Religion, the body and eating: The lived experiences of religious individuals as a believer, through the body, and of eating
Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between the individual’s relationship with God, body image, eating attitudes and eating behaviors amongst religious individuals in Sweden. This study is designed as a qualitative research study. The empirical data is collected via eight semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions in order to understand the individual’s lived experiences as a believer, through the body, and of eating. The sample consisted of both religiously and ethnically heterogeneous individuals living in Sweden (Male=3, Female=5, Age 22-40). The theory used for the data analysis is mainly attachment theory, which has the evolutionary origins of the attachment system and its manifestation in child – caregiver relationship. This theory is applied to religiosity by assuming that the individual’s close relationship with a personal God is an attachment relationship. Complementarily, a set of theoretical perspectives on the body - Grosz’s (1994) application of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach to the body and Bell’s (1992) ritualization theory – are also used for the analysis. Further, an acculturation perspective is used in order to explore cultural contexts, in which the respondents are situated. The results show that multiple factors have influences on the respondents’ past and current body images, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and behaviors. However, faith in, and relationships with God are identified as one of the most important and influential factors for their body images, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and behaviors except one respondent, whose case is not fit in the result. The results indicate that positive attachment relationships with God/other supernatural figures can play a role in the establishment and maintenance of positive body image as well as problem free eating behaviors.

Keywords: Attachment to God/other supernatural figures, body image, eating behaviors, psychological acculturation
# Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction ................................................................. 1
   1. Introduction ........................................................................ 1
       1.1. Purpose statement and aims ........................................... 3
       1.2. Research questions ..................................................... 4
       1.3. Limitations .................................................................. 4
       1.4. Previous studies ......................................................... 6
           1.4.1. Literature search .................................................. 6
           1.4.2. Review of literature ............................................. 7
           1.4.3. Findings of literature searches and conclusion of research review ........................................ 11
       1.5. Method and Material .................................................... 13

Chapter 2 Theory ........................................................................... 14
   2.1. Presentation of theory ..................................................... 14
       2.1.1. Attachment theory .................................................. 14
           2.1.1.1 Psychology of religion and attachment theory .......... 16
           2.1.1.2 Limitation and problem ...................................... 18
       2.1.2. Theoretical perspectives on the body ......................... 19
           2.1.2.1 Lived body and Grosz’ model of the Möbius strip .... 19
           2.1.2.2 Ritualized body ................................................. 21
       2.1.3. Acculturation theory ............................................... 23
           2.1.3.1 Psychological Acculturation and Acculturative stress 24
           2.1.3.2 Limitation and problem of acculturation theory ...... 25
   2.2. Working model .................................................................. 26

Chapter 3 Method .......................................................................... 29
   3.1. Research methodology ................................................... 29
   3.2. Data collection procedures ............................................. 30
       3.2.1. Participants .......................................................... 31
       3.2.2. Interview procedure ............................................... 32
   3.3. Data analysis procedures ................................................ 32
   3.4. Ethical considerations ..................................................... 33
   3.5. Validity considerations ................................................... 34

Chapter 4 Presentation of Empirical data ........................................ 37
   4.1. Presentation of data ......................................................... 38
       4.1.1. Respondent 1 ......................................................... 38
       4.1.2. Respondent 2 ......................................................... 40
       4.1.3. Respondent 3 ......................................................... 43
       4.1.4. Respondent 4 ......................................................... 45
       4.1.5. Respondent 5 ......................................................... 47
       4.1.6. Respondent 6 ......................................................... 49
       4.1.7. Respondent 7 ......................................................... 52
       4.1.8. Respondent 8 ......................................................... 54

Chapter 5 Empirical data analysis .................................................. 57
   5.1. Analysis .......................................................................... 57
       5.1.1. Relationship with God/other supernatural figures ....... 57
       5.1.2. Attitude towards the body, body image, eating attitudes and behaviors ........................................ 60
           5.1.2.1. Lived body: Analysis from the model of the Möbius strip ........................................ 61
           5.1.2.2. Ritualized body: Analysis of the practices from the ritual theory ..................................... 63
       5.1.3. Acculturation experiences/cultural context ............... 64
Chapter 1 Introduction

1. Introduction

*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? (Matthew 6:25, New International Version)*

*The great majority of us are required to live a life of constant, systematic duplicity. Your health is bound to be affected if, day after day, you say the opposite of what you feel, if you grovel before what you dislike and rejoice at what brings you nothing but misfortune. Our nervous system isn't just a fiction, it's part of our physical body, and our soul exists in space and is inside us, like teeth in our mouth. It can't be forever violated with impunity.*

(Boris Pasternak, Dr. Zhivago)

Why cannot we simply enjoy eating and drinking as Matthew says? Why is it so hard to be ourselves without worrying about being fat or skinny, for example? My questions are simple, but answers to them seem not to be as simple as I hope. Eating disorders are problematic food intake-related behaviors, which include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge eating disorder, and all common especially among young women. According to Kunskapscentrum för Ätstörningar (KÄTS, 2007) about 10 000 in the risk age (13 to 30 years) meeting the diagnostic criteria for anorexia nervosa, 20 000 that meet criteria for bulimia nervosa, and 30 000 who are classified as eating disorder NOS (Eating Disorder not Otherwise Specified) in Sweden today. In other words, about 60,000 girls and young women are suffering from eating disorders in Sweden. If men, younger girls and older women are included, the number becomes around 100 000 people in Sweden (KÄTS, 2007).

Eating disorders are often considered to be a modern phenomenon discovered recently. However, there are more than a few studies on the relationship between religion and eating disorders inspired by cases of female catholic saints’ self-starvation during the late Middle Ages. Rudolph Bell’s *Holy Anorexia* (1985) and Caroline W. Bynum’s *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (1987) are two prominent books among such studies. Bell defines the medieval self-starvation as Holy Anorexia because of the similarities in symptoms between women's ascetic self-starvation in the Middle Ages and contemporary eating disorders. Then, we may ask: *Have such problematic food intake-related behaviors always been relevant to religion(s)?* Or
more directly: *Is it possible to consider such holy women’s self-starvation eating disorders?* The answers might be “no”. Here contexts matter. The ascetic women's self-starvation cannot be properly understood if we leave the context where they were exercised. As Bynum points out, the symbolic uses of food and the body during the Middle Ages, especially the relationship between food, Eucharist and fasting cannot be understood if we forget the milieu they lived in. The mediaeval ascetic women's self-starvation cannot be seen as eating disorders in the modern psychological context because suffering from hunger and living in poverty are not symptoms but rather theology. Studies on the relationship between religion and eating behaviors including problematic eating behaviors from theological and historical perspectives are interesting, but they do not tell much about the relationship in a contemporary context. Then, what if we ask a different question: *Is there any relation between religion and eating behaviors including problematic eating behaviors in contemporary Sweden?* Despite criticism of secularization theory as many scholars have argued for decades, the term “secular” is still widely used, and Sweden is often considered as one of the most secularized countries in the world. Regardless of whether we use “secular” or “post modern” or “late modern,” one thing is clear that the state and the individual have been liberated from the power of the Church (Bäckström, Beckman & Petterson, 2004, p. 18) in Sweden, which affects religion and its role in general. It is often said that religion and its role are shifted from the public sphere to the private one in Sweden. Presumably because of this reason, research on the relationship between religion and eating behaviors including problematic eating behaviors in a Swedish context is scarce. I am, therefore, interested in this topic.

We can also ask, *“Which role can religion play in the individual’s eating behaviors?”* The relationship between religion, health, and well-being has been the focus of a number of empirical studies over the last two decades (Green & Elliott, 2009, p. 150) and psychiatry has been undergoing rapid change in its relationship to religion and spirituality and clinicians increasingly recognize the importance of cultural differences and incorporate spiritual approaches into treatments of the various disorders (Josephson & Peteet, 2004, ix). In fact, there are not a few studies on the relationship between religion and eating disorders approaching the topic from psychological perspectives in the clinical and medical field. Although the causes of eating disorders remain unknown, it is often considered that the social and cultural factor, such as the idealization of thinness is relevant to eating disorders. In this context, eating disorders are considered a "western disease" since eating disorders are seen in most of the so-called Western industrialized countries. Then, it is not much of surprise that
most studies on eating disorders and religion focused on the relationship between eating disorders and Christianity. Research on this topic with regards to non-Christian religions is still scarce.

My experiences of body image misconception that led to problematic eating stimulates my curiosity about eating behaviors including problematic eating and body image as well. As a religious person, I am simply interested in the individual’s personal relationship with God or other supernatural figures in general. The opportunity for studying the psychology of religion at the theological faculty at Uppsala University has moved me to study these two interests together. In other words, this study is started out of my curiosity about religion’s role in the individual’s psychological well-being regarding body image satisfaction and eating behaviors. In my graduation thesis I have studied on self-starvation among catholic saints that lived during the Middle Ages from object relations theoretical perspective, mostly from Ana-Maria Rizzuto’s theory about the formulation of representations of God. In a sense, this study can be seen as a continuation of my previous work. However, the aim of this study is neither to study the relationship between Christianity and eating disorders nor to focus self-starvation of female catholic saints during Middle Age. There already exists research on these topics, as I will reflect over later in this chapter. The aim of this study is primarily to explore roles of the individual’s personal relationship with God/other supernatural figures in body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and eating behaviors, which has not yet been fully studied especially in Sweden. Regarding Sweden as a multicultural and a religious pluralistic society, in which many life philosophies co-exist, this study will include participants, who have different religious beliefs yet identify themselves as religious/spiritual.

1.1. Purpose statement and aims

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the individual’s relationship with God, body image, eating attitudes and eating behaviors amongst religious individuals in Sweden. In principle, it is to explore how the personal relationship with God/other supernatural figures may relate to the religious individual’s perception of body and attitudes towards eating in a Swedish cultural context. In order to understand the individual’s lived experiences as a believer, through the body, and of eating, eight semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions will be conducted. Data will be transcribed and analyzed with the help of four theoretical perspectives, which are to be introduced in the next chapter.
1.2. Research questions

The starting point of this study or the central topic in this study is the individual’s relationship with God/other supernatural figures. Taking this into account together with the purpose of this study, the central research question is:

*What role can the individual’s relationship with God/other supernatural figures play in body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and eating behaviors?*

The central question is operationalized by four sub-questions in order to explore the relationship between the individual’s relationship with God, body image, eating attitudes and eating behaviors amongst religious individuals in Sweden. These sub-questions are:

1. How do the respondents describe their religious faiths and what kind of relations with God/other supernatural figures can be identified among the respondents from an attachment theoretical perspective?
2. What factors can be identified as influential and affective for the respondents’ body images, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and eating behaviors? What characterizes the relationship between the factors, body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and eating behaviors look?
3. How can the respondents’ body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and eating behaviors be understood from a phenomenological approach to the body and ritualization theory?
4. How can the respondents’ experiences as believers, through the body, and of eating be understood from an acculturation theoretical perspective and in a Swedish context?

1.3. Limitations

My interest lies in the relationship between religion and eating disorders. Herein problems arise touching on the purpose of the study, research population and ethical considerations. First, eating disorders are considered an illness, which is diagnosed medically based on symptoms. Therefore, putting focus solely on the relationship between religion and eating disorders will be beyond the reach of my research, given limited knowledge. Second, limiting the research population to people with eating disorders can result in having too few participants. In addition, there are ethical issues to consider. Thus, the purpose of this study is...
to explore the relationship between the individual’s relationship with God, body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and eating behaviors amongst religious individuals in Sweden. The focus of the study is especially on understanding roles of the individual’s relationship with God/other supernatural figures in body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and behaviors. This will be explored primarily within the frame of psychology of religion. Considering the personal nature of the individual’s relationship with God/other supernatural figures, I use attachment theory in this study. There seem to be a variety of ways to approach this topic. Applying some other psychodynamic or psychological theories, such as object relations theory, to the study may be possible. When considering that research on body image and eating behaviors are often conducted within sociology, this study can also be done by applying some sociological theories, which may bring some broader and interesting angles into the study. However, due to limitations concerning the size of material and the space of the study, such theories and approaches are not used. Furthermore, I may take up some more interesting research questions, such as “How do religions and denominations differentiate from each other in relation to body image and eating behaviors?” or “To what extent the sex and gender difference affects the relationship with God/other supernatural figures as well as body image and eating behaviors?” Such questions are excluded, while interesting, given the limited space and time of the study. These limitations regarding space and time also affect the choice of research design and strategies. Quantitative approaches may enable me not only to grasp the overview of the relationship between religions, body and eating issues but also to generalize the study result because of the large data. While an understanding of interrelationships between religions, body and eating issues can be deepened through qualitative approach. Thus, I believe that a mixed method, i.e., a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches can bring many benefits into the study. However, due to limitations regarding space and time, this study is designed as a qualitative study.

**Terms of definition**

There are several terms used in this study that need to be defined in this section. The terms *religion* and *spirituality* are often used synonymously but are actually separated, yet related (Josephson & Wiesner, 2004, p. 16). In this study, unless stated otherwise, the term *religion* will be used in its institutionalized form and collective character. According to Zinnbauer et al. (1997), definitions of *religiosity* include both personal beliefs, such as a belief in God or a higher power, and organizational or institutional beliefs and practices such as church membership, church attendance, and commitment to the beliefs system of a church or organized religion. On the other hand, *spirituality* is often described in personal or
experiential terms, such as belief in God or a higher power or having a relationship with God or a higher power. In this study, the term religious and religiousness will be used along with this definition by Zinnbauer et al. (1997). While the term spiritual and spirituality refer to non-organizational or non-institutional personal beliefs and practices. Further definitions of terms will be presented in the theory chapter.

1.4. Previous studies

In this section, I will present previous studies that are relevant to this thesis. I start by presenting the literature search process. Thereafter follows a literature review, which will be presented along with the categorized topics. Lastly, I will end this section by presenting the findings from the literature review.

1.4.1. Literature search

First, I used "eating disorders + religion" as keywords in order to search for material for this essay. The reason for this was that I wanted to get a general research overview on the relationship between religion(s) and eating disorders. I conducted searches from February 2 to February 17, 2012, first in LIBRIS (Swedish university and research library catalog), which resulted in 12 hits. To find research on the relationship between eating disorders and religion in a Swedish context, I also conducted a search using the keywords "ätstörningar + religion" in LIBRIS and got 11 hits, which were overlapping search results. Thereafter, searches were conducted with keywords "eating disorders + religion" in PubMed and PsycINFO, which resulted in 113 hits in PubMed and 14 hits in PsycINFO. To find some relevant research with other perspectives than psychological, medical or clinical, searches were also conducted in ATLA Religion Database + ATLAS. I got 28 hits in the theological and historical areas. Due to the limited search results, further searches were conducted in Taylor & Francis Online Journals and in Google Scholar, which resulted in a large number of hits (Taylor & Francis Online Journals: 3643, and Google Scholar: 61 400). In order to find studies and research that were relevant to my research questions, I continued searching with combinations of multiple keywords in LIBRIS, PubMed, PsycINFO, Atlas, Taylor & Francis Online Journals and Google Scholar. The key words were: eating disorders, eating, eating behaviors, religion, religiosity, spirituality, Christianity, Islam, Jewish, ethnicity, race, immigration, acculturation, identity and Sweden. Searches with these key words in Swedish were also done. To narrow the number of hits, searches were conducted with different combinations of these multiple keywords. Searches were continued until the saturation was reached. The findings were sorted
out and organized into categories. Thereafter, a literature map was made according to these categories.

1.4.2. Review of literature

Religion, Eating Disorders and Clinical treatment/intervention

Richards et al. (2009) highlighted a psychological treatment for women with eating disorders, who had theistic spiritual beliefs. They illustrated how a theistic approach complemented traditional treatment through a case study of a 23-year-old Christian woman, who received inpatient treatment for eating disorders. According to Richards et al., almost all women with eating disorders, who had been observed in their clinical work, struggled with the loss of spiritual identity, felt distant from God, felt unconnected to family/friends and suffered from low self-esteem (i.e. they often felt unworthy, unlovable, and incapable). As their relationship with God and family and friends deteriorate, they rely ever more exclusively on their eating disorder as their way of coping with pain and problems (Richards et al., 2009). They concluded that patients’ physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual well-being were all interconnected. Thus, they suggested that clinicians and psychotherapists should encourage patients to explore how their faiths in God could help them during treatment and recovery.

Smith et al. (2003) investigated the relationship between religious orientation, religious affiliation, and spiritual well-being. In this study, 251 women (age 12-56), who were diagnosed with an eating disorder, participated. Eating Attitudes Test (EAT), The Body Shape Questionnaire (BSQ), Outcome Questionnaire (OQ), Therapist Outcome Evaluation Scale (TOES), and the religious well-being subscale of the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) were used as the measures in order to assess the outcomes of treatment. According to them, multiple regression analyses indicated that neither intrinsical religiosity nor religious affiliations were associated with treatment outcome. Pearson correlations showed that improvements in spiritual well-being during treatment was significantly associated with positive gains in eating attitudes, less body shape concerns, and positive psychological and social functioning.

Religion as a risk/protective factor

Homan and Boyatzis (2010) conducted a short-term longitudinal study from an attachment theoretical perspective to explore whether a secure relationship with God could protect young women from the impact of four risk factors for eating disturbance: pressure to be thin, thin-ideal internalization, body dissatisfaction and dieting. Participants were 231 female students at
a private Christian liberal arts college (the mean age 21, 97% of participants were Caucasian, 99% of participants affiliated with Christian denominations). Homan and Boyatzis used four measures in order to assess the impact of four risk factors for eating disturbance: the 10-item Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (Stice, n.d.), the Internalization subscale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ; Heinberg, Thompson, & Stormer, 1995), the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ; Cash, 2000), and the Dutch Restrained Eating Scale (DRES; van Strien, Frijters, van Staveren et al., 1986). They also used the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI; Beck & McDonald, 2004) in order to assess individuals’ relationships with God. After analyses (Descriptive data and intercorrelations for the variables, comparing means for each of the risk factor variables using independent samples t-tests, regression analyses, and hierarchical regression analyses), they found that women who felt loved and secure in their relationships with God perceived less pressure to be thin, internalized the thin-ideal to a lesser degree, were more satisfied with their bodies, and dieted less frequently. They also found that women with anxious relationships with God were more dissatisfied with their bodies.

Gates and Pritchard (2009) examined whether there was a relationship among religious affiliation, religious angst and disordered eating. They explained that religion was usually considered as a positive aspect of life, but religion could have negative impacts on body image perceptions. In order to investigate the relationships between eating disorders and religious affiliation, they conducted surveys about religious affiliations and eating behaviors at a large university in the Northwest United States and gathered responses from 330 students (67% female students). They conducted a Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). They found that religious affiliation was significantly associated with body dissatisfaction. The results showed that the Catholic and Christian students showed significantly more disordered eating than the other students. They claimed that the result was not surprising giving that other studies’ results that Christians were more likely to have disordered eating. Gates and Pritchard explained that the result was in line with other studies on a relationship between religious affiliation and disordered eating, for example, a study, in which male and female students with the Catholic faith displayed significantly higher scores on drive for thinness and body image dissatisfaction (Sykes et al., 1988). Regarding the similarities between their result and those of others, Gates and Pritchard assumed that the Catholic church was more apt to deal with a large amount of shame, guilt, self-hatred, and negative self-image, which affected the Catholic students’ eating behaviors. They also found that students who experienced higher levels of religious anxiety (negative emotions that associated with
religion) showed much stronger desire for thinness and bulimia. Gates and Pritchard explained that this was also in line with other studies on religious angst. Taking this into account, they assumed that churches sent anti-body messages to their members and failed to de-emphasize the social norm that emphasized the importance of thinness.

Jacobs-Pilipski et al. (2005) examined the spiritual and religious (S/R) beliefs and practices of college-age women at high-risk for eating disorders, and the relationship between body image distress, coping, and S/R. They carried out surveys about the spiritual/religious beliefs and practices and gathered responses from 255 female students, who were recruited from two public and two private universities in the United States. The average age of participants was 20.7, Caucasian (n = 153), Asians (n = 49), Multiethnic (n = 23), Hispanic (n = 19), African American (n = 4), Native American (n = 1), other (n = 6). 29% (n = 68) reported affiliation with a Protestant church, 24% (n = 58) with the Roman Catholic Church, 11% (n = 26) identified themselves as Jewish, 19% (n = 45) identified with non-Western religions, and 17% (n = 40) reported being agnostic/atheist. Jacobs-Pilipski et al. performed analysis of variance (ANOVA). They found that participants, who rated spiritual/religious as important, were significantly more likely to call upon their spiritual/religious beliefs and practices to cope with negative feelings about their bodies. Religious female students, who had strong faiths and practiced their faiths, were significantly more likely to pray, meditate, or read religious/spiritual texts to cope with body image distress, while female students without strong faiths were more likely to deal with dissatisfaction with their bodies through distraction. They also found that participants with strong religious or spiritual beliefs were significantly less likely to use distraction in order to cope with body image distress and considered prayer an effective strategy to cope with dissatisfaction with their body. Jacobs-Pilipski et al. acknowledged that the implications of these findings remained unclear and therefore more research should be conducted in order to seek to replicate these findings. However, regarding the results, they assumed the use of spiritual/religious beliefs and practices could potentially moderate the outcome of eating disorders prevention and treatment efforts.

Relation between Eating Behaviors, Body Image, Religious/ethnic minority and Acculturation Mussap (2009) highlighted the relationship between acculturation, body dissatisfaction and eating behaviors among Muslim-Australian women. He conducted surveys and collected data of 101 Australian women between 18 and 44 years of age, who identified Islam as their religion. Mussap first conducted a two-way MANOVA on four dependent variables: body
dissatisfaction, dietary control, bingeing and, purging. Thereafter, he conducted a two-way MANOVA by two independent variables: religious affiliation (Muslim and non-Muslim). The results suggested that Muslim women did not differ markedly from a community sample of non-Muslim women in terms of their eating attitudes and behaviors. However, after conducting a series of bivariate correlations on the Muslim data, he found a positive relationship between the measures of body image and disordered eating, and between these measures and internalization of the thin ideal. He also identified a significant positive relationship among western valuation of the body, acculturations levels and dissatisfaction with the body and eating disorders. Mussap concluded that there might be a potential risk for Muslim women in Australian to incur their body images by adopting Western values and that Islam and its values could contribute to the women's positive self-image.

Greenberg, Cwikel and Mirsky (2007) conducted a comparative research on cultural correlates of eating attitudes between native-born and immigrant university students in Israel. They undertook a cross-sectional survey using a self-report questionnaire, in which 499 university students in Israel participated: 216 Israeli natives (103 men and 113 women), 153 new immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (FSU, 50 men and 103 women, 3 years or less since immigration), and 130 veteran immigrants from FSU (65 men and 65 women, 4–15 years since immigration). They used Eating Attitude Test (EAT-26) to assess attitudes toward eating and conducted bivariate analyses of the demographic variables by the EAT-26 and its subscales. They also conducted an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) on the EAT-26 and the two subscale scores to verify the immigrant group and gender effects. The results showed that Israeli born women had higher weight and body mass index (BMI) than new immigrant women. The results also showed that native-born Israeli women and veteran immigrants women had positive EAT-26 scores than new immigrant women, which indicated that native-born Israeli women and veteran immigrants women more likely to have disordered eating attitudes. Greenberg, Cwikel and Mirsky concluded that the veteran immigrants had adopted Western cultural norms and eating patterns, which erased the differences in the tendency toward eating disorders between them and the Israeli born women.

Cachelin et al (2000) examined disordered eating, acculturation, and treatment-seeking in a community sample of Hispanic, Asian, Black, and White women. Participants in the study consisted of 118 women with current disordered eating (49 Hispanic, 21 Asian, 23 Black, and 25 White) and 118 women with no history of eating disorders (49 Hispanic, 21 Asian, 23 Black, and 25 White), who were recruited in the urban Los Angeles area. They conducted telephone interviews in order to assess eating and weight-related behaviors,
psychiatric symptoms, acculturation, and health care usage. Results of Multivariate analysis of variance, with age, education, and BMI as the dependent variables, as well as Chi-square analysis indicated that the four ethnic groups were equally likely to present behavioral symptoms of bulimia, anorexia, or a binge-eating disorder. After measuring by the variables of language and country of origin, they found that the eating disorder group was more acculturated than the control group. This result was, according to Cachelin et al, in accord with some other studies and with the general belief in the field, i.e. perfecting one’s body to meet Western ideals might be a means of acculturating to societal values.

Lindberg and Hjern (2003) conducted a national cohort study to identify risk factors for anorexia nervosa through Swedish national registers, and the study included the entire Swedish population of 989,871 individuals born between 1973 and 1982, which were based on data from the national registers of the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare and Statistics Sweden. They identified patients with anorexia nervosa (1,122 cases) through the Swedish Hospital Discharge Register from November 1990 to December 1999. Lindberg and Hjern conducted Multivariate analyses using Cox regression of person-years with the dichotomized outcome variable anorexia nervosa as the dependent variable. Results showed that females had the highest Attributable risk (AR) for hospital admission because of anorexia nervosa (89.2%) Results also showed that having parents born in northern, central, or eastern Europe was a risk factor for anorexia nervosa, while having non-European parents or parents from southern Europe was a protective factor.

1.4.3. Findings of literature searches and conclusion of research review

Through literature searches, I found extensive amount of studies on the relationship between eating disorders and religion. However, most studies had its focus on the relationship between Christianity and eating disorders in general and self-starvation of female catholic saints during Middle Age in particular. I excluded such studies from my literature map because the aim of this study was neither to study Christian dichotomy’s effect on eating disorders nor to argue the similarities and differences between the self-starvation of female catholic saints and the contemporary eating disorders.

Although the causes of eating disorders remained unknown, it was often considered that socio-cultural factors such as the idealization of thinness were relevant to eating disorders. In this context, eating disorders were considered "western disease" since eating disorders were seen in most of the so-called Western industrialized countries. Therefore, it was not surprising that most studies on the relationship between eating disorders and religion focused on the
relationship between eating disorders and Christianity. This meant that there was a lack of research on the relationship between eating disorders and non-Christian religions. Furthermore, research on the relationship between eating disorders and ethnic/religious minorities in Sweden was scarce.

Many studies on the relationship between eating disorders and religion in the clinical and medical field tried to find the causes of eating disorders from psychological theories such as object relations theory. Since the purpose of this study was not to find the causes of eating disorders, these types of studies were excluded from the literature map and review. As already seen, there appeared to be not a few studies on the relationship between religiosity and eating disorders, in which religiosity was considered either a risk factor or a protective factor for eating disorders. There were not a few studies on religious interventions for patients with eating disorders, too. As a whole, there were rich resources in the clinical and medical field. However, most of them were quantitative research to test hypothesis such as correlation between eating disorders and religiosity, and it was noteworthy that there was the shortage of qualitative research.

In sum, although there were extensive research on the relationship between religion/religiosity, body image and eating behaviors as well as eating disorders, there was a lack of qualitative research on this topic. This lack of research was noticeable especially in Sweden. Regarding Sweden as a multicultural and a religious pluralistic society, it was surprising that there was almost no research on a relation between eating disorders, religious/ethnic minority and acculturation in a Swedish context. Thus, I assumed that it was challenging but important to do a qualitative study on the relationship between religion, body image and eating behaviors in a Swedish context and from discipline of psychology of religion. As a conclusion of the review, I will end by addressing especially two points that I will put the focus on in this study:

- To explore the applicability of an attachment theoretical perspective on roles of God/other supernatural figures to religiosity regardless of religion.
- How religious individuals regardless of religion have the personal relationship with God/other supernatural figures in a Swedish cultural context.
1.5. Method and Material

This study is designed as a qualitative research study and will be conducted along with qualitative research strategies. The study will be undertaken from the social constructivist worldview with an approach inspired by a phenomenological strategy of inquiry. I use “an approach inspired by a phenomenological strategy” to mean that I will take advantage of what a phenomenological approach can bring into this study. It is more likely a tool to understand the respondents’ subjective experiences rather than to mean this study is a precisely phenomenological study. I am aware of some difficulties to use this approach since interview questions will be formed with regard to research questions and theories that will be presented in the next chapter, and data analysis of this study is primarily a theory-driven approach. Yet this approach will be used especially at the stage of creating interview questions, which will be formed as open-ended questions as best as possible, and for transcribing of interviews in order to understand the respondents’ subjective experiences as religious individuals, through the body, on eating and in a Swedish context. Furthermore, in this study, data processing procedure will be according to a Template Analysis Style (Malterud, 1998, p 89), which often can involve a risk for the reproduction of already known knowledge according to Malterud. Therefore, I hope the approach inspired by a phenomenological strategy, which is often theory-generating by its nature, can be a help for avoiding the reproduction and reconfirmation of existing theories and be a help for developing theories used in this study instead.

Considering the aim of the study, empirical data will be collected via eight semi-structured interviews. Primarily, a theory-driven approach will be used for data analysis as already mentioned. During the data processing procedure, four categories will be used. They are relevant to theories. Codes will be created predominantly in accordance with each category, but there will be possibilities that more codes will be added during analysis procedures. Further descriptions of method and methodology including validity considerations, as well as ethical considerations will be presented in the method chapter.
Chapter 2 Theory

2.1. Presentation of theory

In this study, several theoretical perspectives will be used. The first one is attachment theory. Although John Bowlby’s theorizing about attachment is based on the evolutionary theory, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008) claim that some core aspects of religious belief and behavior represent real manifestations of attachment processes similar to those seen in infant-caregiver relationships that Bowlby focuses on. They claim that Bowlby’s criteria for the attachment relationship can be applicable to psychology of religion. Thus, my focus is to present an attachment theory application to religiosity, which can be beneficial in analyzing empirical data. The second one is a set of theoretical perspectives on the body. I first present a general discussion on the body as a subject/object and a presentation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach to the body as “lived body”. Thereafter follows a presentation of Elizabeth Grosz’s (1994) application of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach to the body. Then, Catherine Bell’s (1992) ritualization theory will be presented to complement Grosz’ theory. Finally, an acculturation theory will be presented. However, it will be a fairly general description of the concept, which I have taken from several articles on acculturation theory and its models. My intention is to bring cultural aspects into my analysis.

2.1.1 Attachment theory

Attachment theory was formed and theorized by John Bowlby (1907-1990), a British child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. Bowlby’s theorizing about attachment focused largely on the evolutionary origins of the attachment system and its manifestation in infant–mother relationship (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008). In Bowlby’s theoretical framework, the term “attachment” and “attachment relationship” do not refer to all types of close relationships, but exclusively to relationships that meet four criteria: proximity maintenance, safe haven, secure base, and separation distress (Granqvist, 2002). According to Bowlby, a role of attachment as a secure base for a child is to give a base, “to which he can return knowing for sure that he will be welcomed when he gets there, nourished physically and emotionally, comforted if distressed, reassured if frightened” (1988, s. 11). In other words, an attachment relationship provides a child with a sense of security so that he/she can explore his/her environment. An
attachment figure - the primary caregiver, often a mother – also serves as a haven of safety, to which a child can retreat (Prior & Glaser, 2006) in times of danger or threat (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008). Although these two rolls of an attachment - a safe haven and a secure base – look similar, yet they should be distinguished, according to Prior and Glaser (2006), because:

When the child uses the attachment figure as a secure base from which to explore, wariness or fear is not implied. However, when the infant seeks proximity to his mother as a secure haven, the implication is that he is to some extent alarmed. Once his alarm is moderated by proximity, he may explore again. (p. 23)

Therefore, these two function differently but in sequence. As already mentioned, the biological function of the attachment system is to maintain proximity between an infant and a protective attachment figure (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008) and attachment behavior is proximity-seeking to the attachment figure in the face of threat (Prior & Glaser, 2006). Bowlby termed this proximity the ‘set-goal’ of the attachment behavioral system (Prior & Glaser, 2006), which is continually activated by monitoring the proximity and availability (Granqvist, 2002) of a child’s caregiver but highly activated by, for example, fear, the absence of comfort, or separation distress/separation from the attachment figure (Prior & Glaser, 2006). If the child senses the danger, he/she retreats to a safe haven, i.e., his or her caregiver as a source of comfort (Granqvist, 2002). If the child is distressed by being separated from his/her caregiver, he/she may protests through, for example, crying or clinging to his or her caregiver. The child may also give signals to show his/her stress or anxiety through crying, and try to regain or maintain the physical proximity through, for example, raising the arms. If the child senses a feeling of security through maintaining the proximity to his/her attachment figure (caregiver), he/she can explore the world around him/her.

Attachment behaviors continue throughout the lifespan, for example, an adolescent’s attachment may shift from his/her parents to his/her peers. As the child's cognitive capacity increases, he/she is often satisfied by visual or verbal contact, or eventually by mere knowledge of an attachment figure’s whereabouts (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008). Then he/she develops internal concept about themselves and their relationships with his/her intimate/important figures (Broberg, 2000). This development of cognitive capacity and the ability of conceptualization of the attachment figure may have importance for the development of relationships with other adults and peers (Broberg, 2000).
To summarize, the term “attachment” is defined as a tie based on the need for safety, security and protection, and attachment behavior is a biological instinct in which proximity to an attachment figure is sought when the child senses or perceives threat or discomfort (Prior & Glaser, 2006). Attachment behaviors continue throughout the lifespan, although an adolescent’s and adult’s attachment may shift from the primary caregiver to peers or partners.

2.1.1.1 Psychology of religion and attachment theory

The question is now whether the theory, which is based on the evolutionary origins of the attachment system, is applicable to religiosity, and if so, how it is possible to apply the theory to religiosity. According to Granqvist, the most obvious point of departure for an attachment theoretical application to religiosity is the oft mentioned centrality, in the scriptures as well as in psychological research, of the religious individual’s close relationship with a personal God (Granqvist, 2002). Granqvist and Kirkpatrick claim that this personal God can be understood as an attachment figure. They argue that some core aspects of religious belief and behavior represent real manifestation of attachment processes similar to those seen in infant-caregiver relationships (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008). As already mentioned, there are four criteria, which distinguish attachment relationships from other relationships: proximity maintenance, safe haven, secure base, and separation distress. In addition to these four criteria, there is the fifth criterion, according to Granqvist (2002), which Bowlby added “concerning characteristics of the attachment figure in relation to the attached person, namely that the former should be stronger and wiser” (p. 36). In order to apply attachment theory to religiosity, it is necessary to demonstrate that these five criteria are reasonably met with regard to the believer’s relationship with God (Granqvist, 2002).

The believer’s relationship with God can be understood from proximity maintenance aspect, because of God’s omnipresent character. Traditionally, in Christianity, God has been described as a being near to a human being. All religions provide places of worship where one can go to be closer to God (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008), and there are a variety of religious symbols and images that may allow people to remind of God’s presence. God is omnipresent, yet people need to check the proximity to God. The most salient mean of obtaining the proximity to God is prayer (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008; Granqvist, 2002). Granqvist and Kirkpatrick claim that prayer is religious behavior, which “seems analogous to “social referencing” in young children – an intermittent checking back to make sure the attachment figure is still attentive and potentially available” (2008, p. 909). Furthermore, several studies of the psychology of religion support that people turn to religion or God
especially in situation of crisis and distress (Granqvist, 2002; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008). Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008) claim that this meets with a haven of safety criteria. Then, how do individuals turn to religion or God? Most likely, it is through prayer. As Granqvist say, “private prayer may function as a religious analogue to attachment system” (2002, p. 37).

According to Bowlby, an attachment figure as a secure base provides a child with a base, “to which he can return knowing for sure that he will be welcomed when he gets there, nourished physically and emotionally, comforted if distressed, reassured if frightened” (1988, s. 11). Granqvist (2002) claims that God is an attachment figure, and this notion is not only supported by theologically – for example, God as “the Father” or “the Shield” - but also by psychological research on believers’ God images. Granqvist (2002) introduces a study by Benson and Spilka (1973):

/.../ correlates of religiosity seem to suggest that possessing an image of God as an adequate secure base, and relating to Him accordingly, are associated with outcomes that are analogue to the situation of secure “earthly” attachment. For instance, holding a loving, as opposed to distant, image of God is linked to higher self-esteem. (p. 37)

According to Granqvist (2002), there is also a large database in the psychology of religion “attesting to the fact intrinsic religiosity” is “associated with mental health indices such as low anxiety, loneliness, and depression” (p. 37). Thus, God is an attachment figure because God, who is simultaneously omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent can provide the most secure of secure base (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008).

God is omnipresent and will not die. Therefore, it is impossible for an individual to experience a separation from God in the same way as a child experiences a separation from his/her attachment figure. However, as the child is distressed by the separation from his/her attachment figure, so is the individual. The threat of separation from God can cause anxiety. The loss of God can cause grief. Thus, it is such responses to the separation from God and the loss of God meet with separation distress criterion. In Christian theology, separation from God is the very essence of hell (Granqvist, 2002; Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008). This can cause believers to have anxiety. A religious individual can also experience a separation from God in a situation, in which he/she urges to communicate with God yet it seems to be impossible. Granqvist (2002) claims, “psychological experiences of God as distant and inaccessible” is not only seen in biblical passages such as in the Psalms and the books of Job but also referred to, metaphorically, as a “wilderness experience” or “the dark night of the soul”. The most obvious approximation to separation from or loss of God is, however,
deconversion or apostasy (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008). It is arguable as Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008) point out, “whether ‘losing’ a relationship with God in this way can be expected to engendered grief, because it is the believer rather than God who is deliberately choosing to abandon the relationship” (p. 912). However, Granqvist (2002) explains, “following de-conversion, or apostasy, Wright (1978) has noted the presence of symptoms, such as separation anxiety that are similar to those found after separation in earthly attachment relationships” (p. 38).

It is not unreasonable to assume that in the caregiver-infant relationship, the former should be stronger and wiser, for the sake of the infant’s survival and security. The God-believer relationship meets this stronger and wiser criterion. As Granqvist points out, God is both stronger and wiser than those who believe in Him (p. 38). For believers, there is little doubt that God is stronger and wiser. Therefore, God is an attachment figure, which protects them, provides them with security and takes care of them with His strength and His wisdom.

Empirical studies support, “perceived relationships with God or other supernatural figures reflect (at least in part) the operation of attachment process” (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008, p. 925), and “attachment to God may confer the kinds of psychological benefits associated with secure interpersonal attachments, especially in times of personal trouble when other attachment figures are insufficient or unavailable” (Ibid, p. 926). As already seen, people tend to turn to God through prayer, which may help them to feel secure, to get comfort so that he/she can get through his/her severe situation of crisis and distress. This “turning to God” is considered one of the religious coping strategies in the recent researches (Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008). Thus, the concept of an attachment to God and its function may help us to understand the relationship between religiosity and mental health or subjective well-being on an individual’s level.

2.1.1.2 Limitation and problem

According to Granqvist (2002), the concept “attachment” and its application to religiosity may not be suitable for other than Christianity. Furthermore, the concept “attachment” and its application to religiosity function on the premise that an individual’s relationship with God cannot be affected by any other traditions than his/her own. Regarding the phenomena that individuals in Sweden are situated in a multi-cultural society, we may question whether there is no significant interaction between different traditions that may affect an individual’s relationship with God. Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008) focus much on an individual’s relationship with God as analogically resemble the caregiver-infant attachment. It is, for them,
an individual’s psychical cognitive perception/understanding of God that affect his/her behaviors not vise versa. This raises some problems. As Miner (2009) points out, “many behaviors of religious people are consistent with attachment to God, but behaviors are multiply determined” (p. 252). Therefore, she continues, “(N)o single behavior (such as glossolalia, petitionary prayer, or lament at God’s perceived distance) can reliably indicate an attachment bond” (p. 252). She also points out, “cognitive-behavioral accounts of attachment to God ignore biological aspects of attachment, with their emphasis on attunement and emotional regulation. Any movement from external regulation to internal sources of regulation is ignored” (p. 253). This critic cannot be irrelevant to an individual’s perception of the body. Is it always the case that individual’s psyche/mind determines his/her behavior? If so, how can this account be relevant or irrelevant to, for example, individual’s perception/understanding of his/her body? Concerning this criticism, I argue that we need to complement attachment theory with theories emphasizing the body concept.

2.1.2 Theoretical perspectives on the body

2.1.2.1 Lived body and Grosz’ model of the Möbius strip

The body is something that is usually just there in the background, and the body is an obvious and immediate part of our existence in everyday life (Larsson and Fagrell, 2010). There has been a “taken-for-granted assumption that the body is a natural feature of reality which is essentially unidimensional and historically continuous” (Turner, 1997, p. 20). On the one hand, the body is a part of us. We are our bodies. We experience our bodies subjectively. At the same time, the body is a tool. We have the body. In this sense, the body is an object. Larsson and Fagrell (2010) explain that people generally perceive the subjective body as something does not separate from them. However, people sometimes perceive themselves as strangers in their own bodies. An example of this perceived distinction between "me" and "my body" is an experience of anorexic patients, who suffer from perceptions of the body as the enemy or as something that needs to be controlled.

Traditionally, or at least in western society, the body has been seen as threatening if not adequately controlled and regulated (Turner, 1997). What appears to be most problematic is that this position supports the mind – body dichotomy, i.e., the body is the subordination of the soul and thus needs to be controlled. However, for Merleau-Ponty, the body is not consisted of two separate elements but a unified entity, in which we experience continuous
intertwining and exchanging between the inside and the outside as Merleau-Ponty (1969) explains:

If my hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible, for my other hand, for example, if it takes its place among things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part. Through this crisscrossing within it of the touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it; the two systems are applied upon one another, as the two halves of an orange. (p. 133)

Elizabeth Grosz (1994) claims that it is a phenomenon, which experienced by the individual, which places him/her in the world and makes relations between him/her and other objects as well as other subjects. Therefore, there cannot be a distinction between "I" and "my body" but a “lived body” or a “body-as-it-is-lived-by-me” (Grosz, 1994, p. 84).

The body is my being-to-the-world and as such is the instrument by which all information and knowledge is received and meaning is generated. It is through the body that the world of objects appears to me. (p. 87)

This lived body, which is localized in space and time, will help us to have a special perspective, the vantage point, from which we create meaning to life (Larsson and Fagrell, 2010). When Merleau-Ponty says that the body is subject, it means that the body has a number of body schemas, by which we can act in/toward the world around us. Our relationships to our bodies are internal and direct one (Turner, 1997), and the body is a sentience that is born together with a certain existential environment (Bigwood, 1991). The body is a lived body, through which “we perceive and receive information of and form the world” (Grosz, 1994, p. 86), through which we actively and continually in touch with its surroundings (Bigwood, 1991).

Grosz (1994) appreciates Merleau-Ponty’s work and sees the relation between the inside/psychical interior and the outside/corporeal exterior as a continuous and interactive process, which can be well illustrated by using the Möbius strip metaphor. She means that the mind and the body are continuously on a same surface of this inflectional Möbius strip. Thus, in this model, there is no room for dualism. The body is “body-as-it-is-lived-by-me” (Grosz, 1994, p. 84). Grosz explains that this body’s psychical interior is established through “the social inscription of bodily process” (p. 27). Grosz uses the term “the social inscription of bodily process” to mean “the way in which the “mind” or psyche is constituted so that it accords with the social meanings attributed to the body in its concrete historical, social, and cultural particularity” (p. 27). As she points out, the psychical interior makes “the body its
forms of exteriority, as it were from the inside out” (p. 115). Here the body is "the site of the intermingling of mind and culture: it can also be seen as the symptom and mode of expression and communication of a hidden interior or depth" (p. 116). The social inscription of the surface of the body gives the body its form of psychical interiority as it were from the outside in. Thus, the body is a social object, on which “a text to be marked, traced, written on by various regimes of institutional, (discursive and nondiscursive) power, as a series of linkages” (p. 116).

Using the Mōbius strip metaphor, Grosz demonstrates how the corporeal exterior is presented and lived by the subject and how the social inscription of bodily process generates effects on the psychical interior of the body. Now the question is: What does this process look like and in which contexts can it be understood? Unfortunately, the model is not suited for representing modes of becoming as Grosz points out. Therefore, Bell’s (1992) ritualization theory is also used in this study in order to understand what a phenomenological approach to the body and the model of the Mōbius strip cannot explain, i.e., a process of interaction, which enables the mind to become the body or vise versa.

2.1.2.2 Ritualized body

According to Sarah Coakley (2000), religious beliefs are embodied through religious practices. She stands that there is an inseparable linkage between religious beliefs and religious practices. It is this relation, in which the body, without consciousness as she points out, plays a role as a medium so that religious beliefs can be embodied. Catherine Bell (1992) also disapproves of the thought-action dichotomy. In her book Ritual theory, Ritual practice (1992) Bell uses a term ritualization to mean “a strategic way of acting” (p. 7), which “differentiates itself from other practices” (p. 7). According to Bell, ritualization is the production of this differentiation, whose intention is to distinguish themselves as a privileged action against other activities. Ritual practices are situational and strategic, and people get involved in ritualization without seeing the relationship between its ends and its means but accepting it as a “practical way of dealing with some specific circumstances” (p. 92). What Bell emphasizes is that “intrinsic to ritualization are strategies for differentiating itself - to various degrees and in various ways -from other ways of acting within any particular culture” (p. 90). Thus, ritual practices are bound to a specific cultural context. Bell explains ritualization produces a ritualized body, which is situated in a specific culturally contextualized structure. The ritualized body then interacts with this structured environment through ritual practices, which constructs an environment organized by schemes. This
constructed environment works together with the physical activities so that these schemes can be absorbed in the bodies of agents as “the nature of reality” (p. 99). This ritualized body then possesses what Bell calls *ritual mastery*, a cultural sense of ritual or “an embodied knowing” (p. 107). Through this body people “deploy schemes of ritualization in order to dominate (shift or nuance) other, nonritualized situations to render them more coherent with the values of the ritualizing schemes” (p. 108). Therefore, ritualization and ritual mastery are circular because the two reproduce “an embodied knowing”/ritual mastery in the body through ritual practices. Further, by applying Foucault’s definition of power, Bell argues (1992) that ritual does not control but constitutes a particular dynamic of social empowerment (p. 181). There is no power that is established and performed without “preexisting forms of behavior, socialized bodies, and local relations of power” (p. 200). As Bell points out, power is rooted in “the social nexus” (p. 202), and the social body is indeed the roots of the social network. Since power is consisted of a network of relations, it also involves the selection of means to secure an advantage over others (p. 202). Thus, power is not an activity itself that directly affect a person or an organization. It is rather consisted of a network of relations, which then in turn produces “a more-or-less-organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations” (p. 200).

In sum, ritual is situational, strategic and bound to a specific cultural context. In other word, ritual is a culturally strategic way of acting, which is accepted by the agent as a practical way of dealing with specific circumstances. Ritual is also performed by the agent, who does not see this strategy but sense the goal of ritual and its purpose. This culturally strategic way of acting produces a ritualized body, which is situated within a symbolically constituted environment. This ritualized body is located in an environment, which is constructed through ritual practices, in which the body is restructured through the acts themselves. This ritualized body is a body “invested with a ‘sense’ of ritual (p. 98), which “exist as an implicit variety of schemes whose deployment works to produce sociocultural situations that the ritualized body can dominate in some way” (p. 98). Thus, the body is no longer just a physical instrument of the mind. Rather, it is a more complex and irreducible phenomenon, “the social person” (p. 96), in which power relations are engendered unavoidably from both micro and macro levels. This ritualized body is then a social body “with the ability to deploy in the wider social context the schemes internalized in the ritualized environment” (p. 107). Thus, it is necessary to identify which cultural and social context the ritualized social body is located in. Bell’s theory of ritualization makes it possible to explain the process of embodiment that takes place “within a symbolically constituted spatial and temporal environment” (Bell, 1992, p. 93), but not particularly in which cultural
and social contexts the respondents have relationships with God/other supernatural figures, body images as well as eating attitudes. Concerning this point, there is a need to complement theories emphasizing the body concept with some cultural perspectives. In the next section, I present acculturation theory believing that the perspective bring cultural aspects into my analyses and helps us to understand cultural and social contexts, in which the respondents experience the process of embodiment.

2.1.3 Acculturation theory

The starting point of the concept acculturation is that acculturation is a phenomenon caused by contact with another culture or tradition. Sam and Berry (2010) cite Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936) “(t)hose phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups”. Such changes may be observed in a number of different domains, including attitudes, behaviors, values, and sense of cultural identity (Ryder, Alden & Paulhus, 2000). There are different aspects of acculturation, such as acculturation at the basic cultural level where intercultural contact generates changes in either or both groups (Hwang & Ting, 2008). A four-fold typology – assimilation, separation, integration and marginalization - is a common bidimensional approach (Hwang & Ting, 2008) and a popular approach to acculturation research (Rudmin, 2003), which presumes that a person can appreciate, practice, or identify with two different cultures independently of one another (Rudmin, 2003). Sam and Berry (2010) explain that this fourfold acculturation strategies depend on the extent to which the individual balances the two issues of culture maintenance and contact: (1) the degree to which people wish to maintain their heritage cultures and identities, and (2) the degree to which people wish to have contact with those who are outside their group and participate with them in the daily life of the larger society (figure 2).

A four-fold typology is very appealing and seems to cover all possibilities, to be logically exhaustive, and to thus be universally applicable (Rudmin, 2003). However, Rudmin (2003) points out that the model focus excessively on minority groups despite the definition that acculturation is a two-way process of cultural change and that the model lacks utility and explanatory force. It is often true that the minority group experiences more change, and minority status of the immigrant is the crux of the matter, both in terms of smaller numbers and less power or lower status in society (Padilla & Perez, 2003). In principle, change occurs
in both groups, but in practice more change occurs in the non-dominant than in the dominant group. For example, non-dominant groups often accept (or may be forced to accept) the language, laws, religion, and educational institutions of the dominant group (Organista, Chun, & Marin, 1998). Therefore, it is important and necessary to pay proper attention to dominant – non-dominant relationships, and to the cultural differences that distinguish the groups and their power relationship to each other (Padilla & Perez, 2003). Yet, as Rudmin (2003) stands, acculturation is a two-way process of cultural change and a normal, universal human process that occurs regardless of minority or majority status. Thus, acculturation model should be expanded to include, such as a greater focus on subcultures, dominant group attitudes, or acquisition of cultural skills (Rudmin, 2003).

![Figure 2 Sam and Berry (2010) Acculturation strategies in ethnocultural groups and the larger society](image)

In sum, acculturation is a phenomenon caused by contact with another culture or traditions, which is a mutual and interactive process of change including behaviors, languages, beliefs, values, social institutions, and technologies (Sam & Berry, 2010). Since acculturation is a two-way process of cultural change, it is not limited to immigrant/non-dominant/minority group, although, in practice, more change occurs in the non-dominant than in the dominant group.

2.1.3.1 Psychological Acculturation and Acculturative stress

Although reaction to intercultural contact is not limited to individuals (Al-Omari & Pallikkathayil, 2008) and it occurs at a both group and a community level, acculturation fundamentally involves alterations in the individual's sense of self (Ryder, Alden & Paulhus,
The concept *psychological acculturation*, which was introduced by Graves (1967), is of use so as to make a distinction between the two levels. The concept of *psychological acculturation* primarily refers to individual level changes in identity, values, attitudes, habits and the like, and which are normally geared towards adaptation, i.e., to ascertain that the individual is able to meet the challenges arising from growing up in the midst of two different cultures (Sam & Oppedal, 2003). These acculturation changes at the individual level range from simple behavioral shifts (e.g., in ways of speaking, dressing, and eating) to more problematic, producing acculturative stress as manifested by uncertainty, anxiety, and depression (Sam & Berry, 2010). *Acculturative stress* is a stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010), which can be likened to a set of major life events that pose challenges to the individual (Sam & Berry, 2010). These life events may qualify as stressors and provoke stress reactions in an individual, particularly if the appropriate coping strategies and social supports are lacking (Sam & Berry, 2010). *Acculturative stress* includes difficulties such as linguistic challenges, loss of social supports and difficulty establishing new social ties, disruptions in family dynamics, difficulty finding a job in the new country, discrimination, and nonacceptance by the host culture (Hwang & Ting, 2008). The impact of *acculturative stress* on immigrants can be moderated by a number of factors, including the nature of the host environment, the nature of the acculturating group, the person’s mode of acculturation (Hwang & Ting, 2008).

2.1.3.2 Limitation and problem of acculturation theory

There seem to be many acculturation theories and models and acculturation theories don’t consist of a single theory or perspective, but rather a plural of concept, covering several disciplines, and at times even producing results that are contradictory (Cetrez, 2005). On top of that, as Sam and Berry (2010) point out, several new terms - for example, biculturalism, multiculturalism, integration, and globalization – have been used “interchangeably with acculturation or as alternative concepts” (Sam & Berry, 2010). Hwang and Ting (2008) point out that acculturation research continues to suffer from significant conceptual and methodological limitations, and there continues to be no uniform conceptualization, operationalization, or method of measuring acculturation (Hwang & Ting, 2008).
2.2. Working model

In this study, the emphasis is on the respondents’ relationships with God/other supernatural figures and its relation to body image and eating attitudes as well as behaviors. The main theoretical perspective used in this study is attachment theory. According to Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008), some core aspects of religious belief and behavior represent real manifestation of attachment processes similar to those seen in infant-caregiver relationships. Therefore, an individual’s relationship with God/other supernatural figures can be understood from this perspective if it meets with Bowlby’s five criteria of attachment relationships - proximity maintenance, safe haven, secure base, separation distress, and stronger and wiser. In this study, I start with this application of attachment theory by identifying five criteria of attachment relationships among the respondents’ relationships with God/other supernatural figures. However, these cognitive-behavioral accounts of attachment to God/other supernatural figures cannot explain any movement from external regulation to internal sources of regulation as Miner (2009) points out, and lack an explanation of interaction between the individual’s interior and the external context. This interaction and influences from the outside will be understood from Grosz’s (1994) application of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach to the body. Grosz claims that the relation between the inside/psychical interior and the outside/corporeal exterior is a continuous and interactive process, in which the individual experience the body. This model enables us to identify which and to what extent environmental factors affect the establishment of the individual’s body image and attitude towards eating. This model also helps us to understand how this individual’s psychical account of body image and attitude towards eating are related to his/her bodily and eating behaviors. However, the model is not suited for representing modes of becoming as Grosz points out. Therefore, Bell’s (1992) theory of ritualization is also used in this study to understand what a phenomenological approach to the body cannot explain, i.e., a process of interaction, which enables the mind to become the body and vice versa. Bell explains that ritual is a culturally strategic way of acting that is accepted and performed by the agent, who does not see this strategy but sense the goal of ritual and its purpose. Bell emphasizes that ritual is situational, strategic and bound to a specific social and cultural context. Herein lies a question: In which cultural and social context the respondents are located? The reason for applying acculturation theory to this study is to understand which cultural context the respondents are situated in and to explore how the context can be relevant to the respondents’ relationships with God/other supernatural figures, body images, attitudes towards the body
and eating attitudes as well as eating behaviors. Regarding that the respondents have diverse cultural and religious background and that they are situated in a multicultural society or belong to subgroups, acculturation theory can bring a useful perspective into the analysis thanks to its basic definition that acculturation is a two-way, mutual and interactive process of cultural change including behaviors, beliefs, values, and not least sense of cultural identity, which occurs regardless of minority or majority status. I apply acculturation theory to this study by focusing especially psychological acculturation and the respondents’ experiences as a believer, through the body, and of eating in a Swedish cultural and religious context. Further, acculturation theory also compliments the concept attachment and its application to religiosity, which is based on the premise that the individual’s relationship with God cannot be affected by any other traditions than his/her own.

The results will be presented in relation to four themes: Relationship with God/other supernatural figures, Body image and attitudes towards the body, Eating attitudes and behaviors, and Acculturation experiences/cultural context. The analyses of the material will be conducted by using these theories.

Figure 3 Experiences of body, eating and Acculturation experiences/cultural context in relation to relationships with God/other supernatural figures

The central topic in this study is the individual’s relationship with God/other supernatural figures but the four categories in this study can relate to each other.
Figure 4 Working model

Figure 4 shows the codes that relevant to the respective categories and the order of analyses. It also shows how theories and perspectives complement each other. The main theory used in this study is attachment theory, which makes it possible to understand the relationship between an attachment to God and believers’ subjective well-being. However, the theory has some limitations because of its emphasis on cognitive accounts and its applicability to Christianity. Theories emphasizing the body concept are used as complementary perspectives to the former limitation, and Bell’s theory of ritualization makes it possible to understand the process of embodiment in relation to body and eating. Acculturation theory complements both attachment theory and theories on the body and brings cultural aspects into the analyses.
Chapter 3 Method


3.1. Research methodology

According to Creswell (2009) qualitative research is:

> a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (p. 4)

In qualitative research, thus, focus is mainly on individual meaning (Creswell, p 4). Malterud (1998) writes that we can use qualitative methods to learn more about the human qualities or character such as experience, thoughts, expectations, motivations and attitudes, and that we can look for meaning, significance and subtleties of events and behavior, which may enable us to gain a greater understanding of why people act the way they do. Malterud (1998) also writes that qualitative approaches fit in the study of dynamic processes such as interaction, development, movement and entirety, and that qualitative methods may open to research for areas, in which the knowledge base is limited, in which the problem that should be explored is complex and convoluted, and in which we expect a variety of possible answers. Concerning the aim of this study, I chose the qualitative approach for this study in order to understand the individual’s experiences as a believer, through the body and on eating.

Creswell (2009) holds that philosophical ideas, which he calls philosophical worldviews, influence the practice of research even though they remain hidden in the research. Creswell (2009) uses the term worldview to mean “a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds” (p. 6), which may affect a researcher’s choice of research designs as well as methods. Therefore, philosophical worldviews that researchers use for
studies need to be identified. According to Creswell (2009), the starting point of the social constructivist worldview is that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). In other words, subjective meanings of individuals’ experiences are constructed from “their historical and social perspectives” (Ibid, p. 8) and through “interaction with a human community” (Ibid, p. 9). Therefore, it is important for a researcher to try to understand the context in which people live. It is also important to identify the historical and cultural settings of the participants, through which they may construct meanings and interpret the world in which they live and work. Regarding the aim of this study, this study was undertaken from the social constructivist worldview.

As for qualitative strategies, Creswell (2009) identifies five main ones: Ethnography, Grounded theory, Case studies, Phenomenological research, and Narrative research (Ibid, p. 12-13). In phenomenological research, “the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences of a phenomenon as described by participants” (Ibid, p. 13). This approach is “powerful for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people’s motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom” (Lester, 1999, p.1). I took advantage of what a phenomenological approach could bring into this study rather than to mean this study was a precisely phenomenological study. It was more likely a tool to understand the respondents’ subjective experiences a believer, through the body and on eating.

In sum, this qualitative study was undertaken from the social constructivist worldview with phenomenological approach in order to understand the respondents’ subjective experiences as religious individuals, through the body, on eating and in a Swedish context.

3.2. Data collection procedures

Kvale (1997) writes that a conversation is a basic form of human interaction, thereby conveying something about people's experiences, feelings and hopes, and the world they live in. According to Kvale (1997), the advantage of interviews is that interviews may capture a variety of people’s opinions about a topic and provide a picture of a varied and controversial human world. Creswell (2009) summarizes advantages of the interviews that: (1) it is useful when participants cannot be directly observed, (2) participants can provide historical information, and (3) it allows researcher to control over the line of questioning (p. 179). On the other hand, it may provide either indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees, or information in a designated place rather than the natural field settings
(Creswell, 2009, p. 179). Keeping these disadvantages in mind, the empirical data was collected via eight semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. The reason for choosing semi-structured interviews was that semi-structured interviews could be designed to obtain descriptions of the interviewee's lifeworld in order to interpret the described phenomena's meaning as Kvale (1997) explained. Furthermore, according to Kvale (1997), in a semi-structured interview it is possible to make changes such as a questions form or order if necessary to follow up the responses and stories from the interviewees. This I considered an advantage of a semi-structured interview and fit in the study as I wanted the respondents to speak as freely as possible. Interview questions were formed as open-ended questions as best as possible. They were formed in relation to research questions and the theoretical perspectives shown in the previous chapter.

3.2.1 Participants

The search for the participants was conducted over two months, in March and April 2012. Several contacts were made with three nonprofit organizations: a nonprofit organization in Uppsala working with immigrant and minority issues, a group of youth and young adults Muslims in Uppsala and a group in a nonprofit organization for people with an immigrant background in Stockholm. Behind the choice of organizations to contact with, there was an assumption that it would be more difficult to find non-Christian participants than to find Christian participants, which turned out to be the case. Unfortunately, no participants were found in these three organizations. In order to spread information of this study, a few more contacts were made with circles of friends and acquaintances and participants of a language circle, in which I worked as a circle leader. This convenience sampling method worked. In the language circle, one participant, who eventually became a gatekeeper (see Creswell, 2003, p. 178), was found. Through the gatekeeper, information of the study reached members of a Christian church and a Christian prayer group, yielding three more participants. Further, a few social networking websites were used in order to find additional participants. Information of the study was put on forums for people with eating problems and for religious people. An event page was also created on Facebook.

After two months’ searching, eight persons (Male=3, Female=5) agreed to participate in the study. These participants ranged in age 22-40 (the mean age 26.9). Self-reported religious affiliations were: a Protestant church (n=3); the Roman Catholic Church (n=1); the Orthodox Russian Church (n=1); Islam (n=1); agnostic (n=1); and spiritual (n=1).
3.2.2 Interview procedure

Before the interviews, a test interview was conducted in order to check whether interview questions could work well. Mostly some language errors and unclear expressions were checked. At the initial contact with participants of this study, they were informed that the interview would be conducted either in English or Swedish. The choice of language was done by participants at the time of the interview. Six out of eight interviews were conducted in English, and two interviews were conducted in Swedish. Six out of eight interviews were face-to-face interviews. They were conducted at places that were suitable for the participants such as working rooms at the campuses of Uppsala University and a learning center in Uppsala. These places were chosen with regard to confidentiality and quietness in order not to be disturbed by, for example, presences of others. However, two interviews were conducted at open spaces at the University since these interviewees did not care much about the presences of others. Two interviews were conducted as telephone interviews via Skype call because of physical and geographical distances between the participants and the interviewer. Interview protocols were prepared and used for each interview. With the permissions of the participants, interviews were recorded by a digital voice recorder. A mobile phone’s sound recording function was also used for the safety's sake. During the interviews, notes were taken in case for failure of recordings. Recorded interviews were then transcribed.

3.3. Data analysis procedures

The collected data were analyzed using a deductive approach, a theory-driven approach from the existing theories into the material (Malterud, 1998). The first step of the data analysis was, therefore, to work closely to theories/theoretical perspectives presented in the previous chapter, i.e., attachment theory, theoretical perspectives on the body and acculturation theory. These theoretical perspectives were my tools to interpret and analyze the data. These theories/theoretical perspectives were also this study’s frameworks, in which the data was presented, interpreted and analyzed. In short, a Template Analysis Style (see Malterud, 1998, p 89) was used in this study. This type of analysis could involve a risk for the reproduction of already known knowledge, but was a good starting point for developing new descriptions (Malterud, 1998). Started by reading material to find meaning-bearing units, texts were sorted along with predetermined categories and codes that derived from existing theories. After the meaning-bearing units were identified, a decontextualization of sorted and meaning-bearing
units was conducted. During this procedure, four categories were used. They were relevant to theoretical perspectives. They were: (1) Relationships with God/other supernatural figures, (2) Body image and attitudes towards the body, (3) Eating attitudes and behaviors, and (4) Acculturation experiences/cultural context. Codes were created in accordance with each category. The codes that relevant for the respective categories were: (1) proximity to God, proximity maintenance, secure base, safe haven, separation distress, stronger and wiser, faith, and prayer, (2) body image, inside, outside, lived body, social body, training, health, power, media, and society, (3) food, diet, fasting, trend, stress, control, and eating problems, (4) personal identity, majority, minority, psychological acculturation, discrimination, and acculturative stress. Recontextualizing was conducted by summarizing contents of categories. The analysis was not completed until results were validated. Therefore, the results were controlled over whether they were in accordance with the context, which they were originally in, i.e., theories/theoretical perspectives. This was a procedure to prevent reductionism and maintain the connection to the field and informants' reality (Malterud, 1998), which led to increase the study's credibility.

![Figure 5 Template analysis style (Malterud, 1998, p. 89)](image)

3.4. Ethical considerations

During research, researchers may face the ethical issues that they need to anticipate. Kvale (1997) writes that an interview is a moral enterprise: the personal interaction in the interview
affects the interviewee, and the knowledge produced by the interview affects our understanding of the human condition. Research involves working with people, for example, to collect data from people and about people, and therefore, Creswell (2009) explains:

Researchers need to protect their research participants; develop a trust with them; promote the integrity of research participants; guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organization or institutions; and cope with new, challenging problems. (p. 87)

The ethical issues that researchers may face can occur not only a specific stage of research but during the whole research processes (Kvale, 1997). In this study, especially issues related to informed consent were concerned and accented. According to Kvale (1997), informed consent means that a researcher informs participants about the general purpose of the research, its structure and their right to participate in/withdraw from the research. Creswell (2009) presents some of elements of informed consent such as identification of researcher, identification of the sponsoring institution, identification of how the participants were selected, identification of the purpose of the research, or guarantee of confidentiality to the participant (p. 89). At the initial contact with participants of this study, they were informed orally or in written form through e-mails about the general purpose of the study, of the highest possible anonymity, about the researcher and her contact address, and about practical information, such as, how the interview would be conducted, how the place for the interview would be chosen, or how long the interview would take. At the time of the interview, participants were again informed about the purpose of the study and about the researcher and her contact address. In relation to confidentiality, anonymity was stressed. Participants were informed that fictitious names were used for a presentation of the material and that they could withdraw from the study anytime they wanted. They were also asked for an oral approval to record the interview and to use the material for analysis and a presentation.

3.5. Validity considerations

Creswell (2009) stands that validity is “one of the strengths of qualitative research, and it is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers” (p. 191). According to Creswell (2009), there are several validity strategies, through which researchers can check the accuracy of the findings and increase the validity of the study. Of those strategies, three strategies were emphasized in this
study: (1) triangulation, (2) rich, thick description, and (3) clarifying the bias of the researcher. Creswell (2009) explains triangulation as follows:

Triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes. If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study. (p. 191)

In this study particularly two types of triangulation were conducted. First, the data was collected from different sites and people, who believed in different God/other supernatural figures and who belonged to different religious denominations. Secondly, the data was analyzed from several different theoretical perspectives: an attachment theoretical perspective, a set of theoretical perspectives on the body, and an acculturation theoretical perspective. These theoretical perspectives were in accordance with and complemented each other as shown in the previous chapter.

To use rich, thick description as a procedure, Creswell and Miller (2000) claims, “researchers employ a constructivist perspective to contextualize the people or sites studied” and refers to Denzin (1989):

The process of writing using thick description is to provide as much detail as possible. It may involve describing a small slice of interaction, experience, or action; locating individuals in specific situations; bringing a relationship or an interaction alive between two or more persons; or providing a detailed rendering of how people feel.

As already mentioned, in this study I used a phenomenological strategy of inquiry, in which the researcher’s focus was on understanding “the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). Therefore, there was a slight difficulty in using this procedure. However, it was not impossible to meet this validity criterion by providing detailed descriptions of the setting, a detailed rendering of how respondents felt about the topics as well as different perspectives about themes so that the results could be realistic and rich.

To clarify the bias of the researcher is related to both the validity and the ethical issue. Kvale (1997) writes that ethical behavior is more than ethical knowledge and cognitive choices and also includes the researcher's personality, his/her sensitivity and commitment to moral issues and actions. Creswell (2009) stands that it needs to identify researchers’ “biases, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status” (p. 177), because they may shape and affect researchers’ interpretations. Therefore, it is
particularly important for researchers to acknowledge and describe their entering beliefs and biases early in the research process to allow readers to understand their positions, and then to bracket or suspend those researcher biases as the study proceeds (Creswell and Miller, 2000). There were four central topics in this study: (1) Relationship with God/other supernatural figures, (2) Body image and attitudes towards the body, (3) Eating attitudes and eating behaviors, and (4) Acculturation experiences/cultural context. Each topic was, in fact, related to my own experiences. As one who was grown up in a Christian milieu, in a small church with its roots in Charismatic movement, I had more understanding of or a sense of closeness to Christian remarks expressed by the respondents. At the same time as one who was familiar to different religions and traditions in general, Buddhism and Shintoism in particular, and had been influenced by them as well as Christianity, I could have brought wider perspectives into the study. My gender might affect interpretation and analysis especially when it came to perception of body image. My experience of suffering from eating disorders might also affect this study. Furthermore, I have experienced an acculturation process in Sweden, as an immigrant. Taking these potential threats to this study into account, I used this strategy, clarifying the bias of researcher, as a critical self-reflection, through which “researchers become more self aware, and they monitor and attempt to control their biases” (Johnson, 1997).
Chapter 4 Presentation of Empirical data

In this chapter, the interview data for eight respondents will be presented. Each presentation includes respondent’s short profile and background information. The respondents’ names are fictitious so as to protect their anonymity. Following the respondent’s profile material from the semi-structured interviews will be presented in relation to the central themes; (1) Relationship with God/other supernatural figures, (2) Body image and attitudes toward the body, (3) Eating attitudes and behaviors, and (4) Acculturation experiences/cultural context. In principle, each interview will be presented along with these four themes. However, in some cases Body image and Attitudes towards the body, and Eating attitudes and behaviors will be presented together. It is because these two topics were connected and intertwined with each other by some respondents. Quotations from the interviews will be shown if necessary in order to highlight respondents’ voices, which are relevant to the central themes. The interview questions can be seen in the appendix.

Table 1 Background of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Country of birth</th>
<th>Belonging to Religious organization</th>
<th>Religious belief</th>
<th>Faith in God/ supernatural figure *1</th>
<th>Time in Sweden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 1</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>Russian Orthodox Church</td>
<td>Orthodox Christian</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21 years (Moved to Sweden at the age of one)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 2</td>
<td>Elin</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Evangelical Free Church in Sweden</td>
<td>Protestant Christian</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>18 years (Lived in Burundi for 6 years from 6 months old)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 3</td>
<td>Erik</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Evangelical Free Church in Sweden</td>
<td>Protestant Christian</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>23 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 4</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>Russian Orthodox Church</td>
<td>- *2</td>
<td>+ *3</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 5</td>
<td>Bairam</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 6</td>
<td>Karim</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Islam *4</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>+/- *5</td>
<td>Circa 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent</td>
<td>Signe</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>Roman Catholic Church</td>
<td>Catholic Christian</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>8 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent</td>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Evangelical Free Church in Sweden</td>
<td>Protestant Christian</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>23 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ means Positive; the respondent has faith in God or supernatural figure. - means Negative; the respondent does not have faith in God or supernatural figure. +/- means Neutral.

∗1 No faith in the church.
∗2 The respondent believes in a supernatural figure, which she calls “High spirit”.
∗3 The respondent officially belongs to Islam but does not have faith in Islam.
∗4 The respondent is comfortable with God’s existence.

4.1. Presentation of data

4.1.1 Respondent 1

Victoria is a female and 22 years old. She is studying at university. She was born in Ukraine and moved to Sweden when she was one year old. She is a native speaker of both Russian and Swedish. She was baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church. Her mother has belonged to the Church as a believer. Therefore, she was also baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church.

Relationship with God/other supernatural figures

Victoria feels she has some sort of connection to the Russian Orthodox Church. However, she does not consider herself a typical believer in a way that the Church encourages. She has some kind of belief but not special or typical faith in God. She does not believe in God or other supernatural figures. Therefore, she does not have any specific relationship with God.

Body image and attitudes towards the body

Currently she is content with her body. She thinks that she has a proper body image of herself now. However, when she was a teenager she had a difficulty with her body image. She started dieting, which triggered her anorexia. At that time, she weighed 40 kg less than what she is now, but she considered herself overweight.

I had a very inaccurate body image and I did not know what I should have seen. When I see pictures now I can see how I looked like at that time, but it didn’t at all accord with what I saw or what I felt. For example, about the body, I felt that it was big and very, very fat. It was completely wrong. I had completely wrong body image. (R1, p. 2)
She was hospitalized in the end. She suspects that media and society’s views on body affected much not only in her body image but also in her eating behaviors. She thinks that they idealize thinness and focus particularly on women’s bodies. She says that they are sending out very wrong signals to people in general and young girls in particular.

Through her experiences, she became more aware of her body and her way of training compared to many peers. She thinks that she got tools to relate to her body in a healthy way.

**Eating attitudes and behaviors**

Victoria explains that she had very complicated ways of relating to food and exercises as well when she was a teenager, which she describes “not at all healthy but very destructive” (R1, p.1). She dieted, ate too little and trained excessively. She thinks her eating behaviors have been affected first by society and also by her surroundings, such as friends or family. She assumes that the media is helping to spread out a wrong signal, as is the case with body image. In her opinion, it is Swedish society, which causes eating disorders or contributes to the development of eating disorders.

I think much of the reason is about society’s views, then I think also it is caused by very personal reason, but there is always reason for eating disorders, it’s not just like waking up and feels that “now I got eating disorders.” /…/ eating disorders are always personal, everyone has some reason. It can be problems at home or personal crisis, but I think it is very much rooted in society. (R1, p. 6)

Anorexia made her social life difficult. She could not see her friends. She felt isolated when she was suffering from anorexia. It had never occurred to her to ask the church for help. During the period she was suffering from anorexia, she understood it as an illness and her own problem that she developed and perpetuated by herself. She thought that she would not live long, but she continued to perpetuate the illness. In the end, she was hospitalized, which was a wake up call for her.

She is currently free from anorexia, but the food is still an important matter for her. For her, nutrition is not much important than eating regularly. Moreover, it is important for her that foods she takes in should be good not only for her body but also for her soul. They may be not nutrition wise healthy but what is important is that they are psychic wise healthy to eat.

**Acculturation experiences/cultural context**

Victoria says that she has not experienced cultural differences or culture shock in Sweden. However, she sometimes feels that it is difficult to understand the typical mentality among the
Swedes in Sweden. She uses “the typical mentality” to mean that people pretend as if everything is fine and try not to talk about problems that exist. She also thinks that people do not know much about how it might have been, for example, to live in war, or to be homeless at times in a place where there are no welfare or unemployment benefits. Further, she claims that she was very much affected by views on the body and eating existing in Swedish society.

She identifies herself as a Russian Orthodox Christian. She thinks there is a significant difference between her home country Ukraine and Sweden when it comes to people’s understanding of Christianity.

People say that Sweden is a Christian country but I don’t think so, for example, Easter, how many people go to church on Easter? And those who call themselves Christians, I do not think they do that. For me, what’s really, Easter is Passover, not about Easter food and Easter eggs, and Christmas is not about Christmas presents /. . ./ in my homeland, that (Christmas) is a day that religion is focused not Christmas trees or Christmas presents. (R1, p. 4-5)

She presumes that the importance of religion will keep on decreasing in Sweden. She thinks Sweden is very open towards different religions. She assumes that the reason Sweden has acceptance of other religions and traditions may be that Sweden itself is not a country where people do hold onto religion.

4.1.2. Respondent 2
Elin is a female and 24 years old. She is studying at university. When she was six months old, her family moved to a small village in Burundi, where she was grown up. She and her family had lived there for six years. Elin identifies herself as a Christian and is currently attending to a church affiliated to the Evangelical Free Church in Sweden (Evangeliska Frikyrkan, EFK). She does not care much about denominations because she was brought up in a small village in Burundi, where Christian churches were not divided into different denominations, unlike in Sweden.

**Relationship with God/other supernatural figures**
Elin says that her faith is the foundation of her life and it is a part of who she is. Her faith is a way to understand people with different beliefs. God is everything to her, and her relationship with God is multidimensional. In general, God is a creator and a loving parent to her, who is righteous and knows everything.

if I imagine myself having kids, if my kids would do something very badly and I get angry with them I
would still open my arms when they come running back and that’s also a strong picture of what I believe. (R2, p. 2)

She prays and reads the scriptures. However, it does not necessarily mean that she does them only to contact God. She believes that God already knows her prayers. She explains that having a relationship with God is a part of breathing and part of being in itself. According to her, it is like “having Him on headphones” (R2, p. 2) and He is always there whenever she plugs in them. She believes that everyone who needs God can reach Him, but just like any other relationship, a person who has a relationship with God needs to work on it.

**Body image and attitudes towards the body**

When Elin was a teenager - between thirteen and sixteen - she had high expectations of herself and low self-esteem, which she considers very typical teenage problems. She thought she was fat. She thought her eyes were too small, too. She told to herself that she was worthless and useless. While she was struggling with her low self-esteem and her negative body image, she also had a problem with eating, which she considers some kind of eating disorders. She prayed. People around her prayed for her, too. However, she always ended up with being in “the same wheel of self-destruction” (R2, p. 5). She knew this was a struggle that she could not handle by herself. For Elin, her struggle was a conflict between her faith - God had created everyone else was beautiful - and her own understanding of herself. Her struggle was a conflict between God, society and media, too. She stands that media in general and society’s opinion about how people should be and what people should do in particular affect and stress out people especially teenagers, who are on the way to developing their own identities.

Her view of herself and her perception of her own body changed and developed. Eventually, she realized that her struggle did not have anything to do with her body image. Her turning point came when she was painting a picture at her friend’s house.

I saw a lot of shoes and a lot of big feet and I heard the voices saying all these things I’d been saying to myself all the time, “you’re worthless” “you’re useless” ”you look fat” “you have two small eyes”, you know, all these things, and all at the same time I couldn’t handle it /…/ I wanted to shut something up, so he (her friend) prayed peace, he said peace. And after while, all these things, all the voices faded out and all became black. And I heard my friend’s voice saying peace. Peace. That was such simple thing, such a simple word (R2, p. 10).

After that her image of herself changed gradually. Today she is content with who she is. Sometimes she gets migraines, but she accepts them as they are.
Eating attitudes and behaviors

Now it is important for her to take care of herself because life is a gift. Therefore, it should be cherished by eating and food or by not taking drugs that affect her body and mind badly. She thinks it is good that there are considerations for health, ecology and the environment in contemporary society. She tries to keep them in mind when shopping and cooking. However, she sometimes feels stressed out by these trends even though she knows they are good for society and people. She thinks that life is a gift to enjoy. Therefore, it is difficult for her to be with people that are extremely aware of what they put into their mouth.

It feels like if you put so much effort into this, when do you have a time to do anything else, when do you have time to see your family member, to say hi to your neighbors. I mean all those things are, to me, more important than whether I eat the most healthiest carrots or not (laugh). But it’s a priority way, I try to eat as healthy as I can and then now I can have a little snack more often (laugh). (R2, p. 6)

She thinks people should simply enjoy life instead of being stressed out.

Acculturation experiences/cultural context

Elin recalls that people in the little village in Africa, where she and her family lived in, did not have many things, but they had happiness and each other. While in Sweden, she thinks many people are lonely and stressed out because there is a pattern that people should follow in Sweden. She stands that people in Sweden make choices “not knowing whether it’s their own or someone else’s but because they should” (R2, p.7). She says she is sure that seven out of ten people would say they are not happy. Meaning to her life is, but she thinks it can be something else like sports for a lot of people. She stands that there are many misunderstandings about believers and labels on different religions in Sweden.

If you say you’re a believer of some kind and it’s like (trembling as if seeing a ghost, and laugh). People really don’t want it, like getting intimate to someone. It’s like “OK, maybe that person is strange,” in general. But it’s usually when I meet new people. They don’t really put their finger on this until after a while, then they ask why I ‘m so nice or why I’m like this or like that and it’s like well, it’s probably because I have this view of the world, and then it’s not a strange because then they already know me. But if you go out and say that right away… (R2, p. 8-9)

She thinks it does not matter what people believe in, but people need something to believe in, which encourages them to live life. She emphasizes that God is the reason of her life and why this world exists as it is.
4.1.3. Respondent 3

Erik is a male, 23 years old. He is studying at a university college. His parents are non-believers. He was raised in a non-religious milieu. He became a believer two years ago in a city in Sweden, where he met his girlfriend who was a Christian. Since he was from a non-religious family and was a scientific person, his approach to faith was very scientific from the beginning. However, he thinks now that Christianity does not oppose the scientific way of thinking but rather complementing it. He has particular views on Theology, but this would not hinder him from going to different churches. Currently, he is attending a church affiliated to the Evangelical Free Church in Sweden (Evangeliska Frikyrkan, EFK), and he is also participating in a Christian prayer group.

**Relationship with God/other supernatural figures**

Erik wants to involve God in every decision in his life, but he thinks he has not managed it yet. He believes God will help him with everything when he manages to hear the voice of God. However, he thinks it is very hard for him to be led by God because he is “very egocentric” (R3, p. 3) and he is much in control himself. At the moment, his relationship with God is based on trust and respect for God. However:

/…/ in the same way, since I know so little and I have to be humble when I speak of my relationship with God, ’cause I really don’t know. I mean my view of my relationship with God is probably not the right one /…/ the true, the only one, who know my relationship with him, is God. (R3, p. 2)

Being a Christian means becoming like Jesus to him. Jesus is his role model. He wears a bracelet around his wrist, which reminds him of Jesus in his everyday life. He is currently trying to build a more personal relationship with God through everyday conversation with Him. He considers prayer the best way to contact God. He also thinks music is one of the best ways. When he sings gospel songs he gets in the very deep mood. He thinks it is wonderful to sing together with other people, who are in the service for the same reason as him.

**Body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and behaviors**

Before Erik became a Christian, he worked on being muscularly fit and trained hard especially during his adolescence. He had a misconception about what girls wanted. However, after he became a Christian, this became less important to him. He thinks one of the main messages of Christianity is that people are loved whatever they do and regardless how they look. Therefore, he believes he does not have to get approval from society and people. What
is important to him now is God and how He sees him. Other than that he can now let go. This he considers a very big change. He has high self-esteem and is very content with himself. He gets fit easily when he trains, and he thinks he looks pretty good. He also has a girlfriend, who helps him to have good self-esteem. Currently, he is not worried about himself and his body. He does not have any intention to change his habits. However, if he sees changes in his appearance, he thinks he will do something about it. He is very concerned with his looks. He wants to acknowledge that it is for his health’s sake, but he admits it is rather a question of self-esteem. He stands that it is easier to live everyday life if people have good looks because:

People like you easily, you’ll succeed easier in your carrier and if you have a girlfriend she is more happier with you if you look good than not, I guess. So it makes things easier /…/ and secondly, it is for my health of course. You feel better when you look good. If you take care of your body and it looks so, you feel better. But the main reason I guess it’s just a perception from others. (R3, p. 4-5)

He thinks there is a norm about body in society, which he considers extremely and twisted. The picture of the perfect body existing in society and media is an excessive body, which does not fit well with reality. Yet he admits that it affects his body image because he assumes that he is judged by others constantly. He thinks people are slaves under the norm regardless of whether they like it or not. He also thinks that society and media have a huge impact on what people eat. Further, he thinks the Swedish society has too much focus on eating, health and fitness. He considers that it is good to make people aware of what they eat because this has an impact on their health and their lives. However, he questions whether people really care about food and eating for their health and their lives.

/…/ I think the way you look rather it’s affected of (by?) the fashion and of the film and music, you know that, you expose your body where you expose it. Then the diet and food is rather a way of getting there. I don’t think people want to be thin because they eat good food. (R3, p. 8)

When it comes to his own attitudes towards food and eating, he emphasizes that nutrition and the purity of food are very important. He prefers more pure and ecological food, fewer additives and a wide variety of meals so that he can get everything his body needs. He tries to buy local food since he thinks it is good for the environment.

**Acculturation experiences/cultural context**

To be a Christian was a big decision for Erik. His decision has a huge impact on his life, including negative experiences. He explains that it is a trend in Sweden to be open to different life philosophies and cultures. He emphasizes, however, it is not like that in real life. He
considers that society is not open especially to Christianity and Islam and discriminates its believers in many ways. When he started studying at a university college, he decided not to show his cross and hid it for two months because he knew that people would see him through their images of religious people when they saw his cross. He thinks if he had not hidden his cross in the beginning, people would have excluded him from many things. He feels that he has been expected to behave in a different way by non-religious people. Therefore

/.../ sometimes I have to think very carefully of when to be officially a Christian, and when and where and with whom I can speak of certain things /.../ since I’m a Christian, I’m a also officially Christian that would mean that I have the heritage of thousands years of pain and suffering and misery, and I have to kind of fight that, because it’s not about that. But people don’t know that. So my fight in everyday life is to live the Christian ideal as I believe in. (R3, p. 10-11)

He emphasizes that being a Christian and living the Christian ideal are everyday fights for his very inner belief and the most intimate part of who he is.

4.1.4. Respondent 4

Anna is a female and 40 years old. She was born and grown up in Ukraine. She has been in Sweden for twelve years and working as an engineer for three years. She was baptized in the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine when she was ten years old, but she does not feel like affiliating to the Church.

/.../ when Soviet fell and became republics and the churches did took a power and then everybody became religious, everybody (laugh). And even the worst criminal, they went to church and then became nearly saints because every sin was forgiven and they paid to priests and they get ... all saints forgiven. It was a craziness and when I saw it, I didn’t want to go to such a kind of church. (R4, p. 8)

She likes to go to churches to see architectural buildings and paintings, but she does not go to churches for religious reasons. She explains that only women have to put on scarf when they participate in the mass and women cannot go to the church when they have a period. Therefore, she thinks the Russian Orthodox Church discriminate women. Instead of going to the church, she decided to believe in something else at home.

**Relationship with God/other supernatural figures**

Anna believes in a higher mind, which is watching over people from the above and is taking care of people. She does not call this higher mind God but high spirit. Her relationship with the high spirit is a parental relationship. If she did something good she would get a reward but if she did something wrong she would be punished in someway. When Anna has a problem in
private life, she often asks the high spirit to help her. She contacts with her high spirit by talking to him/her in the same manner when she talks to people.

/…/ it helps me or maybe, maybe not just this high spirit but the thought about the high spirit helps me, it just helps to go through some kind of hardships. /…/ Maybe it’s not a help in real, I don’t know if it’s for real but just the powerful, our mind is so powerful, so if you think that it will be OK, and it is in the end. (R4, p. 2)

Her high spirit shows up when she really needs him/her. She has often asked her high spirit to help her, and he/she has listened to her and helped her.

**Body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and practices**

Anna had not been satisfied with her body for a long time. About three years ago, she was disappointed with her private life and had a sort of depression. At that time, she locked her in herself and was isolated. Her best friend was a refrigerator rather than her high spirit. She ate a lot whenever she felt stressed. She gained weight quickly. Her turning point came when she got a qualified job, which was her first job in Sweden.

It was about that somebody believed in me and it was less than three years ago. And then, I weighed thirty kg more than now. I was very round and I, in my past mind, I’d never thought that somebody could believe in me when I looked like that, that big, bigger scale (laugh). But somebody believed in me and gave me a job, and that was, I think, that was a turning point. So, it doesn’t matter how I look, it just what I am that counts. (R4, p. 3)

Thereafter, she started dealing with her situation and lost weight about 30 kg eventually. Now she is content with herself.

She explains that she had been overweight most of her life. She emphasizes that appearance is extremely important in Ukraine where people ask her casually whether she has gained or lost weight as a greeting. She used to hear people comment on weight, proportion or appearance. She feels pity that in the last few years, Sweden has also started following the trend and concentrating on appearance and body, as well as dieting, just like many other countries in the world. She considers this trend extreme, but it does not affect her eating practices because she is very stubborn, who does everything opposite to such an extreme trend. The only thing she is obsessed with is weight control. It is a custom for her to weigh herself on a scale every day, which she has been doing since she was a teenager.
Acculturation experiences/cultural context

Anna was very surprised at and shocked by a difference between Ukraine and Sweden when it came to views on appearance and body.

When I came to Sweden and I was watching TV, maybe for the first time. I saw a TV commentator and she was, she was really round. She looked like Sarah Dawn Finer. So I was just shocked. It’s not normal in Ukraine (laugh). She couldn’t be on TV, so just, no, no (laugh), it was, I was really shocked. But then I was so happy about it. Sweden! How great it is! (R4, p. 4)

Although she feels Sweden has also started being affected by this world trend, she still thinks the Swedish society is more open minded to appearance and body comparing with Ukraine. This is one of the reasons she is content with her life in Sweden. She thinks she is well involved into the Swedish society. She does not have anything to complain about her life in Sweden. She says she feels much more comfortable in Sweden than in Ukraine.

When she had problems she asked for help by expressing her wish in detail to her high spirit. After she came to Sweden, she got everything what she wanted through asking for high spirit’s help.

4.1.5. Respondent 5

Bairam is a male and 25 years old. He is studying at university. He is from Turkey, and this is the third year for him to live and study in Sweden. Bairam identifies himself as a Muslim. He tries to live his life according to his religion as best as he can. He prays five times a day and goes to the Masses on Friday. He also fasts during Ramadan.

Relationship with God/other supernatural figures

Bairam has a personal relationship with God. He believes that God is aware of him, sees him, and hears him. He says prayer is a general way to have contact with God, but it is not the only way because he feels His presence all the time:

/…/ in Islam God is all seeing and hearing, so you don’t have to do something particularly to reach God. So, I mean I can pray and that might be my contact but it’s more or less, I mean prayer is generally a reminder for myself to remind me of his presence and why I am here now but to contact, I just think that I contact in God and that’s it /…/ God hears and sees everything, so I don’t need to do something special to get his attention. (R5, p. 1)

His faith and his relationship with God keep his feet on the ground and keep him safe. They give meaning to his life and make his life much easier.
Body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and behaviors

First of all, what eating means to him is for life, but it does not have to mean that people eat just for survival. He says that people can enjoy eating. However, when considering what is happening in the rest of the world such as hunger, he thinks there should be a limit. He points out a few significant problems in the contemporary system: people eat much more than they need; eating is highly fetishized; and capitalistic system that promotes consumption.

His faith is a base for his eating practices, too. He takes up Ramadan as an example. Ramadan is not just fasting or “a set of rules” (R5, p. 5) but a practice to understand hunger, “one of the core desire in human life” (R5, p. 5). He explains that he questions himself why he eats through Ramadan. He thinks that he, as a religious person, should fit everything including eating into his faith. He tries to eat ecologically as best as he can. He is not a vegetarian but he tries to buy ecological meat because he does not like the way animals are treated. He also checks from where the meat comes.

He suspects that the contemporary system and media also affect society’s views on body:

if you check mainstream media and staff like that and that’s quite screwed actually. Because, it’s all about, I mean it’s over sexualized, over materialized. I think it’s, it comes hand in hand with the capital system. Because, it is something to sell, unfortunately. I mean it doesn’t have to be in the sense that, in the sense of prostitution but it’s, I mean, you watch TV and you see what it is like, it’s more or less selling the body, making it something to sell. (R5, p. 2-3)

He emphasizes that it does not have to be just Swedish society, but it is more western. It is the dominant lifestyle and view of the body because the western way of life is the most apparent one that people follow on TV or mainstream media. He tried to change his body according to this view when he was younger. He tried to keep fit, tried not to be too fat and tried to get tighter trousers etc., but he thinks he did them unconsciously. Today he tries to be himself as best as he can. He considers his body a contact window to the world and to other people because the first thing people see is his body, through which they interface to his soul or himself (R5, p. 2).

Acculturation experiences/cultural context

His faith is a base for his life, but he thinks this may be difficult for people in Sweden to understand. According to him, if someone starts talking about this topic, people look that person as if he/she were from another planet. This makes him feel a bit disappointed. He thinks religions are invisible, and it is not preferable to talk about religions in Sweden.
People get weird it out when you start talking about religion or they just joke about it but they don’t talk about it seriously. And by name it’s a Christian country but it’s definitely not. I mean it’s just traditions that are Christian. It’s traditionalized, so it’s fun./* But if you ask personally people what they think about religion and how do they define themselves, the most general answer you would get is like, probably they are agnostics. (R5, p. 6)

Although his major is a Natural Science subject, he does not think science has answers to everything. He knows through his experience that his opinion is not generally accepted in Sweden. He thinks that science helps to find out how things work. However it does not explain why things work, which he thinks is beyond science. He claims it is not a question that science deals with, at least it should not be.

4.1.6. Respondent 6

Karim is a male, 27 years old. He was born and grown up in Morocco. He has been in Sweden almost for 5 years. Karim has a Muslim background. He holds a lot of Muslim values. However, he does not identify himself as a Muslim. He sees himself as an agnostic but not an atheist.

I think it’s when you realize that you don’t really have control, when you lose the control, when you don’t have like the means to change things, then you tend to refer to some sort of a high power to help you. You lose the control and basically you give up. Even, like your reasoning and your logic is diminished, I think, I’m speaking to myself and I could refer to God. That’s why I don’t say that I’m an atheist, because I am still comfortable with the idea that there is a God. (R6, p. 1)

He does not think it is relevant to him whether God exists or not even when he is in a moment of weakness.

Relationship with God/other supernatural figures

Karim does not feel like having any connection with a deity. However, he has a daily relation with God unwillingly and unconsciously. His relationship with God is:

more related to reflexes I used to have, and to the languages, the Arabic language and the Moroccan language. They have a very close relationship to references, to a religion. We say thank you, we say in “Help yourself”, we say in “You’re welcome” etc., like very everyday expressions are religious connotations with God. So, even if I try to cut off completely, they have still connections, on daily bases, with God. (R6, p. 1)
Although he is comfortable with the idea of God’s existence, he does not sense the presence of God. The idea of God’s existence is for him like a back up plan, and he tends to say, “OK. If you’re there, thanks, by the way” (R6, p. 2).

**Body image and attitudes towards the body**
Karim considers he has an average sized body. He is comfortable with his body. He does not care much about his body. He is not the very person who enjoys taking care of the body. He neither spends any money on body products nor spends time seeing himself in a mirror. It does not mean that he does not like his body. Rather, he does not care much about it. He thinks he is detached from body issues in a sense. He considers that the concept of body that people tend to have is inherited from the neo class system. It is affected by the consumption society that has too much focus on appearances, which he does not like. He thinks it is sad that people perceive body from one angle instead of seeing it from multiple angles.

**Eating attitudes and behaviors**
Karim is a vegan, but he does not practice a strict vegan diet. He practices a proto-vegan diet. He does not consider himself a self-disciplined person. Therefore, he chose to be a vegan, because being a vegan means that people have to be a good planner of everything related to food and eating. His past experience and education also influenced him to be a vegan.

I had a discipline at home where I had to finish my plate. Whatever is given, it has to be finished. So, whether I liked it or not, I had to eat it. So, like I had this sort of power structure in front of me while I was sitting at the table. Very interesting, it really, I think I’m still having it. I’m still influenced by it. I had a hard time to not finish my plate. (R6, p. 4)

Therefore, he wants to reverse the power structure, which affect both him and other creatures and animals.

He likes hosting people because it is important to him so as to socialize and contact with others. When he socializes, however, he often does not disclose that he is a vegan because he knows that people think that “being a vegan can be very tricky on meal” (R6, p. 5). He does not like having attention on him. He sometimes says that he is a vegetarian because he thinks being a vegetarian is more accepted than being a vegan in Sweden. He does not want to cause restriction for his guests because of him being a vegan and he wants them to have fun and pleasure when they meet for meals.
Acculturation experiences/cultural context
Karim has been in Sweden nearly for five years. He feels he has been in Sweden too long because he thinks it is important for people not to stay in one place for a long time. He claims that living in other countries is a process. Therefore, he would move to another place when he felt he learned enough from Sweden.

Being in Sweden enables him to be distant from values existing in Morocco. In Sweden, he does not have to be decent. He uses the word “decent” to mean that he does not have to care about the Moroccan norm ranging from dress and appearance codes (for example, ways of dressing, hair style or facial hair) to behaviors and life style. He explains that he already had the agnostic idea, skepticism towards religion, and criticism of Muslim values when he was in Morocco. However, being distant from his home country made him more critical towards both Muslim and non-Muslim values.

According to Karim, in Islam it is the biggest sin to identify oneself as an atheist. He does not believe in sin. Therefore, he can easily change his faith according to himself. It depends on the context whether he says he is a Muslim or an agnostic or just not interested in having religious identity/label.

/…/ for example, when I work, I think I have a better, people better listen to me when I say I’m a Muslim. So I don’t have a problem using it. I use it as a tool rather than believing in it, but I use it as a tool /…/ when I’m asked too many questions, I just tend to say I’m not interested /…/ I do this depends on the context, but with my true friends, I think I’m comfortable, I think, agnostic, and I wouldn’t really change it. (R6, p. 7)

He thinks religion is taboo in Sweden. He considers religious holidays and celebration to be the only things of importance in Sweden. For people in Sweden, it is very uncomfortable to be asked about their faiths. People hate to be associated with religion and sometimes people take it as an insult when they are asked about their faiths. He thinks religion has good teachings spiritually. However, he also thinks it is good that there is such a view of religion in Sweden because it helps people not to particularize themselves according to dogmatic views and enables people to be open to others and differences amongst people. He explains that the differences of people are taken negatively in Morocco. He considers that in Morocco “decency” is formed by the uniformity and collectivism. He is against such uniformity as he believes it hinders people from cultivating the differences.
4.1.7. Respondent 7

Signe is a female, 31 years old. She was born and grown up in Lithuania. She has been in Sweden for eight months and is currently studying at university as a master student. She was raised in a Catholic milieu and has practiced and developed Catholic faith since she was a child. She is currently attending a Roman Catholic Church in Uppsala and a Catholic prayer group in the church.

**Relationship with God/other supernatural figure**

God is very important in her life. She is helped and saved by God. In the mornings even when she does not have time for anything but just getting out of her bed, she asks Him to bless a day. God helps her in different occasions – both in good times and bad times. If she has a difficult task, she asks Him to guide and lead her. Even in her daily life, God helps her.

When you’re busy in a daytime, He helps me, sometimes free for these, how to spend your time and you like all the time … what I should do in this hour, this moment. So should I choose like an entertainment or should I choose to help people or should I choose to… I don’t know, /…/ you find the right answer, so He really gives your development everyday /…/ So all the time you’re thinking from a perspective of things how God teaches us not just to follow your selfish ambitions or selfish decisions. (R7, p. 2)

She used to pray alone so as to contact God. Eventually, she realized that praying together with other people in the church was amazing and had great power because through collective prayers people could share knowledge and information about God, and they could bring the community together.

**Body image and attitudes towards the body**

Signe takes good care of her body. God helps her not to do anything wrong to her body. She exercises regularly. She likes jogging and swimming, too. She also does a kind of bodybuilding exercise, which strengthen muscles. She is content with her body, and she believes taking care of body through sports and training helps her to be stable and confident, especially when her body and mind are in stressful situations. She considers herself lazy. Therefore, she tries to push herself to the limit when she trains because it helps her to strengthen not only her body but also her mind. She thinks Sweden and Lithuania have in common when it comes to body issues especially among the younger generation: they work out very often and take good care of their bodies. However, unlike the youth in Lithuania, people in Sweden do not care much about how they dress. As a whole, she thinks the Swedes
train and exercise very much. She is nicely surprised that even the elderly play sports, go to gyms and are actively involved in society, which are not common in Lithuania.

Eating attitudes and behaviors
Signe also cares much about food and what she eats. Her faith plays an important role in her eating practices. God helps her not to overeat or drink too much. She does not believe that she is capable to do anything wrong with her eating practices because God helps her. She tries to get natural and fresh food as much as possible. She loves cooking and eating “something real” (R7, p. 3) and something that comes from the heart or soul and culture. She also likes to invite people so they can unite and share food. She thinks that cuisine in Lithuania is richer and that food in Sweden is boring. She explains that people whom she met in Sweden seemed not to care about food and cooking.

Her eating practices have changed from when she was a teenager. When she was sixteen years old, she decided to become a vegetarian. Before that, she ate meat and meat products. She admits that she wanted to lose weight. She read many books about vegetarianism and started to think that eating animals was not good and nice. At that time, her parents and relatives tried to convince her to readjust her eating, which was hard for her because she did not want to have attention on her. Recalling those days, she says that she felt isolated.

Currently she fasts once per week. She fasts not to lose weight but as a sacrifice for God to ask Him show the right way and to ask Him to help other people. Her boyfriend is against her fasting because he thinks it is not good for her body. However, she does not think it damages her body.

It gets a bit much strength in your body because, sometimes, you are just… maybe can’t control your mind and different things, and when you are not eating, I believe your mind feels a bit cleaner, so you can think not about food but you can think about sacrifices and different things like praying and thinking and just being free out of food. (R7, p. 6)

While she fasts, she does not feel isolation and disturbance. She thinks it is important to enjoy fasting, as the bible says, because people get some big reward afterwards.

Acculturation experiences/cultural context
Signe has been in Sweden for eight months. She considers Sweden a multicultural country, in which she can learn something new to herself. In Sweden, she can communicate with people from different cultures, which she considers interesting. She is also surprised by the fact that
there are many different Christian denominations in Sweden. She thinks that her Christian neighbors and friends help her to develop and strengthen her belief. They also help her in everyday life, which makes her feel at home.

Currently, she lives in a house where more than twenty people live together. Fifteen of them are Christians. She does not have non-Christian friends in Sweden except her classmates. However, she does not know whether her classmates are really non-Christians because she does not ask people about their faiths unless they start talking about the topic first. When she invited her classmates to the house, her neighbors, who belong to a bible school, started to ask her classmates about their religion, which made them shocked:

“How they can ask our religion?”, “It’s quite private thing” and so on /…/ I don’t want to push for other people to talk about religion, it’s like something we don’t want to talk and a couple of people, they even refuse the topic about religion, “Oh, I don’t want to talk about it, because I don’t believe and don’t want to deepen this topic”. /…/ and one classmate, he was an atheist, he said, “OK, let’s go. I want to talk with these people just to make fun of them.” (R7, p. 7-8)

She knows through her experience that it is impolite to ask people about their faiths as it is quite sensitive question for people in Sweden. She does not want to make a conflict situation because of religion and religious issues.

4.1.8. Respondent 8

Sara is a female, 23 years old. She is studying at university. She was born and grown up in Sweden. She was raised in a Christian family. It was her parents who introduced her Christianity. She inherited ethics and morals from her Christian parents. However, she developed her Christian faith by herself. Currently she is attending to a church affiliated to the Evangelical Free Church in Sweden (Evangeliska Frikyrkan, EFK).

**Relationship with God/supernatural figure**

Sara explains that she is not the kind of person, who feels so close to God as to almost get a response or an answer from God. When she prays the prayer comes before thought, and there is something very habitual in her prayer. She assumes that praying like a conversation may work for some people but not for her. She tries to have God’s gaze upon the world. She explains that her relationship with God is stronger when she is sad or feels stressed.
Body image and attitudes towards the body

Her faith is very important to her because it is her faith on which she forms her identity. She considers her faith quite political in many ways.

When you profess another world order or world ethic, it's very political /…/ if you take Eucharist as an example, in which people of all nationalities, all sorts of different people unite and become a community, it's also incredible. It is so equal and egalitarian as anything can be, I think. Then, Jesus as a person is very political /…/ I do not mean the party politics but I see messages that Christianity presents very provocative. (R8, p. 1)

She considers Christian faith political, which affects her choices in her life. She tries to buy fair trade and organic products. Though it is very hard, she tries to live according to a Christian principle: to put others before oneself.

She confirms that she has never tried dieting. Her father is very slim, and so is her mother. Therefore, she assumes that she will not gain weight even if she eats a large amount of food. Dieting has never been an issue for her. Currently she is comfortable with herself. However, it was not always that way. Especially when she was younger, she considered herself too tall. She thought she had a bit strange feature, too. When she was young, she often participated in the church’s summer camps, where there were leaders, who were very important to her and her self-image. It was through the camps that she heard and learned the truth of God and how God saw the good in people. She learned a message that people were important and beautiful. She considers this experience to be an example of how her upbringing in the church milieu influenced her perception of herself.

She does not mean to deny the importance of the body, but she thinks society encourages people to pay too much attention to the body and appearance. She also thinks there are extreme and irrational views on the body in everywhere. She suspects that this is relevant to the economic system, which tries to make people dissatisfied in order that they will consume more.

Eating attitudes and behaviors

Sara is a vegetarian. She sees food from the world perspective regarding limitations of food on earth. She does not eat meat because she thinks resource allocation in the world is problematic: the large portion of agricultural lands is used for the meat industry, which she considers unsustainable. Being a vegetarian is also relevant to her faith. She explains:

I have been inspired by both the Bible and Christian theologians, who writes about ecology and theology. But then I have been inspired a lot by green movements and political movements, and inspired very much by my friends who are not Christians but are vegetarians for other reasons. I think
people should care about the environment. I think I would do that even if I were not religious. (R8, p. 4-5)

It is also very important for her to check the origin of food and products she buys. They should be organic and not be sprayed, for example. She explains that it is of course for the health’s sake because she does not want to take poisons in her body. Then it is also for the environment’s sake because she assumes if there is something poisonous in food it will probably harm nature, too. Since people eat every day, she considers this point very important. Authenticity is also one of the things she considers important, which applies not only to food and nutrition, but also to her relationship to others.

Acculturation experiences/cultural context
Sara explains that there is both skepticism towards, and curiosity about religion in Sweden. She thinks that people in general are very tolerant towards religion. However, she also thinks there are certain assumptions about religious people in society. For example, believing that Christians behave differently or that they are weird. She thinks this comes from a lot of ignorance. She assumes that many people do not know anyone who is a Christian. When she sits among people, who do not know she is religious, she often encounters people's skepticism towards religion. She also often meets many people, who think religion creates only troubles or something harmful in the world. Such skepticism and attitudes give her pain. She explains that she is often forced to explain her faith more specific and concrete, for example, what Christian means.

She does not know many people who are believers of non-Christian religions. She once had a close colleague who was a Muslim. She explains that she could see both similarities and differences between Christianity and Islam through this relationship.

For me it is a positive thing to meet the minority, not just one minority, but we as religious people are both minorities. It is, because for both of us God is a base, then we are very understanding and have respect each other. (R8, p. 5-6)

She thinks it is easier to meet and get to know other religious people regardless of religions than atheists.
Chapter 5 Empirical data analysis

In this chapter, I start with analysis of the interview data. The data is analyzed by using theories and the working model presented in chapter 2. The analysis of the interview data will be presented together with tables that show the results in relation to the central themes in this study. In conclusion, I will go back to the research questions.

5.1. Analysis

5.1.1 Relationship with God/other supernatural figures

Table 2 Religious faith and relationship with God/other supernatural figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Faith in God/other supernatural figures</th>
<th>Relationship with God/other supernatural figures</th>
<th>Attachment relationship with God/other supernatural figures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Victoria</td>
<td>- *2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Not identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Elin</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Proximity maintenance, Safe haven, Secure base, Stronger and wiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Erik</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Proximity maintenance, Secure base, Stronger and wiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Anna</td>
<td>+ (High spirit)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Proximity maintenance, Safe haven, Secure base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Bårram</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Proximity maintenance, Secure base, Stronger and wiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Karim</td>
<td>+/- *3</td>
<td>+*5</td>
<td>Safe haven, Secure base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Signe</td>
<td>Christian God</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Proximity maintenance, Safe haven, Secure base, Stronger and wiser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Sara</td>
<td>Christian God</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Proximity maintenance, Safe haven, Stronger and wiser</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1 +: positive/identified, -: negative/not identified  
*2 She considered herself religious but not identified with Christian.  
*3 He did not deny God but did not have faith in monotheistic God  
*4 +: positive, -: negative/no relationship  
*5 He had a relationship with God but it was unconscious and unwhished one.

According to Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008), God/other supernatural figures were omnipresent yet people need to check the proximity to God. Regular attendance at weekly
worships/services and wearing a cross or a bracelet can be understood from this proximity maintenance aspect. Prayer can also be understood from this proximity maintenance aspect. Although there were differences in understanding and practice of prayer among the respondents, many respondents shared a view that prayer was one of the ways to contact God. When considering respondents’ proximity to God and omnipresence of their God, there might be no reason for them to make efforts to get in touch with God. But then again, from proximity maintenance aspect, prayer could be a way for them to obtain the proximity to God and to check His/Her availability and accessibility. It was significant that one respondent said clearly that prayer was a reminder of God’s presence. One female respondent, who believed in high spirit, contacted with her high spirit by talking to Him/Her in the same manner when she talked to living people. This may appear to be irrelevant to proximity maintenance at a glance. However, considering that she did not have any symbol or ritual that functioned as reminders of her high spirit, unlike Christianity or Islam, it is not much surprising that her way of checking the proximity to high spirit was different from those of the respondents with faith in monotheistic God.

An attachment figure serves as a haven of safety, to which a child can retreat in the face of threat, fear, the absence of comfort, or distress and in which a child is comforted and nurtured so that the child may explore his/her environment again. For some of the respondents, God/a supernatural figure was the one whom they turned back to and asked for help in crisis and distress. How they turned to God/a supernatural figure was different, however. Despite the difference, there was one common character among them (but not all): they contacted God/a supernatural figure. This supports the attachment theory’s account of safe haven as a proximity-seeking, especially in the face of threat, fear, the absence of comfort, or distress.

According to Bowlby, a role of attachment figure as a secure base is to give a base, to which the child can return knowing for sure that he/she will be welcomed when he/she gets there and nourished physically and emotionally. The majority of the respondents, who had a personal relationship with God, expressed a sense of security. This is of no surprise because God, who is simultaneously omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent, can provide the most secure of secure base. Further two more respondents, who were not believers of monotheistic religions, alluded that God/other supernatural figures might serve as a secure base. For them, the idea/thought that God/a supernatural figure exists functioned as a secure base.

Theoretically it is impossible for an individual to experience a separation from God, but a threat of separation from God or loss of God can cause separation distress. This separation
distress was the least general criterion identified among the respondents. One presumable reason for this can be relevant to the respondents’ proximity to God/a supernatural figure. As it has already seen, many of the respondents had a personal relationship with and proximity to God/a supernatural figure as well at the time when interviews were conducted.

The term “attachment” is defined as a tie based on the need for safety, security and protection (Prior & Glaser, 2006). Thus, in the caregiver-infant attachment relationship, the former should be stronger and wiser, for the survival’s sake. Since God in monotheistic religions is omnipotent and omniscient, the God-believer relationship meets this stronger and wiser criterion because there is little doubt that God is stronger and wiser for believers. God protects them, provides them security, takes care of them and guide them with His/Her strength and His/Her wisdom. For this reason, there is of no surprise that many of the respondents, who had faiths in either a Christian God or a Muslim God, expressed God’s wisdom and strength in relation to His/Her omnipotent and omniscient. For many of the respondents, God was their principle/guideline/base/model in their life in general. This indicates, in an implicit but obvious way, that they considered God wiser than them. The sense of security that many respondents expressed can also be related to this stronger and wiser criterion because it is obvious that the one, who is stronger and wiser than who need security and protection, provides safety.

As already seen, a personal relationship with God/a supernatural figure was identified among almost all respondents except one who emphasized that she did not have any personal relationship with God/other supernatural figures. Since she acknowledged connection to the Church and identified herself as an Orthodox Christian, her case might be understood from separation distress criteria, provided she once had faith in/relationship with God and currently is losing contact with God. However, there was no evidence that she used to have a relationship with God or at least it was not identified from her accounts that she used to have a relationship with God. Therefore, it was difficult to apply attachment theory to her case. Furthermore, as Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008) point out, it is arguable whether ‘losing’ a relationship with God can be expected to engendered grief or distress if it is the believer rather than God who is deliberately choosing to abandon the relationship. There can still be another approach to understand her case, considering that her relationship with God can be other than what we can understand from attachment theory.
5.1.2 Attitude towards the body, body image, eating attitudes and behaviors

In this section, several theories were used as tools for the analysis of the respondents’ attitudes towards the body, body image, eating attitudes and behaviors. First, model of the Möbius strip, Grosz’s (1994) application of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach to the body, was used in order to understand the inside - outside interaction and its influence on the respondents’ body images and eating attitudes. Second, Bell’s theory of ritualization was applied so as to understand the respondent’s practices relating to the body and eating.

Table 3 Attitude towards the body and body image

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Experience of body image misconception, negative body image, body image dissatisfaction</th>
<th>Behaviors, practices and problem related to body image misconception, negative body image, body image dissatisfaction</th>
<th>Current body image and attitudes towards the body</th>
<th>Relation between religious faith, relationship with God/supernatural figure, body image, attitudes towards the body</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Victoria</td>
<td>- Body image misconception - Negative body image</td>
<td>- Dieting - Excessive training - Anorexia</td>
<td>- Proper body image - Comfort with her own body</td>
<td>Not identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Elin</td>
<td>- Negative body image</td>
<td>- Self-destructive behaviors - Food intake problem</td>
<td>- Proper body image - Acceptance of her own body - Comfort with her own body</td>
<td>Identified (Religious faith &amp; relationship with God; positive effect on body image and attitudes towards the body)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Erik</td>
<td>- Body image dissatisfaction - Body image misconception</td>
<td>- Excessive training</td>
<td>- Positive body image - Comfort with his own body</td>
<td>Identified (Religious faith &amp; relationship with God; positive effect on body image and attitudes towards the body)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Anna</td>
<td>- Negative body image - Body image dissatisfaction</td>
<td>- Dieting - Food intake problem - Daily weighing</td>
<td>- Proper body image - Acceptance of her own body - Comfort with her own body</td>
<td>Identified (Relationship with high spirit: positive effect on body image and attitudes towards the body)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Bairam</td>
<td>- Body image dissatisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Positive body image - Comfort with his own body</td>
<td>Identified (Religious faith &amp; relationship with God: positive effect on attitudes towards the body)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Karin</td>
<td>- No specific experience of body image misconception, negative body image, body image dissatisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Comfort with his own body - Detachment from the body</td>
<td>Not identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Signe</td>
<td>- Body image dissatisfaction</td>
<td>- Vegetarianism*1</td>
<td>- Positive body image - Comfort with her own body</td>
<td>Identified (Religious faith &amp; relationship with God: positive effect on attitudes towards the body)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Sara</td>
<td>- Negative body image</td>
<td>- No specific mention</td>
<td>- Positive body image - Acceptance of her own body - Comfort with her own body - Less focus on the body</td>
<td>Identified (Religious faith: positive effect on body image and attitudes towards the body)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1 For the weight control’s sake
### Table 4 Eating attitudes and behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Eating attitudes</th>
<th>Eating behaviors and practices</th>
<th>Experience of eating problems</th>
<th>Relation between religious faith, relationship with God/supernatural figure, eating attitudes and eating behaviors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Victoria</td>
<td>Healthy eating for mind</td>
<td>Eating regularly</td>
<td>Positive (Anorexia)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Elin</td>
<td>Healthy eating for body and mind</td>
<td>Ecological, Environmental</td>
<td>Training when ate too much/foods high in fat or sugar</td>
<td>Positive (Eating less)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Erik</td>
<td>Healthy eating for body and mind</td>
<td>Ecological, Environmental</td>
<td>Training when ate too much/foods high in fat or sugar</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Anna</td>
<td>Less focus on trend</td>
<td>Ecological, Environmental</td>
<td>Fasting (Religious)</td>
<td>Positive (Eating much)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Salam</td>
<td>Ecological, Human rights concerned, Ethical treatment for Animals</td>
<td>Ecological, environmental shopping and cooking</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Karm</td>
<td>Human rights concerned, Ethical treatment for Animals</td>
<td>Ecological, environmental shopping and cooking</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Signe</td>
<td>Healthy eating for body and mind, Tradition</td>
<td>Vegetarian, Fasting (Religious)</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Sara</td>
<td>Ecological, Human rights concerned, Ethical treatment for Animals</td>
<td>Ecological, environmental shopping and cooking</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1 She practiced vegetarianism in the past.
*2 + : Positive/The relationship was identified, - : Negative/The relationship was not identified.

#### 5.1.2.1 Lived body: Analysis from the model of the Möbius strip

If applying Grosz’s Möbius strip model, it is reasonable to think individual’s perception of body image and eating attitudes can be generated as a part of his/her psychical interior through inscribing information from his/her surroundings, and this psychical interior directs his/her external reality. In most of the respondents’ cases, it was, quite possibly, the social and cultural meanings attributed to the body that they perceived and received. According to Grosz, there is accordance between information people perceive from the outside, body image and practices because the psychical interior is constituted so that it can accord with the social meanings attributed to the body in its particular context. Then, the respondents’ past experiences of body image misconceptions and negative body images can be seen as a certain distortion in the outside-inside intertwining. They seemed to experience some distortions in the process of the outside-inside continuum, which made them experience alienation from their bodies. Thus, for them, their bodies were not psychophysical unities but rather they were objects, which needed to be controlled. This alienation from the body may explain why some
of them trained extremely hard, did dieting, changed eating habits for the sake of losing weight, or stopped eating in a proper way that, in an extreme case, caused a food intake problem. What is noteworthy is that the respondents, who had body image misconceptions and negative body images, experienced such when they were adolescents. Even the respondents, who did not believe they had this type of experience in the past, admitted that their peers or media to some degree influenced them when they were teenagers. They had tried to conform their bodies to what was seen as trendy and proper. As some of the respondents suspected, it can be related to personal identity issues assuming adolescents are on the way to developing their own identities. Since there should be no distinction between mind and body but a body as a psychophysical unity, body is, then, “self”. Thus, identity or perception of self is embedded in this body. It is worth arguing this body-identity issue, but I will not go further on this issue here. I will refer to this issue as one of the discussion topics in the next chapter instead.

Respondents’ accounts showed multiple factors that had influences on their past and current eating attitudes and behaviors. Among the majority of the respondents media and society’s attitudes towards food and eating were identified as some of outside’s/surrounding’s factors related to their past and current eating attitudes. All respondents were critical about society’s attitude towards eating, and there was no significant evidence that their current eating attitudes were negatively affected by the extreme focus on eating existing in society and media. Rather, their current eating attitudes were much influenced by various views and perspectives related to food and eating issues, which also existed in media and society: ecology, environmental concerns, or human rights as well as animal rights. Their eating attitudes accorded with their eating practices, which implied there was interactive relation among information from the outside, respondents’ eating attitudes and their eating practices.

Since eating is one of the most essential activities of human survival, which has a direct physical effect, eating is bodily matter. However, people obviously do not eat just for survival as respondents’ accounts showed. Therefore, eating practices cannot be just act of biological physical needs. Respondents’ various accounts implied that eating could be seen, rather, as physical appearance of individual’s psyche-physical interaction. If applying the inside-outside perspective to the body-eating relation, it is of little surprise that some of the respondents, who experienced body image misconceptions or negative body images, also had eating problems while some respondents, who were content with their body and very conscious of it, paid much attention to what they put in their bodies. This implied that there was a relation among the respondents’ body images, attitudes towards the body and their eating behaviors.
5.1.2.2 Ritualized body: Analysis of the practices from the ritual theory

All respondents were currently content with their bodies. This suggested that the majority of the respondents, who experienced body image dissatisfactions, body image misconceptions or negative body images in the past, changed or developed their body images or attitudes towards the body. In the past, many of them tried to deal with such experiences through some specific practices and behaviors such as excessive training, changing eating habits, or dieting, which led to the food-intake problem in a few cases. Those who had eating problems were currently free from the problems, and those who trained excessively did no longer train in the same manner as in the past. Some of the respondents ate food for the mind and worked out extra hours when they ate too much or when they ate foods high in fat and sugar. Many of the respondents ate in healthy ways—“healthy” from their perspectives. Some respondents exercised regularly but not in extreme ways. As one of the respondents clearly expressed, this implied that those who had negative or obsessive experiences of the body and eating found some tools to relate to their bodies in some proper ways. Taking it into account that the outside-inside relation is continuous and interactive that occurs in a specific situation and context, it is reasonable to assume that they learned or gained skills that accorded with the surroundings in the specific contexts. If applying ritualization theory, this can be taken to mean that they learned some practical ways of dealing with the surroundings, which gave excessive focus on the body and eating through their experiences and interaction with their surroundings. Furthermore, two vegetarian/vegan respondents chose to whom they disclosed it. This can be also seen as they learned ways of dealing with situations related to eating.

Some of the respondents explained that they trained, tried to eat healthy, or weighed regularly for their own physical health’s sake. However, their training and weight control behaviors, as well as healthy eating practices, were also relevant to their psychological health, i.e., “feeling good”. In other words, they seemed to gain and maintain this sense of “feeling good” through such practices. This can be, again, understood as they gained practical skills to deal with their bodies and eating, but this can be also understood as what Bell calls “misrecognition of what it is doing” (Bell, 1992). It seemed as if these respondents knew their practices’ goals: gaining and maintaining physical health and psychological health as well. Nevertheless, they still looked fixed on their own bodies and bodily matters such as daily weigh, weight control, or training and exercise despite their genuine body satisfaction. As Bell explains, practice sees its intention or a goal, but it does not see the strategies it uses to produce what it actually does accomplish (p. 87) because it is still fixed on the old question,
the old horizon, on which the new problem is not visible (p. 88). Some of the respondents’ practices seemed still to be bound to the old problem of a certain body image existing in their surroundings. If applying Bell’s term redemptive hegemony, i.e., the reproduction of and negotiation with the power relations, it can be said that the respondents might support such a body image to be standardized and universalized through their practices without seeing things as such. Further, as one of the respondents expressed, the body was the first thing people contacted to the individual. In other words, the body was not just a physical appearance of the mind but an interface to the rest of the world. This body was a social body located in the social nexus, in which the power relations rooted. In many of the respondents’ cases, these power relations were not just between the respondents as individuals and society or their family for example, but rather they were situated in various complex contexts. As Bell claims, ritual practices “cannot be grasped outside of the specific context in which it occurs” (p. 81) and ritual practices are bound to a specific cultural context. Thus identifying which specific cultural contexts or specific circumstances the respondents located in was a necessary task for this study. This was examined in the following section with regard to Acculturation experiences/cultural context.

5.1.3 Acculturation experiences/cultural context

Table 5 Acculturation experiences/cultural context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Length of stay in Sweden</th>
<th>Religious identity</th>
<th>Experiences as a believer, through the body, and of eating in Swedish cultural context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Victoria</td>
<td>21 years (immigrated to Sweden at the age of one)</td>
<td>Orthodox Christian</td>
<td>- Psychological acculturation (Body image, Attitudes towards the body, Eating attitudes, Eating behaviors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Elin</td>
<td>12 years (moved to Burundi at the age of 6 months and lived there for 6 years)</td>
<td>Protestant Christian</td>
<td>- Negative experience in relation to religious faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Erik</td>
<td>23 years</td>
<td>Protestant Christian</td>
<td>- Perceived discrimination as a believer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Anna</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>- *1</td>
<td>- Psychological acculturation (Body image, Attitudes towards the body, Eating attitudes, Eating behaviors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Bairam</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>- Negative experience in relation to religious faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Karim</td>
<td>Circa 5 years</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>- Psychological acculturation (Attitudes towards the body, Eating attitudes, Eating behaviors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Signe</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>Catholic Christian</td>
<td>- Negative experience in relation to religious faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Sara</td>
<td>23 years</td>
<td>Protestant Christian</td>
<td>- Negative experience in relation to religious faith</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1 She considered herself religious but not identified with Christian.
From the respondents’ accounts, two dominant - non-dominant contexts in general were identified. First, many of the respondents considered the Swedish culture the dominant culture. Many respondents also considered the majority group the “Swedes”. In this context, five respondents, who did not consider themselves Swedish, belonged to the minority group. Theoretically, acculturation is a mutual and interactive process of cultural change that occurs regardless of minority or majority status. However, in practice, the minority group often experiences more changes, regardless of acculturation strategies, than the majority group. Therefore, it would not be surprising if more acculturation changes or developments were seen among the “non-Swedish” respondents than the “Swedish” respondents. However, the results showed that the respondents’ acculturation experiences were diverse and complicated regardless of their ethnical background and national identities. This diversity of respondents’ acculturation experiences implied that the influence of acculturation on the respondents’ personal identities, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors was complex.

Concerning variance in the degrees of acculturation changes among the “non-Swedish” respondents, there seemed to be two factors that were relevant to the changes: the length of stay in Sweden and the degree to which they wished to maintain their heritage cultures and identities including religious identities. The results indicated that the respondents, who had the longer length of stay in Sweden, experienced more acculturation changes. The respondents, who experienced positive acculturation change in/development of attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes or eating practices, were non-believers of monotheistic religions and expressed dissatisfaction with their respective heritage cultures and religions. This implied a correlation between a negative attitude towards maintenance of heritage culture and a positive attitude towards adjustment to/integration with another culture. Relating to these two factors, however, there was a significant difference between two respondents, who identified the Ukrainian culture as their heritage culture. One was born and brought up in Ukraine and immigrated to Sweden as an adult. This respondent expressed strong satisfaction with Swedish society and culture because of its less focus on the body and appearance. Thus, this respondent experienced changes in attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and eating practices in some positive ways. The other was born in Ukraine but immigrated to Sweden at the age of one. This respondent also experienced psychological acculturation but in some negative ways. This respondent considered that the Swedish society encouraged more thinness ideal, which she considered one of the reasons for her experience on anorexia. This difference between two respondents can be understood as the respondents’ acculturation
changes were affected by a complex relationship among multiple factors on the one hand. On the other hand, this can be interpreted as an example of the paradoxes of assimilation.

All respondents considered, to some degree, Swedish society secularized society. Many of the respondents assumed that the majority of the residents in Sweden were non-religious. In this context, they considered themselves to be part of minority in Sweden. Several negative experiences and perceived discriminations in relation to their religious beliefs were identified among them, although none of them confirmed distress with regard to such experiences in explicit ways. Regarding that acculturative stress includes discrimination and nonacceptance by the host culture (Hwang & Ting, 2008), some of non-Swedish respondents’ perceived discriminations and negative experiences could be seen as acculturative stress. However, none of such experiences caused changes in their religious identities. This is not so surprising since the impact of acculturative stress can be moderated by a number of factors including the nature of the host environment, the nature of the acculturating group, and the person’s mode of acculturation as Hwang and Ting (2008) explained. In some respondents’ case, support from surroundings or status in Sweden – exchange student or working temporarily in Sweden – can be the factors that moderated stress. During the analysis procedure, there emerged a question whether some of Swedish respondents’ perceived discriminations could/should be understood from acculturation theory. Rather, their experiences seem to be examined in relation to a Swedish cultural context and a religious milieu, which are often seen as secular, postmodern and individualistic.

5.2 Answering the research question and sub-questions

In conclusion, I will return to the study’s research questions. I start by concluding analysis in relation to four secondary questions. The central question will be answered last.

1. How do the respondents describe their religious faiths and what kind of relations with God/other supernatural figures can be identified among the respondents from an attachment theoretical perspective?

All five characteristics of attachment relationships were identified among the majority of the respondents, although this did not mean that these respondents’ relationships with God/other supernatural figures met with all five criteria of attachment relationships. They had proximity to God/a supernatural figure and their God/a supernatural figure was omnipresent. However,
most of them needed to check the proximity to God through prayers, worships or religious symbols. For some of the respondents, God/a supernatural figure was the one whom they turned back to and asked for help in crisis or distress. God/a supernatural figure was also the one who provided them with a sense of security. For many of the respondents, God was the one who protected them, provided them security, took care of them, and guided them with His/Her strength and His/Her wisdom. Then, as one of the respondents experienced, if one felt God as distant and inaccessible during the time of difficulties, he/she might have stress or anxiety.

2. What factors can be identified as influential and affective for the respondents’ body images, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and eating behaviors? What characterizes the relationship between the factors, body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and eating behaviors look?

Among the respondents, who experienced body image misconceptions, negative body images or body image dissatisfaction in the past, attitudes towards the body in society and media, such as thinness idealization, were identified as affective factors in their negative experiences of the body. Some of the respondents referred to people around them, such as family or friends, as an influential factor, too. Among the majority of the respondents, society’s attitudes towards food/eating and media were also identified as environmental factors that were related to their past and current eating attitudes. However, this did not mean that these factors affected their eating attitudes only in some negative ways. Rather, their current eating attitudes were much influenced by various views and perspectives related to food and eating issues, which also existed in media and society: ecology, environmental concerns, or human rights as well as animal rights. Religious belief and faith in God were also identified as influential factors of body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and behaviors among the majority of the respondents, especially among the monotheistic respondents. Religious belief in general and faith in God in particular were also identified as influential factors for changes in body images among the majority of the respondents, who experienced body image misconceptions, negative body images or body image dissatisfaction in the past.

As the respondents changed and developed their body images from negative one to positive one, their attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and behaviors also changed in positive ways. Furthermore, respondents’ attitudes towards the body and eating attitudes accorded with their eating practices. This implied that there was an interactive and circular
relationship between the surroundings, information from the outside, body image, attitudes towards the body and eating attitudes, as well as eating behaviors.

3. How can the respondents’ body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and eating behaviors be understood from a phenomenological approach to the body and ritualization theory?

The majority of the respondents’ past experiences of body image misconceptions, negative body images or body image dissatisfactions implied they experienced some distortions in the process of the outside-inside intertwining continuum of the body as a psychophysical unity. They experienced alienation from their bodies and saw their bodies as objects that needed to be controlled. However, all respondents were content with their bodies currently. Through their experiences and interaction with their surroundings, they learned not only some practical ways of dealing with their bodies but also skills to gain and maintain their psychological well-beings in their surroundings, which gave excessive focus on the body and eating. At the same time, however, their training and weight control behaviors, as well as healthy eating practices, were still bound to specific attitudes towards the body and body image existing in their surroundings, such as thinness idealization. In this sense, these respondents’ practices relating to the body and eating could also be understood as negotiation with their surroundings and reproduction of the unsolved problem.

4. How can the respondents’ experiences as believers, through the body, and of eating be understood from an acculturation theoretical perspective and in a Swedish context?

There were diverse/complex cultural and social contexts, in which the respondents were situated. Therefore, the respondents’ experiences were also various and complicated, which made it difficult to generalize. Provided that the minority group often experiences more changes in acculturation, it is not much surprising if psychological acculturation is identified among the “non-Swedish” respondents. However, the results showed that there were differences in acculturation experiences among them. This implied how they experienced acculturation process and changes depended on multiple factors. However, the degree to which they wished to maintain their heritage cultures and identities seemed to be one of the key factors to understand the respondents’ experiences. Furthermore, many of the respondents’ accounts implied the existence of a power relationship between the secular
majority and religious minority groups regardless of religion. This dominant-nondominant relationship seemed to be relevant to many of the religious respondents’ perceived discriminations and negative experiences in relation to their religious beliefs.

_What role can the individual’s relationship with God/other supernatural figures play in body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and eating behaviors?_

If applying attachment theory to the respondents’ changes and developments of body images, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and behaviors, some characteristics of attachment relationships were identified. Above all, a case of one respondent, who had an eating problem related to negative self and body image in the past, portrayed well how the attachment behavioral system was activated, and how the five criteria of attachment relationships related to each other. In the middle of suffering from negative self and body image, the respondent sought after God’s help by prayer. Here, God functioned as a _safe haven_, to which she turned back in her crisis, and prayer can be seen as _proximity maintenance_. Despite prayer, she kept on suffering from negative self and body image as well as eating problem. God was inaccessible and unavailable, which caused _separation distress_. Once the respondent realized God’s love was unconditional and unlimited, she eventually developed her self and body image from negative one to positive one. Parallel to this, her eating problem disappeared. The respondent regained _proximity to God_ and God’s unconditional and unlimited love provided her with a sense of security, with which she reevaluated her perception of body image. Further, God as _stronger and wiser_ aspect was seen in her case when the respondent expressed God’s omnipotence. In addition to this respondent’s case, some characteristics of attachment relationships were identified among many other respondents, too.

In sum, the positive attachment to God/other supernatural figures can play a role in the establishment and maintenance of positive body image as well as problem free eating behaviors. A positive attachment to God/other supernatural figures can also help an individual to change and develop body image especially when one’s body image is negatively affected by the surrounding. In other words, a secure relationship with God/other supernatural figures can function as a protective factor for body image misconception/dissatisfaction and problematic eating. Furthermore, faith can be one of the most influential factors for body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and behaviors.
Chapter 6 Discussion

In this final chapter, I will reflect on this study and discuss what could not be discussed in the previous chapter. I will start with an empirical reflection. A reflection on this study’s contributions follows. After a critical reflection on theories and its use, a methodological reflection will be presented. Finally, some of the findings and new questions that were not given a space in the previous chapter will be discussed and presented as a concluding reflection and recommendations for future research.

6.1. Empirical reflection

Although my interest lay in the relationship between religion and eating disorders, the aim of this study was to explore the relationship between the individual’s relationship with God, body image and eating behaviors mainly from attachment theory. It was due to limitations regarding the size of this study and the difficulty related to ethical considerations. When comparing the results of the study with previous studies presented in the literature review, there were some similarities as well as differences.

This study’s result showed that a positive and secure attachment relationship with God/a supernatural figure played a role for many of the respondents in the establishment and maintenance of positive body image as well as problem free eating behaviors. This accorded well with a short-term longitudinal study, Homan and Boyatzis (2010), who examined the relationship between eating disorders and an attachment to God amongst female students at a private Christian liberal arts college from an attachment theoretical perspective. This result could also be related to the results of a study by Smith et al. (2003) that showed spiritual well-being was associated with positive gains in eating attitudes and less body shape concerns.

This study’s result also implied a relation between a distance from God/other supernatural figures, low self-esteem including negative self/body images and problematic eating. On the one hand, this could be seen as another similarity with the result of Homan and Boyatzis’s study, which showed women with anxious relationships with God were more dissatisfied with their bodies. On the other hand, this result also accorded with the results of Richards et al.’s (2009) study that showed there was a significant relationship between a feeling of a distance from God, low self-esteem and eating problems.
The results of this study showed that religious faith and a secure relationship with God/other supernatural figures were related to positive attitudes and feelings towards the body and eating. This was not irrelevant to the result of a study conducted by Jacobs-Pilipski et al. (2005), in which participants, who rated spiritual/religious as important, were significantly more likely to call upon their spiritual/religious beliefs and practices to cope with negative feelings about their bodies.

Gates and Pritchard (2009) conducted surveys about religious affiliations and eating behaviors at a large university in the Northwest United States. The results showed that the Catholic and Christian students showed significantly more disordered eating than the other students. This was not identified in my study. Presumable reasons for this could be three. First, participants in my study were too few to generalize the result. There was only one Catholic Christian respondent in this study, who was content with her body and did not have an eating problem. There was a possibility to get a similar result as theirs if observed more Catholic Christians in the study, however. Second, their study did not pay attention to degree of religiosity. Affiliation with religious denominations presented in their study showed neither a degree of religiousness of participants nor how participants practiced religions. Third, contexts matter. There was, simply, a difference in the context between this study and their study, which was conducted in the United States.

Several studies (Mussap, 2009; Greenberg, Cwikel and Mirsky, 2007; Cachelin et al., 2000) highlighted the relationship between acculturation, body dissatisfaction and eating behaviors. They found that the eating disorder group was more acculturated than the control group, which partially accorded with this study’s results, for example, a positive relationship between the length of stay in Sweden and acculturation changes in body image and eating behaviors. However, the respondents’ accounts also showed multiple factors for their acculturation experiences rather than influence of “Western” values and norms. It was not easy to generalize and reduce the results of this study to “Western” matters only.

6.2. Contributions

Due to limitations regarding the size of this study and the difficulty related to ethical considerations, this study focused on exploring the relationship between the individual’s relationship with God, body image and eating behaviors in general instead of eating disorders. In the literature review, I showed how most research on the relationship between religion, body image and eating behaviors had its focus on the relationship between Christianity and
eating disorders. When considering the lack of research on the relationship between eating disorders and non-Christian religions, this study was in a sense unique for its choice of participants. Religiously and ethnically heterogeneous participants presented diverse experiences as believers or religious/spiritual individuals, in their relationship with God/other supernatural figures, through the body, and of eating. This made it difficult to generalize the results on one hand, but become interesting resource for further study on the other hand.

In this study, I concluded that a secure and positive relationship with God/other supernatural figures could function as a protective factor for body image misconception, body image dissatisfaction and problematic eating. Again, I have to emphasize that the sample of this study was too small to generalize this result to a larger population. Still I believe the result can inspire those who want to study further on this topic from an attachment theoretical perspective when considering a lack of research on the relationship between body image, eating behaviors and non-Christian religions/spirituality from attachment theory.

6.3. Theoretical reflection

Provided the individual’s close relationship with a personal God was an attachment relationship, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2008) demonstrated how the believer’s relationship with God met with five criteria of attachment relationships. In this study, attachment theory was applied to psychology of religion in order to understand how the respondents’ relationship with God/other supernatural figures play a role in body image, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and eating behaviors. Despite the evolutionary origins of the attachment system and its manifestation in child – caregiver relationship, the concept of attachment relationship enabled me to approach closely to the respondents’ relationships with God/other supernatural figures. The theory could not be adapted to one respondent’s account due to the fact that the respondent emphasized she did not have any relationship with God/other supernatural figures. The respondent was the only one who experienced a life-threatening situation in relation to body image and eating. Due to the sample size of the study, I cannot claim that insecure or lack of relationship with God/other supernatural figures can be relevant to negative body image and eating problem. Still this case was interesting considering the result that God/other supernatural figures could play a role in the establishment and maintenance of positive body image as well as problem free eating behaviors for the majority of the respondents, who had a personal and positive relationship with God/a supernatural figure. Otherwise, the theory worked satisfactorily for understanding
the relationship between the respondents’ relationships with God/other supernatural figures, body image, attitudes towards the body and eating. This is, however, not surprising because the concept attachment and its application to religiosity are suitable especially for Christianity according to Granqvist (2002). In fact, the majority of the respondents in this study were Christians. Due to the sample size of the study, I cannot conclude that this application of attachment theory to religiosity was applicable to any type of religion other than Christianity. However, judging from the results, there seems to be a possibility that it can be applied to non-Christian religions and non-institutionalized spirituality. More research is required to draw a conclusion whether the application of attachment theory to religiosity was applicable to any type of religion and spirituality.

The application of attachment theory to religiosity had its emphasis on cognitive-behavioral accounts of attachment to God. I consider this the biggest disadvantage of the theory. This theoretical perspective explains neither the influences of external and environmental factors on an individual’s attachment relationship with God/other supernatural figures nor the interaction between the respondents’ interiors and the environment. In fact, as the results showed, multiple factors had influences on the respondents’ past and current body and eating related attitudes and practices. Grosz’s (1994) application of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach to the body by using the model of the Möbius strip as well as the outside in-inside out perspective made it possible not only to explore the interaction with and influences from the outside/environment on the respondents’ body image, attitudes towards the body and eating attitudes, but also to approach close to the respondents’ experiences of the body and eating. Further, Bell’s (1992) ritualization theory complemented what the model of the Möbius strip and the outside in-inside out perspective could not explain, i.e., a process of interaction, which enables the mind to become the body or vise versa. The advantage of Bell’s theory was that the theory did not necessarily limit rituals to religious practices. Although ritualization distinguishes itself from other practices, ritual is, by its nature, human activity. Seeing ritual as situational, strategic and bound to a specific cultural context made it possible to approach the respondents’ experiences of the body and eating. Bell’s theory also brought important perspectives into the analysis of the respondents’ body and eating related behaviors and practices. As seen in some of the respondents’ accounts, their body and eating related behaviors and practices could be understood from the term redemptive hegemony. Unfortunately, I could not go further on issues of this reproduction of and negotiation with the power relations in the analysis due to several reasons including the limitations regarding size
of this study. Still, as a whole, these theories on the body became useful tools to explore the interaction between the respondents’ interior and the external contexts.

My intention of using an acculturation theory was to bring cultural aspects in relation to a Swedish context into the analysis. As Hwang and Ting (2008) point out, there is no uniform conceptualization, operationalization, or method of measuring acculturation. Regarding this problem, in this study I used acculturation perspectives by focusing several concepts and aspects instead of by using a specific acculturation model. I focused especially psychological acculturation and the respondents’ experiences as a believer, through the body, and of eating in Swedish cultural and religious context. I can say, to some extent, this made it possible to understand in which social and cultural contexts the respondents were situated. However, it resulted in an unsatisfactory analysis when it came to the exploration how these contexts could be relevant to the respondents’ relationship with God/other supernatural figures, body images, attitudes towards the body and eating attitudes as well as eating behaviors. The most significant question that emerged during analysis was whether some Swedish respondents’ perceived discriminations could/should be understood from acculturation theory. Although acculturation is a two-way process of cultural change, and it is not limited to immigrant/non-dominant/minority group, it was difficult to explain their experiences only from acculturation theory. Taking it into account that Sweden is one of the most secular countries in the world, it is understandable that many of the Swedish respondents, who had faith in and personal relationships with God, considered that they belonged to the minority group as religious individuals. This majority-minority issue was interesting but difficult to understand in the frame of acculturation theory. To explore this religious majority-minority issue, more broad theory would be needed. However, this does not mean that the theory is unusable and difficult to apply to analysis of changes that occur on an individual level. My other regret was that there was a difficulty in operationalizing this theoretical perspective especially when the sample size was too small. Presumably, it would have been possible to deepen the analysis if I could have used a certain model and a measurement that could enable, to some degree, more systematic analysis. Furthermore, considering that acculturative stress can be moderated by a number of factors, it is not unreasonable to assume that some respondents’ secure attachment relationship with God/other supernatural figures might have played some positive role in acculturation experiences, which this study did not explore much. Regarding that acculturation fundamentally involves alterations in the individual's sense of self (Ryder, Alden & Paulhus, 2000), there may be a possibility to approach acculturation from an
attachment theoretical perspective, which has its emphasis on individual’s psychical cognitive-behavioral accounts.

As a whole, I see that theories used in this study complemented each other to some extent. Hopefully, this combination of theories could highlight the central categories and its relations to each other. Last but not least, my emphasis was on the application of attachment theory to the respondents’ relationship with God/other supernatural figures and its relation to body image and eating attitudes as well as behaviors. Although I believe that I managed to use the attachment theoretical perspective to answer the research questions, I am aware that the material could be investigated using other perspectives or concepts. The theory’s emphasis on believers' subjective relationship with God caused me to miss some new angles and perspectives. I also failed to reflect on other contexts. One example of this, which showed up during the analysis procedure, was a personal identity issue. Religious beliefs, on which the respondents established a personal relationship with God/other supernatural figures, were relevant to the respondents’ personal identities. Issues of the body and eating also seemed to be related to the respondents’ personal identities. Another example was a lack of a gender perspective. As the results showed, there were gender differences when it came to body image and eating problems. These examples will be discussed in a later part in this chapter.

6.4. Methodological reflection

According to Malterud (1998), qualitative approach fits in the study of the human qualities or character such as experience, thoughts, expectations, motivations and attitudes. Concerning the aim, this advantage was relevant to this study. According to Creswell (2009), the social constructivist worldview enables a researcher to approach the context that people live in and cultural settings of the participants, through which they may construct meanings and interpret the world. A phenomenological strategy of inquiry is, according to Lester (1999), suitable for understanding subjective experience. I considered that these were advantages of qualitative method and its strategies. Therefore, this study was designed as a qualitative research and was undertaken from the social constructivist worldview with an approach inspired by a phenomenological strategy. Although a phenomenological approach accords well with inductive strategy rather than deductive, using this approach as a complement to a theory-driven approach, I believe I could manage to avoid the reproduction of already known knowledge I hope that this combination worked satisfactorily for understanding the
respondents’ subjective experiences as religious individuals, through the body, of eating and in a Swedish context.

According to Kvale (1997), the advantage of interviews is that interviews may capture a variety of people’s opinions about a topic and provide a picture of a varied and controversial human world. Creswell (2009) points out advantages of the interviews that participants can provide historical information and that interviews allow a researcher to control over the line of questioning. In fact, the respondents presented rich and divers opinions about their faith, the body and eating. They also provided very personal and historical information, which highlighted their experiences related to the topics of this study. Open-ended questions enabled the respondents to speak about the topics and their experiences as free as possible. While the semi-structured interview style kept the interviews in line without impeding the respondents’ story. However, there was a difficulty in conducting interviews. I realized that the respondents could understand same questions in different ways. Partly it was due to language problem, but mostly it was due to the definition of terms used in the questions. The clearest example of such was a term “society”. As one of the respondents pointed out, it was problematic to define the term “society”. Such an ambiguity of definitions caused difficulties and confusions during interviews, which I regretted.

The convenience sampling method worked well for the search of the respondents. However, it would have been more interesting if this study could have involved more participants with non-monotheistic beliefs. As a whole, I consider the choice of data collection procedure proper if considering that I could gather enough sufficient data for the study.

In this study, a Template Analysis Style (see Malterud, 1998, p 89) was used. This type of analysis could involve a risk for the reproduction of already known knowledge, but was a good starting point for developing new descriptions (Malterud, 1998). This I consider an advantage and a disadvantage of this model, which I tried not to ignore during my work. Research on the topic from attachment theory was still scarce, and the subjects of such research were often limited to Christians and women. I hope this study managed to show some new angles for the application of attachment theory and understanding of the relationship between religion, body issues and eating disorders by including respondents who were not Christians. The data analysis procedure was facilitated by sorting out the material into four main categories, which were relevant to theories used in the study. When considering that theories used in this study, this analysis model enabled me to conduct the analyses considerably efficient. For coding, there was an alternative to use some programs,
such as the Open Code program. However, such programs often are not designed for semi-structured interview. Therefore, it was conducted as a manual labor. The codes that relevant for the respective categories were: (1) proximity to God, proximity maintenance, secure base, safe haven, separation distress, stronger and wiser, faith, and prayer, (2) body image, inside, outside, lived body, social body, training, health, power, media, and society, (3) food, diet, fasting, trend, stress, control, and eating problems, (4) personal identity, majority, minority, psychological acculturation, discrimination, and acculturative stress. These codes were created in accordance with each category. Generally, these codes were helpful for identifying meaning-bearing units.

To clarify the bias of the researcher was related to both the validity and the ethical issue. The bias of the researcher could affect not only the data analysis but also the respondents’ reactions and answers in the interviews, even though I tried to keep objectivity as best as possible when I conducted interviews and analyses. I used this strategy as a critical self-reflection by clarifying the bias that I might have in order to be more self aware of this potential threat to this study, control them and increase the validity of the study. My religious background, my gender and my experience of suffering from eating disorders, as well as my experience as an immigrant in Sweden could affect not only interpretation and analysis of data but also whole interview process. In fact, my being a religious seemed to help the majority of the respondents to speak out their experiences as believers. This can be seen as a failure of control these biases on the one hand. On the other hand, this resulted in enriching interview data, which I consider an advantage being “insider” of qualitative research.

The empirical data was collected from different sites and divers people, who were both religiously and ethnically heterogeneous, and was analyzed from several different theoretical perspectives. I consider these two types of triangulation adding to the validity of the study. Further, as already mentioned, this study was inspired by a phenomenological strategy, in which the researcher’s focus was on understanding the respondents’ experiences as religious individuals, through the body, and of eating. Therefore, I had a slight concern for the use of rich, thick description concerning the validity issues. However, by providing detailed descriptions of the interviews, a detailed rendering of how the respondents felt and thought about the main themes, I believe the results became realistic and rich as possible. I also hope that the rich thick description of the data presentation enables the reader to grasp the essence of the respondents’ experiences relating to the main themes.
6.5. Concluding reflection and recommendations

The majority of the respondents had experienced body image misconceptions, negative body images or body image dissatisfaction when they were adolescents. This phenomenon is interesting with regard to adolescence and personal identity issues. As some of the respondents suspected, this can be relevant to personal identity formation and development. According to Miller and Kelly (2005), adolescence is a stage of life in which a sense of self and identity begins to crystallize and the social/peer group usurps influence from the family dynamic (p. 467). Miller and Kelly (2005) explain that adolescence is a fertile period for the study of religion, spirituality, and mental health since many psychiatric disorders have their roots and the first indications of disturbance appear in adolescence. They claim that religious belief and involvement have been found to exert salutary effects on the psychological functioning of teens in domains as diverse as academic performance, subjective well-being, self-esteem, and motivation toward civic involvement, as well as in fostering healthy lifestyles (Miller & Kelly, p. 467). Still according to Levenson, Aldwin and D’Mello (2005), religious developments from adolescence to middle adulthood have received less attention. Therefore, less research has been conducted. Then, it would be interesting to examine how religiousness and spirituality can play a role in identity formation and development of adolescents with regard to body images and eating behaviors.

As the results showed, body image misconception and body image dissatisfaction were seen in the majority of the respondents regardless of sex. However, those who experienced eating problems were all female. Regarding this difference, research on this topic from gender perspectives and with regard to social and cultural context are waited and needed.

For future research on this topic, I recommend a mixed method approach. This topic is broad in a sense, which opens up the possibility to use many different approaches and theories. In other words, one approach alone may be inadequate. Quantitative methods may enable us not only to grasp the overview of the relationship between religions, body and eating issues but also to generalize the study result because of the large data. While the understanding of interrelationships between religions, body and eating issues can be deepened through qualitative methods. Thus, I believe that a mixed method, i.e., the combination of quantitative method and qualitative research inquiry can bring many benefits into research on this topic.
Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the individual’s relationship with God, body image, eating attitudes and eating behaviors amongst religious individuals in Sweden. The empirical data collected via eight semi-structured interviews were analyzed mainly from attachment theory and its application to psychology of religion. Complementarily, a set of theoretical perspectives on the body - Grosz’s (1994) application of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach to the body and Bell’s (1992) ritualization theory – were also used for the analysis. Further, an acculturation perspective was used in order to explore cultural contexts, in which the respondents were situated. The results showed that the majority of the respondents had experienced body image misconceptions, negative body images or body image dissatisfaction in the past. This indicated they experienced some distortions in the process of the outside-inside intertwining continuum of the body as a psychophysical unity. Multiple factors had influences on the respondents’ past and current body images, attitudes towards the body, eating attitudes and behaviors. Among majority of the respondents, faith in, and relationships with God was identified as one of the most influential factors for the establishment and maintenance of positive body image, positive attitudes towards the body and eating attitudes and behaviors. The results indicated that especially monotheistic religions’ God, who was theologically omnipotent and omnipresent, could function for the believers as the most secure base, on which they built up their existential reasoning to be who they were. Taking these results into account, I concluded that a positive and secure attachment relationship with God/other supernatural figures could play a role in the establishment and maintenance of positive body image as well as problem free eating behaviors.
Reference


disorders. *Eating Behaviors, 6*: 293–300.


Appendix

Semi-structured interview questions

- How do you describe your faith?
- How do you describe your relationship with God/other supernatural figures?
- How do you have contact with God/other supernatural figures?
- What kind of meaning does your relationship with God/other supernatural figures have in your daily life?
- Can you describe your perception of your body/your body image?
- How do you describe society's perception of body?
- Can you describe society's approach to/attitudes towards food and diet in your country?
- Tell me about your approach to/attitude towards food and diet?
- Can you describe the importance of food in your daily life?
- How do you understand society's approach to/attitudes towards food and diet?
- Have you ever adjusted your eating habits along with society's approach to/attitudes towards food and diet?
- How do you see society's attitude towards religion(s) and other life philosophies?
- Have you ever adjusted your eating habits, or tried to change your body for your faith?