Where did they go?
An explorative study on the marketplace absence of elderly consumers

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Author signature

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Abstract

This thesis will explore the complex relationship between marketplace exclusion and symbolic resources mediated by the market, for older consumers who have traversed from a socio-cultural identity in the majority to stand on the periphery of consumption. Employing a Consumer Culture Theory influenced perspective and using Baudrillard critical theory of symbolic exchange and death as a lens of analysis, this thesis will utilize a psycho-social method to explore how and why older consumers find themselves excluded from the market. As well as how this absence is negotiated in a society where inclusion in social life is dependent on consumption. This thesis postulates the market as an ideological structure that promulgates a capitalist ideology of life as an affirmatory force and, therefore, negates death. In doing so this thesis problematizes the dominant notion of the market in theory and practice, in particular, the notion of the market as a free and open space for participation. Contributing to an explorative effort to shed light on the complex relationship between exclusion and sign-value, marketplace representation and ideology.

Keywords: Baudrillard, exclusion, CCT, elderly consumers, consumption, ideology, sign-value
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1. Lost to the Ages

In the recent Netflix show Gourmet Samurai, viewers get to follow Takeshi Kasumi, a 60-year-old Japanese man who finds himself having to navigate a strange new existence as he retires. Defining himself through his previous role as a corporate worker, Takeshi drifts around perusing various restaurants as he learns to come to terms with his new status and role as retired (Shoji, 2017; O’Guin, 2017). While on the surface a story of coming to terms with retirement and finding happiness in the abundance of leisure time, beneath the veneer is a story of a sudden abolition, a shift in losing one’s clear place in consumption society and society at large, leading to Takeshi constantly second-guessing himself and his actions, uncertain as how to navigate a young man's world (O’Guin, 2017).

Takeshi is far from alone in his plight, in fact, the lack of integration of elderly consumers in the marketplace has repeatedly been pointed out by a plethora of marketing studies (Boyd and Lee, 2009; Carrigan and Szmigin, 2001/2003; Moschis, 2003; Myers and Lumbers, 2008; Nielson and Curry, 1997; Tynan, 1989/90). This is a phenomenon only bound to grow increasingly relevant, with the cohort of people aged over 60 projected to reach 2 billion the year 2050; a result of a higher quality of life and scientific improvements in medicine and healthcare, that has improved the average human lifespan with more than 30 years during the twentieth century (Moschis, 2003). Nevertheless, despite a growing corpus of research pointing out the vast lucrative potential of the elderly segment (Boyd and Lee, 2009; Moschis, 2003), elderly consumers continue to be absent from the marketplace.

Lacking in representational images and subsequently market goods directly meant for elderly consumers, as marketers and marketing literature continue to direct efforts almost solely towards younger age cohorts (Moschis, 2003; Pak and Kambil, 2006; Taken Smith, 2012;). Something further popularized by the rise of paradigms such as relationship marketing, offering lifelong customer retention and deeply loyal customer (Payne and Frow, 2005; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Grönroos, 1997; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995), promising greater value by targeting and capturing younger consumers. Takeshi’s plight also represents the salient question of identity within a modern society where marketplace participation and consumption lie as a kernel of construction of identity as well as social relations (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988; Cody and Lawlor, 2011). As such, marketplace disappearance and its relation to social and individual identity plays a pivotal part in the question of exclusion.
1.1 Marketing and The Elderly

The demographic change of the baby boomers reaching retirement, age has increasingly been the subject of attention for a larger degree of marketing scholars (Carrigan and Szmigin, 2001; Moschis, 2003; Parment, 2008; Tynan, 1989/90). However, these studies have predominantly followed a traditional belief in the market as a virtuous and benevolent entity open to all and marketing as a rational agentic driven enterprise seeking to satisfy consumer wants and demands (Wilkie and Moore, 1999). From this perspective, the sole thing lacking is to convince marketers to perceive the unmet wants of older consumers, continuing a genealogy that strips the market of its ideological function and effects in relation to society in large (Kozinets, 2002). As such, hitherto, marketing literature has remained lackluster at explaining how and why old consumer traverse from active, involved participants to become excluded; In a tautological manner reiterating that older segments have vast untapped monetary value and ought to be the target of a company and marketing interest (Boyd and Lee, 2009; Dann, 2007; Moschis, 2003; Moschis et al., 2004). In addition, Marketplace exclusion as a topic remains rather limited within marketing scholarship (Saren et al., 2019). Moreover, the elderly in relation to exclusion exhibits a key distinction as a majority of older consumers were previously included as a majority within the marketplace, and the number of elderly people - estimated to reach 2 billion people over the age of 60 in the year 2050 (Moschis, 2003) - argues for a stronger possibility to promote their interests (Bennett et al., 2016).

This thesis hopes to aid in opening the exploration of the phenomenon of marketplace absence of elderly consumers by employing the critical work of Jean Baudrillard and his theory on *symbolic exchange* and *death*. Drawing on Baudrillard's theory that postulates the market as a system of signs that forms normative expectations i.e. our identity directly in relation to what we wear (signs). That in turn informs and structures social participation as our social identity becomes mediated through signs. From this stance the exclusion of the elderly from consumption is not postulated as an outlier or unique exception in an otherwise inclusive market, but as a defining essence of the capitalist market itself. As, for Baudrillard, exclusion of the elderly exists to banish death, which is abolished in our modern society as it constantly threatens to rupture the symbolic order and the system of signs. Inseparably intertwined, this thesis will thus problematize the prevailing notion of the market as a meeting point for rational supply and demand populated by agentic subjects of which barriers of participation appears non-existent (Wilkie and Moore, 1999).
As such, this thesis can be seen to follow a growing field of Consumer Culture Theory research that has taken an interest in studying the consumer as embedded in wider, cultural and social forces (See Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Focusing on aspects of the markets ideological function (Kozinets, 2012) and the social role of consumption for one’s position in social life (Belk, 1988; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Furthermore, Consumer Culture Theory has proven adept at integrating various postmodern philosophical theories to advance a perceived deadlock and lack of criticality in marketing thought (Cova et al., 2013).

Seeking to understand the relation between the elderly and the marketplace, this study postulates the market as a macro assemblage, of micro-processes of social life (Knorr-Cetina, 2014). In which, marketplace consumption is understood as both an individual and social process. As such, this study employs a psycho-social methodological approach (that holds individual identity and the social as interrelated) to capture the experience and sense-making of 7 active consumers above the age of 50. Achieved through the use of free association interviews in which participants were found employing a snowballing technique.

The emergent data and themes are analyzed through a Consumer Culture Theory perspective and a Baudrillardian framework, in order to explore:

- How the process of marketplace exclusion occurs.
- Why the elderly have found themselves excluded from the marketplace and why this exclusion remains.
- How the absence of representational image, marketplace goods and its effects within a society which postulates inclusion on consumption and marketplace participation comes to be negotiated by elderly consumers.

1.2 Research Question

*How do elderly consumers negotiate their absence from the marketplace?*
1.3 Thesis Structure

This thesis is organized into five sections and structured as follows. The first section, *Consumer Culture Theory (CCT)*, provides an overview of how the market and consumption is approached from a CCT perspective and how marketplace exclusion has traditionally been approached within marketing scholarship, with a further emphasis on the elderly. This is followed by a section on how identity is influenced and dependent on consumption and the marketplace. In the second part, *A Baudrillardian Approach*, Baudrillard’s critical contribution to marketing scholarship will be outlined and its implications discussed. Followed by an exploration of Baudrillard’s (2017) theorizing on symbolic exchange and death and the formulation of a theoretical framework. In the third part, *A psycho-social Method*, the methodological and ethical considerations of a psycho-social approach within the study are discussed followed by a description of how the psycho-social account was formulated. The fourth section, *Absence, Consumption, and Identity* is composed of the psycho-social account and Baudrillardian analysis. In the final and fifth section, *Conclusion*, the conclusions of the study are outlined, and limitations and suggestions for future research presented.
2. Consumer Culture Theory

Consumer Culture theory (henceforth CCT) is a developing theoretical body of knowledge that seeks to fulfill a lack of knowledge in cultural, social and experimental facets of consumption (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Joy and Li, 2012). While far from a unifying theory, it shares a common denominator in the importance of understanding the complexity of culture and its significance for consumer actions and marketplace behaviors (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Joy and Li, 2012). Culture from a CCT perspective can be understood as a multiplicity of meanings that overlap within a wider “[...] sociohistorical frame of globalization and market capitalism” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 869), that forms the frame of lived meaning and experience.

From this perspective, consumer culture is “a social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources upon which they depend, are mediated through markets” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 869). Where the marketplace is perceived as a system where wider forces such as culture and ideology are grounded (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 869). Likewise, marketing from a CCT perspective functions as a system that produces mediated images that both informs consumer action and is influenced by it in turn (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 869). It is the role of marketing promulgating a consumer ideology that predominantly centers around youth that will be the central topic of the first section.

2.1 Consumer Ideology

The term consumer ideology has been denoted as a system of meaning that “[...] channel and reproduce consumers thoughts and actions in such a way as to defend dominate interests in society” (Hirschman, 1993 in Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 874). This conceptualization of ideology follows along the lines of Althusser (2009) and Zizek (1989) (see also Sharpe, 2006), where ideology is not an illusion to be dispelled to reach an objective reality, but rather a phantasmatic aspect that augments and forms a part of everyday life. In which, aspects such as culture, fantasies, desires augments and reproduce our view of our social reality and life.
Consumer ideology from this vantage point can be seen as an illusory machine of image and meaning production that promotes certain types of social roles and identities (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Thomas, 2013) while marginalizing others (Downey, 2009; Gilleard, 1996; Thomas, 2013). These representational images became a pivotal aspect of navigating everyday life, forming poles of which to orient one’s own identity and place (Belk, 1988; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Thomas, 2013).

2.1.1 The Marketplace, Symbolic Resources and An Ideology of Youth

In discussing the marketplace, this thesis postulates the market as a macro assemblage formed by a micro-processes of social life (Knorr-Cetina, 2014). Where individual interactive processes produce social action, by the interlocking of intentionalities (Knorr-Cetina, 2014). The market is thus largely formed by social interactions that are “[...] externally and internally contingent upon others [...]” (Knorr-Cetina, 2014). Where people engage in actions and notions who is based upon a presupposed knowledge of broader societal institutions (Knorr-Cetina, 2014).

In addition, as a plethora of marketing studies have highlighted (see Ahuvia, 2005; Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Belk, 1988; Thomas, 2013; Tian and Belk, 2005), the marketplace provides both material and symbolic resources upon which we depend for a meaningful life. The individual through consumption of symbolic resources (sign-objects) engages in social interactive processes (Hietanen et al., 2018). Consumption is, therefore, a crucial aspect of inclusion or exclusion from social life (Gilleard, 1996; Holt, 2002; Saren et al., 2019). Whereas, the normative images produced and circulated by marketing, structures who the market is for (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Thomas, 2013). Producing social groups that find themselves marginalized; lacking in representation or goods, making it hard to navigate the market as well as society in large (Thomas, 2013; Saren et al., 2019).

This consumer ideology continuously strives and pushes toward the future, new goods, new market, new choices (Shankar et al., 2006). Disfavoring the present - which historically used to hold a more central role- e.g. transactional exchanges, a meeting of supply and demand and emphasizing the future as the true benefactor through relationship marketing (Shankar et al., 2006).

Consequently, the elderly find themselves navigating a marketplace and consumer ideology that is dominated by a focus on youth (Coupland, 2003; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2006;
Moschis, 2003). Where marketing’s dogmatic focus on the future and future value leads to a predominant emphasis marketing towards the youth per se. And, where capitalism and consumer ideology has made youth itself a commodity; moisturizers, skin care treatments promising a holding on to youthful luster and avoidance of degradation that appears for marketing to come with age (Coupland, 2003). In which the elderly become forced recipients of images promising either a longer or a return to youthful life (Hepworth, 2003). As such, there is an implicit demand permeating western consumption ideology, that compels one to be young. One that marketing has played a pivotal role in circulating.

As Moschis (2003 p. 517) states “Just less than 25 years ago, there was hardly any evidence to suggest that the older consumer market was of interest to most businesses. Until 1980, the focus of companies had been on younger consumers, usually those under the age of 50, mainly because this country has been predominantly youth-oriented”. And, while Moschis (2003) later claims an increased attention towards older consumers in his following discussion of marketing after the 1980’s up till today, he subsequently returns and ends the discussion with stating that “Yet, even today, a large number of companies do not make an effort to the older segment because either they still do not see its importance or do not know how to market to this group of consumers” (p. 518). This will be the loci for the following section, where implementations of exclusion and the exclusion of the elderly from the marketplace will be explored.

2.2 Out of sight out of mind: Exclusion from the Market

Marketplace exclusion represents a concept that remains subject to a modest degree of attention within the fields of consumer as well as marketing research (Saren et al., 2019), and while there exists a growing corpus of laudable research pertaining to exclusion and inclusion within the marketplace, the major focus has been on marginalized groups such as; ethnic minorities (Thomas, 2013; Peñaloza, 1989/1999), people with disabilities (Beudaert, 2018), gender (Hildebrand et al., 2013; Mc Lanahan et al., 1989; Saren et al., 2019) and poor social classes (Hutton, 2019). In contrast, the elderly is an odd case since a majority of older consumers were previously included as a majority in marketing and the sheer number of older people - estimated to reach 2 billion people over the age of 60 in the year 2050 (Moschis, 2003) - enables a stronger exertion of power to promote their interests (Bennett et al., 2016).

However, while impactful, the main variable of a group’s power stems from social status, the cases of college-educated classes and Afrikaners in South Africa being two examples of
privileged small “minorities” (Bennett et al., 2016, p. 282). It is in the sense of a collective identity deprived of social status that allows us to perceive older consumers, akin to other marginalized groups, as inhibiting a periphery existence due to a covert exclusion from the marketplace (See Moschis, 2003; Parment, 2008; Tynan, 1990/1989). Stripping them of recognition as legitimate consumers, denying them the social relations and cohesion that has become an essential trait dependent on marketplace participation (Saren et al., 2019).

The focus of exclusion and inclusion is in this thesis concerned with the cultural and symbolic facets, where marketplace exclusion is defined as “[...] the mechanisms through which certain individuals and communities are barred from the resources and opportunities provided by the market to other citizens [...] but also the failure of the market to adequately represent them symbolically” (Saren et al., 2019, p. 2).

2.2.1 Definitions of Exclusion and the Elderly

Discussing exclusion, Bennett et al., (2013) argues for the distinction between explicit exclusion and covert (non-inclusive exclusion). Whereas, explicit exclusion is to actively expunge undesired social groups from the market (Bennett et al., 2013), covert exclusion makes itself known through a lack of effort, for example “[...] salespeople watching minority patrons for shoplifting or failing to offer assistance to minority consumers (Bennett et al., 2013, p. 16).

Bennett et al., (2016) further conceptualize covert exclusion through the notions of marketplace omission; indicating a failure to acknowledge, incorporate and engage the perspective of marginalized groups and marketplace commission: the inclusion of marginalized groups but in a stereotypical, misrepresentational or discriminatory manner. This definition defines exclusion as a matter of perception, where a group’s “[...] collective identity is in an active state of negotiation” (Bennett et al., 2016, p. 281).

As the majority of older consumers, a priori inhabits a position in a dominant narrative and discourse (Beudaert, 2018). That presupposes the young body as the natural healthy body (Coupland and Gwyn, 2003) and of health as the normal condition to be restored (Beudaert, 2018). The process of aging succinctly leads to a phase of marketplace omission, where, as one ages, the prevalent ideology of youth begins to efface the image of self, as oneself disappears from mediated images and marketplace narratives (Gilteard, 1996).

Entering into a collection of bodies that become invisible (Kearney et al., 2019), where, the aging (failing) body becomes a marker that signifies their exclusion and constrained
consumption (Bennett et al., 2016). Giving rise to a struggle of visibility and disappearance from the marketplace due to an inescapable inability to conform to the image of the authentic (majority) consumer (Downey, 2009). Consequently, the selection of choice which directly includes, and targets elderly consumers becomes constrained to health and youth, advertising facets such as, appearance of youth (Coupland, 2003), insurance (Lindbergh et al., 2007) and healthcare (Benet et al., 1993).

Campaigns directed towards sustainment of life, rather than meeting any wants or desires, therefore, providing a sub-par desirable standard of living that hinders future consumption (Bennett et al., 2016). Giving rise to a marketing system that fails, through both its actions as well as inactions, to engage and meet elderly consumers desires and wants (Bennett et al., 2016). Leading to a subsequent social exclusion as they are unable to keep pace with new modern consumption arrangements (Saatcioglu and Ozanne, 2013). Producing what Bennett et al., (2016, p. 281) calls a collective trauma, a loss of meaning and identity for a cohesive social group, deriving from a lack of goods, representation and thus choice in the marketplace.

2.2.2 Exclusion and its Recognition

Interestingly, Hutton (2019) illustrates how this marketplace failure of omission, in-action and action that fails to engage with the wants of consumers and marketplace exclusion can be negotiated by individuals as protective against marketplace trends, expectations and pressure. In which, exclusion becomes argued as something positive juxtaposed other social actors (In Hutton’s study the affluent) who are subjected to be “dictated by the pressures and expectations of marketplace trends” (Hutton, 2019, p. 9). As Hutton (2019) further illustrates this appears to be more a defensive illusory construct as the same participants which claimed a non-need of marketplace pressure and expectation would frequently be in contact with the market and striving for satisfaction through discount and bargain hunting (Hutton, 2019). Exclusion from the marketplace does thus not (necessarily) entail recognition of one’s own exclusion (Eyerman, 2014 in Bennett et al., 2016). As Miller and Stovall (2019) note, the general perception of modern consumers is one of empowerment and agency that factiously enacts on the surface, forming the notion of the individual being in power and having all the choice. And, as such, leaving consumers more easily influenced by cultural and capital enterprises (Miller and Stovall, 2019).

In addition, there is a strong drive for not recognizing or consciously acknowledging one owns periphery existence and lack of consumption possibilities, as it presents a threat to a precarious
position of the subject (Berlant, 2011). When on the other hand, people do become aware of their own exclusion it gives rise to an apprehension of further participation in the marketplace (Hutton, 2019). Perceiving it as a space of social scrutiny, where shortcomings and embarrassment or shame for one’s unequal status is highlighted (Hutton, 2019). As exclusion has an immense impact in the participation of social life and identity, it subsequently raises questions on the nature of how elderly consumers navigate and construct their self in a different marketscape which no longer addresses them directly. This will be the topic for the next segment, where exclusion and the role of consumer ideology on identity will be explored.

2.3 Consumer Identity

As the marketplace and consumption has grown to be a central feature in the construction of identity as well as for social relations (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988; Cody and Lawlor, 2011), the question of identity construction through consumption for people excluded from the market plays a pivotal part in the study of marketplace disappearance. For Ahuvia (2005) consumer identity revolves around objects that symbolically demarcates the subjects desired identity vis-a-vis rejected identities. Objects that also enables the subject to navigate amongst conflicting identity narratives e.g. a social ideal contra a personal desired identity (Ahuvia, 2005). The juxtaposition of collective vis-a-vis individual identities takes a different form for Thomas (2013, p. 100) who claims that “[...] individual identities are simply a mass of collective identities; individual identities are rendered unique by the combination or configuration of its parts and not by the parts themselves”.

In a similar vein, for Belk (1988) collective masses of identities often define our individual identity by stating our belonging to a certain subculture, group, nation and so forth, membership which is defined through their pattern of consumption. For Cody and Lawlor (2011) this interdependent relationship between individual and social identity produce tensions for people who are excluded from the market, creating conflicting identities, leading to social and marketplace invisibility. In which, the notion of self as competent consumer clashes with a subjectivity assigned from the social. Subsequently creating conflict for the individual, as social identity functions as the foundation which informs other social actors’ perception and behavior (Cody and Lawlor, 2011).

This becomes the issue for Gilleard (1996) who argues that the dependency of individual identity on collective identity has led to a marginalization of older people as their social worth
decline due to their status as old (Gilleard, 1996). To a point where the social collectives of older people have all but vanished, with remnants existing in the form of “[...] pastiche communities created by present-day TV soap operas” (Gilleard, 1996, p. 495).

A process which has a significant impact on identity, as marketing messages and other forms of mediated cultural images function to introduce certain ways of understanding others as well as one’s own identity (Thomas, 2013). As consumers pursue bonds with mediated characters that coincide with their representational image of self, that can shape both the self and his/her subjective reality (Russell et al., 2013). Thus, for Cody and Lawlor (2011) the degradation of status is directly intertwined with a liminal marketing existence, where the liminar can be understood as “[...] experiencing a suspension of identities in which the commitment to the fixed and definable social categories from which they left and towards which they gravitate cannot be made” (Cody and Lawlor, 2011, p. 209).

A movement of transformation which puts the subject into a new identity and in some cases (for example in the transition from child to adolescent) also bars the possibility to revert back to the previous identity (Cody and Lawlor, 2011). These “neophytes” (people lacking a cohesive social identity) as Cody and Lawlor (2011) calls them, find themselves in a void, due to the fact that consumer culture functions on an axis of binary choices and position (Cody and Lawlor, 2011). Which negates any space between the boundaries of socially established positions, demanding an either-or choice (Cody and Lawlor, 2011). Consumption – that forms and informs social identity- for neophytes, lacking a defined social category is thus restricted, and while Cody and Lawlor (2011) claim, there are products that could be conceptualized as products for people on the periphery (liminal). Products that due to their ambiguity evades a clear (signifying) categorization and thus opens a space for its use.

The pursuit of liminal products concomitantly signifies the desire to pursue a social identity currently lacking. Therefore, liminal products, rather than representing an actual possibility for inclusion, signifies the status of exclusion and deprivation in marketplace participation (Cody and Lawlor, 2011). In the case of elderly consumers, the progressive corrosion of social identity is inseparably intertwined with the aging body (Hepworth, 2003).

Where, ideologically, aging is perceived as the decline of the body; a breakdown of the “normal” functions of the body and a symbolic degradation (Hepworth, 2003). That marks the elderly as failing and dying bodies, demarcating them as separate from other social groups (Hepworth, 2003). This symbolic (non)stature of elderly consumers lies as a foundation within
marketing praxis, where the aged body is framed as one in constant need of repair or maintenance (Coupland 2003).

These concerns will be the central loci for the next segment of the theoretical framework, where a Baudrillardian approach towards exclusion for elderly consumers will be outlined. Supplementing existing research on exclusion, the symbolic status of age and old bodies will be situated as a result of a western-capitalist ideology that promotes life while abolishing death. This will permit us to explore exclusion as deriving from a capital reality that demarcates a strict structure of acceptable permittable social positions for the subject. Offering a framework for examining how old age is labeled and constructed as unwanted, albeit not by an agentic system of actors. Contributing to a more complex understanding of the excluded status of older consumers while also providing a framework to perceive why older consumers remain excluded.

3. A Baudrillardian Approach

Although the question of exclusion, consumer ideology and identity has been growing amidst marketing literature (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Bennett et al., 2016; Kozinets, 2002). The majority of marketing literature holds the market as a rational agent that; facilitates a positive allocation of resources (Wilkie and Moore, 1999) and the means for one’s desired identity (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988). In opposition, a number of scholars have sought to employ postmodern theory from prominent figures such as Foucault and Baudrillard seeking to problematize the rationality and inherent benefits assumed in the market, that dominant marketing theory has insofar failed to critically investigate (Cova et al., 2013). One of the more prominent postmodern thinkers, Baudrillard's theorization on symbolic exchange and death, in particular, presents a novel way of advancing the discussion initiated in the previous theory section.

3.1 Baudrillard's Contribution to Marketing Theory

Baudrillard has been posited as a novel way to understand “how a commodity signifies a thoroughly relational distinction in an entire market of exchangeable and consumable objects [...]” (Hietanen et al., 2018. p.109). As well as explore question of meaning, value and the
broader meaning of consumption as culturally embedded (Hietanen et al., forthcoming). By far, the majority of marketing theory’s engagements with Baudrillard has focused on his (In)famous theory of simulation and hyperreality; that claims modern society is subsidized under a political economy of the sign (Hietanen et al., forthcoming). In which our reality as we know it has come to be constituted by signs, in the sense that everything we consume inherently has sign-value, demarcates a social position and informs our identity (Baudrillard, 1981).

For Baudrillard (2017) functional and use value is therefore always subsided under sign-value which is the main function of our consumption activities. Furthermore, in this political economy of signs (or system of signs) commodities only gain their value on their differential signifying value in relation to other commodities. Whereas, the value of one object is not only in its sign-value but to realize its function as a sign, it needs to be produced as and become separate in relation to all other signs. This system and function of signs is what organizes and reproduces social reality, governed by a code of signs (Cherrier and Murray, 2004). For Baudrillard social relations have thus collapsed into a “technological order of simulation” (Abbinnett, 2008, p. 72). Consequently, for Baudrillard (1981), subjects are forced to constitute themselves through objects that produce symbolic distinctions between people¹ (see also Hietanen et al., 2018).

In other words, participation in modern society is dependent on conforming to a logic (code) of signs that structures participation and roles in a society where identity has become dependent on the grafting of signs unto oneself. On the other end, individuals failing to conform to the logic (code) find themselves as outcasts and separated from society (Cherrier and Murray, 2004). A precarious position that in turn drives a desire for signs that (re)estabishes one’s own social importance and role (Cherrier and Murray, 2004). In this sense, consumption always occurs in relation to the market as a whole, as its value is only realized in relation and difference to the signifying-value of other commodities in the market (Hietanen et al., 2018).

In other words, the consumption of goods is thus never an individual affair, as what we actually consume is the relationship of the commodity with all other commodities i.e. the market. Consumers are thus constantly reproducing the conditions of their own domination. Where, the logic of the code erects boundaries that structures participation as consumers dogmatically

¹ As the subject becomes required to acquire objects to invest oneself with meaning and status, the subject reversely, becomes dependent on the objects for his/her constitution of self (Baudrillard, 2017).
strive to attain (consume) status and prestige through produced signs e.g. brands (Hietanen, forthcoming; Cherrier and Murray, 2004).

While Baudrillard's theories have often come under attack for its totalitarian tone, as well as its lack of empirical footing (Kellner, 1987). What we can gain from adopting a Baudrillardian approach is a more nuanced discussion on the role of consumption for social participation and inclusion. Presenting a theoretical lens that permits us to move the discussion from questions of needs and monetary means to perceive the centrality of consumption for social relations and the internalization of a consumer ideology that shapes our reality. The value of Baudrillard's polemic theories should thus be assessed on the merits of its critical contribution that provides a novel perspective that permits a critical engagement with conventional points of views and underlying assumptions. This will be the aim for the next segment, where Baudrillard's theory on symbolic death and exchange will be explored to discuss how it can be employed to explore how and why older consumers are expunged from consumption and the marketplace.

3.2 Symbolic Exchange and Death

“At the very core of the ‘rationality’ of our culture, however, is an exclusion that precedes every other, more radical than the exclusion of madmen, children or inferior races, an exclusion preceding all of these and serving as their model: the exclusion of the dead and of death” (Baudrillard, 2017, p. 147)

Above we outlined the general contribution of Baudrillard's theory to marketing scholarship and how it can provide a novel way to understand and perceive the complexities of both the market and marketing as an economy of signs. In order to further explore the poignant marketplace absence of elderly consumers, this part will outline Baudrillard's theory of symbolic exchange and death. In particular the absence of death and its relation to old age in modern society that Baudrillard developed extensively in his book Symbolic Exchange and Death (2017). It is prudent to mention that what is discussed here as death is more the symbolic notion of death within a symbolic order, rather than of death as a biological finality.

For Baudrillard (2017), death was not a finality until the recent advent of modern society and archaic societies could still engage with symbolical exchange with the dead - for example, gifts for spirits in return for protection and power- and thus death was neither a strict end and, had a definite place in their society as every death was social rather an individual affair (Baudrillard, 2017; Pawlett, 1997). However, following the ancient Egyptians, death has been succinctly
abolished from the social and any role in the community\(^2\) (Baudrillard, 2017). To the point that, in our age of science and capitalism, death has been forced to give way to life; in the form of never-ending accumulation and growth (Baudrillard, 2017; Bishop and Phillips 2007). Whereas before death used to be symbolically exchanged through symbolic rituals that achieved a form of reciprocal exchange between the dead and the living (Pawlett, 1997), today all death occurs on an individual level (Baudrillard, 2017).

The hospital becomes our final destination as a caretaker of our death, separating and isolating the old and sick e.g. those who signify death with their old or sick, as death has no place in the social sphere (Baudrillard, 2017). For Baudrillard (2017) what the old in our society demands, is a chance to be symbolically recognized as old, and dying and on the symbolic virtue of their difference compared to other social actors. However, any symbolic acknowledgment is always barred by an operation of functionality e.g. the discourse between the patients and the doctors and nurses always remains on the level of functionality. Of the functions of the body and the expectancy of his/her life, coupled with the assurance that all efforts to render him healthy are being made (Baudrillard, 2017). Regardless of whether he/she desires it or not (Baudrillard, 2017).

In our western modern society, the only acceptable death is the one that comes on our term, meaning, at the end of a full and - often used synonymously- long life (Baudrillard, 2017). The very concept shows our odd relationship with death, as it places death as only acceptable if placed under our structural law of value and as such, natural death becomes the “systematic denegation of death” (Baudrillard, 2017, p.182). Funerals are the apotheosis of this logic, where the body is carefully constructed through procedures of make-up, constructing the expression of his/her face with re-colored skin and shadow (see Hou, 2013) to produce the effect of appearing almost alive e.g. sleeping.

Thus, even their death is not allowed to retain its symbolic difference, a refusal of allowing death to be imbued with the force of death as a sign (Baudrillard, 2017, p. 201). Instead, the corpse has to be barred from signifying death: from appearing as an actual dead corpse and retained away from the social status of death (Baudrillard, 2017, p. 201). However, death and traces of death still exist in, firstly, the form of graveyards; which find themselves increasingly

\(^2\) A process that started in earnest with the emergence of Protestantism that gave rise to “[...] the intense modern enterprise of staving of death; the ethics of accumulation and material production... the labour of profit collectively called the ‘spirit of capitalism’” (Baudrillard 1993, p. 145).
pushed out from cities and central locations, and secondly in the feeble, sick and old \(^3\) (Baudrillard, 2017).

Based on an absence of death and the modern impossibility of symbolical reciprocity of death, the elderly come to represent the victory of life (science) over death (excess), by merit of their longevity in life. That, nevertheless, also signifies a reminder of the inescapability of death and therefore must be abolished and isolated (Baudrillard, 2017). Therefore, while in civilizations of old, the elderly often held positions of power, wisdom, and respect (Baudrillard, 2017). The old are today pushed out from being included in society; at times literally with forced retirements (Tynan, 1990). And, absolved from providing any value to society except as to stand as signifier for life and lack of death by virtue of living long (Baudrillard, 2017). Retirement further expresses the paradoxical relation the system has with old people and death, as rationally the sustainment of an immense amount of people is nothing more than dead weight for the social (Baudrillard, 2017). Yet still an enormous effort of social worth- money and moral values- is undertaken without “being able to give it a meaning”\(^4\) (Baudrillard, 2017, p. 183). Placing the retired into a ghetto-like existence as economical leeches, deprived of symbolic recognition (Baudrillard, 2017, p. 183).

### 3.3 Summary of Theoretical Framework

Drawing on Consumer Culture Theory and Jean Baudrillard this thesis postulates that culture forms the frame of lived meaning and experiences (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) which are dependent on symbolic resources mediated by the market (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Holt, 2002; Saren et al., 2019). And, perceives consumption as an inherently social process, as social relations are constituted through the consumption of sign-objects that produces difference and distinction between social actors (Hietanen et al., 2018).

As such, social inclusion is dependent on marketplace participation and inclusion in the marketplace which is in turn structured around representative images (in)formed by a consumer ideology that forms normative social identities (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Thomas, 2013). One central facet within western consumer ideology is the dominant notion of youth (Coupland, 2003; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2006; Moschis, 2003). This consequently translates to the

\(^3\) In this sense, death haunts us as pure symbolic excess, that which cannot be exchanged within a system of “rational meditations [...]” (Abbinnett, 2008, p. 71).

\(^4\) An excluded or periphery social existence can thus not be solved within the prevalent frame of rational monetary means but has to be viewed as a system of signs.
marketplace and social exclusion of elderly consumers, as aging leads to a progressive transgression to a new social identity which due to a consumer ideology of youth lacks a representational image (Gilleard, 1996). Resulting in an inability to conform to the image of an authentic consumer (Downey, 2009). A process which Bennett et al., (2016) terms exclusion due to marketplace omission. Consequently, the social identity of elderly consumers is characterized by a lack of social status as the elderly become deprived of the symbolic resources of the market directly targeted towards them (Bennett et al., 2016).

Producing a loss of meaning and identity e.g. collective trauma (Bennett et al., 2016) and a conflict between individual contra social identity (Cody and Lawlor, 2011). The aged body becomes perceived as the decline and failure of the body and comes to demarcates the elderly as separate from the circulating image of the consumer (Bennett et al., 2016; Hepworth, 2003). This image of the declining body is circulated by marketing and media and reduces the symbolic value of the elderly to one of function (Gilleard, 1996). An operation, that from a Baudrillardian (2017) perspective occurs to prevent the elderly from being symbolically acknowledged which would entail a social recognition of death. From this perspective, the corrosion of representation, social identity and symbolic acknowledgment of elderly consumers is based upon abjection of death that derives from a capitalist system that abolishes death and hails life as victorious (Baudrillard, 2017). In which, the elderly come to stand as signifiers of life’s victory over death by their longevity (old age). However, this simultaneously entails that the elderly also signifies death and must, therefore, be excluded from social inclusion and as such, marketplace participation (Baudrillard, 2017). Lastly, as consumption and marketplace inclusion holds such a central function in western modern life, the exclusion is seldom consciously recognized (Eyerman, 2014 in Bennett et al., 2016).

This framework thus contributes to build upon existing ideas of marketplace exclusion and inclusion as culturally and ideologically contingent (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Bennett et al., 2016). Accentuating how marketplace inclusion and exclusion ought to be situated as symbolically dependent (Baudrillard, 2017).

In the final segment of the thesis, this theoretical framework will be developed further through a psycho-social account of the meaning frame of elderly consumers. However, before such a discussion, the next segment will outline the methodological and practical implications of the study. Where the implications of a psycho-social method will be examined parallel with possible limitations of a psycho-social approach in regard to marketing. Followed by a
discussion of ethical considerations and ending with a reflexive account on the process of gathering, interpreting and analyzing the data.
4. A Psycho-social Method

Psycho-social studies is an emerging field that has gained increased recognition in its insofar two-decade presence, transdisciplinary in nature, the defining contours of the field remain fluid and indeterminant (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009, p. 3). As the method remains, in large, novel to the field of marketing, extra time and effort will be utilized on a critical examination, review and discussion of the relevance, benefits, approach, limitations and ethical consideration of why a psycho-social approach was selected for this study.

The field of psycho-social studies has been posited as a particular attitude towards social research (Alexandrov, 2009; Crociani-Windland, 2009), a critical methodological engagement between psychoanalysis and social research (Burman, 2008), a synthesis of social theory and psychoanalysis (Clarke, 2006), a movement towards questions of subjectivity (Parker, 2010), an attempt to apply psychoanalysis to the social sciences (Paul Hoggett, 2015 in Redman, 2016), a reimagining of method and practice (Clarke, 2009 in Redman, 2016) and as a transdisciplinary anti-discipline (Paul Stenner, 2014 in Redman 2016). Regardless of theoretical and methodological avenue, psycho-social studies possess a distinct different epistemological stance in how it interprets the ontology of its subjects (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009; Crociani-Windland, 2009; Watts, 2009). In which the subject is always a social entity that is subjected to external forces (e.g. class, gender, the unconscious or culture) (Clarke, 2006; Emerson and Frosh, 2004). While simultaneously possessing a degree of agency e.g. our use language (Frosh, 2003). Concomitant, people do not pertain full access to their own construction of meaning which is influenced by unconscious motivations and protective barriers (Holloway and Jefferson, 2013).

Seeking to allow a story to emerge that is untainted by the researcher’s narrative and desires, psycho-social studies make use of free association and autobiographical interview techniques (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). That aims to minimize any guiding elements and enhance reflexivity by regarding the researcher as an active participant in the research setting (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009; Alexandrov, 2009; Beedell, 2009). This paper utilizes the free association interview method in order to capture the experiences and meaning frame of seven elderly consumers, defined in the majority of marketing literature as above the age of either 50 or 55 (Carrigan and Szmigin, 2003; Dann, 2007; Moschis, 2003; Mumel and Prodnik, 2005; Pak and Kambil, 2006; Parment, 2008; Szmigin and Carrigan, 2001; Thompson and Thompson, 2009).
Every participant was interviewed twice, allowing for retrospection of initial data and the ability to hone in on relevant experiences that emerged initially, at the shorter subsequent interview. Participants were selected using a snowballing sampling. Miles et al., (2014) deems snowballing as a beneficial method for studies which are inductive and theory-building. The participants were between the ages of 55 to 80 and included both male and female respondents. All participants were active: not living in a retirement home nor being dependent on government elderly care. With four of the participants were retired and three who to a varying degree still worked. In addition, all names used in this study are pseudonyms to allow participants to stay anonymous for ethical consideration. At the end, the data gathered consisted of 185 pages of transcript interview records, 12,5 hours of audio recordings, 3 pages of interview notes and 8 pages of reflective notes, that were analyzed and were congregated into a psycho-social account using thematic coding. In the following method section, the implications of a psycho-social method will be examined parallel with possible limitations of a psycho-social approach in regard to marketing. Followed by a discussion of ethical considerations and ending with a reflexive account on the process of gathering, interpreting and analyzing the data.

4.1 A Psycho-social approach

"By doing social research, one is involved in a process of knowledge production and is therefore confronted with the questions concerning the nature of knowledge and its relation to reality as it is experienced by the researcher [...]" (Alexandrov, 2009, p. 30)

In turn with an increased awareness of the complex interplay between the researcher and the wider social setting in which the research takes place (See Chatzidakis et al., 2018; Manley, 2009). Psycho-social studies adopt a constructionist ontology and interpretive epistemology (Alexandrov, 2009). Reality as real, is as much a social reification arising from interpretations that presents itself as and indeed becomes as real as reality itself in our quotidian existence (Alexandrov, 2009). Psycho-social studies does insofar, not aim at capturing reality as an objective real rather than gain an understanding of the how the human subject acts within and constructs his or her subjective reality (Crociani-Windland, 2009; Watts, 2009), postulating that an objective real and a reality arising from cultural and social factors do not exude a clear separating line (Alexandrov, 2009; Crociani-Windland, 2009). Instead, both are equally real insofar as it constitutes a reality human subjects are forced to navigate (Alexandrov, 2009).
The process of gathering data is, therefore, never a neutral process, as our theoretical standpoints very much are lenses, from which certain patterns are discerned and emerges (Alexandrov, 2009).

Within this genealogy of though, in what has been termed “the emotional turn in social sciences” (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009, p. 8). Truth becomes one that is co-constructed between the researcher and the subject or phenomenon in question (Beedell, 2009; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). That in the case of psycho-social studies emerges through a dynamic process of countertransference from an affective relationship (Jervis, 2009). Countertransference as such represents an important way to access the unconscious subjective processes and derives from the “utilization of the researcher's subjectivity” (Jervis, 2009, p. 147). In order to take heed of the emotional state evoked in the researcher by the participant's emotions (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009), which often foreshadows intellectual understanding (Jervis, 2009). Providing a tool to recognize respondents affective states and incorporate it to further enrich findings.

Countertransference builds largely upon Melanie Klein's (1946) notion of projective identification; the unconscious process of which subjects split of undesired parts of the self and projects them into an external object i.e. the bad object. Projective identification is argued to be “used all throughout life” (Jervis, 2009, p. 147) and is a way to communicate experiences and feelings that insofar cannot be expressed in language (Jervis, 2009). Experiences or objects in the subject's discourse that presents difficulties of description, or evokes an affective state provides a valuable palimpsest into elements of subjective experience that otherwise is often glossed over, missed or neglected (Jervis, 2009). Psycho-social studies can thus be seen as inherently critical of positivist ontological and epistemological approaches (Alexandrov, 2009. Watts, 2009).

4.2 Marketing and a Psycho-social approach

Marketing is no stranger to integrating ideas and theories from other social sciences (Levy, 2007; Shaw and Jones, 2005) and its rich history of qualitative endeavors in behavioral marketing and social research provides ample proof of their value in forming a holistic understanding of the processes of consumption and the role of the consumer (see Levy, 2007). The emerging work of psycho-social studies presents a new avenue for marketing to develop a deeper picture of the complexities of the ambiguous term, the market.
Providing an approach that regards the market and its cultural complexities from the perspective of the consumer but one that is always situated and affected by social and cultural forces. A subject “[…] constructed and yet constructing, a power-using subject which is also subjected to power […]” (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009, p. 2; Chatzidakis et al., 2018, Manley, 2009, Watts, 2009). Shifting the perception of consumers as rational and controllable, to complex fragmented subjects (Alexandrov, 2009; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995) driven by motivations and desire often unbeknownst to themselves (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Manley, 2009). Permitting the field of marketing to build on a growing corpus of laudable marketing research situating the subject as one in interplay with social and cultural forces (See Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Kozinets, 2002; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Answering the call to scrutinize our own role in the production of knowledge (Hopkinson and Hogg, 2007, p. 169).

4.3 Merits of a Psycho-social Account

The merits of employing a psycho-social approach in the exploration of (marketplace) exclusion lie in the notion as Eyerman (2014 in Bennett et al., 2016) states; recognition of one’s own exclusion from social life and the market is seldom consciously recognized nor consciously negotiated. There are thus, a multitude of processes in negotiating absence which would be unable to be properly captured if one stayed solely on a discursive and conscious level. Employing a psycho-social account, however, allows for the utilization of techniques and aids that recognizes the importance of both conscious and unconscious processes as well as the role of the social in informing individual identity (Clarke, 2006; Emerson and Frosh, 2004). Furthermore, as this thesis postulates the market as a macro-assemblage of micro social processes (Knorr-Cetina, 2014). A psycho-social approach allows for a displacement of the traditional dichotomy between individual and collective forces. Perceiving the individual as through consumption of symbolic resources (sign-objects) mediated by the marketplace engaging in social interactive processes. This is perfectly in line with the purpose of this study, that perceives in accordance with Cody and Lawlor (2011) and Gilleard (1996) individual identity as informed and influenced by social identity. As well as Baudrillard's (2017) notion of consumption as inherently carrying a social meaning, as it always occurs in relation to the market as a whole.

Through this approach, affects and emotions that emerge throughout the interview are taken into account, as well as body language, metaphors and breaks, and stoppages in their storytelling that reveal an individual (subjects) meaning-frame.
For example, approaching the topic of the future after retirement, Ingrid would stop and break to then change the topic to something else altogether (often relative but not regarding retirement or her future). Moreover, while she would consciously attempt to negotiate how retirement actually was a time for relaxation and enjoyment, it was often accompanied by nervous laughter, fidgeting and an anxious tone that did not reflect the supposed enjoyment she was discussing. To ensure, the utmost possibly validity of interpretation of both conscious but moreover, unconscious processes, a process of triangulation was used, by combining data from interview audio records, transcripts, reflexive notes, colleague interpretation and confirmation of respondents in case interpretations remained vague, pertaining they did not regard a topic the subject had in the interview been rejecting.

4.4 Limitations of a Psychosocial approach

Despite several benefits of a psycho-social approach, within the field of marketing a psychosocial approach remains largely unexplored within marketing literature (see Chatzidakis et al., 2018; Elliott and Yannopoulou, 2007 for exceptions). In part, this may derive from the marginal stature of qualitative research within marketing at large (Hunt, 1994, Levy, 2007). A legacy from the time where marketing studies were still carving out its space and in similar fashion as other fields facing the dilemma of arts vs science, such as psychology (Frosh, 2003), vigorously pursued a scientific rigor (in the early 20th century) that would allow for the establishment of its own field (Anderson, 1983; Bartels, 1951; Hunt, 1976; Peter and Olson, 1983). Therefore, favoring quantitative research methods that gave the impression of being more neutral and objective, and thus more rigorously scientific in nature (Hunt, 1994; Levy, 2007). Which facilitated replicability of studies, more generalizable findings and minimizing potential bias errors; an over looming risk perceived in qualitative studies (Levy, 2007).

However, recent times have seen a resurgence of interest in qualitative methods (Levy, 2007, p. 12; Murray and Ozanne, 2006; Scott, 2006), in large due to change in perception (zeitgeist) of qualitative and quantitative as no longer a duality of either or (Bahl and Milne, 2007; Hopkinson and Hogg, 2007). Instead, quantitative and qualitative methods are perceived to provide different tools for different problems, subsequently providing different solutions and highlighting certain aspects of the phenomenon (Levy, 2007). In which, the quality (benefit) of qualitative studies lies in its capability of providing a more nuanced and richer description of the phenomenon, taking into account cultural facets and descriptions that are often lost in a quantitative account (Levy, 2007).
However, qualitative studies within marketing remain predominantly occupied with capturing the internal world of its subjects through direct observation and interpretation of discourse (Chatzidakis et al., 2018; Daymon and Holloway, 2011; Hopkinson and Hogg, 2007). Often through semi-structured interviews (Daymon and Holloway, 2011, p. 225), employed to reduce the subjective nature of the interview and grant it a higher degree of validity i.e. objectivity (Gilmour, 2009). Misrepresentation, misinterpretation and irrelevant data are the dangers that structured interviews offer to theoretically plug (Gilmour, 2009, p. 125).

The problem of structured interviews from a psycho-social vantage point is that by delineating the interview, it consequently limits the respondent’s responses as well as understanding what lies beneath them (Gilmour, 2009; Nicholls, 2009). Positioning the human subject as an agentic constructor of his world in unison with others agentic actors, where the human subject is in constant control and has access to its motivations and reasons for his or her actions and choices (Frosh and Baraitser, 2008). Access to the subject's world thus becomes a rather skewed although straightforward task of asking, understanding and interpreting how the subject consciously construes and navigates her or his own world (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Following this approach, semi-structured interviews inhibits a didactic undertone of expecting the subject to be able to provide the truth of his or her meaning, which poses issues as respondents often condition their responses based on expectations of what is expected or desired by the researcher, evident in the often-posed question of: “is this what you want?” (Beedell, 2009, p. 105; Clarke, 2006, p. 1163).

It is for these reasons that the established poles for navigating research becomes problematic for psycho-social research. As they are centered around the dichotomy of truth vs lying, knowing vs not knowing (Alexandrov, 2009), and are laden with scientific notions of authenticity that smoothens over the inherent ambiguity in what telling the truth de jure entails (Alexandrov, 2009). Often, what would be termed *the* truth lies hidden from even ourselves, making the boundary of truth vis-a-vis blurry and unclear (Alexandrov, 2009). That the most dangerous lies are the ones we tell ourselves exists as a popular proverb, demarcates the common truth that lies are often not an outward act of deception, and that we often engage in hiding truths that threatens our identity (Alexandrov, 2009).

In this sense, psycho-social methods and free association interviews can be seen as a complementary method enriching both qualitative and quantitative research; fronteering the
development of new insights into how subjects make sense and negotiate their cultural surroundings (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). Revealing both the impossibility of an objective researcher without emotions and the relevance of the dynamic relationship between researcher and participant for facilitating new findings (Jervis, 2009). There is also cause to problematize the possibility of a value-free approach altogether (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). As several feminist and psycho-social research has gone to claim; any study always expresses a priori interest from its initiator and therefore, is inevitable filled with a degree of value-bias (See Miller, Hoggett and Mayo, 2008).

In the case one accepts the impossibility of value-free research the psycho-social methods become immensely alluring, openly dealing with the imposed boundaries of its own subjective position (Alexandrov, 2009), through its central notion of the reflexive researcher and the autobiographical method (Petrov, 2009). The merit of a psycho-social should thus not be judged by quantitative variables of rigor, validity, and generalizability (Alexandrov, 2009; Hollway, 2018). Instead, it should have its contribution measured by how it provides an accurate depiction of the subject’s unique reality through thick descriptions of the subjects, discourse, including emotions, affects and unconscious associations (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009; Frosh and Emerson, 2005).

Perhaps the most discouraging factor is that a psycho-social inductive approach makes it very hard to a priori determine whether the research will yield any valuable insights (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). While also requiring the researcher maintain a constant reflexive mindset all throughout the research process (Petrov, 2009), remaining susceptible for unexpected findings to emerge (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009, p. 20; Daymon and Holloway, 2011, p. 225). In addition, while the process of analysis and interpretation of the data in a psycho-social approach may be complex (Alexandrov, 2009), the marketplace is itself a complex autopoiesis of ideological and cultural forces that requires a wider array of tools to delve deeper into its meaning for modern existence (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 876). To conclude, while the difficulties presented above certainly poses questions for any prospective psycho-social research, these issues should rather be read as a map in how to navigate psycho-social studies. As the confines of a positivist epistemology and emotional labor are increasingly showing its constraints (Alexandrov, 2009; Beedell, 2009), psycho-social studies present an intriguing avenue for studying cultural variables and the interplay between social, culture and the individual.
4.5 Free Association Interviews and Ethical Considerations

The principal goal of free association interviews (in the following referred to as FANI) is to produce the subjects meaning frame (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). Enabling a more holistic understanding by facilitating various forms of conscious and unconscious communication to emerge through the affective relationship and countertransference between researcher and subject (Jervis, 2009; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). To allow the subject to emerge, structuring the interview is deemed detrimental, as it potentially pushes the researcher's wishes and desire onto the subject and the setting (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). Watts, (2009) argues that the merits of a FANI approach can be perceived in how its interviews often lead to findings that are in stark contrast to prior expectations. Demarcating the limited capability for a researcher to encapsulate all relevant question and aspects in a structured interview (Nicholls, 2009). Therefore, as Alexandrov (2009, p. 29) notes “[..] compared to other research traditions, psycho-social studies have unique investigative and explanatory as well as transformative potential”.

However, while several benefits exist with a psycho-social FANI method (Clarke, 2006; Clarke and Hoggett, 2009; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). Important questions have been raised in regards ethical challenges that emerge from; its distinct ontological view of the self (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009), the central recognition of and affects (Alexandrov, 2009). As well as the researchers as an active participant (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013; Jervis, 2009). The majority of apprehension concerns the possibility to reliably interpret a subject’s unconscious facets and how to determine the analysis to be valid and not simply the preconceptions of the researcher i.e. wild analysis (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009; Hollway and Jefferson, 2013). As FANI regards not only what, but also what does not emerge in discourse (Boydell, 2009). Furthermore, while the notions of countertransference, the active researcher and the recognition of an affective relationship between researcher and participant, allows psycho-social studies to dive deeper into subjects meaning-making (Jervis, 2009; Hollway and Jefferson, 2013).

It also poses questions whether the affective relationship between researcher and participant makes it possible to nudge the participant in certain directions and conclusions (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). The motivations, values, and wishes of the subject are often beyond the conscious or discursive reach of the participant and so are the desires, values and preconceptions the researcher carries with him or her into the research (Petrov, 2009). This extends to social factors of class, ethnicity, and gender (Clarke, 2006; Emerson and Frosh,
2004), that forms pre-conceptions we rely on to navigate “[...] complex web of meaning and relations” (Alexandrov, 2009). That is not to say that the researcher is able to extract whatever he or she wishes, on the contrary, it is partly due to the incapability to get the subject to discuss certain events or experiences that both necessitates and facilitates a psycho-social approach (Gadd, 2012). As psycho-social studies posit us all as engaged in unconsciously defending ourselves against our anxieties (Beedell, 2009; Gilmour, 2009; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000), assuming defensive positions in the frame of discourse to support our fragile identity (Boydell, 2009). This also holds true for the researcher himself, that may abstain from engaging with data that produces feelings of anxiety, foreclosing any possibility for interviewee response and expression (Beedell, 2009, p. 107).

These issues have been and remain at the forefront of any psycho-social method (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009; Frosh and Baraitser, 2008), and discussion of methodological integrity has led to the creation of several techniques to aid in interpretation without sacrificing the nuance of affects and emotions (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). One of the ways in which to ascertain a better degree of clarity is through assistance from colleagues and researchers within the field (Beedell, 2009; Gilmour, 2009). Gaining outside perspective allows a reflective process to occur through procuring a variety of vantage points in which to view and ground the data i.e. the perspective of the third (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009; Petrov, 2009). In the same sense, especially for newcomers to the field- the presence of a supervisor is greatly propitious in offering insight and perspective for a more robust analysis of data (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). In a discussion about the value of autobiography when conducting research, Petrov (2009) states that a reflective diary is immensely beneficial in providing clarity and perspective (see also Watts, 2009). By continuously noting down salient but often fleeting thoughts, emotions and experiences that might be otherwise be forgotten in time, a reflective diary provides a richer account of data and possible reflection by both the researcher and colleagues (Petrov, 2009). In particular if connected with other mediums of data e.g. transcripts, audio recordings (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009).

It is important to note that a reflective diary is not an attempt of immediate interpretation, as generally, psycho-social studies have sought to abstain from forming interpretations during the process of data procurement (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000/2001). This notion has however of late come to be disputed by feminist researchers problematizing the notion of not interpreting as a choice (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009, p. 16). While Hollway and Jefferson (2000) argue that
interpretation during the interview risks forming a preconceived notion of what is said, structuring future topics and establishing a “destination” the research “ought” to lead to.

Miller et al., (2008) disputes the argument, stating that it takes too much of a traditional stance where the researcher can approach the topic and its subjects’ value-free and that interpretation during interviews is a natural and unavoidable way human subjects make sense of the world. Similarly, Petrov (2009) calls for the need to reflexively engage in how and why we interpret the way we do and to negotiate the impact of both the subject and one owns emotions, rather than obscuring the fact that we are all constantly in a state of interpretation of our surroundings (see also Nicholls, 2009). As such, psycho-social studies hold reflexivity and ethical consideration as an ongoing process that initiates the moment the project starts to take form (Petrov, 2009). Why the interest in this project? What is my emotional interest in it? This consequently aids the researcher to create a reflective distance imperative in interpretative research (Watts, 2009).

While differences within the field concerning whether one ought to interpret during, or strive to abstain until after, is still ongoing. Rather than establishing the truth of one or the other, the ongoing discussion should be regarded as reflexive process of the field in itself, a constant dialogue on the virtue, possibilities, and pitfalls, that inevitable exists in any method. As Alexandrov (2009, p. 30) puts it “Critically questioning the foundations of one’s knowledge has become an integral part of scientific research, and increasingly of the practice of living itself under the uncertain circumstances of reflexive modernization”. As such, while these issues appear to present a succinct debility of FANI and psycho-social studies, the argument could be made that the issues raised here are far from unique. And, that dangers of preconceptions, bias and researcher desires and hopes are prevalent in all forms of research (Alexandrov, 2009, p. 37; Baker and Gentry; Clarke and Hoggett, 2009, p. 4; Petrov, 2009). What is here presented as ethical considerations and weaknesses should thus rather be seen as strengths. Whereas, in openly acknowledging and reflecting upon the potential for bias, misinterpretation and the responsibility afforded to us as researchers when offered participants data, psycho-social studies adjure its partakers to recognize its impact (Baker and Gentry, 2007, see also Beedell, 2009; Jervis, 2009), augmenting the ethical considerations inherent in any production of knowledge (Alexandrov, 2009)
4.6 Interpretation and Coding of Interviewer Data

To facilitate an awareness of the position of elderly consumers in terms of marketing, I spent several days viewing commercials which directly targeted and included the elderly. Viewing popular commercials from their youth, in case reflections of commercials here and now vis-a-vis their youth would emerge. The aim was to familiarize with the position of having connections between commercials and oneself, that progressively fade with one’s age. This prior effort helped me to create a reflective inner process as I strived to imagine the disappearance of a representational image in marketing due to age, and lead to more salient interviews discussion as they became aware of my knowledge of older commercials or products. For example, familiarity with the old Marlboro man cigarette commercials led to a salient discussion about the use of brands for a participant’s youth compared to now. In these ways, the interviews elicited stories that followed an unstructured pathway defined by the emotional drive rather than any rational logic (Boydell, 2009).

As respondents often position themselves and their answers in response to the question asked, often in an attempt to “figure out” what to say or what is the right answer (Beedell, 2009). The use of imagery - printed advertisement- proved another access point to respondents subjective meaning-making, aiding to “[...] trigger latent memories, evoke multilayered responses and elicit more concrete information” (Thomas, 2013, p. 97). Where, asking participants to share thoughts and feelings on pictures, provided an enrichment of the subjects meaning-making frame, by eliciting their subjective interpretation of the imagery presented.

In the end, interviews with 7 -identified point of data saturation- elderly consumers in Stockholm and Uppsala had been conducted, resulting in 12.5 hours of recordings, 8 pages of reflective notes, 3 pages of interview notes and 185 pages of transcribed data was collected. The transcribed interviews formed the primary basis for analysis, with reflective diary notes acting as a supplement. In cases where the transcription noted particularly intriguing paradoxes, contradictions or blockages in the subject’s discourse that audio segment was revisited together with notes taken at the moment. The reflective notes consisted of two sections, one with thoughts, feelings, and reflections that emerged during the interview and one that was written after the interview had finished, always within the same day.

Interpretation of data occurred through thematic color coding where red was used to note affective or emotional states and changes, that emerged through changes in tone and shift in
vocabulary use. Green salient body language and blue for discursive elements and metaphors. This process was aided by using Atlas.ti, a qualitative software tool to assist the process of coding the transcripts. The analysis was undertaken when themes started to emerge from a wider amount of data. As Hollway and Jefferson (2013) and Young and Frosh (2009) both argue that analysis should be data “bottoms up” driven, refraining from looking for pre-conceived themes and allow themes to surface on its own as more individual case data gives rise to it. Data collection came to a stop when saturation of data had been reached and involvement of more participants would have proved too strenuous within the allotted time of the study.

The reflective diary proved immeasurable in enriching transcript data with notes of affective states and giving context to the text. As Young and Frosh (2009, p. 4) argues, any psycho-social account dealing with text cannot suffice to stay on the level of text alone but must incorporate the context i.e. the “performative aspects of interviews - participants gestures and actions [...]”. In order to further enhance validity, avoid misrepresentation and ensure conclusions made had a strong basis, interpretation on affective aspects were not made unless supported by statements and other evidence within the data (Frosh, 2003). For example, one participant Katniss, during discussion of the body and staying active, would always emphasize how fit she always was, using metaphors that one was only as old as one felt. In addition, during a moment in the interview when her body caused her discomfort and she asked to stand up for the remainder of the interview, she fervently disclosed any discussion about her discomfort or offer to pause the interview. Highlighting, her precarious relation to her aging body as one to be ignored or displaced in terms of age and disfunction. In addition, both colleagues and interviewees were consulted of the validity of interpretations, to further ensure a valid representation and analysis of the data.

4.7 The process of writing a psycho-social account

There is no set pathway of how to conduct psycho-social studies (Frosh, 2003) and as the a priori majority of my work has been conceptual in nature, it was a heavy task to embark on a psycho-social study. My lack of interviewing as well as formulating a psycho-social account from its findings proved arduous and the process has been plagued by a fragmented stumbling amidst a forest of data that at times was difficult to make sense of: a common sensation in working through a mountain of data (Emerson and Frosh, 2004, p. 29).
For example, it was apparent, in the beginning of the interviews that I was too shut in, afraid of making mistakes or providing too much structure. Leading me to assume a too much rigid and defensive stance that hindered respondents’ stories through shaping the atmosphere as one of questions and answers. After a review of the reflexive notes and the transcripts from the first interview, it became apparent that I was damaging my own data-gathering, shutting myself of into the role of objective researcher. Subsequently and succinctly, in the following interviews, I dared to loosen up. I did not cling to the questions as much, I presented pieces of myself and my personality which helped us formed a connection and for further discussions and affects to emerge and the interviews became both longer and richer as a result.

In addition, without the assistance, guidance, and feedback of colleagues with significantly more experience and knowledge of the field, as well as recurring meetings with my thesis supervisor, this study would not have been possible. The reflective notes in conjunction with the transcripts posited a fruitful setting of discussion as it gave a vantage point of both the data and the performative and emotional aspects of the interviews. As well as enabling a reflective discussion on the active role of the researcher.
5. Absence, Consumption, and Identity

The psycho-social account is split up into three parts. The first, *Negotiating Advertisement*, outlines how participants related and negotiated marketing, advertisement and consumer ideology. In the second section, *Sustaining Identity*, how participants negotiated their own exclusion and liminal identity and constructed their own discourse (trope) to sustain an identity of social inclusion. In the third section, *Signifying Age: The Old Body*, the centrality of the aging body in invalidating elderly consumers symbolic value is explored further and will be used to understand how symbolic value is denied by societal discourse of the aging body in terms of function.

5.1 Negotiating Advertisement

It rapidly emerged throughout all of the interviews that the participant's relation to advertisement, regardless of its form was characterized by negative connotations. While a plenitude of reasons and reactions surfaced as to why marketing was bad, the central notion in the relationship between elderly consumers and marketing was the vehement rejection of advertisement which according to the participants positioned them as in a constant state of need. Where the shared consensus was that most commercials and advertisement presented a “tant/gubbe” (old lady/old man). Who was identified as an elderly individual who complained, appeared in a constant state of duress and thus in need for assistance and generally expressing the traits that were represented in the various -primarily medical and insurance- commercials which postulated the elderly as a group with functional needs to live a full life. Reducing the symbolic value of consumption goods as a symbolic resource to a one of function (Baudrillard, 2017)

During the discussions regarding the pictures (see appendix A) would predominantly center around topics such as; the unattrativeness of the pictures, its inauthenticity and misrepresentation, and its manipulative goal. As well as being intrusive, manufactured, fake and creating impossible ideals that most of all, affecting the youth; was argued to be the main goal for contemporary commercials. In contrast, when discussing their own youth and commercials of the time, the narrative of their youth and identity was characterized as a time of self-expression, exploration, and uniqueness.
Aspects argued to be lacking for the youth today. Furthermore, the participants often discussed popular mainstream brands of this time as part of collective shared experiences and played a central role in certain recollection for memories of youth, centered around the joy of consumption, the experience of brands or the enactment of personality through the use of various brands. For example, during a recollection of old commercials and times of yore, Greta remembered a commercial slogan for Volkswagen “nobody knows how far a Volkswagen may go” (aired during the heyday of the Volkswagen Beetle car).

The long period of time that it lay in Greta’s unconscious (the recollection was not immediate and came to a while after asking about any salient memories of brands or products from her youth) pointed at the central importance of the slogan. For Greta the phrase “nobody knows how far a Volkswagen may go” represented more than words, rather “they were images and affects that replaced the word.” (Manley, 2009, p. 95). That evoked a time where products were made for the everyday individual or as Greta said the “typical Svensson” which included her. Similarly, Nisse had also owned a Volkswagen in his youth and stated its central importance for the time, stating that everyone had the popular car, how good it was, and the uniqueness afforded by the car. It was clear that marketing and the consumer ideology in the past resonated with the participants in a way that contemporary marketing did not. With older commercials discussed as “containing more authenticity”, “being more natural”. While also being more unobtrusive; “simply presenting the value of the product” rather than trying to enforce or manipulate the receiver, as was argued to be the main objective for contemporary marketing.

The juxtaposition between narratives of their youth compared to perceptions of youth today appeared to enhance the notion that participation within the marketplace as unwanted and detrimental. As the discourse of elderly consumers stated that the actual precarious situation is to be young today rather than old. Nisse for example, described the youth as “Being in a precarious situation due to being more confided in their potential of being themselves”, while Lisa claims that the majority of young consumers “all end up looking eerily similar to each other” and attributed it to the detrimental effect of marketing that she herself is no longer subjected to. In contrast to their own youths, where, despite their own enjoyed memories of employing mainstream brands of the time to form a social identity - stories often involved experiences of belonging through brands - as being outside brand and consumer ideology was still perceived to be possible.
The strong affective rejection towards any contemporary marketed ideal became particularly evident when respondents were discussing the pictures of Jennifer Lopez, Jennifer Aniston, George Clooney, and Johnny Depp, especially post learning the celebrities current ages (49, 50, 58 and 55 respectively). And, it was rapidly pointed out that no “normal” person could ever look like that. In particular to reference with Lopez (picture B).

With Katniss calling it boring and devoid of any personality just like younger models that “are not allowed to show any joy for life at all or spontaneity [...] and are you going to show a facial expression, especially on the younger models, then they have to look utterly gloomy, as if life is a hell”.

Although some of the participants were only one or two years away in age from some of the celebrities the presented marketed images were not perceived nor recognized as representative for their age or social group. Instead, they were most often discussed as targeted towards younger consumers, often in connection to inauthenticity.

“There is so much one can do with make-up that they do and then photoshop. Sometimes it can even become like a completely different person which is unfortunate and sad. Because, I mean, teenage girls that begin to use make-up, they want to emulate these people. It kind of becomes this huge gap between what is real and what simply is…” Lisa

While the elderly consumers themselves thus, regarded the market as one characterized by a dogma of youth (Coupland, 2003; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2006), it was concomitant dismissed as a malevolent entity that produced detrimental effects for those involved (youth). Consequently, elderly consumers negotiated their lack of representation as a victory over the dubious machinations of marketing. Where, the participants claimed to be too experienced and knowledgeable due to their old age to fall for marketing’s manipulative strategies, in contrast to younger generations. This was concomitant presented as the main reason for the marketing’s over-emphasis on youth i.e. the gullibility of younger generations. Something I was not seldom called into action to help confirm. The discussion of their thoughts on advertisement would at times shift to include me and lead to questions regarding my experience with commercials and a compassionate sadness for my behalf due to living in such a commercialized society. Asking me to validate the experience of contemporary commercial as exploitative, detrimental and most of all limiting as well as enforcing a confirmative identity of sameness.
From a psycho-social lens, the construction of such a trope and narrative can be regarded as a defensive barrier that enables a subject position that hides one’s exclusion. Forming a narrative that subsequently explains and gives a positive reason for the absence of marketed images, campaigns and products directed towards the elderly consumer. As such, aiding in sustaining a distance to confronting one’s absence and maintaining a notion of social inclusion. That in addition to a Baudrillard theory of postulating subjects as forced operators of signs which always exists in relation to the wider social sphere (the market). Projects older consumers to constitute their lack of representative images and products through a direct differential relationship with participating i.e. younger consumers. Signifying a collective identity by virtue of anti-sign, of difference from the majority. Therefore, still in relation and connection with the market but one that simultaneously signifies their absence from the very same social institutions of the marketplace.

However, the Åhlens pictures displayed after the more traditional set of marketing mediated images was part of a recent campaign to include and target elderly consumers (see pictures G, H and I in appendix A). Presenting an opportunity to perceive whether the participants identified with the picture and whether it produced any changes in their perception of advertisement as detrimental, now that it was an attempt to directly target them (in contrast to the majority of advertisement). And, lastly, whether image related to their social notion of an elderly individual). For the participants who were yet not retired but for which its horizon was evidently a stressful and looming moment (Ingrid and Klara, aged 64 and 55 respectively). The pictures (G and H) represented a way to negotiate their perceived current individual identity compared to a social identity, which they identified as represented by picture I (See appendix A). Where the pictures were heavily infused with hopes and aspirations of maintaining a sense of not yet being old and potentially synthesizing a new collective identity of “old age” with a personal notion of not feeling “that” old yet. or as Ingrid succinctly stated “When you are growing old, you don’t feel old. In your soul you still feel like you are 25. It is the body that grows older”

While noticeable in all the younger participants, for which age was synonymous with a discussion of an impending retirement (Klara and Ingrid). For Ingrid in particular, whose retirement was a mere month away, something that produced palpable feelings of anxiety and future uncertainty. Image H (see appendix A) of the older woman in a leather jacket, jeans and as she commented tough demeanor, produced a palpable change in her discourse regarding commercials.
Suddenly, all notions of being beyond commercials vanished and instead Ingrid invested into the image her hopes and aspiration that she herself could remain tough and active. Subsequently, the image would constantly be brought up by her during the full length of her discussion the moment we entered any territory that dealt with her retirement, the feelings of growing older, what was to come after she stopped working and if she ever felt old. This was in turn often accompanied by statements how she, similarly to her perception of the women in the picture, was keeping herself active (which was inferred by the fact that in picture H the elderly women was wearing Adidas pants). The representational image of an older woman near the same age as herself seemed to aid Ingrid to perceive a representational self that adhered to her current personal identity. Something she clearly found lacking before, repeatedly stating how fun and good it was that these types of images were emerging. Showcasing the salient role of marketed images for positioning one’s social identity (Russell et al., 2013; Thomas, 2013). The image permitting a recognition and investment of the self as an authentic consumer (Saren et al., 2019).

In contrast, for the majority of the respondents, which had been retired for several years, the image of the older women rather seemed to represent a fictitious construction of old, perceiving it as an attempt to make old people “younger” or as Greta stated “I think this looks a bit fake and constructed. I do not know if this would appeal to the common old person. She is trying to appear too young and to tough”. As such, it was often regarded as another case of marketing producing an ideal image that was impossible for anyone to live up to. As Lisa stated “She has a bit too youthful clothes on her, which one reacts to. The leather jacket and tight jeans. I myself might have jeans on me but it is not often I wear a leather jacket of this kind…. I mean if you blocked her face you would not think she was this old. So she has tried to made herself younger than she is”.

In this sense, for participants who had already crossed the liminal threshold (Cody and Lawlor, 2011) and reconciled their social identity as elderly through a discourse of being beyond marketing, the image represented the very lack of actual representation of elderly and marketing’s inability to include them (Bennett et al, 2016; Gilleard, 1996). In contrast, for Ingrid and Klara who were right at the threshold and anxious about an inevitable crossing to a social category of old; that was strongly connected in upcoming retirement. The image represented a possibility of not having to surrender a personal identity of authentic consumers (Downey, 2009) they desired to maintain. That conflicted with their notion of old age and being retired: absence and uncertainty (Bennett et al., 2016).
In addition, the fact that marketers were trying to depict (albeit marginally) older consumers prompted the senior retired participants (between the age of 75-80) to express a desire for advertisements that could capture representations of older consumers in a more authentic manner. There thus appeared a paradoxical relationship with the discourse that elderly consumers had established: being above marketing influence as well as the need to consume. And, yet desiring the creation of commercials that adhere more to their image of old age. However, this more authentic image of an elderly consumer proved a precarious thing to explain without positioning it into what youth was not or what old consumer had moved beyond.

Showcasing the difficulty in presenting a social cohesive identity beyond basing it on its radical difference from what it meant to be young. From a Baudrillardian (2017) and (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) lens this can be understood as the lack of symbolic resources to construct a social identity through marketplace participation results in a formulation of social identity that can only be distinguished by what it is not rather than what it is. In a sort of anti-manner that constructs their lack and absence in marketing and advertisement as celebratory to form a trope of defendable position for the subject.

5.2 Sustaining Identity

This section will outline how alternative means of consumption proved key in sustaining a relation to marketplace engagement (social inclusion) for elderly consumers. That simultaneously protected a conscious confrontation with their own alienation. While a common denominator for all participants, the ways this occurred differed greatly. As such, this section will present the main experiences of this process from various participants, that all functioned to sustain a social identity of inclusion and resistance towards a stereotypical elderly marketing image.

5.2.1 Liminal Identity

Discussing the social identity of an older person, participants would -as has been touched upon in the previous discussion- refer to notions such as tant (old lady) or gubbe (old man) to paint a picture of the perception of the collective identity of old people as one in large dominated by a negative view and discourse in large. For the participants who were close but had not yet reached retirement, the social detrimental identity of old people produced tangible effects of anxiety and uncertainty in regard to their own personal identity.
In contrast, for the participants that were significantly older and had been retired for a multitude of years the collective identity of older people rather presented a frustrating image that became constantly enforced upon them and that they vehemently rejected by framing it as a matter of some old people who come to stand for the majority e.g. “taner” and “gubbar”. However, it also produced palpable difficulties in framing one’s personal identity and in order to construct a personal identity that did not adhere to the collective identity projected by society and marketing at large. Services and products were employed in order to signify an image of self that did not -in the minds of the participants- adhere to the detrimental notion of old people. However, as the media marketed images of old people played upon the tropes the participants were attempting to avoid, finding such commodities, proved challenging.

From a Baudrillardian (2017) lens, this is because of the impossibility of any individual identity that is not constituted by its relational difference through acquired signs in the market. And, as the signs that formulate the relational difference are completely dependent on consumption, older consumers find themselves unable to avoid the market altogether. These examples of expressed uncertainty and anxiety can be interpreted as stemming from the reliance on signs and symbolic confirmation for inclusion and therefore; revealing participants fear of losing their current symbolic buttress. Consequently, participants adopted various coping strategies to carve out a space that either, marked them out as different, allowed them to engage in the market but without confronting marketed mediated images. Seeking out spaces that offered liminal products without clear sign-value categorization, enabling consumption (Cody and Lawlor, 2011). Or engaging in practices which displaced and hid the fact that they were partaking in the marketplace.

This was prevalent in all participants but showcased itself differently depending on age. Klara (aged 55) for example had a child eleven years old and when discussing consumption practices Klara would talk about how she predominantly purchases things for her child (often in H&M). In addition, although Klara stated that the stores were becoming all the more directed towards younger people “Now it feels as if I am no longer a customer they want, because they only have things that work for young people”. She would nevertheless, while already being there pass through the female section to peruse items she might be interested in. However, if unable to find something and taking too long, this would lead to stressful and anxious moments when recognition of her lack of consumption options made her exclusion visible (Berlant, 2011). Turning the store into a social arena of scrutiny (Hutton, 2019), where if the store was full Klara would often feel at unease, preferring to shop during times when fewer people were present.
Consequently, Klara would always end by reassuring me (and herself) that at the end of it all, she in fact only really goes there for the children clothing. As for Lisa, while she still engaged in marketplace consumption, consumption of objects, (mostly clothes) would exert itself as at times anxious moments due to the uncertainty if she was buying clothes that were too young i.e. that made her try to appear young. Which was resolved by being subjected to what she termed the “fashion police”, her two daughters which would ring judgment whether their mother managed to balance the fine line between looking too young or too old. It was subsequently not only clothes that made her appear too young that was subject to judgment, but also clothes that made her look too much of a “tant”.

Placing Lisa in a difficult position of having to navigate between both social identity roles, which presented itself as constantly fluctuating between both. Her consumption of clothes (sign-objects) signifying her position and relation to society as a whole (Baudrillard, 2017). A strenuous navigation as Lisa had an increasingly hard time consuming without ending up too much into one or the other. Evident in a recent purchase of shoes; “Actually, sometimes I buy “tant” clothes. I am a “tant” now so I am allowed to have such shoes for example. However, both my daughter said No immediately when I came home with a pair and told me to return them haha”. This process of attempting to buy “tant” shoes is according to Cody and Lawlor (2011) an attempt to approach an established social position due to the inexistence of in-between boundary positions within consumer culture. Enforcing a choice between binary social roles (Cody and Lawlor, 2011). In addition, as the option of fully assuming a social position as young is barred the only permissible one is that of a “tant”. A process Lisa was undertaking - albeit in secret- as she had constructed her home as a space which she - regardless of complaints- was allowed to wear older and more “tant” clothes. Showcasing her reluctance to insofar adopt the “tant/old lady” persona socially.

In the case of Ingrid, she avoided any traditional and larger stores, opting to instead consume in various second-hand stores, outlets, and markets. Often bringing old objects to trade in and then purchase new objects. Something she conceptualized more akin to a trade exchange than purchasing. Where the second-hand market functioned as a liminal market where the exclusion and omission of older consumers were not present due to objects not being imbued with a clear categorization of their sign-value (Cody and Lawlor, 2011). As they are not subjected to the mediated control of marketing and as such, not put under the consumer ideology of youth that excludes elderly consumers (Coupland, 2003; Moschis, 2003). Evading a stressful confrontation of exclusion as in the case of Klara and the H&M store.
For Greta and Nisse (both 80 years old) and Lasse (79), all significantly older than the majority of the other participants, the ability to negotiate their individual identities contra their social one was centered around the act of refurbishing aspects of their home and existing goods. An avenue where they could engage in consumption by spending money on repainting, changing and designing various objects or elements of the home, while avoiding direct participation in the marketplace. Followingly, all three of them stated the need for more products and consumption to be superfluous but would repeatedly discuss how they were considering various projects for objects they already owned. As well as whom they would contact to get it done.

Juxtaposing the interviews and discourses and consumption practices. It became apparent that entering into a new social collective identity of “old” was a transgressive threshold, that produced changes in consumption practices (marketplace participation). Showcased by the various ways’ participants had and were experiencing as well as negotiating consumption. For all of the participants, marketing, advertisement and marketplace consumption went hand in hand. The rejection of a stereotypical image, therefore, inevitable included a rejection of consumption in the marketplace. As the objects that the participants either acquired or engaged in (renovation, repainting) came to symbolize this non-relationship with the market. However, instead of a positive experience of love through key objects as promoted by Ahuvia (2005). For elderly excluded consumers, it’s a relationship characterized by constant tension, in a perpetuating state of conflict in trying to construct an individual identity in contrast to a social identity they constantly come into conflict with. Simultaneously, due to the inability of not participating in consumption without becoming completely excluded (Baudrillard, 2017). Participants of elderly consumers engaged in periphery marketplace consumption practices that allowed them to engage the marketplace to some degree. While avoiding and sheltering themselves from any interaction with the marketplace that would have meant a confrontation with their own alienation.

5.2.2 Conflicting Identities

While these liminal marketplace consumption practices served to carve out spaces for the participants to renegotiate their identity contra the one circulated by marketing, it had to be repeatedly reiterated in interactions with other social actors. Lacking a cohesive social identity not formulated by its absence (Gilleard, 1996), the elderly were repeatedly confronted by a discourse informed by consumer ideology that categorized as them as frail and in need of aid due to their bodies.
The personal identity of elderly consumers was always placed within this existing categorization by other social actors. In this case largely defined by their non-access to consumption and symbolic resources (Belk, 1988; Gilleard, 1996). And, even in its resistance elderly consumers still had to operate within the space of social identity (Thomas 2013). Ingrid and Klara, although seemingly not consciously, brought up several aspects that formed their distance in the discussion when faced with a social other that had placed them in a marketed informed category of old. For example, when asked about their retirement by others and the possibility for relaxation and rest, they would instead begin to emphasize their dancing and more active aspects instead.

Moreover, when I expressed my admiration and surprise of the degree of their bodily activities (which recognized afterward to be my surprise due to my own image of old people as playing boule, taking walks or bowling as the majority of activity), the reactions (change in tone of voice and body language) showed the affronted disposition to my surprise. The body for elderly consumers was thus an important place of contention between personal identity and social identity.

5.3 Signifying Age: The Old Body

For all of the participants, the aging body, their body was a precarious thing to discuss. For the three participants (Klara 55, Ingrid 64 and Lisa 60), it signified an uneasy relation to growing older and what such aging would entail. The body became a source of increasing degrees of limitations, that was forced to be taken into account in new ways. A limitation they ostensibly ignored as much as possible. For the four older participants (Katniss 75, Greta 80, Nisse, 80 and Lasse 79) this required a stage of planning before embarking on tasks or activities in order to ensure the body was up to the task. Therefore, the process of aging as a visible change on the surface of their bodies became a predicament, a relationship Lisa saliently put into words saying that” you don’t feel old. In your soul you still feel like you are 25. It is the body that grows older”

The most problematic issue of the visibly aging body was the palpable change in social relations, as social interactions became structured around age. That changed the way other social actors interacted with them, nudging them towards a social position of old age that created cracks and discomfort in participants which attempted to distance themselves from a “typical role” and social identity assigned to old people.
As in Lasse’s case who expressed his annoyance at finding a middle-aged man changing his tone and slowing down his speech when addressing Lasse compared to others. However, as Arnould and Thompson (2005) and Thomas (2013) states, consumer ideology forms the normative poles for identity. And, although the participants would attempt to negotiate their own personal identity as separate from a social identity of old people. Other social groups and members still formulated their interaction on the axis of a social identity informed by consumer ideology, which denied the elderly symbolic value and construed them as aging (failing) bodies in need of repair (Bennett et al., 2016; Gillear, 1996). Consequently, rendering elderly consumers symbolically invisible (Baudrillard, 2017).

Physical activities became a mode of resistance for several participants. For Ingrid, dancing played a pivotal role in her sustainment of identity, staying active, being fit was a recurring theme that was brought up in relation to discussions of marketed images of old people. “I dance often, actually, I dance more often now than when I was young. I think it is fun to keep the body and brain going” serving as a marker of distinction from the typical frail old body as presented by advertisement images. Dancing and staying fit similarly played an even more pivotal role for Katniss identity, where likewise to Ingrid it accentuated her distance from the ideal of frail and old. What had started as a return to dancing (ballet) she had done as her youth, quickly spread to include a multitude of dancing classes, sessions as well as teaching dancing to others. Therefore, when during the interview she required a moment to stand up due to bodily discomfort, it was unhappily so, and she politely refused my offers to pause the interview for a short break and eluded what appeared to be an unwelcome topic that had forced itself into the setting.

Unwittingly or not the body thus became a site of contestation for the social identity of old people, that produced a certain discourse the participants rejected. Consequently, the body became a project where, if one managed to sustain an active and healthy body, one could displace or at the very least contest the assignment of old on the basis of appearance alone (Coupland and Gwyn, 2003). For the more junior participants, the body played an immensely active part in their negotiation of aging and a gradual disappearance from the social, coming to signify the very change (of identity) they resisted against. While not possible for the older participants who were unable to sustain that level of activity. Sustaining the body in condition to avoid the bodily ailments that all participants (between the age of 55-64) attributed to and connected with age became paramount in negating the advance into a social identity of old.
As well as the increasing change in social relations and engagements they came across during their daily lives. Often describing their exercise in relation to aging “it makes you feel like you are years younger” and “I don’t feel old in my body at all”.

However, this negation of visible aging only functioned as long as the body itself functioned. In other words, breakages, breakdowns, and interruptions enforced a confrontation with the old body, as when Nisse poignantly stated about his inability to ride a bike “the body is not up to standards anymore”. Something that endangered the negation her body as Ingrid stated, “only looking old”. The most problematic consequences of such interruptions and breakdowns of expected bodily functions is that it leads to a discourse that shifted the participants towards an axis of the old body as one in constant disrepair and thus in need of maintenance, reducing the role of agency and independence that characterized their constructed identities (for the younger participants). A factor that became very poignant when such bodily breakdowns forced the person to visit a medical professional.

While some of these visits were age-related and some argued not to be, the problematic of meeting a medical professional was that regardless of the issue at hand, the cause would always be negotiated on the place of their old body as the source of the issue. The dominant ideology and subsequent discourse of the old body as a body in distress (Bennett et al., 2016) came here in full force and was unable to acknowledge the problem other than as a caused by or as a symptom of an old body. And, even if eventually some participants expressed success in changing the view of the problem as age-related, it was nevertheless, always the initial part of any medical meeting. Subsequently, for the most part, participants simply resigned themselves to being reduced to a dysfunctional age machine (Baudrillard, 2017).

Forming a discrepancy between the elderly and the rest of society, where, elderly consumers find themselves unable to be engaged on a symbolic level due to the lack of any symbolic representation of the elderly beyond once again a functional plane (Baudrillard, 2017). Due to age, elderly consumers (people) are thus placed in a discoursal position that strips them of symbolic value by failing to acknowledge them as such, instead of relating them in terms of a (dis)function because of age (Baudrillard, 2017). Informing a normative image that enforces a societal discourse that engages the elderly in virtue of a circulating ideological image that denies the elderly any symbolic value insofar (Baudrillard, 2017). Where the individual’s sign value (social status, individual expression through sign-objects), aspects that otherwise form the basis of recognition and informs initial discussion are instead displaced (Baudrillard, 2017).
Consequently, denying the individual itself through, in the case of medicinal meetings; relating all ailments to dysfunction due to age. From a Baudrillardian (2017) lens, this underlies the symbolic location of the elderly as signifiers of death, - the unnegotiable other of capitalist life - rendering any symbolic acknowledgment for the elderly unrealizable as long as the deathless operation remains as such, as the absence of death suffuses all levels of modern existence.
6. Conclusion

The predominant foraging for rational, logical and incorporeal answers of the lack of marketing for the elderly has led to a simplistic way of understanding the exclusion (and absence) of elderly consumers. This has sequentially misconstrued a comprehension of how and why the absence of elderly consumers came to be and concomitant, the methods to address it. An issue magnified by a significantly increasing age cohort of elderly consumers. As the interviews in this study have displayed, hitherto attempts still come short and remain too bound up by traditional marketing scholarship, that has failed to fully grasp the ideological, cultural and symbolic facets of marketplace inclusion and exclusion, as well as critically examine its own underlying assumptions.

This study has sought to aid to this exploration, by contributing how social inclusion is dependent on symbolic resources (sign-value) and how the exclusion of elderly consumers occurs as the process of aging leads to a progressive inability to conform to an authentic image of the authentic consumer. An image which is dominated by youth, promulgated by consumer ideology. Consequently, the inhabitation of an aged and aging body becomes the demarcation of this difference, which separates the elderly and reduces social engagements to a functional level instead of a symbolic one. Subsequently, denying the elderly of symbolic value as marketed and cultural representational images disappear or become effaced from sign-value (medical and insurance commercials). Excluding them from the marketplace by invalidating them as inauthentic consumers and disallowing a social cohesive position beyond one poised as anti-youth (authentic) consumer.

Furthermore, by drawing on Jean Baudrillard’s (2017) theory of symbolic exchange and death, this thesis outlined a theoretical framework that permitted an exploration of the lack of marketplace representation and subsequent exclusion of the elderly as due to the elderly standing as signifiers of death by virtue of their old age and bodies. Death which capital life and society seeks to abolish. This was in turn applied to an interviewee data set employing a psycho-social approach to investigate how the process of exclusion was negotiated. Showcasing how lack of marketplace representation and approaches to discernable life transgressions (retirement) leads to the construction of a trope and narrative that places the elderly as above the needs and allure of the market. As well as being above what is argued to be the manipulative touch of marketing.
However, elderly consumer still desire representation albeit one that recognizes a normal and “authentic” elderly consumer, fervently rejecting current circulating images of elderly consumers. Furthermore, due to the impossibility of being utterly separate from the market without existing social life altogether, elderly consumers simultaneously engage in alternative ways of consumption that allows the sustainment of their image as beyond the market while pursuing various consumption engagements. This image of self as beyond marketing constantly comes into conflict in engagements with other social actors. In particular, as the axis of interaction is often based around the negative image of function for the other social actor that the elderly rejects. One of the more poignant cases lies in medicinal meetings, where all ailments are (initially) approached as a dysfunction of their aging bodies. Showcasing the relationship between exclusion and symbolic value as pivotal in seeking to understand the exclusion of the elderly.

This thesis has thus aided to highlight the role of commodities for social participation and inclusion, while departing from the widely held assumption amongst marketing research that situates the inclusion of the elderly as a matter of rationally showcasing the elderly’s monetary potential (Moschis, 2003; Tynan, 1990/89;). As such, it has also served to problematize the notion of the market as a free and open entity (see Wilkie and Moore, 1999), by arguing that symbolic representation within the marketplace adhere to certain pre-accepted normative poles and therefore, erects excluding boundaries. This thesis has, therefore, contributed to trace(outline) how Baudrillardian theorizing which postulates the economy as structured by signs can be employed in order to expand the current marketing research oeuvre on exclusion and inclusion. It also serves to supplement existing research in the field by offering an alternative perspective to a largely omitted phenomenon (exclusion of elderly consumers) while establishing the central role of commodities for personal as well as social identity (Baudrillard, 2017; Saren et al., 2019; Tian and Belk, 2005).

As these findings were made evident and possible through employing a psycho-social methodology, it emphasizes how a psycho-social approach could serve as a useful tool for understanding consumer meaning-making frames and identity negotiations in relation to consumption from a critical perspective. One that recognizes the subjective nature of dealing with consumer meaning and the role of the researcher in co-constructing truth; often obscured or absent in marketing research. Opening up an avenue to critically scrutinize our own production of knowledge. Furthermore, a psycho-social method supplements existing
marketing scholarship by recognizing that not only are our respondents and participants are beings of affects and emotions but so are us researchers.

Providing a more nuanced interpretation of consumer behavior, one that takes into account the individual as possessing an agency but one that is limited and influenced by external social forces. Facilitating a further discussion of the ethical considerations inherent in all production of knowledge. As the field of marketing moves forward, this thesis therefore, argues that a psycho-social method could provide several benefits in endeavors to understand marketplace as well as consumer behavior.

Lastly, this study has highlighted the complex interconnected relationship between the market, ideology, identity and exclusion by drawing upon the thoughts, experiences, and emotions of 7 active elderly consumers. In doing so it has widened the avenue for further questioning of the dominant position awarded logic and rationality within marketing scholarship as well as practice from a critical vantage point. It can thus be seen as following the lines of Cova, Maclaran and Bradshaw (2013) who claim that “postmodernism inspired us to challenge mainstream marketing theories and rethink consumer research in significant ways that exposed embedded ideologies and power relations in taken-for-granted concepts and techniques.” (p. 214). This thesis provides further grounds for such a stance affirming the centrality of viewing the market as a cultural and ideological machination.
7. Limitations and Future Research

As the scope of this research, due to time and resource constraints, focused predominantly on the aspect of old age and its implication for exclusion, there a several facets of old age and exclusion that remained open for future research. Firstly, old age in this thesis took its point of departure from previous marketing literature which identified as above 50 or 55. However, the process of this study displayed certain discrepancies between the more senior (between the age of 75-80) and the junior participants (between the age of 50-64) and as Mumel and Prodnik (2005) have argued the homogeneity of old people is dubious at best. Future research could as such, more closely examine key differences amongst older generations in relation to exclusion and consumption practices as, in the way currently defined elderly consumers can be situated from 50 to 85.

Similarly, there are also interesting questions raised whether the negotiating of absence and the use of symbolic resources are similar or differ across gender orientations. For example, whether a higher social demand on women to manage appearances influences their relation to visible aging compared to men. In addition, this study included 5 female and 2 male participants, potentially skewing data to be more applicable to female experience and negotiation of gender. Future study may thus compare the general findings here with a focus including a larger respiratory of male respondents. As a final remark, of interest to note in the case of future studies was the existence of salient discrepancies in what constituted a tant (an old female) compared to a gubbe (old man). However, as this study focused on the old as a collective group and thus the shared notions of both, taking into account those differences are instead suggested for any potential future study.
8. References


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Appendices

Appendix A - Pictures

Picture A

Picture B
Appendix A

Picture C

What’s my advice for healthy-looking, radiant skin?
A positive attitude and Aveeno.

Picture D

Enduring Glow
BY JENNIFER LOPEZ
Appendix A

Picture E

![Image](image1)

Picture F

![Image](image2)
Picture G

Picture H
## Appendix B – List of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
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<td>15/03-2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Retired</td>
<td>1 h 50 min</td>
<td>15/03-2019</td>
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<tr>
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Appendix C – Interview Guide: translated from Swedish

**Conversation starter:** picture pairs,
- A pair that show typically ‘young consumers’ and ‘mature consumers’
- A pair showing ‘people of a certain age’ represented differently – Cruise and George Clooney (both 56) – and then the same for female celebs.

**Q1:** If I say the word commercial what comes to mind?

**Q2:** Where do you most often come into contact with advertisement/commercials

**Q3:** What would you say makes a commercial good?
- What makes a commercial bad?
  - Example of a good commercial?
  - Example bad commercial?

**Q4:** Does advertisement/commercials play a role in what you buy?
- If yes, in what way?

**Q5:** Can you tell me about your most recent meaningful purchase?
- What brand was it?
- Did the brand play a role on your decision?
  - If yes: why?
  - If no: ask what he/she looks at to decide

**Q6:** If I say the work young, what comes to mind for you?
- Do you remember a commercial from your youth?
- What did you like about that commercial?
- How did you feel about commercials when you were young?
- Has commercials/advertisement changed since you were young?
- How has it changed?

**Q7:** At your first job, what was the first thing you used to buy when you had your paycheck?
- What did you save money for at the time?
  - Is it the same now?
  - What is the first thing you buy when you receive money now?

**Q8:** If I say the word old, what comes to mind?
- Do you have an experience or memory of when you’ve felt old?

**Q9:** What comes to mind with the word Tant?
- What comes to mind with the word Gubbe?