Levd erfarenhet av ålder

Föreställningar om och erfarenheter av att vara och bli äldre

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i Hörsal A, Samhällsvetarhuset Fredagen den 28 september, kl. 10:15.
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Abstract
Starting from the perspective that the ageing human body always is a situation and in a situation, the present thesis explores situations in which the meaning of age and ageing is negotiated. The analytical focus is on situations, and more specifically on experiences of age and ageing. The aim of the thesis is to describe and analyse the lived experience of age and ageing. A hermeneutic understanding of experience and lived experience is fundamental to the thesis. Three studies are included.

The first study is based on descriptions of situations in which older people felt “especially young” and “especially old”. The analysis revealed that the same kinds of situations gave rise to experiences both of feeling “especially young” and of feeling “especially old”, but they differed in focus regarding social inclusion/exclusion.

The second study is based on interviews with amateur dancers regarding their experiences of a dance project in which the artistic focus is on the aged body. Two themes emerged in the analysis: the dance project as a situation in which the meaning of age and ageing was both given new meanings and restated in stereotypical terms; and the aged and ageing person him-/herself as a situation for negotiating the meaning of age and ageing. The meaning of age was negotiated, as there were tensions between referring to age and ageing as resources and referring to them as a problem associated with restrictions. The situated experiences involved changes in the body, pointed out by other people or felt oneself. The dissociation from being old appeared as an internalized social norm, and one strategy for avoiding old age was to keep active, but not too active.

The third study is based on a vignette dialogue with amateur dancers. Text excerpts from Simone de Beauvoir's book The Coming of Age (1970/1972) were used as vignettes to grasp notions about the aged in society as they appeared to the informants. Among the informants, notions of being and becoming old in a society are filled with fears of being dependent, becoming a social burden on society and being reduced to an aged person with standardized needs who is unable to live a worthy life. In sum, the lived experience of ageing is always situated as a complex interplay between the body, social norms, the available language and our notions about these phenomena. The present thesis shows that age and ageing can be filled with various inconsistent meanings that embrace social inclusion as well as social exclusion.

Keywords
Lived experience, ageing, situated ageing, age positions, social aspects of growing old, situational analysis, phenomenological aspects of being and becoming, age negotiation