

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

***Male Bodies in Pedro Almodóvar's Filmography:  
Representations of White Masculinities  
in the Context of Contemporary Spanish Society***

Master Thesis

ERASMUS MUNDUS MASTER'S DEGREE  
IN WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES

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## ***Abstract***

By means of exploring masculinities at a representational level, the present Master Thesis develops a sociological, intersectional analysis of white masculinities in contemporary Spanish society. The research focuses on the white male fictional characters depicted throughout the filmography of the most renowned Spanish director: Pedro Almodóvar. Considering cinematographic productions as a prominent platform that generates and reflects normative social stereotypes, this research examines the extremely powerful symbolic implications of the privileged positions represented by white masculinities. In order to analyse the interconnected plurality of masculinities, this work adapts R.W. Connell's relational model (Connell, 2005). Thus, according to the four typologies identified in Connell's theory, which are constrained by the relations of hegemony, complicity, subordination and marginalization, I examine in depth a broad range of white male characters portrayed in Almodóvar's features.

This research articulates an innovative approach to Almodóvar's filmography not only through the adaptation of Connell's model but also through an extremely fruitful intersectional perspective. Consequently, this thesis shows the existence of a meaningful diversity of masculinities represented within 'Almodóvar's universe', while also informs of the way in which these white male characters are necessarily related to the current Spanish social context. Finally, according to my general goal of contributing to the field of masculinity studies, this work critically engages with Connell's theory, seeking to further develop its theoretical potential.

## ***Resumen***

Mediante la exploración de las masculinidades a un nivel de representaciones, esta tesis de máster desarrolla un análisis sociológico e interseccional de las masculinidades blancas en la sociedad española contemporánea. La investigación se centra en los personajes masculinos blancos de ficción descritos a lo largo de la filmografía del director español más célebre: Pedro Almodóvar. Considerando las producciones cinematográficas como una plataforma destacada que genera y refleja estereotipos sociales normativos, esta investigación examina las poderosas implicaciones simbólicas de las posiciones privilegiadas representadas por las masculinidades blancas. Para analizar la pluralidad interconectada de masculinidades, este trabajo adapta el modelo relacional de R.W. Connell (2005). De este modo, de acuerdo con las cuatro tipologías identificadas en la teoría de Connell, que se definen por las relaciones de hegemonía, complicidad, subordinación y marginalización, he examinado en profundidad una amplia gama de personajes masculinos blancos descritos en las películas de Almodóvar.

Esta investigación articula un enfoque innovador sobre la filmografía de Almodóvar no sólo mediante la adaptación del modelo de masculinidades de Connell sino también mediante la aplicación de una perspectiva interseccional extremadamente fructífera. Por consiguiente, esta tesis demuestra la existencia de una pluralidad significativa de masculinidades representada en el 'universo de Almodóvar', mientras que informa del modo en que los personajes masculinos blancos están necesariamente relacionados con el contexto actual social español. Finalmente, de acuerdo con mi objetivo general de contribuir con los estudios de masculinidades, este trabajo aborda críticamente la teoría de Connell, buscando desarrollar su potencial teórico en el futuro.



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## 1. Introduction

The main purpose of this dissertation is to examine the representations of white masculinities in the filmography of the Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar. The research seeks to strengthen the understanding of contemporary Spanish representations of white male bodies<sup>1</sup> by means of analysing the distinctive standpoint of one of the most visionary and gifted Spanish directors. While Almodóvar's work has been frequently praised for the cleverness with which it describes the female universe, his films also offer an extraordinarily interesting perspective on male bodies and representation of white masculinities.

The present work aims to connect with the sociological analytical approach that considers cultural representations as a privileged platform for reflecting but also producing normative stereotypes (Hall, 1980b; 1997). The case of white masculine representations proves to be of special interest owing the fact that white male bodies are traditionally perceived as the 'unmarked' positions par excellence, under a Western perception of false neutrality. This research intends to grasp the unavoidable intertwined articulation of racial and gendered stereotypes as a way to encourage the reflection on the representations of 'privileged' locations within influential spheres, such as media culture. Echoing Foucault's work on discursive practices and bodily construction, the previous concern is intimately related to a study of the normative side of power acting through the micro structures that shape daily legitimate bodies (Foucault, 1978). Accordingly, this dissertation is also deeply indebted to Butler's perception of gender as performatively constituted, which will lead to a suggestive reading of Almodóvar's male characters (Butler, 1999).

Whereas a relevant amount of work has been focused on Almodóvar's gendered representations, this research seeks to shed new light on the topic through the adaptation of Connell's relational typology of masculinities (Connell, 1987; 2005). Consequently, the dissertation will not pay attention to Almodóvar's stories by themselves, but to the complex relational network of male characters portrayed through them. Bearing the general framework in mind, this study aims to answer the question of how white masculinities are represented along Almodóvar's filmography? I also explore the ways

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<sup>1</sup> While I am perfectly aware that the study of masculinities does not refer exclusively to 'male' anatomies, as Halberstam have shown in her work *Female Masculinities* (1998), I have consciously taken the practical decision of limiting the object of study to the traditionally considered 'male bodies' due to the existing dissertation restrictions.

in which his work interrogates hegemonic white masculinity and how his white male characters are ‘marked’ by an ensemble of relational processes.

In order to deal with these questions, I consider it absolutely indispensable to develop an intersectional analysis that grasps the complex combination of not only race and gender elements but also factors such as class, material wealth and education, nationality, age, sexuality, body ability, etc. These methodological and theoretical concerns will be set out in the following pages of this introduction, which consists of four main sections. First of all, I will deal with methodological concerns by positioning my current feminist perspective, detailing my sociological approach on cultural representations and laying the foundations of my intended intersectional analysis. Secondly, I situate my theoretical perspective on white masculinities, mainly with regard to Connell’s pioneering work (1987, 2005). Thirdly, I focus the research on Spanish particularities and Almodóvar’s universe and finally I outline the structure of this dissertation, according to the relational typology of masculinities borrowed from Connell’s work.

### **1.1. Methodological concerns**

#### ***My positioning***

For me, this dissertation is the perfect culmination of a two-year intellectual experience at the heart of gender studies. Accordingly, I feel the necessity of briefly situating my broad (current) feminist position with regard to the matter I will deal with, namely the representations of white masculinities in the filmography of Almodóvar.

First of all, I consider that any responsible piece of academic work should start by a sincere positioning of the author, echoing Donna Haraway’s methodology of ‘situated knowledges’ (Haraway, 1988). As a white, Western, female researcher, my perspective involves profound biased considerations that markedly influence my analysis and that should not be hidden under false objective paradigms. On account of the concrete research focus on representations and audience reception, such bias should be read not only at an individual level but also at a collective level, as Naples (2003: 79) highlights, “some standpoint theorists define standpoint not as a property of disconnected knowers but as located within particular communities”. As far as my particular position in this case study is concerned, I feel involved in some sort of territory-based Spanish audience. My proximity to Almodóvar’s cinema lies in my experience as a woman

raised in Madrid. Although ‘Spanishness’ cannot obviously be perceived as a monolithic category, I also find it fruitful to acknowledge my prolonged experience under certain common Spanish codes, such as a characteristic sense of humour or the familiarity with cultural and political references, which allow me to ‘decode’ messages in a dominant-hegemonic way (Hall, 1980b).

Secondly, with regard to the theoretical framework, my analytical approach is extraordinarily indebted to Michel Foucault’s conceptualization on body and knowledge production (Foucault: 1978). Foucauldian work provides relevant tools in order to reflect on the power relations involved in discursive practices, such as the reflection on the positive side of power (necessarily connected to the constructive effect of representations) or the analytical value granted to the body materiality in itself. Although Foucault was not the first who proposed to study processes over causes (and will not be the last); this view constitutes an attractive feature of his analysis undoubtedly. The former concept is deeply attached to the genealogical-historical approach that he proposes, which should not be read as a mere descriptive initiative but as a reinforcement of contextual aspects in order to achieve a better understanding of discursive practices. This perspective will be fully connected to Hall’s work on the semiotic analysis of cultural representations.

Finally, my analysis of the representations of white masculinities in Almodóvar’s filmography cannot be understood without Butler’s articulation of gendered practices instead of fixed, unitary identities as a way to rethink categories outside the metaphysics of substance (Butler, 1999: 33). This interpretation will be echoed not only at a theoretical level in Connell’s perception of gender as performatively constituted, but also at a practical level in the depiction of Almodóvar’s white male characters. Finally, Butlerian interpretation of Foucault will also be useful through the recognition of a possible resistance to the normative side of power. Almodóvar’s stories will invoke this subversive potentiality again and again through some of their white male characters.

### ***Cultural Representations***

Whereas most of the feminist literature focused on film analysis has traditionally engaged with psychoanalytical accounts such as Mulvey’s pioneering article (1975); I will deal with Almodóvar’s work following a sociological approach. This methodological decision is connected not only to my previous academic background in the sociological field, but also to my disagreement with certain theoretical assumptions

in Mulvey's account. I fully agree with Nixon's criticism about the tendency of psychoanalysis to develop an ahistorical and totalizing analysis of representations, whereas, for instance, a Foucauldian tradition provides a more accurate and contextualized emphasis (Nixon, 1997: 321).

In that sense, I feel connected with so-called *cultural studies* as a tradition that provides the tools to read and interpret one's culture critically (Kellner, 2002: 10) by means of focusing on political implications rather than "objectivist" aesthetic valuations. According to Carrington, the importance of studying representations lies in their role as a "primary site for the construction and constitution of identities, collective and individual, rather than merely being a secondary reflection of already formed social identities" (Carrington, 2001/2002: 92). Assuming these further ideological and political implications necessarily leads me to appreciate the importance of analysing popular representations, not only that which concerns the rapport between the intentional message and the audience's interpretation of it but also that which concerns the standpoints of the researchers themselves. For instance, MacKinnon warns about the fact that cultural critics themselves are predominantly white, middle class and highly educated men (MacKinnon, 2003: 23).

The approaches explained above are interestingly related to British academic developments in Media Studies<sup>2</sup> and, particularly, to the figure of Stuart Hall. Apart from his influential role in the development of Cultural Studies at an institutional level, Hall has brought to the field several determinant thoughts, such as the dialectic encoding/decoding process or the active, normative role of representations. Borrowing Saussure's understandings of language as a social fact, Hall considers representation as a *practice* that produces meanings (Hall, 1997: 34), instead of assuming representations as a mere 'reflection' of society. Echoing a Foucauldian emphasis on discursive practices and productive power, Hall thus bets on contextualizing all meanings as product of history and culture (Hall, 1997: 32).

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<sup>2</sup> As a result of the social movements of the 1960s and the 1970s, the University of Birmingham promotes a Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies that focused their critical studies on the representations and ideologies of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality in cultural texts, including media culture (Kellner, 2002: 10). Hall himself defined the intellectual process of the school as a 'break' with former approaches, especially through the employment of semiotic methods of textual analysis. According to Hall, this 'break' materialized in four main ways: switching the models of 'direct influence' by 'ideological roles of the media; challenging the notions of media texts as 'transparent'; broking with the passive and undifferentiated conceptions of the 'audience'; adding the ideological component of representations in order to secure *dominant* definitions (Hall, 1980a: 117-8).

Regarding the study of media representations, Hall also elaborates a model of relation between the producer and the receiver of messages, in which the idea of the audience as passive consumers is broken by acknowledging their active role in what he defines as the encoding/decoding process (MacKinnon, 2003: 24). According to Hall, there is not always a correspondence between what the producer of messages intends to communicate and how the audience receive them (Hall, 1980b). Within the dynamics of a discursive practice, Hall proposes three types of responses regarding to the degree of agreement between the reference code articulated by each part of the communicative process: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated code and oppositional code (Hall, 1980b: 136-138). Such variety of reading texts implies that the subjective characteristics of the audience directly influence the decoding process. While I mentioned above Carrington's affirmation that representations have an active role in 'constructing' individual self-perceptions, it is also true that self-understandings previous to the process of decoding equally determinate the type of reading that audience make<sup>3</sup>, allowing viewers/readers to decode texts differently (Saco, 1992: 32).

As far as this research is concerned, the literature produced within the field of cultural studies leads us to consider two relevant issues. On the one hand, representations should be considered not only as a reflection but also as a production of social practices and identities; as such, Almodóvar's white male characters had normative effects on contemporary Spanish society. On the other hand, Hall's remark about the active role of the audience equally involves a more prudent reading of the effective echo of Almodóvar's films. This precaution is perfectly expressed by Hanke's warning that "apparent modifications of hegemonic masculinity may represent some shift in the cultural meanings of masculinity without accompanying shift in dominant social structural arrangements" (Hanke, 1992: 197). In any case, both remarks lead to a necessary reflection on the context in which these representations were produced, as it will be detailed in the section 'Almodóvar's universe'.

### ***Intersectional Analysis***

An intersectional perspective seems the most adequate methodologically in order to approach the complex framework involved in the analysis of the representations of

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<sup>3</sup> "Spectators already have identities (albeit, tenuous ones) before coming to a film. They are already marked as particular kinds of subjects (e.g., masculine, white, heterosexual, Anglo-Saxon, and so on) [...] Experience informs and also limits understanding" (Saco, 1992: 33).

white masculinities. Whilst gender and race constitute the core axes considered in this dissertation, the intertwined relation of other key features such as class, material wealth and education, nationality, age, sexuality or body ability will not be disregarded.

In this field, the pioneering work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991) originated the concept of “intersectionality” as a result of her concern about the focus of discrimination policies in a single categorical axis, involving the invisibilization of much more complex experiences (black women, for instance). In order to avoid such negligence, Crenshaw encouraged avoiding the focus on race- and class- privileged women in cases of sex discrimination, by approaching the particular intersectional experiences of these disadvantaged women, which was greater than the sum of racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1989: 140).

With regard to this dissertation, an intersectional approach implies that white masculinities must be understood as the embedded relation of racial and gendered connotations and not as a mere sum of their parts, as will be detailed in next section. In order to approach such phenomenon it is indispensable to question in which ways stereotypes of masculinity and whiteness are unavoidably articulated together. The implementation of such intersectional theoretical perspective involves the articulation of a corresponding method of analysis. To be more precise, according to Leslie McCall’s (2005) classification in her article “The Complexity of Intersectionality”, the specific approach adopted in this research will be the “intra-categorical method”, which focuses “on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups” (McCall, 2005: 1774). Obviously, this method was originally conceived to study the most disadvantaged locations; however, it can also contribute to provide wider understanding of privileged “unmarked positions”, such as white masculinities. One of the main manifestations of this methodology consists of studying case studies in depth, which allows grasping the complexities of certain individual experiences. Accordingly, this work will develop thorough analyses of the white male characters portrayed in Almodóvar’s filmography.

## **1.2. White masculinities**

Traditionally, gender studies have situated women as the centre of their analyses. Since the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, feminist positions widened their previous focus from white heterosexual standpoints towards disadvantaged positions, especially

with regard to the traditionally considered racial and sexual ‘others’. Whereas all these trends have developed, and continue developing, an indispensable task of visibilizing the ‘others’ (gendered, racial, sexual); this dissertation assumes as a key work the reflection on the ‘unmarked’ positions par excellence, namely *white masculinities*. The relevance of explicitly naming masculinities as an object of theoretical concern lies on problematizing the treacherous perception of white, middle-class, male body as the universal subject<sup>4</sup>.

‘Masculinities’ is a difficult term to define, which throughout this dissertation will be articulated in the plural on account of the diversity of practices it gathers. According to Whitehead and Barret, masculinities are those behaviours, languages and practices commonly associated with males and defined by opposition to the “feminine” in certain cultural locations (2001: 15-16). Traditionally masculinities have been linked to male bodies as the obvious embodiments of these practices<sup>5</sup>. However, recent theoretical developments severely question not only the assumption of such rigid binary distinctions between female and male bodies, but also the assumption of a necessary relation between masculinities and ‘male bodies’<sup>6</sup>. While I will focus the research on male bodies, as I explained above, the analysis of representations adopted here will follow an understanding of masculinity as “something that one ‘does’ rather than something that one ‘has’” (Whitehead and Barret, 2001: 18).

### ***From Men’s Studies to Gender Studies of Masculinities***

First of all, I will reflect on the evolution of research on masculinities with the help of Carrigan, Connell and Lee’s article “Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity” (1985), which is considered an inflection point by most of the specialists in the field (Cheng, 1999; Edwards, 2005; Whitehead, 2002). The mentioned article not only revises the state of the field in those days but also proposes the juridico-discursive model of power, later developed by Connell, which would become predominant in the following years (Whitehead, 2002: 88).

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<sup>4</sup> Actually, Hearn and Collinson acutely stress the fact that social sciences are full of “analyses that take men for granted as the dominant gender” (1994: 99).

<sup>5</sup> On this matter, Hearn and Collinson attempt to define the relation between ‘men’ and ‘masculinities’ as follows: “One powerful way is to see men as existing and persisting in the material bases of society, in relation to particular social relations of production and reproduction; in comparison, masculinities exist and persist as ideology, often in their surface form in terms of elements of production and reproduction” (Hearn and Collinson, 1994:104).

<sup>6</sup> Halberstam believes in focusing on female masculinities in order to avoid the process by which white male middle-class body’s centered studies has obscured other masculinities (Halberstam, 1998).

Carrigan, Connell and Lee stated that first men's studies were articulated according to what they denominate 'sex role' theories, which, according to them, involved doubtful biological assumptions of gendered articulations<sup>7</sup>. Besides, according to the 1985 article, the implicit normativism of 'sex role' theories, which was shared by other influential trends in the field of masculinities such as psychoanalytical perspectives, unavoidably leads to the neglect of the possibility of change within gender relations themselves. Given that sex role literature did not differentiate between "the expectations that are made of people and what they in fact do", any variation from the assumed 'male role' was necessarily considered as 'deviance' or 'failure' (Carrigan, et al., 1985: 578). Having sex roles revisited, Carrigan, Connell and Lee also acknowledged the influential role of the 1970s Men's Liberation movement, which equated the social pressure over men with the oppression suffered by women (Carrigan et al., 1985: 575).

After recognising the pioneering role of the previous approaches, the article "Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity" highlights that none of them really managed to deal with the 'nature' of masculinity in itself. At this point, the authors emphasize the importance of a movement that had been ignored until that day, the gay liberation movement<sup>8</sup>. Due to its stronger connection with feminist approaches, the gay movement not only introduced within men's studies the consideration of a hierarchical plurality of masculinities, but also the consideration of structural men's power over women (Carrigan et al., 1985: 583-4). By means of reflecting on the history of homosexuality (gendered history of men as Connell called it later, in 1995), the perception of a unitary and normative masculinity was definitively deconstructed.

This renovated perspective led to the urgency of analysing masculinities within a structure of gender power relations that implied a complex ideological and political ongoing process. Thus, according to Carrigan, Connell and Lee, assuming that masculinity is based on the general advantage of men over women should become the cornerstone of following developments in this field (Carrigan et al., 1985: 590).

The combination of the domination/subordination relation over women and the hierarchical relations over other men (such as homosexual collective) provided to Carrigan, Connell and Lee with the necessary tools to articulate the crucial concept of

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<sup>7</sup>“Sex role' research could, and did, wobble from psychological argument with biological assumptions, through accounts of interpersonal transactions, to explanations of a macro-sociological character, without ever having to resolve its boundaries” (Carrigan et al., 1985: 559)

<sup>8</sup> Edwards has likewise denounced the heterosexist bias of men's studies in the 1970s (Edwards, 2005).



*hegemonic masculinity*, which was defined in first instance as a “culturally exalted form of masculinity” (Carrigan et al, 1985: 592). Unlike previous elaborations on men’s studies (‘sex role’ theories, psychoanalytical approaches to sex and men’s liberation movement), the construct of *hegemonic masculinity* not only introduced the power relations of gender in the ‘equation’, but also avoided the normative-descriptive feature by stating that the “cultural ideal of masculinity need not to correspond at all closely to the actual personalities of the majority of men” (Connell, 1987: 184).

Therefore, Carrigan, Connell and Lee’s 1985 article served as a starting point for future core theories to be developed, among others, by Connell’s following work as it is explained in the next section.

### ***Masculinities-in-relation***

*Masculinity as an object of knowledge is always masculinity-in-relation* (Connell, 2005: 44)

After the release of “Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity”, the work of R.W. Connell on the topic of masculinities has been considered an absolute key reference. Connell’s conviction that studies of masculinities constitute a coherent field of knowledge has led her<sup>9</sup> to continue exploring the matter in her subsequent works, *Gender and Power* (1987) and *Masculinities* (1995).

In *Gender and Power*, Connell roots the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* in the homonymous term of Gramsci, within his neo-marxist understanding of social structure. According to Connell’s reading of Gramsci, hegemony could be understood as

*A social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes. Ascendancy of one group of men over another achieved at the point of a gun, or by the threat of unemployment, is not hegemony. Ascendancy which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth, is* (Connell, 1987: 184)

Gramsci’s perception of hegemony allows Connell to strengthen the historical on-going process that functionalist ‘sex role’ theories forgot and gay movement liberation recuperated for social analysis. Hence, Connell underlines the dynamic character that characterizes Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, in the sense of a continuous social struggle for leadership (Connell, 2005).

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<sup>9</sup> Although the work of Connell echoed in this dissertation was produced when he was male identified, as Robert, from now on I will refer to this author in female terms owing the fact that she changed her name as a transgender woman for Raewyn. On the other hand, in the occasions that I mention her name, I use the initials R.W. under which she has published the main book of theoretical reference for this thesis, *Masculinities* (2005).

The other fundamental feature of Connell's *hegemonic masculinity* is that it is always constructed both over subordinated masculinities and over women. The approach to masculinities should not lie in studying them as independent types, but to focus on the relationships established with other men and women (Connell, 2005: 71). Thus, while recognizing the plurality of masculinities constituted an indispensable first step, examining the relationships among different kinds of masculinities proves to be of extraordinary importance. In order to better grasp this complex network of practices, Connell elaborates an extremely useful typology from a relational perspective that I will use as the main analytical axis of this dissertation. The four kinds of relationships among masculinities proposed by Connell are the *hegemony*, the *complicity*, the *subordination* and the *marginalization*.

First of all, Connell's model starts by defining the core concept of *hegemonic masculinity* as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 2005: 77). Apart from being always constructed in heterosexual terms<sup>10</sup>, *hegemonic masculinity* is not a fixed type but a dynamic position that varies within historical mobile relations, as it happened in Gramsci's model. Mostly embodied by white men, the characterization of *hegemonic masculinity* does not only depend on social/historical contexts but also on class structures.

Secondly, the relation of complicity is intimately related to the *hegemonic masculinity*. Unlike normative perceptions elaborated by 'sex role' theories, Connell conceptualizes the *hegemonic* type of masculinity as an exemplary principle that few men actually embody, but which the majority of men benefit from (for instance, men gained from the overall subordination of women). In order for this to happen, some masculinities establish a relation of *complicity* to the *hegemonic* model (Connell, 2005).

Connell observes a third type of relationships produced within the framework of masculinities, the relations of dominance/*subordination* between certain collectives. The most representative example is the *subordination* suffered by homosexual men at

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<sup>10</sup> The intimate relationship heteronormativity-patriarchal system of gender has been broadly developed by Judith Butler that defines gender as a "binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire" (Butler, 1999: 30-31). Demetriou also refers to this entangled connection, asserting that gay masculinities are "subordinated to the hegemonic model because their object of sexual desire undermines the institution of heterosexuality, which is of primary importance for the reproduction of patriarchy" (Demetriou, 2001:344).

the heart of a strong heteronormative patriarchal society. Similarly as it happens with other disadvantaged positions, these groups have traditionally contributed to social sciences with the most revolutionary analysis of power structures.

Finally, the relationship of *marginalization* is probably the most complex of this framework. While *hegemonic*, *complicit* and *subordinated* relational positions were internal to gender order as such, *marginalized masculinities* are defined by Connell as those kinds of relationships which are possible through the ‘authorization’ granted by the *hegemonic masculinity*. Hence, although certain individuals should be ‘naturally’ excluded from *hegemonic* positions, they are ‘permitted’ to access to them due to particular reasons. For instance, black athletes may be exemplars in their sport domains while broad social domination over black men remains intact (Connell, 2005: 80-81). Whereas Connell acknowledges that ‘marginalization’ is not the most adequate term<sup>11</sup>, it serves to conceptualize the practices of those members belonging to displaced groups that perform *hegemonic masculinity* in order to gain patriarchal privileges within their group, if not the larger society (Cheng, 1999)<sup>12</sup>.

The set of these four types of relations among masculinities constitutes an interesting network in which none type could be understood without the relations to the others; especially with regard to the central axis of *hegemonic masculinity*. Thus “one’s membership in either the dominant group or a marginalized group is based on the conformity to hegemony” (Cheng, 1999). Finally, the positions embodied by diverse men are always immersed in a changing dynamic of relations (Connell, 2005: 81).

Nevertheless, this relational network model has not been exempt from several criticisms. For instance, by means of a critical engagement to Connell’s *hegemonic masculinity*, Demetriou claims to recover the original sense in Gramsci’s idea of ‘hybrid bloc’, in which *hegemonic* forms of masculinity are constituted precisely in interaction with *subordinated* and *marginalized* masculinities and not in relation of exclusion with them, as Connell seems to propose<sup>13</sup>. Embracing this feature of hybridity, then, involves

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<sup>11</sup> Demetriou criticizes that Connell has not developed the concepts of ‘authorization’ and *marginalization* further (Demetriou, 2001:346).

<sup>12</sup> Cheng follows by stressing that “we are simultaneously members of multiple groups, including dominant and marginalized groups. One may be marginalized by a visible marker, such as race, sex, or the display of behaviour generally regarded as ‘gay,’ or wearing religious adornments of a non-Christian group, but this does not mean one is marginalized based on gender performance” (Cheng, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> “Whereas for Gramsci the process is essentially a dialectical one that involves reciprocity and mutual interaction between the class that is leading and the groups that are led, Connell understands the process in a more elitist way where subordinate and marginalized masculinities have no effect on the construction of the hegemonic model” (Demetriou, 2001:345).

breaking with the conception of *hegemonic masculinity* as closed and unified totality that incorporates no otherness<sup>14</sup> (Demetriou, 2001: 347).

Similarly, Whitehead criticizes the general conceptualization of power expressed by Connell and previously by Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985). According to Whitehead, the juridico-discursive model that they propose engages with a strong hierarchical understanding of power within the patriarchal social order. As an alternative, Whitehead proposes echoing Hall (1997) in his Foucauldian understanding of power as circulatory rather than hierarchical, while thinking of hegemony more about negotiation than about domination and both having cultural representations as a key site in the processes (Whitehead, 2002: 92). These criticisms and others will be further examined in the Discussion.

### ***White Masculinities***

In a sense, the studies focused on whiteness share a relevant concern with the theoretical development in the field of masculinities, namely the goal of making visible certain positions that went unnoticed under the treacherous veil of false neutrality in hegemonic Western perceptions. For instance, Richard Dyer consecrates his efforts on writing about white Western culture, aiming to denounce how “white people are not racially seen and named” and function as a human norm (Dyer, 1997: 1)<sup>15</sup>.

In a parallel way to Connell’s determination of stressing men’s domination over women, Frankenberg emphasizes the power race privilege of whiteness as a location of structural advantage, which implies a particular ‘standpoint’ and a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed (Frankenberg, 1993: 1). Du Bois’s foundational text of whiteness studies “The Souls of White Folks” openly names the locations of white people as ‘masters’ (Du Bois, 2003: 45).

With regard to the unitary perception of whiteness, theorists have maintained a different position in its understanding. Whereas Dyer asserts that white people in their whiteness “are imaged as individual and/or endlessly diverse, complex and changing” (Dyer, 1997:12), Griffin and Braidotti have denounced the opposite reading. According to their article “Whiteness and European Situatedness”, the European academic debate

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<sup>14</sup> “In short, hegemonic masculinity, the masculinity that is culturally exalted and capable of reproducing patriarchy, is not constructed in total opposition to gay masculinities. Rather, many elements of the latter have become constitutive parts of a hybrid hegemonic bloc whose heterogeneity is able to render the patriarchal dividend invisible and legitimate patriarchal domination” (Demetriou, 2001:354-355)

<sup>15</sup> On this matter, Frankenberg points out how “for a significant number of young white woman, being white felt like cultureless” (Frankenberg, 1993: 196)

on race has been tackled following a skin-colour coding that does not grasp sufficiently the complex ethnic and cultural diversities of this geographical region<sup>16</sup>. One of the costs of this homogenization is the maintenance of the ‘them’ and ‘us’ mentality, promoting a static model of two different monolithic groups (Griffin and Braidotti, 2002: 231). While this position can work out strategically, it addresses insufficiently the decisive intra-group differences, in European context at least. Furthermore, whereas black is always marked as a colour, white shows the propensity to be everything and nothing. Both the invisibility and naturalization of whiteness lead to some kind of status defined by the ‘colourless multicoloured-ness’ (Griffin and Braidotti, 2002, 234). Therefore, the authors propose moving beyond the black-and-white binary as a way of dismantling the treacherous representational power of white by exposing its obvious internal plurality. On this matter, Hartigan makes an interesting remark about the risks of certain debates, although the task of marking the colour and establishing whiteness as a racialized position in the debates of the 1990s seemed very relevant, “determining the ‘fact’ of whiteness may have the unintended effect of undermining the concept of race as constructed” (Hartigan, 1997: 497).

Although I have consciously structured the literature review in separate sections in order to better grasp the theoretical developments on the fields of masculinities and whiteness; from now on, the analysis will follow a joint intersectional approach echoing what have been said previously regarding this method. In a similar way as Connell’s network of masculinities, whiteness is rarely connoted in pure forms. White masculinities are articulated in relational forms not only with regard to ‘other’ racial marks (mainly blackness), but also with regard to multiple social axes, such as class, age, sexuality, nationality, etc.

### **1.3. Pedro Almodóvar’s universe**

According to the theoretical approach stated in the previous section, this research will mainly deal with the intersection of white masculinities, paying special attention to other social axes such as class, material wealth and education, nationality, age, sexuality, body ability. In order to better grasp these intersectional positions, I will

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<sup>16</sup> “There are black and white scenarios where colour is key but in many instances of discrimination and oppression colour is not the (only) determining factor. It is this complexity that the whiteness debate in Europe needs to address” (Griffin and Braidotti, 2002: 227)

focus on the case study of white masculinities in contemporary Spanish society<sup>17</sup> through the analysis of the particular universe represented in Almodóvar's filmography.

However, taking these general axes of representation into account does not involve forgetting about the concrete particularities of Spanish society. For instance, while the class factor represents an important analytical feature in Anglo-Saxon tradition, it has not been understood as a key fact with regard to contemporary Spanish society. According to Allison, whereas economic class division in Spain cannot be denied, the social segregation seems more marked by material wealth and education, which become manifest in Almodóvar's universe itself (Allison, 2001: 49). As far as skin colour is concerned, I agree with Griffin and Braidotti's remark (mentioned above) about the necessity of more nuanced intra-group European distinctions. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that nationality and ethnic categories could be obscuring skin colour implications. In that sense, the task of visibilizing whiteness proves to be still very relevant, especially in the case of Almodóvar's filmography where the almost completely absence of non-white men could lead to the treacherous assumption that male characters depicted in his work lack of racial identification.

Regarding Spanish society's perceptions of the issue of sexualities, the historical post-dictatorship period in which Pedro Almodóvar started creating his universe should be necessarily considered. The end of Francoist dictatorship in 1975 triggered a new social scene characterized by multiple social aspirations of freedom in different ambiances. One of the most remarkable phenomena was the social and artistic movement known as "la Movida" (Allison, 2001; Smith, 1992). In the 1980s, a group of (mostly) young people gathered in urban centres, especially in Madrid, and explored "alternative identities, sexualities and values in an orgy of experimentation and hedonistic pursuit of pleasure" (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 81). This phenomenon was mainly related to pop culture, music and general artistic manifestations, being Pedro Almodóvar the most representative figure in film world. On account of this atmosphere, the first works of Almodóvar seek mainly to scandalise sensibilities while making visible the alternative Madrid's subculture to mainstream audiences, by means not only of his stories and characters but also of his striking aesthetic (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 82).

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<sup>17</sup> Whereas referring to Spanish society as a monolithic belonging perception seems untenable, the intra-group differences within Spanish territory-based culture has not been especially considered in Almodóvar's filmography (a fact that has been severely criticized).

The reason why I have entitled this section ‘Pedro Almodóvar’s universe’ refers to the distinctive charisma that characterized all his work; which has been defined by Smith as the *auterisme* of Almodóvar, “the fact that each of his films is immediately recognizable as his” (Smith, 1992: 169). Precisely this perception has maybe provoked that Almodóvar’s films are coded as aimed at an initiated, international, culturally elite audience (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 84). Apart from the aesthetic and fictional particularities of his works, Almodóvar has helped to create a specific universe by means of the strong self-referentiality along his filmography. For instance, the majority of what I will denominate his *queer* characters are connected to each other through common stories in different films.

As far as a feminist perspective is concerned, Almodóvar’s features stand out because of their engaged concern for the issues of gender, sexuality and, specially, identity, which, according to Fouz-Fernández and Martínez Expósito (2007: 158) is one of the thematic constants of the director’s career. Some authors have observed in Almodóvar’s characters a way of problematizing gender through parody and satire, particularly, in connection to current theoretical-feminist concerns, such as ‘queer theory’ or Butler’s conceptualization of gender<sup>18</sup> as ‘performatively constituted’ (Allison, 2001: 90). Allison also considers that Almodóvar’s depiction of sexual choices include the characteristic of fluidity where there are homosexual acts but not homosexual people (Allison, 2001: 107). From a wide perspective, identity construction could be considered as one of the core thematic of Almodóvar’s filmography. According to Piganiol, the director portrays identity as “plural, moving and complex” and constructed by a type of ‘authenticity’ detached from any idea of ‘nature’ but for the free expression of our aspirations, as the character of Agrado expresses in her monologue during *All About my Mother*: “you are more authentic the more you resemble what you’ve dreamed of being” (Piganiol, 2009: 89).

With regard to other issues that are commonly treated within Almodóvar’s films, one of the main topics shared to all the stories refers to the interpersonal relationships, with special attention to family and friendship. Many critics have emphasized the tendency of Almodóvar’s stories to value unorthodox, non-standard families as

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<sup>18</sup> “Almodovar’s vision of gender is similar to Judith Butler’s idea of *Gender Trouble*. Manhood and womanhood are socially constructed. They reflect power structures, and especially masculine domination. Hence, in order to upset this gender dichotomy, and to become free from social categories that annihilate our liberty, we should at our individual level perform the gender we choose, independently from our sex and sexuality (Butler 1990). Working on body is also what Almodóvar stages through drag queen’s shows” (Piganiol, 2009: 88).

providers for equal if not better support for its members than conventional nuclear families, which are usually portrayed as oppressive and uncaring (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 115; Allison, 2001: 63; Piganiol, 2009: 91). On this matter, the absence of father figures as protagonist characters is very significant. While mothers have developed an important role in many of the most emotional stories; fathers always appear as prejudicial, uncaring or absents.

Finally, I would like to refer to another common topic of Almodóvar's features that will be developed in this research, namely the inclusion of theatrical elements as leading parts in the plots. On the one hand, both the characters of male directors and the filmmaking process frequently appear as central arguments of some of Almodóvar's stories: *Tie me up! Tie me down!* (1990), *The Law of Desire* (1987), *Talk to Her* (2002), *Bad Education* (2004) and *Broken Embraces* (2009). On the other hand, performance becomes important in itself, particularly in relation to *queer* sub-culture in *High Heels* (1991), *All About my Mother* (1999), *Talk to Her* (2002) or *Bad Education* (2004). In this sense, the meaningful articulation of spaces characteristic in Almodóvar's work<sup>19</sup> finds in the stage its perfect example.

#### 1.4. Dissertation structure

To end up this introduction, I will briefly explain the structure of this work. As I have already announced in the second section, the dissertation will be divided in four chapters according to the four relational types of masculinities proposed by Connell. Hence, the research is not articulated focusing on any particular film but focusing on what I consider as shared characteristics of certain white male characters throughout different Almodóvar's features. While, all the film plots have been summarized in the Appendix, the role of footnotes have been reserved to certain important theoretical clues as well as additional explications with regard to the fictional characters examined.

First of all, I will deal with *hegemonic masculinities*, which, in this case, could be understood as the typical Spanish 'macho'. The white male characters included in this category are markedly heterosexual, they fulfil the traditional role of head of the family and they are mostly located in lower class positions. They are the violent, corrupt

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<sup>19</sup> The relevance of the space is also especially meaningful in the dichotomy urban/rural atmospheres. While the majority of Almodóvar's stories pass in urban centres (Madrid and Barcelona), country is considered as a sort of refuge from the disappointments occurred in the big city.



policeman of *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* (1980), the self-centred husband of *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984); the absent, idealized lover of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988); and the double figure of the absent, rapist father and the almost rapist husband in *Volver* (2006).

Secondly, I find that the *complicit masculinities* are represented within the stories of Almodóvar by a very specific young white male figure, namely the low educated misfit who aims to reach ‘normality’. This normality is usually related to achieving the role of heterosexual head of patriarchal families, as *hegemonic masculinities* actually achieve. The characters that fit in this relational category are the self-repressed, confused student in *Matador* (1985), the orphan kidnapper in *Tie me Up! Tie me Down!* (1990), the orphan ex-convict in *Live Flesh* (1997) and the sensitive, feminine nurse in *Talk to Her* (2002).

Thirdly, *subordinated masculinities* are represented by what I will denominate as *queer* roles. Whereas they are not always explicitly self-perceived as male characters, they maintain narrow links with forms of masculinities in assertive, subtle or oppositional senses. They play with the frontiers of gender, sexuality and nationality. The characters that I include in this category are the cross-dresser judge in *High Heels* (1991), the female transsexual father in *All About my Mother* (1999), and the cross-dresser and transsexual triple character in *Bad Education* (2004).

Finally, as it happens at a theoretical level, *marginalized masculinities* offer the more complex account. In my interpretation of Almodóvar’s filmography, I consider that this relational category consists of three white male cinema directors that belong to traditional *marginalized* male collectives but reach *hegemonic* positions thanks to their successful role on the artistic context. Besides, they are the protagonist characters of their respective films. They are the homosexual director in *The Law of Desire* (1987), the homosexual director in *Bad Education* (2004) and the disabled director in *Broken Embraces* (2009). This final typology could be interpreted as the alter ego of Almodóvar himself.

After having examined the four *white masculinities* in depth, I will devote a final chapter to further discuss the theoretical criticisms directed at Connell’s relational model while analysing deeper sociological implications of Almodóvar’s male characters with regard to contemporary Spanish society.

## **2. Hegemonic white masculinities in Almodóvar's filmography: self-centred husbands, violent policemen and absent 'lovers'**

Drawing on a sociological approach, the main goal of this chapter is to explore the male characters within 'Almodóvar's universe' that are representative of *hegemonic white masculinities* regarding patriarchal Spanish society, even though they do not play dominant roles in their films. Actually, all of the figures analysed here are secondary and frequently prove to be quite simplistic, while the masculinities that I will define in following chapters as *complicit*, *marginalized* and *subordinated* are articulated through richer, more sophisticated and protagonist characters<sup>20</sup>. However, the relevance of *hegemonic white masculinities'* contextual and triggering functions is undeniable. Whereas the characters that I consider *marginalized* and *subordinated* are the most 'revolutionary' and the most distinguishing of Almodóvar's particular perspective, the fact that *hegemonic* characters are found all along his filmography informs us of the necessary depiction of these *masculinities* in order to convincingly portray contemporary Spanish society. Consequently, I have decided to examine the *hegemonic white masculinities* focusing on four characters portrayed in four different Almodóvar films, namely, the violent corrupt policeman of *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* (1980), the self-centred husband of *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984), the absent idealized lover of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), and the double figure of the absent rapist father and the almost rapist husband in *Volver* (2006). Regarding the time context of the works that accommodate these characters, the cases studied here show an interesting continuity throughout Almodóvar's work. Hence, these fully patriarchal roles are not specific of one period or genre<sup>21</sup> but they constantly appear, from his first feature in 1980 to one of his most recent films, in 2006<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Moreover, as it will be treated below, these *complicit*, *subordinated* and *marginalized masculinities* articulate a greater empathetic role with the spectator, and, in the case of *marginalization*, I would suggest that they also represent some sort of 'alter ego' of Almodóvar himself.

<sup>21</sup> Almodóvar's extensive filmography cannot easily be divided into periods. Throughout his career, the director has explored numerous genres in an unorganized way. Some of his critics (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 83) have tended to classify his work into his comedies and his more serious, dramatic films. Nevertheless, it is true that 1988 *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* has been traditionally considered not only the 'less original and thought-provoking' (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 117); but also the turning point that brought Almodóvar's work into mainstream international cinema and changed completely both the aesthetic and the stories of his films.

<sup>22</sup> While the characters chosen to exemplify the *hegemonic white masculinities* are only my personal selection within a multiplicity of figures, other characters could perfectly fit in this category; for instance, the strongly violent and 'authoritarian' roles of the last two Almodóvar's films: the businessman and lover of *Broken Embraces* (2009) and the surgeon and lover of *The Skin I live in* (2011).

The four characters included in this category are all white, able-bodied, middle-aged, ‘Spanish’ men. They are also markedly heterosexual and they articulate traditional positions of breadwinner within patriarchal middle class families<sup>23</sup>, except in the case of the sophisticated lover in *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984). Three of these characters have a paid job and, therefore, they are economically independent, except the husband in *Volver*, whose unemployment seems to be presented as the cause of his frustration and subsequent rapist behaviour. In fact, the ‘excessive’ heterosexual appetite is a defining factor of these four characters: the ‘uncontrollable’ policeman of *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* (1980) rapes several women in the film; the self-centred husband of *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984) is permanently longing for his former German lover and resigns himself with his marital sexual life; the absent partner of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) is the lover par excellence, desired by three different women and by the audience as well<sup>24</sup>; and both the father and the husband in *Volver* (2006) ‘satisfy’ their ‘uncontrollable’ sexual appetite raping and attempting to rape their own daughters. In that sense, the male able-bodies themselves prove to be of extraordinary relevance; given that the sexual desire for women is presented as ‘naturally’ uncontrollable. On this matter, Fouz-Fernández and Martínez Expósito state that, although the audience may never get to see them, “the penises are of crucial relevance for these narratives and, indeed, a key part of men’s identities” (Fouz-Fernández and Martínez Expósito, 2007: 206).

With regard to their professional activities, while one of these four characters represents a figure of violent ‘authority’ through his work as policeman in *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* (1980), a second character develops a typical ‘male’ profession in Spain: taxi driver. Both consider themselves the only support of their patriarchal families even though their own wives work simultaneously as ‘housewives’<sup>25</sup> and as wage-earning cleaners. Their professional activities not only serve to encourage repeated discourses emphasizing their hard daily work that require their wives to have everything perfectly ‘prepared’, but also serve to justify their aggressive behaviours due to either the stress or to their role as ‘reputed’ men outside the home space.

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<sup>23</sup> In the case of the husbands portrayed in *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984) and *Volver* (2006), they also represent work migration from countryside to capital suburbs, both as first and second generation.

<sup>24</sup> Given that his job (dubbing films) is based on the attractiveness of his sickly-sweet, pompous voice.

<sup>25</sup> Whereas the actual value of housework is still denied in Spain, as happens in most Western societies, the role of such tasks in maintaining others’ quality of life should not be undervalued, especially within the current context of economic crisis.

This hierarchical structure with regard to the characters' self-perceived professional and economic independence also informs of a strong spatial division. Whereas the wives of *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* (1980), *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984) and *Volver* (2006) remain confined to reduced spheres (such as the house, the neighbourhood or the born village), the white male heterosexual characters enjoy free mobility, mostly due to their professions or to the ownership of their own means of transport. The only exception is the case of the heterosexual couple depicted in *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), where both of them enjoy high economic status and have successful careers in the cinema industry. Although the story of this film takes place almost completely in a top-floor apartment in Madrid, the two protagonists show an extraordinarily mobility around the city. It is curious how the two female leading roles of *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984) and *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), both played by the well-known Spanish actress Carmen Maura, are linked to such different urban apartments, according to their respective social status. Establishing a similar parallel, Vernon and Morris exemplify the end of Almodóvar's *Movida* cycle by means of the social mobility that connects two characters interpreted again by Carmen Maura "from Pepi's low-rent apartment block to Pepa's penthouse terrace" (Vernon and Morris, 1995: 11)<sup>26</sup>.

Interestingly, the four white male characters defined as *hegemonic masculinities* never articulate the protagonist role within their plots. On the contrary, these men always represent secondary, background figures at the heart of women's stories. While Almodóvar's interest in female standpoints is considered as the distinguishing feature of his work, especially in what concerns social relations of friendship among women (Allison, 2001: 68); his heterosexual male characters "tend towards caricatures and stereotypes" (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998). According to Morgan (2005), undue patterns of behaviour are common traits in Almodóvar's characters, in the case of heterosexual men this feature is usually demonstrated through an excess of male chauvinism and misogyny. Actually Morgan provides three of the examples examined here, namely, the sadism' of policeman husband in *Pepi, Luci, Bom* (1980), the 'callous detachment' of lover in *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) and the husband's insensitivity of *What Have I Done to Deserve this?* (1984).

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<sup>26</sup> From *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on The Heap* (1980) to *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988). This evolution is also meaningful because it corresponds with the period of professional and personal relation between the Pedro Almodóvar and Carmen Maura.

The fact is that *hegemonic white masculinities* in Almodóvar's cinema never perform a central role. They are always defined in relation to the female protagonists of the films, being the women's lovers or husbands and eventually, their lives are marked by female decisions. For instance, among the four males included in this chapter, three die at the hands of their wives<sup>27</sup> and daughter<sup>28</sup>. Similarly, the lover of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) ends by losing the sentimental control over the female protagonist who despises him in the final scene. The only white male *hegemonic* character who achieves a 'satisfactory' ending after having been abandoned by his wife is the violent policeman of *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on The Heap* (1980), and, in this case, it is also a woman's decision driven by her masochistic sexual preferences. Thus, although the female protagonists of these films are presented in first place as women who endure the chauvinist behaviour of their husbands/lovers, they end up empowering themselves against the 'oppression' of the *hegemonic white masculinities*.

Finally, with regard to the articulations of these masculinities-in-relation (Connell, 2005: 44), there is another relevant aspect to analyse: fatherhood. Three of the four characters selected here are fathers<sup>29</sup> who develop their parental role in a very similar absent way. They are not involved at all in the personal growth and education process of their children; they ignore them, they fill their heads with criminal values or even they try to rape them<sup>30</sup>. As will be explored in the following chapters, the absent fathers constitute a recurrent topic within Almodóvar's filmography; for instance in *All About My Mother* (1999) through the character of transsexual Lola; or by means of the relevance given to the half orphan condition in the male protagonists of *Matador* (1985), *Live Flesh* (1997) and *Talk to Her* (2002); which will be analysed in this thesis as *complicit masculinities*.

To sum up, the four male characters analysed in detail below are the perfect representation of the exemplary model of *hegemonic* man in Spanish society. They are white, able and 'male'-bodied, they are middle-aged and part of some sort of 'Spanishness', they are involved in heterosexual patriarchal relationships and, in three of the cases, they are heads of middle-class families. The exception could be considered

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<sup>27</sup> It is not only the case of *What Have I Done to Deserve this?* (1984), but also of the rapist father of the female protagonist in *Volver* (2006), which is killed by his wife.

<sup>28</sup> In *Volver* (2006), the husband is killed by his non-biological daughter and buried secretly by his wife.

<sup>29</sup> In *What Have I Done to Deserve this?* (1984), *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) and *Volver* (2006)

<sup>30</sup> Referring to *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on The Heap* (1980), *Matador* (1985) or *All About My Mother* (1999), Allison states that "fathers fare particularly badly in the films. They tend to be either repressive patriarchs or absentees" (Allison, 2011: 63)

the absent lover of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), whose *hegemonic masculinity* is defined rather in terms of idealization. However, within the ‘Almodóvar’s universe’, these four characters do not embody dominant positions over women, as it was necessarily included in Connell’s definition of *hegemonic* relation (Connell, 2005: 77), but they play secondary roles with regard to female protagonists. This fact contributes to the subversive perspective that has been largely attributed to Almodóvar’s perspective.

Bearing the previous common approach in mind, I would like to deal with the four characters separately. First of all, following a chronological order, I focus on the character of the violent policeman in *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* (1980), which was the first full-length film in Almodóvar’s career. The aesthetics and the plot<sup>31</sup> of this feature cannot be understood outside the political and historical context of the 1980s in Spain. Five years after the end of Francoist dictatorship, Spanish society demanded ground-breaking cultural creations and Almodóvar proved to be the ideal artist for this request<sup>32</sup>. Accordingly, the first of Almodóvar’s features offered a wide range of references that deals not only with the general political freedom and the changing social climate, but also with provocative expositions of non-normative gender identities and sexual experiences. For instance, the first scene opens with the bursting in Pepi’s house by a threatening policeman that asserts his authority by showing a police license and ends up the raping Pepi. In that sense, the fact that the narrative events are triggered by the abusive behaviour and discourse of a violent, chauvinist policeman representative of the former regime is not casual at all<sup>33</sup>. On the other hand, the *hegemonic white masculinity* represented by this policeman is articulated not only by means of his obviously privileged power position, but also by means of his constant discourse longing for ‘good manners’. For example, during the last conversation that Luci and her husband maintain before she abandons him, the policeman articulates an

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<sup>31</sup> From now on, I will briefly refer to the plots of the majority of the films analyzed by adapting the summaries provided by one of the most prestigious Anglo-Saxon critics of Almodóvar’s work, Paul Julian Smith, in his book *Desire Unlimited: The Cinema of Pedro Almodóvar* (2000) in the Appendix.

<sup>32</sup> “Distinctive about his (Almodóvar) work, especially the pioneering *Pepi, Luci, Bom...* (1980), for example, was that he pushed these narrative, thematic, intertextual and stylistic elements to filmic excess, to levels of crudity, explicitness and self-consciousness hitherto unseen Spanish filmmaking” (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 82).

<sup>33</sup> Smith emphasizes how the character of this policeman “is a caricature Fascist, complete with dark glasses who complains over breakfast that he doesn’t know what the country is coming to ‘with so much democracy’” (Smith, 1992: 175)

archetypal chauvinist discourse of control: he tells her what she should wear, he reproaches her for using certain expressions and he eventually warns her that he does not like ‘those stories of independent women’.

However, whereas the policeman intends to impose his will by means of physical and discursive violence according to historically social assumptions, he confronts a changing society. For instance, when he tries to make Luci come back home, a colleague reminds him that there is no such a law that ‘forbids wives to become groupies’ and that, if he decides to act, he will ‘turn all the Spanish feminists against him’. In a similar way to following Almodóvar’s features, *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* (1980) focus on a group of empowered women that behave freely and find courage and strength in friendship relations. Hence, the female characters’ actions lead the storyline. After all, the masochistic tastes of Pepi are the only reason that allows her husband to achieve her goal; ultimately, the policeman should be violent with the only person he has ‘physically’ respected until that moment<sup>34</sup>. Thus, the interest of the male character analysed here also lies in his representation of the only normative patriarchal role within a film devoted to show the powerful alternative gendered and sexual spheres that are emerging in the 1980s Madrid<sup>35</sup>.

The second male character that I would like to examine in depth is the self-centred husband of *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984). By means of portraying the hard living conditions of a low class family inhabiting the suburbs of Madrid<sup>36</sup>, this film is probably the toughest and most realistic films of Almodóvar. In similar terms as those depicted by the policeman of *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* (1980), the taxi driver Antonio represents a traditional superiority over his wife within patriarchal families. Accordingly, his *white hegemonic masculinity* is sustained in the self-perceived powerful position he embodies as the ‘breadwinner’, even though Gloria also has several paid jobs, apart from the housework. Thus, while the structures of economic dependency are always visible and repeatedly verbalized (Gloria should constantly ask

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<sup>34</sup> The fact that the policeman had been reluctant to be violent with his wife but has no problems of raping two other women could be explained by chauvinist catholic stereotypes that regarded the marital status of wives as ‘sacred’ in certain way.

<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, the actual implications of the transgressive ambience so-called the *Movida* should be considered carefully. First of all, the changes on mentalities with regard to sexual and gender identities did not reach all social spheres; the *Movida* had impact especially in young people living in urban centers, mostly Madrid. Actually most of the audience considered *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* (1980) as a disgusting, unnecessarily provocative film. Secondly, in my opinion, the atmosphere of free speech perceived in the 80s in Madrid sadly finished very early and led to a conservative decade during the 90s in the political and social Spanish scene.

<sup>36</sup> See plot summary 2 in the Appendix.

Antonio for money to cover the expenses of the house and their sons), other kinds of dependency structures remain hidden (Antonio needs Gloria's housework to survive). Of course, Antonio assumes that certain tasks, concerning the meals prepared, the clothes ironed, etc., should be done when he comes back home after 'his long working day', and if it is not the case he complains about the quality of Gloria's housework.

Antonio also dislikes that Gloria spends time with their neighbour, who is a sex worker, and he wonders how it is so difficult to 'keep women at home'. Besides, Antonio reinforces his male power over his wife by stating his higher educational level. Whereas Gloria is not able to write, Antonio fancies himself as a great 'writing imitator' and even suggests to his eldest son to become a forger. Actually, Antonio is not exemplary either in the domain of fatherhood; he barely interacts with his two adolescent sons who, in the meantime, spend their time being the drug dealer of the neighbourhood and prostituting himself with his father's friends, respectively. The only character that Antonio seems to love within his daily life is his mother, who lives with them in the small apartment of Madrid's suburbs. Antonio's life is reduced to his job and to the memory of the time he spent in Germany working for the singer he truly is in love with. He repeatedly listens to one of her songs and the sudden reappearance of this singer finishes by provoking his death on the hands of his wife.

In short, according to Allison, 1984 *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* draws a portrait of a standard family as "oppressive, uncaring and frequently in the process of breaking down" (Allison, 2001: 63). Antonio perceives himself as the 'head' of this family, even though he does not fully maintain them neither at an economic level nor at a sentimental one. Although Antonio is presented as an 'independent' man, he cannot be understood without Gloria; his *white hegemonic masculinity* necessarily articulates in relation to her. Whereas the film firstly presents a housewife acting 'in tow' of her husband's will, the self-centred, chauvinist actions of Antonio eventually provoke Gloria's relative empowerment in accordance with her limited resources.

Having revised these two cases of patriarchal husbands who exercise a partial power over their wives by means of chauvinist ideology and authority based on their professional activity and educational level; I would like to deal with another type of *hegemonic white masculinity* exemplified by the case of the absent, idealized lover of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988). This feature is considered Almodóvar's incursion in mainstream cinema and Hollywood market, due mainly to its



aesthetic, ‘light’ plot<sup>37</sup> and comedian intentions. Similar to *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* (1980) and *Volver* (2006), this film relates a women’s story in which men play limited, background roles. In this case, the male character (Iván) is defined by his absence. The audience hardly sees him and only gets to know him through his mysterious voice, and, specially, by means of the female protagonist’s impressions (Pepa). Hiding under an apparent concern for Pepa’s comfort after their break-up, Iván avoids meeting her former lover while Pepa desperately tries to contact him. Although it seems that Pepa is condemned to merely hear Iván’s voice the rest of her life (not only in the messages he records in her answer machine, but also in the films he dubs), in the final scene, after saving his life (the first time she achieves to meet him), Pepa rejects Iván, freeing herself of this sentimental dependence<sup>38</sup>.

Meanwhile, Iván also hides from his former life, including his wife (Lucía) and his twenty-year-old son. In a similar way as Pepa puts her life on hold during the days to which the plot relates, Lucía also stopped her normal life at the moment Iván abandoned her several years ago, for instance, by wearing the same clothes that she used when Iván lived with her. Moreover, whereas it is not a fully developed theme in the film, Iván is presented not only as a ‘fugitive’ lover and husband, but also as an absent father. Thus, Iván is depicted by means of the ‘trail’ he leaves:

*In Mujeres the very physical female protagonists circle around a man who is intangible, disembodied, filtered through technology. The (singularly unattractive) Iván speaks mainly through the answerphone and earns his living by dubbing foreign language films: in other words, he is a mere impersonation of masculinity* (Smith, 1992: 210)

As Smith interestingly points out in the previous quote, unlike the two previous cases, it is not Iván’s presence that embodies the *hegemonic white masculinity*, but precisely the idealization of his absence and the figure of ‘latin lover’ that the audience is led to imagine of him. His almost completely physical absence is balanced by his brief spoken interventions, in which he is presented as kind and considerate. Iván’s job makes him a professional of vocal and fake; an expert of hiding his body beneath a sound. However, due to their common profession and the multiple experiences working together, Pepa is capable of perfectly recognizing Iván’s tones and intentions. Finally, another interesting element of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) lies in the recurrent use that Almodóvar makes of spectacle metaphors in order to show the

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<sup>37</sup> See plot summary 5 in the Appendix.

<sup>38</sup> “Pepa finally realizes the limited attraction of middle-age philanderer Iván” (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas 1998: 154)

performative articulation of gender. In this case, the ‘tool’ that serves to shape Iván’s *hegemonic masculinity* is his own ‘manly’, charming voice; which is articulated through his job dubbing foreign films.

The last male character considered in this chapter clearly connects with the absent and ‘reprehensible’ fatherhoods reflected in the case of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) and *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984). The topic that was slightly treated in these previous films serves to trigger the action in *Volver* (2006), again a women’s story<sup>39</sup>. In order to deal with this example of *hegemonic white masculinity* I analyse a double figure consisting of the absent, rapist father and the almost rapist husband of the female protagonist. The combined analysis of both characters seems relevant owing the fact that they overlap in certain ways. Paco (Raimunda’s husband) represents somehow a failed continuation of Raimunda’s father, who raped her and ‘fathered’ her child (Paula). On the one hand, Paco attempts to rape Paula, under the excuse that it does not constitute incest because he is not her biological father, but he fails and Paula kills him. On the other hand, Paco agrees to recognize Paula as his own daughter fulfilling the social fatherhood that biologically corresponds to Raimunda’s father. Interestingly, in the end, he tries to repeat the action (raping his ‘own’ daughter) that brought his family (Raimunda, Paula and himself) together.

While we never get to ‘know’ Raimunda’s father except from the narration of his ‘deplorable’ actions (not only raping his own daughter but also being constantly unfaithful to his wife, Irene), Paco is slightly introduced in the beginning of the film. He is the image of an unemployed, frustrated man who dedicates his evenings to drinking and watching TV lying on the couch. When his wife denies him sex, he masturbates beside her making Raimunda feel disgusted. As Antonio in *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984), Paco personifies the self-centred husband of patriarchal families: exigent with his wife’s ‘housework’ and insensitive to her feelings.

As the previous films examined here, the white male characters of Paco and Raimunda’s father represent secondary roles, whose narrative ‘fates’ depend on female actions. Both men die on the hands of female members of their family<sup>40</sup> while engaging in ‘prohibited’ sexual behaviour: Raimunda’s father is sleeping with his secret lover and Paco tries to rape Paula. Besides, the absent bodies of both become extremely symbolic in the film. Actually, one of them triggers the core plot: Paco’s body should be hidden

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<sup>39</sup> See plot summary 12 in the Appendix.

<sup>40</sup> Raimunda’s father is killed by Irene and Paula kills Paco in self-defence.

and secretly buried. The other is burned by his wife while incurring in an affair and the body ‘disappears’; remaining only the ashes that are buried in the cemetery with his lover’s, although everybody thinks they are Irene’s remains. Paradoxically, Raimunda’s father ‘owns’ a ‘proper’ grave without a proper body to fill it, while Raimunda’s husband lacks a ‘proper’ grave but his body remains ‘intact’.

Throughout these pages I have tried to approach *hegemonic white masculinities* in Almodóvar’s filmography according to the theoretical concerns detailed in the previous chapter. In that sense, I want to close this chapter referring to the two indispensable theoretical elements that have been followed in this analysis. First of all, no *white masculinity* can be understood in isolation, and, therefore, analysing stereotypes-in-relation proves to be of extraordinary importance. In the particular case of *white hegemonic masculinities* in Almodóvar’s universe, the relations that are most relevant are those established with women, while in other cases analysed in following chapters the relational weight will fall on the rapport to other types of masculinities<sup>41</sup>. This fact is explained by the genuine perspective expressed by Almodóvar’s female stories, where men’s existences are conditional to women’s decisions and, therefore, their *masculinities* cannot be defined in separated terms but in relation to them. That is why the connections established with the protagonist women of every story have been examined in such great detail throughout this chapter.

Secondly, in the theoretical review I have also echoed Connell’s definition of the core concept of *hegemonic masculinity* as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 2005: 77). Besides, Connell also emphasizes that the *hegemonic masculinity* is not a fixed type but a position immersed in a dynamic structure of relations that depends on the social and historical contexts. According to this approach, I have chosen the four white male characters examined above because I consider that they represent the “currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy” (Connell, 2005: 77) in the context of the contemporary Spain. First of all, they embody privileged locations exclusively for the mere fact of being white, middle-

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<sup>41</sup> For instance, *subordinated* and *marginalized masculinities* will be articulated mostly in relation to heterosexual *hegemonic masculinities*, given that their disadvantaged hierarchical positions are directly defined by their ‘incapacity’ of fulfilling the normative masculine model instead of by their domination over women.

aged, able-bodied men. Secondly, they confirm their 'suitability' by means of strong heterosexual behaviours that reflect the intimate relationship between heteronormativity and patriarchal system (Butler, 1999). Thirdly, they validate traditional clichés about family divisions between the figures of the breadwinner and the housewife, by which men should assure enough economic incomes while women should take care of the private space, the sentimental work and they must look after the children. Finally, above all, they represent the "accepted answer" by means of their performative behaviour: their chauvinist, violent and abusive attitudes shape these characters as the perfect symbol of patriarchal ideology.

### 3. *Complicit white masculinities in Almodóvar's filmography: fatherless, young misfits aiming for social 'normality'*<sup>42</sup> and heteropatriarchal families

This third chapter examines a second category of *masculinities* described by R.W. Connell's work (1987, 2005), namely the *complicit* relations articulated by a considerable group of men with regard to the *hegemonic* stereotype. Unlike previous normative-descriptive elaborations on men's studies (such as 'sex role' theories, psychoanalytical perspectives on sex or the men's liberation movement), Connell perceives the *hegemonic* type of masculinity as an exemplary principle that few men actually embody, but which the majority of men benefit from, for instance, by means of the overall subordination of women (Connell, 2005). Accordingly, the author finds in the notion of *complicity* a suitable understanding in order to approach this 'majority of men' that mirrors the "cultural ideal of masculinity" (Connell, 1987: 184). Given that Connell's theoretical conceptualization of the plurality of *masculinities* is always defined in relational terms (Connell, 2005: 44), *complicit* practices are mainly articulated by means of an intimate, reflective connection to the *hegemonic* model. In other words, *complicit* male behaviours do not fully embrace the *hegemonic white masculinity* but they benefit from this archetype while looking to fulfil it at the greatest possible degree. With regard to this dissertation topic, whereas Almodóvar's male characters depicted as *hegemonic white masculinities* in the preceding chapter were mostly defined in relation to women, the *complicit* white male figures analysed here are unavoidably marked by the mimic rapport to the exemplary *hegemonic* referent.

Having the sociological perspective of this work in mind, I understand the relation of *complicity* in connection with the representations of *white masculinities* within patriarchal Spanish society, rather than approaching the role played by the chosen characters in their respective films. In this regard, unlike the lack of prominence suffered by the *hegemonic white masculinities* in their plots, the *complicit* male figures analysed in this chapter enjoy relevant positions within their stories, representing richer, more sophisticated and more complex characters. In order to examine this second type of relational *white masculinity*, I have selected four characters that stand for the prototype of heterosexual, able-bodied, 'Spanish', young, white men who, coming from disadvantaged positions as fatherless or orphan misfits, seek to reach social 'normality'.

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<sup>42</sup> From now on, the term 'normality' will be articulated according to the use given by the different characters within their respective films rather than according to a sociological theoretical perspective.

Such longing for 'normality' is mostly related to normative aspirations to embody heterosexual leading figures, for instance, heads of heteropatriarchal families, as the examples of *hegemonic white masculinities* examined above actually were.

The characters that I include in this relational category are the self-repressed, confused student of *Matador* (1985), the disturbed, orphan kidnapper of *Tie me Up! Tie me Down!* (1990), the insecure, orphan ex-convict of *Live Flesh* (1997), and the sensitive, feminine nurse of *Talk to Her* (2002). As it happened with the *hegemonic white masculinities*, the *complicit* male figures appear in four different films throughout Almodóvar's filmography, from the 1980s to the 2000s. According to my interpretation, the continued presence of this kind of dissatisfied, social maladjusted male roles informs of Almodóvar's persistent interest in the personal rapport that individuals establish with social normative patterns. Actually, the stories that include these four white male characters could be considered the richest sociological analyses within Almodóvar's work<sup>43</sup>, due to their examination of the role played by certain institutions of social control such as heteropatriarchal families, medical discourses or legal systems, materialized in legitimate centres of surveillance (prisons or reformatories). With regard to this further sociological implication of 'Almodóvar's universe', as I announced in the introduction, my analytical approach is extraordinarily indebted to the Foucauldian concern about the role played by certain micro structures and social institutions in articulating the normative side of power and daily shaping of legitimate gendered bodies. Particularly, as far as the *complicit white masculinities* are concerned, my perspective is inspired by Foucault's theoretical development about the secularization process within Western societies that established new ruling discursive regimes on the basis of sciences (particularly medicine) and legal system (Foucault, 1978).

Drawing on an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1989; McCall, 2005), the four characters included in the category of *complicit white masculinities* share certain defining elements: they are all white, heterosexual, able-bodied (markedly muscular three of them), young men. Although, they apparently occupy a *hegemonic* prototypical position in 'material' terms, they do not fully embody it. They are frustrated, half orphan boys who have experienced difficult and oppressive childhoods and most of

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<sup>43</sup> On this matter, there are other Almodóvar's features that prove to be very thought-provoking from a sociological standpoint. For instance, one of his most recent films, *Bad Education* (2004), offers an interesting approach to the effects that oppressive religious discourses have in an extremely Catholic country as Spain. This feature will be examined in the last two chapters through the analysis of *subordinated* and *marginalized masculinities*. Similarly, the last story of Almodóvar to date, *The Skin I Live In* (2011), cleverly deal with the medical discourses that define gender identities.

them lack any kind of social opportunity, due not only to their class positions<sup>44</sup> but also to their predominant insecurity in social relations. Such insecurity is mainly represented through the inexperience in the sexual domain, except in the case of the disturbed kidnapper in *Tie me Up! Tie me Down!* (1990). The anxiety triggered by not fulfilling the role of virile heterosexual lover perfectly connects with the idealization of the *hegemonic* model, which was widely based on the sexual relation to women, as was examined in the previous chapter. Thus, the *complicit white masculinities* cannot be understood but in-relation to the *hegemonic* prototype (Connell, 2005: 44).

Furthermore, all of the characters selected in this chapter engage in criminal behaviour during the films, spending short periods in prisons or reformatories. Their experience within the penal system triggers their subsequent search for ‘normality’, except in the case of the nurse in *Talk to Her* (2002), where the causality is reversed: the legal punishment is due to his perverse attempt of establishing a ‘normal’ heterosexual relationship. Actually, the desire of taking part in heteronormative sentimental couples is a defining factor on the depiction of these four white male figures, especially concerning the creation of patriarchal families, which could be interpreted as ‘rewards’ for achieving ‘normality’. Again, the idealized perception that situates nuclear families as a core of happiness cannot be understood in isolation from the exemplary pattern showed by the *hegemonic white masculinities* as head of families.

On the other hand, as it happens in most of Almodóvar’s films, fatherhood is characterized by a complete absence (Allison, 2011). While three of the four characters that I consider *complicit white masculinities* have been considerably marked by their mothers<sup>45</sup>, none of them has ‘enjoyed’ a father figure during his short life. In a way, their standpoints as half orphan determine their life approaches, owing the fact that, for most of them, fathering their own children at the heart of ‘normal’ families represents a longed wish. Interestingly, the outcome of three of these figures within their respective

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<sup>44</sup> On this matter, Allison highlights that Almodóvar depicts a wide range of social classes, often within a single film (Allison, 2001: 49). With regard to the works examined in this chapter, the situation of low class individuals is especially visible in *Live Flesh* (1997), owing the fact that this feature is probably the most openly political of Almodóvar’s career. On the contrary, *Matador* (1985) offers an interesting analysis about Spanish elite, by means of a detailed portrait of conservative social spheres. In *Talk to Her* (2002) and *Tie me Up! Tie me Down!* (1990), the male characters are representative of working class, being their economic situation marked by the absence or by the disability of their parents and their consequent necessity to get by on what they earn.

<sup>45</sup> Both in *Matador* (1985) and *Talk to Her* (2002), the *complicit white masculinities* have been raised by omnipresent mothers. While in the 1985 feature, the male character interpreted by Antonio Banderas grows up within an oppressive fundamentalist catholic ambience, the nurse of the 2002 film is obliged to take care of his disabled mother, devoting most of his lifetime to her. In the case of *Live Flesh* (1997), the protagonist’s mother is a prostitute whose sex-life deeply marks his self-perception.

films will be defined by ‘fatherhoods’. For instance, the kidnapper of *Tie me Up! Tie me Down!* (1990) achieves that his ‘victim’ falls in love with him and they plan a family together; the insecure ex-convict of *Live Flesh* (1997) ends up having a child with his beloved wife; and the nurse of *Talk to Her* (2002) rapes his patient, provoking a pregnancy that makes her wake up and send him to prison.

With regard to the performative gendered constructions (Butler, 1999) articulated by these four characters, the *complicit* rapport to the *hegemonic* model emerges once more as a fundamental element. In the previous chapter, I referred to the abusive, chauvinist behaviours carried out by the characters of Almodóvar’s filmography that I consider could be representative of the *hegemonic white masculinities* within contemporary Spanish society<sup>46</sup>. As far as the *complicit white masculinities* are concerned, the violence over women practiced by these male figures equally plays a relevant role in the construction of their characters but, in this case, the aggressive component is rather an expression of the frustration triggered by their incapacity to reach the *hegemonic masculinity*:

*More controversially in Matador and ¡Átame! [Tie me Up! Tie me Down!], Almodóvar establishes a causal link between the fear of failing to achieve the impossible goals of traditional masculinity and violence towards women*  
(Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 144)

According to Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, in the film *Matador* (1985), when his heterosexuality is questioned, the male protagonist sets out to prove himself by raping his neighbour, who is also his mentor’s girlfriend. In *Tie me Up! Tie me Down!* (1990), the violence is clearly articulated through the kidnapping as the only way that the main character finds to have a heteropatriarchal family and, hence, fulfil the traditionally dominant *masculinity*. As an exception, the male figure of *Live Flesh* (1997) does not direct his violent impulses to the female protagonist but to his heterosexual, male ‘rival’ in the film, as a way of competing for the ‘possession’ of this woman. Finally, although in *Talk to Her* (2002), the violence exercised by the male character is not directly shown but implicitly narrated, in fact, the nurse ends up raping his comatose patient, perpetrating maybe the most savage and, at the same time, less aggressive act of all of them.

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<sup>46</sup> Of course I am not asserting that violent behaviours are generally idealized by Spanish men. The fact that I consider certain characters as *hegemonic white masculinities* is not due to the concrete violence articulated by them but to their general dominant attitude over women. The added component of violence is part of Almodóvar’s fictional universe; however it is linked to an actual symbolic violence implicit to patriarchal structure.



Bearing the previous general approach in mind, I would like to deal with the four *complicit white masculinities* separately. First of all, following a chronological order, I examine the self-repressed, confused student of bullfighting (Ángel) in *Matador* (1985). Apart from *Live Flesh* (1997), this fifth feature is the only of Almodóvar's films with two heterosexual male characters as leading roles: the insecure pupil and Diego, a retired bullfighter and Ángel's mentor<sup>47</sup>. The dialectic rapport established between both perfectly exemplifies the in-relation typology analysed by Connell (2005), by which the *complicit masculinities* do not actually embody the *hegemonic* model but they do benefit from it. Whereas Diego personifies the strength, violence and heterosexual success with women of the exemplary *hegemonic white masculinity*, Ángel constantly fails in mimicking Diego's idealized male figure, remaining as mere *complicit* of this dominant model and, otherwise, benefiting from the overall privileges of being a white, heterosexual, 'Spanish', young, able-bodied man. For instance, regarding the violent component, while Diego continues killing after his retirement due to his insatiable 'thirst' for blood, Ángel is a disappointing apprentice of bullfighting and murdering precisely because he faints at the first sight of blood. With regard to the sexual domain, Ángel also represents a 'failed' *hegemonic white masculinity* due to his lack of any experience. When his heterosexuality is questioned by Diego, Ángel decides to rape his female neighbour (and Diego's girlfriend) as a desperate attempt to reassert his normative 'manliness'. However, in this situation, Ángel's violent act also falls apart and the unsuccessful rape ends up making him the victim instead of the girl<sup>48</sup>. On this matter, Allison interestingly grasps the character of Ángel in the following quote:

*The character of Ángel perfectly illustrates masculinity in crisis. Where male subjects in cinema are usually identified with activity, voyeurism, sadism, fetishism and narrative progression, Ángel is associated with passivity, exhibitionism, masochism and spectacle in his failed attempt to possess what his master possesses* (Allison, 2001: 83).

As a constant, defining feature of the characters analysed in this chapter, the *complicit white masculinity* represented by Ángel is also articulated in relation to certain institutions of social control, such as the legal system, by means of his prison stay, or the medical discourses, through the psychiatric treatment that Ángel undergoes. Both regulatory institutions consider that Ángel is socially 'maladjusted' and, hence, needs to be mentally or physically disciplined in order to become a normative man. Actually,

<sup>47</sup> See plot summary 3 in the Appendix.

<sup>48</sup> "Ángel's attempt to rape Eva constructs *him* and not *her* as the victim" (Allison, 2001: 83).

Ángel's overcontrolling, religious mother also insists on straightening his son up with religion. In this case, the spiritual leader's supervision seems an adequate tool for solving Ángel's disorientation, which, in his mother's opinion, is due to the insane heredity of his currently absent husband. Thus, Ángel's half orphan condition is equally presented as the explanation of his lack of acceptable life goals and his constant search for an exemplary male reference, for instance, Diego's *hegemonic white masculinity*.

The second male character that I want to reflect on is the orphan, disturbed kidnapper of *Tie me Up! Tie me Down!* (1990). This feature is one of the most controversial<sup>49</sup> of Almodóvar's filmography owing to the heteropatriarchal violence involved in the plot: a young boy (Ricki) kidnaps a female porn actress (Marina) in order to make her fall in love with him and, actually, they end up planning a family together<sup>50</sup>. However, other critics of Almodóvar's work describe the film as a "serious critical study of the mechanics of masculinity" (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 144), or as a "parody of heterosexual relations" (Smith, 1992: 209).

Regarding the analysis of the *complicit white masculinities*, the character of Ricki seems extremely revealing of the way in which normative heteropatriarchal families are socially portrayed as a desirable life goal. In that sense, Ricki's main aim throughout the film consists of achieving and fulfilling the role of breadwinner: getting a job, being the husband of Marina and fathering her children; exactly what he has been denied as an orphan child. The *complicit* male character is defined in-relation (Connell, 2005) through his admiration of the 'head family' figure, which was depicted in the previous chapter as the *hegemonic white masculinity*: "Ricky is obsessed with the idea of marriage and fatherhood as a ratification of his dubious sanity and normality when he leaves the psychiatric institution" (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 144). At a performative level (Butler, 1999), Ricki equally acts mirroring the violent behaviours of these *hegemonic* characters but in a most 'considerate' manner. Whereas the act of kidnapping is evidently an aggression in itself, both the alleged motivations<sup>51</sup> and the way in which Ricki treats Marina tone down the violent character involved in the situation. By means of avoiding certain episodes that would be obviously expected from

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<sup>49</sup> While, according to Morgan, "the film operates at the extremities of both misogyny and romance" (Morgan, 2005: 114), Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas emphasizes the dangerous ambiguities implicit in *Tie me Up! Tie me Down!* (1990) as follows: "the film's one weakness is less an irresponsible condonement of misogyny (as some have suggested) than a failure to place its critique of patriarchy beyond the dangers of misinterpretation" (Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 144).

<sup>50</sup> See plot summary 6 in the Appendix.

<sup>51</sup> He announces his intentions to Marina with the words: "I'm 23 years old; I have 50 thousand pesetas, and I'm alone in the world. I'd like to be a good father of your children" (Smith, 1992: 209)

Ricki's behaviour, such as sexual violence<sup>52</sup>, Almodóvar presents the kidnapping as an everyday 'date' for Marina to get to know Ricki rather than as an actual attack. Furthermore, during this process, Ricky already starts behaving as a stereotypical protective 'man of the house': fixing a broken pipe in the kitchen and promising Marina to get her out of porn industry.

With regard to the normative institutions, the film starts with Ricki being released from the psychiatric centre where he has spent the last years after going through the orphanage (since the age of three) and several reformatories. During one of his escapes from the psychiatric hospital he meets Marina and, according to Ricki's own words, filling his mind with her image makes him avoid any 'crazy' act and become 'normal'. This perception is institutionally confirmed when he is freed by means of a judge's decision that states his 'normality' and considers him apt to join society. Thus, in the case of *Tie me Up! Tie me Down!* (1990), the relation of the *complicit white masculinity* to the disciplinary institutions is not only marked by the dichotomy madness-normality, but also by the collaborative rapport of legal and medical institutions in disciplining social dissidence. At the end, according to Morgan:

*Mechanics of masculinity at work in the complex and absurdly contradictory behaviour of a 'normal' madman who adopts 'madly' exaggerated patterns of masculinity to pursue conventional social 'norms'* (Morgan, 2005: 114)

According to the meaningful self-referentiality that characterizes 'Almodóvar's universe', the example of the third *complicit white masculinity* is strongly connected to the second character examined above<sup>53</sup>. Furthermore, this third case appears in *Live Flesh* (1997), which can also be related to the first film examined, *Matador* (1985), given that both are the only Almodóvar features starring two heterosexual male roles, as I have already mentioned. By means of a politically critical approach to contemporary Spanish society, *Live Flesh* (1997) relates the story of a love triangle among David, Elena and Víctor, the insecure convicted orphan who represents the third *complicit white masculinity*<sup>54</sup>. In this case, the *complicity* is defined in-relation (Connell, 2005) to

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<sup>52</sup> According to his idealistic romantic vision of the kidnapping, Ricki rejects the possibility of raping her by stating that "they will have sex when the moment comes". Morgan considers that the absence of this 'expected' sexual violation has "a disorienting effect on the spectator and opens up a narrative gap which is filled by a preposterously incongruous substitution: Ricky's desire for social integration and 'normal' family life" (Morgan, 2005: 115).

<sup>53</sup> Paul Smith relates both characters, adding a comment about the close interpretations that the two protagonist actors develop: Liberto Rabal in *Live Flesh* (1997) and Antonio Banderas in *Tie me Up! Tie me Down!* (1990): "Rabal's Víctor is suspiciously close to Banderas's Ricky" (Smith, 2000: 183).

<sup>54</sup> See plot summary 8 in the Appendix.

the *hegemonic* myth of the virile heterosexual lover. As a female sex worker's son, Víctor feels very unfortunate due to his lack of sexual experience with women compared to his mother<sup>55</sup>. Actually, the worst affront that Víctor suffers during the story is when Elena confesses that she barely remembers the sex encounter that they had, which was absolutely relevant to Víctor as it was his first sexual relation. That is why Víctor asks Clara to teach him to become the 'best fucker in the world' in order to prove his 'amatory' skills to Elena. Víctor's insecure approach to heterosexuality reminds the character of Ángel in *Matador* (1985), who tries to reassert his virility by attempting to rape his neighbour. However none of them manages to fulfil the sexual act, failing in his 'path' to reach *hegemonic white masculinity*. In a sense, both characters, Ángel and Víctor, are 'sexually' marked by their characteristic mothers, who represent, respectively, the absolute chastity<sup>56</sup> and the open promiscuity.

On the other hand, Víctor's *complicit masculinity* is also highly connected to the other heterosexual male role in *Live Flesh* (1997), David, who possesses everything that Víctor desires: Elena's love, freedom or social recognition. Víctor's *masculinity* is determined to a large extent by the rivalry with David, mostly at a material level<sup>57</sup>. Actually they physically clash in several scenes showing their shared submission to traditional masculine values, such as competitive instinct. However, whereas David's disabled body is paradoxically presented as powerful and in control, Víctor's *complicit* body "seems at times more vulnerable: confined to the space of the prison and less sexually experienced" (Fouz-Fernández and Martínez Expósito, 2007: 108).

Finally, in the case of *Live Flesh* (1997), the relation to the penal system is presented again in educational terms. During the four years that he spends in prison for a crime that he has not committed, as it was the case of Ángel in *Matador* (1985), Víctor decides to study and be trained, as Ricki does in *Tie me Up! Tie me Down!* (1990). Hence, jail represents the location where misfits are converted into diligent, hardworking men. In this way the disciplining *raison d'être* of the penitentiary institution is to carry out a regulatory task shaping non-normative subjects into

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<sup>55</sup> During a visit to his mother's grave after having received the inheritance, Víctor bitterly wonders how many 'fucks' did she need in order to gather all that money, while paradoxically he is getting it without ever fucking.

<sup>56</sup> Ángel's mother in *Matador* (1985) is a convinced catholic, member of Opus Dei who raises his son in an extremely oppressive, religious atmosphere, including the sexual domain, of course.

<sup>57</sup> "Both men have muscular bodies. But whereas for the paraplegic, David's muscular strength is of crucial importance, not only for his sporting ambitions but for the sake of movement and physical independence, Víctor built his body obsessively whilst in prison perhaps to compensate for the castration anxieties that Elena had triggered" (Fouz-Fernández and Martínez Expósito, 2007: 107).

‘suitable’ citizens in order to be reintegrated to society. The proof that both Ricki and Víctor have adequately fulfilled what was expected of their respective periods in prison lies in the fact that, at the end of their stories, their trajectories of ‘redemption’ are rewarded with what they have yearned more for: a heterosexual, normative family.

The fourth character portrays the most peculiar *complicit white masculinity* of the cases examined in this chapter. This male figure is one of the multiple protagonists of *Talk to Her* (2002), a film composed of several, unusual heterosexual love stories<sup>58</sup>. Benigno (‘benign’ in Spanish) is a sweet, sensitive nurse that takes care of Alicia, a comatose young girl with who he falls in love with. In a much stronger way than Ángel in *Matador* (1985) and Víctor in *Live Flesh* (1997), Benigno is feminized through several typically female-assigned features: he works as a nurse, but he has also been trained as hairdresser and beautician, he is meticulous and precise in his job and he deals with people in an extraordinary sweet, tender, amiable way (Gregori, 2005). According to this image, his workmates assume that he is homosexual, which he partially confirms to Alicia’s father as a way to protect his job by seeming less sexually dangerous. Whereas these characteristics can represent some kind of alternative to the *hegemonic white masculinity*, the character of Benigno articulates a *complicit* rapport to the dominant model not only by aiming to have a traditional heteropatriarchal family but also by eventually performing a violent behaviour against Alicia<sup>59</sup>. After devoting four years of his life to her, not only at a professional level, but also at a personal one (using his free time to do all the things that she liked in order to tell her about them), Benigno wants to marry Alicia and create a family, as ‘they have a better relationship that most marriages’. Whether the sentimental relation with Alicia is a product of Benigno’s loss of reality or they are an ‘actual’ couple in a bizarre way<sup>60</sup>, the nurse ends up raping his comatose patient carrying out what can be considered a brutal aggression to a defenceless woman but also a perverse act of love that eventually brings Alicia back to life. From an audience’s point of view, the visual, narrative omission of such behaviour combined with the amiable, maternal portrait of Benigno’s role leads to a relative empathetic understanding of the sexual aggression.

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<sup>58</sup> See plot summary 10 in the Appendix.

<sup>59</sup> “Alicia is, in a contradictory and sickly way, everything that Benigno desires (with his masculine side) and everything that he admires (with his feminine side)” [My own translation of the original quote: Alicia es, de una manera contradictoria y enfermiza, todo lo que Benigno desea (con su yo masculino) y todo lo que admira (con su yo femenino) (Gregori, 2005)]

<sup>60</sup> During the film, Almodóvar appoints the different couples by means of writing their names together in a sign, for instance: Lydia and Marco or, at the end, Marco and Alicia. In the case of Alicia and Benigno, the director makes the same, considering them equally as a couple even if they never meet ‘consciously’.

Finally, with regard to the rapport of this case of *complicit white masculinity* to the institutional centres of social control, the role of Benigno radically changes his previous sweetness for a rough character when he enters jail after raping Alicia. As Gregori (2005) observes, the prison represents the opposite to Benigno's work, making him to switch his tone of voice, his gestures or his vocabulary. In that sense, similarly to Víctor's experience in *Live Flesh* (1997), prison is presented as strongly stereotypically 'masculine', where all the sensitive features of Benigno are subjugated: whereas his job as nurse was characterized by freedom, physical contact and communication, jail is defined by isolation, loneliness and impossibility of human contact (Gregori, 2005). Thus, regarding Benigno, the disciplinary task of the penitentiary centre focuses on the gender domain, suppressing his 'feminine' features and making him normatively 'masculine'.

The analysis of the *complicit white masculinities* developed in this chapter has been articulated around two main theoretical premises. On the one hand, I have examined the four characters chosen on the basis of Connell's definition of *complicity* as the relation by which the 'majority of men' benefits from the *hegemonic masculinity* without actually embodying it (Connell, 1987). Consequently, I have selected four Almodovarian figures who although apparently occupy privileged social positions as white, young, able-bodied, heterosexual, Spanish men; they do not actually fulfil these *hegemonic* roles and their life goals lie precisely in reaching what they consider the social 'normality'. Thus, drawing on Connell's typology of *masculinities* (2005), the partly-protagonists<sup>61</sup> of the features analysed here are always articulated in relational terms to the *hegemonic* model, which is represented either by specific characters within their respective films or by a general myth showed in the four cases of the previous chapter. In other words, whereas the roles of Ángel in *Matador* (1985) and Víctor in *Live Flesh* (1997) mirror *hegemonic* values exemplified in their own films<sup>62</sup>, Ricky in *Tie me Up! Tie me Down!* (1990) and Benigno in *Talk to Her* (2002) are mostly driven by the idealized figure of the 'head' of heteropatriarchal families. Furthermore, their *complicity* to the *hegemonic white masculinity* is also accomplished at a performative level (Butler, 1999) with regard to two main aspects: violence and sex. All of them carry out violent behaviours in the name of 'love', but mostly as an ultimate attempt to assert their normative *masculinity*.

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<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, while the *complicit white masculinities* considered here play quite leading roles in their respective films, which are mostly multi-character stories where men have considerable protagonism, the *hegemonic masculinities* approached in the previous chapter played secondary roles of women's stories.

<sup>62</sup> In *Matador* (1985) Ángel mimics his mentor and in *Live Flesh* (1997) Víctor competes with David.

On the other hand, I have argued that it is extremely interesting to observe the *complicit white masculinities* through their rapport with certain disciplinary institutions of social control, given that the four white male characters examined in this chapter have not only entered prison or reformatories, but they have also undergone various types of psychiatric treatments. Accordingly, medical and legal systems are presented as the means by which maladjusted subjects are led into normative behaviour, which in the case of gendered practices seems greatly relevant.

#### 4. *Subordinated white masculinities in Almodóvar's filmography: heterosexual, occasional cross-dressers men and female transsexual father*

The third type of *masculinity* examined in this forth chapter makes reference to the relation of *subordination* of certain groups of men with regard to the *hegemonic* model. Taking into account the unavoidably intertwined rapport of patriarchal structure and heteronormative ideology (Butler, 1999), the *subordination* tends to be articulated by means of non-normative sexual behaviours<sup>63</sup>. Actually, according to Connell (2005), the most representative example of the *subordinated masculinities* proves to be homosexual men at the heart of strongly heteronormative patriarchal societies.

However, as far as my sociological interpretation of 'Almodóvar's universe' is concerned, I will deal with the homosexual locations in the following chapter, as examples of narrative masters (cinema directors) that enjoy *hegemonic* dominating privileges coming from *marginalized* positions as openly gay men. With regard to the *subordinated white masculinities* within Almodóvar's features, I would rather prefer to approach this category by means of studying those characters who articulate alternative modes of understanding sex, gender and sexuality boundaries in socially *subordinated* but also symbolically *subversive* ways<sup>64</sup>. Apart from my personal perception of *masculinities* within Almodóvar's filmography, such analytical decision also echoes some of the critical readings received by Connell's work, which have emphasized its lack of "enquiring into the epistemological foundations of gender/sex or culture/nature dualisms" (Petersen, 1998: 117). Petersen observes how the material component does not appear in Connell's theory of *masculinities*, where male bodies are perceived as naturally given, without historical and cultural influences on them<sup>65</sup>. Accordingly, I intend to examine the *subordination* not only by means of what I consider the Almodovarian *masculinities* immersed in dominated positions from a sociological standpoint, but also by means of an insubordinate adaptation of Connell's typology including certain theoretical questionings of oppressive dualisms that her analysis lacks.

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<sup>63</sup> Demetriou also refers to this entangled connection, asserting that gay masculinities are "subordinated to the hegemonic model because their object of sexual desire undermines the institution of heterosexuality, which is of primary importance for the reproduction of patriarchy" (Demetriou, 2001:344).

<sup>64</sup> Consequently, the characters examined in this chapter are also those who have attracted more theoretical attention from gender and feminist scholars within 'Almodóvar's universe'.

<sup>65</sup> "Connell seems not to recognise that the very materialisation of men's bodies as biologically sexed bodies is effect through historically ad socially specific discourses, and that this ultimately affects how men experience their bodies, including their sexual desires" (Petersen, 1998:117).



Similarly to the two previous *masculinities* analysed, the *subordinated* roles included in these pages are defined in-relation (Connell, 2005) with regard not only to the *hegemonic* idealized prototype of the heterosexual, chauvinist man who behaves violently and abusively, but also to the *complicit* men that benefit from this exemplary *masculinity* and embody it to the greatest possible degree. At the same time, the male figures of this chapter also constitute symbols of counter-discourses in the domain of gender/sexual identities and behaviours. Therefore, the interest of this category lies precisely in the contrasting narratives by which these characters are defined: whereas their alternative articulations of *masculinity* condemn them to inferior positions, reinforcing the status quo, they also represent subversive forces through their practices.

According to my sociological perspective, there are three white figures within Almodóvar's filmography that can be included in this subversive/*subordinated* group, namely, the cross-dresser male judge of *High Heels* (1991), the female transsexual father of *All About my Mother* (1999), and the cross-dresser and 'identity-stealer' actor of *Bad Education* (2004). Drawing on an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989; McCall, 2005), the three characters are white, male-born individuals who articulate their gender self-perceptions through fluid, unsettled performative acts. Whereas they are not constantly self-perceived as men, they maintain narrow links with forms of *masculinities* in assertive, subtle or oppositional terms. They personify three different life periods: the young boy Juan/Ángel/Zahara of *Bad Education* (2004), the young adult Judge Domínguez/Femme Letal<sup>66</sup> of *High Heels* (1991) and the middle aged Esteban/Lola of *All About my Mother* (1999). As it can be inferred from the previous name descriptions, these characters also play with double and even triple identities. Actually, as Fouz-Fernández and Martínez Expósito (2007: 156) point out, the multi-identity male figure of *High Heels* (1991) represents a clear precedent of the cross-dresser Juan/Ángel/Zahara in *Bad Education* (2004). As a consequence of such multiplicity of roles, they develop different degrees of protagonism in their respective films. Whereas the *subordinated white masculinity* of *Bad Education* (2004) attracts most of the spectator's attention, the character of Esteban/Lola embodies an absent presence that is continuously defined by others in *All About my Mother* (1999). Thirdly, the Judge Domínguez/Femme Letal is the male assembly of a women's plot in the story of a mother-daughter relationship in *High Heels* (1991).

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<sup>66</sup> Almodóvar gives to this character the name "Femme Letal" (literally "Lethal Woman") as a way of playing with words and with the figure of "Femme Fatale" ("Fatal Woman").

Finally, owing the fact that foreignness barely appears in Spanish films (Fouz-Fernández and Martínez Expósito, 2007: 165), the degree of subversion/*subordination* linked to these three figures also lies in the international frontiers that they trespass, not only at a fictional level, but also as actors. Paradoxically, while the female transsexual father of *All About my Mother* (1999), played by a Spanish actor, represents an Argentinian that migrates to Europe and eventually settles down in Barcelona; the Spanish cross-dresser and ‘identity-stealer’ brother of *Bad Education* (2004) is played by a well-known Mexican actor, Gael García Bernal. The choice of García Bernal for such multiple *queer* roles, where everything ends up being a theatrical performance, was greatly controversial because the physical and linguistical (accent) cross-dressing was interpreted as a way of playing with the public persona of the actor rather than really acknowledging transidentitarian transvestism (Fouz-Fernández and Martínez Expósito, 2007: 155). Actually, the case of the actor starring Judge Domínguez/Femme Letal in *High Heels* (1991) was similar. The choice of Miguel Bosé, a singer whose image at that moment was attached to sexual ambiguity equally informs of Almodóvar’s interest in playing with gendered stereotypes not only inside but also outside fictional context, for instance by drawing on both heterosexual female and male gay fantasies.

On account of the extremely interesting portraits provided by these three white ‘male’ figures in the field of gender and sexuality, several critics have also considered them as some sort of coherent category within ‘Almodóvar’s universe’ (Fouz-Fernández and Martínez Expósito, 2007; Piganiol, 2009). Whereas these authors usually include a fourth figure in this group, the transsexual sister of *The Law of Desire* (1987), I have not added her to my study of *masculinities* owing to her repeated self-identification as a woman. Hence, although other figures analysed here articulate a strong gender ambiguity, they always remain attached to male symbolic elements in one way or another. For instance, the female transsexual of *All About my Mother* (1999) always states her desire of being a *father* even though she refers to herself in female terms. As far as this master thesis is concerned, the role of the transsexual sister in *The Law of Desire* (1987), is relevant due to her rapport to the religious institution by means of the abuses she suffered as child, which greatly inspires the character of Juan/Ángel/Zahara in *Bad Education* (2004). Again, the self-referentiality proves to be one of the distinctive features of Almodóvar’s auteristic style filmography, since most of the *queer* figures reflect each other.

According to a more theoretical interpretation of the characters examined in this chapter, Piganiol (2009) considers that Almodóvar blurs the frontiers between sex, gender and sexuality not only by avoiding to categorize them as transsexuals, drag queens, cross-dressers, or transgenders, but also by questioning the fixed relationship between nature and social categories and, thus, opening the possibility to change through their life (Piganiol, 2009). Actually, this subversive attribution to Almodóvar's characters, i.e. roles that serve to problematize gender through parody and satire, directly connects to current theoretical-feminist concerns, such as 'queer theory' or Butler's conceptualization of gender as 'performatively constituted' (Allison, 2001). Particularly, the *subordinated white masculinities* could be read by means of Butler's notion of 'subversive bodily acts' (Butler, 1999). Considering the 'body' as a 'variable boundary' rather than a given 'reality' while understanding 'gender' as a conscious intentional 'act' leads necessarily to open the space to deformity, parodic repetition and political gender constructions (Butler, 1999: 173-179):

*If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity* (Butler, 1999: 174)

According to my interpretation, the Almodovarian white male characters immersed in relations of *subordination* with regard to the normative gender/sexual model (which is embodied by the *hegemonic masculinities* and admired by the *complicit masculinities*) articulate gendered 'bodily acts' that have *subversive* potential, even though they do not revert the powerful mechanisms of social exclusion that condemn them to such *subordinated* positions. However, this reading of Almodóvar's *queer* characters as articulating naturally subversive trans-performances also entails problems. For instance, although one of the further aftermaths of transvestism could be to destabilize established binaries such as male/female, gay/straight or sex/gender, Butler herself warns that there is no "necessary relation between drag and subversion, and that drag may well be used in service of both the denaturalization and reidealization of hyperbolic heterosexual gender norms" (Butler, 1993: 125)<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> "Where these identities have become open and/or permanent, they have been seen as pathological and/or problematic. In other words, no permanent "in-between" identity was allowed for. To the extent that the transvestite or transsexual passes as a person of the other gender, and to the extent that the transgending remains hidden, the "fact" of two invariant genders remain unquestioned" (Ekins and King, 2005: 388).

In any case, whether Almodóvar's *queer* characters play reactionary roles contributing to reinforce hegemonic gender binaries or articulate refreshing bodily performances, the fact is that they offer an extremely interesting reflection on the field of *masculinities*, and more generally, on the field of identities. According to Piganiol, the director portrays identity as "plural, moving and complex" while constructed by a type of 'authenticity' detached from any idea of 'nature' but for the free expression of our aspirations, as the character of Agrado expresses in her monologue in *All About my Mother* (1999): "you are more authentic the more you resemble what you've dreamed of being" (Piganiol, 2009: 89). On the other hand, Smith emphasizes the element of fluidity and performance in Almodóvar's deconstructive questioning of identity, by means of what he calls an "unlimited transvestism" (quoted in Fouz-Fernández and Martínez Expósito, 2007: 154).

With regard to the materialization of this gendered fluidity in the case of the *subordinated white masculinities* within Almodóvar's features, there is a feature shared for the three characters: the background role played by theatrical contexts and performance. The two cross-dressers considered in this chapter, namely the judge of *High Heels* (1991) and the young actor of *Bad Education* (2004), 'release' their 'feminine' alter egos by means of performances on stage, while the female transsexuals of *All About my Mother* (1999) develop a close relation to the theatrical world. As Piganiol (1999) observes, metamorphoses always occur in dressing rooms, cabarets or theatres. In these contexts the symbolism lies in playing with different aesthetics and stereotypes through masquerade, costumes or fiction. Furthermore, this role of spectacle tends to be accompanied by a strong sense of artificiality, for instance by means of the playbacks that Almodóvar always uses when his characters sing, as Femme Letal and Zahara do in their respective features.

In order to conclude this general overview of the characters that represent the *subordinated white masculinities*, I would like to add a final remark about the domain of sexuality, which I used at the beginning of this chapter to explain my different interpretations of the *subordinated* and the *marginalized* forms within 'Almodóvar's universe'. According to Allison (2001: 107), Almodóvar's depiction of sexual choices is also characterised by fluidity where there are homosexual acts but not homosexual people. With regard to the *subordinated* roles, the figures analysed here are also defined by their behaviours instead of having strong self-perceptions in the field of identities, except for the judge/Femme Letal of *High Heels* (1991), who actively considers himself

heterosexual and only establishes sexual relationships with the woman he is in love with. Although Juan/Ángel/Zahara in *Bad Education* (2004) engages in same-sex or opposite-sex sexual intercoursés without distinction, depending on the interests he pursues with those relationships, his character is certainly presented as homophobic through the derogatory expressions that he dedicates to the gay male protagonist. Finally, the most complex *subordinated white masculinity* to define in the sexual domain is Lola of *All About my Mother* (1999), given the ambiguity in her identity construction. Whereas Lola has sex with two of the female characters and fathers their children; she refers to herself simultaneously as a *woman* and as a *father*, rendering highly problematic his/her inclusion in sexual binaries. At the end she is the perfect example of the fluidity and consequent pointlessness of fixing gender and sexual definitions into restrictive dichotomies.

Bearing the previous general approach in mind, I would like to deal with the three *subordinated white masculinities* separately, following a chronological order according to their respective films releases. First of all, within the mother-daughter story<sup>68</sup> related in *High Heels* (1991) I would like to examine the male white character of a judge that embraces multiple identities in order to further investigate the different cases that he is supposed to solve. One of the identities used by Judge Domínguez is a drag performer called Femme Letal, who mimics the figure of a reputed female singer, Becky del Páramo, while being secretly in love with Becky's daughter, Rebeca. Femme Letal is characterised by a significant ambiguity, whereas she develops a spectacle emphasizing gestures traditionally considered feminine, she reasserts her *masculinity* out of stage, by means of declaring himself a man to Manuel, Rebeca's husband. While working as a judge, Domínguez represents a 'normative' *masculinity*, for instance, by being very appealing to heterosexual women or by not mastering certain skills stereotypically attributed to women, such as distinguishing different a variety of tissues and colours. Thus, according to Almodóvar's depiction, Judge Domínguez perfectly integrates cross-gender dressing practices without having questioned his *masculinity* or his heterosexuality; which are both together expressed by means of his love to the female protagonist, Rebeca. In that sense, this male character coincides with Ekins and King's description of the figure of transvestite as a man who is able to suspend his *masculinity* for varying amounts of time, wishing to be perceived as a "normal" man or "normal"

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<sup>68</sup> See plot summary 7 in the Appendix.

woman depending on the context (2005: 388). Actually, Smith considers that this “primacy of voluntarism” is distinctive of Almodóvar’s stories: “the freedom of the subject to place him/herself on either side of the sexual divide” (Smith, 2000: 125).

With regard to the sentimental relationship between Rebeca and Judge Domínguez, the only sexual encounter takes place within the secrecy of the dressing rooms in the pub theatre where *Femme Letal* has acted. The scene starts with Rebeca helping *Femme Letal* to undress and satirizing about the fake female elements of her costume, such as artificial hips and breasts. In the middle of the dressing transition from *Femme Letal* to Judge Domínguez, i.e. from ‘female’ to ‘male’, he seduces Rebeca who ends up having sex with a self-perceived male subject who is still in *Femme Letal*’s costume. Taking into account Domínguez’s security in his *masculinity* and Rebeca’s in her femininity, this couple can be easily considered as ‘heterosexual’. However, recovering the contrasting narratives mentioned above, whereas the judge’s easiness to suspend his manliness in order to embrace the most exaggerated ‘feminine’ features as *Letal* locates him undoubtedly in a position of *subordination* in the eyes of *hegemonic* and *complicit white masculinities*, it also constitutes a *subversive* symbol to the strict gender binaries. Ultimately, the Judge Domínguez is a performer who consciously moves from seriousness to ‘frivolous’ spectacle, from men to women, showing that life and identity also consist of a succession of gendered and racial ‘representations’.

The second *subordinated white masculinity* plays the triggering absent male role in one of the most moving and empathy-provoking women’s story<sup>69</sup> of Almodóvar’s filmography, *All About my Mother* (1999). Whereas he represents the male figures par excellence: father, husband and lover, this character’s gender is also articulated through ambiguity. As the audience finds out throughout the film, Esteban was Manuela’s husband who, after migrating to Europe, carries out a partial sex change becoming Lola. According to Manuela, Esteban suddenly appears with female breasts asking her to continue their lives as if nothing had really happened. Thus, far from claiming gendered awareness, Manuela’s account of her husband’s bodily changes gives an impression of fluidity, but also of superficiality in a sense.

Nonetheless, this vague perception of Lola’s motivations for changing sex is also due to the fact that she barely appears in the film<sup>70</sup>. Paradoxically, the presence of

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<sup>69</sup> See plot summary 9 in the Appendix.

<sup>70</sup> Actually, the character of Esteban/Lola only appears in two sequences: in the cemetery when Sister Lola has died and at the moment when Manuela presents her his second son. The scene in the cemetery is

Esteban/Lola in *All About my Mother* (1999) is marked by an absolute absence while being the person who actually reunites the female protagonists, triggering a friendship of three completely dissimilar women. Hence, the *subordinated white masculinity* examined here is mainly depicted by the external gazes of the three women that have known him deeply: Manuela, Sister Rosa and La Agrado. Whereas for Manuela ‘Lola has the worst of a man and the worst of a woman’, Sister Rosa maintains some kind of innocence in terms of her relationship with Esteban/Lola, even though she is the cause of her AIDS. On the other hand, the female transsexual, La Agrado<sup>71</sup>, portrays Lola’s gender ambiguity by means of her own role, which also stays in the middle of a sex change process, having female breasts while keeping male genitalia. The material aspect in Esteban/Lola’s gendered definition proves to be of extraordinary importance. In a way, the implicit question remains open: female breasts make you a woman? Interestingly, when Manuela is telling Sister Rosa about the sexist behaviour that Lola ends up having with her at the end of their marriage, she wonders: how could someone with tremendous boobs be so chauvinist? By means of all these statements, as when Manuela asserts that ‘Lola has the worst of a man and the worst of a woman’, Almodóvar offers an interesting questioning of the boundaries of gender, sex and sexuality and especially in that which concerns the fixed stereotypes expected of gender identity categories.

Although a univocal female condition could be inferred from Lola’s sex change process, as I stated above, this character also plays with ambiguity through a strong sense of normative *masculinity* that is directly articulated by means of his fatherhood of multiple Estebans. While Lola articulates an absent fatherhood for both children, a recurrent topic in Almodóvar’s features (Allison, 2001: 63), at a certain moment *she* reminds Manuela that she has always wanted to be *father*. The matter of gender is presented as fluid and not fixed, depending on the context. Actually, during his short actual intervention in *All About my Mother* (1999), Lola always refers to herself in female terms, except when it is a matter of his sons. With regard to the progeny, Esteban reveals the importance of his *masculinity*, which can be also related to the fact

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extremely meaningful because it represents not only the death of Sister Rosa caused by AIDS transmitted by Lola but also the birth of a new Esteban. When Manuela finally meets Lola, she bitterly asserts that Lola could not appear in a place other than the cemetery given that she “is not a human being, but an epidemic”.

<sup>71</sup> The character of Agrado recovers the relevance that the world of theatrical spectacle has for these *queer* characters. She maintains narrow links with theatre where she ends up making a powerful statement: “you are more authentic the more you resemble what you’ve dreamed of being” (Piganiol, 2009: 89).

that Lola maintains *his* male genitalia, a symbol of fatherhood that protects *him* from a concern traditionally attributed to male symbolic: the anxiety of not having ‘genetic’ descendants to whom he transmits *his* legacy. On account of the meaningful weight awarded to *fatherhood* I have considered Lola as an example of *white masculinity* that articulates both *subordinated* and subversive practices in relation to a *hegemonic* model.

Finally, I would like to examine the cross-dresser and ‘identity-stealer’ character of the complex men’s story<sup>72</sup> narrated in *Bad Education* (2004). In this case, the *subordinated white masculinity* is articulated through different partial roles played by the same actor, the Mexican Gael García Bernal<sup>73</sup>. This multi-identity male character consists of three main figures at ‘real’ and fictional levels: the actual Juan (Ignacio’s brother), Ángel Andrade (as a fake version of Ignacio in ‘reality’) and Ignacio’s female alter ego in fiction, Zahara. For the purposes of this chapter, I focus on two elements: the spectacle and artificiality represented by Zahara and the fluidity in sexual behaviour and gender self-identification articulated by the combined figure of Juan/Ángel.

First of all, at a fictional level, the intervention of Zahara on stage is characterised by exaggerated ‘feminine’ gestures on the basis of makeup and costume, hence, as a very artificial woman. While the actual Ignacio has undergone partial sex changes, constituting a very androgynous figure in a similar way to Esteban/Lola of *All About my Mother* (1999), Zahara’s male body remains intact articulating her transvestite performance in spectacle terms. By defining herself as a “mix of desert, hazard and cafeteria”, Zahara plays with the mystery around herself and her gendered ascription.

Secondly, at a level of ‘reality’ the character of Juan, artistically called Ángel, tries to prove his skills as an actor in order to play the part of Zahara in the film adaptation of *The Visit* that Enrique directs. Ángel aims to learn effeminate gestures and turns to a drag performer that mimics Sara Montiel, the Spanish diva of the 60s idolized by the children Enrique and Ignacio. In that way, Almodóvar leads the spectator through the transformation of Juan/Ángel, who originally seemed too ‘man’, into a more ‘reduced’, feminine version of himself as Zahara. Throughout the converting process, this male character, in his two identities as Juan and Ángel, shows not only an extraordinary flexibility in entangling same-sex relationships (even though he has deeply homophobic mentality), but also a great fluidity in adopting oppositional

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<sup>72</sup> See plot summary 11 in the Appendix.

<sup>73</sup> According to Fouz-Fernández and Martínez Expósito (2007: 157), the complexity of the several roles played by García Bernal is achieved by two methods that appear in every Almodóvar’s approach to transgenderism: performance and cross-dressing.



gendered stereotypical features depending on the context. As Femme Letal in *High Heels* (1991), Ángel is able to suspend his *masculinity* and to enter *subordinated* registers in order to achieve the goals he pursues. Whereas this fluidity offers a subversive potential, it is also condemned to inferior positions with regard to *hegemonic masculinity*. Finally, at a wider level, *Bad Education* (2004) constitutes not only a political statement claiming an homoerotic aesthetics as a way of denouncing the devastating heritage left by the Catholic Church in Spain, but also a general reflection of legitimate identities and the right of individuals to define their own ‘destiny’.

Throughout this chapter I have tried to examine some of the multiple ‘male’ characters depicted in ‘Almodóvar’s universe’ that play with sex, gender and sexual boundaries, hence, being simultaneously condemned to *subordinated* positions with regard to *hegemonic* and *complicit* models while representing some sort of subversion. Although I have only dealt with three of these *queer* roles due to the limited space, within Almodóvar’s filmography there is a whole range of subversive characters that reinforces the director’s *auteristic* reputation of showing alternative ambiances. Actually, in the same three films analysed here, there is a diversity of roles that complements what I have considered the *subordinated white masculinities*; such as the three transvestites that accompany Femme Letal singing in *High Heels* (1991), the Zahara’s ‘effeminate’ cross-dresser friend in *Bad Education* (2004), or La Agrado and her account of the Barcelona’s drag ambience in *All About my Mother* (1999).

The three ‘male’ figures studied in these pages are characterised by playing with their senses of *masculinity* depending on the context, for instance, being able to suspend their manliness in order to achieve certain goals, such as Femme Letal and Juan/Ángel, or to emphasize it in order to embody the role of fatherhood, such as Lola. This flexibility finds in spectacle and performance the perfect tools to be expressed. By means of costumes, makeup and acting Almodóvar’s stories provide a suitable space to play with stereotypes and fixed assumptions in the realm of identities. Such gender fluidity proves to be very refreshing for Spanish cinema, given that it offers an extraordinarily subversive account of self-articulations without denying the hierarchical structures that condemn these positions to *subordination* in relation to *hegemonic* and *complicit masculinities*. Ultimately, Almodóvar’s suggestive point lies precisely in not seeking to solve this contradiction but in leaving it open and enjoying ambiguity.

## 5. *Marginalized white masculinities* in Almodóvar's filmography: homosexual and disabled narrative 'masters' as film directors

The last *masculinity* that I would like to examine is characterized by the relationship of *marginalization*, which is probably the most complex of Connell's model (2005). While the *hegemonic*, *complicit* and *subordinated* positions are internal to gender order, the *marginalized masculinities* are defined by Connell as those kinds of relationships that are always relative to the 'authorization' granted by the *hegemonic masculinity* of the dominant group (Connell, 2005: 80-81). Hence, although certain individuals should be 'naturally' excluded from *hegemonic* positions, they are 'permitted' to access to them due to particular reasons<sup>74</sup>. Whereas Connell herself admits that 'marginalization' is not the most adequate term, it actually serves to conceptualize the practices of those members belonging to displaced groups that perform *hegemonic masculinities* in order to gain patriarchal privileges within their group, if not the larger society (Cheng, 1999).

According to this theoretical approach, the relational aspect necessarily implicit to Connell's model materializes through the rapport that the *marginalized masculinities* establish with the prevailing positions in a concrete cultural context, for instance, contemporary Spanish society. As far as the relationship of *marginalization* within 'Almodóvar's universe' is concerned, I would like to focus on a particular figure that, although it should be condemned to 'exclusion' on the basis of certain social markers, not only takes part in *hegemonic* positions from a sociological point of view but also represents some sort of alter ego of the Spanish director<sup>75</sup>. In my interpretation of Almodóvar's features, I consider that this relational category is adequately represented by three white male film directors that play the protagonist roles within their respective films. They are the homosexual, ground-breaking director of *The Law of Desire* (1987), the homosexual, passionate director of *Bad Education* (2004) and the 'disable-bodied' (blind), heterosexual director of *Broken Embraces* (2009).

Hence, the characters that I analyse throughout this chapter, on the one hand, represent the *marginalized white masculinities* according to the sociological perspective adopted as a core analytical approach in this master thesis, while, on the other hand,

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<sup>74</sup> Connell (2005: 80) exemplifies this relationship with the role played by black athletes, which can be model in their sport domains while broad social domination over black men remains intact.

<sup>75</sup> Actually, one of the films examined here, *The Law of Desire* (1987), was considered as almost an autobiographical work. Echoing Smith, this feature offers itself as an auteurist work (Smith, 2000: 80).

play a relevant role within the *auteristic* universe created by Almodóvar. Firstly, drawing on a sociological perspective, despite certain features that should naturally exclude them from prevailing locations (gayness and disability), the *marginalized white masculinities* of Almodóvar's filmography benefit from *hegemonic* positions on account of their roles as renowned film directors. Whereas this 'privilege' is due to the general 'permission' granted by the dominant group<sup>76</sup>, these characters are also greatly marked by the axes that condemn them to *marginalized* starting positions, which are mainly related to the corporal and sexual domain. Secondly, as I have mentioned in the introduction, the distinctive charisma of Almodóvar's films (Smith, 1992) usually materializes through a strong self-referentiality among his characters. Meaningfully, the three cases of *marginalized white masculinities* examined below are also examples of Almodóvar's distinctive perspective but in a different way. Finding inspiration in his own trajectory, the Spanish director 'awards' disabled and self-identified homosexual men with the leading roles at a narrative level by means of omnipotent characters as well-known film directors within cinematographic world.

Among the three male white figures that I have selected, I have special interest in the self-identified as homosexual characters of *The Law of Desire* (1987) and *Bad Education* (2004), given that their *marginalized* 'condition' is a constant defining feature: both achieve recognition as film directors being markedly homosexual. On the contrary, the *marginalized* 'condition' (blindness) of the character of *Broken Embraces* (2009) is suddenly triggered by a car accident when the director has already gained access to *hegemonic* positions as an 'able-bodied' creator. According to the theoretical remarks mentioned in the previous chapter, the homosexuality was articulated by R.W. Connell (2005) to exemplify the *subordinated masculinities* at the heart of heteronormative patriarchal societies. However, I have chosen to examine the relation of *subordination* by means of its subversive aspect, through the fluid, multi-identity roles that question gender and sexual boundaries, while leaving the analysis of self-defined homosexual locations as examples of *marginalized* characters that enjoy dominant privileges. Apart from my personal understanding of Almodóvar's filmography, this analytical decision also responds to a lack of attention to this group of

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<sup>76</sup> It can be inferred that at a fictional level, the permission is granted by some sort of cultural dominant elite within contemporary Spanish society, who, by means of recognizing the artistic value of these directors' creations, allow them to access to *hegemonic* positions. Additionally, these prevailing positions are also reinforced by a general support of spectators, in terms of *complicity* to the *hegemonic* judgment.

characters (homosexual male directors) as a meaningful category, unlike the wide variety of gender studies that focus on what I consider *subordinated white masculinities*.

Interestingly, the two *marginalized white masculinities* on the basis of their homosexual self-perceptions share the protagonism of their respective films with *queer* roles, namely the female transsexual sister in *The Law of Desire* (1987) and the multi-identity character, previously considered *subordinated*, of Juan/Ángel/Zahara in *Bad Education* (2004). The co-protagonism established among such *subordinated* and *marginalized* roles extremely determines the unique tone of both films. Actually, *The Law of Desire* (1987) and *Bad Education* (2004) can be considered the only two of Almodóvar's films with a central focus on a male homosexual relationship<sup>77</sup>. The relevance of 'gay' thematic in Almodóvar's filmography has been widely discussed. On the one hand, according to Allison (2001), the way in which Almodóvar presents the gay love triangle in *The Law of Desire* (1987) perfectly reflects his lack of political agenda, presenting homosexual relationships as a non-determinant narrative feature but as a merely 'anecdotal' depiction of the protagonist characters. On the other hand, Smith acknowledges the role played by Almodóvar's film in appropriating "popular genres and narrative such as melodrama and romance for the gay imagination" (Smith in Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998: 148). Whether an ideological intent could be ascribed to Almodóvar's features or not, many critics have agreed that both the centrality of same-sex stories and the fact that markedly straight actors, such as Antonio Banderas, play gay men in commercial films have positively contributed to the normalization of gay characters in world cinema (Allison, 2001; Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas, 1998).

Furthermore, echoing the theoretical approaches considered in the previous chapter, Almodóvar's portrait of sexual choices has been interpreted through a sense of fluidity, where there are homosexual acts but not homosexual people (Allison, 2001: 107). Whereas such readings directly connect with refreshing feminist approaches to gender as performatively constituted (Butler, 1999), the case of the two characters examined in this chapter as *marginalized white masculinities* differs from the *subordinated* characters previously examined who articulate a defined sexual identity. According to my interpretation, the two gay film directors of *The Law of Desire* (1987)

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<sup>77</sup> Jordan and Morgan-Tamosunas have already asserted this distinctive fact when they analyzed *The Law of Desire* (1987) in 1998. In the absence of more recent criticisms, it could be implied that the second Almodóvar's film fully devoted to a male homosexual relationship is undoubtedly *Bad Education* (2004).

and *Bad Education* (2004) articulate a more powerful awareness of their sexual orientations than the *queer* roles previously included in the category of *subordinated white masculinities* do. On the one hand, their consciousness as ‘homosexual subjects’ is greatly represented in opposition to the ambiguity involved in their respective sexual partners’ depiction. As such, within their stories, both *marginalized* characters establish sexual and sentimental relationships with men that either do not have any experience with same-sex relations<sup>78</sup> or even tend to incur homophobic gestures<sup>79</sup>. As such the two male gay directors are obliged to develop a leading part within their couples, based on their own security with regard to their sexual self-perceptions, which results not only in their constant initiative but even in a pedagogical task, for instance, during the sexual encounters.

On the other hand, their homosexual awareness is also expressed through their artistic works. While the director’s features in *The Law of Desire* (1987) are explicitly devoted to gay thematic in a provocative way, the film shot in *Bad Education* (2004) deals with homosexuality by means of a harsh criticism to the same-sex, paedophilic abuses suffered by some of the young Spanish boys educated in the oppressive Catholic, Francoist period. Consequently, both characters (and their cinematographic works) are absolutely linked to the socio-historical contexts in which their stories are developed. For instance, the gay male director of *Bad Education* (2004) is a product of contradictory forces: whereas he has been raised according to the authoritarian sexual Catholic morality during the dictatorship, as a young adult he enjoys the transgressive freedom and scandalous subculture of the urban context in the first democratic years in Spain<sup>80</sup>. Similarly, the works of the gay white male director in *The Law of Desire* (1987) are also defined by the specific context of Madrid in the 1980s, where emergent, transgressive sexual discourses coexisted with a still conservative religious mentality. This contradictory atmosphere fully explains the necessity of provocation involved in the works not only of these fictional characters but also of Almodóvar himself. Hence,

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<sup>78</sup> For instance, the character played by Antonio Banderas in *The Law of Desire* (1987) is portrayed as a young boy who initially seems reluctant to same-sex relationships but ends up succumbing to the gay male director’s charms, the *marginalized white masculinity* of this chapter.

<sup>79</sup> As it was analysed in the previous chapter, the character of Juan/Ángel/Zahara of *Bad Education* (2004) engages in same-sex or opposite sex relations depending on the interests he pursues, even if his character is presented as homophobic through the derogatory expressions that he dedicates to the gay male protagonist, the *marginalized white masculinity* of this chapter.

<sup>80</sup> As it was mentioned in the introduction, this ambience is mainly articulated by the 1980s social and artistic movement of the *Movida*, which gathered young people especially in Madrid and had Pedro Almodóvar as one of the most representative figures. Besides, Almodóvar also shares with the characters of *Bad Education* (2004) the educational period in Catholic institutions during the 1960s.

the opening scene of *The Law of Desire* (1987), where the spectators witness a gay masturbation by means of a film-within-a-film structure, proves to be a challenging statement of the male character within his fictional context, while also being a provocation of Almodóvar to the still conservative Spanish audience.

Taking this specific socio-historical context into account is also relevant due to the relational connotations implicit in Connell's model of *masculinities* (2005). At the beginning of this chapter, the *marginalization* was defined as the relation that benefits from *hegemonic* positions thanks the 'authorization' granted by such prevailing locations. In the case of the male directors examined here, the permission to enjoy prestigious status is triggered by their role as narrative 'masters' in the cinema world and, therefore, is awarded by the *hegemonic* cultural elite and the *complicit* wide receptive answer given by the audience<sup>81</sup>. Thus, whereas these male characters should be condemned to the exclusion of gender order given certain axes drawing on an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989; McCall, 2005): they are openly gay and, in the case of *Broken Embraces* (2009), suffer from a socially considered disability; they engage with *hegemonic masculinities* as admired creators. The fact is that individuals are simultaneously "members of multiple groups, including dominant and marginalized groups" (Cheng, 1999) and, hence, the figures analysed here also represent the privileged positions par excellence, being white, high educated, young men. In the end, these *marginalized white masculinities* 'taste' *hegemonic* positions by means of their gender performances (Butler, 1999), not only with regard to the cinema creative context but also with regard to the interpersonal relationships. As I examine further below, these male white directors try, and almost always achieve, to dominate the tempo and to take the decisions of the events that happen around them: from directing the shooting of their films to controlling their sentimental relations.

As it was the case of the *subordinated white masculinities*, another interesting defining feature of the *marginalized* characters lies in the extremely relevant role of the spectacle as a means to articulate their *masculine* performances. The three male protagonists of *The Law of Desire* (1987), *Bad Education* (2004) and *Broken Embraces* (2009) are madly passionate for cinema and artistic creations in general<sup>82</sup>. According to

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<sup>81</sup> In this regard, the *marginalized white masculinities* also represent some sort of Almodóvar's alter ego, since the director's success is based on both the *hegemonic* cultural recognition and the massive *complicit* answer of Spanish audience.

<sup>82</sup> For instance, the film *Bad Education* (2004) finishes with an epilogue stating that "Enrique Goded [the gay male director] is still making films with the same passion".

the gay thematic implicit in two of the films, the sense of spectacle is developed in relation to a male-to-male gaze. Both *The Law of Desire* (1987) and *Bad Education* (2004) include several close-ups of male-body nudity as objects of *desire*, playing with scopophilic fantasies (Morris, 1995: 89), where the observers in control of the scene are always the white male directors. In the case of the character in *Broken Embraces*, the voyeuristic look (focused on the female body of the protagonist's beloved) is doubly meaningful, owing the fact that, in the end, he cannot actually see and he ends up editing a film with the help of other friendly gazes.

Finally, there are two last elements shared by these three white male characters, namely, the tragic outcomes of their respective romantic stories and their belonging to non-normative families. In one way or another, all of them end up losing their actual or platonic loves who prematurely die<sup>83</sup>. The sadness that seems to accompany the role of the narrative 'masters' contrasts, for instance, with the positive endings that enjoyed the *complicit white masculinities* as being rewarded with their yearned heterosexual, normative families. However, the characters that I have defined as *marginalized white masculinities* find comfort not only in their successful professional careers, but also in their 'built' families, which provide a warmer 'refuge' and protection than more traditional heteropatriarcal constructions (Smith, 1992). Hence, in two of the cases, the white male directors are 'happily' involved in non-normative families, which include the transsexual sister and her adopted daughter in *The Law of Desire* (1987), and the former female lover (and current agent) and her son in *Broken Embraces* (2009).

Bearing the previous common approach in mind, I would like to deal with the three characters separately. First of all, following a chronological order, I would like to examine the leading role in the gay love triangle story<sup>84</sup> of *The Law of Desire* (1987). Throughout the film, the self-identified homosexual director, Pablo Quintero, attempts to control all the events that take place around him, perfectly representing the dominating gender performance that characterizes the access to *hegemonic* positions from *marginalized* starting points. While the general story is mostly based on a constant homoerotic spectacle, the concrete emphasis of Quintero's gaze in his role as a film

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<sup>83</sup> In *The Law of Desire* (1987) the second lover kills the man whom the director Pablo Quintero is truly in love with and then kills himself. In *Bad Education* (2004), the real Ignacio is killed by his brother Juan before he achieves to write a letter to his first love, the director Enrique Goded. And in *Broken Embraces* (2009), Lena dies in a crash, leaving her lover, the director Mateo Blanco, devastated and blind.

<sup>84</sup> See plot summary 4 in the Appendix.

director reinforces his power as narrative ‘master’. Not content with managing everything at a cinematographic level<sup>85</sup>, this male figure also needs to ‘direct’ the personal relationships in which he engages. As far as the homo-romantic relations are concerned, Quintero’s master position covers all the possible aspects: he plays with his male lovers deciding when, where and how having sex, he rejects the letter that he has received from his former partner, writing himself a new letter and asking this partner to sign it and send it to him, and, eventually, he also teaches another male lover how to properly kiss. However, in the end, the male director is not able to keep everything in control and the ungovernable passion of a ‘crazy’ lover ends up triggering the tragic deaths of the two men that Pablo had *desired*:

*Pablo’s tragedy is muteness. Condemned [...] to the repetition of identical amorous adventures, he fails to note the specificity (the otherness) of his lovers, and can only realize his desire for them when both are dead. Ironically he attempts to speak of the other characters (‘directing’ them and literally writing their lines) but he cannot speak of or for his desire until it is too late (Smith, 1992: 198)*

With regard to his non-normative family, made up of his female transsexual sister and her ten-year-old daughter, Pablo Quintero curiously articulates the patriarchal role of male protector over the two women, not only at an economic level but also at a sentimental one. While Quintero provides a job to his sister as the leading actress of his theatre play, he develops some sort of traditional fatherhood with his little niece. Interestingly, the *marginalized white masculinity* articulated by the protagonist of *The Law of Desire* (1987) engages in a kind of ‘fatherhood’ that none of the *hegemonic white masculinities* were able to fulfil. In the end, Pablo’s endless desire of control is stopped by her sister when the director starts writing a screenplay inspired in her. Quintero’s necessity of being the narrative ‘master’ even of his sister’s life<sup>86</sup> turns out to be the ultimate proof of his gender performance in *hegemonic* terms.

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<sup>85</sup> The emphasis on the overall control at a cinematographic level has focused most of the feminist analytical attention. For instance, one of the elements broadly examined by gender studies is the, already mentioned, masturbation scene represented through a film-within-a-film structure. Interestingly, Smith (2000) stresses how this scene avoids shots of the man’s penis as a way of preserving the phallic mystique. Besides, the scene is followed by the reaction of an individual member of that fictional audience who goes to the cinema’s toilets and masturbates. According to Fouz-Fernández and Martínez Expósito (2007: 204-5), this man, Antonio, “becomes fetishized at this very first appearance, by means of a close-up of that other male orifice, the mouth, thus anticipating the penetration of his own body by no other than the director of the film”.

<sup>86</sup> Actually, Pablo’s sister is eventually involved in her brother’s romantic drama, as his lover (Antonio), seduces her to gain access to Pablo. Although this event is not Quintero’s responsibility, Tina blames him, connecting the situation to her previous disastrous experiences with heterosexual relationships.



Secondly, I would like to examine the overbearing tone of the gay male director in the Almodóvar's most autobiographical film<sup>87</sup>, *Bad Education* (2004). Echoing what has been mentioned in the previous chapter about this feature<sup>88</sup>, this story presents a young director in the 1980s adapting for the screen a short story written by his school love and based on their common childhoods in a Catholic institution. In a similar way as the protagonist of *The Law of Desire* (1987) does, the character of Enrique Goded strengthens his authority inside and outside the cinema environment. On the one hand, although he believes himself to be in the midst of a creative crisis, Enrique still plays the absolute role of narrative 'master', not only by deciding which stories have film potential but also by altering the end of Ignacio's short story in order to make it more 'plausible'. Besides, as the director of the feature, Enrique has the power to decide the actors' suitability for each role: he denies Juan/Ángel's ability to play Zahara's character, and, when he eventually accepts him for this role, he does it in a strongly objectifying manner. Again, the dominating effect of the male-to-male<sup>89</sup> gaze proves to be extremely relevant. On the other hand, at a personal level, Enrique also masters the tempo of his personal relationship with Juan/Ángel, by deciding when it is the proper time to talk or to have sex. Moreover, Enrique also dares to determine Juan/Ángel's identity because he cannot recognize his school friend and first love, Ignacio. Nonetheless, as it happens to the director in *The Law of Desire* (1987), Enrique does not manage to control everything, being unable to fully 'penetrate' Juan/Ángel's mystery even though he has enough power to make a film exclusively to find out his secret.

With regard to the *marginalized* character within *Bad Education* (2004), the socio-historical context of the story has a defining relevance in the articulation of this *white masculinity*. Whereas Enrique experiences his childhood under the repression and abuses of Catholic Church and the subsequent obligation to hide his first same-sex love,

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<sup>87</sup> "For despite Almodóvar's repeated insistence that while his work is influenced by personal events, it is not autobiographical. *Bad Education* features characters and experiences that appear directly rooted in his life. Almodóvar attended a parochial boarding school in Extremadura much like the one in the film where Ignacio and Enrique meet, and he has frequently admitted being aware of the kind of abuse that Father Manolo commits. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the movie's most haunting sequence—in which the priest first seduces Ignacio, then discovers Ignacio and Enrique together in a bathroom stall after curfew, leverages Ignacio to have sex with him to save Enrique from being expelled, then breaks his promise and dismisses Enrique from the school to eliminate him as a suitor—coming from someone not familiar with such experiences, for the scenes somehow generate a sympathy for all the characters involved and render the struggle of intimacy as something both tender and terrifying" (Pingree, 2004: 6).

<sup>88</sup> See plot summary 11 in the Appendix.

<sup>89</sup> Whereas the consideration of 'male-to-male' gaze should be problematized here, given that Juan/Ángel acts in female costumes (the transvestite Zahara) during most of the film; the objectification of Juan/Ángel's body also takes place at a personal level, within the director and actor's same sex relationship.

he lives his youth in the first Spanish democratic years in Madrid in which non-normative sexualities enjoyed a short period of relative freedom. In this specific context, Enrique openly self-identifies in homosexual terms, showing a strong security in his sexual practices<sup>90</sup>. Thus, it could be interpreted that, according to historic and political codes, Enrique is getting his own back for being repressed in the past while feeling empowered in a 'new' society where the Catholic influence seems to decrease. In that sense, recovering the theoretical remarks mentioned in the introduction about the dynamic implications within the hierarchical structure of *masculinities*, in a way, Enrique's gender performances are 'allowed' to reach *hegemony* due to the specific socio-historical context. In other words, the *marginalized white masculinity* performed by the openly gay male director of *Bad Education* (2004) is 'permitted' to enjoy *hegemonic* privileges as narrative 'master' thanks also to the period of relative sexual freedom occurred in the first democratic years in Madrid

Finally, I would like to deal with the painful story<sup>91</sup> of the male film director, Mateo Blanco/Harry Caine in *Broken Embraces* (2009). Similarly to the multi-identity roles articulated by the *subordinated white masculinities* in the previous chapter, the protagonist of *Broken Embraces* (2009) also plays with different names and identities. According to the literary weight of this character, Mateo Blanco adopts his pseudonym of writer (Harry Caine) as an identity that helps him to overcome his tragedy: the death of the woman he loved and his own blindness. Eventually he recovers his 'true' name as way to reconcile with his past not only at a personal level, but also at a creative one. Leaving aside the scriptwriter (Harry), Mateo recovers his strength to finish the feature that triggered his tragedy because, as he states: "films have to be finished, even if you do it blindly". Hence, *Broken Embraces* (2009) finishes with Mateo Blanco editing his film as he has imagined it with the help of his agent and their common son's sights. Furthermore, following with Almodóvar's tendency to emphasize the importance of non-normative relationships, Mateo, Judit and Diego constitute a caring nucleus stronger than most of traditional heteropatriarcal families, without actually having established formal bonds.

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<sup>90</sup> Whereas I understand the importance of making explicit and visible the whole process of identity construction of Enrique and Ignacio, I argue that the portrait of homosexuality articulated in *Bad Education* (2004) is greatly problematic. The fact that the adult sexual preferences of the protagonists are rooted in the traumatic abuses experienced in the Catholic school confers to 'gayness' a pathological sense that involves dangerous connotations with regard to the distinction between normative (commonly considered as natural) and non-normative (unnatural) perceptions of sexuality.

<sup>91</sup> See plot summary 13 in the Appendix.

Another interesting characteristic of the male director in *Broken Embraces* (2009) directly connects with the element that situates him as *marginalized white masculinity* in the first place: his disability as blind man. Actually, this film opens with a close-up of Mateo/Henry's eyes as a way to announce the absolute relevance of these eyes within the story. As it happens in other of his features<sup>92</sup>, Almodóvar articulates an empowering representation of disability by means of a strong male character that leads a very normal life in all aspects. Again, despite the apparently irreversible exclusion from the gender order, the blind male director depicted by Almodóvar takes part from *hegemonic* positions thanks to his performance as dominant narrative 'master'.

Finally, the relevance of this character not only lies in his controlling force during the story even though he embodies a *marginalized* position as blind man, but also lies in the strong connection to Almodóvar's figure as some sort of alter ego. If the similarities with Almodóvar were obvious in *Bad Education* (2004) and *The Law of Desire* (1987) as far as socio-historical contexts and personal experiences are concerned, the tribute to Almodóvar's previous cinematographic creations in *Broken Embraces* (2009) reveals itself. The fictional feature shot by Mateo, *Girls and Suitcases*, constitutes an accurate recreation of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), making evident the role of alter ego of the character I have considered a *marginalized white masculinity*.

This final chapter has attempted to examine a particular figure within Almodóvar's features characterized by the articulation of dominant, powerful roles in spite of certain conditions that should condemn them to positions of male exclusion at first sight. According to the importance of spectacle and creative process represented throughout his filmography, Almodóvar grants an outstanding relevance to these characters by means of depicting them as cinematographic directors, which also makes them represent some sort of his alter egos in fiction. Consequently, I have dedicated these pages to study three examples of this profile in depth, namely, the self-identified homosexual directors in *The Law of Desire* (1987) and *Bad Education* (2004) and the blind director of *Broken Embraces* (2009). In my opinion, these three characters properly fit with Connell's theoretical conceptualization of *marginalization* (2005): whereas the three of them could be excluded from gender order on account of their 'homosexual' and 'disabled' conditions, they reach *hegemonic* positions by means of

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<sup>92</sup> In the chapter focused on *complicit white masculinities*, I refer to the remark of Fouz-Fernández and Martínez Expósito (2007: 108) about the paradoxically control and strength of David's disabled body compared to Víctor's in the film *Live Flesh* (1997).

their leading roles as narrative 'masters'. Hence, their strength lies in their gender performances (Butler, 1999) not only at a professional level as film directors, but also at a personal level with regard to the relationships they establish. For instance, the objectifying forces that they articulate by means of their male-to-male and male-to-female gazes become undoubtedly defining of their power over 'their' actors and sexual partners. Furthermore, I have also considered extremely revealing how these *marginalized white masculinities* are the results of the concrete socio-historical contexts in which their stories are set, especially in the cases of the 'homosexual' white male directors in *The Law of Desire* (1987) and *Bad Education* (2004). The fact that their male articulations are greatly determined by such external factors shows the dynamic character immersed in the hierarchical relations among *masculinities* stressed by Connell (2005). Hence, the possibility to reach *hegemonic* positions coming from *marginalized* starting points as non-normative sexual practisers, not only for the characters but also for Almodóvar himself, is deeply determined by the relatively open-minded scene during the first democratic years in Spain. Therefore, the *auteristic* implication also contributes an understanding of the relational character of the framework of *white masculinities*. If it could be inferred that the access of 'disabled' and 'gay' directors' to prevailing positions is granted by an *hegemonic* permission and a *complicit* positive audience's answer, Almodóvar's location is also explained by the same logic. Thus, by representing these *marginalized* directors, Almodóvar is telling his own story.

## 6. Discussion

The main goal of this master thesis has been to explore in depth the representations of *white masculinities* within the context of contemporary Spanish society by means of reading Almodóvar's filmography through the theoretical model elaborated by the pioneering author in the field, R.W. Connell (2005). Hence, drawing on the sociological approach that inspires this master thesis, the relevance of this study lies in the meaningful understandings of *white masculinities* provided by the analysis of Almodóvar's distinctive universe. While I have examined the plurality of Almodóvar's white male characters according to Connell's relational typology throughout the four previous chapters, I would like to devote a brief final reflection, before concluding this work, to engage in the discussion of two overall considerations. On the one hand, although this research is absolutely indebted to Connell's relational model, I consider it indispensable to problematize her theory by echoing some of the most relevant criticisms that it has received. On the other hand, according to my perception of Almodóvar's features as vehicles for grasping contemporary Spanish society, I would like to discuss further the social implications reflected and produced (Hall, 1980b; 1997) by the film characters analysed throughout these pages. Taking into account not only the overview character of this final reflection but also the entangled relation of these two elements, I deal with the criticisms to Connell's theory and the sociological implications of Almodóvar's white male characters together.

With regard to the critical readings of Connell's work, in the introduction of this master thesis I mentioned two theoretical criticisms to the general understanding of power dynamics within her relational model of *masculinities*. First of all, Demetriou claims to consider *hegemonic masculinity* a result of the interaction with *subordinated* and *marginalized masculinities* rather than produced by the exclusion of them (Demetriou, 2001: 347). Secondly, Whitehead also criticizes the hierarchical, unidirectional conceptualization of power implicit in Connell's theory and proposes a circulatory articulation of *hegemony* in terms of negotiation rather than domination over the relations of *subordination* and *marginalization* (Whitehead, 2002: 92). Actually, this reciprocal influence has been also expressed by Connell herself in a later formulation:

*Hegemony may be accomplished by the incorporation of such [non-hegemonic] masculinities into a functioning gender order rather than by activate oppression in the form of discredit or violence* (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 848).

In order to avoid such exclusionary connotations involved in the first of Connell's conceptualizations, one of the main priorities of my approach to the white male characters depicted in Almodóvar's filmography has been to acknowledge the unavoidably relational feature of a dynamic and contextual structure. Consequently, I have defined every kind of intersectional *masculinity* in relation to the other prototypes, especially with regard to the central *hegemonic* model.

Nevertheless, this preeminence granted to the *hegemony* runs the risk precisely of considering certain *masculine* constructions in isolation. As far as my sociological analysis is concerned, I have considered that the *hegemonic white masculinities* within Almodóvar's filmography correspond to the stereotypical Spanish figure of young, heterosexual, able-bodied, white men who articulate chauvinist, abusive behaviours. Whereas I have emphasized the relevance at a fictional level of the determining interplay between femininities and masculinities in the portrait of Almodóvar's *hegemonic* characters; the influence of the *subordinated* and the *marginalized* constructions in the formation of the prevailing prototypes has been comparatively overlooked. However, at a sociological level, considering the hybridity and reciprocal influence of the *subordinated/marginalized* patterns and the *hegemonic* figures proves to be of extraordinary importance in contemporary Spanish society. Actually, some of the latest political and social developments that have occurred in Spain provide the perfect example of the process defined in the previous quote as the "incorporation of non-hegemonic masculinities into a functioning gender order" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 848). For instance, in the last years Spanish society has witnessed a strong phenomenon of legislative and commercial integration of *subordinated* and *marginalized white masculinities* on the basis of non-normative sexual orientations. As long as male subjects fit in 'adequate' definitions of homosexuality, they have benefited from the possibility of getting 'properly' married and to openly celebrate gay 'pride'. However, it should be questioned the extent to which the process of institutionalization and commercialization has contributed not only to dismantle the 'subversive' potential of such locations but also to strengthen the privileged positions of *hegemonic white masculinities*. Finally, in a significantly meaningful way, Almodóvar himself has also been part of this institutionalization and commercialization: moving from his subversive image articulated during the *Movida* to his current role as mainstream director and conformist, leftist figure.

Regarding the other three types of *masculinities* examined in this research, the criticisms articulated by Demetriou (2001) and Whitehead (2002) should be equally taken into account. Whereas the relationships of *complicity*, *subordination* and *marginalization* have been originally conceived by Connell as constructions that revolve around the core *hegemonic* archetype, given that their disadvantaged hierarchical positions are ultimately defined by their ‘incapacity’ to fulfil such exemplary model; I have found within the particular ‘Almodóvar’s universe’ a comparatively significant weight of the other *masculinities*. Such refreshing relevance granted to the *complicit*, the *subordinated* and the *marginalized* figures throughout the Spanish director’s filmography cannot be adequately grasped without approaching power relations in circulatory terms rather than in merely unidirectional, hierarchical terms on the basis of *hegemonic* domination (Whitehead, 2002).

On the one hand, the essential role articulated by the characters that I have defined as *complicit white masculinities*, not as mere companions but as fully protagonists of their respective plots, provides to these figures with a symbolically meaningful power that is not limited to a unique *hegemonic* prototype anymore. Besides, the relative weakness and insecurity implicit in their portraits confers to these *complicit* roles a determinant sense of closeness. Drawing on a sociological perspective, such defining characteristic of proximity reinforces the *complicit white masculinities*’ representation as an accessible prototype that the majority of men can embody, hence, laying the foundations for an empathic answer of Spanish audience.

On the other hand, the most suggestive, as well as subversive, account of Almodóvar’s cinema with regard to contemporary Spanish society is articulated by the characters that I have considered as the *subordinated* and the *marginalized white masculinities*. One of the elements that situates these figures in subversive positions lies precisely in their leading roles within their respective films, coinciding with Demetriou’s emphasis on recognising the decisive agency of *subordinated* and *marginalized* groups as a way to problematize an unidirectional articulation of power (2001). For instance, whereas the *hegemonic* characters within Almodóvar’s filmography involve deep ‘passive’ connotations by being dependent on women’s decisions and not mastering their own fictional stories, the *marginalized* figures, and some of the *subordinated* roles, are in charge of the whole narrative weight of their films. According to the extraordinary relevance granted by the Spanish director to non-hegemonic figures, there are questions that remain open to further examination in future

research, e.g. in which precise ways are the traditional gender hierarchies being subverted within ‘Almodóvar’s universe’? Could the *subordinated* and *marginalized white masculinities* be considered in a way the *hegemonic* characters of Almodóvar’s particular perspective? To what extent does Almodóvar’s approach correspond to actual subversive trends of contemporary Spanish society?

With regard to the last question, the socio-political context of Spain in the last few decades has proved to be crucial in the definition not only of the *hegemonic white masculinities*, as stated above, but also of the *subordinated* and the *marginalized* characters depicted throughout Almodóvar’s filmography. Drawing on a sociological analysis, whereas Almodóvar’s suggestive perspective certainly reflects the attention that certain discourses on sexuality and gender issues have recently attracted in Spain, the actual effect of these potentially revolutionary approaches at a social level should be questioned. On the one hand, the genuine play with gender, sex and sexuality boundaries carried out by the *subordinated* Almodóvarian characters confirms a subversive potential of certain locations, by means precisely of not seeking to solve the contradiction between the conflicting forces of *subordination* and *subversion*, but by leaving such contradiction open and enjoying the corresponding ambiguity. On the other hand, the *queer* roles portrayed by Almodóvar are still far from representing a broadly ‘accepted’, social reality in Spain. Nevertheless, the depiction of such ‘alternative’ characters constitutes one of the distinctive features of the Spanish director’s filmography. Almodóvar’s currently prestigious position within Spanish cinema allows him to introduce almost any kind of gender identity in mainstream symbolic imaginary, although they are not representative at all of actual social patterns. In this regard, it could be inferred that ‘Almodóvar’s universe’ offers a particular vision of contemporary Spanish society that can be considered either envisioned or nonsense, but refreshing anyway.

Bearing in mind the previous broad considerations about the articulation of power relations within my adaptation of Connell’s typology in relation not only to Almodóvar’s white male characters but also to their sociological implications in the contemporary Spanish society, I would like to focus on more concrete critical readings of Connell’s theory, given that this research has examined *masculinities* in depth.

The most common criticism to Connell’s model tends to warn about the risk of essentialism implicit in the reduction of the concept *hegemonic masculinity* to a mere



set of traits, which thereby renders the notion static. In his article “Subordinating hegemonic masculinity”, Jefferson (2002) defines this problematic implication by means of the tendency to use *masculinity* attributionally, despite Connell’s insistence on its relational, contingent and dynamic nature. Hence, Jefferson’s main concern lies in the attributional readings of *hegemonic masculinity* in contrast to more adequate relational understandings. Although Jefferson considers that such misuses are mostly articulated by subsequent interpretations of the *masculinities* model rather than by Connell herself, for instance in the field of criminology, he equally warns of a risk involved in the original articulation of *hegemonic masculinity*. According to Jefferson (2002), the formulation in singular terms of the notion of *hegemonic masculinity*, unlike the plural conceptualizations of the *subordinated*, the *marginalized* and the *complicit* articulations, paves the way for an unique, essentialist interpretation of the core concept of Connell’s model. Similarly, in their article “Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity”, Wetherell and Edley (1999) stress the fact that Connell’s definition of *hegemonic masculinity* as just one style facilitates a singular, limited understanding of the concept rather than promoting a theoretical perception as multiple, context-specific strategies.

In view of these critical readings, Connell herself, along with Messerschmidt, have responded in the article “Hegemonic masculinity: rethinking the concept” (2005), where the authors both defend their original approach but also reformulate it in certain aspects. For instance, with regard to the accusation of producing a static typology that risks to essentialize the character of men and the male-female differences, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have answered by reminding the behavioural character of their understandings of *masculinities* and reinforcing their configurations as abstract rather than descriptive concepts. Besides, they have also emphasized the contextual aspect that originally determines *hegemonic masculinities* as those positions that come into existence in specific circumstances (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 832-33).

In the case of my research about the representations of *masculinities* in contemporary Spanish society on the basis of Almodóvar’s fictional characters, I would like to carefully examine the suitability of the numerous criticisms to a unique, attributional consideration of the notion *hegemonic masculinity* (Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Jefferson, 2002). Whereas my interpretation of Almodóvar’s white male figures actually falls into listing some sort of set of specific traits, as Jefferson (2002) ascribes to the attributional reading, the inclusion of a plurality of *masculine* models, such as the idealized lover or the daily husbands, intends precisely to problematize a tricky singular

definition. Furthermore, I have tried to avoid an attributional understanding of *hegemonic white masculinities* by means not only of approaching gender locations as performative constructions (Butler, 1999), but also of stressing the necessarily relational implications in the original network of *masculinities* (Connell, 2005). At a sociological level, although they do not embody similar preeminent positions than in social Spanish 'reality', the *hegemonic* men within Almodóvar's features mimic certain dominant heteropatriarchal stereotypes. Consequently, while the *hegemonic white male* characters cannot be defined by an attributional, unique model of Spanish men, at a symbolical level, they certainly reflect a range of patterns that characterizes contemporary Spanish normative *masculinities*.

Closely related to the previous critical remark, I want to consider another concern that has been shared by several authors (Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Jefferson, 2002; Hearn, 2004; Moller, 2007), namely the empirical limitations of Connell's model or what Jefferson (2002) defines as the "oversociological view of masculinity". Hence, by means of wondering how 'real' men actually connect with the different types of *masculinities*, the potential application of Connell's theory has been often questioned. For instance, in his article "Exploring Patterns: A Critique of Hegemonic Masculinity", Moller considers that the structure of *masculinities* "reduces everything to a solely logic of domination", limiting researcher's capacity to explore the actual complexity, plurality and contradictory experiences and meanings of men's lives (Moller, 2007). Similarly, Hearn considers the focus on *masculinity* too narrow and proposes broadening it by examining the hegemony of *men* (Hearn, 2004: 59). According to Hearn, analytical efforts should focus on actual men's practices rather than on abstract considerations around the confusing, undefined concept of *masculinities*, which can be interpreted as cultural representations, everyday practices or institutional structures. Finally, Wetherell and Edley (1999) are also concerned with the empirical limitations of Connell's model and propose a greater emphasis on psychological perspectives in order to grasp adequately the multiplicity of *hegemonic* sense-makings that produces actual *masculinity* identities.

As far as the questionings of the empirical applications are concerned, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have also acknowledged the numerous critical readings. On this matter, the authors defend the original concept of *hegemonic masculinity* by means of defining such construct not as a type of man, but rather as a way in which men

position themselves through discursive practices (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 841). Moreover, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 843) enhance the value of their understanding of *masculinities* not only at a symbolic level, as discursive constructions, but also, at a material level, as products of other constraints such as embodiment, economic forces or institutional histories. In that sense, the pioneering author in the field of *masculinity* studies intends to strengthen her theoretical links with ‘reality’, as a response to the accusations of her hypotheses being disconnected from the real world.

Regarding my concrete research topic of interest, whereas the warning about locating men’s experiences in a “single, coherent pattern of masculinity” (Moller, 2007) seems extremely relevant; the focus of this work on a symbolic-representational level renders this criticism less suitable. Besides, as stated in the introduction, I agree with some of the major specialists in the field (Cheng, 1999; Edwards, 2005; Whitehead, 2002) who emphasize Connell’s crucial role in problematizing the previous normative approaches within *masculinity* studies. By not seeking to define what men actually are or should be, one of the greatest strengths of Connell’s theory lies precisely in avoiding descriptive accounts of *masculinities*. Therefore, drawing on the sociological approach that inspires this work, I do not intend to articulate typologies of actual men within contemporary Spanish society but to reflect on some of the symbolic patterns that tend to shape the representations of *masculinities* within the heteropatriarchal society where I was born and raised.

Finally, the last weak point acknowledged by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 844) refers to the self-reproducing logic that characterizes the whole network of *masculinities*, by which gender relations are perceived as self-contained and explanatory of a unique, monolithic model. Consequently, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) propose to reformulate the understanding of gender hierarchies with a broader holistic comprehension that considers women and non-hegemonic men’s agencies by means of a more hybrid perception of gender power relationships. Such warning of avoiding a functionalist logic is, besides, absolutely necessary to favour an articulation of *masculinities* in more dynamic and contradictory terms. In Connell and Messerschmidt’s own words: “hegemony may fail”, owing the fact that “the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* does not rely on a theory of social reproduction” (2005: 853). Furthermore, this risk of functionalism directly connects with one of the critical readings mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (Demetriou, 2001), which claims a

more reciprocal influence among the plurality of *masculinities*. Whereas this aspect has been already treated regarding the relatively considerable agency granted to the *marginalized* and *subordinated* characters within ‘Almodóvar’s universe’, I must admit that my research has partially incurred in this tendency of functionalism. Throughout my interpretation of Almodóvar’s fictional *white male* figures according to the four categories proposed by Connell (2005), my research could have taken for granted a perfectly suitable adaptation of the characters with each kind of *masculinity*. As any broadly explanatory model of analysis, Connell’s typology of *masculinities* tends to elaborate a reductionist discourse where contradictions are partially minimized to self-logic categories. Whereas it is obvious that any kind of concrete social context cannot be fully explained by means of a unitary theoretical model, I argue that constructs such as *hegemonic*, *complicit*, *subordinated* and *marginalized masculinities* usefully serve to articulate an overview of particular representations, offering fruitful analytical suggestions. In that sense, although R.W. Connell’s theory involves numerous risks of creating essentialist categories, having empirical limitations, incurring in self-contained explications or articulating hierarchical, unidirectional understandings of power, I consider that it offers a suggestive model to deal with the representations of *masculinities* as interconnected and powerfully meaningful sociological elements.

## 7. Conclusions

Throughout this master thesis, I have directed my analytical efforts to answer the core question set out in the introduction: how *white masculinities* are represented along Almodóvar's filmography? Consequently, one of the main goals of this dissertation has been to examine in depth the unmarked positions par excellence, *white masculinities*, by means of observing the plurality existent in 'Almodóvar's universe'. Being inspired by my own sociological background, I have dealt with the diversity of fictional white male characters represented in Almodóvar's features by means of approaching their roles as both the reflection and the production of normative stereotypes (Hall, 1997) within contemporary Spanish society. In order to provide an answer to these general concerns, I have articulated my research echoing the relational model of *masculinities* elaborated by Connell (1987, 2005). By means of situating the *hegemony* as the core concept, Connell deals with the plurality of *masculinities* as a dynamic framework of four prototypes that are defined precisely by the hierarchical relationships among them. Accordingly, this study has been organized echoing these four types of *masculinities*, namely *hegemonic*, *complicit*, *subordinated* and *marginalized*, making special attention to the interconnected character of this model.

In addition to my personal reading of Connell's relational framework, I have attempted to examine Almodóvar's white male characters by means of three key theoretical premises in gender studies. First of all, I have conferred an absolute relevance to the material aspect, especially in which concerns the prescription of legitimate bodies through discursive practices (Foucault, 1978). Secondly, bearing in mind the complexity involved in the field of self-perceptions, I have emphasized an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005), paying special attention to the factors of sexuality, nationality, age and bodied-ability, obviously apart from issues of gender and skin colour/raciality. Actually, the almost complete absence of racial 'others' represented within Almodóvar's features has proved to be defining of Spanish cinematographic tendency to take whiteness for granted. Thirdly, my analytical perspective has been deeply indebted to a performative understanding of gender (Butler, 1999) as way to adequately grasp the relative fluidity granted by Almodóvar to some of his white male characters.

As the present master thesis has intended to show, the extensive filmography of Almodóvar offers a meaningful diversity of white male characters that are immersed in an ensemble of in-relation processes. Throughout this research I have devoted four chapters to examine the Almodóvarian representations of *white masculinities* in depth. Echoing Connell's approach (2005), I have presented four categories according to a gradual scale of agreement to the *hegemonic* exemplary prototype.

First of all, the reflection on the characters that I have identified as *white hegemonic masculinities* has highlighted the defining relevance not only of the hierarchical rapports among different groups of men but also of the overall relationship of domination over women. Drawing on a sociological approach, I have exemplified the relation of *hegemony* in Almodóvar's features with those characters that embody privileged locations as white, middle-aged, able-bodied men while confirming their 'suitability' to the patriarchal model by means of violent and abusive behaviours against women at the heart of heteronormative families. Hence, they are mainly depicted by the traditional figures of arrogant bread-winners and distant fathers. Interestingly, whereas the self-centred husbands, violent policeman and absent lover depicted in *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* (1980), *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984), *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988), and *Volver* (2006) perfectly reflect and reinforce normative patriarchal stereotypes at a symbolical degree, the potentially subversive approach of Almodóvar's filmography lies precisely in the secondary roles that these socially dominant *masculinities* play within his distinctive universe. Thus, all of these *hegemonic white* characters are immersed in genuinely women's stories in which the female roles eventually subvert the status quo, freeing themselves of such male oppression.

The second *masculinity* examined in this master thesis has been defined through the *complicit* relation articulated theoretically by a majority of men that benefit from the *hegemonic* model without actually embodying it. Meaningfully, unlike the *hegemonic* characters, Almodóvar presents the *complicit white masculinities* as the leading roles within their respective features. The in-depth analysis of *Matador* (1985), *Tie me Up! Tie me Down!* (1990), *Live Flesh* (1997) and *Talk to Her* (2002) have detected a recurrent figure throughout Almodóvar's filmography that reflects fatherless, young misfits aiming to reach what they consider social 'normality', especially with regard to heteropatriarchal families. Although, they apparently occupy privileged social positions as white, young, able-bodied, heterosexual Spanish men, they aspire to fully articulate

the *hegemonic* prototype at a performative level, for instance, carrying out violent and abusive behaviours. Hence, the relational connotation of Connell's model undoubtedly lies in their *complicit* admiration for *hegemonic white masculinities*: these characters are mostly driven by the idealized figure of the 'head' of heteronormative families. Interestingly, the way in which Almodóvar depicts this anxiety for 'normality' offers a suggestive reflection on certain disciplinary institutions of social control, such as prisons or psychiatrics, where the maladjusted subjects are led into normative gendered behaviour.

Thirdly, I have examined a revealing group of Almodóvar's characters that play with sex, gender and sexual boundaries being simultaneously condemned to *subordinated* positions with regard to *hegemonic* and *complicit masculinities* while representing some sort of subversion. In this case, I have engaged with Connell's conceptualization in a critical way, as she always portrays this relation by means of 'homosexual' men at the heart of heteropatriarchal societies, which I have preferred to define as *marginalized white masculinities*. Accordingly, three 'male' figures of *High Heels* (1991), *All About my Mother* (1999) and *Bad Education* (2004) that I have included in this category correspond to a female transsexual father and two heterosexual, occasional cross-dressers and multi-identity men. All of them play arbitrarily with their senses of *masculinity* depending on the context, being able to suspend their manliness in order to achieve certain goals or to emphasize it in order to embody expected roles of fatherhood. Moreover, these *subordinated white masculinities* not only characterize Almodóvar's *auteristic* reputation of showing alternative ambiances, especially by means of theatrical contexts and artistic performances, but also characterizes Almodóvar's fluid depiction of identities, offering a subversive account of self-articulations without denying the hierarchical structures that condemn these subjects to *subordinated* positions.

Finally, the relation of *marginalization* has been analysed again through a distinctive figure of Almodóvar's features: the self-identified 'homosexual' and 'disabled' film directors of *The Law of Desire* (1987), *Bad Education* (2004) and *Broken Embraces* (2009). These three white male characters articulate dominant, controlling roles in spite of being initially condemned to exclusion from *hegemonic* positions on account of their non-normative sexuality and bodied-ability. Their strength lies in their gender performances not only at a professional level through their roles as narrative 'masters', but also at a personal level through their dominant roles within the

personal relationships they establish. Furthermore, the *marginalized white masculinities* are greatly determined by their socio-historical contexts, showing the dynamic character stressed by Connell's model. The last *masculinity* also offers a meaningful *auteristic* connotation as these characters seem to represent some sort of Almodóvar's alter ego: coming from *marginalized* starting points reach privileged positions as artistic creators, thanks to the *hegemonic* 'permission' and the *complicit* answer of Spanish audience.

Bearing in mind the previous in-depth analysis of the representations of *white masculinities* within 'Almodóvar's universe', I have devoted a final chapter to further discuss both the theoretical value of Connell's model as well as the actual sociological implications of my research with regard to contemporary Spanish society. Some of the main criticisms to Connell's work considered in this final reflection make reference to: its tendency of creating essentialist, attributional categories of *masculinities* (Jefferson, 2002), the empirical limitations of the theory (Hearn, 2004; Moller, 2007), the limited hierarchical and unidirectional articulation of power (Demetriou, 2001; Whitehead, 2002), as well as the tendency to functionalism implicit in the self-contained framework of *masculinities* (acknowledged by Connell herself along with Messerschmidt, 2005). As I have argued above, despite the obvious problems that a broad explanatory model involves, I consider that Connell offers a suggestive tool in order to deal with an overview of the representations of *masculinities* at a sociological level.

As far as the sociological implications of this master thesis are concerned, Almodóvar's fictional white male characters have proved to simultaneously reflect heteropatriarchal patterns that are still deeply rooted in contemporary Spanish society, while offering a relatively subversive approach to the representations of *white masculinities*, by means of fluidity, ambiguity and contextualization in the field of gendered identities. Consequently, 'Almodóvar's universe' offers a particular vision of contemporary Spanish society that can be considered either envisioned or nonsense, but refreshing anyway. As stated above, such particular perspective cannot be understood outside the current socio-political Spanish context that has relatively favoured alternative discourses in the realm of sex, gender and sexuality issues. However, this revolutionary potential at a sociological level has been questioned owing the fact that such discursive 'freedom' has been accompanied by a conservative process that not only institutionalizes and commercializes non-hegemonic *masculinities* but strengthens *hegemonic* and *complicit* powerful positions.



In conclusion, one of the main goals of this research thesis has been to contribute to the broad field of the studies of *masculinities*. Accordingly, this research has been focused on a representational level, seeking to examine some of the symbolic patterns that daily shape heteropatriarchal Spanish society, instead of articulating a typology that describes ‘real’ men. Apart from the criticisms considered in the chapter of Discussion, I consider that Connell’s model (2005) should be further explored, for instance, by developing the different kinds of *masculinities* and by examining in greater detail the relationships established not only with the central *hegemonic* core but also among other prototypes. Actually, I believe that the relationships of *complicit masculinities* with *subordinated* and *marginalized* figures, without considering the *hegemonic* epicentre, prove to be extremely interesting. Furthermore, the four categories established by Connell could also be extended with different theoretical constructs that allow better grasping the complexity of *masculine* self-perceptions. Finally, the examination of *masculinities* at a representational level appears as an absolutely relevant field to develop in future studies on account of the fruitful information to gender studies provided by the production and reflection of normative stereotypes.



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## APPENDIX: Plot Summaries (chronological order)

### 1. *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* (1980)

(Original title: *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón*)

The story narrated in *Pepi, Luci, Bom and Other Girls on the Heap* (1980) could be summarized as follows: After being raped by a policeman, Pepi enlists the help of her friends in a punk rock group to exact retribution of her lost virginity. On discovering that they have mistakenly beaten up the rapist's twin brother, Pepi embarks on another revenge plot by taking knitting lessons from the policeman's wife, Luci. Luci's masochistic tastes soon became apparent, finding in Pepi's friend Bom her sadistic match. The friendship of the three women then develops through outrageous parties and concerts, representative of the provocative world of the *Movida*. Luci leaves her retrograde husband to be Bom's 'groupie'. During one evening in a disco, the policeman abducts Luci (his wife), winning her admiration and devotion in a violent struggle which results in Luci's hospitalization. After Luci's final reconciliation with her husband, Pepi and Bom plan a new life together (Smith, 2000: 142-143).

### 2. *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984)

(Original title: *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?*)

The plot of *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984) tells about a family living in a small tower-block apartment. Gloria lives with her husband Antonio, a taxi driver, her fourteen-year-old son Toni, her twelve-year-old Miguel and her mother-in-law. Gloria works as a cleaner, often refused money by Antonio, she is forced to take on extra work and she uses amphetamines to keep her going. Meanwhile, Antonio lives with the memory of the period he spent in Berlin, working as a chauffeur to the singer Ingrid Müller and having an affair with her. One day, after a surprising call from Ingrid, Antonio and Gloria have a fight and she kills him unintentionally with a hambone. After that, Toni and his grandmother decide to return to their village and Gloria decides to redecorate a house that is suddenly empty, except from her and his son Miguel, who stays to be 'the man in the family' (Smith, 2000: 146-147).

### 3. *Matador* (1985)

*Matador* (1985) is about two killers: Diego, a retired bullfighter that runs a bullfighting school and María, a lawyer and a fan of Diego's 'art', who murders her sexual partners imitating a matador-style. Among Diego's pupils is Ángel, who suffers from vertigo and faints at the sight of blood. He lives with his mother, a fervent member of *Opus Dei*. To prove to Diego that he is not homosexual, Ángel attempts to rape Eva, his neighbour and Diego's girlfriend. Then, he confesses to the police but Eva refuses to press charges. After his failed attempt of being legally punished, Ángel confesses to the murder of four men (actually killed by María and Diego) and is put in prison. María is appointed to defend Ángel and a police psychiatrist is also put on the case. The police find out about the true killers' identities. When María and Diego discover their respective crimes, they realize they are destined for each other and they decide to die,

killing simultaneously each other as a poetic metaphor of their bloody lives (Smith, 2000:149).

**4. *The Law of Desire (1987)***

(Original title: *La ley del deseo*)

After the premiere of his latest film, director Pablo Quintero is abandoned by his partner, Juan, for the retreat of a small coastal village. Trying to forget him, Pablo pursues his next theatrical project, starring by his lonely sister Tina, a female transsexual actress. Celebrating the play's success, Pablo is seduced by Antonio who, in the course of the night, goes from having his first homosexual experience to becoming a demanding lover. Learning of Pablo's love for Juan, Antonio drives to the village and pushes Juan from a cliff top. While going to meet Juan, Pablo is seriously hurt in a car crash and loses his memory. The police wait for him outside his hospital room, suspecting he murdered Juan. Finally, after recovering his memory, Pablo realizes that Tina's new lover is the insane Antonio. Meanwhile Antonio has kidnapped Tina and her daughter. Pablo races to Tina's home and offers himself in exchange for the killer's hostages. In the end, Pablo and Antonio make love before Antonio shoots himself (Smith, 2000: 150).

**5. *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown (1988)***

(Original title: *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*)

The first scene of the film shows a young woman, Pepa, awakening from drug-induced sleep to find that her long-term lover Iván has gone, leaving only an answer-machine message asking her to pack his bags. Pepa, who has just learned that she is pregnant, becomes near-hysterical while she waits for Ivan to call again. By a series of accidents, she finds herself on the trail of Iván's insane ex-wife, Lucía, and discovers that Iván has a twenty-year-old son. Pepa also finds out that Iván is in the airport, leaving with his new mistress to Stockholm. Pepa and Lucía race each other to the airport, where Pepa saves Iván from Lucía's attempt to shoot him. Remorseful, Iván suggests that maybe they could get back together, but Pepa realizes that now she has no desire to see or even speak to him (Smith, 2000: 151).

**6. *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down! (1990)***

(Original title: *¡Átame!*)

Ricki, a young man raised in institutions, is released from psychiatric hospital after being declared sane by a judge. Infatuated by Marina, a porn actress with whom he has a one-night stand during one of his earlier escapes, he kidnaps her and ties her to the bed. Marina resists Ricki, but he declares his intention of marrying her and looking after her, demonstrating his affection in the way he treats her. At a moment, while Ricki is out, Marina manages to free herself from the bonds, although she does not go through with the escape and when Ricki returns, they make love. The following day, Marina has another opportunity and escapes with her sister, but she has already fallen in love with Ricki so she traces him to the village he was born and they 'reconcile'. Ricki meets Marina's sister and the three of them return to the city as a family (Smith, 2000: 153).

7. ***High Heels (1991)***  
(Original title: *Tacones lejanos*)

The plot starts with Becky del Páramo, once a famous pop singer in the 1960s, returning to Madrid after fifteen years, anxiously awaited by her daughter, Rebeca. Becky finds out that Rebeca is now married to one of her former lovers, Manuel. Manuel tries to revive his old affair with Becky, and tells her that he wants to divorce her daughter. That evening the three of them attend a performance by a drag artist called Femme Letal, who specializes in micking Becky's old songs. Later on, Rebeca goes backstage and secretly has sex with Letal. The following morning, Manuel is found murdered and the investigating Judge Domínguez discovers that three women visited him that night: Becky, Rebeca and Manuel's occasional lover. Rebeca, who works as newsreader, confesses to the crime on television and goes to prison. After realizing that she is pregnant by Femme Letal, Rebeca is released from prison because Domínguez does not believe her to be guilty. Domínguez reveals to Rebeca that he is Femme Letal and asks her to marry him. After collapsing on stage, Becky decides to incriminate herself for Manuel's death (actually committed by Rebeca) and she dies (Smith, 200: 154-155).

8. ***Live Flesh (1997)***  
(Original title: *Carne trémula*)

*Live Flesh* (1997) starts with the empty streets of Madrid in 1970, where an unnamed young prostitute gives birth on a bus to her son, Víctor. Twenty years later, Víctor meets a girl called Elena for one night, but when he looks for her after one week, she barely remembers him. That night, she threatens him with a gun. Two policemen, David and Sancho, arrive. David is shot and Víctor is sent to jail. Two years later, Víctor sees David, now a paraplegic married to a now-sober Elena. Víctor vows revenge. After being released from jail, Víctor sees Elena at her father's funeral and meets Clara, Sancho's wife, with whom he begins an affair. Víctor gets a job at the children's shelter Elena works at. When David tries to confront Víctor, Víctor reveals that it was really Sancho (David's former friend) who shot him. Meanwhile, Elena goes to bed with Víctor. At the end, after Clara's attempts to leave Sancho, both end up killing each other. In the final scene, we discover that David and Elena got divorced and Elena gives birth to Víctor's son in a taxi. Víctor tells his child how lucky he is to be born in a new Spain (Smith, 2000: 202).

9. ***All About My Mother (1999)***  
(Original title: *Todo sobre mi madre*)

The protagonist of this multi-female character story, Manuela, is a single mother living in Madrid. She takes her son Esteban on his seventeenth birthday to see a theatre play starring Huma Rojo. While trying to get an autograph of Huma Rojo, Esteban is hit by a car and he dies. Then, Manuela goes to Barcelona to find Esteban's father –also called Esteban before he had a sex-change and became Lola-, who she has not seen since she was pregnant, in order to tell him about their common son. In Barcelona Manuela finds La Agrado, another female transsexual who twenty years ago had lived with Manuela and Lola. Some days later, Manuela starts working as Rojo's assistant

and meets a nun called Sister Rosa, a friend of La Agrado who is pregnant and infected with HIV by Lola. Manuela nurses Sister Rosa through her pregnancy, the birth and eventually her death. Lola finally appears ravaged by AIDS. Sister Rosa and Lola's child is born HIV+ and Manuela decides to bring him up, naming him again Esteban. Before Lola dies, Manuela presents her with the new-born Esteban and tells her about the dead one. At the end, the third Esteban has neutralized the virus naturally (Smith, 2000: 203).

#### **10. *Talk to Her* (2002)**

(Original title: *Hable con ella*)

*Talk to Her* (2002) is the story of three heterosexual couples and a men's friendship, where the two female leading characters (Alicia and Lydia) are in coma, leaving the active, narrative roles to the two men (Benigno and Marco). Benigno is the personal nurse who has taken care of Alicia over the past four years. He has spent his life looking after women, firstly his mother and now Alicia, with whom he is secretly in love. At the hospital, he meets another patient's boyfriend, Marco. They become friends and help each other in the caregiving of their beloved women. Losing the sense of reality, Benigno ends up raping Alicia one night. As a consequence, Alicia gets pregnant and wakes up from her coma. Benigno is sent to prison and, without any news from Alicia, he kills himself while attempting to go into coma in order to meet Alicia. The film closes with Marco and Alicia starting as a new couple.

#### **11. *Bad Education* (2004)**

(Original title: *La mala educación*)

The plot of *Bad Education* (2004) is probably the most difficult to summarize, owing to the multiple narrative levels involved in it, namely the 'real' relationships among the male characters, including the fake identity created by Juan as Ignacio/Ángel Andrade, the fictional story written by Ignacio Rodríguez and the film adaptation of this story by Enrique Goded. However, the story could be presented as follows:

In 1980 Madrid, Enrique Goded, a young film director, receives the unexpected visit of an actor who claims to be Enrique's school friend and first love, Ignacio Rodríguez. This actor, who is using now the name of Ángel Andrade, brings to Enrique a short story, *The Visit*, inspired by their common childhoods in a Catholic school in the 1960s. *The Visit* narrates the plan for revenge of a drag artist and transsexual called Zahara, whose real name is Ignacio; hence, she represents the author's alter ego. Zahara's plan entails blackmailing father Manolo, the priest who abused her when he was at the Catholic school. In the fictional story, she demands an amount of money from him in exchange for halting publication of her story, also called *The Visit*, where Zahara/Ignacio tells about the abuses of father Manolo. At the level of 'reality', Enrique decides to adapt Ignacio's *The Visit* into a film accepting Ángel's condition to play the part of Zahara. Under the suspicion that Ángel is not really his former love, Ignacio Rodríguez, Enrique drives to Ignacio's mother and learns that the real Ignacio has been dead for four years and that Ángel is actually Ignacio's younger brother, Juan. After such disclosure, Enrique decides to do the film with Juan in the role of Ignacio to find out what drives Juan. Meanwhile Enrique and Juan start a relationship. The last day of

shooting, the film set is visited by Manuel Berenger, who is the real Father Manolo after resigning from Church duty. Berenguer confesses to Enrique that he and Juan both killed Ignacio, making it sound like an accidental overdose. Berenguer pursues Juan because they also had a sexual relationship and he is still in love with him. With the film finished, Enrique throws Juan out of his house without listening to his explanations. In the epilogue it is mentioned that Juan achieved great success as an actor with Enrique's film and that Berenguer dies in a hit-and-run caused by Juan.

## **12. *Volver* (2006)**

The film starts with the female protagonist (Raimunda), her daughter Paula and her sister Sole travelling from Madrid to a small south village to visit the grave of their mother and grandmother Irene, who died years ago in a fire with her husband. They return to Madrid, and after a hard day of work, Raimunda meets her daughter completely distraught at the bus stop waiting for her. When they arrive home, Paula tells that she killed her unemployed father Paco, who was drunk and tried to rape her, under the confession that he is not his biological father. While Raimunda decides to hide and secretly buried Paco's body, Sole finds out that her mother Irene is still alive. In the end, we discover that Raimunda was raped by his father and got pregnant, and Irene did not realize until several years later; that it was Irene who burned his husband with his mistress and that Paula is both Raimunda's daughter and sister.

## **13. *Broken Embraces* (2009)**

(Original title: *Los abrazos rotos*)

In 2008, a blind writer lives in Madrid, producing screenplays with the help of his agent, Judit, and her adult son, Diego. Fourteen years before he had a terrible accident where he lost not only his sight but Lena, the love of his life. After the accident he stops using his real name, Mateo Blanco, and starts being called by his literary pseudonym, Harry Caine. Events in the present begin to bring back memories of the past and, through several flashbacks, Harry tells Diego the story of the shooting of his latest film, starring by Lena. In 1994, Lena was the mistress of a millionaire financier, Martel, and Mateo Blanco was preparing the shooting of *Girls and Suitcases*. Despite Martel's reluctance, Lena won the main role in Blanco's film by bringing Martel as producer. Martel discovered Lena and Mateo's passionate affair by sending his effeminate gay son to videotape the production of the film. Then, Martel confronted Lena and threatened her with ending the film if she does not stay with him. The film completed, Lena and Mateo escape from Martel to the Canary Islands where they ended up having the terrible accident. In the present, Judit confesses to Harry that Martel bribed her and the film editor in order to sabotage the release of *Girls and Suitcases* by using the worst takes from each scene. Having exorcised some of his demons, Harry decides to return to his life as Mateo Blanco by re-editing the feature as he envisioned it.