

# Masculinity and Virility – Representations of Male Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Sweden<sup>1</sup>

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*What should historians do with contrasting and contradictory accounts of male sexual practices and how should these be connected to notions of masculinity? Although the analysis of masculinity has developed sophisticated models of hierarchic and multiple masculinities, the history of sexuality has long been dominated by a phallogentric model. In this model, before the emergence of modern concepts of sexual identity in the nineteenth century, male sexual behaviour and desire were really about domination and the demonstration of social power, primarily symbolized by the active performance of penetration and the passive submission of the penetrated partner whether in hetero- or same-sex relations. The first sections of this essay deal with the relevance of this model for eighteenth-century Sweden, with reference to male self-apprehension and descriptions of male sexual practices in two secret diaries and autobiographies which, taken together, provide very different images of male sexuality. It will be argued here that the concept of virility in the sense of culturally constructed notions of bodily and sexual comportment as ultimate symbols of masculine strength and vigour could play a crucial role in connecting male sexual practices and meanings of masculinity. The essay closes with a brief suggestion of where the basis for hegemonic ideas of masculinity may be found..*

How do historians reconcile contrasting and contradictory accounts of male sexual practices and how should these accounts be connected to notions of masculinity? Although the analysis of masculinity has developed sophisticated models of hierarchic and multiple masculinities, the history of sexuality has long been dominated by a phallogentric model. In this model, before the emergence of modern concepts of sexual identity in the nineteenth century, male sexual behaviour and desire were really about domination and the demonstration of social power. The first sections

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<sup>1</sup> Masculinity is used as the analytical term for socially constructed notions of male sex and gender, while manliness refers more specifically to early modern representations of masculinity.

of this essay deal with the relevance of this model for eighteenth-century Sweden, with reference to male self-apprehension and descriptions of male sexual practices in two secret diaries and autobiographies from the mid-eighteenth century. Below, it will be argued that the concept of virility in the sense of culturally constructed notions of bodily and sexual comportment as ultimate symbols of masculine strength and vigour could play a crucial role in connecting male sexual practices and meanings of masculinity. The essay closes with a brief suggestion of where the basis for hegemonic ideas of masculinity may be found.

### **A true masculine hero? The erotic conquests of Gustaf Halldin**

The starting point for this enquiry is two secret, erotic diaries or journals which, taken together, provide very different images of early modern male sexuality in Sweden. The first, kept by Gustaf Halldin, the son of a county treasurer in Falun, and who, after a successful career as a state secretary in Stockholm, was later ennobled and taking the surname Hallenstierna, corresponds closely with assumptions of a phallogentric mode of sexuality. In *Mina kärleksäventyr (My Erotic Adventures)*, Halldin recounts his sexual conquests in late eighteenth-century Stockholm. Halldin, as he was still known during his documented erotic career (and as he will be called here), was not a man to take no for an answer. He took every opportunity to ambush and force himself on young housemaids, letting his hands insinuate themselves under skirts and blouses. Such behaviour seems to have been quite usual in the male circles of ambitious, career-seeking civil servants in the Swedish capital. Halldin recalls how once he was relaxing with friends when a girl who sold diverse “friperies” was brought into the room. His friends proved eager to “finger the merchandise”, “both the visible and the hidden”. The girl wanted to leave but was stopped, and “it was proposed in French that someone ought to do the company honour”. Halldin was chosen and the others left the room. At first, the girl cried but “soon became genial”. After “a little coaxing” and the offer of a ducat in payment, “she made herself comfortable”. During the act itself, Halldin’s friends opened the door a little in order to watch, and finally rushed in laughing and “babbling”. Sniffing, the girl grabbed her basket and ran off. For the middle-aged Halldin and his friends, the whole thing was a “point of honour” – the ducat was taken from their common purse “pour l’honneur du froc”.<sup>2</sup>

All this more or less forced seduction of housemaids was justified by claiming that the girls themselves desired it. “I have”, he wrote, “during my many erotic forays and adventures noted that very few take offence at being courted in this manner as one seeks to acquaint oneself with their little secret. They always see it as evidence of affection and a confirmation of their beauty and charm. Though it is also part of the game that at least the first times, they pretend to be surprised, so that it should

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<sup>2</sup> Gustaf Halldin 1972. *Mina kärleksäventyr av Gustaf Hallenstierna. En dagbok från sjuttonhundratalet redigerad och med inledning av Gardar Sahlberg*. Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 89f.

not appear that they did it voluntarily. Thus one must always be bold, clever, and a bit impudent. A modest man, or one who allows himself to be summarily rejected on his first attempt, is considered a weakling". In fact such a man is doing women a disservice, since "they would happily have the honour of their resistance" before finally relenting.<sup>3</sup> The lack of emotional mutuality is palpable. When Halldin confronts a housemaid who makes demands on him, he is suddenly in a hurry to get rid of her – imagine what damage such a woman could do as a lawfully-married spouse if she tries to take command of his feelings in this manner! The very idea makes him shudder.<sup>4</sup> Sex without dominance and submission seems to have been unthinkable for Halldin. The account in general is not particularly arousing; descriptions of strong feelings and erotic passions are conspicuous by their absence. Instead, emphasis is placed on how Halldin approaches, manipulates, and overcomes the resistance of girls and young women. The entire account is imbued with images of an obtrusive lout who time after time grasps, grabs, "attacks" and finally gets what he wants, and a woman who cannot escape, who must relent and "pay the penalty".<sup>5</sup>

Halldin's described behaviour and attitude correspond with assumptions about a dominant phallogentric sexuality, according to which male sexuality was first and foremost performed by penetration as a confirmation of power and social dominance. This perspective, which has most often been associated with Michel Foucault's analysis of power and sexuality, has been further elaborated, in particular by David M Halperin. Halperin emphasises that in antiquity, sex was not perceived as an act of mutual satisfaction but as something performed *by* someone *on* someone else.<sup>6</sup> Although Halperin bases his model on the classical era, similar assumptions have also been made about more modern times. Thus, it has been claimed that the emergence of a modern homosexual identity in Sweden was preceded by a "rural penetrative paradigm" of a more general character, according to which "an animal, another man or a woman [was] merely a tool to satisfy one's sexual needs".<sup>7</sup> Another well-known study states that to have sex without penetration was "nearly inconceivable" in early modern times, due to the dominant phallogentric view of sexuality.<sup>8</sup> Penetration as an ultimate source of male triumph and self-esteem

3 Halldin, *Mina kärleksäventyr*, 187; Cf. Jonas Liliequist 2001. Om vidsynta äkta män och ömsinta älskare i 1740-talets Norrland. In Claes Ekenstam, Thomas Johansson & Jari Kousmanen (eds.) *Sprickor i fasaden. Manligheter i förändring*. Stockholm: Gidlunds förlag. 53–83.

4 Halldin, *Mina kärleksäventyr*, 199, 202.

5 For a more detailed analysis, see Liliequist, Om vidsynta äkta män; and Jonas Liliequist 2004. Manlighet och virilitet i 1700-talets Sverige. In Jakob Christensson (ed.) *Sjuttonhundratalet. Tidskrift utgiven av Sällskapet för 1700-talsstudier*. 34–51.

6 David M. Halperin 1990. *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love*, New York: Routledge.

7 Jens Rydström 2001. *Sinners and Citizens. Bestiality and Homosexuality in Sweden 1880–1950*. Stockholm: Stockholm's University, 91

8 Rudolf Dekker & Lotte van de Pol 1989. *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 69, 78. For a critique of this see Jonas Liliequist 2000. Cross-Dressing and the Perception of Female Same-Sex Desire in Early Modern Sweden. In Lars-Göran Tedebrand (ed.) *Sex, State and Society. Comparative Perspectives on the history of Sexuality*. Umeå: Almqvist & Wiksell International. 337–352.

most certainly characterises Halldin's descriptions of his erotic conquests. How representative was this phallogentric perception for eighteenth-century Swedish society?

## Phallogentricism and male homosociality

Halldin's behaviour is clearly described as part of a larger homosocial pattern. Time after time it becomes obvious how the various episodes begin in contexts of male socialising with friends and acquaintances. Halldin "bequeaths" a maid to one of his friends when he leaves Uppsala. Another is "recommended" by a friend who was of the opinion that she would probably be "agreeable". Halldin promises to introduce his friend Laurin to one particular lady's maid in return for his friend returning the favour, and so on. This homosocial pattern also bore the distinct stamp of class. Halldin himself would eventually become a member of the newly-ennobled class of civil servants, and socialised from the start of his career with individuals who would subsequently rise to respectable and leading positions in society. In the above-mentioned episode with the girl who sold fripperies, the company included "Rosenstein, Bungencrona, Numers, Cederborg, Fredenheim, Adlerbeth, Mannerheim, Morian and Carleson of the guard" – writers, poets and government civil servants in full career or in the course of making careers.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, the object of Halldin's and his friend's obtrusive attention and sexual appetites were as a rule young, unmarried maidservants from the lower classes.

The authenticity of Halldin's accounts may not, of course, be taken for granted. Perhaps his diary was nothing more than a literary expression of male fantasies?<sup>10</sup> The manuscript seems to have been written down continuously as the episodes happened, but Halldin does not formulate any explicit motivation in the text for keeping his journal, nor express an opinion about what should happen to the manuscript after his death, nor does he address any intended audience. There are passages that could be seen as attempts at self-justification – he declares, for example, that he will never seduce the wives and daughters of "honest" men and he also refuses to recognise himself as a seducer in the literal meaning of the term. To seduce, according to Halldin, was to make a promise that was not meant to be kept and then brag about it. For his part, Halldin had never gone "the whole way" with a girl who had not "by her own will and lust fallen into the trap". But these initial passages are quickly passed over.

Seen in a comparative European perspective, Halldin's erotic journal and obsessive noting of his erotic exploits were far from unique. There are, for example, obvious parallels to the escapades of Casanova, both in the detailed descriptions of the seduction rather than the act, the emotional fickleness and the almost compulsory exploitation of every possible situation to make new conquests

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9 Halldin, *Mina kärleksäventyr*.

10 A more thorough investigation of letters and notes written by his circle of friends remains to be done and could perhaps confirm the authenticity of Halldin's diaries.

(Casanova's memoirs were, however, not published until the 1820s). But while Casanova exploited his charm and good manners in order to seduce ladies of aristocratic origin, Halldin and his friends preferred young maidservants and acted in a more straightforward manner. In this respect Halldin comes closer to another contemporary erotic diarist, John Boswell, who did not hesitate to use brutal force to get his way with reluctant prostitutes. Halldin, on the other hand, already declares in his early entries a declaration that he will never use prostitutes. These seemingly slight differences lend further authenticity to Halldin's narratives.<sup>11</sup>

There is, however, one possible source of influence that casts serious doubt on the authenticity of at least the last twenty pages of Halldin's manuscript. In these pages Halldin's female acquaintance "Miss S" tells in the first person of how she was sexually initiated in bed as a young maid by her mistress, and how thereafter she began to attend to the young gentlemen who visited the house. This text is rather close to the opening episodes in John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* of 1747, utilising the same technique of a male narrator pretending to be female.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, in Halldin's journal there is nothing that corresponds to the explicitly pornographic style of Cleland, which indicates that Halldin was a poor plagiarist or a bad pornographer or that he was not really interested in pornography.

## Phallocentrism and seduction in public discourse

Even if taken mainly as a literary representation of fantasies, the diary's phallogentric attitudes and morals seem to have been anchored in broader segments of contemporary Swedish society and culture. It is not difficult to find proof of similar attitudes and behaviour (if not to the same extent) in broader social groups of men, reproduced in the pages of court records in trials of fornication, alleged paternity and rape, or in the popular and public culture of the eighteenth century. The evidence is not always in the form of direct praise; rather it often appears as a justification summarised in the popular saying, "The maid's 'no' is her 'yes'. The more she says no, the more she means yes". Or, as explained in more detail in a contemporary dictionary of adages: "It is her modesty that does not allow her boldly to say yes, yet nevertheless to mean so".<sup>13</sup>

This moral attitude could also appeared in a more burlesque and insidious manner in printed publications like *Et Samtal på Djurgården Emellan En Ung Jungfru och En Ungkarl* (*A Conversation in Djurgården Between a Maiden and*

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11 For a closer analysis and references, see Jonas Liliequist 2007. *Kärlek, kön och sexualitet*. In Jakob Christensson (ed.) *Signums svenska kulturhistoria. Gustavianska tiden*. Lund: Bokförlaget Signum, 169f.

12 John Cleland 1985 (1748). *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press; Nancy K. Miller 1981. "I's" in *Drag: The Sex of Recollection. Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 22, 51f.

13 Christoffer Larsson Grubb 1678. *Peni Proverbiale dhet är: Ett ymnigt förråd aff allehanda gamla och nya swenska ordseedher och lährespråk*. Stockholm, 672.

a *Bachelor*) from 1785. Words are placed in the mouth of a young girl who is accosted, protests, refuses, and resists: “Listen closely now! You are being too familiar! I am going to scream! [...] I swear, I will box his ears”. But to no avail. In the end, the girl capitulates, though not so much to her impertinent cavalier as to the dormant lust that has been awakened by his brusque and insistent advances: “Well, I never would have believed it. I am fairly burning! [...] Oh, take me!” The verse ends with the author allowing the young maiden hypocritically to conceal her own lust: “I dare say to all and sundry how he behaved himself. Shame!” Here, the moral of the story is as before – fair young maidens feign resistance but deep down really want sex, as long as the man forces his will upon them. This is also the manner in which Halldin constructs his own stories.

Phallocentrism also thrived in an unofficial repertoire of bawdy songs, riddles, jokes and verses of which some have been preserved in manuscript. Thus, phallocentric attitudes seem not to have been restricted to the male circles of ennobled civil servants and lower aristocracy, as represented by Halldin and his friends. The perception that it always befits a man to make advances, that a maid’s “no” is merely an obstacle to overcome, and that penetration is a definitive source of male triumph and prestige, seems rather to have been an undercurrent to more officially approved ideologies of masculinity, which could be found across social classes and estates. These three principles can also be said to represent the very core of phallocentrism in early modern Sweden.

There was also, however, powerful criticism of seducers, besides the official condemnation and criminalisation of all sexual relations before and outside marriage by the law and the church. This “vandal of our own sex”, as the seducer was often called by respectable male writers, could be portrayed in poems, journals and on the stage, as the evil destroyer of young women’s reputation and happiness.<sup>14</sup> Nor was the seducer necessarily characterised as particularly manly. In the novel *Orthenbergiska familjens lidande* (*The Sufferings of the Family Orthenberg*), the seducer, “General H\*\*\*”, is described as a slender, imposing man with a head of black, carefully-groomed hair, a nasty sneer and thin, white hands adorned with rings glittering on fingers that constantly played over the portrait of a young female beauty inlaid in the golden knob of his walking stick. The demonic, rather than the manly, as well as an aristocratic origin are emphasised as characteristic of the seducer.<sup>15</sup> In a similar manner, seduction and womanising could be associated with vain gallants and obtrusive “sparks” (*sprätthökar*) who were said to be flocking at coffeehouses, spending their time “kissing each other, disgracing each other, [...] bragging about fights, whorechasing or other kinds of mischief”.<sup>16</sup> The spark constituted the most popular rhetorical figure of unmanliness in the public rhetoric

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14 See, for example, Didric Gabriel Björn 1792. *Den besynnerlige eller Den Uprättade Oskulden; Moraliskt Lustspel Uti Tre Akter*. Stockholm: Författarens förlag, "Företal".

15 August von Kotzebue 1794. *Orthenbergiska Familjens Lidande*. Stockholm, I, 54f.; II, 18.

16 *Sedolärande Mercurius* 1730, no. 10.

of eighteenth-century Sweden. His vanity, fickleness and exaggerated interest in “the fair sex” rendered him unmanly. Sexual indulgence then was not taken as a sign of virility. On the contrary, it was usually considered to be debilitating to the manly spirit.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, women were not the only ones portrayed as sexual victims. While moral and satirical periodicals like *Posten* (*The Post*), warned their readers about bold suitors and crafty “Tartuffes” who gained access to a young woman’s house by pretending to be respectable and making false promises, the very same periodicals also presented satires of hard-hearted “coquettes” manipulating their admirers and suitors in ruthless ways.<sup>18</sup> While coquetry was seen as a woman’s most efficient weapon to gain control over a suitor, the eighteenth century public image of the coquette could be even darker than that of the seducer. This actualises an aspect which is absent in Foucault’s analysis of power and sexuality – the question of female subjectivity and counterstrategies.<sup>19</sup> To what degree did the maids and young women internalise their roles as objects of seduction? Did women have room to manoeuvre and win something in the game where the man was always required to make a foray and the woman was expected initially to turn him down? From a male perspective, the coquette was depicted as a *femme fatale*, an irresistible and cruel seductress ruining young men’s careers and earnings. Female writers on the other hand usually saw such behaviour not only as damaging to a woman’s dignity, but also as a misdirected strategy to obtain “indirectly a little of that power of which they are unjustly denied a share”, as Mary Wollstonecraft put it.<sup>20</sup> At the same time Wollstonecraft and others warned that even the feeling of power obtained through coquetry could turn out to be nothing but a chimera: “The sensualist”, she continues, “has been the most dangerous of tyrants, and women have been duped by their lovers, as princes by their ministers, whilst dreaming that they reigned over them”.<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein, another harsh critic of the male seducer, Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht, also condemns the “pleasure-seeking” woman who is said to “plunder her lover and subdue her husband” just for the fun of it.<sup>22</sup> Like Wollstonecraft, she reminds her readers that coquetry was actually only a game

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17 Jonas Liliequist 1999. Från niding till sprätt. En studie i det svenska omanlighetsbegreppets historia från vikingatid till sent 1700-tal. In Anne-Marie Berggren (ed.) *Manligt och omanligt i ett historiskt perspektiv*. Uppsala: FRN. 73–94.

18 *Posten* 1768, no. 22, 171f.

19 Ellen Greene 1996. Sappho, Foucault, and Women’s Erotics. *Arethusa* 29, 1–14. Cf. Laura L. Runge 2001. Beauty and Gallantry: A Model of Polite Conversation Revisited. *Eighteenth-Century Life* 25, 43–63 for female resistance to gallantry discourses.

20 Mary Wollstonecraft 1974 (1792). *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc. xii. Cf. Barbara Taylor 2005. Feminists versus Gallants: Manners and Morals in Enlightenment Britain. In Sarah Knott & Barbara Taylor (eds.) *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 30–52.

21 Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication*, 48f.

22 Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht 1992 (1762). Fröjas räfst. In Olaus Petri *Witterhets Arbeten utgifne af et 1528*. Een liten underwisning om Ehteskäpet. In *Samlade skrifter af Olavus Petri*. Bengt Hesselman (ed) Bd 1. Uppsala 1914: Almqvist & Wiksell, 322.

that men allowed women to play! The games of seduction and coquetry come close to the harsh characterisation of Foucault's analytical perspective by one of his critics – “a social-Darwinian jungle of competition, domination, and status-consciousness, a vision that ignores affection, friendship, pity, all the other ways humans relate to one another [...]”.<sup>23</sup> Is this really all there is to be said about male and female sexuality in early modern times?

### **Jonas Burström's secret diary – the expression of an alternative male sexuality?**

Other male voices also made themselves heard in the genre of erotic diaries. During his stay in Härnösand in the year 1748, fifty-seven-year-old enforcement officer Jonas Burström kept a secret diary of his affair with one of the town's unmarried women, Barbro Hjelte, then twenty-nine.<sup>24</sup> Jonas Burström was married but had not cohabited with his wife for several years and the journal ended up serving as evidence in a subsequent trial for adultery. The court ordered the journal itself to be burned, but some of its contents have been preserved verbatim as they were quoted in the court transcripts. The tone of the diary is both frank and tender, as revealed already in its title, “The Erotic Dealings between J. B. and the Highly Agreeable and Prettiest B. H”. While Halldin dwells on his efforts to break down the resistance of his conquests, Jonas Burström describes his intimate relations with Barbro Hjelte as delightful. He rests his head on her “sweet arm” and one day he notes that for the first time he had occasion to “touch her dainty little pullet and clap her smooth stomach”. During an excursion on Midsummer's Day, he arranges a little love hunt in order to steal away from the others, when Barbro “ran like a hare up towards a little hill in order to conceal herself”, and he pursued her “like a hunter”. The pursuit ended in a secluded spot by a stream “where they played in Cupid's lust in all sweetness” – twice, only to fall asleep in each other's arms.

Jonas meticulously describes both his shortcomings and efforts to oblige Barbro, in sharp contrast with Halldin's triumphant, numerical count of penetrations. On 18 September Jonas records a failure when Barbro took off her clothes and got into his bed, whereupon he sank down “and with lust kissed her pullet a long time while she very amorously awaited pleasure”. When his second attempt also ended in failure, Barbro could not resist uttering a sigh that they should have met “twelve years ago”, something noted in the diary with the same fidelity as successes and affirmations. On one occasion Barbro mentioned that she received no “enjoyment” because he “got on with Cupid” too quickly; on another, that their relations ended far too abruptly and that she derived no pleasure from such “shoddy workmanship”. What is then described is characterised by the court transcript as an “appalling”

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<sup>23</sup> Bruce Thornton 1991. Constructionism and Ancient Greek Sex. *Helios* 18, 186.

<sup>24</sup> Härnösand, Sweden. Court records, Härnösands rådstugurätt, (HLA) [Provincial Archive of Härnösand], Härnösands rådstuga 14/6 1749 -10/3 1750, AI:62, AI:63. For quotations, see Liliequist, Om vidsynta äkta män.



and “abominable abuse” of “the marital limbs”. But what emerges for a modern reader is the image of mutual desire and a female sexuality which is affirmed on its own terms. The interesting thing is that this is the image of himself Jonas Burström chooses to portray.

This frank and yet tender tone also emerges in their correspondence. Barbro writes a letter to her lover in a poetic verse, which refers to Spring and the mating of the birds. “I think of mating [...] for Spring is on its way, heralded by a plucky, savoury Cupid, who moves towards a well-stuffed pillow”. In reply, Jonas calls her “most beloved sweet little girl and soft bed cushion” and describes how her “sugary-sweet letter” had such a “magnetic effect” that “Cupid [...] began to thicken, like a little sheepskin sausage”. This impression of mutuality is further reinforced by testimony in the subsequent trial, where Margareta Lång, a housemaid, speaks of the tender embraces and kisses exchanged between Jonas and Barbro, while Burström’s hostess describes their feeling for each other as “a powerful and ineffable love”. Moreover, witnesses also described how Barbro (or “Babba”, as she was affectionately called by Jonas and her friends) had written to Jonas that he had “captured her heart” and that it “would be faithful to him unto death”.

Jonas does not reveal any motive for keeping his journal, but its poetic and self-reflective tone differs radically from Halldin’s mixture of narcissistic bravado and attempts at self justification. These were words written by a man who apparently and unexpectedly had fallen in love after eight years of solitude in Stockholm, preceded by an unhappy but not yet dissolved marriage. The picture given in the journal of his wife and his former married life is dark in contrast with the meeting with Barbro, which was described as the work of Providence. “Like a magnet” he was drawn down bad roads and through snowstorms on unforeseen official business to the small town of Härnösand where he immediately caught sight of Barbro. Socially, he had a position as a civil servant of middle rank whereas Barbro was the unmarried daughter of a citizen. Barbro appears both in the journal and before the court as independent and possessed of a strong temper. At first Jonas had given her the impression that he was a widower and the disclosure after some weeks that he was married caused a serious crisis in their relationship. Barbro complained that she had been ashamed and started to press him to get a divorce. Divorce, however, was not an easy thing to obtain in early modern Swedish society. Adultery was definitely a legal justification for divorce, but the adulterous partner could not remarry without the permission of the other spouse and never with the person in the adulterous relationship. However, Jonas told Barbro that he had once caught his wife redhanded in bed with another man and that he had other evidence that he would use. Barbro was contented for the time being, but the question continued to arise and cause discord in their relationship.

What does Jonas Burström’s diary actually show? That a dominant phallogocentric perspective did not always affect practice? That there were several different concomitant male sexualities? Both interpretations are possible, but there are also circumstances that complicate such conclusions. Jonas Burström’s attitude was more complex than his secret diary would lead us to believe. Housemaid Margareta

Lång told the court that during his stay in Härnösand, Burström often attempted to convince her to engage in “fleshly commingling” and with cunning and threats force her into bed. Her testimony could be taken directly from Halldin’s journal. If this was true, how can two so apparently irreconcilable attitudes within one and the same man be explained? And how could such contradictory behaviour connect to contemporary notions of manliness? And how should the described behaviour and attitudes of Halldin and his circle of well-respected friends be interpreted against the background of the often harsh criticism of gallantry and male seduction raised in public culture, often by male writers of very much the same social origin as Halldin and his friends?

### Virility – the essentialising logic of masculinity

One way to start may be to analyse masculinity as a set of codes, notions and strategies which can be articulated in certain situations and emphasised to varying degrees during the life cycle, but which do not necessarily need to be mutually compatible. This perspective offers numerous advantages. The term “hegemonic masculinity” has facilitated the existence of a number of different masculinities in any given culture, but at the same time, the concept of masculinity has also been criticised for leading to too cohesive and clearly-delineated typologies.<sup>25</sup> Instead, a perspective that embarks from an entire repertoire of codes, notions and strategies allows for the fact that one and the same individual can display different and otherwise contradictory behaviours, depending on the situation and context at hand.<sup>26</sup>

A strategy of such central significance is all about expressing male vigour and vitality. Virility seems to be the operative term, and refers to male strength, especially in sexual terms. The central point here is that it is not necessarily sexual potency, but the immediate relationship to physical characteristics, abilities, attributes and behaviour that is a fundamental measure of masculinity. Virility embraces everything from body language, tone of voice and physiognomy, to musculature and sexual potency which, in a certain culture is considered expressive of manly essence or character. Thus, in an analytic sense, virility can first of all be seen as a “materialisation” or embodiment of postulated male qualities that make bodily appearances, organs, essences, nerves, musculature and anatomy the essential signs and sites of masculinity.<sup>27</sup> What is considered decisive can vary over time

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25 For an overview of this debate see R. W. Connell & James W. Messerschmidt 2005. Hegemonic Masculinity. Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society* 19, 829–859.

26 See Andrea Cornwall & Nancy Lindisfarne 1994. Dislocating Masculinity: Gender, Power and Anthropology. In Andrea Cornwall & Nancy Lindisfarne (eds.) *Dislocating Masculinity. Comparative Ethnographies*. New York: Routledge, 12; Alexandra Shepard 2005. From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, circa 1500–1700. *Journal of British Studies* 44, 291.

27 For an application of Judith Butler’s concept of materialisation in historical analyses, see Will Fisher 2006. *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.

and between cultures even if muscles and potency are recurring, fundamental categories. In this way, virility can be said to represent a culturally constructed notion of an essential natural core of masculinity – a kind of lowest common denominator for all men, regardless of class, status and other more sophisticated ideals. At the same time, virility is also a measure of the *intensity* and *vitality* of an individual's masculine qualities and charisma. Thus, virility does not primarily answer the question whether a person is *manly or not*, but rather *how much man he is* or if he is *man enough*. These three aspects – the embodiment, the image of an essential core, and the continuous measuring of male qualities – comprise the basic logic of virility as an analytical concept. In this sense virility comes rather close to the early modern Swedish usage of “*manlighet*” (manliness) and “*att vara manlig*” (to be manly). Virility is as much a question of prowess, maturity, capability and bodily grandeur as behaviour according to normative rules.<sup>28</sup>

How then could the analysis of Halldin's and Burström's sexual behaviours benefit from including the perspective of virility? First, Halldin's phallocentrism seems an obvious obsession with virility – the endless series of efforts to prove an ability to conquer and penetrate young housemaids, references to a strong “natural inclination” as explanatory cause and the homosocial settings as a confirmatory audience. The latter was not only a question of mutual bravado, as in the episode with the girl who sold fripperies, but also could be played out in confrontation and rivalry. Halldin tells, for example, of being invited to dinner by a female acquaintance from his youth, now wed to a wealthy shopkeeper twenty years her senior who spent his evenings gambling. However, on this particular occasion her husband came home earlier than expected and nicely drunk to boot. Halldin, having “romped” with the wife during their previous acquaintanceship, now only had eyes for the twenty-year-old maidservant of the house. The returning husband became instantly enraged and when Halldin is introduced as an old friend, he blurts, “Oh, sure, the missus seems to have many a friend from that time, but I have no wish to be cuckolded!”. Upon his wife's protestations, he retreats to the bedroom, loudly proclaiming that he was not going to be cuckolded “as long as he can do a man's work”, meanwhile trying to force his wife to go with him. “The missus good-temperedly declined [...] she wanted to leave him, but he stopped her and swore that she would stay with him”. The housemaid becomes agitated, but Halldin holds her firmly in his lap (all the while kissing and caressing her here and there) while they hear the wife being compelled to get into bed with her husband. After some “carrying on” in the bedroom, the man is heard to ask his wife to go tell her male acquaintance that he can spare himself the trouble of visiting them in the future – his “assistance” was no longer needed.<sup>29</sup> Cuckolding other men was not, however, a strategy of Halldin.

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28 SAOB, Svenska Akademiens Ordbok [The Swedish Academy Dictionary] 1893. Lund: Gleerup, Manlig, Manlighet

29 Halldin, *Mina kärleksäventyr*, 150f.

Fraternal collusion rather than erotic rivalry characterised the homosociality in which he partook.

If the authenticity of the bulk of episodes in Halldin's journal is to be taken seriously, such behaviour was certainly not part of the official picture. In a commemoration, Nils von Rosenstien praised his "oldest friend" for his sociability, wit and "manly character", alluding not, of course, to anything amorous, but to his capability and assertiveness in the making of his career.<sup>30</sup> The described behaviour and attitudes of Halldin and his friends could best be characterised as an expression of a male, class-based, double standard. The situations described in Halldin's diary were hardly things the participants would have mentioned outside their male social circle – not even Halldin himself, whose manuscript was locked up for almost two hundred years.

### Virility as a double standard

The question of the double standard lends the concept of virility a first and obvious explanatory force. As the expression of a "raw" and "natural" masculinity, virility need not be articulated publicly, or even jibe with the official ideal of masculinity. On the contrary, it can thrive as an implicit double standard and an undercurrent on which men can rely in certain situations without having to dissociate themselves from the official norm. This is most vividly illustrated by Halldin's and Burström's contemporary, James Boswell. Boswell invested considerable energy into living up to a middle-class ideal of masculinity that emphasised self-control, dignity, compassion, gregariousness, good manners and dressing in the latest fashion. Boswell agonises over his recurring failure to live up to this ideal, but also occasionally plays the role of "blackguard". He puts on worn, shabby clothing, gets drunk, hollers and swings his cane recklessly on the streets, buys sex from prostitutes or simply rapes them. The role of blackguard allows him to feel manly because it radiates a toughness acquired through physical labour and robust habits in contrast to the refined and cultivated ideals that comprise his official masculinity.<sup>31</sup> Philip Carter sees Boswell as exchanging one sort of class-based masculinity for another, but one might just as easily interpret his behaviour as falling back on a notion of virility that many others in his circle might perceive as a corrective against threatening feminisation – the violent and phallogocentric behaviour renders his sexual desire manly and vigorous instead of suggesting effeminacy through indulgence in dissipating excesses.

The basic premise for this kind of virility was domination of women as the ultimate sign of masculinity, paired with a conception of the influence of female sexuality as

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30 Nils von Rosenstein 1838. Tal öfver RegeringRådet Gust. Hallenstjerna, hållet i Malmö Kyrka den 18 Augusti 1813, då dess vapen sönderlogs. In *Samlade Skrifter*. Andra delen. Stockholm: Hellsten, 53f., 64.

31 Philip Carter 1999. James Boswell's Manliness. In Tim Hitchcock & Michelle Cohen (eds.) *English Masculinities 1660–1800*. London and New York: Longman, 111–130.

a threatening source of effeminacy. The question then was how to make a woman submit to one's will but never oneself to submit to the temptations and desire of a woman.<sup>32</sup> This is also how Halldin's phallocentrism could be interpreted – the only way to control a woman was by conquest. When it comes to mutual desire and love, a man is doomed to defeat and loss of independence. From this perspective, coquetry could function as a reinforcement of male logic, perhaps most intricately illustrated by Jean Jacques Rousseau, a favourite target of both Nordenflycht's and Wollstonecraft's criticism. Women are coquettish by nature, writes Rousseau in *Emile* from 1778.<sup>33</sup> This means that one can never trust a woman's "no" to be serious. On the contrary, it is a woman's duty to offer up a certain amount of resistance so that men can learn their own strength and how to use it. "The chief charm of the man's victory" is then "the uncertainty if it is weakness which yields to force or the woman's voluntary self-surrender".<sup>34</sup>

There is also another, more modern premise reflected in Halldin's phallocentric attitudes – the references to his possibly more sensitive male member and a stronger, inborn natural inclination to the opposite sex than others. Traditionally, lechery and unbridled sexual lust had been seen as typically feminine weaknesses. From the latter half of the eighteenth century, there was an increasing tendency to emphasise instead the intensity and strength of male desire as an implacable, powerful drive that required an outlet (in contrast to a re-drawn female passivity focused on motherhood). This new emphasis was reflected in courts of law as a more tolerant attitude towards the violent advances of young men in cases of rape as well as in medical, moral and semi-pornographic literature and doggerel; in the following century this attitude would morph into arguments in favour of legitimising prostitution as a necessary safety valve for male sexuality as part of a more or less institutionalised bourgeois double standard.<sup>35</sup>

It would, however, be a mistake to restrict the expression of virility to Halldin's phallocentrism and Boswell's blackguard behaviour. While Jonas Burström's obtrusive advances towards the maid Margareta Lång may be an expression of a similar double standard pattern, Burström seems to have been obsessed with virility and masculine vigour in his relationship with Barbro as well, but in a very different way. It becomes necessary to make a distinction between the basic logic of

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32 Cf. Lyndal Roper 1994. *Oedipus & the Devil. Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe*. London and New York: Routledge, 60.

33 Jean-Jacques Rousseau 1778 (1966). *Emile ou de l'éducation* Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 476: "la femme est coquette par état".

34 Rousseau, *Emile*, 468f.: English translation is from Jean-Jacques Rousseau 1993 (1793). *Emile*. Trans. Barbara Foxley. London: J. M. Dent, 387. Rousseau, however, insists that this is a game played on the woman's terms. The ability to attract attention and a natural cunning give her power over men – the physically more powerful sex thus only appears to be master; see Rousseau, *Emile*, 387.

35 Karin Hassan Jansson 2002. *Kvinnofrid. Synen på våldtäkt och konstruktionen av kön i Sverige 1600–1800*, Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 308; Jonas Liliequist 2006. *Sexualiteten. In Män i Norden. Manlighet och modernitet 1840–1940*. Jørgen Lorentzen & Claes Ekenstam (eds.). Stockholm: Gidlunds. 167–207.

virility (the embodiment, the image of an essential core, the continuous measuring and comparing of male qualities) and its representations in different contexts. Phallogocentric and “blackguard” virilities seem to have flourished especially in asymmetrical class relations, where males in upper social positions made advances towards housemaids and maidservants and waitresses at inns, coffeehouses and lodgings, or molested prostitutes. But there also seems to have been a connection to age and marital status. The exploitation and interchange of housemaids within the homosocial networks of Halldin’s male circle of friends went on in their twenties and thirties. Rosenstein, for example, was 22, Adlerbeth 23, Fredenheim 26 and Halldin 33 years old, all unmarried, when they accosted the young girl with the basket. Halldin never married and as the years pass, gradually his circle of friends disappears from his notes. For many of Halldin’s companions these episodes seem to have been features of youth and unmarried life rather than indications of a continuous double standard and expressions of male and class prerogatives. The question arises of to what extent Halldin’s attitudes and behaviour could have been anchored more specifically in youth culture. This lends a further explanatory force and analytical usefulness to the concept of virility as a question of maturity, and the displaying of male qualities in striving for manhood.

### Courting and romping – games of virility and youth

Youth and adolescence were described in medical and conduct books as life stages of excessive heat, great boldness and undisciplined joy, notorious for young people’s vulnerability to sensual pleasures.<sup>36</sup> From the perspective of the young male adolescence could be seen as a transitory phase, marked by striving for recognition of one’s manhood through competitive trials and tests like wrestling and various demonstrations of physical force, often organised by the peer group, and not least through the courting of young women.<sup>37</sup> Gender roles in courting were basically settled by law and tradition, which stipulated that the male was to be active and propose and the female to be passive and respond, with the parents and especially the father still having the legal option of withholding an inheritance from a son or daughter who married against their wishes. A certain male assertiveness was thus expected, but where to draw the line between legitimate and obtrusive behaviour and what was considered a seemingly response from the girl, were topics for moral discussions and commentaries. These questions were actualised most vividly in the comedy *Det våldsamma frieriet* (*The Violent Courtship*) first performed on stage in 1779.<sup>38</sup> The central issue of the play is the conflict between a father’s

36 See, for example, Heraclitus 1691. *Heraclitus eller Betrachtelse om Menniskiones Lefwernes Fåfånglighet*. Stockholm: Wankijf, 9f., Grubb, *Penus Proverbiala dhet är*, 836ff. The fatal consequences of debauchery in youth were emphasised more and more in the late eighteenth century; on this development, see Liliequist, *Sexualiteten*.

37 Sigurd Erixon 1921. *Ynglingalaget. En gengångare i samhället. Fataburen*, 95–123; Orvar Löfgren 1969. *Från nattfrieri till tonårskultur. Fataburen*, 25–52.

38 *Det våldsamma frieriet. Lust-spel i tre öppningar*. 1779. Wästerås: Joh. Laur. Hornn.



Figure 1. “På Skeppsholmsbryggan” [“On the Skeppsholm quay”]. Romping scene. Water-coloured etching, Martins skola no. 16, engraved by Märten Rudolf Heland, 1790, detail, Uppsala University Library.

authority and his daughter’s freedom to choose in matters of the heart – one of the recurring themes in eighteenth-century literature and public debate.

The play opens with Charlotta, the only daughter of Baron Stolzenfelt (a name meaning Proudfield) discovering that her father has chosen a suitor for her who will shortly arrive. The suitor is a young country squire, son of her father’s close friend Baron Wingelcreutz (Ficklecross), who has been away in Stockholm learning the latest (French) manners. After dispensing several introductory compliments upon entrance, the suitor immediately attempts to “steal” a kiss from Miss Charlotta but is fended off. But the young man takes no notice and makes a new attempt before disappearing on hearing that both barons are on their way in. Charlotta is left with her housemaid Justina. Justina, who represents a more robust point of view, says that if she were in Her Ladyship’s shoes, she would soon have the suitor “singing another tune [...] We [women] are quite rightly thought both weak and hard”. According to Justina, it is all about taking control; a girl should not be swayed until the suitor is lying at her feet begging for permission to kiss her hand. It is a game in which the young man must both be encouraged and kept on a tight leash, and the young lady learns both to relent and resist. Justina exits and the incorrigible

suitor makes his entrance once again. After a few exaggerated compliments, he rushes towards Charlotta and places his hand on her breast. She screams and Justina rushes in, but is pushed away brutally by the suitor, who continues to clutch Charlotta. The housekeeper appears and yells, "Violence! Violence! Everywhere!". The whole episode ends in tumult, with the suitor losing his wig, a shoe and his "leggings" (the ultimate early modern symbol of male authority), hopping around with a pannier pulled over his head when the two barons/fathers enter and the story moves towards its final resolution.

In this play, the young squire's poorly executed and exaggerated gallantry is juxtaposed with Justina's cunning coquetry. Gallantry fails miserably and is rejected, but so is Justina's proposed counterstrategy. At the same time, the question expands from what is considered to be proper courtship behaviour to what may be an attentive suitor's "permissible liberties" and the limits of a courted girl's seemingly receptivity, laid out in a dialogue between the two fathers after the suitor's first entrance and Charlotta's initial complaint. Charlotta's father, who is eager to make this excellent match work, is quick to upbraid his daughter for being unreceptive. On the other hand, the father of the young suitor, who values his future daughter-in-law's reputation, objects and says Charlotta has behaved admirably, not lamentably. "Remember, my dear Brother, the days of our own youth, and how a Lady, who at the least nod lay herself in our arms, was thereafter regarded". Still, Charlotta's father comes to the suitor's defence. "To treat a girl" who is to be married off "to a kiss" is more about "permissible liberties" than possible damage to her reputation. This kind of talk rendered the illegitimacy of uninvited kisses and hands on the bosom a certain negotiability as a constantly recurring theme, not just in the stratagems of Halldin but also in general discussions of love and courtship.

According to convention, kisses exchanged between unmarried individuals were counted as "marital pledges", at least when exchanged sensually. A kiss on the hand was acceptable, but not on the cheek and certainly not on the lips (the attitude towards kisses between two friends of the same sex was much more generous).<sup>39</sup> This was the official etiquette, at least among the aristocracy and urban middle classes, but kisses and small caresses could also be "stolen" by an impudent beau, or "given away" by a young woman. Halldin often associates this with the expression "att rasa" which can be best translated as "romping" – to play and frolic in a boisterous and physical way, which to a modern observer would appear rather brusque and obtrusive and hardly fitting behaviour for adults. Romping did not necessarily have any erotic connotations and could pass as a diversion in mixed, as well as in same-sex, company. At the same time, the jocular form and frolicsome tone provided opportunities for making erotic advances without having to take full responsibility – it was nothing more than fun and games! In this way, romping could constitute a grey area where distinctions between courtship, seduction and

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39 Johann Friedrich Heckel 1776. *Historisk och Philologisk Afhandling om Kyssar*. Wästerås: Joh. Laur. Hoorn, 87; Gustaf Näsström 1962. *Forna dagars Sverige III. Kulturhistorisk bilderbok om frihetstid och gustaviansk tid*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag, 117.



victimisation could easily be blurred. Unrequited advances could pass as jokes, groping as unintended intimacy or just part of the game, and intentions to seduce could be masked as playful attention before leading to outright victimisation.<sup>40</sup> This could be compared with another related genre of socialisation – “*ralleri*” or raillery – a kind of playful teasing, which could also be of a physical nature, in which distinctions between friendly jokes, offences and competitive provocations could be blurred in very much the same way.<sup>41</sup> Romping, on the other hand, could, of course, work the other way round as well, turning jests and pranks into affection and intentions to seduce into courtship.

That it was a young man’s nature to engage in romping with maids and “have a try” was something that could be taken for granted. This is illustrated in Israel Holmström’s satirical poem *En Suputhz försvar (A Drunkard’s Defense)* from the early eighteenth century, in which a young man who “sits sober as a milksop” without either “making a move” or trying to “snatch kisses [and] fish for titties” is deprecated. Only after having a little wine does he begin to “plume” himself like a “high-stepping rooster” and start to “cause a ruckus, wrestle, grab and tear, coo with lovesickness until a kiss he has got; more he may have gotten, but upon that I will not touch”. The verse concludes with a sentence in German which, freely translated reads, “He who knows the art, as one says, will not embarrass the master”.<sup>42</sup> Some authentic glimpses of popular attitudes are offered by Maria Johansdotter’s short but successful career in men’s clothes as a shoemaker’s apprentice, fiddler and womaniser. Passing as a young man, she had no problem whatsoever in getting close to young unmarried women when she worked on local farms. Indeed, a promise of lodging with the maidservants in the barn at night was offered by a leaseholder’s wife in return for Maria’s agreeing to be hired as extra farmhand during hay-making. When Maria hesitates telling the wife about the maidservants’ talk that “He won’t do”, the wife exclaimed: “Let them have at you then!”<sup>43</sup>

While romping in a broader sense could be a diversion among adults, romping also had the more specific connotation of having a fling (“*att rasa ut*”), behaviour closely associated with the concept of the virile and yet unrestrained vigour of youth and adolescence. Romping represented a form of socialising especially associated

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40 This was not, of course, restricted to mixed company; cf. the romping of Captain Hoen with his soldiers in Jonas Liliequist 1998. State Policy, Popular Discourse, and the Silence on Homosexual Acts in Early Modern Sweden. In Jan Löffström (ed.) *Scandinavian Homosexualities: Essays on Gay and Lesbian Studies*. New York & London: Haworth Press, 25, or the romping between maids; Liliequist, Kärlek, kön och sexualitet, 193.

41 Christopher Collstedt 2007. *Duellanten och rättvisan. Duellbrott och synen på manlighet i stormaktsväldets slutskede*. Lund: Sekel bokförlag, 176f.; cf. Anna Bryson 1998. *From Courtesy to Civility. Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 238f.

42 Israel Holmström 1999. *En Suputhz försvar*. In Bernt Olsson, Barbro Nilsson & Paula Henriksson (eds.) *Israel Holmström: samlade dikter I*. Stockholm: SVS (Svenska Vitterhetssamfundet), 235f.

43 Stockholm. Court record, Svartsjö län och Färentuna häradsrätt, Svea hovrätts renoverade domböcker Stockholms län 13, (RA) [Swedish National Archive], Svartsjö län och Färentuna härad. 13/2 1706, Svea hovrätts renoverade domböcker, Stockholms län 13, RA.

with youth; at the same time it could offer a first stage of informal courtship as well as opportunities for seduction and the free play of phallogocentric behaviour and attitudes, attitudes which were held in check by parents and peer groups in more official forms of courtship such as bundling (“*nattfrieri*”). Halldin, who remained a bachelor all his life, could thus also be said to represent a perpetual continuation of this pattern, free from community control and reinforced by a class-based exploitation that allowed the ageing royal sector to molest with impugny housemaids and waitresses from the lower classes.

## Virility and marital duty

Marriage and the establishment of a household in early modern society marked a definitive transformation when the son/young man acquired independence, (ideally) became the head of the household and ultimately “a real, full-grown man”. A man’s status as head of the household, husband and father emphasised demands on masculinity and virility other than the tests of strength, brawls and courtships of youth. Manhood was perceived as an age of cooler, corporeal constitution and a more reasonable mind. As a married man and the father of at least one daughter, Jonas Burström might reflect a more general marital ideal, given his performance of a more mutual and affective sexuality. Mutuality (not to be confused with equality) in the relations between husband and wife, was emphasised in marital advice literature and was also the basic premise of the concept of marital duty.<sup>44</sup> Capability and a will to “prove” to each other “due benevolence” was a requirement for marriage, and intercourse was necessary for its legal consummation. It has been argued that this also implied a valuation of marital sexual pleasure in its own right, at least in a seventeenth-century Puritan context.<sup>45</sup> Contemporary Swedish sources such as medical books, advice literature and divorce petitions are not as outspoken; Swedish Reformer Olaus Petri declares, for example, that desire and lust for the opposite sex are natural and part of God’s creation, and that marriage should be respected as something good and necessary as a safeguard against whoredom and fornication. On the other hand, young men were warned not to marry out of carnal lust – the marital desire should be reasonable; otherwise it was the same as if one were to pursue adultery before God.<sup>46</sup> What this would

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44 Jonas Liliequist 2001. Mannens våld och värde inom äktenskapet. En studie av kulturella stereotyper från reformationstiden till 1800-talets början. In Inger Lövkrona (ed.) *Mord, misshandel och sexuella övergrepp. Historiska och kulturella perspektiv på kön och våld*. Lund: Nordic Academic Press. 88–123; Andreas Marklund 2004. *I hans hus. Svensk manlighet i historisk belysning*. Umeå: Borea, 163ff.

45 Thomas A. Foster 1999. Deficient Husbands. Manhood, Sexual Incapacity, and Male Martial Sexuality in Seventeenth-Century New England. *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56, 723–744. Foster challenges the dominant view in family history that intimate relations between spouses were restricted to reproductive ends until the emergence of a companionate marriage base on love in the eighteenth century. Cf. Ruth. H. Bloch 2003. Changing Conceptions of Sexuality and Romance in Eighteenth-Century America. *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d Series LX, 13–42.

46 Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht 1992 (1762). Fröjas räfst. In Olaus Petri *Witterhets Arbeten utgifne af et 1528. Een liten underwisning om Echtskapet*. In *Samlade skrifter af Olavus Petri*. Bengt Hesselman (ed) Bd 1. Uppsala 1914: Almqvist & Wiksell, 446, 447f., 452.

imply in a Swedish Lutheran perspective is illustrated by Dean Jacob Boëthius's "confession of sin", written in 1707 during his prolonged imprisonment for lese-majesty. Under the heading "Unchaste acts within marriage" he lists his insistence on intercourse against his wife's wishes and advice, having intercourse on Sunday mornings before preaching as well as during the last days of menstruation or at a time when his wife had not been properly churched after giving birth, and the last and most abhorrent – coitus in the "wrong" position, which had caused his semen to "fall back" and "pollute" his own body and the marital bed.<sup>47</sup> Thus, restrictions were put on inappropriate times and periods, and inappropriate positions and the spilling of semen, not on mutual desire and enjoyment *per se*. On the contrary, or as it is expressed in an edifying piece of verse, when one partner is "angry and unwilling or cold, incapable and denying, while the other wants to play amorously", the marital bond is in danger.<sup>48</sup> For Carl von Linnæus, sexual pleasure was as natural as it was necessary for reproduction, and it was part of God's plan for humans to fill the earth and multiply.<sup>49</sup>

Nor did procreation as the principal purpose of marriage necessarily diminish or exclude an emphasis on mutual sexual pleasure. According to a common medical view, both the male and the female produced semen. Thus, without female orgasm, conception was considered impossible.<sup>50</sup> The fathering of children was not only to be taken as a sign of potency but also implied a capacity to please a woman physically. Furthermore, the ultimate responsibility for marital sexuality fell on the husband as head of the household and his ability to ensure good household order upon which the stability of society at large was considered to rest (in contrast with the developing double standard and domestic ideology of the nineteenth century). This meant that a wife could point to a childless marriage not only as an indication of a neglected marital duty and disorderly living, but even worse, as a sign of impotence and inability, much to the husband's disadvantage and shame. In such cases a wife's adultery could be judged more leniently (and cuckoldry seen as well deserved) and the marriage dissolved if the wife could convince the court that the union had never been consummated.<sup>51</sup> Certain anatomical standards also had to be met. Linnaeus reports from Luleå church about a hole in the wall that was said to have been used since pre-Reformation times as the minimum measurement of

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47 Boëthius 1977. *Mora-Prosten Jacob Boëthius' Syndabekännelse av år 1707*. Stockholm: Proporius, 45f.

48 Petrus Törnwall 1694. *Dygdz och Odygdz Spegel I Huus-Håld och Gemehna Lefwerne*. Stockholm: Wankijffs änka.

49 *Collegium Medicum. Om sättet att tillhoppa gå. Sexuälföreläsningar av Carl von Linné*. 1979. Göteborg: Zindermans. [Lecture given by Linnaeus on sexual reproduction], 15, 33f.

50 Foster, *Deficient Husbands*, 56; cf. Stephen Greenblatt 1988. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Oxford: Clarendon, 66–93. This seems also to have been the opinion of Linnaeus. See *Collegium medicum*, 39 and 47.

51 Nils Söderlind 1969. *Error personae. Svensk domkapitelpraxis under 1600-talet. Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift*, 107–116.

a male member suitable for marriage; similar stories were associated with other churches.<sup>52</sup> The doctrine of marital duty in combination with central cultural and societal notions, legal paragraphs and medical theories of the day could promote a more considerate male sexual practice based on mutual pleasure – at least within marriage (but not necessarily so, of course, which is illustrated by the episode of the drunken husband’s violent attempt to rehabilitate himself from presumed cuckoldry and failing potency, related by Halldin).

The married man’s sexual prowess and virility would not be based simply on potency and penetration but also on the capacity to give pleasure as a lover. Something of this is clearly reflected in Jonas Burström’s journal. Jonas was obviously worried about his potency and even received permission to cut some pieces of pubic hair from Barbro to put in a small purse which he wore in a string around his neck, a kind of aphrodisiac known from cases of love magic.<sup>53</sup> At the same time he took satisfaction in his ability to please Barbro in other, less conventional, ways. Their flirting and erotic conversation seem to have been dominated by a mutually playful and frivolous tone mixed with romantic and poetic expressions. If these activities had some basis not only in mutual feelings of love but also in conventions of marital life, then Jonas Burström’s behaviour towards the maidservant Margareta Lång could perhaps be seen as a slipping back into the practice of “romping” and the kind of more assertive and irresponsible virility that reigned during his youth and bachelor days (that is, if we are to rely on the maid’s account). Härnösand was a small town of about 1,000 inhabitants, and Jonas Burström was a middle-aged man of a certain position and wealth, who at least at the beginning of his stay appeared to be a widower and was thus probably attractive to more than one of the town’s young women and widows. Jonas and Barbro’s love affair certainly attracted much attention and mixed feelings (Barbro complained, for example, that people were gathering around the house and outside the windows in the evenings). This excited atmosphere also lent itself to equivocal allusions and perhaps even to small erotic invitations – the hatter’s wife who was often engaged as a go-between, for example, carried a love letter from Barbro in her bosom, forcing Jonas in a jocular tone to “feel her breasts and how small and depleted they had become from wet-nursing”. Perhaps the situation fostered attempts to exploit the stereotypical image of a male seducer as a way of attacking his respectability, as well.<sup>54</sup> The point, however, is that Burström’s described behaviour, if true, could be understood from the perspective of a double standard or a slipping back into a male strategy which could be excused, rationalised or even celebrated in his own eyes and in the eyes of others as an elementary and natural expression of being male – that is, of being virile.

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52 Hilding Plejel 1964. Bräck och ofall som äktenskapshinder. *Budkavlen* 1964–1965, 67

53 Cf. Liliequist, *Om vidsynta äkta män*, 78.

54 Cf. Bernard Capp 1999. The Double Standard Revisited: Plebeian Women and Male Sexual Reputation in Early Modern England. *Past and Present* 162, 70–100, for female counterstrategies based on the double standard.

## Virility – a useful category in historical analyses of masculinity

Virility has seldom been used as an analytical concept in gender analysis, perhaps due to a close association with what has been perceived as the essential properties of a biological male sex in contrast with a culturally constructed masculine gender.<sup>55</sup> However, I am arguing that the analytical concept of virility is useful for capturing the full meaning of the early modern usage of “manliness”, not only as a label for *certain kinds* of proper behaviour and characteristics, but also as a qualitative measurement of *certain degrees* of physical and mental capabilities and bodily perfection (an action of great impact could, for example, be labelled as manly). While the logic of virility could be summarised in a few principles, its expression could vary with different emphasis and focus according to cultural codes, social situations and personal strategies. The rhetorical strength of virility, however, would still be the same as the ability to represent a notion of an essential, natural and “true” core of masculinity. It is from this perspective that the recurring fascination with the idea of a raw and essential masculinity not yet moulded by culture should be seen. Codes of virility could thus be both in line and in conflict with respectable norms of masculinity. Historians like Alexandra Shepard have drawn attention to the often ambivalent attitudes of adult, respectable masculinities towards the excesses of male youth, comprising both condemnation and condonation as a more or less tacit recognition of the potency of such behaviour for meanings of manhood.<sup>56</sup> Such ambivalence could also be formulated from the perspective of masculinity and virility. While effeminate sparks and cruel seducers figured as stock characters of misdirected youth and depraved bachelor life, daily hardships and loss of male independence to the vanities of wives were the recurring themes in satires of marriage and in verses dedicated to newlyweds, often ending up with declarations that the marriage being celebrated would be an exception or by stressing that the hardships of bachelorhood would be even worse.<sup>57</sup> In light of reciprocal demands and the duties of marital sexuality, youthful romping could be reprimanded for its irresponsibility and disposition to excess, and at the same time appeal as an expression of a more unrestrained, and thus essential, masculine vigour and strength. In this way, a phallogentric and more assertive code of male sexuality could be nurtured as an underlying vein and possible recourse as part of a more responsible and respectable masculinity.

This tension between a respectable marital masculinity and the unrestrained virility of youth is illustrated in another autobiographical journal, kept by County Governor

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55 One notable exception is Barbara Spackman’s analysis of the rhetoric of Italian fascism, Barbara Spackman 1996. *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.

56 Alexandra Shepard 2003. *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 106f.

57 Bernt Olsson 1970. *Bröllops beswärs ihugkommelse II*. Lund: Geleerup, 132ff.

Baron Nils Reuterholm. Reuterholm expressly stresses that his autobiography is only intended for his nearest and dearest, and that it should absolutely not fall into “the wrong hands”. This attitude also characterises his story. On the one hand, he complains that “love-making or that which the Frenchman calls gallantry has been my greatest fault”, while on the other he cannot resist commenting on the romping he and his comrades did in their youth, a period which he labels “the romping years”. At the outset, he is shy and not at all daring, but he soon learns the rules of the game and together with his faithful friend “Orestes” embarks like “Pylades” on numerous “amorous adventures”. In the end, the pair arrive at a house where two fair sisters live under the watchful eye of a sombre-looking father. They decide to try and fool the old man and after having drawn straws to decide who gets whom, their final, wanton adventure ends in marriage, thanks to the noble, virtuous disposition of his wife-to-be, as Reuterholm is careful to point out. In this manner romping is lent an edifying finale and classified as a natural phase in the life cycle of a man.<sup>58</sup> Marriage is a logical conclusion to the game Reuterholm describes as a man’s attempt to overcome the weakness of the woman, and the woman’s efforts to catch a man using her wiles.<sup>59</sup> At the same time Reuterholm does not completely succeed in overcoming the sense of constant tension. With poorly-concealed glee, for example, he tells how the Swedish royal secretary Polus on a mission to England gained the favour of King Charles II for being reputed as a well-hung suitor and “exceptionally stiff in his pants”.<sup>60</sup>

Maybe it is here in references to unrestrained virility, rather than in abstract principles of power and declarations of male superiority, that we ought to seek the basis for persistent, hegemonic ideas of masculinity. History shows a predilection for articulating such references in indirect or rhetorically defensive terms, such as double standards and apologetic strategies, or as campaigns to restore a masculinity that is said to be threatened and in crisis. This hegemony could then be defined (paraphrasing Connell’s classic formulation)<sup>61</sup> as the currently accepted answer to the question of what is the most essential, natural core and lowest common denominator of masculinity that guarantees (or is considered to guarantee) a man to be recognised as manly, thus making virility not only a useful but also an indispensable category of historical analysis of masculinity.

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58 Nils Reuterholm 1957. *Nils Reuterholms journal*. Historiska Handlingar 36:2. Ed. Sten Landhal. Stockholm: Norstedts, 141f.

59 Reuterholm, *Nils Reuterholms journal*, 38.

60 Reuterholm, *Nils Reuterholms journal*, 82.

61 R. W. Connell 1994. *Masculinities*. Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 77.

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