ELIN BENGTSSON

"Daddy Says I Have To Be Home at Nine"

Ageplay, Queer Temporality, and Domesticity

ABSTRACT

In theories of queer temporality, queer experiences of time are commonly constructed as the opposite of domesticity. Queer temporality is linked to the abandonment of normative life schedules, which are closely connected to family-making, reproduction, and social respectability. Thus, queer temporality is often equated with queer nightlife, public sex cultures, and nonrespectable urban spaces. This article, which builds on an interview study with ageplay practitioners in Sweden who identify with littleness, discusses how we can rethink queer temporality's relation to domesticity by considering experiences of ageplay and littleness. Ageplay is a term for practices and dynamics based on performative age and age differences beyond chronological age. Ageplay is discussed here as a method of doing kinship, which neither reproduces nor rejects the symbols of the socially respectable family institution, but rather uses them in queer and perverse ways. In contrast to depictions of queer temporalities as synonymous with abandoning of the socially respectable routines of the bourgeois family, i.e., what Halberstam (2005) defines as "repro-time" and "family time," the article discusses the interviewees engagement in temporal practices that appear to align with repro- and family time. Thus, the article explores ageplay practices' potential to challenge the normativity ascribed to domesticity and its implications for queer temporal theory.

Keywords: Ageplay, queer temporality, domesticity, family time, sexuality, BDSM

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THEORETICAL DISCUSSIONS OF queer temporality often center around temporal experiences beyond domesticity, in queer subcultures and lifestyles at odds with bourgeois family ideals (Edelman 2004; Halberstam 2005; Halberstam in Dinshaw et al. 2007; Muñoz 2009). In Jack Halberstam's prominent book *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005), queer temporality is linked to the abandonment of (hetero)normative life schedules and their markers of individual development, which are closely connected to family-making, reproduction, and social respectability. In an oft-cited roundtable discussion on queer temporality, Halberstam uses the imagery of "the dark nightclub" to describe how queer life rhythms challenge the idea of a socially respectable life (Halberstam in Dinshaw et al. 2007, 182). In other words, domesticity is often assigned the role of the antithesis of queer temporality (cf. Hilson 2017).

This article draws upon an interview study with ageplay practitioners in Sweden who identify with littleness (Bengtsson 2022). The article discusses how the relationship between queer temporality and domesticity can be imagined somewhat differently by considering experiences of ageplay and littleness. Ageplay is a term for practices and dynamics based on performative age and age differences beyond chronological age, which can be expressed in sexual role play, or may form part of everyday identities and relationships. Littleness can be understood as a feeling that arises from assuming the position of a child or adolescent, or from entering an abstract mental state that cannot be translated into age terms but implies a desire to be cared for and to relinquish adult responsibilities. Littleness is often, though not always, acted out in a dynamic with someone assuming the position of "Mommy," "Daddy," or another caregiving and/or authoritative adult figure. Earlier research on littleness has considered it either as a specific kink/BDSM practice (Weiss 2011; Bauer 2014, 2018, 2023; Paasonen 2018; Tiidenberg & Paasonen 2018), as a psychopathological sexual deviation (Money 1985; Pandita-Gunawardena 1990; Pate & Gabbard 2003; Croarkin et al. 2004; Evcimen & Gratz 2006; Kise & Nguyen 2011; Lasala et al. 2020),[1] or as loosely connected to certain queer relationship structures (Hale 1997; Maltz 1999, 2002; Rodríguez 2014).

In this article, ageplay is considered a complex cultural phenomenon that actualizes nonnormative relations to temporality and age. Ageplay and littleness are used as broad terms that convey different types of meaning for different individuals. As presented in my material, as well as demonstrated in earlier research, practitioners' views often differ regarding whether the practices are perceived as sexual or not, and whether they identify with the term BDSM (cf. Richards 2015; Bauer 2018, 2023; Tiidenberg & Paasonen 2018; Zamboni 2019). Although not all interviewees referred to themselves as BDSM practitioners, it is within the framework of negotiated and consensual play with roles and positions that these practices should be understood. Since the study does not focus on mapping ageplay communities or categorizing different types of practitioners, I do not analytically delve into distinctions between sexual and nonsexual experiences, nor between role play and ongoing caregiver/little-dynamics, which more deeply structure the interviewees' lives. The article instead focuses on how littleness poses a potential challenge to the idea of a linear and progression-oriented temporality by exploring how desires, needs, and vulnerabilities, which are culturally constructed as belonging to the past, can play an important role in present-day (adult) lives. Still, as we shall see, my interviewees' experiences of being out of sync with time differed from established representations of queer temporality. Rather than locating queer temporalities in queer nightlife, public sex cultures, and "nonrespectable" urban spaces, they were anchored in domesticity and centered around family dynamics and everyday routines. Thus, this article is a playful dialogue with Halberstam's work, which seeks to explore the queer temporalities of ageplay's perverse domesticity – where the aspects of domesticity explored revolve mainly around kinship relations and the rhythms and routines of family time – and I argue that queer theory should not be too quick to reject domesticity as queer temporality's normative Other.

Methods and material

This article builds on a semi-structured interview study with adults in Sweden who have experiences of assuming the position of an adult "little," a child, or an adolescent figure, in ageplay. The sample was recruited

through a call for participants on the online platforms Darkside.se and Abdlscandinavia.se, which are mainly targeted at BDSM and ageplay practitioners and fetishists, as well as by snowball sampling. It consists of fourteen people, aged 25–59. Among them are cisgender men and women, as well as trans and nonbinary people. They identify as homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, queer, demisexual, and heterosexual, with eleven out of fourteen participants identifying with a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. They live in the major cities of Sweden as well as in smaller towns. The group mainly, but not exclusively, consists of white people. Among the interviewees are people who primarily view ageplay as a temporary role play, while others have relationships where the caregiver/little dynamic is constantly present. Chosen age positions differ widely in the sample: it includes individuals who identify with toddlers as well as with schoolchildren or adolescents, but also individuals who describe their littleness as a mental state focused on playfulness and the desire to be cared for, not linked to a specific age. The sample is not intended to be representative of the ageplay community but to reflect a diversity of experiences.

The positioning of the study within a queer theoretical field does not imply that I define all ageplay as intrinsically queer or progressive, nor that the study focuses exclusively on the experiences of queer-identified people. The main focus is rather on how ageplay can queer time, age, and (hetero)normative life schedules.

My position in the field is partly that of an insider, since I am personally involved in queer BDSM communities and have been for many years. This means that the interviewees and I to a large extent share the same vocabulary, and my prior understanding and personal experience have facilitated conversations about intimacies and vulnerabilities that some participants found challenging to verbalize. Still, due to the diversity of the participant group, the interviewees did not belong to a single community but rather had their backgrounds in different contexts and communities. Therefore, I have been careful to ask follow-up questions and to encourage the participants to define central concepts themselves, since our views and understandings were not necessarily aligned.

The interviews were conducted in Swedish between 2018 and 2019 and lasted between one and a half and three hours. They were transcribed in full by me, and the direct quotes were translated into English by me. The transcriptions were openly coded, with the theoretical framework of queer temporality studies guiding the analysis toward certain aspects of the narratives, while I at the same time took an interest in parts of the empirical material that created friction within that framework. This article's main argument – namely, that theories of queer temporality should better account for the queer and perverse potential of domesticity – derives from that dialectic.

A note on perverse temporalities

In certain ways, aspects of littleness are not only tolerated but even idealized in contemporary Western culture, where youthfulness – especially young femininity – is eroticized (Kyrölä 2011, 132), and where being young at heart regardless of chronological age is celebrated (Lövgren 2009, 139f.). Nonetheless, when ageplay is represented in media and popular culture, it tends to be portrayed as pathological and bizarre (Paasonen 2018, 86 ff.). Although the term refers to consensual practices between adults, it is often discursively linked to pedophilia and portrayed as monstrous (Richards 2015, 61; Tiidenberg & Paasonen 2018, 385 f.). Ageplay is thus a cultural phenomenon shaped by various, partly contradictory, discourses. It establishes contexts in which certain ideals, such as the eroticization of youthfulness or the idea that we all have an "inner child" to nurture (Kincaid 1998, 69 ff.), are expressed in ways that make them slip into something perverse and potentially threatening.

The term *perversity* derives from the Latin *perversus*, meaning "turned away," "askew," or "unresasonable" (Nationalencyklopedin 2021, s.v. "pervers"). The word has mainly been used in a derogatory way, but it has also been renegotiated by groups associated with it, such as BDSM practitioners (Sheff & Hammers 2011, 199; Carlström 2016, 113). One interviewee – Hedda, a pansexual queer person in their late twenties – talked about using *perverse* in terms of "reclaim[ing] the word". Like Hedda, I am interested in the potential for discursive resistance that

lies in reclaiming the pejorative terminology attached to BDSM and ageplay practitioners' bodies (cf. Butler 1993; Sedgwick 1993). My discussion of the temporalities of ageplay in terms of perverse temporalities thus reflects the incomprehensibility and deviance that ageplay is associated with in public discourse. However, the definition of certain dynamics and practices as perverse relies on the naturalization of others, which are interpreted as signs of "normal" sexuality (cf. Amin 2017, 91). I thus use the term from a position shaped by a critical view of the power structures that construct some sexual expressions as more authentic and original than others.

The concept of perversity is already imbued with temporality. From a psychoanalytic perspective, we are not born "normal" but become so over time; the Freudian developmental narrative is based on the idea that we will eventually abandon childhood's multiple sexual expressions and end up safely at the final destination – a heterosexual and reproductive sexuality (cf. Kelleher 2004, 154 ff.). The concept of perverse temporality thus captures how littleness creates pleasure and meaning through engagement with expressions that, according to a normative temporal order, should be outgrown. In this article, *perverse* is also considered a useful complement to *queer*, since it more clearly reflects how ageplay is constructed in public discourse, although not all practitioners themselves perceive ageplay as merely – or at all – sexual (cf. Richards 2015; Bauer 2023). Moreover, the term captures how even heterosexual relationship dynamics can deviate from (hetero)normative life schedules (cf. Jönsson 2015) and the potential queering of sexual scripts generated by embracing identities other than adult femininity or masculinity.

Perverting kinship

Central to the field of queer temporality studies is the idea that, in order to appear temporally intelligible, one is expected to form a family in the right way and at the right time. Becoming little means appearing disobedient to what Halberstam (2005) describes as *normative life schedules*, and to what queer theorist Elizabeth Freeman (2010) calls *chrononormativity*. Both of these theoretical concepts capture how normative

understandings of linear temporality are based on cultural assumptions about markers of individual development, that characterize a desirable and intelligible life. In order to be perceived as a normal and successful citizen, one must fulfill social expectations of heterosexual coupledom, reproduction, and child rearing, and relinquish desires and expressions constructed as immature and belonging to an earlier life stage.

The interviewees in my sample had different family situations. Some of them were married or living with a partner. Some practiced monogamy, but the majority were nonmonogamous. A few were single. In their ageplay dynamics, however, they engaged in forms of kinship-making and play with kinship that were not necessarily visible to the outside world. Karin, a pansexual woman in her fifties, had "an ordinary adult relationship" with her boyfriend but also another relationship characterized by a caregiver/little dynamic with a person she called Daddy. She did not consider it a romantic relationship: "It's more like a friendship, perhaps. But really, he is my Daddy." Felicia, a pansexual woman in her twenties, lived with her husband and his son from a previous relationship. Rather than assuming a parental role toward the child, Felicia said that she "[teamed] up with him" and that she did not want to have children of her own, because her husband would then risk becoming "a single parent of three kids." Karin's and Felicia's narratives exemplify how ageplay dynamics can ascribe new meaning to intimate relationships and family. Having a Daddy/girl relationship can form a special bond that does not fit into linguistically established relationship categories, and what at a first glance appears to be an ordinary marriage can involve unexpected ways of relating to each other.

As queer performance scholar Juana María Rodríguez (2014) observes, the concepts of family and perversity are often constructed as opposites. Ageplay's specific queering potential may lie not in rejection but in the reimagining and renegotiation of domesticity and family. Within Daddy/girl, Daddy/boy, and similar dynamics, the meanings of power differences, care, and belonging are constructed not as naturalized features of the family structure but as rooted in mutual desire and consent.

Although kinship relations are not the only kinds of relationships that can involve a power dynamic based on age differences, the parent–child relationship was the most common in the sample, consistent with the results of previous studies (Bauer 2018; Tiidenberg & Paasonen 2018). According to the interviewees, this type of relationship was based on a potent mix of care and power exchange. Ageplayers who assume these positions in their dynamics do so on the basis of varying – and sometimes contradictory – discourses about family. The interviewees' narratives were anchored both in a cultural discourse of children as parental property and in a discourse of children as entitled to parental care and protection. A recurring theme in the narratives concerned the tension between good and healthy parenting and depravity Elliot, a queer agender person in their thirties, described their relationship with their Daddy as characterized by "loving care on one hand, and sexual exploitation on the other." Annie, a bisexual woman in her thirties, considered a desirable Daddy someone who both "[made their little girl] finish her broccoli" and took sexual advantage of her. Elliot's and Annie's accounts illustrate how the fusion of the good and respectable – in the form of care, protection, and guidance – and its opposite, the depraved, was considered central to the enjoyment of ageplay by several interviewees. Since the parent who abuses power over a child is perceived as "the worst thing most people can imagine", as Annie put it, it became particularly exciting to play with in this symbolic practice.

When sociologist Robin Bauer (2023) discusses how childhood is performed in ageplay practices, he emphasizes that practitioners tend to maintain normative discourses about childhood innocence and asexuality. Innocence is a key concept in the cultural construction of childhood in Western culture (Higonnet 1998; Kincaid 1998; Bruhm & Hurley 2004; Stockton 2009; Pugh 2010), and in my material the corruption of innocence emerged as a central theme (cf. Tiidenberg & Paasonen 2018). It coexisted with other themes and discourses – such as the naughty child and the wild child – but was particularly prominent in the interviewees' explanations of what they found most appealing about ageplay. However, interpreting these discourses as reflections of

practitioners' views of childhood outside the ageplay context risks producing inaccurate assumptions about the relationship between littleness and childhood. When Felicia spoke about her desire to appear "innocent," she also stated that she herself had not been particularly innocent as a child. Although the interviewees anchored their practices in various established cultural discourses on childhood and family, it was clear that their littleness did not mirror their understanding of the lives of real minors. When Åsa, a heterosexual woman in her fifties, discussed how the experience of being an adult little and the experience of being a minor relate to each other, she explained that she associated real childhood with "boring, awful overalls and wellies" and "being vulnerable in a negative way." What is desired in a relationship between an adult little and a caregiver, she stated, is a particular feeling or headspace, "not an imitation of being a real kid."

Rather than reproducing the normative family institution, the participants' relationship dynamics functioned as a playful way of detaching family from the chrononormative order by decoupling the question of who is raising whom from both chronology and biology. By demonstrating that raising another person need not to be part of a social order based on the reproduction of heteronormativity and the production of useful citizens (cf. Halberstam 2005; Ahmed 2006), they disrupted the temporality that Halberstam (2005, 5) describes as "the time of inheritance," referring to how both wealth and values are transmitted through family bonds from one generation to the next (see also Ahmed 2006, 90). In this way, they not only merged the imagery of idealized and desexualized parenthood with perverse sexuality (cf. Rodríguez 2014), but also demonstrated how nurturing relationships constructed as exclusive to the normative family can extend beyond it. Most importantly, they approached parental power and care as dependent on mutual interaction and open to negotiation rather than based on naturalized and implicit power relations, since both a Daddy and their little must consent to the dynamic and actively maintain it for it to exist (cf. Rodríguez 2014, 57).

As queer theorist Lee Edelman (2004) argues, both individual subjects and political projects strive for legitimacy by orienting themselves

toward the figure of the Child. By representing oneself or one's politics as, in a concrete or abstract sense, "fighting for the children," one is considered culturally intelligible and legitimate. Subjects or projects that are not interpreted as oriented toward this reproductive futurism instead appear sterile, meaningless, and even threatening to the future itself. Speaking with Edelman, then, littleness can be understood as an alternative way of orienting oneself toward the figure of the Child – one that does not fit into chrononormative reproductive logics. Rather, these orientations deliberately help denaturalize such logics by decoupling the positions of child and adult caregiver from established biological and legal definitions, in a way that appears precisely sterile and meaningless within a heteronormative and reproductive order. Thus, ageplayers' family dynamics can be understood as a playful reworking of expected orientations toward the figure of the Child, in which the "wrong" person assumes the position of the child and the "wrong" kind of child is desired by someone who seeks to educate and provide care.

When Hedda reflected on how their ageplay practices revolved around family, they said: "I have very nice memories from my childhood, and I think that affects you a lot in adult life. You miss it a lot, so you try to find something new. Even though I haven't had kids myself. It comes out in other kinds of situations." Although Hedda articulated this connection, they emphasized that their desire was not about "reliving my childhood, that I'm searching for something like that, that I never had a proper childhood and now I want to have it. Absolutely not. Because I had a fantastic childhood, very idyllic."

In the introduction to the collection of short stories *Doing It for Daddy*, author Patrick Califia states that "Daddy (and mommy) fantasies are one way to make a new, nonbiological family within the subculture of self-aware pervs" (Califia 1994, 15). Califia's understanding of how erotic dynamics centered on a parental figure can inspire queer family constellations must be understood in the context of how queerness has often been defined in opposition to family – in terms of broken ties to the family of origin and as a renunciation of future family (Weston 1991; Nealon 2001; Edelman 2004; Ahmed 2006). Califia's portrayal

conveys how heteronormative life schedules threaten to damage queer people's ties to their families of origin. Daddy/boy, Daddy/girl, and similar dynamics can thus serve as ways of seeking new forms of belonging, which also carry the potential to nurture the wounds of the past (see also Maltz 2002, 63; Rodríguez 2014, 56 f.).

In media discourse and popular culture, the desire to engage in ageplay is often constructed as a sign of deficiency, either in the past or in the present – for example, childhood trauma, unsatisfactory parental relationships, or involuntary childlessness (Paasonen 2018, 87 ff.). Hedda's emphasis that their desire to "find something new" did not stem from shortcomings in their childhood can be understood as a way of rejecting an interpretation of their experience through such a discourse. In Califia's account, by contrast, this discourse is invoked – but not from a pathological perspective. Rather than locating the desire for the parent–child bond in individual psyches, Califia situates it within a queer collective history. He emphasizes, however, that this history is not uniform and that there can be as many different connections between childhoods in the past and desires for eroticized parent–child dynamics in the present as there are "boys" and "girls" (Califia 1994, 15). The conceptualization of ageplay as a way of "searching for something new," as Hedda put it, is therefore not dependent on a uniform or pre-given history.

As Califia (1994, 11 f.) puts it, littleness can be about "unfinished business," in the sense of vulnerabilities from the past that are allowed to merge with adult sexual subjectivity, thus creating more constructive relations of dependence and belonging. From a queer temporal perspective, however, one can problematize the cultural expectation that certain needs and pleasures should be outgrown. Littleness can be understood as a way of extending those needs and pleasures through time – as a refusal to heed chrononormativity's call that certain kinds of "business" should end upon reaching a certain age – and as an insistence that the connections among past, present, and future can be made in more than one way.

"Daddy says I have to be home at nine"

Halberstam (2005, 5) uses the concepts of *repro-time* and *family time* to describe how reproduction and child-rearing are made central to the normative organization of time. Through the centering of the home, the nuclear family, and life rhythms that privilege the motto "early to bed, early to rise," specific understandings of temporality are intertwined with ideas of social respectability. Family time can thus be understood as a temporal regime that, based on notions of the best interests of the child, renders certain ways of living healthy and self-evident.

According to Halberstam, queer time can be imagined as "the dark nightclub, the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence–early adulthood–marriage–reproduction–child rearing–retirement–death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility" (Halberstam in Dinshaw et al. 2007, 182). In Halberstam's (2005, 153) discussion of ways of life beyond prescribed life schedules, "the stretched-out adolescence" in queer culture plays an important role. The concept refers to queer subcultural community engagement, that extends beyond the adolescence to which such identifications and activities are expected to belong. Family time is thus juxtaposed with temporalities that emanate from the night, queer underground clubs, and wildness.

It is not coincidental that it is precisely the dark nightclub that is centered in Halberstam's representation of queer temporality, both as a metaphor and as a concrete space populated by bodies engaged in "activities that probably seem pointless to people stranded in hetero temporalities" (Halberstam in Dinshaw et al. 2007, 181f). As I have previously noted, queer temporal theory typically presents queer time as connected to lives led in spaces other than those coded as heterosexual and respectable, such as the home (Gorman-Murray 2006; Johnston & Valentine 1995).

However, as Mica Hilson (2017) observes, even domesticity can hold the potential for temporalities that deviate from family time. In discussing the work of British playwright Harold Pinter, Hilson shows how two recurring activities in Pinter's plays – queer cruising and bathing

– carry similar meanings. The cruising and bathing characters experience time in unconventional ways that disrupt the routines of everyday life. Bathing time, as well as cruising time, represents an alternative to the social conventions associated with family time. Like Pinter's plays, which move queer pleasures and temporalities into living rooms and bathrooms, my interviewees often made the rhythms and routines of everyday life central to the perverse temporalities of ageplay. When I asked them to describe what they usually did as littles, I received responses such as telling their Daddies and Mommies about their day, going shopping and cooking together, taking a bath or having a nap. Viktor, a queer man in his thirties, lived with his "big" partner every two weeks. On the days he was on his own, he had a bedtime story read to him over the phone while his partner watched him in bed via webcam. Mariana, a lesbian woman in her thirties, talked about how, at bedtime, her Mommy would always "tuck [me] in and put all the stuffed animals around and put the Spider-Man blanket on the duvet." Thus, they spoke about activities and routines that formed a kind of everyday temporality – one based on habit and repetition and anchored in the domestic sphere (cf. Felski 2000, 81). When the interviewees were asked to describe particularly memorable ageplay moments, they highlighted events such as watching a movie with their caregiver or hugging after an argument. In other words, it was situations that at a first glance may appear mundane and unremarkable that they associated with particularly intense feelings of littleness.

The erotization of domesticity can, of course, also be found in other forms of BDSM relationships. Performing household chores can, for instance, be a central element of power exchange (cf. Bauer 2014, 127). What made the domestic particularly central in the narratives about ageplay, however, was not merely that it allowed a power dynamic to include the everyday; it was also that the child figure itself was clearly linked to the rhythms and routines of the home.[2] Several interviewees' relationship dynamics were characterized by a careful structuring of time, with bedtimes, curfews, and other forms of scheduling of everyday life. Karin's Daddy helped her organize her daily life by making

space for exercise and cooking throughout the week, and Saturday was the only day she was allowed to eat candy without asking permission. According to Felicia, such structuring of time risked making one appear unintelligible to outsiders, so she mainly sought out friends who did not perceive her lifestyle as odd:

> People [in the ageplay community] understand this. If I said: "My Daddy says I have to be home at nine," no one would raise an eyebrow […] Otherwise, this is something that's frowned upon. People think it's weird. Like, you know, how could anyone want something like that? In many people's eyes, there is nothing fun about being little. People want to be independent and make their own choices. If they want to stay up and party until 4 a.m., that's what they want to do. That's why you leave home – because you don't want anyone to be able to tell you: "You're not allowed to do that." And I have no problem with someone telling me: "You're not allowed to do that." Actually, I think it's quite nice.

In the quotation above, littleness is associated with living against normative temporality – but in a somewhat different way than by orienting oneself toward Halberstam's dark nightclub. That Felicia has to be home by nine o'clock and is not allowed to be out partying all night appears to align with respectable family time rather than challenge it. She describes how young people are expected to distance themselves from the family's authority and care, and how control over their own (free) time becomes central to this process. Adulthood means being able to stay out until four o'clock in the morning if one wishes, while littleness is constructed as aligning with family time. Since Felicia is neither a minor child subject to her parents' rules nor a parent herself responsible for putting children to bed, her adherence to the rhythms and rules set by her Daddy structures her life in ways that skew the expected life schedule. In her narrative, the lack of freedom and the restraints associated with the home become a source of pleasure, with the demand to return home early in the evening confirming the power-and-care dynamic between her and her Daddy.

Halberstam and queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz (2009) both highlight alternative ways of life that emerge within queer communities and propose that these lifestyles challenge a mandatory "grow up'" imperative. Yet, in their accounts, there are specific ways of not growing up that come to represent the opposite of (hetero)normative adulthood. They focus on an extension of the expected wildness of adolescence (Halberstam 2005, 152 f.) – on the phase belonging to "the queer wild child of punk subculture" (Muñoz 2009, 98) – which is presumed to evolve into an organized and respectable adulthood over time. For some interviewees, it was indeed playing the role of an unruly teenager that they sought in ageplay. However, many of them shared quite different narratives about ways of not growing up or being unruly, as Annie did in the following excerpt:

> I'm an impulsive person, and if I'm in bed with my Daddy and might want to have sex with them, then it can be an adult decision to say: "It's late and you shouldn't be too tired at work tomorrow, so now we're going to sleep." That's an adult decision – that's not my decision – even if it's what's best for me in the long run. I'm not very good at making these kinds of decisions; I just want to go for what I want right here and now.

In Annie's narrative, littleness was consistently contrasted with "adulting," that is, behaving in accordance with the expectations of adult responsibility (Abate 2020, 20 f.). Expectations of adulting imply that each individual is obliged to maintain a convincing self-presentation as a real adult. According to philosopher Michel Foucault, technologies of power based on self-discipline mean that power cannot be localized in a specific instance but is decentralized so that everyone becomes their own supervisor (Foucault 1989/1996, 232 ff.). Littleness makes it possible to temporarily relinquish this obligation in favor of indulging in what feels pleasurable in the moment. In Annie's example, the decision to abstain from sex because she had to get up early could be made by her Daddy. What she described as "an adult decision," which at first glance appears

to involve the withholding of pleasure, thus generated alternative forms of pleasure. These were rooted in the parental care that strengthened the power dynamic and enabled Annie to express the desire to be "fucked by Daddy now" without having to think about "what's best […] I can just put that aside for a bit and trust that someone else will make the best decisions for me."

The power dynamic rooted in age positions, which at first glance appears to involve giving up freedom, at the same time produces sensations of freedom. When the self-discipline and responsibilities associated with adulthood can be assigned to an adult authority, it creates the possibility of being a wild child who does not have to think about regulating the balance between pleasure and duty.

A key aspect of the theme of time structuring was how the person assuming the role of the adult caregiver was ascribed a power of delay – a power to control whether, and if so, when, the little would have their desires satisfied. Having power over someone is often intertwined with having power over their time. Muñoz (2009, 182) highlights the centrality of waiting in experiences of subordination, emphasizing that there is "something black about waiting. And there is something queer, Latino and transgender about waiting […] something disabled […] poor, and so forth, about waiting." Those who wait are "out of time," thrown out of normative temporality. Muñoz's formulation brings to mind, for example, queuing and waiting times for those who cannot pay their way past the line or whose time is not perceived as equally valuable as that of others (cf. Sharma 2014). To Muñoz's list of those who are expected to wait, I would add that there is also something childlike about waiting. Children are often expected to learn to wait for the next activity in a schedule set by adults, to wait for their turn, and so forth.

Waiting occupied a central place in the interviewees' experiences of littleness. One example appears in Karin's account: she was sometimes punished by her Daddy with "corner time" when she misbehaved. Corner time is a form of discipline that involves spending time separated from everyday contexts. Instead of taking part in everyday activities or

conversations, it means spending time reflecting on one's behavior and waiting for permission to reenter everyday time. A related concept is the "time-out," which linguistically further emphasizes the link between discipline and being deprived of the place *in* time enjoyed by the well-behaved (cf. Zisman Newman 2018, 140). Corner time and time-outs are ways of "doing time," a slang term for being imprisoned, signaling how the person being punished – by the state or by Daddy – is deprived of control over their own time and forced to wait.

As queer theorist Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009, 62) demonstrates, the cultural understanding of childhood is deeply intertwined with the idea of delay. It is by delaying the child's entry into the domains of sexuality, labor, and pain that the child is expected to grow (up). What the young person desires access to – such as staying up as long as they want, watching movies forbidden to children, or not having to come home at a certain time in the evening – is postponed by well-meaning adults. As Åsa put it, "[There are] lots of things that you are allowed as an adult, but as a child you are not allowed." Desirable feelings of powerlessness, of being left out of adult decision-making, are thus intimately linked to being denied things in the present that are deferred to an abstract, imminent future.

In the interviewees' narratives, the imagery of maturity and adulthood could serve as a driving force in their dynamics. Karin, who had practiced ageplay for about twenty years, noted that even as she ages, her little self never grows up. In her account, the expectation that children will one day become adults was invoked to reinforce power dynamics and experiences of being little. She described how her ex-partner and big sister would tell her: "'Now you have to do this!' 'No, I don't want to.' 'Yes, you have to. Otherwise, you'll never grow up – you need to learn.'" A certain imagined future was thus made central to the dynamic – but it was a future that could be postponed indefinitely, one that never needed to be realized. Its capacity to generate pleasure lay in the fact that it existed only as a mirage, allowing Karin to rehearse for it in an extended, unceasing present.

Littlespace and the ecstasy of the everyday

As demonstrated earlier, littleness was experienced as a state in which the interviewees could temporarily move away from the obligations associated with adult life. The interviewees' representation of ageplay as distinct from everyday life is consistent with how BDSM research tends to explain the relationship between BDSM and the everyday. In Charlotta Carlström's (2016, 212) ethnography, BDSM is described as aiming "to break the monotony and boredom of everyday life by constituting various forms of transgressions" (my translation). Several studies link BDSM to spiritual, transcendent, and ecstatic experiences (MacKendrick 1999; Taylor & Ussher 2001; Easton & Hardy 2004; Westerfelhaus 2007; Beckmann 2009; Simula 2013; Carlström 2016, 2021; Baker 2018).

While the interviews indeed portrayed ageplay as enabling experiences and emotions beyond the everyday, a parallel image emerged – namely, littleness as a way of experiencing the everyday. A key theme was the concept of *littlespace*. Several interviewees compared littlespace with *subspace*, which describes a state of consciousness associated with intense experiences of submission. Carlström (2016, 224) defines subspace as "hypnotic trance, getting high, 'flow,' a feeling that the world around disappears" (my translation). Mariana, who identified as submissive in BDSM practice, explained:

> Subspace – then I'm high. I have trouble keeping my balance, and my hearing becomes poor. I can't say that littlespace is anything like that […] Littlespace, for me, is when all responsibility just runs off in a second – like an extra layer of skin just disappearing.

Felicia, who identified as a switch, described her littleness as completely distinct from both her submissiveness and her dominance. She associated being submissive with overwhelming, intense feelings and sexual desire. Littleness, on the other hand, did not generate the same kind of ecstasy. Rather, she described littlespace as "a state where I can feel very safe and relaxed and calm."

Although the interviewees did not describe littlespace in terms of

ecstasy, their narratives revealed how littleness allowed them to transcend the everyday by entering a special state of mind in which the ordinary appeared new, wondrous, and euphoric. Karin described it as follows:

> My mind becomes more here and now. I lose my sense of planning and of remembering that tomorrow I have to make sure I have these things in my bag – all such things. I'm just like this: Oh, what a beautiful butterfly! […] I need Daddy to keep track of me, to say: That's great, now you have seen a white and a blue and a yellow butterfly, but now we have to continue walking, otherwise we'll never get home in time.

In the above quotation, littlespace is portrayed as a mindset in which one becomes absorbed by the here and now. It allowed Karin to linger in the moment, to deviate from the expected forward motion, and instead to follow the unpredictable movements of the butterflies. In littlespace, an ordinary walk can thus become an adventure in which one notices things one might not otherwise perceive. Linear temporality is disrupted when the gaze of the wondering child makes it possible to see and experience things almost as if they were encountered for the very first time.

Viktor expressed that in littlespace, "stuffed animals have more life […] the world is transformed in that way. I see much more; I see details in a different way. The world is the same, but it is experienced differently." When Viktor entered into littlespace, he experienced the interactions with stuffed animals as genuine communication, whereas in his adult position he did not relate to them in the same way. His account illustrates how littlespace can manifest itself as a particular way of being in the world, in which, for example, established boundaries between objects and living beings become uncertain and open to reinterpretation (cf. Stockton 2009, 15; Halberstam 2011, 27f.). Littleness thus opened up an ecstasy of the everyday – an enchantment of the world that made the ordinary appear more unpredictable and adventurous.

Conclusions

Why would it be relevant for queer temporality studies to consider non-normative experiences of temporality that are usually visible only to a very limited circle? In general, the interviewees did not express their littleness publicly. Still, their experiences of littleness shaped how they related to societal norms more broadly. Several interviewees described how their experiences, in an embodied way, led them to view established norms of development and adulthood with a critical eye: "I guess I play an adult, in the same way as I play a child," as Elliot put it. Joar, who was in his late thirties, had earlier identified as straight but discovered a bisexual side through ageplay practice. Taking on the role of a young boy had fundamentally changed his views of both masculinity and adulthood, he stated. Both Hedda and Viktor spoke about how littleness created a space beyond expectations of status and productivity in a capitalist system. Ageplay experiences may seem private but are at the same time constantly woven into larger structural contexts. Experiencing ways of being that are usually excluded from adulthood, and cultivating vulnerability and playfulness, can create a space for questioning what is otherwise taken for granted. Embracing littleness allowed the interviewees to approach the world differently. Still, this was not portrayed as the Other of the everyday but as a special way of experiencing the everyday.

In this article, I have argued that the ageplay phenomenon has the potential to complicate the dichotomy between respectable domesticity and perversity, as expressed in different ways in dominant discourses on sexuality and in queer norm critique. The perverse temporalities of ageplay are largely based on playful (re-)negotiations of domesticity. The play with family dynamics and the structuring of everyday life according to idealized family time highlight how one can be deeply involved in domesticity without being considered particularly respectable according to social expectations.

As pointed out by Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson (2015), queer theory's focus on antinormativity carries the risk of turning the normative into something stable – something we immediately think we

know what it is. In theories of queer temporality, it is often precisely repro- and family time that function as the normative counterpart to queer temporality. When queer theorists such as Halberstam (2005) and Muñoz (2009) portray queer lives that loosen the rigid boundaries between youth and adulthood, it is mainly a certain type of youth culture that is presented as a model for lives beyond repro- and family time. This entails the risk of rendering other ways of experiencing queer temporalities invisible (cf. Hilson 2017). Against this background, I argue that queer critiques of normative constructions of temporality would benefit from complicating the dichotomy between respectable domesticity and queer and perverse anti-domesticity. As highlighted in my discussion, non-normative temporalities can arise from the rhythms of the queer club's dance floor, but they may also arise from the rhythm of one's own heartbeat while running from that same queer club in order to be home before curfew.

Ageplayers' play with kinship, mainly in the form of child–parent dynamics, is at the same time a play with time itself. Kinship constitutes the individual's link to both the past and the future, in which heritage and child-rearing become what concretely links generations together, transmits wealth and values, and ensures the reproduction of identification with the nation (Berlant 1997; Halberstam 2005, 5; Amin 2017, 122). As Jack Rinella's (2003, 40 f.) discussion of Daddy/boy relationships in gay leather culture points out, such dynamics constitute an intervention in generational time by building on the idea of generation and at the same time overturning it, causing "total generational confusion" (Rinella 2003, 41). Who is positioned as the parental figure and who is positioned as the child are regulated by mutual desire and consent rather than being based on linear chronology and normative markers of development (cf. Rodríguez 2014, 57).

In sum, my analysis shows how experiences of littleness open up ways of thinking about domesticity perversely and how the relations between the ordinary and the extraordinary, ecstasy and everyday life, and normative life schedules and queer temporalities can be understood in unexpected ways.

ELIN BENGTSSON, PHD, is a researcher in gender studies at the Department of Ethnology, History of Religions, and Gender Studies (ERG) at Stockholm University. Her research interests include queer theory, queer temporality, BDSM sexualities, and cultural studies. She is also a writer of literary fiction.

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NOTES

1. There are also studies within clinical psychology which do not necessarily portray littleness as pathological, see for example Hawkinson & Zamboni 2014; Zamboni 2019.
2. The important role ascribed to domesticity in the narratives did not presuppose a shared household; most of the interviewees did not live together with a caregiver/"big" partner.