

### 3 The Normality of Being a Centenarian: A Day in the Life of Aldéa Pellerin-Cormier

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After having discussed a very popular example of a centenarian in the previous chapter, this section presents a shift in genre. While I still focus on the construction of extraordinary 'old' age in centenarian narratives, the subject of this chapter is the short documentary, "A Sunday at 105," which is significantly less popular than Macklemore's music video "Glorious." Comparing the views both videos got on *YouTube* suggests that the music video for the song "Glorious" has been watched over 200,000 times more often than "A Sunday at 105" (as of July 2021 247,030,038 as opposed to 2,880 clicks). These numbers are of course not entirely reliable since both videos are available through numerous sources in which the overall ratio might differ. Nonetheless, the numbers indicate a trend for a significantly wider reach for Macklemore's music video. Furthermore, while the music video addresses a demographic of rap music fans, the documentary discussed in this chapter is designed for people who are either interested in documentary film, living in Quebec, Canada, or, very specifically, aging lifestyles and the representation of extraordinary 'old' age. While Helen from "Glorious" is thus presented in a way that designed to sell to a younger audience and that highlighting a special day with special activities, Aldéa Pellerin-Cormier in "A Sunday at 105" is portrayed in an every-day scenario, drowning out the noise of sensationalism.

"A Sunday at 105" is described on the Homepage of the National Film Board of Canada as follows:

A 105-year-old Acadian agrees to be filmed one Sunday as she goes about her daily routine and ruminates on life. Filmed by her great-grandson, Aldéa Pellerin-Cormier comments wisely on politics, sex and religion. From getting ready in the morning to drinking her nightcap before bed, every moment is punctuated with a witticism or existential thought. Respectful of the old woman's privacy, Daniel Léger's first documentary looks at wisdom, serenity and enjoyment of life. ("A Sunday at 105: Synopsis")

This short introductory text not only provides information about the documentary's protagonist, it also already contributes to the way the centenarian is pre-

sented to the audience. For instance, the reader learns that the documentary's director is also the centenarian's great-grandson. There is a familial relationship between the maker of the narrative and its subject. As well as in the previous chapter "A Sunday at 105" thus not only deals with a centenarian but with the relationship of a centenarian to her (great-)grandson and is therefore a representation of a relationship between 'old' and 'young.' Furthermore, the text provides the same ever-present terminologies, so commonly used within the discourse surrounding centenarians. The centenarian appears to be wise, has many existential thoughts, and is presented as a 'historic' person, as she is not introduced as Canadian or Quebecoise but rather as Acadian, which stresses her heritage as descendent of French settlers.

The moviemakers, on the other hand, are established as 'respectful of the old woman's privacy' which serves as a disclaimer to anyone who might accuse this documentary of using the centenarian for their own profits. This disclaimer becomes even more interesting when looking at the modes of production of the video. The thirteen-minute clip was filmed by Daniel Léger as part of the Tremplin Program of the National Film Board of Canada. This "Canada-wide competition is for emerging filmmakers from Canada's French-speaking minorities looking to make their first or second documentary" ("Tremplin Program"). This documentary about a centenarian is thus used by its director to further his own career as a filmmaker. The centenarian, again, becomes a commodity and the object of another person's artistic fulfillment.

As well as in Macklemore's music video, in "A Sunday at 105" the centenarian is used to attract attention. However, the short documentary provides a much more 'ordinary' image of a centenarian by not showing her in settings which would typically be associated with 'young' age. Rather, "A Sunday at 105" invites viewers into the living room of a person that would, with the sole exception of being over 100 years old, be considered utterly normal. She spends her time, cleaning her house, engaging in physical activities, praying, or visiting with her family. In that connection, one could claim that in "A Sunday at 105" the sense of performativity so prevalent in "Glorious" is significantly weaker. This might be one reason why, as previously mentioned, the attention generated by the respective videos is significantly more prominent in Macklemore's case.

I am hence interested how this very different format of documentary film works to construct what it is like to be a centenarian. Here, it is particularly important to focus on the way being a centenarian is portrayed as something extraordinary within an ordinary life. In that sense, this documentary is not as much about juxtaposing 'old' institutionalized age with 'young' behavior, but more about pointing toward the fact that being a centenarian itself can present a juxtaposition to an expected life-course. In that sense, the institutionalized age of 100 and over is so unbelievable that it juxtaposes all other categories of age in itself: As centenarians

are simply too 'old' to exist, of course their institutionalized age does not match their outward, behavioral, or physical age. By simply turning 100, they defy stereotypes of 'old' age, as they outlive them. I argue throughout this chapter that the archetype of the centenarian as the star of aging is not deconstructed by revoking the sensationalism. Rather, the same tropes are hidden behind the depiction of normality in everyday life and show that centenarians, no matter how they act, are depicted as role models for aging.

Despite fundamental differences in audience and approach, the short documentary "A Sunday at 105" and Macklemore's music video share certain similarities having been made by young relatives of the centenarian presented. They both portray one day in the life of a female centenarian, they both deal with issues of physical fitness, independence, and sexuality, and they both contribute to an archetypical imaginary of extraordinary 'old' age. One major difference between the videos, however, is that "A Sunday at 105" lets its centenarian speak. As opposed to Helen, Aldéa Pellerin-Cormier gets to answer questions and thereby introduces herself to her audience. However, she replies solely to questions she is asked by her great-grandson, giving him the agency over the general narrative. Yet, as she—if we assume the answers are not scripted—gets to reply herself, there is a very basic form of agency on behalf of the centenarian in this documentary.

A large portion of this chapter looks at the way Pellerin-Cormier is portrayed in terms of age within this documentary; therefore, it is interesting to see what the audience receives from this clip. *YouTube* provides viewer comments that indicate how the video is perceived by its audience. Words that are recurring throughout the comments are "wisdom" and "cute" (M L.; Petit Phantome). While this description shows that a lowered sense of performativity does not necessarily lead to a negative view on the centenarian, the concepts mentioned tie into positive stereotypes of 'old' age. However, reading this documentary against the grain and inquiring about Pellerin-Cormier's representation from a cultural, social, and biological angle, provides a more multifaceted image of extraordinary 'old' age than these comments suggest. On the other hand, the comments are an indicator that expectations about extraordinary 'old' age are deeply rooted within society, keeping people from taking a second look and asking questions about what they have seen.

This chapter looks at the way Pellerin-Cormier is framed and frames herself as an extraordinarily 'old' person. Therefore, I discuss the way she is portrayed through the juxtaposition of her institutionalized, outward, physical, and behavioral age. I focus especially on her femininity as well as her independence in order to argue that she is fabricated into a model centenarian. Thereby, the documentary shows, in a more subtle imaginary of a centenarian than Macklemore's music video, the dream of aging well. Centenarianism, in case of Aldéa Pellerin-Cormier, is portrayed as not necessarily easy but still as a desirable achievement. Unlike other representations of centenarians, this one offers a rather raw view on life after turning 100,

yet, it still works to take away younger people's fears of growing 'old' as well as the fear of an aged population. From Pellerin-Cormier's perspective, the centenarian paradox crumbles, as she does not always describe her extraordinary age as positive. This makes it all the more interesting that the framework of the documentary suggests the desirability of extraordinary 'old' age. By looking at the way especially physical age is portrayed, I will point out that in order to become a role model of aging, a centenarian needs to be set apart from the 'old' in ways that go beyond behavior. Opposed to Helen, behavioral age here is not a determining factor, because Pellerin-Cormier descriptions of her every day life are often deeply connected to the 'waiting room' of 'old' age. Although this may not be her own choice—raising questions of care and isolation in general—it appears that the makers of the documentary feel the need to compensate this lack of behavioral youth by emphasizing physical fitness.

### 3.1 Music, Setting, Camera: How the Documentary 'Makes' the Centenarian

This subchapter deals with the way filmmaking techniques within "A Sunday at 105" work in order to create an image of Aldéa Pellerin-Cormier as a centenarian and a role model of aging. Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg describe documentary film

not as the neutral picturing of reality, but as a way of coming to terms with reality by means of working with and through images and narrative. And beyond merely representing, reflecting, or helping to comprehend what exists, documentary can produce reality and thus influence beliefs, actions, events, and politics. (13)

It is thus crucial to understand that what the audience gets to experience in "A Sunday at 105" is not considered to be a 'truthful' or 'authentic' depiction. Rather, it is the attempt of its creators to come to terms with the everyday life of a centenarian. In that sense, it can be assumed that the director himself is so much in awe about his great-grandmother's extreme longevity that he needs the medium of documentary to help him make sense of the phenomenon. By this process, he in turn creates an image that he sends out into the world for his audience to make sense of it themselves. In this regard, documentary does not appear to be different from other forms of narratives. However, in this context Balsom and Peleg point to a very important factor: Documentary film intertwines narrative with images. The story that is told does not only consist of the centenarian's spoken word but also of various images that focus on certain points by use of camera angle and width. Moreover, the message of the documentary is supported through music. The entire clip is accompanied by changing background music which has a significant impact on the mood conveyed within the scene. I will therefore analyze selected scenes

in terms of images, setting, and music, as well as the overall structure of the film to argue that these techniques of filming the documentary work toward depicting Aldéa Pellerin-Cormier as a model centenarian. This model centenarian is a religious family person who can take care of herself without imposing too much on others. Furthermore, she is able to speak for herself and has agency over her actions and words. Thereby, the documentary creates a meaningful ‘reality’ about centenarians for its audience.

The first speech act<sup>1</sup> of the documentary does not initially work to introduce Aldéa Pellerin-Cormier but rather to introduce her relationship to her great-grandson. The audience hears a voiceover of him asking, “Grandma, what do you think of me making a film on you?” to which Pellerin-Cormier replies giggling, “using your Granny to make money! Naughty boy” (00:12–00:21). This short exchange dives right into the politics of autonomy and agency. The audience is told that it was not the centenarian’s idea to make this film. This again points to the idea of relational autonomy and suggests that without the initiative of the great-grandson, the centenarian would not have told her story in the first place. Moreover, by replying in an ironic tone, she implies the absurdity of thinking that making money could be her great-grandson’s agenda. The fact that Léger feels the need to address the issue of agency and the commodified centenarian at the beginning of his documentary reveals that he is aware of these mechanisms. It shows that there is an ever-present question of commodifying extraordinary age when it comes to the stories of centenarians. As previously mentioned, this documentary is also not free from these questions, as it was a tool to initiate Léger’s career.

As ironic as it may be portrayed, there might thus be a grain of truth in Pellerin-Cormier’s comment. However, the statement shows that Pellerin-Cormier is asked and, even if it remains implicit in her statement, gives some kind of informed consent to filming the documentary. Connected to the idea of informed consent, Couser points out that “the cardinal approach to biomedical ethics known as ‘principlism’—respect for autonomy, beneficence, and justice—seem pertinent to the sorts of life writing [he discusses]” (*Vulnerable Subjects* x). These same principles are also applicable to narratives of extraordinary age(ing). In this instance, Léger aims to inform his audience that he respects Pellerin-Cormier’s autonomy by showing that his great-grandmother is aware of the situation she is put into. According to Tom Beauchamp and James Childress, who established the four biomedical principles, autonomy is based on ‘informed consent’: “[S]ince the mid-1970s, the primary justification advanced for requirements of informed consent has been to protect autonomous choice” (121). Léger is not only aware of the ethical pitfalls he has to

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1 As Aldéa Pellerin-Cormier is Quebecoise, the documentary is filmed in French. In order to ensure a homogenous reading experience, I will quote from the English subtitles provided in the video.

avoid but also offers his audience an insight into the consent process itself. That is, of course, only if the entire sequence is not scripted and artificially made in a way for it to appear to be a consensual process.

Thinking back to Bolsom and Peleg's statement that documentary does not depict reality may also suggest that the dialogue on consent presents the director's attempt to make sense of the politics of agency and voice within his own work. Assuming that he does not want to exploit his great-grandmother, it must be difficult for him not to intertwine his own voice and imagination of the story with what the subject actually has to say. Reading the scene as an attempt to make sense of a reality then provides a new perspective on questions of agency. According to that reading, Léger creates a reality in which his great-grandmother has agency over the story because he is trying to come to terms with the agency question himself. Whether or not this happens is impossible to detect, yet, it does not change the fact that there is a need to address issues of agency in the first place. The centenarian is thus established as an autonomous human being with agency who gets to tell her own story.

Whereas the first dialogue of the documentary sets the tone in terms of agency, the background music works toward establishing the general mood of the video. By adding music, the film does not only become more pleasant to watch, the music also contributes to the message of a particular scene. John Fisk, for instance, claims music to be one of the "codes of television" which are "rule-governed systems of signs, whose rules and conventions are shared amongst members of a culture, and which [are] used to generate and circulate meanings in and for that culture" (1275). In terms of music, it is a common perception in the Western world that minor chords contribute to a rather 'sad' sound. Moreover, there are tunes connected to events, moments, or feelings that are shared within a certain culture. In the beginning of the documentary Pellerin-Cormier is shown going about her morning routine, including getting dressed, washing her face and putting on make-up (00:24-00:17). These images are accompanied by an upbeat tune that sounds like it could have been composed for a children's program. This music appears at the beginning and at the end of the documentary, setting the mood in a light, conversational way. It indicates that extraordinary 'old' age should not be taken overly seriously. Consequently, the music could be read as a means to overcome the stereotype of 'old' age as an era of gloomy decline.

Pellerin-Cormier putting on make-up in this early scene, indicating that this is her normal, every-day behavior, connects back to Helen's attention to her outward appearance. No matter how 'old' a person—or, more specifically—a woman is, trying to enhance one's outward appearance seems to be mandatory, although, as discussed earlier, the female aged body is not regarded as desirable in the first place. This scene may then either be a means to overcome these stereotypes or a continuation of midlife practices that could be attributed as mere habit. In any

case, this scene shows that Pellerin-Cormier does not conform entirely with being put away in the 'waiting room' of 'old' age and rather still acts according to social expectations concerning her gender role, rather than her age role. This is comparable to the portrayal of Helen in "Glorious." Both women cannot alter their outward appearance in a permanent way, but they both use non-permanent tools to supposedly enhance their looks.

Whereas using make-up is a purely visual tool for human enhancement, the documentary also shows Pellerin-Cormier engaging in her workout routine (01:13). Physical activity serves the purpose of staying in shape, both visually and physically. The scene shows that this documentary uses familiar tropes when it comes to describing a centenarian. The centenarian is able to engage in physical activity, and, at the same time, shown as willing to work for it. The documentary specifically points to physical age in connection to institutionalized age by including a voiceover of the centenarian speaking about her age while she is working out. Here, the documentary hints at the idea that it is not necessarily predetermined by genetics who lives the longest but that a long and healthy life is hard work for the individual. Accordingly, the fact that Pellerin-Cormier is shown working out also implies that in order to get to the goal of turning 100, one needs to do the same. If one does not, one will not reach the goal and have thus failed at the game of aging. In this instance, the documentary ties into a successful aging paradigm by promoting neoliberal ideas of extraordinary 'old' age as achievement that is left to individual responsibility.

This scene serves yet another purpose, besides making sure the audience understands the need for physical fitness in order to achieve extraordinary 'old' age. After reminding us of her age, Pellerin-Cormier continues by saying "[w]atch it, I'm gathering speed" (01:19), indicating the humor of the statement by laughing. Here, the centenarian works as her own comic relief, showing that, even at 100, she is a humorous person. In this instance, she herself plays with the juxtaposition of age categories, that is, she is fully aware that the rather ordinary activity of using an exercise bike becomes an extraordinary one when looked at in connection to her institutionalized age. The humor thus arises from the fact that she knows that she is not the fittest or fastest person anymore, yet, she still tries. The centenarian hence subverts stereotypes of 'old' age, by not getting frustrated by the restrictions that the biology of her body present. Consequently, the scene can also be read as one of these rare narratives that accept the biological changes of aging without demonizing them. At the age of 105, it appears to be allowed to be a little slower. This in turn partly revokes the ever-present after taste of successful aging in centenarian narratives.

The two readings of the scene reveal two different perspectives on age(ing). Léger, the middle-aged director uses the technique of a voiceover to remind the audience of his great-grandmother's age while showing her during physical activ-

ity. This speaks to the ‘young’ wish that the restrictions of the aged body are not as severe as many decline narratives would suggest. At the same time, however, it reinforces images of successful aging. Pellerin-Cormier, on the other hand, shows through her joke that she is well aware of the restrictions of the aged body and content with them, offering a perspective that questions imaginaries of the biology of aging that have been established in Western culture. What this documentary drives home, then, is that it is always exceedingly important to understand who gets to speak. In this connection, Karin Lövgren argues that “it does matter who conveys a message and who has the right to define and verbalize. As far as aging as an asymmetric power relationship goes, one of the problems is that it has mainly been others who have spoken for, in this case, older people” (51). Although the documentary lets the centenarian speak herself, it is often, as the following subchapters will continue to show, the way her speech acts are entangled with images and music that alter the meaning. This then reveals the underlying power structures within this documentary. While Pellerin-Cormier gave her consent to filming in the first place, the ways in which filming techniques might alter her voice are generally beyond her control.

This observation, in turn, raises numerous questions about the issues that we do need to address within narratives about ‘old’ age. Ricca Edmondson reminds us that it is essential to find meaning in later life (102). But who is to decide what meaning means and what renders a life meaningful? Can there ever be narratives of ‘old’ age that neither buy into either the successful aging nor the decline paradigm? In that connection, Lily Nosraty argues that “definitions and models of successful aging attempt to prescribe how people should age rather than understanding how elderly people as a heterogenic group define the process themselves as they age” (51). This argument refers back to the discussion of voice within narratives of extraordinary age and indicates that the only way to move away from binaries, such as decline versus progress, is to focus on the individual and listen to individual stories. Yet, how can a co-produced narrative be an individual story in the first place? And how can the creators of such narratives bridge the gap of different experiences of a middle-aged director and a centenarian subject? While this particular narrative tries to navigate this very fine line, sometimes conflicting perspectives lead to contradictory moments within the documentary.

Besides emphasizing her physical fitness, the documentary also focuses on Pellerin-Cormier’s outward age. In fact, there are many scenes that highlight her as extraordinary ‘old’ through outward appearance. For example, there is a lengthy close-up shot on the centenarian’s hands during an interview (03:41). Due to popular belief, a person’s hands are the body parts most likely to reveal their ‘real’ age. Shelly Emling writes in the *Huffington Post* that “[a]lways exposed to the elements, your hands probably give away your age more than any other body part.” Of course, this article cannot be regarded as a reliable scientific source, yet, it shows how be-

liefs about outward age are fostered in broader society. It may thus be no coincidence that Léger chooses this close-up shot onto his great-grandmother's hands. If hands are perceived as the most reliable indicator when it comes to a person's age, the documentary shows us, what a centenarian's hand looks like. In this scene, there appears to be no filter or anything working in order to make Pellerin-Cormier appear younger. In this instance, I argue, this is because the spoken narrative goes along with the images. In this particular part of the documentary, the centenarian speaks about the moon landing and how going to space influenced humans' perception of time. In order to address such philosophical questions of time, there needs to be a certain amount of wisdom, a quality that is often expected from elderly people with a great amount of life experience.

Furthermore, the visual emphasis on her extraordinary 'old' age supports the claim she makes about temporality. She asserts that by going to the moon, humans "broke the stars of time. Now time is different" (03:41-03:44), meaning that they did something so extraordinary that it seems to be out of a futuristic sci-fi movie. At the same time, however, she herself 'broke the stars of time' by living much longer than the average person. Consequently, Pellerin-Cormier's extraordinary 'old' age is implicitly linked to the changing of time and its perception. The centenarian is a role model not only for a healthy lifestyle and extreme longevity; she is also what scientists such as Aubrey de Grey look toward when they try to slow down the aging process. In that sense, then, slowing down aging or living longer means slowing down time itself. Connecting her outward age to temporality offers a new perspective on centenarianism: as centenarians have broken the stars of time, it really does not matter what they look like. They have earned the right to be 'old.'

Pellerin-Cormier is frequently depicted laughing and joking which suggests that her great-grandson knows of the joys she has in life. This depiction can be read as an attempt to present extraordinary 'old' age as meaningful and fun. Her bubbly personality and constant giggles, on the other hand, may remind the audience of a teenager—especially since her fits of giggles increase when she speaks about sexuality—juxtaposing her institutionalized age with her behavior as well as contrasting her outward age with her behavior. Her personality opposes the idea that she might be unhappy with her life and longing for the past. Rather, she appears to be a lively person who enjoys herself in the moment. The juxtaposition inherent in these scenes can be read as a criticism of lively behavior being reserved for 'young' people. Seeing a giggling grandmother may strike people as something extraordinary whereas it should be normal at all ages to engage in laughter and vitality.

Through filming techniques and music, the centenarian is framed as an outgoing, bubbly person who enjoys life. Yet, the documentary seems to constantly navigate between the perspectives of Pellerin-Cormier herself and that of the director, giving a twofold imaginary of extraordinary 'old' age. This form of narration

adds to the depiction of the complexity of (late) life. There is no black and white and there is, at no age, a perfect life without problems, desires, and hopes. Léger takes the reality of his great-grandmother combined with the reality he assumes about 'old' age in general and presents his audience with an elaborate thirteen-minute piece that tries to make sense of the complexities of extraordinary 'old' age. Nonetheless, the topics addressed in the documentary are similar to what can be usually found in articles on centenarians. There is generally the underlying question of "how did you do it?" and "how can I get there as well?" This first impression, gained through looking at selected scenes through the lens of representation and filmmaking, deepens throughout the documentary as Pellerin-Cormier takes the audience through her thoughts and her experiences.

### 3.2 Passing on Knowledge: The Centenarian's Wisdom

Besides portraying Pellerin-Cormier's physical ability by focusing on her workout routine, the documentary emphasizes her mental abilities. Marlene Goldman argues that "[t]he current 'Age of Alzheimer's' is . . . characterized predominantly by fears of an epidemic of terrifying proportions" (4). In order to counter this fear, it appears important to show that Pellerin-Cormier is able to respond and speak to her audience about her experience. At the same time, the centenarian's ability to retell her life's story, in connection with her extraordinary 'old' age, seems to elevate centenarianism to a special position within the context of 'old' age. This framework becomes important in many centenarian narratives, as the centenarian is often framed as a beacon of wisdom, therefore needing their memory to draw from their vast life experience. This expected wisdom, on the other hand, is also a general stereotype of 'old' age. Because 'old' people have experienced a lot, they are expected to have insights into life itself that 'young' people cannot have come by, yet. The older a person, consequently, the wiser they are supposed to be. In that sense, centenarians are presumed a gift to humanity, as they can share the wisdom and experience of more than 100 years. This following section deals with the moments in the documentary when Pellerin-Cormier is presented as a wise person and is implicitly or explicitly asked for advice. These expectations of wisdom do not always go along the lines of the centenarian's self-perception and indicate how the fabrication of centenarians, or generally all age groups, goes beyond the power of members of the respective age group.

First of all, the documentary makes a stark contrast between wisdom and knowledge. In that connection, Pellerin-Cormier explains: "I have no education. I went to school for two days. The teacher wasn't there. I didn't learn much. What I know, I learned on my own. I'm not knowledgeable" (03:00-03:35). This scene emphasizes again that she comes from a different time. When she grew up,

education, especially for girls, was not regarded as important. More significantly, the scene makes a claim about the centenarian's intelligence. Pellerin-Cormier's statement is presented as a voiceover in the documentary, accompanying images of her reading the newspaper. Although she thus has no formal education, she is literate and eager to stay up to date with current events. Presumably, she was able to teach herself to read, a fact that points to great cognitive abilities and diligence. This foundation is needed in order to give merit to her musings about the world. Her experiences and what she can teach others about life becomes all the more important because she is an intelligent person. A general intelligence or interest in one's surroundings is portrayed as more important than any formal knowledge.

Consequently, formal knowledge is not needed to be a wise person because the wisdom sought of 'old' people does not need knowledge. Indeed, 'old' people who try to ingrain a great deal of knowledge and expertise into their statements are frequently socially sanctioned. Psychologist Scott King, for instance, traces the persona of Sister Jean who rose to fame as she served as the Loyola basketball team's Chaplain at the age of 98. Treated more like a mascot than a person, Sister Jean was well-liked until she offered her opinion on college basketball—a field she has great expertise in. After sharing her thoughts, she was faced with derogatory and ageist comments, showing that she can serve as a mascot but that she cannot have an opinion (King). Like Sister Jean, Aldéa Pellerin-Cormier is welcome to be wise about life's experiences, yet, she is not supposed to be very knowledgeable. By establishing this from the very beginning, the documentary portrays the centenarian as harmless to society: She wants to help, but she is well aware that she can only contribute to certain areas. These areas include lifestyle questions more than anything else. The centenarian accordingly enlightens the audience on her ideas about religion, diet, and the fear of death.

As the guide to a healthy long life *Celebrate 100: Centenarian Secrets to Business and Life* suggest, "faith" is one of the key 'secrets' of centenarians (Franklin and Adler 139). Accordingly, Pellerin-Cormier is presented as a deeply religious person. Her home is full of crosses and Virgin Mary statues, and she is shown praying. Further, the only scene of the documentary showing her outside her house depicts her putting up a Virgin Mary statue in her backyard. This is also a rare scene where she is not shown alone but accompanied by her great-grandson. Religion and spirituality here imply freedom and community. In her religion, she is not alone and therefore able to escape the loneliness of 'old' age. Again, the documentary does not only work with images but also with music. During this scene, the melody changes into an instrumental version of Billy Joel's "And So it Goes," a well-known love song about the endlessness of love but the ever-present possibility of changing partners. Billy Joel sings in the opening verse "in every heart there is a room / A sanctuary safe and strong / To heal the wounds from lovers past / Until a new one comes

along” (00:25-00:50). This sanctuary, for Pellerin-Cormier, is her faith. As long as she believes, the world can come and go, because she has God.

Moreover, the emphasis on religion speaks to a certain expectation of morals and values. Religious, and in the Western world especially Christian people, present themselves in accordance with certain commandments that stir their morals and supposedly demand a certain amount of altruism and charity. Connecting the centenarian to these characteristics stages her as a person who deserves to live to 100. Being a good Christian in this instance goes along with being a good centenarian. At the same time, the narrative suggests that in order to achieve the goal of centenarianism, a person does not only have to live well and healthy but also be a good person. Religion and faith are introduced as means to a good life and also as a means to achieve extreme longevity. This message is backed by numerous studies tracing a correlation between longevity and spirituality. Ana Sandoui writes that “[r]esearchers led by Laura Wallace, a doctoral researcher in psychology at the Ohio State University in Columbus, have conducted two studies whose results show that religion could give believers a 4-year longevity boost.” These studies, among many others, suggest that religious people generally live longer. It is thus part of the centenarian’s wisdom to be a spiritual person because this is the only way to lead a good and long life.

The above-mentioned scene portrays this wisdom without having Pellerin-Cormier speak while putting up the statue. Rather, it is supplemented by her own voiceover, as she comments on people’s strive for ‘truth’ and knowledge. She claims that people want to be “smarter and smarter... smarter than God” (04:20). It is seems important to her to convey that scientific hybris is not desirable. She claims that there are certain phenomena better left alone, an attitude that provides a human being with a certain ease when it comes to the big questions in life. Instead of wondering about the ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’ of the world, she puts her faith in the hands of God and therefore worries less.

Despite giving advice on faith and knowledge, Pellerin-Cormier is supposed to provide wisdom when it comes to her diet. Although, she never explicitly tells people how to act, Pellerin-Cormier talks about what she eats, as well as shows the audience how she behaves. Voluntary or not, the documentary gets the centenarian’s wisdom, no matter if the centenarian herself thinks she has it. For instance, she casually mentions “I love lobster, I’ve eaten a lot of it” (10:08-10:10). This sort of food advice is as common in centenarian narratives as the emphasis on physical ability. The main interests of ‘young’ people seem to be questions such as ‘What do I have to eat?’ and ‘How much do I have to move in order to live to 100?’ The lobster, in this instance does not only become a symbol for a model diet but also touches upon issues of physical ability. Pellerin-Cormier does not only say she likes lobster, she is also depicted taking one apart and eating it (10:08). This imagery emphasizes that she has the necessary strength and motor skills to do so. Her eating habits

thus have not only kept her alive until the age of 105, they have also kept her strong enough to pull apart a lobster.

The centenarian becomes an expert on dietary needs. Since dietary choices clearly have an effect on a person's longevity, it makes sense to inquire about these issues. In that connection, molecular biologists Burtner and Kennedy write that "[c]oncomitant with longer lifespan, dietary restriction delays the onset of a range of age-associated pathologies in invertebrate and mammalian models" (567). Interestingly, however, people seem to not only turn to science in order to find out what diets exactly are supportive of a long and healthy life, rather, they put their faith into firsthand accounts, no matter how contradictory they might turn out to be. Why should the public ask a person who has studied nutritious needs on paper, when they can listen to a person who has healthily made it to extraordinary 'old' age? In that connection the lobster scene also points to the fact that no matter what the centenarian says, it is perceived as wisdom. Quite possible, Pellerin-Cormier simply wanted to declare her love for lobster without indicating that its consumption is a reason for her longevity. The audience, on the other hand, is inclined to read it as advice, simply because this is the way narratives about centenarians are structured.

At the end, the documentary works with another common trope of centenarian narratives and food. For her evening routine Pellerin-Cormier takes a shot of liquor, pauses and comments, "that's strong" (12:43). At the end of the day, the centenarian is no health guru; she, too, drinks alcohol and enjoys the little treats in life. She does so moderately, but the good news conveyed here is that one does not have to be a saint after all to become a centenarian. These 'feel-good' factors, the little extraordinary things that nobody would associate with longevity, are an integral part of narratives about centenarians. There is, for instance, a centenarian who attributes his longevity to drinking one glass of red wine every day (Somper); another claims her secret to be eating chocolate (Pawlowski). In the vast landscape of the internet, there is virtually no 'secret' to longevity that one could not find, giving every single person a justification for an unhealthy guilty pleasure. This presentation of centenarianness decreases the notion of sacrifice needed to supposedly age successfully, suggesting that anybody can do it. Ultimately, depictions as such, while, on the one hand, pointing toward the little pleasures in late life, are, on the other hand, always also prone to increase the notion of supposed failure of those who do not manage to age in the same manner.

The wisdom Pellerin-Cormier is asked to provide is not restricted to dietary needs and spiritual guidance. She is also interviewed about how to deal with the aging process, in this case the only area, that she does have a natural expertise in. She has experienced age(ing) through all the life stages and can give the audience a firsthand account of what it felt like for her. Thus, her comments on her own experience as a centenarian become one of the main values of this documentary. For

instance, she comments on the world she lives in by saying “[t]he world turns fast, very fast. That doesn’t bother me, I travel at the same speed” (08:28–08:35). This indicates that she can keep up with the world and therefore with ‘young’ generations. As she can keep up with the fast movement, she emphasizes that she can still be a part of everyday life. In that sense, she refuses to become isolated from society or become invisible.

This visibility is also granted through the documentary, of which she is the subject. She is made visible by her great-grandson, a mechanism only possible because she is not just ‘old’ but extraordinarily ‘old.’ Nevertheless, with her statements, she herself works against the label of invisibility and social exclusion. Against popular belief, she can keep up with life and can therefore still be a valuable part of society. This take on extraordinary ‘old’ age is mirrored in her wish to go to the moon someday (03:26). Pellerin-Cormier is not only able to keep up; she also wants to go further than most people have. She quite literally tells her audience that she is still willing to reach for the stars. In these instances, the centenarian emphasizes that she is not a creature of the past but that she very much lives in the here and now, with ambitions for the future.

What is interesting about these statements, however, is that they not only provide insight on how to get to extraordinary ‘old’ age but also on how to live in late life in general. On the one hand, this can be read as directed to ‘old’ people who are trying to escape the invisibility and presumed meaninglessness of their age group. On the other hand, these scenes also address ‘young’ people who might be scared of growing ‘old.’ Ultimately, the documentary provides insights into Pellerin-Cormier’s wisdom to strengthen a neoliberal stance on aging: If you manage to live a life as good as she did and does, you might be able to remain a viable part of society in later years, as well.

As much as Pellerin-Cormier is focusing on the present or even the future, the documentary shows that she is aware of her limited remaining life expectancy. Therefore, it hints at questions of how to cope with the knowledge that one may die quite soon. The centenarian appears to be well aware of that fact as she states: “I’ve little time left in this world” (12:06). Although this statement is accompanied by sad music and the centenarian’s rather sad facial expression, she generally appears to be content with her situation, especially because previously in the documentary she stated “[a]fraid of dying, at 105? Oh, come on, I’m old enough to die” (06:50–06:55). She is hence not particularly looking forward to the day she will die but she has made her peace with it. She knows that she has had an exceptionally long life and is grateful for that. Here, the sense of temporality ties in again: she is aware of the experiences she has had and understands that her lifespan has been long enough. The wisdom that it is okay to die after a long and fulfilled life goes against the attempts of scientists to prolong life or find a ‘cure’ for aging. As a person who spent 105 years on this planet, Pellerin-Cormier might have insights

into longevity that the 'young' scientist, so afraid of aging and dying do not yet have. This also goes along the lines of the centenarian's claim that scientists are trying to become smarter than God and are thus meddling in affairs that they cannot possibly understand.

For Pellerin-Cormier it seems to be more important to have led a good and fulfilling life than to go on forever. She contemplates, "I've had a nice life. No complaints there. I wasn't too mischievous. I worked. Working... was my forte. Working and Praying . . . There isn't much I can say I didn't like" (11:11-11:59). She tells the story of a life well lived, not only in terms of happiness but also in terms of contribution to society. She again emphasizes her faith and adds to it her nature of being hard-working. The wisdom that can be read into this suggests that once a person has led a good life, it is okay for this life to end. Generally, the entire documentary points to Pellerin-Cormier's good life, faith, and hard work having led to a great and happy family who will carry on her legacy, after she has died. In that sense, the centenarian does not only escape the invisibility of 'old' age, she also does not have to fear oblivion after death. Knowing all that, she enjoys her remaining time on earth without having to fear death.

Interestingly, Pellerin-Cormier is given the chance to comment on politics, and, as opposed to Sister Jean, is allowed to have an opinion which is based in specific knowledge. Yet, she does so very timidly, without any concrete statement. Furthermore, her political criticism is directed toward the U.S., not toward her home country, Canada: "Americans are all right but maybe they go too far to their detriment. They've gone too far into the affairs of other countries" (04:00-04:12). From a perspective outside the USA, her comment appears uncontroversial, as she merely echoes common assumptions about U.S. politics. Other than Sister Jean's comment on basketball, Pellerin-Cormier's brief excursion into politics is hence uncontroversial and therefore remains unsanctioned. The same goes for her own voting practices: "I never voted conservative. I always voted liberal... Voting conservative is a mortal sin" (09:35-09:47). Here, the centenarian gives a fairly direct advice on how to vote. Yet, she does not do so in a political setting but from the safety of her own home. Furthermore, she does not engage in a political argument. She merely states her political preferences and does so quite vehemently. Yet, she is given the stage to voice her opinions and according to the comments, this does not affect her likability: The user Russel Loomis writes that "[he] like[s] her even if she is a Liberal and [he]'s a sinner." Whereas Sister Jean, as an almost centenarian, was sanctioned for having an opinion, as a centenarian, Pellerin-Cormier is able to harshly criticize people about their political preferences and still be well-liked.

Ultimately, Aldéa Pellerin-Cormier is staged as a person who has to share wisdom about life in general. While her own opinion on whether the audience can learn valuable lessons from her may differ, the documentary continuously points to her as a wise role model. It is because of her extraordinary 'old' age that she can-

not make a simple statement about her preferences in diet, exercise, or worship without it appearing to be advice for a long and healthy life.

### 3.3 Femininity, Sex, and Gender in Extraordinary 'Old' Age

Besides giving insights into the everyday life of a centenarian, "A Sunday at 105" touches upon topics such as the connection of extraordinary 'old' age to femininity, sex, and gender. As previously mentioned, the female aged body is sanctioned due to lack of attractiveness. In that connection, Ateret Gewirtz-Meydan and Liat Ayalon explain, "older people are often excluded from the discourse on sexuality and are considered asexual. . . . This stereotypical view of later-life sexuality is termed 'sexual ageism'" (648). This 'sexual ageism' may then be the reason that in Macklemore's music video sexuality in extraordinary 'old' age is depicted but frowned upon by younger generations. In "A Sunday at 105" there are numerous statements concerned with sexuality, yet, Pellerin-Cormier appears to distance herself from the idea of having a partner, a romantic relationship, or just sex. Accordingly, she behaves appropriately, according to her age, in a broader cultural context. Hence, it is interesting that the documentary would touch upon these issues in the first place. After all, 'old' age and sexuality do not go together well in popular consciousness. This subchapter is dedicated to tracing the way the documentary portrays femininity and sexuality in extraordinary 'old' age and to discuss how this portrayal works to (de)construct age categories.

One very crucial point when talking about gender relations in "A Sunday at 105" is certainly the absence of a partner. The audience may assume that there once was a husband who might have passed away—a thought quite possible, when considering the higher female overall life expectancy. The one time Pellerin-Cormier mentions a husband is when she talks about how she used a huge shell she would blow into to signal him to come home from the fields for food (00:09:00–00:09:06). This suggests that their relationship was defined by traditional gender roles of a working husband and a stay-at-home wife. Yet, apart from this scene, where he is only mentioned in passing, the husband remains absent. This absence of a partner would raise questions in many life stages, yet, in extraordinary 'old' age, the audience is invited to assume that there once was a husband who is now dead. In that connection, it is interesting that the documentary in general does not touch upon the high probability that the majority of Pellerin-Cormier's peers have passed away. As opposed to many other centenarian narratives, the question of how to deal with grief is not addressed in this documentary. This is one more aspect that adds to the construction of her extraordinary 'old' age as a phase of joy and meaning, rather than grief and loneliness.

As for her current love life, Pellerin-Cormier comments as follows “I’m not doing anything on earth, nothing worthwhile. I don’t even have a boyfriend” (07:00-07:16). This statement indicates that the centenarian connects her self-worth to man in her life. However, although the two sentences follow each other, there is a significant pause between them. Furthermore, they belong to different scenes of the documentary. While they are both presented as voiceover, not a direct interview, the first part is accompanied by an image, where Pellerin-Cormier looks like she is falling asleep and followed by a sequence, where she is desperately trying to keep her eyes open (07:01-07:10). This underlines that she is not doing anything worthwhile, as she can barely stay awake. Looking at this scene individually suggests that the documentary here moves away from its extraordinary ‘old’ age as meaningful pattern and establishing a narrative of decline, after all. Throughout the documentary, showing the biological realities of the centenarian body seems not problematic. Through the connection to the statement, however, it depicts the aged body as worthless in society because it cannot do anything that would be considered to be useful.

The second part of the statement, her not having a boyfriend, is accompanied by a camera shot of Pellerin-Cormier—or what we assume to be her—in bed, sleeping (07:16). Taken separately this voice-image connection suggests that, like it is socially acceptable, she only uses her bed for sleeping. While looked at separately, the two parts of the statement in connection to the images going along with them suggest that the centenarian lacks worth and that she is not sexually active. In combination, however, they suggest that the centenarian connects her self-worth to a man, an idea that seems ironic, thinking back to the fact that she does not even mention a partner as a significant part of her life. Conclusively, she might not have needed a man in order to live a meaningful life. Finally, the editing of the film and the images provided here are crucial for the analysis. After all, the audience cannot know whether Pellerin-Cormier did make these two statements successively. Maybe, here the director, who also is the centenarian’s great-grandson, flees into wishful thinking, avoiding imagining his great-grandmother as a person with sexual desires. Following this reading, there is a connection between “A Sunday at 105” and Macklemore’s music video. In both instances, a male descendent denies sexuality to a female centenarian and thereby contributes to ‘sexual ageism.’

However, the way Pellerin-Cormier is framed here does not indicate a wish for romance in late life. If she had a boyfriend, would she consider her life more meaningful? In that connection, Pellerin-Cormier continues saying that “[men] don’t excite [her] anymore” (07:20). The fact that the camera still shows her in her bed sleeping ties in with the assumption that the director wants to declare to the audience that his great-grandmother does not have a sex-life at all. The centenarian herself also makes it very clear that she might be interested in a companion but not in a sexual relation, as she chooses to say “excite,” not “interest.” Later life remains a

space that lacks eroticism for her as well. There appears to be little possibility to subvert social assumptions about sexuality that are connected 'old' age. Whereas centenarians are portrayed as beyond 'old' age in many aspects of their existence, being imagined as sexually active seems to be an uncrossable border.

At another point in the documentary, Pellerin-Cormier speaks about her past relation to sex and gender roles. She explains that “[w]hen I was young, I wanted to be a man. That was my wish, because I felt men didn't work very hard. But once I grew up, I no longer wanted to be a man. Sex...” (07:33-07:46). After saying this, she starts giggling and waves her hand as if to brush away the last part of her statement while shyly looking away from the camera. Then she says “get out” and laughs (07:47-07:50). The belief that men do not work hard presents a contradiction to common stereotypes of only work outside of the domestic sphere being hard work. In that sense, Pellerin-Cormier is presented as a pioneer in terms of gender imaginary, pointing to the fact that women indeed work very hard, despite the fact that their efforts often remained unseen.

Considering the second part of her statement shows that apparently sex had something to do with her change of heart when it comes to her preferred gender. She does not elaborate further on what she means, however, her statement can be read as her changing her mind from wanting to be a man toward wanting to be *with* a man, especially when thinking about her hand gestures and the ‘get out’ at the end of the scene. Possibly, she cannot imagine having sex as a man and prefers what she considers to be the female part of the act. Her accompanying hand gesture, on the other hand, might also suggest that sex is something that she was never really interested in or at least something that she does not want to elaborate on. This might be due to her Christian beliefs, her general shyness, the familial relation to the interviewer, or just her acquired gender role as a woman telling her that it is not acceptable to speak about her sexual desire publicly. The following conversation between her and her great-grandson supports this reading: Léger asks, “What did you do under the covers?” to which she replies “Slept” and chuckles (08:02-08:08). This almost reminds the audience of a teenage girl who has had her first sexual encounters but is too shy to speak about them or knows that her family would not approve of her ever having (had) sex in the first place. It seems that, for the centenarian, sex is a taboo. Interestingly, she is thus placed back into adolescence behaviors. Her behavior does not conform with a confident woman but rather with a shy girl. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that she did grow up in a different time, which might restrict her from confidently claiming her sexuality.

Ultimately, this scene denies the centenarian to break out of stereotypes of ‘old’ age in this very instant. Gewirtz-Meydan et al. describe that “key myths that have been conceptualized in relation to older people’s sexuality include: a lack of sexual desire that accompanies aging; the physical unattractiveness and undesirability of older people, which is particularly evident in relation to gender” (150). In

terms of sexuality, the director as well as the centenarian seem to acquire a sense of conservatism and conform to the stereotypes prevalent concerning 'old' age and sexual desire. It is arguable that it may be possible for a centenarian to break free of stereotypes of 'old' age in many instances and become part of a new life stage. At the same time, it remains impossible to break free of gender stereotypes at the same time. As will be discussed further in chapter 4, the absence of sexuality is not as prominent in male centenarian narratives. Antiquated gender roles which imply that women are the object of desire rather than actively feeling it themselves may thus tie into the current representation of female centenarians' sexuality. This reading then shows how centenarianism influences the way a person is perceived in terms of age while stereotypes of gender remain in place.

### 3.4 Aging, Place, and Questions of Ability: (In)Dependence in Extraordinary 'Old' Age

Besides speaking to questions of wisdom and sexuality in extraordinary 'old' age, "A Sunday at 105" also addresses one of the major issues connected to aging and late life in general: How does a person deal with the biological changes of the aging process? How does life change once a person is not able to live entirely independent? How is late life affected by loneliness and loss? As mentioned above, loss is never a concrete issue in this documentary, yet, the images depicting Pellerin-Cormier's ordinary life raise questions about her being alone for most of the day which, in turn, implicitly points to a loss of friends and family members. The documentary hence deals with questions of loneliness and care in later life that are ever present within the media or even in people's minds as there is a fear of 'the grey tsunami' rolling over society, overwhelming 'young' generations in terms of care capacities and finances. In that connection, Ulla Kriebner and Sally Chivers argue that most people will require some kind of care in later life, leading to a narrative that connects care homes with failure and living at home as success:

Whether in a nursing home, care home, retirement home, assisted living, or other form, institutional care for seniors offers a cultural repository for fears and hopes about an aging population. While people adamantly desire to age well at home, without making the big move to render their latter years more manageable, and policy makers play to that desire, apparently buoyed by how it offers them an opportunity to download the costs of care onto the family unit, the fact remains that many contemporary senior citizens will require institutional care, and some might even choose it. (17)

Pellerin-Cormier's narrative is one that ties into the desire to age well at home, as she is depicted as living in her own apartment, being at least partly indepen-

dent. The fear of having to leave one's home and move into a care facility seems to evoke fear amongst older people. This is, on the one hand, due to the obvious loss of independence and daily routines. On the other hand, these fears are increased through media reports demonizing life in these facilities. "A Sunday at 105," in that connection, presents an implicitly harmful message within the discourse of care, as it suggests that 'stay at home' care is easily possible and desirable.

Meaning in Pellerin-Cormier's life might thus be tied to the fact that she is living at home. Consequently, Chivers and Kriebner continue arguing that "[w]hen the popular press is overwhelmed by negative, it is not just evoking fear about what each person's fate might be—a deep fear of physical change that could bring pain and restriction to the activities of daily living, not to mention raising the spectre of death" (19-20). Although the documentary does not actively paint care homes as something negative, it makes caring for the elderly at home look effortless and is thus harmful in two ways. First, it implies that the paragon of aging does not need a care home, because whoever ages successfully, can do so at home. This goes back to neoliberal ideas of self-improvement and a narrative of success versus failure. Second, it presents home care as something that is done effortlessly without portraying the care givers. The audience never learns about Pellerin-Cormier's support system when it comes to everyday life. This chapter will thus look at the way care, (in)dependence, and aging in place are portrayed within the documentary and elaborate on the implications this makes for a broader debate on health care issues. The model centenarian, I argue, has to live at home in order to function in their role as paragon of aging and take the fear of later life away from society. In terms of independence, their lifestyle or behavior is juxtaposed to expectations of a dependent elderly person. While contributing to this idea of the model centenarian, the depiction of Pellerin-Cormier's everyday life cannot be regarded as one of successful aging, as it is shaped by loneliness.

The documentary opens with a shot of a home, which—for lack of any other information—has to be Aldéa Pellerin-Cormier's house. Some cars passing by indicate that she does not live completely remote, yet peacefully and quietly. In accordance with the entire rest of the documentary's makeup, the setting could be described as utterly 'ordinary.' The general setting, however, invites initial questions about the centenarian's living situation. Does she live alone? What is the (aging) infrastructure like in this rather rural setting? Does she have access to a store, entertainment, friends? Unfortunately, these are all questions that are never directly addressed through the documentary. Hence, it appears that although the narrative can be read as a guidebook when it comes to questions of how to age well, it is not any help for people who are looking for care-taking models. This conforms to the idea that the centenarian needs to be constructed as a very able person in order to function as a role model.

Some questions are touched upon implicitly through the centenarian's statements concerning other topics. For instance, Pellerin-Cormier enlightens the audience in her daily routine:

When I wake up, I cross myself and that's how my day begins. I get dressed, I eat breakfast. If I have chores, I do them. Otherwise, I sit... and rock. I wait for lunch. When lunch comes, I eat and lie down again. When I've slept enough, I get up and sit down again. That's how I pass my time. (01:47-02:18)

In this quote, the centenarian again emphasizes her faith, as she starts every day acknowledging God. What is more interesting about her statement, however, is the way she describes her everyday life. There may be no other description more fitting than dull. It does not seem very desirable to spend most of the day sitting and waiting. This directly speaks to the metaphor of the 'waiting room,' especially when thinking about the fact that Pellerin-Cormier herself states that she is 'old' enough to die at 105. Of course, as mentioned above, this shows contentment with the finiteness of human life; on the other hand, it can be read as an implication that the centenarian spends her days waiting for death. The audience does not know if she ever goes out to meet friends or has any other activities on her daily schedule. After all, we are watching her on a Sunday, a day that for many people means to primarily relax. Yet, as a religious person, she is not shown going to church on a Sunday, implying that she is mostly confined to her home.

Her words, however, are contradicted by the images of the documentary. She is precisely not depicted sitting around, waiting. Rather, she is shown exercising, praying, watching TV, putting up a Virgin Mary statue in her backyard, and even playing cards with, what we can assume is her family, as one player calls her "Grandma" (10:52). Generally, this incongruence of word and action could be due to another discrepancy between awareness of self and awareness of others. Either the centenarian might feel that she is not doing anything but sitting and waiting when, in fact, she engages in a variety of activities, or she talks about her general day that may differ from what has been staged for the documentary. Maybe the only human contact she has on an ordinary day is someone, presumably her daughter, bringing her lunch (06:26-06:44). In that connection, Pellerin-Cormier's remark serves as a criticism of her limited abilities to engage with other people. In terms of activities, she seems to be completely dependent on her family. Loneliness, although the images of the documentary suggest otherwise, is thus implicitly presented as a major problem in extraordinary 'old' age. The audience does not get to know whether the centenarian has a community of friends to support her, and sheer statistics demonstrate that chances are high that her peers have passed away. Isolation can have tremendously negative effects on the human organism. The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention explains that "[a]lthough it's hard to measure social isolation and loneliness precisely, there is strong evidence that many adults aged

50 and older are socially isolated or lonely in ways that put their health at risk” (“Loneliness”). In terms of aging, or even generally, loneliness therefore should be avoided. However, as Pellerin-Cormier is depicted as preferring to stay at home and to pass her days mostly sitting and waiting, the documentary implies that living in a nursing home would be a worse fate. The factor of being alone and isolated for most of the time is glossed over by the documentary and only traceable in certain statements by the centenarian herself. In that connection, images might trump her words with regard to the power of determination of the narrative. Consequently, the audience is inclined to believe what they see, a woman who frequently interacts with several family members and has a full schedule of activities.

In addition to the issues of loneliness and isolation, the documentary indicates that stay at home care is easy to handle for all participants. Elder care does not seem to be a problem in Pellerin-Cormier’s case. She is independent enough to do her chores and prepare her own breakfast. Furthermore, her house does not seem to have any special needs facilities, which indicates that she does not require them. Throughout the documentary, she seems rather mobile and self-sufficient. There is only the odd moment when she is shown falling asleep sitting up or when her great-grandson needs to support her walking in the garden that allow her to show weakness. All these signs of supposed weakness are treatable with relatively low effort and cost: if she needs to sleep, the easy solution presents itself in form of taking a nap. If she is unable to navigate the uneven ground of her lawn by herself, there is no urgent need for her to go out there in the first place unless someone is there to accompany her. These thoughts, although they present easy solutions to the arising problems, are of course highly problematic as they all suggest that problems are solvable by restricting the centenarian to certain areas and certain activities. These solutions only appear to be acceptable when not looking at the centenarian’s perspective, who is unable to do as she pleases. From the perspective of younger generations, however, it does not seem to be a sacrifice, as the solutions offered solve problems of elder care without putting too much strain on broader society, as these solutions do not cost money or bother the health care infrastructure or the personal care givers.

In that connection, this portrayal veils the difficulties of providing for elderly relatives, omitting the pressure that especially women are often under when it comes to committing to the task of giving care for their relatives. Ferrant et al. point out that “[a]round the world, women spend two to ten times more time on unpaid care work than men” pointing to an imbalance not only in elder- but also in childcare. The audience never learns how the daughter copes with bringing her mother lunch every day or what other caregiving duties she fulfills. It is not touched upon where she lives or if she has a job. Instead, she is only portrayed briefly twice, once when she is bringing lunch and once when she is playing cards. Of course, this is a documentary focusing on the life of a centenarian but by leaving out the struc-

tures behind her life, it also denies the caregiving community a voice. Ultimately, this narrative fosters a neoliberal perspective on caretaking, propagating a model that has elderly people staying at home and being taken care of by family members instead of them moving into a care home facility where, in fact, there might be a social infrastructure not only of care takers but also of peers to engage with.

Ultimately, the ‘waiting room’ of age may be a different one for centenarians than the one for those who have not reached the threshold of 100, yet. A rather bleak reading of this centenarian narrative is then that turning 100 is merely a ‘waiting room’ upgrade. Consequently, in these terms, the documentary fails at the chance to become a meaningful source on care advice. Especially the way it covers up issues such as loneliness and loss, as well as questions of care in later life, seems highly problematic. However, this is yet another instance where it appears that the film tries to avoid the pitfall of portraying Pellerin-Cormier’s life as either a case of successful aging or a narrative of decline. What happens instead is that it denies the caregiver a voice and becomes a story confirming neoliberal demands and stereotypes about care.

### 3.5 Aldéa Pellerin-Cormier and the Normality of Centenarianism

By presenting a tricable break in the perspectives of Aldéa Pellerin-Cormier on the one hand and Daniel Léger on the other, “A Sunday at 105” allows one to analyze the topic of extraordinary ‘old’ age from two angles. Consequently, the documentary shows that there can never be a strictly black and white image of age(ing) and that individual perspectives influence representations. The cultural imaginary presented here is not as idealistic and sensationalist as that of Helen, discussed in the previous chapter. More often than not the centenarian’s age categories seem to more or less align. Yet, the fact that she is a centenarian in the first place lets any representation of outward, behavioral, or physical age seem ‘young’ in comparison to her institutionalized age. In that connection, the cultural imaginaries presented go along the lines of other media representations of centenarians trying to stage the centenarian as paragon of aging. Generally, there seems to be an ever-present tension between the portrayal of extraordinary ‘old’ age and the portrayal of ‘old’ age, clearly showing that, although centenarians are fabricated as a distinct age group, they do share some commonalities with ‘old’ age.

In terms of social structures, the narrative implicitly engages with questions of isolation. Pellerin-Cormier regards herself as being inactive and isolated most of the time. The images of the documentary, on the other hand, portray her as very much part of the social structure of the family. While she is not portrayed as being disengaged, she seems to feel that way. What is clearly shown here, however, is that

the disengagement Pellerin-Cormier feels is not a result of her actively seeking it. Rather, she appears ready to engage and be part of society.

When it comes to the aging body, and therefore biological implications of age(ing), the centenarian's perspective seems to be more nuanced than general ideologies of progress versus decline. That is, Pellerin-Cormier is aware of the physical age(ing) process and seems content with the limitation that she faces because of it. For her, physical ability does not necessarily appear as a focal point of her everyday life. The narrative surrounding her, on the other hand, suggests differently by portraying her as physically very fit, especially in connection to her institutionalized age, and physically very active.

Ultimately, Pellerin-Cormier herself does not seem to see herself as a role model or an other 'other' in terms of 'old' age. Rather, she appears to regard herself in terms of a continuous life in progress that is not defined by institutionalized age. Léger, on the other hand, focuses on the instances where his great-grandmother can be imagined as a role model of aging, portraying her not in a sensationalist, yet in an extraordinary way. By also portraying what is believed to be her perspective, however, the documentary does become a rather nuanced discussion of extraordinary 'old' age that portrays success, failure, progress, and decline as well as several shades in-between.