Attitudes to Ageing and Elderly Care – Film Stories as Mirror or Creator of Norms

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Abstract: *Research on representations of older people in popular culture shows that this group is awarded limited space and often assigned negative images. How older people are represented in film stories reflects general notions of ageing, which may have consequences for the design and quality of elderly care. In this study, cultural studies and gerontological research are used for interpretation of feature films to discuss how standards on age and ageing are created and maintained. Contemporary films with older starring characters are analysed. Ageism is visible in the films, which may contribute to negative views of old age. Older people have, or are perceived to have, impairments and extensive care needs. They are in some ways treated as minors. The older characters display resistance and ambitions to control their lives. There is a challenge to redefine prevailing age norms and meet increasing demands for care of older people.*

Keywords: *older people, elderly care, popular culture, film stories, ageism, normativity, staff skills.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Popular Culture as a Ground for Ageism

How the needs of older people are met hinges on perceptions of this group and on general expectations of what it means to be old and thus what care needs it implies. The design of care is a result of social actors' interpretations of the conditions for older people based on assumptions about who older people are and what they need (Krekula 2010). Generally, the perception of older people is not very positive. Lundman, Norberg and Santamäki Fischer (2012) argue that society is permeated with ageism and that both younger and older people have negative perceptions of getting old. *Elderly Policy for the Future* (Senior 2003) emphasises the importance of reviewing and changing negative attitudes to ageing and older people. The younger and middle aged determine the status and role of older people in society – a quite important reason to problematize notions of ageing and older.

Cordishi (2012), who studies perceptions of the new generations of older people, argues there is a need for consideration of e.g. socio-economic and ethnic parameters, but also for an anticipated redefinition of the prevailing age norms when new generations are getting older. The focus for this study is how older people are portrayed in popular culture which is important for perceptions and beliefs among both older people themselves and people in other age categories (cf. Musaiger & D'Souza 2009). Media images serve as a comparison framework; we measure ourselves and consider our bodies and our conduct in relation to them (Featherstone & Hepworth 1995). How older people are represented and what roles and positions are assigned to them in motion pictures can be examples of beliefs surrounding ageing and older people's living conditions. To analyse a cultural phenomenon such as film, it may help to discover patterns that depict the existing power relationships and injustice. The overall aim of the present study is to contribute to a nuanced discussion of ageing through a critical analysis of contemporary feature films with particular emphasis on how older people are represented and under what conditions. Our choice to use feature films as an empirical basis is justified by the central meanings of different forms of media of reflection, construction, and changes in community conditions. The intention is to use contemporary film portrayals as "case studies" for discussion and reflection in education and in-service training in elderly care.

1.2. Aims and Issues

This study is part of a research context focusing on health and welfare as well as ageing and perceptions of ageing. In order to develop elderly care, there is a need both to use the staff's

knowledge based on their experiences and to enhance their skills (Sörensdotter 2008, Nilsson & Herrman 2012).Thus, the study is included in two local projects aimed at developing elderly care by utilizing staff experiences and creating new knowledge. These local projects are intended, in cooperation with researchers, to develop the elderly care and identify new forms of responses and attitudes to the older person's needs. These new forms include challenging the fundamental values and creating intergenerational encounters by using music. The projects are based on the right of older people to be seen, understood and treated in a respectful manner. In both projects, the staff problematize and discuss the experience of their work and also their understanding of who older people are, their needs and their human rights. The projects also aim to highlight and examine the attitudes and approaches to older people, and to advance reflections on what impact these beliefs have on working methods and care quality. In this context, motion pictures can form "cases" and starting points for discussion. We want to emphasize that our study is not about the films per se, but rather about how films can be used for examination of societal and norm-critical aspects. We are interested in the ageing phenomenon notions of ageing and the contribution of the film medium to the attitudes and knowledge related to ageing and the conditions for it (Lee et al. 2007). The primary aim is not to make a cultural analysis of films, but rather to examine how older people are portrayed in film based on the roles, opportunities and actions they are assigned.

In the world of film, generalizations, conventions and stereotypes are used as accepted solutions, shorthands, methods of establishing social or narrative meetings (Turner 2006). Chronological age or generation affiliation often form the basis of stereotypes. The audience is supposed to quickly understand the characters' features and advantages. The limited duration of films and thus the need for clarity and quick understanding make film an interesting field of study. We set out to examine age norms and cultural beliefs, how older people and their living conditions are portrayed and how norms related to age and ageing are staged.

1.3. Older People's Presence in Popular Culture

Popular cultural forms of media such as television, film, advertising and magazines are influential sources that can make visible a cultural influence over how the media consumer perceives different age categories and older people (Lee et al. 2007). Older people are considered the least represented social category in the media world; they are the least visible and their experience and knowledge are not considered to be of interest (Vasil & Wass 1993). Older people have a weak position in the film and television media (Bazzini et al. 1997; Bildtgård, 2000; Cuddy & Fiske 2002). Older characters are often stereotypically portrayed as a homogeneous group that differs substantially from younger counterparts. Older women tend to be marginalized (Öberg & Tornstam 1999). Bazzini et al. (1997) show that older female characters are represented and portrayed more negatively than younger. The women portrayed in media are exposed to greater physical examination than men, the expectation being that they should live up to female beauty standards (Archer et al. 1983). The film industry is therefore likely to reinforce gender roles rather than transcend and problematize them. Older people are judged, regardless of gender, as having lower skills, level of activity, intelligence, attractiveness and health than younger ones. Cuddy & Fiske (2002:3) refer to Zebrowitz & Montepare (2000), who claim that "older adults are more likely than any other group to appear in television and film as conduits for comic relief, exploiting stereotypes of physical, cognitive and sexual ineffectiveness". Media's celebration of youth ideals is regarded as having a central role in how ageism and stereotypes are perpetuated (Cohen 2002, McConatha et al. 2003).

The research on representations of older people in motion pictures is limited; older people have largely been overlooked in cultural studies and film (Cordischi 2012). There are few portrayals of older people engaging in sexual activity in film (Bildtgård 2000). Hockney and James (1995) point out that the very idea that sexuality and old age could be linked invites you to laugh. Sexistic and ageistic stereotypes interact in this way (Bazzini et al. 1997). According to Kane (2006), sexuality among older people is usually perceived as negative and is condemned as unacceptable by the media consumer. Interestingly, however, there is a higher tolerance for older men's than older women's sexuality.

Chivers (2011) demonstrates how age and functionality are linked together in films; the image of old age includes the notion that older people also have disabilities. Chivers' analysis of modern film is based on gerontological studies and studies on disability: "the fact that popular film operates as one site of 'elderhood' that merits scrutiny for its cultural formations" (28). The link between old age and disability gives a further indication in the search for how older people are represented in film.

1.4. Age Discrimination and Adult Interpretative Privilege

The understanding of age and ageing is socially and culturally constructed and connected to our approach to age (Ronström 1999). Each description of the ageing process means that temporally, spatially and socially defined notions are actualized (Jönsson & Lundin 2007). Because our perceptions of age groups have a central role in our treatment of others, they are important to pay attention to (Krekula 2010). How we treat others and assess the actions of others is derived from our beliefs about age, gender and ethnicity (Kunda 1999). People are sorted into categories according to the standards that are considered valid for each category. Different standards affect, interact, and strengthen or weaken each other intersectional, meaning that categories that creates difference interact. The group of older people is automatically perceived as different, deviant and problematic compared with other age groups, with some parallels to how children and young people are perceived (Jönsson 2002).

Although age discrimination is perhaps the most accepted form of prejudice existing today, the research on it is sparse (Barrow & Smith 1979; Nelson 2004). Negative statements and opinions are accepted in a completely different way if they are directed towards older people than if they target other groups. Featherstone and Hepworth (1995) argue that the age discrimination faced by older people undermines their personal value. Krekula (2010) uses the concept of age coding to show the distinctive practice that is based on and maintains notions that certain characteristics and behaviour depend on the individual's age. Specific beliefs related to age serve as a mental framework (Jönsson & Lundin 2007).

Närvänen (2009) points to a clear demarcation between older and younger. There are standards governing both the individual and the collective, according to which certain appearances and behavioural patterns are considered appropriate (Blaakilde 2007). This means that the scope for action may be limited due to expectations of how individuals within a certain age range should behave, dress and speak. Närvänen (2009) suggests that the adult phase is assigned higher status than other life stages, such as childhood and old age. Younger and older people do not contribute to the public welfare, and hence they are seen as just consuming, while adults are seen as nourishing. The norm is adulthood, which for example authorizes adults to have opinions on the behaviour and conditions of the other categories. As for the norm, adult sovereignty found in the research reported, there are no or few attempts for change, which leaves the norms and values unchanged to marginalize and exclude.

Age-wise categorization tools include language, appearance, media and values (Wilkinson & Ferraro 2004). Clothing, hair styles and other attributes represent a symbolic capital, i.e. they are valued differently according to social class, age, ethnicity or disability. Although today's consumer culture is largely youth-oriented with greater freedom to follow fashions, age normative codes do exist and must not be exceeded: "An old body in a youthful outfit is considered vulgar and pathetic" (Cordishi 2012: 28). Beliefs about ageing are related mostly to the physical attributes (Okoye 2004). Appearance, especially of the face, is a significant factor when categorizing people as older people. Baldness and wrinkles are among the more visible manifestations of ageing. Changes are rarely welcomed, but are defined as negative. Old people's physical inability to control their bodies is sometimes associated to a child in nappies, and thus a lack of social skills is implied (Lundin, 2007). Palmore (1999) argues that even the language has a significant impact on the way ageing is represented and constructed. Older people are frequently treated with protective explanations or simply baby talk (Lundman et al 2012). Ageing is often associated with childhood visually and verbally. By linking old age with childhood, the hegemony of adulthood remains unbroken (Hockney & James 1995).

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The films chosen in this study are fictional stories depicted in modern and some sort of realistic costumes. Well aware that the stories are constructions, we hold that film narratives offer opportunities to illustrate possible processes and events useful to elucidate an approach to older people, how older people are treated and the position of older people in society. We study the visual aspects of culture (Pink 2007). Our method is ethnographic and exploratory. We chose the path of discovery with an intention to investigate what kind of issues can be set in relation to the representation of older people in the films. The term "older people" in this study refers to people who

can be believed to be in their seventies.[1] The movies used are Nordic and were chosen from the shelves of a Swedish nationwide store chain and can as such be expected to be films that many people can either rent or buy. To be considered for selection, a film had to be a comedy or a drama[2] giving examples of film portrayals of older people. It also had to be available on DVD and must have been released in the last ten years.

In movies available in the manner described above, there is an overall absence of older characters. Older people occur mainly in supporting roles or as extras. Thus, our idea to select only Nordic feature films in which older people were the protagonists limited the sample to only three films.[3] As a contrast to the Nordic films, we chose as a fourth film – an Italian film that served as our main inspiration for the study.

We watched the selected films several times, keeping records of relevant events, artefacts, dialogues and various visual aspects of culture. We also wrote down our reflections and discussed our understanding of the film narratives, alternative interpretations and points of interaction. We have discussed each film separately, but also intertextually, as part of a genre. An analysis scheme was prepared, where a number of themes emerged: roles, social class, the relationship between men and women, the relationship between the older and the younger, situations of dependence and sexuality. These themes are presented and discussed in the empirical section. It is obviously problematic to highlight several themes in an article format, but the intention is to establish a starting point for a more thorough discussion about ageism in society and the role of media in perpetuating or changing underlying values that affect the design of elderly care.

2.1. Presentation of the Films

The four selected films are typical examples of how older people are represented. They were produced between 2006 and 2011, and the Italian film offers a contrast to the Nordic films. After a short presentation of the four films follows an analysis of some of the themes we found and wish to highlight.

2.1.1. The Source of Inspiration: August Lunch in Rome

August Lunch in Rome is an Italian feature film from 2009. It is about a middle-aged man, Gianni, who devotes a lot of time and effort caring for his old mother. When Gianni's landlord offers to waive part of his rent in exchange for Gianni caring for his mother on weekends, Gianni cannot say no. The landlord´s aunt also comes in the bargain. And when Giannis male doctor offers him medicine in exchange for weekend care of his mother as well, Gianni suddenly has four older ladies to attend to. The film is a comedy with serious undertones: older women's conditions as a burden for their sons to carry.

2.1.2. Welcome to Verona

The Swedish love comedy *Welcome to Verona* (2006), directed by Suzanne Osten, is set in a private care home for older retired actors and directors. In the opening scenes, the home is presented as a facility with the ambition to offer guests a comfortable, luxurious and joyous living environment. One of the guests, the main character, is a former director named Walter who, after a stroke, is confused and has few memories of his earlier life. When an older female opera diva named Virginia arrives, she quickly becomes the older men's favourite. Walter's passion for theatre re-emerges with Virginia's entrance. It is proposed that the residents should form an ensemble and put on a love play: Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. The film is described as a love comedy but with serious topics such as ageing, sexuality, dementia and death.

2.1.3. Mail to Pastor Jacob

Mail to Pastor Jacob is a Finnish chamber play from 2009, where director Klaus Härö depicts how a female prisoner, Leia, is pardoned with the duty to help an ageing, blind pastor. The former prisoner reluctantly does her job, which is to read aloud every day all the letters to the pastor from people who

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[1] The category "older person" is problematic to define. We selected this age well aware that chronological age is difficult to determine.

[2] We chose not to include films from the police and thriller genres.

[3] Other films focused on middle-aged problems where older people had peripheral roles.

want him to pray for them and help them with their troubles. The pastor is also dependent on assistance in his daily life. Leia is in need of rehabilitation after a long imprisonment. She is bitter from her life experiences and the last to acknowledge any dependence on other people. The story focuses on the need for support and assistance that crosses generations based on reciprocity and respect for vulnerability and dependence on others.

2.1.4. One way to Antibes

This Swedish drama from 2011 is directed by Richard Hobert. The story is about a widower in his 70s, George, and his life journey. Life lies and shortcomings, but also the older man's wish for love and relationships, arise. George has a daughter and a son. The son is separated and owes his family money. He wants to put his father in a retirement home on the grounds that he is senile. While visiting their father for his birthday, his son and daughter along with the young woman the father hired to help him in the household, have planned to sell George's house. The film illustrates generational conflicts and the main character's desire to get back the relationship he had with his young love sweetheart.

3. ANALYSIS

We begin by presenting the roles, functions, relationships and expressions of social belonging highlighted in the four films.

3.1. Men and Women, the Protagonists and Supporting Roles

One common theme is that the main role is assigned to a man, while women have supporting roles. In *August Lunch in Rome*, Gianni, the middle-aged son, takes care of his own and other men's mothers. Despite four strong portraits of ageing women, Gianni's living conditions are the central, and the storyline revolves around him. The *Verona* care home is populated by a number of senior cultural figures and younger staff. The main character is Walter, an older director and stroke victim. The former opera diva Virginia becomes the target of Walter's desire, but she is a nevertheless a supporting role character. It is Walter's dreams that are central and drive the plot forward. Jacob, the blind pastor, is the main character in the drama *Mail to Pastor Jacob*. The film depicts how his life changes when Leia is hired to help the pastor with letters and household work. Even in *One way to Antibes*, the older man George has the starring role, a character whose life takes a new turn thanks in part to the young woman, Maria, whom he hired to take care of household chores. Common to the four films is that these men's lives change radically when the female supporting actors enter the picture. Two of the supporting characters in the films, both women, have been in prison. Leia served a life sentence but was pardoned, but also George's daughter has been in prison.

3.2. Social Affiliation and Dependence

The four films take place in contexts that make the characters' social positions, former education and social and economic resources can be noticed. In *August Lunch in Rome*, Gianni and his mother struggle with financial problems but the environment, social relationships and symbols belong to the middle class. Both the landlord and the doctor turn to Gianni with a wish to temporarily be relieved of the responsibility of taking care of their older female relatives. The landlord leaves his mother and aunt and with Gianni and disappears with his mistress in a convertible sports car. The four older women in the Italian film are neatly dressed and wear jewellery, which shows that they share the same standard of appearance, clothing and behaviour. They become a collective. The filmmaker does not avoid showing close-ups of wrinkles and age spots, but does not let any of the women appear confused or sloppily dressed. For the Sunday dinner, the older ladies are changed into evening wear.

Pastor Jacob's life takes place in a large vicarage in rural environment. He has sufficient social and economic resources to get Leia pardoned from prison and to hire her as his assistant in everyday life. From the interior in the vicarage, it can be inferred that the pastor lives in an older upper-middle class home with large halls, chandeliers and dark furniture. The home is a semi-public area intended to host visitors. The interior reinforces the impression of a wealthy man living in an early 1900 environment who has lost his status. The environment bears witness to a time long gone.

Walter's opportunity to stay at the exclusive care home Verona, and the cultural elite that surround him, testify to cultural, social and economic resources. In *Welcome to Verona*, institutional conditions but also social conditions are reflected. The outdoor environment is verdant, the indoor environment is elegant. The accommodations belong to a cultural elite who share social and cultural capital. They can afford their stay, are well-dressed, articulate and socially competent. They share cultural interests.

In *One way to Antibes*, George lives in his own house, has a car and studied in France in his younger years. The interior of his house reflects a Swedish middle-class environment, indicating that George does not lack economic means. His attire is neat and accurate. He displays sufficient social skills to perform in a variety of contexts.

Although the films reflect the main characters' favourable socio-economic conditions, the same does not apply to the supporting female roles. The opera diva Virginia belongs to the same cultural elite as Walter, while his daughter is a police officer represented as not interested in culture. Leia with her criminal background in no way shares Pastor Jacob's life and the same can be said of Maria, the young woman who George hired to help him with home chores. Maria steals some articles from her employer and gets beaten by her boyfriend. She helps George's son and daughter, for money, to try to sell George's house and put him in a nursing home.

The stories shed light on not only age differences but also on significant gender and class differences, while making it clear that with the ageing process comes declining social status.

3.3. Location, Care and Dependency

The place is important for understanding the context in which the older characters are situated. By describing the social connections and the places, frameworks for the stories are developed and attention is given to the context in which an older character should or could be placed. The place is not neutral – the given context provides information about power relationships and who "owns" the place. de Certeau (1988) reasons in terms of strategy and tactics, space and place and analyses power structures. Strategy is a means for the powerful to impose limits and conditions on the weak, while tactics are contextual and relational and may be the resistance of the weak to occupy place in areas dominated by those with power. A school, a nursing home or other type of institution, with their specific social and cultural structures, can be understood as spaces dominated by those who own time, strategies and resources to decide over others. Children and older people in their respective institutions, schools and retirement homes have few opportunities to make decisions about site conditions. They have no power, but this does not prevent them from using tactics and resistance to acquire a place within the framework that "the other" has power over.

The film narratives are about creating environments that will provide a credible framework for the chain of events that take place as well as create a dynamic that accentuates the image of power, domination and resistance. We found recurring themes of care and dependence, conditions that are tied to the space, the place and the aspects of power that are applicable. The films portray representatives of adult judgment, the adult children, striving to own the space, i.e. prevailing over the older, defining them as not accountable and in need of guardianship. The physical settings of the four films are either the older people's home or special accommodations where older people are staying temporarily or permanently. Whatever the setting, the older character is attributed a need for some form of care, either of their own choosing or a relative's.

The setting of their own homes can be found in *one way to Antibes* and *Mail to Pastor Jacob*. The example of an institution is the care home in *Welcome to Verona*. The fourth example, *August Lunch in Rome,* can be likened to both, a temporary institution situated in a private residence. George in *One way to Antibes* is the only one of the main characters who has an opportunity to select his accommodation. Others are, due to disability or dependency referred to other people's choice of accommodation. Pastor Jacob is blind and dependent on both a well-known environment as well as assistance in managing his priestly duties. The care home is a place for disabled older cultural persons. Gianni and his mother's home can be likened to an institution where other men's mothers are temporary placed.

3.4. Age and Disability

All ageing is not successful, as also reflected on the screen. In films, old age is often accentuated with various disabilities, which reinforces the image of ageing. Those who do not manage to avoid diseases and disabilities or are unable to maintain good health and high physical and cognitive functioning become dependent on care initiatives (Lundman et al. 2012: 27). Care needs are met within either their own homes or in institutions. Which of these is most current is related to time-bound political and economic decisions. Special housing is created for those with high levels of dependency. Institutions can be described as a well-defined physical and generational place where less successful

ageing is handled. Referring to Foucault, Hyltén- Cavallius (2007) discusses how social groups are assigned to specific locations, so-called heterotopias[4]. A heterotopia is a place reserved for individuals in some state of crisis. In a society where youth is the ideal, illness, disability and old age become deviations, norm violations and emergency conditions that cause older people who can no longer take care of themselves to be put in special places that handle the crisis of ageing (Hyltén-Cavallius 2007). Such themes can also be observed in the studied films. The care home constitutes an institutional example where the less successful ageing is handled. Confused older people can be placed there, an accommodation where crisis and deviation can be dealt with, without transparency and involvement of society. By constructing a sort of sanatorium for specific groups, waiting for death is rationalized and given a special place in society (Bauman 1992).

In *August Lunch in Rome*, the older mother is staying with her son, Gianni. The son is the one who has contacts outside the home, provides care, and takes care of the shopping, housework and cooking. Gianni's care of his mother is an example of the family's private elderly care solution.[5] When another three older ladies enter as guests for the weekend, the border between independent living and institutionalized accommodation becomes less sharp. The three ladies are "moved" from their usual accommodation to another, but the conditions are the same. Their sons decide where their older relatives shall stay. Gianni retains his role as caregiver, but now with increased responsibility. His task is to arrange meals and sleeping space, but also to construct a temporary community for the four women. The older generation's forced community is organized both temporally and spatially. The older ladies are presumed to be satisfied with this arrangement and spending the weekend together because they share both gender and generation.

In *One way to Antibes*, the widower George lives in his own house. By being able to pay for a housekeeper, George can live an active and vital life, despite some physical shortcomings. He has visual problems and uses a magnifying glass to read the newspaper. However, he does not let his visual impairment hinder him from setting out on dangerous trips with his car.

Welcome to Verona is an institutional example where Walter and the other older people who due to various impairments cannot take care of themselves are staying. Conditions of progressive dementia and confusion are concealed with the help of conciliatory and friendly words from the staff. The motto is friendliness and cosiness. The care home constitutes a distinct physical location with special guests. The older guests share not only the same generation within the care home – they also have disabilities as well as social and cultural capital in common.

In *Mail to pastor Jacob*, the blind pastor lives in the countryside in a vicarage. By writing a letter to the prison authorities, he manages to get a female prisoner, Leia, pardoned. As part of the arrangement, Leia is to read and answer the letters that the pastor receives from the parish members. Pastor Jacob's life is limited by his blindness and Leia's is limited by social disability after many years in prison.

Whatever the spatial context, the older main characters are in situations of dependence or threatened independence. Närvänen (2009) argues that adulthood as the norm is empowering the younger generation to have views on the conditions for older people. Particularly vulnerable are the older individuals who fail to have a successful ageing process but who instead are disabled and alone and thus become dependent on support from others (Cordischi 2012). The four film examples depict dependence ranging from total dependence on others' care and benevolence (Jacob and Walter) to the four older ladies in *August Lunch in Rome*, whose care needs seem to have been more attributed to them than real. The caregivers, professional or private, all belong to the younger generation.

3.5. Older People – Children with Needs?

In many scenes in the film *Welcome to Verona*, narrative techniques are used in which older people are portrayed in a childish spirit. They all bear pins with animal symbols to help them find their

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[4] Heterotopias is: "actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested and reversed"

(Foucault 1998: 178). Heterotopias have in common that the "normal" rules are set out of play (Haider & Sundin 2011).

[5] Da Roit (2007) argues that the responsibility for care of older people in Italy falls on the family and it is not a societal concern.

rooms, which are signposted with the same symbol. That is, older people retreated like children – both children and older people are expected to navigate in the world using images rather than language. In the care home, excursions and activities resembling preschool activities are organized. These narrative techniques depict how older people are often equated with children, constantly in need of care and tending. The adult children are the metaphorical parents of their ageing parents, i.e. by defining older people as "babies who have gone gaga" (Hockney & James 1995: 136). Older people are often addressed with baby language (Lundman et al. 2012). Consigning older people to a childhood stage means that it occurs naturally and legitimizing that the younger generation, the adult children, define and make decisions on behalf of older people.

3.6. Older People's Sexuality

Öberg (2005) asserts that older people's sexuality has long been taboo in both popular culture and research. Notions and images of older people's supposed asexuality can make these individuals feel ashamed of their sexual desires and fantasies with a risk of being branded as dirty old men or ladies (Levy 2005). Older people may internalize this and live with expectations of denial of sexuality which could result in a kind of self-monitoring, a cultural adaptation to the expectations (Foucault 2002). Bildtgård (2000) studied films with older protagonists to examine how older people's sexuality is portrayed. The results reveal an absence of sexual activity, which suggests prejudices about older people regarding whether they are sexually active or not (Wylie & Kennedy 2010).

In *Welcome to Verona*, the silence about sexuality is broken but at the same time emphasized. Taboos cannot be ignored with impunity. The film makes it clear that sexual activity is associated with death. The older men showing a sexual interest in Virginia all die in her arms bysupposed putative myocardial infarction associated with romantic encounters with Virginia. Sexuality is in this way made a pathogenic and lethal condition. Older people's sexual activity can be understood as pathological. It is assumed that older men should not, or are even not able to, engage in sexual acts.

References to sexual interests are more scarce in the other films. In *August Lunch in Rome*, one of the women departs from the residence to visit the pub. When the runaway returns, she makes a sexual invitation to Gianni, which he declines. The scene challenges powerful taboos – an older woman clearly shows that she is drunk and sexually interested in Gianni, a much younger man. In *One way to Antibes*, George is searching for the love of his youth and when he finds her the love affair restarts, indirectly alluding to older men's desire for intimate relationships.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Normativity and attitudes to Ageing and Older People

The image of ageing is often based on myths and stereotypes (Musaiger & D'Souza 2009). Stereotypes are generalizations and simplifications of the properties of a group and its members. The picture of the ageing condition that filmmakers choose to highlight is not neutral but a result of their own intentions regarding what they want to convey. Contemporary values, as well as societal codes, conventions, myths and ideologies affect filmmaking (Turner 2006). Film stories and representations of ageing and older people are fictional, but nevertheless, they are representations inviting the viewer to identify with them. In the images of older people conveyed through films, there is a risk that the notions of old age are synonymous with dependence and physical and mental decay. The representation of older people could then be simplified (Ronström 1999). These film stories take place in the present – they are constructed contexts that borrow traits of the social conditions where they take place. The contexts are not unreasonable – Italian society offers few special homes for older people, and hence the responsibility for care stays within the family. This is a development that can be discerned also in other contexts to varying degrees, which makes the issue of solving the elderly care problem within the family highly relevant. *Welcome to Verona* illustrates a possible scenario in a society where private and exclusive elderly care can be paid for by specific groups, such as cultural or other elite groups who do not want to grow old with people from ranks other than their own. The design and environment of the care home stand in clear contrast to the often negative connotations of Swedish elderly care and are far removed from some recent elderly care scandals in the country. In *One way to Antibes*, George's integrity is threatened when the adult children want to have him diagnosed with dementia. By linking age to disabilities such as dementia and visual impairment, the image of older people's need for care is reinforced.

In *August Lunch in Rome*, the older women's position as subordinate to a patriarchy, i.e. to their sons, is the focus. The image of ageing in this film is not unilaterally negative. The women appear to be alone but the focus is not on physical or mental disabilities. Despite forced togetherness, they seem to find fellowship with each other. They are dependent on others but the film also points to their ability to use common tactics and create a place (de Certeau 1984) within the actual conditions and rooms their sons prevail over. Women are subordinated by gender throughout the life course, and to be an older woman and have left the right of adult judgment to assert one's position behind leaves little room for negotiation. The power and the strategies these women may have used in roles such as being chiefly responsible for home and children cannot be repeated in old age. On the other hand, those who were housewives are something they have not left behind unlike those who left paid employment and professional life at retirement. In the film stories, it is made clear that the conditions seen in terms of authority and position may change with age. Breakpoints for change can occur when, for example, wage labour ceases, care needs arise and the life phase adulthood is replaced with old age. The older people whose previous position may have been strong and implied authority may be lost when old age and dependency disqualify affiliation with the nourishing. The films highlight themes that identify old age, distinctive from the adult judgment standards – dependency on younger generations and the child generation's views on how older people should live, behave and relate.

The main characters in *Welcome to Verona* and *One way to Antibes* emerge as individuals with strong social, cultural and economic capital. Jacobi (2011) argues that successful ageing is not least a class issue. Walter can "buy" a well-functioning accommodation where his interests and desires can be met; George can choose to look for his youth love in France. Quite obviously, the characters have enough resources to realize some of their dreams. Pastor Jacob, however, is tied to his home environment and the help he gets from Leia. Baltes and Baltes (1990) argue that successful ageing is a balance between losses and strengths. Social networks are decimated and involuntary passivity, loneliness and age-related impairments are other examples of losses related to old age. Such shortcomings can be used by filmmakers to enhance the image of the negative ageing process, highlighting the need for assistance. Yet, this potentially stigmatizes those who do not succeed, those who become sick, depressed or lonely – a variant of ageism that expresses a certain contempt for those individuals who fail their ageing projects (Cordishi 2012).

The film images can be used to problematize adulthood and old age. The prevailing of adult judgement is prominent in all studied movies. Older people are depicted as passively waiting, until some action in the film dramatically changes and new conditions become applicable. While the new generation of older people, along with the purchasing power of the 1940s generation, is considered to have redefined the prevailing age-related standards (Cordishi 2012), such violations are difficult to discern in these films. The film narratives could of course be interpreted and discussed in different ways. One interpretation could be that traditional standards are implicit– Gianni's taking care of his mother could possibly be understood in terms of broken gender norms. Cinema Statistics shows that younger filmgoers are becoming fewer while the number of older ones is increasing. Despite this, the film industry seems to give higher priority to the younger preferences. That the age distribution of the audience is changing with an increasing proportion of older people does not automatically imply the production of more films with older protagonists. A variety of films with older protagonists are now being produced in Hollywood. It remains to be seen whether Nordic filmmakers will challenge traditional age and ethnic boundaries and thus give a more nuanced picture of the heterogeneous age group of the about 1.8 million Swedes who are 65 and older.

4.2. Resistance

The four films show a range of more or less successful ageing. Some of the main actors are defeated by the circumstances that the support they are offered gives them. Their ageing is not successful. For others, new possibilities are opened. They find new friends, new love and can create new places (de Certeau 1988). They resist, and can to some extent free themselves from, the constraints of the adult children. They get and create participation and respect.

In our research projects in collaboration with local elderly care providers, we are involved in discussions of value issues. Together with staff in elderly care, we problematize examples of empowerment, integrity and older people's right to dignity. Whether the discussion is about culture as a means for health promotion and meaning or about implementation plans in homecare, discussions are centred on notions and interpretations of ageing conditions and needs of older people. This is an

urgent task requiring awareness and recognition of a new understanding of underlying causes of the social categorizations. New understandings can reveal underlying values that are important for the perception of older people, design of elderly care and the planning of appropriate activities. The films illustrate fundamental human rights and how rights are met and needs fulfilled. It is not obvious that even a private accommodation gives older people a "place" they can prevail over. How care is designed, planned and applied is closely linked with the societal values concerning ageing. These values determine how training for care professions is provided, which in turn is linked to societal perceptions of age and ageing. Thus, there is a mutual influence between societal values and care performance. Staff in elderly care have experience of ageing conditions and how older people's needs are met in practice. Such experience is closer to older people's real needs and is useful and required for recognizing ageism and developing future elderly care (Alsterdal 2009, Sörensdotter 2008, Nilsson & Herrman 2012).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The four films discussed here are fictional, but even so they can serve as examples on normative and power-related attitudes to older people. How ageing and older people's specific conditions are portrayed in contemporary film can reveal something about contemporary notions. The films can be used to draw attention to perceptions and expectations related to age, gender, social and ethnic background, disability and sexuality. The consequences of such notions affect the lives of both the individual and the collective. The four "cases" raise issues that critically examine what old is, and should be, how older people are represented and what cinematic representations do for our way of perceiving and understanding the perception of older people and ageing. Film illustrations can open up discussions about standards, rights, obligations and gender issues and can also draw attention to alternative approaches. With film as a tool, value issues can be discussed: do older people have power to make decisions about their lives, are they listened to, and are they treated with respect and understanding? These types of questions can incite reflection and critical review of prevailing norms, which is important for learning both for and in working life in training for health and social care professions. Feature films can serve as "neutral" examples, where the characters' situation and performance can be discussed and where the underlying values and attitudes can be examined in a more distanced way than may be possible in examples related to real care issues.

The examples illustrate the interplay of strategies and tactics. The conditions for the various main characters' opportunities to offer resistance depend on the younger generation. The younger may empower older people, yet neither letter reading, a theatre production, joint dinners nor a journey to Antibes can be realized without generational agreement and consent from the younger generation. Isolated older individuals who protest have no real opportunity to ensure their personal requests. With a critical perspective on how ageism is perpetuated and could be changed and with the use of staff experiences to formulate new knowledge for elderly care, opportunities for future elderly care are opened up.

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