

Linn Sandberg

Getting Intimate

A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF OLD AGE, MASCULINITY & SEXUALITY



Linköping University
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Linköping Studies in Arts and Science • No. 527

Linköping University, Department of Thematic Studies – Gender Studies

Linköping, 2011

Linköping Studies in Arts and Science • No. 527

At the Faculty of Arts and Science at Linköping University, research and doctoral studies are carried out within broad problem areas. Research is organized in interdisciplinary research environments and doctoral studies mainly in graduate schools. Jointly, they publish the series Linköping Studies in Arts and Science. This thesis comes from Tema Genus, the Department of Thematic Studies – Gender Studies.

Distributed by:

TEMA – the Department of Thematic Studies
Linköpings universitet
581 83 Linköping
Sweden

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Getting Intimate: A Feminist Analysis of Old Age,
Masculinity and Sexuality

Edition 1:1

ISBN: 978-91-7393-198-4

ISSN: 0282-9800

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TEMA – the Department of Thematic Studies, 2011

Photography on page 116: Frida Lenholm/Aftonbladet Bild. Comic strips on page 206: Sven-Bertil Bärnarp.

Printed by LiU-Tryck, Linköping, 2011

Typesetting by Albin Grahm, templates by Francis Lee

Set in Adobe Minion Pro/**Bauer Bodoni**

Cover design by Kajsa Eldsten

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Acknowledgements

Writing a doctoral thesis means recurrently facing the question “Does this make sense to anyone but myself – or am I simply going mad?” I think I am far from alone to experience how the long and lonely hours of writing and re-writing a thesis makes you question what you are doing, and at times even question your sanity. I found it quite amusing and ironical that when the director Lars von Trier recalls the infamous “madwoman in the attic” scenario of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* in his film *Anti-Christ* from 2009, it takes the shape of a woman who tries to finish her thesis in Women’s Studies up on a loft. Feeling like the madwoman in the attic at times, being blind to the strengths and weaknesses of my own work and when wondering how to proceed, the input and support of people around me has been vital. This thesis had not been written without the endless encouragement and contributions from co-workers, friends and family.

However, first of all I want to thank all the men who participated in this study by being interviewed, and/or writing a body diary. My deepest, most sincere thank you for sharing very intimate stories about your lives. *Mitt varmaste tack till alla er som deltog i studien och delgav era personliga berättelser. Att ha fått ta del av era erfarenheter har varit mycket spännande, och denna studie hade inte varit möjlig utan er!*

I would like to thank the whole of Tema Genus, all my co-workers at the Department of Thematic Studies – Gender studies, both past and present. Anna Adeniji, Anna Lundberg, Hanna Hallgren, Malena Gustavsson, Cecilia Åsberg, Kristina Lindholm, Robert Hamrén, Alp Biricik, Victoria Kawesa, Tanja Joelsson, Ulrica Engdahl, Magda Górska, Wibke Straube, Lotta Callerstig, Katherine Harrison, Dag Balkmar, Emma Strollo, Redi Koobak, Pia Laskar, Monica Obreja, Ulf Mellström, Barbro Wijma, Björn Pernrud, Jami Weinstein, Måns Andersson, Stina Backman, Berit Starkman, Jeff Hearn, and Nina Lykke. Thank you for being such a wonderful, inspir-

ing and passionate crowd, for making life in academia so stimulating and joyful. Working with you has been a constant reminder of the “merrymaking of a movement that aims to change life”, to quote feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti.

I would like to say a special thanks to Dag Balkmar and Emma Strollo. Dag and I started our lives as PhD-students together in 2006 and we have shared many courses, conferences and seminars since then. Thank you Dag for all your comments, support and for all our conversations, and not least for being such fun hanging around with. In 2007 Emma Strollo started as a PhD-student at Tema Genus and Emma has become both a great colleague and a very dear friend. Thank you Emma for your encouragement and your many useful comments, for all the late night talks and early morning talks in Skäggetorp, for keeping me company on the train, at the Royal library and in many other places. Our friendship has been very important for me during these years.

I feel there is no way I can enough thank my supervisor Professor Jeff Hearn for his help with this thesis. My warmest thanks to you Jeff for your constant support, your enthusiasm for my work and your open mind for what I have wanted to do. You have not only contributed to this thesis through your many comments, suggestions and discussions, but also by being so funny and friendly. It has been very inspiring and fun working with you and I look forward to many future conversations (not least on materiality versus discourse).

I am also very grateful to my co-supervisor Docent Ericka Johnson for all the help and input during these years. Thank you Ericka for all your readings and comments and for coaching and guiding me in academic life, which at times has seemed so very confusing. Your support and advice has always been very assuring in times of doubt.

This thesis is multi-locational in the sense that it has been written in many different places. Outside Tema Genus I have spent many hours at the Royal library in Stockholm, where I have met many colleagues and friends. I would in particular like to thank Amelie Björck and Klara Arnberg for being such good company and for all the academic and non-academic chats over lunch and coffee in Sumlen.

Before coming to Linköping university and Tema Genus, I received my undergraduate education at the Gender Studies department, Södertörn University College, and as a doctoral student I had the possibility to return there to teach. I would like to thank all the teachers at Gender Studies, Södertörn, for being an inspiring milieu for discussion and thinking for me throughout the years. I am particularly grateful to Professor Ulla Manns, Associate Professor

Ulrika Dahl and Professor Teresa Kulawik for your support, encouragement and interest in my studies and doctoral research.

Another milieu that has been welcoming and supportive during my years as a doctoral student is the Department for Gender Studies, Stockholm University. I would like to thank all the teachers and co-workers at this department for your warm atmosphere and for giving me the opportunity to teach, letting me present my work and your enthusiastic encouragement.

The first tentative chapters of this thesis were presented at my 60 percent seminar in December 2008. I would like to thank Professor Toni Calasanti, as my opponent in this seminar for your constructive criticisms and helpful comments, and for sharing your vast knowledge on issues of gender and ageing also later on in my doctoral research.

I am also very grateful for the help and advice of Associate Professor Dorte Staunæs, as the opponent of final seminar. Thank you for making this seminar into such an enjoyable yet thought-provoking occasion. Your valuable suggestions and questions on what different theories made me capable of thinking gave me the push in the right direction to finalise this thesis. Many thanks also to the committee of my final seminar, Docent Peter Öberg, Docent Kristin Zeiler and Professor Nina Lykke for your insightful readings and suggestions.

I have found the comradeship with other doctoral students very important over the years and there are so many of you that I have met in courses and conferences who have been important to my work. I would especially like to mention "Stockholmsgruppen" consisting of Erika Lundell, Catrine Andersson, Niclas Järvklo and Emma and Dag from Tema Genus. Thank you for your readings, your ideas, suggestions and constructive criticisms and comments, and for all discussions on life as a PhD-student.

I am also very happy to see that the thesis turned into the nice book you hold in your hands. The talented illustrator Kajsa Eldsten has done the cover of the book. Thank you Kajsa for being so perceptive to what I wanted the book to look like and for making it into such a beauty. That you hold this book in your hands is also very much thanks to the meticulous work of Albin Grahn who did the typesetting. Thank you Albin for being so committed in your work with the book and for making it look this good. Liz Surbout has done a wonderful job as a proofreader of this thesis, and her corrections and suggestions have improved the overall impression of the thesis significantly, which I am very thankful of. Thank you also Sven-Bertil Bärnarp, the creator of the comic *Medelålders plus*, who gave me the permission to print two of his comic strips in this thesis.

My passion for studies and research has always been encouraged and cheered by my family. *Tack mina älskade föräldrar Ann-Lis och Anders Sandberg för att ni alltid har varit stolta, stöttat mig och låtit mig göra det jag velat. Tack också min käraste syster Susanna för all dans och allt skoj.*

Besides myself there is one person who has lived in a very intimate relationship with this thesis, yet has shown no signs of madness. Thank you Anton Gustavsson for keeping your calm and making me happy not least in the very last phases of writing. Thank you also for being the smartest and best editor who has taken the time to read many of my chapters and given me constructive comments and helped me in my writing.

This thesis also owes its existence to all my loved friends. Thank you for being so enthusiastic and understanding about my work, for all the fun, for listening, and handling my crying and for all the really enjoyable discussion on feminism and politics in general. I would particularly like to mention my dear friends Liv Nordlund and Knut Jakobsson, who have both read my work and commented on chapters of this thesis. Also, thank you Knut for your friendship and for putting up with me not least during the years we shared a flat.

So thank you all for keeping me sane over the years, for reminding me of what is interesting and pleasurable about academic work. When you think about it, madness may be just another word for passion, and it might not be worth coming down from the attic just now, but rather inviting everyone up.

Årsta, March 2011
Linn Sandberg

1

Introduction

The sexual encounter cannot be regarded as an expedition, an adventure, a goal or an investment, for it is a directionless mobilization of excitations with no guaranteed outcomes or ‘results’ (not even orgasm) (Grosz 1995a, 200).

Karl: Do you know how 80-year old people fuck?

Inga: How?

Karl: She’s standing on her head and he dips it from above.

[Laughter]

Inga: [in between laughs] That was a good one [...] How old are you really?

Karl: Me? 76 years old, four years to go...

[Dialogue from the German film *Wolke neun* (2008)¹]

How do you think an 80-year-old person fucks? Do you think he or she fucks at all? In the humorous conversation above, taken from the German film *Wolke neun*, one of the central ideas around the sexualities of old people is evoked: that old men are impotent and incapable of having sex. But the conversation, which takes place between 60-year-old Inga and her older lover Karl while lying naked in bed, is not merely a reflection of sexuality in old age as equalling impotence. The way the lovers joke and laugh about ideas of sex in later life also changes and subverts these ideas; a flaccid penis does

1. English title: *Cloud Nine*.

not have to be the end of the world, and not the end of sex for that matter. As absurd as the joke above may seem, I also find it a telling illustration of the inventiveness and new possibilities that ageing bodies may introduce into heterosexual sex. This is something that this thesis will explore further.

The topics of this study are, as the thesis' subtitle reads, old age, masculinity and sexuality, more specifically heterosexuality. Also involved with these three topics is the body, which is another central aspect of this study. I have chosen to study men not because I necessarily think that men need more attention, not even old men. My choice of men as a topic of study springs from my belief that men are gendered, and that masculinities emerge in different modalities in relation to age and the life course (Calasanti 2004). I also understand sexualities, which, following Foucault, I regard as social constructions and discursive phenomena, to emerge and be shaped differently in relation to old age and ageing bodies.² More ambitiously, my turn to old men, sexualities and bodies is also motivated by feminist aspirations. As Calvin Thomas (2002, 60) argues: turning to the "matter' of the male body" may be "one possibly productive way to analyze male power and hegemony, and to reconfigure male identification and desire" and, accordingly, to serve feminist purposes of changing gender relations and men's dominance, not least in the central realm of sexuality.

I have chosen to approach this topic by listening to and analyzing the ways in which old men themselves articulate and shape narratives on sexuality in interviews and written diaries. I could have approached the topic in other ways, by analyzing media accounts, films, books or medical and scientific representations of old men's sexualities.³ The way I have chosen to do this is, however, by focusing on how 22 heterosexual men born between 1922 and 1942 themselves articulate, take up and shape discourses on sex, sexualities and masculinities in relation to old age. These narratives and articulations, I argue, are part of forming what in this thesis I call sexual subjectivities, in short one's sense of self as a sexual and gendered being.⁴ This shaping does

2. When I say "discursive" and "discourse" in this study I am referring not only to language, but also to discourse, following Foucault, as denoting an entire set of practices which make articulations possible (Foucault 1993, 57, Translator's note 1).

3. For discussions on masculinity, sexuality and old/ageing bodies in media representations and advertising, see: Calasanti & King 2005 and Gross & Blundo 2005, Marshall & Katz 2003; in film, see: Vares 2009, Walz 2002 and Biltgård 2000; in pharmaceutical, medical and sexological accounts, see: Åsberg & Johnson 2009, Johnson 2008, Andersson 2009.

4. I use the term "narrative" in this thesis to denote men's accounts and articulations in interviews and diaries. Importantly, I do not understand narrative here in an analytical sense (as developed within narrative studies and analysis). Whereas discourse in this thesis refers to "broader or more global patterns in collective sense-making and understanding" (Wetherell & Edley 1999, 338), narra-

not take place in a vacuum, but happens in dialogue with the societal discourses at hand. As such, the way in which men talk about sex and sexuality can also tell us things about what discourses are more widely available on masculinity and old age in a 21st century Swedish context.

Old age, masculinity and (hetero)sexuality: Understanding the concepts

This study is situated at the crossroads of several fields of research and areas of knowledge production. Since it focuses specifically on the experiences of men as gendered, it relates to critical studies of men and masculinities, as a sub-field of gender studies (cf. Hearn 1997, Hearn 2004). As a study on old age (and gender), it is also situated in relation to feminist and critical gerontology and ageing studies (cf. Calasanti 2003, 2004, Calasanti et al. 2006, Cruikshank 2003). And additionally, as a study on sexuality and more specifically heterosexuality, it also relates to and draws on insights from feminist studies of sexualities in various forms and queer theory (cf. Kippax et al. 1990, Waldby et al. 1991, Holland et al. 1998, Butler 1990, 1993, Ahmed 2006). A common denominator of these fields is a critique of essentialist and/or reductively biological understandings of age, gender and sexuality respectively. Accordingly, in this study I understand age, sexuality and masculinity to emerge and become intelligible in different ways in different social and cultural contexts. Since these concepts are of great significance to my work and will repeatedly be referred to, I want to clarify in brief how I use and understand them in my thesis.

First of all, the concepts of old age and ageing bodies are central to my work. When I say old instead of older in this study I concur with a position held by sociologists Toni Calasanti & Neal King (2005). Calasanti & King (2005, 5) argue that our use of “older” instead of “old” to describe people in later life reflects an ageism in which being old is seen as inherently negative and something that needs to be avoided at all costs. To label something older instead of old does not necessarily do away with the negativity attributed to old age but rather reinforces the stigma.⁵ I therefore discuss *old* age and *old*

tive is used interchangeably with terms such as articulations, stories and expressions, in other words how men write/speak about something.

5. The argument of Calasanti & King (2005) on old age can be compared to that of sexual difference theorists such as Rosi Braidotti (1994) or Luce Irigaray (1980), who argue that feminist aspirations for sameness, that men and women are alike and the same, end up in reducing female specificity and disabling possibilities of female becoming, as women then in essence are to become men. By renouncing differences between old and other ages, a midlife-norm is reinforced and becomes the

men in this study.⁶ This does not imply that I see old age as some essence with a univocal meaning; age is a fundamentally social category and ageing is not only dictated by the ageing of our bodies. As such, what it means to be old is subject to change. Old age is a social construct in the sense that what it means to be old is shaped by culture; we are, as Margaret Morganroth Gullette (2003) has pointed out, “aged by culture”. In this sense age, like gender, is something we are interpellated into; it is performative, we are not only doing gendered selves but also doing aged selves (Laz 2003).

This thesis does not, however, regard bodies as mere inscriptions of culture, bodies are also unruly. Ageing bodies are neither due solely to biological processes nor are they only linguistic products. So when in this thesis I talk of old age and ageing bodies I am referring both to a social categorization (and power asymmetry) and material processes in which bodies are constantly changing and becoming.

In this study, my discussion of sexuality encompasses both sexuality as *heterosexuality* and sexuality as denoting *activities, practices, desires and feelings* related to the erotic lives of the men who participated (cf. Jackson & Scott 2010). Firstly, I approach and understand heterosexuality to be closely bound up with the shaping of gendered subjectivities. Being a man, and constructions of masculinity, are entwined with expressions of and orientations to heterosexuality. Notably this is not merely about identity, but is a matter of how subjects emerge as subjects in society by being intelligible as gendered beings, and in this I follow the work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993) and Sara Ahmed (2006). (This will be discussed further in Chapter Two, on theory).

Secondly, this study also understands and looks at sexuality as a mundane set of practices and experiences, as a “sphere of human, social activity and a field of sociological inquiry” (Jackson & Scott 2010, 2). Sexuality is for many people a set of very intimate and embodied experiences, felt as intensely corporeal and linked to feelings of pleasure and pain. This does not mean, however, that sexuality is merely a private matter or “a discrete set of practices” (Hearn & Parkin 1995, 57). The sexual experiences narrated in this study are understood as taking shape from their social and cultural contexts. In line with a long tradition of feminist studies of sexuality, this thesis does *not* understand sexuality to be first and foremost a biological phenomenon

only possible position, just as renouncing differences between men and women makes everything into the masculine.

6. The exception, when I use the term older, is when referring to the research of others, since older is the term used by most researchers on later life.

and/or innate in any way. Rather, the concept of sexuality denotes the social organization of eroticism and relationships in particular ways.⁷

Thus, in this study sexuality is discussed both as integral to gendered subjectivities and as practices/activities/experiences. Importantly, however, when I discuss sexual practice/activity and sex this does not limit itself to intercourse, nor even to genital sexuality. To me this became particularly clear when interviewing and reading diaries by the men in this study. I asked men what they considered to be sex and sexuality. The answers were diverse and what counted as sex or sexual activity was in the end open to everything from intercourse, touching and rubbing to looking, flirtation and fantasizing. Similarly, sexuality was understood as denoting something much wider than sexual activities, feelings and desire.

When I discuss men's narratives on sexuality in this study I will use the concepts of *intimacy and touch*, which I have found to capture many of the diverse ways in which men spoke/wrote about sexuality and what they found to be important. Indeed, the very title of this thesis, *Getting intimate*, springs from the significance of the term intimacy for this study. It is worth clarifying just briefly how I understand and use intimacy in the thesis, since the concept has a range of everyday meanings.⁸ Intimacy is sometimes used as a euphemism for sexual activities, often intercourse, but in this study it is not merely a mild expression for sexual activities. Rather, intimacy (together with touch) can here be understood as a specific modality of sexuality, which links with relationships, feelings of love, commitment and elements of disclosure, to mention just some things.⁹ If sexuality is understood as discursive in this study this also goes for intimacy: men's turn to intimacy (and touch) shapes sexual subjectivities in particular ways. So, intimacy is an analytical concept that is used in this study to discuss sexuality and how gendered and sexual subjectivities take shape.

Turning finally to masculinity, I use this concept in a rather straightforward way in the thesis, as referring to what it means to be a man and the

7. However, claiming that sexuality is important to the shaping of gendered subjectivities does not imply that I understand sexuality to be the truth of one's self (cf. Foucault 2002). I believe it is worth keeping Stevi Jackson's (2007, 5) question: "What is so special about sex?" in mind when researching sex and sexuality. Although gendered and sexual subjectivities are mutually shaped, sexuality may still be regarded, in the words of Jackson, as "one facet of the self" (Ibid.), not some core of the subject.

8. The Oxford English Dictionary defines Intimacy in the following way: 1. close familiarity or friendship 2. A cosy and private or relaxed atmosphere 3. euphemistic sexual intercourse 4. an intimate remark 5. closeness of observation or knowledge of a subject.

9. My uses of intimacy differ in significant respects from how it has been used in discussions and research elsewhere, for example in the influential work of sociologist Anthony Giddens (1995).

combined qualities and characteristics attributed to men in a particular culture at a particular time. In terms of masculinity, my study has been particularly inspired by the work of social psychologists Margaret Wetherell & Nigel Edley (1999). Wetherell & Edley reject understandings of masculinities as different types, and instead argue that the focus should be on how men take up, negotiate, resist and challenge masculinities in various ways in their everyday lives and interactions.

Investigations are required into how men negotiate regulatory conceptions of masculinity in their everyday interactions as they account for their actions and produce or manage their own (and others') identities. (Wetherell & Edley 1999, 337)

When I discuss masculinity in this study, I thus focus on how men in different ways shape desirable and undesirable masculinities, and identify or disassociate with different ways of being a man.¹⁰ In contrast to Wetherell & Edley (1999), my discussion on masculinity does not take its point of departure from explicit questions and answers on how men understand masculinity, but rather from how masculinities take shape in men's narratives on sex and sexuality. Clearly there is not one masculinity at stake in this study, but rather several co-existing and sometimes competing masculinities are taking shape.

Important to this study is an intersectional approach; that is, I understand old age, masculinity and sexuality to be mutually constructed. As such, and as I mentioned earlier, masculinities emerge in different modalities in relation to age and sexuality. For example, in this study masculinity is being shaped through age relations, how old men position and understand themselves vis-à-vis young and middle-aged men.

Studies of men and masculinities have shown little interest in the lives of old men and what old age does to the shaping of masculinity (Calasanti & King 2005, Calasanti 2004). Queer theory and research on sexualities have, in turn, generally overlooked later-life experiences of sexuality (Jones 2003, Gott 2005). And studies of ageing and later life have, to a great extent, avoided topics of sexuality. Consequently, the combination of old age, masculinity

10. The concept of hegemonic masculinity, coined by Connell (1995), is often a natural point of departure for many studies on men and masculinities. The controversies and debates around the concept have been many, however, and I have neither been interested in partaking in these debates, nor found the concept of hegemonic masculinity to be particularly useful for my ambitions and purposes in this study (e.g. Demetriou 2001, Hearn 2004, Wetherell & Edley 1999, Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). However, along with Wetherell & Edley, I would rather frame my discussion in terms of hegemonic sense-making in the construction of masculinity and masculine subjectivity.

and sexuality is an original study set up which hopefully will contribute to several fields of research.

Aim and central questions

This study has two overarching aims, which will run throughout. These are:

Firstly, to study the sexual subjectivities of old men. My ambition with this project has been to study how sexual subjectivities take shape in relation to masculinity, heterosexuality and old age. I approach this by analyzing how old men articulate and make meaning around sex and sexuality in later life. This aim is primarily empirical and seeks to expand qualitative knowledge on old age, masculinity and heterosexuality from the perspective(s) of old men themselves.

Secondly, this study aims to explore what a male body may become in relation to ageing. This aim is more concerned with theoretical exploration, and the concept of becoming is picked up from deleuzian thinking and brought into a feminist theoretical discussion. Following Elizabeth Grosz, I have been interested in the possibilities of a “radical rethinking of male sexual morphology” (Grosz 1994a, 201), and in particular how the ageing male body may propose such a site of rethinking. In other words, if bodies are not mere anatomies but are shaped in complex interactions between materiality and language, I am interested in how the ageing of bodies proposes a possibility to think about masculinity and the male body differently. Although this aim is more theoretical, it is still situated in the empirical, in the narratives of the men in this study.

The following questions have guided my research and have been central in approaching the aims of this study:

- How are sexuality and sex in later life made sense of by old men themselves?
- How is impotence discussed, is it narrated as a problem, when and why? ¹¹

11. In medical contexts, impotence is now usually referred to as erectile dysfunction (ED). I understand ED, however, to be a “medical construct” partaking in the medicalization of men’s sexualities (Wentzell & Salmerón 2009, Marshall & Katz 2002). In this thesis I have chosen to use the term impotence rather than ED, especially since this term is still commonly used in Swedish everyday language (impotens). I am aware of the negative undertones of the notion, relating to powerlessness and weakness in a more general sense (Tiefer 2004). However, I think that by using the word in a study which seeks to challenge and complicate the relation of male embodiment and the penis/phallus, the notion may be re-signified and combined with new meanings. When I speak of impotence in this study, it encompasses varying degrees of “erectile function change” (Wentzell & Salmerón 2009, 1759).

- How do the men explicitly and implicitly discuss sexual desire? How can sexual desire be understood?
- What is the meaning of age in men's narratives on sexuality? How are the sexuality and sexual practices of old men discussed as being different from/the same as those of young and middle-aged men? Are old men understood to be sexual and in what ways?
- What role does the ageing body play in how old men's sexual subjectivities take shape?

Neither asexual nor a dirty old man? Old men and sex as a topic for Gender Studies

Why are old men's sexual subjectivities an interesting and important research topic? Why is it relevant to gender studies? How did intersections of masculinity, sexuality and old age come to be the focus of my research and what led me to the questions I pose in this study? In the following, I will describe why I have found the topic of this thesis important and interesting to study.

When I started my doctoral research I was interested from early on in what I perceived as the potentially contradictory discourses that surround the sexualities of old men. On the one hand, there are discourses of old age as asexual, but also of sexuality as a part of healthy ageing (Gross & Blundo 2005). On the other, there are strong prevailing discourses on male sexuality as assertive, predatory, penis- and penetration-focused, but also discourses of the "dirty old man", who is inappropriately sexual (Calasanti & King 2005). I started to formulate questions for this study from how I perceived that old men seemed required to "stay hard", to stay healthy and maintain masculinity, and while doing this having to navigate between the Scylla of being seen as "dirty", and the Charybdis of discourses of asexual old age. I became interested in how old men themselves thought about these things, their own personal experiences of sex and sexuality in later life, and how they articulated their thoughts around different issues related to sex and sexuality.

Old men's sexualities can indeed be understood as a contemporary "hot topic" in Western societies. As I commented at the beginning of this chapter, old men's sexualities have generally been associated with impotence, as an end-point to sexual activities in later life. With the advent of Viagra and other sexuo-pharmaceuticals on the market, however, men's impotence has gained widespread attention, been renamed erectile dysfunction and described as an emergent pathology (Marshall & Katz 2002). In what some researchers refer to as "Viagra culture" (Potts & Tiefer 2006), impotence has become a curable disease and sexual function is not necessarily thought to disappear

when men grow old (Marshall & Katz 2002, 2003, Marshall 2008, 2010). This shift is likely to affect how old men themselves understand their own sexualities and sexual practices. As several critical researchers have pointed out, in Viagra discourses sex and sexuality are narrowly defined in terms of men's sexual function and the ability to have coital sex (Gross & Blundo 2005, Calasanti & King 2005, Marshall & Katz 2002, 2003). There has in recent years been a growing interest in how old men themselves experience and think about impotence, and what is important in later life sexuality, but there is still relatively little qualitative research in the area (Marshall 2010).¹²

From a gender studies perspective, men's experiences of impotence are evidently interesting and relevant since the constructions of men's sexualities (and indeed masculinity more generally) are so closely tied to erection and penetration (Tiefer 2004, Plummer 2005). If masculinity is understood to be linked to the penis and the ability to gain an erection, impotence is consequently commonly understood as a loss, and a threat to masculinity (cf. Tiefer 2004, Oliffe 2005, Fergus et al. 2002). Rather than just taking this assumption for granted, however, in my research I have wished to focus on and highlight other perspectives on impotence than as a threat to masculinity. This implies that I have been open to ways of thinking about the flaccid penis and other changes following from ageing as *possibilities* for other sexual practices and subjectivities to emerge, when analyzing my material. It has been my belief that, by turning to men's own narratives, some presupposed and assumed conceptions on old men's sexualities may be challenged and understood in more complex ways.

If sexual function and the "risk" of impotence is generally perceived as a problem, and hence what is most often discussed in relation to the sexualities of old men, men's experiences of sexual desire in later life have gained considerably less attention. Although it is generally understood that sexual function and desire are interlinked and interdependent, desire and function are nevertheless often separated. It is consequently possible to read and hear things such as: "one might suffer from physical illness, function may decline, but the desire remains" on sexuality in later life.¹³ Sexual desire and loss of

12. For exceptions, see Potts et al. 2006, Kleinplatz et al. 2009, Jones 2003, Loe 2004, Vares et al. 2007, Gott & Hinchcliff 2003a, 2003b, Gott 2005, which will be discussed more in the section on existing research. A related field that is relatively well-researched is men's experiences of prostate cancer and erectile dysfunction and how this impacts and shapes men's experiences of masculinity and sexuality. See e.g. Oliffe 2005, Bokhour et al. 2001, Gray et al. 2002, Sand et al. 2008, Boehmer & Babayan 2004, Fergus et al. 2002, Chapple & Ziebland 2002.

13. From Swedish magazine *Ottar* 2004 (4). In Swedish: "Den sexuella lusten och förmågan till förälskelse upphör inte med åldern. Man kan drabbas av kroppsliga sjukdomar, förmågan kan avta, men

desire, to want or not want to engage in sexual activities, relate to what I discussed as the contradictory discourses of old men's sexuality. Old age as asexual may on the one hand assume a lack of desire, but expectations of sexuality and sexual assertiveness in men may on the other hand make a retained desire important also for old men. Additionally, there is an evident shift in attitude towards sex and old age, whereby sexuality is increasingly understood as life-long and pivotal to old men's health in general (Marshall 2008, Gott 2005). In pharmaceutical advertising as well as in popular media representations men are not only constructed as "forever functional", but also forever willing (Marshall & Katz 2002, Gott 2006). Raising issues of sexual desire in this study is a way to come at how men themselves make sense of and understand the role of desire. Is sexuality understood as a component of old age at all? Should one feel sexual desire as an old man? If so, this in turn raises questions about what it is one should desire and what expressions and articulations of desire are possible and acceptable. In this study I will explore both articulations of existing desire and ways of telling about lack or loss of desire. Is lack of desire understood as a problem, and if so, in what ways? Looking at desire is not only a way of understanding the shaping of sexual subjectivities at the intersections of old age, masculinity and heterosexuality, but is also a way of developing ideas around the deconstruction of binaries of the sexual and the non-sexual. This also involves the distinction of the sexual and the non-sexual body, where male bodies are assigned as sexual by their erections.

This is not only a study of experiences of sexual practices, impotence and sexual desire, but most importantly it is also a study about attitudes and ideas about later life sexuality among old men themselves; the meanings taking shape around old age and age relations and sexuality. Age as a social categorization and a power asymmetry is generally little discussed in feminism and gender studies, despite the impact of theories on intersectionality in the field (Krekula et al. 2005, Calasanti et al. 2006). The ways in which understandings of appropriate and desirable heterosexuality may be age-specific are also rarely explored in research. The important queer theoretical concept of *heteronormativity* not only involves the binary of heterosexuality/homosexuality, but also normativities around sexuality more broadly, including around age (cf. Nordin 2007). Still, there is an evident dearth of discussion on desirable heterosexualities in relation to old age and masculinity. The "dirty old man" could in some senses be seen as a queer figure, insofar as he is sexual

lusten finns kvar". <http://www.rfsu.se/sv/Sex-och-politik/Ottar/Ottar-20041/Ottar-nr-4-2004/Aldresoker-lust/>

in the wrong time and place, but little is known about how old men relate to this figure and what is perceived as desirable heterosexuality in later life. By looking at how men in this study talk about, compare and contrast their current experiences with the sexualities of young and middle-aged men, as well as themselves throughout their own life course, I attempt to get at how the sexual subjectivities of old men take shape.

The aim of this study, as I have noted, is twofold and I wish both to increase empirical knowledge about old men and sexuality from gender studies perspectives, and to contribute to theoretical discussions in gender studies. In terms of theory, my concern has been to explore what thinking about age, most notably old age, might do for feminist theorizing on embodiment, sexuality and subjectivity. I would like to emphasize that, although this is a study of old age and old men, thinking through old age not only sheds light on experiences of being old and meanings of the category of old age but also on age as a social categorization and means of cultural intelligibility more widely. Margrit Shildrick (2009) points to how disability is not only an issue for people with disabilities but also probes into the role and meaning of ablebodiedness in our societies more widely. She asserts that, just as racism is a “problem of whiteness”, so is disability a matter of ableism (Shildrick 2009, 15). I suggest that this argument is equally salient to old age and ageing; exploring issues of old age and ageing also raises questions about how ageism operates through the taken-for-grantedness of mid-life (and youth). Age is an interesting category to explore in gender studies since it is a difference that resides within all of us (Schwaiger 2006). Also, the ageing of bodies presents us with a morphological difference that is a potential of all bodies, and points to the instability of the body altogether.

From a theoretical point of view, I have also been interested in how ageing bodies and being interpellated as old bring a whole new set of questions into the studies of men and masculinities. Old age may in many respects be understood as oppositional to hegemonic masculinity, as defined by stamina, strength and autonomy. This potential contradiction between old age and masculinity has made me consider the possibilities of thinking masculinity differently in relation to old age, and not least the possibility of thinking the male body in new ways in relation to ageing. A turn to the deleuzian concept of becoming has been a way for me to engage in such a rethinking. The theoretical exploration of men and masculinities in my thesis has meant departing from some of the more well-trodden paths of masculinities research (most notably the legacy of Connell’s (1995) hegemonic masculinity). In this study I bring a wide range of theories and theorists together, from deleuzian and corporeal feminism to Sara Ahmed’s queer phenomenology (2006) and

feminist discussions on heterosexuality and male dominance, to think and rethink ageing, embodiment and masculinity in various ways, thus I call it a feminist analysis.

By drawing on a wide range of different theories in this thesis, my ambition has been to encompass complexity in studying men and masculinities. I have wanted to point out how intersections of sexuality, masculinity and old age may propose re-organizations of sexuality (cf. Grosz 1995a, 218) and disruptions to dominant patterns of masculinity. Yet, at the same time, I will also discuss and explore how hegemonic features of male sexualities, often grounded in erection and penetration, persevere in old men's lives.

Importantly, when I stress that one aim of this study is theoretical exploration, my ambition is not to propose a fixed and final answer on what thinking age could do to feminist theory. Rather I wish this work to spur further questions and discussions in gender studies.

Between asexual old age and sexuality as lifelong: Discourses on sexuality and old age

In the previous section, when arguing for the relevance and importance of the topic of this thesis, I have pointed to the existence of a number of discourses which old men may have to handle, and which may also at times be very contradictory. I have also pointed to how old men's sexualities have increasingly become a "hot topic", with the advent of sexuo-pharmaceuticals promising men lifelong sexual function. In the following, I will try to give the reader some further background on how research has discussed later life sexualities in general and old men's sexualities in particular, and also how these discussions feed into and shape more popular discourses of old age and sexuality. I will point to two pervasive discourses on later life sexuality, one on asexual old age and the other on sexuality as lifelong and of the "sexy senior", and argue that both these discourses are limited when it comes to understanding how people make sense of sexuality in later life. I will subsequently present the "results" of a number of qualitative studies on later life research. These studies form an important background to my research, but I will also point to how my study differs in some significant ways.

In studies on later life sexualities, researchers almost routinely point out that old people are very often seen as asexual and undesirable (Calasanti & Slevin 2001, Gott & Hinchcliff 2003a) and that old age is seldom part of a "sexual imagery" (Connidis 2006, 141). The Swedish historian, Åsa Andersson, argues that the idea of asexual old age has a long history, where the alternative to the neglect of older people's sexualities was derision (Andersson 2009).

Andersson (2009) argues that, in the Western Christian tradition, sexuality was linked to reproduction, which subsequently deemed non-reproductive later life sexuality to be perverse and immoral (also Gott 2005). In more recent times the reproductive norm was, as Gott (2005, 15) argues, further “cemented by the writings of early sexologists”, but now the sexuality of older people was deemed unwanted from a health perspective. Right up until the present day the idea of asexual old age is both reflected and reinforced in larger studies and surveys on sexuality, which often have a very small sample of old people and argue that sexuality is irrelevant to the older population, something that is challenged and questioned by critical researchers (Jones 2003, Gott 2005, Gott & Hinchcliff 2003a).

Yet, although discourses of asexual old age have a long and prevalent history in Western societies, including Sweden, this is not the only way in which later life sexuality is understood. Rebecca Jones (2003 and 2002) argues convincingly that even though the asexuality of older people is often evoked in academic literature it is largely refuted, argued to be a “myth” and something that needs to be challenged. A cultural shift has also occurred in popular culture and media representations, where old(er) people are increasingly seen as sexually active in films, on websites and in newspaper articles (Vares 2009, Walz 2002, Calasanti & King 2005).

Recent studies by Lindau et al. (2007) and Beckman et al. (2008) can be seen as examples of this shift whereby the sexual activity of older people is affirmed. Both studies assert that people continue to be sexually active in later life and Beckman and colleagues also conclude that contemporary Swedish 70-year-olds are more satisfied with sex than 70-year-olds 30 years ago. The bottom line of the two studies was that old people do have sex and they enjoy it too, a message that became the centre of media attention in both Sweden and the United States, with headlines such as: “Sexed-up seniors do it more than you think” and “Sex and the city at the oldies’ dance” (Marshall 2008, 21).¹⁴

Accordingly, researchers argue that, in relation to discourses of asexual old age, another discourse on later life sexuality has emerged, a discourse that Gott (2005, 24ff) terms a new myth or stereotype of “the sexy oldie” (Vares 2009, Jones 2003, Calasanti & King 2005). In challenging the idea of the asexual older person, this discourse sets out to “liberate” old people from the myths and stereotypes of asexuality, and to reverse the negativity attrib-

14. For Swedish media reports related to the study by Beckman et al. 2008, see for example <http://gt.expressen.se/nyheter/1.128475/sex-and-the-city-pa-pensionarsdansen>, <http://www.aftonbladet.se/wendela/article128664.ab>, <http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=406&artikel=2285901> [2011-02-21]

uted to later life sexuality (Jones 2003). The sex-positive 1960s can, according to Andersson (2009), be seen as a time during which a shift also occurred towards increasingly positive discourses on later life sexuality. During this period, sexuality in later life not only became acceptable, but was in fact recommended for reasons of health and wellbeing. The idea that sexuality is part of a healthy and positive ageing has not dwindled in the Western world since the 1960s, rather there has been a proliferation of discourses on “sex for life” (Potts et al. 2006). Contemporary discourses even shape sexual activity in later life as a way to postpone ageing and retain youth (Gott 2005, 2006).

In this shift towards increasingly positive attitudes to later life sexuality, one of the more important contributing factors has probably been the emergence of sexuo-pharmaceuticals and their promise of lifelong sexual function, which I briefly discussed earlier (Gott 2005). In a number of studies, sociologists Barbara Marshall and Stephen Katz have pointed to the changes in discourse on men’s erectile changes and impotence (Marshall & Katz 2002, 2003, Marshall 2008, 2010). Marshall & Katz discuss how erectile changes have been transformed from a primarily psychological problem into pathology through the advent of pharmaceutical treatments such as Viagra, and impotence has been renamed erectile dysfunction (ED) (Marshall & Katz 2002, 2003). Whereas a decline in sexual function was previously seen as a sign of natural ageing in men, it is now considered a disease that can be cured (Marshall & Katz 2002, Johnson 2008). When sexual function no longer automatically vanishes as a result of old age, but can be retained with the help of Viagra and other potency drugs, this furthers the idea that sexual activity can be lifelong (Gott 2005, Marshall & Katz 2002).¹⁵

Accordingly, the picture I have outlined so far is of two seemingly contradictory discourses of later life, where the latter takes the shape of a more liberal pro-sex discourse. It may seem as if the idea of sexuality as lifelong, what Jones discusses as the storyline “of course older people have sex too” (Jones 2002, 125), is the one that I could most readily take up in this study. However, I am not interested in simply proposing that old people are sexual. Rather, in line with a foucauldian way of thinking, I want to problematize the meaning of sexuality and what it means to be sexual more widely (Foucault 2002). If men in this study understand sexuality to be an important part of old age, in what ways should one be sexual and what may this tell us about the discursive conditions of later life sexuality?

15. For research on Viagra culture and the development and impact of Viagra see e.g. Potts & Tiefer 2006, Mamo & Fishman 2001, Potts et al. 2004, Tiefer 2006. For a Swedish context, see Åsberg & Johnson 2009, Johnson 2008.

Also, as benevolent as these attempts to reverse the negative stereotyping of asexual old age may be, discourses of the “sexy oldie”, or sexuality as lifelong, carry their own set of problems that need to be critiqued. First of all, the idea of sexually active later life leaves little room for people to choose not to be sexual and sexually active in later life. Sexuality as lifelong becomes a new rectitude that old(er) people should adjust to, in particular since remaining sexually active is linked to health and wellbeing; imperatives that are very hard to resist.¹⁶ There is also an ageist aspect of “the sexy oldie” or “sexuality as lifelong” insofar as remaining sexually active is a means of resisting ageing and remaining young, and to be sexual in old age also means not to become saggy and unattractive but to conform to youthful standards of beauty. Since old is still incompatible with being sexual, the “sexy oldie” is essentially a person who resists becoming old (Calasanti & King, 2005, Gott, 2005).

Moreover, being sexually active in later life is by and large equated with having intercourse in research and popular representations (Jones 2003). Research on sexual activities have tended to focus on the ability to have intercourse and as a result men’s physical problems, often impotence, are regarded as the central reason for ending sexual activities (Gott 2005).¹⁷ Critical feminist researchers have argued that the tendency to equate sex with intercourse and to focus on men’s sexual function is buttressed further by the introduction of sexuo-pharmaceuticals and the surrounding Viagra-discourses (Potts et al. 2003, Marshall 2008). Not only is later life sexuality medicalized and commodified by the introduction of sexuo-pharmaceuticals (Gross & Blundo 2005), but Meika Loe (2004, 322) argues that Viagra contributes to a masculinization of later life sexuality, as a “cultural phenomenon that ends up reinforcing ideas about sexuality conflated with manhood and male desires”. Viagra can be understood as a gendered technology which functions to reconstruct male bodies along lines of normalcy, and which reinstates the erection as central to male bodies and sexualities (Mamo & Fishman 2001). In other words, Viagra and other erectile dysfunction drugs are thus reconstructing a phallic body for old men.

The tendency to focus on sexual function and the ability to have intercourse is, for one thing, overlooking women’s desires and what women find enjoyable in sex. But it may also have consequences for how men experience sexuality in later life, by putting pressure on old men to perform sexually

16. In particular in increasingly neo-liberal and consumerist societies, where the bio-powers of controlling and taking care of one’s self are also operating and shaping later life, this seems very much the case (cf. Katz 2000, 2001/2002, Rudman 2006).

17. In the study by Beckman et al. (2008), for example, only questions on intercourse are included, and masturbation, cuddling, oral sex, etcetera are thus excluded from the term sexual activities.

and be able to produce an erection in order to penetrate. The dominant imperative to treat erectile dysfunction may additionally undermine men's own experiences of satisfying sex beyond erection and penetration (Potts et al. 2006, Oliffe 2005).

So, while discourses of asexual old age are problematic in the way in which they overlook old people's experiences of sexuality and deem them undesirable, the discourses of sexuality as lifelong define sex in very limited ways and allow little space for those who wish not to engage in sexual activities. The co-existing discourses on later life sexuality, as asexual or as lifelong, are strikingly paradoxical and contradictory when it comes to gender. Discourses of asexual old age overall treat old people as genderless (Calasanti & Slevin 2001, Silver 2003, Andersson 2009), whereas discourses of sexuality as lifelong, spurred not least by Viagra, emphasize a functional, masculine and hypersexual body. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, I find it interesting to explore how these possible contradictions influence and shape the ways in which old men's sexual subjectivities emerge.

Consequently, rather than understanding these discourses as reflections of how old people have sex, I understand them to be available ways of how to be sexual for old people in contemporary western societies, including Sweden. Research in this area is not an exception, but can also be seen as part of discourse production on later life sexuality. In terms of research, the main source of production on later life sexuality has come from quantitative studies by geriatric and medical specialists (see e.g. Lindau et al. 2007, Beckman et al. 2008, Wiley & Bortz 1996, Skoog 1996, Matthias et al. 1997).¹⁸ In these studies, however, old people's own ways of making sense of sexuality are generally omitted (Hurd 2006). Consequently, it is left to experts and pharmaceutical companies to define the meanings of later life sexuality. Hinchcliff & Gott (2008, 67) propose that:

The discourses associated both with the asexual old age and the "sexy oldie" stereotypes thus serve to disempower older people by constructing sex in a strict oppositional way which limits alternative choices.

If quantitative studies with a medical or geriatric background partake in a dominant discourse production on later life sexuality, a small but significant number of qualitative studies with a critical and/or feminist outlook can be understood as forming a counter-discourse on these issues (cf. Jones 2003).

18. For an extensive overview of international research on later life sexuality see Gott (2005) and Jones (2003).

In these studies, which seek to recognize old men's and women's own meanings on sexuality and sexual activity, later life sexualities emerge in far more complex and nuanced ways than through a simple rhetoric of "use it or lose it" (See Marshall 2010, Potts et al. 2003, 2004, and 2006, Gott 2005, Gott & Hinchcliff 2003a and 2003b, Hinchcliff & Gott 2008, Jones 2002 and 2003, Wentzell & Salmerón 2009, Hurd 2006, Loe 2004, Vares et al. 2007.)

I would like to point to two important insights from existing qualitative research, results that also resonate with what the men in my study articulate. First of all, that changes in terms of both erectile function and desire are understood as parts of normal ageing by old men and women. Secondly, that closeness and non-coital sexual activities were seen as being just as important as intercourse to later life sexual experiences.

One of the studies that has been of vital importance to this study is the research by Annie Potts and colleagues (Potts et al. 2004 and 2006). Potts et al. conducted interviews with 33 men on their experiences of using Viagra. The significant result from their study was that men's own stories on sexuality challenged understandings of solid erections as necessary for enjoyable and satisfying sex and questioned the idea that old men always seek to maintain youth through the restoration of their erection. Potts et al. argue that the biomedical endorsement of "sex for life" and the imperative to always maintain an erection was at odds with some men's experiences of sex, and how they adapted their sexual practices due to erectile changes. Where "pharmascrits" reductively define sexuality in terms of decline/anti-decline and term erectile changes as "dysfunction", the meaning and significance of the erection was negotiated by men in Potts et al.'s research (also cf. Marshall 2010). The results of Potts et al.'s research are also echoed in a study by Wentzell & Salmerón (2009), where Mexican men's preference for alternative treatments instead of Viagra is the topic of research. Wentzell & Salmerón argue that men may experience erectile changes as being natural changes of the body and appropriate to certain parts of the life course.

Not only may men understand erectile changes as being part of natural ageing, but several qualitative studies also point to how old men and women themselves may understand a decline in sexual activity as something that happens as one grows old (Oliffe 2005, Hurd 2006, Gott & Hinchcliff 2003a and 2003b). Gott & Hinchcliff (2003a, 1626), who conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with 44 heterosexuals over the age of 50, point to how old age and ageing can be a way of "coping" or negotiating the importance of sex when "sex" cannot happen as frequently or is not possible at all. In line with this finding, impotence was also experienced as being more difficult for those who experienced themselves as young (Gott & Hinchcliff 2003b).

Qualitative research on old age and sexuality also suggests that old men and women de-emphasize the importance of intercourse, but rather stress cuddling, touch and other forms of closeness as significant (Fergus et al. 2002, Potts et al. 2006, Gott & Hinchcliff 2003a, Hurd 2006, Hinchcliff & Gott 2008, Kleinplatz et al. 2009). In Hurd's study (2006), for example, where 24 women aged 52-90, who had been married at least twice, were interviewed, the participants stressed companionship as more important in later life relationships. This suggests that, despite a strong discourse on sexual function and intercourse in Viagra culture, men and women may themselves complicate and challenge the significance of erection and intercourse, and create new meanings around what it means to be sexual when old.

The qualitative research discussed above accordingly serves as an important backdrop to this study, and resonates with many of the issues that the men in this study evoked on later life sexuality. My study, however, differs in several significant ways from the existing qualitative studies on old men's experiences and understandings of later life sexualities. First of all, this study is more firmly situated in discussions on gender. In this thesis I am more committed to exploring the social construction of masculinity in relation to old men's sexual practices than has been done in earlier qualitative studies. Men's narratives on the importance of intimacy and touch therefore become important analytical concepts in my study, ways of understanding the shaping of masculinity, rather than just being taken to straightforwardly reflect old men's attitudes and practices. Although gender is salient and discussed in the above-mentioned studies, it is merely treated as a category (with Potts et al. 2004, 2006 being possible exceptions) and there is little engagement with feminist theories.

My work also differs from existing qualitative research on later life sexuality by engaging explicitly with queer theory and critically scrutinizing normativities around sexuality. As Gott (2005, 25) argues, a great deal of gerontological and health literature on old age and sexuality focuses on a very narrow context, that of the "loving, monogamous relationship". By ensuring that sexuality in later life is connected to love and the long-term couple, the sexualities of old people may become "easier to accept" as Gott claims, and not come across as deviant (Gott 2005, 30). For one thing, this leads to omissions on extra-marital sex, casual sex and one-night stands among old people in the literature. But it also works to reinforce and normalize particular heterosexualities and heterosexual sexual practices.

While this study does not primarily discuss sex outside relationships/the couple, my ambition has been to use queer theory's critical and denaturalizing eye on men's narratives on later life sexuality in this study. In doing so

I wish to discuss heterosexuality *as heterosexuality* and critically interrogate how coupledom normatively shapes old men's sexual subjectivities.¹⁹ When I write this, there is, to my knowledge, no existing research on later life sexuality and old heterosexual men which takes this approach to later life sexuality.

Earlier I pointed to how asexual old age and sexuality as lifelong are two available discourses on later life sexuality. This way of talking about later life sexuality in terms of discourses reflects how I in this study take a discursive approach. This is not conventional in qualitative research on later life sexuality. By a discursive approach I here imply that the ways in which the men in this study talk or write about sexuality do not merely reflect experiences of sexuality in later life, but also reflect how old men's sexuality can be articulated and become intelligible. In this respect my work has similarities to the work of Jones (2003), who analyzes older women's talk about sex, and more specifically how women draw on or counter the idea that sexual activities are inappropriate for older people. As the primary focus of Jones' study is talk, there is little discussion on ageing bodies and how they may matter to the way in which older women talk about sex. In my work, however, I understand the discursive to encompass more than just talk, and I am thus also committed to discussions on bodies and practices. This will be discussed more in the forthcoming chapter on theory.

In this section I have described how discourses of sexuality and old age take shape in relation to ideas of both asexuality and sexuality as lifelong and the new stereotype of the "sexy oldie". By describing these discourses I have wished to show how they both, albeit in different ways, may be too narrow and disempowering to old men and women. The idea of sexuality as lifelong seemingly sets out to "liberate the old" from asexuality and may seem to be a very palatable discourse. Yet I have argued that it risks reinforcing erection- and penetration-focused sexuality, driven by a health imperative. To reiterate, the idea that old people are made invisible and oppressed by a myth of older people as asexual may function as an apparatus of discourse production, following Foucault (2002), as yet another "will to truth" on later life sexuality (cf. Andersson 2009). Rather than sticking with either of these discourses as "true" ways of understanding old men's sexualities, I look at

19. Of those old people who expressed a continued interest in sexual activity in the study by Gott & Hinchcliff (2003a and 2003b), the long term monogamous relationship was the context in which sex was expected to occur. The desire to engage in one-night stands was rarely expressed. Widowed men and women expressed 'not wanting someone else than their life partner' as an important argument for terminating sexual activities. This not only reflects the attitudes and feelings of the participants in the study, but I would argue that it also reflects normative expectations on how to be as an old person and what it is readily possible to express in terms of sexuality and desires.

how, in various ways, they intervene in men's stories on sexuality. So, when I discuss asexuality in this thesis, I wish neither to assert that old men should be understood as asexual nor that asexuality is a myth that needs to be done away with. Instead I have been interested in what ideas of asexuality do to the ways in which men articulate sexuality and sexual desire.

In this chapter I have also presented some qualitative work which has affinities to this study, and which complicates the picture by not defining old people in terms of being either sexy seniors or asexual. The way in which my work differs from existing studies stems primarily from my point of departure in feminist and queer theory, and a post-structuralist epistemology. Another significant difference between my work and the background research is that the studies discussed above have a clear Anglophone bias, being from Canada, the United States, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. There are no qualitative studies on later life sexuality in a Swedish context. Although existing and relevant studies are all from western countries with rather similar cultures to Sweden, there are still likely to be cultural and regional variations when it comes to discourses on sexuality and gender. Therefore, next I will describe Sweden in terms of gender and sexuality, in particular from a historical point of view, and argue that not only age but also generation matters for how sexual subjectivities take shape in this study.

Sex in Sweden: Generations and culture

In the previous section, I outlined a broad discursive landscape on old age and sexuality and pointed to affinities between my thesis and a number of existing qualitative studies which seek to understand old men's and women's own ways of making sense of sexuality. The ways in which sexual subjectivities take shape in this study rely on the available discourses on old age and sexuality, but they are also a matter of culture and generation. As Gott & Hinchcliff (2003b) rightfully point out, age is just as much a matter of generations, and changes in attitudes towards sexuality and gender throughout the 20th century thus impact on how sex and sexuality are approached, understood and experienced in different generations. Generational belonging and their Swedish cultural background thus necessarily shaped the participant men's understandings and ideals of masculinity and sexuality, and determined the availability of discourses to talk/write about these things in this study (cf. Wentzell & Salmerón 2009).

Importantly, the men in this study belong to different generations and those born in the 1920s are likely to have experienced changes related to sexuality and gender differently from those born in the 1940s. Yet, I would point

to three aspects that are significant in the shaping of the sexual subjectivities of the generations of men in this study, of Swedish cultural background.

- Firstly, the availability of sexual discourse has been greater for the generations that the men in this study belong to. Sexuality emerged as a matter of public and political discussion in the early 20th century, and this increased the number and range of discourses on sexuality. Also, sex education was popularized, not least by its introduction into schools.

- Secondly, Swedish men and women in these generations are in general likely to be more sexually experienced than older generations. This relates to increasingly liberal attitudes to pre-marital sexuality, as well as the rise in divorce rates and the legalization and introduction of contraception.

- Thirdly, gender relations and notions of masculinity have shifted during the 20th century in Sweden, with an increasingly strong discourse of gender equality. New ideals of masculinity and new practices among men are thus influencing how masculinity and sexuality emerge in this study.

Sweden is known internationally as a sexually liberal country that was early to introduce sex education into schools as well as early in taking a liberal attitude to premarital sexuality. Yet, the idea of entirely sexually liberated Swedes is a stereotype that needs to be understood in more complex ways.

In the field of Swedish sexual politics and proponents of public sex education, one of the pioneers was RFSU, the National Association for Sexual Education, founded in 1933.²⁰ The work of RFSU was important in sex education becoming voluntary in 1942 in Swedish primary schools and being made compulsory in 1955. The generations that the men in my study belong to were consequently the first that may have received sex education. Yet, this education was often limited and abstinence was promoted for youth in the school materials. That sex education was limited is something that Owe, born in 1925 and interviewed in this study, reflected upon.

Owe: We had one or two hours of sex education in primary school. Then our biology teacher told us about the different organs, and showed pictures and told a little about how it all worked. But more than that, nah, I can't think of... Later it was friends who told me about contraception, any education about venereal diseases or things like that was out of the question.²¹

20. RFSU was founded and operated out of the belief that more sex education would bring about a more relaxed attitude to sexual life, which in turn should function to prevent disease and unwanted pregnancies (Lennerhed 1994, 2002).

21. O: Vi hade, vi hade en i realskolan det var mellan efter 6 år nån gång där hade vi nog en eller två timmar sexualundervisning (mhm) då vår biologilärarinna berättade om dom olika organen och

The early introduction of sex education in Swedish schools was regarded in other countries as a sign of the sexually rampant situation in Sweden, and gave rise to the mythology of “the Swedish sin” in the 1950s. Sex education, together with Swedish films such as Arne Mattson’s *Hon dansade en sommar* (1951) and Ingmar Bergman’s *Sommaren med Monika* (1953), provoked great debates in other countries about the immoral condition of Sweden (Lennerhed 1994, Glover & Marklund 2009, Arnberg 2009). Discourses of the “Swedish sin” depicted Sweden as a country of free sexual relations among the young and, in particular, that the “Swedish girl” wanted to make love” (Lennerhed 1994, 92).

The reality, however, bore little resemblance to media descriptions of the Swedish sin. Foreign articles often greatly exaggerated the numbers of children born out of wedlock and the liberal attitudes around non-marital sex in Sweden (Bäckman 2002, Arnberg 2009). Also, the freedom to have abortions was very restricted and sex education was far less radical than imagined.²²

Even though the discourses about a sex-liberal Sweden were highly exaggerated, the 1960s was in Sweden, as in many other Western countries, a time of increasing focus on sexuality and sexual liberalization. Whereas, earlier in the 20th century, sexuality had been much debated in relation to reproduction, sexual discourses in the 1960s shifted towards sexuality as a value in its own right, able to provide people with happiness and pleasure and as something that should not be repressed (Lennerhed 1994, Hirdman 2008).

The sexuality of young people was a particularly hotly-debated issue during the 1960s. The liberal and cultural radical debaters of the time asserted, in the tradition of liberal thought, that humans are autonomous and capable of making their own decisions and acting upon their own lives, and that sex was a private matter for the individual to decide upon. This was also the case for youth, liberals argued; young people were responsible and independent and should consequently be able to make decisions about their own lives and sexualities (Lennerhed 1994).

Mid 20th century Sweden can consequently be seen as a location of more affirmative, liberal and secularized attitudes to sexuality, and these new dis-

visade bilder på hur dom såg ut och berättade lite grand om det gick till men mera blev det nog inte (nej) utan sen sen var det kamrater som berättade att man skulle ha preventivmedel, vad mer ja jag kan inte säga det det gav sig själv nästan, någon direkt undervisning om könssjukdomar eller sånt det det var aldrig på tal.

22. The reactions from abroad, particularly the United States, have instead been pointed to, by Swedish researchers, as serving commercial and right-wing purposes (Lennerhed 1994, Glover & Marklund 2009). Lennerhed (1994), for example, argues that the construction of the Swedish sin functioned in a cold war context to denigrate the Swedish “middle way” between capitalism and socialism.

courses also led to several important legislative changes. The law against giving information about contraception was repealed in 1937 in Sweden, but the sale of condoms was limited (the law was not repealed completely until 1970). One important change that had an effect on people's sexualities and sexual practices, not least for women, was when the contraceptive pill was made available in 1964.

Access to contraception is likely to have reshaped sexual experience when people did not have to fear pregnancy as a result. Other important changes in Swedish culture were new attitudes to marriage and shifts in gender relations. Gender relations underwent enormous changes during the 20th century, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s. Ideals of women as submissive and passive were increasingly challenged, and women's entrance onto the labour market and feminist grassroots work changed relations between men and women (Rydström & Tjeder 2009).²³ In the 1930s, the idea of the "companionate marriage" became increasingly popular, in which husband and wife should be able to talk, and equality was more valued in marriage than before. Although marriage continued to be the norm for heterosexual relationships, even after the 1950s and 1960s, couples living together and having children without being married became more and more common and accepted. Divorce rates rose remarkably during the 1960s and continued to rise during the 1970s until they stabilized at around 20 000 per year (Rydström & Tjeder 2009, 175f).²⁴

Besides changes in gender relations through women's entrance onto the labour market, the increase in divorces, and so on, 20th century Sweden also developed a reputation as a "woman-friendly" state and gender equality emerged as a vital part of the national Swedish self-image (Hernes 1987).²⁵ Discourses on gender equality in Swedish society proliferated, not least from the 1970s onwards, when gender equality was launched as a project at the state level (Rydström & Tjeder 2009, 198).²⁶ The Swedish emphasis on gender

23. Swedish women were enfranchised in 1921. The establishment and expansion of the welfare state was also part of changing gender relations, even though the early years of the welfare model were dominated by a male bread winner ideal (Rydström & Tjeder 2009). State-funded childcare enabled women to participate in the labour market and the 1971 reform of separate taxation (*särbeskattning*) has been pointed to as important in increasing the independence and equality of Swedish women.

24. There were 9 000 reported divorces in 1960 and 13 000 in 1970 (Rydström & Tjeder 2009, 175f).

25. It was the political scientist Helga Hernes who asserted, in 1987, that the Nordic countries were potentially women-friendly. The term women-friendly has, however, been subject to critique, not least from feminist scholars in critical race and ethnicity studies. The increased recognition of differences between women has implied that the term has been regarded as biased, given its obfuscation of racial/ethnic differences between women (See Melby et al. 2009).

26. The dominant Social Democratic Party took up and particularly embraced gender equality in the 1970s, with Prime Minister Olof Palme in the party congress of 1972 stressing the issue as one

equality has not only involved women's emancipation and equality but has also been aimed at men.²⁷

The strong emphasis on gender equality and on transforming masculinity in a Swedish context is likely to have a bearing on how men themselves relate to masculinity and what is considered hegemonic masculinity. In my study this can be seen, for example, in how men disassociate themselves from men's violence against women, condemn the buying of sex and express egalitarian and women-friendly attitudes. The generations to which these men belong have accessed discourses on masculinity that were not available to their fathers and grandfathers, and have been involved in relations with women that have been markedly different from gender relations earlier in history.²⁸

Despite these important changes in gender relations, and increasingly liberal attitudes to sex, it is vital to remember, however, that the conditions for men and women have been markedly different. The liberalization of the 1960s has, for example, been described by Swedish historians as a sexual revolution for heterosexual men (Rydström & Tjeder 2009, Lennerhed 1994).²⁹ Pervasive double standards around men's and women's sexualities, where women have been expected and required to uphold propriety and respectability, point to different conditions for men and women in terms of sexual expression.³⁰ Literature on women and ageing, moreover, returns to how sex was discussed by older women in terms of being a marital duty, and how they

of the most important political issues of the decade. A law on equality was enforced in 1980 and an ombudsman on gender equality was appointed the same year.

27. Men's opportunities to take paternity leave can be seen as one reflection of how Swedish gender equality politics has also involved men. Also see Järvklo (2011) for an outline of Swedish state masculinity politics and Hill (2007) on the Swedish men's movement.

28. One should not assume however that men's association with discourses of gender equality necessarily implies gender-equal practices, whatever this may mean. In the 1980s, Swedish researcher Lars Jalmert coined the concept "in principle-man", which denotes that Swedish men are generally positive towards gender equality but that their practices are not in accordance with these ideals (Jalmert 1983).

29. Lennerhed notes that the sex-liberal debates of the 1960s were mostly dominated by men, and that the liberal claims were limited and unable to deal with issues such as abuse and rape. Although the debates benefitted women in terms of pushing claims for abortion and affirmative attitudes to sexuality, they were not necessarily compatible with the claims of feminists and women's movements. Rydström & Tjeder (2009) similarly point to how sex-liberal discourses on pornography were seldom gender conscious or raised by feminists. Arnberg (2009) discusses how discourses on lucrative Swedish pornography reflect men's sexualities as strong and in essence impossible to stem. For an international comparison see: Jeffreys (1990).

30. Although these double standards around women's sexuality were increasingly subject to critique from the 1960s onwards. One central work on the double standard on women's sexuality was Kristina Ahlmark-Michanek's *Jungfrutro och dubbelmoral* from 1962. Sex outside marriage and as a part of friendships was advocated in this book and it was made into a film in 1965 with the title *För vänskaps skull* (For the sake of friendship).

have grown up in a climate where there has been little concern with women's sexual pleasure (cf. Loe 2004, Hinchcliff & Gott 2008).

The idea of a Swedish culture saturated by influential discourses on gender equality and the emergence of more liberal discourses on sexuality, accepting contraception as well as pre-marital sex in the 20th century, is important in gaining an understanding of the sexual subjectivities in this study and the meanings of sexuality and old age. The introduction of contraception, for example, may have changed how sex was experienced. As Frank, an interviewee in this study, argues, the pill made it possible to have sex in a more unrestrained way and this has probably continued to influence his generation as they got old. But, just as importantly, the ways in which sexuality can be articulated and talked about at all in this study are made possible by the emergence of historically and culturally specific discourses on sexuality and gender. Thus, this should not be read as a study about sexuality, old age and ageing per se, but about how sexuality emerges in relation to age in culturally and historically specific ways.

Structure of the thesis

The words of Elizabeth Grosz which opened this chapter, on how the sexual encounter cannot be seen as an expedition with a guaranteed outcome, capture something I find significant for this thesis. If the sexual encounter has no given outcomes, this unpredictability also opens up to possibilities of something unexpected. In this study, this idea also relates more specifically to the potentially new and different experiences that one may encounter as one ages, and which can, as the study will show, reconfigure both masculinity and sexuality.

If sex is not an expedition or adventure with a fixed goal and guaranteed outcome, this is perhaps an equally pertinent and true thing to say about the research process: you never quite know where you will end up, or if you will end up anywhere at all. The risk or possibility of getting lost is there in both the construction of gendered and sexual subjectivities and in research. Although disorientation can be a good thing that can make you see things you never saw before, as Sara Ahmed (2006) argues, I do not wish the readers of this thesis to get completely lost and disorientated and I will therefore describe the structure and brief contents of this study.

A study, including the topic, theories and methods, does not fall from the sky in what Donna Haraway has referred to as a "god trick" (1991). Rather, what is presented in this book is a reflection of numerous encounters. Encounters with the men, which form the empirical material, as well as the

meeting points that discussions with colleagues and different readings have provided. The two chapters that follow are thus on theory and method. Next, in Chapter Two, *Theories and theoretical perspectives*, I describe the central theoretical departure points of this study. My perspectives on central concepts such as old age, the body, gender and sexuality will be further clarified in this chapter.

After the theory comes Chapter Three, *Methods and methodology*. Here I describe the research process in terms of how the men participating in the study were gathered, how interviews were done and the method I have invented and explored in this work, which I refer to as body diaries. An ongoing discussion in Chapter Three concerns reflexivity and the situated knowledge produced in the encounters between the old men who participated and me as a young female researcher. Central to this discussion are issues of power in research, and how to be accountable as a researcher in gender studies. In Chapter Four, *Doing “it” differently?*, readers are (finally) introduced to the voices of the old men, as this is the first empirical and analytical chapter of the study.³¹ Instead of starting out in the expected, in men’s impotence experienced as a problem and a threat to masculinity, I start out in narratives of how things become different (but not necessarily worse). What is different relates both to men’s experiences and to accounts of becoming more unselfish, knowledgeable and mature in relation to sex when old, and also to how bodies become different as they age. As bodies change, this opens up possibilities of other sexual practices and reinventions of bodies – and this leads in turn to ways of reconfiguring masculinities. In this chapter, I begin to introduce *intimacy and touch* as an analytical assemblage that will be important to the study as a whole.

While Chapter Four presents disruptions and potential ways of re-thinking old men’s sexualities, bodies and subjectivities, Chapter Five, *Responsible for the erection?*, focuses on a more conventional story – how masculinity is still for some linked to potency. Impotence may then be experienced as a problem for men, in particular since they feel obliged to perform sexually to satisfy their female partner. But the chapter also discusses how there are underlying expectations of the female partner in a relationship; she is also understood to be “responsible” for curing or repairing men’s impotence. In this chapter I discuss the problems and challenges that arise as we seek to understand power and dominance in heterosexual relationships, here in relation to later life.

31. Parts of this chapter have previously been published in an earlier work-in-progress version, see: Sandberg (2009).

Chapter Six, *In lust we trust?*, focuses on the role of sexual desire for the construction of heterosexuality and a male sexual subjectivity.³² In this chapter I analyze men's narratives of sexual desire and loss of desire in order to understand how men handle the discourses I discussed earlier in this chapter, on asexual old age or sexuality as lifelong. The way in which specific conceptions of sexuality are tied to various stages in the life course, and the idea that sexual desire in old age is understood as different from adolescent desires, is central here. Chapter Six also picks up discussions from previous chapters, on maturity and responsibility for example, and relates these to sexual desire. In this chapter I also return to *intimacy and touch*, as concepts which could make possible re-thinkings of sexual desire and sexuality, but which also reinforce heterosexuality by being an unthreatening and cosy form of sexuality in later life.

Finally, Chapter Seven, *Final discussion*, is a discussion chapter which ties together the issues raised in the previous empirical and analytical chapters, to ask how old men's sexual embodiment may pose further questions and make us further re-think issues of male embodiment, masculinity and sexuality.

To return to the joke at the beginning of this chapter, from the film *Wolke neun*, old men may not require their female partners to stand on their heads during sex, but hopefully the readers of this study will have some of their ideas and presumptions about old men and sex turned on their heads, and will begin to see things from new perspectives.

32. Parts of this chapter have previously been published in a Swedish version, see: Sandberg (2010).

2

Theories and theoretical perspectives

The arrival of an object does not just happen in a moment [...] An arrival takes time and the time that it takes shapes “what” it is that arrives. The object could even be described as the transformation of time into form, which itself could be redefined as the “direction” of matter. What arrives is not only dependent on time, but is shaped by the conditioning of its arrival, by how it came to get here (Ahmed 2006, 40).

I start this chapter with the words of Sara Ahmed because I think that what she expresses, how an object is shaped through its arrival, also nicely describes how a thesis takes shape over time and from different encounters with theories. The way in which I analyze and discuss the empirical material in this study is a result of theoretical encounters and the thesis you hold in your hand has been shaped and reshaped in various ways during the course of my research. The study was initially expected to focus on old men’s experiences of bodies in a more general sense but meeting with theories on the body and with the empirical material made me focus more specifically on sexuality and the sexual bodies of old men. It is not possible, however, for me to describe the entire smorgasbord of theories I have indulged in during the course of my research and the various ways in which they have influenced the shaping of my study. In this chapter, I describe and discuss what I find to be the most important concepts and theories for my research. In various ways, these have influenced and refigured how I look at my material and I

will attempt to show what I think they have made me capable of thinking and how they have directed my gaze in certain ways, in certain directions.

I start out with the concept of *becoming*, a concept that reflects my post-structuralist perspective and the inspiration I have taken from feminists engaging with Deleuze in various ways. I then describe the concept of old age more specifically and discuss ageism as a power asymmetry, and how this can be thought of in relation to gender studies and old men. I also position myself vis-à-vis the influential discourses on successful ageing and propose an alternative way of thinking old age, as *affirmative old age*. From there I move on to discuss how the corporeal feminism of Elizabeth Grosz has offered ways of thinking the body beyond the binaries of representation/language and materiality. The body is instead understood as an *open materiality*, which I argue is also a fitting way to think of ageing bodies. I subsequently turn to the matter of sexuality to describe how queer theory's critical gaze on heterosexuality is important to this work and how heteronormativity is also linked to age and intertwined with expectations about the life course. In particular, the work of Sara Ahmed on sexuality as *orientation* has been important to how I have analyzed and understood old men's narratives on sexuality and how sexual subjectivities emerge in these narratives.

The theories and concepts that have been important to this study do not come in any one neat package, and they may even be thought of by some as irreconcilable and contradictory. However, the use of several different lines of theory is a conscious decision. I concur with Margrit Shildrick in the field of disability and sexuality studies, who argues in favour of keeping "open all the lines of enquiry" and trying different theories (Shildrick 2009, 102). I use theories in this study for different purposes, because I believe that different theories are suitable for different things. Theories make us travel in different directions, ending up in different locations, from which the outlooks on the world are different. I see academic scholarship as ultimately being about presenting new and different ways of seeing and understanding the world, and thus I wish this thesis to provide multifarious ways of thinking about old men: in intersections of bodies, sexualities, masculinities and age.

Becoming as an approach to old age, the body and sexuality

In the previous chapter, when I phrased one of the aims of this thesis – to explore what a male sexual body may become in relation to ageing – I involved a concept which is of particular theoretical salience to this study, that is: *to become*. By using this very concept I have wished to make clear how

I am theoretically inspired by and associate with the concept of *becoming*, as developed by philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari 1987).

Explaining and discussing the concept of becoming in Deleuze and Guattari could entail unravelling a whole philosophical universe, and going into endless commentaries on how to understand the plethora of deleuzian concepts. However, as my prime concern in this thesis is not philosophical as such, my discussion on the concept here will be fairly pragmatic and focus on how and in what ways it has been understood in this study, and why I have found it useful and important. In that sense, one may well regard my taking up of becoming, as well as my involvement with Deleuze, as mainly a story of betrayal and infidelity.³³ Importantly also, my understandings and uses of Deleuze come primarily from feminist readings, which evidently shape how and in what ways I put deleuzian theorizing to use in this study (see Shildrick 2009, Braidotti 2002, Colebrook 2002, Buchanan & Colebrook 2000, Bray & Colebrook 1998, Grosz 1995a, Lorraine 1999, Potts 2004).

To put it simply, I understand becoming in this thesis to denote the very activity of thinking differently, of creatively imagining and discussing the possibilities of difference, of the world unfolding in new and unforeseen ways (cf. Braidotti 2002). Claire Colebrook (2002, 126f) uses the eye as an example to explain the deleuzian meaning of becomings: the eye takes up and uses some light waves to create the colours we see, whereas others are not actualized, seen with the eyes. “The human eye only perceives what interests it”, Colebrook (2002, 127) suggests, which I understand to be an expression of how some ways of seeing the world are more available and possible in a specific situation. Becoming is then that which actualizes other ways of seeing/imagining/thinking the world. In this respect, becoming relates to a post-structuralist approach, opening up to the multiplying of truths and the instability of meaning.

From a feminist point of view, becoming links with feminist aspirations to challenge the current phallocentrism and to think of other possible ways of imagining the world (Braidotti 2002). When in this study I explore what the ageing male body may become, this is in other words a pursuit of *rethinking* not only gender but also bodies, sexualities and age. Becoming is thus an

33. However, as I understand it, this unfaithful position towards Deleuzian philosophy is paradoxically in a way also being true to Deleuze's thinking. The works of Deleuze (and Deleuze and Guattari) advocate not staying true to any origin or meaning behind the text but instead enquiring about what can be produced, what new ideas and concepts may emerge. See Kaufman (2004, 651) and Buchanan & Colebrook (2000, 12) for discussions on how betraying the ideas of Deleuze, being anti-deleuzian, is in fact being deleuzian.

ontological as well as an epistemological position in this study, which interweaves with how age, gender, sexuality and the body are discussed. Below, I will briefly discuss how I understand deleuzian theorizing and the concept of becoming to be useful in thinking old age, gendered bodies and sexuality, and this discussion will thus continue further on in this chapter.

I would argue that, when it comes to old age, it is particularly interesting to link to becoming exactly because it may seem so very antithetical to becoming. As Krekula et al. (2005, 84) assert, children and adolescents are characterized in our culture as “not yet”, whose lives lie ahead of them and as such are lacking experience. Old people, in contrast, are characterized as “has beens”, whose lives lie behind them and who are stagnant and conservative (Närvänen & Näsman 2007, 236). Thus, in order to break with pervasive discourses of old age as stagnant, in decline or regression I have in this thesis approached and analyzed old men’s narratives from a perspective of becoming. In relation to old men’s sexualities, the onset of impotence is, as I pointed out earlier, commonly made sense of as a potential loss of masculinity to old men; a threat to gendered subjectivity. Deleuzian becoming, however, involves the production of positive difference and ageing bodies may thus be understood as possibilities, rather than as lacking and in decline. The concept of *affirmative old age*, which I will return to later in this chapter, is a concept inspired by deleuzian becomings as the potential for producing positive difference.

If becoming is described as creative rethinking, this may seem like a very idealistic approach that does not encompass or concern materiality. However, I understand becoming as ultimately involved with materiality and embodiment; as a “post-Lacanian emphasis on the materiality of the body which is redefined as a pre-reflexive recollection of embodied matter” (Braidotti 2002, 72). Feminist theorists and gender scholars have in various ways been committed to challenging biologically determinist accounts of bodies and discourses that tie gender and gender relations to men’s and women’s anatomies as a biological *telos*. To think of what a body may become is a way to follow in this tradition and to think of bodies as neither determined in particular ways by biology nor passively inscribed by culture. As a point that I will return to when discussing my understanding of bodies as *open materialities*, it is possible to see ageing bodies as blatant cases of becoming in the way in which they are engaged in constant transformations and mutations; the cells in our bodies are constantly renewed as long as we are alive.

Thinking back to how Grosz (1995a, 200) characterized the sexual encounter “as a directionless mobilization of excitations”, this is indeed a very deleuzian statement on sexuality. If a great deal of theorizing on sexuality

has focused on the foucauldian regimes regulating and forming how sexualities can take shape, deleuzian becoming turns the spotlight on the potentials for reorganizing libidinal structures; ways of rethinking sexualities as a “mode of living and utilizing bodies and pleasures beyond the regimes of sexuality that establish heterocentrism” (Grosz 1995a, 219). Desires, bodily practices, relationships and feelings can in other words be reorganized and reassembled in multiple ways. In my work this approach is not wholly free from tensions, however. As I will discuss later in the chapter, my engagement with Sara Ahmed’s queer phenomenology is a perspective more committed to how bodies and pleasures are retained within the regimes of sexuality; how they are kept “in line” (Ahmed 2006, 83).

Rethinking, reorganization and reconfiguration are then concepts that will recur in this study to denote potentials for becoming in various ways. Still, I would like to raise a caveat here; when I point to the centrality of becoming in this work I am not simply claiming that everything can become and be actualized all the time. Importantly, I do not wish to downplay or deemphasize the role of knowledge regimes and cultural and institutional powers in restraining what can effectively be actualized. It is of primary importance to me in this study to account for complexity and to retain a critical perspective on men and masculinities, yet at the same time to do affirmative readings on what can become. In Chapter Three, on methodology, I will describe further how this is reflected in my analysis as the alternation between *reparative* versus *paranoid readings*. To think through becoming is thus a perspective, an approach, in this study, and should not be taken as a neglect of the limitations on becoming that certainly exist.

Also, while it seems as though I am here proposing old men’s sexualities and bodies to be intrinsically subversive sites, I would like to emphasize that this is not the case. I follow Deleuze & Guattari (1987, 257ff) in the sense that I regard becoming as neither having a beginning, nor aiming at some destination or end; to settle into some being. This implies that the becoming of ageing male bodies that I discuss in this study is not about aiming for a subversive body at the end of the road; it is not a challenge once and for all to phallocentrism. The becoming that I discuss in this thesis is not a matter of “either/or” as either subversive or dominant, but is instead a “both/and”.³⁴ Becoming presents possibilities of something other, while at the same

34. Here I have Deleuze’s distinction between different “lines”; “molar” “molecular” and “lines of flight”/“nomadic lines”, in mind (see for example Deleuze (1983)). Grosz (1994b, 203f) describes molar lines as stratifying, as that which “divides, orders, hierarchizes and regulates social relations through binary codes, creating the opposition between sexes, classes and races”. I understand this to be similar to what others like Butler or Foucault have discussed as “hegemonic” discourses. Mo-

time reiterating sameness, forcing things back onto the well-trodden paths. Overall, by starting in becoming – what a male sexual body may become in relation to ageing – I raise questions about what realities are actualized in different situations, what ways of seeing the world are thinkable and possible.

Old age and ageism

In the previous chapter, I have already clarified some of my understandings of the concept of old age, and here I will discuss further what it means to approach old age as a social and cultural construction and how I understand and relate to ageism as a power asymmetry. To claim that “one is not born old, one becomes old” is probably not a highly controversial statement. To imagine someone being born as an old person is, on the contrary, a rather grotesque and comical thought. We understand old as something that one is transformed into, through living a (long) life. Yet, if we think of the statement “one is not born old, one becomes old” as a paraphrase of Simone de Beauvoir’s more commonly cited phrase “one is not born a woman, one becomes one” (2002, 325), it is also possible to think of old as something that is linked to cultural and social constructions. Gender studies has for a long time debated and challenged the natural existences of “man” and “woman”, and has pointed to how men/women/masculinity/ femininity must be understood as social and cultural constructs, rather than mere biological matters of fact. Ageing and old age are, however, still often treated as natural facts and little disputed, either in gender studies or elsewhere (Woodward 1991, 1999, Cruikshank 2003). There is an evident dearth of discussion on how we may “do age” just as we “do gender”, and that we are “aged by culture” just as much as we are gendered by culture (Laz 2003, Gullette 1998 & 2003). In feminist studies of intersectionality, age as a social category/power asymmetry often occurs at the end of the verse “gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality...”, if it is mentioned at all (Krekula et al. 2005, Calasanti et al. 2006). This study wishes to bring discussions on old age further into gender studies, to add to a field of study which I believe will become increasingly important – gender/feminist studies of old age and ageing.³⁵

lecular lines are understood by Grosz as more fluid “which map processes of becoming, change, movement and reorganisation”. The molecular does not altogether shift and challenge the molar, but rearranges and reorganizes the world. I understand this as close to Butler’s “performativity” (1993), where the slippages and changes that can occur are not free from the forces of dominant cultural and societal institutions.

35. There is some existing important and pioneering work in this field that needs to be acknowledged; see e.g. Calasanti & Slevin 2001, Calasanti 2004, Calasanti & King 2005, Calasanti 2005, Arber

I am not coming from gerontology, as a field of research on old age and ageing, and my prime concern in this study is not to engage with theoretical debates and positionings within this field. Instead, my starting point is from feminist intersectionality, and how old age is shaped in intersections of masculinity and heterosexuality (cf. Ambjörnsson & Jönsson 2010).³⁶ I have, however, been inspired by and am situating my work in relation to critical gerontology in how I understand old age. Magnus Nilsson (2008, 21, my translation) describes critical gerontology as studying (old) age and ageing from “a critical approach to social structures, norms and cultural representations, rather than from individual ageing”. Critical gerontology advises researchers not to approach old age as a matter of fact and work from pre-existing assumptions on old age, but to explore and deconstruct the discourses and representations that exist on old age and ageing (Nilsson 2008, Ronström 1999, Jönson 2009, Jamieson 2002).³⁷

Consequently, and as I have suggested already in the previous chapter, when I use the term old in this study I understand old, like gender, to be something that becomes intelligible and meaningful through culture and discourse. Old age does not merely refer to chronological age, but is just as much a matter of social positioning, for example, how we are situated in relation to working life, family/reproduction etcetera, and age relations (young/middle-aged/old). In this study, I explore the ways in which men make use of and understand themselves as old, and how this is done by relating to other age positions and the life course.

I am wary of using the term social construction about old age, for the same reasons Ahmed (2006) is reluctant to discuss sexual orientation as a

et al. 2003, Arber & Ginn 1995, Twigg 2000, 2004, Woodward 1991, 1999, Cruikshank 2003. In Swedish: Krekula 2006, Lövgren 2009, Persson 2010.

36. The concept of intersectionality was introduced by Crenshaw (1994) and has its genealogy in postcolonial and antiracist feminists focusing on the mutual constructions of ethnicity/race and gender and the power asymmetries within feminism. The concept has subsequently been influential to feminist theorizing and underlines the necessity of understanding gender as always mutually co-constructed with other categories/power asymmetries (cf. Lykke 2009, 104ff). Importantly, feminist intersectional thinking emphasizes that social categories cannot be understood as clearly separated, and “adding” (Lykke 2003). Gender scholar Nina Lykke, who has been influential in the theorizing of intersectionality in a Nordic context, proposes that categories should be understood as intra-acting, rather than interacting in intersectionality (Lykke 2005, 2009). This points to how categories are never separate but always mutually influencing one another. In this thesis I focus on the intersections of age, gender and sexuality, and thus understand power asymmetries of ageism, sexism and heteronormativity to take shape in simultaneous co-construction (cf. also De los Reyes & Mulinari 2005).

37. Jönson (2009, 10) compares the differences between early traditional gerontology and critical gerontology with shifts from women’s studies to gender studies and from studies on immigrants (in Swedish, “invandrarforskning”) to studies of ethnicity and migration, and how this has involved shifts in objects of study as well.

construction. Ahmed (2006, 80) argues that the concept of construction “does not quite explain the ways in which sexual orientation can be felt as inherent and bodily or even as essential”.³⁸ Similarly, pointing to old age as being intelligible through culture and discourse should not be understood as a neglect of how old age is in fact lived and experienced through bodily ageing. Old age, like gender, should be understood as an interpellation into culture (cf. Butler 1990, 1993, Althusser 2001).³⁹ We become subjects by being gendered and aged (as in being assigned an age). Still, I do not think that the ageing of bodies should, as Gullette does (1998, 4), be discussed only as an effect of culture. As I will discuss later in this chapter, in the section on how I understand the body, I see bodies as neither effects of culture nor as natural facts, unmediated by culture, but as “open materialities”, which go beyond the dualism of nature/culture (cf. Grosz 1994a). I understand being old as something that depends on cultural intelligibility; signs on the body that we interpret as old, being eligible for a pension and having experienced parts of the life course from childhood to adolescence and middle-age, are all parts of being accepted and read as old. But although there might be variations in how and when one is understood to be old and feels old, the ageing of the body occurs regardless of how it is culturally signified. The body ages differently depending on class, gender and ethnicity etcetera, but the body will, if we live, age (cf. Cruikshank 2003).⁴⁰

That old age is indeed a social and cultural category also entails that the meaning of old is subject to change. What it means to be old today is different from what it has meant to be old for earlier generations, and what old will mean in the future. Some researchers on ageing and later life have argued that post-modernity, with its increasingly fluid, unstable and fragmented identities, has significantly influenced experiences of growing old and what it means to be old (cf. Gilleard & Higgs 2000, Featherstone & Hepworth 1989). Old age is less fixed as a position, and with an increased blurring of the age stages there is an increased openness and the possibility for people to shape their own identities (Biggs et al. 2003). To the extent that old age is more

38. Also, see Lykke (2009), on discussions of theories on gender as constructed and the subsequent critiques from corporeal feminists and new feminist materialists.

39. Being interpellated to age can be compared to Schwaiger's (2006, 25) discussion of “age-tagging”, “a discursive practice that [...] grades individuals into a chronological age cohort, which is conflated with other, naturalized characteristics including those referring to social power and bodily control”.

40. I am here concurring with Twigg (2004, 63), who discusses the limits of social constructivism for understanding the ageing body. I understand a conceptualization of bodies as being both shaped and produced out of specific knowledge regimes, but at the same time agentic and not merely being inscribed by discourse, as a more apt way for how to understand ageing.

open as a category, this evidently also has consequences for the experiences of and ways in which the men in my study can articulate sexuality.

An important aspect of critical gerontology, which also saturates my work, is how age should be understood in relation to power; to the asymmetry which is referred to as ageism (cf. Bytheway 1995, Andersson 2008). By using the term ageism, coined by Robert Butler (1969), gerontologists and activists have wished to highlight how the way in which society is structured in terms of age and age relations is not only a matter of social organization, but of hierarchization; “different age groups gain identities and power in relation to one another” (Calasanti 2003, 203). Although age intersects with other asymmetries, it should be understood as a power relation in its own right. Ageism implies that old age is signified and understood first and foremost as negativity and decline. Old people are stereotyped and represented in negative ways; in the case of sexuality, which is the focus of this study, the sexuality of old people is, as I have noted, generally understood as non-wanted and non-desirable and is often made invisible.⁴¹ Ageism is not only a matter of how individual old people are looked upon and treated, but also denotes a social structure which reinforces age as an explanation for behaviours and characteristics. If people are assumed to be in specific ways that follow from age this also influences how people behave, that people treat others and are treated differently depending on age (Krekula et al. 2005, Nilsson 2008).⁴² Ageism is consequently not only something that affects old people but, similarly to other power asymmetries: racism, sexism, ableism and many others, the privileged and normative group goes unmarked. Mid-life is thus an invisible category in age relations. It is worth noting, however, that ageism differs from, for example, sexism or racism in that most of us are likely to experience all ages, and thus be both marginalized and made powerful through ageism (Krekula et al. 2005). One should thus not presume ageism to function in exactly the same ways as other asymmetries and categorization

My reason for discussing the above is that it provides a necessary setting for how to understand old age and the narratives on sexuality of the old men in this study. Ageism affects old men in the cases when they are interpellated as old. Calasanti (2003, 205) writes:

41. The negative attitudes against old age and ageing are not only held by young and middle-aged people. If ageism is something already learnt when young, then old people are likely to have internalized old age negativity (Calasanti 2003).

42. The links can here be made to racism or sexism as structures that, from assumptions about inherent characteristics based on race/ethnicity or gender, result in structural inequalities, exclusion and stereotyping.

Old age does in fact confer a loss of power, even for those who are advantaged – and thus able to make different ‘claims’ in later life to power and resources – by gender and class.

Old age in itself is consequently a marginalizing factor for old men and something they are likely to respond to in various ways. To think intersectionally is, however, to disentangle a complex knot of power relations and social categories. My position in this study is that different power relations and social categories are actualized in different situations, and this means that the men in this study are not only responding to discourses about age, but also to discourses about gender, sexuality and class, to mention just a few.⁴³ Thus, for example, when men in this study discuss their sexualities in comparison with young and middle-aged men, age is actualized, whereas when they discuss their current relations with their female partners, heterosexuality and gender are actualized.

There is a trend in the little literature that does exist on old(er) men to point to the invisibility and absence of old(er) men in research (Fleming 1999, Calasanti 2004, Hearn 1995, Fennell & Davidson 2003, Spector-Mersel 2006, Hoon-aard 2007). As few studies have actually engaged with old men as men, it may in some sense be plausible to speak of old(er) men as invisible. Yet, the word “invisible”, or sometimes “absent”, may somehow point to an all-encompassing marginalization and vulnerability of old men. I am sceptical about this kind of assumption and would argue that it matters to whom we relate/compare/contrast old men’s lives. My intersectional approach in this study implies that ageism and age as a social category are explicitly discussed and considered, but that age does not overrule other differences and asymmetries. My ambition in this study is to encompass the complexity of entanglements of age, gender and sexuality, to reflect how old men may be advantaged through masculinity and heterosexuality yet disadvantaged through old age.

43. Gender scholar and researcher on men and masculinities, Jeff Hearn, was one of the earliest to discuss issues of masculinity and ageing/old age. In an article from 1995, Hearn argues that with age comes “mental labour-power and the accumulation of resources” for men, which may add to men’s power (Hearn 1995, 102). Hearn’s argument can be related, for example, to powerful directors in corporate business, or world-leading politicians such as John McCain, candidate for the presidency in the election of 2008 in the United States (McCain was 72 years old in 2008). Yet I think it is necessary here to separate the chronological age of these men from being interpellated as old. As Calasanti argues, when men such as McCain are labelled old this is always done as a way to discredit or question their eligibility (from private conversation 2009). Consequently, old age in itself does not bestow men with power, rather intersections of, for example, class, race and ablebodiedness/health grant men privilege in later life. I would claim, however, that being interpellated as old is always a threat to these privileges.

From successful ageing to affirmative old age

Social gerontology, as a field of research, has been very problem-oriented and often directed towards practice (Jamieson 2002, Biggs et al. 2003). A central pursuit has been to challenge the taken for granted links between old age and dependency and decline, and to problematize the picture of old age as pathology. Gullette (1998, 7) discusses how decline discourses have become “the truth about aging” and how this not only affects those labelled old, but already starts in midlife (see also Schwaiger 2006).⁴⁴ Attempts by gerontologists to reverse and challenge decline discourses have led to engagement with the concept/theories of “successful ageing”, which were introduced in an article by Rowe & Kahn (1987). Rowe & Kahn equated successful ageing with low risks of disease, physical functioning and active engagement with society, and their work has been influential in a great amount of work in gerontology.⁴⁵ Maintained activity, to “just keep on going” as Rowe & Kahn have phrased it, is at the core of successful ageing (1998, 40 cited in Calasanti 2003, 200). Other terms that have been important are generativity, autonomy and capacity for self care (Torres 2001).

Successful ageing has not only become an issue within gerontology and academic debates, but has also become an influential discourse in policy-making, community work and grey activism in Western societies (Katz 2001/2002). That the discourse is problematic is rather evident, given the normative overtone of “successful”; if one can age successfully this also implies that one may in fact age unsuccessfully, or even be a case of failure. The critiques of the concept have thus been many.⁴⁶

What I find perhaps the most compelling critique, however, and the one which I will particularly engage with in this study, is how discourses of successful ageing may in fact reinforce ageism; this is despite the fact that the ambition of introducing the concept was originally to challenge old age as decline. In several works, Calasanti has argued for the ageist backdrop of

44. Notably, Gullette is discussing Western societies.

45. A search on the term “Successful aging” in international research databases generated 892 results in Web of Science and 729 results in Pubmed (2011-03-03).

46. The critiques have deemed SA too narrow (Torres 2001), and the concept has been critiqued for its universalistic stance with a strong western template (Torres 2001, 2003, and Torres & Hammarström 2006). In relation to class, Featherstone & Wernick (1995) have pointed out the middle-class bias of the understandings of successful ageing, where only those who can partake in consumerist practices to lessen the effects of bodily decline can become successful. These critiques have led to revisions and new approaches to SA. The 1990s saw a shift in social gerontological debates of successful ageing, from an emphasis on “what” successful ageing may imply to “how” successful ageing can be achieved: various strategies for optimizing potentials for ageing well (Baltes & Baltes 1990). There has in addition been a turn to discussing the concept in terms of how older people themselves understand “successful ageing” (Torres & Hammarström 2006).

successful ageing (Calasanti & Slevin 2001, Calasanti 2003, Calasanti & King 2005). Calasanti asserts that the strong focus on remaining active overlooks the inevitable changes that occur in ageing bodies (which may be particularly felt by the working classes). To age successfully means to fight all signs of ageing by remaining active and, as Calasanti and King (2005, 7) write, “successful aging means not aging and not being old because our constructions of old age contain no positive content”. Paradoxically then, the increased emphasis on positive aspects of ageing and old age may not work to fundamentally alter and challenge the decline discourse that exists around old age, but instead simply advises old people to escape and overcome the effects of the ageing body by all possible means.⁴⁷

In this study my discussion on successful ageing will obviously relate to sexuality. In the previous chapter, I discussed how discourses on “sexy oldies” and sexuality as lifelong have become increasingly pervasive in the West, and how these have been further encouraged by the market introduction of Viagra, Cialis and other potency drugs. But the “sexy oldie” is not merely a construct of pharmaceutical companies wanting to increase their sales, discourses on lifelong sexuality are very much part of successful ageing discourses as well (cf. Gott 2005). Sexuality is in this sense part of an overall focus on health and activity in successful ageing discourses. And it is worth repeating the potentially normative implications of this; if sexual activity is part of ageing in a positive and successful way, it may become very difficult to choose inactivity. Moreover, as I was arguing in Chapter One, the emergence of a discourse of sexuality as lifelong has not precluded the existence of discourses of asexual old age, and so successful ageing does not preclude the existence of decline narratives. Rather, I believe them to co-exist and indeed reinforce each other.

Instead of remaining within this binary of success versus decline narratives on old age, in this study I will propose an alternative way of conceptualizing old age: what I call affirmative old age. Whereas successful ageing relies on a mid-life body norm, and is saturated by neo-liberal discourses of activity, autonomy and generativity (cf. Rudman 2006), affirmative old age is an alternative challenge to decline discourses on old age. When I discuss affirmative old age in this study, I retain a critical position towards power and differences but open up for thinking old age as a positive difference in its own right (Irni 2010). The concept is thus clearly invented in dialogue with

47. I have discussed elsewhere how successful ageing as reliant on a mid-life bodily norm may be compared to liberal assimilationist discourses directed towards LGBTs, which effectively work to reinforce heteronormativity. See Sandberg (2008).

deleuzian theorizing that emphasizes becoming, in particular the feminist-deleuzian strand. Affirmative old age, in contrast to successful ageing, does not aspire to agelessness or attempt to reject and fight old age, but instead seeks a conceptualization and acceptance of old age in all its diversity, from active to sedentary, from sexually vibrant to sexually indifferent. Affirmative old age is ultimately a political force and empowering strategy. Although she does not use this term, Calasanti (2003, 215) eloquently expresses the possibilities of an affirmative old age, where the old are positively valued as old:

Old people will achieve equality with the middle-aged when “old” carries positive content rather than stigma as disease, mortality, or the absence of value. Only then will old people no longer need to be “exceptional” or spend their time “staying young” to be acceptable; only then will they be free to be frail, or flabby, or have wrinkles – to be old, in all its diversity.

The meanings and consequences of affirmative old age, including how it relates to gender studies, will be developed throughout this thesis. Importantly, however, an affirmative position on old age is to a great extent a matter of identifying and accepting the specificity of the ageing body. Therefore, I next discuss how I understand bodies in this study from a standpoint of corporeal feminism.

Corporeal feminism and the body as open materiality

Few concepts have gained as much attention and consideration in feminist theory and gender studies as the body. It is, however, predominantly the female body that has been the centre of attention, and the ways in which the female body has been discussed and theorized are diverse (cf. Shildrick & Price 1999). The lack of substantial feminist theorizing on male bodies has meant that I have had quite a struggle in deciding how to understand and discuss men’s bodies in my research. What I have settled with, and found to be the most inspiring and promising way to understand male ageing sexual bodies in all their fleshiness and unruliness, is Elizabeth Grosz’s corporeal feminism where corporeality and the body are at the very centre of concern.

Grosz (1994a, 191) conceptualizes the body as an “open materiality”, which implies that it can be understood neither as a culturally inscribed product of the social, nor as simply a part of nature. Instead, the body should be conceptualized as a borderline between the binary poles of the nature/culture dichotomy in Grosz’s interpretation. In the words of Colebrook, the body is to Grosz neither “a biological presence” nor a purely linguistic effect: “differential writing” (Colebrook 2000, 89). The representations, the language from

which bodies become intelligible, and the materiality of bodies are linked so that there is no inside or outside of bodies as such.

To illustrate how the body is neither simply a natural entity nor a social product, Grosz uses the metaphor of calligraphy in order to point out that it is not only what is inscribed or the ink used that matters, but also in fact the quality of the paper. From this analogy, she argues that, rather than understanding the body as emerging as “writing on a blank page”, it can be conceptualized through a model of etching, “which needs to take into account the specificities of the materials being thus inscribed and their concrete effects in the kind of text produced” (Grosz 1994a, 191).

Put simply, the materiality of the body matters; it “possesses a force and being that marks the very character of representation” (Colebrook 2000, 77). By underlining this point, Grosz’s ambition is to point to the material specificities of male and female bodies, to make a case for sexual difference. In my study, however, I extend her argument to relate to the differences and specificities of ageing bodies as well. When bodies change, as a result of ageing, this may also reconfigure the ways in which they are represented and, in relation to this study, their sexual subjectivities.

The way in which, with inspiration from Grosz, I underline the force and materiality of bodies in this study can be seen in the light of resuscitated claims for the need to emphasize materiality.⁴⁸ However, my turn to Grosz and bodies as open materialities is not primarily motivated by a need to re-acknowledge materiality and I am not making any grand gestures here about “taking matter seriously” (Alaimo & Hekman 2008, 6). I believe that this kind of emphasis on materiality risks, once again, to maintain the binaries of matter/discourse and to privilege materiality and matter. As Ahmed (2008, 35) rightfully points out, “matter becomes a fetish object: as if it can be an ‘it’ that we can be for or against” in debates on the return to materiality in feminist theory. What I have found truly useful in Grosz’s corporeal feminism is how she proposes a non-binary way of thinking bodies, which to some extent encompasses the agency of bodies, their messiness and uncontrollability.

It may also be worth explaining how I understand the relationship between Grosz’s corporeal feminism and the work of Judith Butler, whose thinking in some respects also saturates this work. In contrast to some of her

48. These claims have more recently been made by feminist scholars working under headlines such as “new feminist materialism” (Hird 2004, van der Tuin 2008) or material feminism (Alaimo & Hekman 2008). Karen Barad is a central figure in this turn to materiality, and she critiques post-structuralism for having “granted language too much power” (2007, 132), and instead introduces “agential realism”, a way of understanding materiality as “agentic” rather than passive matter. The idea of materiality as agentic resonates in some respects with Grosz’s conceptualization of bodies.

critics, I understand Butler to deal with the materiality of bodies, through her concept of the “materialization of bodies” (Butler 1993). This concept attempts to underline how constructions of bodies are not solely a matter of language, but are in fact a very “in flesh” matter that connects materiality and discourse in complex ways. Along with Nina Lykke, I position Butler in a middle ground between social constructionism and corporeal and material feminism (Lykke 2009). But, as Lykke (2009, 101) argues, Butler discusses the agency of bodies only parenthetically, and I have thus found that Grosz’s work made me capable of thinking about ageing male bodies more creatively. But I do not regard the work of Grosz and Butler as entirely oppositional; along with Colebrook (2000) I see the difference primarily as a difference between an epistemic body in Butler and an ontological body in Grosz.⁴⁹

As I have already touched upon in this chapter, the impact of deleuzian thinking translated via feminist readings is important for how I understand bodies in this study, and also the role of the body for thinking old age differently as affirmative old age. Although Grosz’s corporeal feminism, as developed in *Volatile bodies* (1994a), was not primarily an engagement with Deleuze, she has in several other works engaged with and been inspired by deleuzian philosophy.⁵⁰ The way in which Grosz emphasizes, not the being of bodies, but what the body can become, its motility, clearly has affinities with deleuzian approaches. If the body is an open materiality, this body is also one in becoming, producing positive difference. Notably, positive does not denote “good” in this case, but positive as in the body’s incessant capability of producing something other than itself. This understanding of bodies as produced through the processes of differentiation follows from Deleuze & Guattari’s thinking of bodies as existing out of constantly resisting organization, and characterized by the flows of desire (Deleuze & Guattari 1984 & 1987).

As abstract as this may seem, the ageing body poses a pertinent example of this way of thinking. The process of ageing is the becoming of bodies, cells in our bodies are constantly changing, being made anew. If one thinks of the ageing of bodies as not solely something that happens when old, but in

49. This argument is proposed in a compelling way by Clare Colebrook (2000) in an article where she contrasts Butler with Australian corporeal feminists. Colebrook argues that Butler has remained with a dualism of discourse and materiality, of signifier and signified, and that the body she engages with is primarily an epistemic one, since she takes the body as emerging as it is “known” (Colebrook 2000, 78). That is, where Butler focuses on how the body can be known, Grosz focuses on the ontological body, the corporeal specificities.

50. Grosz is increasingly engaging with Deleuze in her later work, see for example 1999 (ed.) and 2008. I am, however, mostly drawing on her earlier works (dealing more with bodies and sexualities), which can be seen as her initial explorations of Deleuzian thinking. See Grosz 1994a, 1994b, 1995b.

fact as a life long process then the ageing body may be seen as set in a constant process of differentiation. Small children grow taller and grow teeth, throughout life one might lose hair and teeth, eventually one gains wrinkles, one's hair may turn grey or white, and the joints go stiffer. All these things may be understood as part of a process of becoming in which the body is set. Rather than thinking of this as the body losing capabilities, it is possible to understand it as the production of difference. Notably, my position on bodies differs from that of Grosz, who understands sexual difference to be the primary and most fundamental difference. I understand all bodies to be different, in particular since the same body is never really the same, we are constantly becoming different from ourselves through ageing.

The Grosz-deleuzian approach to bodies has accordingly been a productive way for me to understand and analyze the ageing bodies in this study. Grosz proposes a non-binary way of thinking bodies, beyond the binaries of language and materiality, of representation and pre-representational object. Bodies are marked by specificities, not least from ageing, are unruly and impacting representations, but are also formed out of cultural discourse. By proposing this position on the body, Grosz tries to re-appropriate the sexed body from biological accounts, but I think her argument fits just as well into the discussion of ageing bodies. As feminist social gerontologist Julia Twigg proposes, the emphasis within social gerontology on ageing as a social phenomenon rather than a biological process has left the ageing body with the natural sciences (Twigg 2004). By thinking of ageing bodies as bodies in becoming and as exhibiting positive difference, however, we can think of the ageing body as both cultural and material, but yet avoid biological determinism.

But ageing is not the sole focus of my study, bodies as open materialities and becoming are also a way to engage in a feminist rethinking of male bodies and gendered and sexual subjectivities. I use the concept of morphology, drawn from the terminology of feminist theorist Luce Irigaray, to discuss how male bodies and sexual subjectivities can be reconfigured, and I will discuss this concept next, along with how male bodies, as an absent presence in feminist theorizing, can be thought of by using the arguments of Irigaray.

Sexual morphologies

When I outlined one of the aims of this study, the exploration of what a male sexual body can become in relation to ageing, I also referred to Grosz who, in her book, *Volatile Bodies* (1994, 201), proposed a “radical rethinking” of male sexual morphologies. That a rethinking is central to this study has probably become clear to the reader, but I would also like to explain the concept mor-

phology and elaborate on the meanings of Grosz's proposal for a radical re-thinking. Etymologically, the term morphology refers to the Greek *morphe*, which means form or shape, and morphology is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "the study of the form of things". These descriptions are useful to understand how morphology is discussed in relation to the body. I understand morphology to refer to the shape of the body, how the anatomical body takes shape as gendered and intelligible in culture.⁵¹

What is a man and what is a woman? Often when this question is answered it is the anatomies of male and female bodies that are referred to. Morphology, in contrast, does not refer to the anatomical body, but to a body entirely enmeshed in culture. Rather than assuming bodies to be products of biology, morphology describes how the body we access is always a body situated in culture. Grosz (1989, XIX) describes how the concept of morphology replaces biological and essentialist accounts, where bodies are understood as "anatomical destiny". She argues that anatomies are regarded as objective facts but are in effect cultural and work to legitimize existing gender relations in patriarchy. That women are understood to lack a penis and to be castrated are effects of patriarchal representations rather than their anatomies.

Similarly, the conflation of male bodies with their penises shapes men's bodies as phallic bodies (cf. Johansson 2006). The phallic body is represented as hard and impermeable, in opposition to the female body, which is represented as soft, mushy and permeable (Waldby 1995, Grosz 1994a). The assumption that men's and women's bodies are inherently that way also legitimizes and shapes sexual relations between men and women in specific ways. Representations of women and a recurring understanding of women in our culture is thus as penetrable and vice versa: men as those who penetrate, and from this a binary relation of activity and passivity is sustained (Waldby 1995).

This understanding of men's and women's bodies, and the implications it has for sexual activities and relations between men and women, clearly has consequences for both men and women in their everyday lives. Men, not least old men, may experience strong discrepancies between expectations of male bodies to materialize as hard, and feelings of their own bodies as vulnerable (Jackson 2001). The phallic body as a pervasive sexual morphology underscores and reinforces the importance of erection and penetration in sexual practice, and influences how men relate to their bodies and sexualities. The phallisizing of the male body prioritizes the erect penis beyond

51. Here I am closer to Butler's understanding of bodies as obtaining cultural intelligibility through a heterosexual matrix than to Irigaray and Grosz, who understand bodies to be sexed pre-discursively.

other body parts and pleasures, and clearly this may be limiting to men's sexual experiences, and have disastrous consequences for men who experience impotence (Grosz 1994a, 200). Yet, if bodies are discussed as morphologies, not as anatomies, this also means that bodies can be re-signified and thought differently, and this is where the rethinking of male sexual morphologies comes in – to explore what a male body may become. If bodies can become something else, this also implies that the way one thinks of oneself and experiences things, one's subjectivity, may become different.

The work of feminist theorist Luce Irigaray has been much devoted to the possibilities of rethinking morphologies and subjectivities, but her main pursuit has been to re-represent female bodies away from phallogentric representations (Irigaray 1985). By describing female sexuality through the metaphor of the lips, which connote women's bodies, the labia Irigaray tries to represent female sexuality and morphology differently. The lips are for Irigaray a route out of a phallic language, in which female sexuality is either represented by the clitoris as the "little penis", or by the vagina as "valued for the 'lodging' it offers the male organ" (Irigaray 1985, 23). The lips are involved in a "mutual and reciprocal touching" (Grosz 1994a, 105) and as such are never involved in any relation of dominance.

In my work, however, it is the possibility of rethinking male sexual morphologies which is the focus, and feminist theorists only discuss this very parenthetically. The question is, for example, only raised tentatively in the works of Grosz and Irigaray. Irigaray suggests that, although her re-imagining of sexual morphologies is specifically based in female experience, and that she draws on the female body for her metaphor, the mutuality and symmetry proposed by the sexual morphology of the lips is not only available to women. The "non-erect" sexuality, in which no rising of one above the other takes place, has major implications for men as well (Irigaray 1980). Grosz gives some hints at what a re-imagining of male sexual morphologies could imply by suggesting that:

Men must renounce a certain hierarchical mastery, control and propriety over their bodies in order to remain in contiguity with their possibilities of pleasure. This involves the decentralisation of the phallus, the exploration of the body's other zones and the encounter or confrontation with an otherness that is acknowledged as other. There must be room in the sexual relation for women, and not just men's fantasies of a femininity that conforms to their (oedipal) needs (Grosz 1989, 118f).

“Renounce a certain hierarchical mastery”, “exploration of other body zones” “confrontation with otherness”, there are some more detailed ideas in this extract from Grosz about what a re-thinking of a male sexual morphology may imply. What Grosz seems to share with Irigaray and feminist scholar Catherine Waldby (1995) is an idea of how the de-phallisizing of male bodies and sexualities is central to a rethinking and a becoming. The above quote suggests some ways of de-phallisizing, and Grosz and Waldby are also both pointing to the permeability of male bodies as one possible way. Grosz suggests that one difference between heterosexual and gay male bodies is the flow of the gay male body. Gay male bodies both “send out but also receive flow”, in other words, they are capable of both penetration and being penetrated (Grosz 1994a, 201). By finding new zones of the body, that have been “phallicly disinvested”, Grosz argues for the possibilities of non-phallic sexual pleasure (*ibid.*). Waldby (1995) is arguing along the same lines when she points to the potential of the “phallic woman” and how she may be the one who penetrates him in heterosexual encounters. This “phallic woman”, both as a product of popular culture and existing in everyday sexual practice, subverts gendered binaries of active/passive but also shapes a different male sexual morphology than the hard and sealed phallic morphology.⁵²

The discussions of Waldby and Grosz are, however, only provisional starting points for how to think of male sexual morphologies. Feminists who turn to corporeality and the materiality of the body have primarily been occupied with reconfiguring female embodiment, and its specificity (Thomas 2002, 71). This thesis is an attempt to work further with male sexual embodiment and has the ambition to radically rethink male sexual morphologies (Grosz 1994a, 201). Exploring what sexual morphologies may mean empirically, in lived experience and men’s own articulations, is one way to take these theoretical propositions further.

Thinking of how I have stressed the deleuzian concept of becoming and the possibilities of thinking through positive difference in this thesis so far, it seems fair to point out the clear affinities between Irigaray and Deleuze, which have been emphasized by several feminists.⁵³ The most striking connection between Irigaray and Deleuze is probably their interest in becoming; to think of what can be produced outside the phallocentric or molar (*cf.*

52. Central to this argument and to a re-imagining of male sexual morphology is then the anus, which, similarly to the vagina, is soft and sensitive and connected to pollution and shame (Waldby 1995).

53. Although Irigaray has not acknowledged any affinities with Deleuze, an abundance of feminist work points to the possibilities of dialogues and linkages between the works of Deleuze and Irigaray. See, for example, Grosz 1994b, Braidotti 2002, Lorraine 1999, Olkowski 2000.

Braidotti 2002). In Deleuze & Guattari, the myriad possibilities of becoming are subsumed under the concepts of the “nomadic” or “lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), whereas in Irigaray it is the emergence of a female sexual subjectivity which is the essential becoming (Irigaray 1985, Lykke 2009).⁵⁴

The quest of exploring becomings and rethinkings of male bodies in this study is not wholly unproblematic, however, since becomings and rethinking do not always translate well with men and masculinity. Following Deleuze & Guattari, there can be no becoming man (1987, 320) and this reasoning resonates with the claims of feminists, such as Irigaray, who state that, since man is equalled to human, everything can be included in man (Colebrook 2002, 139, Grosz 1994b, 207). On this line of thought, what counts as human is closely linked to male experience and the bodies that matter are male bodies. In the argument of Irigaray, and following feminist theorists, there is a lack of cultural images to mirror female experiences (Lykke 2009, 87).

Yet, and as I have discussed, phallic morphologies do not necessarily or fully represent men’s experiences of sexuality and the sexual body, and it must be possible to think of becoming and rethinking male sexual morphologies.⁵⁵ Men and women are by no means equally posited and the rethinking of men’s and women’s morphologies and subjectivities cannot happen in quite the same way. Still, I believe that accounting for and analyzing (in this case old) men’s lives and experiences is not by definition reinforcing Man with Capital M, but may offer the possibility to extend into what Grosz names “a thousand tiny sexes” Grosz 1994b, 207.

Since the predominant social gerontological work that exists on old age/ageing and bodies/embodiment focuses on old women’s bodies, old men’s bodies are little explored or discussed from feminist perspectives (Twigg

54. Although there are strong affinities between the work of Irigaray and Deleuze, it seems relevant to point out that Irigaray remains within a Lacanian scheme of psycho-analysis and works with a distinction of symbolic/representation versus matter which Deleuze & Guattari are moving away from. See discussions in Braidotti (2002) and Bray & Colebrook (1998).

55. Grosz (1994b, 207) asserts that becoming woman (which is Deleuze & Guattari’s privileged position, a primary way of becoming) for men involves “a de- and restructuring of male sexuality”, while it is less sure what becoming woman means for women. I find this assertion unsatisfactory and relying on an idea of women and the feminine as an original ground (the maternal?), which I disagree with. The belief that we can know men but not women reinforces a mystification of women that I am critical towards (and which Grosz herself disputes elsewhere, see Grosz 1995a, 223). I think we have seen just as little of “men” as we have seen of “women” and that the men’s becoming is just as unforeseeable.

2004).⁵⁶ As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, however, I believe that a focus on old age and ageing is fruitful for how to think of the reconfigurations of bodies and gendered subjectivities of men. This is not some cannibalistic attempt to feed on the experiences of the men in this study for theoretical purposes. I believe that, by bringing the theoretical perspectives I have discussed so far into an analysis of old men's narratives on sexuality, it is possible to actualize ways of seeing the world that have so far been unseen.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, the theories that I am engaging with in this thesis do not come in a neat package and this will perhaps become more obvious when I next turn to queer theory, and more specifically the work of Sara Ahmed, to discuss how I approach sexuality, gender and age in this study. Ahmed comes from a different theoretical lineage than the theorists discussed so far, especially in how she follows the theorizing of Butler.⁵⁷ I have, nevertheless, found the queer theoretical discussions on normativity interesting for how to think sexuality in old age in this thesis. Not only will my discussions focus on the possibilities of rethinking sexuality, I will also probe into how heterosexuality, as central to the shaping of gendered subjectivities, links with old age and ageing.

A queer eye on the old straight guy

It's February 2010 and I am on a beach resort in Thailand to write and to escape the dreadful Swedish winter. With few exceptions, all the persons who are staying at the resort are heterosexual couples. An occasional family. A group of friends. But the overwhelming majority are heterosexual couples. When sitting on the beach with my laptop on my knees I am surrounded by straight couples cuddling in the water, taking photos of each other on the shoreline. I am thinking to myself how intriguing it would be to ask them: why do you think people become heterosexual? This question, probably so unthinkable and bizarre to most of them, is, however, one of the central questions to queer theory. It is highly unlikely that the couples on the beach would see themselves as partaking in a social system when taking those photos, kissing or just lying there side by side. What is a relaxing holiday to them is a heterosexual craze to me. [From research diary 2010-02-08]

56. For exceptions, see e.g. Slevin 2008, Hearn & Sandberg 2009, Jackson 2001, Marshall & Katz 2002, Jones & Pugh 2002, Öberg & Tornstam 1999.

57. As I understand it, Butler's philosophical roots are in Hegel and she also engages with the psychoanalytic discussions of Lacan (Butler 1993), which contrast starkly with the anti-oedipal pursuits of Deleuze & Guattari (cf. Braidotti 2002, 112).

I start this section with an excerpt from my research diary, because I think this memory points to how my gaze, on the couples on the beach but also on the people I study in this thesis, has been enabled by yet another arrival; the arrival of queer theory's critical eye on heterosexuality. Queer theory is perhaps best described as an "umbrella term" rather than a unified theory, and the words and concepts which have been used to describe and in turn to de-naturalize heterosexuality as normal, good and natural are many (Adeniji 2008, 115).⁵⁸ The common strand and the shared underlying assumption that permeate the many different concepts in queer theory are that heterosexuality is not just a "thing" (Berlant & Warner 1998, 552). Heterosexuality is not just the innocent fact of men and women coupling up, such as those couples I encountered at my holiday resort. Nor is heterosexuality just the fact that men and women have sex with each other, not just a plain orientation and an individual's business. Instead, heterosexuality is understood as a system of privilege, a social structure, which throughout all societal spheres privileges male-female relations and functions to sustain these relations.

To make explicit the functioning of heterosexuality as a social system, queer theorist Michael Warner coined the term heteronormativity, a concept that has since won widespread acceptance (Warner 1991). Heteronormativity points to how heterosexuality and heterosexuals become a social rectitude. The societal assumption that all people are heterosexuals, unless otherwise stated, and that heterosexuality is the natural way of being, have been defined as central features of heteronormativity (Rosenberg 2002). But the concept of heteronormativity not only captures the way in which heterosexuality is invisible and taken for granted, but also the fact that specific forms of heterosexuality are more desirable than others (Nordin 2007). My holiday memory from the beach illustrates quite explicitly the form of heterosexuality that is envisaged as desirable: the couple.

The couple can be described as the backbone of heterosexuality, the "referent or the privileged example of sexual culture" (Berlant & Warner 1998, 3) and "the dominant cultural form" for the organization of sexual relationships (Gustavsson 2006, 113). To claim that coupledness and heterosexuality mutually saturate one another is not to disregard the fact that queers too are in couples or that straight people may organize their relationships in other ways than being in a couple. What I am suggesting is rather that heterosexual

58. Monique Wittig's early seminal work referred to heterosexuality as a "social contract" (1992). Judith Butler takes inspiration from this to theorize heterosexuality in terms of a "heterosexual matrix" (1990). Others, such as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, use the notion of "heterosexual culture" (1998) rather than the notion of heterosexuality to point to its contingent and provisional status. Warner again, in another instance, also refers to "heterosexual ideology" (Warner 1994).

coupledom is socially and culturally sanctioned, supported by laws, institutions, cultural imaginaries etcetera, to emerge as a vision of the good life (Nordin 2007, 25).

Thus, this is not a study of sexuality in general but more specifically a study of heterosexuality looked upon with critical eyes derived from queer theory. If heteronormativity implies not only that heterosexuality is compulsory (Rich 1980), but also that some forms of heterosexuality are more desirable than others, this suggests that the men in my study are differently positioned vis-à-vis heteronormativity. The majority of the men in this study are living in couples and a discussion on coupledom, and the ways in which the couple as a culturally dominant form is linked to love and commitment, are thus of special interest and will be discussed in the study. For those who are widowed or otherwise living alone, being outside the couple thus has consequences for how they experience themselves and how their sexual subjectivities take shape (cf. Nordin 2007). Coupledom signifies sexual practices in specific ways, makes them desirable and good in different ways than sex in other contexts/ways. The concept of intimacy, which I argued in the previous chapter to be a specific modality of sexuality in this study, will be discussed as something that may reconfigure and disrupt ways of thinking about sexuality and masculinity. But it will also be discussed as feeding into ideals of heterosexual coupledom.

Moreover, the way in which queer theory has suggested that it is not simply enough to be heterosexual, but that it in fact matters how one is heterosexual, has made me consider the meaning of age in relation to heterosexuality. As I pointed out in the introductory chapter, the “dirty old man” is a potentially “queer” figure in the sense that he seems to break with age expectations of desirable and good heterosexual behaviour, and it has thus been of interest to me to explore how old men handle this figure when talking about sex and sexuality. When sexual hierarchies are discussed, including what are seen as more desirable hegemonic forms of heterosexuality, little attention is generally given to age and age-relations (Rubin 1984, Hubbard 2000).⁵⁹ Calasanti & Slevin (2001) discuss how the sexual activities of old(er) people are always

59. When discussing sexual hierarchies, the seminal work of Gayle Rubin cannot be omitted. Rubin critically discusses hierarchies of sexual value by outlining a “charmed circle”, where the inner limit denotes “good, normal, natural, blessed sexuality” and the outer limit denotes “bad, abnormal, unnatural, damned sexuality” in our culture (1984, 13). Age surfaces insofar as cross-generational sexualities are understood as undesirable and same-generational sexualities are understood as desirable and “good” in our culture, according to Rubin. However, she does not discuss whether these sexual hierarchies have different impacts in different parts of the life course or differ between generations, which gives her theory a problematic ahistorical character and obfuscates age (and other potential differences).

degraded and seen as non-desirable in contrast to the sexual activities of the young and middle-aged, which suggests that there is an age-norm to heterosexuality. To explore how heterosexuality is shaped in relation to age and the life course in this study I found the work of Sara Ahmed (2004, 2006) to be useful (cf. Ambjörnsson & Jönsson 2010).

Ahmed's queer phenomenology

To describe the work of Ahmed and how her theories, most notably on queer phenomenology, have been important to my work requires a brief description of Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) concepts of performativity and the heterosexual matrix and what these concepts tell us about sex, gender and sexuality. Butler's seminal work, *Gender Trouble* (1990), differed from many of the feminist theories of the time in that it did not claim gender to be merely the social or cultural aspects of sex. Gender was instead, according to Butler (1990, 11), an "apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established". Sex is thus granted no pre-discursive existence, but is in fact as socially and culturally constructed as gender. The process whereby people emerged as gendered beings Butler named performativity. To Butler, there are no pre-existing subjects who act or perform but, through constant repetitions, reiterated performances, the subject emerges in particular ways. These reiterations are not performed on an individual level; one does not voluntarily choose to perform one gender or another. To emerge as a woman or a man requires cultural and institutional backup (to be legally and socially read as a woman or man; compare this to my discussion on age earlier). The performativity of gender is intrinsically linked to sexuality since, in order to become intelligible as a woman or man, it is necessary to desire and to attract the opposite sex, what Butler calls the heterosexual matrix. I will return to and use this concept in my analytical discussion to point to how men's expressions of desire for women, or a taken-for-granted orientation to women in different ways, are not only enactments of heterosexuality, but in effect are a way of doing masculinity; of taking shape as men.

The work of Sara Ahmed follows in Butler's footsteps in several respects. Along with Butler, Ahmed (2006) understands bodies to take shape from reiterations; bodies do not simply appear as gendered and straight but this is an effect of work over time. Ahmed, like Butler, asserts that there is a naturalized relationship between gender and heterosexuality so that they are lived and experienced as "originary or a matter of how one's body inhabits the world" (Ahmed 2006, 80). Ahmed's new contribution, however, is that she brings the queer theoretical discussions of Butler into dialogue with phe-

nomenology, with its focus on bodies and spatiality. Ahmed picks up the term orientation to argue that sexuality is about being oriented, of being “directed” (Ahmed 2006, 68).⁶⁰ In the reiterated performances through which sexuality and gender are constituted, bodies are directed towards some bodies rather than others.

The emergence of heterosexuality is, in Ahmed’s account, effectively about picking what is closest to us; our “bodily horizon [...] puts some objects and not others in reach” (Ahmed 2006, 66). If we are continuously throughout life directed towards the other sex (think for example of how the little boy or girl is teased for being in love with another child of the opposite sex), choosing a sexual object of the opposite sex is going down a road that has already been pointed out to us. Ahmed uses the path as a metaphor to explain heterosexuality as an orientation (2006, 16). A path emerges as a line in the ground from repeated walking, and it exists only insofar as it is walked upon. We walk upon the path because it is there, but paradoxically the path exists only because we walk upon it. In Ahmed’s argument, heterosexuality as an orientation is, like the path, a line that directs and shapes us, but in parallel is also an effect of our work.

To say that lines are performative is to say that we find our way and we know which direction we face only as an effect of work, which is often hidden from view. So in following the directions, I arrive, as if by magic (Ahmed 2006, 16).

Straight and queer are spatial terms and by thinking of being straight as following a line of direction, of being in line, queer also appears as that which does not follow the pre-designated direction, which appears wonky and “out of line”, Ahmed argues (2006, 67). Going back to my holiday memory of the heterosexual couples on the beach, they have arrived there not only by travelling there on holiday but, following Ahmed (2006, 84), through repetitive work, by following a direction and orienting their bodies towards the opposite sex – to form the social entity of the couple.

I have found Ahmed’s argument on how bodies, gender and sexuality are produced from orientations intriguing and inspirational for several reasons. What I find most inspiring in Ahmed is how her focus on lines, and on heterosexuality as being “in line”, can be fruitfully used to think of ageing and

60. The term sexual orientation has been criticized, not least because it conveys an idea of sexuality as being a matter of choice or voluntary. Ahmed’s use of sexual orientation, however, differs significantly from the more everyday use of the term, as will hopefully become clear in my description of Ahmed’s queer phenomenology.

the life course. Heterosexuality is a lifelong work and the life course can be understood as a line into which heterosexuality is interwoven and expected. To research old men and sex is thus to research a “path” that has been walked throughout life but which is still continuously walked. When analyzing my material, I realized that in order to grasp how the participant men looked upon sexuality and sex today, when old, it was necessary to also take into account how they discussed and talked of their sexual selves and experiences throughout the life course. Here, issues of time were shown to be important and the way Ahmed’s work underlines how bodies are taking shape as an effect of time links in with Judith Halberstam’s (2005) work on queer and heterosexual temporalities, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Six.

As I noted in Chapter One, my interest in sexuality in this study is also about practices, activities, fantasies and desires. What role does sex, and “having sex” in various shapes, play in old men’s sexual subjectivities, and to what extent was “having sex” experienced as important and necessary to the shaping of masculinity? By employing the concept of orientation, following Ahmed, I came to see how following a direction was not only a matter of what one traditionally thinks of as sex, but was just as much an orientation to women (and relationships with women) in a wider sense. Ahmed’s thinking is most visible in Chapter Six of this study, when I discuss and analyze the meaning of sexual desire. Desire has conventionally been discussed in relation to psychoanalysis and critiques thereof, but from Ahmed I was inspired to think of desire as a form of compass, a kind of device for heterosexual orientation. Desire is then not (only) a biological drive, and inherent to bodies, but is also made socially and culturally intelligible and meaningful. Following the thinking of Butler and Ahmed, loss of sexual desire could then, as I will discuss, be experienced as a gender trouble and as feeling lost in relation to one’s gendered and sexual self

Theories as “tools”

If a certain tool does not work, then it can either be remodelled or cast out and replaced with a more suitable one [...] One usually thinks with one’s hands and they are seldom clean (Braidotti 2002, 89).

Here, at the end of the chapter, I would like to summarize some of the key points of my discussion on theories, theoretical perspectives and concepts. But I would also like to say a few things about how I understand and approach theory in this thesis. I opened the chapter with the words of Ahmed about arrivals in order to point out how this thesis has taken shape from

encounters with different theories. I have visited and revisited, been infatuated with and “broken up” with, different theories and theoretical perspectives along the course of my research. What can be found in this chapter are the perspectives and approaches that have remained most useful for how to understand and think about old men’s sexual subjectivities, taking shape at the intersections of heterosexuality, old age and masculinity, but also those which have been most inspiring and which have made imprints on the formulation of the research.

I finish this chapter with the above quote from feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti, which captures my position on theory quite neatly. Braidotti argues that theories are tools that should be put to use and that our uses of them also make impressions on them; we come to soil them as our “hands are seldom clean”. Speaking of theories as tools may be read as a very instrumental and even positivist approach. I think, however, that when Braidotti speaks of theories as tools she rather wants to indicate how they are ours to use and to “dirty” (i.e. make imprints on) in the labour of thinking. This is a position I concur with, and thus I have collected the toolbag of diverse theories which come together in this thesis.

I began by presenting how the concept of becoming is central to this study, and how it lies behind my aim of exploring what a male body could become in relation to ageing. Becoming, as inspired by Deleuze & Guattari (1987) and the subsequent feminist uses of the concept, points to the possibilities of creatively thinking differently, of doing affirmative analyses that focus on the production of positive difference. Becoming is then important to what I have formulated as affirmative old age in this study, but it is also important that it coincides with feminist aspirations to rethink a male sexual morphology.

After the discussion on becoming, I described my understanding of old age as taking shape socially and culturally. Here I also discussed ageism, understood as a pervasive power asymmetry where age is given as an explanation for behaviours and characteristics and which marginalizes or benefits people, depending on their age. I suggested that old men’s lives should be approached from an intersectional perspective that also takes into account other social categories, but that old age as such always involves a loss of power. Moreover, I argued, along with several critical gerontologists, that successful ageing as a dominant discourse on old age, rather than challenging ageism, could work to reinforce it. In its place I instead suggested affirmative old age, an approach that can also take the ageing body into account.

I thereafter turned to discuss the corporeal feminism of Grosz. In Grosz’s work (1994), the body is understood as an open materiality, being neither only an inscription of culture nor purely a biological raw material; but a bor-

derline between binaries. The body thus possesses force and materiality in a way that I find apt for thinking the ageing and sexual body. This way of conceptualizing the body is additionally in line with a deleuzian approach to bodies as persisting through connectivity and endless differentiation.

Connected to the body, I also discussed the concept of morphology and how feminist theorists have discussed the possibilities of reconfiguring sexual morphologies. The phallic body was discussed as a dominant male sexual morphology, but little discussion exists among feminist theorists about what a challenge to and rethinking of a male sexual morphology could mean, a project that this thesis is committed to.

At the end of the chapter, I outlined the queer theoretical perspectives in this thesis. I argued that queer theory not only opens up to a denaturalization of heterosexuality but also points to how some heterosexualities are more desirable than others. If it matters not only to be heterosexual, but also how one is heterosexual, I suggest that there might be an age aspect that could be further explored. Although Ahmed does not discuss age, ageing or the life course as such, her theorizing of sexuality as orientation, where bodies are directed towards some bodies rather than others, is also promising for how to think of sexuality and age.

I find the theories and theoretical perspectives that I engage with in this chapter to be useful for different analytical and political purposes in the thesis. Ahmed is in many senses following in the tradition of Butler and Foucault in the way in which her focus is on the regulatory, the persistence of the normative, rather than what escapes these regulatory regimes.⁶¹ She argues that what she finds intriguing is not the queer effects, how things “get out of line”, but instead how gender and sexual orientations are “kept in line” (Ahmed 2006, 83). How things are “kept in line” is not only a matter of heterosexuality but also of masculinity, and thus, throughout the thesis, I will also discuss various ways in which masculinity is reinforced, albeit not always in the same shapes as before. The feminist-deleuzian road I am going down in this thesis, in contrast, points to “lines of flight”, the modalities of becoming which exist on a different plane where bodies, sexualities and gender are configured in entirely different (and perhaps even unthinkable) ways (Grosz 1999). The potential tensions between the perspectives in this thesis reflect, for one thing, the potential tensions involved in studying men, masculinity and old age; in doing feminist critical research on men and masculinities while at the same time exploring possibilities of thinking affirmative old age.

61. See discussion by Shildrick (2009, 126) and Grosz (1995a, 211ff).

In the next chapter, on methods and methodology, this tension will be discussed as a matter of how to do analysis, and I will point to how the theoretical perspectives have meant alternating between analyses that emphasize continuity and those that emphasize flux, instability and thinking differently. I discuss this in relation to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (2003) propositions about paranoid versus reparative readings.

Importantly, however, theories do not always translate smoothly into empirical analysis, how people make sense of their everyday lives may be very different from the theories discussed in this chapter, with their relatively high level of abstraction. What I find important in this study is to explore how my work may contribute to and add new perspectives on how to think about the above theories, not only about what the theories may do for me and my material.

The ambition of this chapter has been to present the central theoretical outlooks of this thesis, theories that have been useful as "tools" for thinking and analyzing, but which have also been remodelled in the encounter with the specific empirical material of this study. In the next chapter, I will present the methods and methodologies, from recruiting participants, to the conduct of the interviews and body diaries, and the methods of analysis. This is in many respects a matter of how the aims and theoretical perspectives of the study were translated into empirical research; how can the sexual subjectivities of old men be studied, how may bodies be explored in research? But it may be that not only the bodies of the old men are relevant in the discussion in this study, but also the body of the researcher. In the next chapter I will therefore discuss my position as a young female feminist researcher studying old men and sexuality as a central element in how the knowledge in this thesis was produced.

3

Methods and methodology

How do you think it affects the study that you are a young woman doing research on old men?

I am in a seminar or at a conference, out to dinner or at a party. And as I talk to people about my research there is one question that recurs over and over again, the question of me being a young woman researching old men and sexuality. No wonder then that it is this question which echoes in my head here as I start my chapter on methods and methodology. I believe that the questions one receives about one's research actually tell something about the research and the knowledge production, about the expectations and understandings of the particular research at stake. And in my case one of the most frequent questions I have been asked about my research is a methodological one. People have often seemed puzzled and even fascinated that I am the one doing this kind of research and have asked whether the men really tell me anything. Don't they feel awkward to talk about these issues with a woman, and with somebody who is 50–60 years younger than themselves? This is ultimately a question of difference, how is knowledge produced in encounters so seemingly saturated by difference, in terms of both gender and age? And are these differences particularly important and influential when researching sexuality?

In my research I am informed by a feminist research tradition, which emphasizes the importance of situating the researcher's self in the research and to reflexively account for how knowledge is produced in relation to power (Haraway 1991, Krook 2006, Ramazanoglû & Holland

2002a).⁶² Thus, in this chapter I will discuss the questions above as well as other methodological issues about how this study emerged. One purpose of this chapter is naturally to present how the study was conducted in terms of ways of selecting participants, interviews and body diaries as research methods, and how I have analyzed my material. But another purpose is also to discuss how the complex power relations in this study, between me as a young female researcher and the old men participating, are a matter of feminist research ethics and how to produce accountable knowledge in gender studies.

To begin with, I will account for how I came into contact with the participants in the study, who they “are” and the ethical issues I have considered in relation to the participants. I will subsequently describe why interviews and body diaries have been selected as methods, how these were conducted, and how I look upon these interviews and diaries as means of knowledge production. I will also describe how the analysis has been done and the sources of inspiration for my analysis. Throughout the chapter, I will return to a reflexive and critical discussion on how the research took shape, also accounting for the problems and difficulties I have encountered and how these have shaped and reshaped my research. Inspired by Laurel Richardson’s (2000 & 1997) writing “stories” and research stories as ways to reflect upon one’s situatedness and knowledge production, I have chosen to include anecdotes and reflections from the process in this chapter. I present my research chronologically and, although this might give an illusion of linearity, I have found this structure useful in accounting for the changes in my research that have occurred over the years.

Methods and “data” as arrivals

In the previous chapter I began by explaining how this study has emerged from various intellectual and theoretical arrivals over time. But the study is just as much shaped by methodological arrivals throughout the research process. To compare the research process to a journey is not only a rather worn cliché to describe a study, but also possibly misleading as it may convey a realist ontology of a world “out there” that can simply be discovered by the exploring researcher (cf. Kvale 1997, Haraway 1991). There are, however, other ways to think of methodology through the concept of travel, which do not suggest that I go out to meet an already existing them. Instead, research as

62. Although it is not only feminist scholars who are concerned with reflexivity and situating the self in research. See, for example, Ehn & Klein (1994) for a discussion on reflexivity in ethnology.

travel could describe how the meetings that a researcher becomes involved in inevitably shape how knowledge is produced, how both the knower and the known materialize on the way. This involves many inseparable steps, including contacting potential participants, interviewing and collecting diaries, and analyzing data.

For the reader with an appetite for “hard facts”, I can state that the material that evolved out of my research consisted in the end of text from 14 people writing diaries and transcripts of 16 interviews. Out of this, eight men both gave interviews and wrote diaries. All in all, 22 men participated in the study. In short the material analyzed consists of:

- 16 interviews⁶³
- 14 body diaries⁶⁴

Of these, eight both wrote diaries and were interviewed (six of these wrote before being interviewed).⁶⁵

How I got in contact with the participant men

In the autumn of 2007, I started to make preparations to get in contact with men who might be interested in participating in the study. As the body diary was an invention of my own, it required a great deal of thinking-through. Who was I looking for and where were these men to be found? At this point I was still open to including homosexual and bisexual men and early on contacted a representative of a gay seniors organization in Sweden.⁶⁶ I was also interested in able-bodiedness and disability and therefore also discussed the possibilities of getting in contact with men with disabilities. I was also considering my methods in relation to the group I was interested in, which may not only be old, but also suffer from illnesses or disabilities. How could I make it possible for those who had difficulties with writing to participate?

63. The interview transcripts are approximately 200 pages, each interview was on average 20 pages.

64. The diaries varied more in length, with some of the longest being 10–15 pages in print and the shortest being only one to three pages.

65. All in all, I was in contact with about 30 men while recruiting participants for this study. Some men dropped out during the research process, some because they did not agree to be interviewed/write diaries, others because we could not arrange a time for an interview, or for other personal reasons. These men have accordingly not submitted anything that has been subject to analysis in this thesis. I have, however, included personal notes from meetings and discussions with these men as a way to discuss context and methodological issues, but also to discuss knowledge produced outside the interview or diary setting.

66. Due to personal health issues, this contact had to withdraw from participation, and as a result closed down some possibilities of further contact with old gay and bisexual men.

Taping? Filming? Could men write diaries only, or only be interviewed, or did I require them to do both?

I decided not to specify my requirements but opted for methods of self-selection and to work from that sample. I also decided to let men who were interested decide for themselves how they wanted to participate, by diary, interview, or both. In late autumn 2007 I started to look for participants in three major ways:⁶⁷

1. Advertising in a Swedish weekly paper, *Kvällstunden*.⁶⁸
2. Putting up calls in health centres, day care centres and social venues for seniors. I was also presenting my research to staff in these places, for them to spread the word to potential participants.
3. Presentation of my research to a senior citizens organization, with a request for men to participate in my study.

In the advertisement in the paper I stated briefly that I was looking for “older men” above the age of 60 who were interested in being interviewed or writing a diary as a part of my social scientific research on older men’s bodies and sexuality.⁶⁹ I also stressed anonymity and that it did not matter who they were, or if they had disabilities or not (see Appendix A). The same advertisement was put up in day care centres and seniors’ social venues and distributed to staff.

The advertising was a very fruitful way of coming into contact with participants and I was in contact with 18 men who had read my ad, 12 of whom participated by writing a body diary and/or being interviewed. The posters

67. Two men participating in the study were found through the “snowball method” through personal contacts (Kvale 1997).

68. *Kvällstunden* is a weekly Swedish paper with a circulation of 53 600. The paper is described on its homepage as follows: “*Kvällstunden* was founded in 1938 and is independent in terms of politics, philosophy or religion. The only profile of the paper is that our readers are “seniors”, that is they belong to the older parts of the population, although it may well be of interest to younger people. A great deal of the paper’s content comes from the readers themselves, there is a very lively and popular readers’ column where politics and religion can also be debated. Overall *Kvällstunden* has close contact with its readers, which makes the paper unique.” <http://www.kvallsstunden.se/> [2010-08-30]

69. I used the term older (in Swedish *äldre*) in my call rather than old (in Swedish *gamla*) since *old/gamla* has a rather negative sound in Swedish, and I figured that people would probably more commonly identify as older. However, later, partly for theoretical reasons, I chose to use the word old (see discussion in introductory chapter and Calasanti & King (2005)). I chose to define older as above 60 since it was close to the Swedish retirement age of 65, yet remained open to those who identified as old even before retirement. In the end, however, all the men participating in the study were above the age of 65, suggesting that men in their early sixties might not readily categorize themselves as older.

put up in different places proved less useful for finding participants. Only two men got in touch with me after having seen one of these. From the presentation of my research in a senior citizens' organization eight men showed interest, and five eventually participated in the study.

Already, at this early stage, my positioning as a young female researcher was evoked and my attention was drawn to understandings of age and gender/sexuality that would influence the knowledge production throughout the study. While out presenting my work, I became aware of how I was perceived as a young girl, which is clearly seen in this excerpt from my research diary from November 2007 after having visited a senior citizens' organization.

"But!", she exclaims. "Can't you be the Lucia?!" I don't know how to respond. It's really weird if I, as a researcher looking for participants for my study, arrive there as their Lucia. She is pushy however. This must tell a great deal about how I am perceived, not as a researcher but as the young blonde girl who should be the Lucia.⁷⁰ [Research diary November 2007]

In the process of looking for participants, I was repeatedly referred to as "young" and/or "girl". These interpellations increased my feelings of insecurity about my position as a legitimate researcher; feelings that were evoked by people's frequent questions about whether it was possible for me to undertake this kind of research. Social gerontologist Simon Biggs (2005, 119) argues that it might be difficult for younger researchers to study later life and older people since this entails an understanding of a life stage that the younger researcher has not yet experienced. I concur with his view that there is a risk of younger researchers falling into and understanding old people through age stereotypes. Still, I think Biggs' (2005) preliminary suggestion, that research should preferably be undertaken by researchers of the same age as those they are studying, fails to acknowledge other social differentiations that may permeate the researcher/researched relationship. The fact that it became clear early on that I was read as "young" and "a girl" made me sensitive to how aged and gendered relations permeated the research encounter; what would the knowledge produced look like if an older and/or male person would have undertaken this research instead? When I started interviewing, issues of age and gender were further underlined, which I will return to later in this chapter.

70. Lucia is a Swedish tradition that takes place on the 13th of December every year, before the Christmas celebrations. Inspired by the legend of the martyr Lucia in Sicily, Italy, a young woman is chosen every year as the Lucia. She dresses in a white dress with a red belt and wears a crown with lit candles in her hair, and appears (followed by a procession) singing Christmas carols.

In retrospect, I also believe that my feelings of insecurity about how my positioning would influence my research reflect a positivist ghost that haunts social scientific research. That I was unmistakably read as a “young girl” was incongruent with an unarticulated positivist-flavoured wish to emerge as a disembodied, invisible researcher, who would not influence my material. I have later come to regard the age relations in this research (between me as “young” and the participant men as “old”) as generating possibilities for producing knowledge that is different, but not necessarily less valid.

In the early phases of my research process, as I was searching for men to participate in my study, I also became aware of how researching sexuality evoked issues that I had not quite foreseen. In contrast to Jones (2002), who, in her call for participants in her study about sex and older people, avoided the word “sex” and instead chose the term “intimate relationships”, I chose to include the word sexuality. I found it important to make the participants aware that sexuality was a central theme of the study, and I argued that words such as intimate relationships could be unclear and potentially misleading.⁷¹ Jones justified her choice of the term intimate relationship by arguing that she wanted to avoid having her name next to the word “sex”. This proved to be something that I too should have considered. The combination of the words “older man”, “sexuality” and “anonymity” in the context of an advertisement provoked reactions and responses that I was not wholly prepared for. The days after my advertisement was published were filled with mixed feelings, some less than pleasant. An extract from my research diary, after a phone call from a man who wanted to participate in the study, reveal my feelings of insecurity, vulnerability and shame.

It's Tuesday night, the 27th of November 2007, when I get the phone call. I immediately feel that there is something fishy about it. Is he wanking off? He walks into another room and there are unidentifiable rustling and swooshing sounds in the background. He is rather quiet. He says he does not want to be interviewed in person, only over the phone. I ask him who he is and he says he's single with all the things that implies. "You're still horny. I watch porn and wank off, and ejaculate and that feels real nice." Already at this point I feel like he is violating some sort of boundary. I use "crude" words, like cunt and horny, myself. But not with just anyone, and how he uses these words does something to the conversation. There is something about the phone call that makes me insecure. At first he does

71. This is perhaps a bit paradoxical, since the study turned out to focus a great deal on the concepts of intimacy and touch, which partly expand and challenge what sexuality could mean.

not want to say his name. Why is he calling at this late hour? When I am explaining my work I stutter, I feel insecure. He asks me I have done this before, haven't I? Sure, I say, but I feel my credibility is low. [Research diary 2007-11-28]

After hanging up, I felt ill at ease and was torn between feelings of being a poor researcher and being offended. I felt as though I was suddenly involved in some kind of “phone sex”, that I had partaken in a conversation which was “sexual” to this man and which I could not control and had not agreed to. The feminist in me tells me to trust my own feelings, my own boundaries of what is okay. But still, to tell me about his sexuality, was that not what I was pursuing? In the following days, as people call about my advertisement, I have to return to this question and have to (re)evaluate and challenge my own ideas about who is a “good” and “representative” participant in a study on sex and sexuality. Clearly there was something about my ideas of sexuality, of the notion, that collided with the understandings of sexuality among some of my participants. Sexuality was in my case linked to research, and I thought about it more on a theoretical level. For the men contacting me and participating in the study, however, sexuality was not primarily theoretical but to do with in-flesh and lived experience (quite naturally actually).

The early responses to my research, provoked by the advertisement, affected my subsequent research process in particular ways. My research diary reveals strong feelings of distress from feeling sexualized in these research encounters, like the phone call and a letter I received with a lot of sexual content. I became suspicious of men's intentions, why were they interested in participating in this sort of research? On the rest of the posters advertising my call for participants, put up in day care centres and elsewhere, the word sexuality was erased and older man was changed to 60+.

The way in which these contacts turned out to be much more diverse, and not always pleasant, encounters is likely to have impacted on the research later on; I have negotiated between feelings of vulnerability as a female researcher studying men and sex and a wish for men to articulate a lot of different positions and issues on sex and sexuality as openly as possible, including things that might be less “nice” in my eyes.

In discussions about methodology, in handbooks on qualitative methods for example, the inequality of the researcher/researched relationship is an often-recurring topic (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln 2005). Not only does the researcher have power in the sense that s/he shapes the research, chooses what questions are asked etcetera, but there is also an inequality embedded in the nature of research insofar as the people researched are giving away more of

themselves than they may actually acquire back (Oakley 1981). While the researched reveal intimate details of their lives, the researcher often remains impersonal and distant, disclosing little of herself. Shulamith Reinharz (1992) argues that good feminist research practice has often aimed to overcome this inequality and non-disclosure by creating a more egalitarian research meeting, with involvement and shared experiences. In the encounters with my participants, however, I found this difficult to live up to. When men in my study have asked me about myself I have often tried to reply briefly and have been unwilling to disclose things about myself. This has not been motivated by a positivist attempt to be neutral or invisible, but rather consists of strategies that often emerged out of fear of sexualizing the encounter. In particular, questions such as whether I have a boyfriend have been the kind that I have avoided answering. My avoidance of revealing details about myself and as a consequence re-constructing some of the boundaries between the researcher and researched has chiefly been (often unconscious) strategies to escape feelings of vulnerability.

Coming into contact with men who wished to participate in my study also made me think of and return to Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (2002, Swedish translation), where he discusses how sexuality emerged as an object of knowledge within and from the growth of scientific discourse, in particular medicine. Was I in fact creating my own *Scientia sexualis*, where men emerged as sexual subjects through this particular research regime? These thoughts made me further consider how I was creating my material, my objects of study, by coaxing men to talk about their sexuality (Plummer 1995). This led me to think about what expectations the participating men had of the study and what were their reasons for participating, which I will discuss next.

Why participate in the study?

The way in which I came into contact with the participants and my experiences and reactions to the early contacts evidently reflect some of the knowledge production in this study. But the reasons why men actually agreed to participate are important for how to understand the knowledge in this study. What were their thoughts, motivations and expectations? The people participating in a study are often referred to as a "sample", a group carefully picked to respond to the needs of the researcher, often imagined to be representative of a particular social stratum or group. A more appropriate term for the men in this study would, however, be arrivals; more than me choosing them, they chose me, and arrived in this study for various reasons. As others have point-

ed out, self-selection in sampling raises a number of important questions, such as: who chooses to be in a particular study, and how do they differ from others belonging to the same group (Lundström 2007, 54, Arendell 1997)? Discussing the participants' motivations for being in the study and their expectations can be seen as part of describing who the men in this study "are".

My first contacts with men who wished to participate in the study made me think that this kind of research would only attract "sex-maniacs", people who in one way or another were exhibitionists and got a thrill from talking about sex with me. Surely the excitement of talking about the forbidden and taboo issue of sexuality could have been a motivation to be in the study for some men. Still, this did not seem to be the primary reason for most of the men who contacted me and wanted to participate. Instead, the sexual content of my research was something that the men had to handle in various ways. For example, several men tried to avoid being regarded as perverted by saying things such as "I'm not an exhibitionist" or "I hope this was not too detailed".⁷² The possibilities of talking about sex were hence for some about revealing "enough" while not seeming like a pervert or a "dirty old man". This might have been of particular importance to those who were recruited after my presentation to their senior citizens' organization. They were possibly aware that other men they knew, friends and neighbours, were also in the study. Hence, some of them may sometimes have refrained from articulating private or sensitive matters, out of fear that people would identify them or that they may in other ways have been given away. Also, the fact that they knew from my presentation that I lived in the neighbourhood close to where they held their meetings could have further shaped some men's responses to avoid being seen as "dirty" or inappropriate. The context in which I came into contact with the participants could accordingly have had some influence on how they felt able to talk and/or write about their bodies and sexualities.

Finding research important seemed to be the most common reason why men chose to contact me and wanted to participate. Since the research was not framed to be only about sex and sexuality, but also about the body in general, it could for some have been about increasing knowledge about health, embodiment and ageing. Some, who had experienced sexual problems such as impotence, explained that their motivation to participate related to their own experiences and how they found it important to increase knowledge on

72. This can be compared to Jones 2003, 2005, who, in her research on how older women talk about sex, argues that framing the topic as sensitive and difficult benefits the conversation and actually functions to enable such talk. If interviewees had not demonstrated an awareness of the sensitivity and riskiness of what they were talking about, they would have risked appearing strange, crass or rude, Jones argues.

sexual issues in later life. Östen, one of the interviewees, was very passionate about enlightening people about older people's sexuality and the fact that sex does not have to stop just because you are retiring. When I asked him what he thought when he saw my ad, he said:

Well, this was something I found positive. I know that there are a lot of [preconceived ideas]. Some people seem to think that this shouldn't be working when they become retirees, and maybe I didn't think so either earlier.⁷³

For others, the topic was less important; rather it was an interest in research generally that drew them to the project. Some regarded themselves as amateur researchers, researching family genealogies for example. Being part of a research project was also a reason in itself; this made them part of something, they were helping out in a higher cause and their voices were heard in this. One man tells me that he has told all his family and friends that he is a part of this project, he feels proud about his participation and it gives him status. This can be understood in relation to how he regards himself as being marginalized as an old man, as somebody who nobody listens to.

The research tag was also important for attracting men to the project because of the connotations with expertise; not only did they want to increase knowledge on issues of older men's bodies and sexualities, but they also wanted to get answers to their own questions. Of the men I have been in contact with, three have asked me questions about erectile problems. One of these men made me attentive to the need to develop clearer ethical guidelines for my work, and this will be discussed later in this chapter. If research is understood as important and is linked to ideas and hopes of research as progress and prestigious to partake in, this also points to the importance of being accountable as a researcher and that doing research is a matter of managing the trust of the participants.

I want to underline that the arrivals of the men into this study were guided by both orientations to research and an orientation to "sex" in all its polymorphous shapes. The men in this study have multiple and diverse agendas for participation in this project, agendas which in this study translate into discourses and counter discourses on later life sexuality. How the men can

73. Det här var nånting som jag tyckte va positivt (m) jag vet ju det att det är så mycket, ja en del de tycker ju inte det här ska fungera, när de blir pensionärer å det kanske inte jag trodde heller förrän [jag själv blev äldre].

speak of issues related to sexuality in this study are reflections of their expectations and understandings of the study overall.

The participants: Who “are” they?

When I discussed my theoretical position on gender and sexuality in the previous chapter, I underlined how I have drawn upon the work of Judith Butler and Sara Ahmed in my understanding of gender and sexuality. Central to Butler and Ahmed’s theorizing is the idea that the subject has no existence prior to discourse, but materializes from realms of intelligibility in terms of gender, sexuality, race – and also age, I would argue. This position also has consequences for my methodological discussion. When describing a study, the researcher often presents the participants in terms of age, class, race/ethnicity and sexuality. By doing so, the reader is assumed to gain a better understanding of the study and the knowledge produced. I would argue, however, that this kind of presentation is precarious, as it may lead to the false conclusion or misconception that by knowing how men are situated socially, through age, class, race/ethnicity and sexuality, we ultimately understand who the men “are” and what knowledge one can arrive at.

Sari Irni (2010, 113ff) who has studied ageing women and working life, makes some interesting points when she discusses what categorizations are accounted for and what it means that we deem some differences to be relevant or irrelevant. Irni argues that some differences are routinely and unreflectively accounted for in research, such as gender and chronological age, whereas others are generally omitted (in a Nordic context, often race/ethnicity).⁷⁴ I concur with Irni’s position that routinely mentioning social categorizations does not necessarily tell us anything about how these categorizations/differences are lived and experienced, and that listing the participants’ positions could at times give a false apprehension of knowing more.⁷⁵ My assumption that subjects are not pre-existing entities, but effectively produced, also entails research as an influential site for the production of subjects.

74. Finnish gender scholar Sari Irni makes a compelling argument about the omission of race and the critique she has encountered when describing her research participants as “white”. She argues that an idea of “colonial innocence”, that the Finns were never a colonial power, and an idea of Finland as an ethnically homogeneous society are used to legitimate why accounts of race/ethnicity are seen as irrelevant or even “disturbing” (Irni 2010, 115f).

75. For example: to me as a gender scholar to say that the participants in the study are “men” is not really sufficient, rather one needs to know more about how men identify and live in relation to categorizations such as man and masculinity. Gösta, for example, responds to the question of whether he has a masculine body with the words: “Well I’ve got hair on my chest and and, oh I’ve got a small willy if [...] if one can count that as masculinity, a small piece of skin, (.) it’s not much really”.

Below, I will give some details of the men in this study in terms of age, region and ethnic background, previous professional life, health and lastly sexuality (see also Appendix B). But I want the reader to approach this information with the above caveat in mind. I discuss heterosexuality at particular length, clarifying what I mean when claiming that the men in this study are heterosexuals, to show that what one “is” can mean several things and is not unambiguous.

Chronological age to begin with. The men were, as stated earlier, born between 1922 and 1942. Of the 22 participants, nine were born in the 1930s, seven in the 1920s and five in the early 1940s. At the time of participating in the study they were consequently between 66 and 87 years of age. All were living in their own homes and were relatively independent in terms of their activities in daily life. Cleaning was the only thing that participants in the study were formally assisted with.

In terms of geographical spread, the advertisement resulted in contacts with men who were living in different regions of Sweden, including both rural areas and larger and smaller cities. The call for participants through posters and the presentation at the seniors’ organization both took place in Stockholm and all in all nine of the men in the study were living in the Stockholm area. All the men were ethnically Swedish and white.

All the men were formally retired when participating in the study, but several had worked long after the official Swedish retirement age of 65. Many had held several different occupations earlier in their professional lives, but their primary professions were almost equally divided between working-class and middle-class occupations (with marginally more middle-class).⁷⁶

Studies of sexuality in later life have pointed to health as a major factor in sexual well-being and continued sexual activity (Beckman et al. 2008, Lindau et al. 2007). None of the men were suffering from severe illness at the time of participation in the study, but almost all reported some health problems. Diabetes was a common health issue. Another relatively common illness was prostate cancer, for which some men in the study either had been or were currently being treated. Problems with hearing and vision, knee problems and angina were other health problems they reported. Apart from one man, who considered himself to be severely impaired due to loss of hearing, no-one in the study considered themselves disabled. The way in which the men in this study articulated their thoughts and feelings around sexuality should

76. The class background in terms of work was reflected in how the men talked about their bodies in the interviews. Among those who had held traditional working-class occupations, bodies were talked of as worn down from working life, on occasion causing disabilities in later life.

be understood in relation to relatively good health and physical independence.

As I mentioned earlier, it was not decided in the early recruitment stages that the study would only involve heterosexual men, I was also open to including gay and bisexual men. But as the men who eventually agreed to participate all identified as heterosexual, I choose to focus on heterosexuality, masculinity and old age. Throughout the research process, but in particular in the early stages when looking for participants and preparing for interviews, I pondered what it means to say that this study is about heterosexuality. Can I really label my informants straight, and what are the implications of this? As my theoretical discussion showed, sexuality and heterosexuality may have several different meanings and my origins in queer theory have made me watchful of reiterating and reinforcing categories such as straight or heterosexual. I understand sexuality and gender to be performative, and being heterosexual is then not merely about self-identification, but also something that one constantly does, through talk and social positioning. When I describe my participants as heterosexual, I am hence accounting both for how the men identify, but also for how they align themselves with heterosexual culture.

Let me be more precise; during the interviewing I asked the men to put a cross on a scale of what gender they are most attracted to, men or women, and to tell me whether this has been the case during their entire lives.⁷⁷ (For those for whom neither women nor men applied, it was suggested that they put the cross outside the scale). All the men interviewed put their cross very close to the woman end, and this is what I understand as heterosexuality as self-identification. When it comes to heterosexuality as alignment with heterosexual culture this can be seen, for example, in how, in diaries and during interviews, the men do heterosexuality through “talk in interaction” (Kitzinger 2005), as in this extract from Claes’ diary:

*I remember my curiosity about girls in boyhood. She, who first of all arrived without socks in spring and while playing with the ball in the schoolyard, lifted her leg to throw the ball under her thigh, towards the wall. Her white thighs shone beautifully and invitingly.*⁷⁸

77. I am aware that this scaling might be problematic in that it retains dichotomous notions of gender. It was, however, an attempt to open up to a more fluid and less binary understanding of sexuality. My choice to let the participants put their cross outside the scale was a way of opening up to other ways of understanding oneself in terms of sexuality, and also to enable an asexual identification. The scale was perhaps not wholly successful or helpful in understanding men’s understandings of desire.

78. Jag kommer ihåg pojkårens nyfikenhet på flickor, hon som första av alla kom utan strumpor på våren och under bollandet på skolgården lyfte på benet för att kasta bollen under låret upp på väggen. Hennes vita lår lyste vackert och inbjudande.

Heterosexuality as alignment with heterosexual culture is not only accomplished through narrations of desire for women and by mentioning female partners, children etcetera, but also through how heterosexuality emerges and is naturalized through the ways in which bodies are oriented in specific spaces. For instance, the senior citizens' organization where I presented my project can be seen as an example of a *straight space*, a context in which heterosexuality was omnipresent and naturalized. For one thing, several women were curious and keen about my project, and their approach was: "oh, so now we'll know what they really think about these things". This reflects not only an idea that men and women live separate lives (gender difference), but seemingly also a heterosexual interest in men – men were those the women had sex with and they were thus interested for those reasons. Moreover, the organization emerged as a straight space through the way in which some female partners were present and pushed or persuaded their men to take part in my study.⁷⁹

Similarly, heterosexuality emerged out of the homes of the interviewees, where most interviews took place. Wives or partners were around, sometimes came in or phoned. In widowers' homes, portraits of the deceased wife were visible. Being heterosexual was thus to a great extent related to the couple; among the participants most were in a relationship, thirteen were living with their partner and three were LAT (living apart together). Only six were single, and of those five were living alone and one lived with his sibling. What is worth noticing, however, is that more than half of the participants were in their second marriage or had had several previous long-term relationships, and are thus likely to have had sexual experiences with more partners than earlier generations, as I discussed in my introductory chapter on the socio-historical context for the men in this study.

My overall understanding of the men participating in this study is that they are situated, albeit differently, in an *intersecting knot of privilege* springing from heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, whiteness and for most a middle-class position. Being interpellated as old may disadvantage men in various ways. Yet, social and cultural capital, not only from class, but also from able-bodiedness, heterosexuality and whiteness, enables some men to uphold and

79. The senior citizens' organization as a straight space can be compared to Ahmed's description of a holiday with her female partner. When they arrive in the hotel's dining room they are confronted with every table seated the same, with a heterosexual couple, "each table presents the same form of sociality as the form of the heterosexual couple" (Ahmed 2006, 82). Although the seating around the table during my presentation did not display the heterosexuality of the context quite as clearly, it was apparent that the men and women present were to a great extent aligned as heterosexual couples.

maintain an active lifestyle and to maintain privileges vis-à-vis women and other men.

A feminist research ethics

At the beginning of this chapter, I pointed to the fact that one of the most common questions I have received about my research was about methodology and my position as a young female researcher. Another related question, which has also recurred throughout my research, is about the potential difficulties of doing research on the topic of sexuality and old age. I believe that there are two reasons in particular why people seem to think of my research as difficult to undertake. Firstly, there is the common understanding that impotence is a sensitive issue for men, and secondly there is a pervasive idea that old people in particular may find it difficult to talk about sex (Jones 2003). Gott & Hinchcliff (2003a, 2) argue that the idea that sex is a particularly sensitive issue among old people has led to an avoidance of the topic among researchers, out of fear of offending old people. This idea, that old people might be easily offended when asked about sex, is also reflected in the Swedish quantitative study by Beckman et al. (2008). Beckman et al. excluded questions on homosexuality and sexual practices other than penetration of the vagina from the study, as they “evoked strong reactions” (Beckman et al. 2008, 6). My position in this study has been that, although sexuality may at times be a sensitive topic, this does not apply more to old men and women than to people overall. I understand assumptions, that old people cannot talk about sex and find this especially offensive, to reflect ageist notions both of old people as asexual (and thus having nothing to say on the topic) and conceptions of old people as conservative, stagnant and backward (Connidis 2006).

My ethical considerations in this study are accordingly not primarily motivated by the sensitivity and difficulty of my topic. My position has been that an ethical discussion should permeate the research process as a whole and involve considerations of power at work in the research (cf. Irni 2010, 20). Accordingly, I do not see ethics as a demarcated area of the research process, which involves only issues of consent, anonymity and avoidance of harm in interviews for example. I will here discuss feminist research ethics in terms of producing accountable knowledge more widely. But I will also point to some direct measures that were taken to ensure the wellbeing of the participants in the study and to follow good practice in qualitative research.

I began my discussion of research ethics at the beginning of this chapter by pointing to the significance of situated knowledge and accounting for

power in the research process. In the two previous chapters I have presented the aim and ambition of this study as exploring possibilities of becoming, and ways of rethinking male bodies, sexualities and subjectivities. This reflects a feminist epistemology and I understand epistemology to be inextricably linked to ethics (Lykke 2009). The researcher is always partaking in shaping and reshaping the world in various ways, and this also entails a responsibility (Haraway 1991). What are the consequences of my research and how can I be accountable as a researcher?

Feminist research has a tradition of giving voice to the researched (women) and there have been extensive discussions on what can be considered feminist research (Wolf 1996). In my case, when researching men, these issues become even more intricate. How and in what ways can we give voice to men and at the same time retain a feminist critical position? This chapter does not present a full and final answer to this question, but I believe that by discussing the ambiguities involved in the research, with regards to recruiting, interviewing, diaries, analysis and more, this chapter will partake in a discussion of feminist research ethics and what this may entail in relation to old men's sexual subjectivities.

So, research ethics in this study concern the accountability of research more widely. Yet there are steps I have taken in this study which are more directly concerned with reducing potential harm to the participants and to ensure their wellbeing and trust.

Communication with the participants has been of utmost importance in performing the research in a responsible way. For one thing, it might be difficult for all the men to understand the nature of my work; some of them could have difficulties reading, hearing etc. I therefore lay emphasis on communicating orally as well as in text with my participants. All the participants received a sheet of information and contact details from me to provide as much information as possible so that they could gain an insight into my project. I also communicated verbally about my project with the majority and several called me up to ask further questions. In order to follow good research practice the following points were stressed in my work:

- *Confidentiality, anonymity.* I have taken measures to make the material confidential, which means that no-one other than myself has been able to see it. I have made sure that no names or other information that may give away the participants are found in transcripts or other material. Names of people and places were immediately changed in the transcripts. The material has been changed and anonymized to ensure the full anonymity of the participants.

All documents on my computers are protected with passwords and all printed consent forms are kept in a closed locker.

- *Written consent.* All participants have also signed a written consent form.
- *Full information, informing participants about the nature of the work and the topics that will be discussed in the interviews.* I have tried, in as simple a manner as possible, to explain the purpose of my research and why I find it interesting and worthwhile. Words such as body and sexuality have therefore been explicitly stated in calls and advertising, to make sure that all the participants know what they are volunteering for.
- *Informing participants that they can withdraw at any point.* For those who never followed up contacts and did not complete their diaries I have therefore not pushed them to continue, and I immediately accepted those who withdrew.
- *Debriefing.* I have both sent back transcripts and been in touch with participants again to explain about the research process and my on-going work.

Ethical guidelines for research sometimes state that extra concern should be given to the “elderly”. Though the needs of old people may vary, in my research I have attempted to be as attentive as possible to age-related factors that might affect my participants, such as illness and fatigue. I have thus avoided exhausting the participants when interviewing and have paid attention to their health conditions. In terms of mental health and wellbeing, I became acutely aware that impotence could be perceived as a very distressing situation through a phone call I received from a man who was so concerned about his impotence that he had even considered suicide. After this incident, I decided to compile a list of phone numbers with contacts, if they wanted to talk to somebody after the contact with me.⁸⁰ This was a way for me to provide resources in cases where my research might provoke thoughts and feelings that the participants needed help with to handle further and which I was not competent to give.

Although I understand research ethics to involve the research as a whole and being attentive to the power relations at stake, the above were some of the more particular concerns I addressed in order to ensure the wellbeing of

80. The list included web contacts and hotline numbers for people in distress, for questions on health and illness, sexually related issues, and an LGBT hotline.

the participants and to maintain trust during the research. For the remainder of the chapter, ethics will be part of my account and discussion of situated knowledge and relations with the participants in the study.

The choice of methods

After advertising, putting up posters, and going out to present my research, I was suddenly standing there with a rather long list of men who had volunteered to participate. I was making phone calls to arrange interviews and sending out notebooks and instructions for people to write what I called body diaries. But what were my expectations from these two methods? Why did I find interviews and diaries to be suitable methods for this study?

First of all, I was interested in men's own ways of discussing sexuality and sex in relation to old age and the ageing body. Along with Marshall (2010, 218), I felt that there was a need for qualitative research that could "provide some narrative resources that can broaden our understanding of ageing and sexuality", and here I found interviews and diaries to be suitable. I believe that by getting at old men's own diverse and complex narrations on sex and sexuality more knowledge is produced about what discourses were available for men to talk about and experience their ageing bodies and sexualities. Since my study focused on subjectivities, I found interviews and diaries to be fitting methods as they provided possibilities for narration, and more precisely self-narration.

Although both diaries and interviews involve self-narration, I understand them to be suitable for slightly different purposes and to produce slightly different knowledge. Since the aim of this study was to study sexual subjectivities, I required a method that made possible narrations and reflexive accounts of what concepts like sexuality or the body meant to men themselves. I use and understand subjectivity here as a post-structural concept denoting a person's sense of self, and I understand subjectivities to take shape in a cultural and social context, where a person's sense of self is shaped from available discourses (Staunæs 2003). The influence of Foucault has been important to discussions on subjectivity, and his concept of subjectification underlines how subjects emerge as intelligible in discourse, and are to some extent determined by discursive regimes (Foucault 1983 & 1991). While Foucault has pointed to how the emergence of subjects through subjectification may produce modes of resistance, he may still be critiqued for downplaying the possibilities of agency (cf. Blackman et al. 2008). In this study, subjectivities are considered to be shaped through processes of resistance and negotiation. Available discourses, here particularly on gender, sexuality and age, are

cultural resources which are taken up and actively handled by individuals. I find interviewing to be a useful method for grasping people's complex and often contradictory ways of handling the discourses that are at stake. Interviews make possible reflexive accounts, and allow for follow-up questions and questions of elaboration. All in all, I find interviews to be a very active method for reflecting on the ongoing work involved in shaping subjectivities.

If interviewing is a fairly traditional and well-known social scientific method, my invention of body diaries reflects a wish to work with more explorative methodology in gender studies. Like interviews, the use of diaries was a way to study sexual subjectivities. But I thought of the diaries as opening up to something more. Although the interviews in many ways were a joint construction between me and the interviewees, they were in the end structured and confined by my questions, how I interpreted what the interviewees were saying and phrased follow-up questions. The diaries I have thought of as providing possibilities for alternative narrations, where men could shape their everyday lives and thoughts without having to respond to my direct questions. Where in interviews the participants may feel obliged to present a coherent, clear and structured response, I have envisioned the diaries to be a space that is also open for fantasy, the fragmented and unfinished.

Also, while interviewing centred quite a lot on attitudes and self-reflexive accounts, choosing to work with diaries was also a way to approach narratives that did not necessarily rely on self-reflection. By asking the men to write diaries I figured that I could receive a different, more uninterrupted narrative, where they could choose to focus more on what they themselves found significant in their everyday lives. I also thought of the diaries as providing narratives that focused on practices and activities rather than attitudes. The diaries turned out very different from how I expected them to be, and my ambitions and hopes for using diaries in this study were not entirely fulfilled. Still, the diaries proved to be useful for how to think about becoming, and did in the end partake in a refiguring of how to understand sexuality altogether, as I will come back to.

In discussions of methodology, the concept of validity has traditionally been used as a hallmark of the quality of research (Widerberg 2002). To use different methods, to "triangulate", is thus in this tradition often seen as a way to ensure the validity of the study, to give a fuller and truer account of a phenomenon (Kvale 1997). However, together with objectivity and reliability, validity has been subject to intense critique, not least from feminists (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002a, 57f). Instead of validity, Laurel Richardson has offered the notion of "crystallization" as a post-modern way of understanding knowledge production and the use of methods (Richardson 2000, 934).

Richardson argues that the crystal is a more suitable metaphor to describe what different methods may bring to the research than the rigid triangle, because crystals “grow, change alter” and “what we see depends upon our angle of repose” (Richardson 2000, 934). Consequently, the use of different methods does not take us closer to Truth with a capital T, or the full picture, but provides different and valuable ways of seeing the world (comparable to how I discussed becoming in the previous chapter). The overall motive for using both interviews and diaries was, ambitiously, to provide two different reflections of the “prism” in producing knowledge around the ageing body in relation to men and masculinities.

It is possible to see research and research methods as attempts to control and to create patterns and structure in the apparent chaos that makes up reality.⁸¹ By choosing the right methods, we want to bring clarity to the world, through the creation of knowledge. Yet it seems as though, no matter how meticulously one constructs one’s research, research methods are always “ambiguous apparatuses” (Irni 2010, 95ff). Methods do not impose complete order on the world. In my case this means that throughout my research I have struggled to decide whether or not interviewing and diary writing are the best methods for understanding and producing knowledge on *subjectivity as embodied*. In a study like this, which emphasizes embodiment and the role of the ageing and gendered body, the choice of interviews and diaries as methods may be seen as problematic, given that both these methods focus on language and prioritize linguistic articulations. Early on in the research process, I focused so much on *how to know* the body that it became almost like a fetish (cf. Ahmed & Stacey 2001, 3). The feeling I got from both interviews and body diaries was often that embodiment and the materiality of the body were slippery and impossible to pin down.

The question of what are the best methods to use to research the body and embodied subjectivity remains open in this research. However, I do understand interviews and diaries to be suitable for the aim of this study. Along the lines of my discussion in the previous chapter, understanding bodies as open materialities implies that I make no separation between materiality and language. Consequently, bodies should not be understood as merely material and opposed to the language-driven interviewing and diaries.

81. I am indebted to Katie King for this reflection, which was presented during a lecture at the Nordic research school on Feminist Methodologies, Södertörn University, November 2008.

Post-structuralist interviewing

My first interviews took place in late December 2007. It seems that no matter how prepared I was, going out to do the actual interviews always involved some nervousness. The nights before the interviews I always slept badly, and I can recall my dry mouth, the slight nausea and the tingly feeling in my chest that stemmed from being nervous combined with drinking too much coffee during the interviews. My nervousness before and sometimes during the interviews was to a great extent caused by a wish to get everything right, to ask the right questions, to be a good interviewer. But these kinds of aspirations can once more be said to reflect a *positivist ghost*, where the interviewer should attempt to be a neutral instrument. This is not my position on interviewing, however. I rather understand my interviewing, like the research overall, to take shape from a post-structuralist epistemology. In this section I will both describe the details of how the interviews were conducted and discuss what a post-structuralist approach to interviewing may entail.

The interviews that make up a substantial part of my material are in many respects traditional qualitative and in-depth research interviews. They were single one-off interviews, conducted with men unknown to me prior to the interview. The interviews were all between one and two and a half hours long. Most were carried out in the interviewees' homes, some in libraries or restaurants and one interview was conducted over the phone. The interviews were taped with a digital recorder and fully transcribed, and transcripts were sent out to the interviewees to see if they wanted to add anything or correct mistakes.⁸²

My ambition with the interviews was to keep them open-ended and focused on participants' own concepts and understandings, rather than following a rigid structure (Kvale 1997, Gubrium & Holstein 2001, Warren 2001).⁸³ Each interview was opened with the question, "if you were to describe your body, what would you say?" in order to relate the rest of the interview to the interviewee's own conceptions of the body and to let the interviewee himself define and create meanings around his body and sexuality. As the study was initially expected to explore issues of embodiment, ageing and masculin-

82. All interviews were done in Swedish and transcribed into Swedish. The quotes that appear in this study are accordingly translations done by me, and the original Swedish quotes appear as footnotes throughout the thesis. In the English translations some pauses and humming have been taken away to improve fluency and make them more readable.

83. While open-endedness may reflect a belief in authenticity, a true voice which emerges out of the non-restricted interview, I did not seek authenticity (cf. Atkinson & Silverman 1997). The purpose of being open, using follow-up questions and venturing into what the interviewees seemed to find of importance was instead in the open interview a way of making possible contradictory and disparate voices on the body, a polyphony of discourses.

ity, and did not restrict itself to sexuality and the sexual body, my interview guide had a broad range of topics on mundane and everyday life, from eating and drinking to sexuality, health and clothing. The interviews were, however, all in all, semi-structured, and in order to follow the interviewee as closely as possible the themes did not come in the same order for all, and what themes were discussed more extensively varied. I carried out my interviews on two occasions; the first eleven interviews took place during the winter of 2007/2008, and then another five followed in spring 2009. In the final five interviews, I extended and elaborated my tentative questions on sexuality (in particular in relation to sexuality earlier in the life course).

It is not really possible to talk of a post-structuralist interview as such (cf. Fontana 2001). There is in other words no particular approach and way of asking questions that could be labelled post-structuralist *per se*. Rather, when discussing my interviewing as post-structuralist, I am referring to my understanding of the knowledge produced from the interviews and a particular understanding of multiple and locally situated truths. So far in this chapter I have described my understanding of subjectivities as discursive insofar as people are simultaneously determined through discourse and actively negotiating, resisting, handling and shaping discourses in various ways. Consequently, I understand interviews as particular sites for the production of subjectivities; subjectivities are consequences of talk in interaction (but not only). To emphasize the interactional context, that interviews are always the result of interactions between the interviewer and the interviewee, is not exclusively a post-structuralist position, however, but has been previously emphasized by symbolic interactionists (Gubrium & Holstein 2001, Mishler 1986). Yet, a post-structuralist positioning on interviewing differs from interactionist ones by rejecting an idea of subjects as pre-existing, whole and unitary. I understand subjectivities in my interviews to be “fragmented subjectivities” (Luff 1999, cited in Warren 2001, 244). This implies that subjectivities are continuously assembled and reassembled, negotiated to emerge in different shapes in the interview context.

If subjectivities are understood as fragmented, this also has consequences for how to understand truth, and whether there are true or authentic subjectivities. A question that is occasionally raised on interviews as materials is: how do we know that the interviewees are telling the truth? This question may in particular be raised in studies of sexuality as, for example, when Calasanti & Slevin (2001) assert that men tend to overestimate and women underestimate their level of sexual activity when participating in research. A post-structuralist approach to interviews, however, is not concerned with locating the one and only truth, which is lying out there to be found, but

rather seeks to explore how several truths can take shape in an interview. To take an example from my material: when I interviewed Roland about sexuality, he talked about how there are things that are more important than intercourse in sex, how he values being close, and that others think of him as a “gentleman”.⁸⁴ When I later met with another interviewee he talked about how other men he knows brag about their sexual activity, and when he described one of these men I realized that he was talking about Roland.

From a realist perspective this would evidently be problematic; the way that Roland has narrated himself in the interview is obviously quite different from how he talks and acts outside the interview. Which version is then the truth? A post-structuralist epistemology, however, does not lead me to the conclusion that either image of Roland is more true than the other. Instead, post-structuralism allows me to understand the way that Roland emerges in different ways on different occasions, in the interview and elsewhere, as an example of how subjectivities are precisely fragmented and dependent on the context. In relation to the male group, Roland is perceived to “brag” about his persistent sexuality, whereas in relation to me as a female researcher he enacts another self, which is more considerate. These different accounts/performances of his sexual self can be understood as meeting (imagined or real) expectations of the different contexts. Even in the same interview, men gave voice to different and contradictory understandings of themselves and their experiences.

This discussion of subjectivities as fragmented, and the implications this has for understandings of truth and what we may know from the interviews, can also be related to the concept of experience. When men speak in interviews and write in diaries I understand this as expressions of experiences. However, I understand articulations of experiences in interviews, not as “expression[s] of essentialized social occurrence/familiarity”, but as articulations both constituted by and constituting discourse (Farahani 2007, 21 note 6, drawing on Scott 1992).⁸⁵ In other words, this implies that experience is intrinsically linked to how it can be articulated and is always emerging and becoming meaningful in relation to available discourses. To suggest that experiences are discursive is not to reduce everything to linguistic effects or to deny or obfuscate materiality and/or practice.⁸⁶ As I have pointed out earlier,

84. Roland has here been given a different name than when discussed elsewhere in the study, so as not to be identified.

85. When I use the notion of experience in this study, I am thus using it interchangeably with concepts such as *articulations* and *narration*.

86. I am here thinking of the many recent suggestions coming from some post-humanist and feminist new materialist theorists that post-structuralists have been obsessed with language, and as such

my understanding of discourse is not limited to text and language, but also encompasses practices and how these work to shape the world.

As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, I have relatively often been confronted with the question: “how do you think it matters that you are a young girl studying old men?” Thinking of subjectivities as fragmented and shaped in different ways depending on available discourses then suggests that age and gender (in this case) are also accomplished in the interviews, and what it means to be old/young and man/girl does not have one unequivocal meaning in the research. Next I will discuss how the meaning of old age was negotiated and resisted in the interactions between the interviewees and me, and how this influenced the research and the knowledge produced.

Resistance and compliance with old age in interviews

Even though questions on reflexivity and situated knowledges have been central to feminist epistemologies and methodologies, discussions on the impact of age and age relations to knowledge production are relatively scanty. Here I would like to bring out further how age and old age were evoked in the interviews and to suggest that ageism, as in pervasive negative attitudes and assumptions about old age, makes up a crucial context for how the men related to old age and what it meant to be old.

First of all I would like say that I started interviewing with a relatively naïve understanding of how to approach and speak of old age. The qualitative interview is often referred to as a conversation “with a purpose” (Lövgren 2009, Gustavsson-Payne 2005, Kvale 1997) and Warren (2001, 86) argues that interviewing as an interactional practice involves walking with the interviewee rather than following a precise route as in survey studies. I sympathize with the idea of staying open to interviewees’ own definitions and understandings.

Still, I believe that the understanding of interviews as following the interviewee in the walk of conversation need to be rethought and considered in relation to the power and differences at stake in an interview. In this case, I started out with an idea that it was simply possible to ask questions about how one experienced and understood old age. But my orientation to old age in itself shaped how the interaction between me and the interviewees took shape. That I was in addition clearly read as a young woman, with obviously no experience of what it meant to be old, further shaped the interactions in

have effaced and failed to account for materiality that I also mentioned in the previous chapter. See for example Alaimo & Hekman (2008), but also the response of Ahmed (2008).

the interviews. My encounter with Gösta, 83, serves as a pertinent example of how my assumptions about old age and ageing, together with me being read as a “young girl”, influenced the way in which knowledge could emerge on old men’s embodiment and sexual subjectivities.

It is January 2008 and Gösta has agreed to meet me in a restaurant in the small community where he lives. I am a bit late, but as I step out of the car I immediately understand who he is and wave. He puts on a grin and exclaims over and over again: “Here comes the young, young girl!” I laugh, and we walk into the restaurant. He walks with a stick and lacks a few teeth. The interview turns out to be a complicated affair, at times it seems very random and off-track. Gösta does not answer my questions, I feel, but get into discussions of all kinds of disparate things. When I ask questions about age and ageing he repeatedly uses the phrase: “one has to accept, we’re old”. A good while into the interview he seems fed up with my endless questions and requests for clarification and raises his voice, almost crying out: “ONE HAS TO ACCEPT, WE’RE OLD NOW!”

After the interview I am frustrated. What can I use this interview for? Reconsidering and going back to the interview later, however, I have come to understand Gösta’s interview as a form of resistance, against the forced labelling of him as old, but also resistance to my way of directing and making sense of him primarily as an ageing body. My choice of focusing on the experiences of bodies at present, rather than in the past, implied a certain shape to the bodies of the interviews. His narrations of a young, strong and virile body and of sexual adventures in the past, could be analyzed as a way to also configure his sexual subjectivity today, but my understanding was so set on old age as being separate from and other than the past that I failed to understand this.

Gösta’s is perhaps the case where resistance to the label old/er or ageing is most obvious (despite his claims that “one has to accept”). But it is also possible to perceive varying strategies for negotiating or resisting old age in other interviews. Some disassociated themselves from being old/er (cf. Hurd 1999), while others attempted to complicate what it meant to be old, along the lines of: “Well I’m old but...” To negotiate and resist being old can be related to what Biggs (2005) discusses as a way for older people to control images of the self. When starting to interview, I partially overlooked the existing power asymmetries of ageism, where old age is imbued with negativity and therefore difficult to take up and associate with. As several others researching ageing and later life have pointed out, old people may feel compelled to speak out against negative attitudes on old age and conform to norms of successful ageing in interviews (Biggs 2005, Hurd 1999, Jones 2006). Still, while nego-

tiations and resistances to old age and ageing often occurred, the fact that some men did agree to participate in the study points to the fact that many at some level accepted and took up the interpellation as old. In order to be helpful, some men seemed to comply with existing assumptions about old age, for example, by readily telling me about all the health problems they had experienced as they got older.⁸⁷

My first interviews consequently alerted me to the difficulties of researching old age. The ageist discourses which old people often feel obliged to defy meant that questions on old age and ageing could be difficult to pose, and the difficulties were probably also further exacerbated by my appearance and body, which were read as a young and female. Apparently, in the encounter with Gösta, he was reading signs of my body and appearance as youth, and I was likewise reading signs of his body, such as a walking stick and no teeth, as him being old. Age was then clearly a co-construct of the interview and our expectations and understandings of young and old subsequently influenced the conversation during the interview.

The encounters with my interviewees underlined the fact that difference and power asymmetries cannot be escaped in research and that there is no such thing as a “neutral” way of approaching ageing, but that research is always happening in a context of ageism (cf. Irni 2010, 103). As this became more evident to me, I fretted in my research diary over the difficulties of grasping the meanings of old age and ageing with these words:

Age is nothing. On one level they say that ailments come with age. On the other hand, age, to become old/older, is very abstract, something one won't connect with one's self. [Research diary 2008-02-08]

Here I get at some of the ambiguity of how to discuss old age. On the one hand, interviews risk reinforcing the social category, on the other, a neglect of the experiences of ageing risks reinforcing ageism by not acknowledging the specificities of a later life situation. Accounting for the problems that researching old age may entail, in particular when marked differences of “me” as “young” and “them” as “old” are at play, does not solve the problems but may help us to understand how we can comprehend the knowledge produced in this study.

87. Interestingly, however, it was not those who were (chronologically) the oldest in my study but the younger old, around 70, who were most willing to talk about themselves as old and what this specific outset meant. This may suggest that the younger old, with better health and fewer signs of physical ageing, could “afford” to take up old as they were not as susceptible to ageist stereotypes of old age as weak.

So, men responded to me, as a seemingly young person, and my interpellation of them as being old/older, through varying strategies of resisting and negotiating the meanings of old age. The question that might be worth asking here is: in what ways does the shaping of age and the impact of age relations differ from other the categorizations and power asymmetries at stake? One of the important issues that has received considerable attention in social and critical gerontology is the tension between people's subjective experiences of ageing and being old and the public images and expectations on ageing, which are often negative, marginalizing and taking shape in an ageist culture (Biggs 2003, Featherstone & Hepworth 2005). The negotiations that older people engage in to handle these tensions have been discussed in terms of donning a "mask of aging" (Featherstone & Hepworth 2005) or "masquerading" (Biggs 2003, Woodward 1991). These concepts also underline the experienced discrepancies between feelings of self, as often younger, and the ageing body and appearance, which many older people experience. Importantly, as Featherstone & Hepworth (2005, 358) argue, "the mask [...] is closely associated with ageist images".

If we compare experiences of ageing to transgendered experiences of not identifying with one's biological sex, the latter are often marginalized and othered in our culture. It is, in contrast, much more customary and accepted for people to claim not to feel their age. Also, in comparison with many other categorizations, being old seems to be something that very few people can fully identify with, not least since old age is so much associated with negativity. These are things that should be taken into account when thinking about how age can be researched in different ways. Also, the fact that ageism is so utterly naturalized as a power asymmetry makes it easy to overlook, even for critical researchers like myself, who are interrogating power in research. The risk of reinforcing ageist stereotypes and/or naturalizing unequal age relations is thus ever-present when endeavouring to research old age and age relations.

Age is, however, only one facet of how subjectivities took shape in this research, another significant element is gender. When I discussed earlier how the potentially sexual associations of my research made me feel vulnerable during early contacts with the participants, gender was very much a lingering issue. In the research process, the sexual content of my study shaped gender relations and gendered subjectivities in several ways. The influences of gender relations are often different from the influences of age in this study, but it is also possible to see that the performance of a successfully ageing person often coincides with performances of desirable and successful masculinity. Hence, I think the process of crafting a successfully ageing self often

must be understood as simultaneous to a process of performing desirable masculinity.

The interview as a site for the production of gender

Edvard: I really have very few good friends who are men, it's almost only women who are good friends.⁸⁸

Why does the interviewee Edvard, 69, underline the fact that he does not get along with men, that his best friends are more often women, when I interview him? I suggest that the above quote is interesting as an example of how gender is performed and takes shape in the interactional context of the interview, in relation to me as a woman and gender scholar. When I have conducted interviews, they have not only been a method of finding out how masculinities are constructed, but they were themselves also sites for constructions of masculinity (Nordberg 1999). To understand the effects of gender in the interviews, and how knowledge has emerged in relation to gender, it is not sufficient to state that I am a woman and the participants are men. Rather than just looking at the gender of the researcher and the researched, my ambition has been to look at “the gendered context of the research environment” (Pini 2005, 202).⁸⁹ In this study, there are two contexts/aspects of my work in particular that I have found relevant in terms of gender in the interviewing and which I will discuss below. The first relates to the above quote from Edvard, where the men associated with women and women-friendly discourses. I understand these articulations in the interviews to have taken shape in relation to a Swedish societal context with a strong emphasis on gender equality and to me as a gender scholar and woman. Secondly, I will discuss how a potential sexualization of the interviews was an issue that had to be negotiated both by me and by my interviewees. As I discussed earlier, I understand subjectivities to be fragmented and non-unitary, and I thus also understand there to be more than one possible masculinity for men to perform in the interviews.

My experiences of interviewing men as a woman, and how I found gender to be relevant in the interviews, differ quite significantly from the small amount of methodological literature that explicitly discusses women interviewing men. This literature tends often to discuss how the interviews are

88. Jag har väldigt få riktigt bra kamrater bland män, det är nästan bara kvinnor som är goda vänner.

89. While I will not focus on this here, it is also possible to discuss interviewing as a gendered method per se (cf. Oakley 1981).

influenced and shaped by masculine ways of asserting control, misogynistic attitudes and actions, and suspicion towards feminism (Arendell 1997, Pini 2005, Lee 1997). What this literature, of anglophone origin, rarely takes into account, however, are the cultural and contextual differences that might exist, that perceptions of desirably masculinity may be locally specific.⁹⁰ That Sweden from the mid 20th century onwards has been saturated by pervasive discourses of gender equality, as I pointed out in Chapter One, certainly influences how gender is talked about and how, and when, misogynist attitudes can be expressed. This does not imply that Sweden is a gender-equal paradise, examples of men's power and dominance over women are not hard to find. Yet, it is very likely that many Swedish men would want to be associated with gender equality when meeting a female researcher from gender studies (Nordberg 2005, Pini 2005).

I often chose not to focus or explicitly raise questions on participants' understandings of masculinity in the interviews. I was more interested in how gendered discourse operated in everyday talk and was intertwined with talk about and understandings of old age and sexuality. On occasion, I asked interviewees if they thought they had a masculine body, to explore whether the ageing body was seen as contradictory to notions of a masculine body. But generally I was more interested in how masculinity existed, not on the reflexive level, but embedded in narratives of everyday lives. Since I come from gender studies, it was naturally not a secret for several men that I was interested in gender, however, and these men accordingly related to gender and masculinity in various ways.

The way in which Edvard, above, points to friendships with women, rather than men, was a common way of performing a specific kind of masculinity. By expressing how they never really got along with other men, felt uncomfortable around men and preferred to have women as friends, men shaped themselves as women-friendly; explicitly or implicitly they starkly disassociated with "macho" attitudes. Some men not only expressed women-friendly attitudes, but even said they were feminists or aligned with feminist ideas. My impression was that several men tried to establish rapport with me as a woman and gender scholar by associating with feminism and positive attitudes about women. This also had consequences for how the interviews took shape as it sometimes implied that the analytical understandings of gender had seeped out of the academic context and were also being taken up by the interviewees themselves (cf. Holmgren 2011). Lennart, 78, for example,

90. See Holmgren 2011, Holmgren & Hearn 2009 for discussions on (feminist) women interviewing men which also take the Swedish context into account.

talked about how gender differences are really insignificant and adhered to cultural explanations of gender by saying:

Well for one thing, men generally have more muscles, so generally speaking we are probably stronger. But this is enhanced by cultural behaviours, so that also the weak men have to be strong, it's not really masculine to be weak and weedy. And so we have an idea about a masculine ideal that a whole lot of men can never achieve, it's kind of silly really.⁹¹

Lennart's attitudes in this quote are clearly socially constructivist, and rather close to Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity. I find this an interesting example of how the interviews in this study are to be understood as more than just a female researcher interviewing men. Instead, the combination of a female researcher working within the field of gender studies in Sweden, as a context relatively conscious of gender equality, made the men in this study approach my questions and raise issues in ways that signalled non-misogynist attitudes and sometimes disassociation from certain forms of masculinity.

When looking at men's narratives on sex and sexuality, this association with a positive and non-misogynistic masculinity is hence important. As the following chapters will show, men talk of themselves as considerate, and stress the importance of her sexual pleasure, and of intimacy, and these articulations must be understood in relation to the gendered context of the interview, that I was a female feminist researcher in a Swedish context with pervasive discourses on gender equality. But talking about themselves like that was also a way of avoiding being seen as dirty in the possibly precarious situation when sex was discussed.

The first contacts with the participants through letters and phone calls had sometimes made me feel more vulnerable than I had expected to. And if I was to believe the feminist literature on interviewing men, going out interviewing would put me at further risk of being sexualized and subjected to violence, not least since I was researching sexuality (Lee 1997, McKee & O'Brien 1983, Arendell 1997, Pini 2005). I was, however, unwilling to take up a position as vulnerable and therefore went ahead with the interviews, thinking to myself that these concerns should not limit me. What was not

91. Ja, för det första så har ju män rent generellt en större muskelmassa, så generellt sätt här är vi nog starkare, men det här förstärks då av ett kulturellt beteende eh men även dom svaga männen måste vara starka, det är lite som inte riktigt manligt att vara lite å klen å svag utan det vi har då en föreställning om en mansbild som väldigt många män aldrig kan leva upp till, å det är lite fänigt bara.

always apparent to me while doing the interviews, however, was that I more or less consciously acted in ways that would reduce my vulnerability in the interviews and minimize sexualizing. Reading through my notes and reflections from the interviews, there are several things that I can see as ways of handling a gendered context, and which shaped my interviewing, and potentially also the responses of the interviewees.

One thing in the interviews that was influenced by gender and potential sexualization was dress. I normally only wear skirts and dresses, but when doing the interviews I decided to wear jeans so as not to underline my female body. After a while I felt that the jeans were so tight that my body was still visible. I decided to go back to wearing skirts, but chose them carefully.

Am I looking too shabby? I'm wearing an old worn skirt and a wrinkly, checked shirt, dirty hair. I have consciously "dressed down" so I won't be too pretty and attractive. It's crazy really. [Research diary 2009-05-19]

Another issue in the interviews that underlined the potentially problematic heterosexualization at stake was hugs. When some interviews were finished and we said goodbye some of the participant men hugged me. In my research diary, in most cases, I write about how this felt natural and a reflection of the rapport that had been established in the interviews. On one occasion, however, one interviewee hugs me and then tries to kiss my cheek. I move away and say: "I think that's enough". "Yes not too much", he quickly replies. To me, he has crossed a boundary here, and I feel particularly uncomfortable as he has earlier commented on my beautiful looks and in the interview said that he likes "young women".

To me, these experiences of dress and of hugging also frame how the interview could take place. Questions that would potentially put me in focus, like asking questions on desire for young women, were thus more difficult to ask. It is also probable that the men refrained from articulating desire for younger women in front of a young woman. I also found it difficult to raise questions on masturbation. The extremely private character of masturbation made it feel like an unexplored territory, in which I could potentially be vulnerable. I am not quite sure what I feared about this territory but I think it was the fact that the sexuality with a partner that was discussed was directed towards somebody else, whereas the narratives of masturbation could be directed towards me.

The above examples only reflect some of the ways in which the gendered context of the interview was continuously negotiated and handled by both my interviewees and me in different ways. I tried in different ways to down-

play the potential heterosexualization between me as a woman and them as men; I avoided being seen as an object of desire. It is very important to note that I very rarely experienced any real occasions of sexualization, rather I was (unconsciously) acting out of expectations on gender. Only in one interview did I feel truly uncomfortable due to the interviewee's talk and behaviour, similarly to the phone call from the contact-phase discussed earlier. In this case, I experienced the feeling that the interviewee's way of talking about sex while I was listening was sexual and involved me. This interview was, however, an exception and my overall impression of the interviews was very positive. This positive impression may in some respects be seen as a limitation. It seems as though the participating men often performed in respectable ways in order not to seem dirty or inappropriate. This has certainly shaped the outcome of the material and of this study; I have occasionally heard from people when I have presented my work that the men's narratives seem very "nice", something that I believe is a result of these negotiations of respectability.

Having spoken extensively about my experiences of vulnerability, it is also worth considering to what extent the interviewed men may have felt vulnerable when discussing intimate issues with me. Interviews have been discussed in terms of a "threat" to a masculine self (Schwalbe & Wolkomir 2001, 9), which could result in attempts by men who are interviewed to protect themselves through strategies such as minimizing responses, taking charge and control of the interview and non-disclosure of feelings and vulnerabilities (Arendell 1997, Pini 2005). It is possible that the men could have had difficulties in expressing things that were sensitive and which made them vulnerable. But, generally, the interviewees expressed their experiences of the interview in positive terms; how it was nice to talk to me, "almost therapeutic". Also, the particular interview situation with me being a woman interviewing men could have made it easier for them to talk about personal matters and to display feelings, since women are often connoted with emotions.

In this section's discussion of gender in the interviews, I have wished to highlight the interactions in the interviews as involving gender performativity, and how the interviews took shape from expectations on gender differences as a site of heterosexualization. I would, however, like to stress that, if gender is performative, this also implies that gender and gender relations can be negotiated and downplayed in the interview (Nordberg 1999). Gender may not always be the most salient category or issue at stake.

Body diaries: The invention of a method

Earlier I described how, besides interviews, as a well-known and established method in the social sciences, I decided to work in the feminist tradition of exploratory methodologies and hence came up with the idea of *body diaries* (Lather 1991). I will now describe in more detail what body diaries meant in practical terms and also emphasize how they differ from a lot of diary research in the social sciences. As an exploratory method, body diaries in some respects meant venturing out into the unknown, and in doing so you always risk (or perhaps have the chance) of getting lost. As I hinted at earlier, the body diaries did not turn out exactly as I expected them to, and at some point made me feel both disorientated and a bit disappointed. What seemed like a failure, however, turned out to be something useful, but perhaps different, in the end.

There are lots of different kinds of diaries and many differences of purpose that diaries have been used for in research.⁹² My invention of the body diaries was using diaries as way of collecting data. Consequently the body diaries have not, like some other diaries, emerged spontaneously but are “researcher driven” or solicited diaries (Markham & Couldry 2007, Elliot 1997). As such, the diaries were created specifically for the purposes of research, and were written more for an audience than private diaries in general.⁹³ In contrast to my use of diaries, situated in a feminist post-structuralist epistemology, solicited diaries have traditionally been used within a naturalist/positivist paradigm to obtain objective reports of phenomena, often within quantitative studies (cf. Verbrugge 1980). In this tradition, diaries have often been taken as more “immediate” ways of knowing, reporting “what happens in reality” rather than what people say happened (Johnson & Bytheway 2001, 183).⁹⁴ As I discussed earlier, however, I regard neither interviews nor diaries as more “true” or “immediate” forms of knowledge production, and diaries are by no means a substitute for observation. I understand diaries to be one

92. Bryman (1997) discusses three main forms of diaries used in research: autobiographical diaries, researcher's logs of field activities and as a research-driven method of data collection.

93. Solicited diaries have been used within several different disciplines where two established forms are health diaries (Verbrugge 1980) and time diaries. Time diaries have been used since the 1960s (Markham & Couldry 2007: 679). Diaries have also been used in organizational studies e.g. to research and evaluate work organization and stress (Symon 2004).

94. Diaries are in some studies understood as more direct and immediate, and as such beneficial, since lack of reporting due to forgetting and/or errors occurring from “vagaries of memory” (Elliot 1997, section 2.4) is reduced from direct writing (Milligan et al. 2005, Symon 2004, Elliot 1997, Hislop et al. 2005). These studies take a naturalist approach to diaries, whereby they may objectively report events and occurrences. Diary studies may also take a hybrid approach, where people's “subjective responses to objective conditions” are sought, this often the case in health diaries (Markham & Couldry 2007, 680).

prism of a phenomenon. Diaries are one way of giving shape and meaning to gendered subjectivities, not a mirror of the truth of old men's bodies and lives.

Writing has long been an important aspect of feminist knowledge production; from memory work (e.g. Haug 1987), to feminist autobiography (e.g. Stanley 1995), feminist creative writing (e.g. Richardson 1997, 2000) and writing related to the feminist tradition of *écriture féminine* (e.g. Cixous 1975, 1986). Body diaries, accordingly, have several roots of inspiration in feminist research, and on a theoretical level I figured the diaries to be a way of exploring relations of textuality and embodiment. My unwillingness to separate discourse and materiality, language and embodiment, led me to think of body diaries as a non-dualistic method that would make possible the analysis of bodies, subjectivities and narrations as ultimately intertwined. On a personal and political level, I also thought of body diaries as a way for men to explore and develop new senses of self. More ambitiously I figured that the possibilities for men to formulate different narratives and to reconfigure their bodies could be part of creating different discourses on male embodiment, which in turn may challenge phallocentrism, patriarchy, the hegemony of men or whatever one chooses to term the current structures of gendered power. This links to the second aim of my study, namely to explore what male sexual bodies may become in relation to ageing.

So how did the body diaries actually take shape? First of all, I began by writing my own body diary as an exploratory method to get an idea of what the method could be like: what could a body diary contain and how could it be structured? My own diary writing, together with some of my theoretical starting points, subsequently became the basis for a number of themes/loose questions that the diarists were given as an inspiration/idea about what they could write about (see Appendix C). For example, I suggested that the diarists could write about their bodies in relation to feelings, places and people, and in relation to themes such as sex/sexuality, eating/drinking, health, sleep, clothes etc. Although I found it important to keep the diaries as open as possible, I justified my use of themes by considering the advantage of giving some comforting guidance, even though the structuring might also have influenced the writing (Symon 2004). Still, in the instructions I underlined that nothing was too big or too small to be included. The amount one wrote was entirely up to the diarist himself, he could choose to write several times during a day, when something came to mind, or do it all at once. The diarists were instructed to write every day to develop continuity to their writing. Writing every day would allow the possibility of developing a style and a way of writing, and would also make it possible for me to trace processes and

change in the writing. This has been put forward as one of the advantages of using diaries: rather than focusing on one event, the diary is an ongoing activity (Elliot 1997, Symon 2004).⁹⁵

Those who responded to my call for writers were sent a black lined notebook to write in and which was sent back to them later.⁹⁶ Around half of the diarists chose to write in the book whereas the other half typed their diaries on their computers.

My aspirations of openness and the possibility for men to define the terms of writing led to a very diverse set of writings.⁹⁷ Not only was there a substantial difference in the amount written by different diarists, there was also a great mix of genres between the diaries. Some very briefly reported their daily activities (*the log*), others included thoughts, feelings and fantasies (*the intimate journal*) and others again wrote what almost seemed like a life story narrative (*the memoir*) (Allport 1943, cited in Elliot 1997). Even in one single diary, a mixture of genres could be found. A few of the writers called me up to ask questions about how to write and what to write, and from the diaries I received it was apparent that many found the diary form very difficult to handle. Several of the writers had never written on a daily basis. The openness also meant that I received other things besides the diaries, such as photos and, on one occasion, extracts from a participating man's health journal (with a blood pressure curve etc.). So, on the one hand, the diarists wrote with an intention to report as accurately as possible and understood their own narratives to be true reflections of their lives, while I, on the other hand, did not approach the diaries as true reflections of selves and I did not analyze the material as objective reports, but as subjective narrations of the self.

95. The processual aspects of diaries also links in well with my theoretical view of the body, in which the body is not an object simply existing out there to be studied but is something that gets its shape, fixity and intelligibility from a trajectory in time and space. A focus on the process taking place within diaries does not however ultimately mean that they share the same epistemology of diaries. Hislop and colleagues, for example, describe their audio diaries as "a mirror [...] providing unique insights into sleep as a socially contextualised embodied process" (Hislop et al. 2005, 5.2). I, on the other hand, do not look upon diaries as mirrors of embodied processes but as intertwined in those very processes.

96. The design of diaries is often discussed in literature on diary studies where many studies, including qualitative ones, have headings and/or instructions on every diary sheet. I considered what the diaries should look like and settled for plain notebooks which the diarists could fill the way that suited them.

97. Three diary forms that have been distinguished and which are reflected in my material are *the intimate journal*, *the log* and *memoirs* (Allport 1943, in Elliot 1997). Where the intimate journal is written in a subjective way, focusing on feelings and reflections, the log more objectively reports events and is more lacking in reflection. The memoir in turn is a more public type of diary written for an audience.

There was consequently a gap between what the participant men understood the diaries to be and how I approached and analyzed them.

So here I was with all the diary material I could dream of, but how could I analyze it? How could I use the many different diaries to answer questions on the ageing male body, masculinity, subjectivity, sexuality? Not only were the diaries diverse, which made them difficult to analyze and compare in any systematic way, but I also found myself with questions on how to understand the body. Many of the diaries were seemingly disembodied; the men were discussing what they had seen on television, their views on society, family matters, and so on. My ambition was to explore embodiment, but everything could be found in these diaries, and who was I to say what was a matter of the body or not? Also, the fact that I had started to think about body diaries from my own positioning: my menstrual blood, my smooth skin, my non-heterosexual desires, had made me very confused about the diaries I received, which so often lacked the bodily self-reflection that I engaged in, in my diary.⁹⁸ Put simply, I had not foreseen that my way of writing was not necessarily how the men would write, and that their relationships to embodiment and sexuality were quite different to my own.

For some time I looked upon the diaries as useless, I felt they could not fulfil the aspirations and hopes I had held. Throughout the research process I started to question the “god-trick”-like aspiration I had initially had; to grasp and understand old men’s bodies fully and completely. I decided to narrow my aims and research questions towards sexuality and, going into more detailed analysis, I found the body diaries to be interesting and useful in the end.

As the diaries differed so much, their contributions to the study are also very different. Narratives that related to sexuality were often only minor parts of the diaries and some can be seen as rather similar to narratives emerging in the interviews. My ambition to get at more uninterrupted narrations through the diaries was, however, to some extent achieved. While the men often seemed unsure of how they could speak of their experiences of sexuality in the interviews, the diaries held some more fluent and uninterrupted narratives of sexuality, as when Erland writes of his experience of impotence, which I will discuss further in Chapter Five. In particular, when analyzing and bringing diary narratives into dialogue with interviews, the

98. Previous diary studies generally discuss little on the gendered aspects of diary writing. Markham & Couldry (2007, 684), however, note the gendered styles of writing where women were more prone to refer to social contexts with “narrative complicity”, whereas men wrote more formally by presenting an issue and stating opinions on it.

picture that emerged was one of “thick” and rather detailed descriptions of sexuality (Geertz 1973).

The diary narratives that I found especially interesting and intriguing were not, however, those that provided the most lucid descriptions of sexual experiences or developed clear attitudes and ideas on meanings of later life sexuality. Instead, it is those diaries that challenged my ideas of what sexuality and sex could imply that are the most important to the discussion in this thesis. The diary of Fritz is one of this kind. What is interesting about Fritz’s diary is that it is largely based on fantasies and sexual dreaming rather than sexual activities with another person or masturbation. As I discuss further in Chapter Four, his narration points to the significance of touch for how to understand desire and sexuality, not least in later life. The diary of Fritz is an example of exactly that kind of exploratory and transgressive potential of the body diary that I envisioned at the start; it mixes lived experiences with fantasies and is often fragmentary and sometimes even poetic.

Another diary narrative that I have found interesting for this study is that of Lennart, where he describes the events following his wife’s cancer diagnosis, and their relationship in this time of great turmoil. Lennart does not discuss any sexual activities or experiences in a conventional sense in his diary. Instead he narrates several occasions where touch emerges as a central experience. In my analysis of old men’s sexual subjectivities, I came to understand intimacy and touch as central, and the diaries were important to how I started to re-assess the meanings of sexuality. Narratives on intimacy and touch, which at first sight I had not regarded as narratives on sexuality and as not being relevant to the sexual body, turned out to be very significant to this work. The exploration of the possibilities of the ageing male body as becoming happened to a great extent from reconsidering the diaries.

I will next account for an important part of the methodology of this study: the methods of analysis. I am, neither in the study as a whole, nor in the particular process of analyzing, a “modest witness” (Haraway 1997). Rather, I am an active agent in what the analysis looks like.

Methods of analysis

As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, accounting for one’s situatedness and reflexively discussing how knowledge is produced has a strong tradition in feminist methodology and can today almost be regarded as common practice by feminist scholars. However, my experience is that, when methods and methodology are discussed, there is one phase of research that generally comes with little reflexive discussion and where the research self is

more absent than in the methodological discussions in general, and that is when analysis is concerned. Qualitative analysis is not infrequently seen as unclear or a mystery, or at worse as unscientific, where “anything goes”, and this problem can probably be referred back to the fact that there is often little description of how the analysis was actually conducted (cf. Braun & Clarke 2006). Below, I will describe how my analysis was done, but I will also discuss how the particular analysis that emerged must be seen in the light of a feminist researcher studying men and masculinities and how this has shaped my analysis in different ways.

Like my theoretical and methodological approach in general, my methods of analysis have been characterized by hybridity or the “bricoleuse’s” way of combining methods and approaches (Lykke 2009).⁹⁹ I have been moving in and out of analytical methods such as discourse analysis and narrative analysis throughout the research process.¹⁰⁰ The method of analysis for this study as a whole is, however, best described as a *thematic* analysis with inspiration from *post-structuralist approaches*, in particular *discourse analysis* (Braun & Clarke 2006, Søndergaard 2002, Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips 2002). I concur with social psychologists Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, who argue that thematic analysis, as foundational to qualitative research, should be acknowledged as an analytical method “in its own right”, which is often not the case (Braun & Clarke 2006, 78). Braun & Clarke (2006, 79) describe thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” and this is roughly what I did in my analysis.

Importantly, my thematic analysis was closely linked to my post-structuralist epistemology and methodology. For example, the fact that I understand subjectivities as fragmented or decentred shaped my analysis in the sense that I was not looking for single unequivocal narratives in my material. Rather, my analysis focused on the emergence of multiple, sometimes contradictory, narratives of the self and the world in the material (cf. Winther-Jørgensen &

99. The term *bricoleuse* is created from the notion of “bricolage” used by the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss in his book *La pensée sauvage* (1962) (English translation *The savage mind* 1966) to describe “working by hand at odd jobs with whatever resources happen to be available within a repertoire of inherited tools and assorted bric-a-brac”. From Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. [<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/theory-bioethics/>] [2010-07-27]

100. As the body diaries were initially developed for their qualities as a method to produce narratives, they were early on analyzed from a narrative perspective, to define genres and the ways in which narratives shaped bodies in different ways, but also how bodies were central to the shaping of everyday narratives. (See unpublished paper “Narrating the ageing male body- body diaries as a method in narrative studies” presented at the conference *Den berättande människan: konferens i narrativa studier* 12–13 juni 2008, Linköping University.) As my research changed and became more specifically focused on the sexual body, however, the narrative analysis of the diaries was discarded.

Phillips 2002, 43). Moreover, I reject a realist understanding of the themes that I worked out, and do not focus “on motivation or individual psychologies”, but regard them from a social constructionist viewpoint as both made possible by and shaping social context (Braun & Clarke 2006, 85).

My analysis was already beginning when I did the interviews and when listening to them afterwards I wrote about what I found to be of significance in the interviews and potential links between them. The analysis subsequently continued while I was transcribing the interviews (cf. Klein 1990). The interviews were transcribed verbatim and in their entirety, and I marked laughs, emphases and when people were raising their voices (see Appendix D). While transcribing, I was making notes on things that came to mind.

In the spring of 2008 I started to do an initial and interim analysis of both the transcripts I had produced so far and the diaries. At this early stage I read through and looked for important patterns and themes in each interview and diary to get an overview of my material. Besides looking for as many themes as possible in the material I also tried to avoid fragmenting the men's narratives. When reading, I attempted to refer back to the question: *what is central to the individual man's way of making sense of his self and concepts such as old age, the body and sexuality?*, or in other words: *what is his key narrative, the central things he tries to convey?* After having read through and “coded” the interviews, I used pen and paper and constructed “mind-maps” where the men's accounts were grouped and linked to form loose overall themes.¹⁰¹ From this I got a number of themes, and several, such as “intimacy”, “reciprocity” and “various sexual practices”, have remained with me throughout my research process and are discussed in this thesis, albeit in more refined and developed ways.¹⁰²

The overall method has been to look for patterns and common themes in the material, as well as contradictions and disruptions in these themes (Braun & Clarke 2006, 86). The many narratives have been compared and contrasted to look for both similarities and differences/contradictions (Lundström 2007, 49). Differences and contradictions have not only been sought *between* interviews but also *within* single interviews.

101. The mind-maps can be compared to the maps presented by Braun & Clarke (2006, 90-91) on how to conduct thematic analysis, although I did not find my inspiration for mind-maps as analytical tools from their work.

102. The refinement and advancement of my thematic analysis meant going beyond what Braun & Clarke (2006, 84) refer to as the “semantic or explicit level” and instead making themes that were “latent”, meaning that they related to theory and referred to “underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations”, from which the more explicit themes took shape.

In refining and going into more detailed analysis of the themes, I used analytical insights from post-structuralism and tools developed in discourse analysis to analyze the excerpts. One such way was to look at what feminist scholar Dorte-Marie Søndergaard (2002) has termed "inclusive and exclusive discursive processes". Søndergaard (2002, 190) asserts that "every category has its discursive boundaries and its core and it is the processes whereby these boundaries and this core are reassessed and challenged that make up the focus of this analytical approach".¹⁰³

To take an example from my study, I was interested in how old men constructed sexual subjectivities and found that a recurring theme was later life sexuality and his sexuality as "more considerate and less selfish". To understand how this theme came to signify the old man's sexual subjectivity, I looked at what the men were distancing themselves from, who was the other that was excluded from this discourse of being considerate and "mature". By engaging closely with the narratives, it became clear that the others in these narrative were men and in particular young men. Discourse analysis uses the term "chains of equivalence" to make sense of how some things are included and other things excluded in discourse, and in this case the "chain of equivalence" consisted of young men, who were linked to things such as egoism, strong desires, and the body (Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 43).¹⁰⁴ The old men's sexual subjectivities thus emerged from what they were not: young men, which linked to egoism and uncontrollable carnal desires. In contrast, old men were aligned with concepts such as maturity, consideration and intimacy.

Figure 1: Example of chains of equivalence

(Young) man → The body → Strong desire → Egoism
→ Penetrative focus

Old man → Experience → Maturity → Consideration/less
selfish → Alternative sexual practices/being close intimacy

Also, when exploring and developing the themes, I have, in a post-structuralist analytical tradition, looked for paradoxes, alternative narratives, resis-

103. This approach resonates with the way discourse analysis, following Laclau & Mouffe, tries to interrogate what concepts can be linked and made intelligible in relation to a "nodal point", meaning "a privileged sign around which a discourse is organised" (Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, 28).

104. Winther-Jørgensen & Phillips (2002, 43) write: "identity is constituted through *chains of equivalence* where signs are sorted and linked together in chains in opposition to other chains which thus define how the subject is and how it is not".

tances or “snags” in the material (Søndergaard 2002, 198). One such “snag” was how sexual desire emerged in my material. The “to be or not to be” of sexual desire in later life was often accompanied by a lot of contradiction. Not only did narratives differ between interviews, but in the same interview the interviewee could give voice to seemingly contradictory views on the sexual desire of old men.¹⁰⁵ An emergent theoretical interest in sexual desire, how it could be understood in gender studies and queer theory (Lindgren 2007a, 2007b), together with the contradictory accounts I discovered from my analysis of the material made me develop more questions about how desire was in fact articulated and made sense of.

The first steps of analysis were inductive insofar as I started to form themes from the material, rather than starting with pre-existing theoretical or analytical assumptions. From this early analysis, resulting in a range of themes, I returned to the relevant literature and theory and wrote draft chapters based on my analysis. The analysis as a whole, however, could rather be described as “abductive” (Alvesson & Sköldberg 1994, in Ryen 2004, 16), moving between theory and the empirical material. Themes that were developed inductively in the early analysis were related to theoretical underpinnings and used to rework the research questions, which in turn led to more interviews and further analysis of the material.¹⁰⁶

My thematic analysis has involved focusing on both content, what the narratives looked like, and form, how they were achieved (Börjesson 2003). Braun & Clarke (2006, 97) assert that one of the disadvantages of thematic analysis is that it does not allow for the analysis of language use, unlike other qualitative methods such as conversation or discourse analysis. Making use of “tools” from discourse theory in my thematic analysis has hence been a way to get at the “how” as well as the “what” of the material.

So far I have tried to describe my methods of analysis, what this process has involved, but one thing that has not been discussed is how my analysis has taken shape from my position as a feminist researcher. Being a feminist researcher does not necessarily lead you down one given line of thought, which the pluralities of feminist work may well account for. But feminism as a backdrop of analytical work recurrently draws you back to questions of whether the narratives you are analyzing partake in the reinforcement or the disruption of gendered relations of power and dominance. The analyses you will encounter in this thesis are produced from the tensions between read-

105. I say interviews here because it was in particular in the interviews that this was articulated; diaries seldom held this.

106. Lundström (2007, 51) describes her abductive analysis, from Alvesson and Sköldberg (1994), as shifting between “empirically saturated theory” and “theoretically saturated empirical material”.

ings that emphasize continuity and readings that emphasize the possibilities of thinking differently, of flux and instability, tensions that I have pointed to already in the previous chapter when discussing theoretical perspectives.

It is worth repeating what I said in the previous chapter, that I am a bit suspicious about the voices that posit old(er) men as invisible, marginalized etcetera, since I believe this may disregard the privileges some old men may (still) have. This suspicion has also remained with me when analyzing the material, and I have been doubtful about accepting the men's narratives of improvement and sexual reciprocity and use of egalitarian discourse as signs of subversive potential in old men. At the same time I am critical of the kinds of feminist work that disregard the possibilities of change and disruption, and where everything incessantly boils down to a reinforcement of male power and dominance. This kind of feminist work is informed by what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has referred to as "paranoid readings" (Sedgwick 2003). Sedgwick argues that paranoid readings are at work to reveal or make visible the workings of oppressive power mechanisms, but they risk ending up with what we already know. "For someone to have an unmystified view of systemic oppressions does not *intrinsically* or *necessarily* enjoin that person to any specific train of epistemological or narrative consequences", she asserts (Sedgwick 2003, 127, her italics).

This means that, rather than doing readings that tell us what we seemingly already know, we should ask what knowledge *does*, that is, what is the performative function of knowledge production? Thus she suggests, instead of the paranoid reading, a "reparative reading" (Sedgwick 2003). This kind of reading is in line with a deleuzian theoretical impetus which focuses on what things can *become* rather than what simply *is*. Hence this reading relates back to my starting point in becoming and the aim to explore what the male sexual body may become.

Sedgwick's description of different modes of analysis, paranoid versus reparative readings, have been important for how I think of my own study, and how the analysis has taken place. I concur with Sedgwick that research should not simply point to the reification of structures of power and dominance. I am, however, critical towards her dualistic presentation, where an analysis is either paranoid or reparative.¹⁰⁷ By alluding to the phrase: "just

107. I am also critical of how Sedgwick in an unreflective way uses the trope of the paranoid and obfuscates the real and lived experiences of an invisible disability, paranoia as part of a mental condition. As disability theorist Ellen Samuels (2002) argues, disabilities are often used as metaphors for the negative, even among scholars whose works aim to subvert and challenge social inequalities. As Sedgwick does with the paranoid, the disability is used merely as a metaphor and reflects ignorance about ableism as an oppressive structure. Sedgwick's use of the paranoid can be compared to Deleuze

because I'm paranoid doesn't mean that I'm not being followed", I would like to argue that, even though some readings might be static and allowing for little change, this does not mean that we should simply avoid those readings, and as a potential result overlook the workings of power.

There must be room for many kinds of readings and in my analysis I have thus attempted to strike a balance and to alternate between "paranoid" and "reparative" readings, readings that can perhaps better be described as critical and affirmative. I hence try to look at how men maintain power and dominance in sexual situations, even when old, and how heterosexuality as a vision of the good life is reinforced. But I also discuss how, for men, sexuality in later life may propose possible reformulations and reorientations, which disrupt and destabilize masculinity, dominant gender relations and heterocentrism. The emphasis differs slightly between the chapters; in Chapter Four I am more engaged in a reparative reading, whereas in Chapter Five I shift position and look more towards reformations of phallogentrism.

Discussing power and difference: Doing rigorous research

We are sitting beside each other on a leather couch. The sofa is high and my feet can barely touch the ground, which makes me feel even more girlish. I have chosen a white jumper, a checked skirt, and my sailor shoes and maybe this is the wrong dress 'cos' I feel my "girly-ness" is highlighted. I feel small and girly beside him. [Research diary 2009-04-23]

What differences matter, where and when? When is a difference irrelevant? What do differences do to particular processes of knowledge production? In this study there are some differences that are particularly conspicuous, gender and age, but also the difference between the researcher and the researched. In this chapter, I have described the steps of my research process. I began with how I recruited participants, how this raised issues of sexualization and of being seen as young, which came to be important to the study as a whole. I have also described the participant men's motivations for being in the study and questioned the idea that describing the participants necessarily increases understandings of the knowledge produced. I then described my choice of interviews and body diaries as methods, and how they "happened". The diaries as an exploratory method may be seen as particularly important,

& Guattari's unreflecting use of the schizophrenic (1987) or Young's (1990) use of disabilities to illustrate the oppression of women.

not least for illustrating how a perceived failure may turn into something useful. The ambition has been to interweave, into the chapter as a whole, a reflexive discussion on how the workings of power and differences have influenced and shaped the knowledge in this study.

To be reflexive and to discuss the power and differences at work in my research does not mean that I can give a full and final answer to the question of how my particular positioning has influenced the knowledge gained through this study. To do so would be to aspire to a “god-trick”, to suggest that I could overlook and fully account for all the things that have been going on in my research (Haraway 1991). Moreover, my reflexive discussion in this chapter is not an attempt to dissolve problems of “power, privilege and perspective” in research (Skeggs 2002, 360). Still, the fact that I cannot entirely overlook and overcome the power and differences at stake does not mean that my discussion in this chapter has been a mere lip service, a simple listing of the characteristics of myself and my participants (cf. Irni, 2010, 126).¹⁰⁸ Instead, my discussion on positions, on power and difference is done with the ambition of creating “rigorous research”, research that is accountable and that is continuously alert to power and difference as intrinsically interwoven in the research project (Irni 2010, 95ff). Additionally, to do reflexivity in practice is an ongoing process, and I have thus not wanted reflexivity to stop here in the methodology chapter but have tried to retain my voice in the forthcoming empirical chapters of the study as well (Skeggs 2002).

As I indicated earlier, I do not see the differences at work in this study as producing better or worse knowledge, but as producing different knowledge. One of the things I have mentioned are the negotiations of gender and sexuality taking place in the interviews, my experiences of feeling vulnerable and objectified in some encounters, while at the same time wanting to know things about sex, together with the men’s navigations through discourses of dirtiness and respectability, which have probably influenced this study in significant ways. It is worth keeping in mind throughout the thesis that when these men seem to articulate a sexuality that is very “nice”, “appropriate”, “cosy” or egalitarian this is probably a response to me as a young female researcher in gender studies. In relation to the Swedish context, I have argued that masculinity was performed in the interviews through men’s orientation to egalitarian discourse rather than, as some previous literature on women

108. The list of what reflexivity should *not* be, according to feminist researchers, can be made rather long. Nordberg (2005, 45) for example asserts that reflexivity can be a modernist and rationalistic way of justifying the choices made by the autonomous researcher subject. As it has hopefully become clear in this chapter, my reflexive discussion is not a mere “justification”.

interviewing men suggests, through misogynistic attitudes and non-disclosure.

Also, the fact that I am read as young in the research encounter and have in addition labelled the participants beforehand as old or older is likely to have provoked specific narratives on age and old age. To discuss sexual desire as lifelong, for example, is probably partly a response to perceived negative and ageist attitudes on old age, which necessitates men giving positive images of later life sexuality. I find it important to further discuss the impact of ageism on research, and to integrate this into ongoing methodological discussions in gender studies.

I would also like to assert that my position, as young and female, could be an asset in the sense that I was assumed not to know what it was like being a man and what it was like being old. When, at one point in the interview, Nore exclaims: "Now that's something only a young person could ask!", this marks how my perceived difference justifies my questions. Since I am in a position where I cannot know, I am required to ask, and thus it has perhaps been easier for me to distance myself from what is said in the interviews and diaries.¹⁰⁹

If the purpose of undertaking a reflexive discussion on power and difference, as I have done in this chapter, is also to underline how doing research is a matter of ethics, it might be worth considering what the consequences of the research are. What are the political implications of this kind of work? It is my hope that my work will both challenge ageism and at the same time critically interrogate masculinity. As I have hinted, and will discuss more throughout the study, performing successful ageing may coincide with performances of desirable and successful masculinity.

I have sometimes found researching old men complicated because of the complex entanglements of age and gender. I have wished to be critical yet at the same time to encompass and account for the participant men's feelings of vulnerability, which may be underscored by old age. My way of doing analysis, by alternating between paranoid/critical and reparative/affirmative readings, has been one way of responding to this difficulty. There are of course several unsolved questions in this study in relation to feminist research ethics and the implications of research. Not least, my study raises the classical feminist question on standpoint; who may speak for whom? Is it possible for me as a young woman to do research on old men that reshapes power rela-

109. Ethnologists Ehn & Klein (1994, 79) assert that "research requires and creates distance". In their argument, distance is a prerequisite for good research practice when studying our own culture and the familiar; the researcher needs to distance herself from shared cultural codes and look upon the empirical material with the eyes of a stranger.

tions related to age? Also, despite my feminist origins, might there still be a problem that the voices of old women are still unheard in this study? And might my research contribute to other forms of Othering, for example of young men? By broaching these questions, I wish this work to be part of an ongoing dialogue on how to do feminist research.

In the next chapter, I will begin my empirical analysis and the focus will be more on the participant men. But throughout the analysis to come it is worth keeping in mind the picture of me on the sofa, with my feet dangling. Does it matter for the knowledge produced in this study that I am feeling like a girl who can barely reach down to the ground? If I had instead been a tall, middle-aged man dressed in a suit with my legs spread open while sitting there on the leather couch, what would the study have looked like then? I believe that looking/feeling/being seen as a young girl does matter for this study, as I have tried to show in this chapter, just as it matters that I am a feminist undertaking this research. Had I been somebody else, my research would no doubt have emerged differently, but how it would have looked can only be a matter of speculation. By actively accounting for and reflecting upon my own meetings in this study, however, I believe that the reader can get an idea of some of the conditions that shaped this study.

4

Doing “it” differently?

The photo shows a suntanned and smiling man looking into the camera. He is greyed and has a double chin and he is seemingly in his seventies. Behind the man stands a blonde woman, leaning over and hugging him. She looks a few years younger and she too is smiling. The photo is taken by a shimmering lake with blue skies above; it seems like a perfect summer day. Obviously there is no sex in the photo, but it illustrates an article with the headline: “Mona helps me with the sex”.¹¹⁰ The article, which was published in the Swedish tabloid *Aftonbladet* in a series of articles on prostate cancer, tells the experiences of Sven Tumba, 75 years old, and a former Swedish ice-hockey player.¹¹¹ In the article, Sven is described as having been a national hero during the 1950s and 1960s, and the article asserts that, with his physique and charisma, he became a role model for many men. Sticking with the sports metaphors, the article describes how, at the beginning of 2005, Sven’s body was put up against “a totally different match” when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. His greatest fear was then, according to the article, of becoming impotent which he claims would have stopped him from being sexually active. However, despite some initial problems after his treatment, Sven eventually regains his erection – which he finds essential to be sexually active. In the words of the article, he refuses to “throw in the towel and become an old geezer” but may continue to have sex thanks to herbal medicine and a “loving wife”.¹¹²

110. Mona hjälper mig med sexet.

111. <http://www.aftonbladet.se/kropphalsa/cancer/article441801.ab> (2008-12-15)

112. Kasta in handduken och bli en gubbe, kärleksfull fru.



This article on Sven Tumba is in many ways telling and illustrative of a prevailing discourse on old men's sexuality as lifelong, in which sexuality is reinforced and constructed as something that persists despite ageing. What the case of Sven Tumba clearly conveys, however, is that being sexually active in later life is, by and large, equated with erection and heterosexual penetrative sex. "Sex for life" as a part of healthy ageing is accordingly conflated with a coital imperative (McPhillips et al. 2001, Gross & Blundo 2005, Marshall & Katz 2002, Calasanti & King 2005). Impotence is posited as the major threat to continuing sexual activity and sexuality is conceptualized in a narrow way that excludes experiences of sexuality outside erection/penetration.

In the example of Sven Tumba, the text and photo of the article are mutually saturating a traditional picture of masculinity, stressing significant elements of masculinity such as sporting achievements, being a role model and an ideal for other men, and the importance of sex. By "playing hard" and "staying hard", keeping up male performance, Sven Tumba manages to avoid and resist becoming an "old geezer" (Calasanti & King 2005, 10ff and 13ff). The old geezer is implicitly made sense of as somebody who is impotent and thus has to cease being sexually active, and when interviewed Sven is stating that sex makes him stay healthy and happy. Becoming old is thus a process that occurs as one gives in and stops being sexually active (cf. Marshall & Katz 2002, Katz 2000).

As I was arguing in Chapter One, it may be seen as positive that a discourse on asexual old age is challenged and that old men are not stigmatized for wanting to have sex and maintain an active sex life. Yet, the emergence of discourses of sexuality as lifelong (notably often co-existing with Viagra-discourses on the maintenance of the erect penis) may work to re-establish normative pressures on men to stay virile and willing even when old (Gross & Blundo 2005, Marshall & Katz 2002). Sven Tumba's story is narrated as one of success, his recovery from impotence is told as a victory and something that enabled him to snub old age and keep on enjoying life as before, including having intercourse. The article on Sven Tumba can thus be understood as an example of how "successful ageing" is closely entwined with masculine performance; to age in a healthy and positive way one should remain sexually active and to remain sexually active one should retain or restore the erection.

But the story of Sven Tumba hardly represents the experiences of all Swedish men, and the narratives I have encountered in this study differ quite significantly from *Aftonbladet's* narrative on sex in later life. Not only have few men been professional ice-hockey players and "national heroes", but men's ways of making sense of sex and sexuality in later life are much more diverse and complex than the simplistic "use it or lose it" rhetoric that the article about Sven Tumba represents (Marshall 2010, 218). I have chosen to name this chapter "Doing 'it' differently?" in order to underline that difference is an important theme of this chapter. Difference as in how the narratives of the men in this study are different from the narrative that is presented on Sven Tumba and his sex life, but also the differences that men in this study point to, between sexuality now that they are old in comparison to when they were younger. Both their experiences and their bodies are different, which in effect makes their sexuality different, but different does not necessarily mean worse. The "it" in the title, "Doing 'it' differently?" denote the often-used euphemism for sex, which then usually refers to intercourse. Here, however, "it" refers not only to intercourse but "doing it differently" also means that sex is done in other ways than by having intercourse.

That I start my empirical analysis in this chapter with narratives of difference is a conscious choice, and relates to the aim of this study: to discuss what bodies can become, going from the fixity of being to the fluidity of becoming. Instead of starting out with mourning for lost potency or in the problems that old age may pose to masculinity, I wanted to begin by exploring narratives that go beyond the narrow confines of phallic sexual morphologies, to see what male sexual morphologies could become if we look at the ageing male body as a possibility, rather than as a deficiency or a lack.

In parallel, I also wanted to explore possibilities of thinking old age in other terms than through discourses of successful ageing, as affirmative old age. Ways of thinking differently then refer to old age, sexuality and masculinity. I have, however, chosen to pose the title, “Doing ‘it’ differently?”, as a question since I think it is far from uncomplicated to determine what is really different or new.¹¹³

My discussion in this chapter starts out with the narrative of Nore, a narrative which revolves around sexual change and learning to do “it” differently. Nore and other men in this study are making sense of sexuality in later life by claiming to be less selfish and more focused on the pleasures of their partner. In the article on Sven Tumba, the sexuality of his partner Mona is completely invisible, she seemingly only exists to serve his desires for continued penetrative sex. Men in this study, in contrast, talk of how they learned about sex throughout life and from this have reoriented their practices to become different and more mature sexual partners. I start out in this story of becoming less selfish because I find it illustrative of how old men start to reinvent sexual subjectivities and see themselves as different.

But the way in which men narrate how they start “doing it” differently is not only about wilful choices, but is also a consequence of the ageing body. After my discussion of how men claim to have learned about sex and sexuality, I discuss how bodies “force” men to engage in sex in new and different ways, and from this to reinvent bodies and sexual subjectivities. Unlike Sven Tumba, old men are not always able to or even interested in regaining their erections and being sexually active in the same way as when they were younger. In this chapter I will discuss how, instead of grieving the loss of the erection or a youthful body, men may turn to *intimacy and touch*. This implies that men prioritize other sexual practices than intercourse, eroticize bodies in new and different ways, and experience sexuality as different following ageing (and illness).

113. My query here relates to the ambiguity and instability of performativity. As Butler discusses (1993, 241), an utterance goes beyond its intentions and cannot simply be controlled by the speaker. This implies that, when men in my study purport something to be different, this utterance does not necessarily enact the change or difference intended by the speaker. If I claimed men to “do it differently” I would also be claiming that what they were differing from was a stable and unambiguous phenomenon, a one-sided power which could simply be subverted. Following a foucaudian view on power, however, every power holds its mode of resistance and as Butler notes it is difficult to know “the difference between the power we promote and the power we oppose” (Butler 1993, 241). See also Ahmed (2004a) on non-performativity when an utterance does not do what it intends to, which is interesting in relation to masculinity and possibilities of change.

Becoming a less selfish man

With the older man you need not worry. He does it thoroughly; he's in no hurry. But younger men, they are just shit. They barely get there before “that's it”.¹¹⁴

If one wished to summarize some of how the men in this study articulate and make sense of later life sexuality, the above verse (originally in Swedish) is a rather neat summary. By contrasting himself with the younger man, who, before he even gets around to the intercourse, ejaculates, the old man comes across as more skilled and sexually advanced. In the narratives I will present here, there is one word that seems to be particularly important: maturity. The old man's sexuality seems, like a good wine, to mature and get better as he ages (cf. Sandberg 2007). The little verse above can thus be thought of as a refrain, which resounds in several men's responses to how they perceive sexuality in later life.

When doing interviews for this study, I asked the participant men the question: “what does sexuality mean, what do you put into that word?” When I pose this question to Nore, 76, he presents an elaborate sexual narrative on his relationship to sex throughout life, a narrative that involves reflections on both masculinity and age. Nore speaks about how he was transformed from a sexually selfish person into a man who engages in sex that is mutually satisfying for his partner. He describes how earlier, when younger, he was “not very good at it”, but how he has eventually learned and improved.

Nore: Well, in the beginning as a teenager it was to sleep with somebody. Yes it was. Hugging and kissing and eventually intercourse, I think it was like that a good bit into adulthood, and eh, I don't think I was very good at it in the beginning. But eventually you have learned that – I did like, I like more to socialize with women than men. I still do, I feel much more untroubled around women and I understand them better. And especially masculine men I have a hard time with – or this attitude...

In the middle of this quote, right after having said that he has “learned”, Nore suddenly shifts and starts talking about his relationships with women and how being friends with and talking to women is easier than with men. He

114. Äldre män ska man ej förakta de gör det noga, de gör det sakta.
Yngre män däremot är skit, det är ju knappt att de hinner dit!

says that he has a hard time with masculine men and I ask him what it is that he has problems with?

Nore: Well I have problems with this, eh, this backslapping. That one should be cocky and superior. I don't know, it's difficult to talk. I don't have a male friend that I can talk to the same way I talk to female friends.

This shift to how Nore disassociates with and dislikes masculine men, with their "cocky" and "superior" manners, may at first seem disjunctive, not having anything to do with sex and sexuality. But as he talks, it becomes clearer that to him learning to become a better lover is about distancing himself from a specific masculine behaviour.

Linn: When you say you weren't good at this sexualities bit, what is it that you're thinking of?

Nore: No, I was more focused on myself, and eh not really attentive to the wishes of my partner, and that is typically the kind of thing I dislike in guys (laughs). I was probably like that.¹¹⁵

To Nore, masculine behaviour is not only linked to being cocky and superior, but also to being sexually selfish, only out to serve his own desires. Despite the fact that Nore disassociates with and dislikes this, which he identifies as a masculine way of being, he nevertheless took up this behaviour in bed. However, the selfish and inattentive sexual self that Nore depicts comes to an end, or is at least significantly altered, from what Nore narrates as an important

115. L: Om du skulle, vad innebär sexualitet för dig? (.) Vad lägger du i det?

N: Ja (.) I början som tonåring så var det ju att ligga med nån, (mm) det var det ju, kramas kyssas och så småningom samlag, (..) så var det nog rätt långt upp i åren tror jag, (..) och eh (..) jag tror nog inte jag var nån (.) bra på det (.) i början men så småningom har man lärt sig det att (.) Jag tyckte ju om jag tycker mer om att umgås med kvinnor än män (..) det tycker jag fortfarande, jag känner mig mycket mer (.) obesvärad tillsammans med kvinnor och jag förstår dom bättre och speciellt manliga män har jag väldigt svårt för (..) eller som har den attityden.

L: Vad är det du har svårt för?

N: Ja jag har svårt för det här (..) äh det där ja ryggdunkandet och xxxxx så där och man ska va så där kaxiga och överlägsna och jag vet inte, det är svårt att prata, jag har ingen manlig bekant som jag kan prata med på samma sätt som jag pratar med kvinnliga bekanta (..)

L: När du säger att du inte var så bra på det här med sexualitet vad är det du tänker på då?

N: Nä jag var nog mer inriktad på mig själv (.) Och eh, (..) som inte så lyhörd för partnerns önskemål och är typiskt sänt som jag inte gillar hos karlar (skratt) så var jag nog.

event. When he was in his mid-fifties his wife left him for a younger man, which he relates to her dissatisfaction with him as a sexual partner.

Nore: She didn't think I could give her. She didn't think, well it had a lot to do with my behaviour in bed. My inability to – lack of responsiveness to her and those things.¹¹⁶

Nore's egoistic behaviour in bed is narrated as the reason for his wife leaving him, but the story has a happy ending as they eventually get back together, and this time with a new improved sex life. In retrospect, Nore realizes that he has taken up a stereotypical masculine behaviour, and he points to peer pressure and his male group of friends as the reason for this.

Nore: I simply thought it should be that way. 'Cos the male friends I had, who had described how things were, that was the way it was. The way it should be.¹¹⁷

Several aspects of Nore's narrative on sexuality are also reflected in the narratives of others in the study. Learning and improving by becoming less selfish is one such aspect, another is how masculinity, and in particular adolescent and mid-life masculinity, is described as sexually egoistic and self-centred. Like Nore, Eskil, 75, points to how he has “learned one or two things” about sex throughout life.¹¹⁸ Eskil describes the occasion when he realized that women enjoyed oral sex.

Eskil: I was in bed with a woman kissing, all the time kissing and kissing. I was so taken by her lips, right? And then she said like this: “Kiss me down there instead”, she said (*laughs*). That was the first time I heard something like that really, that was the first time I understood it.

This discovery, however, is one that Eskil made only a few years earlier. “Unfortunately”, he says, because had he known this earlier he would have practised it much more.

116. Hon tyckte inte jag kunde ge henne, hon tyckte inte ja, det hade till stor del att göra med mitt uppträdande i sängen, (ja) och min oförmåga att kunna, brist på lyhördhet och sånt.

117. Jag trodde helt enkelt att det skulle va så, för dom manliga bekanta som jag hade som (...) beskrev hur det va så var det på det viset och det var det som gällde.

118. Man har ju lärt sig ett och annat.

Eskil: I was really stupid earlier, never understood anything. But also because the woman never said anything to me. That was the first time it happened to me.

Linn: Do you think that's the case for others your age, that they don't know what their sex partner, the female sex partner, wants?

Eskil: Well, I can imagine many don't have a clue, or they're just simply egoistic, thinking of themselves, [...] wanting to satisfy their own wishes, there are probably a lot of men who are like that.¹¹⁹

Here, Eskil's reasoning is both similar to and different from Nore's. Like Nore, he points to a lack of knowledge. But where Nore describes himself as not being receptive to what his wife desired sexually, Eskil explains his behaviour as partly caused by his sex partners' silence, their inability to articulate what they wanted. The sexually egoistic male also surfaces as a figure with Eskil, but here it is other men, rather than himself, who are sexually egoistic.

When Nore and Eskil discuss how they have changed and become *different* and better sexual partners as they have aged and learned more about what women enjoy in sex, it seems to be a matter of doing other things than intercourse. Eskil describes giving women oral sex and kissing women's breasts as things that he has learned while ageing. Nore also points to the fact that he now values "the foreplay", "getting in the mood" and uses words such as "closeness", "feeling the body" and "softness" to characterize what is

119. E: Jag låg och kysste en kvinna i sängen hela tiden, kysste och kysste, jag var så fångad av läpparna va, å då sa hon så här, kyss mig där nere istället sa hon (*skratt*), det var första gången jag hörde nåt sånt alltså, det var första gången jag förstod det.

L: Att hon ville just bli slickad eller hon ville ha oralsex?

E: Ja hon ville bli slickad där nere i vaginan (ja) det gillade hon, det blev hon så där.

L: Men det var nånting som du kom på relativt sent?

E: Ja tyvärr.

L: Hur gammal var du dåra?

E: Det var väl bara några år sen (mm).

L: Vad tänker du runt den upptäckten, den vetskapen?

E: Jo men det vetskapen skulle jag ju tillämpa mycket mer nu (mm) eftersom jag nu vet om det men att jag har varit så korkad förr om åren, aldrig fattat nånting, men därför kvinnan har heller aldrig sagt nånting till mig. Utan det var faktiskt första gången jag var med om det.

L: Tror du att det är så för fler personer i din ålder att dom inte känner till vad ens sexpartner, den kvinnliga sexpartnern vill ha?

E: Ja det kan jag tänka att många inte har nån aning om, eller så är dom så själv – egoistiska att dom inte bryr sig, tänker bara på sitt.

L: Mm, hur tänker du då?

E: Ja, att dom är egoistiska och bara vill tillfredställa sina egna önskningar (mm) det finns säkert många män som är på det sättet.

important to him in sex today.¹²⁰ To be more attentive to the wishes of one's partner, which Nore claims to have learned, is something that Frank, 71, also brings out when discussing what he is like sexually today, in comparison to earlier in life.

Frank: As a sexual partner I am probably more considerate, I think I was in my fifties too, but in my thirties I was not considerate like that, let me see I don't remember exactly. Between 50 and 70 I could probably say that I've become more tender, oh these questions!¹²¹

Frank's exclamation: "oh these questions!" suggests that it might not always be easy to know if and how one has changed sexually throughout life, but seemingly the available discourse to think of one's sexual self when old is through words such as tender and considerate. Being more considerate does not necessarily only relate to sex, but to an attitude to life more generally. To Jakob, 83, who likes to think of himself as a gentleman who serves the ladies in the senior's club, being considerate concerns more than only sexuality. When I interview him, he discusses how he has learnt to think of others, not only himself.

Linn: But has your attitude towards your own sexuality, what intimate relationships should be, has that changed throughout life or has it been pretty much the same all the time?

Jakob: No, I think it has become more considerate. As time goes by.

Linn: What do you mean by this?

Jakob: Less egoistic, can I give you some more? (*gives me a piece of cake*)

Linn: But when you say less egoistic, do you think about pleasure or that kind of thing or what do you mean by less egoistic?

Jakob: Yes. Less egoistic in terms of my own pleasure, yes.

Linn: Why do you think that is? That you've become more considerate?

120. Komma i stämning, närheten, känna kroppen, mjukheten.

121. F: Ja att ha sex men som sexpartner är jag nog mera omtänksam eh, det var jag nog i 50-års-åldern, i 30-årsåldern var jag nog inte lika omtänksam på det sättet.. får se jag minns inte riktigt (...)

L: Vad är det då som skulle vara den här skillnaden mellan 30 och 50 till exempel – vad hände där?

F: (...) Ja mellan 30 och 50 kan jag inte, mellan 50 och 70 kan jag säga det att jag att jag har blivit mer öm. Vilka frågor! (mm)

Jakob: Maturity.

Linn: (*laughs briefly*) Tell me, what does maturity involve?

Jakob: (*laughs*) Insight.

Linn: Mm, about what?

Jakob: That one shouldn't simply think about oneself.¹²²

In this quote, Jakob echoes what the men above said about being less egoistic and more considerate, but for Jakob a less selfish sexual self is part of a more considerate self altogether. He even enacts consideration in the interview by offering me another piece of cake as we speak. Jakob explicitly uses the word maturity when speaking, but it seems as though this is what several others are getting at as well. Discussing themselves as less egoistic and knowing more about what women want is part of maturing and learning from life in general, and as a result becoming a better, more advanced sexual partner (Potts et al. 2006).

In my study, Nore was the participant who offered the most developed narrative on sexual improvement and how this was related to age and masculinity. Nore's narrative contains both a background, how he was misinformed about sex by his peers when young – a turning point, where his wife leaves him in midlife because of sexual dissatisfaction – and a resolution, where they get back together and he improves sexually and becomes less egoistic. The elements in his narrative are not unique, however, but can be found in the accounts of several other participants in the study as well, as I have indicated.

Central to the narratives discussed above is the idea of self-improvement, where men move from being selfish and unaware of/inattentive to the wom-

122. L: (..) Men har din syn på just din egen sexualitet, vad samliv ska va, har det förändrats under livets gång eller har det vart ungefär liknande syn hela tiden?

J: (..) Nej (..) Jag tror att det har blivit mer hänsynsfullt (..) med tiden.

L: Hur tänker du då?

J: Mindre egoistisk (..) Får jag peta till dig en bit till? (ger mig lite kaka)

L: Men när du säger mindre egoistisk då tänker du till exempel på njutning och så eller hur tänker du när du menar egoistisk?

J: Ja (.) Mindre egoist-, mindre tanke på egen njutning ja (.)

L: Hur tror du att, vad kommer det sig av? Att du har blivit mera (..) hänsynstagande?

J: Mognad.

L: (skrattar till) Berätta, vad innebär mognad då?

J: (skratt) Insikt.

L: Mm, om vad då?

J: (..) att man inte bara ska tänka på sig själv, (...)

en's sexual pleasures to becoming more considerate, tender and sexually skilled. This kind of shift that the men in my study narrate has many parallels with the interview study by Terry & Braun (2009), on sex in long-term relationships and constructions of masculinity through discourses on maturity. Terry & Braun show how New Zealand Pakeha men constructed imaginary positions of the immature self and the mature self, where the first position was narrated as a position in the past and the latter was taken up and associated with in the present day. Similarly to my participants, the men in this study described how, previously, they were unknowledgeable and primarily focused on themselves during sex. The mature position that these men shaped was in contrast characterized by an orientation towards the relationship and a great focus on the mutual pleasure of the partners.

The male interviewees in a study by Potts et al. (2006) also narrated their sexual selves in terms of improvement and described sexuality in mid-to-later life as better; "more advanced and satisfying than sex in youth" (Potts et al. 2006, 317). Adolescent sexuality was described as being focused on personal pleasure, "empty out and move on", whereas men claimed that sexuality in mid-to-later life was more about the satisfaction of their partners (Potts et al. 2006, 316).

To point to sexual improvement, and to shape one's sexual self as more mature, considerate and skilled, can consequently be understood as a way of shaping masculinity and male sexuality by distancing oneself from an immature past (or other immature men in the present). Notably, the studies by Terry & Braun (2009) and Potts et al. (2006) suggest that discourses on maturity and sexuality are not necessarily only linked to old age. Considerably younger men than those in this study also seemed to speak in terms of maturity and of having improved sexually (cf. Korobov & Bamberg, 2004). Maturity is thus a relational term, rather than fixed to a specific position in the life course. In this particular study, however, maturity can be understood as a way of shaping sexuality in relation to old age.

It seems that, for old men, alluding to a discourse of maturity, that one has learned and improved sexually, becomes a resourceful way of making sense of one's sexual self that is distanced from both discourses of asexual old age and the old man's sexuality as dirty. As I have pointed out elsewhere, "maturity" is a central component of discourses of positive and successful ageing and may function as a resource to attribute old age with positivity (Sandberg 2007). This seems particularly salient for old men, and in relation to sexual desirability maturity may translate into being read as "elegant" or "distinguished" (Sandberg 2007, 100, Vares 2009, 513). Consequently, maturity brings positive connotations to later life sexuality, and Nore's narrative,

for example, can be described as a “progress narrative”, in stark contrast to the “decline narrative” that often accompanies old age and ageing (Gullette 1998).

That men draw on a discourse of maturity and being less selfish seems to be no coincidence, but is rather a conscious way of resisting negative images and stereotypes of old men’s sexuality. For example, after Eskil has said that he was more easily aroused when younger and that he is “slower” today, he immediately adds “what’s funny is that you’ve learnt one or two things”. Saying that one is slower today might support conceptions of old men as sexually uninterested and incapable, but by suggesting improvement this negative image might be challenged. All four men discussed so far, Eskil, Nore, Jakob and Frank, have experienced erectile changes, although of varying degrees. A discourse of maturity seems to de-centre the importance of the erect penis and can hence be seen as a way of negotiating and reorienting one’s sexual self as a result of bodily changes.¹²³

Since this study involves only men, it is impossible to know whether the female partners of these men have actually experienced their partners becoming more considerate and attentive to their pleasures. It is in this sense very difficult to say whether the men’s claims of having become different have involved any actual changes in practices. What interests me, however, is how men, when speaking of becoming less selfish, also distance themselves from a specific kind of masculinity, which can be understood as a traditional and stereotypical masculinity. But how can this distancing from stereotypical masculinity be understood?

If going down a more “paranoid” line of thinking, analyzing the men’s accounts in a more critical vein, claims to increased reciprocity may not necessarily be understood as inherently good or progressive. In their study on how men relate to masculinity, and how hegemonic masculinity is taken up in men’s psyches, social psychologists Margaret Wetherell and Nigel Edley (1999) discuss the fact that few men actually identify with and understand themselves in relation to hegemonic masculinity. Instead, men often described themselves as ordinary and common and distanced themselves from perceived hyper- and macho masculinities. What Wetherell and Edley argue,

123. The participant men’s ways of negotiating and reorienting their sexual self when experiencing bodily changes from ageing can also be compared the study by Gerschick & Miller (1995), on men with physical disabilities. Gerschick & Miller identified three strategies that men took up and relied on in the construction of their identities: reliance, reformulation and rejection. The first strategy, reliance, meant continued identification with hegemonic masculinity, whereas the latter two involved negotiating with and reinventing meanings of masculinity to better accustom themselves in the cases where their disabilities were at odds with expectations of masculinity.

however, is that the macho-man as a recognized social ideal can both be used to identify with and disassociate from, but a disassociation does not necessarily mean that hegemony is *not* reproduced. Instead they assert: "men may be most involved in reproducing the hegemonic when they position themselves against the hegemonic masculine ideal" (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, 351).

If hegemonic masculinity is maintained by seeming desirable and acceptable, old men's narrations of a transformation into a less egoistic sexual subjectivity could then be understood as a reformulation of hegemony, not necessarily a flight from masculinity. Terry & Braun (2009, 176) also touch upon this briefly when discussing the significance of maturity to masculinity and argue that:

The discursive work the men did in attempting to define themselves as "different" or "improved" is perhaps part of the hegemonic sense-making, borrowed from Western ideals of self improvement, that men deployed in the formation of their identities.

If self-improvement can be understood as a pervasive Western ideal, improving to become more reciprocal has particular salience in relation to Swedishness, where discourses of gender equality are influential as "technologies of gender" (De Lauretis 1987, Dahl 2005). To draw upon a discourse of maturity, which involves being considerate, more advanced and unselfish, may then be a way in which hegemonic masculinity can take shape in relation to age and later life in a Swedish context.

Moreover, it is important also to consider how age and age relations are at stake in the shaping of old men's sexual subjectivities as more mature and considerate. To emerge as sexually different and less selfish, the men discussed above distanced themselves from an egoistic male sexuality, which was often connected to youth and younger men (also see Terry & Braun 2009, Potts et al. 2006). As I will return to later in this thesis, in particular in Chapter Six when discussing meanings and understandings of sexual desire, the men in this study described sexual desire in younger men, primarily adolescents, as driven by strong almost carnal desires, and younger men's egoism was thus partly explained as a consequence of this desire. The old man's sexuality was in contrast described as more sincere, committed and deeper, which was related to his more serene sexual desires. Consequently, what men do is to construct an age binary of young(er)/old where youth is connected with egoism, the body and stereotypical masculinity, while old age becomes associated with the more highly-valued maturity and unselfishness. Ageism may thus be reinforced in men's narratives (even if not on

purpose). In attempting to escape from and challenge ageist discourses on old men's sexualities and to avoid being an Other of masculinity, old men may in fact engage in an othering of young(er) men instead. Throughout the study it is therefore worth paying attention to how old men's constructions of sexual subjectivity may not necessarily work to challenge ageism and power asymmetries based on age.

So far I have discussed the way in which, when making sense of sexuality in later life, the men described how they have become different, as in less selfish, more knowledgeable and more mature. I have taken a critical position vis-à-vis these narrations, and argued that these accounts may not necessarily be different in the sense of challenging or fundamentally altering hegemonic masculinity and ageism. However, having started out with this more "paranoid reading", I will next engage in a more affirmative analysis. When the men talked about becoming different, this can be understood as rather strategic ways of constructing a desirable self, yet it is also possible to see how things become different as a result of the agency and unruliness of ageing bodies. When Nore says: "I'm more interested in touching and feeling and like that, now than [before]. She thinks that's really nice," this can be interpreted as a strategic way of shaping the self as a more desirable lover.¹²⁴ But it may also point to how "touching and feeling", a turn to intimacy and touch, is something that happens as bodies age and some activities are no longer possible. "Touching and feeling" may then be an expression of how men's sexual practices, and the way the body is experienced as erotic, are reconfigured in ageing.

"I still like it, though I can't do it with my willy": Changing bodies, changing practices

So far in this chapter I have discussed how men talk about how they have changed and become more considerate, unselfish and mature over the years, and argued that this can be seen as a reformulation of desirable masculinity. What is different in the above account seems foremost to be men's attitudes to sex and sexuality; what one prioritizes in sex has changed and is different. However, in my interviews and diaries there were also examples of *becoming different* that were not necessarily always about shaping a desirable self, and were not always a voluntary or rational choice. For several men bodily changes, illnesses and/or other consequences of ageing induced a significant

124. Jag är mer intresserad av att ta i och känna och så där (..) nu mot, hon tycker det är väldigt trevligt.

difference in how sex and sexuality were experienced in later life. For the remainder of this chapter I will discuss how, in different ways, men narrate bodily changes and sexual practices, and engage in a more affirmative analysis, a reparative reading, which reconnects with the aim to explore what a male body may become in relation to ageing.

When discussing the bodily changes that may influence how sex could take shape for men in later life, impotence is perhaps the first thing one thinks of. Men in this study did indeed point to experiences of altering and decreasing ability to gain an erection as they were ageing. Several had contracted illnesses such as diabetes or prostate cancer, which significantly impacted on their possibilities of getting an erection. It is important to note, however, that impotence was far from the only bodily issue that the men described as influencing their sexual practices. Stiff joints, back problems and vaginal dryness of the female partner were other physical issues that they discussed as influencing their experiences and possibilities of sex. Jakob, 83, for example, had gone through knee surgery shortly before the interview, and this also shaped his sexual practices. That Jakob in addition has prostate cancer further decreased both desire for and ability to enact some forms of sex.

Jakob: Well, I can't put weight on my knees, 'cause one of my knees hurts. So that's an impediment. And the prostate issues make both my desire and my ability decrease, not disappear, but decrease. We used to have a very active intimate relationship, but her problems and mine have meant we are less active.¹²⁵

Jakob, who met his current partner after retirement age, underlines that he and his partner used to be very active, and at some point he remarks: "I would probably shock you by saying that we could do it maybe five – five times a day".¹²⁶ By this statement he positions himself as a sexually active person in the past, but argues that sexual activity has had to decrease as a result of a combination of his knee problems and prostate cancer and her ailments. Jakob is far from alone in experiencing how the body influences what it is possible to do, and how sex may be practised. Knut, 67, says that his partner has issues with her genitals and how this "makes them go piano"; being both

125. (...) Ja att ha ont i knät gör ju att man inte kan ligga på knä (skrattar) det är ju en broms, själva prostatahistorien gör att både lust och förmåga minskar, inte försvinner men minskar (...) Å från att (...) jag och min partner tillexempel har haft ett (...) väldigt intensivt samliv (mm) (...) mycket intensivt samliv, om vi betecknar allt ihop som samliv (...) Så egna och hennes besvär gör att det har blivit mindre.

126. Jag skulle nog kunna chocka dig om jag säger att (...) vi kanske orkade med (...) fem gånger en dag.

more gentle and less sexually active. Men do not only discuss illnesses and ailments as having consequences for sex, even a thing such as weight/body size was described as a potential obstacle to some sexual activities.

Lennart: Well, both Lena and me are overweight and it's always more fun to have sex if you're thin than if you're fat. That's just the way it is. The belly is in your way.¹²⁷

Returning to Sven Tumba from the tabloid article, he described his impotence as something that could potentially have led him to “throw in the towel and become an old geezer”; a dead end to sex. From this, one might assume that the men in this study would see sex and sexual practices as coming to an end when experiencing varying bodily changes, including impotence. However, although they pointed to how the ageing body makes some practices more difficult, this does not imply that they perceive their sexual lives as over. Lennart, 77, expresses what many in this study articulated in various ways:

Lennart: Sex and intercourse, this is of course a sensitive question, but sex can be done, there are a lot of different ways of having sex without intercourse.¹²⁸

Rather than equating sex with intercourse, several men in this study pointed to how sex was much more. In interviews and diaries, they gave examples of oral sex and mutual masturbation, but also kisses, caresses, hugging and holding each other, as things that could be considered sex. In cases of impotence, the importance of the penis was negotiated and decentred, as when Axel, 83, talks about the changes that his impotence has involved, but states: “I still like it, though I can't do it with my willy”. This articulation is interesting, since the “it” that Axel talks about would generally be taken to mean intercourse in everyday language.¹²⁹ But in this context, where Axel says he cannot do it with his “willy”, there is an apparent shift and re-signification of the meaning of “it” so that it may now mean a lot of other things. When Axel

127. L: (..) Nja det är ju så här att både jag Lena är överviktiga å blir alltid roligare å lättare att bedriva sex om man är mager än om man är väldigt tjock, så är det bara.

LS: Hurdå?

L: Magen sitter i vägen.

128. Sex å samlag kan ju, det här är ju en känslig fråga men bedrivs på så många olika sätt, (mm) eh och det finns (..) väldigt många metoder att (..) bedriva sex utan att ha det (..) ha det samlaget.

129. See, for example, the Oxford English Dictionary on “it” as an informal term for sexual intercourse. This is also the case in the Swedish language.

describes how fondling each other and taking showers together may also be pleasurable ways of being together with a partner, he broadens the meaning of sex from intercourse to a range of other practices as well.

When men describe later life sexuality and the changes that bodies may bring about, there are two concepts in particular that I find to recur in different forms in my material: *intimacy* and *touch*. Subsumed within these concepts is a wide array of practices, feelings and desires. Touch, for example, may include descriptions of bodily contact, holding, caressing and much more and intimacy may denote being close to somebody in a physical sense, but also in an emotional sense. Throughout my analysis in this thesis, I will engage with these terms on an analytical level, and suggest that they may propose ways of rethinking sexuality as well as masculinity and old age. But I will also discuss how intimacy in particular may be a resource to orient to, in order to shape desirable heterosexuality and desirable masculinity.

When discussing intimacy and touch in this study, I am not suggesting that these concepts should be seen as unitary and unambiguous terms, holding only one meaning and being stable objects of knowledge. Rather, I propose that they can be thought of in *deleuzian* terms as an *assemblage*, holding disparate and multiple meanings and producing sexualities, bodies and desires in different ways (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, Colebrook 2002).

What I find very interesting in these men's accounts of changes, and of turning to touch and intimacy, is the role and meaning of the body. The materiality of the body is very evident in the narratives, but also its strikingly transformative character in ageing. Nore, who I discussed earlier as somebody who claimed to have become more considerate "in bed", not only points to maturity as a shift in attitude but also to what bodily changes do to experiences of sexuality and what sex is like.

Nore: Well it changes – it's probably like that for all older couples. It gets drier and the man has more difficulties in getting an erection. So it isn't just like the old days, and maybe that's a good thing in some ways, 'cause then there is a different technique sort of. It's not just to – You have to touch each other in a different way. I add lubricant and if I can't get an erection the whole thing is a way of getting [an erection]. It becomes part of the foreplay. So in a sense that's good.¹³⁰

130. Det förändras ju, det är väl så för alla äldre par, det blir torrare och mannen har svårare att få erektion så det det är liksom inte bara som förr i världen, och det är väl kanske bra, på nåt sätt (skratt) (hurdå?) för då blir det en annan om man ska prata om så är det en annan teknik liksom, det är inte bara att, man måste ju röra vid varandra på ett annat sätt och så där (..) jag applicerar glidmedel och

Nore's description of his sexual practices today underlines how he and his partner cannot simply go ahead with intercourse like they could when they were younger. For him to get erect and for her to lubricate, become wet, they have to touch each other in a different way and use lubricants to make sex pleasurable. The way in which Nore and others point to changing sexual practices as a consequence of ageing bodies can be related to my discussion on corporeal feminism in Chapter Two, and how bodies can be conceptualized as *open materialities*; neither mere inscriptions of culture nor pure biology beyond culture, to follow Grosz (1994a). When Nore and others discuss their ageing bodies, these bodies are very "agentic" in the sense that what the body can do also refigures the kind of sexual practices that men engage in and also how they come to think of themselves sexually, their sexual subjectivities.

Importantly, however, when claiming that the unruliness and agency of ageing bodies impacts upon and shapes practices and subjectivities, I am not suggesting that this is a one-way movement, where the body is the original ground. If the body is a non-binary system, this means that we are not left with a clear separation between materiality and language. In other words, when bodies change, these changes reshape practices and the ways in which the body may be represented. But available representations, accessible language on bodies and sexualities, also direct bodies, what they can do and how subjectivities take shape. In this study, Nore's and others' bodies are changing in unforeseen ways as they age, and the practices that are made possible (and impossible) are made sense of and become discursively intelligible through a discourse of maturity; being less selfish and becoming a better lover.

What is noteworthy in these men's narratives on bodily changes and their influence on sexual experiences is how they seldom phrase it in terms of something getting lost or missing when, for example, one cannot have an erection. Rather, when Nore says above that later life sexuality requires "a different technique", he claims that this might be something positive, because it enables him to become a better and more considerate lover, and to enjoy his partner's and his own body more fully. Jakob expresses things in similarly positive terms:

The desire is the same, and eh, being together doesn't have to end with or lead to intercourse. A lot of warmth can be given just by bodily contact really.¹³¹

så är det en del av det här och eh, om jag inte kan få erektion, så är det ju också ett försök till att få, det blir också en del av ett förspel så det, på nåt sätt är det bra.

131. J: Nej, lusten är den samma å å (mm) en samvaro behöver ju inte avslutas med eller leda till ett samlag det kan mycket – värme kan ju ges genom bara (...) kroppskontakt (mm).

With these words, Jakob not only challenges the significance of intercourse, but also points to the possibilities of desire emerging from bodily contact, from touch. The way Nore, Jakob and others speak of the possibilities of pleasure and desire from "getting in the mood", "closeness", "feeling the body", "softness" and "bodily contact", suggests that ageing bodies can be analyzed in feminist-deleuzian terms as productive. When Jakob speaks of "the warmth" that can be produced from bodily contact, he clearly exposes the body's capacities for producing intensity (as in sexual desire or other kinds). Accordingly, instead of seeing the flaccid penis, or the ageing male body with its various ailments, as an obstacle to sex and sexuality, a deleuzian perspective stresses connectivity, the endless possibilities from which desires are spurred (Grosz 1995a, Shildrick 2009).

My analysis of the ageing body is in this sense similar to the work of Margrit Shildrick, who uses Deleuze to argue that, rather than understanding the disabled body as faulty, it can be read as holding more possibilities of connections, as producing more channels of desire (Shildrick 2009).¹³² When Jakob's knee is stiff and hurting and his penis cannot get as hard as it used to, his body and sexual practices are re-organized in ways that make desire possible through intimacy and touch, rather than through intercourse. This kind of analysis also relates to what in Chapter Two, on theoretical origins, I described as *affirmative old age*. That is, many of the participant men in this study did not compare and value their bodies in relation to young and mid-life bodies, which are traditionally understood as being more able, and did not try to regain ability and sexual function in order to age successfully. Instead, they shaped narratives where the specificities of the ageing male body were potentials for producing desire and pleasure, in their own right.

From this kind of feminist-deleuzian approach, the ageing male body may be discussed in terms of possibility, rather than lack or deficiency.¹³³ Notably, by no means all of the men in this study understand impotence or other bodily changes as positive for how they perceive sexuality in later life. As I will argue more in the following chapter, men's investments in phallic bodies may still make impotence into a very challenging experience. That ageing male bodies could be analyzed and discussed as possibilities does not necessarily imply that men experience ageing as positive, but possibility in this case denotes a modality of becoming.

132. Shildrick (2009) argues, for example, that the use of prostheses and the help of personal assistants enable other modes of desire production in the disabled body.

133. My analysis here has also taken inspiration from the work of Grosz (1995a), where she discusses the possibilities of thinking lesbian desire outside the psycho-analytical realms of lack by a turn to Deleuze.

I will continue this line of argument throughout the rest of this chapter to suggest that not only could men's narratives open up to ways of thinking affirmative old age, but also to rethinkings of male sexual morphologies. Thinking of gender and heterosexuality as reiterated throughout the life course, and where having intercourse is part of those reiterations, erectile changes as a result of age may in some respects throw you temporarily "off line", positioning you differently in relation to masculinity (Ahmed 2006). Changing bodies might take men off the well-trodden paths, the regular sex dominated by intercourse, towards "regions never known" (Grosz 1995a, 200). As Ahmed suggests: "the unreachability of some things can be affective, it can even put other worlds within reach" (Ahmed 2006, 153). Not having an erection or not being able to perform sex in the same way as earlier in life may require inventiveness where the body may become something different.

In the above discussion, I have suggested that ageing bodies may change men's sexual practices and what they understand as pleasurable sex, which may also change their sexual subjectivities. Moreover, the bodily changes that men experience as they age can lead to new ways of relating both to one's own body and to the body of one's partner. Next I will discuss how the body may in fact emerge as erotic in radically different ways when men narrate changes in the ageing body. I will continue the above line of argument: to understand men's ageing bodies as possibilities. It is often suggested that men's impotence causes castration anxiety and feelings of not being men enough when lacking a central male signifier, but my study points to another picture, where impotence and other bodily changes may be regarded as a possibilities of eroticizing the body anew and beyond the genital.¹³⁴

Eroticizing bodies differently

Eskil: I think I would act in a totally different way now, really, [...] I won't just have the woman's face and mouth, but her whole body attracts me, in a different way. I'll see the whole female body in a different way.¹³⁵

134. See Oliffe (2005, 2250) for an overview of the literature on men's investment in the penis and erection and how failures to perform physically create marginalized and subordinated forms of masculinities, men who experience "humiliation and despair" and feelings of not being "real men".

135. E: Ja det det tror jag nog att är, jag skulle bete mig på ett helt annat sätt nu (...) faktiskt.

L: När du säger på ett helt annat sätt...

E: Ja då har jag inte bara kvinnans ansikte och mun, då är hela hennes kropp som jag blir attraherad av va (...) på ett annat sätt(.) Då ser jag på kvinnokroppen på ett annat sätt.

When Eskil describes how he is different now after having learned more about what women enjoy sexually, he discusses this in terms of seeing the "whole female body in a different way". To emphasize "the whole of the body" seems to be a way to decentre the importance of genitality, and this was something other men in this study also did, as I have mentioned earlier. However, the men's focus on the entirety of the body in sex can be analyzed in different ways. Frank, 71, who talks about how he enjoys oral sex and that "one should love the entire body", can, along with the above quote by Eskil, be analyzed as attempting to become desirable lovers.¹³⁶ And, as I discussed earlier, trying to become a desirable and accomplished lover does not necessarily imply any significant changes.

But speaking or writing about the "whole of the body" is not only a matter of becoming a desirable lover. Rather, changes in the body due to ageing and subsequent changes in sexual practices, where one widens the definition of what counts as sex, may also involve a re-assessment of the erotic potentials of bodies. One example of this is Nore, who experienced some significant changes due to his treatment for prostate cancer. Nore tells me that he started developing breasts and how he experienced this in terms of gender, his sense of masculinity.

Nore: It was a very special experience, this hormone treatment. One part was how it changed the body: the breasts started growing. I thought it was really embarrassing (laughs). It was a real blow to masculinity (laughs).¹³⁷

As breasts were things he connected with women and femininity, his growth of breasts was troubling for his sense of masculinity. However, despite this experience of a challenge to masculinity, Nore continues by describing how the breasts also opened up new sexual possibilities. Through the eyes of his wife he starts to see his breasts as fitting and proportionate to his body, and even as a sexual asset.

136. I understand the way in which men emphasize "the whole of/or the entire body" (in Swedish *hela kroppen*) as relating to and giving/finding pleasure from other body parts than the genitals (cf. de-oedipalization).

137. Det var en väldigt speciell upplevelse, den här hormonbehandlingen, dels så förändrades ju kroppen, bröstet började växa, det var jättepinsamt tyckte jag (skratt) det var väldigt slag mot manligheten (skratt).

Nore: She [the wife] thinks that since I have this big belly, she thinks that if I didn't have the breast the belly would look [bigger], these breasts (laughs) take out the difference.

Linn: So she thinks it's sort of fitting?

Nore: Yeah, yeah, she thinks so, and also that it's a bit sexy.

Linn: Oh, how do you think or what does she mean by this?

Nore: Well it's sort of soft and nice, well, they aren't that big.

Linn: But does she say that she thinks it's sexy?

Nore: No, but she touches them, [and then] I've realised, I've connected—

Linn: So when she touches you, you can feel that this is something she finds attractive sort of?

Nore: Yes, soft and sensual.¹³⁸

This extract is a wonderful and very telling example of a re-signification of changes in the body, and how this influences masculinity and gendered subjectivity. In this case, the development of breasts, as a consequence of prostate cancer, changes from being experienced as a loss of manhood or a challenge to masculinity, to becoming an erotic potential and a site of desire. Central to the process of re-signification and how the breasts emerge as erotic, as “soft and sensual”, is touch. It is when his wife touches his breasts that he experiences the realization that they could be desirable; touch becomes the very junction where desire is spurred and his body emerges in new ways. When Nore's wife touches and feels his breasts, they are not oppositional to sexual subjectivity, instead the breasts make new sexual subjectivities possible. Shildrick (2009, 132) argues, following Deleuze, that “embodiment persists *only* through the capacity to make connections, both organic and inorganic, and

138. N: Hon tycker att eftersom jag har lite så här stor mage (mm) och så tycker hon att skulle jag ha inte ha några bröst, då skulle den här magen se, dom här brösterna (skratt) tar ut skillnaden.

L: Så hon tycker på nåt sätt att det passar ihop?

N: Jaja hon tycker det, tycker också att det är lite sextigt.

L: Jaha hur tänker du då eller hur menar hon då?

N: Ja det är liksom mjukt och skönt (skratt) ja dom är inte så stora dom (..)

L: Men säger hon att hon tycker det är sextigt?

N: Nej, men hon tar på dom, så har jag förstått det att hon kopplat det.

L: Ja så när hon tar på dig så kan du känna att det här är nånting som hon tycker liksom är attraktivt?

N: Ja mjukt och sensuellt.

to enter into new assemblages – which in turn are disassembled”, and this may be seen as the theoretical version of Nore’s narrative on growing breasts.

So far, my discussion on ageing male bodies as possibilities has been inspired by deleuzian thinking. But the uses of Deleuze and Guattari’s theories on embodiment and desire can be criticized from feminist perspectives for obfuscating sexual specificity. Deleuzian theories may, as Grosz puts it, “de-sexualise and obfuscate one of the major features of phallogentric thought – its subsumption of two sexual symmetries under one sexual norm” (Grosz 1994a, 163).¹³⁹ I think, however, that the story of Nore’s development of breast presents a very fruitful ground for combining Deleuze with feminism. The ageing body’s capacities for producing pleasure and desire, of becoming, is here closely linked to feminist aspirations of rethinking sexual morphologies.

Feminist theorists have argued that leakiness, fluidity, mushiness and lack of boundaries are strong prevalent symbolic representations of female bodies (Grosz 1994a, Shildrick 1997). Iris Marion Young (1990) argues that breasts in particular epitomize the softness and mushiness of femininity, and as such denote the uncontrollable and fluid. The symbolic representations of male bodies as hard and impermeable and female bodies as soft and permeable make up a central binary which solidifies relations of male domination and female subordination in this line of argument (cf. Waldby 1995). But, as Grosz (1994a, 20) proposes: “developing alternative accounts of the body may create upheavals in the existing knowledges” and “relations of power” between the sexes. Nore’s narrative may propose exactly this kind of alternative account in the way in which male breasts figure as erotic. In Nore’s narrative, the development of breasts makes him an object of desire in the gaze of a woman, his wife, and as such may both point to new potentials for the production of desire outside the realms of femininity/masculinity, and also reconfigure male sexual morphologies.

Owe, 84, presents another narrative of the body and changes in the body following illness, which made him and his wife relate differently to the sexual body and to re-eroticize the body. Owe talks of how his wife, when they were in midlife, was diagnosed with breast cancer and was forced to have both breasts removed by surgery. He says that at first they thought this would affect their sexual relationship, but instead it meant a new orientation to the sexual body.

139. For a more elaborate discussion on feminist critiques of Deleuze and Deleuze & Guattari, see Grosz 1994a and also to some extent Grosz 1994b.

Owe: The breasts are things that are nice to caress and touch, and Olivia was probably afraid because of that. And of course I perhaps felt too that there was something that disappeared. But I think that this has largely been replaced. There was a deeper feeling of other things that could be pleasurable. Just caressing the body and to feel each other, that this works out, this works fine... It could possibly have been something that could have disturbed, but this was 1983. And there was probably no big difference before and after.¹⁴⁰

Owe's story represents the opposite case to Nore's development of breasts, but it is similar in the way in which it points to the body's capacity to emerge as a site of endless productions of desire. Something lost, in this case a pair of breasts, becomes something found, in terms of new parts of the body being found and explored. The way in which Owe also talks of a "deeper feeling" involved when exploring each other's bodies anew is reflected in other studies on changes following erectile problems (Potts et al. 2006, Oliffe 2005). Discussing a "deeper feeling" towards the sexual body, in which the entire body is involved, also relates to how strong sexual desire and a one-sided focus on erection and penetration is considered by the men in this study to be shallow and egoistic. The emphasis on a new relationship to the body, characterized by closeness and touch, is entwined with narrations of strong feelings of love. In Chapter Six, on sexual desire, I will further discuss how men's articulations of intimacy are very much connected to emotions and feelings.

When Nore and Owe started to eroticize bodies anew following illness, it was about finding erotic potentials in bodies, which they at first might not have thought of as such. In the case of the diarist Holger, 67, he not only finds new erotic potentials in the body but goes as far as to suggest that the body might not even be necessary, that desire can emerge even without physical contact.

When older I have discovered that sex life is not entirely dependent on a man's big firm penis. It is more about what feelings you may convey. A woman may experience orgasms without intercourse or touch of her genitals through fondling. I have many times experienced how sexually active women experienced intense orgasms from a kiss or a hug. If you

140. O: bröstet är ju nåt som är skönt att smeka eller ta, men och Olivia var nog rädd för det och det klart jag kanske tyckte också att det var nåt som försvann, men det tycker jag har ersatt så mycket det blev något djupare känsla för annat som kunde vara skönt, bara smeka kroppen och (..) och så känna varandra att det här går vägen, det här gick bra (mm) det var nog nånting som kunde ha stört, men det var 74 så det efter det så hade, det var nog ingen större skillnad före och efter (nä).

*may convey the feeling to a woman "You are the most wonderful woman" then there might not be a need for potency invigorating Viagra, Cialis or other chemical preparations. Joie de vivre, erotic curiosity and freedom from prejudices solve most questions on sexuality, of all ages. It is mostly about what two people want to experience together.*¹⁴¹

In this diary excerpt, Holger dismisses the need for genital practices in sexuality, but uses words such as "joie de vivre", "curiosity" and "freedom from prejudices" to describe what he believes are important to sexuality. One may read his words on freedom and openness, "what people want to experience together", as being a matter of a generation who has had more possibilities to be sexually explorative. Holger, who was born in the early 1940s, belongs to a generation to which debates on sexuality and increasingly liberal attitudes to sex were more accessible. But his words on how "sex life is not entirely dependent on a man's big firm penis. [I]t is more about what feelings you may convey" is not only about a generation's openness to sexual exploration. It is also about the availability of a discourse where the firm penis is not what matters, but rather the production of pleasure and desire, a production which may not even require bodily contact. Holger's diary narrative gives a further twist to the Deleuzian notion of "Bodies Without Organs" (BWO). In Deleuze & Guattari (1987, 165ff), the BWO is a body that refuses organization through clearly separable organs. The BWO is instead reminiscent of an egg, as consisting of strata. However, in this case, the body without organs could also denote the body which does not prioritize genitalia and the phallic and which does not need the erect penis as the primary site of desire production.

Finding one's body and the body of a partner erotic in new ways following ageing and illness may not always be about decentring the significance of the erect penis. But the narratives of the men in this study suggest that, when men turn to intimacy and touch, it also involves discovering, if not the whole, at least more of the body. By discovering how all kinds of different body parts and practices may evoke pleasure and desire, one realizes that the penis (and the vagina) does not necessarily take precedence over the rest

141. Som äldre har jag upptäckt att sexlivet inte är till alla delar beroende av en stor styv penis hos mannen. Det handlar mer om vilka känslor man kan förmedla. En kvinna kan få och uppleva orgasmer utan samlag eller beröring av könet genom smekningar. Jag har många gånger upplevt att kvinnor sexuellt aktiva upplevt intensiva orgasmer av en kyss eller en kram. Kan man förmedla den känslan till en kvinna "Du är världens underbaraste kvinna" så kanske det inte behövs vare sig potensstärkande Viagra, Cialis eller andra kemiska preparat. Livsglädje, erotisk nyfikenhet och frihet från fördomar brukar lösa de flesta frågor i sexualiteten för alla åldrar. Det mesta handlar om vad två personer vill uppleva tillsammans.

of the body. This is also in line with what feminists have long discussed and advocated: a challenge to the coital imperative (McPhillips et al. 2001).

I find it important not to see the possible re-formulations of sexual practices and re-configuring of the sexual and eroticized body as unequivocally good and progressive. Although Holger's extract on disembodied sexual practices offers a way of rethinking male sexual morphologies, his writing also conveys ideas and notions about men as responsible for and doers of women's orgasm. This, the reinforcement of men as active in sexual encounters, rather than breaking with traditional ideas and presenting lines of flight and deterritorializations, seems to reinstate phallocentrism, something I will discuss more in the next chapter.

Bodies may be eroticized in new ways through ageing, but ageing may also lead to ways of being intimate which disrupt taken for granted scripts about sexuality. Next I will discuss how intimacy and touch are discussed by the men in this study as less confined by a beginning or end and as more unbounded and fluid.

Sex that leads nowhere

Jakob: The desire is the same, and eh, being together doesn't have to end with or lead to intercourse.

When Jakob points to the fact that being intimate with a partner does not necessarily have to lead to intercourse, he evokes the question of what sexuality and sexual desire should lead to and challenges the idea that intercourse is necessarily always strived for. When men in this study narrated orientations towards intimacy and touch this could, as I have argued, be analyzed as potentially refiguring male sexual morphologies and might propose ways of thinking the ageing body differently, as a possibility. But what I have also found interesting and significant in these men's narratives on intimacy and touch, is how, in various ways, they evoke questions of directionality in sex: what should sexuality and being together actually lead to?

In Chapter One, when I introduced available discourses on later life sexuality, I discussed the way in which the emergence of a discourse of sexuality as lifelong was very much about remaining healthy and even postponing ageing. When men speak about intimacy and touch in this study, however, this is not primarily about staying healthy and youthful. What is striking in these men's narratives on later life sexuality, made sense of as intimacy and touch, is instead how it need not lead to anything in particular, and as such has no clear beginning or end. There is in other words a non-teleology

involved in the narratives on intimacy and touch that I find worthy of discussion.

Central to this discussion is the question of time. Some men point to how sex might take more time. But they also discuss how there is *both more time* to spend on being intimate after retirement, and *less time* as in the approach of death. Knowing that one is going to die also shapes experiences of sexuality.

Owe, 84, is one of the men in this study who most clearly expresses how experiences of sexuality take new shapes in later life. Owe and I are sitting out on his balcony during the interview, it is a sunny day in May and spring has finally arrived. I have read Owe's body diary before meeting with him for the interview. I thus know that he and his wife sleep in separate bedrooms, and the diary tells nothing about intercourse or other things that one would generally consider sexual. What can be found in Owe's diary, however, are narratives of intimacy, how he and his wife enjoy the warmth of each other's bodies, how he sits on the side of her bed before she goes to sleep and caresses her back. After interviewing Owe and others, I come to realize that the men in this study do in fact regard the diverse practices of intimacy and touch as parts of sexuality, and I thus start to reconsider and understand his diary in a new light. Owe says in the interview that there is more to sexuality than intercourse. He tells me that the activities he and his wife mainly engage in today, and which he regards as part of sexuality, are things like mutual masturbation, holding each other, hugging and kissing. To him this is nothing unusual, but is the case for most men of his age, since old men often cannot get an erection, he says. But he underlines the fact that being intimate in other ways than intercourse is of no less value, rather the opposite.

Owe: In my mind, they [people Owe's age] are lying naked together caressing each other's bodies and saying nice and tender words. They might fondle the genitals from time to time. That's pretty much how I imagine it. I value those things just as much today as the regular intercourse in youth. Then, it was the arousal, to do the actual – and then it was over. And everyday life was back, you had your duties. Often you had something you had to do. Or you had to go to sleep. This [sexuality] is more elongated; it could stretch over an entire evening or an entire day.¹⁴²

142. O: Jag tänker på att dom kanske ligger tillsammans nakna och smeker varandras kroppar och säger vänliga ord och – kanske smeker, ja könsorganen då, och då det är nog ungefär vad jag lägger ini bilden för jag tror att man, jag lägger lika stort värde vid det idag som det regelrätta samlaget, i ungdomen, för då där då var ju upphetsningen före att genomföra själva, sen var det, sen tog, (Hund

What Owe raises in this quote is how “lying together and caressing each other” are framed within a different temporality than sexuality earlier in life, a sexuality which is ostensibly defined by “regular intercourse”. When sex as intercourse took place earlier in life this was always something that happened within a bounded time, between work and sleep. This resembles what Frank says about sex in mid-life.

Frank: Well, when you’re in your thirties you’re just sort of running on [doing things], so sex takes place when it fits the schedule, sort of.¹⁴³

To both Owe and Frank, sex was something that earlier in life had to be fitted into a limited amount of time between other duties and work. Now, when retired, things can take more time. The image that might surface from this, of old people who may, when obliged by no other duties, engage in physical intimacy and sexual activities all day, seems incredibly nice. It might, however, be slightly romanticized and different from how many people live their lives when old. Still, it is interesting that not being framed within working hours may reshape sexuality into something longer, but also adjusted and fitted to an ageing body. It takes more time but there is also more time, which as a consequence enables different practices and different morphologies.

Owe also points to how intercourse, which defined sex earlier in life, was shaped through a normative sequencing: “it was the arousal, to do the actual – and then it was over”. Where intercourse is experienced as having a clear end, intimacy and touch are discussed as more undefined and unbounded activities, with no clear end point. This is something Yngve also points to when I ask him what he appreciates about intimacy and touch, in contrast to intercourse, which he defines as “regular sex”.

Linn: But when you’re saying that actual sex hasn’t been that important but that it’s this touching each other, holding hands... What’s important about this, do you think? What is it that you appreciate in this, in comparison to what you talk about as “regular sex”?

skåller) ja så jag trodde det var du som var på väg att nysa, så tog ju vardagen vid ganska snart efter i varje fall tycker jag att det var så att hade man haft det, sen så då skulle man ju göra någonting, ofta, man hade ju någonting, antingen skulle man sova eller... (L skraut)

L: Så här är det liksom, då var samlaget en avgränsad som inträffade, här är det mera ett – (...)

O: Ja här är det mera utdraget och det kan sträckas sig över en hel kväll eller en hel dag

143. F: (...) Ja (...) i 30 årsåldern då springer man väl bara på (.) så blir det sex när det passar på nåt vis.

Yngve: Well, regular sex, I'm exaggerating a bit but – It lasts only a short while.¹⁴⁴

So, both Owe and Yngve describe intercourse as something that has an end to it, which one may assume is orgasm. This way of framing intercourse as a sequence from arousal to the intercourse itself and its subsequent culmination and end with orgasm, reflects sexologists Masters and Johnson's (1966, 1970) work on sexuality, which has been very influential in defining sexual activities in terms of normal/abnormal in the West from the mid 20th century onwards. Masters and Johnson defined normal sex as a sequence of activities, from "foreplay" with kisses and caresses, to the key act of intercourse, eventually resulting in climax marked by (his) orgasm. As such, intercourse is an activity with a built-in goal or *telos*, a goal which, if unfulfilled, marks a failure or something incomplete to the sexual practice. Thinking with Foucault (2002), sexology and medicine can here be understood as modern forms of "Scientia sexualis", a discursive apparatus which organizes, codifies, and hierarchizes sexual activities in binary terms of normal/abnormal (and perhaps also healthy/unhealthy).¹⁴⁵

Owe and Yngve speak about the fact that they are impotent and this means that they cannot follow the scripts of intercourse. However, when they speak of valorizing and practising intimacy and touch, this seemingly also provides a certain freedom outside the narrow definitions of sex which intercourse entails. When sex cannot and does not have to be finished, as in stopping at a specific point (notably orgasm/ejaculation), the possibility of desires to leap in unexpected and unknown directions might be produced. Grosz argues, following Deleuze & Guattari (1987) and theorist Alfonso Lingis, that erotic desire is non-teleological and always leaks and seeps out of its pre-existing realms of definition.

Sexuality and desire cannot be seen in terms of a function or goal for this is to reduce it to functionality; materiality [...] is always in excess of function or goal (Grosz 1995b, 285).

144. L: Men du säger att du inte tycker att själva sexet har inte varit så viktigt utan det här eh att nudda varandra att hålla varandra i handen, vad är det som du tycker är viktigt med detta, vad är det du uppskattar med det mot för det du pratar om som vanliga sexet?

Y: Ja det vanliga sexet, jag överdriver litegrann, det är ju bara en liten stund.

145. Sexology and medicine's production of sexual truths, organizing sexuality in binaries of healthy/unhealthy, normal/abnormal, can also be understood as molar lines in Deleuzian terminology (cf. Potts 2004).

Grosz (1995a, 1995b) is critical of sexologists like the above-mentioned Masters and Johnson, who continuously attempt to measure, organize, code and signify sexuality and sexual desire, and impose notions of function and goal. I would argue that Owe's and Yngve's accounts of the sexual desire involved in intimacy and touch provide a conspicuous everyday example of how sexuality and sexual desire are not ultimately defined through a definite goal or *telos*. While, in this thesis, I am specifically discussing how old age and ageing bodies may influence the shaping of sexuality, I believe that the narratives of Owe, Yngve and Frank are useful for thinking and rethinking sexuality in more general terms.

The above narratives by Owe and Frank suggested that later life sexuality was different not only because of bodily changes, but also because life after retirement, with fewer duties, made being together different. But another aspect that makes things different, and which gives another shape to sexuality, is how old age is linked to non-reproduction. Sexuality is, in other words, experienced as different when it should not/cannot lead to children and forming a family. This is something that Edvard elaborates on in a rather detailed way. It all starts with me asking: "Do you think people are attractive in the same way when seventy as earlier in life?" Upon hearing this question, he suddenly and enthusiastically asks if he can read me a small poem he recently wrote. When I agree he recites his poem, which describes different phases of the life course, from the fiery urges of adolescence, to settling down with house and kids, divorce, and finally old age, where the poem goes something like this:

"To be old and in love, to get a glance
of her red lips, as we dance
to feel a nose and our cheeks
so very close
To get the chance, to be free
to enjoy our intimacy."¹⁴⁶

Edvard's poem quite neatly captures how he understands sexuality to be bound up with the life course in different ways. Adolescent sexuality is in his poem characterized by strong urges, something which is echoed by several others in this study (and which I will discuss more in Chapter Six, on sexual desire). Midlife is described as a period of settling down with a family and the subsequent break-up. Later life, in Edvard's poem, in contrast to the

146. Att vara gammal och kär, att se dom små röda när det när en dans oss bär, att omärkt snudda vid en näsa som så nära är, att trycka en kind mot din, att kravlöst få njuta av närhet nu och här.

carnal desires of youth and midlife's focus on family matters, is portrayed as a time when intimacy and touch are of key significance. This could involve pleasures ranging from touch in a dance to the sight of a pair of red lips. When Edvard talks about sexuality, he stresses the reproductive aspects of it and how this influences how sexuality is experienced throughout life.

Edvard: When you're eighteen or nineteen, it's different. Then there are all these urges and instincts, really. Nature's created things that way, made us nest, reproduce...¹⁴⁷

Sexuality, rather than existing as sheer pleasure and enjoyment from the sexual acts, exists to make us reproduce and the strong desires in youth are there in order for us to find a partner to mate with. The way in which sexuality is depicted as foremost a matter of reproduction gives a strong biological overtone to Edvard's account. Interestingly, however, this also impacts on how sexuality in later life is perceived. Edvard argues that being old means being completed, in the sense that all the things that are expected from life, such as having children and moving in together, have been fulfilled.¹⁴⁸

Edvard: What was the future when I was eighteen, all the things we dreamed about– that's where we are today. So it's finished, sort of.¹⁴⁹

While being finished could be an expression of a decline narrative, this is not necessarily the only way to understand Edvard (Gullette 1998). When it comes to sex and sexuality, he is not saying that sexuality and sexual desire automatically decline, but that things are different.

Edvard: Sexuality isn't the same, and how things are... Well, I can only speak for myself and people I meet, but if it [sexuality] exists it's in an entirely different dimension.¹⁵⁰

147. När man är sjutton, arton, nittion år och då är (..) det är ju helt annorlunda så visst.

L: Hur är det helt annorlunda? E: Jamen då är det ju en massa drifter som som sexualitet och såna saker, helt klart och då är man ju, det har ju naturen sett till vi ska ju, sätta bo och reproducera oss, (..)

148. The way in which Edvard describes different expectations related to the life course, both in his poem and when speaking, bears a great resemblance to Persson's (2010) discussion on femininity and the body following a cultural timetable with different life stops on the way (Persson is in turn drawing on Blakilde 2005).

149. Det som var framtiden när jag var arton och det som vi fantiserade om, det är ju där vi är nu, det är där jag är (..) så det är ju liksom färdigt på nåt sätt.

150. Sexualiteten är ju inte den samma och hur den är det kan jag ju inte veta mer än på mig själv och dom jag umgås med då, men (m) om den existerar så är det ju på ett helt annat plan.

To speak of sexuality in later life as existing in a “different dimension” is a recurrence of a characterization that can be identified with several men in this study. When the interviewees describe themselves as young men, they describe a more egoistic man, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, but also a young man driven by strong and forceful sexual desires, largely located in the body. Growing old means developing a more sincere and committed relationship to sexuality and sex. But also, as bodies change due to ageing, priorities and the possibilities for different kinds of sexual practices change. Sex and sexuality earlier in life emerge as something shallow and almost instrumental, in contrast to sex and sexuality now when old, which connect feelings of love and togetherness in intimacy with practices such as touch. Again, these claims about how young versus old men are should not be read realistically, as “how things really are”, but they are a matter of how the men in this study make sense of sexuality and old age by distancing from and perhaps also partaking in an Othering of young(er) men.

What I find especially interesting in Edvard’s narrative, however, is how his experience of later life sexuality as being beyond reproduction also produces different dimensions/modalities of sexuality. Edvard proposes that being outside reproduction generates an evident freedom for the shaping of sexuality; things are easier today now that he is old. Edvard says that one may laugh and joke about things that in youth would have been very embarrassing.

Edvard: It isn’t that different really, with people of different sexes and interests meeting and holding each other [...] But it’s more carefree now in comparison to when you were younger. Well I don’t know your age, but you’re not *that* young. At that age things were embarrassing, you blushed real easy and those things. But now you’ve been around an entire life and maybe had several relationships, so we’re sort of laughing and joking about things, right? It’s more carefree because we are in the future, the future is passed [...] and, well, it’s easy.¹⁵¹

151. Men det det är ju inte annorlunda det egentligen än kroppar av olika kön och intressen som möts och håller i varandra och så va, jag menar det är när man pratar och skrattar och (...) men det mycket det blir ju så kravlöst men det vi, om man tänker sig att när man var ung, nu vet jag inte riktigt hur gammal du är men så ung är du ju inte men ändå, det var ju pinigt och man rodnade lätt och allt möjligt sänt och det fanns ju så mycket så, nu har man vart med hela livet och kanske haft flera relationer så vi skojar ju och skrattar öppet om saker och ting va, och det är ingen som tar illa upp om det är så mycket enklare det är så mycket kravlösare därför att vi är i framtiden, framtiden är förbi och vi kan berätta för varandra och skoja om hur det var när en va tjugo och så där (skratt) och (...) ja det är enkelt.

What Edvard seems to be saying is that, while in adolescence there was a lot at stake and one was inexperienced, today when old, fewer things are at stake and one has experienced sexuality and being in relationships. This change implies a certain freedom, in the words of Edvard "it's more carefree" and "it's easy". This freedom seems largely to be about not having to aspire towards a specific goal as before: the teleology of reproduction. Edvard argues that when one can no longer have children the act of intercourse is not as central as before, but instead other things become important.

Edvard: Sexuality exists for people to reproduce, and for us [older people] this is not the case anymore. It's quite natural that this is not the case anymore, things change character, there's warmth and things are different, I don't know how to say it. Like, when you're young intercourse is the goal of sexual activities, right? But that's not the case anymore, it could happen but it doesn't have to... That's not what's important, there's a lot more. There's the closeness. Some kind of trust in having a close friend that you may share even a naked body with, so to speak.¹⁵²

Along the same lines as others in the study, Edvard explains that "there's a lot more" to sex than intercourse and underlines how being close becomes more important. Like Owe, Edvard describes the sensations of lying beside another naked body, which in his case is made possible by not having to engage in the reproductive act of intercourse. Perhaps surprisingly, Edvard does not reflect upon the fact that men can in fact reproduce, become fathers, even when old. Instead, he seems to take it for granted that old men are sexually active only with post-menopausal women.

Being "finished", as in having reached a point in the life course where reproduction is no longer viable, thus means being beyond teleological sexuality, and stepping into a period where sexuality is less bounded. Again, in a similar way to my discussion around erection, something lost may in fact be something found; the old heterosexual couple's lost possibility of having

152. E: (skratt) sexualiteten är ju till för att vi ska reproducera oss och det ska vi ju inte längre, det är ju ganska naturligt att det inte är så längre, och den ändrar ju karaktär också det, eh (..) det blir ju värme och det blir annorlunda (.) Hur jag ska uttrycka mig (..) alltså man har nog inte om du tänker dig som ung så har man ju samlaget som mål för dom sexuella handlingarna då va, men det har man inte längre, det kan bli så men det måste inte va det, det är inte det som är det viktiga så att säga, det finns ju mycket annat.

L: Vad är det som är viktigare då, nu till exempel?

E: Ja det är närheten (..) förtroendet på nåt sätt att ha en så nära vän som man kan dela till och med en naken kropp med om jag säger så.

children may, as Edvard proposes, “instead deepen togetherness, warmth and love”.¹⁵³ Accordingly, when Edvard talks about being finished, he is not offering a decline narrative but is rather producing a narrative on affirmative old age.

Similarly, Owe and Frank, who spoke of life in retirement as making possible a more unbounded sexuality, can be analyzed as producing affirmative narratives on old age. In contrast to discourses of retirement as a loss and a potential threat to subjectivity, in particular for men, retirement in these narratives opens up to something else (Thompson 2006). Here, old age is affirmative in the way that the sexuality that emerges neither seeks to keep you young, in the vein of successful ageing, nor is understood in terms of negativity and decline.

But what is meant by saying that old age opens up to a more carefree and unbounded sexuality? In some literature on old age and gender, it is suggested that old age lacks gendered scripts and involves a de-gendering (cf. Spector-Mersel 2006, Silver 2005, Thompson 2006). These assertions, of a genderless old age free (or disoriented) from gender interpellation, lack support in my study. The participant men were generally, and as will become clear in the following chapter, still heavily invested in discourses of masculinity, in particular in the heterosexual encounter and when narrating their own sexual desire throughout life. When I talk of an “outside” here, this is not a fundamental outside, outside discourse. What I am suggesting is that having finished working and no longer being about to form a (new) family creates experiences of freedom and possibilities to explore things like a different relationship to sex and sexuality. It seems as if Owe and Edvard almost felt compelled to engage in intercourse when younger; the idea that men have strong urges and that sex is about reproduction (even though far from all intercourse leads to conception) makes intercourse into a “natural” and given part of sexuality and sexual practices. Being old, however, seems to be understood as a period when sexuality is not as manifest and thus things are not expected in the same way. Although a coital imperative might still be strong for old men, as the following chapter will discuss, a different relation to time could nevertheless provide promises of deterritorialization, of reshaping male sexual morphologies away from the phallic male body.

Not only is sexuality produced differently as a result of being outside working and fertile life, but it is also taking shape from experiences of living *with little time left*, of being closer to death. *Little time left* can be seen as yet another temporality that shapes sexuality in specific ways. Death was, per-

153. Fördjupas istället, gemenskapen och värmen och kärleken kanske.

haps surprisingly, little discussed by the men in this study; maybe because they wanted to subvert negative images of old age and detach later life from its strong associations with death. Owe, however, points to how knowing that life is not going to last forever induces a specific pleasure and intensity into the sexual encounter.

Owe: Well, it might not be pleasurable in the same way, but what's pleasurable today is perhaps more valuable than what was pleasurable in adolescence. There's such a different content to it today. Today this pleasant togetherness – you know there's an end to it. Before, like I was saying, there was always another day tomorrow as well.

Linn: So, knowing that something might end does something to the experience?

Owe: That adds another beauty to it all.¹⁵⁴

Owe compares the pleasure of sex earlier in life with the sex he engages in today. Where earlier in life he engaged in intercourse, his sexual practices today are more focused on fondling, lying naked together, and saying nice words. The reason that he finds the sexual activities he engages in today more valuable is because they are enhanced by feelings that *it might be the last time* before either he or his wife passes away.

"Another beauty", the words Owe uses to describe sexuality today, framed by death, can be compared to what Erland says about a "different dimension". The proximity of death enhances feelings and experiences of the sexual. This is something that Lennart also speaks of when being interviewed. He describes how he and his wife became more sexually active when she was diagnosed with cancer a couple of years earlier; as he puts it: "swans sing before they die". Lennart, like Owe, describes how the knowledge that either of them could die is also there with him during the sexual encounter.

154. O: Ja, alltså det det, det kanske inte känns skönt på samma sätt men det är, det som känns skönt idag det är kanske är lika värdefullt kanske värdefullare till och med än det som kändes skönt i ungdomen, men då det är så olika innehåll i det hela. Idag det är alltså ett, det här sköna gemenskapen idag den känner man att den det finns ett slut på den, förr var det ju som jag sa det finns en dag imorgon också.

L: Så just vetskapen om att det kommer ta slut gör nånting för upplevelsen?

O: Det lägger in en annan skönhet i det hela.

Lennart: Both Lena [his wife] and I are of an age where one thinks about what will happen next, who will pass away first and how will it feel not to have somebody to crawl over to during the night.¹⁵⁵

Thinking about how it will feel to lie alone in one's bed after the partner has died could seemingly reconfigure sexual practices and the way one relates to one's body. A body is shaped through encounters with others, and a sexual body is thus shaped in specific ways from living in a (long-term) couple with somebody. The body thus does not stop and start with the skin but encompasses the body of the other part(ner) in coupledness. If coupledness is a desired and culturally sanctioned form of social organization (cf. Nordin 2007), the absence of a partner (not only through bereavement) is felt and experienced as if one is being cut in half, as being a lack. While coupledness is not age-specific as such, the proximity to death experienced in later life may underline the threat of the loss of a partner. This may in turn, as the above narratives suggest, make sexual experiences different and emphasize the importance of bodily contact.

When, for example, Owe talks about "another beauty" to sexuality in later life, he is apparently filling later life sexuality with a positive and affirmative content. This affirmative view seems, however, to be different from the successful ageing discourses where sexuality is seen as a positive and healthy aspect of later life. Where discourses of successful ageing, as in the example of Sven Tumba, understand sexuality to be a way of avoiding old age and in essence a postponement of death, the affirmative discourse presented by Owe and others does not understand sexuality to be a way of postponing death, but death is instead what makes sexuality meaningful. This view can be compared to the argument of Vincent (2006), who criticizes the anti-ageing sciences for not enabling an affirmative old age, where old age has a value in its own right. Vincent (2006, 693) argues that old age should be seen as valuable as a "summation" or a "rounding off", that life would not be meaningful without the existence of death. Irni (2010, 124) asserts this to be a very compelling argument for an affirmative later life, because, she argues, "old age has value in itself and also *because of* its relation to death, rather than despite of it". Similarly sex and sexuality are meaningful because of death not despite of it, and rather than sex being a way of escaping death, sexuality in

155. Båda Lena och jag är i den åldern nu då man funderar över vad händer härnäst, vem ska gå bort först och hur kommer det att kännas att inte ha nån att krypa över till, att eh, under natten, ibland säger Lena "håll om mig", då håller jag om Lena å så säger jag "håll om mig" och eh det kan vara när man har svårt att sova, det är en del av sexualiteten som nästan aldrig utmynnar i ett samlag men som, också tycker jag är en del av (..) kroppskontakten.

later life is positively experienced and made meaningful through the proximity of death.

Still, it is the coupled sexuality, the sexual experiences together with a partner, that are affirmed in this discourse and as such it feeds into a cultural ideal of coupled sexuality as a more desirable sexuality and form of social organization. As I will discuss more throughout this study, sexuality among young men is described as more egoistic and shallow, whereas later life sexuality is narrated as more sincere and deeper. This understanding of later life sexuality is partly achieved through linking old age with committed relationships and long-term coupledness saturated with love. Intimacy as a central concept of this study is neither positive/subversive nor negative/reactive but holds several different possibilities and meanings. Accordingly, when men in this study talk about later life sexuality as different and positive, this may be a way both of shaping discourses of affirmative old age, and at the same time reinforcing heterosexuality through the emphasis on coupledness.

In this section, I have discussed how a turn to intimacy and touch in men's narratives on later life sexuality challenges and disrupts ideas of sexuality as productive and goal-oriented; teleological. While intercourse was sometimes experienced as having a clear end, intimacy and touch was not as readily experienced as having a definite beginning or end. I will return to the question of the unboundedness of sexual desire in Chapter Six, when discussing how desire could be understood in relation to intimacy and touch. I have also discussed how a different relationship to time in these men's narratives can further be analyzed in terms of affirmative old age. Later life is not only conceptualized as a time of losses and bereavement but also as a time for doing things differently, when sex is not a matter of reproduction or something that should be squeezed into the hours between work and sleep. Even the role of death in sexual experiences may be analyzed as a matter of affirmative old age. Knowing that one is approaching death could be experienced as intensifying experiences of sexuality, of being together. This is not to overlook the great anxieties and pains that life close to death can involve for many, but to claim that death may be what gives meaning to life.

At the end of this chapter I will return to discuss touch further by analyzing two body diaries from this study. In doing so I will further emphasize the possibilities for rethinking male sexual morphologies, the becoming of the male body in ageing. While a great deal of this chapter has reflected very positive experiences of later life sexuality, there are also experiences of death, illness, loneliness and pain that figure in the participant men's narratives. The next section will thus also underline how becoming is not only (or even pri-

marily) about those things that we think of as “nice” or “positive”. Knowing that death is near may fortify needs for and feelings of touch.

A desire for touch

Would need, lonely as I am, with sincere tenderness, to wash a woman's back softly. Mentally horny now, but not physically.¹⁵⁶

[Diary of Fritz, December 2, 2007]

It has not been the “stiff dick”, the erection, and the possibility of subsequent intercourse that has stood out as being important to old men in this chapter. Instead, when the men described what they considered to be important they used words such as “feeling the body”, “warmth” and “being close”, things that I have termed a turn to *intimacy and touch*. In the above diary quote, Fritz writes of how he wishes to “to wash a woman’s back softly” with “sincere tenderness”, but also how this longing for touch is very much linked to desire by claiming to be “horny”. These accounts, I have argued, de-centre and challenge the importance of the erection and intercourse, and these “findings” are supported by other existing qualitative studies (Potts et al. 2004, Potts et al. 2006, Vares et al. 2007). In stark contrast to discourses of successful ageing, where an active and healthy ageing is by and large equated with men’s abilities to maintain erectile function when ageing, the men in this study presented accounts of ageing bodies which directed them to other practices as well as other ways of relating to one’s body and the body of one’s partner.

However, intimacy and touch are not only about practices per se, but just as much about feelings. As Twigg (2000, 47) argues: “touch has profound emotional significance [...] it takes us back to our earliest experiences”. By focusing further on touch in this last section of the chapter before concluding, I wish to explore in more detail the ways in which touch challenges a phallic body, as a male sexual morphology. This discussion will take place in dialogue with Irigaray’s theorizing on touch. But I will also raise questions about how touch matters for thinking subjectivity, sexuality and relationships to others. Issues of touch feed into experiences of pain, death, illness and loneliness, as part of life in general and perhaps later life in particular.

The discussion will be based on two body diaries, which in different ways relate to touch. First I will discuss Fritz, who, living alone out in the coun-

156. Skulle ensam jag är, med ärlig ömhet behöva tvåla in en kvinnas rygg mjukt. Psykiskt kåt nu, men ej fysiskt.

tryside, longs for touch and articulates this in terms of desiring to wash a woman's back. Secondly, I will discuss the diary narrative of Lennart, who writes about touch as a means of consolation when his wife falls seriously ill.

I have never met Fritz, born in 1935. I know and understand him only through the letters and diary writings he has sent me, written in a florid handwriting and with a certain smell to the paper. The man Fritz who materializes on these pages, is a lonely man. With short fragmented sentences, he narrates his life out in the Swedish countryside. His encounters with people are few and he lives his life in solitude, with the company of the radio, reading his newspapers. The darkness of the Swedish winter is strikingly present in Fritz's narrative, and his narrative reveals an aspect of life (and perhaps more so later life) that is often effaced and downplayed by other participants in this study: loneliness. I find it especially important to reflect upon and discuss the loneliness of Fritz, since it is a reminder that sexual subjectivities do not only take shape in relation to an Other. Although there are other participants in this study who are widowed or single, the ways people speak of/write about sexuality is generally by talking about sex with another person (although sex need not imply intercourse). Fritz's narrative, however, exposes how desire is neither bound to the genitals nor to encounters between two (or more) people; but exists as a force or flow that is directed towards no particular object and aims at nothing but its own proliferation.

Fritz's narrative is not only different because it reveals loneliness as an aspect of later life and how sexual subjectivity is not only shaped in relation to the couple or another, but also in how the narrative reveals fantasies and desires in a much more explicit way. The fact that I have never met Fritz, never even spoken to him on the phone, is perhaps the reason why his narrative is much less "respectable" and self-censored than other interview and diary narratives in this study. In an almost "stream of consciousness" style, he writes about sexual fantasies and desires, in stark contrast to the narration of his lonely everyday activities. Fritz's day revolves around the activities of getting up, going to the post box, eating, doing crosswords and listening to the radio. But mixed up with these everyday activities are narratives of fantasies: fragmentary dreams of women. Some narratives are explicitly sexual, telling fantasies of women's "pussies" and bare breasts, and voyeuristic dreams/memories of outdoor sex; while others are less explicitly sexual, often telling about his desire to wash a woman's back.

It is in these fragmented narratives, in the wish to wash a woman's back, that the issue of touch surfaces most clearly. Touch is here an ambiguous matter, since the washing of a woman's back can be seen as an activity in the borderland between the sexual and the non-sexual, as in the quote:

*Would need, lonely as I am, with sincere tenderness, to wash a woman's back softly. Mentally horny now, but not physically.*¹⁵⁷

The way Fritz describes how he is “mentally horny now, but not physically” for one thing reflects a disjunction between physical and mental arousal, illustrating that feeling desire and becoming aroused can occur without the actual physical arousal of an erection. But I also find it interesting that it is the washing of a woman’s back that Fritz returns to in his diary. It is not the desire to have intercourse, masturbation, oral sex or any other activities one would conventionally think of as sexual that are emphasized, but a desire for touch.

*My sincere tenderness in hands and mind desires to wash a woman's back. Such a normal activity, entirely unattainable unfortunately. Why?*¹⁵⁸

Thinking back over the discussions in this chapter, touch – through kissing, hugging, holding – has been considered just as important as, if not more important than, the intercourse most had regarded as proper sex earlier in life. The way in which washing a woman’s back is eroticized and desired in Fritz’s narrative resembles how other participants “discover” the body as a result of impotence or other bodily changes, but with the significant difference that to Fritz there is neither intercourse nor touch in a wider sense to be found.

The orientation to touch, rather than to intercourse, could be explained in many different ways. Touch is seen by some to denote something “deeper”, more sincere and committed in comparison with the shallow and egoistic focus on the erection and intercourse. But there is also something about the non-erect penis that directs towards and enables touch. In his diary, Fritz discusses his penis by writing:

*Feeling small nowadays with this willy, that comes with old age.*¹⁵⁹

In this quote he describes his penis as “small” and this could be interpreted as not being able to become erect anymore, but may also refer to the shrinkage of the male organ in general while ageing. Fritz’s expression of feeling small

157. Skulle ensam jag är, med ärlig ömhet behöva tvåla in en kvinnas rygg mjukt. Psykiskt kåt nu, men ej fysiskt.

158. Min ärliga ömhet i händer och sinne trängtar efter att få tvåla in en kvinnas rygg. En så normal handling helt oätkomlig tyvärr. Varför?

159. Känner mig liten nuförtiden med den här pissesnopen, som följer ålderdomen.

can be compared to what Gösta, 82, says with a laugh when I ask him if he thinks that he has a masculine body.

Gösta: Well, I got hair on my chest and I've got this little willy, if one could count that as masculinity. A small piece of skin. It's not much to talk about really.¹⁶⁰

In this quote, Gösta evokes a well-known discourse which links masculinity to the size of the penis. His impotence and experiencing that he has only a “small piece of skin” between his legs seemingly impacts on Gösta's feelings around sex, which he describes as “nothing” today, when intercourse is not possible. Similarly, Fritz writes about how his small “willy” makes it impossible for him to engage in some sexual activities. “It's too late”, he writes, but it is not entirely clear *what* is too late. It may be understood as too late for intercourse, but it may also be about being intimate with another person more widely.

*Thinking back as the older always do. If I had only engaged more in the woman's natural. Now it's too late, with this little willy small.*¹⁶¹

The melancholy of this quote is evident. Fritz wishes he had had more opportunities to engage in sexual activities but precludes the possibility of this now because of feeling old and experiencing his non-erect penis as small. This could be an example of how the materiality of the ageing body, the perception of the actual anatomical body, shapes and influences the morphology; how the body is lived, experienced and made culturally intelligible. The feeling of the small and flaccid penis shapes a male sexual morphology in relation to touch rather than intercourse. The experience of feeling old is something I will come back to in the forthcoming chapters, since this experience is so clearly connected to feeling unattractive and less assertive and able. In the case of Fritz, the feeling of being old is obviously connected to his flaccid penis.

160. G: (skratt) Ja jag har hår på bröstet (skratt) åhå å så har jag en liten snopp å så det det om en kan räkna det som manlighet (mhm) ett litet skinn (.) Det är inte mycket att komma med ska xxxx det är annat.

161. NB: It is not specified what “The woman's natural” that Fritz writes about here refers to, but from the diary's context it seemingly refers to the female sexual body, including her genitalia. Tänker tillbaka som alla äldre gör alltid. Om jag hade ägnat mig åt kvinnans naturliga mera. Nu är det försent, med den här lilla pissesnoppen lilla.

How then may one understand Fritz's narratives of wishing to wash a woman's back and experiencing himself as small? I suggest that one way to turn here is to the theorization of touch in Luce Irigaray's (1980) "When our lips speak together". As the title reveals, Irigaray approaches touch through the metaphor of the lips. It is the non-separability of the lips that interests Irigaray. Where the hands (as discussed by phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty) are about one hand touching the other, the lips are involved in mutual reciprocal touch. The touching proposed by lips is thus in Irigaray an escape from a sexual ontology in which difference always involves hierarchy, of the one rising above the other.¹⁶² Touch instead figures as that which bridges and overcomes the separateness of bodies. Irigaray writes:

There is no above/below, back/front, right side/wrong side, top/bottom in isolation, separate, out of touch. Our "all" intermingles (Irigaray 1980, 75).

In my interpretation, touch is then a form of communication and coming together which involves nobody being conquered or "destroyed" in the sexual encounter; there is no need for one to become subject to the other (Waldby 1995). Evidently touch may not ultimately imply symmetry, the most evident example being sexual harassment where touch is unwanted. Twigg (2000, 48) argues that touch is involved in power and status, "with the more powerful touching the less powerful". And when Fritz writes about the washing of a woman's back it is seemingly he who touches her, rather than him being touched. I argue, nevertheless, that Fritz's recurring narratives of his non-erect penis, together with the narratives on longing for touch, may be interpreted and understood as a longing for and a way of imagining another sexual morphology; which does not require a phallic body. If touch in Irigaray is understood as a boundary work, which destabilises the borders of self and other, the turn to intimacy and to touch as a sexual/non-sexual practice opens up to a sexual subjectivity which could be understood as essentially antithetical to the independent and autonomous modernist subject. This, the way in which touch can be understood as a way of overcoming the separateness of self and other, is also relevant in the narrative of Lennart, which I will discuss next.

For Lennart, intimacy and touch are particularly important in his diary narrative on his wife's illness. Lennart writes his diary after I have interviewed

162. Sexual as in sexual ontology is here, following Irigaray, referring to the sexually differentiated body, not to be confused with how I use sexual to denote the erotic and sexuality.

him, but already then he emphasizes intimacy and the need for touch, and argues that sexuality is essentially about touch.

Lennart: To me it [sexuality] means a lot of bodily intimacy and warmth.

He goes on in the interview to argue that perhaps the need for touch grows as one gets older. Lennart is interested in literature, and he makes references to literary works to describe and exemplify. When he discusses sexuality he talks about a novel he has read about King David, and how when he becomes old the king feels chilly and wants to sleep in bed together with the queen. But the queen rejects King David, and tells him that he can sleep with a young girl instead, Lennart relates. Lennart says that this scene fascinates him because it depicts how there is more than "just sex to sex". He also talks about the Swedish poet Gustav Fröding and his nurse, and how she used to sleep in his bed as he became old and angst-ridden.

Lennart: And why did she do this? Well it wasn't about intercourse, but this need for bodily warmth, that could be of such great significance.¹⁶³

When Lennart utters these words in the interview he does not yet know what will come and how touch will indeed be crucial to his own narrative later on. Soon after the interview, he and his wife become aware that she has malignant tumours, and this period of acute crisis is narrated in his diary. Touch and the intimacy of bodily contact is evoked in the diary when Lennart writes about coming home from a long day at the hospital having gotten her diagnosis.

*We get home totally exhausted. "Come", Lena says. "Let's hold each other". We undress, naked, and get into bed, come together skin to skin, but tense like two fists clenched hard. The usual relaxation doesn't come.*¹⁶⁴

"Skin to skin", the touching of naked bodies, here becomes a means of consolation, a sort of language of the tactile. This may perhaps not seem like a narration of something sexual. But thinking about what Lennart and others

163. Varför gjorde hon det?, ja det var ju inte eh inte att det förekom samlag å utan det var just det här behovet utav kroppslig värme som kan vara så otroligt viktig, (m).

164. Vi kommer hem totalt utmattade. "Kom" säger Lena. "Vi håller om varandra". Vi klär av oss nakna och kryper ner i sängen, kryper samman hud mot hud, men spända som två hårt knutna nävar. Den vanliga avslappningen kommer inte.

point to in the interviews, that touch can in fact be a part of the sexual, suggests that this narration need not necessarily lie outside the sexual realm. This encounter, of Lennart and his wife lying naked, might not involve arousal in any way. But, following Irigaray, in touch things such as “arousal”, “erection” and “satisfaction” are suspended. Instead, when Lennart and Lena undress naked and come together skin to skin, this reflects the desire not to be alone as one self, not a desire for “sex”. Ahmed & Stacey (2001) point to how the touching of skin is about the coming together of self and other by saying:

Skin opens our bodies to other bodies: through touch, the separation of self and other is undermined in the very intimacy or proximity of the encounter (Ahmed & Stacey 2001, 6).

Evidently it is not only in later life, and the case of old/ill bodies, that touch opens up to an encounter of the self and other. But, similarly to Shildrick's (2009) argument on how disability may deterritorialize and provide new grounds for the sexual, old age and illness may reconfigure the sexual body and orient it towards touch. While all bodies are essentially vulnerable, as boundaries are always “at risk” of being transgressed, the case of the old and/or ill body perhaps more clearly exposes this vulnerability. The illness of his wife makes Lennart almost forget his own body, which means that the body diary is more about her body than his. But at one point his body “dys-appears” as he gets a painful stomach ache (Leder 1990).¹⁶⁵

Feel an aching in my belly. Always had a belly made of steel. Has the tension given me an ulcer? Crawl up against Lena's lower back and the aching goes away. I whisper “I need you”.

The dependency and vulnerability is apparent in this quote and it is also obvious how touch figures as a means of consolation. Consequently, touch both exposes the body to vulnerability and is also a way through which bodies escape the exposure and loneliness of the autonomous self.

Throughout this chapter, I have repeatedly discussed how intimacy and touch may allow for a rethinking of male sexual morphologies, that the ageing body as an open materiality may refigure meanings of both sexuality and

165. The term “dys-appear”, coined by Leder (1990), refers to how the body is invisible to oneself and only surfaces to be experienced when in pain or otherwise disrupted (ageing may be seen as one such disruption). The concept can notably be critiqued from feminist/critical disabilities/post-colonial/critical race perspectives for being based on a white male midlife able body, since for some being unaware of one's embodiment in the world is never fully possible.

masculinity. Although Lennart’s and Fritz’s narratives are different in many senses, I find them to further this argument and point to how a turn to touch may offer radically different ways of understanding sexuality and male sexual morphologies.

To begin with, touch, as it figures both with Fritz in his fantasies and with Lennart in relation to his ill wife, is not about sexuality as a form of conquering or destruction in which binaries of active/passive, subject/object, giver/receiver are reinforced. Instead touch happens, in the words of Irigaray (1980, 75) “all’ over”. Also, touch, as it figures in Lennart’s and Fritz’s diaries, is not primarily an issue of climaxes or peaks through things such as arousal/erection/orgasm. Rather, touch involves an unbounded and non-programmed desire; “it cannot be schematized or mastered. [I]t’s the total movement of our body” (Irigaray 1980, 75). The way in which touch does not involve a peak or climax (and does not, as I noted earlier, follow the scheme of “normal sex” as prescribed by Masters & Johnson, 1966, 1970 and others) can be related to the deleuzian concept of a “plateau”, as something which “is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 24). The deleuzian “plateau” has much in common with and is seemingly parallel to what Irigaray says on satisfaction:

Are we unsatisfied? Yes if that means we are never finished. If our pleasure consists of moving and being moved by each other, endlessly – Always in movement, this openness is neither spent nor sated (1980, 73).

If desire is endless, as in Irigaray (1980) and Deleuze & Guattari (1987), and not defined by lack, there can be no finishing point; touch has no clear beginning and aims for nothing in particular. So when Fritz wants touch he does not seek erection – does not want to “fuck her”, and when Lennart lie naked with his wife Lena it is not for the sake of orgasm. I will return to this argument in Chapter Six when discussing how desire is articulated and understood, to argue that touch and a turn to intimacy may destabilize the boundaries of the sexual and the non-sexual. Sexual desires in later life may then go beyond a wish for intercourse or other genital practices and be much more fluid and unfixed.

I also think that Fritz’s diary narrative is particularly interesting since it does not bind desire to “sexual relationality”, sexuality is not involving sex with another person but is also about fantasies, dreams and memories (Shil-drick 2009, 135). Fritz’s story resonates with much of what has been discussed earlier in this chapter, on how experiences of an ageing body refigure how the body is lived and experienced and how one thinks of sexual practices. But he

differs significantly in how he involves elements of fantasy/memory/dream in his narrative. Whereas a lot of research on sexuality in later life focuses on coupled sexuality, the narrative of Fritz is a reminder that sexuality does not only take place as an activity between people, but that there should also be a focus on people living alone (Gott 2005). Fantasy may be a significant aspect of one's sexual subjectivity, not least when living alone.

Moreover, what I find interesting in the diary narratives of Fritz and Lennart is how they both, albeit in different ways, expose the less nice and potentially dark sides of life, not least later life. If discourses of successful ageing are influential in how sexuality in later life can be thought of, there is a particular sexual subject that is more viable in these discourses. This is an active, rational subject who enjoys ethical sex which is pleasurable and potentially healthy (Calsanti & King 2005, also cf. Rudman 2006). Sexuality is, in other words, part of accomplishing a successful self and the dark sides, including issues of illness, death, pain and loneliness, are as a consequence erased from the picture. Lennard Davis (1995, 5), a prominent scholar within critical studies of disability, argues that in mainstream theory "the body is seen as a site of *jouissance*, a native ground of pleasure, the scene of excess that defies reason" and that the disabled body, seen as mutilated, disfigured and broken, is thus always turned away from. This argument is not only relevant to the disabled body, however, but can also be applied to the ageing body. Attempts to reverse the negative associations of ageing and to challenge ageism may turn into a celebration of old age and focus on the healthy, able ageing bodies, which may fulfil promises of bodies as "sites of *jouissance*". Not least may the sexual body propose such a promise to discourses of ageing, since being sexually active is in many ways so strongly associated with being a successful subject.

But in focusing only on the positive sides, the negativities that old age and ageing bodies may concern, including illness, pain, death and loneliness, are turned away from. When men speak of becoming better, more mature and considerate lovers they emerge as accomplished and successful subjects. But the diaries of Fritz and Lennart reveal another side of later life, where also the less "successful" and the more painful is brought out. Importantly, affirmative old age, which I have proposed as one way of thinking old age in this chapter, should not be understood as something that only encompasses the apparently "bright sides" of old age and ageing, but as something that also harbours experiences of pain, loneliness, illness and death. In the following chapter, where I will discuss men's worries, disappointments and even feelings of failure when encountering impotence, this should be borne in mind.

What I have attempted in different ways to argue here on touch, but also in the chapter as a whole, is that touch and intimacy may reconfigure male sexual morphology. I concur with Irigaray that touch may be thought of as something that does not require phallic bodies and as such proposes other ways of shaping subjectivities. Moreover, touch may both expose vulnerability and dependency and challenge the autonomous and discrete subject, through the way in which touch undermines the separation of self and other. Touch becomes an escape from the loneliness of independence and autonomy, and a flight towards the togetherness of bodies. Again, it is not simply the case that the body materializes from touch, or that intimacy shapes bodies in specific ways beyond the phallic body. The materiality of the ageing (and ill) body, and how this materiality is lived as morphology, such as Fritz's feeling of being small, orients and turns the body towards intimacy.

Sven Tumba's sex is not the only sex

If, at the end of this chapter, we return to the article on Sven Tumba's recovery from prostate cancer and his fear of impotence, it seems clear that this construction of masculinity and sexuality in relation to old (age) differs in significant ways from how the men in this study approached and made sense of sexuality, masculinity and old age. The article on Sven Tumba reinforces links between masculinity and a specific kind of sex, centred on erection, and constructs old age as irreconcilable with a masculine sexual subjectivity. In contrast, the narratives by the men in my study suggest that discourses on old men's sexuality do not necessarily always require the story of the erect penis. Nor do they suggest that old age is irreconcilable with sex and sexuality.

Old men's ways of "doing 'it' differently" that I have discussed in this chapter may for one thing be understood and analyzed as a (strategic) way to re-signify sexuality in later life as positive. Old age is then used as a resource to emphasize a *different* sexuality when old, one characterized by maturity and consideration, more aware of and attentive to the wishes of their female partners. When men emphasize intimacy and touch as important parts of sexuality in later life, this could then be analyzed as a way of reconciling old age with desirable masculinity. Intimacy and touch are narrated as less egoistic and instrumental sexual practices, and also as involving deeper feelings of love and togetherness. What I have pointed out, however, is that this shaping of a less selfish sexual self in old age may build on ageist binaries, where young men are posited as selfish and inconsiderate. What is claimed to be different may then in some respects be just a *new look for the same old* asymmetries and grids of power.

But men's ways of doing it differently could not only be analyzed as attempts to emerge in a positive light; as bodies age one may simply be required to do things differently. The ageing of bodies makes some practices difficult and sometimes impossible, but this may in turn become a possibility for alternative sexual practices and new orientations to bodies, where bodies may emerge as erotic in different ways than before. Put simply, the ageing body orients men towards intimacy and touch, but intimacy and touch also refigure men's bodies; how they are lived and experienced. What is perhaps most important to this study is how these men's narratives on intimacy and touch propose alternative accounts of male bodies, where a male sexual morphology is not always phallic.

The way intimacy and touch are emphasized in this chapter involves decentring genitality and discovering the whole body, but it also involves a non-teleology; it need not lead to somewhere or to something. As Jakob says, "it could lead to intercourse but it does not have to". These descriptions of sexuality are thus very similar to how feminist theorists Shildrick (2009) and Grosz (1995a) understand desire to be "productive, excessive to the embodied self and unfixed" (Shildrick 2009, 132). Whereas the sexuality of Sven Tumba is fixed to the parameters of erection, masculinity and youth, the men in this study propose sexualities in ways that leap out of these definitions in a very deleuzian way. Importantly, I am not trying to romanticize later life sexualities here or claim old men's bodies to be inherent sites of subversion. Rather, what I have tried to do in this chapter is to explore the possibilities of becoming that ageing may entail.

If Sven Tumba's sexuality, as it takes shape in the article in *Aftonbladet*, is produced within discourses of successful ageing, intimacy and touch are rather sexualities in line with affirmative old age. Turning to intimacy and touch could help men to get erect as they were slower and required more time, but they were also discussed as pleasurable and valuable in their own right. As such, it was not primarily about bringing back the bodies of youth. And, rather than understanding old age as a time of deprivation, old age took shape as a time of increased "freedom"; a time outside reproduction and working life, and being closer to death seemingly shaped its own modalities of sexuality. Also, where the success stories such as that of Sven Tumba are always filled with sunshine, I propose that thinking through affirmative old age is not necessarily only about thinking about the positive experiences, but also about encompassing feelings and experiences of pain, disappointment, loneliness and death.

Now let's look at the photo of Sven Tumba again. There he sits by his shimmering lake, his wife Mona embraces him, and he is happy – he has got

his erection back. But what if we imagine another picture, one where the sky is clouded and Sven never got his potency back. A cloud passing over Sven Tumba's face. Is Mona sticking by his side or has she gone? In the next chapter, it is this picture which will be focused upon; where impotence is experienced as a problem by men, and even as a threat to their masculinity. Central to this discussion is the role of the female partner; men feel concerned and worried because she might not be satisfied. The same men who I discussed as finding new ways, of turning to touch and intimacy, may still express concern about their erectile changes if they feel that they should perform for her.

5

Responsible for the erection?

It's late November 2007 and it's dark outside. I'm still in the office, though it's past office hours. The phone rings. My advertisement has been published today and this will be my first contact with the men whose stories form the material of this study, the participants. The man who is calling says he is 76 years old and living in the southern region of Småland, in Sweden. He is calling me at this late hour because his partner is out of the house. I ask him if he wants to be interviewed or write for me but he says he can't, he is in a hurry. There is something he has to talk to me about before his partner returns.

"I can't get an erection."¹⁶⁶

After his previous wife's death he's incapable, he says. At present he is living with a new woman, seven years younger than himself, and he thought he would continue having sex with her. But he can't. He seems very concerned. His partner says it doesn't matter, but he notices how she finds it dull. The situation has gone so far he has even thought of killing himself. But it's too early to give in at 76, he says. But the situation really affects him.

"I become awkward, she wants a man and I want a woman."¹⁶⁷

In our conversation I ask him about the possibilities of having other kinds of sex, visits to a specialist, his relationship with his partner, if he

166. Jag kan inte få erektion.

167. Jag blir besvärlig. Hon vill ju ha en man och jag vill ju ha en kvinna.

has any sexual desire, and if he can get an erection on his own. He tells me that he has tried everything. I point to how one may pleasure women in many different ways and advise him to see new doctors. Little seems to help, however, he is so disappointed with how things have turned out.

"I hoped it would go on. I want to experience the things I've experienced earlier in life. I am not enough. My partner should have someone who's younger. A real man."¹⁶⁸

He says he knows he is not alone. But still, this is HIS problem.

Overall, I find this a very odd situation. It is obvious that he is calling me because he wants help and advice, which I feel I can't give. (I feel like a feminist counsellor for old men.) The conversation is both counselling and interview. I can't just be quiet and listen when it's so obvious he is looking for answers. I'm feeling rather calm after hanging up, I didn't make any obvious blunders. I just wish I had more time, some things are just so difficult to ask about; how do you ask about feelings of inadequacy, what it means not being a real man? [From research diary 2007-11-27]

In the previous chapter, I started my discussion and analysis of sexuality, masculinity and old age by looking at how old men in various ways narrated negotiations and ways of doing things differently as a result of old age and ageing bodies. In contrast, this chapter will focus on the occasions when erection and the ability to have intercourse are still discussed by the men in this study as being important or even vital. Sometimes there are limits to the possibilities of rethinking male sexual morphology.

I started this chapter with notes from my research diary, based on a phone call with a man I have chosen to call Caesar. I started with the words of Caesar because I think that the way he phrases his impotence in many ways represents a well-known and traditional discourse on masculine sexuality: men need potency to be men at all. Where the previous chapter set out to deconstruct this discourse, and wished to produce other narratives on male sexuality, it is nevertheless the case that, in various ways, several men in this study expressed the importance of erection and being able to have intercourse. Interestingly and importantly, it was not one group of men who were able to negotiate and challenge the importance of the erection and another who still relied on the erection and wished to restore it. Rather, for many a turn to intimacy and touch could often coexist with a wish to still be able to have an erection and coital sex.

168. Jag hade hoppats att detta skulle fortsätta. Jag vill uppleva det som jag upplevt tidigare i livet. (Han talar om sig själv som att han inte räcker till. Säger att sambon nog skulle ha en som var yngre.) En riktig man.

The phone call with Caesar clearly exposes how impotence may be experienced as a full-fledged catastrophe. However, the scene of Caesar calling me from his empty house in the dark Swedish November evening, the anguish and disappointment he expresses, and the embarrassment and shame he feels towards his partner is in many ways unique. The men I interviewed and the diaries I received revealed very little about their possible feelings of anxiety about impotence; instead they pointed to a need for acceptance of their loss of potency, to finding ways of negotiating their current situation, and to the naturalness of declining potency in old age. It may well be the case that the wish to emerge as a successful interviewee prevented the men from evoking narratives on feelings of failure and grief. Where Caesar's narrative emerges spontaneously, other stories on impotence in this chapter are more "coaxed" by me asking questions about whether they have experienced difficulties in getting an erection (Plummer 1995).

Although Caesar's narrative emerged in a slightly different context than the other narratives I discuss in this chapter, it captures several important issues that were evoked by other men in this study: the sense of needing an erection to satisfy a female partner and the worry about her disappointment, as well as his own feelings of disappointment.

To begin with, I will discuss how potency may still be experienced as important to masculinity through the narrative of Axel and the above phone call with Caesar. In their narratives, youth comes to represent sexual stamina. From there I will discuss how the men in my study strongly emphasized the importance of giving her an orgasm and how erectile changes were conceptualized as a potential threat to his ability to satisfy her. These men evoke a discourse of a disappointed partner who might blame and reproach him if he is impotent, and I discuss what the consequences of this idea may be for both men and women. Much of this chapter's discussion concerns the way in which men take up a position as the active doers in sexual relations with women, and as such reinforce a gendered binary of activity and passivity. At the end of the chapter, however, I discuss a discourse in which women could (and should) take the initiative to arouse him and cure his impotence, and here, in contrast, the activity of women is valued and underlined.

As I have asserted earlier, in this study I wish to encompass complexity, to account for the possibilities of rethinking masculinity, sexuality and old age but also to point out the relative continuity and stability of masculinity and the, the limits for rethinking male sexual morphology. In doing so I also want to turn briefly to questions of power in heterosexual relations in later life. Although old men could in some ways be seen as "victims" of a coital imperative and to be suffering from impotence because masculin-

ity is closely tied to having an erection, I claim that the situation might be more complex than that. Thus, at the end of this chapter I will discuss what the consequences of old men's sexual subjectivities, including experiences of impotence, might be for women and gender relations.

“A man should have potency”

When Caesar exclaims over the phone “She wants a man and I want a woman”, he clearly captures the very mundane and everyday makings of gender and sexuality. To Caesar, an erection is clearly expressed as being essential to what it means to be a man. In order to perform an intelligible gendered and sexual self, he has to “have a woman”, to be able to engage in heterosexual coital sex. Central to Butler's (1993) influential theory on the heterosexual matrix is the entwinement and mutual construction of gender and sexuality, and Caesar's words are an elegant expression of the heterosexual matrix in terms of everyday life. While Butler's heterosexual matrix does not discuss age and ageing, these issues clearly have implications for the shaping of masculinity and heterosexuality. When Caesar expresses the belief that he is “not enough”, he argues that his partner should have someone younger, and equates a younger man with a real man. The younger man as a more real man, due to his assumed ability to have an erection, contrasts clearly with what I discussed in the previous chapter, where my participants expressed the way in which they saw themselves as better and more considerate lovers than (when they were) younger men.

Axel, 83, is one of the men in my study who points to the links between masculinity and potency. Axel has gone through surgery for prostate cancer which has made him impotent, and this bothers him since, “after all, it is the actual insertion [of the penis into the vagina, i.e. intercourse] which is the ‘frosting on the cake’”, he says.¹⁶⁹ He also argues that it would be a loss of face if people became aware that he was impotent.

Axel: If I'd stop being with her that I'm seeing now, whom I've been seeing for eleven years, and she'd tell [people] that I couldn't get a hard-on, that would be absolutely terrible for me. A man should have potency. Of course those who are younger are generally saying old geezers and old crones shouldn't do those kinds of things.¹⁷⁰

169. För att hur det e så e det ju införandet som grädden i moset.

170. AX: Det är väl de (.)om man nu till exempel med den här som jag träffar nu det är elva år sen (ja) om vi skulle sluta sällskapa å hon säger att jag inte får fjäder (.) det vore det jävligaste för mig (.) en karl ska ha potens, yngre säger ju annars att det ska inte gamla gubbar å kärringar hålla på med.

The way in which Axel shifts from the importance of potency for men to ideas of asexual old age seems to be done as a way of contravening the idea of asexual (and genderless) old age (cf. Jones 2003). Potency is important for him as a man, Axel claims, even now that he is old. While he has previously discussed how it is possible to fondle each other, to take showers together and have a pleasurable time even without an erection, Axel now conveys a contradictory view on sex and the need for an erection. This is visible when he discusses sex and the famous Swedish actress Britt Ekland.

Axel: When I see a beautiful woman, you're thinking sometimes "it'd be nice to sleep with her". But when I saw Britt Ekland on that TV show I was thinking "God knows If I could handle her" (laughs). (Linn: Like how?) Well, she must have had a lot of sex, don't you think?

Linn: Cause she's famous?

Axel: No, not because she's famous but because she's been around those kinds of people. I'm imagining that, that's my guess. Of course things aren't always great for them either...

Linn: To handle?

Axel: Well, I don't think I could handle her, not even when I was younger.

Linn: Tell me more, what are you thinking of then? Not being able to handle her –

Axel: Well, it all depends on what kind of relationships they've had with other men. Some men are better than others in bed. But I'm pleased if – not now I wouldn't say – but before, if my missus was pleased at least twice before I came.¹⁷¹

171. AX: Nej (nej) när jag ser en vacker kvinna så (.) ja man tänker ibland, henne skulle det va fint å ligga me, men när jag såg Britt Ekland i det här slottstornet, (ja programmet ja) så tänkte jag henne vette fan om man klarar av (skrattar) (hurå?) Ja hon måste ju ha (.) haft mycket sex, tror du inte det själv?

L: Jo för att hon är känd tänker du?

AX: Nej inte för att hon är känd, hon har levat bland såna som (.) ja jag inbillar mig det, det är min gissning (ja) Det klart det blir väl inte alltid så lyckat för dom heller (.)

L: Klarar av.

AX: Ja jag tror inte jag skulle klara av henne, inte ens när jag var yngre (mhm).

L: Berätta mer vad tänker du då? Att inte klara av henne?

AX: Ja det beror ju aldels på vad dom har haft för relationer med andra karlar (.) Vissa karlar är ju bättre än andra i sängen (.) men jag är nöjd om, nu ska jag väl inte säga men förut, om frugan å ja då att hon hade det skönt minst två gånger innan jag kom (ja).

There is a duality to this extract, where being able to “handle” a woman like Britt Ekland requires something extra, whereas for him personally it was enough if he managed to pleasure his partner twice (here seemingly referring to orgasm). At first I understand Axel to be talking about sexual experience, and how sexually experienced the men around Britt Ekland must be. But when I ask him what he means by being a better lover, he answers that it has got to do with one’s sexual organ.

Axel: Well, I must say, some are big and thick.

Linn: And you’re thinking that makes them better in bed?

Axel: Yes exactly, [they] might have bigger [sexual] organs (laughs). But they’re always talking about how size *doesn’t matter*, but it does.

Linn: Matters for what, you mean?

Axel: Well, to have perfect intercourse, but they said, if it was on TV or in the newspaper, that it was the hardness that was important, someone said, and that is important.

Linn: A lot of men can’t be as hard as before, for example. How do you think that affects their sex life, or your own and others you know?

Axel: It’s so different, like for me, I can give the partner an orgasm anyway, and that’s what matters.¹⁷²

The contradictory understanding of the significance of the erection that Axel brings out is something that others in this study also give voice to. Whereas for Caesar there seems to be no option other than having an erection in order to be a man and to satisfy his partner, Axel both relies on the idea of a hard penis as necessary for optimum sex and acknowledges other ways of pleasur-

172. L: När du säger vissa karlar är bättre än andra vad är det som liksom, vad är man bra på då tänker du?

AX: Ja, måste säga en del är stora å kraftiga.

L: Det gör dom bättre i sängen tänker du?

AX: Ja precis, kanske har större organ å (skrattar) men dom snackar ju alltid om att storleken har ingen betydelse, (ja) men det har den (..)

L: Den har betydelse för vadå tänker du?

AX: Jo för att genomföra ett perfekt samlag (.) men så stod det i (.) det va om det va på teve eller om det va Dagens Nyheter, det var hårdheten sa en som va viktigare, å den e viktig (ja).

L: Då när många män inte kan bli lika hårda längre till exempel, hur tror du det påverkar deras sexliv då, eller ditt eget å alla andra du känner?

AX: Det är ju så olika på varje, som i mitt fall, jag kan få fram orgasm ändå på motparten, å det är viktigast.

ing his female partner. Britt Ekland and the men that she has been involved with notably represent “the rich and famous”, whose lifestyle also supposedly involves sexual debauchery. The entourage of Britt Ekland’s lovers seems, however, to be a cultural fantasy that, just as Connell (1995) has noted on hegemonic masculinity, men associate with but that few ever embody. The way in which, in the end, Axel points to how he has been able to satisfy his partner even though he is not one of Britt Ekland’s men, suggests that it is possible for him to distance himself, at least in part, from this masculine ideal. Like Caesar, Axel links youth with sexual stamina by saying: “I don’t think I could have handled her, not even when younger”. But Axel also points out that not even youth would have made it possible for him to embody that sexual stallion ready to handle Britt Ekland.

In both Caesar’s and Axel’s narratives on impotence, having an erection becomes significant and is emphasized in relation to the female partner, what pleasures her and how she will react if he cannot have an erection. Stressing the female partner links back to my discussion in the previous chapter, on how men narrated themselves as being more considerate and attentive to the sexual pleasures of their female partners. When men narrate worries and concerns about their erectile changes and the onset of impotence, this is also largely linked to their concern for her sexual satisfaction.

A hard-on for her?

When discussing the emphasis on becoming more mature, and as such more considerate and sexually unselfish, as an old man, the importance of sexual practices other than intercourse seemed important. Learning to become a better lover also involved extending one’s repertoire from an intercourse-only focus. This opened up a space for men to be sexually active and desirable even when experiencing erectile changes in later life. As such, a “coital imperative” was negotiated and to some extent challenged, and this finding can be compared to results from other studies on later life sexuality (Hurd 2006, Gott & Hinchcliff 2003a, Oliffe 2005, Wentzell & Salmerón 2009). What still remained strong in several old men’s narratives, however, was an “orgasmic imperative”, meaning that orgasm was still understood as an important and integral part of what sexuality and sexual activity was about (Potts 2000). Notably, in this study the imperative was not formulated as the pursuit of his orgasm, on the contrary it was her orgasm that was stressed by several men in this study.

I meet with Frank, 71, in the local library, and when we start discussing sex and sexuality in the interview he emphasizes how her orgasm is important to him.

Frank: It's important to be tender with your woman. And what I find very important – I think it's more important really, I think it's more important that she gets an orgasm than me.¹⁷³

This kind of assertion can be seen as a way of pointing to himself as “woman friendly” in relation to me as a gender scholar and woman, and in relation to Swedish discourses on gender equality more generally. Frank is one of the interviewees I feel most affinity for and he explicitly associates himself with gender equality and claims to be a feminist. However, when I ask him why he finds her orgasm important he says that he “want[s] to be an accomplished lover, a desirable lover”.¹⁷⁴ Wanting to be an accomplished and desirable lover who satisfies her does not necessarily only refer to one's wish to be equal and reciprocal, rather when men in this study discuss her orgasm as what is most important this builds into a traditional “key plot” in the shaping of male sexuality; that a man should be able to “knock the socks off” his female partner (Plummer 2005, 185). Another example of this perspective is Axel, who as a result of his impotence also has problems in having an orgasm/ejaculating.¹⁷⁵ But he entirely deemphasizes the importance of his own orgasm and says he has no need for “those feelings”.

Axel: The most important thing [is] that she gets it, cause to see her eyes, or any woman's eyes, when they are enjoying it the most [...] That's enough.¹⁷⁶

The way in which Axel speaks about giving a woman an orgasm, and to see her eyes while doing so, shapes him as an active agent both in the sense that he is the doer and because he is simultaneously an onlooker. In turn, this also posits the woman as a passive receiver of his active attempts to pleasure her, as well as an object of his gaze. When men in this study discussed the importance of her orgasm, they tended to reinforce a very pervasive gendered binary of activity/passivity (Waldby et al. 1991). Men, in other words, emerge as the “doers” of women's orgasms.

173. Det är viktigt att vara, vara öm med sin kvinna (mm) och vad jag tycker är väldigt viktigt det tycker jag är viktigare faktiskt, jag tycker att det är viktigare att hon får orgasm än jag själv.

174. Jag vill vara en duktig kärlekspartner, en ätråvärd kärlekspartner.

175. Men's orgasms are not necessarily dependent on the ejaculation, and ejaculation may occur without an orgasm. This implies that orgasm and ejaculation cannot be completed conflated, although in many cases they do occur simultaneously. Axel here uses the word ejaculation but it is likely that this also denotes orgasm.

176. Men huvudsaken att hon får det för att se hennes ögon, eller vilken kvinnas ögon som helst, när dom har det skönast (mm, det är liksom tillräckligt?) Det är tillräckligt.

Although men like Axel and Frank speak about the possibilities of having satisfying sex without intercourse and how they can give their female partners orgasms anyway, the need to perform, to be active, has consequences when encountering erectile changes and impotence. Frank talks about the impotence he has encountered in later years and how he has never really been able to overcome them. He says that his wife thinks it is a psychological thing. When I ask him why he is so worried about not being able to keep his erection he replies:

Frank: Well, cause my wife thinks it's nice when I come inside her, and then I can't get inside her [...] but I'm fondling her anyway.¹⁷⁷

When talking about why impotence troubles him, what worries him is accordingly how she might not be satisfied without him coming inside her.¹⁷⁸ He should perform in order to pleasure her and in this case it seems that the ultimate performance is being able to penetrate her. Also, when Nore, 76, speaks about the erectile changes he encountered after his prostate cancer, he narrates this as a very distressing circumstance and links it to her reaction.

Nore: Well it's difficult for me, but not for my wife

Linn: How did you feel then, when you couldn't get a hard-on?

Nore: Well I thought it was rubbish [...] I thought it was so difficult for me that I didn't believe her when she said it doesn't matter, take it easy (laughs). No, it was tough.¹⁷⁹

Impotence is here negatively discussed, as rubbish and a difficulty, but the way Nore says, "I didn't believe her when she said it doesn't matter" suggests that what is "tough" is not his own loss of pleasure from not being able to have intercourse. Instead he articulates his discontent around how she might feel about it, that she, in contrast to what she says, might still be dissatisfied.

177. F: (..) Jo därför att min fru tycker att det är skönt när jag kommer i henne och det, då kommer jag ju inte in i henne, och då blir det ju liksom, MEN jag får ju, jag smeker ju henne ialla fall så för henne är det.

178. This has a double meaning, it could mean both to penetrate her but also to ejaculate inside her.

179. N: Ja det är jobbigt för mig, men inte för min fru.

L: Hur kände du då inför att inte kunna få stånd?

N: (..) Ja det var (..) det var värdeöst tyckte jag (..) det tyckte jag men nu (..) men får vi då, jag tyckte det var så jobbigt så jag trodde inte henne när hon sa att det spelar inte så stor roll, (..) ta det lugnt (skratt) och ehm (..) nå det var jobbigt tyckte jag.

When Frank's wife remarks that she thinks it is a psychological issue and Nore's wife says "take it easy", they seemingly do this out of an awareness that their husbands' impotence may be about performance anxieties. Nore's wife in particular responds to this by trying to alleviate his worries. On the other hand, if one does not have a steady partner, a female partner's response to his impotence is more unknown, and it might feel even more important to perform in certain situations. When I interview Edvard, 69, who is divorced and living on his own, I ask about how it would be to meet somebody new and he discusses whether he would be able to "perform".

Edvard: Of course you miss it [intercourse], right. But I think, I don't know how it would work, I don't know if I'd dare [...] There's a longing still and I think there's a physical possibility too. There's probably no doubt about it, 'cause you notice when you wake up. But, eh, if it was to become reality, then it'd be pretty difficult I think – I mean it would be *pretty awkward*.

Linn: What is it that would be difficult and awkward?

Edvard: Well, if you were about to go as far as having sex and that it works, it's mental. Mentally it's really difficult, you'd have to be mentally prepared for it and I think there'd be a fear [...] And that fear would put you in a position where it all became a total flop (laughs).¹⁸⁰

Edvard points to the fact that it is not desire or physical ability that is lacking in his case but rather concern about whether he could handle it psychologically, and the fear that it might turn into a disaster if he could not. In stark contrast to how touch was discussed in the previous chapter as not leading anywhere in particular, the sexual activity that Edvard discusses above is an activity that needs to result in something, notably an erection, or it will be experienced as a failure or a "flop".

180. Det klart att man saknar den va, (mm) men jag tror att jag vet inte hur det skulle fungera, jag vet inte om jag skulle tordas (skratt) [...] det finns ju en längtan fortfarande och jag tror det finns en fysisk möjlighet också det är nog ingen tvekan om det, för det märker man ju när man vaknar då va, men eh (.) men om det skulle bli verklighet, då skulle det nog bli ganska svårt tror jag då (.) jag menar det skulle ju vara rätt jobbigt (utdragen intonation).

L: Vad är det som du tycker skulle vara svårt och jobbigt?

E: Ja men om man nu då skulle gå så långt att man (..) jag skulle ha sex och så det fungerar, det är ju mentalt det är ju jättesvårt man måste ju, mentalt laddad för det va det är, det det är, jag tror det skulle finnas en rädsla, för det det tror jag, (..) och den rädslan skulle i sin tur försätta en i en situation så det blev pannkaka alltihopa (skratt).

One man who has experienced this kind of “flop” is Sven-Bertil, 68, whom I interviewed over the phone. Like Edvard, Sven-Bertil is single and he describes himself as a sexually inexperienced person. That impotence can be a sensitive issue and a very distressing experience is noticeable in the interview with him. There were several difficulties involved in this interview. I found it difficult to interview about personal issues over the phone, where I could not see and interpret the interviewee’s reactions to my questions, and also problematic for ethical reasons, since I could not ensure the wellbeing of the interviewee. Additionally, Sven-Bertil was not an extroverted or eloquent man, he rarely developed his thoughts and feelings much. Still, I somehow got the impression that sexuality was one of the reasons that he, like Caesar, had contacted me in the first place. After chatting for some time about various bodily issues on the crackling and whining phone line, he eventually brought up sexual issues of his own accord. When I asked if he had experienced any changes in his body as he had aged he said that “the sexual” disappears a bit when you get older. But he had a hard time expressing what “the sexual” issues that he was experiencing were.

Linn: The sexual, what is it that you’re thinking of, for example?

Sven-Bertil: Well, it could be because of the diabetes maybe, yes I think so.

Linn: But what is it you’re thinking of, is it the ability to get an erection?

Sven-Bertil: Yeah, yeah that as well, I noticed it a couple of years ago, that was before I knew I had diabetes. There was a failure. [And] then you thought it was peculiar.

Linn: What was it – how did you notice this then?

Sven-Bertil: Because it didn’t happen what should happen, you noticed because you couldn’t satisfy the partner. And that was surprising for both her and me.¹⁸¹

181. L: Det sexuella vad är det du tänker på då till exempel?

SB: Jo men det kan väl vara för att man har diabetesen kanske, ja jag tror det.

L: Men vad är det du tänker på är det förmågan att kunna få erektion?

SB: Jo jo det det med ja, det märkte för ett par år sen, det var innan jag visste jag hade diabetes, det blev ett misslyckande sen, tänkte man det var lustigt.

L: Vad var det, hur var det du märkte det då?

SB: Att det inte gick som det skulle, (ja) det märktes ju att man inte kunde tillfredsställa partnern (ja) och det var ju snopet för både hon och mig.

Sven-Bertil narrates his loss of erection in a sexual situation as a failure, and describes it as not being able to satisfy his female partner. He uses the Swedish word *snopet*, which could mean surprising but there is also a strand of disappointment connected with the word, and disappointment is a term that he comes back to later in the interview. In Sven-Bertil's narrative, having an erection is conflated with the ability to satisfy a partner and the disruption of the erection thus becomes problematic for him in the sense that he cannot give her what (he believes) she wants. After this occasion when he couldn't get an erection, he and the woman he was seeing broke up, and Sven-Bertil says, "I think she was a bit disappointed".¹⁸²

Although a coital imperative may in some respects be negotiated and de-centred in the narratives of the old men in this study, the orgasmic imperative – the wish (and obligation) to satisfy her – seems to reinstate the significance of having an erection. Although these men speak about having learned that women are perhaps more sexually satisfied through fondling and other non-coital sexual activities, which I discussed in the previous chapter, the idea that women still need intercourse to be sexually satisfied seems to remain. In this sense, a coital imperative is reflected in the way in which sex is understood as including practices other than intercourse, but that intercourse is still understood as a vital part of what sex is (cf. McPhillips et al. 2001).

As I discussed in my chapter on theory, the dominant male sexual morphology as a phallic body prioritizes the erect penis beyond other body parts and pleasures, and this has consequences for how men may understand and experience sexuality and sexual activities. When the men in this study understand the erection as being necessary to satisfy a woman sexually, a phallic body seems, in these cases, to constitute a limit to the rethinking of the male sexual body.

What I refer to in this thesis as a phallic body or a phallic sexual morphology can be compared to what Oliffe (2005, 2257) discusses as a "phallocentric model of sex". In his study on men with prostate cancer and their experiences of impotence, Oliffe argues that men's investments in a phallocentric model of sex make them take a "leap of logic" from the fact that they cannot have penetrative sex to the idea that other aspects of sexuality, such as "libido", "emotions" and "intimacy", would also disappear with the erection (Oliffe 2005, 2257). Drawing on Connell (1983), Oliffe argues that a "phallocentric model of sex separates men from their sexuality" and that this was visible in his study (Oliffe 2005, 2257). When men in my study return to the need for an erection to satisfy her, despite the fact that they have experienced her (and

182. Jag tror hon blev lite besviken.

him) being satisfied through non-coital sexual activities, a similar separation seems to be at stake. Phallocentrism overshadows men's own experiences of pleasurable sex outside the coital.

Moreover, the fact that the men who were single (widowed, divorced or other) seemed to be more concerned with their impotence and how this might affect possible future relationships, could suggest that men have different investments in a phallic model of sex, depending on things like relationship status, sexual experience etcetera. For example, the two single men, Sven-Bertil, 68, and Ingvar, 73, point to their lack of experience, and seem unacquainted with forms of sex other than the coital. Sven-Bertil says that his ex-partner was both younger than him and had several children, and this somehow indicated that she might have a greater need for sex and also was more sexually experienced than him. Thus, when he noticed that he could not get an erection, he felt that he could not live up to her expectations. Men with long-term partners, on the other hand, may have the security of a relationship, meaning greater sexual confidence, but also experiences of sexual activities other than intercourse. Frank for example, immediately after having said that he cannot penetrate his wife, underlines that he fondles her. And Axel, who doubts that he could handle Britt Ekland, points to how he may nevertheless pleasure his partner. From the fact of being in a relationship, men may perhaps obtain an assurance of their abilities to satisfy their partners without erections. Further studies and comparisons between single and coupled men are needed to explore this in more depth.

“I think she was a bit disappointed”

In my discussion so far on links between masculinity and erection, men's concerns about giving women orgasms and worries that their impotence might mean less sexual satisfaction for the partner, there is one idea that recurs with several men; the idea of a disappointed partner. I will discuss and explore this idea next, since I find it to reflect understandings of male and female sexualities, gender relations and men's and women's bodies. By contrasting the idea of the disappointed woman with existing qualitative research on old women's experiences of later life sexuality, I will argue that there might be a great discrepancy between what men believe women want and women's own experiences. Men's belief that women will be disappointed from not having intercourse tends to overlook the materialities of women's ageing bodies.

As I mentioned earlier, it was Sven-Bertil, whom I interviewed over the phone, who explicitly raised the possible disappointment of a partner: “I

think she was a bit disappointed”.¹⁸³ But worry about her disappointment is also visible when other men speak of their impotence. Caesar, who calls me up, expresses how “she says it does not matter, but I notice how she finds it dull”. That Sven-Bertil *assumes* rather than *knows* that his partner was disappointed, and that Caesar claims to *notice* that she finds it “dull”, despite the fact that his partner says it does not matter, seems, however, symptomatic of the lack or failure of communication. The narrated experiences of impotence are seemingly very much centred on the imaginary wishes of a partner. Her voice and disappointment are seldom raised as a matter of fact, instead it is what the men believe that their female partners think about them not being able to have intercourse that they keep coming back to. In some cases, like Nore, 76, who says, “well it’s difficult for me, but not for my wife”, the wives actually explicitly voice the opinion that it is not such a big deal. But this is something the men have a hard time believing. Consequently, they present a very contradictory picture when they say, on the one hand, that she is not bothered, but on the other hand, that he worries that she might be disappointed if/when he cannot get an erection.

The only occasion when a narrative is evoked of a woman who *actually* expresses dissatisfaction and frustration with her partner’s impotence is when Yngve talks about a friend of his. Yngve himself became impotent shortly after he broke up with his latest partner, one of the three “great loves of his life”, as he says. He does not grieve his lack of potency, however, but cherishes the happy life he has led and the love he has experienced. But while love has been the most important thing for Yngve, this is not the case for everyone, he argues. For some, sex is so important that people break up because of it.

Yngve: Well, for me it [being impotent] has never really been a problem. But I’ve understood that it has been for others, who’ve become impotent *early* and their wives haven’t liked it. I can tell you about a woman I know, she asked me one day if I’m at home if she can come see me. “Sure”, I said, “how nice”. “Well you see”, she said, “I’ve left my husband.” “Well”, I said, “it’s none of my business, you’re welcome anyway.” And she’s sitting where you’re sitting right now and we’re starting to talk about why she left him. And the reason was he refused to buy Viagra. “But, Oh My God,” I said, “are you divorcing because of this?” “Well, he’s impotent.” “But, Lord, do you have to divorce because of that? You could just cruise with the ferry to Finland¹⁸⁴ and there are

183. Jag tror hon blev lite besviken.

184. Ferries to Finland here refer to cruise ships where people go for entertainment, dancing, parties and shopping on the Baltic sea.

loads of men [on board] you could go to bed with.” But she was so obsessed with sex, right? And I think this whole thing sounds really crazy.¹⁸⁵

Yngve uses this narrative to distance himself from the sex-obsessed culture he feels we are living in, a culture that de-values love. But I would argue that this narrative also partakes in shaping a discourse of a frustrated and disappointed partner who reproaches and might even goes as far as leaving her husband when he cannot get an erection. Even though Yngve distances himself from this discourse, “this whole thing sounds really crazy”, and posits it as illegitimate and non-desirable, the discourse is nevertheless invoked, brought into existence, by him telling it. This discourse in turn functions to shape men's experiences and understandings of becoming impotent, as being a matter that their partner could possibly blame them for. Frank, 71, is one who brings up blame by saying:

Frank: Well, but my wife, she doesn't blame me for this, she doesn't think it's that important really.

Linn: So it's more important for you than for her, you'd say?

Frank: [sighs] Well, I've never asked her about – but she thinks it's nice when I enter her and when I come in her.¹⁸⁶

When Frank discusses blame here, however, it is by saying that she does *not* blame him and again, like several of the examples I discussed above, the wife

185. Mig har det inte varit några problem med alls, ehh men jag har ju förstått det på andra som tidigt har blivit impotenta och fruarna inte har tyckt om det till exempel (.). Jag kan tala om en dam som jag känner igen se, jag har haft mycket kontakt så där, så frågar dom en dag om jag är hemma då och då, ja det är jag, får jag komma å hälsa på säger hon, javisst sa jag vad roligt (.). Ja du förstår sa hon, jag har gått ifrån min man, (mhm) jaha sa jag (.). Det angår inte mig varför men du är välkommen i alla fall, och hon kommer hit och hon sitter där hon sitter nu, och då så kom vi in på tal om varför hon hade gått ifrån honom då, och då var det det, han vägrar att köpa Viagra, nämen herregud sa jag skiljs ni för en sån sak, ja han är ju impotent, har blivit, å det skiljs ni för säger jag, va jamen herrgud det behöver ni väl inte skiljas för du kan väl åka med Finlandsfärjan och det finns massor med karlar att gå i säng med (L skratt) Vad som helst men hon var så sexfixerad va att, å det där tycker jag låter så vansinnigt (mm).

186. F: Ja men min fru hon hon (..) anklagar mig ingenting för det här, hon tycker inte det är så viktigt i och för sig va så att (..)

L: Så det är viktigare för dig än vad det är för henne skulle du säga?

F: (Suck) Ja det har jag ju aldrig frågat henne om men, hon tycker det är skönt när jag kommer in i henne och skönt när det går för mig i henne.

seems to claim that it is not important. Ingvar, 73, speaks about his partner's (non)-reaction to his impotence in a similar way.

Ingvar: But, *oddly enough*, she has never said that you're not good enough or that kind of thing, but she has always been satisfied, right...¹⁸⁷

Ingvar's way of phrasing it as a peculiar thing that his wife has not said anything about his impotence reflects an understanding that the expected reaction of a woman would be to be disappointed with a man's impotence, and that she should find him inadequate. Yet, what he, like Frank, points to is that his wife did not blame or reproach him. Interestingly, that she "has not said", and in the case of Frank, that he "has never asked", again reflect a striking silence between the partners in the couple. And Frank and Ingvar are not the only examples of men evading asking their partners or talking about her feelings about their impotence. Sven-Bertil, whose relationship with a woman ended because of her alleged "disappointment", expresses the fact that he found it too difficult to bring it up, "that's challenging".¹⁸⁸ It is hardly surprising that men find it difficult to talk to their partners about impotence because it may mean being confronted with her disappointment and having to reveal his vulnerability and loss of face. What is interesting, however, is the way in which men assume that what women really want is intercourse, even when they say they are not bothered by his impotence, and the fact that she has not blamed or reproached him for this is noted. The discourse of the disappointed and frustrated partner that is evoked in Yngve's narrative of his friend, is apparently lingering with men to the extent that women's silences are taken to be a sign of disappointment. And even when she says that she is not bothered, he worries that she might still be.

The idea that women are disappointed with and might blame their partners points to an almost contractual aspect of sexuality (cf. Pateman 1988). The contract of heterosexual practice then grants women rights to sexual pleasure (through intercourse) and posits men as *sexual breadwinners*, responsible for bringing home sexual satisfaction to her. Instead of sexuality and sexual desire being a "directionless mobilization of excitations" (Grosz 1995a, 200), it is here much more goal-oriented. The aim is to produce an orgasm and/or sexual satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction becomes an object of exchange between the partners. And, as I discussed earlier, it is the idea of

187. Men märkligt nog så har hon aldrig sagt att du inte duger eller nåt sånt där utan alltid vart nöjd va, å hon va (...)

188. Det tar emot.

an active man, ultimately signified by his erection, that is important in this exchange.

There is apparently a very contradictory and complex picture of men and women's sexualities emerging in this study. In the previous chapter, I discussed how men claimed to have learned about sexuality throughout life, not least what women enjoy sexually, and as a result had become orientated towards non-coital practices. In this chapter, I point to how men may still feel concerned about having an erection – for her sake. But, as I have argued above, men seem to assume rather than actually know what women want. In the existing qualitative research studying heterosexual women's attitudes, experiences and understandings of later life sexuality, disappointment and/or frustration with the partner's impotence was not a topic. For example, the 24 Canadian women in Hurd's (2006) study, aged between 50 and 90, were arguing that intercourse was of less importance and not a priority in later life. Women emphasized "companionship, closeness, and emotional warmth" over intercourse (Hurd 2006, 136), something which very much echoes what the men in my study voiced. Moreover, studies by Loe (2004) and Potts et al. (2003) discussing the social impact of Viagra on older women's sexual experiences suggest that a maintained erection for old men through Viagra may not necessarily benefit women. Potts et al. (2003) argue that the women in their study did not necessarily wish to have an increased frequency of sexual intercourse, but if the male partner had taken Viagra some women felt pressured to "put up with sex" in order to preserve men's masculinity and self confidence (Potts et al. 2003, 705). Qualitative research does not suggest that old(er) women overall were uninterested in coital sex. For some, intercourse may even be experienced as vital, optimizing pleasure and satisfaction (Vares et al. 2007). But the fact that intercourse was perceived as a pleasurable and important part of sexual activities, in later life as well, did not imply that women generally experienced men's impotence in terms of disappointment or frustration.

In the previous chapter, I discussed ageing bodies as open materialities, whose agency and unruliness closed down and opened up different routes and possibilities for sexual practices, excitements and pleasures. When, in this chapter, men discuss intercourse as a means of sexual satisfaction for her, however, the specificity of the ageing, post-menopausal female body is not really taken into account. This is remarkable since most of these men lived with women who were around their own age, and post-menopausal. Vaginal dryness is a well-documented condition among post-menopausal women, which may lead to discomfort or even pain from intercourse (Potts et al. 2003, Lindau et al. 2007). Some men expressed awareness that their partners

experienced vaginal dryness and sensitivity, but overall they did not challenge the assumption that intercourse was always enjoyable for women.

I would argue that the maintenance of a coital imperative, and the omission of the specificities of ageing bodies in turn, point to an ageist mid-life body norm which impacts on men's understandings and experiences of later life sexuality. This contrasts with what I argued in the previous chapter about how men's narratives on later life sexuality can be discussed in terms of affirmative old age, where the differences and specificities of ageing bodies are valued and understood as possibilities. The unwillingness of some men to accept and believe a female partner who says it does not matter and who is not bothered about his impotence seems to be based on an understanding that bodies and subjectivities do not change, and that women and men therefore essentially enjoy the same sexual practices throughout the entire life course.

An orientation to a mid-life body norm may have negative consequences for both old men and old women; men may feel guilty and inadequate when they can no longer perform an erection, and a focus on intercourse may not optimize old women's sexual pleasure. Yet, a mid-life body norm is masculinized in the sense that it is his body that matters, not hers. It is he who must be able to perform an erection. Axel explicitly articulates this understanding by saying:

Axel: Guys are different from a woman. She can perform intercourse no matter how old she gets.¹⁸⁹

Axel's articulation conveys his belief that women can always be penetrated in intercourse, and that this is not affected by ageing, whereas men's erections decline with age and thus prevent intercourse. In their study of young people and sexuality, Holland and colleagues (1998) argue that, in contrast to the established binary of women as embodied and men as disembodied in Western cultures, it was the young women who were disembodied, through feelings of shame due to a lack of language about their bodies. I would argue that in this study women also become largely disembodied; his body emerges as necessary for sex and it is his body that represents function and as such his embodiment is continuously reinforced.

Paradoxically, despite the fact that it is his body and his erection which emerge as important, when discussing impotence the participants very rarely mentioned the pleasure *they* received from intercourse. Feminist schol-

189. Karlar är ju annorlunda än en kvinna (.) hon kan ju genomföra ett samlag hur gammal hon än blir.

ars have continually argued that men's pleasures and desires are prioritized in heterosexual relations (cf. Holland et al. 1998, Ramazanoglû & Holland 2002b). But does the silence about men's pleasure here signal that his pleasures are overlooked and downplayed in these situations? Or does it suggest that men's pleasures are always so self-evident that they need not be articulated? Several of the men in this study discussed women's sexualities as being more complex and requiring more effort than men's. For example, Nore, 76, says that sex was seldom a failure "strictly physically" for him when he was younger. But his wife was in contrast dissatisfied because he could not meet her needs, he says. And Eskil, 75, expresses the way in which men are more easily pleased than women by saying:

Eskil: Well, for a man it's pretty simple, it's penetration and that's that. Then the man is pleased. But women have a lot of other things, much more delicate needs really.¹⁹⁰

But the idea that men's sexualities are more simple in the above quote seems largely to rely on the erection and sex as equalling intercourse, and does not, in that sense, explain why men do not speak about how impotence could mean less satisfaction and pleasure for them as well. I will come back to this later when I discuss how to think of men's impotence in terms of gender and power.

So far I have emphasized how men in their narratives focus on the need to be active and doers of her orgasm. Another way of understanding impotence is as a couple's problem that both he and she should engage in and try to resolve. This discourse, perhaps even more than the discourse of men as "doers" of her orgasm, is built on ideals of reciprocity in sex. Both he and she should be involved in optimizing sexual pleasure and this also involves handling his impotence. From a feminist position I will, however, raise the question of whether seeing impotence as a collaborative project necessarily benefits women or grants them possibilities to negotiate in heterosexual relations.

The considerate partner as a "cure" for impotence

So far I have discussed impotence as something that is narrated and understood to be a problem because it hinders men from being the desirable lover that several in this study aspire to be. There is, however, a duality at play in

190. Eskil: Ja för mannen är det ju ganska enkelt, (...) det är ju penetrera och det, då är mannen nöjd, det det det, men kvinnan har ju en massa andra saker mycket mer finstämda behov faktiskt.

the way in which the same men who de-emphasized the importance of coital sex could at the same time emphasize it as important. As the previous chapter shows, men propose non-coital sexual practices as possible and perhaps even more enjoyable. But, on the other hand, they also narrate worry and distress about their sexual function and seem to find penetration with their penis crucial for satisfying the woman.

Since this chapter focuses on how impotence is perceived to be a problem, and the limits of rethinking male sexual morphologies in various ways, the narratives I concentrate on here are those that do *not* point to possibilities of other roads, but where men seek to regain their erections when experiencing erectile changes. One of these narratives is that of Erland, 74, which he presents in his body diary. In contrast to Caesar from the phone call, for example, who neither overcomes nor accepts his impotence, Erland's story is narrated as a "success" narrative where he eventually, to his relief, manages to keep his erection. This eventual success is strongly linked in Erland's diary to his partner, and I will argue that his narrative partakes in shaping a discourse of a considerate and loving partner who can help to "cure" or repair erectile dysfunction. Whereas earlier I discussed men's feelings of responsibility to regain an erection for her sake, here the female partner should also be involved and try to repair his impotence by being understanding and considerate. By presenting Erland's narrative on impotence in its entirety, I wish also to point to the structuring of this sort of narrative.

Erland is one of the participants in this study who only wrote a diary for me, and in his diary he describes having intercourse with his long-term partner and the pleasure this brings them. Like Axel earlier, Erland dismisses the idea of asexual old age with the words: "young people believe the older cannot enjoy sex, but oh, how wrong they are!"¹⁹¹ It has not always been possible for Erland and his wife Ester to have intercourse, however. Some time ago Erland encountered erectile changes, a situation he describes in a rather detailed way.

When I got an erection, it vanished after a couple of minutes. The more I thought about it the worse it got. We have had a very intense and wonderful sex life all these years, that we've both much appreciated and had great benefit from all these years. I feared this would end now. At the time I also thought a lot about Ester, cause it would have been just as hard for her having to give up our normal sex life. Well, it didn't have to be like that just because I didn't function. There are other solutions. Luck-

191. Unga människor tror inte att vi äldre kan njuta av sex, men oj vad fel dom har!

ily that didn't become a necessity. She helped me through this back to a normal life with her loving and her wonderful intuition of what "turned us both on", you may call it therapy. She knew I was especially turned on when she sometimes for different reasons had shaved her genitals, so she shaved off all her body hair. She started wearing G-strings, even though she finds that uncomfortable. She hasn't been particularly interested in cunnilingus, but now she invited me to it in a wonderful way. I'm not particularly aroused by seeing other women naked, but I'm really "turned on" if some other man sees Ester naked (a bit weird perhaps). She knows this well and reminded me about a couple of times when this had happened. It wasn't long before she had "cured" me. The nervousness disappeared and I functioned like before again. I really feel sorry for those men who've become impotent for some reason and of course also those women whose husbands this has happened to.¹⁹²

The structure of Erland's narrative reveals some interesting things about how impotence is made sense of. Erland begins by describing the background, the onset of his impotence and his worries and concerns about his wife's sexual satisfaction. In a short passage, he briefly mentions other ways to sexually satisfy her, but soon leaves this to describe in detail the process by which he regains his potency and his wife's activities to help him. His wife, Ester, is narrated with great appreciation, how she, by being considerate and knowing what he likes, takes action to "cure" his impotence in an almost therapeutic manner. Her consideration and compassion even stretch as far as doing things that she does not really like, such as wearing a G-string or inviting him to perform cunnilingus on her. Her willingness to take actions to arouse Erland pays off and his sexual function is restored. The narrative is thus one

192. När jag fick erektion, så försvann den efter några minuter. Ju mer jag tänkte på det, ju värre blev det. Vi har ju haft ett väldigt intensivt o härligt sexliv i alla år, som vi båda uppskattat mycket och haft stort utbyte av i alla år. Jag var ju rädd att detta skulle ta slut nu. Då tänkte jag också mycket på Ester, för det vore ju minst lika svårt för henne att tvingas avstå från vårt normala sexliv. Nå det hade ju inte behövt bli så för att inte jag fungerade. Det finns ju andra lösningar. Nu blev det tack o lov inte aktuellt. Hon hjälpte mig över detta tillbaka till ett normalt liv genom sin kärleksfullhet och sin underbara känsla för vad som "tände" oss båda, kalla det gärna terapi. Hon visst ju att jag brukade tända litet extra när hon ibland av olika anledningar hade rakat sitt underliv, så hon rakade bort all kroppsbehåring. Hon började använda stringtrosor, trots att hon tycker att detta är obekvämt. Hon har inte varit särskilt intresserad av cunnilingus, men nu inbjöd hon till detta på ett underbart sätt. Jag blir inte särskilt upphetsad av att se andra kvinnor nakna men "tänder" däremot ordentligt om någon annan man ser Ester naken (litet konstigt kanske). Detta vet hon ju också väl om och påminde mig om några tillfällen när detta inträffat. Det dröjde inte så länge förrän hon hade "botat" mig. Nervositeten släppte och jag fungerade som vanligt igen. Jag beklagar verkligen de män som blivit impotenta av någon anledning och givetvis även de kvinnor vars män råkat ut för detta.

that develops from failure and mishap to subsequent success. The stylistic turn at the end, to discuss other men with erectile problems and their partners and sympathize with them, becomes a sort of concluding remark which further emphasizes impotence as a hardship and cause of suffering for the couple, not just for the man.

The way in which, early in the narrative, Erland turns to how he worried about his wife, how his impotence would also be her problem, aligns with my earlier discussion in this chapter: of how men feel concerned about their partners' pleasures. What is evident in this narrative is also how Erland, like others, presents contradictory views on the importance of an erection. On the one hand, he worries about how it will affect his partner, on the other, he acknowledges that there are other ways of sexually satisfying her: "there are other solutions". The use of the word "normal" about coital sex in this narrative not only points to this sexual practice as being the most common, but also underlines that it is the desired sexual practice. Although other "solutions" to her sexual satisfaction exist, they are positioned as secondary to intercourse.

Where I have so far discussed ideas of the man's involvement in and responsibility for the restoration of the erection, what I find particularly interesting in Erland's narrative is how it also involves the engagement of his partner, how she takes action when he becomes impotent. As I discussed above, men articulate in various ways that their women said it does not matter, which can be understood as the partners being considerate and trying to console their men. But Ester, Erland's wife, also dresses, speaks and acts in ways that might make him aroused. Here, it is not only he, but also she, who is active and a doer in sex.

Erland's narrative clearly makes impotence into a couple phenomenon, which involves her as well as him, and overcoming impotence is here a collaborative project where she can help him out. This idea is not isolated to Erland's narrative, however, but feeds into a larger discourse and can be found in other contexts as well. According to the historian Åsa Andersson (2009), the shift in the 1960s towards a more positive attitude to later life sexuality also involved ideas that old men should avoid standstills in sexual activity, to avoid a decline altogether. And in this the role of the partner was emphasized; she should take the initiative and had "great responsibilities" to "stimulate" her male partner (Andersson 2009, 61). Although this idea, that the woman should take the initiative to maintain the old man's sexuality, may have emerged in a context where women to a greater extent than today were understood to serve men sexually, there are contemporary versions to be found as well. One example is the article I discussed in the previous chapter

on the ice-hockey player Sven Tumba and his impotence. The way in which Sven Tumba's story on impotence turns into a "success" story is strongly built around the help of his partner, and this is underlined not least by the article's headline: "Mona helps me with sex". The article describes how Sven Tumba had taken Viagra and herbal remedies to treat his impotence, but when it comes down to it, it was his wife who mattered the most. "You've got to have a gal like Mona, otherwise it won't work," he says and laughs in the article.¹⁹³ Sven Tumba talks of his partner as a necessity and this resonates strongly with how Erland speaks with appreciation of his wife's engagement with his impotence. Both Erland and Sven Tumba talk of the "help" they received from their partners to overcome their problems. Although the story of Sven Tumba is a media representation, it nevertheless points to how Erland's narrative is in dialogue with other narratives on the female partner who takes the initiative. In other words, this is an available discourse on impotence.

The emphasis on the couple and the (female) partner's help is also visible in medical discourses produced by pharmaceutical companies and among medical practitioners. Johnson's (2008) study of the Swedish medical journal *Läkartidningen*, shows how this journal discusses the considerate partner as being important and closely linked to the curing of his impotence. The discourse is additionally noticeable on the homepage *Potenslinjen*¹⁹⁴, a public campaign website to inform about erectile dysfunction sponsored by the pharmaceutical company Pfizer. Through headlines on the homepage such as: "Can I help?" and "Talk and encourage", the (female) partner of the impotent man is addressed and erectile dysfunction is framed as a couple's problem (Åsberg & Johnson 2009). Åsberg & Johnson (2009), who have analyzed "Potenslinjen" and how it functions in the making of Swedish "Viagra selfhood", argue that the photos on the homepage do not exclusively construct the Viagra man as a heterosexual man. But they contend that the persistent use of couples in the images clearly shows that Viagra is not "a drug for the single man, wishing to enjoy masturbatory sex on his own" (Åsberg & Johnson 2009, 151). The bottom line is that the erection is there for both him and his partner, and it is thus the responsibility of both to achieve it.

I understand this discourse of impotence as being a couple's problem to rely on an idea of reciprocity in heterosexual relations; intercourse is understood to be something that is pleasurable for both him and her and thus worth restoring for both. It is thus possible to see it as a benevolent discourse and based on egalitarian ideals where the female partner is also understood

193. Men man måste ha en brutta som Mona som hjälper till, annars går det inte (skratt).

194. www.potenslinjen.se.

as a sexual subject with desires that should be met. Erland's narrative conveys how Ester, his wife, acts on her own initiative and in the interests of them both, and Erland articulates his feelings in terms of great appreciation and thankfulness for her help. As benevolent as the discourse may seem, however, I would suggest that there is a potential risk of discursive slippage from the idea that women *could* be active in counteracting the onset of impotence or making men regain potency to a more normative notion that women *should* act on men's impotence. The strong positive connotations of reciprocity, which seem to underlie the framing of impotence as a couple's issue, may make it particularly difficult to criticize, and reciprocity may also obfuscate the inequalities and power differentials that remain in heterosexual relations.

So far in this thesis, issues of power in heterosex have been little discussed. Yet one important feminist genealogy in discussions of heterosexuality is the feminist critique and problematization of heterosex and heterosexual relations as a "site of male power" (Jackson 1999, 16) and as a "primary site where gender difference is re-produced" (Hollway 1984, 228). This strand of feminist thinking has been subject to thorough and sometimes justified critiques.¹⁹⁵ This does not mean, however, that a feminist genealogy on heterosexuality and power has to be discarded altogether. I find these perspectives particularly significant in how they retain a suspicion of the alleged changes in terms of men's and women's power. As such, this line of argument focuses not only on sexuality as pleasure and/or site of disruption, but also the "discontents" of heterosexuality, to use the phrasing of Stevi Jackson (Jackson 1999, 26).

One example of feminist work in this vein is the major study on young people and heterosexuality in the UK by Holland and colleagues (Holland et al. 1998). In this study, young people were interviewed on sexuality, and a central argument of the authors is that, despite aspirations to gender equality and an emphasis on egalitarian sexual relationships, sexuality is still often male-defined and women have limited possibilities of negotiation. In their work they coin the term "the male in the head", meaning, in short, the privileging of male sexuality and desire over women's, which constricts women's possibilities of pleasure and sexual agency. The "male in the head" in some respects resonates with my discussion of phallic sexual morphology in the way in which it prioritizes men's sexualities and bodies through erection and penetration.

The kind of analyses enabled by beginning with an assumption of heterosexuality as a site of male power can rightfully be understood as "paranoid readings" in Sedgwick's terms (2003), in particular because there is a strong

195. See for example Segal (2007).

tendency to already *know what you will arrive at* when starting out in your analysis; that women are subordinate in sexual relations with men. Nevertheless, I find it necessary and useful to deconstruct a discourse of impotence as being a couple's problem, and the idea that she should help, by asking what this might mean in terms of gender relations and men's and women's access to power in heterosexual relations.¹⁹⁶

As I pointed out above, stressing the importance of women's partaking in "solving" men's impotence and seeing women's involvement as a positive thing seemingly relies on an idea that women and men are both benefiting from his erection and are equals in the sexual relationship. However, drawing on empirical work, feminists have continuously asserted that men and women are "not on an equal footing" and do not have equal power to negotiate and assert themselves in sexual relationships (Roberts et al. 1995, 530, also Waldby et al. 1991, Holland et al. 1998). When Andersson (2009) discusses sexology literature from the 1960s and the way in which the woman there has a responsibility to arouse her old male partner in order for him to keep his sexual function (and desire), this is a rather blatant case of prioritizing male sexualities and the obfuscation of women's sexualities. To use the terminology of Wendy Hollway (1984), a "male sexual drive" discourse, where men are understood to *have to have sex*, thus underlies the imperative that women should go out and keep up or restore men's erections.

In Erland's narrative, however, it is not just his sexual needs but also hers that are evoked and it thus relies more on what Hollway (1984) has termed the "have/hold discourse" and the "permissive discourse". These two discourses afford women more power, and in particular the permissive discourse acknowledges women's sexual desire and the woman as a sexual subject (cf. Kippax et al. 1990). However, the possibility of men and women engaging in sexual relations on equal terms may not be as easily achieved, even if permissive discourses are invoked. As Braun et al. (2003, 254) argue about heterosex, reciprocity may be just a "more palatable guise" for heteronorms, where women are still bound up in expectations and demands to be sexually accessible and to pleasure men in various ways. When Erland narrates the ways in which his wife takes action, he remarks that she starts wearing G-strings, "even though she finds that uncomfortable", and invites him to cunnilingus, oral sex, although she is not interested in this. Erland's wife accordingly

196. Notably, this kind of feminist reading is only one of several different readings I do in this thesis. By offering several different readings of my material, I rely on a post-structuralist epistemology which does not opt for one truth in the singular, but which nonetheless does not preclude the existence of structures. After all, I see post-structuralism not as anti-structuralism, but as a different approach to structures.

obliges him with things that might arouse him, even though this is not what she herself desires. In his narrative, Erland draws both on a permissive discourse, where his wife desires intercourse, and a have/hold discourse, where men and women have rights and responsibilities towards each other when in a couple. When these two discourses come together, the result is obviously that she is looked up on as a sexual subject, but her sexual subjectivity is still very much dependent on and defined through him, what arouses him, and his ability to have an erection.

The idea that women could help out and enable their male partners to regain their erections is also visible when Östen, 79, talks about erectile changes, the use of Viagra and his belief that women are just as good a solution as Viagra. Östen has not himself experienced any erectile changes, and he is the participant in the study who most strongly proposes sexuality as lifelong and the value and importance of continuing to be sexually active in later life.

Linn: But it's fairly common when you grow older that you get problems with your erection, that's nothing you've [experienced]?

Östen: No, I haven't [experienced it], but then, as they wrote about the people in Jönköping [Swedish city], they're not using much Viagra, it's the woman who's doing that instead, arranges things so that –

Linn: So how do you think Viagra works?

Östen: Well, it works so that it hardens, so one can have intercourse, but that could just as well be done by a woman – she could perform those [actions].¹⁹⁷

In this quote, Östen argues against the use of Viagra by saying that women can also make men have erections. But he goes on to argue that it “needn't always just be about intercourse, but just this thing of both getting aroused”,¹⁹⁸ which suggests that what women can do is not always necessarily about erec-

197. L: Mm, men det är ju ganska vanligt när man blir äldre att man får problem med erektionen men det är ingenting som du?

Ö: Nej, det är det ju inte, men sen är det ju det att det är som det stod om folket i Jönköpings län de använder inte mycket Viagra, utan det är kvinnan som utför det istället, alltså ordnar så att blir

L: Hur – så hur tänker du att Viagra fungerar?

Ö: Ja det fungerar ju så att de blir styvt å de kan ha ett samlag, men det går ju lika bra om kvinnan gör det (.) Hon kan ju utföra dom (..).

NB. When Östen here talks about the people, he might also be referring to a newspaper named *Folket* (the people) which he has read. The meaning of the sentence is not changed by this, however.

198. Sen kan det ju inte va samlag alltid utan det kan ju bara liksom känna di hur det, å det blir ju för bäge, (..) blir upphetsade bäge två på det viset.

tion but is also to do with desire and arousal. While earlier it was his efforts that were emphasized, what he did to pleasure her, what both Erland and Östen point to here is how her efforts may make the difference; to make the man sufficiently aroused to keep or retain an erection. Although Östen is not arguing that women should perform and make men have (or regain) erections, there is a built-in normative statement in what he is saying. If women can resolve problems of impotence just as well as the drug Viagra, this may well result in a discursive slippage to the point where she actually *should* act to resolve them. Similarly, if one understands Erland's narrative about what his wife does for him in order to rebuff impotence as part of a discourse production on impotence, then his narrative serves as a moral narrative, indicating what an ideal partner should do.

An ideal femininity is then surfacing in these narratives, which involves being able to arouse her male partner by being active. But the flipside of this ideal femininity must then be a woman who is not active and is unsuccessful in arousing her partner (and giving him an erection). Especially when thinking back on how some men also raised the idea that men's sexualities were "simple", and as such aligning with a male sexual drive discourse, to make a man have an erection comes across as an easy thing. Thus, the woman who cannot make her husband have an erection is, on this line of thinking, doing something wrong.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, and which Caesar made very clear by saying: "she wants a man and I want a woman", a heterosexual matrix implies that masculinity and femininity become intelligible and take shape through sexuality. This is also visible in the way in which women may "work" as solutions to impotence instead of sexuo-pharmaceuticals in Östen's account. By being sexually accessible and bringing out his sexual arousal, a woman may then bring out his masculinity. And by doing so she in effect performs desirable and intelligible femininity. A woman who cannot succeed in arousing him, in making him have an erection, can in turn be understood as an example of "failed" femininity, of someone who is not performing femininity well enough.

Central to both Erland's and Östen's articulations is consequently what the woman does, her initiative and activity. Others also point to the importance of a partner who takes the initiative to arouse him. Eskil, 75, for example emphasizes "her response" as being important for whether or not he could get an erection, and points to women's inability to arouse him as an explanation for his lack of erection. He explicitly points to the way in which the fact that he does not get an erection could partly be explained by how his female partner has not been active in making him aroused.

Eskil: So there are two sides to it, desire – but ability may not be there to the same extent as before.

Linn: Is this something you're noticing when you're masturbating, or have you noticed this together with a partner you've had?

Eskil: Well, it's been, when I've been in some relationship, then I've noticed that it didn't work right, but that also depends somewhat on, you have to be turned on too, it depends on how the other party [in question] is acting.

Linn: So you're thinking that the difficulties you've had with obtaining an erection have been somewhat about you not being sufficiently aroused?

Eskil: [sighs] Yes, I've been –

Linn: But when you're saying the partner's not –?

Eskil: No, but it's been like that – That the partner hasn't been enough, in a way, then you've felt that way, that I haven't been turned on enough.

L: When you're saying "like that", how do you think the partner should be to –?

E: Well [...] It's got to be in a way that [...] *attracts* in a way, hugging and caressing and one thing after another, that you're feeling you have a response or something like that, that's how I feel.

L: So when you've felt the partner didn't give that response –

E: No, I don't think I've had that response, several times, and then I haven't been turned on.¹⁹⁹

199. E: Så att det det är väl både och lusten men förmågan finns ju kanske inte i lika hög utsträckning (...)

L: Är det nånting som du märker exempelvis när du onanerar eller har du märkt det tillsammans med, när du försökt ha samlag med nån partner som du har haft?

E: Ja det har väl varit då i samband med nåt förhållande också för då har jag märkt att det gick det går inte va, men det beror också lite på, man måste ju vara lite tänd också (mm) det beror ju på hur den andra parten beter sig.

L: Så du tänker ju att de svårigheter som du har haft att få erektion har handlat lite om eh att du inte har varit tillräckligt upphetsad?

E: (Suck) Jo det har det varit.

L: Men när du säger att partnern inte vad –

E: Nä men då har det varit att partnern har inte varit tillräckligt på det sättet. Att man då har upplevt har upplevt på det sättet att utan jag har inte blivit tänd tillräckligt.

L: När du säger "på det sättet" hur tänker du att partnern ska vara då för att –

This extract is rather contradictory; Eskil both says that he is aroused and that he is not. The way in which he shifts from saying he *was* aroused to saying he *was not* aroused enough by her seems to suggest that there is an inherent desire or arousal in him, but that it needs to be teased out by a woman. This could be a way of restoring a masculine sexual self which in the end always wants to have sex, and in this sense Eskil seems to draw on a male sex drive discourse. If only she is “good enough”, she may then bring out this inherent desire. In other words, erection as a man’s problem is re-oriented to become an issue of women being sufficiently sexually accessible and doing enough to please him. One possible interpretation of why Eskil points to the significance of her initiative could be that by doing so he lifts some weight from his own shoulders. This can be compared to Ingvar who, when discussing his impotence, talks about his wife’s lack of initiative.

Ingvar: The wife, in later years, she wasn’t all that active, in comparison to how she’d been and so it is kind of a decline from both sides, so to speak.²⁰⁰

Rather than himself being the one who bears the responsibility for a decline in sexual relations, as a consequence of erectile changes, men may then, as in the cases of Ingvar and Eskil, point to her lack of effort, to a “decline from both sides”.

I would like to stress once more that the idea that impotence is a couple’s issue, and something that she could help him resolve, may have normative implications and consequences for both men’s and women’s power in later life sexual relations. When men speak of sexual relations with women, they sometimes draw on a male sex drive discourse but perhaps more often on permissive and have/hold discourses where women and men are connected to each other through their relationships based on love and commitment.²⁰¹ Women then emerge as sexual subjects who also have desires and enjoy in-

E: Ja (..) det ska ju vara då så på nåt sätt som (..) *attrahera* på nåt sätt kramas och smeks och det ena med det andra va, att man känner att man har ett gehör eller nåt sånt, det är sånt det tycker jag i alla fall.

L: Så det har varit så att du har upplevt att partern liksom inte har gett den responsen –

E: Nej jag tycker inte det i många fall jag har inte fått den responsen och då har det inte tänt till hos mig.

200. Hustrun på senare år hon var ju inte så aktiv på det viset mot för vad hon har vart förr så det är liksom avtynande på två håll där kan man säga.

201. The take-up and availability of a permissive discourse on sexuality may be particularly salient to men and women (of different ages) in Sweden as a context where discourses of gender equality have been pervasive.

tercourse. If she enjoys intercourse and thus benefits from his erection, it may seem like a “fair deal” that men and women work together so that he can have his erection back (Braun et al. 2003). If one presupposes equality between men in women in sexual relations, the idea that the partners should help each other out in sex does not come across as problematic.

From a feminist point of view, however, the idea that women should “help” and be active in cases of impotence (and to prevent impotence) largely overlooks the fact that women and men are (still) positioned differently in relation to discourses on sexuality (Hollway 1984). This may for example imply that men and women have different opportunities to negotiate how (and if) sex should take place, and whose sexual desires are important (Potts et al. 2003, Waldby et al. 1991). If, as feminist researchers suggest, men’s sexualities are generally prioritized over women’s, then to ask her to help him with his erection may in essence be assuming that she should go all out to enable his sexual needs and desires rather than her own.²⁰² In some instances it may even be desirable that she does things she really doesn’t like, since the pay-off (the erection and subsequent intercourse) will be for her benefit as well. This means that impotence may be a potential site where women’s desires and pleasure are downplayed and obscured; as they are required to go all out for the restoration of men’s erections.

As the reader hopefully remembers, one of the aims of this study is to explore the becoming of male ageing bodies, and the possibilities of rethinking male sexual morphologies in various ways. As I underlined in my theoretical discussion on becoming in Chapter Two, there are limits to becoming that are generated by dominant knowledge regimes and cultural and institutional power. Men’s attempts to regain or maintain their erections can be understood, in the words of Sara Ahmed (2006), as attempts to remain “in line”, to follow expectations of normal heterosexual bodies as phallic bodies. It has been my argument in this section that the way in which men narrate impotence as being a couple’s problem has consequences for gender relations and power in men and women’s sexual relationships in later life.

When discussing power in heterosexual relationships, however, so far I have not clarified the meaning of the concept power, or how I use it to explain men’s articulations of impotence and the role of women. In the following section I will further discuss how to think of power in relation to men’s

202. Holland and colleagues argue that a male in the head implies “the power of masculinity masquerading as heterosexuality” (1998, 170), which means that, since male and female sexualities are not equal, heterosexuality is in essence the reinforcement of masculinity, because female desires are generally silenced and seen as less important.

accounts of impotence, and I will juxtapose a more conventional feminist understanding of power with a foucauldian understanding.

Old men's sexualities: A matter of power?

In contrast to the previous chapter, I have here presented and discussed how men may experience impotence as being a problem, how potency is still linked to masculinity and how pervasive understandings of masculinity, linked to sexual assertiveness and performance, may shape how old men understand themselves and sexuality in later life. In that sense, this chapter has been an attempt to discuss some of the limits to the rethinking of male sexual morphologies, the relative permanence of things.

Since this is a feminist and critical study of men and masculinities, I have also wanted to refer my discussion to issues of gender and power in this chapter. As I began to discuss in the previous chapter, old men's way of speaking of themselves as better, more mature and considerate lovers may not necessarily be understood as a sign of changes in gender relations or changes in masculinity altogether, but could also be analyzed in terms of resisting negatives stereotypes of old men's sexuality and negotiations with desirable masculinity. My discussion above attempted to deconstruct what may at first emerge as very benign discourses on men and women's mutual interest in "solving" his impotence, and suggest that in fact they may potentially reproduce inequalities and reinforce power relations between men and women. As a conclusion to this chapter I will further discuss how to understand power from old men's narratives on sexuality in later life. By contrasting a feminist analysis, of sexuality as a site of men's power and dominance, to a foucauldian analysis, where power is understood as a system of knowledge/power, two different versions of how to understand old men's sexual subjectivities emerge. I will begin with a more traditional feminist position on power and later discuss my material in relation to a foucauldian position.

Earlier, I discussed how men emphasized the importance of the erection and how this was related to the female partner and a wish to be a desirable lover who pleased her. As a result, impotence was articulated as a hardship since he worried that he would not be able to perform and satisfy her fully if he did not have an erection. The consequence of men's articulations of a wish to pleasure her, most notably to give her an orgasm, is, however, a continued reproduction of a gendered binary of activity and passivity. Through this binary, men still emerge as subjects and women as objects, and women's sexualities and pleasures are by and large dependent on men's bodies. While individual men may not feel powerful in their everyday sexual relations, on

a feminist line of thinking men are advantaged through being continuously positioned as active subjects. Even men's concern with her orgasm, which may at first seem to reflect increasing reciprocity in heterosexual relationships, can work to reinforce gender relations built on power, because it is he who grants her an orgasm, he is necessary for her to come in these narratives. As Carole Vance suggests:

Male concern that their partners experience orgasm may signal the development of more egalitarian and reciprocal sexual standards. On the other hand, the anxious question 'Did you come?' may demarcate a new area of woman's behavior men are expected to master and control – female orgasm (Vance 1984, 12).

In many ways this is a very paradoxical matter, because when the men in this study speak about their sexual relations with women, some express explicit disappointment that their partners have been so passive, and relate this to a generation of women brought up to be passive. Eskil, for example, describes the sexual passivity of women of his generation by saying that she "just lay down".

Eskil: No unfortunately really, they've just – The woman has just lain down on the bed. And lain there waiting for you to come. It's been like that almost always I think. I think women are more open and unashamed today. In those days it was much more restrained, it wasn't the same openness. [...]

Linn: Yeah, how were they before [i.e. women of his generation], do you think?

Eskil: Well, it was only, the woman should only provide for the man's need I think. [That's] the way you experienced it then. So they just lay down on the bed, there were no games [of seduction] as I remember it, not really.

Linn: So it has always been you taking the initiative in the sexual relationships you've had?

Eskil: Yes, that's probably fair to say. It's always the man who should take the first initiative and then see how the woman reacts, right? And then if you notice that she's turned on to the whole thing, then it's just to start kissing and fondling.²⁰³

203. E: Nä tyvärr inte hörrudu, dom har bara, kvinnan har hela tiden bara lagt sig på sängen (..) och legat där och väntat att man skulle komma, så har det varit nästan jämt tycker jag.

It is also interesting to consider how men downplay the pleasure they might receive from intercourse and the potential decrease in satisfaction that impotence may cause for them, and how this relates to gender and power. The way in which the men in my study emphasized her orgasm and pleasure rather than their own can be compared to Agnes Bolsø's (2002) study of power in lesbian sexual practice. In Bolsø's study, some women serviced their female partners, pleasuring them to an orgasm, without themselves receiving an orgasm, and this leads Bolsø to discuss how issues of power should be understood in these cases. Bolsø argues that it may seem as if the women who only service are subordinate, since they only provide without receiving anything. Yet she is critical of this interpretation, arguing that the fact that the women who are servicing and being the providers of orgasm seem to be in control during the sexual encounters, and also express the fact that they receive pleasure from the service orientation, points to the interpretation that they are not subordinate. The women who are giving their partners an orgasm may also, according to Bolsø (2002, 175), "profit from the power that masculine signaling can give." If one links this argument to my study, then the old men may obtain power from being active and pleasuring their partners, even if this means that they do not always receive pleasure from the sexual encounter.

Thinking in line with Catherine Waldby, the identification with a phallic imago (what I refer to as a phallic sexual morphology) implies "erotic costs", of which one is the "injunction against passivity which says that the phallus gives pleasure rather than receives it" (Waldby 1995, 271). Paradoxically enough, men enact masculinity by taking up a phallic morphology, and by this means they may in some senses associate with power, but this may still not be what men receive most pleasure from. This idea can be related to my discussion earlier in this chapter about the way in which a phallocentric

E: Ja jag tror kvinnor är mera öppna och ogenerade idag, jag tror dom har mycket mer på den tiden var det mycket mer återhållsamt det ena med det andra, å det var inte alls samma öppenhet (nä) ska bara ta en klunk (gör det) (...) Nä men det där tror jag kvinnornas har ändrat på sig väldigt (så du tänker -) kvinnorna är mer öppna nu än dom har varit tidigare.

L: Ja hur var dom förr då tänker du?

E: Ja det var ju bara, kvinnan skulle ju bara vara tillgodose mannens önskemål tycker jag, så var det nästan tycker jag, på det sättet som man då upplevde det så så, dom bara lade sig på sängen och låg där (...) det var inget spel eller annat att tala om vad jag minns, faktiskt inte.

L: Så det har alltid varit du som har tagit initiativet i dom sexuella relationer som du har haft?

E: Ja det kan man nog säga att det har varit för att (...) det är ju alltid mannen som ska ta in-, åtminstone första spadtaget och sen får man ju se hur kvinnan reagerar va (...m) och märker man att dom är med på noterna och så säger då då är det bara att kyssas och smekas.

model of sex may distance men from the possibilities of pleasure and desire that lie outside a realm of erection and penetration.

So one discourse that emerges in this chapter describes the way in which men want to pleasure their female partners and how impotence is seen as a possible obstacle to being an active and desirable lover. Another discourse describes the way in which a woman should also be active and “cure” his impotence in different ways. Women are then understood to a greater extent as sexually desiring subjects. But in terms of power this is a very complicated matter, because if we assume that the idea that women should be active co-exists with a discourse in which men are those who are active and should give her an orgasm, there may be difficulties for women to simply be active. While women are evidently not sexually passive by nature, passivity is “enjoined” upon women through the way in which men are recurrently signified as active (Kippax et al. 1990, 541). As Waldby et al. (1991, 49) assert: “sexual activity requires passivity to give it meaning, and this meaning is allocated according to the sex of the body which enacts it.” In relation to my study, this means that if men take up and enact activity, by being responsible for and the doer of her sexual pleasure, then her opportunities to be active are restrained.

Yet, this kind of feminist discussion on power understands power to be a zero-sum game, where women are losers and men winners during a sexual encounter. If women cannot be active as long as activity is linked to and taken up by men, it seems difficult to envision any kind of change in gender relations and power. It may also seem as though men are driven by an unconscious desire to dominate women. I believe, however, that Lynne Segal is quite right when she asserts:

Neither men’s masturbatory fantasies, nor men’s experience in relationships with women, reduce to the conventional rituals of sex as male domination (Segal 2007, 180).

If men’s own experiences of sex and sexuality do not reduce to experiences of dominance and of being powerful, then there might be a need for another way of understanding power in gender relations, and how power is reproduced. I suggest that turning to Foucault makes another version of power available, a version that does not locate power in men and where power cannot be possessed as in the earlier versions.

The feminist genealogy on heterosexuality that I have accounted for so far in this chapter generally relies on a conceptualization of power as repressive (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002b). Men and women are accordingly locked

into a dualism of oppressor and oppressed. However, Foucault (2002) rejects this understanding of power, arguing that it is based on the idea of the power of the monarch, a power which is temporary and specific to a particular historical context. Instead, Foucault suggests power to be relational, existing in all relationships, and as productive. Rather than functioning through prohibitions, power operates through incentives, thus contributing to the proliferation of some discourses. The functioning of power is then not necessarily or primarily through coercion. Also, and importantly to this study, the work of Foucault emphasizes bodies and sexualities to be effects of and shaped through dispersed and various sites of power, rather than pre-existing and simply regulated or dominated by power.

Analyzing how men articulated their experiences around impotence and erectile changes, which I have presented in this chapter, through the ideas of Foucault, decentres power from being solely in operation from the men themselves and instead identifies the ways in which men are caught up in a system of power/knowledge. Instead of seeing power as one regime that shapes old men's sexual subjectivities in this study, a foucauldian analysis suggests that co-existing discourses on age, gender and sexuality work to shape how old men understand sexuality, sex, themselves and their partners. Some discourses are more pervasive than others, and it may not always be possible to separate one discourse from another. In this chapter, several significant intermingling discourses that impact on old men's sexual subjectivities can be traced. For example, when Axel and Caesar speak of the importance of an erection at the beginning of this chapter, they are invoking a discourse of masculinity and potency that links them to youthfulness, and how young men's bodies are accordingly more ideally masculine than the old man's. There is also the intermingling of discourses of being a good partner who satisfies her and discourses of satisfying sex as being important to the relationship. And, most importantly, this chapter shows how a coital imperative continues to function as the dominant sexual truth, where vaginal sex through penile penetration is understood as the most enjoyable and real form of sex for men *and* women. Men's narratives on sex and sexuality in this chapter show how a coital imperative as a form of sexual truth is produced on multiple discursive levels. Several of the men refer to things they have heard or read in various contexts; for example, Östen on the people in Jönköping not needing Viagra or Axel on how the hardness of the penis matters according to a paper he has read. I have also pointed to media representations, such as that on Sven Tumba and his success story of overcoming impotence or the Pfizer-sponsored impotence webpage *potenslinjen.se*, as possible sites for discourse production on masculinity, potency, age and intercourse.

This dominant discourse, the sexual truth which postulates intercourse as the optimal kind of sex and the hard penis as significant, obviously also has effects on the shaping of gender relations. This may for example lead to a man not believing his female partner when she says it does not matter, or assuming that her silence is a sign of disappointment. While men may not wilfully aim to mould female desire, the discursive impact of a sexual truth may work to silence women's own voices and desires.

Consequently, a foucauldian analysis does not locate power in men or women as something that can be held and lost, but understands how power functions to shape what can be understood as desirable sex and ideal masculinity and femininity in relation to age. This may in turn position men and women differently and advantage and disadvantage men and women in different ways. What is helpful about a foucauldian analysis of impotence is the way in which it may also better make room for men's feelings of anxiety and worries about their potency (and masculinity). The phone call with Caesar, which I described at the beginning of the chapter, reveals that men may feel very powerless when experiencing impotence, yet this does not mean that feminist critiques of masculinity are irrelevant or that gender relations are completely turned on their heads.

Also, as I have argued in both this chapter and the previous one, it is not possible to separate the men in this study into two groups, where one is thinking in terms of doing things differently and orienting to non-coital sexual activities and the other relies on an erection for satisfying sex and subsequently grieves erectile changes. Men may both downplay or negotiate the significance of the erection, while at the same time understanding an erection to be very important. Using a foucauldian lens on power and discourse makes it possible to see how these men are not simply "cultural dopes" taking up one discourse, but continuously resist, negotiate and challenge dominant discourses on age, sexuality and masculinity (Staunaes 2003, 103).

When discussing power and the ways in which feminist and foucauldian approaches to power result in different ways of understanding old men's sexual subjectivities, my ambition has not been to recommend one position as better than the other.²⁰⁴ Both positions provide outlooks for valuable insights into understanding old men's sexual subjectivities. One may direct us more in the direction of seeing men's privileges vis-à-vis women, whereas the other

204. Importantly, I do not understand foucauldian and feminist analyses to be mutually exclusive and separate; the foucauldian analysis I am presenting here can be understood as a feminist foucauldian analysis. However, I use these labels to point to the potentially different outcomes from these analyses, most notably springing from different approaches to power (cf. Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002b).

points more towards the ways in which regimes of power and knowledge shape and restrict both men and women's ways of making sense of sexuality.

Bringing in issues of power in this chapter has been a way to resist a tendency to regard old men's sexual subjectivities and the becomings that old age and the ageing body may propose as being by definition subversive and Other in discussions of masculinity. Bringing back a discussion on power is a way for me to retain a critical stance in this study. In that respect, the analyses I have engaged with in this chapter are perhaps more of the "paranoid" kind than those of Chapter Four. In the chapter to come, Chapter Six, I will engage with both reparative and paranoid readings when analyzing the meanings of sexual desire and will also return to the concepts of intimacy and touch.

Another phone call

Another day in November. Another phone call from a man who has seen my advertisement where I am looking for diarists and interviewees. Gösta talks rapidly, but without seeming nervous. He has seen my ad, he says, and he wants to be in the study. He's 81 years old, and the sexual "doesn't work", but he says: "you could do other things, like fondling her." The earlier phone calls and letters of the week, in which the word "sexuality" in the ad has spurred reactions ranging from letters with sexual fantasies to dubious phone calls, have made me slightly uneasy. I am thus a bit reserved, not to say suspicious, about why men approach me with their sexual stories.

Gösta is keen to talk about sex. But not present-day sex. He says he doesn't have intercourse with his partner much. But he is more than willing to tell me about sexual episodes from the past. Of how he lost his virginity with an older hunchbacked girl, "who took care of him", at the age of 14. Of the 65 women he has had sex with and how he has written down the names of all of them in a notebook, with stars assigned to them, from one to three. Of course people have to be able to speak about their sexual pasts, but the sexual episodes he narrates gives me a strong feeling of voyeurism, it feels weird. Why is he telling me these things? [Research diary 2007-11-28]

It is the day after I received the phone call from Caesar and I am still in the process of handling my first experiences of speaking to old men about sex and sexuality. As I discussed on methodology in Chapter Three, encountering the men who wanted to participate in the study sometimes made me feel very vulnerable and insecure, in particular at the beginning. The extract

from my research diary above reveals some of this anxiety, and I phrase this in terms of voyeurism and ask what has led the 81-year-old Gösta to tell me stories from his sexual past over the phone. In this chapter, the memory of the phone call with Gösta not only serves as a reflection of feelings and subjectivities in the research process, but is also an interesting contrast to the call with Caesar. Quite differently to Caesar's phone call, where his impotence is placed centre stage, Gösta is downplaying the loss of erection, making it insignificant. Gösta, like many others in this study, says in passing "you could do other things, like fondling her". But he is not primarily interesting as an example of somebody who "does 'it' differently", who orients towards intimacy and touch as a result of his impotence, as I discussed in Chapter Four. Rather, Gösta is interesting in how he focuses on the sexual conquests of earlier life, how central they are to him. Also, later when I interview Gösta, he presents himself as a "stud", a sexually assertive and experienced man. Since sex seems to be so important to him, one might think that encountering impotence would be experienced as a catastrophe, similar to how Caesar feels about it. But when I ask Gösta how he feels about this, whether it feels odd not having intercourse any more, he replies:

No, we don't find that odd, 'cause we're old now. Now, that's something, *you come back to it again and again*, that you're old.²⁰⁵

In the previous chapter, this idea of acceptance and affirmation of the changes that ageing brings about was more visible, whereas in this chapter men's wishes to regain their former erections seemed to largely rely on a young and mid-life body norm, for which erections were always possible. As I discussed in my introductory chapter, discourses on impotence have changed significantly with the introduction of Viagra and, as Johnson (2008) notes, the term "old age impotence" disappeared from medical discourse during the 1990s. This may make it more difficult for men to articulate erectile changes and impotence as part of normal ageing.

Even if this chapter has pointed to the hardships that men may experience in encountering impotence, it seems from my study as though men may still express ideas around impotence as something normal that happens with age. As Frank, 71, contends:

205. G: Nä vi tycker inte det är konstigt för vi är gamla nu, så det det kommer man kommer återigen tillbaka till det att en är gammal.

You're starting to lose your hard-on when you're seventeen, so it's no wonder it's almost gone when you're seventy-one.²⁰⁶

But the acceptance of how things change as one ages is foremost to do with bodily ability and sexual function. So far, sexual desire has been little discussed in this thesis. As I pointed out in Chapter One, asexual old age has been a pervasive discourse of later life which old men and women have to handle, and which may in particular be at odds with dominant discourses of masculinity as always willing.

Thus, in the next chapter I will discuss desire. Many of the participants in this study drew on discourses of sexuality as lifelong, but at the same time pointed to desire in later life as being different from earlier in life. Desire, how it should be experienced and expressed and what happens if it is not there thus proved to be complex matters. It is worth raising the question: is desire, more than the erection, what matters most in the shaping of sexual subjectivities for old men? In the next chapter I will discuss how Gösta's and others' stories of being sexual studs, men with strong sexual desires in the past, may also be seen as articulations of desire and as enactments of masculinity and sexual subjectivities. In later life, those stories might be just as important as a hard-on for men.

206. F: Men man börjar ju förlora sitt stånd när man är sjutton så det är ju inte konstigt att det är nästan slut när man är 71.

6

In lust we trust?

Erection or no erection, touching, feeling, fondling, less selfish, more mature, disappointments and possibilities... The ways in which sexuality in later life has surfaced in this thesis so far are numerous. Men's sexualities in later life, as articulated by the men themselves, are surfacing as possibilities; of becomings of male sexual bodies and sexual subjectivities in new and different ways. But men's narratives also point to how phallocentrism continues to shape old men's experiences of sexuality and reinforce some dominant and culturally pervasive ideals of masculinity and heterosexuality. Sex and sexuality then become a matter of goal-oriented "doing", in which the phallic body is essential to be able to have pleasurable sex and to sexually satisfy a woman.

But a lot of the discussion so far has been on sexual practice and function, often related to men's possibilities of erections. What has been relatively unquestioned and unchallenged so far is the existence and meaning of desire. As I discussed in my introduction to this thesis, in research on old age and sexuality sexual desire has attracted much less interest than issues of sexual practice and function. I believe that to understand how old men's sexual subjectivities and sexual bodies take shape it is also important to explore the meanings and experiences of sexual desire; what does one lust for and how does desire take shape?

I understand sexual desire, like sexuality more generally, to be experienced by people and to materialize through available discourses. To get at available discourses around later life and sexual desire one need turn no further than to a Swedish newspaper and the comic *Medelålders plus* (Middle-aged plus). This comic deals with the everyday life of an old couple, who lead a serene

life as retirees. The strips are humorous and the wit seems to depend on the readers' identification. While sex and sexuality are not frequently dealt with in the comic, there are two strips I encountered that address these issues, and which also represent two different ideas on old age and sexual desire.



In this first strip the old man opens a drawer and says: "I'm not gonna freeze my balls off, so these lovely old long johns will do fine today". From the drawer he takes out and puts on a pair of seemingly worn and shabby long underpants. As he stands there getting dressed his wife happens to get a glimpse of him through the doorway. In the last panel the old man, now fully dressed and ready to go outside, says to his wife: "It's Saturday. We'll have an erotic festivity tonight, right?" His wife replies by saying: "Not tonight I think..."



In this the second strip the old man looks out of the window, with his head hanging down dully, and he says: "I don't find the sexual to be what it used to be." His wife walks up beside him and pats his shoulder comfortingly while saying: "But that's more than one can ask for, you see." "But when we were younger it was like volcanic eruptions all the time!", the man exclaims and raises his hands in a dramatic gesture. His wife answers: "But there are one or two aftershocks every now and then, right?"

In the first strip, the sexual desire that the old man expresses is humorously depicted as rather ludicrous. The long woollen underpants that he wears

seem to illustrate the non-desirability of sexual desire in old men and the joke is largely based on the unthinkability of the old man engaging in any sexual activity. Who would want to have sex with this man clad in tatty old long johns? Not even his partner seems to be interested any more. If this strip characterizes old men's sexual desire as ridiculous and a matter of derision (albeit in a warm way), the second comic strip characterizes sexual desire in later life as declining, and alludes more to a discourse of asexual later life. The two comic strips can accordingly be understood to represent two different versions of sexuality and sexual desire in later life: the first of sexuality as existing but unwanted, and the other of sexual desire as in decline and perhaps even of asexuality.

Although the two strips raise the issue of later life sexuality, they both seem to allude to and play with stereotypes of asexual old age and the old man as sexually undesirable. As I was arguing in Chapter One, these ideas have a long history and have been traced back as far as ancient times (Andersson 2009). In this chapter, I will discuss whether old men draw upon and rely on these discourses, as represented by the comic *Medelålders plus*, or whether it is the more contemporary "positive" discourse on the "sexy oldie", where sexual desire is understood to be lifelong, which informs the ways in which old men make sense of their sexuality and sexual desire (Gott 2005). Or perhaps it is something entirely different from this? The focus of this chapter is consequently sexual desire and the lack/loss of desire in the old men's narratives on sexuality. In focusing on sexual desire in this chapter, I have also wished to explore how the very complicated term "asexuality" is implicitly handled by old men.

I will start this chapter by discussing how sexuality and sexual desire are understood by the men in this study as important in later life, and as bringing health, wellbeing and even youth to people. This way of framing sexuality is, as I will discuss, concurrent with discourses of positive and successful ageing. The chapter will go on to discuss how sexual desire, although narrated as something that persists, particularly for men, is still understood by the men in this study as different from desire earlier in life. This links back to my previous discussion in Chapter Four, on old men's sexualities as different, more mature and considerate. Young men's sexual subjectivities, which were conceptualized as more egoistic and focused on their own pleasures, are in this chapter linked to strong carnal desires, and as such are seen as more shallow than the desires of men in later life.

Throughout this chapter, I will return to Ahmed's (2006) concept of *orientation* to discuss how heterosexuality and masculinity take shape in later life. I will explore the ways in which sexual desire might be important to

one's orientation and also how loss or lack of desire may be narrated by the men in this study. As I discussed in the previous chapter, for some men the experience of impotence was troubling to their sense of masculinity. In this chapter my question has been whether a lack or loss of desire may also be experienced as being "lost" vis-à-vis a gendered and heterosexual subjectivity, and what role age plays in this. The analyses of my interviews suggested that an experience of lack of desire may indeed be troubling to a gendered subjectivity and is also entangled with feelings of being old. But desire is not only about articulating a desire for sexual practices today, I suggest in this chapter that, by showing "a well-trodden path" of heterosexuality, a heterosexual masculine subjectivity can be retained (Ahmed 2006, 16).

Analyzing the stories of the men in this study with a focus on sexual desire made me question what a loss or lack of desire really meant. The narratives of the men in this study do not speak of loss or lack, but rather of a reorientation of what one should desire and a re-signification of what sexual desire could imply. At the end of this chapter I therefore return to the concepts of intimacy and touch to discuss how they may be understood as destabilizing the boundaries between the sexual and the non-sexual. Key to my argument is the idea that intimacy and touch harbour desire in diverse ways but without being narrowly defined as desire for intercourse. This relates to my discussion of how intimacy and touch involved a de-centring of genitality and a challenge to conventional sexual scripts, and may work to refigure male sexual morphologies.

But again, a turn to intimacy and touch should not only be understood as deterritorialization in deleuzian terminology, of producing ground for thinking masculinity and sexuality differently. In Chapter Four I discussed how a turn to intimacy was part of narrating one's self as more considerate, less selfish and more mature and how this could be interpreted as a way of negotiating and reshaping hegemonic masculinity in relation to old age. In this chapter, I will add to this discussion by elaborating on how a turn to commitment and love in the close relationship becomes an integral part of old men's sexual subjectivities in this study. Intimacy may then also be a way of shaping not only masculinity but also heterosexuality in desirable ways.

The highlight of the season: Sexual desire and ageing well

In a letter to me, Östen, 79, has already revealed that he and his wife have sex twice a week, and this is basically all I know about him as I drive my car up his driveway one afternoon in January. As I enter the living room of

the house I am greeted by a table literally crammed with sandwiches, cakes and biscuits that Östen's wife has prepared. While we are having coffee, I ask Östen why, after having read my advertisement, he contacted me and wanted to be in the study.

Östen: Oh, well I was thinking – that this was something I found positive. I know that there's so many [preconceived ideas/misconceptions], some seem to think this shouldn't work when they retire and maybe I didn't think so either until [I became old]. But it's like, I read that you don't need those happy pills [anti-depressants] [if you continue to be sexually active]. So I found it really important that more people become aware.²⁰⁷

Östen declares that he is positive towards my research, and he believes that it might help to subvert and change some of the existing attitudes, according to which sexuality is something “that should not work” when you grow old. Before he himself got old he did not know what he now knows – that there is no need for sex to stop just because you grow old. In contrast to the old man in the comic strip earlier, who remarks that “the sexual is not what it used to be”, Östen points to a continuity of sexuality; to him sexual desire is something that persists and is a positive aspect of later life. As I was arguing in Chapter One, this positive discourse on old people and sexuality is a fairly new and recent one, emerging with the increasingly liberal attitudes to sex and sexuality in general during the 1960s (Andersson 2009).

To Östen, sexuality and maintained sexual desire are not only a part of old age, but in fact are essential to his quality of life now that he is old. When in the above quote he says there is no need for “happy pills”, anti-depressants, he constructs sexual activity not only in terms of pleasure and something you may desire, but also as valuable for what it does in restoring mental health and wellbeing. Östen essentially understands old age as a state of decline and negativity and he points to how he and others after retirement wonder “now what, should one simply sit around waiting for death?” In handling fears and worries about death and dying, the role of sexuality becomes central.

207. Ö: Ja men (.) nämen jag funderade ju på om att det här var nånting som jag tyckte va positivt (m) jag vet ju det att det är så mycket, ja en del de tycker ju inte det här ska fungera, när de blir pensionärer å det kanske inte jag trodde heller förr än xxx, men det är, det är som jag läste nu att en behöver ju inga såna här lyckopiller, (m) jag vet en granne han har ju hållt på å ta det i tio år, en sån där, men det fungerar inget sånt där, nej han är ju så ärlig så han kommer hit vi pratar, så jag tyckte det var väldigt viktigt, liksom (.) många, eller mer att de får kännedom om det för de (.) så därför tyckte jag att om det kunde va nåt (m).

Östen: It's a problem that we as retirees – sometimes you think that, well, you should give up, you haven't got a long time to live, so. But I'm sort of over that now. Now I'm thinking I'll live as usual for the time being.

Linn: Yes – Why did you think you should give up living just because you've become a pensioner?

Östen: Well, of course, that's nothing for your age. But I met one person the other day who said that "When you get to this age..." then she felt that she didn't want to take any new initiatives. She thought "Now there's not much left". But it's all about getting that out of your head, so you won't think about it, but take new initiatives.²⁰⁸

Sex and sexuality are not only important for maintaining a feeling of activity and to reject feelings of negativity and decline around old age, but are also seen as central to keeping one's health. Östen captures this neatly with the words: "the love life adds a real vigour to the body really".²⁰⁹ In Östen's narrative, keeping up with sex spurs hormones in the body that may protect you from depression, something which he thinks old age is likely to bring along with it. But sexuality is not only discussed as being important to wellbeing, to Östen sexuality is experienced as something of a "highlight" after retirement; something that makes life worth living.

This narrative of keeping up desire and the continuation of sexuality in later life as being a positive experience, and something which rejuvenates, resonates with the attitudes of several other interviewees, as well as other studies (cf. Potts et al. 2006). When Axel describes a 90-year old woman he knew, who got into a new relationship with a very good sex life, he characterizes this as: "she lived again".²¹⁰ Through this articulation, he not only points to the links between sexuality and health, but also to life and to retained youth in a more general sense. Sexual desire and sexuality are a source of

208. Ö: Alltså det är ju ett problem vi är pensionärer ibland så tycker en ju så att ja (.) att en kanske ska ge opp en har inte länge kvar å leva å sådär men (.) men så (.) så men jag har väl kommit över det där med så nu tänker jag att, nu lever jag som vanligt, så länge

L: Ja varför har du tänkt att du skulle ge upp å leva bara för att du blivit pensionär

Ö: Ja men det är det klart det är inget för din ålder men jag träffar, jag träffade en häromdan som sa det att när kom upp i den här åldern så tycker hon att hon vill inte ta några nya initiativ, kanske utan tänker nu har en inte mycket kvar, men det är just det att få bort det ur huvudet, så att man tänk inte på det utan kommer med nya initiativ å det gäller ju inte bara detta(ja) men jag (harklar sig) det är ju en väldigt väldigt styrka för kroppen med kärlekslivet det är det (.) absolut

209. Det är ju en väldigt väldigt styrka för kroppen med kärlekslivet det är det (.) absolut.

210. Hon levde opp.

life in people, which have effects on the entire being, and this is visible when Gösta talks about Ella Berg, a woman who is in her nineties.

Gösta: She's above ninety and she dances like a girl, supple as hell! And I mean, she used to be a cleaner in industry. By that I'm saying love is a good thing, just look at Ella Berg, she's known it.²¹¹

Sexuality in later life (as well as in life generally) is consequently made sense of as being positive, bringing health, vitality and youth to people, and continued sexual activity may as such either be a rejection of old age as decline and a dull period or a way to negotiate and handle old age as negativity.²¹²

It is clear, however, that sexual desire in these narratives appears as self-evident and naturally existing. The problem is the prevalent negative attitudes, where old age is connected with both general and sexual decline, attitudes which Östen attempts to challenge (cf. Jones 2003). Function and ability may also be an issue, as the previous chapters have discussed; when bodies age, some sexual practices may become more difficult. The way in which the men in this study approached sexuality and sexual desire as something that is natural and always there, resonates with contemporary discourses elsewhere. In an article entitled: "Seniors chatting about sex" in the magazine *Ottar*, published by RFSU, the Swedish Association for Sexual Education, the Swedish sex counsellor Marianne Göthberg is interviewed, and she claims:

Sexual desire and the capability for love do not cease with age. One might suffer from physical illness, function may decline, but the desire remains.²¹³

Göthberg makes a clear distinction between sexual desire and sexual function. Where decline in sexual function may be a natural part of ageing, decline in sexual desire is not, one may deduce from this excerpt. Although Göthberg's remark is benevolent, there are clearly normative effects stem-

211. Hon är över 90 år å hon dansar som en flicka (jaha) så smidig som fan, (mm) å jag menar hon har varit städerska vid fabriken å ja sa det ja kärlek det är bra sa jag för titta på Ella Berg för hon har vart med om det (L skrattar).

212. NB. Gösta here says love rather than sex and sexuality, but as love and the love life were occasionally used as euphemisms for sexuality and sex, I have here chosen to include the quote in the discussion. Also, as I will discuss later in this chapter, feelings of love were often closely related to sexuality in the men's narratives.

213. Den sexuella lusten och förmågan till förälskelse upphör inte med åldern. Man kan drabbas av kroppsliga sjukdomar, förmågan kan avta, men lusten finns kvar. Ottar 2004 (4) <http://www.rfsu.se/sv/Sex-och-politik/Ottar/Ottar-20041/Ottar-nr-4-2004/Aldre-soker-lust/>

ming from her statement. If sexual desire is understood as something that remains, and which is even honoured for its positive effects on health and wellbeing in later life, this could potentially become a pressure for men to stay sexually active. If youth in an ageist culture is valued and an imperative to strive for, and a retained sexual desire is linked to retained youth and vigour, this may further enhance the importance of continued sexual activity. And if in addition the sexual function can be restored and sexual desire is understood to be natural, in particular in men, it might be difficult for an old man to express the fact that he does not want to have sex.

But the link between sexual desire and keeping one's youthful vigour is rather paradoxical. On the one hand desire is always there, but on the other it is something that has to be worked at in order for it not to disappear. Where before youth was a given thing, the old man has to struggle to maintain it and this also involves a struggle to keep one's sexual desire. As Nore, 76, expresses it:

Nore: It is maybe more important *now* to keep, what can I say, the feeling of youth or what you should connect it with. To keep going, 'cause I think you feel better by it simply.²¹⁴

That one has to "keep" one's sexuality and sexual desire intact relates to what Marshall (2010, 218) refers to as a "use it or lose it" rhetoric on ageing and sexuality. Where Marshall primarily discusses sexual function and erection, the idea of "use it or lose it" also seems to guide an understanding of sexual desire. Bernt, 76, who is being treated with hormones for prostate cancer, is experiencing a decline in sexual desire and has, as he sees it, a hard time taking an initiative sexually.

Bernt: But then in intercourse for example, it's not as manifest as it was before. And I think it's important to keep these intuitions [instincts?] alive. You're supposed to take a quarter of Viagra each day – so that sexual desire doesn't die, but that you keep it going.²¹⁵

214. Nore: Det är kanske nästan viktigare nu för att hålla (.) vad ska man säga känslan av (.) av eh ungdomlighet eller vad man ska koppla det till igång för att man mår bättre av det helt enkelt tror jag, känslan för varandra förstärks.

215. [...]men sen är det ju det vid samlag till exempel det är ju inte så påtagligt som det har varit tidigare (mm) (..) och sen är ju det tycker jag det är viktigt att hålla dom intuitionerna (?) vid liv så det inte bara helt försvinner, dom här (..) xxxx att man ska ta en kvarts viagra eller varje dag så inte dom här, ja (suck) vad ska man kalla dom för att inte den här sexlusten dör ut, utan man håller igång den där (...).

Bernt has the experience that sexual desire is not as strong as it used to be when engaging in sexual practice but argues, similarly to several others, that it is important to work on it so that it does not vanish altogether. In this quote, however, there is a confusion of function and desire. Viagra, a drug originally used to enhance potency in cases of impotence, is here discussed as something that also enhances sexual desire. To “use it or lose it” then refers not only to a restoration of the erection, but also to sexual desire. If sexuality is constructed as a way of maintaining health and wellbeing, and in essence works, if not to stop, at least to delay a process of ageing, then a maintained sexual desire is something that men cannot afford to lose.

As I have noted earlier in this thesis, there is a striking paradox in how a discourse which positions sex as a positive aspect of later life may also rely on ageism, and thus sustain negative attitudes towards old age and the elderly. As Calasanti & King (2005, 7) argue, “successful aging means not aging and not being old because our constructions of old age contain no positive content”. This may be related to the way in which the men in my study, when discussing reasons for remaining sexually active and maintaining one’s sexual desire, do not solely motivate this from the pleasure it brings, as a good thing in itself. Instead, being sexual is important because it restores youth. Youth is once more asserted as being desirable, and old people should essentially only have sex to postpone or avoid ageing and becoming old.

Moreover, a discourse which claims that “of course old people are sexual too” is essentially a way of including old people into a discourse where sex is a positive aspect of life, a discourse that they were excluded from before. But this sort of assimilationism does not question the core of its own logic, which is that all people are assumed to be sexual. Not being sexual is then made into an impossibility and an unintelligibility, which naturally has consequences for those who do not wish to assert themselves sexually (cf. Lindgren 2007a, 2007b).

Importantly, while I am not claiming here that old people should be seen as asexual, I would argue that turning to a perspective of affirmative old age, rather than successful ageing, should also entail the possibility for people to choose not to be sexual. If people feel better through engaging in sexual activities that is one thing, but to claim that people should be sexually active in order to remain youthful or healthy is another. A positive discourse, which claims sexual desire to be inherent and lifelong, seemingly implies that sexuality and sexual practices take the same shapes, regardless of age. As I have repeatedly pointed out throughout this study, this requires men to keep or regain their erections even when old, and for women to engage in intercourse despite the changes that women’s ageing bodies bring on. In contrast,

affirmative old age is sensitive to the specificities of ageing bodies and the specific context(s) of old age.

Importantly, however, in this study sexual desire is not only discussed in terms of how it brings vitality and youth, there are also narratives on sexuality and on the meaning of sexual desires which produce affirmative discourses on old age. In these narratives, intimacy and touch once again figure as important in demonstrating the ways in which desire is not bound to sex as “it” is conventionally understood (i.e. intercourse and/or genitality). In a turn to intimacy and touch, the ageing body has a capacity for pleasure and desire, but sexuality is not a means to retain youth, instead it exists without a specific purpose.

I will discuss more about how intimacy and touch may provide other ways of thinking about sexual desire later in this chapter. But first I will discuss how men’s claims to have sexual desire and that it should be retained do not necessarily imply that sexual desire is experienced in the same way or attributed with the same meanings as when younger.

Seventeen and a “chronic hard-on”: Past sexual desire as orientation

If we return to the old man in the comic strip *Medelålders plus*, and how he complains about how the sexual is not what it used to be, he seems to be the complete contrast to men like Östen, who regarded sexual desire as lifelong. But the way in which this old man from the comic strip talks about sexuality earlier in life in terms of “volcanic eruptions” bears many similarities to the ways in which the men in my study understand the difference between sexuality in later life and earlier in the life course. Even though sexuality and sexual desire are not narrated as age specific, it is clear that most men in this study seem to understand and experience sexual desire in old age as very different from during their younger years. Even Östen, who spoke so enthusiastically about sexual desire in later life, admitted to certain differences.

Östen: The difference is that everything was easier before, when you were younger, I mean it’s – it was more easily aroused so to speak. But besides that, I don’t think there are any problems really. But things happen as the years go by, kind of...

Linn: What is it that happens as the years go by?

Östen: Well this thing, that arousal is stronger and more forceful when you're younger, and it's not just to do with that, everything gets more inspired [when you are young].²¹⁶

The notion of sexuality earlier in life as "more inspired" goes along with a general understanding of youth as a period when sexuality is more vivid, uncontrollable and forceful. To Östen, this is understood as a natural part of ageing, something that several others in this study seem to agree with. Sexual desire is conceptualized as less forceful and strong, as taking more time and on the whole as being less present than in adolescent sexual desire, which emerges as almost uncontrollable and always present. Edvard, 69, for example, describes adolescent sexual desire in the following way:

Edvard: I mean nowadays it's not like that. If you think about when you were young, you could see – you saw a good-looking woman across the street or something like that. And you could be affected by that, right? Sexuality is also affected. I think it is more about close contact now. You're not turned on by somebody on the other side of the street (laughs).²¹⁷

Adolescent sexual desire was, in addition, described in a very carnal and corporeal way, as something emanating from the body. Axel, 83, narrates the erection as a constant fact when young: "now, it's not like when you were seventeen, eighteen, 'cause then you had a chronic hard-on, almost."²¹⁸ Jakob, 83, talks about how there was probably a greater risk that you would be unfaithful when younger, and says: "well, before, desire won over reason, the blood was probably flowing faster than it does today."²¹⁹ In other words, being young is equated with being more hot-blooded. The links between un-

216. Ö: (...) Skillnaden det blir ju det att (.) det va ju alltid lättare förr när man var yngre, jag menar det det är ju (.) det är ju lättare upphetsad om man säger så, eh men annars så tycker jag det är aldrig några problem egentligen (.) eh men det det följer väl med åren på det viset

L: Vad är det som följer med åren ?

Ö: Ja just det att (.) att emm ja upphetsningen blir ju starkare å kraftigare när man är yngre, å det är ju inte bara det utan det är ju med allting, kanske blir mer inspirerad.

217. Jag menar nu för tiden är det ju inte så men om man tänker sig när man var ung, att man kunde se, såg en snygg kvinna gå på andra sidan gatan eller så kunde man ju bli påverkad av det va, det är ju också sexualiteten som påverkas, men du säger att det är inte så nu, nå jag tror dom sitter lite mer i närkontakt nu om, man tänder inte sexuellt på nån som går på andra sidan gatan, (skratte)

218. nu är det ju inte som när man var sjutton arton, för då hade man ju nästan kronisk fjäder (skrattar)

219. J: Ja då har väl lusten ta'tt över eller (.) före omdömet (ja) /.../J: (skrattar) Ja (..) blodet har väl runnit fortare än vad det gör nu.

controllable, carnal desire and youth is even more evident when Eskil, 75, describes his young self; a man with strong sexual desires.

Eskil: Well, but I can't deny that I'm not 20 years old any more, right? I remember that I used to masturbate quite liberally when I was in my twenties. A bit here and there. My dad always entered and looked at the floor. And then I had sort of ejaculated...²²⁰

Both in Eskil's almost burlesque depiction of adolescent sexuality, and with Axel and his "chronic hard-on", what is being referred to is a particular male body, with its erection and ejaculation. This body gets to represent strong sexual desire. Furthermore, the way in which this desire is described as strong, uncontrollable and direct has clear overtones of traditional and pervasive understandings of male sexuality.

Literature on old(er) men has repeatedly discussed how ageing may involve a de-gendering and de-masculinization of men, and the way the men in this study evoke images of hyper-sexual younger men could be interpreted as old men understanding masculinity to be more linked to youth and mid-life (Silver 2003, Thompson 2006). However, in complete contrast to this, I would argue that the above narratives show that masculinity is central to old men's constructions of themselves and their sexual subjectivities. Through these narratives, of how they were men with strong sexual desires in the past, these men establish themselves as masculine subjects in the present.

The way in which they talk about strong sexual desires in youth is often followed by laughter, laughter that cannot be interpreted in any unequivocal way. It could be a way of defusing the situation, when talking about sex as a potentially sensitive topic. But I also understand the laughing to be an expression of nostalgia, of positive feelings and memories of their adolescent sexuality. Thus, to tell about one's active sexual desire in the past need not be understood as something that is over but is in essence a way of speaking about one's self today as well. What you have been also tells something about what you are today. Here, thinking through Ahmed's metaphor of the path becomes useful. Ahmed (2006) argues that heterosexuality, like a path, is simultaneously shaped by and shapes one's direction. And in this case, looking back and retelling a desire that one used to have, as Edvard, Axel, Eskil

220. Nej men jag kan ju inte förneka att man är ju inte tjugo år längre va? (skrattar) Jag kom ihåg, jag onanerade ganska friskt när jag var i tjugoårsåldern. Lite här och var. Pappa kom alltid in och tittade på golvet (skrattar) då hade jag liksom sprutat.

and others do, becomes a way of pointing out a path walked through life, and thus a heterosexual life course takes shape.

To narrate sexuality in later life as different, and sexual desire as less forceful, does not necessarily imply that one has lost a heterosexual orientation, that one is, in the words of Ahmed, “off line” (2006, 70). Rather, the varying shape and force of desire throughout the life course becomes a matter of timing, of doing the right thing at the right time. The reiterated performances through which heterosexuality come into being are linked to time and temporality, and, as Halberstam (2005) discusses, some temporalities are naturalized and taken for granted, experienced as the way things should be. Heterosexual temporalities are, as opposed to queer time, a “time of reproduction”, fundamentally bound up with reproduction concretely as well as metaphorically (Halberstam 2005, 5). Having and raising children is understood as a natural and good thing and is linked to a normalized heterosexual life course.

Entwined in heterosexual temporalities is also the process of maturation; to be “in time” is to follow the life course along expected lines of maturation.²²¹ Hence, to be in time is to be in line and vice versa. Following this line of argument, it does not even seem desirable to narrate oneself as having as strong a sexual desire as in adolescence. Maturation to Halberstam (2005, 4) is the “emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence” and this process thus also involves sexuality and coming out of a period of uncontrollable desire into a more serene sexuality.

While time may seem to be something that simply takes places in a natural and inevitable way, it is in fact a social construct insofar as we understand it in particular ways in different contexts and different historical periods. When Östen says: “it happens as the years go by” about the decline of sexual arousal, he underlines how certain heterosexual practices and desires are tied to certain parts of the life course, to different modes of time. The passing of time in a specific way is expected, and perhaps even wanted, by Östen. By expecting experiences of desire and arousal to shape themselves along a naturalized passing of time, a sexual desire that is retained in the same form as when younger may then seem to be “against time”. Being against time, as a disruption of a heterosexual temporality, could then in turn imply disorientation, or being “off line”, with heterosexuality in general. One could emerge as a “dirty old man”, a person who is sexual at the wrong time (or in the

221. This can be compared to Freeman (2007), who argues that queer sexualities can be discussed in terms of having the wrong timing, of not following cultural expectations of what should occur during a particular time of one's life (cf. also Ambjörnsson & Bromseth 2010).

wrong place). By talking of a less strong and forceful sexual self, one avoids appearing sexually anachronistic, at worst a dirty old man.²²²

Having a (hetero)sexual desire today may thus be of less importance for maintaining a masculine and heterosexual subjectivity than being able to show a well-trodden path of heterosexual desire throughout life, and of having the right timing. However, what strikes me when I interview Owe, who tells me about the old men in an all-male bridge club he belongs to, is that it might be more important for some than for others to still perform a masculine and heterosexual self by being sexually assertive. Owe speaks about how the men in the bridge club brag about their sexual activities and conquests, and says that there is a tendency among some of the men to want to seem sexually alert. But he says that he himself keeps quiet, since he claims to have no need to “sexually influence my surroundings”.²²³ When I ask him why he thinks it is important for some men to come across as sexually alert and assertive, he starts discussing the fact that those who are more prone to perform as sexual studs, making jokes and innuendos about sex, are those who have formed new relationships in later life, for example after being widowed.

Owe: I don't know what it is... If I think about it... Well maybe, it's just a guess – that they've found a new [partner] lately who they have to show special attention to, that's what it could be about. And maybe there's nothing wrong with that...

Linn: You think it might differ, that you have to prove your sexual ability, or that you're a sexual person, if you have a new partner?

Owe: Yes... It could be something like that, because it is those [...] Now one of the men, he was widowed in the spring, he's starting to fall into this pattern as well. Not so blatantly, but when I think about it, he has started going to a social club for senior citizens with lots of widows. And he has told how the newly widowed women are making moves on him, “want to catch him” so to speak. That makes you think, sort of – isn't he doing the same [thing] – or has the same tendency? ‘Cos he's taken the initiative to set up a genealogy group for seniors, helping each other to study their family histories [...] And then, there are only women in the circle and him. So he's like the rooster among hens, and

222. This argument about how sexuality and sexual desire are linked to timing and cultural expectations about the life course can be compared to Persson (2010), who discusses how femininity takes shape in relation to the age norms and expectations of a heterosexual life course, a discussion based on interviews with Swedish women of different ages. See also Ambjörnsson & Jönsson (2010) for a discussion on intersections of gender, sexuality, age and the life course.

223. Sexuellt försöka påverka min omgivning.

he has made some insinuations about women seeing him as a possible prospect.²²⁴

Owe seemingly suggests that, for men who have been widowed and are finding new partners in later life, the need to underscore themselves as sexually assertive and to be able to seduce women is stronger than for himself and others who are in long term relationships. To Owe, the man who sets up a genealogy group with only women does so in order to meet women, and to find proof that he is still seen as desirable: "a possible prospect". Relating this to my discussion on timing and being able to point to the past as a way of reiterating heterosexuality, it might also be the case that the proximity of a sexual partner makes a difference to how one emerges as a sexual and gendered being.

If a man, as in the case of Owe, has been in a heterosexual relationship for 60 years, he is firmly situated within a straight space and does not need to point to sexual desire in order to emerge as masculine and heterosexual. On the other hand, for those who are widowed, single or in fairly new relationships, the "insecurity" might be greater, one's gendered and sexual position not as firmly secured – and as a consequence one might feel the need to assert oneself sexually. This links to my discussion at the end of the previous chapter, about how men who were single in my study expressed more anxieties and worries about being able to have an erection when expected to. Being outside a stable relationship may require men to "prove" themselves sexually, both in terms of function and desire.

So men are narrating past sexual conquests and strong sexual desire in youth to establish themselves as masculine subjects, but claim to have a diminished sexual desire now that they are old. In the old men's narratives, the

224. O: Jag vet inte vad det är (..) jag vet inte, ja om jag ska tänka (..) alltså ja (..) ja kanske det är ja det en gissning bara att dom har hittat en ny på senare tid som det gäller att vara speciellt uppmärksam mot, kan va kan va det men det kanske inget fel.

L: Du tror att det kan skilja sig att man måste bevisa sin liksom, sexuella förmåga eller att man är en sexuell person om man har en ny partner?

O: Ja..någonting sånt kan det vara, men men det det är just dom som, ja sen har vi ja men någonting ja det är någonting sånt där, för nu har vi en utav männen som har blivit änkeman i höstas och han han har börjat falla ini samma samma modell som dom, inte så påfallande men när jag tänker efter han har gått på sån här pensionärsklubb tillsammans med nyblivna änkor och då har han berättat om hur en del lägger an på honom och vill fånga in honom så att säga (mm) man kan undra om inte han gör samma- eller har (?) samma tendens för han har nämligen bildat en, men det kanske inte var avsiktligt, han har bildat en släktforskningsgrupp här bland dom här äldre, och i den här cirkeln är det bara kvinnor med och så han (Linn skrattar) så att åtta eller nio kvinnor och så han då som tuppen i en hönsgård, och där har han gjort en del antydningar om att kvinnor kanske har sett honom som en möjlig chans, (mm).

younger man with a strong sexual desire is thus necessary, both to identify with and to distance from. To distance oneself from this younger man is a way of being in time, to follow cultural expectations of maturing and becoming more controlled, also sexually (Terry & Braun 2009).

But claiming to have matured and distancing themselves from strong sexual desires (of earlier life) and sexual assertiveness was not only about doing age-appropriate sexuality. As I was arguing in Chapter Four, several men in this study also seemed to want to distance themselves from a “stereotypical macho-masculinity”. Thus, when Owe tells me about the bragging men in the bridge club, this also seems to be a way of shaping himself as a special kind of man, oriented towards particular “positive” version of masculinity. By orienting towards this kind of masculinity, Owe at the same time makes room for feelings of lessened sexual desire.

Owe: While playing cards we get into these kind of things, and talk, and I know some talk far and wide that they're going home to their partners for some cavorting, but I don't think there is much to it, it's more prattle. 'Cos on other occasions it seems as if they are pretty much the same – they're probably in the same position as me.²²⁵

Owe dismisses his friends' sexual stories as “prattle”, talk without any substance or reference to real life events. Instead, he claims that they are probably like him now, having less intercourse and engaging more in intimacies without intercourse. A lessening of sexual activity and desire is accordingly argued to be a natural and normal thing as one ages. A critique of assertive male sexuality need not be linked to old age per se, both Ingvar and Yngve talk critically about other men who have boasted about their sexual prowess and “jumped into bed real easy” throughout their lives.²²⁶ But if a more serene sexual desire is understood as part of a process of maturing, this apparently fits well with a critique of and orientation away from sexually assertive masculinity.

From the discussion so far, it is fair to say that the ways in which the men in this study discuss desire are complex. On the one hand, sexual desires are spoken of as self-evident and natural, in line with discourses positive to

225. O: När vi spelar kort så kommer vi ju in på såna här saker ibland och pratar och jag vet en del dom pratar vitt och brett att dom ska hem till sambon som dom säger att dom ska hem till dom och ha rajtantajtan då, men jag tror inte det är så mycket utan det är mera munväder, för sen i andra sammanhang så kommer det fram till att dom, dom är ungefär samma,(...) dom är nog i samma sits som jag, ungefär där.

226. Hoppas i säng hur lätt som helst va.

sexuality as a part of later life. On the other hand, sexual desire in later life is conceptualized as *different from* and *less forceful* than earlier in life. Just as the old woman in the comic strip *Medelålders plus* who, when her husband complains about his diminished desires, remarks: “but that’s more than one can ask for”, the men in this study described a less manifest and less strong sexual desire as something to be expected; along naturalized lines of time. To claim that sexual desire fades in later life does not imply, however, that men draw on a discourse of asexuality. Sexual desire is still perceived to exist and manifests not least through looking and fantasizing. A lack of desire is very seldom articulated. Where this is done, however, it may tell us something interesting about the construction and meaning of desire to a gendered and aged sexual subjectivity.

Lack of desire as gender trouble?

Although sexual desire is described as vanishing a bit as one grows older, the men in my study generally seemed to think that sexual attraction to and desire for women is biological, and as such always present in men. When I ask Ingvar, 73, about sex and sexuality, he expresses the fact that sex for him today is “out of the question”. But this is not because he has experienced loss or lack of desire.

Ingvar: Well, you’ve pretty much given up on that. The possibility of sex today is excluded more or less, because there hasn’t been an opportunity for it. But you might have a wish and feeling for it of course. That’s a part of the drive you have, biologically, you can’t say anything else. You might still feel attracted to women. It’s probably completely normal to us guys.²²⁷

Ingvar had been a widower for a little more than one year when interviewed, but he did not express the reason for his sexual inactivity as a loss of sexual desire. Instead he speaks about lack of possibilities/opportunities to have sex. The remaining “feeling” or “wish” he refers to is made sense of as a biological drive, and as such something that is inherent in humans, and ever-present. While this assertion may point to how Ingvar establishes himself as someone

227. I: Ja det har man väl gett opp, möjligheten till sex idag den är ju utesluten mer eller mindre för (ja) det har ju inte funnit tillfälle för det, men önskemål och känsla för det det har man ju kunnat ha förstås, det ingår väl i den drift man har, (...) biologiskt det kan man ju inte säga annat –

L: Varför, du känner, du känner liksom –

I: Attraktion kan man ju känna till kvinnor, fortfarande, det är väl helt normalt för oss gubbar.

who still feels sexual desire, his narrative of sexual desire is not unambiguous on the whole. As I shall discuss later on, in some parts of the interview Ingvar does express a loss of desire to engage in any sexual practices. It seems, however, as if the initial articulation of an existing sexual desire is an important way of establishing himself, which is also visible in other interviewees' self-presentations.

Sexual desire in youth was described with strong carnal and physical overtones, in contrast to the more controlled desires of later life. Yet desire was still understood as being a physical need, as in the case of Östen.

Östen: It feels like a necessity, if there's been more than a week or so, then you feel that things aren't the way they should be. It becomes physical too, 'cause you can feel it and sometimes it aches a little, if there is something that should – if you see what I mean?²²⁸

When sexual desire and sexuality are discussed, it is generally in gender-neutral terms. Östen, who is the one who most strongly asserts that sexual desire is lifelong, explicitly points to how this goes for women as well as men. Yet, as I pointed out above, narratives of age and sexualities, of young and old, have implicit references to masculinity and male sexual morphologies linked to erection and ejaculation. Also, it seems as if discourses of later life sexuality and sexual desire as positive (in a vein of successful ageing) may intersect with gendered norms, which ordain men always to be sexual, wanting to engage in sexual practice.

Where I have so far focused on how the men in my study narrate perpetual desire, from now on I will discuss how they narrate lack or loss of desire. Using Ahmed's notion of orientation to think of the reiteration of sexualities and how bodies are directed, what is interesting is to think about whether to lack desire may imply a "lack of direction". What does an experienced lack of sexual desire do to the shaping of subjectivity? Thinking again of Butler's (1993) *heterosexual matrix*, men's expressions of desire for women are part of becoming intelligible as (real) men. This may be a very inflexible postulation in the sense that one can of course pass as a man without desiring women, but it seems fair to say that the reiteration of heterosexuality (and to a great extent masculinity) is made possible and is directed out of a perceived desire, as a form of compass. This takes its expression in my material through the

228. Det är en sak som man inte kan leva utan helt enkelt, för det piggar upp och det förenar det känns ju som en nödvändighet det, har gått över en vecka eller så det kan ju bli saker då känner en att, då är det inte så det ska Det går det blir ju kroppsligt med för det känns ju och ibland så värker det lite grann å då är det nånting som ska (he) Om du förstår vad jag menar?

way in which men talk of attraction to women and constantly look at women. But it may also have the consequence that when men lack sexual desire this is experienced as a strange feeling, and something that is not so readily articulated.

The two interviews in which a lack or loss of desire was most explicitly addressed were with men who explained their lack of desire as a side effect of prostate cancer and the subsequent hormone treatments for this illness. Nore, 76, expresses clearly how sexual desire for women is a central part of one's sense of self. This does not mean that sexual desire has to imply sexual practice per se, but certainly an "interest" in women. When he starts to experience a loss of desire and reduced interest in women, as an effect of his hormone treatment, this is consequently felt as a very strange feeling.

Nore: But, the interesting thing was that the interest in the opposite sex sort of vanished, it was a real personality change. I mean like, if there's some woman or female friends or something, you notice as a man. Women do that too, how the person is and with a certain interest. That did not exist at all. I found that very weird.

Linn: Tell me more, you kind of stopped looking, or?

Nore: Well, the interest that I had had my entire life, I've always looked and or appraised or how I should put it. I think everyone – I don't think that's anything special, it has nothing to do with you being unhappy in your marriage. That disappears suddenly.²²⁹

Nore discusses how "an interest" in the opposite sex is always there and takes its expression through looking and appraising the qualities of, in men's case, women. Nore rejects the idea that this is something only men do, a characteristic linked to masculinity. Rather, he is reinforcing heteronormativity, the idea that women and men are always attracted to each other. In a very straightforward manner he shows how a heterosexual matrix takes shape in everyday life, through an orientation towards the opposite sex enacted

229. Men det intressanta var att intresset för det motsatta könet var som bortblåst, det var en riktig personlighetsförändring, jag menar då så här, om det är nån nån kvinna som eller kvinnliga bekanta eller vad som helst så noterar man som man och det gör ju kvinnor också, hur personen är och med ett visst intresse (.) och det fanns inte alls (.) det tyckte jag var väldigt konstigt.

L: Berätta mer du slutade liksom titta eller liksom –

N: Nja de intresset som jag har haft hela livet jag har alltid kollat och eller bedömt eller vad ska jag säga det tror jag alla, det tror inte jag är nåt speciellt, det har inget med att man vantrivs med sitt äktenskap och göra, det försvinner plötsligt.

through (practices of) looking, desiring, and alleged feelings of interest or attraction.

The “weird” feeling that something is wrong and “a change of personality”, a challenge to one’s subjectivity, could be understood as expressions of the everyday life experience of not being able to stay within a heterosexual matrix due to the lack of desire (for the opposite sex). Thinking of sexuality within a Butlerian theoretical framework, consistency between gender and sexuality is vital, and the “broken, failed or abject or unintelligible gender” creates uncanniness (Lindgren 2007a, 53). It is then possible to think that lack of desire as a lack of interest in/desire for women could also be seen as faulty, and result in feelings of discomfort and not recognizing one’s self. If one’s subject position is bound up with feelings of desire, and those feelings are expected to always be there, lack of desire can indeed be said to be challenging or even threatening to subjectivity. In a study by Hinchcliff et al. (2009), on heterosexual women’s experiences of loss of sexual desire, the participating women, similarly to Nore, felt very *Other* when not experiencing any sexual desire. The women even described themselves in terms of being “abnormal”, “odd” or a “freak” because of their loss of desire (Hinchcliff et al. 2009, 455). This suggests that loss of desire is not only experienced as troubling for men in terms of masculinity, but also for women in relation to femininity.

Another aspect of how lack of desire may be troubling to a gendered subjectivity is shown in Bernt’s narrative. Here, lack of sexual desire is a form of “gender trouble” in the sense that he cannot be sexually active and take initiatives to satisfy his partner, something he feels is expected of him. Bernt, too, is being treated with hormones for prostate cancer. As lack of desire is a documented side effect of the hormone treatment, one might perhaps expect Bernt to understand a loss of desire as “natural”, when experienced within the realm of pathology. But Bernt feels obliged to be sexually active and satisfy his female partner, and he thus seems to have a hard time in accepting and handling his feelings of lack of desire. As with several others, Bernt’s narrative on sexual desire is surrounded by ambiguity and contradiction. To begin with, Bernt is rather reluctant to speak about sexual issues, and when we start talking about sexuality he does not express that he lacks desire but instead says:

Bernt: The need is there, right, but it’s not as frequent, I mean the feelings are still there.²³⁰

230. B: Behovet finns ju va men det det är ju inte så högfrequent som det har varit under åren, jag menar känslorna finns ju kvar (...)

What is meant by “the feelings” that Bernt claims to still have is not entirely clear but may be interpreted as a way of attempting to point out a sexual orientation, and that his body is still directed towards women. To claim to still have “feelings” could be interpreted as a way of retaining the possibility of heterosexuality, rather than the possibility of sexual practice *per se*. I met with Bernt once before I conducted the actual interview and he told me then that he was “chemically castrated” by his treatment, but I did not really understand what this might involve. In the interview I therefore start asking him whether the treatment makes it difficult to get an erection. Bernt agrees that the treatment affects his erection, but he also mentions “difficulties in taking an initiative” as a consequence. The notion of “taking an initiative” is his way into narratives of loss of desire.

Bernt: Well surely, you don't feel the same desire as before but – you have to get over that threshold so that the partner is satisfied anyway.²³¹

What echoes once again is the discourse that surfaced and was discussed in Chapter Five – the responsibility to satisfy *her* in sex. Bernt's narrative thus points to ways in which there might not only be pressures to have an erection in order to satisfy one's partner, but also that a man has to have desire in order to “take an initiative” in sexual activities. Bernt talks repeatedly about sexual activities as something to engage in for his partner to become satisfied. He wants things to be the same as before, for her sake, and thus fondles her and tries to give her an orgasm. To make her satisfied, however, requires an effort on his part, to keep up desire enough to engage in sexual activities with his partner. When I ask whether this “castration” is something he is suffering from, he does not respond to the question in a very direct manner. Instead he starts talking about his obligations towards his partner.

Bernt: Well of course, these moments you have together (..) but you can't skip it all together either, 'cause you have a partner who – ²³²

Bernt's lack of sexual desire is discussed in relation to his partner, in a similar way to how the men in the previous chapter discussed their impotence as something that could potentially mean they might let their partner down sexually, rather than in terms of the pleasure *they* might miss out on. It is

231. B: Ja det klart att det, man känner ju inte samma lust (mm) som tidigare utan, man måste ju ta sig över den där tröskeln så partnern blir tillfredställd i alla fall.

232. B: Ja det klart att eh dom här stunderna som man har tillsammans (..) men man kan ju inte heller helt och hållet hoppa över det för det man har ju partner som –

not entirely clear how one should interpret what Bernt says above. It seems as though he is trying to convey that the intimate moments that he and his partner have together are suffering due to his “castration”. His shift to how “you can’t skip” these moments indicates that, despite his lack of desire, he feels an obligation towards his partner.

Overall, Bernt seems to be arguing that sex is central (although it is not very clear what “sex” in this case involves), and thus to maintain a functioning relationship one has to overcome the lack of desire one experiences, as he phrases it “get over the threshold”.²³³ “There shouldn’t be an insurmountable wall between you when you have an intimate relationship in many ways,” he argues. To retain the desire in the relationship is seen as important in order not to grow cold and indifferent. The importance of not growing cold and indifferent is illustrated by metaphors of turning into “ice-statues”.

Bernt: I mean you can’t be two ice-statues, you’ve got to try and hug each other every now and then.

Linn: Why is it important not to grow cold like that?

Bernt: Well, well, that – you’re the same individuals before and after the illness, right?²³⁴

Bernt’s way of underlining the importance of keeping up sexual desire and continuing a sexual relationship reflects how sexual desire is not only about the sexual practice per se, but about orienting and shaping your body and subjectivity in relation to the couple and the heterosexual relationship.

Consequently, sexual desire not only serves the purpose of making sexual practice possible, but also works as a form of glue to a maintained desirable relationship with the female partner. This aspect of loss of desire also resonated in the study by Hinchcliff et al. (2009). The women in their study worried about not being “‘proper’ wives” when not having sexual desire, and feared that if they did not fulfil their male partners’ sexual needs the relationship might end (Hinchcliff et al. 2009, 457). Hinchcliff and colleagues (2009, 460) argue that the women’s feelings relate to traditional cultural expectations of

233. Och jag menar man får ju inte vara två is-stoder utan man måste ju försöka å krama om varandra lite då och då och då.

234. B: Ja det klart att det, man känner ju inte samma lust (mm) som tidigare utan, man måste ju ta sig över den där tröskeln så partnern blir tillfredställd i alla fall. Och jag menar man får ju inte vara två is-stoder utan man måste ju försöka å krama om varandra lite då och då.

L: Varför är det viktigt att man inte blir två isstoder så?

B: Jo men det det (..) man är ju samma individer före och efter (..) sjukdomen va [...]

femininity to act responsibly and care for the partner in order to maintain “happy committed heterosexual relationships”. But Bernt’s narrative suggests that men may also experience pressure to maintain a good relationship by enacting sexual desire. It is then perhaps more a matter of performing the (heterosexual) couple in the right way by enacting desire.

It is not only in Bernt’s head that maintained sexual desire is necessary for the relationship even in later life. This idea is seemingly also part of a popular discourse, which can be found, for example, on the Swedish homepage Lust50plus.se (desire 50 plus). Lust50plus.se is a commercial website filled with sexual advice and sexual products (lubricants, sex toys etc.) aimed at the older population. The slogan of the homepage is: “Your first aid for sexual desire at a mature age”.²³⁵ With its focus on desire and its sex-positive tone, the homepage is apparently part of the discourse of sexuality as part of successful and positive ageing. On the introductory page of the website, one may read:

A well-functioning intimate relationship is documented to be healthy, and in a relationship it is the responsibility of both [partners] to keep the fire sparkling.²³⁶

This kind of statement clearly resonates with the normative backdrop of discourses proclaiming sexuality to be part of successful ageing. Again the health aspect is underlined; one should maintain sexual activity for reasons of health. But it is also striking how the above quote stresses the couple and how sexual desire is a “responsibility” when being in a couple. The worries and anxieties that were expressed both by Bernt in this study and by the women in the study by Hinchcliff et al. (2009) are then likely to emerge in relation to popular normative expressions on sexual desire and the couple such as the one above. I would argue that coupledness, as a social rectitude which feeds into heteronormativity in various ways, also influences and shapes people’s sexual relationships. Coupledness is not only normative in the sense that one is expected to be in a couple, but also in how one is expected to act as a couple and enact coupledness in particular ways. In this case, having a good relationship in later life also involves having sexual desire.

As will be discussed later in this chapter, the importance of emotions and feelings of love and togetherness is a significant part of how the men in this study construct heterosexual subjectivities. For someone like Bernt, main-

235. www.lust50plus.se, “Första lusthjälpen för dig i mogen ålder”.

236. Ett väl fungerande samliv är dokumenterat hälsosamt och i en relation är det bådadas ansvar att hålla gnistan vid liv.

taining sexual practice may then also be a way to maintain love and togetherness.

Where some men in this study voiced sexuality and sexual desire as things that were simply there, as part of a biological drive and inherent to one's person, Bernt's narrative points to how sexual desire could be understood as something that needs to be performed. Several men in this study pointed to the need to have more "foreplay" when getting older, and this was then often a matter both of adjusting one's practices to "new" insights about what women enjoyed, and adjusting to ageing bodies that were slower than before. To Bernt, however, having more foreplay was also a way to retain and perform sexual desire.

Bernt: Well of course you have to have a bit more foreplay than before, it [the sexual desire] is not all dead, right, but it's not like it used to be but – I mean there's a way of playing along, so that the partner feels satisfied.²³⁷

In a similar way to several others, Bernt points to sexual desire as being less strong and forceful now that he is old. But, interestingly, he also uses the words "playing along" to describe how sexual desire can be enacted. When hearing the words "playing along" I associate this with faking pleasure. When I ask him about this, he seems to argue that it is not about faking, as in doing something you really do not want. Rather, "playing along" means to keep doing it, as Bernt phrases it, as "completing".²³⁸ To "play along" then means for somebody to continue sexual activity, even if he does not have a strong sexual desire, and would really rather not. Although Bernt himself does not want to term this "faking", it bears a striking resemblance to how women expressed their reasons for faking orgasms in Roberts et al. (1995, 529): because it "keeps the man happy and, thus, the relationship functioning".

The words "playing along" point to the performative character of sexual desire, where desire has to be played out, worked on and done. Yet, sexual desire was also described as being inherent and natural. This ambiguity of sexual desire links to sex/gender distinctions, in which gender is supposed to emanate from the body, as something that is stable and always there, while at the same time being a role that is played.

237. B: Ja det klart man får ju lov att ha lite för för mera förspel än tidigare, det är inte alldeles dött va (nä) men det är inte som som man är van att det har varit va utan, men jag menar det är ju ett sätt att man spelar med så att partnern känner sig tillfredsställd.

238. Fullfölja.

The narratives of Nore and Bernt show two different versions of how a loss of sexual desire may be understood as gender trouble and may trouble subjectivity in different ways. To Nore, it is the sense of self that is challenged when one's (heterosexual) orientation to women through looking and having an interest vanishes. To Bernt, his loss of desire is expressed as a lack of initiative, and is troubling to him since he cannot be active and pleasure his partner in the way that he feels is expected of him. His feelings of not wanting to or being capable of engaging in sexual activities with his partner threaten not only his masculinity, but also the possibility of maintaining a good loving relationship.

Next I will discuss how experiences of lack of sexual desire relate not only to gendered subjectivity but also to an aged subjectivity, how one's sense of self is shaped through experiences of feeling old and ageing.

Got a lust for life? Loss of desire as being old

It might not be all about "volcanic eruptions" any more, but once in a while there are a few "aftershocks". The way in which one of the comic strips at the beginning of this chapter conceptualizes sexual desire, as less forceful but still there, has much in common with how the men in this study make sense of desire. Even in the cases where men experience a loss of sexual desire, this is not made sense of through a discourse of asexual old age. There were, however, cases where feelings of loss of desire seemed to be closely related to experiences of becoming and being old, such as those of Ingvar and Owe that I will discuss next. Discussing their narratives will lead on to a subsequent questioning of whether it is meaningful to speak of the terms asexuality and sexuality at all.

Ingvar and I are sitting at the kitchen table in his house, with an interior that seems to have been decorated in the 1970s. Ingvar is proudly offering me soup that he has cooked, and our conversation in the interview ranges from his health to what he refers to as "his forty dull years" of working life. Since his wife's death one year earlier, Ingvar has lived alone and does not have a partner. When I ask about sexuality, Ingvar tells me about the decline in sexual activity between himself and his wife prior to her death. I also ask him what it would be like to meet a new partner, if sex would be part of it or not. At some point, Ingvar expresses a continued interest in women as being a normal thing to "us guys". But when I ask him whether he would like to have sex with a new partner, he seems doubtful.

Ingvar: I don't know really, I don't think so. I don't feel particularly attracted to sex. I don't know really. It's a possible partner who – how they

look upon the whole thing, things to do with hygiene and all that. It might feel a bit messy to do it. I don't know. I don't feel any need for it.²³⁹

Ingvar is clearly hesitant in the above quote, he takes pauses and clears his throat, which may point to the possibility that *not wanting to have sex* could be difficult to talk about. What a potential partner would think about sex is important to Ingvar, and this resonates with some of what Bernt was discussing above: that if she wanted it he might have to comply. But Ingvar also points to the embodied character of sex, of sex as something “messy”. There is no elaboration on why the messiness of sex causes dislike (or lack of desire) for sex, but the way in which, throughout the interview, Ingvar talks about himself and his life indicates that his experience and feeling of being old and unattractive shapes his lack of sexual desire.

Ingvar: You're living alone here, and you're out for walks. And I usually say hello to people, but damn there are so many grumpy people walking around here. Who don't even say “hi”. Those who are my age, ladies my age, that isn't a problem. They are always really happy if you start talking to them. But the young ones, you know, they just “spit at you”. “Why are you saying hello to me, you old fuck?” That makes you stop. It's difficult to get in contact with younger women so to speak.²⁴⁰

I ask him whether it is important to meet a woman who is younger and he says:

Well, there's nothing wrong with one the same age really. But there aren't many who are interested in old geezers (laughs).²⁴¹

In these quotes, Ingvar uses the words “you old fuck” or “old geezer” when referring to himself. I believe that these words play a significant role in understanding Ingvar's reasoning around the difficulties of meeting a new part-

239. Jag vet faktiskt inte, jag tror inte, (harkel) jag känner mig inte så speciellt attraherad för sex [...] Ja jag vet faktiskt inte. Det är ju eventuell motpartner (sic) som, hur dom ser på det hela med, ja med hygien å allting sånt. Det kanske kan kännas en aning kladdigt å hålla på, jag vet inte. Jag känner inget behov för det.

240. Man lever ensam här och man är ute och går på promenader, då brukar jag hälsa på folk, men fan så mycket sura folk det går här, som inte hälsar ens, å framför allt dom som är jämnåriga med mig som jag upplever som jämnåriga å damer inga problem, dom är jättegla om man börjar prata med dom va, men yngre vettu de bara fräser åt en å gubbtjyv va ska du hälsa på me, då slutar man ju (jaja men) det är svårt att få kontakt med yngre kvinnor om man säger så va (ja).

241. I: (.) Ja en jämnårig är det väl inge fel på kanske, men det är inte så många som är intresserad av gamla gubbar (skratt).

ner. Ingvar does not use these derogatory words only in this particular quote. Throughout the interview, he takes up and uses negative words related to old age to describe himself. Although words such as “old fuck” or “old geezer” are partly a humorous jargon, they also convey the way in which Ingvar feels marginalized and *othered* as an old person. The fact that people regard him as an “old geezer” affects his feelings about the possibilities of engaging in another relationship, and might also in turn discourage or create obstacles to feelings of desire.

When I ask Ingvar what he thinks people might find attractive in him he laughs, points to a photo of himself and says: “Look at this sports car, a lot of women are drawn to that”.²⁴² He jokingly proposes that his potential attractiveness is attributed to his car rather to himself as a person. That an old person is an unattractive and undesirable person is a relatively firmly established discourse, and to think that anyone would want to have sex with this person is at best a funny joke, as when the old man dressed in long johns suggests an erotic festivity in the comic strip at the beginning of the chapter (cf. Jones 2003, Calasanti & Slevin 2001, Andersson 2009). These feelings of undesirability, such as those expressed by Ingvar, are likely to shape experiences of sexual desire and whether one wants to engage in sexual activities with somebody else or not.

To think once more of sexual desire along the lines of Ahmed and her theoretical terminology of orientation, sexual desire may, as I have suggested, function as a directing device that orients bodies. In this sense, desire functions as a form of “technology”, bodies are felt to be directed through how they are drawn to each other. Ahmed (2006, 85) argues:

Indeed orientation is a powerful technology in so far as it constructs desire as a magnetic field: it can imply that we were drawn to certain objects and others as if by a force of nature.

Thinking of desire as being made intelligible through a language of magnetism, that objects/others attract by a force of nature, it is worth noting how magnetism also involves movement. Magnetic fields are created by the relative movement of electric charges. So, if orientation functions as a technology to construct desire in terms of magnetism, this also implies that desire cannot just exist in a stationary state as a result of orientation but rather, desire as magnetism in fact involves movement. What might this imply in relation to what I have just said about Ingvar and his feelings of being un-

²⁴².Ser du den här sportbilen, xxxx xxxx, den drar till sig mycket fruntimmer (skratt).

attractive? If Ingvar experiences himself as an old geezer, and as such not desirable as an object of attraction, he experiences that objects, his body and another body, cannot attract. And when objects (bodies) do not attract, there is no desire. Put simply, when Ingvar feels that nobody wants him, he cannot feel sexual desire either.

What I have tried to discuss so far is how experiences of desire must be understood in relation to old age as a social position and context. Experiencing oneself as an “old geezer”, a non-desirable subject (whose age, body shape etc. do not match what is understood as attractive in our culture), and feeling marginalized – “being alone” and “difficult to get contacts” – influences and shapes feelings of desire. It seems, however, that the wide range of meanings connected to desire must be acknowledged. Rather than simply stating that either you have desire or you don’t, I would like to emphasize the way in which Ingvar may have desire in the sense that he is still being oriented towards women through “interest” and “attraction”. But he lacks desire in the respect that he does not want to engage in sexual practices. What one actually should feel sexual desire for is a question that remains with us, and that I will next discuss in relation to Owe and the way in which he narrates lack of sexual desire as an experience of growing old.

Despite discourses of sexual desire as lifelong and continuing into later life, being old could still be a way of making sense of a lack of sexual desire. This could imply that experiences of being old make one’s sexual desire drop, but it could also mean that lack of desire is made sense of and related to a narrative of being old. Owe, 84, narrates a specific event as having been important to his changing relation to and desire for sex, in particular intercourse. This event meant a significant change from his earlier life and also a disruption to the social engagement he has had. His narrative suggests that changes in later life, experiences of becoming old, affect if and what kind of sex you desire. When we start discussing sex and sexuality in the interview, Owe talks about it as something positive, but links it primarily to youth, at least where intercourse is concerned. As the interview goes on, we get into why he and his wife stopped having intercourse, something they had rather frequently up until about eight years ago. I ask what happened that made him lose his desire for intercourse eight years ago.

Owe: Well that [happened] at the same time as we sold our summer-house, I lost weight and generally – I mourned that.²⁴³

243. O: Jo men det samtidigt med det att vi sålde sommarstället, jag gick ner i i vikt och allmän och helt jag sörjde det där, det –

Selling the summerhouse is an incident he returns to at several points in the interview, and he also hands me a piece of paper on which he has written some things about himself and where he also mentions the selling of the summerhouse as having been a crucial event and also a turning point in relation to his body. The summerhouse is described as a place full of joy, as a get-away and a social spot where they met friends to socialize, to sing and dance. Owe says that by selling the house “a piece of our lives disappeared”. Although the occasions on which they had intercourse were fewer than when they were younger, Owe assures me that it still worked without any problems up until they decided to sell the house. The sale, however, affected him physically as well as mentally, he seemingly became depressed, and this impacted on his desire as well. His loss of desire, combined with his wife’s back problems, made them stop having intercourse.

What Owe describes can very much be characterized as what gerontologists describe as a transition phase from the third to the fourth age. Whereas the third age is connected with continued activity and engagement with social life and relatively good physical health, the fourth age is more connected with physical decline, social disengagement and dependency on caregivers, etcetera (Gilleard & Higgs 2000, Jönson, 2009). Gott & Hinchcliff’s (2003b) study of attitudes to sexuality among older people suggests that impotence could be seen as a “potential catalyst for the transition between the Third Age and the Fourth Age” (2003b, 66), and that impotence was problematic for those who still regarded themselves as young, whereas for those who identified as old it was seen as normal. Their study also suggests that impotence might be a trigger for identifying as old. This case might be similar but opposite to issues of sexual desire.

Events involving a transition into the fourth age, when one starts to identify as old, physically and mentally, do things to one’s experience of sexual desire. Selling the much-loved summerhouse could be regarded as just one example. Moving into residential care, experiencing significant physical changes, the death of a spouse or other close friends or relatives, might be examples of events which drastically influence experiences and feelings of desire. If we return to Ingvar, his feelings of being old and unattractive are likely to also be shaped by his wife’s death one year earlier. For both Ingvar and Owe, sorrow and depression seem to be important factors in their loss of desire.

The way in which Owe approaches sexuality is very much in contrast to how, at the beginning of the chapter, Östen talked about sexual activity as bringing “vigour to the body”, something that benefited both health and wellbeing in later life. Owe on the other hand seems to regard the force and

movement that sex may involve as potentially harmful to the ageing body and he describes how he avoids making his wife too sexually aroused.

Owe: Well I – sometimes I fondle her a little, but I don't want to excite her to an orgasm, or something like that. 'Cause I don't think it's good for the body to be disturbed that much, and nor does she want to get that excited.²⁴⁴

The different ways in which sexuality and sex are regarded as either *a strength to the body* or as *potentially draining the body's energies* or “disturbing” the body not only represent two different attitudes, but in fact two historically competing discourses of sexuality in later life. During the 20th century both these discourses have existed, to motivate or restrain old people to or from sexual activity (Andersson 2009, Lennerhed 2002). Behind these different discourses lie seemingly different understandings of ageing and/or sexual bodies. If sexuality and sexual desire, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, are understood as strong and uncontrollable forces then, as Östen and others argue, this could work to revitalize and bring youth into ageing bodies. But sexual desire is also made sense of as something that is reserved for young bodies, who can handle the strong force that sexual desire involves, and Owe's narrative is an example of this perspective. Experiencing oneself as old, or circumstances that make one enter into the last phase of later life, could then potentially also change experiences of sexual desire and lead one to re-conceptualize and reinterpret one's sexual subjectivity.

Sexual desire, which at first seemed to be something very self-evident and natural, something that is “always there”, a drive or aspect of biology, turns out to be more than one “thing” in this thesis. Firstly, sexual desire may be understood as an orientation, a way in which memories, fantasies, gaze and “interest” clears the path of a heterosexual line, a reiteration of heterosexuality (doing heterosexuality by telling how one has done heterosexuality). In the cases where men experience a loss of this desire, for example, Nore and Bernt, this could imply gender trouble and a threat to one's subjectivity more generally. But, as the above narratives of Ingvar and Owe indicate, sexual desire is also taking shape and becoming intelligible through age. Accordingly, sexual desire should not only be discussed in relation to a *heterosexual matrix*, in which gender and sexuality are intertwined, but also in relation to

244. O: Nej jag, jag då och då så brukar jag väl smeka lite grann så men jag vill inte reta upp henne till orgasm, eller nåt sånt för jag tror inte det är bra för (.) att komma i för, att kroppen kommer i för mycket oro och hon vill inte heller bli så upphetsad.

a “matrix of age”, from which subjectivities emerge and become intelligible (cf. Persson 2010, 326).

I have discussed the narratives of Ingvar and Owe as examples of how feeling old in various ways shapes experiences of sexual desire and may contribute to feelings of loss of desire. But the question that one may raise from this is: what is one actually expected to desire? What Owe and Ingvar seemed to have lost desire for was first and foremost intercourse, and next I will argue that the old men’s ways of emphasizing intimacy and touch may be understood as expressions of sexual desire and may even propose a rethinking of desire outside the realms of coital and genital sexuality.

Intimacy and touch as (a)sexual practice

Owe: I still find it nice and pleasurable to see my wife naked, and likewise she enjoys looking at me. And that’s really fantastic, when you think about it, that you’re able to feel that way after 85 years.²⁴⁵

Is sexual desire only about desire to have intercourse? The narratives on desire and lack of desire that have been presented in this thesis so far clearly reflect desire as something wider than longing for intercourse, indeed something even beyond feeling arousal. The words of Owe above serve as an example of how looking may also be an expression of desire in different ways. Owe says that he has no need for sex any more, and that this is something that belongs to youth. But at the same time he also speaks of how he enjoys seeing his wife naked and describes how they are physically intimate together, narratives that are filled with pleasure and desire. This could involve him fondling her or them lying together holding each other. Owe also tells me that “in the mornings when I leave [her bed] she always feels my old [penis]” and he laughs quietly when saying this. Rather than this being a way of making him erect, her way of touching him is part of a “nice feeling”, and a way for them “to keep the contact”, Owe says.²⁴⁶

This keeping in contact, not through intercourse or even sexual genital practices, but through intimacy and touch more generally, resonates strongly with what was said in Chapter Four (see also Potts et al. 2006, Hurd 2006). What I would like to add here is that not only does a turn to intimacy and touch make it possible to rethink male sexual morphologies, sexual subjec-

245. Jag tycker det är skojigt och njutbart å se min fru naken och likadant tycker hon det är skojigt att titta på mig, och det tycker jag, det är ju fantastiskt å, efter 85 år att tycka så fortfarande.

246. ”På mornarna sen när jag går ifrån henne så brukar hon alltid känna efter och hälsa på min gamla (tyst skratt)”, ”skön känsla”, ”hålla kontakten”.

tivities and what is meant by sexual practice, but in effect intimacy and touch also evoke questions about what is meant by sexual desire.

Even though Owe says that he has no need for sex any longer, this does not mean that his story is unambiguously one of a complete loss of desire. Instead what he has lost interest in, and does not feel desire for any more, is to have a specific kind of sex in later life: that is, intercourse. Similarly, when Ingvar expresses a lack of interest in sexual activities, or even dislike at the thought of “messy” sex, this could be interpreted as lack of desire for a specific kind of sex, but does not necessarily imply a dislike of physical contact in other ways. So, what I have discussed as a loss or lack of desire so far might not really be about lack at all, but rather a turn towards something outside the realms of erection and penetrative sex.

Another example of how men's way of making sense of desire is not restricted to intercourse, or even genitality, is when Yngve in the interview asks me: “Can I take your hand?” I agree and he takes my hand and holds it around my little finger and says:

Yngve: To walk maybe like this [holding just a finger], with the one you like beside you, that's sexy as hell. But not sexy in the genital way, right? I don't know how to say it really. But those kinds of things have been of great importance to me. Usual sex has had much less importance.

Linn: When you're saying usual sex, what are you thinking of, then?

Yngve: Well to make love to one another. But rather it is touching each other, holding each other, to show each other that you like it and so on. There's too much weight put on the sexual today, and sleeping with each other. That's my opinion.²⁴⁷

Holding somebody's finger, the subtle touch of another person, is here described by Yngve as “sexy as hell”, as something linked to desire. Yet, the desire that is evoked through these small gestures of touch is far from the uncontrollable sexual desire that some men described in their youth. Nor

247. Får jag låna din hand, (tar om mitt lillfinger) att kanske gå så här med den man tycker om bredvid sig, det är sextigt till tusen, fast inte sextigt så där könsmässigt va, jag vet inte hur jag ska uttrycka det riktigt. Men såna där saker haft en väldig betydelse för mig eh (..) vanligt sex har haft mindre betydelse.

L: När du säger vanligt sex vad är det du tänker på då?

Y: Ja det att älska någon annan så att, utan det är mera kanske nudda vid varann, hålla vid varann, att visa varann att man tycker om det och så vidare- det fästs för stor vikt vid idag just det sexuella och ligga med varann det (..) det är min åsikt.

is this desire, as Yngve points out, directly related to genital sexuality, and it may as such be less readily conceptualized: "I don't know how to say it really."

Returning to the ideas I raised at the beginning of the chapter, exploring men's understandings and experiences of sexual desire is a way to get at how men handle discourses of asexuality in various ways. What I find significant in both Owe's and Yngve's accounts of intimacy and touch, however, is that these accounts neither readily categorize and comply with a discourse of asexual old age nor fit smoothly with more sex-positive discourses on sexuality as lifelong, discourses which place much emphasis on sexual function and the possibility of having intercourse. As I have argued earlier, intimacy and touch are unbounded and fluid, there are "no guaranteed outcomes" (Grosz 1995a, 200). Touch was indeed producing intense desires and strong feelings, it made men feel close to a partner, but this by no means implied that it had to lead to intercourse or anything at all conventionally considered to be sexual practice. From the analyses of these men's narratives on sexuality and how desire is made sense of, I argue that intimacy and touch should be understood as an (a)sexual practice. This implies that intimacy and touch destabilize boundaries between the sexual and the non- or even asexual. One might even go so far as to argue that intimacy and touch implode the very category of sexuality.

To speak of a loss or lack of desire is only meaningful if sexual desire is understood as something that should lead somewhere, if desire is bound up in a teleology. If, on the other hand, the sexual encounter is regarded as "directionless mobilization of excitations with no guaranteed outcomes", following Grosz (1995a, 200), then the idea of a lack of desire becomes impossible because sexuality is not made sense of through binary terms (of being/not being).

Just as maturity was a resourceful way of making sense of one's sexual subjectivity in later life, a turn to intimacy and touch became a way for the men in this study to navigate between discourses of asexual old age and sexuality as lifelong. Particularly for those men who disassociated themselves from sexually assertive masculinity, intimacy and touch proposed a line of flight of sexual desire, breaking with its genealogies of lack but also with its strong links to coitus and genital sexual practices. Where the old man in the comic strip mourns his vanishing desire, "which is not what it used to be", the men in my study reinvent meanings of desire and open up to other ways of thinking sexual desire and sexuality.

This discussion of intimacy and touch as an (a)sexual practice that reshapes how sexual desire may be thought is yet another attempt to do a reparative reading in this study. But it is not only that intimacy and touch open

up to more affirmative analyses. What is apparent when these men speak/write about intimacy and touch in various ways is that it harbours not only a great variety of practices, but also emotions, feelings of love and affection. Therefore, I will next discuss how the seemingly “innocent” attachment of later life sexualities with love and affection can be linked to constructions of heterosexuality and heterosexual bodies. Again in dialogue with Sara Ahmed, the links of desire and emotion may function to orient and hence shape bodies in line with heterosexuality.

Intimacy as heterosexual orientation

Yngve: One thing to consider is [...] maybe because I had such an incredibly happy life, right, then you don't miss it.²⁴⁸

Can a happy life substitute for sex, and even substitute and fill in for feelings of sexual desire? The words above are Yngve's; we are sitting in his living room drinking instant coffee. He leans back on the sofa, asks me if it is “all right” if he smokes, and as I reply, “Yes, yes” he carefully fills his pipe with tobacco. While he tells me his life's story, which in particular revolves around the great loves of his life, he several times points to the three photos standing on his book shelf. “Three beautiful women,” he repeats, and it was the eyes that made him fall for them all. “I'm crazy about eyes, all the three women in my life, it's been the eyes that I first fancied.”²⁴⁹ Yngve presents a very strong narrative on love, and to him sexuality definitely takes second place after love. He says that sexuality requires love, but not the other way around. This influences and shapes the way in which he understands and makes sense of his impotence and his feelings of sexual desire. When he breaks up with his third great love during his eighties he becomes impotent, and this is something he partly explains as a result of the loss of his love. Since sexuality and feelings of sexual desire are to Yngve so closely bound up with feelings of love, he grieves neither his potency nor the sexual desire of the past. Instead he points to the way in which the happy life he has led becomes a reason for why he does not miss sex or the sexual desire he experienced earlier in life.

The way in which the sexual past is narrated as a part of what constitutes a sexual subjectivity today can, as I pointed out above, be a way of reiterating a heterosexual orientation. By pointing to how sexual desire has been a part

248. Kanske beroende på att jag har haft ett sånt otroligt lyckligt liv va (m) ehm (..) så saknar man det inte.

249. Jag är galen i ögon. Alla mina tre kvinnor jag har haft i livet och ägnat min kärlek åt så hag jag blivit förtjust först i ögonen.

of one's life, sexual subjectivity emerges in a normal and good way, distanced from the faulty position of asexuality. But the shaping of heterosexuality does not only involve finding a "direction" from sexual desire, in the past or present, it is also a matter of alignment with emotions such as love, affection and happiness. Being able to point to a happy life filled with love, as in the case of Yngve above, becomes just as important as having sexual desire in the emergence of a successful subjectivity, if not more so.²⁵⁰

When Yngve says that "too much weight is put on the sexual today", and objects to how young people today jump into bed "real fast", this links to the way that several men in this study distance themselves from an egoistic sexual subjectivity which is often associated with youth, but sometimes also with masculinity. But, by saying that too much weight is put on the sexual today, Yngve is also trying to de-centre the importance of sex in a relationship, in favour of love and being close. Above, I discussed intimacy and touch as possibilities for destabilizing the sexual and (non)sexual, of thinking sexual desire differently. But at the same time it is possible to read narrations of intimacy as a reinforcement of desirable and good sexual subjectivity, to which emotions such as love, happiness and affection are vital.

In dialogue with Ahmed, I am here discussing love, happiness and affection in terms of the "sociality" of emotion" (Ahmed 2004b, 8). That is, along with Ahmed, I do not understand emotions to be interior and psychic, connected solely to the individual. But nor should emotions be regarded as purely social and collective. Ahmed (2004b, 10) argues that:

Emotions are not "in" either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects.

In my study, this means that I am particularly interested in what these purported emotions of intimacy do, what do they produce in terms of boundaries of subjectivities and bodies? This links up with my deleuzian inspiration and the question of what bodies may become. Clearly, a claim to love and happiness within the couple marks a difference from how the body is shaped in relation to sex and sexuality. In his diary, Ingvar writes about his relation-

250. Here it is worth recapturing the ways in which cultural context and generational belonging matter in this study, which I pointed to in Chapter One. Yngve, who was born in the 1920s, belongs to a generation to whom the idea of the "companionate marriage" became increasingly popular. In these marriages equality and the ability for man and wife to talk was important, but here it is also possible to see how love between the partners was seen as an integral part of marriage.

ship with his wife, who died one year earlier. During the last ten years prior to his wife's death they did not have sex, but Ingvar writes:

Despite the lack of an active sex life, we've had a very good time together. Our shared and different interest, with hobbies (genealogy) and travels have given our life together another dimension. Of course we kissed and hugged each other and you can really be "quiet" with your company and still enjoy it.²⁵¹

Similarly to the way in which Yngve talks about how too much emphasis is put on the sexual today, Ingvar here seems to write against a sex-obsessed culture, which denies the value of love and intimacy. When describing their relationship as a good one, even if they did not have sex, he uses the notion of "another dimension", a characterization which resonates with how Owe talks about the "deeper feelings" that evolved following his wife's breast cancer. As I discussed in Chapter Four, Owe and his wife both feared that something would go missing after the removal of her breast, but that instead it created "deeper feelings" for the body and led them to find new ways of being sexual in the relationship. While not altogether similar situations, Ingvar's "another dimension" and Owe's "deeper feelings" both seem to discuss increased intimacy in a long-term relationship based on a turn to emotions (cf. Terry & Braun 2009).

However, as Ahmed argues, emotions are connected to social hierarchies and the display of some feelings stratifies bodies differently. When the men in this study, in different ways, emphasized intimacy and the emotions bound up with it, this also somehow posits sex and feelings of sexual desire as shallow and unimportant. Thinking about how sexual desire in adolescence is considered egoistic and linked for some to a form of masculinity they disassociate with, emphasizing intimacy may be understood as more genuine and as such of higher value than sex and sexuality. It is remarkable that, when some men in this study talk about sexuality in later life as more committed and sincere, they almost seem to speak of it in spiritual terms. Sexuality in later life is guided by disembodied love, whereas sexuality in earlier in life emerges as rooted in the flesh, driven by carnal desires and as such shallow. When the men evoke these kinds of binary terms, this not only functions to make sense of sexuality in later life versus when young(er), it is also a form

251. Ingvar: Trots avvaro av aktivt sexliv, har vi haft en mycket bra tid tillsammans, Våra olika och lika intressen, med hobbies (släktforskning) och resor har givit vårt liv tillsammans en annan dimension. Det är klart att vi kramades och kysstes och man kan faktiskt vara "tyst" i sitt sällskap och trivas med det.

of hierarchization of young/sexual/shallow/uncontrolled versus old/sincere/loving/controlled. A turn to love and emotion may then be read in a context of ageism, where the position of the old men takes shape from an othering of younger men.

Even if intimacy is characterized by close loving relationships, in contrast to shallow embodied urges, this does not imply that the men in this study understood intimacy as non-sexual. For example, when Jakob says, “being together doesn’t have to end with or lead to intercourse”, he does not entirely preclude intercourse; he only states that it is not always necessary. The diary of Holger holds another example of how emotions and “deep” feelings of love and affection were connected to sexuality in later life. When I discussed this extract in Chapter Four, it was primarily in relation to how bodies may be re-eroticized outside the genital, even to the extent that the body was no longer necessary. Returning to it here, I will concentrate on how emotions and feelings are used to shape sexuality.

When older I have discovered that sex life is not entirely dependent on a man's big firm penis. It is more about: what feeling you may convey. A woman may experience orgasms without intercourse or touch of her genitals through fondling. I have many times experienced how sexually active women experienced intense orgasms from a kiss or a hug. If you may convey the feeling to a woman "You are the most wonderful woman" then there might not be a need for potency invigorating Viagra, Cialis or other chemical preparations. Joie de vivre, erotic curiosity and freedom from prejudices solve most questions on sexuality, for all ages. It is mostly about what two people want to experience together.²⁵²

By underlining the importance of “the feeling you may convey” and making her feel like “the most wonderful woman”, Holger’s narrative seems to suggest that the sincere and strong feelings involved in the encounter are what is fundamental to sexuality. Thinking with Ahmed (2004b, 4), emotions are “orientations towards others” and emotions involve making an impression.

252. Som äldre har jag upptäckt att sexlivet inte är till alla delar beroende av en stor styv penis hos mannen. Det handlar mer om: Vilka känslor man kan förmedla. En kvinna kan få och uppleva orgasmer utan samlag eller beröring av könet genom smekningar. Jag har många gånger upplevt att kvinnor sexuellt aktiva upplevt intensiva orgasmer av en kyss eller en kram. Kan man förmedla den känslan till en kvinna ”Du är världens underbaraste kvinna” så kanske det inte behövs vare sig potensstärkande Viagra, Cialis eller andra kemiska preparat. Livsglädje, erotisk nyfikenhet och frihet från fördomar brukar lösa de flesta frågor i sexualiteten för alla åldrar. Det mesta handlar om vad två personer vill uppleva tillsammans.

Being able to convey feelings of attraction and love, as in the case of Holger, then implies being shaped in relation to that other. Since this other is a woman in this narrative, ultimately, evoking that feeling thus also shapes his body and subjectivity in line with heterosexuality, and as a man. To recall the discussions earlier in this chapter, sexual desire may not necessarily be only about arousal and feelings of wanting to engage in sexual practice, but may be just as much about an *interest*. An interest could in this case take shape through expressing emotions, and emotions may then be just as important as sexual desire for orienting bodies in specific directions, reiterating heterosexuality.

So what interests me is what these feelings, which are so closely tied into the assemblage of intimacy, do (rather than just seeing them as being there as consequences of psyche or the social). When, in different ways, the men in this study invoke intimacy as feelings of affection or love, this can be seen as a private matter. But to refer to these feelings may also be part of wider construction of heterosexuality, and as such not private at all. To get at the meaning of intimacy in the diaries and interviews requires us to go beyond the private meanings held by the participants in this study. Intimacy, meaning love and deep feelings of affection and the sincerity of a relationship, can be discussed as a concept that travels and holds its meaning beyond the private sphere, as a concept that is linked to and part of a wider cultural imaginary of heterosexuality.

Queer theorists Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner make this clear by saying:

A complex cluster of sexual practices gets confused, in heterosexual culture, with the love plot of intimacy and familialism that signifies belonging to society in a deep and normal way (Berlant & Warner 1998, 554).

Far from being a neutral concept, intimacy is, as Berlant and Warner (1998) note, an ideology and institution which adds onto and gives meaning and intelligibility to heterosexual culture. Rather than seeing the stress on intimacy as an understanding of sexuality developed in relation to old age, we may just as well see it as partaking in the construction of heterosexual culture. As Berlant & Warner (1998, 552) argue, going along with other queer theorists' understanding, "heterosexuality is not a thing" but a complex and non-stable system of dominance. Through the normalization of some identities and practices, the preference for some lives over others, heterosexuality comes across as sexuality, rather than an unstable grid of power.

To make my argument on intimacy and heterosexuality clearer, it might here be worth returning once more to the by now familiar Sven Tumba and his wife Mona from the article in *Aftonbladet*, as an example through which the narratives on intimacy in this study may be read. Looking again at the photo of the couple, Sven and Mona, by the shimmering lake (see p. 206), there is evidently no *sex* as such in the photo. But yet there is *sexuality* there, conveyed through the intimacy between the two; them holding hands, her leaning over him as though about to give him a kiss on the cheek. How would the photo have been read and received if it had been shot on the side of the bed in the couple's bedroom? Probably it would then have been read as much more sexual and possibly also inappropriate.

Intimacy becomes a possible sexual expression exactly because "it" manages to keep the sex out of the public realm; intimacy emerges as desirable and good because it creates a balance between the sexual and the non-sexual in a successful way. The photo of the intimacy between Sven and Mona is not asexual, because it retains the possibility of something sexual that could happen, the kiss could in another context lead on to sex. Moreover, intimacy is produced in the photo by reference to feelings. In the caption, Mona is described as a "loving" wife and the fact that she is "loving" further underscores the intimacy of the photo, as a positive and desirable (sexual) scene.

I have discussed the photo of Sven and Mona as an example of intimacy because I think it captures the way in which intimacy is about producing a specific kind of desirable heterosexuality. A kind of desirable heterosexuality which also takes shape when the men in this study talk about intimacy as characterizing their later life sexualities. The invocation of intimacy, as a set of positive emotions, creates boundaries between the appropriate "healthy" sexual and inappropriate "dirty" sexual. To stress intimacy is to narrate a cosy and unthreatening form of sexuality and also, as I touched upon earlier, a respectable sexual self which is distant from any "dirtiness".

In relation to this, it is noteworthy that several of the men I interviewed, without me touching upon the subject, began to raise the subject of how they could never buy sex, and to denounce men's rape and assault of women. These kinds of sexualities are not only plainly bad and undesirable sexualities, but understood as something that happens elsewhere, outside the cosy private domain of the couple. By starkly disassociating from these "bad" sexualities, the sexuality characterized by intimacy and an implicit reciprocity emerges as even more good and healthy. As I pointed out at the beginning of this study, alongside the discourse of the healthy older man who engages in good ethical sex is the stereotype of the "dirty old man" (Calasanti and King 2005). Stressing intimacy as being central to sexuality, and as taking place

within a stable and loving relationship, is hence necessary in order to avoid being castigated as a dirty old man.

Also, relating back to my discussion on sexual desire and the focus on timing, the photo of Mona and Sven points to the intersection of “the right thing in the right place” with “the right thing at the right time” as being important to the shaping of later life heterosexuality. Showing ageing bodies engaged in anything too sexual would be considered inappropriate given the way in which desirable sexual expressions are both linked to time and place.

To stress intimacy as being a couple’s project, entangled with love and togetherness, can also be related to what I have discussed around becoming a more considerate and less selfish sexual partner. Signifying and making sense of sexuality in terms of intimacy is a positive and unthreatening way of presenting the sexual subjectivity of old men. Being more considerate and attentive to her sexual needs fits with the positively flavoured notion of intimacy, where feelings rather than instrumental sexual activities are prioritized. By linking sex in later life to intimacy and a more profound and deeper sexual feeling, it may then not only come across as better than sexuality earlier in the life course, but in fact position itself as closer to a desirable heterosexuality altogether.

So, intimacy can be understood as a discursive resource to draw upon in order to align with heterosexual culture, associated with respectability and decency in monogamous relationships. By saying this, I am not proposing that this by definition undermines the possibilities of intimacy and touch to produce difference, or the possibilities of becoming through old age, sexuality and male sexual morphologies. The feminist-deleuzian analysis that I have been committed to in this thesis should be seen as one that is sensitive to the reinforcement of dominant patterns, be it on age, sexuality or gender (in deleuzian terminology, molar lines), while at the same time engaging in affirmative readings that are open to the possibilities of flux, of difference (Braidotti 2002). When talking about lines of flight, I am not talking of an *outside power* in which desires and sexualities are produced completely freely, but the possibilities of the production of things differently, a re-organization which allows bodies and pleasures to emerge in new modalities.²⁵³ It is thus

253. I am here thinking of Grosz’s (1995a, 217ff) discussion of Foucault, where she argues that in a passage of the *History of Sexuality* Volume 1 he seems to propose sites of bodies and pleasures outside the reach of power. Grosz critically examines this and argues that, if we make a generous reading of Foucault, he might be suggesting that there might be possibilities for re-organizations of libidinal structures so that bodies and pleasures may be produced and regulated in ways different from those we are familiar with today. In this passage, she offers Deleuze as a way of thinking this re-organization.

possible to think of intimacy as both being an aspect of the molar, that is the reiteration of heterosexuality and heterosexual culture, and at the same time a reorganization of the phallic body in favour of a “radical rethinking of male sexual morphology” (Grosz 1994a, 201).

No “volcanic eruptions” but one or two “aftershocks”

One of the initial ways into this thesis was an interest in how old men navigate between discourses of asexual old age and ideas that men should always feel sexual desire. When listening to the men in this study, however, it seems that this does not have to be a great issue of conflict or complication. The availability of more recent discourses of sexuality as lifelong makes it possible for men to continuously shape themselves as sexual beings. Sexual desire is, on the one hand, regarded as something given and natural by the men in this study. But, on the other hand, not only do they express the belief that sexual desire remains, but sexual desire and sexuality are seen as something that *should* remain for reasons of health and wellbeing.

Thus, the men in this study were, in some respects, drawing on discourses of sexuality as lifelong and their narratives resonated with successful ageing buzzwords such as health, vitality and youthfulness in order to make sense of sexuality and sexual desire. But to claim that sexual desire remained did not necessarily imply that it was experienced as being the same as before. Where desire in youth (and sometimes mid-life) was seen as strong and forceful, the desire of old age was understood as more serene, but as such also more in line with a mature sexuality.

The representation of sexual desire in the comic strip *Medelålders plus*, where sexual desire earlier in life was like “volcanic eruptions” and in contrast desire in later life was merely about a few “after shocks”, is in this sense very similar to how the men in this study make sense of later life sexualities and sexual desire. Timing and temporality proved to be of central importance to how sexual desire is conceptualized and understood. A decline in sexual desire is not a strange thing to the men in this study since everything is understood to have its time and place and things change “as the years go by”, as Östen phrases it. A decline in desire may then rather be seen as age-appropriate.

As I have been arguing in this chapter, narratives about one’s strong sexual desires in youth were used both to distance from and as a form of identification. Along the lines of my argument in Chapter Four, to point to a more controlled sexual desire in later life was a way of shaping one’s sexual subjectivity as more mature. But stories of the sexual past were also a way of consti-

tuting a sexual subjectivity today; to point to a heterosexual path reiterated throughout the life course.

When I started this study, I was interested in how feelings of loss of desire were experienced and articulated, and whether they could be experienced as a threat to one's gendered subjectivity, to masculinity. For the men in this study it did not seem to be sexual desire for intercourse that was most important, however. A claim to still have an interest, through looking or fantasizing, or the proximity of an actual partner, seemed to be sufficient as an *orientation*, which shaped masculinity and heterosexuality. This supports the claim of Lindgren (2007b, 29), who argues that sexual desire is not something that needs to be constantly done, but is more about retaining an imaginary possibility of sexual practice.

In some cases, however, it seemed as though a loss of sexual desire could be experienced as a form of gender trouble. For Nore, a loss of desire seemed foremost to be a matter of identification, he felt weird when he no longer had a desire for women. In Bernt's case, having sexual desire was part of being a man in the sense that one should sexually satisfy one's partner and build a loving and successful relationship.

Moreover, feelings of lack of desire are not only linked to feelings of masculinity but also to feelings of being/becoming old. When discussing the examples of Ingvar and Owe, I suggested that feeling old and undesirable, or going through life events in which one experiences oneself as old, shape feelings of sexual desire. From this it is worth discussing how a heterosexual matrix intersects with and should be understood in relation to a matrix of age, where gender and sexuality also become intelligible in relation to age.

My overall impression is that when the men in this study talk about sexuality, desire expands and relates to feelings of attraction, to looking and fantasizing. What they desire and do not desire cannot be restricted to genital sexual practices. When the men in this study emphasize intimacy and touch as what is important in later life, this also involves a reconfiguring of sexual desire. Intimacy and touch, as things that are both experienced as sexual and at the same time as something other than sexuality, destabilize the boundaries between the sexual and non-sexual. Is it then possible to talk about lack or loss of desire? In this chapter I have argued that if sexuality is *not* defined as something teleological, that should ultimately lead to or produce something, then it seems hardly meaningful to talk about a lack or loss of desire.

As something on the borderland of the sexual and non-sexual, intimacy and touch allow men to avoid being castigated as either asexual or feeling forced to remain sexually active as when they were younger (which might be postulated by discourses of successful ageing). In contrast to discourses of

sexuality as lifelong, where sexual desire is made sense of through a binary of keep it or lose it, the desire involved in intimacy and touch leaps out of this binary.

But, again, what I have attempted to articulate in this chapter is complexity. Men's orientations to intimacy, their ways of speaking and writing about sexuality as related to feelings of love and commitment in a (long-term) relationship, may also, as I have argued, be a way to shape a desirable heterosexuality. Intimacy then links to the loving couple, as a possible context for the emergence of sexual subjectivity in later life. As an assemblage, intimacy and touch are thus an unruly knot of things. As much as they are promising to the feminist pursuit of re-thinking male sexual morphologies and to thinking sexualities outside the phallic, they may also be a new wrapping for the same old Sameness. Intimacy and touch may then be just another way of shaping heterosexuality and masculinity in a desirable way, without any significant transformations of the world and its hegemonies.

Next, in the final chapter of this study, I will reiterate some of the central arguments and insights drawn from my analysis of the diaries and interviews to return to the central and overarching questions of this study: what can a male sexual body become in relation to ageing, and how do the sexual subjectivities of old men take shape? By doing so, I wish to discuss how old men's bodies and sexualities, rather than merely being isolated phenomena, may in fact serve as an interesting basis for broader discussions and explorations in feminist studies.

7

Final discussion

In August 2010, the Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter published a series of articles under the headline “Desire and longing 50+”.²⁵⁴ The articles in the series focused on experiences of sex and sexuality in mid and later life, foremost the experiences of older women. Overall, the women who are represented and interviewed in the articles convey a positive picture of older women’s sexuality, and many express the opinion that they have experienced their best sex when older. The positive overtones and pleasure orientation of the series seems yet again to resound to a discourse of sexuality as lifelong, and the women in the articles in many respects emerge as “sexy oldies”. What came to interest me, however, was not the articles but rather the readers’ letters that were published at the end of the series. It is one letter in particular, from the correspondent “Karin”, 69 years old, that I come to notice.²⁵⁵ Karin writes about how her husband has contracted prostate cancer, and explains that this has had consequences for their sexual relationship. But, Karin claims:

Things are certainly different, but yet the same in many ways.²⁵⁶

“Different, but yet the same”. I find this sentence compelling since it captures what has been discussed in this thesis on several levels. When the men in this study made sense of sexuality and sex in later life, several contradictory narratives co-existed, and it was even the case that same man could make sense

254. “Lust och längtan 50+”

255. Dagens Nyheter 2010-08-25, <http://www.dn.se/insidan/lasarreaktioner-antligen-talas-det-om-kvinnors-sexualitet-efter-50-1.1159187> [2010-12-15]

256. Det blir visserligen annorlunda men ändå lika i många stycken.

of sexuality in very different ways. The men expressed things to be different in terms of having a different attitude to sexuality. But also different in the sense that sexual desire diminished and their bodies were changing and thus were experienced as different from earlier in life. On the other hand, things were expressed as being the same, in the sense that these men claimed to still have sexual desire and that the pleasure was equally important, despite the fact that their bodies were different. By continuously orienting their bodies towards women, and claiming to still have an interest in women, things in the end emerged as being “the same in many ways”. The ageing of bodies, and illnesses such as prostate cancer, introduced different ways of being sexual and changes in sexual subjectivities, but this did not necessarily mean an entire reorientation from how sexuality and masculinity had figured earlier in life.

Considering how things are different but yet the same is also a way to think of this study on a more theoretical level. The three empirical chapters engage with ways of thinking about how things may *become different*, but also about how *sameness prevails*, not least through the way in which a phallic sexual morphology continues to shape old men’s sexual subjectivities, and cause feelings of anxiety and distress when they experience changes in erectile function. Moreover, *different but yet the same* may also denote the duality and ambiguity of intimacy and touch, which I have engaged with and discussed throughout this thesis. Intimacy and touch hold the potential for destabilizing the boundaries between the sexual and non-sexual and reconfiguring male sexual morphologies, but may also be analyzed as resourceful ways of reshaping desirable masculinity and “good”, respectable heterosexuality. Intimacy and touch are consequently promises of something different, but may also be understood as different versions of the same.

In this final chapter, I will summarize some of the central arguments in this thesis, and will refer back to what I proposed as the two aims of this study: to study the sexual subjectivities of old men and to explore what a male sexual body may become in relation to ageing. This summarizing will subsequently lead me to further discuss how thinking old age and ageing bodies, and in particular the concept that I have introduced in this thesis as affirmative old age, contributes to critical, feminist and anti-ageist discussions. At the very end I will consider how this study may unfold into new questions, other perspectives and future pursuits and studies.

Mature, intimate and simply better?

The correspondent “Karin”, who writes to the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* about her experiences of sexuality after her husband’s prostate cancer, says

that she finds her husband more considerate and concerned about pleasuring her nowadays. This resonates with what several men in this study also expressed, that consideration and mutual pleasure became more important in later life. By distancing themselves from the younger man's sexuality, which was claimed to be more selfish, the men shaped themselves as more considerate and mature. Peer pressure and lack of knowledge were put forward as the reasons why some men felt they had been egoistic in the past and not the considerate lovers they aspired to be.

Also involved in the discussions of becoming more mature was the idea of how sexual desire changed throughout life. Young men's sexualities were often conceptualized as driven by strong immediate desires, whereas the old man's desire was understood as more moderate, less impulsive, and hence less egoistic. The bottom line of several men's narratives in this study seemed to be that, where young men prioritize sex, old men prioritize love, commitment and the relationship. Importantly, the men in this study used age and age differences not only in order to emerge as more sexually considerate, mature and committed, but some were also critical of and distanced from a sexually assertive masculinity, embodied by men who jump into bed immediately, men who brag about their sexual conquests and who are sexually pushy.

When I have analyzed the shaping of the sexual subjectivities of old men in a critical mode (or through paranoid readings as Sedgwick proposes), I have argued that their ways of stressing that they had improved sexually may not necessarily reflect any actual changes in their sexual practices or a flight from masculinity. The mature old man who turns to intimacy and prioritizes her pleasure and love in a committed relationship may be understood as a reformulation of desirable masculinity in relation to age. This does not ultimately imply challenging power in gender relations (Terry & Braun 2009, Wetherell & Edley 1999). Men's concern to sexually pleasure their female partners often seemed to reflect a very traditional masculinity, where the man should be active and able to "knock the socks off" a female partner (Plummer 2005, 185).

This study has been committed to a critical analysis, not only of masculinity and gender relations, but also of ageism. As I argued in Chapter Two, on theoretical perspectives, being interpellated as old involves a loss of power. Ageism should not only be understood as discrimination and the marginalization of the old, however, but more widely as how "different age groups gain *identities and power* in relation to one another" (Calasanti 2003, 203). When the old men in this study claimed to be more mature and considerate, this in some respects also involved an *othering of youth and midlife masculinities*.

The way in which younger men were constructed as sexually egoistic and impulsive may be compared to racialized discourses where Black and Hispanic men in particular are othered as “macho” and are assigned hyper-sexuality (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner 1997). By referring to specific (sexual) behaviours and attitudes as related to age, old men may consequently partake in a reinforcement of ageism. In some cases, ageism was also entwined with sexism and an othering of old women, who were claimed to be sexually inactive and prudish, and were thus hindering men from improving and being the skilled lovers they aspired to be.

In my introduction, Chapter One, I pointed to the potentially contradictory discourses on old age, sexuality and masculinity that old men perhaps have to grapple with and that may impact on how their sexual subjectivities take shape. How discourses of asexuality in old age, of sexually assertive masculinity, of sexuality as a part of healthy ageing and of “the dirty old man” are handled and made sense of among old men themselves was a way into the project. My study suggests, however, that when old men talk and write about sexuality and sex in various ways these contradictions are not very visible. By emphasizing a considerate and mature sexuality in later life, one retains sexuality (and in effect masculinity) while at the same time avoiding being too sexual – as in the case of the “dirty old man”. A turn to intimacy and touch seems important for how these contradictions are “resolved”, since intimacy and touch hold the potential to be sexual, yet can also be seen as cosy and unthreatening forms of sexuality.

It seems also as though a discourse of sexuality as a part of a healthy and positive later life is very accessible for men to draw upon when making sense of later life sexuality. Continued sexual activity was discussed as part of a maintained wellbeing and as something that brings vitality and youth even in later life, and this was also reconcilable with discourses of male sexuality as active and pervasive.

At the beginning of this thesis, I raised the question of the meaning of sexual desire and whether a loss of desire was experienced as troubling in a culture where old men are not only seen as forever functional but also forever willing. My study suggests, however, that the reduced sexual desire which several men experienced was generally not articulated as a challenge to masculinity. Rather, as I have argued, in particular in Chapter Six, narrating oneself as different and with a more serene sexual desire is a way of presenting a sexuality which is *in time*; going along with expectations about age-appropriate sexuality in later life. Stories of sexual bravados in the past and of a former strong sexual desire were then effective both to distance from and identify with. Using the work of Ahmed (2006) to think about age and

heterosexuality, I discussed the way in which men's stories of the past could be seen as pointing back to the heterosexual path they had walked throughout their life course, a path which also works to constitute masculinity in later life.

When studying the sexual subjectivities of old men in this study, one of my concerns has been to look at how normativities around sexuality and age function to shape men's sexual subjectivities. From my analysis I have concluded that a turn to intimacy and touch, as linked to coupledness and the private and "cozy", may be understood as possible and desirable modalities of sexuality in later life. But the turn to intimacy and touch in these men's narratives may also be understood as a negotiation and decentring of the significance of the erection and of being able to have sexual intercourse, and at the same time shaping a desirable masculinity.

That intimacy and touch could be resources for men to draw upon in order to shape masculinity may seem paradoxical if one thinks about how the concept of intimacy has historically been linked to emotions, the private and, as a result, to femininity (Johansson 2007). The cultural disassociation between men and intimacy has led masculinities scholars such as Victor Seidler (1985) to discuss men as being emotionally crippled by masculinity, as "fearing intimacy" and being unable to develop functioning relationships. In stark contrast to this assertion, the men in my study were very much able to associate with love and other intimate feelings, and were in fact often emphasizing emotions over sexuality and sexual desires. My work suggests that intimacy was indeed central to the shaping of these men's sexual subjectivities and that it may even be a part of shaping a desirable masculinity.²⁵⁷

If being a mature and considerate man was central to how several of these men shaped sexual subjectivities in later life, this was also intermingled with experiences of impotence and loss of sexual desire. As I have been repeating throughout this study, men's experiences of impotence were not limited to a "use it or lose it" rhetoric, the loss of a firm erection was not expressed as the end of the world or the end of sex. However, this did not mean that impotence was never experienced as a hardship. Several men spoke about worries and anxieties about impotence, but perhaps surprisingly it was not discussed in terms of their own (loss of) pleasure, but was rather expressed as worries

257. This argument is similar to that of anthropologist Lissa Nordin (2007), who has studied single middle-aged men in rural parts of Sweden and their search for love. Nordin disputes the idea that men are disassociated from intimacy, and claims that the men in her study were very much able to relate to feelings of love. Nordin asserts that the way in which some male masculinities scholars point to (other) men as emotionally dysfunctional can be seen as a way of constructing themselves as more emotionally developed, which I find to be an astute observation (Nordin 2007, 66).

about their partner's loss of sexual satisfaction, of letting her down sexually. This was not only related to impotence. When Bernt, whom I discussed in Chapter Six, talked of his loss of desire, his main concern seemed to be that he might not be able to satisfy his partner and might thus be unable to maintain a loving and functioning relationship.

So, normative expectations still shaped these men's sexual subjectivities to some extent. These were linked to masculinity, that men should be active in sexual relations (and that being active was very much linked to erection). But normative expectations were also linked to coupledness, where sex was understood to be an essential part of a healthy and functioning relationship. These expectations were particularly visible when men experienced impotence or a loss of sexual desire. Stressing a more mature sexual self and orienting to intimacy and touch did not automatically imply that men were unbothered by impotence or that they could entirely negotiate a phallic sexual morphology.

As I have commented earlier in the thesis, this study tells little about the experiences of old heterosexual women. How do they experience men's "increased maturity and unselfish sexuality" and "turns to intimacy and touch"? In Chapter Five, when discussing men's feelings of being responsible for her sexual satisfaction, I suggested that there might be great discrepancies between what women actually desired in sexual encounters and what men believed they desired. I have also discussed the possibility that there might be expectations and pressures on women to help their old male partners to resolve their impotence, and that "egalitarian" discourses, where women are expected to be sexual agents, may reinforce these kinds of pressures. More research is needed on the experiences of old women, not least to explore how a context with a strong emphasis on gender equality and sexual reciprocity shapes women's experiences of later life sexuality.

In sum, I argue that the sexual subjectivities that emerged when these men narrated themselves and their sexualities align both with discourses of desirable heterosexuality as intimate, filled with love and commitment, and desirable masculinity as considerate and egalitarian. Turning to intimacy and touch may then be understood as a resource which men orient towards in order to shape a desirable heterosexual subjectivity in later life. To understand the shaping of old men's sexual subjectivities as *different but yet the same* can thus be analyzed from a critical perspective as the ways in which men negotiate and reorient meanings of sexuality and sexual activities in later life (often as a result of bodily changes), but that these negotiations and reorientations do not mean a flight from masculinity altogether; that would be something fundamentally different.

However, as I have tried to show, this kind of critical reading is not the only possible approach when studying old men's sexual subjectivities. An important strand in this thesis has also been to engage with affirmative/reparative analyses. The affirmative readings I have engaged in involve discussing the possibilities of rethinking male sexual morphologies. This rethinking has in my study been closely related to the ageing body as an open materiality possessing the force and capacity for *positive difference*. Next I will reiterate some of the key points from these affirmative/reparative readings, and in doing so I will also return to the second aim of this study: to explore what a male body may become in relation to ageing.

Touch, intimacy and bodies without phallic organs

I came to this project partly through a dissatisfaction with the way in which feminist theory discussed male sexual morphologies as phallic but gave few suggestions about how these phallic morphologies could be rethought (and potentially even subverted?), as I discussed in Chapter Two, on theoretical perspectives. It seems quite evident that men do not experience their bodies, in sexual encounters and elsewhere, as only hard and impermeable (if they do at all). Consequently, I have argued that, just as there is a need for refiguring women's sexual morphologies, a pursuit to which feminists have been committed for a long time and in various ways, there is also a need for further discussions on ways of rethinking male bodies and sexualities.²⁵⁸

I turned to old men and ageing bodies because I found these to be interesting sites for these kinds of explorations, in particular since they seemed in many ways to be so at odds with cultural fantasies of male bodies as hard, strong and controlled. By exploring old men's lived experiences and their own articulations of sexuality and their sexual bodies, I have sought to discover what possible narratives exist in everyday life that could provide alternatives to phallic sexual morphologies. What might a de-phallicizing of the male body mean in heterosexual men's everyday lives and sexual encounters?

Above, I have summarized my analysis of intimacy and touch as strategic negotiations in the shaping of desirable masculinity and heterosexuality. But in this thesis intimacy and touch have also been analyzed as modalities of

258. I am not claiming that this is my invention or a completely original proposition in any way. Discussions on gay male bodies may also be seen as examples of this kind of rethinking (see e.g. Svensson 2002). It is also possible to see how these ideas on challenging representations of male bodies have figured in activist contexts, such as pro-feminist men's movements, for some time (e.g. Pease 1997, Stoltenberg, 1989, Jackson 1990). These kinds of work can hence be understood as related to my work in this thesis.

sexuality, which took shape from the ageing of bodies, and which in turn re-configured men's sexual subjectivities, including how they experienced and understood their bodies, sex and what they desired. Men's narratives on intimacy and touch can thus also be seen as the kind of alternative narratives that offer ways of rethinking male sexual morphologies, a becoming of the male body.

In men's narratives, the changes that followed from the ageing of their bodies were very conspicuous, and these changes clearly also influenced how sexual practices could happen. This could involve things such as whether penetration was possible and whether one could put weight on one's knees when engaging in sexual activities. At first sight, one could perhaps understand these bodily changes as limitations on sexual activities. However, when the old men narrated their bodily changes, it was evident that these changes were also opening up for something different and sometimes new. I find this best described (once more) by the words of Ahmed (2006, 153): "the unreachability of some things can be affective, it can even put other worlds within reach." The ageing of bodies was then in some respects actualizing the "other worlds" of intimacy and touch.

One of the most compelling examples of how old men's bodies could be reconfigured as "sexy" or erotic in later life was the story of Nore, who developed breasts as a consequence of his treatment for prostate cancer. What Nore emphasizes in his narrative is the shift that occurred when his breasts changed from being a threat to his masculinity into a site for pleasure and the production of desire. When I asked him how he realized that his wife found his breasts sexy, he said: "Well, she touches them". Touch is here a junction for the production of new desires, and when his body is touched he also experiences it anew, and comes to think of his new breasts as potentials for desire. What is masculine, feminine or other is here less important than the body's capacity for producing desire.

I find it striking that touch and intimacy in these men's narratives are articulated as things that happen "all over", include the whole of the body, and are not confined to genitality. If a phallicizing of the body involves prioritizing the erect penis beyond other body parts and pleasures, men's stories on discovering the whole of the body may be seen as resistances against phallic bodies. As I was suggesting a bit jokingly when discussing the men's stories of discovering their bodies, the deleuzian concept of *Bodies without organs* could in this context lend itself to a play on words and become *Bodies without phallic organs*. Instead of being organized and made intelligible via the erect penis, *bodies without phallic organs* were disintegrated bodies, capable and consisting of endless possibilities for connectivity, of surfaces coming

together, and thus resisting the organization of the body in binary terms, as either phallic or lacking.

Central to my argument in this thesis is the idea that being touched and “getting intimate”, to reorient to a different set of practices and different approaches to the sexual body, shapes masculinity in particular ways. But it may also be that the lived and experienced bodily changes due to ageing, together with being interpellated as old, may make one experience one’s self as different (also in terms of masculinity), and thus orient one’s body to intimacy and touch.

For example, when the diarist Fritz describes his longing for touch, this takes shape partly from his experiences of his ageing body. He writes about how it is “too late” to engage in some sexual activities since his penis is small and flaccid. Touch, on the other hand, does not require bodies to react or function in particular ways; the penis need not be erect, the vagina need not lubricate.

What I have found particularly interesting in these men’s narratives about their practices of touch and desire for touch is how this differs from how sexuality and sex are often understood and discussed. Touch is not primarily oriented towards arousal/orgasm/climax, but is valuable as a pleasure in itself. Notably, there were stories where touch was about masturbating a female partner, where men were set on “doing it for her” and “giving it to her”. But many stories of touch were about feeling the warmth of another body, which entailed neither conquering nor active/passive distinctions.

In Chapter Four, I related my discussion to the argument of Irigaray (1980), where touch could be a way of thinking beyond phallic sexual morphologies and renouncing hierarchical mastery in sexual encounters (Grosz 1989, 119). I have also argued that touch may be understood as a form of transgression of boundaries, a dissolution of self and other, and as a consequence potentially threatening to the autonomous self (cf. Shildrick 2009). If autonomy is especially linked to masculinity in this particular context, it is possible to ponder whether touch in some respects threatens masculinity (or at least particular dominant form(s) of masculinity).

I want to underline here that these discussions on intimacy and touch, the ways in which they are involved in becomings and ways of rethinking male sexual morphologies, are preliminary and form starting points for further discussion. What other contexts are there where intimacy and touch could reconfigure and challenge masculinity? What other forms of intimacy and touch may take shape and how do these differ from the discussions in this thesis? As I stated in the introduction, Chapter One, my ambition when discussing the possibilities of rethinking male sexual morphologies is not to

state a full and final answer about what another morphology could entail; to explore becomings is to look for non-closures.

In Chapter One, I also argued that exploring experiences of old age was not merely a concern of those who are old. Here at the end I would like to emphasize this once more; although I discuss intimacy and touch in relation to old men and ageing bodies, I do not understand the discussion to be relevant only to old men. As Waldby (1995) argues, it is important to work against the privatizations of non-phallic sexual experiences. That is: rather than making non-phallic sexual experiences into a limited phenomenon, it is important to show how sexual experiences exist in multifarious ways outside the phallic. Following from this, old men and intimacy and touch should not be seen as a marginal or exceptional phenomenon. The case of old men may in fact be illustrative of how to think of male sexual morphologies more broadly. Touch and intimacy could then be understood as a potential for the becoming of masculinity altogether; *the non-phallic body is not a characteristic of some men but a potential in all men.*

When I discussed the meaning of the concept of sexuality at the beginning of this thesis, I described intimacy and touch as specific modalities of sexuality. However, now at the end I would like to qualify this slightly, because what is notable about intimacy and touch is that they exist on the borderlands of the sexual and the non-sexual and may even destabilize boundaries between the sexual/non-sexual. When the men described enjoying the warmth of another body, the wish to wash a woman's back and the consolation they gained from touch, this does not, as I have argued, readily categorize in terms of sexual, non-sexual or asexual. If genitals are no longer the prime and only site for the production of desire, and intimacy and touch can be arousing, but also pleasurable in other respects, it is no longer clear-cut what is sexual and what is not. As Grosz (1995a, 181) argues, the de-centring of genitality may highlight how "sexual relations are contiguous with and a part of other relations" and not distinct and separate from other spheres of social life.

In these men's narratives it was also evident that intimacy and touch "need not lead anywhere", and involved non-teleology on many levels. Edward spoke about how sexuality in later life led nowhere in the sense that it was not about reproduction, and Owe and Frank argued that sexuality became different when it was no longer squeezed into a life filled with work and children. These factors enabled intimacy and touch as activities that did not stop and start in any clear and definite way. I believe that the non-teleology of intimacy and touch is what further positions them in the borderlands between the sexual and the non-sexual, destabilizing these boundaries. Touch and intimacy *could be sexual but do not have to be*; they could lead to arousal,

to erection and to orgasms but this was not felt to be necessary. Touch and intimacy can thus be termed an (a)sexual practice, as not readily defined as either sexual or non-sexual.

Research on old(er) women and later life sexuality has argued that heterosexual women may experience some freedom in terms of sexuality when they get older, as they no longer have to fear getting pregnant post-menopause and no longer have children to rear (Hinchcliff & Gott 2008, Hurd 2006). To my knowledge, there are no such discussions on freedom and sexuality in relation to heterosexual men's ageing. Still, when the men in my study spoke of sexuality in later life they expressed either explicitly, as when Edvard says "it's more carefree", or implicitly that they experienced some kind of freedom in later life sexuality.

Thinking of the discourses of sexuality as lifelong and of "sexy oldies" that I introduced in Chapter One, which have primarily been represented by the article on Sven Tumba in this thesis, what was imperative in these discourses was the possibility of remaining sexual. In the narratives of the men in this study, in contrast, the possibilities of not being sexual (at least not in terms of intercourse), and instead engaging in the more ambiguous practices of intimacy and touch, were experienced as important and as a kind of freedom in later life. I argue that the potential for rethinking male sexual morphologies in this study through intimacy and touch is closely entwined with a challenge to the "sexualization" of old men. Thinking with Foucault (2002), this means challenging the idea that sexuality is at the heart of what it means to be human and that to emerge as an intelligible subject one must be sexual/have a sexuality (see also Shildrick 2009).

Although Grosz, in her essay "Experimental desire: Rethinking queer subjectivity" (1995a), discusses a very different case, that of lesbian desire, I find her argument interesting and compelling for how to think of old men, intimacy, touch and the potentials for becoming. Grosz discusses whether the inarticulateness of lesbian desire is a strength insofar as it creates sites of resistance or whether it just works to de-legitimize lesbianism, and she writes:

When sexuality takes on its status as phallic, entities, organs, pleasures and fantasies associated with it become definitive, distinguishable from their environment or context [...] To submit one's pleasures and desires to enumeration and definitive articulation is to submit processes and becomings to entities, locations, and boundaries (Grosz 1995a, 222f).

Following this line of thinking, and relating it to this study, the potential of intimacy and touch may lie in the fact that they do not easily categorize as sexual activities, are not readily taken up in a *Scientia sexualis* that increasingly also involves later life sexualities.²⁵⁹ Touch and intimacy are then oppositional to phallic sexualities and refigure phallic sexual morphologies by being less articulate, less clearly defined and more fluid.

In earlier chapters, I discussed how the men were more prone to emphasize a continued sexual desire and that a loss of sexual desire seemed less readily articulated. I suggested then that a loss of desire could have been more difficult to speak of because it could potentially threaten one's gendered subjectivity as a man to claim not to have an interest in sex. However, the fact that the men did not speak of a loss of desire could also reflect what Gayle Rubin has discussed as a "fallacy of the misplaced scale", whereby researchers on sexuality, like myself, give greater significance to sexual activities and practices than to other human activities (Rubin 1984, 278f). That some men do not articulate or problematize loss or lack of sexual desire could then reflect the reality that sexual desire and/or activity may not be of major importance to them. But another possible understanding is also that it is not really viable to speak of a loss or lack of desire as such, that this implies a false binary understanding of desire as either existing or non-existing. Men might lose interest in intercourse, but this did not imply that their desire for intimacy and touch vanished – quite the contrary. Intimacy and touch are not (yet) completely subsumed into a category of Sexuality with a capital S, merged into a *Scientia sexualis*, and men's narratives on intimacy and touch may as a result be interpreted as a loss of desire. The inarticulateness of loss of desire may then be more a matter of the inarticulateness and ambiguity of intimacy and touch.

I started this thesis with the words of Elisabeth Grosz (1995a, 200), who suggested that the sexual encounter cannot be understood as an "expedition" or an "adventure" since it has no final and fixed end or "result". I chose to start out with these words because I think they capture a very central aspect of this study. The ageing of the body and the changes (sometimes illnesses) that follow, are in some representations positioned as what puts an end to sexuality,

259. The term "*Scientia sexualis*" was developed by Foucault (2002) and describes how sexuality emerged as a field and object of knowledge through regimes of power/knowledge. Foucault discusses the emergence of modern medicine in the 19th century as being most central to the development of a *Scientia sexualis*. Psychoanalysis and modern sexology are other sites of discourse production that have subsequently reinforced it. As I was suggesting in Chapter Four, it is possible to understand the discourses produced by pharmaceutical companies, sexology, medicine and gerontology as partaking in the shaping of a *Scientia sexualis* that also encompasses later life.

and takes sex to the end of the road. The many narratives from interviews with and diaries of old men that I have collected in this study on the contrary point to inventiveness and the many (sometimes new) possibilities that may emerge from the ageing body. What was most striking were the many varying ways in which intimacy and touch figured as important for the ways in which old men made sense of later life sexuality. Although intimacy and touch could surely be adventurous in the sense that they involved new ways of experiencing what was pleasurable, there were, as the Grosz quote states, “no guaranteed outcomes”.

Touch and intimacy as potential routes for becoming and ways of rethinking male sexual morphologies are closely linked to and intertwined with the ageing body as positive difference. My engagement with the body, its force, motility, and capacity for becoming is part of thinking old age as *affirmative old age* throughout this work. By developing this concept, I have wished to go beyond the binary poles of old age as either successful/positive or negative/declining. Challenging binaries is notably at the heart of a feminist project and I will next discuss how I find the pursuit of rethinking old age to be parallel in many ways with feminist pursuits, a matter for feminist theorizing and politics.

Affirmative old age: A feminist matter

In western discourses, the old man often takes shape as a grumpy, backward and stagnated fellow, an “ancient monument” lurking around with no ambitions or future (cf. Sandberg 2007). My turn to becomings in this thesis is, however, a conscious choice and a way to challenge ageism and ageist discourses like these. The ambition to rethink male sexual morphologies has been interlinked with an ambition to present alternative critical perspectives on age, to present *affirmative old age* as an anti-ageist concept of old age. A challenge to ageist representations and developing other ways of thinking the concept old may at the same time be a contribution to feminist discussions. Below I will therefore discuss how the concept of affirmative old age that I have introduced combines with critical studies of men and masculinities and feminist research.

Without going into tedious critiques of how feminist theorizing and gender studies have on the whole omitted old age and ageing bodies, I would like to say that it is indeed quite curious that old age as an “‘Othered’ category” that we are all likely to belong to at some point, has received so little attention in feminist theory (Marshall 2006, Woodward 1999). Among the prominent and influential feminist theorists whom I engage with in this study, there is

effectively no explicit discussion of old age or the ageing body. However, as I pointed out at the end of Chapter Two, when we use theories our “hands are seldom clean” (using the phrasing of Braidotti 2002, 89), which means that we leave our own imprints on theories, transforming them as we take them up and use them. For example, when Grosz (1994a, 19) writes: “bodies are always irreducibly sexually specific, necessarily interlocked with racial, cultural and class particularities”, she does not mention or point to the particularities and specificities of ageing bodies. In my work in this thesis, Grosz’s discussions on bodily specificities and the motilities of bodies have consequently been taken “further”, to also involve bodily specificities that stem from ageing. And when Ahmed (2006, 66) claims that: “the normative can be considered an effect of the repetition of bodily actions over time” she stresses time, the temporal aspect of the normative, but nowhere links this to questions of ageing or old age. My discussion on the shaping of sexual subjectivities in this work is thus an elaboration of Ahmed’s work in the sense that I bring out the life course and ageing as potential themes and issues that may be developed in her work.

So I understand this thesis to bring out issues on old age and ageing bodies in feminist theories, as potentials which have not yet been actualized. But this is not only a matter of making visible the lives of old people, at the heart of this project lies an understanding that anti-ageism and feminism are mutual struggles in many ways. As Liz Schwaiger (2006, 35) argues in an interesting discussion on feminist theory and ageing, “ageist perspective on older age [...] is informed by the same patriarchal system that privileges the masculine over the feminine.” The devaluing of old age is linked to its associations with passivity, dependence, lack/loss (of control), the same characteristics that are dualistically linked to femininity.

However, to challenge negative approaches to old age does not automatically involve a challenge to a binary system in which passivity and dependency are always devalued and othered. This is most visible in the contemporary inventions of successful ageing, where attempts to fill old age with new and positive content involves connecting old age with more highly-valued terms such as activity, autonomy and productivity, terms which notably are also linked to masculinity. This risks re-inscribing failure and degradation onto those who cannot or do not want to be active, autonomous and incessantly in control during later life, and continuously devaluing the binary sides connoted with femininity.

By introducing the concept of affirmative old age as an alternative approach to old age, I have wished to avoid reinforcing old age as decline and decay. But I have at the same time wanted to challenge discourses of success-

ful ageing, which to a great extent involve the rejection of ageing and becoming old. Developing the concept of affirmative old age can be understood as a response to Schwaiger's call for a new perspective on ageing inspired by feminist post-structuralism:

We need to find ways to transcend dualistic perspectives of ageing, to value ambiguity and flux over stability and fixity of boundaries, and to draw on the strategies used by poststructural feminists in order to develop age theories of difference rather than of loss (of equality) (Schwaiger 2006, 36).

My understanding and use of affirmative old age in this thesis is closely linked to acknowledging the materialities and specificities of ageing bodies, bodies which also hold force and agency. When ageing bodies are related to youth or mid-life body norm(s), they are commonly understood as being less capable or in decline in relation to these normative bodies. Affirmative old age is instead a way of affirming differences and what these may involve. This also relates to sexuality. Instead of understanding sexuality and sexual desire as positive because they retain health and bring back youth and vitality, thinking in terms of affirmative old age means emphasizing the ageing body's capacities for pleasure. Sexuality is then not simply about feeling young again or doing things in the same way as earlier in life. These men's narratives of intimacy and touch can in some versions also be understood as narratives of affirmative old age. Intimacy and touch are not constantly compared to intercourse and seen as inferior modalities of sexuality. Instead, intimacy and touch were seen as valuable and pleasurable in their own right. Ageing bodies make intimacy and touch possible, and as such this also underscores how the ageing body is not by definition a deficient body characterized by loss.

As paradoxical as it may seem, thinking through affirmative old age makes it possible to see even death, as a lingering aspect of old age, as meaningful. While death is often seen as oppositional to life and sexuality, the experiences of being close to death in this study suggest that, rather than being something that deprives sexuality of its meaning, death instead intensifies experiences and gives them further meaning. This does not mean, however, that the men in this study experienced death and dying as something positive.

Using the term affirmative in the concept of affirmative old age may perhaps be slightly misleading. It may give the impression that affirmative old age is a celebration of old age and ageing bodies, which emphasizes positivity, the healthy rather than the ill and disabled, pleasure rather than danger and

dysfunction etcetera.²⁶⁰ But this would be to create yet another version of successful ageing. If affirmative old age is a concept that rejects dichotomous understandings, it should also acknowledge and encompass the negativities of old age and ageing bodies. Rather than othering experiences of pain, disappointment, anxiety and illness, it is possible to understand these as different reflections from a prism.

Affirmative old age then, in the words of Schwaiger (2006, 36), is an “age theory of difference rather than loss of equality”. As such it is also an anti-assimilationist political strategy, whereby old people should not be forced to adjust to standards built on youth and mid-life in order to be acceptable. The anti-assimilationism of affirmative old age has clear affinities with queer challenges to heteronormativity and challenges to ableism from critical disabilities scholars and activists. Femininity, queerness and disabilities have all been the Other in relation to a rational, autonomous and unitary modernist subject, while at the same time endangering and destabilizing the unity of this subject. In the argument of Shildrick (2009, 173), disability exposes how “embodiment in general is disordered and uncertain”, and that instability is the “*unexceptional* condition of all corporeality”. I would argue that old age and the ageing body should be thought of as yet another Other which threatens to destabilize a modernist subject and modernist paradigm. The difference of disabled bodies parallels the difference of ageing bodies, the fragmentariness, unboundedness and instability of ageing and/or disabled bodies may challenge the ideal of unity and wholeness and the striving for unified and coherent subjects (Shildrick 2009, also Schwaiger 2006, 25)

So what are the practical political implications of this concept? First of all, I think that affirmative old age sheds light on how ageism is entwined with masculinist binaries. Feminists should thus critically interrogate the implicit or explicit ageist binaries and otherings at stake, and incorporate age further into feminist discussions. While writing this thesis, I have been asked the question: “do you think your work contributes to making it easier to become/be old?” To answer this question is not wholly uncomplicated since it depends on what easier implies. My ambition with the concept of affirmative old age is to make possible lives that do not necessarily conform to ideas about activity, autonomy, strength and so on. This may not only be a concern related to old people, but may involve a challenge to normativity in a wider

260. The tensions between emphasizing sexuality in terms of either pleasure or danger have been central to feminist discussions on sexuality (see Vance 1984), and it is possible to see how later life sexuality is framed in a similar way as either focusing on dysfunctions or as positive, healthy and pleasure-oriented (Jones 2003, Gott 2005). Affirmative old age, however, is an approach which attempts to surpass dichotomous understandings when it comes to later life sexuality.

sense. There might be pedagogical reasons for turning to discussions of age since old age is the one difference (in terms of corporeality and subjectivity) that will affect most people (Woodward 1999, Marshall 2006, Schwaiger 2006). But the need for thinking non-assimilationist futures, futures that are open to radical differences and alert to new formations of normativity, is not only about making it easier to become old. Overall, there cannot be one body or one subjectivity that all humans should assimilate to, not a “one size fits all” future.

By introducing and discussing affirmative old age, it may also be possible to raise the question of vulnerability, a question which I find to be of great political salience. In different positions and at different times during our lives, people are differently vulnerable. I argue, however, that vulnerability is in many ways seen as an unacceptable position in our culture because it is at odds with ideals of a successful, strong and competent subject. The question is then how may we encompass this vulnerability, how can vulnerability be made into an intelligible and acceptable position? As I pointed out in Chapter Four, it always seems easier to turn to and theorize the pleasures of the body, the body as “a site of *jouissance*” (Davis 1995, 5). This is also a risk when discussing sexuality and the sexual body. But in this study sexuality is not only about pleasures, transgressive passion, the “gloss of lubrication” (ibid.) There are also experiences of pain, illness and sorrow lingering, which are also central aspects of embodiment and sexuality. All these issues are closely linked to vulnerability.

In terms of men and masculinity, vulnerability is a complex matter and raises questions of how men may feel vulnerable and disempowered yet at the same time be privileged and powerful in many respects. Some of this complication was taken up and discussed in Chapter Five, on how men could feel anxious and powerless due to their impotence while at the same being involved in gendered power relations. This relates to key issues in studies of men and masculinities and needs to be studied and discussed further. My discussion of touch in this study has largely focused on touch as something desirable and as a non-hierarchical issue. But touch is also about vulnerability and should also be discussed in terms of unwanted touch. This could manifest in different forms of abuse and harassment, but also in more benevolent forms of unwanted touch. As Twigg (2000, 48) notes, in her discussion on bathing and community care for old people, “touch is also a vector of status, authority and dominance with the more powerful touching the less powerful, superiors touching inferiors”. In this respect, gender is evidently involved, where women are “more likely to be touched than men” (ibid.). In this study, the tension between power and vulnerability has been reflected

not least in my alternations between paranoid and reparative readings. I have tried to keep a critical eye on masculinity, while at the same time finding ways to encompass vulnerabilities, some of which may be linked to old age.

Many of the narratives on sexuality in this study, and on intimacy and touch, were very positive, and the painful and shameful often seemed to be effaced and downplayed. Many of the men in this study were also relatively privileged and resourceful as able-bodied, heterosexual, middle-class men. Further studies are needed on sexuality and other old people (perhaps being multiply othered). In the last part of this thesis, I will engage with discussions of futures. I will present some thoughts about future studies that this thesis has raised.

Making difference? Thinking new futures

My ambition in this study has firstly been to focus on old age, masculinity and sexuality by turning to men's own perspectives and ways of making sense of sexuality in later life. But my ambition has also been, in line with feminism and feminist theory, to think "differently" or "new", and to propose possibilities of change (cf. Shildrick 2009, 170ff, Grosz 1999, 15 ff). Old heterosexual men may not be the first group one thinks of or turns to when looking for ways to think the new. As Ronström (1999) remarks, we seldom turn to old people to ask them how they think about the future. Yet, the future is in many ways one of ageing and old age; increasing longevity means that Western populations are increasingly growing older. Although this is the final chapter of the thesis, the work does not stop here but stretches out into the future in the sense that there are many more questions to be asked, many more studies to be undertaken on issues of old age, sexuality and gender. This thesis is in some ways an unruly knot of issues which opens up to further explorations, on desires, on sexuality and death, on silences and inarticulateness and many, many other things. I will here point out and discuss two issues or questions that I believe to be interesting and important to future studies, issues that have evolved out of this study.

This thesis primarily, and perhaps inevitably, concerns *possible* sexual subjectivities, the ways in which the men studied could articulate their ideas around sexuality. Yet, I believe that mingling with these possible sexual subjectivities are also the *impossible* sexual subjectivities, those which in many ways are unthinkable and uncanny in our culture. From a historical point of view, one may probably understand the sexualities of old people in general as having held the position of something abject. However, as I described in my introduction, and have also discussed throughout the thesis, sexuality in

later life is today far from being something unwanted, but is often framed and made intelligible through a discourse of health and wellbeing. But does this include all old people? Here I have come to think of one group of old people which is growing at a fast rate: people with dementia. How is sexuality among people with dementia understood and approached?

In my discussion of affirmative old age, I suggested that this is a concept and theory of difference that encompasses the specificities of ageing bodies. My discussion on the specificities of ageing have mainly concerned the physical changes involved in ageing, however, how the body of an old person is physically different from someone in mid-life and youth. Dementia, a cognitive illness that becomes more prevalent as people age, underlines how the specificities of ageing may also be a matter of cognitive difference. My discussions of affirmative old age must then be expanded to also account for cognitive difference. I think the case of dementia and sexuality is interesting for future studies since it highlights the boundaries of sexual subjectivities, the sexualities of old people which in many ways are made impossible. It seems that cognitive function is a burning issue here, something that must be retained in order for a person to become/be perceived as a proper sexual subject. I believe that my discussions on intimacy and touch as (a)sexual practice could be pursued in interesting ways in relation to old people with dementia. In cases where language is lost as a result of the illness, the significance of the tactile may even increase. Importantly as well, the subject of sexuality and dementia links to my discussion earlier in this chapter of the significance of also including the dark sides, experiences of illness, pain and anxieties, into a discussion of affirmative old age. Suffering from dementia in many ways epitomizes vulnerability, and matters of abuse are aspects of sexuality and dementia which should not be trivialized or overlooked.

In terms of future studies, of what this thesis could lead on to, I also think that intimacy and touch lend themselves to further explorations, not least when it comes to research on sexuality. Intimacy was clearly about something other/more than having intercourse, and it was interesting that in many ways it also involved something that was not necessarily about “doing” in any sense of a physical practice at all. When Owe, for example, spoke about giving compliments and “saying nice words”, this was more about creating an intimate and loving ambience. It might be that, just as researchers on sexuality sometimes tend to overestimate the significance of sexuality in people’s lives, they perhaps also tend to overstate the role of “getting down to” doing, of engaging in some kind of sexual practice (Rubin 1984, Jackson 2007). However, the diary of Fritz, where he narrates fantasies of washing a woman’s back, which I discussed in Chapter Four, was indeed a unique contribution to this

study and points to how fantasies can be a very central part of sexuality and one's sexual subjectivity. Fantasy is evidently an interesting and relevant topic to pursue, not only in relation to later life sexuality. I believe, however, that with loneliness and/or lack of a sexual partner being a shared experience for many old people, the significance of fantasies may increase or be experienced as more important, in particular during what gerontologists have referred to as the fourth age (Gilleard & Higgs 2000). What I find interesting is not primarily to study fantasies from a psychological point of view, but rather to explore them from a cultural and sociological perspective, similarly to Ahmed's (2004b) discussions on emotions as being boundary work between the individual and the social.

One area in which issues of intimacy and fantasy could be interestingly explored is in relation to online sexualities among old people. With the Internet increasingly emerging as a part of our everyday lives, it has in many ways reshaped our intimate and sexual spheres (Hearn 2008). None of the men in this study spoke about the Internet as a sexual sphere, nevertheless, for people growing old today and in the future, online dating, sex chatting, web-cam sex, access to pornography, and many other things related to the Internet, are/will become central parts of how sexuality is experienced. Fantasy is here interestingly entwined in people's online behaviours, and sexual experiences need not lead to offline sexual encounters. Whereas the men in this study mostly discussed and understood intimacy in relation to a loving relationship with a well-known partner, it also seems interesting to explore how encounters on the Internet, sometimes anonymous, could be experienced as a form of intimacy, as a modality of sexuality in later life. If the ageing body is important for how sexuality is experienced among old people, I find the interfaces between ICTs and ageing bodies to be fascinating. It is possible to imagine that ageing bodies are experienced very differently in online sexual encounters, whether one can have an erection or not might for example be of less significance in an online sex chat room.

Thinking futures, thinking something new and different, is in many ways about thinking the unthinkable. As Grosz (1999, 16) remarks, all too often the things we understand as new or different are still "part of the fabric of the known". Things are "different but yet the same", as I began this chapter by saying. At the end of this study, I would like to turn to the words of Foucault, and his definition of work.

[Work is] that which is susceptible of introducing a significant difference in the field of knowledge, at the cost of a certain difficulty for

the author and the reader, with, however, the eventual recompense of a certain pleasure, that is to say of access to another figure of truth (Foucault 1994, 367, quoted in preface to Foucault & Hurley 1997, vii).

I believe that this definition is what many researchers, not least feminist researchers, strive for when writing. And personally, well, writing this thesis has indeed for me involved some difficulties at times, but also a great deal of pleasure as my explorations have led me to new ways of seeing and approaching the world, to “another figure of truth”. Whether readers will find my work difficult or pleasurable, and whether in this study I have introduced a significant difference into the field of knowledge, is not for me to answer. As I said in the introduction, the reader will not learn from this thesis whether old women stand on their heads during sex while the old man “dips it from above”, as the joke from the film *Wolke neun* describes. But my wish has been, if not to introduce a significant difference, then at least to cause some ideas and presumptions about old men, sex and sexuality to be turned on their heads.

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- Wolke Neun*, 2008, film. Directed by Andreas Dresen.

Appendixes

Appendix A: The advertisement

Äldre man som vill skriva om din kropp? Äldre man som vill bli intervjuad?

Jag heter Linn Sandberg skriver på en avhandling, en bok kring äldre mäns kropp och sexualitet ur ett samhällsperspektiv. Jag söker dig som skulle vilja hjälpa mig i min forskning genom att skriva en dagbok om din kropp under en begränsad tid. Det enda kravet är att du ska vara över 60 år, i övrigt spelar det ingen roll vem du är, om du har funktionshinder eller ej om du är frisk eller sjuk. Du kommer att vara anonym i min bok, men om du vill kan du få vara anonym även i din kontakt med mig.

Jag söker även män över 60 år som skulle vilja bli intervjuade om kropp och sexualitet när man åldras för min forskning.

Vill du veta mer eller är intresserad av att delta genom att skriva kroppsdagbok och/eller vill bli intervjuad kontakta mig.

Linn Sandberg
Tema Genus
Linköpings universitet
58183 Linköping
013-286669
epost: linsa@tema.liu.se

This advertisement was published in the Swedish weekly newspaper *Kvälls-*
stunden in November 2007.

Appendix B: The participants

Name*	Born	Participation	Contact
Bernt	1932	Interview	Snowball
Edvard	1939	Interview, BD	Ad
Fritz	1935	BD	Ad
Gösta	1926	Interview	Ad
Holger	1941	BD	Ad
Ingvar	1935	Interview, BD	Ad
Jakob	1924	Interview, BD	Org
Knut	1941	Interview	Org
Lennart	1929	Interview, BD	Org
Nore	1931	Interview	Org
Owe	1925	BD, interview	Org
Sven-Bertil	1940	Interview	Ad
Tor-Björn	1930/31	BD	Ad
Erland	1934	BD	Ad
Östen	1929	Interview	Ad
Axel	1925	Interview	Org
Bror	1940	BD	Ad
Claes	1942	BD, interview	Ad
David	1922	BD	Snowball
Eskil	1934	BD, interview	Ad
Frank	1938	Interview	org
Yngve	1922	BD, interview	Ad

*All names are simulated.

Abbreviations:

BD: Body diary

Org: Senior's organisations (also including day activity centres for senior citizens, for reasons of anonymity)

Ad: Advertising in the newspaper *Kvällsstunden*

Snowball: Personal contacts and/or recommendations

Marital status of informants

Single (including widowed and divorced)	5
Living apart together (LAT)	3
Living together with partner (married and non-married)	13
Other	1

Primary profession formerly held by the participants

Butcher	Painter
Builder (2)	Director
Civil servant (2)	Caretaker
Accountant	Teacher
Sales persons	Engineer
On disability pension	Typographer
Soldier/in the military (2)	Social worker
Illustrator	Building Contractor
Journalist	Profession unknown
Farmer	

Appendix C: Instructions to body diary writers

Skriva kroppsdagbok

Du har visat intresse för att skriva en kroppsdagbok som en del av min forskning om äldre mäns kropp och upplevelser av kroppen. För att ge dig lite vägledning om vad en kroppsdagbok kan innehålla har jag försökt att ge några förslag på vad du kan tänka på när du ska skriva.

Vad?

- Du kan skriva om hur kroppen känns. T.ex. om du har ont eller om något känns skönt. Du kan också skriva om mer vaga kroppskänslor som t.ex. oro.
- Du kan skriva om hur du upplever din kropp på olika platser. Hur påverkade olika platser din kropp och hur kändes din kropp?
- Du kan skriva om din kropp i mötet med andra människor. Hur känns din kropp när du träffar olika människor? Du kan också skriva om beröring av andra människor (när någon tar på dig eller inte tar på dig)

Saker du kan skriva om:

- Ätande och drickande
- Toalettbesök och personlig hygien
- Att vara med vänner/ partner/ kollegor/ vårdare/ barn
- Sex (vad helst du betraktar som sex, det kan vara med en partner eller själv)
- Att bli vårdad eller vårda någon annan
- Att gå till doktorn eller annan hälso- och sjukvård
- Att vakna och att somna
- Kläder och utseende
- Motion

Det här är bara förslag och du kan inkludera vadhelst du tycker är viktigt kring din kropp. Allt är av intresse för mig. Du väljer naturligtvis själv hur mycket du vill berätta om för mig men inget är för obetydligt eller litet för att inkluderas.

När och hur?

Skriv när du vill under dagen, antingen flera gånger eller allt på en gång. Skriv så mycket du vill/orkar/har lust. Om du missar att skriva en dag fortsatt nästa dag. Skriv i en vecka. Du har fått en liten skrivbok av mig. Skriv i den, ha den gärna med i fall du får tillfälle att skriva. Kan du inte skriva i den så skriv på ett separat papper och lägg in det i skrivboken. Dagboken ska du skicka till mig i det frankerade kuvert du fått efter att du skrivit klart din kroppsdagbok, jag kommer att skicka den tillbaks till dig så snart jag kopierat den.

Appendix D: Key to transcription

(.) – Pauses, varying lengths

[...] – Talk cut out

Underlined – emphasis (in translated English quotes emphasis is marked with italics)

CAPITAL LETTERS – Higher voice

Xxxxx – Unhearable on tape

(Text in brackets) – Interrupting comments or questions by interviewer or interviewee in other's speech

(Italics in brackets) – Non-verbal such as humming, laughing or actions such as making gestures, standing up et cetera.

Note on transcriptions

The Swedish transcripts (in the footnotes) are presented un-edited. The English translations have been slightly edited to make them readable and comprehensible.