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Pain and glory: Narrative (De)constructions of older gay men in contemporary Spanish culture and cinema

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ABSTRACT

If (older) gay men have recurrently been stereotyped as hypersexual and as sexually voracious, they have also been represented as weak and effeminate, miserable and lonely, and as less manly than their heterosexual counterparts (Goltz, 2014; Freeman, 2010). Quite often, as Goltz reminds us, the two stereotypes intersect, as in classic films such as *Death in Venice*, *Gods and Monsters*, or *Love and Death on Long Island*, to name but a few, where ageism and homophobia combine to judge intergenerational relations as inappropriate and gay characters as "dirty old men" eager to recover their lost youth. Given these negative images, it is no wonder, then, that both youthism and ableism have become part and parcel of contemporary gay culture, which may also be linked to the few positive cultural images available of aging or disabled gay male bodies (Goltz, 2014). Starting off from the assumption that bodies are shaped and reshaped in complex interactions between physical and symbolic dimensions, the paper will demonstrate, however, how (auto)biographical narratives of older gay men, what we call "egodocuments," may be useful to rethink such traditional (mis)conceptions. Crossing the traditional divide between the Social Sciences and the Humanities, the study will draw on both life stories and film representations of older gay men in Spain, focusing on Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar's (2019) latest film, *Pain and Glory*, as a (semi-)autobiographical re-vision of traditional representations of gay men's aging. While Almodovar's protagonist and alter-ego, Salvador Mallo, appears as "prematurely aged" (Curtis and Thompson, 2015) due to bodily pain and disability, the film also travels back and forth from Mallos's childhood and youth to his maturity. This shows aging not only as a life-course experience, but also helps redefine it as a "queer" rather than linear or "straight" experience (Halberstam), allowing for both "pain and glory" to coexist in old age. Almodóvar's portraiture of gay aging will be compared to the life stories collected in a number of focus groups with Spanish older gay men, which will provide equally complex, varied, and often contradictory narratives.

Introduction

Over the last thirty years, gender studies have increasingly expanded, incorporating the analysis of both men and women as gendered beings (Kimmel, 2009: 16). There are few fields, nonetheless, that have been less receptive to these new understandings of gender and masculinities than gerontology studies. If age studies have concentrated on the very young (possibly a reflection of Western culture's obsession with youth), gerontology and aging studies have repeatedly overlooked analyses of older men, concentrating instead on older women or on "ungendered portraits of ageing" (Saxton and Cole, 2012: 98). As a consequence, both fields seem to have failed to study the specificities of older men *as men*. "Especially outside, but even inside, the field of gerontology," Edward H. Thompson, 1994: xi) noted, "there has been a tendency to view the elderly population as…homogeneous."

This is equally true of gay studies, which have long been dominated by a presentist/youthist tendency, reflecting the very ageism that indirectly reinforces the heterosexist assumption that there is no future for gay men (Berger, 1996; Bergling, 2004; Freeman, 2010; Goltz, 2010; Sears, 2010). Whereas gay culture has largely excluded aging, studies of aging have often ignored LGBT communities. Maria Brown (2009), for example, argues "that LGBT elders have been excluded from queer theory in much the same way as they are excluded from the LGBT community and from gerontology" (2009, 65). No wonder, then, that youth-centeredness, or "youthism," has become part and parcel of contemporary gay culture. This may also be linked to the few positive cultural images available of aging gay men. "Popular culture," as Dustin Bradley Goltz notes, "continually reifies a story of the aging gay male as

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tragically punished, lonely, a failure, and in a perpetual state of loss (Goltz, 2014: 1506). It should come as no surprise, then, that (younger) gay men are terrified of aging and, especially, of coming to embody such negative stereotypes. Yet recent scholarship on queer aging by scholars such as Maria Brown (2009), Jane Gallop (2019), and Cynthia Port (2012) harshly criticized queer theory for failing to consider old age, reminding us of the imperious need to bring together "queer sexuality and old age as embodied subjectivities and categories of identity" (Port, 2012: 2). Indeed, the very specificity of homosexual men's aging, what Jack Halberstam has described as "queer" as opposed to "straight" time, may be particularly useful to rethink not only the alleged universality of (heterosexual) (male) aging, but also of gay men's aging experiences themselves.

In line with this, the present article deals with both social constructions and cultural representations of aging gay men in Spain. While the first part of the article draws on life stories obtained from focus groups with Spanish gay men aged 60+, the second part analyses gay aging through *Pain and Glory/Dolor y gloria* (2019), 70-year-old Spanish gay director Pedro Almodóvar's (semi-)autobiographical film. Exploring the (auto)biographical accounts of the interviewees in relation to this autofiction will allow us to realize how the social (de)construction of aging (gay) masculinities and their cultural representations interact, but also how Social Sciences' and Humanities' approaches to (gay) aging complement and feed off each other. Indeed, exploring and thinking about such connections is one of the aims of this research article, with "egodocuments" being taken as theoretical and methodological intersection points. Egodocuments may be understood as stories of the self, "documents of life" (Brian, 2002; Plummer, 1983) on highly personalized interests, which are of great humanistic, ethnographic and sociological interest. While (literary and film) autobiographies, fictional and non-fictional, stand out in the humanities, autobiographies are also closely linked to "life stories," which have been defined as "a fairly complete narrating of one's entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important aspects" (Atkinson, 1998: 8). Insofar as life history is a qualitative methodology of social research based on the study of the biographical experiences of individuals, it offers discursive modalities that can also be considered egodocuments. In an effort to cross the traditional boundaries between autobiography and life stories, this paper thus aims to demonstrate how (auto)biographical narratives of older (Spanish) gay men, both fictional and nonfictional, work as a place *where* hegemonic models of masculinity and aging are deconstructed, moving beyond monolithic visions of aging "as decline" (Jackson, 2016: 1). Moreover, they can also point to an alternative images of what aging people can and *do* gain through the experience of pain and loss. Not only does this allow us to re-evaluate the relevance of narratives, fictional and non-fictional, to sociological research, revisiting both autobiography and life stories as invaluable research (ego) documents; this can also help to rethink, as we shall see, conventional theoretical approaches to, and stereotypes of, both aging and masculinity from highly innovative perspectives.

Methodology

"There is nothing outside the text" (Derrida, 1997: 163). With these famous words, Jacques Derrida gave an account of the linguistic turn that not only emphasizes the presence of language in the construction of meaning but considers it constitutive of human life. Life is a narrative because only through story can we give meaning to events and actions that would be lost if there were no spectators and narrators to tell it and reveal who the agent is (Arendt, 1998; Cavarero, 2000; Kristeva, 2014). However, not all biographies have the same opportunities to be recognized and narrated by others. Insofar as "a sense of [an insubstantial] self is […] something socially produced through the narratives people use to make sense of and understand their own lives [and those of others]" and that "these narrative[s] […] must partly depend on wider, [socio/] cultural narratives" (Jackson, 2016: 39), it is clear that dominant narratives often hide rather than reveal, thereby relegating non-hegemonic narratives to silence. This is the case with older people, particularly older gay men. Yet giving these narratives a voice allows us to deconstruct stereotypes of masculinity and aging and, in doing so, understand aging as a complex process where different narratives coexist, albeit not always in a congruent way (Jackson, 2016: 1). Furthermore, it gives rise to a broader perspective on both aging and gender, far from the homogeneity imposed by dominant social discourses and cultural representations.

The methodology for conducting the field work for this research article was designed with these ideas in mind. Taking into account the potential of narratives to construct but also deconstruct stereotypes, this study is based on a qualitative research work focused on the life stories of five older gay men, who lived throughout Francoist Spain and the Transition period.[1] They are currently members of the *Fundación 26 de Diciembre/26 December Foundation* (https://fundacion26d.org/), an organization which provides specialized and professional psychosocial care for LGTBIQ+ older people in Madrid.[2] During the research process, two focus groups of 2 and a half hours each were conducted, both conditioned by the pandemic situation. The dates for the group meetings were chosen in line with the confinement and perimeter closure measures in place between Spanish communities. In order to avoid external contact, recruitment was limited to five members of the Foundation. The average age of the participants was 65 and they were all living in Madrid at the time of the focus groups. Although most of them are originally

[1] The Transition is the name given to the historical period ranging from the end of Franco's dictatorship in 1975 to the onset of democracy in Spain in the 1980s.

[2] It is difficult to trace a common evolutionary line of the homosexuality repudiation that pervades Fascist regimes, but all of them may be characterized by a constitutive homophobia based on the link between race, nation, and virility. In Spain, this connection had a strong clerical imprint (Ugarte-Pérez, 2008: 13). Catholic morality was linked to the "moral of the victors," strong and virile, as opposed to the "moral of the defeated," seen as weak and effeminate. In this dualism, the so-called "asocial/inverted" became an enemy of the Francoist regime, as they were considered opposite to both (hegemonic) masculinity and the heteronormative family.When political and police persecution are added to social marginalization, repression is introduced at the legal level and "asocials" become "criminals" (Ugarte-Pérez, 2008: 19; Mora-Gaspar, 2016: 40). The result was that many were forced to conform to the heteronormative structure and lead a double life, or even enter the ranks of the Catholic Church to go unnoticed in a hetero-oppressive system, as is the case of two of the participants in this research. Most of them grew up under the so-called Vagrancy Law (*Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*, 1933) of the Second Republic, extended by the Franco regime in 1954 to integrate the legal figure of the homosexual. But much of their adulthood was traversed by the Social Dangerousness Law (*Ley de Peligrosidad y Rehabilitación Social*, 1970), which was intended to replace the prior law, by emphasizing the intention to "prevent crime" and promote social "rehabilitation". However, they also lived through the Spanish Transition period. Although this did not rapidly change the situation of the social rejection of gay men, it activated a period of mobilization and vindication of fundamental rights, which was key to transforming public opinion and the penal code. On December the 26th, 1978 the Council of Ministers of Spain ratified the modification of the Law on "Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation". The foundation at which our field work has been carried out is named after this date.

from Spain, two were born in Cuba and Peru.[3] Moreover, most of them lack a privileged social position, which is part of the impact of the Franco regime on now-aging homosexuals and, which the *26 of December Foundation* tries to alleviate by offering social hep and resources. Many gay men were unable to exercise their right to work or were forced to emigrate and are currently dependent on non-contributory pensions. Both aspects, the participants' original nationalities and their underprivileged status, have been taken into account to ensure an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

The original idea behind these meetings was to merge the qualitative methodology typical of focus groups and individual interviews with a narrative focus, based on life story methods (Rosenthal, 1993; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Sandberg, 2011). The first session comprised an approach to the (self-)perception of old age and its intersection with that of masculinity, as well as to cultural representations of this intersection based on a joint discussion on more than three advertisements. The second session was completely focused on cultural representations of older men in the Mediterranean area, and particularly in Spain, through a debate on six fragments of films, including *Pain and Glory* by Almodóvar.[4] The result was a joint reflection on the social and cultural representations of aging masculinities in Spain, taking into account how the participants linked them to their personal experiences, and paying attention to their own interpellations.

Analysis/findings

Our analysis drew on the stories obtained from the aforementioned focus groups. All of them were conducted in Spanish, the audio was recorded, and the data were coded in Atlas.ti version 9, considering a thematic analysis (Ezzy, 2002; Rosenthal, 1993). We paid special attention to topics related to the (de)construction of stereotypes of older gay men, without losing sight of those the participants were more insistent on, which were also incorporated into the analysis. A total of five group codes were established as thematic areas for the analysis of the data. They were met with (dualistic) stereotypes, which seem to make invisible the plural experience of old age, especially of older gay men. At the same time, however, alternative narratives permeate these thematic areas, calling those stereotypes into question and opening up an intermediate space where they can be analyzed in all their complexity. The five axes around which the analysis revolves were age (youth/beauty-aging/decline); sexuality (hypersexual-asexual); relationships (isolation-networking); health (illness/disability-care); and temporality (past-present), where all the other categories seem to converge.

[3] Sociodemographic characteristics of participants:

Pseudonym	Age	Birthplace	Socioeconomic status	Identify as	Partnership Status	Children
Fernando	62	Spain	Comfortable	Gay	Divorced and living with partner	1
Sergio	66	Perú	Modest	Bisexual	Single	0
Ernesto	66	Spain	Comfortable	Gay	Single	0
Daniel	67	Cuba	Modest	Gay	Partnered but living alone	0
Alberto	68	Spain	Hardship	Gay	Single	0

[4] The selected film excerpt was 0:10:23–0:12:49 and 1:06:08–1:19:56. The other five films chosen were: *Elsa y Fred* (2005), directed by Marcos Carnevale; *AzulOscuroCasiNegro* (2006), directed by Daniel Sánchez-Arévalo; *La grande bellezza* (2013) and *Youth* (2015), both directed by Paolo Sorrentino; and *Abuelos* (2019), directed by Santiago Requejo.

Between beauty/youth and decline/old age

"Being homosexual, […] we have been whitewashed into a culture of beauty and thinking that everything is going to be perfect and divine, so then, when you turn 60, all of that comes crashing down" (Session 2:25 ¶ 265). This is how one of the participants refers to the powerful influence of youth and beauty ideals on (older) gay men. This emphasis on youth and physical appearance does indeed seem to be in line with Western youthism, which denies or rejects old age and, especially, looking "old" (Heaphy, Yip and Thompson, 2004: 896; Jackson, 2016: 66). This fear seems to be shared by both older women and gay men, in opposition to heterosexual men, who seem more concerned with the loss of bodily functionality. According to Lodge and Umberson (2013), this is probably due to the fact that "the culturally ideal form of masculinity is predicated on heterosexuality and that gay masculinity stands as the 'repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity'" (2013: 227). The aging process would thus seem be more overwhelming for gay men and women, whose social and cultural relevance is made to depend much more heavily on their physical appearance. We should not lose sight, however, of the fact that "heteronormativity constructs both straight and gay masculinities" (Kimmel, 2009: 27) not only by way of exclusion but also incorporation. Thus, solid research shows that [hegemonic] masculinity continues to be [to some extent] the organizing principle of heterosexual and homosexual behaviour" (Kimmel, 2009: 28), which revolves around the idea of courage (*protection*), competitiveness and productivity (*provision*) and virility (*potency*). In any case, stereotypical masculinity, gay and straight, is linked to youth and thus intersects with stereotypes about "ageing men in Western culture [who] are seen as inevitably in decline" (Jackson, 2016: 1). Yet this seems to be even more complex in the case of older gay men. If, for older straight men, legacies of masculine and heterosexual privilege are already in conflict with their marginalization due to ageism, bodily fragility, and loss of sexual potency, gay men find themselves subjected to stronger ideals of youth/beauty but also to heteronormative views of gay men as weak and feminine.

The specific discrimination of older gay men thus reflects the intersection of patriarchal, heteronormative, and ageist discourses, but it also shows how, at times, such dominant views end up becoming internalized by the gay community itself: "We are in a society where being older is a bad thing […] and mostly in our community, where we have been instructed […] that being gay is being young, being handsome, being consumers. And then, nobody wants to get out of there" (S.1: 6 ¶ 26). However, all of the participants insist on the socially and culturally constructed nature of this perception and form of oppression. While one of them says he is "very proud of his wrinkles and spots" (S.1: 5 ¶ 22), another points out the ways in which the same gay community goes about facing this imperative, as is the case with the "bear community," created to deal [with] "the problem of all the people who were getting old and getting a belly" (S.1: 48 ¶ 229–253).

Between hypersexuality and asexuality

We have already mentioned sexual potency as one of the constitutive elements of dominant masculinity (Jackson, 2016; Kimmel, 2009; Plummer, 2005). As sexual activity is considered typical of young people, older people seem to be deprived of the "right to enter the privileged space of the young and certainly not with the perceived undesirable and unattractive bodies" (Jackson, 2016: 56). From this perspective, older people, particularly older men, who have been linked their entire life to their sexual potency, are considered asexual subjects and, in cases where they express their sexual desire, "are liable to be seen as inappropriate or even 'dirty old men'" (Jackson, 2016: 56). They are often seen as "a queer figure, insofar as [they are] sexual in the wrong time and place" (Sandberg, 2011: 20–21). Both stereotypes are present in the stories of the five participants in our focus group, yet they also coexist with narratives that deconstruct them.

All the participants seemed to agree that the stereotype of the older hypersexual man, obsessed with sex and remaining sexually young ("dirty old man"), is also predominant in the gay community. Recalling his experience at a gay sauna, one of them says, "the elderly had to be sent to the dark rooms and they were called old men. Look at that old man! Be careful with that old man, he is going to grope you!" (S.1: 47 ¶ 220–227). Although one of the interviewees thinks that "logically" it is "horrible" to think about older men when one is young, another responds to him mentioning the undervalued character of the elderly as "mentors" and as more appealing due to their greater experience and capacity for care (S.1: 48 ¶ 229–253). In any case, most of participants agreed on a critical view of the (younger) gay scene. In addition to stereotyping the young and beautiful man, it also seems to stereotype sexuality as unrelated to affection. Most of the participants classify dark rooms or "chemsex" as an "aberration" that has nothing to do with them. Instead, they uphold the idea of establishing relationships.

In their narratives, then, two stereotypes seem to coexist in tension: that of heteronormative romantic love and that of the radical rupture between sexuality and affection in gayness. This is particularly pressing in the context of the Spanish dictatorship that prohibited them from experiencing their sexuality in freedom and conditions of equality, and then accused them of being promiscuous: "in the world we grew up in, homosexuality was something that had to be overcome […]. So, people got married and then ended up in public urinals. People went to a convent or became a priest as in my case […] or took drugs". (S.1: 63 ¶ 507–521). In order to deal with this oppression, many of them had to hide not only their (sexual) desires from others, but from themselves, adjusting their lives to the hegemonic family model and a form of experiencing love and sexuality that often crashed when they entered the gay scene, "I saw how heteronormativity was shoved down our throats when I was married […]. When I entered the gay world with my hetero background, I thought I was going to fall in love […]. [However] I found an LGTB society that had no notion of falling in love. It had the idea of having relationships, of using you […]. That affects your sexuality, it affects the person and your identity. I am not that! I am affection, I am tenderness!" (S.2: 36 ¶ 354–,378). These are narratives that come to dismantle both the stereotype of romantic love and that of a gay man obsessed with sex without love. When they intersect with the aging process, however, such narratives do not end up backing up the stereotype of an asexual older gay man, desireless and undesirable. In fact, although it is widely believed that there is an interdependence between desire and sexual function, it does not always occur, often appearing as disconnected in narratives of older men (Sandberg, 2011: 20).

All the interviewees agreed that there is a change in the frequency and the way of having sex as one gets older. Although, at times, this feeling seems to be perceived as a "loss of aura" or resignation, most of them speak of a process of adaptation and even of reinvention. The same participant who speaks of a "loss of aura" clarifies that although some time ago sex for him was a "biological, physical [and even psychological] need," he now resorts to other forms of satisfaction: "I delight in social networks and [I] have gone back to self-stimulation" (S.1: 17 ¶ 31–33). Similarly, another participant, who came to consider "sex [as] a stage of life [that] changes," recognizes that although at a certain age "our body is not the same […], one has to feel active" (S.1:3 ¶ 19), alluding to the advantages of Viagra as a way to keep up with sexual activity. Despite these advantages, other participants also highlight the limitations in the use of Viagra. One of them even expressed his refusal to use it because "there are many ways to enjoy yourself and have sex. I'm not going to say that it is more satisfying than when you were young, it's just a different type of satisfaction" (S.1: 5 ¶ 22). With these words, he dismantles the medicalization of sexual impotence as the only solution to what is now called "erectile dysfunction" (Plummer, 2005; Sandberg, 2011; Wentzell and Salmeron, 2009). If, on the one hand, this reinforces the stereotype of eternal youth by turning a natural decrease in sexual function into a disease (Sandberg, 2011: 24), on the other hand, it ends up reinforcing the hegemonic model of male sexuality based on penetration (Plummer, 2005: 183). Moreover, by claiming new ways of feeling pleasure that are not centred on oneself, but on giving pleasure to the other party, he offers an alternative to the hegemonic model: "I fuck when I can, because it is a lie that as one gets older there are fewer possibilities, there are others […]. Suddenly, you discover that it is better to worry about the happiness of others than your own, and curiously this is how you discover your own happiness" (S.1: 5 ¶ 22).

Between social isolation and social networks/agency

The figure of the older (gay) man as lonely has, to some extent, an empirical foundation. All the interviewees suggest that the self-isolation of older men usually coincides with the onset of retirement. With regard to their early retirement, two interviewees mention their own sense of loss, which highlights the construction of subjectivity based on productive capacity, imposed socially and even transmitted within the family. Another interviewee indicated "the social tragedy of a need to work" (S.2: 14 ¶ 114), which, according to the participants, does not affect men and women equally. Not only because women "are much more educated to serve […] [and] the ones who have been given the role of care never retire" (S.2: 18 ¶ 170–184), but also because they have greater ability to adapt to changes as they age. This, in the participants' view, is linked to their ability to establish social relationships with other women due to their situation of inequality in patriarchal society. David Jackson states that aging men are "challenged by physical changes, biographical disruptions and social issues about loneliness, intimacy, relationships and friendships" (2016: 145). They often have fewer social resources than women, probably due to the construction of their subjectivity as *Homo faber*, based on the physical and social capital of their bodies. Moreover, this subjectivity, built on the idea of competition, self-sufficiency, autonomy, and individualism, has been defined as unemotional and poorly oriented to social relationships. As a result, "many ageing men experience a lack of close, intimate friendships with other men and often face a diminishing social support network as they age" (Jackson, 2016: 145). And this affects, in particular, heterosexual men, especially when they lose their wives, who were often in charge of the social relationships. According to Cohen and i as, this "chosen" isolation would have a homophobic component, including the fear of appearing "effeminate," "cultural barriers" such as "competitiveness and its inhibiting effect on self-disclosure, a lack of role models in intimacy […] and a need to be in control, which also restricts men's willingness to be vulnerable" (Cohen, 1992: 116). These barriers that favour the often unconscious self-isolation of older men have as their flip-side the socially imposed isolation on older gay men. As one interviewee puts it, "They have constructed us on loneliness. We have been taught that we have to be alone" (S1: 27 ¶ 60–62). In the case of Spain, structural isolation intersects with the class question. During the Franco regime, homosexuals were not only imprisoned, but they were also relegated from the labor market while others were forced to emigrate. So, as many of them could not contribute to the national pension scheme, they are now aging in a situation of absolute social and economic precariousness.

However, all the participants mention the need to be actively involved and to create networks of solidarity, spaces for meeting, as well as social agency to confront both social isolation and society's indifference to it. All the participants recognize the central role that the Foundation (*26 de Diciembre*) has played in this regard. "In the Foundation I have found not only a group of people who have the same need, but also friends that you can share and talk to. And this helps with your *know-how*, […] and to accept the reality of aging" (S.1: 19 ¶ 35). So, these discourses demonstrate, on the one hand, that older men's fear of "appearing effeminate" when establishing friendships with other men is diluted in the case of older homosexual men and, with it, the male-rational and female-emotional dualism. In a similar way to women, the need to respond to their social exclusion leads them to create support networks and develop social agency. In so doing, they confront loneliness at the same time as they embrace vulnerability as a human

condition (Butler, 2014), rather than as an attribute of one gender/sex only.

Between disability and care

Vulnerability takes on special relevance at its intersection with old age. As health deteriorates and disabilities emerge, one's relationship with the body as well as society changes. This is because "disability is not only a medical tragedy," as the restricted biomedical discourse suggests, "but a socially oppressed position" (Jackson, 2016: 22). If some (aging) bodies may be considered as "disabled," non-normative bodies are vulnerable to being marginalized, which is also part of heteronormativity. As Robert McRuer argues, "the system of compulsory able-bodiedness, which in a sense produces disability, is thoroughly interwoven with the system of compulsory heterosexuality that produces queerness" (2006: 2). In a society in which the male (heterosexual) body is built on the stereotypes of strength and autonomy, disability is perceived by many men as damaging to their masculine identity (Jackson, 2016: 27).

Rather than a feeling of loss of autonomy, however, the narratives of the five men involved in this research addressed the vulnerability of disabled bodies through an emphasis on "care" in all its dimensions: taking care of themselves, being care receivers, and becoming care givers. Most of them mention having become aware of their bodies through a loss of strength and "wear and tear": "You are aware of your body because you know where your kidneys are. When you're young, you don't even realize it" (S.2: 28 ¶ 286). However, they also mention that these bodily pains remind them of the need to take care of themselves, and for some of them even to leave behind their addiction to drugs as a means to alleviate their emotional pain. One interviewee states, "when I left parties, I was drunk or on drugs […]. But there was also a time where I just decided to give it all up […] I realized that [drinking and taking drugs] made me sadder, it made me more dependent on something that […] I no longer see as comforting […]. Over time you learn to love yourself a little more and to be aware of your body and what all these excesses entail" (S.2: 27 ¶ 282). From this perspective, aging appears to be a turning point in self-care, which makes us rethink aging as more than a body in decline. It is also the activation of a whole series of resources to take care of it.

Besides self-care, the participants highlighted the situation of vulnerability to which they are exposed in our ageist societies and demanded "the right to be taken care of." As one participant states, "old age has never been valued. […] we have been forced to live in anxiety, in fear, when in fact, aging is a life process that would also have to be intergenerational […]. Sometimes we are in need, sometimes we help" (S.1: 7 ¶ 26). At the same time that they criticize this socially induced fear, they complain about the "incapacitation" of the elderly, which is also socially induced. In the same way that (gay) older men are forced into loneliness, they highlight the social production of an "illness" that makes older people needy and even useless: "they do not treat us as equals, they treat us as […]: 'you can no longer do this, you can no longer do someone else'" (S.2:50 ¶ 533–543). This (mis)interpretation of caregiving relationships clearly ends up robbing older people of their capacity for agency.

With regard to the stereotype of the elderly as mere care receivers, the participants highlighted the essential care work of older people. One pointed out the fundamental role they had played in his youth, "They guided me through my loneliness […] they led me away from becoming a drug addict […]" (S.1: 45 ¶ 196). He also highlighted how he is now happy to help older people deal with loneliness, "I like providing support to people in need […] (S.1: 16 ¶ 30), insisting how "You are like an angel that brings them a bit of peace and relief' (S.2: 46 ¶ 505–506).

The gender difference existing in care relationships is especially perceived when it comes to care giving. And, at this point, the interviewees perceive intersection with sexual orientation as a central theme. Although society generally links women to care work, they associate care giving as an inner tendency for them: "Care is inherent to us… If we were straight, we would see it differently […]. We are caregivers, we do that work without any problems" (S.2: 43 ¶ 464–466). Furthermore, although there is no "natural" connection between giving care and gender/sex, hegemonic masculinity values limit the capacity to take care of others. As gay men, their experience of embodying subordinated masculinities can become a model of what Elliot calls "caring masculinities", which she defines as "masculine identities that exclude domination and embrace the affective, relational, emotional, and interdependent qualities of care identified by feminist theorists of care" (Elliott, 2016: 13). Because they also are older, their experiences of giving care help to deconstruct both stereotypes: older people as mere care receivers and care as a natural trait of women.

Between past and present

"'I am I and my circumstance' [Ortega y Gasset] influences us so much that perhaps it is an 'I' and the speed of life. And you don't realize that until are old" (S.1: 35 ¶ 90). Here, one of the participants alludes to the speed of time as the key "circumstance" mentioned by all the members of the focus group. They also share the feeling that the pace of life varies depending on its stages. Bodily changes modify the pace of life and although energetic activity diminishes, everyone argues that aging brings with it more peace and happiness (by caring for oneself and for others). While one participant recognizes that "quality of life is now much more palpable [because] you are no longer in a hurry to do things" (S.1: 13 ¶ 29), another claims to feel "very happy" because now they see "reality in a different way, with an alternative sense of calm" (S.1: 10 ¶ 27). Along the same lines, another participant speaks of a kind of liberation "when you reach a certain age […] you no longer do what you don't like. […] [and] One becomes more of a 'Lord' […] in the sense of trying to make the people around you happy" (S.2: 8 ¶ 30–34).

These accounts seem to reflect a linear perception of time, which portrays old age as the culmination of the different stages of life which, in theory, appear to be socially determined. The same interviewee states, "old age is a natural thing […] if you have burned stages of life. I have burned those stages […]. There have been times I've gone to bed at 8 in the morning or not gone to bed at all. Then I had a period of 'seriousness,' then love and […] what is called 'stability'". And yet he adds, "you handle old age well if you have memories" (S.1: 35 ¶ 90).

Consciously or not, the past and present are continuously intermingled in the stories of these five men in diverse ways through all the axes of the aforementioned analysis. Their constant references to childhood and youth made them seem very present, dismantling the gap between youth and old age. Thus, for example, while one of the participants recalls his recent beach experience stating, "every day was like being a child again! […] I like the sea, getting in the water all day, putting on my snorkelling mask, just like when I was young" (S.2: 31 ¶ 314). Another remarks, "a 30-year-old can be a respectable old man and a 66-year-old […] can feel perfectly young" (S.1: 4 ¶ 21–22). The same can be said of the way they experience ailments, social, and care relationships, as in the case of the abovementioned interviewee who had received the support of older people during his youth in solitude, and now helps older people to deal with their loneliness. He also recognizes that many of his current bodily ailments are the price he has to pay for his past addiction to the drugs used to alleviate his emotional pain, "Now that time has passed, [those excesses] have started to take their toll on me […]. They are the things that you go through in your life and that impact your current reality" (S.2: 27 ¶ 282).

However, the interaction between past and present is particularly visible when it comes to (sexual) desire. Again, consciously or not, the participants' memories influence their present experiences in that they reappropriate and reinterpret those memories. Most of their memories of the awakening of their sexual desire were permeated by repression and the feeling of guilt, due to the presence of the Catholic Church and the Franco regime. From childhood to adulthood, their sexual desire was

conditioned by this oppressive context, "As LGTB people, we have had a bad experience of sexuality. As children, our first experiences of desire were repressed. We did not live up to what was expected of us. […] I wonder if being homosexual had been allowed, would it have influenced my future sexuality" (S.2: 36 ¶ 354–378).

From the perspective of these narratives, old age no longer appears to be a specific stage at the end of life. Instead, it is much more of a diffuse memory of everything, where past and present converge, as does the sense of loss and sublimation. This calls into question the radical rupture between the past (youth) and the present (old age) as well as the linear (and even teleological) perception of (*hetero-)chrononormative* temporality (Freeman, 2010: 3),[5] based on reproductive time and hegemonic family patterns (Halberstam, 2005: 10). One participant states, "When I entered the gay world from my hetero background, there was a whole rupture in my mind. Sexuality, as we had been told, is: you fall in love, you have a relationship, and you move in together" (S.2: 36 ¶ 354–378).

What these stories offer us, then, are counter-narratives that provide an alternative way of perceiving old age and time. They suggest a transition, to use Jake Halberstam's words, from "straight" to "queer temporality", which allows (queer) people "to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (2005: 2). Conducting these focus groups has shown us that this transition can be encouraged through cultural representations. This is the case of the film *Pain and Glory*, about which one of the participants commented, "While other films are moralistic, this one teaches […] and it acts as a reminder. It then brings back those memories, but without pain […]. This is what is needed for our experiences to be remembered". (S.1: 62 ¶ 486–494).

Cultural representations of older gay men in Spain: Pedro Almodóvar's *pain and glory* and its (de)construction of stereotypes

As we already suggested, this article focuses on both social construction and cultural representations of older gay men, especially with a view a focus onllustrating their interaction. If, as Teresa De Lauretis (1987) has argued, "the representation of gender *is* its construction" (1997: 3), then cultural and film representations of aging masculinities may be particularly useful to explore their social construction. Indeed, as many contemporary Spanish film directors have aged, both gay (i.e., Pedro Almodóvar, Ventura Pons, Alejandro Amenábar) and straight (e.g., José Luis Garci, Antonio Hernández, Ignacio Ferreras), older (male) characters have become increasingly present, which makes the present study timely. With a growing number of films with older characters as protagonists (*Dolor y gloria/Pain and Glory* [2019], *Arrugas/Wrinkles* [2011], *En la ciudad sin límites* [2002], *El abuelo* [1998], for example)–, it now seems both possible and desirable to rethink their specific influence on masculinity of aging in contemporary Spanish movies. If most cultural studies on gender and aging have focused on women (Brennan, 2004; this article will thus deal with aging masculinities as portrayed in Pedro Almodóvar's semi-autobiographical film *Pain and Glory* (2019), which focuses on the life, past and present, of Salvador Mallo (presumably Almodóvar's alter ego) as an aging gay man. In so doing, Almodóvar's recent autofiction may be considered another important "egodocument", which sheds new light on the often invisibilized experiences of older gay males, deconstructing, as we shall see, a number of stereotypes traditionally associated with both queerness and aging.

Much of the existing criticism on Almodóvar's *oeuvre* seems to concur that most of his movies focus on women. From early films such as *Pepi, Luci, Bom* (1980) and *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) to later titles like *The Flower of My Secret* (1995) to *All About My Mother* (1999) to *Volver* (2006) to *Julieta* (2016), his films have recurrently centred on women from different social backgrounds and ages, including prostitutes, drug addicts, film stars, and mothers, amongst other characters. "As Spain's most famous contemporary cinematic auteur, he is known internationally," Sarah Gilligan and Jacky Collins argue in this respect, "for his 'cinema of women', creating memorable, vivacious, emotional and funny cross-generational female characters" (2019: 148).[6] It is true that many of his movies, from *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1990) to *High Heels* (1991) to *Live Flesh* (1997) to *Bad Education* (2004), have included a wide range of male characters, too, both homosexual and heterosexual. Yet while his films are peopled with many types and archetypes of heterosexual men,[7] ranging from the traditional "Iberian *macho*" (Garrido-Lora, 2017: 79–81; Ramírez-Alvarado, 2017: 133–136) of the Francoist era to the much more complex characters from the Spanish Transition to the present,[8] his gay characters have often been associated with camp culture. "Whilst the male subject is not absent from Almodóvar's prolific cinematographic body of work, when such subjects do appear," Gilligan and Collins rightly note, "they are usually camp, queer, and spectacular—or they are absent, mad or dead" (2019: 148).

In this sense, *Pain and Glory* may be seen as a welcome addition to his film career, as this (semi-)autobiographical film moves beyond the traditional set of gay characters available in his previous works by giving voice and visibility to *aging* gay men, who had remained ostensibly absent from his previous filmography. As Barbara Zecchi, (2015: 50) rightly notes, Almodóvar's filmography seems to have moved from his early "gay" movies from the 1980s and 1990s—based on gender inversions which, however, kept intact binary oppositions like gay/straight and feminine/masculine—to the later "queer" films from the 2000s onwards—which seem to move beyond such binary oppositions through the indeterminacy of both gender and sexual identity categories. While leaving behind much of the "spontaneity," "sexual subversion," and "ludic optimism" of his former films, which Zecchi refers to as Almodóvar's "pink period" (2015: 51), his later works, which Zecchi groups into Almodóvar's "blue period," would seem to be characterized by deeper yet more "melancholic" stories on the "fluid" identities associated with being both an artist as well as an (aging) man (Zecchi, 2015: 51). By moving from gay *identification* to queer *disidentification*, the director is able to cross traditional gender and sexual boundaries, which are now placed in ambivalent and often slippery contexts, thus opening up "another discursive horizon, another way of thinking the sexual" (De Lauretis qtd. in Zecchi, 2015: 51). As part of this

[5] Following Elizabeth Freeman's definition, *chrononormativity* may be defined as "a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts. Schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches inculcate… 'hidden rhythms,' forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege" (2010: 3). Heterosexual institutions like family and reproduction, based on "forward movement" and "linear time" (2010: 5), encourage chrononormative patterns with a view to promoting both production and reproduction.

[6] On Almodóvar's women characters, see, for example, Gruber (2019), who also contends that his movies—especially *Broken Embraces* (2009), *The Skin I Live In* (2011) and *Julieta* (2016)—are amongst the best and most personalized cinematic representations of women and the female experience (2019: 45).

[7] According to Rey (2017: 1–7), such archetypes include the villain, the violent man, the seducer, the satyr, and the Iberian *macho*, who embodies the most conservative and reactionary values of Spanish national heteronormative masculinity, combining physical and sexual aggressiveness, as in the case of the protagonist bullfighter of *Matador* (1986).

[8] In this respect, Javier Escudero, for example, has noted how many of Almodóvar's early films, such as *Labyrinth of Passion* (1982) and *Dark Habits* (1983), are set in Madrid between, roughly, 1977 and 1983, during the Transition. In social as well as artistic cultural terms, the Transition coincided with the so-called *movida*, a cultural and artistic movement set in Madrid which revolved around drugs, sex, drinking, and rock music as social expressions of the newly gained freedom (Escudero, 1998: 147).

"blue"(s) period, Almodóvar's *Pain and Glory* may be seen, as we shall see, to also question (aging) gay male stereotypes in highly innovative and subversive ways.

Pain and Glory was first released in 2019, when its director was almost 70. Pedro Almodóvar's alter ego is Salvador Mallo (Antonio Banderas), a gay film director who, like Almodóvar himself, is also supposed to be in his (late) sixties. Given the youthism that pervades contemporary gay culture, the film's focus on a gay male protagonist may already be considered subversive enough in its own right. It is true that, given his age, Salvador Mallo's description of himself as "old" (1:08:12) might sound odd, even exaggerated. Yet besides the fact that research within gay male cultures suggests that the term "older" may be used to describe gay men as early as thirty-five to forty years of age (Goltz, 2010: 7), it must not be forgotten that the ailing Mallo introduces himself as both physically and mentally disabled from the start. While he was healthy until he hit 30, he was thereafter afflicted with an increasing number of ailments and bodily pains, including insomnia, chronic pharyngitis, otitis, ulcer, reflux, asthma, muscular pains, sciatic nerve pain, muscular pains, tinnitus, and back pains, amongst others. To these, he adds his "soul" afflictions, which include mental panic, anxiety "and, of course, depression" (10:29–12:45), much of which is connected to him mourning his late mother. Thus, Almodóvar's alter-ego, we would argue, is doubly marked and socially stigmatized as "old," not only because he is gay but also, above all, because he is both physically and mentally impaired.

Indeed, aging and disability have often been seen as inseparable. Despite Mallo's ostensibly "middle-aged" status, Almodóvar makes it clear that his status as a disabled man causes him to already "*feel* old" (1:08:12). Thus, when his former boyfriend Federico asks him, "how are you?", Mallo simply replies, "old" (1:08:12). Crucially, *Pain and Glory* illustrates age as both constructed and culture-specific, which would thus seem to bear out Curtis and Thompson's argument about what they described as "premature" aging (2015: 587). This, they conclude, helps to "complicate our understanding of the life cycle" and highlights that "old age" possesses a "contingent, subjective quality" (2015: 587). Such "premature aging" does indeed seem to take a toll on Almodóvar's protagonist, whose constant ailments seem to prevent him from producing any new films. At the same time, this only increases his loneliness and isolation, two features which have, in turn, been stereotypically associated with older people. Our identity, as Katharina Zilles, (2014) has rightly noted, is as inflected by aging as it is by disability, which is actually quite often understood as a premature form of aging. "The 'message of ageing' - that physical existence is moribund, frail, vulnerable - is clarified and exemplified," as Zilles insists, "by the irreversible maiming of the body: the mark of disability points to the marks of age (ing); one category of otherness brings along, and shapes, another" (2014: 230). Insisting further, we would like to suggest that "queerness" may itself be seen as a form of "disability," both literally and figuratively. If, as Robert McRuer has skilfully noted (2006: 2), homosexuality has long been associated with illness, both mental and physical, especially since the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, then it seems reasonable to infer the associations between on the one hand heterosexuality with "normalcy" and on the other homosexuality with illness or "disability." In other words, "compulsory able-bodiedness," which produces "disability," seems inseparable from compulsory heterosexuality, which generates "queerness" (McRuer, 2006: 2).[9] Thus, Salvador Mallo might be said to be aged as much by his gayness as by his disability, which may be seen as another form of "queerness."

Yet Salvador's woes, both physical and emotional, are mitigated through all kinds of medical treatments and substances, legal and illegal. Amongst the latter is heroin, which causes him to remember some of his past, especially his childhood and youth, thus providing the film with what Desmond O'Neill (2019) has rightly termed "a simultaneous and subliminal powerful counter-message of vitality" (2019: 909). Such memories and flashbacks focus on three main episodes of his personal life, which also incapsulate much of Spain's history, from Francoism to the present. Thus, a revival of one of his early movies from the 1980s, *Sabor (Taste)*, causes Salvador to reconnect with its protagonist, Alberto Crespo (Asier Etxeandía), who invites the director to smoke heroin. This, in turn, takes us back to Salvador's memories of his childhood and his devoted mother Jacinta (Penélope Cruz) in the village of Paterna, Valencia, which reveals the impoverished rural environment and strict Catholic upbringing he was subjected to during the post-Civil War years (07:55) but also the awakening of his (homo)sexual desire and attraction towards a mason painter, Eduardo (César Vicente), whom the child Salvador taught to read and write.[10] Such erotic memories are only fuelled by Salvador's coming across a portrait of himself as a child, which was painted by Eduardo himself. Thus, we see how the past (childhood) interweaves with the present (adulthood) through what Alberto Mira has referred to as "objets trouvés" (2013: 88–104), certain objects that Almodóvar's filmography recurrently uses to bring the past into the present. "Through the photographic portrait," as Hermida and Cobo-Durán argue, "Almodóvar makes the memory corporeal" (2017: 92). Last but not least, Alberto discovers a love story on Salvador's computer, set in Madrid in 1981, which he turns into a play. Titled *Adicción* (*Addiction*), this story also helps reconnect Salvador with the protagonist of the romance, his Argentinian ex-boyfriend Federico Delgado (Leonardo Sbaraglia), whose drug addiction put an end to their relationship. Salvador's story with Federico did indeed come to an end after the latter decided to leave Madrid, which was a "mine field" and a "dead end" (1:03:15) for him, and returned to Argentina, where he finally managed to get over his addiction and form a new family with his wife and children.

Besides combining personal and social history, most of Salvador's recollections and flashbacks may thus be seen as exemplifying "queer notions of time. Following Jack Halberstam's definition of "queer time" as "those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family" (2005: 6), it may be argued that Mallo's memory work both challenges (hetero)"chrononormativity" and embraces "queer" understandings of time in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. On the one hand, most of his memories are infused with (queer) desire, so that "different histories… brush up against each other, creating temporal havoc in the key of desire" (Halberstam, 2005: 3). In so doing, Almodóvar's story not only challenges "straight" notions of time regarding the conventional logics of "development" and "maturity," but also proposes "new life narratives and alternative relations" to such concepts, which (Halberstam, 2005: 3) sees as a central aspect of queer (re-)formulations of time and space.

Thus, for example, Mallo's flashbacks undermine the binary conception of a linear life narrative separating childhood from adulthood, illustrating instead a life-course perspective whereby past and present (desire) continually influence and interact with one another. Similarly, Almodóvar's challenge to heteronormative conceptions of family leads him to represent Mallo as a (male) carer, offering what Juan

[9] It is true that contemporary gay culture, as McRuer himself acknowledges, is dominated by youthism, "musculinity," and able-bodiedness, but not despite the 1980s AIDS crisis, but precisely because of it, as a direct response to the images of sick and disabled bodies that it ensued (2006: 2).

[10] While Qingyang Zhou sees the rural environment of Salvador's childhood as an "idealized version of the past" (2020: 1), which he contrasts with "the middle-aged director's apartment in Madrid" hosting "a soul tortured by pain and impasse" (2020: 6), We believe Almodóvar complicates any easy binary opposition between city and countryside. After all, it is only in Madrid, for example, that he is able to enjoy (homo)sexual freedom, as opposed to the much harsher homophobia and even backwardness of rural Spain, and it is in Madrid where his creative career flourishes, despite his constant trips, fictional rather than real, to his hometown.

Rey has defined as "a wider perspective" on care beyond "the care of the offspring" (2017: 11). While Almodóvar's men are often depicted as selfish and unfaithful characters who have been unable to take care of their families,[11] there are some examples, as Rey insists, in which "male care is represented in a positive way" (2017: 66–67). This is the case, for example, of films such as *All About My Mother* (Maierhofer, 1999) and *Volver* (2006), where sons and offspring are represented as nurturing carers, but also of *Pain and Glory*, where Salvador Mallo is portrayed as a devoted carer of his drug-addicted boyfriend Federico first, and of his aging mother (Julieta Serrano) later on. In both cases, Almodóvar challenges the (heteronormative) stereotype by associating the caring figure with women only.

Even more importantly, perhaps, Mallo's embrace of "queer" time, especially his revisitation of the past through and from the present, allows him to retake his creative work and finally heal. After all, it is Salvador's decision to allow the adaptation into a play of his (past) love story with Federico and his struggle with drugs that allows him to reconnect with his former boyfriend, which in turn helps Mallo overcome his own addiction to heroin. In a similar vein, Salvador's finding his portrait of himself as a child leads him to remember Eduardo and to start writing again, in this case a new autofiction titled *El primer deseo* (*The First Desire*). Finally, the last sequence ends up revealing Mallo's life story as part of a film shooting, or film-within-a-film, which points to the protagonist's newly recovered creativity as a director after his creative crisis while emphasizing the role of cinema in reliving and revisiting Salvador's memories. Ultimately, then, Almodóvar shows how Salvador's pain, which is as physical as psychological, is also the source of his inspiration and creativity. Of this, Qinyang Zhou argues, "Salvador's reunion with Federico and his rediscovery of Eduardo's portrait of him reading in that romantic afternoon reinvigorate the now aging director, allowing him to rediscover hope in life, fight against his drug addiction, and open a new chapter in his career" (2020: 4–5).

The participants' responses to *pain and glory*

As mentioned above, the second session of our focus group was devoted to discussing cultural representations of older men in the Mediterranean area, and particularly Spain, through a debate on six fragments of films on male aging, including *Pain and Glory* by Almodóvar. With regard to the lack of cultural representations of older people in general, the respondents complained about the predominant visibility of the "young man in the film as a hero, the one who is stronger" (S.2: 2 ¶ 10) because "it's what sells" (S.2: 5 ¶ 14), as well as the (binary) ageist, classist, and heteronormative representations of old age in cinema (either as decrepitude or prolongation of youth, as needy or funny). Instead, they emphasized the attractive character of older men linked to experience rather than physical appearance, with one saying, "I flirt more now than I did when I was young. How handsome I was back then!" (S.1:48 ¶ 229–253). Although another participant says, "I feel a kind of martyrdom. As long as I do not look in the mirror, I feel as if I were 30 years old […] [however] we have a mirror" (S.1:47 ¶ 220–227); he also insists, "we must break the mirror." Even though he defines old age as a "tragedy," he rejects the stereotype of the depressed old man and admits that he is happy at this peaceful stage of life. Like the others, he emphasizes the need for acceptance and adaptation "to a new phase" which, despite decreasing in energetic activity, brings greater experience and self-knowledge. He says, "I have always tried to get to know who I am. Now I know who I am!" (S.2: 24 ¶ 250), while another participant maintains, "I've spent half my life growing on the outside but now I've started growing on the inside. So, I think to grow on the inside, the first thing you have to do is love yourself, forgive yourself, respect yourself and look for things that help you to continue". (S.1: 23 ¶ 48).

Regarding Almodóvar's *Pain and Glory*, some of the participants did not identify with the film. One of them, for example, contends that "*Pain and Glory* didn't leave [a mark on me]. I identified more with his early films" (S.1:67 ¶ 476–482), while another insists on the contrast between Cuba, his homeland, and Spain regarding their different histories and understandings of sexuality: "Here we have a fundamental problem. In the colonies, all that sexuality was a natural thing. Here everything was oppression" (S.2: 61 ¶ 428–446). However, other participants not only identified with the film, but did also praise its realistic and sober treatment of the repression and oppression undergone by Spanish homosexuals during the Francoist dictatorship, celebrating the role of the film in revisiting their history (S.1: 62 ¶ 486–494).

Conclusion

From what has been argued here, it seems clear, then, that gay male aging in Spain is a complex and multifaceted experience. While subject to numerous gender(−ed) and age(−ist) stereotypes, Spanish gay men's experiences of aging are inflected by the particularities not only of sexuality but also class, nationality-ethnicity, disability, health, etc. Like social constructions, cultural representations of gay aging are anything but monolithic. Thus, it is no wonder that some of the participants in this study identified with Almodóvar's film while others did not. Given the underprivileged status of our respondents, most of whom depend on the financial and care services of the *26 of December Foundation*, it is no wonder some had difficulty in identifying with Almodóvar's (self) depiction as a white, middle-class, and successful film director, who lives in a lavish apartment filled with expensive art works and who can afford the care services of Mercedes (Nora Navas), a personal (female) assistant. Interestingly, however, most of the respondents seemed to find themselves reflected in many of Almodóvar's major concerns as an aging gay man, including health problems, the inexorable passing of time, and the fierce repression of homosexuality during the Franco regime, shared by both Almodóvar and the participants. Even more importantly, perhaps, the respondents' attitudes not only help deconstruct a number of stereotypes associated with gay male aging, but they also promote, as in Almodóvar's case, ultimately "affirmative" perspectives on both aging and queerness. While many studies have relied on (opposite) visions of "successful aging" vs. "aging as decline," our participants do indeed seem to be in line with Almodóvar in trying to move beyond such dichotomous views by embracing what Linn Sandberg (2013) refers to as "affirmative old age," which acknowledges the specificities of the aging body (e.g., pain and vulnerability) while embracing its difference. "Affirmative old age, in contrast to successful ageing, does not aspire," as Sandberg reminds us, "to agelessness…but instead seeks a conceptualization and acceptance of old age in all its diversity" (2013: 35). Such an "affirmative" view does not deny aging, or the physical and emotional "pain" that often comes along with it, but rather suggests accepting aging in all its complexity, multiplicities, and contradictions, adopting what Sandberg calls a new "empowering" attitude to aging (2013: 35). In this sense, then, the use of maturity to revisit and make sense of the past from a "queer" perspective may be seen as intrinsically positive and "affirmative," too. Besides recognizing the relevance of both pain *and* glory, as the title of Almodóvar's film indicates, to our aging bodies and souls,[12] such an approach to aging may thus end up proving the potential of pain, both physical and psychological, *as* a path to personal reinvention and artistic creativity. Indeed, the two could

[11] In Almodóvar's filmography, childhood does indeed seem to remain inseparable from the mother (Hermida and Cobo-Duran, 2017: 95). On the role of (largely absent) fathers in Almodóvar's filmography, see Molina (2017: 71–78).

[12] As Freeman argues, "queer becoming-collective-across-time and even the concept of futurity itself" are often "predicated upon injury—separations, injuries, spatial displacements, preclusions, and other negative and negating forms of bodily experience—or traumas that precede and determine bodiliness itself, that make matter into bodies" (2010: 11).

even go hand in hand. "A wider appreciation of older people's inner treasury of romantic and intimate sexual experiences," as gerontologist Desmond O'Neill argues of Almodóvar's film, "might serve as a potent portal to a fuller and richer vision of later life for health-care professionals who engage with older people," especially when "many other aspects of memory begin to falter" (2019: 909).

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