

Jesus Didn't Tap

A discourse analysis of the Christian MMA landscape

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Foreword

This thesis is a the finishing piece of my studies in religious studies in Groningen. During my studies, I developed a personal interest in MMA and an academic interest in gender. As such, a thesis combining these two interests is the fitting capstone to the past nine years.

I came up with the central question and the structure of the thesis in close collaboration with my supervisor Erin Wilson, who has been an important help in the process. Also, my second supervisor, Mathilde van Dijk, has been a great help. They spend a lot of time helping me with both the content of the thesis and with motivating words to help me go on with a project that seemed endless at times.

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Last but not least, I want to thank my friends and family. My parents for supporting me during the two years that the writing of this thesis took. I would like to thank my friends at GGW, who accompanied me during the writing process, especially Job-Jan, Elske and Martijn. Of course, the person who helped me in every way possible, has been my girlfriend: Loes. Thank you, Loes, for everything you have done for me in these two years.

For now: I hope you enjoy reading this thesis.

Jon Elbert

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1. Introduction

The fastest growing sport amongst young men in the United States is mixed martial arts (MMA) (Philpott 2010; Dooley 2013: 63). MMA is a combat sport involving the use of “a combination of techniques from different disciplines of the martial arts, including, without limitation, grappling, submission holds, kicking and striking” (UFC 2011). A fight can be won by judges decision, (technical) knockout or submission. In case of a submission a fighter usually taps the floor or his opponent with the hand, as a sign that he admits defeat, referred to as ‘tapping’ or ‘to tap out’. Since the first UFC event¹ in 1993, MMA has been controversial, because of its supposed health risks and brutal aesthetics (Dooley 2013: 63).

Among the supporters of MMA are, according to the Schneiderman (2010), “pastors of roughly 700 ... white Evangelical churches in America.” A quick look on ChristianPost.com² shows various articles discussing the desirability of Christians participating in MMA. An MMA clothing brand calls itself *Jesus Didn't Tap*, stating on their website that “Jesus didn't quit after going through unimaginable suffering and pain when he was crucified on the cross.” (Jesus Didn't Tap 2015) Website fightland.vice.com aired a documentary about Christian MMA fighters, and in this thesis, I take a look at, among others, New Calvinist pastor Mark Driscoll, who wrote the essay ‘A Christian Evaluation of Mixed Martial Arts’.

Mark Driscoll is an influential pastor in the New Calvinist movement. In this thesis he is a central figure, because of his influence and his vocal, explicit support for MMA. In a documentary appearance about MMA he said that “as a Bible teacher, I think that God made men masculine ... In the end of the day ... two guys are gonna go at it and see which one is the dude.” This statement tells the following about Driscoll's opinion on MMA: according to Driscoll, MMA is basically two ‘dudes’ fighting. As such it is a violent sport. Furthermore he sees the act of two men fighting as something that is not necessarily to be condemned. Lastly, he sees two *men* fighting, and he sees this as a natural phenomenon, because God “made men masculine.”

As such, the quote raises numerous questions. In the first place it raises questions about violence and Christianity. Christianity is generally seen as a peaceful religion (see World Council of Churches 2011; Catholic Church 1993). Yet if Christianity is opposed to violence, how can Mark Driscoll and the other 700 white Evangelical churches that the New York Times counts, value MMA in a positive way? Secondly, Driscoll links violence to masculinity here. He even suggests that it is how men are made. How does this fit in his Christian world view? In order to answer these

1 UFC stands for Ultimate Fighting Championship. 'UFC 1' is often considered to be the birth of modern MMA.

2 <http://www.christianpost.com> is an influential nondenominational, evangelical Christian news website that was founded in 2004 (Christian Post 2015). It is visited 47.900 times daily (Statstool 2015).

questions I will analyze texts of and about a number of these pastors, focusing primarily on Mark Driscoll.

Thus, as the central research question in this thesis I will investigate:

What understanding of the relationship between violence, gender and Christianity has made it possible for New Calvinist Evangelicals in the United States to support and promote participation in MMA?

In order to answer this question, I will address the following sub-questions:

How has the relationship between violence, gender and Christianity been described in existing theory and literature, specifically in the context of the United States?

What is MMA and to what extent can it be considered a ‘violent’ sport?

What is New Calvinism? What is its relationship to other forms of evangelicalism? What conceptions of gender and violence exist within New Calvinism and how are these justified?

How do understandings of gender and violence within New Calvinism enable the promotion and justification of participation in MMA by New Calvinist pastors and MMA sportsmen?

Before answering these questions, I will give a short introduction to their theoretical background. I will also give a short explanation of my methodology and the structure of this thesis.

1.1 MMA

In various historical periods, different combat sports have existed in which different fighting styles were combined. The ancient Greeks had Pancrase, a combination of boxing, wrestling and other techniques (Crowther 1985: 89-90), the U.S. and the U.K. in the 19th century had ‘no holds barred’ competitions (a hybrid form of wrestling), Thailand had Thai-boxing, which evolved to kickboxing in the twentieth century, and since the 1990s, Japan and America have had organizations like UFC, PRIDE, Pancrase, and Strikeforce, which organized events that were known as Mixed Martial Arts events, or MMA.

Another development that existed alongside most of the above mentioned is the informal practice of Vale Tudo in Brazil. Vale Tudo, meaning ‘anything goes’, matches were held in Brazil in the twentieth century between practitioners of different fighting disciplines. Often these matches were singular events, with new rules set up for every particular fight. Although often Vale Tudo matches were held in the private surrounding of a gym, sometimes they were held in public. For example, the match between Japanese Judo-star Masahiko Kimura and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu-founder Hélio Gracie in 1951, was held publicly and drew a crowd of 20,000 in the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro (Grant 2012).

Besides the afore-mentioned, other style-vs-style matchups have taken place outside existing organizations such as K-1, PRIDE or the UFC. Such matchups include the fight between boxing champion Muhammad Ali and Japanese wrestler Antonio Inoki in Tokyo, 1976 (Bull 2009). Thus one could argue that MMA as a combination of combat styles has existed long before the founding of organizations such as K-1 and the UFC.

However, modern MMA, I would argue, has its direct roots in the event UFC, later called UFC 1, which took place in 1993. Although K-1 was an earlier style-vs-style martial arts competition, I see this as a kickboxing competition, because grappling isn't allowed in K-1 fights, whereas in most definitions of MMA, grappling is seen as a core attribute of MMA. UFC 1, or the Ultimate Fighting Championship, was an event held in New York, which was intended to identify the best fighting style in the world. Showing this in an objective way was achieved through a minimization of the rules to a maximum extent. Although the world was shocked to see such extreme levels of violence in a sanctioned event, a UFC fan base soon came into existence after the event.

Since then, the UFC has seen considerable growth, but then also a rapid decline due to political opposition. This decline stopped when two casino owners from Las Vegas bought the almost bankrupt organization, and successfully invested in advertising campaigns that attracted more fans and participants. Another important matter that stopped the decline was the start of a real life television show called 'The Ultimate Fighter'. This show led to a resurgence in popularity of the UFC, and of MMA in general, in the early 2000s. Recently, with big stars such as Jon Jones and Ronda Rousey, and the fights being broadcast on national television, MMA seems to have claimed its place in the American mainstream.

Thus two important characteristics of MMA can be seen: the use of techniques from different combat sports and a minimal rule set. As a result it is difficult to control the levels of physical violence that participants engage in, raising the question of whether MMA can indeed be considered a violent sport.

1.2 MMA and Violence

The statement that being both Christian and a supporter of MMA is paradoxical suggests that on one hand Christianity, as I mentioned above, is a pacifist religion, on the other hand it suggests that MMA is a violent sport. In determining whether MMA can be considered a violent sport or not, there are three important questions to take into account: 1. What is violence? 2. How violent is MMA? And 3. What different 'types' of violence are present in MMA? In response to the first question, the definition of violence given by the Encyclopedia of Religion, which begins as follows:

In current research, violence is understood in several different ways. In common speech,

violence usually refers to physical force directed against another human being in order to inflict bodily harm or, in extreme cases, death. This narrow use of the term is easily extended to include physical violence against other living beings and material objects. Violence may be a spontaneous emotional reaction to a provocation; premeditated; or institutionalized and ritualized, as in the violence associated with warfare, torture, or punishment (Graf 2005: 9595).

This leads me to three identifying characteristics of violence: 1. violence refers to physical force; 2. it is intended to harm someone and 3. violence can have numerous causes. Regarding MMA, both Abramson & Modzelewski (2010) and Sánchez García & Malcolm (2010) argue that the supposedly high level of violence that exists in MMA requires nuance. Abramson & Modzelewski state that “Fighters repeatedly invoke the distinction between a sportive contest that may potentially involve hurting an opponent or being injured, and what they see as true violence - an attempt to hurt or kill people out of animosity or anger, for instrumental gain, or duty (Wacquant 1995a, b: 2004)” (Abramson & Modzelewski 2010: 160). Sánchez García & Malcolm make a distinction between instrumental and affective violence, also to separate the use of violence as an instrument to achieve the sporting goal of winning from the use of violence with the aim to hurt someone. In addition to that they present us with certain statistics that show how MMA has lower death rates than for example boxing, and is therefore a less violent sport (Sánchez García & Malcolm 2010: 47-48). Furthermore both articles divide spectators from participants. Whereas the former experience extreme violence, featuring hybrid fighting styles, bloodied fighters and a limited rule set, the latter experience fighting as “a game of chess” in which they use “controlled violence” in a controlled environment, where there is “no animosity between fighters” (Abramson & Modzelewski 2010: 159-160).

The implicit definition of violence provided by the articles I referred to is intentionally doing (physical) harm to another person. The level of violence increases when the rule set diminishes, yet it decreases when fighters use ‘controlled violence’, that is when fighters seek not to injure their opponent, and when a fight happens with consent of the participants. The limited rule set of MMA and consequently the great chance of severe physical damage lead me to a description of the sport as being (extremely) violent compared to other combat sports, though not as violent as armed conflict or hand combat occurring outside a sporting context.

As such I define the violence seen in MMA as physical (1); I do not define it as intended to harm someone (2), although there will always be damage inflicted upon the contestants as it is a necessary means to win the contest; and I follow Abramson and Sánchez García, who deem MMA less violent than for example a street fight, because the violence is caused by the desire to win a

sports event (3). The high level of violence found in MMA, I argue, is the result of a minimal rule set, allowing a lot of physical damage to the contestants. Thus I regard MMA as violent, referring to the first attribute of violence given in the definition of the Encyclopedia of Religion: inflicting bodily harm.

However, my material presents different ‘types’ of violence. When I analyze my material on the topic of violence, I look at words like ‘fighting’, ‘violent’, ‘wrestle’, etc. When pastors use these words, they can mean roughly three different things: spiritual or metaphorical fighting, which is for example fighting the devil, or fighting temptations; ‘real’ fighting, which is to inflict physical damage to someone else, for example in a street fight or in war; and MMA, which is in a sense ‘real’ fighting, because people are physically harmed, yet it is not ‘truly’ violent, for the contestants are engaging in an athletic enterprise, not aiming to hurt each other, although hurting your opponent is both allowed and often involved in the process of beating an opponent, and they follow certain rules during their fight.

1.3 American Evangelicalism and New Calvinism

The pastors that I look at in this thesis are American pastors, who stand in the tradition of Evangelical Christianity. One of the key figures of my research, Mark Driscoll, belongs to a movement within Evangelical Christianity that is referred to as New Calvinism. The views of the pastors in this thesis are rooted in these traditions. A third important movement that is apparent in this thesis is a movement called ‘Muscular Christianity’. It has its origins in the nineteenth century and has been a factor ever since in American Christianity. I will discuss Evangelicalism and New Calvinism here briefly. I will then discuss Muscular Christianity in the section ‘Gender and Christianity’.

Evangelicalism is a movement with its roots in the First and Second Great Awakening, periods of religious revival in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was then characterized by a focus on the reconciliation between God and humanity through the crucifixion, a call to personal conversion and a positive outlook on the future and as a result a strong emphasis on evangelization. Conflict between the traditional ‘mainline’ churches and within Evangelical Christianity arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the light of the conflicts between traditional and liberal theology. As a result, the contemporary Evangelical landscape is very pluralistic, ranging from progressive Evangelicals to fundamentalists and Pentecostals. To get a grasp of what evangelical Christianity is, I therefore use the definition of Bebbington (1989) who focuses on four elements to describe evangelical Christianity: 1. Conversionism, this is the idea that “lives need to be transformed through a ‘born-again’ experience and a life long process of following Jesus” (NAE 2012). 2. Activism, which means being actively missionary. 3. Biblicism, the idea that the highest

and ultimate authority lies in the Bible. 4. Crucicentrism, which means a strong focus on Jesus' crucifixion as a means to redeem humanity.

The evangelical movement that is most present in my material is New Calvinism. This movement relates to Calvinism, but is also different from traditional Calvinism. John Piper, a central figure in the movement, points out the importance of the "five points of Calvinism" for New Calvinism. These five points are often summarized in the acronym 'TULIP': Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saint (Piper 1985). Oliphint (2014) adds to this a number of characteristics that he considers typical of *New Calvinism*, which include: a strong complementarian view on gender, being culture-affirming and actively mission-driven, and being inter-denominational, with a strong Baptist element. As such it fits very much in Bebbington's definition of evangelical Christianity. According to the *New York Times* (2014), New Calvinism is growing very quickly, and Evangelicalism is "in the midst of a Calvinist revival." I will elaborate more on New Calvinism in Chapter Two.

1.4 Gender and Christianity

Before introducing the idea of Muscular Christianity, I will give a short (historical) introduction to gender, the feminine and the masculine, and the relationship between men and women in Christianity. In the first place I will explain what it means that God is referred to as He. Then I will give a historical overview of (male) positions of power in the Church. I will then show how women created their own power, based in piety. I will also elaborate on the shift in gender relations that took place in the twentieth century, before introducing Muscular Christianity in the final part of this chapter.

In *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction*, Woodhead (2004) explains that the Bible does not view women and men as equal. Also, although rituals are open to both sexes, the framework underlying the Church, which for example for centuries only allowed men to preach, is more positive towards men than it is towards women. It can be said that in Christianity men are conceived to be the norm. God is referred to as He and although He is assumed to be sexless, referring to God as She and Her has led, and still leads to controversy. Furthermore, the Bible states that God created man in His own image. That is: he created Adam in His image. Woman, Eve, is taken from Adam's rib and therefore secondary, and as such not created in the image of God. She is dependent of Adam. Furthermore it was Eve who sinned before Adam did. As a result women have been told that they "must discipline [their] body and [their] bodily appetites more harshly" than men. As a result of this connection between the masculine and the divine, in Early Christianity women aimed to destruct their female bodies and become 'spiritual men' (Woodhead 2004: 131-132).

Also, according to Woodhead, the image of God as Father also shows itself in the organization of

the Church. The pastor is a 'father' for his congregation, the Catholic Church is led by the pope (*il papa* - father). Historically, the (Catholic) Church has been represented as a family. This does not exclude women from the Church; it does however exclude women from positions of authority. And as such it reaffirms men as powerful and as those closest to God (Woodhead 2004: 133-134).

In this 'family model' the role of women is to care. However, according to Woodhead this caring role does give women a certain position of power. In the first place, their feminine role in the Church and the family prevents men from taking and exercising unlimited power. Secondly, they can find respect and gratification in the idealizing of typical 'feminine' virtues, such as patience and care. As a result female piety arose in the late Middle Ages, which included a more feminized image of Christ. In the 19th century the number of women doing charitable work increased, which led to more informal power for women (Woodhead 2004: 136-139).

Around the *fin de siècle* women started to outnumber men in Church, a development that continued in the twentieth century. Combined with the rise of feminism in the Western world, this development of 'feminization' has led to friction in the Church. Churches however hardly reacted to this. According to Woodhead (2004: 141-143) this might be a factor in the rapid secularization in the West. However, in most countries outside Europe and the U.S. Christianity is still growing, while feminism is not. Therefore the emergence of so-called Feminist Theology, which tries to find ways to make Christianity a religion that does not benefit men over women, is mostly successful in certain liberal Churches, whereas, according to Woodhead, the conservative Churches, both inside and outside the Western world, still remain indifferent (Woodhead 2004: 141).

1.5 Muscular Christianity

Muscular Christianity is a phenomenon that entered the U.S. in the late nineteenth century. The movement within Christianity emerged as a reaction to the supposed feminization of the American church, as well as of society as a whole. According to Welter (1973) the Protestant Churches in the late 1800s were "more domesticated, more emotional, more soft and accommodating – in a word, more 'feminine' than their Puritan forebears" (Welter 1973: 307). The reaction to this feminine culture was the promotion of more masculine ideals. According to Putney (2010) two influential writers who represented these ideals were Englishmen Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes. In the books of these writers, athleticism and roughness were approved and even praised. This view conflicted with the Calvinist Protestantism of the U.S., which disapproved of physical exercise, viewing it as a sign of vanity. However, after the Civil War, Americans began seeing the supposed feminization of church and society as a threat, and the promotion of manliness was considered the answer. This led to a rise in the popularity of activities that were considered more "masculine", such as camping – the first church camp was held in 1880 (Putney 2010: 36) – and (team) sports. This

view of manliness, in which action is valued over reflection, experience over book learning, and pragmatic idealism over romantic sentimentality, is what characterizes Muscular Christianity.

1.6 Method

In order to relate New Calvinist ideas about violence and gender to MMA, I will analyze my data through the method of ‘discourse analysis’. Discourse analysis as an epistemological model has its roots in the work of Foucault, and has developed into numerous methods since. It is a way of researching the social world in terms of social constructions and is therefore very suitable for looking at how religious ideology and gender perceptions are constructed. In my analysis of the evaluation of violence in my data, I draw upon Van Dijk’s (2011) method of ‘Ideological Discourse Analysis’. I make this choice, because I look at texts from pastors, in which views of violence are presented in an ideological way - that is: pastors create a ‘We’-group that is based on religiously ideological opinions.

For the gender analysis of my material, I draw upon the work of several gender scholars. In the first place, gendered use of language was recognized by Simone de Beauvoir. In her work *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949) she recognized the sexist bias of language. Her work has led later feminist social scientists to focus on the hidden messages about gender in texts (Kramarae 2011) and to the way people ‘do’ gender. That is: people behave in a way they learned, choosing to (or not to) obey the gendered standards (Butler 2004). In the analysis chapter I will give a more widespread overview of both discourse analysis and the place of gender within it.

1.7 Chapter Outline

In the following chapters, I will answer the question *What understanding of the relationship between violence and gender has made it possible for New Calvinist Evangelicals in the United States to support and promote participation in MMA?* In order to answer this question I adopt a theoretical framework combining social constructionism and feminism, which I outline in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, I discuss the historical background of Christianity and gender, Muscular Christianity, gender and sports, Evangelical Christianity, New Calvinism, and violence and Christianity. In Chapter Four, I explain my choice of discourse analysis methodology, and outline how I perform this. In Chapter Five, I perform the analysis itself, consisting of an ideological discourse analysis and a gender discourse analysis. I then present my key findings and outline future directions for research in the conclusion.

2. Theory

In this chapter I explain the theoretical assumptions underlying the methodology of my analysis. I will first write about the epistemological model of social constructionism, which is closely related to the methodology of discourse analysis. I will then give an overview of how I view gender and masculinity. I will do this based on the work of feminist scholars and therefore labeled the section 'Feminism' instead of 'Gender'.

2.1 Social Constructionism

In *The Gendered Society*, Kimmel (2004) states that "sociology begins with a critique of biological determinism." Thereby he means that from a sociological perspective gender is not an expression of inborn qualities, but rather the result of social interaction. As such, ideas about gender differ from culture to culture and over historical time. He calls this approach to gender 'constructionist'. This epistemological model, 'social constructionism', is also the model in which the methodology of this thesis, discourse analysis, is rooted. I will shortly discuss Burr's view on social constructionism here, followed by Edley (2001), who discusses critiques on social constructionism, and how these are often based on misconceptions considering ontology and epistemology.

Burr (1995) states that no single description of what social constructionism is can be given. Rather different viewpoints of social constructionist writers share a 'family resemblance', which is to say that these views have similarities, yet not necessarily an essential common characteristic. She sees however four key assumptions in social constructionist thinking, it being "a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge". Hereby she means, "conventional knowledge is [not] based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world" (Burr 1995: 3). Secondly, she emphasizes "[h]istorical and cultural specificity" of knowledge, by which she means that knowledge is always embedded in a cultural and historical context. Third: "Knowledge is sustained by social processes", that is to say that knowledge comes from social interaction as opposed to being derived from a 'natural', 'objective' world. And finally: "Knowledge and social action go together." This point means that different constructions will lead to different actions from human beings.

The constructionist view on social reality has its roots in the 'turn to language' in philosophy and psychology, in the 1970s and 1980s. According to Edley (2001) common sense assumes that there is a 'real' world, and representations of the world are just that: "re-presentations or copies of something original" (Edley 2001: 434). The turn to language criticized this model of representation. According to a number of anthropologists, philosophers and other social scientists, this was an inadequate model of language as a representation of reality. The relation between language and reality is more complicated than language 'mirroring' reality. Language is also a constructive force. Bradley (1998) and Nightingale and Cromby (1999) criticize this view, stating that it would mean

that for social constructionism language is the only reality, and that it denies the materiality of the body respectively. However, as Edley explains, when Foucault (1972) stated that discourse creates the objects of which it speaks, or Derrida (1976: 158) that ‘there is nothing outside of the text’, they do not mean that the world is purely textual. To understand that considering language as a constructive force does not mean that ‘everything *is* text’, it is important to make the distinction between ontological and epistemological explanations of social constructionism. Edley draws upon Edwards’ (1997: 47-48) statement that “the major sense of ‘social construction’ is epistemic; it is about the constructive nature of *description* rather than of the entities that ... exist beyond them.” As such, social constructionists do not suggest that there is no world outside of language, yet language is the system through which we perceive the world. As such, “epistemologically speaking, reality cannot exist outside of discourse, waiting for fair representation. Instead, it is the *product* of discourse, both the subject *and the result* of what talk is about” (Edley 2001: 437).

In this thesis I have a social constructionist approach to my material. This means that I view masculinity and femininity not as immutable natural phenomena, but as constructs that are the result of a complicated interplay of social, natural and psychological factors. What I investigate is the gender discourse that is present in my material, which is to say that I investigate how my research subjects construct models of masculinity and femininity and how this enables New Calvinist engagement in and promotion of MMA. The views on Christianity and violence present in my material are also part of discourses, ideological discourses, as I will explain in the chapter on methodology. In this part of the analysis, I will show that the viewpoints of my research subject on violence and Christianity are not based solely on the interpretation of Biblical texts. Instead, their views are the result of their views on Christianity, violence, and gender, embedded in their cultural, historical and political context. Further, I argue that there is an ideological aspect to these views.

2.2 Feminism

As I stated in the previous section, Kimmel (2004) argues that biological determinism is not the main cause of gender differences. As such, he criticizes the idea of ‘gender essentialism’. Essentialist theories, according to Smiler and Gelman (2008: 864), are theories which, often erroneously, hold that members of a category share a set of characteristics that is fixed and unchanging, and mostly present from birth. “Thus, in the realm of gender, essentialism would suggest that differences between males and females are stable, unchanging, fixed at birth, and due to biological differences rather than environmental factors” (Smiler and Gelman 2008: 864). Instead of an essentialist view on gender, Kimmel argues that gender differences are much more the result of social interaction.

The idea that many attributes of gender are actually not solely rooted in biological differences

between the sexes was probably first elaborated by Simone de Beauvoir. In *Le Deuxième Sexe*, De Beauvoir argued for sexual equality. She analyzed the model of patriarchal domination and how this was the result of cultural, social and religious traditions in Europe, which produced an ideology in which the woman was ‘naturally’ inferior to the man. De Beauvoir’s argument for sexual equality was twofold. In the first place, she focused on how masculine ideology creates a system of inequality. Secondly, she argued “that arguments for equality erase the sexual difference in order to establish the masculine subject as the absolute human type” (Bergoffen 2014). De Beauvoir fought for women’s equality, yet she insisted that sexual difference existed. However, to use it as an argument for women’s subordination she found it unjust and immoral.

One of the most notable sentences from *Le Deuxième Sexe* has been “One is not born but becomes a woman” (“*On ne naît pas femme: on le devient.*”) According to Berghoffen this sentence is often understood as making the distinction between sex and gender, though it is not clear if De Beauvoir meant it as such. Yet, regardless of De Beauvoir’s intention, through *Le Deuxième Sexe*, De Beauvoir “gave us the vocabulary for analyzing the social constructions of femininity and a method for critiquing these constructions” (Bergoffen 2014).

The notion that there is a difference between sex and gender is nowadays taken for granted in the social sciences. Yet there are different views on the way gender and sex are related as well as on how gender roles become constructed. Butler (1990) sees both sex and gender as constructions. These constructions, according to Butler, are ‘performative’. Thereby she means that acts are not an expression of gender identity, but that gender works the other way around: gender identities are the result of gendered acts (Butler 1990: 24-25, 136).

As stated above, Kimmel (2004) takes a social constructionist stance towards the issue of gender, by which he means those characteristics, attitudes, behaviors etc. that are *considered* masculine and feminine. For Kimmel sex is an anatomical category. For their relation, he draws from a 1994 Supreme Court case:

“The word ‘gender’ has acquired the new and useful connotation of cultural or attitudinal characteristics (as opposed to physical characteristics) distinctive to the sexes. That is to say gender is to sex as feminine is to female and masculine is to male” (J.E.B. v. Alabama, 114 S Ct., 1436 (1994); Kimmel 2004: 2-3).

When it comes to the construction of gender ideals, Kimmel points out the influence of four different contexts: In the first place, gender ideals differ from culture to culture. Second, they change over historical time. Third, gender ideals do not only differ over historical time, but also over the course of a person’s life. For example: men are found to ‘soften’ over the course of their

life. They tend to become more nurturing when they become grandfathers than when they were fathers. Kimmel (2004: 95) ascribes this development to a decrease of pressure to perform or to “leave a mark”. Fourth, gender ideals vary within a culture, by “race, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality, education, region of the country, etc.” (Kimmel 2004: 95).

In this thesis I investigate the gender identity that is masculinity. The ideal of masculinity has also changed over time and in different cultures. Varying both between and within cultures, John Beynon (2002) therefore argues that there is no such thing as ‘masculinity’. As there is not one single, fixed definition of masculinity, according to Beynon we must speak of ‘masculinities’. This does not mean, however, that nothing can be said about general themes occurring in certain cultures. For example, according to Beynon “western pop-culture ... continue[s] to celebrate the ‘he-man’” (Beynon 2002: 6).

MacInnes also (1998) problematizes the idea of masculinity. He suggests similar to Butler, that sex and masculinity are constructed, and not ontological realities. However, MacInnes questions the interconnection between masculinity and ‘maleness’. He argues that, when asking students to define masculinity, “[t]erms such as hard, aggressive, strong, dominant, remote, powerful, fearful of intimacy, rational, unemotional, competitive, sexist and their synonyms crop up regularly” (MacInnes 1998: 14). Yet these characteristic are not only attributed to men: “... discussion usually promptly turns to Margaret Thatcher” (MacInnes 1998: 14).

Ergo, the relationship between sex and gender is sometimes unclear. Yet what does this mean for my thesis? One could say that in general, masculinity is seen as the “cultural and attitudinal characteristics ... distinctive to the sexes.” Although sometimes masculine characteristics are ascribed to women, and vice versa, in most cultural and political discourses maleness and masculinity are necessarily connected, so in my data I consider attributes ascribed to men as features of masculinity. Within the context of this thesis, I focus on mostly Western conceptions of masculinity, such as Benon’s ‘he-man’. This idea of masculinity is for example described by Craib (1987: 723-724):

“The qualities of masculinity, however, seem invariable, and are associated with the male as breadwinner, provider, worker, the active and public half of the species: a man is strong, aggressive, rational, independent, task-orientated, invulnerable and successful (O'Neill 1982). Such qualities are listed whether the work is based on attitude surveys or whether it is theoretically derived, whether it is concerned with identifying a cultural stereotype, a sex or gender role or the male identity – a man’s sense of himself.”

A key term in studies on masculinity has been ‘hegemonic masculinity’. I will discuss Hearn

(2012) here, who elaborates on both hegemonic masculinity and the hegemony of men. Furthermore he discusses how these models of hegemony are related to men's violence. The concept of hegemony points to the way in which societal power, ideology, the notion of 'commonsense', the 'natural', and the 'normal' relate. Thus Connell (in Hearn 2012) defines hegemonic masculinity as "... the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 1995: 77).

Within this model of hegemonic masculinity, violence is mostly seen not as constitutive of gender relations as it is seen as a means to pre-existing ends (Hearn 2012: 592). Yet, Hearn does observe that men are more likely to abuse women than vice versa. Therefore he focuses not on hegemonic masculinity but on the hegemony of men. Whereas masculinity is an ideological concept and, as we have seen before, multiple masculinities exist, 'men' is a social category. The question that needs to be addressed is thus "how *legitimacy* works in patriarchy or patriarchal relations, and specifically how men's violence ... produces (or does not produce) legitimacy" (Hearn 2012: 604).

In this thesis, the way gender is constructed within an American evangelical Christian culture is the focus of research. I will look at if and how masculinity is contrasted to femininity and if this is the result of gender inequality. I will look at what is considered masculine behavior and how this behavior is valued. Lastly, I will look at the place of violence in the construction of masculinity that is present in my material, and ask if masculinity is considered to be a legitimization of violence.

3. Historical Background

In this chapter I look at the literature regarding the relationship between violence, gender and Christianity. Further, I look at gender and sports, Muscular Christianity and the history of Evangelical Christianity in the U.S., as such connecting the literature to New Calvinism and Mark Driscoll, central objects of my discourse analysis.

3.1 Christianity and Gender

In *Doctrine* (2010), Driscoll calls himself a ‘complementarianist’. This is a position on gender roles that he describes as follows: “... [C]omplementarianism ... mean[s] a husband and wife are equal with complementary roles (like a left and right hand that work together, though one is dominant)” (Driscoll 2010: 124). The opposite position of complementarianism is called ‘egalitarianism’ (Colaner and Giles 2008: 528). In Chapter One, I discussed Woodhead’s (2004) interpretation of the history of women in Christianity. In this section, I will elaborate on the issue of complementarianism and egalitarianism.

Complementarianism is a position which holds that God made women and men equal, yet God’s intent for their roles, both in the Church and in the family, is different. The complementarian position has been articulated in *The Danvers Statement* by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (1988). They advocated for distinct roles for men and women, and for men to have the “ultimate headship, authority, and responsibility in the marriage” (Colaner and Giles 2008: 528). Driscoll (2010: 124) stresses however that “this ... does *not* mean that a husband is in ultimate authority.” Yet, “in the creation account God establishes an order to the covenant of marriage and organizes the family with the husband as the leader and the head” (Driscoll 2010: 123). To support the position of complementarianism, its supporters often point to the fact that God reveals himself as Father. Furthermore, they point to for example 1 Corinthians 11:3: “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God” and “But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness” (1 Timothy 2:12). Referring to these texts, complementarianists hold that positions of power in the family as well as in the church should be for men. Scanzoni and Hardesty (1992) argue that women who hold complementarian views often focus on what they call the “woman’s sphere”, which consists of for example “keeping the suburban home ... tending the children, and supporting the church” (Scanzoni and Hardesty 1992: 206). As such, Colaner and Giles (2008: 528) state that although complementarianists argue for the equality of worth, they also argue that “men and women have unequal roles; specifically, women are helpers to men.” As such, one can say, complementarianists hold very one-sided, essentialist views of what it means to be a man or a woman.

Egalitarians however, claim that not only man and woman were created equal, but also gender roles should be abandoned. In 1989 the non-profit organization Evangelicals for Biblical Equality released a document entitled *Statement on Men, Women, and Biblical Equality*, in which they advocated gender equality. Egalitarians argue that God created man and woman equal (Genesis 1:27). Besides, they argue that Jesus' teachings abolished different gender roles for men and women. They therefore point to Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Egalitarians see marriage as a partnership between equals, advocating "mutuality in all aspects of life including home, church and career" (Colaner and Giles 2008: 528).

3.2 Muscular Christianity

In the late nineteenth century, the American Church was considered feminized by some. Why was this, and what does it mean? First of all, feminization was observed in other spheres of society as well as in the Church. Putney (2010: 31-32) lists three more spheres that were conceived as overly feminized, being education, literature and politics. The Church was also considered too feminine in character as it lauded female traits such as "nurturance, refinement, and sensitivity" (Putney 2010: 24). Moreover, education and the Church were also feminized statistically: in 1920, 80% of precollege teachers were women (Putney 2010: 31). In 1899, 75% of Church members were women and so were 90% of those attending service (Putney 2010: 41). This development led Douglas (1988) to formulate the 'feminization thesis'. She argues that in post-bellum U.S. 'manly men' chose business careers over ecclesiastical careers. Laymen were thus 'feminine' men, preaching for a female audience. As a result they were very fond of 'female' qualities, emphasized 'female' virtues, supported women's spiritual leadership at home, and Church imagery became sentimental and feminine. As such, in the late 1900s, the Protestant Churches were "more domesticated, more emotional, more soft and accommodating – in a word, more 'feminine' than their Puritan forebears" (Welter 1973: 307).

The 'manly reaction' to this femininity was the promotion of masculine ideals. Putney traces the roots of Muscular Christianity back to English writers Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) and Thomas Hughes (1822-1896). Core ideas in their books were the approval and even praise of athleticism and roughness. As they saw it, these attributes were virtues that were good and necessary for both religion and the leading role of the British Empire in the world. In the U.S. Kingsley and Hughes were generally well-received, but the rise of the desire to create a more muscular society and religion, was influenced by many more people – and events. An important event that held back Muscular Christianity and the popularity of sports in the U.S. was the Civil War. Men who proved themselves on the battlefield didn't feel inclined to prove themselves on the sports field again. The

U.S. had not yet witnessed the industrial revolution, which meant that many people did physical labor, thus did not worry about the underuse of their muscles. Lastly, the Calvinist Protestantism that characterized the U.S. at the time, was still hostile towards physical exercise, other than for labor.

However in post-war America the previously described feminization of both church and society in general was seen as a threat. One of the promoters of ‘manliness’ was later President Theodore Roosevelt, who did so in promoting what he called ‘the strenuous life’. This held the promotion of an attitude of action as opposed to reflection, experience as opposed to book learning, and pragmatic idealism as opposed to romantic sentimentality (Putney 2010: 33). These ideals led to a growing popularity of camping and (team) sports in the U.S. The development in broader society also had its impact on Christianity, and in 1880 the first church camp took place (Putney 2010: 36).

Yet in the relationship between sports and Christianity, other factors also come into play. As I mentioned, athleticism for a long time did not fit within the Calvinist Protestant tradition that was strong in America. However opinions on sport began to change. According to Hopkins (1951), theologians started to focus on justification criteria for participating in sport, such as no gambling, honoring the Sabbath, no physical harm-doing etc. As such, they were not actively campaigning for sports, and for example boxing still did not suit the criteria. According to Ladd and Mathisen (1999), it was Evangelical Christianity that made the true ‘marriage between faith and sports’ happen. The goal that for example Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield (Ladd and Mathisen 1999: 29) pursued was to combine education and sport to serve humanity. They thought of sport as having a moralizing influence. Putney (2010) also credits the “body as temple” theologians (Putney 2010: 56), who were positive about physical exercise and critical of the strong mind-body dualism, referring to the masculinity of Biblical characters, and linking strength to goodness and weakness to sin. According to Ladd and Mathisen (1999) there were two views on how this worked: through the adult supervision of the play of young men, or because participation in sports would inherently lead to the development of character-forming values (Ladd and Mathisen 63-64).

Advocates of Muscular Christianity are still found in contemporary evangelical Christianity, particularly in the U.S. A vocal and explicit advocate is John Piper, who was quoted as saying that “God revealed Himself in the Bible pervasively as king not queen; father not mother ... I conclude that God has given Christianity a masculine feel” (Murashko 2012). In his article ‘Muscular Christianity after 150 years’, MacAloon (2006: 687-700) paraphrases a Newsweek article (Newsweek 2004: 36, 44-45) that analyzed the presidential elections in terms of Muscular Christianity. The Newsweek article claimed that John Kerry had internalized an attitude of Muscular Christianity, where he had to “‘compete hard’ while never forgetting ‘the virtue of

humility, the sin of pride, the value of quiet service to others” to remember his privilege (MacAloon 2006: 691). George W. Bush’s Muscular Christianity on the other hand was described as a culture of “sporting ‘swells’ and fun-loving ‘regs.’” At Yale University this type of Muscular Christianity translated to being a “hard drinking, anti-intellectual frat-boy” (MacAloon 2006: 691). A famous exponent of the contemporary Muscular Christianity that MacAloon ascribes to John Kerry is Tim Tebow, a football player who was described by ESPN as a Muscular Christian for being vocal about his faith publicly (Thomassos 2011). According to the article he is a textbook example of traditional Muscular Christianity, “a version of Christianity that stressed athleticism and fortitude.” Yet according to MacAloon, both the ‘modest’ and the ‘outgoing’ versions of Muscular Christianity are part of Muscular Christianity, giving it the minimal definition: “‘moral character, military strength, and certitude’ built upon Christian faith” (MacAloon 2006: 691). Thus, when arguing that in my material Muscular Christianity is present, I argue that the discourse fits this definition. If this is the case, I will then specify its particular place in the Muscular Christian spectrum.

3.3 Gender and sports

Images of masculinity, as I stated above, are present in every culture and in every time. In sports images of masculinity exist as well. Professional wrestling is also a sport which is considered violent and is therefore potentially interesting to compare to MMA. Soulliere analyzed images of masculinity as present in the WWE³ in the article ‘Wrestling with Masculinity: Messages about Manhood in the WWE’ (2006). In this article she analyzed the content of multiple WWE television shows. Earlier studies showed that the WWE carries out hypermasculine values and that in general televised sports are a gendered genre. The results of the study showed six messages about what masculinity encompasses, being 1. “Real men are aggressive and violent.” 2. “Men settle things physically.” 3. “A man confronts his adversaries and problems.” 4. “Real men take responsibility for their actions.” 5. “Real men are not whiners.” And 6. “Men are winners.” In my analysis I will investigate if these, according to Soulliere, ‘hypermasculine’ values, can be found in my corpus as well.

Koivula analyzed televised sports as well, in the article ‘Gender Stereotyping in Televised Media Sport Coverage’ (1999). In this article Koivula analyzed national sports broadcasting on the Swedish television, focusing on the gendered presentation of sports. She found that in the first place, men’s sports received much more media attention than women’s sports. She did however observe increasing coverage of women sports in the period 1988-1996. In the presentation of

3 The WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment) is the biggest professional wrestling promotion in the USA and consequentially the world.

gendered sports, she found three remarkable results: in the first place, when speaking about women's sports, the gender of the participants was explicitly named, for example women's football. When men's sports were mentioned however, they were referred to as just the sport, for example 'football'. Secondly, women were often referred to as 'girls', men were never referred to as 'boys'. This also applied to 'ladies'; 'gentlemen' were virtually never found in sports. Lastly, she found that women were often defined in terms of relations, e.g. 'wife' or 'mother'. This, according to Koivula, indicates that men's sports are viewed as 'the norm'. In the same way, I will investigate whether in my data men's MMA is also explicitly or implicitly seen as the norm.

3.4 Evangelical Christianity

The term Evangelical Christianity, or Evangelicalism, defines a pluralist movement within Christianity. In this section I set out why the subjects of my corpus are Evangelical. Therefore I will give a short overview of Evangelicalism in the U.S., which is rooted in the eighteenth century, and I will give an overview of present-day Evangelicalism, thereby discussing how emic definitions of Evangelicalism and etic definitions of the movement might differ, and also paying attention to Bebbington's sociological definition of Evangelicalism. I will then introduce Mark Driscoll, who is the main focus of my corpus, and his position within the movement called 'New Calvinism'. I will conclude this chapter by placing my corpus in the tradition of Evangelical Christianity in the U.S.

Generally, the beginning of Evangelicalism is dated to the eighteenth century, in a period that is referred to as 'the First Great Awakening'. This period was characterized by a religious revival, which differed from traditional Christianity. In the first place, this religious Revivalist movement focused on the reconciliation between God and humanity, through the crucifixion of Christ, also called 'crucicentrism'. The second important characteristic was a call to personal conversion. In the early nineteenth century the U.S. experienced another revival of Protestant religion, 'the Second Great Awakening', which added to the characteristics of the First Great Awakening: a positive outlook on the future and as a result a strong emphasis on evangelization and thus the saving of as many people as possible. According to Marsden (1991: 33-34), up to the Second Great Awakening the evangelical movement had been a widely supported movement within Protestant Christianity. This began to change in the late nineteenth century, however, when a schism between Evangelical and traditional churches came to exist. On the one hand the Evangelicals focused on the individual and the personal, whilst the other traditional 'mainline' churches focused on creeds and rituals, linking faith less explicitly to everyday problems (Marsden 1991: 31-32).

According to Marsden (1991: 32-34), another conflict within Protestantism that arose at the turn of the century was the conflict between traditional and liberal, modernist theology. These terms are often used interchangeably, yet they refer to two different developments. Modernist theology stated

that the Bible was not an accurate historical or scientific account, but rather an account of religious people in another day and age. Liberal theology criticized strict doctrine and dogmatic faith (Marsden 1991: 33). As both developments questioned traditional religious authority, this led to a conservative evangelical reaction. ‘Dispensationalism’ was a reaction based on a literal reading of the Bible, claiming that the Bible contained no factual errors, and therefore dividing the history of the earth into so-called dispensations (Hankins 2002: 86-87). In the 1920s conservative Evangelicals who rejected and attacked modernist theological ideas were named “fundamentalists”. Although after the 1920s the conflict seemed to have lessened, in the 1940s the fundamentalists had become increasingly separatist, resulting in the foundation of the fundamentalist American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC) in 1941. However, at the same time another revivalist evangelical movement within Evangelicalism had occurred, which was inclusive and positive, focused on saving souls for Christ. This movement, headed by Billy Graham, established the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942. These ‘new Evangelicals’ were successful in the twentieth century, yet division between fundamentalists and more progressive Evangelicals in the U.S. remained (Hankins 2002: 2; Marsden 1991: 73).

To give insight into present-day Evangelicalism it is important to define the pluralist movement that Evangelicalism is. The movement includes progressive Evangelicals, fundamentalists, Pentecostals, and more. To somehow define ‘Evangelical’ Bebbington (1989 2-17) gave the following set of characteristics: 1. Conversionism, this is the idea that “lives need to be transformed through a ‘born-again’ experience and a life long process of following Jesus.” (NAE 2015) 2. Activism, which means being actively missionary. 3. Biblicism, the idea that the highest and ultimate authority lies in the Bible. 4. Crucicentrism, which means a strong focus on Jesus’ crucifixion as a means to redeem humanity. The said groups, Evangelicals, fundamentalists and Pentecostals, fit within this definition. The definition is confirmed by the NAE as well as the ISAE, thus American Evangelicals themselves, and widely used. ISAE also points out that Marsden suggests a fifth characteristic, trans-denominationalism, which refers to a pragmatic stance regarding cooperation and shared projects with other denominations. Though NAE and ISAE define Evangelical Christianity from their insiders’ position, Evangelicals do not necessarily refer to themselves as Evangelicals. In a survey executed by Gallup in 2005, 43% of Americans answered ‘yes’ to the question “Would you describe yourself as a ‘born again’ or evangelical?” in 2005. Yet, these numbers included Christians that are mostly not considered Evangelical. For example, 19% of the Catholic respondents answered ‘yes’ to the question, whereas in most definitions Evangelicalism is limited to Protestant Christians. When I speak of Evangelicalism in this thesis, I therefore do not use Evangelical for those who self-ascribe as such, but as those Protestants that fall within Bebbington’s definition of Evangelicalism.

3.5 Violence and the Bible

In chapter 3.5 (and 3.6), I discuss the relation between religion and violence. In the introduction of this thesis I stated that Christianity is often considered a peaceful religion. Yet at the same time, the history of the Christian world is filled with bloodshed. How peaceful, then, is the message of the Bible? I will start this chapter with discussing theories of Schwartz (1998) and Juergensmeyer (2003) on the relation between religion and violence. I will then discuss the violent passages in the Old Testament and the New Testament, and how theologians have dealt with these passages. In my material violence as it is seen in MMA is justified. In the last part of this chapter I will look at how violence has been justified in the history of Christianity.

Regarding the question why religion sometimes leads to violence, there are several theories. I discuss two of these theories here. The first work that I discuss is *The Curse of Cain*, written by Schwartz (1998), secondly I discuss Juergensmeyer. He views the use of violence by religious people in the light of ideas of ‘cosmic war’. Regina Schwartz is a scholar of literature (Van Henten 2008) who wrote about the relationship between violence and monotheism. She describes three processes in the formation of identity in the Old Testament that can lead to violence. In the first place, she sees the covenant between God and his people, negatively disposed against the Other, as a source for violence. As the chosen people, they are separated from the peoples around them. Therefore their identity is formed “parasitically depend[ent] upon the invention of some Other” and violence, then, “stems from any conception of identity forged negatively, against the Other.” Secondly, the identity of the people of the Old Testament is linked to the land of Israel. Because the land belongs to them, God punishes the enemies of Israel harshly. But he also punishes the people of Israel themselves when they disobey Him. After giving the land to His people, God dedicates them in Deut. 7:2 to kill the previous inhabitants. Lastly she focuses on kinship. The identity of the people of Israel is based on kinship. Thus the identity of the not-Israelites is negative and incites violence against them. In all these relations the people of Israel are negatively identified against the Other. This, according to Schwartz, is the source of Biblical violence.

Juergensmeyer is a scholar of international studies, sociology and religious studies. In *Terror in the mind of God: The global rise of religious violence* (2003), he provides an explanation model for religious violence through the notion of ‘cosmic war’. According to Juergensmeyer the notion of a cosmic war is the deciding factor in religious violence. The cosmic war often has a universal character and an eschatological dimension. It does two things: it explains reality in a way that there is a clear dualistic opposition between the morally good and the morally wrong, and as such it justifies the use of violence.

When it comes to questioning the pacifism of Christianity, a large factor is the difference

between the New Testament and the Old Testament. Whereas the former largely focuses on Christ and his message of peace, the latter focuses on the history of the Jewish people, including bloody wars and God's approval thereof. In *Christians and War* (2010) Reimer refers to the God of the Old Testament as God as a warrior. This holds that he commands his people to act violently, acts violently himself, or supports his people in times of war (Reimer 2010: 17). Examples are found in 1 Samuel 15:3, where God commands his people not only to attack the Amalekites, but even to "devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey." God himself is acting violently for example when he drowns the Pharaoh's army (Exodus 14:28) and when he destructs the cities of Sodom and Gomorra (Genesis 19:24). God's support for his people is for example found in Psalm 18:34: "He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze." These violent passages seem to contrast with the New Testament, in which Jesus tells us to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). Reimer denotes several ways to reconcile the paradoxes between the violent and peaceful passages of the Bible. Here I discuss three important strategies. The first solution that I discuss is 'supersessionism'. In this view, the 'God of wrath' (Reimer 2010: 26) from the Old Testament is superseded by the loving God of the New Testament. This view was held by the early Christian bishop Marcion, and is therefore sometimes referred to as Marcionism. A second strategy of reconciliation is called 'fourfold hermeneutics', which means that there are four methods of interpreting the Bible: literally, allegorically, tropologically (aimed at moral and ethics) and analogically, which is a future-oriented reading (Reimer 2010: 26-27). This method of applying hermeneutics gives us the possibility to read violent passages in the Old Testament in a sense that is not literal, but for example in a spiritual sense, interpreting it as texts regarding not actual but 'spiritual warfare'. The third and last strategy that I discuss here is the historical critical method. In this method the historical origins of the Bible are taken into account, thus for example the agenda of the authors of the violent texts are taken into account. For example, Collins (2003) points out that "[t]he archaeological evidence does not support the view that marauding Israelites actually engaged in the massive slaughter of the Canaanites." Instead, he argues, these are ideological constructions of later time, written by powerless Judeans after the exile (Collins 2003: 10-11).

However, when it comes to violence in the Bible, it is not only about the paradox between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Also within the New Testament there appear to be some inconsistencies regarding the attitude towards violence. Though Jesus is depicted as a peaceful person, he gets angry at the moneychangers in the temple and uses a whip to drive them out (John 2:15-16). Furthermore he stated that he had not come to bring peace but a sword (Matthew 10:34). Apart from these violent passages, we find several texts with Paul, but also with Peter (2:13-17) and Mark (12:17) regarding the duty of Christians to the state, which according to Reimer (2010) can be

interpreted as ‘just war texts’. Most frequently quoted in this matter is Romans 13:1-7, in which Paul urges Christians to be loyal to the state, to “do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (Romans 13:3-4). Lastly, there are plenty of violent images in the apocalyptic texts of Revelation, among which is Revelation 15:19, quoted by Mark Driscoll in both his sermons that I analyze in this thesis: “From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.” Yet the New Testament is best known for its pacifist passages, including the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), in which Christ urges to “turn the other cheek”, and also in Romans 12:17, right before the mandate to be loyal to the state, Christians are told to “repay no one evil for evil.” Reimer (2010) sees eight ways to harmonize these texts, taken from different Christian traditions, ranging from the “Medieval Roman Catholic view” (Reimer 2010: 46) to liberal pacifism and the position held by the Jehovah’s Witnesses (Reimer 2010: 48, 50). In general these ways to harmonize texts can be categorized in two positions: a radical pacifist position, in which Jesus’ example of nonresistance is considered the core message of the New Testament; and a form of dualism in which different duties are ascribed to either different groups of people, for example laymen versus clergy, or different situations or dispositions, such as the difference between the “inner disposition and personal relationships on the one hand, and public, vocational responsibilities, on the other” (Reimer 2010: 46-47).

In this section I discussed how violence and Christianity are related. I also discussed how the Old Testament and the New Testament seem to give different messages about violence, and how within the New Testament paradoxical statements about violence are made. I made it clear that the Bible contains both peaceful and violent passages and I showed a number of ways which theologians have used to overcome these paradoxical statements. In the next chapter I will look at how theologians have dealt with violence in a historical context.

3.6 The history of violence and Christianity

Although many answers to the question of Christianity and war were given, all of them agreed that the core of Christianity is peace. Churches have contributed to peacebuilding and continue to do so. Recently, the World Council of Churches held the “International Ecumenical Peace Convention” in 2011 in Jamaica, which led to the writing of “An Ecumenical Call to Just Peace” (2011); the catechism of the Roman Catholic Church urges the “safeguarding [of] peace” and Pope Francis has urged for peacebuilding for example in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2014 (Posthumus 2014). What then has caused the use of violence in the name of Christianity?

The question whether it is acceptable for a Christian to be involved in violence has been broadly discussed. However, the violence discussed is virtually never violence within the context of combat sports. For example in ‘Religion and Violence: A Protestant Christian Perspective’ Ariarajah (2009) describes different dimensions of violence, such as violence as (Godly) punishment, violence as structured oppression and violence in war and conquest, as well as different forms of violence, such as structural violence, economic violence, social violence and physical violence, which he says expresses itself in “killings, massacres, genocides and other forms of blood-letting” (Ariarajah 2009: 137, 141-142). The place of the violence as seen in MMA is vague in this context, since in form it is clearly physical violence, but incomparable to killings or massacres, and since the dimension ‘sport’ is nowhere mentioned in the article. As it is hard to discern which stances Christians have taken over the centuries regarding violent sports, in the historical overview that now follows I will look at the instrumental use of violence that has been approved in other violent contexts. I will focus especially on the context of war, exploring the concept of Just War, drawing upon James Reimer’s *Christians and War* (2010).

In Early Christianity, the general attitude towards the question of war and peace was a position of pacifism (Von Harnack 1963: 2, 46-51). When under Constantine and later Theodosius Christianity became the most important religion in the Roman Empire, a theological problem arose. How could the Roman Empire stay in power if no violence or war was permitted (Reimer 2010: 55)? Multiple answers were given to the question of war and peace, beginning with the Just War Theory of Augustine and later Thomas Aquinas, via the Reformed doctrine of two kingdoms, to present-day theologians investigating the matter.

The concept of Just War was first coined by Augustine (Reimer 2010: 71). In his theory of just use of violence, he states that even though it is bad for an individual to act violently, a Christian can still be a soldier. This is because God has given kings the authority to go to war. Therefore a good Christian can fight for his country. Besides that, Augustine argued, it is a good thing to use violence if it can prevent bad things from happening. He even goes as far to say that it would be a sin for a Christian not to act in such a situation.

Augustine’s work on violence remained the standard for what is considered ‘Just War’, only to be elaborated on by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Aquinas drew upon the work of Augustine, coming to three conditions for war to be just. These conditions are that first, the authority, that is the state that wages the war, must be Christian. Secondly, the purpose of the war must be right, it must be in the interest of the people. Thirdly, peace must always be what is strived for in a Just War (Reimer 2010: 79-82).

Augustinian and Thomasian notions of Just War have had authority until the Reformation. When

new denominations came to exist, Christian ideas about violence began to change, sometimes leading to more violent doctrines, sometimes to extreme pacifism. For my research subjects the Calvinist approach to violence is most important to look at, as Calvinism is the core brand of Christianity that conservative Evangelicals draw upon.

The Reformation saw a crisis in the medieval relationship between church and state (Reimer 2010: 88-89). Luther's theology resolved this with the doctrine of the two kingdoms. This doctrine held that two kingdoms exist: one inward kingdom that is eternal, the spiritual kingdom (of God), and one kingdom that is external, the temporal kingdom, which is governed by secular powers (Reimer 2010: 90-91). Calvin argued that they have a two-way relationship: the church tells the rulers how to act, but at the same time the temporal rulers have a right to regulate "the eternal order of polity of the church." In the issue of war, Calvin agreed with the Thomasian Just War Theory at large. It was after the prosecution of the French Huguenots that Calvinists radicalized: Philip Mornay argued that defending the church and its members is just by whatever means. The Biblical authority of kings, he wrote, lay in the entire congregation. The king emerges from the people. Therefore oppressive governments may be overthrown.

In sections 3.4 and 3.5 I discussed the relation between Christianity and violence from different perspectives. I started with the explanations Schwartz and Juergensmeyer give for what drives religious violence. I then gave an overview of paradoxical statements on violence that are found in the Bible. I also discussed a number of strategies of how to overcome these paradoxes. Yet apart from statements about violence made in the Bible, also in the history of Christianity, churches have responded in different manners in questions of war and peace. In section 3.6 I summarized the different positions that important theologians have taken regarding the question of war. Thus, I have outlined the Biblical, theological and historical context in which my research subjects deal with the question of violence and Christianity. In the analysis I will look to place them in this context.

3.7 New Calvinism

Looking at the history of Evangelical Christianity and its sociological definition as it is given by Bebbington, my corpus consists of mostly texts either written by representatives of the Evangelical movement, or texts of which Evangelicals are objects. Yet Mark Driscoll, who accounts for 40% of the texts of my corpus, describes himself as 'New Calvinist' (Driscoll 2009). What is New Calvinism, and what is its place in Evangelical Christianity? New Calvinism is a Revival movement that falls back on the Reformist movement of Calvinism. As such, according to Burek (2010) it draws upon predestination, and God who is an "all-powerful potentate", which, he argues, differs strongly from the "me-centered prosperity gospel of much of modern evangelicalism". Yet he notes that New Calvinism is a growing movement, making it also different from classical Calvinism.

These distinctions were recognized by influential New Calvinist pastor John Piper. Oliphint (2014) draws from the Richard Gaffin lecture that Piper gave on 12 March 2014, in which he sets out twelve points that characterize New Calvinism. These twelve points include a complementarian view on gender issues, which is to say that New Calvinists believe that men and women are created for different roles in life. Furthermore New Calvinism is a culture-affirming movement, but holds conservative positions when it comes to for example homosexuality and abortion. New Calvinism is inter-denominational with a strong Baptist element. It is aggressively mission-driven, it focuses strongly on Pietism, and New Calvinists are very active when it comes to writing books and presence on the internet, according to Oliphint. As such New Calvinism is a movement within Evangelicalism, which adheres to the characteristics of Evangelicalism as stated by Bebbington.

3.8 Mark Driscoll

Mark Driscoll is a pastor and founder of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, which he, Lief Moi and Mike Gunn founded in 1996 (Driscoll & Breshears 2010: 54). Starting as a Bible group of thirty members, in 2013 Mars Hill Church had over 13.000 people attending services in 15 churches in five different states every week, according to its website (Mars Hill 2013). According to Christianity Today Mark Driscoll is known for his aggressive preaching style. He is the writer of several books, including the rather controversial *Real Marriage* (2012), a best-selling book co-written with his wife, in which they discuss their marriage, including detailed discussions about sex. His views, however, on both sex and other topics, are generally conservative and as such typically New Calvinist.

Mars Hill Church has seen a lot of growth in a period that has lasted until 2014. Besides that Mark Driscoll has gotten a lot of media attention as a result of *Real Marriage* and his comments on homosexuality (West 2013; Evans 2011) and he is generally regarded as a polarizing figure (Graham 2012; Thomas 2011).

Mars Hill Church, having become the third fastest growing large church in the U.S. according to The Atlantic (2014), came to an end at the end of 2014, after a year of decline. Mark Driscoll resigned on October 14, 2014 after having been accused of abusive and intimidating behavior and a bullying leadership style. He was accused of plagiarism in his books as well, and of having misused funds and donations intended for missionary purposes among others. Driscoll is supposed to have used some of the money to buy thousands of copies of his own book (*Real Marriage*) to make it into a best-seller, according to The Seattle Times (2015). Finally, bloggers found out that Driscoll had posted many homophobic and misogynistic statements under a pseudonym on a church messaging board.

The fifteen different locations of Driscoll's mega church have in January 2015 either closed,

merged or have gone independent. All church properties are being sold. Many of the former Mars Hill followers are now taking a stand against Driscoll, most of them deploring the fact that he has never apologized for his deeds or acknowledged the hurt he caused them. Four former members are seeking to start a civil racketeering lawsuit against Driscoll (Lee: 2014).

In May and June 2015 Driscoll again made public appearances at (events of) different Evangelic Churches, leading friends and foes to surmise he might start a new church, according to The Seattle Times. Blogger Warren Trockmorton (2015), who has been following Driscoll's every move, writes on Patheos (a well-known website about religion and spirituality) that he has received tips about Driscoll planning to start a new church in Phoenix, Arizona. For my thesis these current events have no consequences, as his remarks found in the corpus were relevant for the Evangelical landscape at the time they were uttered. Whereas Mars Hill Church does not exist anymore, Mark Driscoll is still on the scene, and his thoughts on MMA and gender are unchanged.

4. Methodology

In Chapter Two, I have explained my social constructionist position. In this chapter I will explain what this position means for my methodology, discourse analysis. To do so, I will start with explaining what discourse analysis is. Then, as the central concerns of my thesis are Evangelical Christianity and gender, I will explain how and why I will use two different approaches to two different discourses, namely the ideological discourse of violence and Christianity on the one hand and gender discourse on the other.

4.1 Discourse analysis

The method of research that I use in this thesis is that of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis as a methodology has its roots in the work of Foucault, and has developed into numerous methods since. Central to discourse analysis is the idea that language constructs social realities. Gee argues that language has two functions: “to support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions” (Gee 1999: 1). He states that human beings are always looking for meaning in communication. Often when we analyze what is being said or written we can even add more, or other meanings to communication. “We believe it a matter of competence to re-read a good book or re-watch a great movie to get more out of it. But we rarely apply the same principle - which now becomes a principle of ethics - to our fellow citizens. And that is what discourse analysis is all about” (Gee 1999: xii). The assumption underlying discourse analysis is that every human being creates complex meanings in language. Language is thus always ‘political’. Language tells you how things are and/or how things ought to be: “is this combatant a ‘freedom fighter’ or a ‘terrorist’?” (Gee 1999: 2).

Further, Gee argues, grammar is ‘political’. For example, the subject or topic of a sentence is often placed at the beginning of the sentence. But what happens when it isn’t? Gee uses the phrase “elections mean real choice” as an example. In this sentence, ‘elections’ is the subject, placed at the beginning. Now, if something is placed in front of the word ‘election’, for example “At least in Italy”, the sentence sounds very different: “At least in Italy, elections mean real choice.” Phrases such as “At least in Italy” provide background information. Yet through putting it at the beginning of the sentence, it is ‘foregrounded’, making it the focal point of the sentence. As such, the information that is communicated in the sentence is read and evaluated with this context in mind (Gee 1999: 3).

All of this does not mean that language, as (post)structuralists pose, creates persons. However, “language provides us with a way of structuring our experience of ourselves and the world, and that the concepts in the world, and that the concepts we use do not pre-date language, but are made possible by it” (Burr 1995: 33). This leads to a methodology that is focused on the analysis of texts.

But what does that mean practically? Wodak and Meyer (2009) state that the method of doing discourse analysis is always eclectic, that there is no accepted canon of data collection, and that it is problem-oriented. Following this idea of the method of discourse analysis having to fit your own particular research questions and your specific data, I have chosen to use two different approaches to my texts. I use Van Dijk's (2011) ideological discourse analysis to analyze the discourse of violence and Christianity; for the analysis of gender discourse I draw upon Burr (1995) and Lazar and Kramarae (2011).

4.2 Ideological discourse analysis

As Van Dijk (2011) states, in ideological discourse analysis it is not assumed that ideologies are either 'true' or 'false' (Van Dijk 2011: 381), but rather ideologies are considered to be structures of attitudes and meanings, that are meaningful to groups. Secondly, ideologies are not limited to groups that are related in a power structure; their relation is found in identity structures. Finally, ideologies are complex belief systems. Van Dijk thereby means that groups which share an ideological framework are more than just interest groups. Examples of these complex systems are liberalism, socialism and feminism, as opposed to for example LGBT interest groups (Van Dijk 2011: 382-385).

In this thesis I raise the question why some Christian pastors have a positive attitude towards the violent sport of MMA, while Christianity is considered by many to be a pacifist religion. To answer this question I will research texts of these pastors which are 1. not necessarily false or true, rather they are an interpretation of the Bible and societal developments; 2. directed to a congregation to which the pastors are related religiously, which is a power structure, but also an identity structure; 3. ideological fundamentals of the pastors investigated are found in Christianity, which is indeed a complex, ideological framework. Thus I will analyze the texts in my corpus as expressions of ideology. One can discuss whether Evangelical Christianity, or New Calvinism, or any religion is indeed an 'ideology'. Yet I do not engage in this discussion here, because it has little relevance as to why I use Van Dijk's method of doing discourse analysis. The focus of my research is a group of Christians with a positive attitude towards MMA. Whether Evangelical or New Calvinist, they find each other in a discourse, which has the characteristics of ideology as it is described by Van Dijk. Thus Van Dijk's method of doing ideological discourse analysis suits my data.

Exposing ideological discourses can be done, by using the 'Ideological Square', as Van Dijk calls it. In this ideological square, two positions are at stake, an "Us"-position and a "Them"-position. While analyzing texts one will be able to see that positive messages about the "Us"-position will be emphasized, whereas negative messages about "Us" will be de-emphasized. The other way around, "Them"-positions will be emphasized when negative messages are sent, whereas positive messages

regarding the “Them”-group will be de-emphasized (Van Dijk 2011: 396-397).

4.3 Gender discourse analysis

To execute the analysis of gender discourse, I will follow Burr. She argues that the identification of discourses is often “largely an intuitive and interpretative process” (Burr 1995: 167). She gives an example of such an interpretative analysis of a news article. This analysis starts with closely reading and rereading the article. She then searches for recurrent themes through the isolation of words, sentences and parts of sentences. From what is being said in the article and what seems to be taken for granted, she identifies different ways of talking about the topic of the text. This method is comparable to the method used by Lazar and Kramarae to analyze the gender discourse of *Sex and the City* in their article ‘Gender and Power in Discourse’ (2011). They also use words, sentences and parts of sentences to construct the gender discourse of *Sex and the City*, thereby connecting the discourse to feminist theory.

For the gender analysis I have utilized a similar approach: I have isolated all words and (parts of) sentences that refer to gender, and using these excerpts, I have analyzed the gender dimension of the texts in my corpus, connecting these excerpts to theoretical notions of gender as described in my theory chapter, and to results from other studies on gender and sports, such as the articles of Soulliere (2006) and Koivula (1999) which I also mentioned in the theory chapter.

This means that I will refer to De Beauvoir and the notion that the male is the ‘default’. Is it possible to see this notion in the texts, using discourse analysis? Do grammar, vocabulary, etc. point to a stance towards gender that says ‘male’ is the default? Koivula (1999) argues that women’s sports are often presented as gendered (for example *women’s* football), whereas men’s sports are not (‘football’ when *men’s* football is meant). How is this in MMA? For example, when MMA is mentioned in my data, is it actually *men’s* MMA that is meant?

Furthermore, I will look at how masculinity is constructed in my data. How does it relate to the definitions of gender as given by Craib (1987), Connell (1995) and Hearn (2012)? And is the construction of masculinity in my data comparable to what Soulliere found in the WWE? Further, masculinity is often constructed in contrast with femininity. How does this show in my data? Is the view on gender relations complementarian or egalitarian? And how do male and female relate within a complementarian view; are they necessarily each other’s binary opposition?

Lastly, I will look at the place of violence within the gender discourse. Hearn (2012) poses the question if violence is legitimated by pointing to masculinity. Kimmel (2004) suggests that in Western cultures violence and masculinity are seen as ‘naturally’ interwoven. In my analysis, I will look at the implicit and explicit messages regarding violence as part of the ‘nature’ of men.

Using discourse analysis I will analyze the complex meanings in the construction of language. I use two methods in this thesis: Van Dijk's (2011) ideological discourse analysis and gender discourse analysis as performed by Burr (1995) and Lazar and Kramarae (2011). In Chapter Five, I will perform a short quantitative analysis to have a general overview of the used data. I will then use Van Dijk's 'Ideological Square' to describe two different "Us"-groups that I observed in the data. The last section of the discourse analysis will be focused on the gender discourse. Using Burr (1995) and Lazar and Kramarae's methods of doing gender discourse analysis, I will isolate words and sentences that refer to gender and connect them to the theoretical assumptions described in this chapter and in Chapter Two.

5. Analysis

In this chapter I analyze the texts of my corpus. The main mode of analysis that I use, is discourse analysis. But before analyzing the discourse(s) I do a small quantitative analysis. This allows me to distinguish the depth of the different texts. Further, it shows the focus of the different texts. The discourse analysis is the main text in this chapter: in the discourse analysis I focus on ideological discourse and on gender discourse in the textual corpus.

The corpus I investigate is made up of different types of texts. It consists of one essay, written by Mark Driscoll, one documentary appearance by Driscoll, two of his sermons, one blog post from Mars Hill Church, one ‘Vlog’ (video blog) by Pastor Steven Furtick, and four articles. The difference in types of text will influence my analysis of the ideological discourses. The focus of my research is the ideological discourse of the *pastors*; this discourse can be found in the text written by those pastors. In the articles *about* the pastors, the ideological discourse of the *authors* of the articles is also at issue. As a result I will also take a look at the ideological discourses of the authors.

Though not completely, this analysis is largely focused on Mars Hill Church and its pastor Mark Driscoll. I chose to focus on him because he is very vocal about his love for MMA. He appeared in a documentary about MMA and he wrote an extensive article on the subject (Driscoll 2011). Further, at the time that the data I use was published, he was considered an influential pastor, who managed to build up a big church community in his hometown of Seattle, reaching a lot of young people with his rather conservative message. And, as I mentioned earlier, he makes his opinion articles and his sermons easily available through putting them on his own website and the website of Mars Hill.

5.1 Analysis

In this chapter I analyze my data on both quantitative and discourse level. The quantitative analysis entails counting the use of several words in the text. These words are connected to three themes: gender, MMA/fighting, and violence. Examples of words connected to gender are ‘man’ and ‘guy’ or ‘feminine’, ‘masculine’. Connected to fighting are words like ‘MMA’, ‘fighting’, but also ‘wrestling’ and ‘boxing’. The presence of the word ‘violence’ is interesting, because the presence or absence of the word violence suggests that in a text, violence is reflected upon.

Furthermore, the general number of words in a text, and the number of words spent on MMA, violence and gender, influences the depth of the argument that is relevant to the analysis of MMA and Christianity. One may assume that long texts in which the word violence occurs a lot are most likely to give insight on the position that the author takes on the level of violence in MMA. On the other hand, in a text in which gender indicators appear a lot, one can assume that the author has

given more attention to the gendered reality of MMA culture. Lastly, the presence of these indicators of ideological and gender discourses might show a difference on these matters depending on the perspective from which the relation between MMA and Christianity is approached. Words such as ‘wrestling’ and ‘boxing’ suggest a more emic perspective on and more knowledge of MMA than using only the word ‘fighting’. When it comes to gender, the use of words like ‘chicks’ and ‘dudes’ imply another view on gender roles than words like ‘men’, ‘women’ or ‘gender’.

In the discourse analysis, the approach is not quantitative, but rather qualitative. I break up the texts to sentences, phrases, or words that influence the reader’s perception. What, for example, does Driscoll suggest about the nature of gender when he sees a church “that is full of chicks”? Two discourses have my interest: the ideological discourse and the gender discourse. The ideological discourse answers the question ‘why?’. Why do Driscoll and other pastors see no paradox in preaching Christianity and promoting MMA? Assuming that opinions on the nature of gender play a role in this debate, it is necessary to find out in what gender discourse MMA is considered masculine, and in what discourse this type of masculinity is considered a positive quality.

I analyze the ideological discourses in the texts following Van Dijk’s (2011) method of ideological discourse analysis. This holds that I expose the assumptions underlying texts, which lead to the construction of an “Us” and “Them”-group. This “Us”-group is usually met with in a positive way, pointing at, for example, tradition or consensus, whereas the “Them”-group is met with skepticism, for example by questioning one’s authority. For the gender analysis, I use a method influenced by Burr (1995) and Kramarae (2011). Like Burr I started with closely reading and rereading the texts, after which I identified the main themes of the texts. Within these themes I looked for the underlying constructions of gender. For the detailed way of linking these themes to gender theory, as well as the focus on textual structure of sentences and phrases, I draw upon Kramarae.

5.2 Types of texts

I analyze a variety of types of texts. The longest text of my corpus is ‘A Christian Evaluation of Mixed Martial Arts’ by Mark Driscoll. This text is an essay, which Driscoll has posted on his website PastorMark.tv. It is the only essay in my corpus and it is the most extensive text that takes an explicit stance in the debate about the relation between Christianity and MMA. This means that the ideological discourse of the text is quite clear and explicit. However, it is still interesting to look at an essay using discourse analysis, because for rhetoric reasons writers do not always make their assumptions explicit; it is often easier to discredit your opponent than to promote your own point of view on delicate matters like violence. In gender, discourse is almost exclusively found when you analyze indicators that are often not a part of the argument. Often ideas about gender are presented

as something that needs no explanation. As De Beauvoir (1949) argued, representation of the world is the work of men, which was also shown by Koivula (1999), who proved how language demonstrates the idea that masculine is the norm.

Two of the texts in my corpus are sermons. Contrary to the essay by Driscoll, these texts are not explicitly about the relationship between MMA and Christianity. Both sermons have (metaphorical) fighting as a theme. MMA is mentioned as an example in these texts. As a genre a sermon is comparable to an essay. The audience however is different. For a sermon the audience is mostly part of the “Us”-group, whilst the audience of an essay is often also the “Them”-group. Yet the goal of both types of texts is to convince the listener of your standpoint.

The other type of texts involved in my corpus I labeled ‘articles’. They are very different in their approach, being an opinion article, news articles, and a background article. Their audience is also varied: they are coming from newspaper websites, evangelical websites and sports sites. The similarity is that their position vis-à-vis their audience is very different from Pastor Mark’s. T Koivula his influences their “Us” and “Them”-positions. The authors of these articles are not necessarily Christian advocates of MMA. This has led me to create multiple “Us” and multiple “Them”-positions in the analysis of the articles. In the first place I constructed the position taken by the author (for example “We are well-informed”). Secondly, I assumed that the Christian advocates of MMA when quoted, were reliable sources for their ideological discourse. This means that I also constructed “Us” and “Them”-positions of pastors and Christian fighters quoted in the articles.

The last category of texts is an eclectic mix of ‘rest’ texts. It includes a documentary appearance by Mark Driscoll, in which he talks about what he likes about MMA and why he thinks the sport attracts many men. Then there is a blog post from Mars Hill about Pastor Jesse, who competes in MMA. And lastly, this category includes a Vlog (video blog) by Pastor Steven Furtick, in which he interviews MMA fighter Vitor “TRT-Rex” Belfort about his faith and about MMA. These texts are comparable in length, and comparable as to their audiences: all but one target their own followers. Driscoll’s documentary appearance is the exception to this, though also this text is a clearly emic voice in the discussion about MMA and Christianity.

5.3 Quantitative analysis

For this analysis I started counting the words of the texts in my corpus. This shows the huge range in length of the texts: the shortest text is the blog on Mars Hill’s website, counting only 125 words. The longest texts, on the other hand, are the sermons by Driscoll, counting 8,360 and 9,081 words. Within this huge range (8,956 words), the average length of texts is 2,681.9 in a corpus with a total of 26,819 words. Because of the huge range it is interesting to divide the texts by type of text. The essay and sermons are the longest texts in the corpus, the former counting 4,795 words, the latter

mediating at 8,720.5 words. The articles are on average a lot shorter: 716 words. The group of ‘rest’ texts is again huge in its variety in length, ranging from a blog post counting 125 words to a video interview counting 1,346 words.

Yet the longest texts in my corpus are not necessarily the texts with the most depth regarding the topic of MMA and Christianity. The longest texts in the corpus are two sermons, which both touch the topic of MMA, but they also discuss other topics, like prayer and the reality of Satan. Other texts are shorter, but have MMA and Christianity as their main theme, or devote more words to it. To show this on a very basic level, in table 1 I counted how often the words MMA and Mixed Martial Arts were termed in the articles, and related that to the total number of words:

	A Christian Evaluation of Mixed Martial Arts	Jesus and Demons. Luke’s Gospel: Investigating the man who is God	Ephesians #17 – I am victorious (Ephesians 6:10–24)	MMA: What Would Jesus Do?	Pastor Attempts to Redeem Mixed Martial Arts
Total	4795	8360	9081	654	424
MMA	65	2	1	4	13
Ratio	0,013	0,000	0,000	0,006	0,031
	Lynnwood ‘Fight Pastor’: Mixed martial arts ministry is not a gimmick	Pastor Steven Furtick - Vitor Belfort, MMA, and your Relationship with God	Mark Driscoll Mars Hill Church on MMA UFC	The Ultimate Fighting Pastor	Flock Is Now a Fight Team in Some Ministries
Total	547	1346	248	125	1239
MMA	13	3	0	1	13
Ratio	0,024	0,002	0	0,008	0,010

Table 1

This table shows that the sermons, although being the longest texts, are not the texts that spend the most words on the relationship between MMA and Christianity. The texts that discuss MMA a lot are Driscoll’s essay and news and background articles. Nevertheless, texts with a low ratio of use of the word MMA, like the sermons, are relevant to the discourse analysis that I executed, because the discourse is often found in ‘implicit’ indicators. The gender discourse for example, is most clearly present in parts of the sermons that do not explicitly refer to MMA. The higher ratio of the use of the word MMA in articles is relevant though, because by using the word MMA and assigning values to it, these articles take a clear stance in the ideological discourse.

Another word that I counted is ‘fighting’, together with other words indicating combat (sports), such as ‘wrestling’ and ‘boxing’. The findings are similar, showing a divide between the sermons (low ratio) and the articles (high ratio). A text that scores notably higher on the words ‘MMA’ and ‘fighting’ is the blog post “The Ultimate Fighting Pastor”. When including the words ‘fighting’ and ‘wrestling’ the ratio of these words is 0.056, which is the highest in the corpus. This can be explained, *inter alia*, as a result of the fact that this text is so short (125 words) that it is statistically incomparable to the other texts. Yet it has its significance, because these words indicate a focus on combat sports and an insider’s position on the matter of MMA.

I also analyzed indicators of gender. I used two sorts of indicators; explicit and implicit gender indicators. The explicit gender indicators are words like ‘masculine’, ‘feminine’, ‘muscular’, and ‘feminization’. Implicit gender indicators are words like ‘man’/‘men’ and words like ‘guy’ and ‘dude’. I suggest these words are implicit gender indicators, because they are not used as analytical gender categories, but they do contribute to a certain gender discourse. I will explain how they do this later in this chapter. The quantitative analysis of these gender indicators shows that the explicit gender indicators are found in the texts with an analytical character. These analytical texts are Driscoll’s essay, his documentary appearance and the news and background articles. In the sermons and Furtick’s video blog the analytical gender indicators are not used whatsoever. On the other hand the implicit gender indicators are found mostly in texts from the pastors. The words ‘man’ and ‘men’ are also found in other texts, but the words ‘boy(s)’, ‘guy(s)’ and ‘dude(s)’ are exclusively found in texts from Mark Driscoll and Steven Furtick. The highest ratio of use of these implicit indicators is found in the text Mark Driscoll pronounced in his documentary appearance, with 16 of these words in a 248 words text, a ratio of 0,065.

5.4.1.1 Ideological discourse

Van Dijk (2011) defines ideology as a belief system that is shared by a social group. He also states that ideology is fairly general and abstract, and does not change easily (Van Dijk 2011: 380-381). To analyze ideological discourse is to analyze the structures of ideology. For this analysis he uses a scheme that he has called the Ideological Square. In this scheme the representation of in-groups and out-groups is shown. The representation has four pillars: emphasize Our good things, de-emphasize Our bad things, emphasize Their bad things, and de-emphasize Their good things (Van Dijk 2011: 396-397). In this chapter I analyze the ideological structures underlying the relationship between MMA and Christianity.

As a result of the different types of texts which I analyzed, I defined two “Us”-groups, associated with two different types of authors: the pastors, Mark Driscoll and Steven Furtick, who represent an emic perspective on the matter, and the authors of different articles, who represent a more etic

perspective. Apart from the different “Us”-groups, there are also different positions within the “Us”-group of pastors. Both Driscoll and Furtick take an ideological position in the religious debate – what is Christianity ‘truly’ like? – and the debate on MMA – what is the ‘true’ nature of MMA?

5.4.1.2 “Jesus Didn’t Tap”

In this discourse analysis I have searched for “Us”- and “Them”-groups regarding the question why some pastors are positive about MMA. This led me to identify two “Us”-groups, being ‘true’ Christian and an “Us”-group that I coined ‘MMA pundits’. The “Us”-group of ‘true’ Christians is an “Us”-group that identifies as the counterpart of a “Them”-group that is supposedly not ‘truly’ Christian. The “Us”-group of MMA pundits also defends MMA from Christian critics, but does so by focusing not on what it means to be Christian, but on what modern MMA is like. The discourse of the ‘true’ Christians is characterized by ideas regarding the image of Jesus, pacifism, discipline, evangelization, and traditional family values.

In the ideological framework of ‘true’ Christians, I will first look at the image of Jesus, which is characterized by masculinity and which is opposed to the pacifist image of him. This frame is found throughout the discourse, but especially with Mark Driscoll and in the N.Y. Times article. Secondly, I will look at the idea of being at war with Satan, and violent metaphors in the Bible. This theme is strongly present in the sermons. Thirdly, I will look at praising values that are benevolent for MMA fighters as well as for Christians. This is a viewpoint that Mark Driscoll shares with Steven Furtick and his interviewee Vitor Belfort. I will then look at the evangelizing potential of MMA, and more in general at the importance of evangelizing in this discourse. Lastly, I will look at the representation of traditional values, mostly regarding family and gender, in my corpus.

The first feature of the ‘true’ Christian discourse that I look at is the image of Jesus. This image of Jesus consists of two important characteristics: he is masculine and he is not a pacifist. In the ideological square this means that the “Us”-group of ‘true’ Christians paint a picture of Jesus who is masculine, by opposing it to “Their” overly feminine Jesus. The view of the “Us”-group that Jesus is not a pacifist is backed up by pointing to non-pacifist parts of the Bible. Thereby it is suggested that the “Them”-group ignores certain passages of the Bible and thus does not accept the *whole* Bible, but only the passages that fit their ideas.

Driscoll draws a masculine image of Christ in his essay about MMA, but also in one of his sermons. In the essay he states: “[He] probably had short hair” and “was in good shape from a labour job and lots of walking across rugged terrain.” “They”, on the other side, have a false image of Jesus, their Jesus is “basically a guy in a dress with fabulous long hair, drinking decaf and in touch with his feelings, who would never hurt anyone.” In a sermon he states that Jesus “is having

one of those Jack Bauer⁴ days ... he's preached, cast out a demon, healed a woman." Driscoll pictures Jesus here as a man who is very masculine in the way Craib describes typical Western masculinity. He is "provider, worker, the active and public half of the species" (Craib 1987: 723). The image of Jesus as a 'masculine', fit man is also found in the article 'MMA: What Would Jesus Do?' In this article the author, Dorothy Willis, states that MMA should be lauded in church as much as other sports. She draws from a book she read as a child, in which the metaphor 'Son of God' is used for a football player. This "son of God was tempted by the Devil and 'sins of the flesh' as the successful quarterback of an up and coming football team ... made the right decisions when faced with unbelievable hardships ... [and] led his team to glory." The masculine vs. feminine divide is also made by the N.Y. Times, who quote Eugene Cho. In the ideological square he can be seen as a member of the "Them"-group. He is quoted criticizing the over-emphasizing of Jesus' 'masculine' qualities: "I don't live for the Jesus who eats red meat, drinks beer and beats on other men."

In this discourse qualities of masculinity as described by MacInnes (1998) and Craib (1987) are found: a real man is active and strong, as opposed to emotional and passive, which is how Driscoll describes "Their" Jesus, who is in touch with his feelings and could never hurt anyone. The image of Christ also corresponds to Muscular Christianity as promoted by Kingsley and Hughes: Willis celebrates team sports and Driscoll even emphasizes the positive effects of outdoor life ("he ... was in good shape from ... lots of walking across rugged terrain.").

The image of Jesus as someone "who ... beats on other men" is not only an image of Jesus who is masculine, but also an image of Jesus as someone who is not a pacifist. In his essay and sermons, Driscoll focuses on Biblical passages that do not promote pacifism, such as Matt. 10:34: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." In his essay on MMA, he states, "Jesus said both to turn the other cheek and to bring a sword to defend oneself. So let's not simply quote one thing he said as if it were the only thing he said." Brandon Beals is quoted stating that "Compassion and love — we agree with all that stuff, too ... But what led me to find Christ was that Jesus was a fighter." Further, in his essay Driscoll argues, "on his first trip to the earth Jesus took a beating to atone for sin; on his next trip he will hand them out to unrepentant sinners instead." Thus Driscoll claims that "They" are selective in their reading of the Bible, which is a reading that supports the image of Jesus as a pacifist. Driscoll's reading of the Bible, however, draws a picture of Jesus who has an aggressive, violent side as well. This also relates to the Western discourse of masculinity as described by MacInnes (1998) and Craib (1987), and also Kimmel (2004). Aggression is seen as a manly feature. This suggests not only that "Their" Jesus is not biblical, it also suggests that "Their" Jesus is not masculine.

4 Jack Bauer is the lead character of the American series *24*. He is a federal agent who works for a counter terrorist unit (IMDB 2015).

In a more spiritual way, Driscoll draws attention to how Jesus is attacked by Satan repeatedly in Luke's Gospel. This spiritual fighting, as well as metaphorical fighting, is also a feature in the ideological discourse of "Us" 'true' Christians. The idea of being in a battle with Satan in my corpus is mainly propagated by Driscoll. In one of his sermons he states that "[i]t's very clear. There's the church, there is God, and then there is a war against God and his people that is waged by Satan and demons." Those who do not believe this, he refers to as snobs: "Some of you, as well, may not believe in Satan and demons because you suffer from something called chronological snobbery." In this way he creates a "Them"-group of non-believers versus an "Us"-group of 'true' Christians. It also creates a space for him to use a lot of violent and militaristic rhetoric.

Violent rhetoric is present in three ways within the 'true' Christian discourse: the use of violent metaphors from the Bible, the use of combat sports metaphors, and the use of militaristic images as part of what it means to be a 'true' Christian. By using Biblical metaphors, Driscoll attacks pacifists by claiming that "They" argue that "we should also rebuke God for wrestling all night with Jacob, and tell Paul to stop using wrestling metaphors to teach us spiritual principles throughout the Bible because he's setting a bad example." The pastors that the New York Times states, "quot[e] verses like 'fight the good fight of faith' from Timothy 6:12" use Biblical fighting metaphors as well. Though it is clear that Driscoll ridicules pacifists here, it is important to point out that using Biblical fighting metaphors claims the pacifist's "Them"-position to be: they reject both actual violence, and Biblical fighting metaphors. The "Us"-position is: we do not reject Biblical fighting metaphors.

To point out how exhausting the battle is, he uses combat sports and militaristic metaphors: "Any of you ever wrestled? ... Any of you actually wrestled, high school, college? True or false, it's exhausting?" and "The language here is like that. It's hand-to-hand combat ... we'd call it, 'in the clinch.' You ever been there? It's exhausting." In another sermon he tells the crowd how much of an MMA fan he is. He explains that MMA is a combination of styles and how in an MMA fight you have to know and exploit the weaknesses of your opponent to win a fight. "The point is you know your enemy, you know their strengths and weaknesses, you defend yourself at point of weakness and you attack at the point of strength." Furthermore he uses violent rhetoric that refers to the military. Elsewhere in the sermon he states: "... when we teach this section of Scripture to little boys in Sunday school, they all get dressed up like soldiers." Another combat sports metaphor is found in 'MMA: What Would Jesus Do?' In this article the author claims that "[i]ronically, before I even saw the T-shirt I knew that Jesus didn't tap and he refrained from tapping so that I could be saved from my sins." As we saw earlier, in MMA 'tapping' means to admit defeat, to give up. To say that Jesus refrained from tapping is to say that he, as the clothing brand describes it, "didn't quit after going through unimaginable suffering and pain" (Jesus Didn't Tap 2015). The use of such metaphors

suggests two things. Firstly, the use of these metaphors makes clear that the pastors reflect positively on combat sports, and not necessarily negatively on ‘real’ violence. Secondly, it emphasizes the positive characteristic of the “Us”-group that is the willingness to overcome hardships. This is something that is seen reflected in the view of the values that are considered typical for MMA.

The idea of praising values in MMA that are favorable for Christians as well, is found throughout my corpus. This frame is present in two ways: MMA fighters are praised for practicing MMA, because values which are of use for MMA fighters are also considered benevolent for living a Christian life. This frame is most clear in the interview of Pastor Steven Furtick with MMA-fighter Vitor Belfort. The other frame is implicit: it praises popular MMA-fighters for living a good Christian life. This is seen very clearly in Driscoll’s praise for Christian MMA fighter Ben Henderson.

The Furtick interview shows how practicing MMA is considered benevolent for living a good Christian life. The central value at stake in the interview is ‘training’. Furtick links Belfort’s dedication in training MMA to the dedication one needs to have for living a Christian life: “You train for this every day, this is your life ... But you bring that same commitment to your walk with Christ”, Furtick states. This attitude is confirmed by Belfort: “Don’t cut your corners, you know, just go to the process ... I believe in hard work.” Besides that, the “Them”-group is accused of decadence for excluding fighters from ‘good’ Christians, although “God has people everywhere, in armies, [and] doctors”, dixit Belfort. Furthermore, his remark implies that “They” do not believe in hard work. In the N.Y. Times article the message that hard work is important is found in a quote of one of the fighters with a harsh background.

“I’m fighting to provide a better quality of life for my family and provide them with things that I didn’t have growing up,” said Mike Thompson, 32, a former gang member and student of Mr. Renken’s who until recently had struggled with unemployment and who fights under the nickname the Fury. “Once I accepted Christ in my life,” Mr. Thompson said, “I realized that a person can fight for good.”

Another argument that Belfort seems to make through this remark is that opponents of MMA are not willing to see how MMA-fighters can be good Christians. He claims a frame in which Christianity and MMA do not conflict because they can be separated, and that it is important to look at the way in which fighters use their MMA lifestyle to live a good life besides MMA. This is also a discourse that Driscoll constructs when he quotes Ben[son] Henderson that “I don’t do the club scene, I don’t go to bars. By people seeing that, that affects them in a bigger way than me talking

about it.” Here, as well as in the Belfort interview, the MMA professional sport lifestyle is used as a way of proving the Christian lifestyle of MMA fighters. Furthermore, Driscoll praises Henderson for “honoring his busy mother by helping relieve her from long shifts at the convenience store she owns ... going to church, working out, explaining his Psalm 144:1 tattoo, and reverently talking about his faith: ‘Before all my fights, the only thing I pray for is strength and honor ... I’m not one of those guys who is about the violence and ... idolizing the lifestyle of money and fame. A lot people, when they fight, they’re afraid of losing. I realize there’s something more important in my life.’” The implicit message here goes further than just claiming that MMA fighters can be good Christians. Like Furtick’s praise of Belfort, characteristics of Henderson, discipline and modesty, are linked to the fact that he is an MMA fighter. As such, Driscoll suggests that practicing MMA is beneficial for a Christian.

Not only does Driscoll praise Henderson’s lifestyle by quoting him, he also highlights the evangelizing results of Christian MMA fighters. The ideological “Us”-position of ‘true’ Christians sees MMA as an evangelizing tool in three ways: devout fighters have evangelizing potential, focusing on MMA brings people, mainly men, to the church who otherwise are not reached, and important values in MMA are also important Christian values. Henderson wants to “affect people” by living a good life, but also through, for example, “walk[ing] into each fight to gospel songs. Henderson said of the gospel music, ‘Through music, that’s one way I like to proclaim my faith.’” In the article “Pastor Attempts to Redeem Mixed Martial Arts”, pastor Brandon Beals confirms this idea: “many Christians are using the sport as a way to praise God”. And in ‘MMA: What Would Jesus Do?’, the author argues that “[s]o many fighters have professed their faith publicly; shouldn’t preachers laud them and their sport for giving them a platform on which to witness their belief in God?” Also when Driscoll speaks about the popularity of MMA brands like Jesus Didn’t Tap, he implies that the growing popularity of MMA is positive for Christianity because of the evangelizing opportunity. Focusing on the evangelizing opportunity of MMA is a way of stating that the “Us”-group takes the task of evangelizing seriously. Further, it shows that the view on ‘true’ Christianity of the “Us-group” holds an important place for evangelizing.

Although some pastors say they’re not willing to use MMA as a marketing trick, they often regard the increase of the number of men in their ministries as a positive side effect. Beals for example says “Canyon Creek’s dominant MMA ministry are men and the church’s MMA ministry has spurred much of its growth ... ‘If (growth) happens organically because of this ministry, that’s cool,’ he said.” Fighters also recognize MMA’s evangelizing potential, with Vitor Belfort seeing his notoriety in the cage as an opportunity to “change the world.” Jon Jones refers to Christian virtues, claiming on ChristianPost.com that “I’d rather be known as that Christian fighter or that peaceful

fighter or that fighter that's spreading positivity and kindness and confidence way more than tactics. It's important." This fits the idea that the discourse of my research objects is evangelical. Evangelizing is one of the core characteristics in Bebbington's (1989) definition of evangelical Christianity. By claiming that they are saving the souls of people who would otherwise not be reached, they place themselves clearly in an evangelical discourse.

Another feature of the ideological discourse of 'true' Christians concerns traditional values. They are what separate "Us" from "Them". The traditional values mentioned cover a wide range of topics, but they are mostly centered around matters of family and gender. Sometimes these values are referred to explicitly; the values are implicitly reconfirmed. Driscoll often explicitly underwrites traditional views on gender roles and marriage. He is "married [to] a woman, I'm very glad to be married to her." And in the article in the New York Times Pastor Ryan Dobson states that "The man should be the overall leader of the household." MMA fits beautifully in this discourse, because the qualities ascribed to the traditional family need a man whose role is very different from the woman's. "God made men masculine," says Driscoll, "[He] made [men] for dominion." That man, who dominates, is masculine in a very traditional way and rejects a supposedly feminized church. I will analyze this position in more depth in the section on gender discourse. In that section I will also give more attention to the implicit notions of gender and traditional values. These implicit ideas on traditional values can be seen when analyzing pieces of text that are *not* about MMA: Pastor Furtick mentions his family life in an interview about dedication. Fighter Mike Thompson, mentioned in the New York Times article, fights for a good quality of the life for his family. They do not explicitly call upon people to be more traditional. However, these text fragments confirm the "Us"-position that it is important to have a family, in which the man is the breadwinner.

In this section, I looked into the "Us"-group 'true' Christians. Within the Ideological Square, in this discourse the "Us"-position is a position in which "Our" knowledge of the Bible is overemphasized. Moreover, "Our" faith is considered stronger than "Theirs". Regarding the image of Jesus, which is masculine and not pacifist, it is emphasized that "We" know best what Jesus was like. "Their" image of Jesus is false, but "They" are also accused of 'picking and choosing' only those parts of the Bible that fit into "Their" worldview. The same mechanism is seen regarding ideas of being in a spiritual war, and using Biblical fighting metaphors. "Their" wrongdoings are over-emphasized: "They" either pick and choose from the Bible only what "They" like, thereby not accepting the authority of the Bible as a whole, or they "suffer from ... snobbery", as Driscoll called the denial of the existence of Satan; as such "They" fall into the sin of pride. The argument of snobbery is also found in the praise of 'MMA values'. That is, hard work is praised, and as a result MMA fighters are praised. The suggestion that "They" do not affirm this, is an implicit accusation

that “They” consider themselves better than fighters. It also suggests that “We”, however, are open to anyone. The last two reasons that relate MMA to being ‘truly’ Christian are the evangelizing potential of MMA and the praise of traditional values. Both phenomena are possibilities that MMA give. Because of its evangelizing potential, and because of the fact that through MMA traditional values are spread, the “Us”-group feels the urge to embrace MMA. Rejecting, like the “Them”-group, would be to deny the task of reaching out to anyone.

I observed in this sub-chapter that the pastors in my data defend their position on MMA in two ways: by drawing a discourse in which “We” see things in a ‘truly’ Christian way, and by claiming that “They” have a false image of what it means to be Christian. Yet there is also another discourse found in my data. This discourse is not based on interpretations of Christianity, but on interpretations of MMA. In the next sub-chapter I will focus on that discourse.

5.4.1.3 “The fastest-growing sport among the coveted demographic of young men”

Besides a religious “Us” and “Them”-group, I also analyzed “Us” and “Them”-positions centered on knowledge of MMA. I defined this “Us”-group ‘MMA pundits’. It is a position that is found in virtually all the texts. In this discourse we find explanations to defend MMA against criticism, suggesting that “They” do not know what MMA is like, whereas “We” do know what MMA is like. The discourse differs from the ideological discourse centered around ‘true’ Christians, because in this discourse the “Them”-group is de-emphasized in another way, namely based on their supposed lack of knowledge, instead of based on morality. It can be argued that the previous section handled the question of what aspects of Christianity can support MMA, whereas in this section I look at aspects of MMA that can support the involvement of Christians in it.

Five themes stand out in this discourse: First, MMA is safe, which is recognized by “Us”. Second, MMA is a mainstream phenomenon. Third, MMA is useful, i.e. it is good to know how to fight. Fourth, MMA is not an expression of Eastern culture and therefore not heathen. And fifth, MMA is a legitimate sport, because participating in MMA isn’t an aggressive activity, and becoming an MMA fighter requires lots of training.

The safety issue concerns both knowledge that is claimed as being “Our” knowledge, and a wrong attitude of “Them” who deem MMA unsafe. Emphasizing the safety of the sport is not only a way of showing that “We” really know what MMA is like, it is also a way of accusing “Them” of either not knowing about MMA, or “Them” willingly ignoring the current state of the sport. In ‘A Christian Evaluation of Mixed Martial Arts’ Driscoll points out the safety development in MMA in a historical context: “At that time, the sport did not have some of the rules or the weight classes that it does today, as it has matured.” He also points out that modern MMA is safe compared to other

sports: “The overall injury rate in MMA competitions is now similar to other combat sports. What’s more is that knockout rates are lower in MMA competitions than in boxing, and this fact indicates a reduced risk of traumatic brain injuries.” However, “They” do not understand this: “many people simply do not understand the rules in place to help make MMA safer for the athletes.” This perception of “Their” standpoint is confirmed by the New York Times article, which claims that “[a]most a decade ago, mixed martial arts was seen as a blood sport without rules or regulation. It was banned in nearly every state and denounced by politicians like Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona.” Thereby the article frames the sport as unsafe by willingly focusing on the state of MMA in another era, whereas the “Us”-group of ‘MMA pundits’ sees the sport as “legitimate sport ... let[ting] men be men and do what men do.”

Focusing on MMA as a mainstream sport suggests that “We” are part of a consensus, whereas “They” are either taking an odd position, or lagging behind. The development of MMA into the mainstream that “They” miss is found in three things: mainstream media broadcasting MMA, the outreach of the sport to young men, and the celebrity status of MMA fighters and their public relations. The mainstream media covering MMA are several mainstream sports magazines and websites, but Driscoll emphatically mentions FOX TV, claiming that “Saturday, November 12, is the biggest day in the history of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). On that day, the sport will go mainstream as the premiere brand ... UFC ... debuts on FOX TV and is broadcast without a pay wall”. This remark about MMA being mainstream, supports both the “Us”-position of the proponents of MMA and undermines the “Them”-position of MMA’s opponents. Bringing up the appearance of MMA on a cable TV channel suggests that the popularity of MMA is something that cannot go unnoticed. The “Us”-group recognizes this development, whereas the “Them”-group, that is not willing to describe MMA as a mainstream phenomenon, appears to take a peculiar position.

The idea that MMA has an outreach to young men, is contested by no one. Yet people like Driscoll, Furtick and Beals suggest that therefore the development must be embraced. They give attention to the sport, because it is “the fastest-growing sport among the coveted demographic of young men”. The celebrity status of MMA fighters and their seemingly ubiquitous presence is the last strategy to make “Us” look like modern people who are up to date as opposed to the old fashioned “Them”-group who seem to miss that “Mixed martial artists are also acquiring celebrity status and accepting lucrative endorsements for gear, workouts, and dietary supplements.” and MMA’s “presence with DVDs ... video games ... books ... and even action figures.” Beside a strategy of mocking the “Them”-group, emphasizing the popularity of MMA is also related to the evangelizing power of MMA that I discussed in the previous section. Yet, the place of the evangelizing opportunity of MMA in the “Us”-position of MMA pundits, is different from the

approach of the “Us”-position of ‘true’ Christians. Whereas the latter focuses on the importance of evangelizing, and criticizes “Them” for not caring enough about evangelizing, the MMA pundit discourse focuses on the observation that MMA has a growing outreach, in particular on young men.

The argument that MMA is useful is also found with Mark Driscoll and Steven Furtick. The usefulness of MMA is propagated in two ways: firstly it is useful for MMA fighters, secondly it is useful for anyone as a means to defend himself. The usefulness of MMA is described by Driscoll for example when he tells how “Tim Kennedy made a guest appearance on an episode of ‘Deadliest Warrior’ on Spike TV, simulating combat tactics.” In “Deadliest Warrior”, according to IMBD.com, ancient and modern martial arts are compared. By referring to this program, Driscoll displays his knowledge of MMA and thereby secures his position as MMA pundit. Furthermore, he uses the authority of a TV show to recognize the position of MMA amongst other combat sports. Driscoll also teaches about the first UFC tournament that “to everyone’s surprise, it wasn’t the much bigger and more physically imposing men who won the tournament. Instead, it was a slender 175-pound Brazilian jiu-jitsu expert from a renowned combat sporting family named Royce Gracie. He continually defeated much larger men by taking them down and putting them in submission holds most of the world had not seen.” Furtick’s son apparently learned from Belfort “how to beat up his seven-year-old brother.” These examples again confirm how modern MMA is a useful tool in combat sports. In addition, it teaches us that MMA is a fighting system that is reachable and useful for people who are not necessarily big and strong. Thus MMA pundits teach us that MMA is useful, also for those who are not engaging in MMA competition.

The MMA knowledge is pointed out strongly regarding the issue of the alleged heathendom of MMA. “They” claim that MMA is an expression of Eastern culture, whereas “We” know better. In drawing up an ideological discourse defending MMA, MMA-minded Christians claim that “They” “argue that we should reject MMA because some aspects of the sport stem from Eastern religions and philosophy.” The New York Times article frames it as part of a “long history of using popular culture — rock music, skateboarding and even yoga — to reach new followers.” Yet, the “Us”-group knows better. They defend themselves to the criticism in two ways: firstly, they claim that MMA is not Eastern, for it is at least partly Western, and secondly MMA can be practiced in a non-heathen way. The first argument focuses on MMA being a hybrid combat sport which also has Western influences. Driscoll argues “MMA involves a host of various combat traditions, including disciplines such as wrestling and boxing that do not have roots in Eastern religion.” Elsewhere, he recognizes the Eastern influences, but by framing MMA as a hybrid sport, he de-emphasizes it. Practicing MMA in a non-heathen way is possible, he later states, “one can practice combat sports

and learn various techniques without immersing oneself in the philosophy and culture of such activities.” Here Driscoll acknowledges the heathendom of Eastern cultural influences, but rejects them by stating that someone who ‘truly’ know MMA has the ability to recognize those influences and reject them. He therefore cares to warn his followers: “I would not encourage anyone to study under a teacher who, in addition to combat techniques, was also pushing non-Christian philosophies and Eastern spirituality.” A third argument in this scope is made by Dorothy Willis. She states that the stage on which the fights take place “is a square, hexagon, octagon, or circle, not a pentagram.” Hereby she acknowledges that there would be a problem if there were ‘non-Christian’ influences, but she de-emphasizes this suggestion with the use of humor. Also she states here that at its core MMA is not anti-Christian.

The last ideological discourse that is constructed within the ‘MMA pundits’-discourse is the discourse of MMA being a legitimate sport. This position draws upon two views on MMA. The first view is that MMA is a legitimate sport for it is not about aggression; the second view is that MMA is a legitimate sport for it requires lots of training. The non-aggressive character of MMA is found particularly with Vitor Belfort who for example states, “I don’t have intention beating [inaudible], you know, trying to create envy. No, not at all. You know what I mean, nothing personal.” It is however also present in less explicit statements. For example, it is also implied in Driscoll’s statement that we should stage fighting as “a viable, legitimate sport and let men be men and do what men do”, for if MMA is a sport, it is different from ‘real’ violence. In the New York Times article, the author sees the transformation of aggression into something positive when he notes that “[t]hese pastors say the marriage of faith and fighting is intended to promote Christian values, quoting verses like ‘fight the good fight of faith’ from Timothy 6:12.”

As such the group of ‘MMA pundits’ follows the arguments of Sánchez García & Malcolm (2010) and Ambramson and Modzelewski (2010), who argue respectively that the aim of MMA is to win an athletic competition and not to hurt your opponent (Sánchez García & Malcolm 2010), and that MMA is controlled violence, where there is no animosity between fighters (Ambramson and Modzelewski 2010).

The second argument, MMA requires lots of training, is seen clearly in the interview with Vitor Belfort. He is said to train every day, and even “had to bring [his] own dish with food that [he] cooked the night before.” Belfort himself tells how training hard is the only way to get to the top: “Don’t cut your corners, you know, just go to the process ... I believe in hard work.” Also when the all-round character of MMA is pointed out, hard training is implied. It is boxing, and kickboxing, and wrestling etc. One has to train hard to get there. It is also the hard work that is praised when it is done. On ChristianPost.com one reads that Christian fighter Roger Pattison sees the beauty of

MMA as a result of training: “Once you understand the history behind the styles, the technical aspect and the respect that is inherent in this sport then you will truly appreciate what it has to offer.”

In this section, I looked into the “Us”-group that I coined MMA pundits. This ideological position is focused on how the “Us”-group has more knowledge about MMA than the “Them”-group and that therefore “We” have more authority to speak about MMA, and whereas “They” do not have the knowledge, *and* “They” might not be willing to acquire knowledge about the sport. In the first place, the “Us”-group emphasizes the safety of MMA: “Their” perception of MMA as a dangerous sport, according to the proponents of MMA, is outdated. Modern MMA, states the “Us”-group, has developed since its very violent origins, and is not more dangerous than other (combat) sports. The “Us”-group furthermore highlights that modern MMA is mainstream, referring, among other things, to the fact that UFC is now broadcast on FOX TV. By emphasizing the mainstream attention for MMA, the “Them”-group is portrayed as old-fashioned and lagging behind, and thus the “Us”-group is framed in a positive way, being aware of present developments. The usefulness of MMA is mainly another example of emphasizing “Our” good feature of having a good understanding of MMA, whereas the alleged heathendom of MMA is a reaction to “Their” accusations, which are considered false. Also in this case, the reaction is focused on knowledge of MMA: the “Us”-group emphasizes the eclectic, and therefore not Eastern, roots of MMA. It also explains that it is possible to engage in martial arts that do have Eastern roots is possible without having to engage “non-Christian philosophies and Eastern spirituality”, as Driscoll states it. Lastly, in the ideological discourse of MMA pundits, MMA is portrayed as a legitimate sport. This holds that the “Us”-group emphasizes how MMA is a sport that requires a lot of training and knowledge about the technique, that as such, an MMA fight is not a violent brawl. Besides, they argue that MMA does not involve ‘real’ aggression, because it takes place in an athletic context.

The ideological discourses of ‘true’ Christians and MMA pundits show both differences and similarities. The chapter on the ideological position of ‘true’ Christians emphasized that being a Christian does not necessarily mean that you have to disapprove of MMA. The chapter on the ideological position of MMA pundits emphasized that there are multiple reasons why MMA does not have to be rejected in general. As such the different “Us”-positions criticize “Them” for not being ‘truly’ Christian, and for being uneducated about the topic of debate. Both ideological “Us”-positions have arguments focused on masculinity. Christians focus on the image of Jesus as masculine and on non-pacifism; MMA pundits focus on the necessity to reach out to (young) men. In the gender discourse analysis, I unpack the ideas about masculinity and violence present in my material. This provides the link between the two ideological “Us”-positions. It will describe what

image of masculinity ‘true’ Christians have, and: why MMA corresponds so well with this image of masculinity.

5.4.2 Gender Discourse

In this chapter, I take a look at the gender discourse analysis that answers the question which image of masculinity is propagated by the “Us”-groups of the ideological discourse chapter. The method I used, is inspired by Burr (1995). She executes discourse analysis by way of closely reading and rereading the material. Then she isolates certain words and sentences, and looks for themes, and analyzes what is taken for granted. Lazar and Kramarae (2011) use a comparable method, and relate those themes to feminist theory. In this section, I roughly follow this method. I took excerpts from the texts, and analyzed these excerpts. The tables that I made for this purpose can be found in the appendix. In these tables I categorized the snippets of text in the context of feminist theory, books and articles, most of which are discussed in the theoretical chapters of this thesis. The ideas and articles that I refer to are in the first place the idea of the male view on the world being normative, as expressed by De Beauvoir (1951) and reaffirmed for the sports world by Koivula (1999). Secondly, I look at the link between violence and masculinity that I observed in my corpus. I relate this to the presence of violence in American culture as described by Kimmel (2004). I will then discuss the idea that ‘real’ men are winners. This is an idea that Soulliere (2006) found in the WWE. I discuss her article and look if and how this idea is present in my material. Looking into Muscular Christianity I focus on athleticism and why athleticism is lauded, and I will share my insights on whether an aversion to feminine imagery is present in my material. Lastly, I will look into the presence of traditional family values and complementarianism as found in my corpus.

In *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir wrote: “Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with the absolute truth.” In this paragraph, I look at my data with this quote in mind: when MMA is mentioned, is it about MMA in general? Or only about men? As a method, I will look if and how the results of Koivula (1999) are reflected in my material. I will also look at gender indicators being used. When speaking of MMA, do the actors in my data refer to neutral words such as ‘people’, or do they use words referring to men, such as ‘men’, ‘guys’ or ‘dudes’? In “Gender Stereotyping in Televised Media Sport Coverage” (1999), Koivula analyzed the television coverage of sports in Sweden. She noted three things: 1. Women’s sports in general receive less media attention than men’s sports; 2. Female athletes are often defined in terms of relationships (e.g. ‘mother’ or ‘wife’); 3. Men’s sports are generally considered the norm, which for example means that women’s football is presented as ‘women’s football’, whereas men’s football is just ‘football’. Likewise MMA media present men’s MMA as ‘MMA’, whilst they represent women’s MMA as ‘WMMA’.

When it comes to the presence of men and women in my corpus, it becomes clear that when MMA is mentioned, men's MMA is meant. Driscoll gives eight examples of fighters in his essay. None of these fighters are female. The other pastors, being Furtick, Beals, and the pastors quoted by the N.Y. Times, do not mention women in the context of fighting. Furthermore, none of the authors of the articles mention women as part of the development of MMA and Christian culture. In the New York Times article for example, the author sees only men in the venue he visits. That means: either there are no women, or he doesn't notice them. In all these examples women aren't mentioned. For the gender discourse it means that there is no reason for women to look at MMA as a viable sport for them. This is stressed even more, when looking at the gender indicators that are mentioned.

An indication that MMA is only considered a men's sport is that when gender indicators are used, they are directed at men. In one of his sermons Driscoll asks his audience: "How many of you guys had a brother? OK, you wrestled with your brother whether you wanted to or not, right?" The implicit message of this remark is that it is normal for boys to wrestle, and odd for girls to do so. In his documentary appearance he states that "two guys are gonna go at it and see which one is the dude." Again, the message is that men are inclined to fight. The Mars Hill blog about Pastor Jesse tells us that the "Ultimate Fighting Pastor", trains with "a few other Mars Hill *dudes* on the Eastside." (emphasis added) Lastly, Pastor James C. Dobson tells us in the New York Times article that "[w]e've raised a generation of little boys." Here the issue that we raised a generation of little boys, that is, we didn't raise 'our' boys to become men, to become fighters; why we didn't raise our girls to become fighters is not at issue.

Besides linking fighting in MMA to masculinity, violence and aggression in general are linked to masculinity. Kimmel (2004) argues that the U.S. has a history of linking masculinity to violence. In the first place he points out that many of the cultural heroes of America are "soldiers – or at least, the actors who played them in the movies" (Kimmel 2004: 276). He then goes on to explain how violence is most present at places where many young men gathered, and how the American frontier was exactly such a place. The culture of violence he shows by discussing the expression 'having a chip on one's shoulder'. This refers to the custom of young boys who placed chips on their shoulder, to challenge other boys to knock them off and thus have a legitimate reason to fight them. Kimmel argues that this hyper masculine and hyper aggressive culture has remained apparent in U.S. culture (Kimmel 2004: 277-278). In this paragraph, I look at if and how in my material violence is linked to man- or, as in the examples of having a chip on one's shoulder, boyhood. Sometimes pastors make explicit remarks about this link. Yet also in this case, it is implicitly visible at times. For example, in his essay Driscoll doesn't bring up the issue of gender, yet every example

he gives of fighting people are men. Also when he talks about Biblical stories: “While we’re at it, we should also rebuke God for wrestling all night with Jacob, and tell Paul to stop using wrestling metaphors to teach us spiritual principles throughout the Bible because he’s setting a bad example.” He makes the link between (military) violence explicit in one of his other sermons, stating that “when we teach this section of Scripture to little boys in Sunday school, they all get dressed up like soldiers.” The idea of the Christian warrior is the epitome of the link between faith and violence. In his essay Driscoll says about Benson Henderson that “I think he’s doing it (MMA), because in his heart, he’s God’s warrior.” He observes this warrior image in Christian MMA culture, pointing out that Christian MMA brand Jesus Didn’t Tap sports slogans like “Jesus Loves Me and My New Tattoos” and “Warrior Of God”. Lastly, Driscoll makes clear that he thinks of men being “made for combat”, in his documentary appearance. “In the end of the day, they’re still gonna wanna throw down”, he states, “[a]nd that’s just the way men are made.”

I already pointed out that Steven Furtick chose to bring his son to his interview with Vitor Belfort. His son was lucky because he “got to train with you, and made you tap out, that was pretty cool”. But Belfort also taught “my son how to beat up his seven-year-old brother today.” Here the theme of violence being a masculine trait occurs again. The last link between masculinity and violence that I discuss is the framing of an MMA event by the N.Y. Times. In the article the author speaks of MMA as a way to “reach and convert young men.” The way it attracts men, the article suggests, is by “inject[ing] some machismo into their ministries.” The author finds this machismo in the aggression and violence that characterizes MMA: ““Hard punches!”” he shouted from the sidelines of a martial arts event called Cage Assault. ‘Finish the fight! To the head! To the head!’” As such, in my material masculinity is linked to violence in the way that Kimmel observed for American culture in general: boys and (young) men have a tendency for violence that is even more highly apparent when large groups of young men come together.

The attendees of the MMA event mentioned in the article link masculinity not only to fighting, but also to dominion. It’s a message about masculinity that Soulliere (2006) also saw, when she analyzed messages about masculinity in the WWE. The WWE, the biggest wrestling promotion in the U.S. is comparable to MMA: as well as wrestling the aesthetics of MMA is violent. Besides the audience of wrestling consists mainly of men, like the audience of MMA. In the article ‘Wrestling with Masculinity: Messages about Manhood in the WWE’ she found six messages, that the WWE conveys, “Real men are aggressive and violent” (Soulliere 2006: 5), being one of them, which is a message that I also found in my corpus. Another one was “Men are winners” (Soulliere 2006: 6-7). According to this article one is ‘the Man’ when he wins. This is exactly what Driscoll refers to as ‘the dude’ when he says: “In the end of the day, they’re still gonna wanna throw down and when

they go to recess, two guys are gonna go at it and see which one is the dude.” Here being the dude is also synonymous to being a winner, to being victorious.

Victory is also contextualized within a more spiritual context. The masculine image of Jesus is linked to being victorious as well. In the article ‘MMA: What Would Jesus Do’, “the Son of God ... led his team to glory”. Anything about the Jesus the author speaks of is masculine, culminating in his victory. The same applies to Driscoll’s masculine Jesus, who is aggressive, and also victorious. “He will come again not in humility but rather in glory”, he states in his essay. In a sermon about the reality of Satan, he argues that defeating demons is a possibility, “[n]ot ‘cause we’re powerful, but because he’s victorious.” Thus masculinity is found in the gender discourse in the importance of victory, both for men, who are made for competition, and as a trait of Jesus.

In my theory chapter, I mentioned the concept of Muscular Christianity. I observed this image of masculinity, both regarding the appreciation of athleticism, and the aversion of feminine imagery clearly present in my corpus. As I stated in the theoretical chapter on Muscular Christianity, the approval and later praise of athleticism has been linked in Muscular Christianity for various reasons. Putney (2010) argued that “body as temple” theologians were critical of the strong mind-body dualism, referring to the masculinity of Biblical characters. They linked strength to goodness and weakness to sin. Ladd and Mathisen (1999) saw that in the early twentieth century, proponents of a Muscular Christian culture argued that participation in sports would have a moralizing influence. Examples of the former are found at multiple places in my material. I already mentioned how Driscoll described Jesus as someone who was “in good shape from a labor job and lots of walking across rugged terrain”, how God wrestled with Jacob, and how Paul used wrestling metaphors. The image of Jesus described in ‘MMA: What Would Jesus Do’ is also athletic: in the book that the author mentioned, “the Son of God” was depicted as a football player. Besides, in this example his athleticism is also praised for having a moralizing influence. Furthermore, the author of the article poses the question: “So many fighters have professed their faith publically; shouldn’t preachers laud them and their sport for giving them a platform on which to witness their belief in God?” The implication of this is that she sees a culture in which athleticism is positively reflected upon, yet MMA is left out of it. Driscoll argues the same in his essay when he states, “if we were going to also discipline those who were endangering their bodies for athletic competition, we would need to include the cheerleaders as well.” So, in the Muscular Christian discourse that I found in my data, athleticism is praised, and the proponents of MMA argue that MMA should be part of the athletic discourse, for it has the same moralizing effect that other athletic endeavors have.

The other feature of Muscular Christianity, an aversion of feminine imagery is also found throughout my corpus. In early Muscular Christianity, the aversion against feminine imagery had its

cause in the feminized church that the Muscular Christians in the late nineteenth century experienced. In the analysis of Muscular Christianity in my material, I also found this notion, sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit. Driscoll, in the texts of my corpus, does not say anything about a supposed ‘feminization’ of the church. Yet he does accuse other Christians of depicting Jesus as “a guy in a dress” and he emphasizes that Jesus actually “probably had short hair”. He even states, “1 Corinthians 11 says it was a disgrace in that day for a man to have long hair.” He emphasizes the importance of masculinity and masculine aesthetics over the problem of a feminized church. This masculine imagery is also found in the sermon in which he tells his audience that:

I’ll use “boots” because I like boots and I always wear boots. My grandpa George was a diesel mechanic, my dad was a construction worker. I wear boots. Soldiers wear what? Not flip-flops. Never seen a soldier in flip-flops. If so, that would be great if he were on the other side, right? “Oh, here comes the flip-flop brigade. Good, good. This will be done by lunch. This won’t take long.” Nobody was ever terrified by the flip-flop brigade.

The mocking of others is done here by suggesting that they are not ‘manly’, yet he does not explicitly attack feminine imagery. In the article about Brandon Beals and in the New York Times article, feminization *is* explicitly mentioned as a problem. In the article on Brandon Beals it is stated that the “church has become too feminized”, something that Pastor Tom Skyles describes as follows in the N.Y. Times article: “We grew up in a church that had pastel pews ... The men fell asleep.” As such, Muscular Christianity is apparent in my gender discourse in its two main characteristics: the praise of athleticism and the aversion of feminine imagery. Athleticism is seen as positive in itself by some, who also stress the athleticism of Biblical figures, and as positive for its moralizing opportunities by others. Feminine imagery is implicitly rejected by the suggestion of femininity of the “Them”-group and the praise of ‘manliness’; it is explicitly rejected by those who see the developments that the traditional Muscular Christian movement: too much femininity in the church’s aesthetics.

The last feature of the gender discourse that I analyze are ideas concerning traditional family values and the role of complementarianism therein. As I stated in the Theory chapter, complementarianism is a position which holds that men and women should have different roles in the Church, as well as in the family. In this view “God establishe[d] an order to the covenant of marriage and organize[d] the family with the husband as the leader and the head” (Driscoll 2010, 123). In my material this complementarian view shows itself in three ways. In the first place, it is suggested that it is good for a man to have a (big) family. Secondly, the man is supposed to be the breadwinner of the family. And thirdly, it is said that the man should be the leader of the household.

Driscoll and Furtick both do not explicitly make the link to MMA, but they continuously mention the family as an important and a natural unity, thereby reaffirming its natural unity. Driscoll mentions his sons, his brothers, the fact that he is married to a woman, and calls the man the leader of the family. In the blog post on Pastor Jesse we learn that “[a] typical Saturday for most pastors usually includes ... some downtime with the family.” Furtick also mentions that he has a family, that Belfort has a family, and that his family is composed of at least two sons. This suggests that godly people have big families. In the New York Times article the complementarian view is linked to MMA. “‘The man should be the overall leader of the household,’ said Ryan Dobson, 39, a pastor and fan of mixed martial arts”, and caring for your family is important, which can be deduced from Mike Thompson, who wants “to provide a better quality of life for my family and provide them with things that I didn’t have growing up.” In the same article Paul Robie articulates the importance of family values as follows: “You have a lot of troubled young men who grew up without fathers, and they’re wandering and they’re hopeless and they’re lousy dads themselves and they’re just lost.” The problems that not having a family seemingly bring, suggest again that having a traditional family is of great importance. This family is traditional, in that it is big; in this family the man is breadwinner, and he is the leader of the household. As such the view on gender found in my material is complementarian.

In this section, I analyzed the gender discourse of my corpus in relation to MMA. As such, it mainly focuses on masculinity. I also looked into gender relations and complementarianism, but in that context the focus was mostly on the role of the man as well. In this section an image of masculinity has arisen, which has five important features. In the first place, the urge to fight is regarded as a masculine trait. This means two things. In the first place it means that women do not want to fight. Nowhere in the corpus are women mentioned as fighters. All MMA fighters mentioned as well as the audiences at MMA venues, and examples of violence in the Bible, are men. As such throughout the material the implicit suggestion is that men are made for fighting, whereas women are not. This suggestion is reinforced as a result of, sometimes very explicit, statements that are made for fighting. In newspaper articles ministries that have a positive view on MMA are said to have such views to draw men to their ministries. Pastors mention boys and men when they refer to violence, and in one documentary appearance, Driscoll even states that the will to fight is inherent to all men. Another feature of masculinity that I noted is the idea that being a winner is a trait of masculinity. This means that the will to be dominant is considered masculine. Men want to be ‘the man’ or ‘the dude’, meaning that they want to dominate others. This trait is also attributed to the image of Jesus. As such it links to a Muscular Christian view on religious aesthetics. The third and fourth features that I have found in my gender discourse analysis are textbook examples of Muscular Christianity. These features of Muscular Christianity are athleticism

and an aversion to feminine imagery. Athleticism is lauded, both as a characteristic of Jesus and other Biblical men, and as a characteristic of a good Christian. In some cases, it is taken for granted that athleticism is to be praised; in other cases it is stressed that it is so for the moralizing effect of sports. The aversion of feminine imagery can be observed in two ways: on the one hand, the “Them”-group is accused of having a feminine image of Jesus, which is rejected. On the other hand the “Us”-group emphasizes its own very masculine image of Jesus, as someone who is athletic and victorious. The last feature of the gender discourse is traditional family values. This consists of the idea of complementarianism. That is the idea that God created men and women differently, for different tasks. In this view, the man is seen as the leader of the household.

In this chapter as a whole I analyzed my data on two levels: the level of ideology and the level of gender. Using Van Dijk’s ideological square, I identified two “Us”-groups: an “Us”-group that I called ‘true’ Christians and an “Us”-group that I coined ‘MMA pundits’. These “Us”-groups sometimes overlapped. For example: MMA is considered a mainstream sport. In the ideological framework of ‘true’ Christians this is important, because as such it offer opportunities for evangelizing. In the ideological framework of ‘MMA pundits’, it is a possibility to emphasize “Our” knowledge of popular culture, whereas it suggests that “They” are lagging behind. Ideological discourses and gender discourse also overlapped at some points. In the ideological discourse analysis, I pointed out that Jesus is depicted in a very masculine way. In the gender discourse, I analyzed this masculine image and its relation to Muscular Christianity. In the next chapter I will, using these analyses, answer the central question of this thesis: “What understanding of the relationship between violence, gender and Christianity has made it possible for New Calvinist Evangelicals to support and promote participation in MMA?”

6. Conclusion

In this thesis I posed the question “What understanding of the relationship between violence, gender and Christianity has made it possible for New Calvinist Evangelicals to support and promote participation in MMA?” I addressed four subquestions:

1. How has the relationship between violence, gender and Christianity been described in existing theory and literature, specifically in the context of the United States?
2. What is MMA and to what extent can it be considered a violent sport?
3. What is New Calvinism? What is its relationship to other forms of Evangelicalism? What conceptions of gender and violence exist within New Calvinism and how are these justified?
4. How do understandings of gender and violence within New Calvinism enable the promotion and justification of participation in MMA by New Calvinist pastors and MMA sportsmen?

To answer these questions I performed literature research and discourse analysis. I executed ideological discourse analysis following Van Dijk (2011) and gender discourse analysis following Burr (1995) and Lazar and Kramarae (2011). I studied the relationship between violence, gender and Christianity and highlighted the concepts ‘Muscular Christianity’ and ‘complementarianism’. These concepts proved central in answering the main question of this thesis. In this concluding chapter I will first briefly summarize the results from the individual ideological discourses and gender discourse. I will then give attention to Muscular Christianity and complementarianism and how these concepts play a role in the New Calvinist support for MMA.

In my analysis I found two ideological discourses: the ideological discourse that I called ‘true Christians’ and the ideological discourse that I named ‘MMA pundits’. The first ideological discourse has four characteristics. The first feature concerns the image of Jesus. In this discourse the image has two important characteristics: he is manly and he is not a pacifist. Secondly, this discourse propagates MMA as a Christian lifestyle, this mainly means that being humble and working hard is reflected positively upon. Thirdly, in this discourse MMA is praised for being an evangelizing strategy: some Christian fighters spread the word for large audiences, and through MMA many young people can be reached. Finally, in the ‘true Christians’-discourse it is stressed that MMA is not an Eastern, and therefore not a heathen sport to participate in.

The second ideological discourse that I distinguished was the discourse of ‘MMA pundits’. This discourse is characterized by five features. In the first place, in this discourse MMA is presented as a safe sport, as a result of the quick development of the sport. This also leads to the second feature: that MMA is now a mainstream sport, and therefore should be taken seriously. In the third place, in

this discourse MMA is presented as a useful activity to engage in. The fourth characteristic ascribed to MMA in the ‘MMA pundits’-discourse is again that MMA is *not* heathen and that therefore Christians may compete in it. The last feature of MMA mentioned in this discourse is that it is a legitimate sport, because it requires lots of training, and because the intention of the athletes involved is not aggressive.

The analysis of gender led me to identify a gender discourse that involves five points. In the first place, in the texts of my corpus, MMA is not a sport for women, as they are not mentioned as possible competitors. In the second place, MMA is seen as a sport for men, because in this discourse men like to fight, because men are considered violent. In the third place, ‘real’ men, according to the analysis of the gender discourse are winners. In the fourth place, MMA fits in a Muscular Christian discourse, because athleticism is praised and in the texts an aversion towards the ‘feminization’ of the Church is present. Lastly, in the texts a conservative, complementarian view of gender roles is given.

This analysis leads me to conclude that the support of New Evangelicals for MMA has three main reasons: a view on gender that is Muscular Christian, a view on gender that is complementarian, and a non-pacifist theological position. Regarding Muscular Christianity I have drawn upon the work of Beynon and Putney. I stated that Muscular Christianity is a movement, which celebrates the ‘he-man’, who is athletic and active, and that it rebukes the ‘feminization’ of the Church. Complementarianism is the position that men and women have different roles in the Church and the family. In the discourse analysis I analyzed what roles were attributed to men. In my Theory chapter I gave an overview of the history of Christianity and violence. Although Christianity has been considered a peaceful religion, violence is sometimes considered acceptable. But there is also another argument at stake: is MMA violent?

I will give five features of the Muscular Christian meta-discourse: masculine Jesus, health and athleticism, violence as a manly characteristic, winning as a manly characteristic and a complementarian view on gender. Regarding the image of masculine Jesus, I noted three things: in the first place, Jesus was manly, which means that according to Driscoll he had stereotypical masculine traits, such as short hair, and a muscular physique as a result of a labor job. Secondly, Jesus was masculine for what he was not; feminine. Driscoll rebukes the female imagery of Jesus, which pictures Jesus as “a guy with long hair in a dress”, who is pacifist. This leads me to my third point: Jesus was not feminine for he was not pacifist. According to Driscoll Jesus was not a pacifist, as he urged men to “bring a sword.” A Christian should not always turn the other cheek, according to this discourse.

Health and athleticism came forward in the discourse of “‘Us’ ‘true’ Christians’”. The image of

Jesus propagated by Driscoll, stressed that he was in good shape, and by Pastor Furtick we were told that “it’s not trying; it’s training”, i.e. a good Christian life is a life lived as if it were the life of a professional athlete. “Us” MMA pundits’ also stressed that MMA is a healthy undertaking. Vitor Belfort brings his own food to a restaurant, because he needs to stay healthy. Driscoll states that MMA is an all-round sport involving “a host of various combat traditions, including disciplines such as wrestling and boxing”, and Christian fighter Roger Pattison appreciates MMA for its athleticism, after he learned “the history behind the styles, the technical aspect and the respect that is inherent in this sport.”

“Men are made for combat, men are made for conflict”, stated Driscoll. This argument was in the background of almost every text in my corpus. Often however this argument was made implicitly: in the first place this happened through not mentioning women, when mentioning MMA. As a result of not mentioning women in the context of MMA, it is suggested that they are not aggressive, that they are not violent. Secondly, violence was often implicitly linked to men: examples of fighters were all men, the people interviewed in the articles were all men, and when either Driscoll or Furtick mentioned that their kids loved to fight, those kids were always their sons.

Soulliere (2006) found that one of the messages in the WWE about masculinity was that real men are winners. This frame was also found in my material. Both the masculine men who are lauded are portrayed as winners, and Jesus is explicitly ‘victorious’. He is so in a metaphorical sense, used by Driscoll in his sermons, but also in the text of Willis, the inspiring Jesus was victorious as quarterback.

In his book *Doctrine* (2011), Driscoll explains that New Calvinism takes a complementarian stance on gender relations. According to Driscoll, “a husband and wife are equal with complementary roles” (Driscoll 2011, 124). In my discourse analysis this view on gender roles was very apparent. I observed three characteristics that were complementarian in my discourse analysis. In the first place, having a big family is lauded. Secondly, men are expected to be the breadwinner of the household and thirdly, men are expected to be the leader of the household.

Yet I argue that this view in which men and women are intended for different roles does not only apply to the Church and the family, but also to MMA. I quoted Driscoll arguing that “men ... gonna wanna throw down ... that’s just the way men are made.” Also Driscoll asked “the guys” if they had a brother, “OK, you wrestled with your brother whether you wanted to or not, right?” In such examples manhood covers more than different roles in the household or in the Church. The differences between men and women that Driscoll sees also comprise ideas of men being aggressive and violent. Or, in his own words: “Men are made for combat, men are made for conflict, men are made for dominion ... and that’s just the way men are made.” In this view MMA is both a sport for

men and a sport that is good for men, because it is a way for them to release their violence: “let[ting] men be men and do what men do.”

The last reason that makes it possible for New Calvinist Evangelicals to support participation in MMA has to do with this view on violence. The supporters of participation in MMA give two reasons for being supportive, regarding violence: they do not condemn violence, but they also use the strategy of downplaying the amount of violence in MMA. This last strategy consists of claiming that MMA is not violent, which they support by pointing out that the amount of injuries suffered in MMA is small. Further, they argue that MMA is controlled violence and that there is no animosity between fighters. The goal is to win an athletic competition, not to hurt your opponent.

When it comes to the violent side of MMA, it turns out that in the ideological discourse that I reconstructed, violence is sometimes reflected positively upon. It is ‘part of man’s nature’, as I explained above. Besides, pacifism is not seen as a key feature of Christianity. Driscoll emphasizes violent passages in the Bible. He points to fighting metaphors, such as God wrestling Jacob. The New York Times quotes pastors who, “quot[e] verses like ‘fight the good fight of faith’ from Timothy 6:12”. Pastor Brandon Beals states “what led me to find Christ was that Jesus was a fighter.” Also, Driscoll disagrees with pastors who are pacifist, who, he says, see Jesus as “a guy in a dress with fabulous long hair, drinking decaf and in touch with his feelings, who would never hurt anyone.” If Jesus had an aggressive side, he assumes, how can it be bad when a man wants to practice MMA?

Thus: *What understanding of the relationship between violence, gender and Christianity has made it possible for New Calvinist Evangelicals to support and promote participation in MMA?* In this thesis I showed that the pastors in my data stand in a tradition that is Muscular Christian and holds a view on gender that is complementarian. This holds that they support a view on masculinity in which the man is active, aggressive and athletic. They see this view on masculinity embodied in a masculine image of Jesus. Furthermore, they hold a complementarian view on gender. As such, men are considered to be the breadwinner of the family, the leader of the family, and that godly men have big families. In the discourse of New Calvinist support for MMA, it also accounts for an essentialist view on gender in which men are competitive, violent and made for dominion. Lastly, the support of MMA can be explained as the result of a non-pacifist position. Violent passages from the Bible are over-emphasized, whereas pacifist passages are hardly mentioned. As such participation in MMA is not considered problematic. Fighting metaphors are apparent in the Bible, Jesus urged not only to turn the other cheek, but also to bring a sword. Violence in this view is therefore not necessarily a bad thing for a Christian to do, and one thing is sure: *Jesus Didn’t Tap.*

In this thesis, I explored issues of gender, violence and Christianity. Regarding Christianity I focused on New Calvinism, a conservative brand of American Evangelicalism. As to the subject of gender, I positioned myself in a tradition of feminist scholarship, especially inspired by Kimmel (2004). Like him, I consider gender a construction, rather than an essentialist character of people of a certain sex. In this thesis, however, I analyzed material that did just the opposite: I showed the complementarian notions of gender in the New Calvinist discourse and explained how this consists of a very essentialist view on the differences between men and women. Whether this view on gender has been an important factor in the growth of New Calvinism or rather a cause of its later decline is an interesting question for further research.

The issue of violence and Christianity has shown to have multiple sides. On the one hand in my material violence is seen as a characteristic of men. Also Jesus is depicted not as a pacifist and violent Biblical passages are often quoted. On the other hand, when it comes to MMA, it is also stressed that MMA is not violent. The positive attitude from the pastors towards violence differs from many of the theological stances on violence that I covered in Chapter Three, yet it fits very well to definitions of masculinity in the U.S. as observed by Kimmel. As such I argue that the issue of violence and MMA in New Calvinism is an issue of gender more than an issue of theology. More research on the books and sermons of Mark Driscoll from a theological instead of a social constructionist perspective could shed more light on that.

In the end, the focus on New Calvinism has been very narrow in this thesis, investigating views on MMA, violence and gender. I showed that on these topics New Calvinists, and Mark Driscoll in particular, fit in a conservative Evangelical discourse that is present in the U.S. Driscoll and other 'MMA pundits' also used MMA as a evangelizing tool, as my research shows. MMA might indeed have been a factor in the evangelizing success of Mark Driscoll. If so, it has come with a message about violence and masculinity as well. Later research is necessary to conclude if these messages have contributed more to Driscoll's success, or to his recent downfall.

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