



## Ashamed of One's Sexism, Mourning One's Friends: Emotions and Relations in Men's Encounters with Feminism in Sweden

By  
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### Abstract

One of the most important questions for feminist research on men and masculinity concerns how men can change and become more affected by feminism and less engaged in sexism. Here, men who identify as feminist, pro-feminist or anti-sexist have been considered to be of particular interest. This article contributes to the emerging research on men's engagement with feminism by analysing contemporary writing about gender relations, inequality and masculinity, more specifically books about men published in Sweden, 2004-2015. Focusing on lived-experience descriptions, the analysis shows how a range of emotions are central to the processes where men encounter and are becoming affected by feminism. The emotions identified include happy ones such as relief, but a more prominent place is given to negative emotions such as alienation, shame, frustration, as well as loss and mourning. Drawing on Ahmed's model of emotions as bound up with encounters with others, the article highlights how men's engagement with feminism is embedded within interpersonal relations with others, particularly women partners, men friends, and children.

**Keywords:** Emotions, feminism, men, masculinity, queer phenomenology.

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## Introduction

One of the most important questions for research on men and masculinity concerns how men can change (Segal 2007), i.e. how they can become more affected by feminism and less engaged in sexist practices. In understanding these processes, men who identify as feminist, pro-feminist or anti-sexist have been identified to be of particular interest (Christian 1994). While there is some writing on 'men and feminism' (e.g. Chowdhury & Al Baset 2018, Digby 1998) and on men's movements (e.g. Messner 1997), there are still relatively few empirical studies of men's engagement with feminism. These include Christian (1994), Connell (1995), and Pease (2000) who make use of life-history interviews and memory-work in the UK and in Australia. More recently, Messner, Greenberg & Peretz (2015) and Flood (2018) focus on men's engagement in activism against men's violence against women. Egeberg Holmgren (2007, 2011, 2012) interviewed (pro)feminist men in Sweden. She found that the men were more inclined to talk about gender theory than about their own lived experience. This calls for more attention to the lived experiences of men's engagement with feminism, which the present article focuses on.

Men's engagement with feminism in Sweden goes back at least to some men's support of women's suffrage (Svanström & Östberg 2004). In the 1970s, there was a men's movement partly focused on men's liberation from restrictive notions of masculinity (Hill 2007). While such movements attracted relatively few men, it is the involved father who has been the main symbol of men's participation in gender equality struggles in Sweden more broadly (e.g. Bergman & Hobson 2002). In recent years, men's engagement with feminism has become increasingly widespread and diversified, and men ranging from prominent politicians to hip hop artists have publicly declared themselves as feminists. In this context, feminism is usually defined as a position of wanting to change unequal gender relations rather than as a 'movement of women for women' (cf. Gemzöe 2014). Following this usage, I will use the notion of 'feminist men' as a shorthand for men engaged with questions about gender inequality from a broadly feminist perspective.

An interesting part of men's intensified interest in feminism in Sweden is the publication of popular books and book chapters on issues about men, masculinity, feminism and gender equality, particularly in the years 2004-2015. While scholars have previously examined men's fictional writing (Johansson 2015) and daddy-handbooks (Henriksson Wahlström 2016) in Sweden, this study is the first to focus on men's journalistic and political writing on men and masculinity, which I will refer to as 'books about men'. While varying analyses of gender relations and of constructions of masculinity are offered in these texts, the present article focuses on the more personal stories provided. *How are lived experiences of feminist men*

*in contemporary Sweden described? And what is the role of emotions and relations to others in these descriptions?*

## **Men, Masculinity and Post-Phenomenological Feminism**

Theoretically, the analysis in this article draws on poststructuralist and phenomenological feminist perspectives. A poststructuralist perspective emphasizes that categories such as ‘men’ and ‘masculinity’ are neither stable nor homogenous entities but are rather subject to constant construction and negotiation (e.g. Butler 1990). Accordingly, Pascoe and Bridges (2016: 4, emphasis added) define masculinity as “the practices, behaviors, attitudes, sexualities, emotions, positions, bodies, organizations, institutions, and all manner of expectations culturally *associated* with (though not limited to) people understood to be male”. This associational definition avoids the tendency in masculinity research to produce long lists of different ‘masculinities’ (Pascoe 2007).

Feminist engagements with phenomenological thought have contributed important insights into subjectivity, embodiment and lived experience (e.g. Ahmed 2006, Fielding & Olkowski 2017, Young 2005). Feminist phenomenology can be defined as the “study of gender-relevant issues from a perspective of lived experience – that is, from a first-person perspective” (Stoller 2017: 343). In recent years, it is increasingly recognized within feminist theory that poststructuralist and phenomenological insights can be usefully brought together. This is reflected in the use of concepts such as ‘post-phenomenology’ (Oksala 2016), ‘queer phenomenology’ (Ahmed 2006) and ‘sticky masculinity’ (Berggren 2014). This line of thinking combines a poststructuralist critique of discursive categorizations with a recognition of the importance of lived experience, and enables an analysis of how lived experiences, emotions and relations to others are described in the books about men. Thus, while the analysis is concerned with the texts rather than the authors, the focus is primarily on how lived experiences are described rather than, for instance, on the theories about masculinity that are employed.

My reading is primarily inspired by feminist cultural theorist Sara Ahmed’s work on emotions (2004, 2006, 2010). Emotion and affect have, for a long time, been of interest to feminist theory (e.g. Liljeström & Paasonen 2010, Lloyd 1984) and to masculinity studies (e.g. deBoise & Hearn 2017, Kimmel 1994, White & Peretz 2010) in different ways. Ahmed’s approach theorizes emotions as relational and bound up with our movements in relation to social norms and to other people. Thus, emotions are not simply first within a subject and then expressed, nor are they first in the social realm and then internalized. Instead, emotions become central to understanding people’s attachments to norms and to others, as well as to the processes through which they change. I draw on Ahmed’s general approach,

as well as on her discussions about disgust, disorientation and happiness. In addition, I make use of Butler's (1997, 2004) work on loss and mourning, as well as of Deleuze and Guattari's (2004) notion of desiring-machines. As Ahmed (2012) points out, the work of Deleuze (and Guattari) can be read in different ways, and it is not necessarily opposed to queer phenomenology. I find the notion of desiring-machines helpful in foregrounding conflicting aspects of subjectivity.

### **Reading Books about Men**

The books about men analyzed in this article consists of political and journalistic writings on gender inequality and masculinity, written by men and aligning with some kind of feminist perspective, published 2004-2015. I have searched broadly for texts on men and masculinity written by men but have not considered fiction, handbooks, or books about gender that are opposed to feminist analysis. I also chose to exclude some texts by authors already represented in the sample, as well as one edited volume to which I contributed myself (prior to becoming a researcher). This procedure resulted in 5 full books (Engström 2005, P. Eriksson 2006, Mendel-Enk 2004, Priftis 2014, Söderlund, 2015) and 29 chapters selected from 4 anthologies (Alvemark & Leffler 2007, Bank & Lindh 2012, Elf Karlén & Palmström 2008, Krook, Söderlund & Idling 2008). In translation, some of the titles read as "The scary gender", "Doing men", "Man's liberation from man", and "Confessions of a sexist".

In general, these books about men share the purpose of making visible the social construction of masculinity. They aim to raise awareness about gender relations, power and norms about masculinity, in particular among men. In this sense, they could be considered part of what hooks (2000: 81) calls "a tremendous contribution to make" for men who believe in feminism, namely an effort in "exposing, confronting, opposing, and transforming the sexism of their male peers". The analyses of gender relations offered in the texts have somewhat different emphases, but overall fit into the four aspects that previous research on men and feminism have highlighted: men's privileges, the costs of masculinity, differences between men (Messner 1997) as well as deconstruction of the categories of men and masculinity (Egeberg Holmgren & Hearn 2009). Some of them emphasise men's structural position of power as well as the gendered nature of men's violence. Some are full of references to feminist theory and masculinity research or offer arguments about how masculinity is performatively enacted rather than the expression of an inner essence. Others foreground how men's lives become restricted by narrow definitions of masculinity. Overall, the least developed aspect in these books is the recognition of differences, and there are few substantial discussions of intersections with ability, age, class, race or sexuality. This is

arguably connected to the authors being predominantly white, middle-class and heterosexual men.

The analysis in this article focuses on the personal stories provided, or what van Manen (2014) calls “lived-experience descriptions”. He argues that personal stories or ‘anecdotes’ are useful in capturing lived experience: “What makes anecdotes so effective is that they seem to tell us something noteworthy and important about life, about the promises and practices, frustrations and failures, events and accidents, disappointments and successes of our everyday living” (van Manen 2014: 250). It is important to acknowledge that lived-experience descriptions found in published books are, to some extent, shaped by this medium, and that we do not know much about what has been left out. Moreover, the experiences of people who are able to write such books may also be relatively specific. Nevertheless, I argue that the books about men discussed in this article, contain descriptions that can cast some new light on the lived experiences of feminist men in contemporary Sweden.

The books about men chosen for this study are all in Swedish, and the analysis was conducted prior to translation by the author. In my reading of the texts, specifically focusing on personal stories, four major themes emerged. I call these themes: *Awakening*, which describes events where critical reflection on gender is initiated; *Ashamed*, which has to do with critical reflection about one’s past sexism and privileges; *Relieved but lost*, which concerns how the subjects relate to themselves; and finally *Mourning friends* where relations to friends are depicted.

## Awakening

The first theme concerns events which initiate a process of critical reflection. In these lived-experience descriptions, children play a central role, such as in the following account in which father and daughter discuss life choices:

An important event in my process of insight came when my then 17 year-old daughter Jennyfer gave me something to think about. We sat down and talked about school, career, and the future. [...] She looked at me and said: “I have always thought that you’ve got a brain damage”. Suddenly, I realised that she was serious. And that she was right. (Engström 2005: 10)

Previous research on feminist men shows that they tend to come to feminism through encounters with others, primarily feminist women (Christian 1994). In the books about men, these others, who affect men and make them question gender relations, are often children, and in particular daughters. In this quotation

—the ableist language notwithstanding (May & Ferri 2006)—it is the daughter’s opinions regarding education and work which lead the man to suddenly acquire another point of view and call his own mindset into question, although we are not told exactly what makes him change. Here is another, similar example of how an episode with a daughter compels a man to reflect:

After the movie, my daughter looked at me. ... “Have you been crying?” “Haha, no no no.” ... Suddenly, I appeared as cold and cynical. ... But it was the first time that I had become conscious of the question: why not cry? I felt like an idiot. ... I have never seen my brother cry. Nor any of my uncles. When I think about it, I have never seen any of my male friends or colleagues cry. (Söderlund 2015: 20–21)

In this example, a man notices his own defensive response to his daughter’s question about whether he had been crying during a movie. He first laughs at the possibility, but then suddenly realizes that this response makes him come across as cold and cynical. This brings him out of the taken-for-granted position that men should not cry and leads to a process of reflection where he recollects never having seen any man cry from his circle of family, friends and colleagues. These reflections are in line with one strand of research on men and masculinity which stresses that dominant notions of masculinity include a taboo on certain forms of emotional expression, particularly regarding sadness and vulnerability (hooks 2005, Seidler 1989). While the first ‘epiphany’ occurred in a conversation on education and career, the second took place in relation to the emotional expression of crying. Both involved a daughter as interlocutor, and it is in relation to the daughters’ opinions and questions that the men come to realize that their own taken-for-granted ways of reasoning and expressing emotions are neither inevitable nor necessarily desirable. The next quotation illustrates another way in which children provide a contrast to dominant notions of masculinity:

I felt sick. I had had a kid just two weeks ago. I couldn’t take “burning pitch torches in the face”, I couldn’t take “jump kick in the chest”. I wished I had never agreed to write that article, I wanted to puke and get the nightmare-like images out of my head. And at the same time, a thought I couldn’t escape from: all of this is familiar (Mendel-Enk 2004: 9)

Here, the subject is writing a journalistic story about men engaged in certain violent aspects of football fandom, and the extract describes the experience of interviewing such violent men. On the one hand, the reports about interpersonal

violence seem familiar and relatively unsurprising for a subject raised in masculine culture. On the other hand, they make him feel sick and he describes the images as a nightmare. In contrast to the two extracts above, the child does not even have to say anything here to affect the father. From the vantage point of caring for a vulnerable infant, he is disgusted by the scenes of violence among male football fans. Ahmed (2004: 86, original emphasis) captures how the feeling of disgust arises when something that is already part of the subject, in this case the familiarity with men's violence, is rejected: "Pulling back, bodies that are disgusted are also bodies that feel a certain rage, a rage that the object has got close enough to sicken, and to be taken over or taken in. To be disgusted is after all *to be affected by what one has rejected*." Thus, similarly to the previous examples, the encounter with a child here results in questioning established ways of engaging with the world. The next quotation is different in that it specifically mentions a son in a description of how parenting breaks with dominant notions of masculinity:

There is one place where the male role is switched off. It is the place as a father. I don't want my son to rape anybody. I don't want anybody to jump on his head. I don't want him to believe that all girls are really horny on Fridays. I don't want him to have to prove himself by knowing stuff about fighting, porn and weapons. I don't want my daughters to meet, socialise with or even have to see guys with that kind of view of women. I don't want them to have that view of men. Having to be on guard. (Söderlund 2008: 183–84)

Unlike most similar passages, this quotation is not exclusively focused on daughters. It expresses a concern about the negative experiences of boys and men that daughters are likely to have, which puts them in a position of having to be 'on guard'. However, the empathic connection to daughters also has implications for the raising of boys. The subject objects to his son being raised in accordance with norms of masculinity, which is connected to power (he may commit sexual assault) as well as vulnerability (someone may jump on his head). Hence, the elimination of destructive standards of masculinity would entail increased safety for girls as well as boys in a win-win situation. While connected to the experiences of daughters, this quotation is rare in the data because it problematises the raising of boys.

In recent years, 'daddy-feminism' has received some media attention in Sweden, due to a number of dads having gone public about how they have discovered feminism through the process of raising daughters (Tillberg 2016). The feminist reception of this phenomenon has been mixed: on the one hand, anything that



sparks change in men is welcome, but on the other hand, their neglect of feminist perspectives prior to becoming a father is apparent. In particular, it has been questioned why the daddy-feminists were not affected by the experiences of other female significant others in their lives, such as women partners or friends. In the books about men, the others by whom the men are affected, and who initiate their critical reflection on their enactment of gender, are primarily children and usually daughters. The fact that men's feminism appears so closely tied to children perhaps bears traces of the Swedish gender equality project, where the involved father has been promoted as the ideal. At the same time, the emphasis on daughters seems to fit to some extent with traditional notions of masculinist protection (Young 2003). In a way, invoking the daughter may function as a way of legitimating men's opposition towards dominant norms of masculinity, drawing attention away from the possibility of men's own dissatisfaction with such norms. However, there are also a few examples where women friends initiate men's reflections:

Simultaneously, things happened to people around me that I had previously only read about in the papers. A woman friend discovered how unattractive you are on the labour market when you are about to become a mom. Another one dared to speak her mind and demand equal rights to her male co-workers, which resulted in her acquiring super powers: she could be in the same room as her male bosses and colleagues without anybody recognising her. A couple of my other women friends were subjected to disgusting things such as battering and rape. In one case, the perpetrator was even somebody I had met before and assessed as a really nice guy. (P. Eriksson 2006: 14)

In this quotation, the subject describes how his women friends are discriminated against in the labour market, or how they are the victims of men's violence in the form of assault and rape. Although he reports being aware of the fact that such things happen disproportionately to women, the media accounts seem insufficient to really affect him. Perceiving this gendered pattern of vulnerability to discrimination and violence taking place among close friends, on the other hand, makes much more of a difference and initiates critical reflection on gender relations. In particular, having previously assessed one of the perpetrators as a 'nice guy' seems to entail a change of perception. Men's violence and oppressive practices do not take place in any distant place but are indeed part of everyday experience, and the extract suggests that it is personal encounters more than impersonal information that has a capacity to affect the men (cf. White & Peretz 2010).



As we have seen, the encounters which initiate the process of 'awakening' are somewhat different. However, it is almost invariably encounters with significant others which make the men start to reflect critically on gender relations. I now turn to the second theme where the men reflect critically on their past.

## Ashamed

The second theme in the books about men is about one's biography. Having started to reflect critically about gender relations, the men scrutinise their own past. They look back on their own sexism and privileges with critical distance and sometimes with a sense of shame:

I once got a board appointment thanks to a conversation in a urinal. Another time, I got an appointment after a conversation in the sauna. At the time, I didn't even reflect upon what was happening. Looking back, it seems crazy, and so not okay. (Bernhardt 2008: 44)

I have spent most of life in business and today I cannot say whether I have done more harm than good. Several times I have neglected women with the best competence when recruiting. [...] I have ignored women speaking at meetings. I have taken part in speculation on whether a woman would get pregnant or not, judging from her age and have allowed that speculation to become a truth, a part of the judgement of her. (Engström 2005: 23)

In these two quotations, the subjects confess how they have themselves been involved in upholding patriarchal relations. The first extract describes the subject having obtained board and job appointments in male homosocial settings, such as in the men's sauna or in the men's bathroom. At the time, he was happy about these things taking place and did not reflect critically about them, whereas now he looks back on those events critically: "it is so not okay". The second extract is similar in that a man looks back at his work practices. He recounts having discriminated against women repeatedly in recruitment, as well as having interacted disrespectfully with women in job meetings. Looking back on his career, he confesses: "Today I can't tell whether I have done more harm than good". While these quotations illustrate critical reflection about the public sphere, the following extract instead concerns personal life:

I remembered with shame and despair that one of the conditions on my part for getting a baby was that she should stay at home. I was making a career and could not be interrupted by small children. ... I was proud that I didn't have the time to take parental leave. Proud that I was making a career and earned a lot of money. (Engström 2005: 48)

Here, the critical reflection concerns negotiations with a female partner about the distribution of unpaid reproductive labour. The subject reports his pride in being busy, being in business, being a breadwinner, and earning a lot of money. This is a pride he would not allow to be disturbed by young children, and consequently, he demands that his woman partner should stay at home at the expense of her own ambitions. Looking back, however, the relentless pride in being a successful man has turned into shame and despair; a shame over how his own entitlement to a career constituted an obstacle which held back his partner's progress in the public sphere.

In a sense, feminism in these stories appears to turn pride into shame. This is what Ahmed (2010) describes as the 'killjoy' function of feminism. Ahmed suggests that if feminism means killing joy, it is because that joy or happiness was already constituted by sexism. By implication, sexism is reproduced by being associated with happiness. As she puts it: "Attributions of happiness might be how social norms and ideals become affective" (Ahmed 2010: 11). If social norms such as sexism are associated with happy affect, feminist politics includes "to be willing to be proximate to unhappiness" (Ahmed 2010: 87). The critical and shameful confessions we have seen in this section, I suggest, are part of such a feminist willingness to speak about the unhappiness of sexism (cf. Gottzén 2019). This section has addressed how the men describe looking back on their own past sexism and privileges. Next, I turn to how they feel about themselves in the present.

## Relieved but lost

In addition to waking up from their sexist slumber and scrutinising their own past, the men describe how they relate to themselves in the present. This is a story about relief, but also about disorientation.

One thing I know for sure, and that is that there is an enormous happiness in not being an oppressor. Life gets lighter. It feels better when you go to bed at night if you know that you did your best, when it comes to communication and cooperation with others. (Engström 2005: 51)

In this extract, the subject positions himself as liberated from being a sexist oppressor. No longer burdened by his domination of women, the subject is relieved: 'life is lighter'. Indeed, there is an 'enormous joy' in not being an oppressor. Here, it is assumed that sexism can be and already has been transcended by the subject. Gender inequality is also understood to be restricted primarily to interpersonal communication, an assumption which minimizes pervasive inequalities on multiple arenas throughout society. Presumably, it is these assumptions that enable the feeling of relief, which is far from the killing of joy described above. However, not all subjects are very convinced that their sexism belongs entirely to the past:

Knowing that you have behaviours steeped in values which you cannot stand by makes life difficult. Feeling shame about how often my impulses are towards ways which I do not accept makes me unsure and afraid. I don't let my impulses and feelings guide me, I have to evaluate my feelings before I communicate them. (Rosén 2007: 214)

When we practice recognising the situations in which we let patriarchy inhabit our bodies, our words and our deeds, when we are mindful about how we become an extension of the gender order and stop thinking for ourselves, then we can break down the loyalty, the silence and the passivity. (Söderlund 2008: 194)

In these quotations, the subjects struggle with their embodied subjectivity. The first extract describes a subject torn between his attachment to a feminist worldview and his bodily impulses and feelings, which are partly at odds with his ideological outlook, and of which he is therefore ashamed. Not being able to trust one's 'automatic' bodily reactions, in turn, leads to feeling insecure and afraid. Also in the second extract, there is a similar concern with how men need to learn to monitor their bodies, in order to not become mere extensions of patriarchy.

In these examples, masculine and sexist ways of engaging with the world have become habitual. In order to understand these struggles about embodied subjectivity, I want to consider the idea of 'desiring-machines', developed by Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari 2004). In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari develop an analysis of embodiment as productive and multiple. In other words, the subject is not theorised as a unitary organism, but instead as a collection of 'machines' which produces certain effects. As they put it: "Given a certain effect, what machine is capable of producing it? And given a certain machine, what can it be used for?" (Deleuze & Guattari 2004:3).

Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's theory of embodied subjectivity, we can say that the feminist men had a number of sexist or masculinity machines running

prior to awakening. The acquisition of a feminist worldview can be regarded as the installation of a feminist machine as well. This feminist machine is a critical machine: it scrutinises previous behaviour and monitors current practices. Its aim is to stop the production of sexist effects. What we can see in the extracts above, however, is that the new feminist machine does not simply cancel out the effects of the old masculinity machines. Instead, there seem to be parallel and competing machines running: patriarchal, sexist machines as well as feminist, monitoring machines. However, the simultaneous operations of these machines are not always smooth:

Help me talk about these questions. Help me understand. (Söderlund 2015: 7)

In my attempt to avoid the curtailed life I had seen among adult men, I rejected everything that could have really shaken my own life. The result was a complete vacuum. I didn't take any initiatives, I was sceptical of the suggestions my girlfriend came up with, and in the end I had no clue as to what I wanted, where I was going or who I was. I had become totally meaningless. (Mendel-Enk 2004: 89)

In these extracts, we see that the loss of the commitment to dominant notions of masculinity can lead not only to relief but also to a sense of disorientation. In the first quotation, there is a plea for help in making sense of the situation. Here, after the loss of identification with normative forms of masculinity, the subject feels not only relief but also a little lost. It is one thing to come to terms with one's past, and quite another to know how to act without the habits or machines which one no longer appreciates. Similarly, in the second quotation, the subject expresses an eagerness to avoid the narrow life of dominant forms of masculinity. This attempt is described as a kind of void: the subject stops taking initiatives and ends up without a clue about what he wants or about who he is. He is lost: 'completely meaningless'. Returning to the notion of machines, we can say that the feminist machine has gained strength here and it has, to some extent, succeeded in cancelling out the machines of dominant forms of masculinity. However, the effects have been primarily 'negative' and focused on undoing problematic patterns of behaviour. There has been less success in replacing the masculinity machines with new, more inclusive and 'positive' machines. With the masculinity machines no longer effective, and with no clear alternative machines installed yet, the subjects feel confused and lost.

Ahmed (2006) argues that the feeling of being oriented in the world depends on following normative lines of direction. Hence, disorientation arises when we step off the well-trodden paths, and no longer find our way or feel at home. Even if this loss of direction can feel uncomfortable, it could be argued that the disorientation felt by the feminist men indicates that they are in fact stumbling in new directions, thus perhaps creating new paths for others to follow. In the next theme, I turn to feelings of loss also in relation to others.

## Mourning friends

The process of awakening was, in a way, a collective process, where the feminist men were affected by encounters with others who initiated their process of reflection. The confessions of past privileges and sexism, as well as the negotiations between current feminist and sexist machines, are depicted as more solitary. However, encountering feminism affects the men's relations not only to themselves, but also to others. In this section, I turn to a range of unhappy emotions which appear in relation to predominantly male friends.

All my male friends are sexists and most of the female as well. (Engström 2005: 17)

When my oldest friends found out that I had gotten cancer, they withdrew, almost all of them, unable to voice their fear—and I believe—their compassion. It was as if they had no language for their fear of cancer. They kept away until I had recovered. (Ekelund 2012: 134)

When the subjects take a look at their male friends, they do not feel very happy. In these extracts, there is a realisation that one's friends are not what they seemed. In the first quotation, the subject discovers that his friends, especially the men, are sexist. In the second quotation, almost all of the friends withdraw and disappear when the subject gets ill. The point is not that the friends' withdrawal was a result of the engagement with feminism, but rather that established friendship practices are looked upon in a new light. These descriptions convey a sense of alienation from one's friends; of being torn apart from significant others by a notion of masculinity (with no room for feminism or vulnerability) which is no longer shared. Here is another example which shows the difference between consciousness and practice:

What all men would need is some kind of 'everyday therapist' whom you could speak your mind to every now and then. Or, as they are also called: good friends. (P. Eriksson 2006: 248)

I still haven't talked to anybody about my divorce. (P. Eriksson 2006: 250)

In these quotations from the same book, we see first a critique of how norms of masculinity restrict possibilities for close relationships with friends in men's lives (cf. Goedecke 2018). However, apparently it is one thing to embrace a critique of masculinity in theoretical terms, and quite another to act differently, because in the second quotation the subject tells us that he still has not been able to talk to anybody about his divorce. "Still not" as in "I wish I could have"? There is a sense of disappointment and of being let down by friends who are not there for you when you need it the most, in times of crisis, such as illness or break-up.

These emotions of alienation, loneliness and disappointment are associated with a loss. It is not primarily a loss of the fantastic friends the subjects had prior to becoming feminists, because the alienating behaviours of the friends do not always take place after the subjects' transformation. Instead, it is perhaps a loss of an expectation that one's friends will be friendly, supportive, and willing to hear about one's troubles (illness, divorce) as well as about one's development (learning about feminism). This changed perception of male friends—from friendly to unsupportive—could arguably be interpreted as a loss of friends.

Butler (1997) has argued that heterosexual masculinity is, to some extent, a melancholic identification: it consists of homosexual ties that are not recognised as such in a heteronormative context, and which therefore cannot be mourned. It is interesting to note here that in the books about men a critical awareness of masculinity seems to come with a process of mourning the love of other men. In her later work, Butler (2004) emphasises how mourning is an inherently relational process. Since we are already constituted by our ties to other people, loss and mourning come to affect our sense of ourselves:

It is not as if an 'I' exists independently over here and then simply loses a 'you' over there, especially if the attachment to 'you' is part of what composes who 'I' am. If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who 'am' I, without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, I think I have lost 'you' only to discover that 'I' have gone missing as well. (Butler 2004: 22)

To the extent that being affected by feminism leads to men's alienation from significant others, it can involve a process of loss and mourning and thus of disorientation of the self. Critical writing on men and feminism has sometimes

claimed that men's attachment to patriarchy may be too powerful to be wiped out (Kahane 1998). However, the analysis here suggests instead that it is one thing to learn to change one's ideological commitments, but quite another to deal with alienation and loss, since our sense of self is entrenched in our ties to significant others. Thus, to some extent, it may be the interpersonal rather than the ideological commitments that are the real obstacle to change in men. This also resonates with Egeberg Holmgren's (2012) interview study of feminist men in Sweden, where there are examples of men who acknowledge that they are acting in sexist ways with their male friends despite feeling bad about it – because of the fear of losing close friends. In thinking about strategies for changing men, it thus becomes important not only to consider how subjects are attached to sexist structures, but also to take into account how such attachments are embedded in interpersonal relationships and networks, the ties of which constitute part of who we are.

Returning to the books about men, the stories about changing relationships with male friends are not only about sadness. One author describes how his friends reacted to the male characters in a novel that he wrote:

“It is ...that weakness—how they cry and ... how they cry and are so cowardly—how he's crying and is longing for his girlfriend all the time. ... What kind of man is like the men in your book, what man is so unmanly, what man weeps for anything like they do in your book?” He became silent, he didn't say anything and I took a puff on my cigarette, and then he said: “They are like four fucking faggots, don't you get it?!” (Sattarvandi 2012: 107)

In this quotation, the friend voices protest that the fictional characters are too unmanly: too weak and cowardly, they cry too much and express too much longing for their girlfriends. In short—and despite the mentioning of girlfriends—they are described as ‘four fucking faggots’. The use of a ‘fag discourse’ in policing the boundaries of masculine behaviour is well documented (Pascoe 2007). In this example, it seems to be breaking the boundaries to write about men's emotions, and accordingly, the friend responds affectively with horror and shock, as if it were completely unthinkable that a man would cry and long for his girlfriend, even in a work of fiction. Thus, alienation from friends is not only about acquiring a new critical perspective on what was previously taken for granted. It also involves men friends protesting against attempts to transform dominant notions of masculinity. This can also be seen when it comes to responses to violence:



Of course it is wrong to fight. Of course you shouldn't use violence. ... But it is OK that the boys punch each other, most people think so. It is in fact something good. They do have to learn to fight. Some are proud that their boys can fight. Laughter. When my son had been beaten up enough times, I gathered all the dads to talk about how we could stop the harassment; it was a pretty restless class. But problems, there weren't any problems, were there? "Then you should see what it's like at the ice hockey practice", and "What's your son going to do when he's a grown up and can't call his dad?" Laughter. Well, he will have to call the police. (Söderlund 2008: 184)

Here, in one of the rare descriptions of men taking action against men's violence, a father tries to assemble the fathers of his son's class, in order to stop boys' harassment and violence. This attempt reveals that while these men pay lip service to being against violence, they in fact support and encourage their sons' use of violence. A 'boys will be boys' attitude is mobilised in order to dismiss the initiative of stopping harassment. Thus, men starting to challenge patriarchal culture can face the same resistance from other men that feminist women have come up against for a very long time, as well as similar feelings of frustration, described by Ahmed (2012) as "coming up against a wall".

## Conclusions

In this article, I have analysed books about men published in Sweden in the period 2004-2015. While these books are generally about teaching men about gender, power and masculinity, the analysis has focused on descriptions of lived experience, particularly the role of emotions and relations to others. Four themes were identified. First, prompted by encounters with significant others, primarily daughters, the subjects were 'awakening' and started to reconsider their taken-for-granted habits. In a second theme, the subjects scrutinised their past sexism and patriarchal privileges, often feeling 'ashamed'. These descriptions addressed work as well as personal life. The third theme concerned their relation to themselves in the present. Here, there was a sense of relief from sexist commitments, but also feelings of disorientation, as previous modes of engaging with the world were broken. The analysis of the acquisition of feminist 'machines' suggested that processes of personal transformation are not always smooth but can involve struggles with embodied subjectivity. The last theme concerned relations to male peers and was characterised in terms of mourning. Relations to other men are now described in terms of alienation, sadness, disappointment and frustration, implying that men who turn feminist can undergo a process of mourning their love for other men, which is also connected to the sense of disorientation.

Ahmed's phenomenologically inspired understanding of emotions as bound up with our relations to others enabled an analysis of how men's encounter with feminism is not simply about replacing one's ideological commitments or renouncing one's privileges. Instead, the analysis suggests that the process of 'changing men' to be more affected by feminism concerns struggles with embodied subjectivity and is deeply interwoven with interpersonal relations to others. The authors of the books about men were predominantly white, heterosexual and middle-class, and the experiences described may to some extent be specific to this social position in contemporary Sweden. Yet, the broader implication of the analysis offered in this article is that *emotions* and *relations to others* are crucial to the transformation of subjectivity in more egalitarian directions.

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