The Holy Hope

A Critical Discourse Analyses of social support on a Swedish online community for individuals experiencing unwanted childlessness

By Bianca Lange

Thesis 2015 for Bachelor Thesis 15 HE
Study Program in Social Work Specialization International Social Work
Department of Social Work and Psychology

Supervisor: Ann Kroon
Examiner: Pia Tham
Abstract

The aim of this study is to problematize social support at online communities for unwanted childlessness by analyzing the discourses of the unwantedly childless and unwanted childlessness at a Swedish online community. This with the purpose of relating online social support to the societal norm for having children. The study is conducted by doing a Critical Discourse Analysis from a Relational- Cultural and Intersectional perspective on a Swedish online community sub-forum called “LESS på ofrivillig barnlöshet? Skriv av dig!” The results show that the social support becomes a paradox. The unwantedly childless themselves view the social support as fostering connection and belonging. In the meantime the social support is reinforcing the societal norm for having children by creating a collective identity of hope and an individual identity of emotional and physical failure. The norm for having children is further reinforced by the relations outside the online community leading to feelings of social exclusion.

Key-Words: unwanted childlessness, online communities, social support, identity, social exclusion
Preface

This study was undertaken at Gavle University during the spring of 2015. The inspiration for this thesis is mainly taken from the book *MAMA DOLLY* by Patricia Lorenzoni (2012) that I discovered in the library of Gavle University. The book contains the citation that link the beginning and end of the thesis together. Other inspirational sources were found on the internet by google scholar or the library databases at Gavle University.

My acknowledgement for this study is given to my supervisor Ann Kroon for excellent guidance during this process as well as family and friends who listened to all my ideas.

*THANK YOU.*
Abbreviations and Acronyms

**RCT**  
*Relational-Cultural Theory*

**CDA**  
*Critical Discourse Analysis*

**IRL**  
*In Real Life*
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1  
   1.1 Problem formulation ................................................................................................. 2  
   1.2. Aim and Research questions ............................................................................... 3  
   1.3 Disposition ............................................................................................................... 4  
   1.4 Definitions and Concepts ....................................................................................... 4  

2. Background .................................................................................................................... 6  
   2.1 Unwanted childlessness as a global social issue ....................................................... 6  

3. Previous Research ........................................................................................................ 8  

4. Method and Theory ....................................................................................................... 11  
   4.1 Type of investigation: Theoretical framework ........................................................ 11  
      4.1.1 Relational- Cultural Theory- RCT .................................................................. 12  
      4.1.2 Intersectionality ............................................................................................ 13  
      4.1.3 Critical Discourse Analysis- CDA ................................................................. 14  
   4.2 Mode of procedure for data collection .................................................................... 15  
   4.3 Mode of procedure for data analyses .................................................................... 16  
      4.3.1 Fairclough’s model for Critical Discourse Analysis ....................................... 17  
   4.4 Validity .................................................................................................................... 19  
   4.5 Credibility ............................................................................................................... 20  
   4.6 Ethical considerations ............................................................................................. 21  
   4.7 Limitations .............................................................................................................. 21  

5. Results and Analysis .................................................................................................... 22  
   5.1 The line between “us” and “them” ......................................................................... 23  
   5.2 Discourse: HOPE ................................................................................................... 24  
   5.3 Discourse: The holy motherhood and the failing body .......................................... 26  
   5.4 Discourse: Relations In Real Life ......................................................................... 28  
   5.5 Discourse: The supportive community .................................................................. 31  

6. Discussion ...................................................................................................................... 32  
   6.1 The results in relation to aim and questions: The sociocultural practice .......... 33  
   6.2 The results in relation to previous research: Two sides of social support .......... 35  

7. Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 36
7.1 Self-critical reflection and limitations ................................................................. 37
7.2 Suggestions for future research ........................................................................... 37

8. Literature ................................................................................................................. 39
8.1 Text material .......................................................................................................... 41
1. Introduction

I am Dreaming.

I start here, with me dreaming. My stomach is big and round

(– Lorenzoni, 2012, p.7)

The topic of infertility or unwanted childlessness is not seen in everyday media or talked about in everyday-life. This might be because of the stigma surrounding unwanted childlessness due to the societal norm for having children and parenthood as a marker of personal fulfillment and social acceptance (Dariiluk, 1988 in Wirtberg, 2008). Parenthood but primarily motherhood has a both mystical and real place in the society. Motherhood affects everyone, from Lady Maria to our own mothers (Lorenzoni, 2012).

Unwanted childlessness is a global social issue that has different cultural meanings (Mcdonalds Evens, 2004). Worldwide 48,5 million couples were unable to succeed to have a child after five years in 2010 (Mascarenas, Flaxman, Boena, Vanderpoel and Stevens, 2012). In Europe childlessness has increased at ages 30–34 and 40–44 years among both men and women, including both wanted and unwanted childlessness but the main increase is of unwanted childlessness (Miettinen, Rotkirch, Szalma, Donno and Tanturri, 2015). In Sweden the number of unwanted childlessness is about one hundred thousand (Lalos, 1985 in Wirtberg, 2008).

It is for a social worker important to have knowledge about different groups and stigmas and how this knowledge can help to find the right intervention and support for such groups. But it might be even more important to be aware of the societal norms that affects us - even social workers. Social workers are a part of mainstream society and should be aware of how the norm for having children creates bias in how the social workers address and understand unwanted childlessness as a social work issue.

The exclusion and stigma of unwanted childlessness drives the unwantedly childless to safe places where they can connect with others who are unwantedly childless namely online communities (Malik and Coulson, 2014). The online communities provide social support in a mainstream society with a strong norm for being able to have children. The mainstream society includes social workers, professionals who should be able to provide social support for unwanted childlessness in a professional way.
The online community is a modern phenomenon and a product of the modern society since it requires internet access and the online community for unwanted childlessness is thereby a modern context for social support and what social support could be. The online community can distance itself to a certain degree from the mainstream society and become its own community (Daneback and Månsson, 2008, p. 156).

1.1 Problem formulation

The online community has according to Malik and Coulson (2013) become an important place for the unwantedly childless because it is anonymous and provides social support. This offers a safe place away from the social exclusion of unwanted childlessness due to the societal norm for having children in the mainstream society.

Social workers who are a part of the mainstream society are as affected by societal norms as everyone else but should work towards social inclusion and social justice for those groups who are excluded (NASW website, accessed 2015). To problematize the social support on online communities for unwanted childlessness in relation to the societal norm for having children is a way of exposing what values/ideology the social support on online communities are built on. The social support is thereby important to problematize for the social work since social workers should work “with the long-term goal of empowering their clients, they use knowledge of existing legal principles and organizational structure to suggest changes to protect their clients, who are often powerless and underserved” (NASW website, accessed 2015, https://www.socialworkers.org/pressroom/features/issue/peace.asp). This means that social workers should add knowledge about the online community as a modern structure of communication that is today functioning as a provider of social support for unwanted childlessness, clients who are today often overlooked and unseen.

This study will therefore problematize the social support given at the online community in relation to the mainstream societal norm for having children by analyzing what discourses are created within the online community for unwanted childlessness and the relation to the mainstream society by doing a Critical Discourse Analysis.

Unwanted childlessness is a global social health issue and unwanted childlessness as a social issue is understood differently in different cultural contexts (Mcdonalds Evens, 2004). The online community is also depending on cultural context since it acquires internet access and this study should therefore be understood as a Swedish study where
online communities are common and integrated as a communicative social support tool in society for unwanted childlessness.

1.2. Aim and Research questions

The aim of this study is to problematize the social support at online communities for unwanted childlessness by analyzing the discourses created of the unwantedly childless and unwanted childlessness within a Swedish online community. This with the purpose of relating online social support to the mainstream society and its norm for having children.

1. What discourses of the unwantedly childless and unwanted childlessness are created within the online community?
2. How do these discourses relate to the mainstream society in terms of social support?
1.3 Disposition

This study is disposed into seven main parts. The first part, *Introduction*, contains the aim of this study as well as definitions and concepts relevant for this study. The second part is the *Background* of this study that contains an overall frame for unwanted childlessness as a global social issue. The third part describes *Previous Research* conducted on online communities for unwanted childlessness. The fourth part is *Method and Theory* used for this study. The theoretical framework used for this study are Relational-Cultural Theory and Intersectionality together with Critical Discourse Analysis that is used both as theory, method and as an analyzing tool for this study by using Fairclough’s model for Critical Discourse Analysis. In the fifth part *The Results and Analysis* is presented, I have chosen to present them both together to add transparency to the analyzing process which is important for the credibility of a Critical Discourse Analysis. The sixth part is *The Discussion* whereas the overall results are analyzed in relation to the aim, sociocultural practice, theories and the previous research of this study. The final part: *the Conclusion* contains a self-critical reflection and ideas for future research.

1.4 Definitions and Concepts

*Definition of unwanted childlessness*

The words unwanted childlessness, involuntary childlessness and infertility are used synonymously but I have in this study chosen the word unwanted childlessness since that is how the unwantedly childless describes themselves at the online community I studied. Unwanted childlessness is usually diagnosed when a couple has had regular sexual intercourse for one year without getting pregnant or being able to carry a pregnancy to live birth (Meyers et al, 1995 in Wirtberg, 2008). This definition is also the definition used by WHO (World Health Organization) as “a disease of the reproductive system defined by the failure to achieve a clinical pregnancy after 12 months or more of regular unprotected sexual intercourse.” ([www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/infertility/definitions/en/](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/infertility/definitions/en/)). This definition is the definition used by the Swedish health care and will therefore be the definition I use for this study since it is taken place at a Swedish online community for unwanted

It is important to consider that unwanted childlessness as defined above refers to a western idea of unwanted childlessness and might not relate to other non-western cultures definition of unwanted childlessness (Mcdonald Evens, 2004).

Definition of the online community
The online community in this study is broadly defined as “a group of people, who come together for a purpose online, and who are governed by norms and policies” (Preece, 2000 in Souza and Preece, 2004). This means that the unwantedly childless come together with a purpose of discussing or talking about unwanted childlessness and that the online community is governed by societal norms for having children and social policies of for example the access to medical treatment for unwanted childlessness as IVF.

IVF as a related concept
In vitro fertilization means that the eggs from a woman and the sperms from a man are taken outside the body to make the sperms and eggs in conception outside the body and then replace the egg that has been successfully impregnated inside the woman. When doing an IVF treatment the woman is injected with medication that will produce more eggs than usual and the eggs are thereafter “picked” for the procedure (The national encyclopedia website, accessed 2015).
2. Background

Unwanted childlessness often refers to unwanted childlessness as a medical issue of biological reproduction rather than unwanted childlessness as a psychosocial issue (Bell, 2013). The background in this study highlights unwanted childlessness as a global social issue by looking at previous literature of unwanted childlessness. The background thereby provides a frame of how unwanted childlessness can be understood and experienced in a social and cultural context.

2.1 Unwanted childlessness as a global social issue

Unwanted childlessness as a global social issue should be understood contextually since different cultures give unwanted childlessness different meanings (Mcdonald Evens, 2004). In 2010 48.5 million couples worldwide were unable to have a child after five years, this means that 1.9 % of women aged 20-44 were unable to succeed with a first birth (Mascarenas, Flaxman, Boena, Vanderpoel and Stevens, 2012). In Latin America and the Caribbean 1.5 % of women were unable to succeed with a first birth in 2010 (Ibid). In North Africa and the Middle East 2.6 % of women were unable to succeed with a first birth in 2010 (Ibid). In the western world, 15- 20% of all couples of child-bearing age, which is about one couple in six are affected by infertility (Kraft, Mithcell, Dean, Meyer and Wright- Schmidt, 1980; Lalos, 1985 in Wirtberg, 2008).

In a recent research on childlessness in Europe it is stated that childlessness is rapidly increasing in Europe in general and that this mainly connects to unwanted childlessness (Miettinen, Rotkirch, Szalma, Donno and Tanturri, 2015). The research further states that the rapidly increasing childlessness in Europe is connected to the individualistic culture whereas higher individualization equals higher childlessness rates (Ibid). Unwanted childlessness can cause psychological distress and increase loneliness that will affect happiness and wellbeing throughout the life span (Miettinen, Rotkirch, Szalma, Donno and Tanturri, 2015). Women currently experiencing infertility problems display more depression and anxiety than women who have eventually conceived naturally (Oddens et al, 1999 in Greil, Slauson- Blevins and McQuillan, 2010).

Greil, Slauson- Blevins and McQuillan (2010) argues that there is a salient difference in assumptions about infertility between developed and developing societies. In developed societies infertility is a “secret stigma” as childlessness is not presumed to be
unwanted but in developing societies there is no concept of wanted childlessness as self-chosen and the stigma is therefore likely stronger and more exposed (Greil, Slauson-Blevins and McQuillan, 2010). In developing societies fertility is strongly connected to marriage as for example in Chad where it after marriage is a pressure to show one’s fertility (Leonard, 2002a in Greil, Slauson-Blevins and McQuillan, 2010). In both developed and developing societies folk explanations of infertility may be intertwined with biomedical interpretations (Kahn, 2000, SewPaul, 1999, Yebei, 2000 in Greil, Slauson-Blevins and McQuillan, 2010). In Cameroon for example infertility is believed to be caused by the weakened state and how the state thereby cannot protect them from witches (Feldman-Savelsberg, 2002 in Greil, Slauson-Blevins and McQuillan, 2010).

Women are more likely to be blamed for the infertility in developing societies than in developed societies - in developed societies the couple is regarded as childless together meanwhile in developing societies the woman is the one with a problem (Greil, Slauson-Blevins and McQuillan, 2010). This can for example be seen in Bangladeshi where the treatment for infertility is for the man to remarry (Nahar et al, 2000 in Greil, Slauson-Blevins and McQuillan, 2010). In developing societies, having children might be the key to gain adult status and acceptance in the community to a further extent than in developed societies as for example in southern Africa where children give the woman access to share her husband’s property and wealth (Sundby and Jacobus, 2001 in Greil, Slauson-Blevins and McQuillan, 2010).

Unwanted childlessness or infertility is a global social issue that affects all societies even though the meaning of unwanted childlessness differs depending on the sociocultural context. The background of this study is to highlight unwanted childlessness and infertility as a global social issue in order to create a frame of understanding for how widespread this social phenomena is. To display unwanted childlessness as a global social issue further strengthens the importance of unwanted childlessness for social work globally.
3. Previous Research

There is not a large amount of previous research on the topic unwanted childlessness on online communities. The previous research found for this study is the only previous research available on online communities for unwanted childlessness at the library databases at Gavle University.

Four articles are found on online communities for unwanted childlessness, they are written between 2010 and 2014. Malik and Coulson (2010, 2013) have conducted two researches whereas the research conducted 2010 is focusing on the negatives for joining an online community and the more recent article from 2013 is focusing on the positives for joining an online community for unwanted childlessness. Welbourne et al (2013) is focusing on the positives for joining an online community for unwanted childlessness. Korolczuk (2014) is focusing on the online community for unwanted childlessness as a social movement of changing the identity of unwanted childlessness. One last article by Wirtberg (2008) was chosen as previous research because it is a research done on unwanted childlessness in Sweden, which is where my study will take place and it was therefore necessary to include previous research on the experiences of unwanted childlessness in Sweden specifically.

In the previous research on online communities for unwanted childlessness and unwanted childlessness in Sweden four themes could be found: Social Support at the Online Community, The Collective Identity, The Hidden Stigma of being Unwantedly Childless and Men and Women have different Stories.

Social support at the online community

In the previous research on online communities for unwanted childlessness it has been found that the online community has a positive role for unwanted childlessness in terms of social support (Malik and Coulson, 2013). Socio-emotional support is a motivation for joining an online community for the unwantedly childless (Welbourne et al, 2012). The online community is an anonymous safe place where the unwantedly childless can identify with others facing unwanted childlessness over a wide geographical area (Malik and Coulson, 2010). The social support becomes a sort of “therapy” or self-help group for the unwantedly childless that can be empowering, improve quality of life and reduce depression (Malik and Coulson, 2013).
Even though there is a positive view on the social support at online communities for unwanted childlessness, a particular disadvantage is sharing negative stories between the unwantedly childless. Negative stories are supposed to have a negative effect for the unwantedly childless (Malik and Coulson, 2010). It could further be found that receiving support was associated with greater psycho-social benefits than posting support (Welbourne et al., 2013).

The social support at the online community became important as the unwantedly childless experienced their relations with friends, family and workmates as problematic due to the fact that unwanted childlessness is a hidden stigma that made the unwantedly childless feel excluded in their relations to friends, family and workmates who are fertile (Malik and Coulson, 2013).

The hidden stigma of being unwantedly childless

In previous research it is stated that unwanted childlessness is not an obvious stigma (Welbourne et al., 2013). This means that unwanted childlessness is not something that can be noticed from the outside. Unwanted childlessness can be seen as a social handicap or social disability due to the hidden stigma and how it affects the social relations for the unwantedly childless as always being excluded from full membership to the parents club (Wirtberg, 2008).

The collective identity

In the previous research Korolczuk (2014) finds that belonging to an online community creates a collective identity of “us” the members of the online community and “them” those on the outside of the online community. Ibid’s research was done at a Polish online community for unwanted childlessness where one sub-forum had been created under the name “conscious childlessness” which tried to create a positive view on unwanted childlessness in relation to the negative view experienced of unwanted childlessness at the online community at large.

The collective identity at the Polish online community at large is not to give up trying getting pregnant and medical treatments are suggested (Korolczuk, 2014). The “us” is thereby the unwantedly childless who wants to create a positive view of a life as unwantedly childless and “them” is the outside online community where a negative view is the norm (Korolczuk, 2014). The sub-community “conscious childlessness” becomes a social movement for changing the discourse on unwanted childlessness by
moving away from how unwanted childlessness is talked about in the larger online community (Ibid).

*Men and women have different stories*

In the previous research it can be noticed that women are those who particularly join and post at online communities for unwanted childlessness (Malik and Coulson, 2010). This can be due to the fact that women seems to be facing a stronger stigma of being unwantedly childless then men because the word woman and the word motherhood becomes fused together as noted in Wirtberg’s, (2008) research in Sweden. Wirtberg (2008) stated that men and women have different stories associated with the experiences of being unwantedly childless. Men being unwantedly childless doesn’t define their identity to the same extent as women where women’s identity seems to be nothing if not being able to be a mother.

*Conclusion*

The four main themes all represents the main findings in the previous research on online communities for unwanted childlessness. Social support is mentioned in the previous research on online communities for unwanted childlessness as an important factor for being a part of and joining an online community. Malik and Coulson (2010) thus states that there is a negative experience of social support connected to sharing negative stories on the online community for unwanted childlessness. This study will focus on problematizing the social support on the online community for unwanted childlessness and thereby trying to go deeper in the understanding of how social support creates both positive and negative experiences for the unwantedly childless on online communities by connecting the social support to the societal norm for having children.

This study will further see how the hidden stigma and collective identity of unwanted childlessness in the previous research relates to the social support at the online community and if there is a difference in the stories of men and women related to the social support.
4. Method and Theory

4.1 Type of investigation: Theoretical framework

This study is qualitative and abductive. Abduction means that cases are observed with a desire to find an underlying pattern that explains the cases (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2008, p.4). This can for example be seen in the example of swans and their color, whereas abduction would observe a swan with a certain color and thereafter show how the swan’s genetic structure might generate a certain coloring, this underlying pattern of genetics then explains the single case (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2013, p.5). Abduction means in this study that the text or empirical material cannot be understood by itself it needs to be understood by the underlying pattern of norms and values which are shaping the text. This understanding of text in relation to norms and values in the society are essential for a Critical Discourse Analysis that believe that text is shaped by societal norms (Winter Jorgensen and Philips, 2000).

The Critical Discourse Analysis used in this study is based primarily on Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis in Winter Jorgensen and Philips (2000) and Bergström and Boréus (2012).

The Critical Discourse Analysis in this study is combined with two theories Relational- Cultural Theory (RCT) and Intersectionality as a theoretical framework that together with Faircloughs model for Critical Discourse Analysis is used for the analyses of the text. Relational- Cultural Theory and Intersectionality are also used as the theoretical lenses of how to view the world. They are not separated in relation to the results; they are a part of the analysis and the results.

Grinnell (2001, p.83) states that a research question always has underlying values that will affect the answers that a question generates and that the interpretation of results is influenced by the values of the researcher and later the values of the readers. My values during this study that are reflected in the questions and the aim of this study connects to the values stated in Relational- Cultural Theory, Intersectionality and Critical Discourse Analysis. Their values/ideology and the reasons for being selected in this study will all be presented below.
4.1.1 Relational- Cultural Theory- RCT

Relational- Cultural Theory is a feminist psychotherapy theory conceived after Jean Baker Miller´s book *Toward a New Psychology of Women* in 1976 (Comstock et al, 2008). Miller´s book emerged from her clinical practice with women where she noted that the centrality of relationships in her client´s life was inconsistent with the traditional theories on human development she had been taught in medical school. The traditional theories focus on individuation, separation and autonomy as markers of psychological health and emotional maturity (Ibid). Miller questions the traditional theories as lacking understanding of the relational and contextual importance for the experiences of women, people of color and marginalized men. Marginalized groups that does not fit in traditional psychotherapy and therefore becomes misunderstood (Ibid). The misunderstanding of these groups due to a lack of contextual importance in psychotherapy creates according to Miller further devaluation of these groups (Ibid).

Relational Cultural Theory challenge traditional psychosocial theories for being patriarchal and too Western by emphasizing on separation and autonomy as the main functions for mental health and personal development (Ibid). According to Relational- Cultural Theory separation and autonomy is not mentally healthy or developing. Instead it is to have many relations to others where you feel connected and belonging that is mentally healthy. An individual who does not have any close relations to others might become disconnected and isolated which will according to Relational- Cultural Theory lead to avoidance towards relationships in general (Ibid).

Relational-Cultural Theory´s two main concepts are *Connectedness*, the idea of how we grow personally through our relationships because Relational- Cultural Theory believe we are all interconnected, and *Controlling images*, the idea that culture and context are important for understanding an individual (Ibid).

Patton and Reicherzer (2010) demonstrates an example of how a transsexual sex worker of color need be understood from these premises of cultural context as the color of a person as well as the sexuality creates a relational context in which the individual need to be understood. This due to transsexuality and being colored both being attributes that are marginalized. In the same way should a person who is unwantedly childless be understood in another way than a person who can biologically produce children since the unwantedly childless person is excluded and stigmatized due to the fact that they not have a child. This means that unwanted childlessness need to be understood in relation to the cultural context. In this study the cultural context is the
online community, the people posting in it, as well as the cultural context outside the online community, the outside society.

Relational- Cultural Theory can be used to understand the individual but can also be applied on groups, communities or nations. (Comstock et al, 2008). In this study Relational- Cultural Theory is used for understanding both the individuals and the group of the online community as well as the society at large.

Relational- Cultural Theory is chosen for this study because it challenges the patriarchal and Western norm in other psychosocial theory and focuses on connectedness and belonging instead as central part for human mental health and personal development. The aim of this study is to problematize social support by analyzing what discourses of the unwantedly childless and unwanted childlessness are created within a Swedish online community for unwanted childlessness and how these discourses relate to the outside society in terms of social support. I want to see what discourses is created when focusing on connection, belonging and the cultural context.

**4.1.2 Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is a feminist theory, originally from Black feminism, concerning race, gender and class and how they interplay in oppression (Jordan-Zachery, 2007). Today the power structures between age, race, gender, class, religion and sexuality and how these interplay depending on context are in focus but with the notion on the supremacy of the white, heterosexual, Christian male as the ultimate power combination of attributes (Taket et al, 2009).

Intersectionality brings the power structures behind for example age, gender and class to this study together with the Relational- Cultural Theory concepts of relations and the cultural context. This creates an interesting lens for interpretation where the discourses of the unwantedly childless and unwanted childlessness in Sweden is problematized and analyzed. Intersectionality is chosen for this research because it has a structural understanding of power that is somewhat missing in Relational- Cultural Theory. The structural understanding of how power moves between different contexts depending on who is in them was used in this study to see how being unwantedly childless could be one attribute and how it is positioned towards other attributes as for example people with biological children (Hancock,2007).

Intersectionality is also chosen for this study due to the fact that it has the same notion on power as Critical Discourse Analysis. Intersectionality means that all
attributes are in a flowing power play depending on context and that this power play is structural, it affects everyone and that some attributes are always holding less power (Jordan-Zachery, 2007) as for example being a black lesbian woman in relation to being a white heterosexual male. Critical Discourse Analysis also focuses on the power in structural terms with the focus on oppression of marginalized groups by hidden ideology (Bergström and Boréus, 2012).

This study will combine Intersectionality as a structural understanding of how attributes hold power, in this study the attribute of unwanted childlessness and how power change by context in relation to the cultural context of Relational- Cultural Theory. Unwanted childlessness as an intersectional attribute will further be combined to the Relational- Cultural Theory concepts of connectedness and belonging as main aspects of emotional maturity and personal development.

The aim of this study is to problematize the social support on an online community by analyzing the discourses of the unwantedly childless and unwanted childlessness that are created at the online community. With intersectionality these discourses can be problematized - as well as the relations between the larger community and the outside society as a power interplay at a structural level.

4.1.3 Critical Discourse Analysis- CDA

Critical Discourse Analysis is a variant of Discourse Analysis which is an analytical research tool that interprets meanings, outspoken or hidden in text and talk (Bergström and Boréus, 2012). A discourse is a way of talking, writing and thinking about a certain phenomenon as for example unwanted childlessness and what meaning this talking, writing and thinking produce together (Ibid). Critical Discourse Analysis interprets meanings in text and talk but with a primarily focus on social power abuse, dominance, and social inequality that is justified and reproduced by discourse in a social and political context (Schiffrin et. al, 2001).

This study focus primarily on Critical Discourse Analysis by Norman Fairclough as presented in Winter Jorgensen and Philips (2000) and Bergström and Boréus (2012). A central part of Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough is how discourse forms an important part of discourse practice that reproduces knowledge, identities and social/power relations shaped by other social practices and structures (Winter Jorgensen and Philips, 2000). This means that for Fairclough it is not enough just to do a text analyses as discourse analyses since it fails to notice the importance of the relation
between texts/discourse and the social practices and structures that are shaped by different power relations (Ibid). For example discourse that expose racism in a text always relates to the social practice it is written within due to the power relation of racism in society.

The power relations are constituted by dominance due to ideology which gives the dominant group power over the marginalized or devalued group. In Critical Discourse Analysis the researcher always take sides with the marginalized or devalued group and therefore Critical Discourse Analysis is not a neutral theory, method or analyzing tool (Ibid). In a wider sense Critical Discourse Analysis should be used for empowerment of marginalized or devalued groups for social change (Ibid).

Critical Discourse Analysis is chosen for this study because it connects text with the norms and ideology in society, both as shaped by and shaping social practice and thereby relates to my aim and questions. The aim of this study is to see what discourses are created of the unwantedly childless and unwanted childlessness at a Swedish online community sub-forum, and how these discourses relates to the larger online community, the outside society in terms of social support. I can thereby relate the text (posts) in the sub-forum with the norms of the outside society as well as to the norms inside the online community. Critical Discourse Analysis will be used as theory, method and as an analyzing tool in this study. This means that Critical Discourse Analysis in this study is a theoretical framework as well as the method of how to abduct the study and finally the tool for analyzing the empirical data; the text. In this section Critical Discourse Analysis is presented as a theory and a method and represents the theoretical framework for this study, Critical Discourse Analysis as an analyzing tool will be presented under the section Data Analysis.

4.2 Mode of procedure for data collection

The sample is selected by interest to my aim and questions by using purposive sampling where the sample is chosen based on the subjugated judgement of the researcher depending on relevance and purpose (Frankfurt-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Purposive sampling is chosen for this study as it is a Critical Discourse Analysis where the direct content of the material is not being studied; it is the meaning of the material that is being analyzed by reading the content.
When searching for unwanted childlessness in Swedish at google (“ofrivillig barnlöshet”) the website Familjeliv.se pops up as one of the top hits and directs you to one large online community at familjeliv.se. The online community is named “Unwanted childlessness- difficulties being pregnant” (Ofrivillig barnlöshet-svårt att få barn) and has several sub-forums (www.familjeliv.se).

The sub-forum: “LESS på ofrivillig barnlöshet, Skriv av dig!” (TIRED of unwanted childlessness? Write!), is a part of the larger online community at familjeliv.se for unwanted childlessness (http://www.familjeliv.se/forum/7/132). The sub-forum was created by the member “dansar” in January 2014 as a reaction to how the larger online community for unwanted childlessness became excluding when you never succeeded in the goal of getting pregnant and this sub-forum would be a place to express the frustration over unwanted childlessness.

This sub-forum is selected because it is a part of the online community for those who have not yet succeeded or will never succeed to get pregnant and are by themselves or by a professional diagnosed as unwantedly childless. This relates to the aim; to problematize and analyze the discourses of the unwantedly childless and unwanted childlessness at an online community whereas the people posting need to be defined as unwantedly childless either by themselves or by a professional.

The data collected is 36 posts written in the sub-forum “LESS på ofrivillig barnlöshet?, Skriv av dig! (TIRED of unwanted childlessness?, Write!). The 36 posts are all the posts that have been written between December 2014 and April 2015. A larger time period of data was needed since the posts vary in text size, some are one sentence long and others are about 20 sentences and some of the posts were written with almost a month between them.

This sampling size is suitable for the time available for this study. From a credibility and validity perspective purpose sampling have a tendency to be too biased or not being able to reflect properly what is intended with the research (Frankfurt-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). To avoid a sample that is too biased all the posts written between the selected timeframe is used for analyzing.

4.3 Mode of procedure for data analyses

The empirical data/text is analyzed with Fairclough’s 3 level/context model for Critical Discourse Analysis and then combined with some of the analyzing tools suggested by
Fairclough in Winter Jorgensen and Philips (2000) and Bergström and Boréus (2012). The model is presented below, see 4.3.1 *Fairclough’s model for Critical Discourse Analysis* (Fairclough, 1992, p.73 in Bergström and Boréus, 2012, p.375). The first level is the text, the second level is the Discourse Practice and the third non-discourse level is the Sociocultural Practice. The model relates to how the text (level 1) is discourse and a part of society as it is institutionalized by being produced, consumed and distributed (level 2) but also how the discourse is a part of a macrostructure with many different social practices and discourses (level 3) (Ibid). The analyzing process with Critical Discourse Analysis was done together with the perspective of Relational-Cultural Theory and Intersectionality.

### 4.3.1 *Fairclough’s model for Critical Discourse Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Text</td>
<td>Grammar-syntactic analyses, Ethos-identity construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Discourse Practice</td>
<td>The institutional level, analyses how the text is produced, consumed and distributed. Intertextuality-how texts relate to each other (production)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sociocultural Practice</td>
<td>The non-discourse level. Relate the discourse to other discourses, cultural practices or societal structures such as norms and values</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fairclough’s model for Critical Discourse Analysis in Bergström and Boréus (2012, p.375) combined with the analyzing tools chosen for this study in each level.
Level 1: Text analyses

The 36 posts in the sub-forum “LESS på ofrivillig barnlöshet? Skriv av dig!” is analyzed in this Critical Discourse Analysis by studying the grammar with a syntax analysis and the identity construction in the text by analyzing the ethos (Winter Jorgensen and Philips, 2000). The grammar in the text is analyzed by syntax analyses which consists of transitivity, nominalization and modality (Bergström and Boréus, 2012, p. 376).

Transitivity relates to how the words are combined to create a certain perspective from which the sentence can be understood which in this study is done by looking at who is doing what to whom (participants, subject, object), in what way (processes), at what time and place (circumstances) (Ibid, p. 280-283). This relates to, in the text selected for this study who is writing the posts about whom/what on the sub-forum, in what way are they posted, for example negative or positive posts about family, friends, workmates or themselves and how often are they posting. This is used to analyze the relations between the participants within the sub-forum and the relations between the sub-forum and the outside world.

Nominalization is when a certain perspective by using the transitivity is hiding participants by taking away who is doing what to whom which will hide the underlying ideologies due to that the perspective loses the participants for the perspective being described in the text (Ibid, p. 283).

Modality is in what degree a sentence produces assent (Winter Jorgensen and Philips, 2000, p. 87). In this study modality is used to analyze which sentences is producing assent about being unwantedly childless or unwanted childlessness and thereby constructs a truth.

Ethos analyses how the choice of language and words used in the text constructs identity (Ibid). This relates to the words with which the unwantedly childless at the online community sub-forum is choosing when describing themselves and their feelings as well as how they describes the outside world.

Level 2: Discourse Practice analyses

The Discourse Practice is the second level of analyzing in Critical Discourse Analysis and analyses how the sub-forum is institutionalized by how the text is being produced, consumed and distributed. This study focus on intertextuality which is an analyzing tool to analyze how the text relates to other texts (Bergström and Boréus, 2012). The posts
belong to the sub-forum “Less på ofrivillig barnlöshet? Skriv av dig!” and the immediate surrounding text belongs to the commercials framing the sub-forum (on the screen). This makes the text and the commercials follow the same link of text, produced at the same place and consumed together (Winter Jorgensen and Philips, 2000, p. 77).

The following questions are asked about the framing commercials (text and image): What is the content? What meaning do they produce for the sub-forum?

In a larger intertextual context the other sub-forums within the online community in subject could be analyzed but due to the time frame this was not manageable.

Level 3: Sociocultural Practice analyses

The Sociocultural Practice is the third level in the analyzing process of Critical Discourse Analysis and is the non-discourse surrounding of the discourse/s, even though it contains other discourses it is not determined by the discourses being analyzed in the first level, instead it is a separate macro level that relates the discourses to a larger societal context where several discourses, cultural practices or societal structures are realized and used in relation and in discussion to the discourse (Bergström and Boréus, 2012).

In this study the societal issues or norms expressed as discourse from level 1 is put into a larger societal context for discussion by relating sociocultural practice to the social support on the online community sub-forum.

4.4 Validity

Validity should explain if I have studied was what intended to study in relation to my aim and method (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008, p.149).

Validity in Critical Discourse Analysis is determined by what power perspective is taken in the study (Bergström and Boréus, 2012, p. 406-408). In this study the power perspective of the societal norm of having children in Sweden and globally is taken with the notion of how unwanted childlessness leads to stigmatization and exclusion. This power perspective can be found in the previous research about unwanted childlessness and online communities. The power perspective relates to the aim- to problematize the social support at online communities for unwanted childlessness with the purpose of relating the online social support to the societal norm for having children.
Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough is very well suited for reaching the aim as its central focus is how text connects to the social practice, and could thereby relate the text material to the larger society and hidden ideology. Critical Discourse Analysis also focus on hidden ideology and power structures and how the dominant group hides ideology in text. The focus of this study is the hidden ideology of the dominant group by the societal norm for having children in the society and how it relates to the social support for unwanted childlessness. The validity is further strengthened by using two theories as theoretical framework, Relational- Cultural Theory and Intersectionality to widen, deepen and further being able to problematize social support in the analyses as that is the aim of this study.

To have a stronger validity in Critical Discourse Analysis citations should be used because they show transparency of the analyzing process (Bergström and Boréus, 2012, 406-408). In this study several citations from the text material is used in order to be transparent in the analyzing process. By presenting the results together with the analyses the transparency of the analyzing process is clearer for the reader.

The validity is further strengthened with Fairclough’s model for Critical Discourse Analysis as it provides analyzing tools for the analyzing process which further makes the study more transparent and easy to follow in the analyzing process (Ibid).

4.5 Credibility

Credibility relates to how trustworthy the results of this study are (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 2008. p.154).

I have already stated that Critical Discourse Analysis is not neutral in how it views the world and that it always sympathizes with the marginalized and devalued in the society. This is also true for this study which is sympathizing for the unwantedly childless as a marginalized group.

This study stated in the theoretical framework that Relational- Cultural Theory and Intersectionality will be the theoretical lenses of how to understand the text and the results and later the view used for discussing the results. This creates of course values that affect the results but I think all research is value-laden and to be aware of the values used and why they are used is to strengthen the credibility in a qualitative study when the researcher is aware of its bias throughout the whole process. I have further been self-critical towards my study and why I am studying unwanted childlessness in the discussion section under self-critical reflection and limitations.
The citations used in the results and analyses are translated into English from its original language Swedish due to the importance of transparency for the analyzing process. The translation can have a negative effect on the credibility if the translation lost intention or meaning or if the words is not properly translated. I did my best in the translation of the citations to be authentic so that the intention and meaning is not lost in translation.

4.6 Ethical considerations

This study is a type of ethnographical internet study where the online community for unwanted childlessness represents an ethnographical group. The main ethical consideration for such a study is to study someone who does not know they are being studied (Daneback and Månsson, 2008, p. 158).

This is considered in the study but I conclude that I have no intention of interfering in the sub-forum in any way more than an observer and therefore it is not needed to inform the online community sub-forum of this study. The names on the sub-forum are anonymous since the people posting create nicknames which does not reveal their identity and this further keeps their identities safe from public recognition. Finally I have tried to keep a respectful position towards the text material in the analyzing process by taking the voices from the unwantedly childless at the online community sub-forum to be of importance.

It should be considered ethically that this study is studying a marginalized group and that this can lead to further stigmatization for pointing out the group unwanted childlessness as excluded and by doing a Critical Discourse Analysis I hold a subjective power of categorization when analyzing this group (Andersson & Swärd, 2008, s.242). On the other hand a study of a marginalized group can deepen the knowledge of the group and also create a voice for the marginalized group (Ibid). In this study I have tried to deepen and problematize the understanding of the group unwantedly childlessness with a self-critical interpretation to my own subjectivity and values by adding self-critical reflections in the discussion.

4.7 Limitations

The limitations for this study is foremost connected to time. The time range for this study forced limitations to the size of text material that could be analyzed. This affects both the results and the discussion of this study in terms of validity and credibility since
a larger amount of text could give further complexity and nuances to the results and analysis.

5. Results and Analysis

The results are found by using Fairclough’s model for Critical Discourse Analysis as a framework and analyzing tool for this study together with Relational- Cultural Theory and Intersectionality.

The empirical data collected for this study is a sample from the online community sub-forum “LESS på ofrivillig barnlöshet? Skriv av dig!” (“TIRED on unwanted childlessness? Write!”). The sub-forum is an online community for unwanted childlessness, a place to write down ones emotions connected to the experience of unwanted childlessness.

I have chosen to present the analyses together with the results to provide a clearer view to the reader of how the analyzing tools from Fairclough’s model for Critical Discourse Analysis is applied to the text together with Relational- Cultural Theory and Intersectionality. The results represents the first and second level of analysis in Fairclough’s model for Critical Discourse Analysis. The first level; the text (36 posts) is analyzed by syntax analysis (grammar) and ethos (identity construction). The second level; the discourse practice is analyzed by intertextuality, how the text is produced, consumed and distributed by linking the surrounding commercials with the text; the 36 posts. The final, third level of analysis with Fairclough’s model for Critical Discourse Analysis; the sociocultural practice will be presented in the discussion.

The following discourses: HOPE, The holy motherhood and the failing body, Relations In Real Life and The supportive community, were found by analyzing the 36 posts from the sub-forum “LESS på ofrivillig barnlöshet? Skriv av dig!” by asking the following questions: What discourses of the unwantedly childless and unwanted childlessness are created within the online community sub-forum? How do these discourses relate to the larger community, the society in terms of social support?

The citations shown in the results and analyses have been translated from Swedish into English due to the importance of transparency for the analyzing process so non-Swedish readers can follow the analyzing process.
An overall discourse of “us” and “them” could be found and is a central theme going through all the discourses in the text analysis (first level) and the discourse practice (second level) of analysis and will be presented before the four discourses.

5.1 The line between “us” and “them”

In all the four discourses presented below a central theme that re-appeared in all of them is the creation of a line between “us” the unwantedly childless and “them” the people with biological children. This can also be noted in the discourse practice, the second level of analysis by analyzing the intertextuality.

In the identity construction explaining the meaning of being unwantedly childless in the sub-forum the posts make a clear line between those who cannot – “us” - and those who can have biological children – “them”. This refers to the ethos of the text as the posts create an identity of failure both emotionally and physically of being a women and not being able to become a mother and this can be seen in the discourse *The holy motherhood and the failing body*. The importance of motherhood make the “us” emotionally and physically subordinated to “them”, the ones who can be mothers, since motherhood is what gives worth and happiness to life for women.

A clear line is also drawn when it comes to the relations between “us” the unwantedly childless and “them” the people with biological children. The line is drawn as the unwantedly childless cannot follow their friends, family and workmates into the transitioning into parenthood and the unwantedly childless feel excluded and left behind in life. This refers to the transitivity of the text and can be seen in the discourse *Relations In Real Life* how the unwantedly childless talk about and refer to friends, family and workmates. Also which words they use for describing their relations and under what circumstances this is said, during what time and place.

The line that is created between “us” and “them” is further reinforced when stated as the truth, knowing that “them” could never understand “us” which refers to the modality of the text, how the text creates assent and can be seen in the discourse *The supportive community*.

A further line of “us” and “them” is created as a collective identity in the discourse *HOPE* which refers to the ethos of the text, the identity construction as well as the modality of the text, how assent is created in the text as the collective identity of hope constructs the truth about how to handle unwanted childlessness. The “us” in this case
are those who will never give up hope on getting pregnant and “them” who have tried to create a happy and accepting life without children.

The line between “us” and “them” is further stated in the *intertextuality*. Intertextuality belongs to the second level of analysis by Fairclough’s model for Critical Discourse Analysis and in this study it refers to how the text (36 posts) relates to other texts within the same chain. The commercials represents text that belongs to the same text chain as the 36 posts are produced and consumed within the same space (the screen).

To analyze the relations between the posts and the commercials I ask the following questions to the commercials: *What is the content? What meaning do they produce for the sub-forum?*

Ten of the 33 commercials and blogs surrounding the sub-forum are NOT about children, the content of the rest is about children or children related topics as children’s toys. The meaning these commercials produce for the sub-forum is further marginalization and exclusion which becomes clear when the 36 posts are analyzed as texts within the same text chain with the commercials. Many of the unwantedly childless might never need those commercials and the commercials might never refer to them still they are together in the same text chain. The commercials and blogs create a meaning where unwanted childlessness is further stigmatized and the societal norm for having children is further reinforced as a line between “us” and “them”.

### 5.2 Discourse: HOPE

This discourse relates to the word and sentences describing hope within the sub-forum as to never give up and how they create an identity of collective assent between the participants of the sub-forum. This can be seen in the post by “Unaangelita” (#445) who posts the following as a comment to another post: “I hope you don’t give up and that the dream to have children will soon come true”. This was a common response to the negative emotions expressed in the posts that you shall never ever give up no matter what. This is even more explicitly expressed in the following post by “Jag är bara jag” (#469) who posts: “If the whole world died or if I died wouldn’t matter. If it is not my turn soon I’ll kill myself”. The post is followed by a response from “princess” (#470): “never stop hoping, never stop praying, miracles can happen”.

The “never give up” comments and posts create a truth, a collective assent about unwanted childlessness as something that you should never accept and that the goal of
having a child is the main purpose of life. This concerns the modality of the text as it becomes a collective identity of truth to never give up and to always give a positive comment no matter what the feelings in the post express as seen above, where the post above by “Jag är bara jag” (#469) is writing about suicide.

One post of all the 36 posts gives another reality and is posted by “Gula Pilen” (#454) who writes:

I have really tried to get pregnant in every way and now I am through with it. Now I am blogging about a life as an unwantedly childless and I am trying to share a positive image where a life without children can be meaningful. – (“Gula Pilen” #454)

The post above by “Gula Pilen” (#454) differentiate from the common consensus in the other posts about never accepting yourself or your life as childless and therefore you should never give up. The post above says something about the ethos of the text; the identity construction in the other posts, it is a marker of what this sub-forum is not. It is not a sub-forum where you write if you want to accept unwanted childlessness, it is a place for those who will not accept and who has not given up hope. The constructed collective identity of the sub-forum is hope.

The discourse HOPE is also connected to the almost religious believe in medical treatment as In Vitro Fertilization (fertilization outside the body) and sperm donation for helping the body getting pregnant which can be seen in the following post by “GoC” (#456) who describes a situation of hopelessness after getting the diagnosis of “no sperms”:

Making a remark here. We are also unwantedly childless. And then I mean that there are no use trying anymore for us. We got the diagnosis “no sperms”. Feels like my future was gone in two seconds. What to do now with life? – (“GoC” #456)

“Jag är bara jag” (#457) happily replies “Sperm donation of course. There is every possibility to succeed then. 😊” - meaning that all unwanted childlessness can be fixed with medical interference.
In Vitro Fertilization is a topic in many of the posts and also carries another side than hope and salvation for solving the unwanted childlessness, it carries a question of class. The expenses for In Vitro Fertilization are not something everyone can afford and can be noticed in the post by “Jag är bara jag” (#447) who writes about how much an In Vitro Fertilization treatment costs and that it is a huge amount: “You can do as many you can endure and can afford (referring to IVF). But 60,000:- (referring to Swedish crones) every time including travel …”. “Jag är bara jag” (#447) had done several In Vitro Fertilization treatments “Almost 9 years of trying and doing my 12:th IVF” which means that “Jag är bara jag” must have a social status that can allow her to afford 12 In Vitro Fertilization (fertilization outside the body) treatments in 9 years.

The notion of class in the access to medical treatment especially IVF is from an intersectional perspective one attribute that should be understood in relation to other attributes as for example age (Jordan-Zachery, 2007). It was clear that many of the women who was writing about IVF at the forum was older and had tried getting pregnant with medical treatment or assistance for several years as described in the citation by “Jag är bara jag” (#462) above. This further was a sign that you should never give up as these women had been trying for several years, still not giving up.

The supportive comments of hope on the online community sub-forum are according to Relational- Cultural Theory positive if they create relationships within the sub-forum that enhances connectedness and belonging (Comstock et al, 2008). If the comments within the sub-forum does not create these relationships they should be viewed as problematic or negative according to Relational- Cultural Theory as the sub-forum in that case might be a source of relational disconnections (Ibid).

The hope seemed to be essential for the posts in order to keep on fighting and to keep on going and the word was often used. The word hope is used as something that might be lost but the comments then always encourage not to lose hope, no matter how serious the feelings are expressed in the comments.

5.3 Discourse: The holy motherhood and the failing body

To feel worthless as a woman – (“Babyheart” #450)
This discourse relates to how the posts express their feelings and how the posts defines themselves. The posts express many negative feelings of worthlessness, loneliness and suicidal thoughts as for example “If the whole world died or if I died wouldn’t matter. If it is not my turn soon I’ll kill myself” by “Jag är bara jag” (#469). The thoughts are all related to how they cannot produce a child biologically which make them feel excluded as “Evylynn” (#466) writes “I am always an outsider”. The feelings are so strong they even take physical shape as “Tazo” (#449) expresses below:

The frustration exceeds, the feelings are mixed, one minute you feel worried, then you feel sad, angry, you cry and laugh. The stress causes eczema all over the body…You feel worthless – (“Tazo” #449)

It becomes clear that most of the posts are written by women even if that is not spelled out in the posts which refer back to the nominalization of the text, where participants, whom it is referring to, is hidden in the text. The status of motherhood emerge as these women feel they become nothing and mean nothing without a child. They question their identity and do not know who they are anymore since they have failed with the purpose of life itself: becoming a mother. This refers back to the ethos of the text, the identity construction and can be shown in the post by “Draugloth” (#472) “To have failed with what is “the purpose of life”. The identities the women construct of themselves is that of failure and the role of motherhood. Becoming a mother is holy, the goal of life itself. This also refers to the modality of the text, how the text creates assent as the women create motherhood as the goal of life into a truth.

Connected to the emotional failure of not becoming a mother is also to have a failed body. The body is letting these women down by not being able to produce a child in the womb, not even by medical treatment as IVF, In Vitro Fertilization. The posts refer to menstruation as the symbol of bodily failure as expressed by “Draugloth” (#472) “Anyway that little hope comes every month, and I get disappointed every time”, it stood clear once again that there will be no child this month either. The bodily failure also relates to the ethos of the text, the identity construction of the text as these women constructs a physical identity of failure as well as an emotional.

In the post by “Wittra” (#440) it is also notable how physically challenging it is to undergo an IVF: “…and there the first ivf failed. I am so tired, so tired. Nice to be free from all the injections, tablets and other shit for a while”.

The emotional and physical failure expressed by these women reveals that there is a strong norm in the Swedish society to have biological children and that motherhood have a somewhat determining position of worth for women. It further reveals a combination of an identity failure of both emotional and physical character. The body is a double failure when the In Vitro Fertilization treatment, which is supposed to be a savior, does not succeed. From an intersectional perspective unwanted childlessness becomes an attribute just as other attributes, as gender and class. The women with child is holding a somewhat predominant emotional and physical position over the woman who is unwantedly childless due to the status of motherhood and how the non-mothers feel inadequate both socially and physically. It is the unwantedly childless women themselves who reinstate this emotional position by creating an identity of worthlessness only further confirming the “us” and “them”.

Intersectionality can explain how the unwantedly childless above are feeling both excluded and at the same time reinstating the norm for having children as a life goal. Intersectionality places the unwantedly childless in a structural subordination, in this case feeling inadequate both emotionally and physically, towards the people with children (Jordan-Zachery, 2007). These feelings of inadequacy will be noticeable even within an online community since it is a part of the mainstream society and the norm for having children. Relational- Cultural Theory stresses the importance of connectedness and belonging in our relationships with others and how not having fostering relations make us disconnected (Comstock et al, 2008). The women in the sub-forum experiences from a Relational- Cultural Theory perspective disconnection in their relation to themselves and their own body.

5.4 Discourse: Relations In Real Life

This discourse relates to how the posts in the sub-forum often describes the relations IRL (In Real Life) with friends, family and workmates outside the online community and this is found by looking at the transitivity of the text. By analyzing who the post is referring to, what is the post saying, is it describing an event or feeling about someone/something and can it be connected to a certain time and place?

I am soon 32 years and all my friends have children, more than one.

So I have no one to talk to IRL, I talk to my friends but since no one
have the slightest problem getting pregnant it is not the same thing –
(“Unaangelita” #465)

In the citation above “Unaangelita” (#465) refers to the friends, the way the friends are
described positively but that they are “them” the others those who are not unwantedly
cchildless and therefore cannot understand how that feels like. Time and place is here
firstly the time and place in which this post was written but it also refers to that the
friends are in a time and place whereas they all have children which means that they
have passed into a time and place of parenthood.

The relations are struggling due to how unwanted childlessness is experienced as a
hidden stigma by creating a constant feeling of social exclusion from child related
activities such as child-talk, pregnant-talk, showing child pictures, participating in child
birthday parties or other gatherings like Christmas as described by “Butterfly32” (#463)
“Now 6 of my closest friends have 1-2 children each. Our siblings have children. Every
Christmas, birthday and wedding day is a difficult experience”. It is not just gatherings
with friends and family that is difficult since children are everywhere as “LadyMaria”
(#460) puts it “All our friends have children now….and wherever you turn everything is
about children and family, even when you watch the TV the commercials are about that
:(“. The post written by “LadyMaria” is an example of the relation to the outside world
and how you never can escape feeling excluded when children are a fundamental part of
society. Sometimes the relation to the people with children as friends and family
becomes so unbearable that a relation no longer is possible as expressed below by “Jag
är bara jag” (#462):

My solution is that I have abolished pregnant people and babies- I
would not have survived otherwise. I’m giving that as an advice, you
do not have to be surrounded by pregnant people and babies if it is
hard for you!

The post by “Jag är bara jag” (#462) displays the dilemma of the relations In Real Life
to people with children for the unwantedly childless when avoiding or abolishing people
with children will lead to further exclusion. You might have to end former relations that
have meant a lot and also the complexity of not being able to avoid your family’s social
gatherings that might hurt and be bad for you. A complex and emotionally draining
relation to friends, family or workmates with children is found overall in the posts but the following post by “Somjagläntgar” (#448) show a positive relation “I have as stated a lot of friends who have children and we still have a really good contact”. A positive feeling or experience of the relations In Real Life for the unwantedly childless like that was an exception.

Another theme within this discourse Relations In Real Life is the unwanted exposing process many posts experienced at the workplace due to the vacancy needed for In Vitro Fertilization treatment as humiliating and stressful as “Wittra” (#453) explains below:

“My boss knows also of course, because you have to be vacant for egg picking, etc, it was she who thought that I should tell my closest colleagues. It felt so uncomfortable telling them, it felt like “getting undressed”

“Wittra” (#453) explains above how being exposed at work feels like “getting undressed” which is describing a very strong feeling.

The relations between the sub-forum and the outside world did not improve as the posts expressed a lot of ignorance and low knowledge about unwanted childlessness from people outside the online community sub-forum in the form of “good advice” on how to get pregnant as for example the good advice given to “Jag är bara jag” (#441) “buy a dog! ”It has helped many, then the baby comes as a mail to the mailbox”. Gah!!!!!!! I am soon tearing my hair- are people generally this stupid?” These good advices are experienced by the posts as ignorance, stupidity and myths that just further reinforce the stigma as the “good advices” further state that everyone can get pregnant if you just do it right. The identity construction of the outside world refers to the ethos of the text and shows that an “us” and “them” is constructed as “them” are ignorant or not knowledgeable about the experiences of being unwantedly childless (“us”).

All the relations In Real Life have a common thread and that is how being unwantedly childless and unwanted childlessness leads to a social exclusion that you have not yourself chosen which affects your relations In Real Life. The outside pressure from friends and family due to the norm in the outside community to have children therefore further makes the exclusion complex by creating a dilemma for the unwantedly childless. The relations In Real Life before being unwantedly childless and the relations In Real Life after knowing you are unwantedly childless. Your friends,
family and workmates, all or partly, have already transitioned into parenthood, a transitioning the unwantedly childless cannot do which force a change onto the relations for the unwantedly childless. This is a complex change that puts the unwantedly childless in a dilemma, how to maintain relations with friends, family and workmates without feeling bad.

Relational- Cultural Theory focuses on relationships for mental health and from a Relational- Cultural Theory perspective the relations In Real Life the unwantedly childless always feel excluded from those with children. To isolate yourself from others with children creates disconnection and isolation that can lead to mental unhealthiness (Comstock et al, 2008). From an intersectional perspective the relations In Real Life further demonstrates how unwanted childlessness is an emotional as well as physical subordinated positioned attribute towards people with children. This due to how the unwantedly childless felt that they are excluded due to their inadequacy to be pregnant both as a feeling and as a bodily manifestation (Jordan- Zachery, 2007).

5.5 Discourse: The supportive community

This discourse, The supportive community, refers to the posts that express understanding from the other posts and how belonging to the sub-forum creates some sort of social support, self-help or “therapy”. The supportive community is about the relations within the sub-forum. The posts create in some extent a truth about the online community as supportive which refers to the modality of the text, how the text creates assent and this can be seen in the post by “Draugloth” (#472) “Just wanted to share with someone who understands my pain. And who understands that it hurts so much even if you have “just” tried for 1 year”. The post by “Draugloth” (#472) also referred to a difference between the sub-forum online community and the outside world. The posts constructs an identity of the online community sub-forum as supportive and understanding in relation to the identity of the outside world which is unsupportive or not capable of understanding the unwantedly childless or unwanted childlessness and this refers to the ethos of the text, the identity construction. This further creates an “us” and “them” as “LadyMaria” (#460) writes “You are here thank God but I am feeling so alone in this real life”.

The posts often express difficult emotions and frustration of being unwantedly childless and the comments for such posts tried to be supportive. This show that the
comments have an almost therapeutic role. This refers to the *transitivity of the text* as the posts in a supportive and understanding way tried to help another post that was in a circumstance of supportive need in that particular time and place (sub-forum). The following post is a response in order to help:

> Have you been looking for help at a curator/psychologist? It can feel better sometimes to put words on the feelings. It has helped me a lot in our struggle. It doesn’t take away the grief, but it eases the stress that I feel. I wish you all happiness and really hope that you will get what you wish! Hug! – (“Babyheart” #450)

The online community sub-forum becomes a place to be understood and supported, a sort of self-help where the comments to post that felt out of hope got supportive comments of encouragement or even tips for seeking professional support outside the online community sub-forum as shown in the post above by “Babyheart” (#450). In this way the sub-forum creates a safe zone for those who posts, it is ok to feel all those negative feelings and no one needs to know who is posting when all the nicknames at the sub-forum are anonymous.

From a Relational- Cultural Theory perspective relations are very important and it could be that the online community sub-forum can create those relations of support the outside community for some reason cannot. In that case the support from within the sub-forum is a very important part for the unwantedly childless that could be a place of self-help for mental health and personal development (Comstock et al, 2008). The positive experience of social support can from an intersectional perspective be understood as problematic due to the emotional and physical subordination experienced by the unwantedly childless in relation to people with children (Jordan-Zachery, 2007).

### 6. Discussion

In the discussion I will discuss the results in relation to social support and the larger community - the society - as the aim of this study is to problematize the social support at online communities for unwanted childlessness by analyzing the discourses created of the unwantedly childless and unwanted childlessness within a Swedish online community. This with the purpose of relating online social support to the mainstream society and its norm for having children.
The discussion in this study will relate to the non-discourse level of Fairclough’s model of Critical Discourse Analysis; the sociocultural practice and the results from level 1 and level 2 of Fairclough’s model for Critical Discourse Analysis. The results from level 1 represents the four discourses found in the text by doing a syntax analyses, grammar analyses and analyzing the identity construction; the ethos. The results from level 2; the discourse practice, is represented in the overall theme of the line between “us” and “them” by analyzing the intertextuality of the text, how the text is related to other texts: the commercials.

6.1 The results in relation to aim and questions: The sociocultural practice

The collective identity of the sub-forum is hope with the meaning to never give up hope about getting pregnant one day no matter how old you are or how bad you feel. Hope in the results meaning not to accept the fact of unwanted childlessness. The results also show how the sub-forum, the online community is a safe zone for the unwantedly childless and provides social support. The collective identity of hope sets a norm for what social support should be and thereby take no consideration to more serious feelings for example suicidal feelings. This creates a dilemma since the online community sub-forum is experienced as a supportive zone and is thereby trusted in its social support for the unwantedly childless. It can be that the supportive hope is not helping when someone posts that they will kill themselves if they do not get pregnant soon. To meet such a comment with hope that miracles can happen, can be dangerous as it further states that unwanted childlessness is not something to accept, ever.

The norm for hope inside the online community as well as the outside societal norm for having children increases the pressure on the unwantedly childless to never give up. The society in the results is represented of the relations In Real Life with friends, family and workmates whom in the results was expressed as unsupportive or unaware of unwanted childlessness in general and being unwantedly childless in particular. The relations In Real Life and the unsupportive experiences of the unwantedly childless further make them trust the social support provided by the online community sub-forum. The societal norm for having children can also be seen in the intertextuality of the text where the line between “us” and “them” is further reinforced.
In the results it is noted that it is mostly, perhaps only, women who post in the online community sub-forum and they express how they have failed as women, as getting pregnant seems to be the purpose of life itself. These feelings are justified as the collective identity of hope further lets them know that they should not accept their unwanted childlessness.

The social support given at the online community sub-forum for unwanted childlessness emerges as a support built on the societal norm for having children. Motherhood is seen as holy and this is further reinforced by the social support than challenged. In many cases the social support thereby becomes a way to keep a negative understanding of unwanted childlessness as a life failure instead of empowering the unwantedly childless by challenging the societal norm for having children. In this way the social support become very two-sided. The unwantedly childless feel that they got support, which is important, but the norms/ideology underlying that social support might just further reinforce unwanted childlessness as a life failure you should forever feel worthless for.

According to Relational- Cultural Theory the exclusion of an individual or group by the society due to the cultural context, in this case being unwantedly childless, should not be accepted if it is oppressive. The individual or the group should not conform to the society in such case but fight for social justice (Comstock et al, 2008). This further shows how the social support given at an online community for unwanted childlessness can rather empower than reinforce societal norms that are oppressive. The social support within the online community sub-forum is though reinforcing the norm for having children instead of challenging it. Relational- Cultural Theory take notice of this paradox but might not be able to explain it as it does not take notice of why connectedness and belonging can mean something negative even though experienced as positive and supportive on an individual level. What is most important: the individual experience of social support by connectedness and belonging or the social change of societal norms that are oppressive or excluding for social justice?

According to intersectionality the norm for having children can by the unwantedly childless be experienced as having an emotional and physical subordinated positioning in relation to people with children in the mainstream society (Jordan- Zachery, 2007). This emotional and physical subordination will in that case not disappear on the online community by itself since the norm for having children is always present as a structure
of how the unwantedly childless have learnt to position themselves towards people with children in terms of feeling inadequate both emotionally and physically.

In summary; Relational- Cultural Theory can problematize the social support at the online community sub-forum that was studied in this study to a certain degree but it lacks the structural understanding of different attributes by Intersectionality and how the unwantedly childless positioned themselves in an emotional subordination to the people with children even in a context; the online community, where the unwantedly childless feel connected and that they belong.

6.2 The results in relation to previous research: Two sides of social support

The results have a strong coherence with previous research in which the online community’s importance for providing social support is stated. In previous research social support is looked upon as something mostly positive. The previous research is done on the unwantedly childless who tried to come to terms with their unwanted childlessness by looking forward in life (Malik and Coulson, 2013, Korolczuk, 2014). In this study the unwantedly childless at the online community sub-forum does not try to come to terms with their unwanted childlessness and that is probably the reason for the more negative results on the social supports role for unwanted childlessness on online communities found in this study. The results thereby follows the results of the previous research by Malik and Coulson (2010) who note that sharing negative stories on the online community have a negative effect on the unwantedly childless.

The results display that it was mostly women who used the sub-forum and it is also stated in the previous research by Malik and Coulson (2010). If this is because women are facing a stronger stigma as stated by Wirtberg (2008) cannot be concluded in this study. The results also display how unwanted childlessness is a hidden stigma due to the exclusion when interacting with friends, family and workmates which also is noted in the previous research by Welbourne et al (2013) and Wirtberg (2008). Finally in the results a collective identity on the online community sub-forum is created which can be seen in the previous research by Korolczuk (2014). The collective identity in Korolczuk (2014) is based on social change where the negative identity of unwanted childlessness is challenged and thereby empowering which is reflected in the social support. The social support in Korolczuk (2014) is thereby challenging the societal norm for having
children. In this study the results show the opposite, how the collective identity of hope is further reinforcing the norm for having children instead of challenging it. The social support have two sides to it, when challenging the societal norm for having children it becomes positive as noted in the previous research by Korolczuk (2014) and Malik and Coulson (2013) but when the norm is not challenged it becomes problematic and to some extent negative as the social support then further reinforces social exclusion and stigma for unwanted childlessness.

7. Conclusion

The results show how important social support can be for people living with unwanted childlessness and that an online community can fill a void that the outside society does not seem to be able to today. It is important to notice how different the outcomes of the social support becomes depending on the reasons for joining the online community. This is displayed when comparing the results of this study with the previous research. In this study the social support have two sides. The two sides refer to the societal norm for having children and how the outcome of the social support become empowering when questioning the norm. However the social support is further oppressive when the norm is not challenged by the online community. This study is done on a sub-forum for those who did not want to accept their unwanted childlessness and the previous research is done on online communities that wanted to change the identity of unwanted childlessness to something positive.

The complexity of the social support stated in the collective identity of hope as being a norm for how to relate to unwanted childlessness is further problematized due to how the people (mostly women) experience the sub-forum as the only place where they are understood. The sub-forum thereby have a very important role in the life of the unwantedly childless that should not be overlooked. This creates a paradox in relation to Relational-Cultural Theory which cannot explain how the individual experience of connectedness and belonging within the online community sub-forum can be negative in a larger societal context. This due to how the societal norm for having children is reinforced by the social support at the sub-forum. This paradox can be better explained by Intersectionality as unwanted childlessness is an attribute in an emotional and physical subordinated position in relation to people with children in terms of feeling inadequate. This emotional positioning recurs on the online community if it is not questioned by the unwantedly childless themselves. A dilemma of what to consider
emerges: Is it still empowerment if the unwantedly childless themselves wants to hold on to the societal norm for having children as a life-goal even though the norm itself is oppressive or excluding?

### 7.1 Self-critical reflection and limitations

This study is conducted by doing a Critical Discourse Analysis on a marginalized group and therefore a self-critical reflection is suitable to reveal my own subjectivity and reasons for conducting this study. I stated in the methodology that I am aware of my subjectivity and that the theories used for this study carries values that relate to my own values as for example being a feminist. I can acknowledge how these values also have been reflected in the analyzing process, the results and finally the discussion. I have emphasized a great value for the societal norm in the society on having children. Especially what this norm creates for women by making the motherhood holy and making their bodies to fail and particularly how this norm is related to social support at the online community sub-forum. This is a feminist view as well as a critical view of power as structural.

I further need to be self-critical towards my categorization of the unwantedly childless as a marginalized group and I have tried not to further state their exclusion but to deepen the multifaceted complexity of being unwantedly childless. I have emphasized with the unwantedly childless as a group as I should when doing a Critical Discourse Analysis but I have also felt the need to criticize the social support provided by the unwantedly childless themselves at the online community sub-forum but with the notion that they are also a part of the norm for having children and shall not carry more responsibility for questioning it than anyone else.

### 7.2 Suggestions for future research

Future research on online communities for unwanted childlessness could be how to create social support on the online communities for those who are unwantedly childless in an empowering and challenging way towards changing the norm for having children as the (only) meaning of life. Social workers might create such viral places of social support of empowerment for social justice? Furthermore future research could specialize in how men experience unwanted childlessness and how the social support online also will include them and if they have a need for viral social support?
I have realized that social support is a complex social issue. It can therefore not be easy to change the identity of unwanted childlessness when the norm for having children is deeply rooted on an individual level, both emotionally and physically, where being a parent and being a mother is all you dream about. Referring back to the introducing citation by Lorenzoni (2012, p.7):

*I am dreaming.*

*I start here, with me dreaming. My stomach is big and round*
8. Literature


Malik, S. & Coulson, N. (2010). ‘They all supported me but I felt like I suddenly didn´t belong anymore’: an exploration of perceived disadvantages to online support seeking. *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 31(3), 140-149.


8.1 Text material


Page 47 (post #460-469) at the sub-forum ”LESS på ofrivillig barnlöshet? Skriv av dig!, http://www.familjeliv.se/forum/thread/72116073-less-pa-ofrivillig-barnloshet-skriv-av-dig/47