

# Gendering religious change

Negotiations of boundaries of institutional religion in  
women's angel practices and LGBTQ activism in Finland

Malin Fredriksson

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Handledare: Peter Nynäs

Fakulteten för humaniora,  
psykologi och teologi

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Ämne: Religionsvetenskap	
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Titel: Att köna religiös förändring: Förhandlingar om gränser till institutionell religion inom kvinnors ängelpraktiker och LGBTQ-aktivism i Finland	
Handledare: Peter Nynäs	
<p>Religiös förändring är en av de mest centrala frågorna inom religionsforskningen idag. Genom att studera genus som en aspekt av religiös förändring är det möjligt att belysa nya synvinklar på samtida religion, då sekulariseringsdebatten till stor del har varit genusblind.</p> <p>Den evangelisk-lutherska kyrkan i Finland har historiskt sett dominerat det religiösa landskapet, men numera är individers religiositet allt mindre knuten till institutionen. Med utgångspunkt i denna utveckling och behovet av att studera genus, är syftet med denna avhandling att utforska betydelsen av genus i gränsdragningar till institutionell religion. Frågan utforskas genom en studie av två fall, kvinnors ängelpraktiker och LGBTQ-aktivism. Materialet består av intervjuer där relationen till kyrkan och könat aktörskap kommer till uttryck. Hur artikulerar och positionerar sig individerna i relation till institutionell religion? På vilket sätt är genus en del av hur de artikulerar och positionerar sig? Metoden för studien består av en diskursanalytisk ram med begreppet makt som bakgrund.</p> <p>Begreppet sekularisering är fortsättningsvis användbart då det ses med genus som premiss. Utgångspunkten i den teoretiska ramen för sekularisering är att förändringar som sker inom religion, bl.a. betoningen på den subjektiva upplevelsen och eklekticism ger mer utrymme för individuellt aktörskap. Synen på genus som performativt utgör den genusteoretiska ramen, vilken fungerar som ett verktyg för att se hur genus och religion konstrueras i en sammanvävd process.</p> <p>Det framgår av analysen att ängelpraktikanterna och LGBTQ-aktivisterna upplever att kyrkan begränsar både det religiösa och könade aktörskapet, samtidigt som det institutionella sammanhanget inte utesluter nya utrymmen för aktörskap. Genusnormer har ett nära samband till hur individerna förhandlar institutionell religion, då normer förklarar hur individer både upprätthåller sin relation till kyrkan och väljer att avvika från den. Denna ambivalenta relation till kyrkan gör att gränsen mellan att vara innanför eller utanför kyrkan blir flytande, vilket kan ses som ett centralt handlingsutrymme även vad gäller genus. Det är alltså framförallt inifrån institutionen som förändring sker, även om det är i institutionens intresse att definiera sina yttre ramar.</p>	
Nyckelord: sekularisering, evangelisk-lutherska kyrkan, avinstitutionalisering, genus, performativitet, diskurs, kvinnor, LGBTQ	
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Master's thesis abstract

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Author: Malin Fredriksson	
Title: Gendering religious change: Negotiations of boundaries of institutional religion in women's angel practices and LGBTQ activism in Finland	
Supervisor: Peter Nynäs	
<p>Religious change is one of the most central issues in research on religion today. The study of gender as an aspect of religious change may provide new insights into contemporary religion, since the debate on secularization has largely been gender blind.</p> <p>Historically, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland has been predominant in the religious landscape, but today the religiosity of individuals is increasingly deinstitutionalized. Having this development and the need to examine gender as the starting point, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the location of gender in how boundaries of institutional religion are negotiated. The question is explored by a study of two cases, women's angel practices and LGBTQ activism. The material consists of interviews where relations to the Church and gendered agency are expressed. How do the individuals articulate and position themselves in relation to institutional religion? How is gender part of how they articulate and position themselves? The method of the study is a discourse analytical framework based on the concept of power.</p> <p>The concept of secularization is still useful in case it is viewed on the premise of gender. The basis of the theoretical framework of secularization is that changes taking place within religion, among others the emphasis on subjective experience and eclecticism, enable more space for individual agency. The view that gender is performative constitutes the gender-theoretical framework, which is used as a tool to examine how gender and religion are constructed in an interlinked process.</p> <p>From the analysis, it appears that the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists experience that the Church restricts both religious and gendered agency, simultaneously as the institutional setting does not exclude new spaces for agency. Gender norms are closely connected to how individuals negotiate institutional religion, since norms explain both how individuals maintain their relation to the Church and how they choose to turn aside from it. This ambivalent relation to the Church makes the boundary of being inside or outside the Church fluid, which can be considered a central space of agency also with regards to gender. Thus, change takes place from within the institution, although it is in the interest of the institution to define its frame.</p>	
Key words: secularization, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, deinstitutionalization, gender, performativity, discourse, women, LGBTQ	
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## 1 Introduction

One of the most central questions considering religion today is how to understand the changing location of religion in contemporary Western societies. In the debate on religious change, the concept of secularization has for decades been predominant. There is a plurality of different views on how secularization should be defined, but the claim that traditional religious institutions are undergoing profound changes can be widely agreed on (Dobbelaere 2002, 13-14). Although the traditional secularization theories, recognized as a collection of connected ideas rather than a coherent theory, have been increasingly problematized and revised in recent years, the issue of gender has often been paid restricted attention. The research field of religion and gender has suffered from a double blindness; as scholars of religion have often ignored gender, scholars of gender have largely ignored religion (King 2005, 1-2). Critique and re-evaluation of existing theories are needed to properly understand the location and relevance of gender as a dimension of religious change. In recent years, scholars (e.g. Trzebiatowska & Bruce 2012; Vincett et al 2008) have suggested that taking gender into consideration is crucial in order to understand contemporary religious change and also to provide new perspectives on secularization. However, the claim that “gender should be understood as a concept requiring analysis, rather than as something that is already known about” (Järviluoma et al 2003, 2) indicates that an idea of “adding” a gender perspective to secularization is a too simplified approach.

The changing position of traditional religious institutions is salient also in the Finnish setting, where the Evangelical Lutheran Church (hereafter the Church) has a long history in the religious landscape. At the end of 2014, 74 % of the Finnish population were members of the Church (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Membership statistics, 2014), which indicates a noticeable but relatively slow decline over the last decades. Nevertheless, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is still today usually seen as *the* Church in public understanding. The decrease in membership is merely a superficial aspect of the deinstitutionalization of religion. At the same time as institutional religion apparently is losing ground, the religious landscape in Finland has turned more diverse during the last decades with the emergence of alternative spiritualities and new religious communities, which primarily are non-institutional in

character (Ketola 2008, 338-352). Taking the peculiarities of the Finnish setting into consideration, it could be assumed that it is an obvious choice to focus on how the Evangelical Lutheran Church is connected to individual religiosity. The choice is, however, less self-evident when considering the deinstitutionalization of religion taking place also in the Finnish context. A step back to the previously mentioned need to be attentive to gender, raises the question of how gender is part of the deinstitutionalization of religion. In order to explore this question, I will in this thesis analyze interviews conducted within the project *Post-secular culture and a changing religious landscape*. The interviewees are individuals involved in so-called angel practices and individuals taking part in LGBTQ activism. Next, a brief overview of the background of these two cases is provided.

### 1.1 Case background

The two cases, angel practices and religious LGBTQ activism, contribute different voices which can shed light on how gender is part of religious change. In this section, I briefly describe the context of the cases in order to frame the questions I intend to focus on in my study.

First, I describe the background of the case of angel practices. Angel spirituality has become increasingly popular in Finland as well as in other Nordic countries during the 2000s (Utriainen 2015, 159). In popular culture, there is a growing interest in angels, and literature by authors such as Lorna Byrne (e.g. *Angels in my Hair* 2008; *A Message of Hope from the Angels* 2012) and Diana Cooper (e.g. *Angel Inspiration: How to Change your World with Angels* 2001; *Angel Answers* 2007) is reaching large audiences (Utriainen 2015, 161). After a lecture given by Lorna Byrne in Helsinki, Terhi Utriainen (2015, 159) conducted a questionnaire, where 94 % of the respondents were women and 74 % were members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. These numbers clearly suggest that gender is one of the main aspects worth exploring in angel practices, but also that church relations are central. For the angel practitioners, angels are highly present in everyday life, not primarily as personalized angels, but rather as energies and agents that can be approached for help and support. Many of them are dealing with issues such as illness, problematic relationships, and recovery from crises. The angel practitioners engage in holistic therapies which

support individual well-being and health, such as reiki, zone therapy and shiatsu (Utriainen 2015, 163).

The growing interest in angels has also been observed by the Church. From the perspective of the Church, the interest in angels is mostly seen as a kind of alternative spirituality which has been successful in attracting members who are struggling in their relationship to the Church (Utriainen 2015, 161-162). The survey Church Monitor 2007 reveals that 46 % of the Finnish population to some degree believe in the existence of angels. This observation is striking, since the Lutheran Church in Finland during the 20<sup>th</sup> century has reduced the theological significance of the angel (Church Research Institute 2013, 40). As observed by Utriainen (2015, 162) the increased interest in angels has faced a negative response mostly from Lutheran male theologians, who are concerned about the popularized and feminized version of the angel. Therefore, the theological significance of the angel is emphasized by them (e.g. Kuula 2013). The concern is manifested in efforts to emphasize the continuity of the angel as a Christian tradition, although the angel in Lutheran theology is not paid much attention (Utriainen 2015, 162).

The other case, LGBTQ activism, demonstrates how LGBTQ issues are on the agenda today also in religious communities. In recent years, the Church has been involved in the public debate on the civil rights of same-sex couples. In 2010, a current affairs program held a debate titled Gay Evening (Homoilta) where LGBTQ activists, church representatives and members of parliament were invited. The leader of the Christian Democrats, Päivi Räsänen, strongly defended marriage as an institution between man and woman. Although Räsänen is not a representative of the Church, but spoke as a private person and as a church member, her statements provoked a negative response which resulted in 30 000 resignations shortly after the program (Moberg & Sjö 2012, 86-87). According to Gallup Ecclesiastica 2011, 43 % of those resigning from the Church during the years 2010–2011 considered the Church too intolerant toward sexual minorities, which indicates a clear difference compared to previous years (Church Research Institute 2013, 86-87). In comparison, in 1982, 56 % of the population had a highly condemning stance towards homosexuality (Church Research Institute 2013, 25-26).

In November 2014, the Finnish parliament approved a bill which legalizes same-sex

marriage. Shortly after the approval, Archbishop Kari Mäkinen announced that the approval was an important event for LGBTQ people and he also mentioned that he was truly happy with the decision (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, 28.11.2014). The fact that official representatives of the Church have shown tolerance toward sexual minorities indicates a clear difference from a previous emphasis on sexual ethics according to which homosexuality is a sin (Church Research Institute 2013, 25-26). However, the approval caused a wave of resignations from church by those who defended the idea of “traditional” marriage between man and woman exclusively (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, 29.11.2014).

Characteristic of the Finnish setting is that LGBTQ activism partially is a project within the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Although the Church is in the forefront, the actual organizer is a secular operator, the LGBTQ rights organization SETA (Seksuaalinen tasavertaisuus/Sexual equality). The arrangement of so-called Rainbow masses, church services directed to LGBTQ people, is by the Church seen primarily as an act of reconciliation toward sexual minorities. Individuals engaged in the masses have diverse backgrounds (Nynäs et al 2013, 82-83). Religious LGBTQ activism is not restricted to the Rainbow masses, but can also be more generally understood as giving a voice for LGBTQ identities within the field of religion or spirituality.

As this presentation of the cases highlights, questions considering religion and gender may lead to controversies and debate both within the Church and in society at large. The cases of angel practices and LGBTQ activism are in many respects different from each other, but together they highlight the position of the Church, the deinstitutionalization of religion, and gender as an aspect of this change. These are the main themes I intend to explore in this thesis.

## 1.2 Purpose of research

The focus of this thesis should be understood against the background of the history of institutional religion in Finland and a current deinstitutionalization of individual religiosity. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the location of gender in how individuals involved in angel practices and LGBTQ activism negotiate boundaries of

institutional religion. The two cases, women's angel practices and LGBTQ activism, are analyzed to demonstrate the relevance and location of gender. A focus on how the boundaries of institutional religion are negotiated is assumed to reveal something about the changing position of institutional religion in individual religiosity.

For the purpose of clarity, I have chosen to divide my research question into two sub-questions. The first question is: how do the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists articulate and position themselves in relation to institutional religion? This question considers both how individuals experience being included in and excluded from institutional religion. The interview material is diverse in the sense that it entails a variety of different religious preferences, which could be understood in terms of alternative spiritualities, holistic spiritualities, neo pagan religion etc. Therefore, the focus on the making of boundaries of institutional religion is also a matter of delimitation. This question is connected to the broader context of religious change, which is framed in the third chapter.

The second research question is: how is gender part of how the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists articulate and position themselves in relation to institutional religion? Based on the premise that gender is embedded in all levels in social life, this question is fundamentally interconnected with the first one. The theoretical framework to be applied draws on perspectives from feminist and gender studies. By examining the cases, I intend to find out what they can reveal about the relevance and location of gender as tied to the deinstitutionalization of religion.

My approach to the topic and the intention of the structure of the research question is to emphasize the *process* through which the boundaries of institutional religion are negotiated. In order to be able to analyze the content of the interview material as a process, a theoretical framework which is sensitive to both religion and gender is needed. In the second chapter, I describe the method to be applied: discourse analysis. In the third chapter, I outline the historical background of the religious landscape in Finland with a focus on the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The theoretical framework of contemporary religious change is also presented in the third chapter. In the fourth chapter, the focus is on how religious change can be understood to be gendered. Although I acknowledge the importance of analyzing religion and gender in relation to each other, I have decided to present the theoretical perspectives

in separate chapters in order to be able to make it more clear how gender and religion can be understood as connected to each other in my analysis in chapter five.

### 1.3 Material

The two cases to be analyzed in this thesis, women's angel practices and LGBTQ activism, consist of material that has been collected for the project *Post-secular Society and a Changing Religious Landscape in Finland* (PCCR), which took place during the years 2010–2014 at the department of comparative religion at Åbo Akademi University. The purpose of the PCCR project was to collect data about different processes of change taking place within the religious field in Finland. The thematic interviews about religious LGBTQ activism were conducted by Peter Nynäs and the interviews about women's angel practices by Terhi Utriainen. In total, 30 interviews were conducted (12 and 18 respectively) and the interviewees were selected through snowball sampling. From these two larger groups of interviews, I made a selection of four interviews from each group. For the sake of convenience, I refer to my selection of interviews as cases.

The interviews were conducted in line with the interview guide of the project, *PCCR & Method*. The guide describes the methodological approach and the common thematic scheme which constitute the basis of the project. Gender is a part of the thematic scheme (PCCR & Method, 22-23). The guide also serves the purpose of giving the collected material content which allows comparison between different groups of interviews. The main assumptions are summarized as follows (PCCR & Method, 5)<sup>1</sup>:

1. A significant part of religious life takes place outside the borders of its historical institutions and is embedded in a commercialized and mediatized broader social and cultural environment with transnational trajectories.
2. The relocation of religion destabilizes earlier forms of regulation of religion, calls for new forms of governance, and causes controversies that contribute to the public visibility of religion.

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<sup>1</sup> A description of the project is also found at the web page <http://web.abo.fi/fak/hf/relvet/pccr/index.html> [retrieved 2-2-2014]

3. This broad environment provides imperative spaces for individuals actively and consciously crafting their personal religious lives, shaping agencies and subjectivities in particular ways.
4. The category of 'religion' is challenged.

The first assumption that a significant part of religious life takes place outside the borders of the traditional institution is highly relevant, as the purpose of this study is to explore how the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists negotiate boundaries of institutional religion. The question that can be raised is whether the claim about religiosity outside religious institutions and the position of the Church exclude each other. The third assumption that individuals are actively shaping their religious lives and subjectivities is a central theme in my study too, as especially gender is about agency. In connection to these two assumptions, the way in which the category of religion can be understood to be challenged is also a question of relevance for the purpose of my study.

Initially, the cases of angel practices and LGBTQ activism were chosen because of a strong explicit gender dimension in the material. At first glance, the cases may seem very different from each other, although gender obviously is what they have in common. I found that eight interviews are enough to cover the research question and at the same time shed light on the different voices within the material. In the analysis, some interviews are presented more extensively, while others play the role of highlighting differences or tensions within the material. As already mentioned, a salient characteristic is that the angel practitioners are predominantly, although not exclusively, women. My selection entails interviews with female practitioners only, since I consider that the predominance of women requires particular attention. This limitation should not be understood as suggesting that studying masculinities is unimportant (King 2005, 5), but I would argue that how masculinities are part of angel practices is a topic that needs more attention also in the interview situation. Because of this limitation to women, I find it motivated to refer to the case as women's angel practices, although in the whole group of interviewees there were a few men. Since my intention is to explore the boundaries of institutional religion, in my selection of interviewees, all are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church

although they articulate their sense of belonging in different ways. Utriainen suggests in her articles *Combining Christianity and New Age Spirituality: Angel Religion in Finland* (2015) and *Doing Things with Angels: Agency, Alterity and Practices of Enchantment* (2013) that angels are border-makers between Lutheranism and New Age. These articles have given me a pre-understanding of how to approach the material, although I find that there are issues that should be further investigated, especially when it comes to the women's relation to institutional religion and how different kinds of womanhood constitute an aspect of agency.

The selection of interviews from the case of religious LGBTQ activism also needs to be clarified. A fundamental question discussed among both activists and scholars is which abbreviations should be used when theorizing and describing gender and sexual minorities. Abbreviations for identity categories are always exclusive, at the same time as they are overlapping, interrelated and contingent, meaning that there is diversity within the categories (Berg & Wickman 2010, 12-13; Munt 2010, 1). I use the abbreviation LGBTQ, since I consider it inclusive enough for the purpose of the study, although this abbreviation obviously is only one of the possibilities to embrace identities<sup>2</sup>. It should be mentioned that within the frame of the thesis, only some identities within LGBTQ are represented in the analysis. My selection of interviews is not primarily based on which gender or sexuality individuals identify with or are assumed to identify with, although the selection in some respect is supposed to show the diversity of gender and sexual identities. The term 'activist', should be understood in a wide sense, as some of the interviewees do not explicitly refer to themselves as activists, but rather are giving a voice for LGBTQ people in general. Also, another important feature of the selection is that the interviewees somehow articulate a relation to institutional religion. It should be noted that the case represents 'religious' LGBTQ activism, although such kind of activism often is assumed to be secular<sup>3</sup>. Nynäs et al (2013) analyze in their article *Sekularism och religiös HBT-aktivism inom ramen för religiös förändring: Exempel på värdet av perspektiv från studiet av samhällsrörelser*<sup>4</sup> how such activism can be studied as a

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<sup>2</sup> For example, GBT, LGBT, LGBTIQ (also variations in different languages) (Munt 2010, 1).

<sup>3</sup> Since my selection of interviews in both cases is made in relation to the other case, I noticed that my selection of LGBTQ interviewees are "more religious" in character than on average in the whole group of interviews. However, I do not consider this a problem in the analysis, rather as a delimitation.

<sup>4</sup> Author's translation of the title: Secularism and religious LGBT activism in the context of religious change: Examples of the value of perspective from the study of social movements

social movement. LGBTQ activism in relation to institutional religion is partially discussed in the article, but this is a topic I find motivated to explore further. In addition, I intend to go into more depth on the diversity and agency found within LGBTQ.

The protection of the integrity and the anonymity of the interviewees is always an ethical concern in research. The issue becomes even more important when one considers the personal and sensitive nature of the themes discussed in the interviews. The interviewees are given assumed names in order to ensure their anonymity. The transcribed interviews are stored in the Cultura archive at Åbo Akademi University.

## 2 Method: A discourse analytical approach

The empirical material, the interviews, and the purpose of the study obviously require a method which provides a framework open for theoretical sensitivity with regards to both religion and gender. Therefore, I consider discourse analysis an appropriate method. Discourse analysis provides a basis for seeing similarities, differences and most importantly, connections, in the material.

Discourse analytical perspectives rely on social constructionism. Vivien Burr (1995, 3-5) summarizes the key premises of social constructionism in four points. Firstly, the basic assumption is a critical stance toward self-evident knowledge and taken-for-granted understandings of the world. Secondly, this means that categories, concepts and understandings of the world are historically and culturally specific. Thirdly, if concepts and understandings of the world are not natural, knowledge and experience are created through social processes. In daily interaction, individuals engage in constructing what they assume is knowledge or truth. Fourthly, knowledge, truths and all understandings of the world also lead to some kind of social action. Depending on the social context, some acts are seen as more natural than others.

The methodological background implies that there is no general model for how to conduct a discourse analysis, and as a consequence discourse analysis always has to be adapted according to the material (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 10). In this chapter, I specify what kind of discourse analysis I will apply. I describe the central ideas of discourse analysis based on Burr's *An Introduction to Social Constructionism* (1995), Winther Jørgensen and Phillips' *Diskursanalys som teori och metod* (2000), and Kendall and Wickham's *Using Foucault's Methods* (1999). As gender is a crucial part of the analysis I have found especially Järviuoma et al's (2003) *Gender and Qualitative methods* and Sunderland's (2004) *Gendered Discourses* useful. The discourse analytical framework is used to identify both religious and gendered agency.

### 2.1 Discourse, power and subjectivity

The concept of discourse is challenging to define, as it has a plethora of meanings used in different research fields. At the most basic level, discourse is defined as “a

particular way of speaking about or understanding the world”<sup>5</sup> (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 7), or as “a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events” (Burr 1995, 48). From the assumption that there exists no reality that is not shaped by who we are, follows that the question of *how* the world is constructed and understood is a more relevant question than *why*. Put differently, the method is closely connected to the theoretical framework, as the method embraces theoretical assumptions about the construction of reality (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 10).

As agency is a main interest of this thesis, I perceive a notion of discourse related to power as advantageous; being attentive to gender inevitably means being attentive to power (Sunderland 2004, 8-9). In addition, this notion of discourse and power provides a basis for examining religious agency. According to Michel Foucault (1990, 93), “[p]ower is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.” A “strategical situation” is, for example, the church, medicine or academic disciplines which are in the position to have an impact on those individuals who belong to the church or are situated in the academic discipline (Foucault 1990, 93). Power is something that is not possessed, rather it is practiced. As a consequence, power is always relational, regardless of whether it is between institutions and individuals, or in everyday interaction between individuals (Kendall & Wickham 1999, 34-35; 50).

Kendall and Wickham (1999, 34) explain that Foucault’s concept of power as productive and relational, gives a broader perspective on power relations compared to a view where power is understood only in terms of restriction and domination. When viewed as relational, power is analyzed as an interplay which makes power not exclusively repressive, but also enabling of resistance and transformation. Power and resistance are intrinsically intertwined with each other; one is embedded in the power one resists, and consequently one is inseparable from it. A discourse is never total or closed, and this fragmentation is what enables change. In other words, the power relation in itself comprises the ability to produce change (Kendall & Wickham 35-39;

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<sup>5</sup> Author’s translation.

50-51).

Since power is productive, it is central in the formation of subjects. An example of the subjectifying power of discourse, discussed by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (1990), is that sexuality as we understand it today in terms of identity is an effect of power. Foucault argues that the scientific study of sexuality and the classification of sexualities in psychiatric literature during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries have resulted in that sexuality has become to be understood as a part of identity in contemporary Western societies. Individuals actively produce themselves as subjects, since they are subjected to power (Kendall & Wickham 1999, 52-54). In connection to power, the term discipline is used to denote the process through which for example institutions create their subjects. Thus, discipline is a mechanism of power through which the agency of individuals is regulated (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 21-22).

At this point, it should be observed that identity and subjectivity are two closely related concepts which to some extent overlap each other. From a discourse analytical standpoint, identity does not emerge from inside a person, but from the social sphere an individual is situated in. Although identity is neither fixed nor predetermined, it is often assumed to represent a higher degree of continuity than the concept of subjectivity (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 48-49; Burr 1995, 51-54). The concept of subjectivity on its part has emerged primarily from the perspective of Foucault, where the process of the making of the subject is in focus (Burr 1995, 152-153). The distinction between the concepts is that identity is often understood in a narrower sense, which implies that subjectivity also encompasses aspects of the self that are not reducible to identity (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 48-49). I use both concepts, since the difference in emphasis sometimes is relevant. On a general level, I do not find it necessary to make the analytical distinction between identity and subjectivity. Nevertheless, whichever of the concepts is deployed, the process of *the making of* identity or subjectivity is what is of analytical interest.

Another central concept is negotiation, since it is part of the title of the thesis. The concept of negotiation is understood here as how individuals self-narrate, meaning how people account for their lives and experiences. Burr (1995, 140-141) explains

that since our understanding of the world is tied to our social surroundings, how we encounter people and how we are encountered, self-narratives are inevitably negotiated as they emerge from social interaction. It could, therefore, be argued that negotiating is a way of positioning oneself in the world, that is to say, positioning is about how individuals relate to culturally available discourses. Subject positions are the positions available within a discourse. Burr (1995, 146) explains subject position and the process of negotiation in the following way: “Our sense of who we are and what it is therefore possible and not possible for us to do, what it is right and appropriate for us to do, and what it is wrong and inappropriate for us to do thus all derive from our occupation of subject positions within discourse”. In other words, the position in discourse shapes our identity or subjectivity. Through negotiations of subject positions, which are never fixed, social change takes place (Burr 1995, 152). As Burr (1995, 90) argues, “Although the person, the subject, is constituted by discourse, this subject is yet capable of critical historical reflection and is able to exercise some choice with respect to the discourses and practices that it takes up for its own use”. This indicates that change within discourse is where social change is initiated. A struggle on the discursive level contributes to both changing and reproducing social reality (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 16).

Our access to reality is mediated through language. A main assumption of discourse analysis is that language is the site where discourse is being created and maintained (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 15-16). The use of language is not a reflection of, or a window to an objective reality, but through language individuals create and maintain representations and understandings of the world. Language as a site for creating meaning can be seen both as constructed and as constitutive, which implies that through language social reality is constructed in relation to earlier discourse but also that language constitutes the world (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 15-16). This notion of language is central when studying texts, such as transcribed interview material.

A common criticism against discourse analysis is that the relativity of knowledge and social identities undermines all regularity in social reality (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 12). The view that “power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault 1990, 93) is both a

strength and a challenge when conducting a discourse analysis. Although knowledge and identities from a theoretical perspective are always contingent, in concrete situations the frames within which statements and identities are enabled are more restrictive (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 12).

Although applying this kind of discourse analysis may in this respect be challenging, I consider the advantages of the approach to be of more importance, since it provides a basis for examining both religious and gendered agency. Foucault's notion of discourse and power has largely influenced the social sciences, including feminist theory and gender perspectives, although he has met extensive criticism because of his androcentric bias (Simons 2007, 179). Foucault's notion of power is seen as the predecessor of Judith Butler's theorization on gender as performative, which is the gender-theoretical framework applied in this study.

## 2.2 Application of discourse analysis

Since the purpose of discourse analysis is not to reach a reality "behind" discourse, but to examine the discourses themselves, the problem that remains is why particular discourses are presented as results of the analysis (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 28-29). For that reason, in this section I describe how I approach the material and connect it to theoretical perspectives.

The coding process is the first step toward making the material manageable. The purpose of the coding process is to find recurring themes according to the purpose of the study. I began with observing in which contexts religion was articulated in a positive or negative manner, with a focus on how the Church or other ideas that could be related to institutional religion were articulated among the interviewees. Another intention was to identify when gender was present in the material. When trying to do this, I found that gender was very salient in the material, but I found it challenging to tie together the observations from each case.

Reading and analyzing the interview material and exploring theoretical perspectives in relation to the material has been a parallel process. Based on theoretical perspectives (presented in chapters 3 and 4), I formed an understanding of what might be found in the material, and after the first coding of the material I returned to

further examination of the theoretical perspectives. This was especially important in the next step, making connections between the coded categories. When I completed writing the analysis, it was helpful to return to the theoretical perspectives in order to take the observed themes to a more analytical level.

As suggested above, making a distinction between different discourses is primarily an analytical strategy that is conducted according to the purpose of the study (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 2000, 137). Foucault's understanding of discourse has often been criticized for not providing concrete tools for conducting an analysis. I have chosen to follow Kendall's and Wickham's (1999, 42) four-step model based on their reading of Foucault:

- 1) The recognition of a discourse as a corpus of 'statements' whose organization is regular and systematic.
- 2) The identification of rules of the production of statements.
- 3) The identification of rules that delimit the sayable (which of course are never rules of closure).
- 4) The identification of rules that create the spaces in which new statements can be made.

There are, however, some issues that should be clarified. Firstly, the assumption that statements are regular and systematic is an ideal rather than reality (Kendall & Wickham 1999, 42-43). Secondly, the identification of the rules of production (i.e. norms, boundaries, discourses), the rules which delimit the sayable, and the rules of the production of new statements, need to be tied to a theoretical framework (Kendall & Wickham 1999, 43). In the third chapter, I describe the theoretical perspectives on contemporary religious change that will serve as the basis of the analysis. In the fourth chapter, I provide theoretical perspectives on gender and how gender can be seen in relation to religious change.

A challenge of discourse analysis is that exploring discourses close to oneself is complicated, as we usually take the immediate reality as we experience it to be self-evident (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 28). For example, an important question is how to operationalize gender in empirical material. According to Järviluoma et al

(2003, 2), in a qualitative material, gender can be identified and analyzed at various levels. At an individual level, one can find identifications and subject positions, and at a macro level ideologies and social institutions. As gender is associated with power, claiming that gender is relevant only when explicitly expressed is a very narrow perspective (Järviluoma et al 2003, 2). This implies that one inevitably “reads gender” into the material. The insider/outsider perspective is a way of self-positioning, but as noted by Yip (2010b, 9-10), the insider/outsider dichotomy neglects the processes through which insiderness and outsidership are constructed, which becomes especially evident when studying gender. The reading process and interpretation can be seen as a negotiation between various subject positions; between me as an interpreter with a specific gender-theoretical framework and the gendered subject positions I interpret from the material (Mills 1994, 34). Given that the interview material is considered a text, “the text constructs a dominant reading which the reader deciphers according to discourses which she has already encountered, and this dominant reading will construct gendered subject positions for the reader” (Mills 1994, 34). The outcome of this is that gender norms do not exist until I recognize them as norms.

A central concept associated with discourse analysis is ‘construction’, but it is often left unproblematized. The critical question is who it is that is constructing, which implies that it is a question of agency. There is a central difference between, on one hand, self-construction as something intentionally striven for, and self-construction as unintentionally reproducing or accommodating to present discourses (Sunderland 2004, 174). In addition, Sunderland (2004, 170-172) explains that who in this question may refer not only to the person in the material who is describing his or her experiences, but also to the interpreter of the material. If I read intentionality into the material, even though the person is not constructing herself or himself in a specific way on purpose, there is a discrepancy between intentionality and assumed intentionality (Sunderland 2004, 173-178). In this case, it is the interpreter who is actively constructing, rather than the interviewee. Of course, when conducting an analysis the interpreter of the material is always in the position to construct and that is indeed the purpose of the analysis.

In this chapter, I have described which kind of discourse analysis is applied to the material at hand. In the next chapters, I describe the theoretical perspectives I will build my analysis on.

### 3 Theoretical perspectives on contemporary religious change

In this chapter, I describe the historical background of the religious landscape in Finland, where the Evangelical Lutheran Church has been, and still is, in a dominant position. In order to provide a basis for my analysis of the interviews, I describe how the concepts of secularization and the post-secular are applied. In addition, a theoretical framework which describes changes taking place within religion (Frisk & Nynäs 2012) is presented.

#### 3.1 Historical background: The Evangelical Lutheran Church and religious diversity

The position of the Finnish Lutheran Church today can be traced to its former position as a state church, which began at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the kingdom of Sweden-Finland. Similarly as in other Nordic countries, the national Lutheran Church as an actor with political and religious power played an influential role in society (Kääriäinen et al 2005, 62). The period of Orthodoxy which followed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by an emphasis on religious uniformity among the people, since religious uniformity was assumed to secure national unity. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the pietist-influenced revivalist movements largely remained as movements within the Church, although they can partially be seen as resistance to the religious hegemony (Kääriäinen et al 2005, 39-52). During the same century, the process of separation of responsibilities between the state and the Church began. The functional differentiation had a significant impact on the Church's presence in society (Kääriäinen et al 2005, 54-56).

After Finland became independent in 1917 and after the civil war in 1918, the role of the Church was to maintain national unity in the young nation. During World War II, the Church reinforced its position as a folk church, with an emphasis on social responsibility and national unity (Kääriäinen et al 2005, 60). The Church has taken the role of a social conscience in society and thus its role has shifted from being state-oriented to society-oriented. The Church being society-oriented and having a role as a social actor keeps it open for debate even today (Kääriäinen et al 2005, 172-174).

An aspect of how the relation between the Church and the individual has been

changing over the years, is the legislation concerning the Church and religious rights. According to the Act of Religious Freedom of 1922, citizens had the right to leave the Church as well as other religious communities, with no obligation to be members of any religious community at all. The renewed law of 2003 emphasizes to a greater extent the positive freedom of religion, in other words, the right to belong to and practice religion (Kääriäinen et al 2005, 56-62). Although the Lutheran Church no longer has the status of state church (accompanied by the Orthodox Church) in the full sense of the word, it has legal connections to the state. Despite the fact the Church and state are separated in the constitution, the Church still today holds a special position guaranteed by law (Kääriäinen et al 2005, 19).

When it comes to membership statistics, the Church has maintained its predominant position, but the decline in number of members is evident. In 1950, 95 % of the Finnish population were members of the Church, in 1980 90 % and in 2000 the equivalent number was 85 % (Kääriäinen et al 2005, 82). In 2008, 81 % were members, but until the end of 2014, the number had dropped to 74 % (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. Membership statistics, 2014). Consequently, it could be argued that in recent years, the decrease has become more distinct. Nevertheless, in European comparison, the number of members today is exceptionally high (Kääriäinen et al 2005, 168).

However, the numbers do not reveal the whole picture, as church membership does not necessarily mean church attendance or adherence to Christian doctrine (Mikkola et al 2007, 55). Church membership in Finland has been described as “believing in belonging”, since belonging in itself becomes the main reason for membership (Kääriäinen et al 2005, 85) or as “belonging without believing” (Mikkola et al 2007, 68). These ways of describing the relation to institutional religion suggest that how religion is practiced and understood shows great variation among individuals. For instance, according to Gallup Ecclesiastica 2011, public religious practice such as participation in worship, is low (35 % of the population participate once a year). Religious ceremonies such as baptism, wedding and funeral are the main events that bring people to church (45 % of the population participate once a year). Since public religious practice is a narrow measurement of religiosity, paying attention to the private dimension of religion or spirituality is even more important. In Gallup

Ecclesiastica 2011, the results indicate that the Finnish population predominantly agrees with claims such as the claim that personal experience is important and decisions in life should be made on the basis of an inner voice (Church Research Institute 2013, 36-37). In other words, how institutional religion is a part of individual religiosity is undergoing changes. Kääriäinen et al (2005, 174) suggest that the emphasis on individual subjective values has the outcome that institutional religion has become more individualized.

The religious landscape in Finland remained fairly homogenous until the 1970s. During the last decades, the religious landscape has become increasingly diverse. Since the 1970s, new religious movements and alternative spiritualities such as Hindu and Buddhist-inspired communities, neopaganism and New Age have gained ground (Ketola 2008, 325-336; Kääriäinen et al 2005, 63-68). At the same time as the range of religious communities obviously has increased, the interest to officially belong to a religious community is decreasing. Therefore, it is central to observe that many of those forms of religion and spirituality are more or less unorganized compared to institutional religion (Ketola 2008, 339). These developments are connected to the so-called “subjective turn” in contemporary culture and religion (e.g. Heelas & Woodhead 2005), which will be further discussed in section 3.3.

The peculiar historical background of the Lutheran Church in Finland necessarily raises the question of how to understand the location of the Church as connected to individual religiosity today. The changing position of institutional religion and the increasing diversity of the religious landscape are obviously central questions in the secularization debate. In the following sections, I will present central theoretical perspectives on religious change, focusing on the aspects of change that constitute the basis for my study.

### 3.2 Secularization, official religion and individual religiosity

Secularization is a concept laden with diverse meanings. Confusion over the definition of concepts, both secularization and what counts as religion, is one explanation to the complexity of the debate. My approach is based on perspectives from Dobbelaere’s *Secularization: An Analysis at Three Levels* (2002) and McGuire’s *Religion: The Social Context* (2002). Despite the diversity of the meaning

of secularization, an underlying assumption of the secularization thesis is that modernization has had a profound impact on the position of institutional Christianity in society and as a part of individual religiosity. The secularization debate has largely been based on the assumption that religion is in decline, where religion equals institutional Christianity (Dobbelaere 2002, 18). As mentioned in section 3.1, the adherence to and commitment to institutional religion in Finland has decreased during the last decades (Kääriäinen et al 2005, 82; Church Research Institute 2013, 36-37). However, the assumption of a general decline of religion and the assumption that religion equals institutional Christianity also neglect the transformation of religion as an aspect of secularization (Dobbelaere 2002, 13-14).

According to Dobbelaere, secularization takes place on different levels: on a societal, an organizational and an individual level. The term organizational secularization, according to Dobbelaere (2002, 21-22), refers to changes occurring within religious institutions with regards to beliefs, rituals, and morals. Thus, organizational secularization occurs when religious institutions take steps toward “conformity with this world” (Dobbelaere 2002, 25), meaning that religious institutions are not restricted to an assumed religious sphere. Since organizational secularization is about the institution in itself, the perspective which remains more relevant for the purpose of the thesis is the individual level of secularization, which provides an insider perspective. Dobbelaere’s notion of individual secularization is useful for the purpose to examine how the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists negotiate institutional boundaries, since the interview material represents the individual level. Dobbelaere (2002, 25) defines individual secularization as “the degree of normative integration in religious bodies”. The degree of normative integration into religious institutions is the interplay between the norms of religious institutions and the members who embrace or reject the norms set by religious authorities (Dobbelaere 2002, 137). Thus, the idea of normative integration describes the tension between the norms maintained by a religious institution or a group, and individuals who shape their agency in relation to the norms. As discussed in the method chapter, power is the regulation of agency (Kendall & Wickham 1999, 34). Consequently, the way Dobbelaere understands normative integration is compatible with the view that the relationship between the religious institution and the individual can be seen as a power relationship. A similar approach to institutional religion is provided by

Meredith McGuire (2002), who uses the term official religion to denote what institutional religion represents. McGuire (2002, 104) defines official religion as follows:

Official religion, then, is a set of beliefs and practices prescribed, regulated, and socialized by organized, specifically religious groups. These groups set norms of belief and action for their members, and they establish an official model of what it means to be “one of us”. Nevertheless, the actual religion of the individual member may not correspond very closely to the official model.

In relation to the model of official religion, individual religiosity can, according to McGuire (2002 104), be seen as the degree of conformity to institutional religion. It is important to acknowledge that individual religiosity never to a full extent corresponds to the official model. The most essential observation that can be made from McGuire’s definition is that the official model sets norms that regulate the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion of individuals into religious institutions. Seen from the reverse perspective, it is motivated to examine how individuals experience institutional religion, and how institutional religion is experienced to be normative.

Since the meaning of the concept of secularization in many respects is problematic, it could be suggested that deploying ‘religious change’ as a general alternative term would more smoothly serve the purpose of describing the changes that are taking place in the contemporary religious landscape. In this general sense I have used the expression religious change to claim that the religious landscape is undergoing transformations. However, as will become evident in this chapter, religious change is a too generalized term, when the purpose is to explain the transformation of people’s religious behavior. Although religious change can be used to describe on a general level that changes are taking place in contemporary religion, the use of the term is fairly limited, since it does not entail the term secular, as in secularization. The secular is an important aspect to take into consideration in order to examine the transformation of religion (Dobbelaere 2002, 158). In which ways secularization and the secular are relevant is further mentioned in the sections 3.3 and 3.4.

As the perspectives above suggest, I regard secularization primarily as a concept through which it is possible to explore the transformation of religion. When secularization is a concept assumed to deal with the changing position of institutional

religion, it is motivated to examine how individuals experience their relationship to institutional religion in terms of normativity and conformity. Another aspect that should be noted is that secularization is not only about a transformation of institutional religion, but also how other religions and spiritualities become a part of individual religiosity. The perspectives of Dobbelaere and McGuire are useful for understanding how individuals position themselves in relation to institutional religion, but it should be observed that the perspectives presented here do not consider gender. A central question that emerges is how normative integration and conformity, as discussed by Dobbelaere and McGuire, are relevant with regards to gender. How the perspectives of Dobbelaere and McGuire can be used in a way that is sensitive to gender is described in the summary in section 4.4.

### 3.3 Secularization and the post-secular

An extension of the secularization debate is the notion of the post-secular. The term post-secular is, nevertheless, associated with diverse claims depending on, for example, the background of the scholar and the definition of concepts. My approach is mainly based on the chapter *Trajectories of Post-Secular Complexity* (Moberg et al 2012) in *Post-secular society* (eds. Nynäs et al).

Moberg et al (2012, 8) define the post-secular as a scholarly position characterized by a critical and reflexive approach to simplified notions of secularization. A main question, according to Moberg et al (2012, 2), is how to understand secularization in a nuanced way, without dismissing the secularization thesis altogether. For that reason, I still find Dobbelaere's (2002) and McGuire's (2002) notions of secularization as conformity and integration into religious bodies useful, since these provide a basis for understanding individual religiosity in relation to the institution. According to Moberg et al (2012, 1), secularization should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon which is intrinsically connected to its social and cultural context. As discussed in section 3.1, this means that in the Finnish context, the position of the Evangelical Lutheran Church needs to be considered. Another central aspect of the Finnish religious landscape mentioned in section 3.1 is the increasing diversity of different religions and spiritualities. Increasing religious diversity can be considered a counter-development, which challenges the assumption

that religion is in decline (Moberg et al 2012, 2). The transformation of religion thus considers both how institutional religion is negotiated (Dobbelaere 2002; McGuire 2002), and how other religions and spiritualities than that represented by the Church take place in the religious landscape.

What is then 'post' about the post-secular? In case the post-secular is considered a scholarly position, 'post' primarily refers to an emphasis on self-consciousness and sensitivity when it comes to the use of concepts. I aim at achieving this by approaching secularization, defined as the transformation of religion, in a way that enables a gender perspective. The issue of sensitivity is obviously a critical part of how discourse analysis is conducted. In other words, I find it central to be attentive to how individuals self-describe and position themselves.

A general tendency of the secularization thesis has been that the religious and the secular have been perceived as exclusive in relation to each other, meaning that a position in between is not possible (Day et al 2013, 1; Gorski et al 2012, 7). In connection to the post-secular, a way to approach the transformation of religion, according to Moberg et al (2012, 2), is to take a closer look at the categories of the religious and secular, and how they are connected to each other. Problematizing the distinction between the religious and the secular may open new ways to understand religion and agency. This is an aspect that also will be considered in the analysis.

The post-secular as a theoretical position from which to approach an object of study should not be confused with a descriptive use of the concept referring to an actual condition in a society (Moberg et al 2012, 2-3, 8). However, Gorski et al (2012, 2) argue that the post-secular as a state of reality and as a conceptual change within academia do not exclude each other. For my study, I regard the post-secular primarily as a theoretical approach. Still, the issue of state of reality is multifaceted since, for example, the narratives of the interviewees inevitably are descriptions and interpretations of reality. Consequently, what is experienced to be a state of reality by the interviewees should be met with theoretical sensitivity on the part of the interpreter of the material. In my understanding and use of the concept, the post-secular is thus not only a theoretical angle of approach, but also a description of reality in the sense that it is a reality described by individuals and interpreted by me.

When secularization is seen as a transformation of religion, it is possible to take into consideration both the changing location of institutional religion in individual religiosity and the diversification of the religious landscape. In order to be able to analytically approach these observations and locate agency in the material, a theoretical framework is needed. In the next section, a theoretical framework for understanding changes within religion is provided.

### 3.4 Changes within religion

In order to further expand Dobbelaere's (2002) and McGuire's (2002) notions of the transformation of religion, conformity and normative integration to religious institutions, an additional framework is needed. In this section, I describe changes taking place within religion mainly as it is understood by Liselotte Frisk and Peter Nynäs in their article *Characteristics of Contemporary Religious Change: Globalization, Neoliberalism, and Interpretative Tendencies* (2012), which will later constitute a central part of the analysis. Despite the fact that religious change in their article is discussed in connection to globalization, these processes can be seen also without regards to globalization, and thereby be understood as a general framework of characteristics of contemporary religious change. I have chosen the main points I find useful for my purpose. In the article, six interrelated processes of change in contemporary religion are distinguished as follows: from particular to eclectic, from dogma to experience, from collective to personal, from hierarchical to egalitarian, from theological to anthropological and from death to this-worldliness. These shifts can be understood as discursive changes in how religion is constructed.

Frisk and Nynäs approach the topic by discussing Paul Heelas' and Linda Woodhead's claims presented in *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (2005). The main argument by Heelas and Woodhead (2005, 6) is that a major "subjective turn" has taken place in Western religion and culture. According to Heelas and Woodhead (2005, 5-6), in previous times, individuals were subjected to and adhering to external expectations and (religious) traditions. In contrast, today, the emphasis is on the individual's subjective experience, individual choice and the cultivation of the unique self. Heelas and Woodhead (2005, 6) take their assumption of the subjective turn to the level that it is motivated to speak of a

“spiritual revolution”. However, Frisk and Nynäs (2012, 66) are not convinced by the subjectivization thesis, since it is according to them biased to the authors’ subjective judgments (see section 3.5). Although assumptions of an occurring “spiritual revolution” should be taken with reservation, the centrality of subjective experience emerges as the most characteristic feature of contemporary religiosity (Frisk & Nynäs 2012, 50). The centrality of the subjective experience in contemporary religiosity is according to Frisk and Nynäs (2012, 53-54) connected to a shift in focus from the collective institution to the personal. In other words, there is potentially a tension between the individual and the institution. This tension between individual subjectivity and collective institution constitutes the background of my analysis.

Another central feature of contemporary religiosity is religious eclecticism. Religious eclecticism entails that “many different religions are used eclectically as resources rather than identified exclusively with one religious tradition being the only source” (Frisk & Nynäs 2012, 52). Woodhead (2012, 19-20, 27) explains that the individual choice of religions and spiritualities supports everyday life and lifestyle, as well as the formation of identities, since individuals are free to decide what forms of religions and spiritualities are appealing. The consequence is, according to Frisk and Nynäs (2012, 52), that “traditional” religions may become undermined, in the sense that religious diversity results in a relativization. Relativization here refers to the view that no religion is more authoritative than another, but all religions are equally true. Therefore, it is increasingly difficult to view different religions as essentialized categories as the boundaries between religions are blurred (Frisk & Nynäs 2012, 51; 63). Consequently, individuals experience that boundaries between religions are unimportant (Frisk & Nynäs 2012, 52). Thus, religious eclecticism is a feature I find highly relevant for my analysis, since examining it will enable me to analyze how the interviewees draw boundaries between religion assumed to be associated with the Church and religion or spirituality outside the institutional setting.

As a consequence of the emphasis on the individual’s subjective experience, a shift from hierarchical order to egalitarian order has taken place within contemporary religion. In this connection, egalitarianism refers to the individual’s authority to interpret religious traditions (Frisk & Nynäs 2012, 54-45). Traditionally, religious

experts such as priests have been in a privileged position to interpret religious traditions. Frisk and Nynäs (2012, 55) mention that values such as tolerance and inclusion, meaning that religions should be open to anyone, are important aspects of egalitarianism. The assumption that religions should be open to anyone can be understood as a ‘democratization’ of religious life and practices (Woodhead 2012, 19-20).

As the emphasis on subjective experience suggests, there is a “radical emphasis on the human being” (Frisk & Nynäs 2012, 55). Frisk and Nynäs (2012, 55) argue that the emphasis on the human being, the anthropological dimension, has overplayed the theological dimension of religion. In case the theological significance of religion is in decline, it could be argued that religion has turned more secular. The claim that religion has turned more secular is also closely connected to the so-called “turn to life”. The turn to life, or the “this-worldliness of religion”, means that religion first and foremost is something that is present here and now (Frisk & Nynäs 2012, 55-56). For the purposes of my analysis, I have chosen to combine the anthropological dimension and the this-worldliness of religion into one unit of analysis.

A challenge that one encounters when tying the theoretical framework to empirical examples is that the processes of religious change as described by Frisk and Nynäs are per definition interlinked and dependent on each other, which makes it analytically difficult to separate them from each other. For the sake of clarification and delimitation, I choose to consider the shift from collective to personal and the emphasis on subjective experience as the background of the analysis. Eclecticism and egalitarianism will be analyzed independently, whilst the anthropological dimension and the dimension of this-worldliness will be analyzed together. The question that remains is how the framework as presented by Frisk and Nynäs can be applied in a way that is attentive to gender, since gender is not accounted for in the original model. In section 4.4, where I summarize the perspectives on religious change and the perspectives on gender, some ideas of how the model can be sensitive to gender are described before proceeding to the analysis.

### 3.5 Religion, spirituality and agency

The purpose of this section is to explain how the concepts of religion and spirituality are connected to agency, which in turn is connected to changes taking place within religion. Moberg et al (2012, 8-9) argue that the use of concepts central to the study of religion, most importantly the concept of religion in itself, is turning more complex than before. This could be explained both as a result of the growing complexities in society and of a more nuanced understanding of religion as a concept. There is, in other words, a motivated interest to examine in which ways religion is a discursively constructed concept. James Beckford (2003, 4) describes the frailness of the concept of religion and connects it to agency in the following way:

Religion does not ‘do’ anything by itself. It does not have agency. [...] As such, the category of religion is subject to constant negotiation and renegotiation. Its meaning must therefore be related to the social contexts in which it is used.

As religion, according to Beckford, is dependent on an agent, it is highly motivated to examine how the interviewees ‘do’ religion. In order to stress the centrality of being attentive to this kind of agency, Beckford (2003, 7) further makes a distinction between ‘first order’ and ‘second order’ notions of religion. First order notions of religion refer to how people in everyday life construct their understandings of religion, whilst second order notions denote how the concept of religion is used for analytical purposes by the researcher. This distinction is fruitful as interviewees are not necessarily comfortable with the concept of religion, but for analytical purposes it is still inevitable to use the concept in some respect. As suggested in section 3.4, the meaning of religion easily becomes biased. For instance, religion (“the mode of life-as”) is reduced to “conformity to external authority” (Heelas & Woodhead 2005, 4), whilst spirituality (“the mode of subjective-life”) is described as the “authentic connection with the inner depths of one’s unique life-in-relation” (Heelas & Woodhead 2005, 4) (Frisk & Nynäs 2012, 49-50; 66). Spirituality as a concept is assumed to refer to something more individual, syncretistic, pluralistic and anti-hierarchical than religion, which is usually associated with rigidity and dogma (Frisk & Nynäs 2012, 49-50). Accordingly, Beckford (2003, 72) employs the definition that spirituality is a freely chosen expression of one’s real self, and therefore different from religion which is experienced to be externally controlled. This bias is in itself

not a problem in case it is acknowledged, but the polarization of “bad religion” and “good spirituality” obviously needs a more nuanced approach.

Day (2011, 43) deploys the concept of “performative belief” as she refers to how belief is constructed and negotiated by individuals in various social contexts: “belief for many people is a statement of self, a way of saying who they are: ‘I believe, therefore I am’”. Although Day’s (2011) primary focus is on the concept of belief, the same idea could be applied to religion. Thus, the idea of performativity emphasizes the process through which different religious/spiritual identities are created. I regard performative religion/spirituality as a useful term to examine religious/spiritual agency, where agency refers to how individuals choose or do not choose to describe themselves.

The main observation of this chapter is that it is central to be sensitive to how interviewees describe themselves, since the use of concepts for identification may be indicative of agency and how they position themselves in relation to institutional religion. A notion of religion and spirituality as being continuously performed provides a basis for an analysis that is also sensitive to gender. The focus of the next chapter is to unfold perspectives on how religious change can be understood to be gendered.

## 4 Theoretical perspectives on gendering religious change

Gender issues relating to religion are ubiquitous, but religion and gender are not simply two analogues which exist side by side and can be related to each other at the same level. They do not exist independently from each other, for patterns of gender are deeply embedded throughout all religions.

(King 2005, 3)

In this chapter, I present perspectives on what gendering religious change means. On one hand, gendering religious change may refer to how the concept of secularization is reframed in a way that is attentive to gender. On the other hand, gendering religious change may also refer to how gender in social reality is a part of the process of religious change. A common assumption is that studying gender and religion means studying exclusively the religious lives of women (Joy 2006, 9). In feminist and gender studies, there has obviously been a distinct focus on the religious lives of women, since women have largely been neglected in previous research (King 2005, 2). However, gender needs to be studied in a critical mode, meaning that a gender-theoretical framework should be applied to analyze gender conventions and to avoid essentialist understandings of gender (Joy 2006, 10). Firstly, women (and men) are not uniform groups that can be generalized into a single identity. Secondly, notions of gender reduced to the woman–man dichotomy exclude issues of gender and sexual diversity (Joy 2006, 14-15). I am aware of the fact that gender and sexuality intersect with each other, meaning that it is not always adequate to speak of women contra men, or heterosexuality contra non-normativity. From this point of view, the way I have chosen to describe the cases, women’s angel practices and LGBTQ activism, is highly problematic, since this formulation implies that being a woman and identifying as LGBTQ are mutually exclusive. In other words, this way of labeling obviously reflects dominant discourses on how to understand gender and sexuality. Despite the overlapping of identities and the recurring problem of how to properly name the cases, the cases studied can on a general level be tied to the research fields of women and religion, as well as LGBT and queer studies. In this section, I present Judith Butler’s notion of gender as performative, since it provides a basis for how to approach gender in a way that makes it possible to tie together the similarities and differences in the cases.

From an analytical point of view, it is motivated to distinguish between whether something is gendered or gendering. Sunderland (2004, 20) explains that ‘gendered’ implies that “gender already is part of the ‘thing’ ”. In contrast, ‘gendering’ refers to the process through which gender is created. However, both are part of the same spectrum, since what is gendered is possibly also gendering (Sunderland 2004, 22-23).

A critical question is how to understand the connection between secularization and gender. In section 3.2, I defined secularization as the transformation of religion. Can secularization be considered a gender-sensitive term? Theoretically, there are different ways to approach the question. Vincett et al (2008, 4) rephrase it in the following way: “[S]ome are concerned with refining the theories so that they take account of secularization’s impact on women, others challenge the theoretical premises of secularization from the perspective of women’s experiences...”. Although Vincett et al (2008) restrict their understanding of gender to women, the statement still provides an idea of how to approach the issue of secularization and gender in general. I consider especially the second approach relevant, although the two approaches do not exclude each other. The second approach is also compatible with Moberg et al’s (2012, 2) question of how secularization can be understood in a nuanced way without dismissing the concept completely. Thus, my intention is to frame the connection between secularization and gender in a way where secularization is viewed on the premise of gender. Scrutinizing the theoretical lens through which secularization is conceptualized and at the same time being attentive to gender, may provide new insights into how to understand religious change today. In the sections 4.1 and 4.2, I will provide theoretical perspectives that can be tied to the cases of angel practices and LGBTQ activism. I regard the angel practices as an example of feminization of religion, whilst LGBTQ activism is a way of queering religion.

#### 4.1 The androcentric bias and the feminization of religion

Modern men’s experiences are taken as the norm and model for the future of religion: when men leave religion, religion is said to be dying, regardless of its continuity in women’s lives.

(Vincett et al 2008, 5)

The purpose of this section is to present the perspectives I find useful for identifying discursive constructions of agency among the angel practitioners. The traditional secularization paradigm has been embedded with an androcentric bias, where women's religiosity is viewed as the deviation from the norm (Keinänen 2010, 10). Men's experience of religion has often been assumed as the norm according to which secularization and religion have been defined: modernization has been accused of causing religious decline as an outcome of urbanization, differentiation, rationalization, bureaucratization and individualization. Vincett et al (2008, 5) argue that the characteristics of what is regarded as secularization, such as rationalization, separation of church-state relations and bureaucratization, have mainly been taking place in the public sphere, which is assumed to be the sphere of men. When religion is claimed to be in decline, only official institutional religion is taken into account, while private religion and its continued existence is ignored (Keinänen 2010, 12). In contrast to men's religiosity, women's religiosity has been presented as invisible, non-official and non-institutional and as an alternative form of religiosity beside official religion. In other words, women's religiosity has been neglected in previous research, since their religiosity often takes place outside formal religious institutions (Keinänen 2010, 8-9), or, alternatively: "viewed from the perspective of the formal religious institutions, women's practices indeed seem to be peripheral, but viewed in the context of the everyday lives of the people, the opposite might be true" (Keinänen 2010, 15). As a consequence of this difference in perspective, studying the religious lives of women has opened new ways to understand religion in contemporary society.

The premises of being woman have transformed during the last century, likewise have the premises of being religious (Trzebiatowska & Bruce 2012, 147). When it comes to the premises of being woman, the feminist movement is a significant aspect to keep in mind when discussing women and contemporary religion. From a historical perspective, the erosion or transformation of traditional gender norms is an example of how feminism as a political movement has had an indirect impact on religious institutions and communities (Gross 1996, 15; Vincett et al 2008, 7). In addition, the erosion of traditional gender norms concerning, for example, the distribution of work and independence, has provided new frames for the self-determination of women. On a general level, the acceptance of normative gender

roles has declined, although these have not dissolved completely (Trzebiatowska & Bruce 2012, 172; Vincett et al 2008, 110).

The crucial question is what the consequences are of taking women's experiences as the standpoint from where secularization is examined (Vincett et al 2008, 4). Somewhat paradoxically, when considering the androcentric bias, is that the so-called feminization of religion emerges as a salient feature of contemporary religious change (Keinänen 2010, 10). The feminization of religion refers to the tendency that women are predominant in both institutional forms of religion as well as in alternative spiritualities, new religious movements and New Age, and other non-institutional forms of religion and spirituality (Sointu & Woodhead 2008; Trzebiatowska & Bruce 2012, Vincett et al 2008). Trzebiatowska and Bruce (2012, 3) estimate that the ratio of women practicing religion today in Western countries is 2/3 compared to men. Although this is only a rough estimation, it gives a general idea of the relevance of the feminization of religion as a part of contemporary religiosity.

There are various ways to explain why women are predominant in both institutional forms of religion and alternative spiritualities. Starting with institutional religion, it has been suggested that women's responsibility for socialization and nurturing children keep them closer to institutional religion than men (Trzebiatowska & Bruce 2012, 175-177). A main argument is that the privatization of religion is closely connected to the feminization of religion. The social division of men and women into separate social spheres, the public and the private, has led to feminized forms of religion, since religion has become more connected to women's lives in the private sphere (Vincett et al 2008, 5). This claim seems to be partially valid in the Finnish setting in the sense that women practice religion more often both privately and publicly, and more often categorize themselves as religious and report belief in Christian dogma (Kääriäinen et al 2005, 187). The claim is also supported by the fact that there is a clear difference between women's and men's intentions to provide their children with religious education (Church Research Institute 2013, 139). Women's role in social reproduction cannot fully provide an explanation to the feminization of religion, but it would explain why many women stay close to institutional religion.

Women outnumber men also in the field of alternative spirituality and holistic

therapies, which have increased in popularity since the 1980's (Vincett et al 2008, 6). This observation is central to seeing why women are moving away from institutional religion. Sointu and Woodhead (2008, 268) suggest that the strong correlation between holistic spiritualities and the female gender can be traced to how these practices are relevant to representations of femininity. As women still are, to a great extent, responsible for the emotional care of themselves as well as of others, holistic practices legitimate traditional discourses and representations of femininity. Additionally, Sointu and Woodhead (2008, 270) suggest that holistic spiritualities provide spaces for women to move away from norms prescribed to feminine subjects. It could thus be argued that holistic therapies and techniques focusing on body and emotion are useful for women constructing autonomous but relational forms of selfhood, in other words, a notion of the self which for the women is seen in relation to others. The idea of an “independent, self-assertive selfhood” is according to Sointu and Woodhead (2008, 268) primarily a normative masculine construction of selfhood, which is not necessarily descriptive of women’s notion of the self.

Keinänen (2010, 28) argues that although the focus of a great part of feminist scholarship has been to make women’s religiosity visible in research, domestic religion has to a large extent been neglected. An explanation to this, according to Keinänen (2010, 29), is that the domestic sphere has in feminist scholarship predominantly not been viewed as a site for women’s emancipation. Simons (2007, 180-181) claims that the cultural association of caring with women and motherhood should be seen as a central site of women’s agency and associated with power and responsibility rather than subordination or passivity. This means that mothering is reconstituted as a resource. Simons (2007, 180) explains that women inhabit a subjectifying power as caregivers as they are responsible for the socialization of children. This means that women are constituted as “subjects endowed with relational and nurturing capacities needed for mothering” (Simons 2007, 181).

In this section, I have presented some approaches that are useful for identifying patterns of womanhood and religion in the interview material: why many women stay close to institutional religion but also why many women find religious practices outside traditional institutional religion. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the approaches presented here, in some respect, are based on stereotypical ideas of

gender, meaning that women are considered religious in a particular way indeed because they are women. For example, Trzebiatowska and Bruce (2012, 135) suggest that women are closer to religion because they more than men deal with issues related to life and death, such as child birth. As Davie (2007, 233) points out, this kind of explanation tends to reduce women's religiosity to biological determinism. Following this, it is crucial to investigate different kinds of womanhoods and be aware of the fact that womanhood does not necessarily equal motherhood. In any case, it could be argued that the category of 'women' is sometimes left unproblematicized. Although the feminization of religion thesis has here been discussed only restrictively, the centrality of norms in the feminization of religion is salient. In case secularization is viewed as a transformation of religion, a central question is what normative integration into a religious institution and conformity to the institution (Dobbelaere 2002; McGuire 2002) mean with regards to women.

#### 4.2 LGBT, queer and queering religion

In this section, I describe the theoretical perspectives which constitute the background of the analysis of the case of LGBTQ activism. The purpose is to describe a historical and theoretical background of LGBTQ perspectives, as well as to provide an idea of what a LGBTQ perspective can contribute to the debate on religious change.

In recent years, there has been both in academia, public debates and in religious communities an increased attention to non-normative identities. Although LGBTQ people often have been described as a hidden population, LGBTQ experiences have in some sense gone mainstream both as part of a political agenda, increasing public awareness and assertiveness, as well as a consequence of provoking negative responses. This can be seen as the main motivation to why it is important to study LGBTQ identities as a part of religious change (Yip 2010b, 7).

The background of LGBT studies is found in the civil rights movements. Notably, queer is not necessarily synonymous with LGBT, since there is a difference in emphasis between the queer political goal to destabilize identity categories and the focus on civil rights of the LGBT movement (Alsop et al 2002, 228; Munt 2010, 3). However, I do not at this point make a distinction, since the perspectives are

overlapping and not exclusive in relation to each other. For that reason, I use the label LGBTQ as an umbrella term to describe this diverse group of perspectives.

Third wave feminism, or post-feminism, which emerged in the 1990s, is characterized by a self-critical stance toward grand theories and essentialist notions of gender (Alsop et al 2002, 4). The influential contribution to the theoretical field of gender studies which emerged was the queer perspective, introduced by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999[1990]). Queer can be defined as a perspective, or a position, from which one can examine the normative status of heterosexuality (Berg & Wickman 2010, 12). The queer perspective emerged as a counter-reaction to the normative status of heterosexuality not only in society, but also most importantly, within feminist theory (Alsop et al 2002, 94). The concept of queer in itself, originally used in a stigmatized way by the majority, has been redefined by theoreticians and activists into an affirmative identity category. Thus, queer is an illustrative example of how concepts are never laden with a specific meaning without a context, since its meaning depends on who is using it and how. Leaving the concept open for definition is an important aspect of maintaining the non-normativity of the concept (Berg & Wickman 2010, 12-15). According to Berg and Wickman (2010, 63), three different meanings of queer can be distinguished: a theoretical, a political and a cultural meaning. Making this distinction is primarily of analytical nature, as they are, in practice, overlapping each other. For the purpose of this study, I consider queer primarily as a theoretical approach to the material to be interpreted, which is used to grasp issues of non-normativity and religion. The political and cultural dimensions of queer are aspects that can be interpreted from the voices in the material, meaning that the political and cultural dimensions of queer are related to individual agency and, in this case, how the act of queering can be related to religious agency. I acknowledge that deploying the term queer to include individuals who do not self-describe as being queer is at risk to distort how individuals perceive themselves. For this reason, I understand the concept of queer mainly as a theoretical approach.

The study of LGBTQ identities and religion is a fairly young research field. From a historical perspective, religion has been of scarce interest in LGBTQ studies, following the idea that “religions were anti-gay, and good gays were not religious”

(O'Brien 2014, xii). Both LGBTQ communities and LGBTQ academia have often had a secularist bias, meaning that they have been antagonistic toward religion, since religion is perceived as an oppressive heteronormative institution. Such an approach tends to put too much stress on the negative power of religion and underestimate agency in terms of resistance and creative transformation (Nynäs & Yip 2012, 9).

In the so-called post-secular turn in feminism, whose premises can be considered valid also from a LGBTQ perspective, the secularist assumptions in European feminism have been acknowledged and problematized (e.g. Bracke 2008; Braidotti 2008). Feminism as an emancipatory philosophy and political force originates from Enlightenment ideas of criticism of religious authorities and dogma. As a consequence, most of the feminist movement in Europe has been characterized as critical of religion (Braidotti 2008, 3). Based on this standpoint, religion is embedded in institutionalism and authoritarianism, and therefore assumed to be constraining and restrictive in relation to gender and sexuality (Nynäs & Yip 2012, 9). As Braidotti (2008, 3-4) argues, feminism has had a too simplified negative perspective on religion and spirituality and their connectedness to political agency, which implies that the idea of radical, oppositional counter-subjectivities is a too narrow approach to the subject. In other words, religiosity or spirituality may be a significant part of political subjectivity (Braidotti 2008, 15-16). Consequently, the term 'queering religion' refers to the process through which LGBTQ individuals negotiate their identities in relation to religion and spirituality (O'Brien 2014, x). For many LGBTQ individuals, religion and spirituality constitute an important resource for transformation and emancipation (Yip 2010b, 12). There is, anyway, a difficulty in defining the nature of a "queer spiritual space", not least because an ultimate definition of the concept of queer would set the concept with normative standards (Munt 2010, 20). These spaces are, however, political as they are negotiated according to emancipatory interests. How religion is queered in this sense, thus exemplifies the political and cultural meaning of queer, as described by Berg and Wickman (2010, 63).

Increasing acceptance and tolerance on a societal level in the form of progressive legislation, is closely tied to a discourse of equality and human rights which is usually considered to belong to the secular sphere (Yip 2010a, 43). As the religious

and the secular sphere by no means are isolated from each other, social issues such as LGBTQ rights have entered the agenda today also in churches and other religious communities (Hunt 2009, 5-6). However, religious communities have often been criticized for and accused of resisting change in issues concerning gender equality and acceptance of sexual difference. Such claim is usually based on the assumption that secular institutions and secularized societies, in contrast to religious institutions, already have achieved equality (Yip 2010a, 35). Having the aim to criticize this bias, Joan Scott (2009) discusses how the concept of secularization is connected with gender equality and sexual politics. Scott uses the concept of sexularism (a combination of secularism and sexuality) to denote the link between secularism and sexuality, which assumes that in a secular society there is no discrimination based on gender or sexuality. The assumption that should be problematized is that secularism “encourage[s] the free expression of sexuality” (Scott 2009, 1) and leads to liberation and emancipation. If there is no inherent connection between secularism and gender/sexual equality, the question that should be raised is what kinds of ways to emancipation may be enabled through religious institutions and religion in general.

In this section, I have presented some approaches that are useful for identifying gendered agency in relation to religion in the case of LGBTQ activism. Institutional religion may be repressive with regards to gender and sexuality, but also a channel through which change can be pursued. In addition, religion and spirituality may constitute an important resource for activism and a way to support one’s identity. The diversity found within LGBTQ should be paid attention to in order to fully illustrate the usefulness of that category.

#### 4.3 The location of gender in the religious and the secular

In the sections 3.3 and 3.4, it was mentioned that the transformation of religion implies that making a strict distinction between the religious and the secular is not necessarily useful for understanding contemporary religion. This question is relevant also when it comes to gender. As observed by Moberg et al (2012, 2) the religious and the secular as categories of identification are not necessarily fruitful for describing identities in contemporary societies. Although Moberg et al (2012) do not discuss gender, gender can obviously be considered as such identity or subjectivity.

The purpose of examining the location of gender thus needs a clarification of what location may refer to. In case secularization is understood to refer to the transformation of religion, it is motivated to examine how the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists perform gender in a way that blurs the boundaries of the religious and the secular. This does not imply that religion has become more secular because of gender, as gender is not a new kind of identity or subjectivity. Rather, the performativity of gender is a crucial part of how religion is performed. As mentioned by Vincett et al (2008, 9), the fact that many women's lives are situated in the private domestic sphere has had the consequence that women's domestic practices have not been considered as connected to religiosity, but rather that these practices take place in the secular sphere. Similarly, activism with the purpose of raising tolerance, and gender and sexual equality, has often been considered a secular(ist) project (e.g. Scott 2009). The starting point of such claim is that politics is assumed to be situated in the public sphere, which neglects the possibility that activism and political subjectivity is a highly personal matter (Braidotti 2008, 3-4). These biases further motivate the need to explore how gender is situated in the religious and the secular.

In order to be able to conceptualize the location of gender, a theoretical approach that enables overcoming the religious/secular distinction is necessary. For this purpose, I consider Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity an appropriate approach. Investigating gender performativity is also a way to tie together gender as it is performed on different premises by the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists.

#### 4.4 The performativity of gender

Is there "a" gender which persons are said to *have*, or is it an essential attribute that a person is said to *be* [...]

(Butler 1999, 11)

In this section, I describe the gender-theoretical framework to be applied in the analysis. Issues of identity, subjectivity and agency constitute an essential part of feminist theory, but gender has been attributed a multiplicity of different meanings (Alsop et al 2002, 2-11). The crucial issue is how to examine how gender goes beyond individual expressions and how to recognize the conventions it is based on (Järviluoma et al 2003, 15). Being a predecessor of the queer perspective, Butler's

theorizing of gender has occupied a central position in contemporary gender theory. I have chosen Judith Butler's approach to gender, since it enables me to bring together the perspectives presented in the sections 4.1 and 4.2. In addition, I regard her approach useful for examining how religious agency is constructed. Similarly, the performativity of gender provides a basis which avoids the division into a distinct religious and secular sphere. As every aspect of Butler's extensive theorization can hardly be catered for within the limits of this study, I present in this section the points I find particularly fruitful to understand in relation to religion. In the work *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler* (eds. Armour & St. Ville 2006), there are suggestions on how to integrate the idea of performativity into the study of religion. Nevertheless, it should be observed that Butler herself has shown limited interest in religious identities (Strenski 2015, 168-169). Armour and St. Ville (2006b, ix) explain that "[r]eligion, like gender and sexuality (and often with them), is a site where language, materiality, theory, and politics all come together in complex ways". Perceiving gender as performative offers a tool to examine the mechanisms through which gendered positions may maintain and subvert religious positions – and vice versa (Joy 2006, 15-16).

Foucault's notion of discourse and power constitutes the starting point for Butler's concept of gender performativity, as introduced in her work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999 [1990]) and further discussed in, among others, *Undoing Gender* (2004). Butler problematizes the notion of a solid feminist subject based on common experience which serves as the base of knowledge production and emancipatory politics. According to Butler (1999, 5), the category of 'woman', the subject of feminism, "is reproduced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought". This idea constitutes the basis of her understanding of gender as performative.

A fundamental assumption in feminist theory had previously been that biological sex was given and natural, and the social sex, gender, was assumed to be socially constructed (Alsop et al 2002, 25-26). The performativity of gender has challenged the idea of "sex roles", which builds on the assumption that there is a straightforward correlation between sex and gender, for example, that a female body correlates with a feminine gender (Butler 1999, 9-10). Butler (1999, 11) argues that there exists no

predestined body with a given sex/gender, characterized in terms of femininity or masculinity. The concept of sex is influenced by socio-cultural understandings of gender, and consequently, sex is already gendered. The correlation between sex and gender is not something natural and given – rather it is a continuum, and it is difficult to point out where sex ends and gender starts. The category of ‘woman’ may, therefore, embrace a variation of identities, subjectivities and bodies. Although Butler’s understanding of gender has been criticized for being too relativistic and difficult to grasp (Alsop et al 2002, 94), the critical issue is not whether gender exists or not as something “objective”. What is essential is how gender becomes very real both on a societal level and in everyday life. This is also a crucial part of the analytical process – since I intend to study norms I also have to acknowledge their existence, and thereby they exist.

Through speech and bodily practices the subject comes into existence. Gender performativity entails the idea that “[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler 1999, 33). In other words, the anticipation of a gender core identity is what creates gender. This also implicates, according to Butler (1999, 182-185), that agency is not created by an independently acting subject, agency is rather a process of repetition in which gender creates itself. Consequently, gender is something that one is constantly *doing*, rather than something one *has* or *is* (Butler 2004, 42). The performativity of gender is illustrated by the following example:

When a baby is born and the midwife says ‘It’s a girl’, she is not reporting an already determinate state of affairs but taking part in a practice which itself constitutes that state of affairs.

(Alsop et al 2002, 98)

How gender and sexuality are connected to each other is a topic that has been of great interest in the field of feminist and gender studies. Gender and sexuality are empirically interrelated, but can be distinguished at an analytical level (Alsop et al 2002, 114-115). Problematizing the norm of heterosexuality is a main concern for Butler. Heteronormativity is based on what is assumed to be ‘intelligible genders’, meaning genders which maintain “coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire” (Butler 1999, 23). This so-called heterosexual matrix is a

discourse that (re)produces the “truth” of heterosexuality. Heteronormativity refers to how heterosexuality as being natural and self-evident is maintained through law, institutions, relations and behavior (Butler 1999, xxix). However, it should be observed that gender/sexuality per definition is neither inherently oppressive nor deliberating, but dependent on the context it is embedded in. Consequently, heterosexual practices cannot be reduced to being repressive heterosexual norms (Butler 2004, 199).

The performativity of gender creates and maintains what we recognize as norms in social life. Most importantly, according to Butler (2004, 206-219), norms inhabit a double nature in the construction of gender. On one hand, norms bind us together as subjects; by following norms we sustain a frame for how to act in relation to our surroundings, how to speak about things and how to understand ourselves in different situations. We act without reflecting over what norms we are actually adhering to, which in turn suggests that those norms are naturalized in that particular situation. On the other hand, norms simultaneously create unity through exclusion; when one is not following the norm, meaning in this case not being acknowledged to represent an intelligible gender, exclusion is the most probable outcome (Butler 2004, 206-207). The experience of not falling within the norm, experiencing exclusionary boundaries, also means that norms (and being non-normative) is the site for mobilization in terms of identity politics (Butler 2004, 217-222). Since norms are socially constituted, they persist as norms merely as long as they are acted out in daily social lives (Butler 2004, 48). Norms are thus regulative, productive, or discriminating depending on the social situation.

The availability of particular subject positions and discourses reveals what is appreciated or discarded in society. Being situated within a certain discourse does not point at determinism, neither is individual freedom unlimited. The “paradox of subjection” can be summarized as follows: “one depends upon that very norm to be formed as a subject and an agent even as one struggles against the conditions of one's own formation” (Butler 2006, 285). Although experience is always discursive, all experience does not fit within a discourse. Consequently, the subversion of the norm cannot take place if the norm is not inhabited to some extent (Butler 2006, 285). Subversion refers to the space for doing differently, since agency is the possibility of

variation on the repetition (Butler 1999, 185).

Although subversion is sometimes considered a kind of tactic that a subject deliberately instrumentalizes for an explicit purpose at hand, I am not sure that it must carry that meaning. If it did have that meaning, subversion would be nothing other than an instrumentality deployed by an autonomous will. What would we make of those kinds of subversions that happen unwittingly?  
(Butler 2006, 285)

In other words, Butler suggests that subversion is not reducible to conscious resistance and transformation. Similarly, as expressed by Bracke (2008, 63), agency should be understood “not only in terms of those acts that resists norms, but also in the variety of ways in which norms are lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for and consummated”. How internalized norms are outlived is in this sense a central aspect of performativity.

The critical question is how Butler’s theory can be applied to the study of religious identities and agency. Armour and St. Ville (2006a, 11-12) imply that Butler’s investigations into language, bodies and norms as part of identity formation would be fruitful also in the study of religion as these are involved in the construction of religious identities. For the empirical material at hand, I regard especially Butler’s focus on norms useful for examining gendered agency in the material. The idea of performativity provides a basis for understanding how religion and gender are constructed together. In addition, the idea of performativity becomes useful when the division of the religious and the secular is assumed to be problematic.

#### 4.5 The performativity of religion and gender

In this section, I bring together the perspectives from the third and fourth chapters in order to summarize the theoretical lens which will be applied in the analysis chapter. When combined with each other, the perspectives presented serve the purpose to identify the location of gender in the negotiation of boundaries of institutional religion in the two cases chosen. The starting point of my study is to approach the relationship between the institution and the individual as a power relation, where individuals shape their agency in relation to the institution (Kendall & Wickham 1999, 34-35). This agency can be analytically distinguished into religious agency and

gendered agency. My intention is to frame secularization and gender in a way that is not simply about “adding” a gender perspective to secularization, but rather to view secularization on the premise of gender.

In chapter three, the definition of secularization was narrowed down to the transformation of religion. Dobbelaere’s (2002, 25) notion of normative integration into religious institutions and McGuire’s (2002) notion of conformity to the institution are useful starting points from where to examine individual agency, since these provide an approach to explore what kinds of norms individuals experience in relation to institutional religion. Frisk’s and Nynäs’ (2012) theoretical framework of changes within contemporary religion further provides a basis for understanding what kinds of spaces for agency are enabled through the characteristics of contemporary religiosity. Although a theoretical background consisting of Dobbelaere’s, McGuire’s and Frisk’s and Nynäs’ approaches is useful, a perspective on how gender can be included is missing. As previously suggested, a perspective on how to view secularization on the premises of gender is needed. Therefore, for the purpose to explore the location and relevance of gender, the gender-theoretical framework by Butler is advantageous, since it enables an analysis of how religion and gender are performed together. The focus on norms is an appropriate approach when analyzing the cases together, since they show in different ways how norms are acted out; the angel practitioners exemplify the feminization of religion, and the LGBTQ activists a queering of religion. The assumption that religion and gender are performed together means that they are constructed in a process where they are dependent on each other.

In the analysis, the theoretical framework of Frisk and Nynäs is combined with the premise that gender is performative. To start with, I examine how the tension between the individual subjective experience and the collective institution is manifested in the interview material. The first step of the analysis considers how the angel practitioners and the activists experience that institutional religion is exclusionary. The next step in the analysis is an investigation into how eclecticism and egalitarianism as ways of shaping agency can be found in the material and what these characteristics imply with regards to gendered agency. The anthropological dimension and the dimension of this-worldliness of contemporary religiosity are

analyzed based on the premise that gender is performed in a way that blurs the boundaries of the religious and the secular.

The purpose of the theoretical framework as it is described here is to provide a basis for interpreting how both (institutional) religion and notions of gender can be seen as normative, and what kinds of spaces of agency these may enable. Consequently, my research question about the location of gender in how the angel practitioners and the activists negotiate boundaries of institutional religion thus considers what kinds of religious and gendered agency take place at the boundaries of institutional religion.

## 5 Analysis

In this chapter, I present the results of my analysis of the cases of women's angel practices and LGBTQ activism. The division into different sections in the chapter serves the purpose of identifying the boundaries of institutional religion from different viewpoints. In the first section, titled "The discipline of institutional religion", I examine how the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists regard institutional religion as exclusionary. In the second section, titled "Negotiating religious boundaries", I examine religious agency in relation to institutional religion. In the third section, "Doing and undoing gender in religion", the focus is on how the interviewees perform gender, both how norms constitute sites of agency and how gender is performed between the religious and the secular. I decided to provide an independent chapter on gender to highlight how gender is present also in the other sections of the analysis. The purpose of the fourth section, "Subversive religion and gender – opening up spaces for agency" is to tie together how both religion and gender may be understood as subversive, meaning which spaces of agency that are enabled through the negotiation of institutional boundaries.

Before proceeding to the empirical examples, it is motivated to clarify how the naming of the chapters and the discourses has been conducted. Sunderland (2004, 46-47) makes a difference between descriptive labels with a focus on substance, and interpretative labels which stress the theoretical standpoint of the interpreter. I regard my presentation of the results as primarily interpretative in nature, although interpretation to some extent always is descriptive. Since the premise is that identities are relationally constructed, a purely descriptive approach would neglect the dimension of power. At the same time, my aim has been to approach the material in a way that respects the interviewees' statements.

Among the LGBTQ activists, two of them are involved in the Rainbow masses. Anniina is a pastor in the Lutheran Church and she actively participates in arranging these masses. Niina is a volunteer and participates in the arrangements too, even though she is less comfortable with the institutional setting. Pekka is an elderly homosexual man, who has been working for change within the institution after he experienced discrimination within the Church. Tanja is a transgender woman, who

does not strongly identify with institutional religion, but finds alternative spiritualities appealing.

Among the angel practitioners, all women are members of the Lutheran Church, although they describe their relationship to the Church in different ways. Mari is an elderly woman, who describes having a strict religious upbringing and has also been employed by the Church. In particular Asta is family-centered as she is in the midst of raising her children. Juulia is a mother too, and she finds angel practices important in balancing family and private life. She describes having been raised not in a particularly religious family. Kristiina has been through a divorce and has found angel practices to support her professional career. In contrast to the other women, she does not have children.

All interviewees are not provided the same amount of space in each sub chapter. The main reason for this is that aspects relevant for the analysis appear differently among the interviewees. The interviews were conducted in Finnish and Swedish, but a translation in English is provided in the text. When presenting examples from the interviews, I consider not revealing the original language an important aspect of anonymization. Since the purpose of this kind of discourse analysis is not a linguistic analysis, I consider that the translations do not distort the analytical purposes. Despite the risk that some details may become lost in translation, I aim at providing a translation as close to the original as possible.

### 5.1 The discipline of institutional religion

In this part of the analysis, the focus is on how the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists articulate their encounters with institutional religion, the Church. The title “The discipline of institutional religion” is based on the premise that the relationship between the individual and the institution is a power relationship, where the institution is in the position to subjectify its members and these as individuals shape their agency in relation to the institution. Thus, the concept of discipline is, in this connection, used to denote the mechanism through which individual agency is regulated (Kendall & Wickham 1999, 34-35). Dobbelaere’s (2002) and McGuire’s (2002) view that secularization is about conformity and normative integration into religious institutions is useful when examining how individuals position themselves

in relation to the Church. In addition, this approach is useful to combine with the view that the emphasis on the individual's subjective experience is stronger than on traditional collective institutions (Frisk & Nynäs 2012, 53-54). The examples presented in this part of the analysis are selected to illustrate the tension between the institution and the individual; in which ways do the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists experience that the Church maintains exclusionary boundaries?

The authority of subjective experience (Frisk & Nynäs 2012, 53) can be seen as the background to why institutional religion is questioned by individuals. I begin by examining how institutional religion is experienced to be exclusionary among the angel practitioners. All of them are members of the Church, but they articulate their belonging in different ways. Mari is an elderly woman who in her childhood was forced to attend church and Sunday school, which she feared at that time. She describes some of her childhood memories in the following way:

My mother's religious upbringing was strict, I went to Sunday school, and from that no exceptions were made [...] There was no possibility to compromise about that. You had to do it, and it was very strict and, it was this kind of fear of punishment, a fear of believing.

Obviously Mari's childhood experiences of the Church are strongly associated with negative emotions and norms which impose believing in a particular way. Juulia, who describes not having a particularly religious upbringing, has somewhat different memories of her childhood. She remembers being disappointed with her parents who did not take her to church, and instead she joined her friend's family to attend church. Juulia explains that she was interested in what the Church could offer, but she was soon disturbed by what the pastor was preaching:

...but then the pastor said something like "from original sin you are born and I may save you", or something. And already at the age of eight I was rioting, I knew that there is no original sin, this is not my place, I knew I would never come back. I mean, already that young I knew that these people are not speaking the truth, or it is their truth, but definitely not mine.

What Juulia and Mari have in common is that they experience the teachings of the Church to be restrictive, meaning that they experience that there are certain standards

of how one should believe. Given that dogma is considered the norms of the Church (Dobbelaere 2002, 25), it could be argued that among these angel practitioners, there is a resistance against normative integration to the dogma of the Church. Their statements are illustrative of the tension between dogma and subjective experience as described by Frisk and Nynäs (2012, 53). Most importantly, the limited attention to angels in the Church is frequently mentioned by the angel practitioners. Despite the fact that angels are a part of Christian dogma, they are paid little attention in the Lutheran Church (Utriainen 2015, 167). Asta describes her complex relation to the Church in the following way:

I belong [to the Church], but at the moment I'm going through a terrible struggle about it, is it my place and my thing? What I get from it right now is almost nothing, our views are just so different. A lot of stuff is left out from the Bible, all this angel stuff is completely left out, because they [the Church] want to raise people in discipline and fear.

Asta openly claims that the Church is not attentive enough to angels and further claims that the Church is an institution of discipline and fear. It could, as previously suggested, be argued that the women oppose conforming to the kind of religion they assume the Church represents. Instead, the angel practitioners stress the importance of subjective experience. Kristiina explains that “It has been very clear since that, because everything is based on my own experience. I couldn't speak about these things if I didn't have personal experience about that thing”. As the statement by Kristiina implies, there is limited space for subjective experience within the frame of institutional religion.

Among the angel practitioners, the restrictiveness of the Church they experience is not explicitly connected to gender in the sense that the women would claim that they are repressed by the Church because of their gender. Rather, the restrictiveness as it is experienced by the women seems to be connected to the kind of religiosity the Church is assumed to represent. However, the way the angel practitioners experience institutional religion suggests that there is not only a lack of space for subjective experience in terms of religion, but also limited space for gendered agency.

Next, I examine in which ways the LGBTQ activists experience that institutional religion is exclusionary. Pekka explains that as a young boy he was convinced by a

pastor that homosexuality could be cured with religion and abstinence. His conviction demonstrates how an institution through a power relation makes individuals internalize sexuality norms through a process of subjectification. The experience of “spiritual and mental abuse”, as Pekka describes it, caused emotions of humiliation and anger, when he realized that he had been mistreated by the Church. At that point, he resigned from the Church.

I didn't want to have anything to do with the church, official church [...] At that time, I was so full of hatred against the church, and all the time I try to distinguish between the church and religion [...] I'm still very cautious, I burnt my fingers so badly with religion.

Pekka does not talk much about religion as a matter of personal conviction, but explains that his experience motivates him to see the Church as the main channel through which he wants to pursue his activism. The Church is the main site of activism also for Niina, who motivates her engagement in the following way:

If there is something I really want to stand up and fight for, that is people's lust for life and also sexual lust. [...] I mean, how is it possible to conduct such an ideology, or religious agenda, to deny people their human basic needs.

Niina says that she is upset by the fact that “sexual minorities are understood in the wrong way and are mistreated by the religion”, and that there is a need to do something for those who have felt abused and been excluded by the Church. The statements are indicative of a social pressure to conform to gender and sexuality norms, which in turn are connected to religion and, notably, often to institutional religion. Niina suggests that what she needs can be found outside institutional religion:

I feel so tired of being involved in religion in the traditional sense, or god in the traditional sense, I would almost prefer to speak of the sacred, and not about god at all, but about what is experienced to be sacred. That's it, that's something I need at the moment, much more than attending Christian Evangelical Lutheran church services.

Thus, the examples show how norms, both when religion and gender are concerned, restrict subjective experience. Although Frisk and Nynäs (2012, 53) focus on the

subjective experience of religion, a similar line of thought can be applied to subjective experience in terms of gender.

The centrality of subjective experience also becomes evident in how the concept of religion is understood by the interviewees. The fact that institutional religion is experienced to maintain exclusionary boundaries, has the consequence that the concept of religion among the interviewees usually has negative connotations. The following quotes exemplify Beckford's (2003, 7) observation that it is of importance to be attentive to how interviewees prefer to describe themselves. Juulia explains her understanding of religion in the following way:

I have become more anxious about this kind of narrow-mindedness of all religions. I notice that I wouldn't previously have claimed that religions are bad, but well, everything that restricts the freedom of mind of people and things like that, that you have to be or live in a particular way, that really narrows you down.

Several of the angel practitioners share the idea that religion is associated with rigidity and restrictiveness (for comparison, see section 5.2.1), and consequently they choose not to self-identify as being religious. Mari describes her way of life as follows:

I don't call it anything. Nothing more than it's life, it's life. God has given me life and he takes care of it. And for me, it does not mean anything such as being religious or becoming religious...

Whilst Mari avoids labeling herself into any category, Asta explains that "choosing the spiritual path" has been her decision in life. The reluctance to identify as religious occurs among some of the activists too. In the interview with Niina, there is an interesting detail as she distances herself from being religious:

Niina: ...during the last years I have become much less religious, or...

Interviewer: What do you mean by becoming less religious?

Niina: Or well, I mean less loyal [...].

The reluctance to identify as religious, in my view, reveals something about agency,

or the lack of space for agency. There is a parallel between the way the activists and the angel practitioners choose to self-describe and Heelas and Woodhead's claim that religion represents a life-as mode, and spirituality represents subjective-life and authenticity (Heelas & Woodhead 2005, 6). A general observation is that religion is experienced to be restrictive, whilst spirituality is experienced to be enabling.

In case the activists and the angel practitioners experience that institutional religion maintains exclusionary boundaries, the question is how they act in that situation. How institutional religion is negotiated can be seen as a process of exclusion and inclusion. Particularly a quote by Anniina demonstrates what it means to negotiate boundaries of institutional religion.

It's about what kinds of boundaries you have in your own head or within yourself, "This I don't cross, I don't cross that boundary". And well, I think it's good that there are [boundaries] [...], but I don't experience that those boundaries have been too strict neither.

In Anniina's statement, it becomes evident that she has to balance between the activism she wants to pursue and what she sees as the outer boundaries of the Church. At the same time, she is obviously aware of the fact that boundaries are not rigid. Anniina seems to suggest that institutional boundaries do not exist by themselves (in an objective sense), but that boundaries are always maintained by somebody. Consequently, her statement reveals something not only about strategies for activism, but also about power relations in general. When a power relation is negotiated, potential spaces for agency emerge, meaning that where boundaries are negotiated is the site where agency is acted out. This is an important detail that remains central throughout the analysis.

In this part of the analysis, examples of how institutional religion is experienced to be exclusionary have been presented. It is central to observe that the premises of how the angel practitioners and the activists experience that institutional religion is maintaining exclusionary boundaries are different in the two cases. Among the activists, institutional religion (and religion in general) is experienced to be disciplinary and exclusionary primarily when it comes to gender and sexuality norms. Among some of the activists, there is also a need to go outside the boundaries of institutional religion, which means that institutional religion is experienced not to

provide enough space for religious agency either. The angel practitioners express the idea that the Church is restrictive especially when it comes to its teachings. However, this can be connected to gender in the sense that the Church does not provide spaces for them where gendered agency can be acted out. Although normativity with regards to gender and sexuality is most distinct among the activists, and normativity with regards to religion among the angel practitioners, both kinds of normativity and exclusionary boundaries are found in each case. These observations are connected to the question of normative integration into religious institutions (Dobbelaere 2002) and conformity to the norms of the institution (McGuire 2002). The general conclusion is that the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists experience that the institutional setting does not allow enough space for subjective experience. In other words, the angel practitioners and the activists seem to seek for more space for agency, both when it comes to religious and gendered agency. The question that remains is to what extent such spaces can be found at the boundaries of institutional religion. As will be shown later in the analysis, the relation to the Church cannot be reduced to negativity, rather the relation can be described as ambivalent. To what extent the activists and the angel practitioners experience ambivalence toward the Church varies among individuals. This ambivalence constitutes a crucial site for agency, which will be discussed in the next sections.

## 5.2 Negotiating religious boundaries

In the previous section, the question was how the angel practitioners and the activists experience that institutional religion is exclusionary. Based on the conclusion that institutional religion does not provide enough spaces for agency, both when it comes to religious and gendered agency, it is crucial to examine how agency still is enabled within the institutional setting. An aspect of how institutional religion is negotiated is the making of boundaries to other religions and spiritualities, for which I deploy Frisk's and Nynäs' (2012) notion of eclecticism. Another aspect which is accounted for in this part of the analysis is how institutional religion can be opened up through the characteristic of egalitarianism.

### 5.2.1 Eclecticism

The starting point of this section is that religious eclecticism is a way of performing religion/spirituality, where performative refers to how religious/spiritual identities are created, constructed and negotiated (Day 2011, 43). Following the theoretical standpoint that “religion does not ‘do’ anything by itself” (Beckford 2003, 4), individuals are “doing religion” in the sense that they are actively constructing their own understandings of religion. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to explore the claim that “many different religions are used eclectically as *resources* rather than identified exclusively with one religious tradition being the only *source*” (Frisk & Nynäs 2012, 52, italics not in original). When considering the Finnish setting, this claim is highly relevant to explore, since the claim sheds light on how to understand the location of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in individual religiosity. Suspicion against the Church as a religious authority, as discussed in section 5.1, is prevalent in the interview material. I also suggested that several of the activists and the angel practitioners express that they want to find religion and spirituality outside the Church, since the Church does not provide enough support, and apparently, spaces for agency. Asta describes herself in the following way:

Follower of the spiritual path, maybe because for me, there is not a religion that is the one and only. And if I think about Buddhism, there is a lot I like, but also in Islam is much that I experience that “hey, this is a nice thing”, and in Judaism. So you can pick from every religion, your own things, what feels good for you.

Asta’s “spiritual path” is illustrative of how religions are eclectically mixed together into a highly individualized kind of religion. Juulia, another angel practitioner, describes the importance of personal choice and independence:

I experienced that it [the Church] is not for me, I apparently have a strong need to stay independent, I don’t want any that kind of influences, I’m afraid they would affect my own, inner path, so it has to be my own choice every time.

The central feature of religious eclecticism is that individuals avoid defining themselves into a strict category. For instance, Mari explains that “people are not in boxes, they have a place in the open hands of God, not in boxes”. The importance of

individual choice is emphasized by some of the activists too. In section 5.1, it was mentioned that Niina does not feel at home with religion in the institutional setting, although she actively participates in the Rainbow masses:

I don't take any religious tradition or religion more seriously than another. I try to look at them equally and now I just happen to be an Evangelical Lutheran Christian, but I wouldn't like to say that I'm Christian, to somehow restrict and put the end there.

The reluctance to self-defining into a strict category is salient also in Niina's description. She explains having a need to move beyond the institutional setting and describes her thoughts after a pagan ritual:

Wow, what have I done? How is it possible this feels so meaningful? I won't stop doing it, although it could be defined in many different ways, why couldn't I bring this into a Christian church service.

Niina's thoughts demonstrate how religious eclecticism takes place in a way that includes the Evangelical Lutheran Church, despite the fact that it is first and foremost experienced to be exclusionary. A similar way of thinking is expressed by Tanja, who describes having a Christian background, but sees her religion as a mixture of different religious and spiritual traditions:

It's a peculiar combination of Christianity, Buddhism and neoshamanism in my religion and spirituality, in some way I think they complete each other, I don't see them competing with each other. [...] But I have been really open now so my prayer is very three-dimensional. God, Buddha, I embrace God, Buddha and the universe, I would say these kinds of spiritual dimensions, this Christian, Buddhist and neoshamanistic, it's more universal. So it makes a kind of trinity.

An essential feature of Tanja's statement, and the other statements that consider religious eclecticism, is that there is not necessarily a conflict in combining different religious influences. These examples supports the claim of Frisk's and Nynäs' (2012, 52) that making a clear difference between different religions is becoming less important for individuals. Another aspect of religious eclecticism is that although

religion as a concept is embedded with negative connotations for many of the interviewees (see section 5.1), Tanja is speaking of “my religion”, which also is indicative of the authority of the self in the construction of religious agency. A similar idea is expressed by Kristiina, who describes “her religion” in the following way:

My religion is love, and it includes everything. Well, I belong to our traditional Lutheran Church, but, of course, some years ago also mother Amma appeared to me, and since then she has been the final aim at the path where I am now [...] It doesn't matter anymore, because God still is the one and same, we just call it by different names, and that's fine, everyone can keep their own God and own religion.

The expression “my religion”, which is articulated by both Kristiina and Tanja, demonstrate the centrality of individual choice and the authority of the self. According to Frisk and Nynäs (2012, 52), religious eclecticism results in a relativization of religion, meaning that one religion is not necessarily more authoritative than another. As emphasized in my selection of interviews, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is often the norm against which other religious traditions and spiritualities are compared. In light of this, it is interesting to observe in the quote above that Kristiina explains that all religions are eligible truth claims, since god is the same. Somewhat paradoxically, Kristiina suggests that the relativization of religious truth claims may provide new ways to approach the Lutheran Church: “Well, for me, God never opened up for me through the Lutheran Church, unfortunately I experience it to be very judgmental, that I'm a very sinful and evil person”, she explains. Although religious eclecticism is a salient feature among both angel practitioners and activists, it should be noted that to what extent religiosity is expressed as religious eclecticism varies between individuals. The pastor Anniina, shows a light form of religious eclecticism, as she explains: “Sometimes I need to go somewhere for my own sake, on my own, and then I actually often go to the Orthodox Church”. These examples, compared to other voices in this section and in section 5.1, demonstrate that there are differences in how the interviewees relate and position themselves in relation to the Church, some are closer to institutional religion than others, but the common feature still is that institutional religion is not abandoned altogether.

Based on the many examples of religious eclecticism in the material, it is motivated to raise the question of the connection between this feature of religiosity and gendered agency. At this point, there are indications that religious agency and gender are intimately connected to each other. How the connection between religious agency and gendered agency can be understood is further discussed in section 5.4.

In this section, I have examined how eclecticism as a type of religious agency is performed by the interviewees. As the examples have shown, religious eclecticism as a form of agency blurs the boundaries between what kind of religiosity is assumed to be connected to the Church and what is found outside the Church. Several interviewees express an ambivalent relation to the Church, but since they choose to negotiate their position in relation to it, it could be argued that they still are positioned within the Church. This means that although the Church is experienced to be exclusionary, it is inclusionary when combined with other religious traditions or spiritualities. The major observation is that it is questionable whether the distinction between institutional and non-institutional religion/spirituality is useful for understanding individuals' relation to the Church.

### 5.2.2 Egalitarianism

In this section, I investigate another aspect of how the angel practitioners and the activists negotiate religious boundaries. This part of the analysis is framed according to Frisk's and Nynäs' notion of egalitarianism, which refers to every individuals' authority to interpret religious traditions. Tolerance and inclusion can be considered aspects of egalitarianism (Frisk & Nynäs 2012, 54-55). Since increased egalitarianism, according to Frisk and Nynäs, can be considered a characteristic of religion, the question is how egalitarianism may open up for a dimension of gender. In other words, egalitarianism with regards to gender and sexuality could be seen as a particular type of egalitarianism in contemporary religion.

Starting with LGBTQ activism, it is well-motivated to claim that inclusion and tolerance are perhaps its most distinct features, since a central purpose is to open up the Church for sexual minorities. Pastors involved in the Rainbow masses can be considered to hold an influential position, as they are situated in the center of the institution, and thereby in a position from which they can reach people both within

and outside the Church. Anniina describes the aim of the Rainbow mass:

It's necessary, much more than before, to approach the so-called ordinary human being, living and being there by their side and not demanding people to be in a certain way to have a place in the Church. Simply opening up without reducing the content.

In Anniina's statement, inclusion and tolerance emerge as the main motivation for pursuing activism. The need of religion that is more inclusive is evident also among the angel practitioners. According to several of the angel practitioners, institutional religion is distant and unavailable. In Juulia's view, religion as it is represented by the Church is unreachable for ordinary people:

We are not allowed to get involved in this religious stuff, we should always go through an authority. But we consider the pastor speaking more precious in some way, if the pastor reads the prayer, than in case I ask, that's clear.

Juulia questions the authority of the Church to interpret the religious tradition. At the same time as Juulia distances herself from institutional religion, Anniina explains how egalitarianism can be achieved through institutional religion, the Rainbow mass:

It's about inclusion, and expressions in language, the choice of words, but it's also about symbolism and the body and gestures, taking in, giving space and giving a voice to people that otherwise do not get a visible role.

The purpose of inclusion of the Rainbow mass exemplifies how egalitarianism as an aspect of contemporary religion also may enable gendered agency. The efforts for achieving egalitarianism through activism on an institutional level indicate that the Church is an institution that has the authority to define not only standards of religion, but also issues concerning gender. These claims suggest that when something is referred to as "the Church", it becomes evident that "the Church" is not a passive structure, rather the Church consists of active members or others who are associated with church activities.

Among the angel practitioners, a frequently occurring view is that angels are more inclusive, approachable and embracing than god. It could thus be argued that the

characteristics of the angel constitute a means for making religion more egalitarian. For example, Mari explains that when she is in need of help and support, the angels can always step in:

Angels don't expect from you more than you are, you are good enough just the way you are with everything. I'd say, they don't punish, they don't judge, they don't blame, they just love. And that is what they also wish from us, that we would just love and accept the differences within ourselves and forgive ourselves and each other.

The fact that the angels are experienced to be easily approached makes it possible for the women to connect to institutional religion, as the angel is part of Lutheran theology. Consequently, the angel can be seen as a means for maintaining the authority of the self, at the same time as the connection to institutional religion is present. A similar idea is articulated by Anniina, whose god-image is closely tied to the idea that everybody is equal.

I think that the Church should not be a community where everybody has to be the same, and I mean, everybody is not the same, and I think it should not be like that [...] In this community we are not united because all of us think alike, but there is something else that unites, and that is the belief in God, it's trust in something that exists outside the self, but still exists within the self.

As Anniina hints at, in the Church as a community, egalitarianism based on the experience of god is more important than conformity. The common experience of god is what makes differences between individuals unimportant. Notably, the experience of god is, however, not seen by all the other activists or angel practitioners as something that unites. Rather god is somebody who excludes, for example, for Niina who is tired of god in the traditional sense, and Asta, who claims that god is judgmental.

In this part of the analysis, I have demonstrated how egalitarianism as a feature of religion is present in the material. The examples presented imply that efforts for egalitarianism are part of the negotiation of boundaries of institutional religion in the sense that through egalitarianism, a connection to institutional religion can be

maintained, although institutional religion is experienced to be exclusionary. It could therefore be argued that egalitarianism, as well as eclecticism, provide the space for agency that institutional religion, strictly taken, does not allow. The examples suggest that eclecticism and egalitarianism enable the angel practitioners and the activists being at the boundaries of institutional religion, which enable them to construct spaces where both religious and gendered agency can be acted out to a larger extent. How religious eclecticism and egalitarianism can be understood in relation to gendered agency is discussed in section 5.4.

### 5.3 Doing and undoing gender in religion

In this section, the focus is on how the activists and the angel practitioners perform gender. Since it is critical to be aware of how gender is read into the interview material (Mills 1994, 34), the starting point from where I read gender is Butler's (1999; 2004; 2006) notion of 'doing gender', which refers to the process through which gender is being created and maintained: "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 1999, 33). Respectively, 'undoing gender' refers to how norms are sites for transformation, since "a normative conception of gender can undo one's personhood" (Butler 2004, 1). First, I examine how norms constitute sites of agency. After this, I present some examples of how gender is performed between the religious and the secular.

#### 5.3.1 Norms as sites of agency

Initially, it should be observed that gender is performed on different premises in the cases. The difference can be traced to how the double nature of norms is played out, which thus serves as the main theme throughout this part of the analysis. The premise is that norms are sites of agency, as they create unity and continuity in social life, but at the same time, that unity excludes those individuals who do not conform to the norms (Butler 2004, 206-207). Absence of explicitly articulated gender in a material does not mean absence of discourse, rather that discourse is naturalized and taken as self-evident (Sunderland 2004, 3). The angel practitioners rarely explicitly articulate them being women, except for when they, for example, are asked why they think

most individuals interested in angels are women. Consequently, the angel practitioners exemplify how gender remains unquestioned and naturalized in speech. In contrast, the activists explicitly articulate and problematize gender, which hardly is surprising since the purpose of their activism is to make gender and sexual minorities more visible. Although this description is somewhat generalized, it clearly shows the relevance of norms as sites for agency.

When gender is not explicitly articulated, the critical question is how to recognize that gender is being performed. I have approached the angel practitioners as an example of feminization of religion, which primarily means that the religious practices can be seen to reproduce norms of femininity. Especially when examining these practices, norms of womanhood become visible. In the narratives of several angel practitioners, family emerges as an important part of their lives. The way these women describe their everyday life emphasizes the mother's position in religious socialization, which according to Trzebiatowska and Bruce (2012, 175-177) keeps women close to institutional religion. For instance, the mother's position in religious socialization becomes evident in memories from their own upbringing. In section 5.1, Mari's childhood memories of the Church were mentioned. Mari connects her mother's strict religiosity with her own negative experiences of institutional religion, as she explains that the god of the Church is judgmental and restrictive. The mother's position in religious socialization is salient also in how some of the women encounter questions of raising their own children. For example, Juulia explains that she is open to her family about the presence of angels in her everyday life. Juulia emphasizes that her children should be able to "choose their own way", but at the same time she argues that activities for children arranged by the Church are important.

As mentioned in section 5.1, the angel practitioners and the activists experience institutional religion as exclusionary since it does not provide space for religious and gendered agency. The question that follows is what kind of spaces for gendered agency are enabled through angel practices. It could be suggested that the angel practitioners are involved in practices which provide more space for gendered agency than institutional religion, strictly taken, does. Nurturing her family is a central part of how Asta, a mother of several young children, describes her everyday life and spiritual life:

For me family is important, it's always the number one. And I would say, in two years' time, this spiritual path has become part of it and everything that is very close to my heart. [...] I get so much power and peace from it, and it really affects my family a lot, how my children behave, and our family's everyday life.

How Asta describes her everyday life exemplifies how motherhood is a crucial site for women's agency (Simons 2007, 190). As the quote of Asta demonstrates, motherhood is for her intimately connected with her spiritual life. Asta explains that angels are present in the daily life of her children too, and the common experience of angels unites her with her children. The angel practices provide her with space for acting out motherhood as a norm. Here, Sointu's and Woodhead's (2008, 16) claim that holistic practices legitimate traditional discourses and representations of femininity, which obviously also entail norms, is a useful perspective. For example, Asta mentions that she usually asks the angels to protect her children when they go to school. In addition, holistic therapies have for her been helpful when her children have been ill, and with the help of the energy of angels her home, according to her, stays peaceful and purified. How the angel practitioners perform gender largely follows the conventions of how womanhood is anticipated to be performed.

Although motherhood is a frequently occurring way of performing womanhood, the agency of the angel practitioners cannot be reduced to motherhood only. Sointu and Woodhead (2008, 16) further suggest that holistic spiritualities provide spaces for women to move away from norms prescribed to feminine subjects. Nurturing is a salient feature of how the women act, but they also make independent choices concerning their lives. Juulia clearly tries to balance between family life, work and individual spiritual development:

Of course I do my day job and I take care of my family, I walk the dog and everything, but my actual day job has been this, developing myself or studying these things. As much as possible.

Although Juulia clearly emphasizes the importance of caring for herself, it is evident that taking care of the self is closely connected to taking care of others. This means that even though the women are autonomous selves, the notion of the self is still

relational (Sointu & Woodhead 2008, 17). The idea of the relational self is expressed in the description by Mari: “Every time I heal, I don’t only heal the client, I’m also healing myself every time”. Among the angel practitioners, there are obviously differences in how norms of womanhood are performed, for example to what extent the emphasis is on nurturing the self or others. These differences can be seen as variations on the same norm, as nurturing is in any case connected both to the individual and others.

As gender performativity according to Butler (2006, 285) also entails the reproduction of norms, it is motivated to examine how the gendered body is part of doing religion. In other words, it is central to examine how bodily holistic practices legitimate traditional discourses and norms of femininity (Sointu & Woodhead 2008, 15). As holistic therapies are exercised on the gendered body, the body is part of the reproduction of these gendered discourses. For example, Mari mentions that therapeutic practices have been important for her not only when dealing with her relationship with her mother and physical illnesses, but she also remarks that difficult pregnancies, childbirths and a hysterectomy have been central events in her life. Similarly, Asta mentions suffering from post-natal depression. Asta and Mari suggest that a strongly embodied subject is present in angel practices. Within institutional religion, strictly taken, there are no spaces where this kind of agency can be acted out.

The centrality of norms of womanhood as sites of agency becomes evident in how the women articulate ideas about women’s religiosity in contrast to men’s religiosity. In the interview situation, the women are asked why they think most people interested in angels are women. The angel practitioners mention sensitiveness, vulnerability and intuition as central characteristics of their personality. Asta explains that these characteristics are directly associated with being a woman:

Women are experienced to be gentle and sensitive, the word woman is so strong and embraces so much. In men, again, there is masculinity and such a strong energy, that you are not experienced to be a man if you say “I have this kind of stuff” [belief in angels].

These characteristics, sensitiveness and vulnerability, emerge as central for being in contact with angels. Although the husband is described as passive or ignorant of

angel practices, several of the women mention that men seem to be increasingly interested in angels, despite the fact that they do not show it in public. Most importantly, norms of womanhood create spaces which are not available for men. In Mari's view, her husband is struggling with her interest in angels at the same time as he is himself dealing with difficult issues. The separateness from men is further emphasized as Mari repeats that her spiritual path is her independent choice.

Although he's sometimes having a hard time, he tries, he is struggling a lot. And of course, when I went for that course, I announced that "from this I won't deviate, that's your choice. Whether you accept it or not, I won't deviate". He tries to accept it, sometimes it's been really difficult. But I believe that also he is contemplating things in silence.

This far, I have provided examples of how gender norms are relevant for understanding the angel practitioners' relation to the Church as well as their interest in going beyond institutional religion. In the narratives of the angel practitioners, there are examples of how motherhood or childhood constitute a link to institutional religion. At the same time, moving beyond institutional religion and being involved in therapeutic practices provide more space for acting out norms of womanhood.

In contrast to the case of angel practices, LGBTQ activism exemplifies how gender and sexuality norms create exclusionary boundaries. Gender performativity often becomes most salient when normative notions of gender and sexuality are crossed. An example of this is the "coming out of the closet"- experience, which refers to attaining a specific identity by making a confession. The premise of such experience is that for non-normative individuals, certain subject positions are not within reach, since their gender/sexuality is invalidated, or being 'undone' by prevalent norms (Butler 2004, 1). The "coming out" is an act that enables individuals to live out their identity. The act of coming out is a regulation of normativity, in the sense that it strengthens the prevalent norms: when the deviant is created, the normal is sustained (Butler 2004, 206). However, as will be shown later in the analysis, such regulation of normativity should not be reduced to negativity, although the individual experience may suggest so. Pekka describes his "coming out of the closet"- experience as a young boy:

After that remained disgust toward my own homosexuality, when I confessed in confirmation class to the pastor that I experience love toward the same sex. [...]He convinced me that homosexuality is a disorder, a disease-like condition, I don't think he used the word disease, but a disease-like condition that is learnt, but which you can also unlearn when you don't exercise it, that's why I started the process of unlearning.

Today, Pekka has accepted his sexual identity, but after the incident he was convinced by the pastor that homosexuality could be cured with religion and abstinence. Years later, when he realized that he had been, as he describes it, “mentally and spiritually abused” by the pastor and the Church, he resigned from the Church and began his activism. Thus, he describes how a deviant identity is denied from existence, in other words, how one's gender is being undone as a consequence of normativity: “The problem of leading a life as gay is that very often people's emotions are invalidated or explained away, or one is forced to hide them”. Pekka's story exemplifies how institutionalized gender and sexuality norms create exclusionary boundaries, but also how those experiences can be turned into efforts to change the institution, the Church, from within. Although Pekka's experiences demonstrate how institutional religion can be repressive of gender and sexuality, other activist voices emphasize the potential of the institutional setting from a more optimistic point of view, or the significance of religiosity or spirituality as a part of activism.

Similar experiences of gendered exclusion are described by Tanja, a transgender woman. Tanja says that she is tired of always being expected to explain herself and her gender identity, which exemplifies how norms impose individuals to repeatedly “come out” when one does not follow the norm.

Yes, and then you just want to continue your life and get started, and at what point should you tell people that you are transsexual, or should you tell that, all that kind of questions.

“The coming out”- narratives demonstrate not only how norms create exclusionary boundaries and therefore are restrictive with regards to agency, but also, as a consequence, how norms are simultaneously productive. The mobilization and politicization of identity categories is based on the premise that these categories,

which are defined as a deviance from the norm, constitute the condition that enables subversion (Butler 2004, 223-225). Consequently, the emancipatory aim of activism is to destabilize categories, which would diminish the need to repeatedly “come out”. Pekka explains his aim to ‘undo’ gender as follows:

I want to break down all those categories and classifications.  
In my opinion, it does not matter, or it should not matter,  
which gender you want to be with.

Pekka’s statement is illustrative of the paradox of norms in LGBTQ activism. Simultaneously as the LGBTQ categories constitute the basis for political mobilization, the purpose is to eliminate the repressive significance of the identity categories in order to open up for equality and tolerance (Butler 2004, 225). This does not necessarily imply that the significance of gender or sexuality should be entirely eliminated, since gender and sexuality still may be sites of identity. Most importantly, theoretically taken, the idea is that identity categories should not be defined on the premises of repression. The diversity of identities that is found within LGBTQ activism also includes individuals who motivate their participation as an act of solidarity. Anniina, the pastor, claims that her motivation for LGBTQ activism is not only a desire to work for the benefit of others, but also to fulfill her own sense of belonging. Her participation may be seen as an act of solidarity, which for her fulfills a “need to belong somewhere”, as she explains it. The mobilization and politicization of identity categories is not restricted to those individuals who identify themselves with the identity categories to be subverted. Solidarity is a central part of the political potential of activism (Butler 1999, 5).

Generally, the meaning of gender performativity is salient when norms are crossed, but one voice in particular clearly demonstrates how gender is performative. Since the premise of gender performativity entails that identities and subjectivities are contingent, the category of woman may come out very differently (Butler 1999, 9-10). Tanja’s desire to “become a woman”, as she describes it, is illustrative of the frailness of identity categories. The fact that she uses the expression “to become a woman”, suggests that her womanhood, seen from a normative perspective, is profoundly different from how womanhood “should” be performed; the transgendered identity challenges the often assumed “natural” connection between

sex and gender (Butler 2004, 6). According to Butler (2004, 209), the desire to “become a woman” cannot imply becoming a copy of an origin, but rather a copy of a copy, since “the origin is understood to be as performative as the copy”. The purpose of pointing out the performativity of gender in this connection is not to claim that certain gendered identities are more “authentic” than others, but rather to illustrate the frailness of gender. Butler (2004, 8) further argues that the transgendered desire to “become a woman” cannot be reduced to a desire to conform to established identity categories, but at the same time, gender norms are experienced to be very real and something that should be achieved. If bodily transformation is experienced to be the only way to live out an “authentic” gender identity, the question that remains is if there even is any “authentic” womanhood to be reached. In this sense, womanhood as it is performed among the angel practitioners is not a more authentic kind of womanhood than any other experience or subjectivity of womanhood.

In contrast to Pekka’s negative experiences of institutional religion, Tanja emphasizes the significance of religion and spirituality as a channel for activism (see sections 5.3.2 and 5.4). Thus, gender and sexuality norms are central both in how individuals experience institutional religion and how they shape their agency in relation to it, as well as how religion/spirituality is part of that agency. Moreover, both can be considered as examples of how religion is queered, since, as previously mentioned, experiences of exclusion cannot be reduced to negativity. ‘Queered’ in this connection means that religion is negotiated in a way that opens up religion to become non-normative, meaning that there is more space for gendered agency.

On a general level, the angel practitioners and the activists illustrate gender performativity in different ways when it comes to how norms are acted out. Another central aspect is that the subject positions (e.g. woman, homosexual, activist) articulated in each case are not exclusive in relation to each other, although some subject positions occur more frequently in one case than in the other one. For instance, Niina explains that her being a mother is a crucial part of her motivation to be engaged in activism:

I was thinking that if my own children at some point in their lives find out that they are gay, how can I support them from the beginning, so that they don't need to go through such a hard struggle many do.

In her statement, Niina exemplifies how motherhood can be a site of agency also in activism. However, among the LGBTQ activists in general, motherhood is hardly at all articulated. Simultaneously as this example shows how particular subject positions are more frequently occurring in some discourses than others, it also demonstrates that gendered identities are not mutually exclusive. From this point of view, it should be stressed that how I have chosen to name the cases reflects dominant discourses, meaning that such a way of labeling them is not in any way “natural”. For example, if the norms would be reversed, the cases could have been labeled heterosexual angel practitioners, referring to an assumed non-normativity among the practitioners, and in the other case simply activists, as they would be assumed to follow the norm.

In this part of the analysis, I have presented examples of how doing and undoing gender/sexuality are processes of inclusion and exclusion. Having gender performativity as the theoretical background is advantageous when contrasting the cases in relation to each other, since they together exemplify the ambiguous nature of norms in the construction of gender/sexuality. Religion is gendering, since ways of doing religion support the reproduction of certain gender norms or work as a means through which gender and sexuality norms can be challenged. This means that norms explain both how individuals maintain their bonds to institutional religion and how individuals turn away from it. The subversion of gender and what it implicates in relation to religion is discussed in section 5.4. Another important observation from the analysis is that when speaking of womanhood, motherhood, LGBTQ identities, it becomes clear that these identity categories are fluid and overlapping, although in each case, certain subject positions appear to be more natural than others. This observation raises the question of how to properly grasp the connections between religion and gender. A general rule would be that labeling religious practices according to gender should be done with reservation, since there is no essentialist category such as feminine, feminist, non-normative or queer religion or spirituality. The labels have explanatory value only when put into context.

### 5.3.2 The location of gender in the religious and the secular

In this section, I present examples of how the interviewees perform gender between the religious and the secular. By location I refer to how the angel practitioners and the activists perform gender in a way that overlaps the distinction between religious subjectivity and gendered subjectivity, where gendered subjectivity cannot be reduced to the secular sphere. I consider the anthropological dimension and the dimension of this-worldliness of contemporary religiosity as the starting point for this approach. According to Frisk and Nynäs (2012, 55), the shift from a theological emphasis within religions to an emphasis on the anthropological dimension, the human being, implies that religion can be considered having become more secular. Nevertheless, the ‘anthropological’ as a concept in itself is indicative of a missing gender dimension. Similarly, Frisk’s and Nynäs’ (2012, 55-56) claim that the this-worldliness of contemporary religion, referring to how religion is experienced “here and now” blurs the boundaries between the religious and the secular, can be useful when the perspective on gender as performative is applied. As mentioned in section 4.2, Butler’s notion of gender as performative is useful for examining how the religious/secular divide is blurred, as the premise of performativity is that there are no essential pre-existing rules of agency.

First, I present an example from each case of how gender is located in the anthropological dimension. The pastor Anniina’s motivation for activism is intimately connected to her god-image. She describes god in the following way:

An including, receiving God rather than a God who says you have to be in a certain way to fit in. A God who lifts you up instead of flattens you down, a God who gives people color, who allows people to have color, a God who encourages you to be the one you are, not what you are expected to be. Simply an accepting God rather than a demanding God.

Although Anniina’s activism can be seen as partly theologically grounded in her god-image, the anthropological dimension emerges as more central in the sense that the right to sexual difference is based on her god-image. In other words, in Anniina’s statement, the theological dimension of religion in terms of god-image is present, but what is essential is that it is defined in relation to the ordinary (gendered) human being. What remains as the central question is how the religious/secular divide is

blurred. For instance, as Anniina explains that god is “a God who gives people color, who allows people to have color”, the focus on people is indicative of the anthropological dimension. If the anthropological dimension, as suggested by Frisk and Nynäs (2012, 55), implies that religion has become more secular, it seems to be the case that gender has a central location. Therefore, it can be suggested that how gender is located in the anthropological dimension makes it difficult to make a distinction between the religious and the secular.

A similar tension between the theological and the anthropological dimension can be found in the case of angel practices. As mentioned previously, the theological significance of the angel has been paid little attention in the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Utriainen 2015, 167). This observation is probably an aspect of the explanation to why the anthropological dimension has become salient also in the case of the angel. In section 5.2.2, it was suggested that angels are perceived as more approachable than god, and apparently especially approachable for women. The feature of inclusiveness of angels is manifested when the women actively encounter angels in everyday life, rather than wait for angels or god to take contact with them. Mari describes angels in the following way:

Angels don't expect from you more than you are, you are good enough just the way you are with everything. I'd say, they don't punish, they don't judge, they don't blame, they just love.

Mari's description of how the angel is experienced to be close and equal to the ordinary human being emphasizes an anthropological dimension, whilst the theological significance of the angel is set aside. As mentioned in section 5.3.1, the reproduction of conventional norms of womanhood is the explanation to why the angel practices can be considered as an example of a feminization of religion. Gender has a central location in the example above, since the characteristics which are associated with being a woman are the prerequisite for being able to approach angels. For instance, Mari describes herself as “very sensitive” and “sometimes even too sensitive”.

Next, I present one example from each case of the location of gender in the this-worldliness of religion. How motherhood is performed among some of the angel

practitioners exemplifies how gender is performed between the religious and the secular. Although gender, on one hand, could be considered a secular identity or subjectivity in everyday life as it is performed “here and now”, what should be observed is how motherhood is performed in relation to religious practices. Asta describes her family being strongly connected to her spirituality:

For me family is important, it's always the number one. And I would say, in two years' time, this spiritual path has become part of it and everything that is very close to my heart. [...] I get so much power and peace from it, and it really affects my family a lot, how my children behave, and our family's everyday life.

In light of the quote of Asta, it could be argued that the location of gender cannot clearly be determined to belong to the religious or the secular sphere exclusively. At the same time as this shows how the religious and the secular are blurred at least on a theoretical level, it is important to be observant to another claim by Asta. She explains that she could not stand being in the spiritual world all the time, as maintaining a balance between her spiritual and worldly life is important. This observation is important, since it implies a discrepancy between the purely theoretical approach and the experience of the interviewee.

A similar example of how gender blurs the boundaries between the religious and the secular is found among the activists too. As mentioned in section 4.2, political efforts for gender and sexual equality have often been assumed to be restricted to the secular sphere (Scott 2009, 1) and religion or spirituality have not been considered as a site for political subjectivity (Braidotti 2008, 15-16). Thus, a related question is, if gender is assumed to be performed in the secular sphere, can being an activist be reduced to an identity in the secular sphere. Tanja describes her aim as an activist:

So in some way, it made me want to make change within the spiritual world, and also in these spiritual circles [encounters with like-minded], and also in the Church for example, making change there, being visible and trying to contribute to tolerance, that's one of my aims.

As Tanja explains, her aim is to make change within the spiritual sphere. She adds that activism is her “spiritual task”. Therefore, it is questionable if gender can be considered to be situated in the secular sphere only. The transgression of the

religious/secular divide as it is exemplified here provides a central additional perspective to the assumption that efforts for emancipation are confined to the secular sphere.

In this part of the analysis, I have presented examples of how gender is located and performed in a way that makes a strict distinction between the religious and the secular insufficient to describe the agency of the interviewees. In case the anthropological dimension and the this-worldliness of contemporary religion are completed with the premise that gender is performed, secularization can be considered as a gender-sensitive concept. However, it should be observed that gender is not the reason why religion has become more secular, since gender is not a new aspect of religion. One could claim that some of the examples presented here are distant from the original focus on institutional religion, but rather, I would argue that some of the examples in particular demonstrate how individuals situate themselves at the margins of institutional religion, which means that they are still situated within.

#### 5.4 Subversive religion and gender – opening up spaces for agency

The purpose of this final part of the analysis is to tie together the observations from the sections above to demonstrate how the negotiation of institutional religion enables new spaces for agency, both religious and gendered agency. I have found Butler's gender-theoretical framework useful for understanding the frailness and the location of norms as part of agency. Subversion, is according to Butler (1999, 185) how gender can be performed differently in relation to what is anticipated, meaning that gender is performed in a way that enables transformation. Similarly, performative religion/spirituality denotes the process through which individuals shape their religious lives (Day 2011, 43). Following the same argumentation as for subversive gender, subversive religion is then how religion is performed in a way that opens up spaces for agency that were not previously available. The idea of performativity has been fruitful in analytically exploring how religion and gender are constructed in relation to each other. In other words, the purpose of this part of the analysis is "the identification of rules that create *the spaces in which new statements can be made*" (Kendall & Wickham 1999, 42, italics not in original). If subversion is the rule, how can institutional religion become subverted?

The crucial detail in the narratives of both the activists and the angel practitioners is the ambivalent position of the Church. In general, the interviewees experience that institutional religion is restrictive and take some distance from it, at the same time as they do not dismiss it altogether. The ambivalent position of the Church is the premise of the possibility of subversion. To start with the LGBTQ activists, the subversion of institutional religion can be understood as redefining institutional religion in a way that provides space for those who are usually excluded. The attitude of some activists toward institutional religion is rather instrumental in the sense that the Church is mainly seen as the site where change should take place, and these individuals do not necessarily have a personal commitment to the Church. In the case of LGBTQ activism, political subjectivity is a central aspect of subversion. The Rainbow mass is, according to Niina, most importantly, a political statement. The rainbow colors which are present in the church service are in themselves of political significance, she explains.

This lap [sense of community], it should be immediately visible that you enter a safe place, there should be obvious indications of that. So it's the rainbow colors, and it has been important during all the years that the altar cloth is, or that there at least over the altar rails is something rainbow-colored, as close to the center as possible.

The way Niina describes the significance of the rainbow colors and connects them to the sense of community, illustrates the emancipatory value that the Rainbow masses are considered to be laden with. The rainbow colors in the church context demonstrate that political subjectivity is not necessarily reducible to negative opposition (Braidotti 2008, 16), which would not recognize the potential of emancipation from within the Church. Rather, the act exemplifies how political subjectivity is also about creating affirmative alternatives from within the institution. The ambiguous position of being against but within, which forms a countersubjectivity, suggests that there is space for agency, through subversion. Such “micro-political practices of daily activism” (Braidotti 2008, 16) exemplifies how institutional boundaries are defined in a way that subverts the norm. The emancipatory potential of the Rainbow mass is also expressed by Anniina, who remembers her first Rainbow mass being very special:

That communion and that feeling I experienced, the first time I attended that communion, I thought, this is real, this is the first real communion I experience. [...] There was such a sense of community, here is space for everyone at this communion table. Yes, this must be what Jesus meant.

Anniina's description of her first "real" communion experience is an example of how institutional religion can be subverted, since recognizing the Rainbow mass as the real nature of communion can be seen as a step toward inclusion. Subversive religion is then a mechanism through which experiences of exclusion can be turned into inclusion. Similarly, the ambivalent position of the Church as described by the angel practitioners provides examples of how institutional religion can be subverted. Mari who has experienced a strict religious upbringing, explains that she later in her adult life worked in Sunday school with children to rehabilitate herself from her negative experiences in the Church.

Sunday school, I needed that form which had brought me all the bad feelings. I needed to have that form so that I could share love. Love is most important. Not hatred, not intimidation, not punishment, but love. [...] Perhaps all this goes back to my childhood, where I got such wrong images from Sunday school. It has affected me so much that I have to give the right image, so that the child can feel safe.

In Mari's case, she was able to turn her negative experiences of the Church from her childhood into something more affirmative as an adult. It could thus be argued that institutional religion was subverted in the sense that what Mari experienced as the norms of the Church could, for her personally, be redefined into an experience which supported both herself and others. Another example of how norms of institutional religion are subverted is demonstrated by Kristiina, who explains that she never understood god through the Church (see section 5.2.1). After all, she felt that she was able to understand god with the help of angels and mother Amma.

And the angels brought God close in another way, through happiness and relief, hope and love, and Amma made it, it's so indescribable when your own heart has opened so much that you cannot any longer stay in any boxes, you just love everything.

In case those norms which maintain the exclusion are redefined into inclusion, exclusionary boundaries of institutional religion can become subverted. Another example of how such subversion takes place is Anniina's explanation of how the definition of god should be left open for a gender dimension:

I mean, the language of the Church is so masculine. When I write a prayer, I try not to speak of the Lord, or if it feels right and it fits, and not necessarily change he into she, but to keep God as God, and that's something that should be left open and independent of whether one identifies God as a he or she.

Based on Anniina's statement, if the definition of god is left open in terms of gender, there is an emancipatory potential embedded in the concept of god, which in turn implies subverting the norm from within the religious institution. Similarly, Niina explains being most comfortable in religion where gender is left undefined, "[... ] which doesn't define my gender, what I am or I am not, as a gendered being, or doesn't define if I am a man or woman [...]". Leaving gender undefined can be considered a subversion of the norm, as the conventional norm that is exclusionary is set aside in favor of the non-normative. Consequently, this act is a way of queering religion, since religion is defined into being non-normative in relation to gender. The act of queering, the effort to undo gender in religion, is still a matter of gendering, since undoing gender inevitably takes place in relation to the gender norms it is ungendering.

In contrast, among the angel practitioners, the subversion of institutional religion takes place on the premise of a reproduction of gender norms, which is the reason why angel practices can be considered a feminized form of religion. As mentioned in section 5.3, the premises of how gender is performed among the angel practitioners and the activists follow the pattern that the agency of the angel practitioners is largely about adhering to conventional norms of womanhood, and the agency of the activists is about challenging conventional norms. However, adhering to conventional norms is also a matter of subversion. Consequently, how gender is performed in both cases provides examples of how gender is performed in a way that can be considered subversive. Butler's (2004, 52) claim that "[t]o the extent that gender norms are reproduced, they are invoked and cited by bodily practices that also have the capacity to alter norms in the course of their citation", implies that also reproducing gender

norms potentially results in subversion. When angel practitioners experience that institutional religion is not satisfactory, which I suggest that can be explained by absence of spaces for gendered agency, they negotiate institutional religion into a form that more properly enables gendered agency. This kind of gendering subverts institutional religion as the angel is distanced from its institutional context although not completely removed from it. As these practices enable angel practitioners to act out norms of womanhood to a greater extent than institutional religion does, acting out the norms is subversive. For example, the stereotype that women are more emotional, intuitive and sensitive than men, meaning that intuition and sensitivity are constructed as gendered characteristics to the advantage of women, suggests that the way the angel practitioners are doing gender enables them to do something that men are excluded from.

A central issue is how to further interpret and describe gender as subversive. Gendered agency is often described in terms of empowerment or emancipation. Especially at this point it is critical to make a distinction between self-construction on the part of the voice in the material, and construction on the part of the interpreter of the material (Sunderland 2004, 170-172). Using the term emancipatory to describe how the angel practitioners perform gender would perhaps be an overinterpretation of the aims and intentions of their agency. The concept of emancipation is laden with political meaning (e.g. Munt 2010, 17), and therefore it is useful for describing the agency of the activists. Although it could be argued that the gendered agency of the angel practitioners is not emancipatory in character, their agency is largely about reproducing and performing norms of femininity, sometimes as norms associated with motherhood, in a way that still enables new spaces of agency, both religious and gendered spaces of agency. For example, at the same time as norms of womanhood maintain the connection to institutional religion, norms of womanhood also constitute the site for agency where these women distance themselves from the Church. In other words, how the angel practitioners perform gender is a way of empowering themselves.

Although the angel practitioners only to a limited extent challenge norms of womanhood, instead, it becomes more evident how their way of performing religion challenges norms about how religion should be performed. Several of the women

describe how their belief in angels has had negative consequences for their social relationships. Asta describes her experiences as follows:

My ex-best friend asked me a year ago "when is the old Asta coming back?", and, "if I'm not enough for you as I am, then we don't have anything" [a relationship] [...]. These two years have not been very easy, and when you choose this spiritual path, a lot of people will leave you.

If the way how the angel practitioners perform religion is more challenging in character than how the angel practitioners perform gender, it is motivated to claim that the angel practices can be seen as an example of spiritual empowerment. The angel practitioners' way of doing religion is subversive in the sense that it challenges norms about how institutional religion (angels as part of doctrine) should be performed.

As many of the examples above suggest, there is a connection between subversive religion and subversive gender. The potential of the self, or the "radical empowerment of the individual" (Frisk and Nynäs 2012, 6) is a characteristic of religiosity that constitutes a common thread throughout the analysis. The authority of the self and the empowerment of the individual could be understood as a religious empowerment, which raises the question of the connection to gendered agency. According to Kristiina, the angels and healing practices constitute an important source of inspiration and support in her professional life.

I have always believed that within the human being, there is power to do things and go forward, and achieve dreams. I have always believed that dreams should be there and they should be achievable. I have always had great dreams and been living on the basis that life will win. What's the point of being in this world if I cannot do what I have been dreaming of and I know it's my thing, what am I without that?

In the quote of Kristiina, both religious empowerment and gender empowerment are present, but it is difficult to draw a distinct line between those two types of agency. A related observation can be made from the examples of religious eclecticism. For instance, as Juulia claims "it has to be a choice of my own every time", does this imply that gender enables religious agency, or is it religious agency that enables

gendered agency? The emancipatory potential of religious eclecticism is also expressed by Tanja, for whom spirituality has been an essential resource and support in her identity formation and self-acceptance:

My aim has also been that, when I began this process of changing gender, has also been to develop my inner side, not only the external. Because often everything is so focused on the outward appearance [...] At the same time, it's necessary to develop as a person in order to manage.

The process of “becoming woman”, as Tanja describes it, is for her intimately connected to a spiritual becoming, an “inner awakening”. Thus, it could be argued that her spirituality is laden with emancipatory value, since it apparently provides space for negotiating a non-normative gender identity. Tanja explains that neo pagan spirituality seems to be quite open to the “queer dimension”, but also says that Christianity is not necessarily restrictive either. In other words, as discussed in section 5.2.1, religious eclecticism is a crucial space for individual religious agency, but also, most importantly, for gendered agency. The question then is whether the “queer dimension”, as Tanja describes it, and emancipation, would be possible without religious eclecticism. Similarly as with Kristiina and Juulia above, it could be argued that the radical empowerment of the individual in terms of religious agency supports and enables gendered agency. However, the link between the possibility of religious empowerment and gendered empowerment could be explained also reversely, meaning that gendered empowerment is what enables religious agency.

In this section, I have examined in which ways religion and gender can be understood to be subversive. The ambivalent position of the Church in the narratives of the interviewees is the key to regarding the positions of the angel practitioners and the activists as subversive. As institutional religion is experienced to be exclusionary by the activists and the angel practitioners, subversion is the rule through which religious and gendered agency are enabled in a way that does not break the connection to institutional religion. In other words, subversion can be seen as the rule which explains why some of the angel practitioners and the activists who are at the margins of institutional religion can still be seen as being situated within the boundaries of institutional religion. In light of the examples presented here, it could

be assumed that gendered empowerment and religious empowerment are not only supportive of each other, but also that it is difficult to make a distinction between them. If both religion and gender are considered performative and potentially subversive, how gender and religion are performed together becomes a theoretical problem. Therefore, a critical question that should be raised is whether it is indeed the characteristics of contemporary religious change which enable spaces of gendered agency or whether it is gendered agency that makes individuals shape their religiosity in the way they want.

## 6 Conclusion

In this final section, I summarize the content of the thesis with an emphasis on the results. I also tie some observations from the analysis to the main assumptions of the PCCR project. The background of this study is found in the changing position of traditional religious institutions in contemporary societies. The purpose of this thesis has been to examine the location of gender in how angel practitioners and LGBTQ activists negotiate boundaries of institutional religion. This question can be divided into two sub questions. First, how do the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists articulate and position themselves in relation to institutional religion? Second, how is gender part of how they articulate and position themselves in relation to institutional religion? By investigating these cases, my intention was to examine what the cases can reveal about the relevance and location of gender as tied to the deinstitutionalization of religion.

My method consisted of a discourse analytical framework, which provided an approach by which to study agency. The concept of negotiation was an important part of this approach, as negotiation refers to how individuals position themselves in available discourses. For analytical purposes, I made a distinction between religious and gendered agency. Secularization was defined as the transformation of religion, which provides a basis for perceiving gender as part of this transformation. The transformation of religion entails processes such as increased emphasis on the individual, subjective experience, eclecticism, egalitarianism and life in this world. Although I found these dimensions as useful tools for identifying religious agency, a theoretical approach that considers gender was still needed. The view on gender as performative provides a basis for identifying the location of gender. The idea of gender performativity is advantageous, since it ties together the two cases although they embrace different variations on gendered agency. The angel practices represent an example of the feminization of religion and LGBTQ activism the queering of religion. In order to deploy the concept of negotiation, the assumption that both religion and gender are performative has been the basis of my approach to the material.

In the analysis, it appears that negotiating primarily is about exclusion and inclusion. First, I describe how the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists articulate and

position themselves in relation to institutional religion. The most central observation is that the Evangelical Lutheran Church inhabits an ambiguous position in the narratives of the activists and the angel practitioners. The Church as an institution and what it is assumed to represent is by them experienced to maintain exclusionary boundaries. These exclusionary boundaries mean that individuals experience that institutional religion does not provide enough space for agency. In which ways institutional religion in this sense is disciplinary has a difference in emphasis in the cases. Several of the angel practitioners mention that the kind of religion the Church represents is too restrictive, which indicates that there are normative boundaries of what kind of religiosity is allowed to take place within the Church. In comparison, among the activists, the emphasis is on norms of gender and sexuality which are assumed to be connected to religion. However, both religious and gendered agency are restricted by institutional religion in each case. This is exemplified also in how the concept of religion is avoided, as it is experienced to be restrictive for the individual.

The next step is to identify what kinds of strategies the angel practitioners and the activists choose when they encounter these exclusionary boundaries. Eclecticism is a form of religious agency where individuals actively choose their religious preferences. This kind of agency makes institutional religion more inclusive, as it is mixed with influences from other religious traditions, spiritualities, or therapeutic practices. Religious eclecticism increases the space for religious agency at the same time as the relation to institutional religion may persist. Thus, it can be suggested that although there is an occurring deinstitutionalization of religion, it is also evident the Church still remains as the main point of reference. The feature of egalitarianism, meaning that every individual has the authority to interpret the religious tradition, is also a way to unfold institutional religion. In the case of LGBTQ activism, egalitarianism is a salient feature, for example, as the purpose of the Rainbow mass is to include people who otherwise are excluded. For the angel practitioners, the angel, which is experienced to be easily approached, enables the angel practitioners to maintain a bond to the Church. In other words, eclecticism and egalitarianism enable the angel practitioners and the activists to make institutional religion more inclusive.

Next, I describe how gender is part of how the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists articulate and position themselves in relation to institutional religion. I have focused on how gender norms constitute sites for agency and how doing gender can be considered a process of inclusion and exclusion. A contrastive approach to the cases has been fruitful, since they demonstrate in different ways how gender and sexuality norms constitute sites of agency: how norms are adhered to and inhabited, as well as how norms are challenged and resisted. Examining norms has been motivated, since norms may explain how individuals maintain their bond to institutional religion, as well as how individuals move away from institutional religion. Furthermore, the location of gender is connected to the anthropological dimension and the dimension of this-worldliness as features of contemporary religiosity. As gender is performed here and now, the angel practitioners and the activists perform gender in a way that blurs the boundaries between the religious and the secular. The anthropological dimension of religion enables an extended space for gendered agency at the same time as the connection to institutional religion may persist. In addition, the subjectivity of a mother and the political subjectivity of an activist challenge the religious/secular dichotomy as these kinds of agency are performed in a way that cannot ultimately be restricted to only one of the spheres. At this point, there is still a bond to institutional religion, although many of the interviewees are situated at the margins of institutional religion. I consider this an example of how secularization can be viewed on the premises of gender.

As a consequence of the negotiations of exclusion and inclusion, the angel practitioners and the activists subvert the boundaries of institutional religion. This implies that both religious and gendered agency can be considered subversive. The subversion of institutional religion means that exclusionary boundaries, both gender norms and religious norms, are redefined by the angel practitioners and the activists in a way that enables them to stay within institutional religion. Thus, subversion is the rule based on which the angel practitioners and the activists stay within institutional religion, regardless of the degree of ambivalence. The reason why they still are able to maintain their bond to the Church is that they negotiate the boundaries in a way that enables more space for both religious and gendered agency.

Especially some results from the analysis need to be tied to the assumptions that

were presented prior to the study. One of the main assumptions was that “a significant part of religious life takes place *outside* the borders of its historical institutions” (PCCR & Method, 5, emphasis not in original). Although there are many different voices about institutional religion among the activists and the angel practitioners, the analysis in the sections 5.2 and 5.4 in particular indicates that the inside and outside position in relation to the Church becomes blurred in the Finnish context. Many of the angel practitioners and the activists situate themselves at the margins of institutional religion, as they distance themselves from the Church, at the same time as they do not dismiss it altogether. Being at the margins is still a position within, since they try to situate themselves in relation to the Church. In light of the cases studied here, it is then equally justified to argue that a significant part of religious life still takes place *inside* the borders of traditional religious institutions. This means that despite the deinstitutionalization of religion, there are still evident connections to the Church. The question of insiderness and outsidership in relation to the Church provides an interesting point of view on religious diversity in the Finnish setting, since religious diversity is possible without losing or giving up the bonds to institutional religion. The outside/inside divide neglects how the space at the boundaries of institutional religion constitutes a remarkable site of agency, not only religious agency but also, most importantly, gendered agency.

The question of insiderness and outsidership in relation to institutional religion and what kinds of agency this enables, is closely connected to the second claim that the contemporary environment “provides imperative spaces for individuals actively and consciously crafting their personal religious lives, shaping agencies and subjectivities in particular ways” (PCCR & Method, 5). In the analysis, my aim has been to be attentive to both religious and gendered agency. When both religion and gender are considered performative, the theoretical problem that appears is whether religion constructs gender or gender constructs religion. For instance, is religious eclecticism enabling gendered agency, or is it gendered agency that leads to certain religious preferences? The same question can be raised considering the connection between the empowerment of the individual as a feature of contemporary religiosity and gender empowerment. I think that how one should understand the connection between religious and gendered agency is highly dependent on the historical context. Is it the contemporary context where gender and sexual equality in many respects

already is achieved that makes it difficult to make a distinction between the two? What would the connection look like in another historical context? This is a topic that would be interesting to explore further.

Examples of how “the category of religion is challenged” (PCCR & Method, 5) are found among the angel practitioners and the activists, since this claim is closely connected to agency. The cases illustrate how religion is challenged particularly in two ways. On one hand, the analysis has shown that religion is experienced to be a concept laden with predominantly negative connotations and experienced to imply restrictions for agency. For this reason, individuals avoid identifying as religious. At the same time, others shape their religious lives in a way that they choose to describe as “my religion”. The fact that individuals relate to the category of religion in different ways, shows the necessity of being attentive to how individuals self-describe, as this may reveal something about agency.

The second aspect of the claim that the category of religion is challenged considers how performing gender blurs the boundaries between the religious and the secular. For example, being an activist or a mother are subjectivities that challenge the religious/secular divide. This, in turn, raises the question of what impact the different kinds of empowerment have on gender and sexual equality on a societal level. In the Nordic countries in general, including Finland, the equality discourse in society has historically been strong. A general view is that the processes of change have been less conflictual than in other cultural contexts, and the equality discourse has more quickly become institutionalized (Berg & Wickman 2010, 92-93). This implies that how the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists perform gender is connected to secular discourses. This connection and fluidity between religious and secular discourses on gender has been only restrictively mentioned in this thesis, but is an important topic for future research. The outcome of the connection between gender and religion has in my study largely been affirmative, which is of course not always the case.

In this thesis, how the LGBTQ activists and the angel practitioners make boundaries of institutional religion has been examined from an insider-perspective, meaning that the individual level has been the starting point of the analysis. From an outsider-perspective, meaning from the perspective of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as an

institution, the question is how to encounter the issue of gender and sexual diversity as well as the question of religious diversity. The public visibility and media storm that has followed the debate on same-sex marriage, causing both resignations from the Church as well as gaining support from the public, indicate that the Church is still trying to fulfill its role as an active agent in Finnish society. The popularization and the feminization of the angel, which has been criticized by male theologians, raises the question of who has the authority to define the meaning of the angel. As angels are part of Christian doctrine, whilst homosexuality can be considered an issue of sexual ethics, these are illustrative examples of how religious change is much about who has the power to define what to believe in and what to do. Since the Evangelical Lutheran Church is dependent on its members, it is a critical question how it responds to the development that individuals disengage from their affiliation with the Church. From the Church's perspective, it could be assumed that the diversity among those belonging and believing, and the emerging conflicts between different interests inevitably leads to increased polarization, which in a long-term perspective puts the Church in a position where decisions crucial for the future needs to be taken. However, the voices of the angel practitioners and the LGBTQ activists imply that it is indeed the members or others who somehow are associated to the Church who are in the position to make changes from within the institution.

## 7 Swedish summary

### Att köna<sup>6</sup> religiös förändring: Förhandlingar om gränser till institutionell religion inom kvinnors ängelpraktiker och LGBTQ-aktivism i Finland

Religiös förändring är en av de mest aktuella frågorna om samtida religion. I debatten om religiös förändring har begreppet sekularisering varit dominerande. Även om det inte finns någon enhetlig definition av begreppet, är det uppenbart att de traditionella religiösa institutionerna är i förändring (Dobbelaere 2002, 13-14). Den traditionella sekulariseringsdebatten har till stor del haft sin grund i antaganden som förbiser betydelsen av genus som en aspekt av religiös förändring (Trzebiatowska & Bruce 2012; Vincett et al 2008). Därför kan ett fokus på genus bidra med nya synvinklar på samtida religion.

Ett särdrag i den finländska kontexten är att den evangelisk-lutherska kyrkan historiskt sett haft ett starkt inflytande i samhället och varit en väsentlig del av den individuella religiositeten. Idag har individers religiositet en allt svagare anknytning till institutionen. I denna avhandling lyfter jag fram betydelsen av genus genom att studera två fall, kvinnors ängelpraktiker och LGBTQ-aktivism vilka båda aktualiserar frågor om kyrkans position, hur religion avinstitutionaliseras och på vilket sätt genus spelar in. Fallet med ängelpraktiker handlar om kvinnor som utövar terapeutiska praktiker och upplever att änglar är närvarande i vardagen. Majoriteten av dessa kvinnor är medlemmar i kyrkan (Utriainen 2015, 159). Fallet med LGBTQ-aktivism är ett exempel på hur frågor om sexuella minoriteters rättigheter är aktuella även i religiösa sammanhang. Den evangelisk-lutherska kyrkan är en central aktör i den mån att den ordnat så kallade regnbågsmässor riktade till dessa grupper (Nynäs et al 2013, 82-83). Religiös LGBTQ-aktivism omfattar även aktivism utanför dessa mässor.

Syftet med avhandlingen är att undersöka betydelsen av genus för hur individer aktiva inom ängelpraktiker och LGBTQ-aktivism förhandlar gränser till institutionell religion. För att förtydliga mitt angreppssätt kan forskningssyftet delas in i två frågor. Hur artikulerar och positionerar sig individerna i relation till institutionell religion?

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<sup>6</sup> Uttrycket ”att köna” används här för det engelska ordet *gendering*, vilket inte har någon annan etablerad motsvarighet på svenska. Jag gör alltså här inte skillnad mellan begreppen kön och genus.

På vilket sätt är genus en del av hur de artikulerar och positionerar sig? Med dessa frågor tar jag reda på vad de två fallen kan berätta om vilken betydelse genus har för hur religion avinstitutionaliseras.

Materialet som utgör grunden för analysen består av totalt åtta tematiska intervjuer med fyra intervjuer från respektive fall, vilka jag anser att täcker frågeställningarna och samtidigt för fram olika röster som finns i materialet. Kriterier för urvalet var att personerna talar om kyrkan och att de kan ge olika perspektiv på hur genus är relevant. Några antaganden har fungerat som utgångspunkter för intervjuerna: (1) religiöst liv äger rum i allt högre grad utanför traditionella religiösa institutioner, (2) individer formar aktivt sina religiösa liv, sitt aktörskap och sin subjektivitet, samt att (3) själva begreppet religion utmanas (PCCR & Method, 5).

För att utveckla ett teoretiskt ramverk som är sensitivt både i fråga om religion och genus ser jag diskursanalys som en användbar metod. För studiens syfte är en definition av diskurs med fokus på makt ändamålsenlig. Foucaults (1990) förståelse av makt som något produktivt och relationellt ger verktyg för att undersöka aktörskap (Kendall & Wickham 1999, 34-35; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, 21-22). Denna förståelse av begreppet diskurs har en nära anknytning till begreppet förhandling, med vilket avses hur individer positionerar sig i förhållande till fenomen i sin omgivning (Burr 1995, 146). Analytiskt sett väljer jag att skilja mellan religiöst och könat aktörskap, och redogör för dessa perspektiv delvis skilt för att sedan kunna föra dem samman i analysen.

Under de senaste årtiondena har kyrkans medlemsantal sjunkit och allt färre utövar religion offentligt (Kääriäinen et al 2005, 82). Samtidigt har det uppkommit en ökad mångfald i det religiösa landskapet. Karakteristiskt för nya religiösa rörelser, alternativ andlighet m.m. är att de oftast inte är institutionella till sin form (Kääriäinen et al 2005, 63-68; Ketola 2008, 325-336). För att kunna ta dessa olika aspekter i beaktande, avser jag med sekularisering de förändringar som sker inom religion. Med individuell sekularisering avser Dobbelaere (2002, 25) hur individer förhåller sig till de normer t.ex. dogmer som institutionen representerar. Sekularisering innebär därmed att individer distanserar sig från dessa normer. Sekularisering handlar alltså inte nödvändigtvis om att religionen försvinner, utan snarare att den tar sig uttryck på nya sätt (Moberg et al 2012, 2). Det post-sekulära är

enligt Moberg et al (2012, 2-3) en forskarposition som inbegriper en reflexiv användning av begrepp, vilket för mitt syfte avser främst hur sekularisering i betydelsen förändring inom religion kan förstås på ett sätt som beaktar genus. Det post-sekulära är alltså framförallt ett teoretiskt angreppssätt snarare än en social verklighet (Moberg et al 2012, 8). En central aspekt av det post-sekulära är hur man förstår relationen mellan det religiösa och det sekulära. Det religiösa och det sekulära har oftast definierats på ett sätt som gör att de utesluter varandra (Day et al 2013, 1). Genom att ifrågasätta denna indelning kan man förstå religion och aktörskap på ett mer nyanserat sätt.

För att undersöka religiöst aktörskap utgår jag från Frisks och Nynäs' (2012) teoretiska ramverk över olika förändringsprocesser som sker inom religion. Enligt Frisk och Nynäs (2012) finns det inom samtida religion en allt större betoning på individens subjektiva upplevelse, vilket innebär att betoningen flyttat från institutionen till individen. Ett annat centralt drag i samtida religiositet är eklekticism, vilket betyder att individer aktivt väljer sina egna religiösa preferenser. Inom religionen finns det även en allt större betoning på varje individs auktoritet i att förstå religion på sitt eget sätt, vilket innebär att religion blivit mindre hierarkiskt. Ett centralt drag är alltså att människan är i fokus och att religionen formar livet här och nu, vilket antyder att religion idag kan sägas ha blivit mer sekulärt. Religion förändras inte av sig självt, utan det är aktören som skapar religion. Exempelvis Day (2011) menar att religion och andlighet i denna betydelse är performativt. Även om dessa utgångspunkter för religiöst aktörskap inte beaktar genus, anser jag att ramverket ger förutsättningar för att undersöka genus. Frågan är på vilket sätt denna typ av religiöst aktörskap kan ge utrymme för könat aktörskap.

En genusteoretisk bakgrund behövs för att undvika essentialistiska tolkningar av genus. Uttrycket "att köna" religiös förändring har två betydelser. Det hänvisar till hur man med teoretiska perspektiv kan utvidga förståelsen av begrepp, t.ex. sekularisering. Dessutom syftar det på hur individer agerar i det verkliga livet och skapar genus inom religion. Fallet med ängelpraktikanterna har tydligast anknytning till forskning om kvinnor och religion, medan fallet med LGBTQ-aktivism kan anknytas till LGBT-och queerforskning. Frågan är hur man kan närma sig sambandet mellan sekularisering och genus. Enligt Vincett et al (2008, 4) är ett möjligt

förhållningssätt att med genusperspektiv som utgångspunkt utmana de teoretiska antaganden som sekularisering bygger på. I enlighet med att Moberg et al (2012, 2) anser att det inte är nödvändigt att helt förkasta begreppet sekularisering, strävar jag till att ha ett perspektiv på sekularisering som är genussensitivt.

Inom de traditionella sekulariseringsperspektiven har mannen i den offentliga sfären huvudsakligen varit normen för hur sekularisering definierats, vilket har lett till att kvinnors religiösa liv som ofta äger rum i den privata sfären inte uppmärksammas (Keinänen 2010, 12; Vincett et al 2008, 5). Inom samtida religion finns det tydliga tecken på att religion feminiseras, d.v.s. att antalet kvinnor dominerar och att religion återfinns i former som tilltalar kvinnor. Även om traditionella genusnormer ifrågasätts allt mer, har de fortsättningsvis ett centralt inflytande på hur många kvinnors religiösa liv utformas. Normer kan ses som en förklaring både till varför kvinnor upprätthåller relationen till institutionell religion (Trzebiatowska & Bruce 2012, 175-177) och varför de väljer andra former av religion och andlighet (Sointu & Woodhead 2008, 268). Ett problem med dessa synsätt är att kategorin kvinna och vad det innebär oftast inte ifrågasätts.

Fallet med LGBTQ-aktivism anknyter till ett forskningsfält som har sin bakgrund i den politiska aktivismen för jämlika rättigheter. Ett centralt perspektiv är det så kallade queerperspektivet, där Judith Butler (1999; 2004; 2006) är en föregångare. Queerperspektivet är en kritik mot normativ heterosexualitet. Begreppet queer är dock svårdefinierat, vilket i sig är en viktig egenskap eftersom begreppet annars skulle bli normativt i sig självt (Berg & Wickman 2010, 12-15). Studiet av religion och LGBTQ-identiteter är ett relativt ungt forskningsfält, vilket delvis beror på att det inom fältet funnits sekularistiska tendenser som innebär en negativ inställning till religion (O'Brien 2014, xii). Därför finns det bl.a. antaganden om att jämlikhet och tolerans endast är möjligt i det sekulariserade samhället (Scott 2009, 1). Det framstår dock som klart att religion kan vara en viktig resurs i LGBTQ-personers identitetsskapande (Yip 2010b, 12) och politiska engagemang (Braidotti 2008, 15-16).

Då de förändringar som sker inom religion antyder att det inte nödvändigtvis är motiverat att särskilja mellan det religiösa och det sekulära (Moberg et al 2012, 2), är det en central fråga vad detta innebär för könat aktörskap. Då betoningen inom

religion är på människan här och nu framstår det som klart att genus är påtagligt. Med andra ord kan det antas att könat aktörskap befinner sig i en position mellan det religiösa och det sekulära. Detta är ett exempel på hur sekularisering kan ses med genusperspektiv som utgångspunkt.

I fallen ängelpraktiker och LGBTQ-aktivism framkommer olika typer av könat aktörskap. Butlers (1999; 2004; 2006) syn på genus som performativt utgör den genusteoretiska ramen för min studie, eftersom den ger en grund för att knyta samman de två fallen. Genusperformativitet handlar om att aktörskap inte skapas av ett förutbestämt genus, utan att genus skapas i en ständigt pågående process, vilket enligt Butler (1999, 33) innebär att ”göra” genus. Därmed kan performativitet även förklara hur genus skapas i relation till religiöst aktörskap (Armour & St. Ville, 2006b, ix). Enligt Butler (2004, 206-207) har genusnormer en tudelad roll. Å ena sidan skapar normer kontinuitet i den sociala verkligheten. Å andra sidan innebär detta att normer samtidigt blir exkluderande för dem som faller utanför normen. Ett centralt begrepp i anknytning till performativitet är subversivitet. Subversivitet innebär att normer följs, bryts eller återskapas på ett sätt som för individen är möjliggörande och eventuellt emancipatoriskt (Butler 2006, 285).

Den grundläggande observationen i analysen är att ängelpraktikanterna och LGBTQ-aktivisterna upplever att de inte helt finner sin plats i kyrkan. För ängelpraktikanterna är det främst normer i anknytning till religion som är exkluderande, d.v.s. de upplever att de inte vill vara religiösa på ett sådant sätt som de uppfattar hör till kyrkan. Samtidigt utgör det institutionella sammanhanget begränsade möjligheter till könat aktörskap. För aktivisterna är det främst normer för genus och sexualitet som är exkluderande, t.ex. att homosexuella inte får leva ut sin identitet. Även bland aktivisterna förekommer uppfattningen att det finns gränser för religiöst aktörskap inom kyrkan. I båda fallen finns det exempel på hur det institutionella sammanhanget inte möjliggör tillräckligt med utrymme för religiöst och könat aktörskap. Begreppet religion förknippas med begränsade möjligheter till aktörskap.

Nästa steg är att identifiera på vilket sätt ängelpraktikanterna och aktivisterna bemöter dessa gränser. Eklekticism är en form av religiöst aktörskap där individer aktivt väljer sina egna religiösa preferenser. Denna typ av aktörskap gör att individerna upplever att institutionell religion i viss mån är inkluderande, då det

sammanblandas med intryck från övriga religiösa traditioner, andligheter och terapeutiska praktiker. Eklekticismen utökar utrymmet för religiöst aktörskap samtidigt som banden till institutionell religion kvarstår. Betoning på jämlikhet är ett annat sätt genom vilket institutionell religion blir mer öppet för aktörskap. Strävan efter att uppnå jämlikhet är ett av de mest centrala dragen i LGBTQ-aktivism, då regnbågsmässans primära syfte är inkludering. För ängelpraktikanterna är ängeln en möjlighet att uppnå delaktighet i det institutionella sammanhanget, då de t.ex. upplever att det är en lägre tröskel att ha kontakt med änglar än gud. Det framstår som klart att eklekticism och betoningen på jämlikhet möjliggör ett större handlingsutrymme, även med avseende på genus.

En väsentlig skillnad mellan fallen är hur individerna ”gör” genus, d.v.s. på vilket sätt genusnormer utgör aktörskap. Ängelpraktikanternas aktörskap grundar sig främst på att de reproducerar konventionella normer för kvinnoskap. Däremot handlar LGBTQ-aktivisternas aktörskap om att mer explicit ifrågasätta och bryta rådande normer de vill kritisera. Genusperformativiteten tar sig även uttryck i att det finns en mångfald av identiteter och subjektiviteter. Exempelvis innebär kategorin kvinna olika typer av normativitet beroende på om det är frågan om en transkvinna som är aktiv inom LGBTQ-aktivism eller om det är en kvinna som utför ängelpraktiker. Genusnormer har en central roll både för hur individer upprätthåller en relation till institutionell religion och hur de väljer att vända sig till andra former av religion och andlighet. Normen enligt vilken modern är ansvarig för religiös socialisering gör att kvinnorna har en anknytning till institutionell religion, samtidigt som terapeutiska praktiker möjliggör att i en högre grad fullfölja normer för moderskap och självständigt kvinnoskap. Aktivisterna upprätthåller en relation till institutionell religion genom de normer som de upplever är exkluderande, eftersom det är på detta sätt som förändring är möjligt. Normer förklarar även varför många aktivister söker sig utanför det institutionella sammanhanget, som i viss mån ger bredare utrymme för aktörskap då religion inte definieras enligt genusnormer.

Ängelpraktikanterna och aktivisterna skapar genus på ett sätt som utmanar gränsen mellan det religiösa och det sekulära. Exempelvis innebär betoningen på människan i samtida religion att även i gudsbilden ligger betoningen på människan, vilket då innebär att genus är en central aspekt av hur religion kan ses skifta till det sekulära.

Dessutom kan identiteter och subjektiviteter såsom att vara kvinna, homosexuell eller aktivist inte tydligt definieras till den religiösa eller den sekulära sfären, t.ex. då terapeutiska praktiker är en central del av moderskap eller då aktivisten beskriver det som sin andliga uppgift att skapa förändring. Dessa exempel visar tydligt aktörskap det finns vid de yttre gränserna till institutionell religion, vilket påvisar hur begreppet sekularisering och genus kan stöda varandra.

Både religiöst och könat aktörskap kan ses som subversivt, vilket betyder att genus och religion "görs" på ett sätt som skapar nya handlingsutrymmen för aktivisterna och ängelpraktikanterna inom de institutionella ramarna. Den ambivalenta relationen de har till kyrkan är förutsättningen för att deras aktörskap ska ses som subversivt. Ett exempel på subversivitet är att regnbågsmässan kan ses som ett politiskt ställningstagande, då den utmanar normer inifrån det institutionella sammanhanget. På motsvarande sätt är ängelpraktikanternas sätt att placera ängeln i ett nytt sammanhang subversivt i den betydelsen att praktikanterna då möjliggör ett större handlingsutrymme för både religiöst och könat aktörskap. Det är i viss mån svårt att särskilja mellan vilken typ av aktörskap som är mer framträdande, eftersom de överlappar varandra.

Avslutningsvis är det motiverat att göra en tillbakablick till de antaganden som presenterades som utgångspunkter för studien. Påståendet om att en stor del av individers religiositet äger rum *utanför* de traditionella religiösa institutionerna kan ifrågasättas, eftersom t.ex. eklekticism gör att individer inte tydligt positionerar sig inom eller utanför kyrkan. Det faktum att religiös eklekticism suddar ut gränserna mellan innanför- och utanförskap i relation till kyrkan, betyder att det är motiverat att hävda att en stor del av nutida religiositet fortsättningsvis finns *inom* kyrkan. Att befinna sig på gränsen till institutionell religion är därmed ett centralt utrymme för aktörskap, även könat aktörskap. Dessa utrymmen för aktörskap aktualiserar påståendet om att den samtida miljön erbjuder möjligheter för individer att aktivt skapa sina religiösa liv. Ett problem som uppkommer då både religion och genus anses vara performativt är att det blir utmanande att urskilja om det är religion som konstruerar genus eller tvärtom, d.v.s. vilket aktörskap har en mer framträdande roll.

Påståendet om att religion som begrepp utmanas är relevant eftersom det handlar om aktörskap. De flesta intervjuade ville inte identifiera sig som religiösa och såg

begreppet religion som för snävt och begränsande. Några andra utformar en religiositet eller andlighet som de kallar för ”min religion”, vilket är ett uttryck för bl.a. religiös eklekticism. En annan aspekt av hur religion utmanas är att genusperformativitet problematiserar indelningen i det religiösa och det sekulära, vilket dessutom väcker frågan vilken betydelse denna typ av aktörskap kan ha för frågor om jämlikhet ur ett samhällligt perspektiv.

Då utgångspunkten för min studie är ett inifrånperspektiv, d.v.s. sett från individens synvinkel, är en följdfråga hur kyrkan som institution förhåller sig till de olika intressen som förekommer inom kyrkan. Aktuella frågor i anknytning till de båda fallen inom ramen för denna studie är framförallt vilken officiell linje kyrkan ska inta gällande samkönat äktenskap eller om kyrkan ska uttala sig om ängelns teologiska betydelse.

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