


Article

# Narrative Reflections on Masculinity and Fatherhood during Covid-19 Confinement in Spain

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Received: 22 April 2020; Accepted: 10 June 2020; Published: 16 June 2020



**Abstract:** This article explores the intersectionalities of masculinity, corporal identity, fatherhood, relationships, and bodily experiences in relation to a person who is living in a period of home confinement. In so doing, I draw on autobiographical narratives to delve into how embodied subjectivities are constructed to advance knowledge on an embodied way of being a man in the context of a health world crisis. In the telling, I attempt to engage the reader by communicating the subjectivity of different moments in a provocative, fragmented, physical, and emotional manner. The results suggest that narratives, such as those presented in this article, contribute to understanding the continuous process of change of life and body projects due to the health crisis pandemic, and serve as a corporeal resource to challenge some of the (self-)imposed tyrannies around the body.

**Keywords:** body journal; Coronavirus; corporal identity; narratives; pandemic; parenthood

## 1. Introduction

A global emergency, such as a pandemic, is not understood or experienced in the same way by all people [1]. This is particularly true in those situations where the body, normally an absent presence [2] comes to the forefront as it is in a position to rethink dilemmas and experiences that might otherwise go unnoticed. The fear of contagion, added to the uncertainty and consequences of the pandemic, is a very intense psychological and emotional situation for the human being, since it is sustained by a component of stress and anxiety that generates a feeling of vulnerability in the person [3]. In this study, I present the intersectionalities of three contexts which are of particular relevance to (re)thinking and reflecting on our embodiment. These contexts are masculinity, fatherhood, and the confinement of the body during a health pandemic.

Researchers, some inspired by the ‘narrative turn’ [4] have engaged with narrative in different ways and at different points within the research process—in the production of field texts, as analytic methods to create interim texts and as research texts for dissemination/communication of the ‘so what’ or ‘what now’ of research [5]. In this paper, we are interested in expanding our understanding of narrative as a form of inquiry and/or representation that may capture and communicate the embodied, emplaced and multisensorial experiences of the living being in a very particular situation: The confinement of the body due to a health pandemic. To illustrate this, I focus on autobiographical moments recounted and selected at different times in the confinement stage to explore experiences with my own body around the concepts of motor (in)ability, masculinity and fatherhood. My intention, with this, is to investigate my own identity so that readers can reflect on their own experiences in relation to mine. As Frank [6] explains, no one should give up hope of saying something useful and interesting that will lead other people to imagine different possibilities about how their lives are formed and informed. In telling this story, it is important to understand that I am not only telling a story about my body, but primarily from and through my body [7]. In a case like the one told here, the body is simultaneously the cause, the subject, and the instrument of any story told [6]. Throughout the work I use the first person to

avoid distancing myself from some events about which it can be complicated (and yet necessary) to write, trying to use a critical, coherent and stable voice.

The writing is an invitation to (re)think of myself as a man, as a teacher and as a father, and to reflect on the interaction between my bodily experiences and the socio-cultural context which, after the pandemic, may never be the same again.

*The Confinement of the Body: When the (Risky) Body Becomes Present*

Writing enriches the lives of those in difficult and unexpected circumstances [8] such as a global pandemic in the face of a new virus.

In the process of telling stories about trauma, such as home confinement for public health reasons, people seek to tell the truth. Yet, as Coetzee [9] questions, how can one write honestly about unique experiences without making ourselves uncomfortable or silencing others?

The confinement that results from the emergence of a global pandemic is appearing and seriously transforming life projects organized around the personal, professional, and undoubtedly, physical sphere. Thus, isolation becomes a threat to appearance and body image, social routines, personal relationships, daily practices, etc. [8] In this time, what is interesting is the analyzed body— biological, molecular, the sick body, the body as a factory of antibodies. But we must not lose the perspective that the body is, also, our travel companion during confinement. A body that, after so long forgotten, manifests itself in all its grandeur. Thus, it is a moment in which bodily experiences come to the fore, putting us in a position to analyze and change our perspectives and priorities in life. In this way, it is possible to understand how the body is determined both by personal experiences [8] and by historical and social contexts in a given moment of time. Therefore, the body can be considered a social construction [10], capable of impregnating the person unconsciously and conditioning all its social manifestations. Gradually, the person is internalizing this corporal symbolism, and with it, reconfiguring his own personal identity.

So much so that the bodies should not be contemplated exclusively from a biomedical perspective but, also, as a central axis in the construction of identity, perception of the world or imagination of the future [4]. It is important to take all this into account to better understand the multiple and diverse ways in which people experience their bodies and how these interact to configure identities and individualities over time and in specific contexts [8]. In this sense, it is important to know that we live in a risk society; a society where there is an increased presence of uncertainty and insecurity connected to global risks related to health and well-being. These socially constructed and perceived risks generate a range of health imperatives and associated surveillance measures, including self-surveillance [11]. This trend for members of society to manage their own health and safety, being ever-vigilant, has paralleled the rise of 'manufactured risk' [12]. There is consequently a greater fear of the consequences of risk than of risks themselves. As Beck claims [11], risks can be changed, magnified, dramatized or minimized within knowledge, and to that extent, they are particularly open to social definition and construction. In the current situation, the risks may be real or imaginary, but people believe the threats are real whether or not they actually exist. Perceived risks actually exist in the private consciousness of individuals and public consciousness of society and really influence personal, political, social and financial decisions [13].

In this article, we start from the premise that experiences derived from confinement can have an important effect on the revision of conceptions about health, risk and other aspects related to the body, such as the interpretation of sensations, experiences and perception of their bodily changes and of competence, which can imply a break with everyday life [6], and threaten some aspects attributed to masculinity [14], even fatherhood [15]. According to Dickson-Swift et al. [16], "we cannot be emotionally involved in our research, showing or feeling emotion without using our bodies" (p. 67). Therefore, the article gathers autobiographical stories in which it is my body that gives the story a particular form and direction in the face of an unprecedented situation on a personal and social level: Home isolation as a result of the Covid-19 virus. The narrative aims to allow the reader to reflect on

their own experiences in relation to mine and how different stories can be told to build different types of body using alternative types of narrative imaginations.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. *Something about Me*

I am a body of almost 42 years. I am what is euphemistically known as a “middle-aged man”, although many times I have been called simply “sir”. Although I was not born trained for consumption or sheltered by the new technologies that invade everything today, I am gradually identifying with this fleeting, uncertain and wasteful life in which, sadly, it seems easier to trust a machine than a person of flesh and blood. As a father and as a physical education teacher, I like to look at the little life that remains in the street, in open spaces and in playgrounds: If, before we used to spend life walking, we spend it now glued to our screens.

I belong to a generation that has barely raised its head since the last economic crisis; a generation in which our parents naively believed that a simpler life would await us, simpler the one. I also belong to that generation that has gradually given up sensory pleasures for an individual and digital life: Few are interested in the smell of a good book, the taste of a fresh beer, the smell of freshly cut grass, the sound of birds waking up, the hug of a friend or the shapes of the clouds. I come from a generation unaccustomed to world crises: We have not lived through a war (or a post-war period), a drought, a military dictatorship, but we may now be able to understand the fear, desolation and terror of others less fortunate than ourselves. It may also be that the metaphors of war and misfortune are not the most appropriate: It is about caring, not fighting.

The pandemic is serving us as a cure for humility: If we take the first symptoms of the epidemic as a joke, we no longer feel special. I am one of that generation that may, from now on, reflect on the society we are and the society we want to be.

### 2.2. *An Approach to Narrative*

Autobiographical narratives are a way of testing and understanding the experiences that teachers have lived through what they write about, by extracting the aspects that they consider most relevant [17]. In this sense, the autobiographical narrative and the importance that certain contents have—in this case, those referring to the body—allow us to glimpse a set of actions and thoughts of their own in order to approach them with a certain distance, to make an analysis of their own life, of the decisions they make, how and with whom they perform the tasks, by whom they are conditioned, so that they can perceive themselves in the reality in which they are involved, and identify the conditions of production of work as a constituent part of their identity and culture [17].

All of the above leads us to characterize narrative as a method that combines the rigor of research with the creativity of styles of expression that are less rigid than those that are usual in academia; it is also defined by its balance between reflection on the self and on the social and cultural environment in which it is developed. With this, in this work, I present different moments and experiences, using personal and corporal memories and experiences in an attempt to lead the reader to empathize with my world and my history. I hope to be able to stimulate a reflection on other lives in relation to mine. To make this possible, I have followed the standards of autobiographical truth [18]. In this sense, my autoethnography intertwines facts (events that are believed to have occurred to me), facticities (how I lived and experienced these facts), and fiction (a story which deals with or imaginary facts and facticities) [18], being faithful to ficticities and facts. To that end, all the daily perceptions, experiences and dilemmas experienced by me throughout the past weeks, were registered in handwriting in a logbook that reflects my life during the pandemic.

The criteria I have followed to judge the quality and relevance of the narrative presented here are the following: (a) Does reading this work allow one to think about the consequences, values, and moral dilemmas that we face as part of a society?; (b) Is there anything worth learning from the story told

here?; (c) Does the text invite dialogue in a space of debate and negotiation?; (d) and finally, does the narrative evoke responses from the readers?

### 2.3. *Body Journal as a Data Source*

I began writing a body journal on 15 March 2020, the day when the state of alarm in Spain was officially declared, and it was obligatory not to leave one's home, with very few exceptions. Understanding that the situation could serve to immerse me in the awareness of my own body and be able to write about it, I began to write a personal diary in which I have been systematically combining intentionalities from the experiential, emotional, communicative, personal and professional spheres that allow me to become aware of my own life and my own body. I discovered, through the writing of the diaries, that talking about the daily life around my body helps me to manage my emotions and to relativize what happens to me [8,19]. In this sense, it serves as a tool for health and well-being through honest writing, which is not necessarily comfortable or easy and which allows my fears, weaknesses, illusions and life expectations to flourish. The journal helped me to understand my present body and to try to imagine my future in the best possible way.

Of all the body stories, I have chosen the most relevant stories written during the first 45 days of confinement. The stories are related to masculinity, fatherhood and relationships with one's own body in order to develop a narrative that combines the different experiences I have lived in an attempt to lead the reader to empathize with the world and the story presented here.

### 3. Results: A Body Confined in a Time without Hugs

From the bed, I hear a symphony of birds. After another night of little and bad sleep, I get up at seven in the morning, practically the same time as every working day. As I look out of the window, I see several sparrows attracted by the flowers where spring is blooming. Not long ago, they were often reported as being in danger of extinction, and now there seem to be plenty of them. Plant and animal life are quickly regaining the ground from which they were driven. The thought makes me wake up energetic and optimistic.

Today is another one of those days when I am not in a hurry, I could try to go back to sleep if I wanted to. I think it is Thursday, but I'm not too sure. Every day, for weeks now, has been the same: Thursday, or Monday, or Saturday. Well, not Saturday. Saturday is our "special family day", a day that smells of popcorn, chocolate and candy. We have settled in for an indefinite period of time with the remaining six days to go, in a daily routine in which we have no other plans but to spend our time at home in the best possible way. Boredom, social isolation, stress, or sleep deprivation, common symptoms in these times of home confinement [3].

I don't even write down in my diary what I have to do anymore: I have organized my work (which is now teleworking) without having to follow a rigid schedule. Luckily, Marcos is only four years old, so the task he has to do at school is simple, and we can do it dynamically, playfully, even without sticking to a rigid schedule. Marta and I, as responsible parents but also as conscientious teachers, try to promote a schedule that takes into account health, good personal hygiene, encourage physical activities, a proper diet and good sleeping habits, and integrate these health promotion materials into our daily work plan with Marcos. The same thing we would want for the students under our responsibility. We know that in the event of home confinement, parents are often the closest and best resource for children to seek help from [20], and in this situation, we teachers become a bit like parents, seeking the well-being of the students above all else.

In this confinement—which began with a fortnight and then extended to a month, and we still do not know how long it will last—all responsibility has been placed on the freedom of the citizens, who have come to see their living conditions reduced to a minimum, even though they do not know what the costs will be for their physical and psychological health. Is health more valuable than freedom, and is not this confinement to the home a clear loss of health? And for Marcos' normal development, will this confinement have negative repercussions? Does this new virus, with the fear it inspires,

have the power to make us endure everything else? Plato's warning to the slaves, those people who were deprived of their freedom and who, consequently, could develop hatred towards their masters, comes to mind. To avoid this, Plato recommended, only constant vigilance could prevent rebellion. The metaphor seems appropriate to me: We are slaves to what the state dictates, and I do not see it as improbable that our bodies, in the short term, will transmute into a jumble of chips, biometric bracelets, and algorithms. Bodies on subcutaneous surveillance.

Marcos wakes up shortly after I do. It seems he also has the biological rhythm adapted to the usual course schedule. He is increasingly plagued by night terrors. He may dream about the monsters out there. In an attempt to reduce his nightmares, he has been sleeping with us in bed for days. Every time a nightmare haunts him, I feel one of those pains that comes to the heart. We do not know how to reassure him. The blood throbs wildly in my chest, in my hands, on my forehead. I am just a heart. As Wang et al. claims [20], close and open communication with children is the key to identifying any physical and psychological issues and to comforting children in prolonged isolation. So my wife and I spent a lot of time, throughout the day, talking with Marcos and seeking his welfare in these days is so complicated for the little ones. Parenting is our primary prevention [21].

The three of us wake up and take advantage of the fact that we are not subject to the clock to toss and turn for a few minutes in bed playing with him. We embrace him—three bodies in one. In this “time without embraces” the short distances, the caresses, the kisses, are a priceless luxury. I notice that his mother, like me, enjoys him with all her senses: the sweet smell of his hair, his soft touch, his childish laughter. Marcos' and Marta's eyes shine with joy.

Getting up and out of bed is a torment. All the bones in my back, rusty, crowded, say good morning to me. Always so opportune, my back pain visited me on the second day of confinement and continues by my side, faithful and without the intention of abandoning me. Perhaps this pain is my body's way of expressing what I cannot formulate: The rage, the disappointment, the uncertainty about everything that is happening.

In any case, if my house is now my prison, at least my body won't become my cage.

My first date is with the shave and the shower. Slowly, thoroughly, I perform my hygiene rituals. It does not matter that I am confined, that we barely make a living outside the home. The pleasure of freshly shaved skin and the smell of cleanliness will accompany me daily as long as I am autonomous in doing so. I then put on my sports clothes; in this, unlike other people, I have not changed. Because of my profession, sportswear is my daily clothing; now that a large part of the population is confined to their homes, sportswear and pajamas have become the usual clothing for everyone. Even jokes about the way we dress these days are common, comparing the fact of having to wear sportswear for many days with, for example, lack of hygiene. I find these jokes in bad taste, not so much because I am someone who usually dresses like this, but rather because of the simplicity of people's reasoning. People usually attribute much more value to a body adorned with a suit and tie than to one dressed in sportswear: The garment is our business card, the shell that decides whether you are more or less worthy.

Soon after, we had breakfast as a family: My wife and son slowly, calmly, with time to savor and appreciate the food; I, on the other hand, hurriedly, without tasting it. I could take advantage now that I don't have fixed schedules to cook slowly and eat slowly, but I do not. I get up quickly from the table, always with the guilt of not spending more time at the table with my family. I force myself to try to be slow, to live slowly, to take advantage now that I can these moments with my family. But the ideal would be not to have to force myself, but to be slow because I want to be.

The excuse I give myself for not spending more time at the table is the need for physical exercise. I have to admit that one of the first concerns that came to mind when home confinement was made official was: What about my workouts? I am not a great sportsman, I have never been. Even during my years as a physical education student, I didn't show much talent for sports. I have never liked the sensations of competition and obligation associated with sport—what I like is the pleasure associated with physical exercise. Sport is industry and money (it is striking to see how big stores, a few days

before the pandemic, began advertising home exercise equipment—did they foresee the crisis?), while exercise is born out of the joy of practicing it simply for the sake of it. It is that pleasure that leads me to practice physical exercise almost daily, and although now my priority is not to fit in with the corporal ideals established by the neoliberal society [22] as when I was younger, I do impose on myself the responsibility of being healthy and capable of fulfilling my responsibilities as a father. Spending one month and a half (or more, depending on the duration of confinement) without physical exercise would be a complete ruin to my physical and motor health. On the other hand, confinement can cause psychological havoc, nervousness, stress. What would happen if I stopped exercising, and moreover, is not it good to try to follow the same routines in isolation as outside? I also want to raise my child in a space where he can appreciate the importance of exercise; my parenting becomes that social and symbolic space that helps shape Marcos' identity. So one of my few daily obligations is exercise, even though it is accompanied by a feeling that, what was really important, was to share the full breakfast with my son.

My routine consists of 45 min on an elliptical machine (the useless thing that for years has done nothing but gather dust is now my ally), abs, and push-ups. "One more!", I always think when I do the background series, "you can one more!", looking to reaffirm the predictability of my body by increasing the intensity of the exercise. One day I will be old, and instead of doing one more repetition, I will have to settle for doing what I can or, even, none at all. In the gloom of the thought hides the joy of knowing that, if that day comes, I will have accompanied Marcos for a good part of his life.

I associate the feel of a wet T-shirt with a serious, intense workout, one of those that make you think you have been to the gym to work, not to waste time. And even though my training is not as intense or as long-lasting as in the gym, I am satisfied to keep my body disciplined [6], a body that tries to keep away aging and disability embodied in the loss of autonomy and control. A body that, once the confinement is over, will be evaluated and compared to other bodies and to itself because it is visible and measurable [22]. Conceptions—aging, disability, body image—all of which are socially constructed and problematic, and which, dangerously, leads to the classification of bodies as first and second class. Just as every week I take a picture of my naked torso to see how my physical condition evolves (or involves), I know that at the next meeting of friends we will compare our bellies, just as we played to compare our muscles as children. I hope that, as the years go by and the body does not go with it, due to the ravages of time, that I do not lose the courage to keep looking at myself in the mirror, even though I may not like what I find in it. But why should I not like the image that I reflect in the mirror, am I so influenced by Western culture and the importance it places on youth, body image and athletic bodies [23]? Why have I not yet developed a critical awareness of these stereotypes; Do I also consider that there are first and second class bodies, bodies that are "worth more than others"? The truth is that it is clear to me that aging is inevitable, that over time my physical capacity will decrease and my weakness will increase. Nor will I have a "men's magazine cover" body image, and I have little concern about such matters. All I care about is maintaining enough body capacity to take care of my child's needs, to be able to work, play with him, and for my family not to have to worry about me. I end the routine with these thoughts in mind, promising myself that tomorrow will be the day I spend time with my body in stretching.

After another quick shower, I talk to Marta, and we decide that I will be the one to go out and do the shopping. "Take care of yourself and don't take any risks", Marta tells me just before leaving home. "Don't worry, nothing will happen", I answer. The conversation is reassuring. Restless. All at once. Am I really convinced that nothing will happen, or am I really worried about the uncertainty and what might happen? In any case, I decide not to show my weaknesses, stay calm and do my best to take care of my family, just like my wife and son are doing everything they can to take care of me.

I put on a T-shirt and a light jacket. It is cold outside, but I like to feel the fresh air around me; if I'm a little cold during the day, when the night comes, I'm more grateful to be able to sleep in a warm bed. On the way to the car, I stop to contemplate some small plants that are beginning to break the asphalt. I am amazed at the force of nature, how is it able to recover so quickly from all the violence

we exert against it? I feel vulnerable, ashamed that I have not done my bit to make the world a better place for my son. At the same time, I am grateful that the situation we are in has put us in our place. The pandemic is a consequence of deforestation, of excessive industrialization, of the indiscriminate killing of bodies different from those of humans (and, in many cases, of human beings as well), of a lack of funding for health care, of a disregard for nature. Used to thinking that these evils always happen to the poor world, the laziness of not having fought to change things is now incarnated in the bodies, teaching us that we are all ethereal.

Everything seems to be in its place and with a special color: The sky is bluer, the green of the grass is more intense, and among the smells of the air, I do not identify chemical products. Unlike Chekhov [24], I believe that the earth is becoming more beautiful every day.

Inevitably, I feel observed. Neighbours may be secretly hiding behind their windows, watching who comes out and who does not respect the rules of confinement. Mistrust and mutual surveillance, a technique of power [25] that leads me to feel, in a way, guilty about leaving the house. In the car, Marta's words resound in my head: "Don't take any risks". Are not we exaggerating the situation too much? Anyone would say that I am going to make war. Or maybe I am not fully aware that the virus can also attack me. I wonder where this idea of immunity comes from, this idea that the virus is not with me, that it's not my life that's going to be affected. That I am not going to be a number one in the statistics of those infected, that this battle does not go with me or my family. I find it curious to think that way, since I have never considered myself invulnerable. On the contrary, since I have been a father, I have been aware of how important it is to take care of my health so that my son does not miss out on me. Experiences as common as driving or walking downstairs (Marcos has already experienced the edge of the steps against his face) scare me and force me, on a daily basis, to recognize the inherent fragility of everyday life: I trust my cells more than the external elements. The fear of the virus, possibly more terrifying than the virus itself [11]. This time I won't let myself be carried away by hypochondria, by that form of mania in which my body is both persecutor and persecuted.

I park in the supermarket parking lot. Before entering, I put on some plastic gloves that will prevent unnecessary contagion. What an inconvenience! It's really a drag to wear these gloves. Have you tried consulting the phone with them on, and opening plastic bags to put in the freshly bought fruit? The gloves limit my touch: I am not comfortable with them, and yet, thinking that this stupid measure can save me from a contagion, I decide not to take them off. As for the mask, we simply don't have one at home. The mask, the mask: Synonymous with anarchy, terror, heroism or simply prudence. The irony of the mask: It is necessary now, when the air is more breathable than in years. Gloves, masks, disinfectant soaps. I would like to know the amount of residue that the coronavirus crisis is generating.

I go into the supermarket after disinfecting my gloves with hydroalcoholic gel. Does this make any sense? I have never seen the store so clean: The smell of disinfectant, the floor so shiny, the atmosphere so fresh. I hear conversations among the workers: "I've read that the virus can't survive in hot climates", "you have to take a lot of vitamin D so you don't get it", they tell each other. I turn off my brain: I do not want to become a disease specialist.

With the gloves I handle the shopping cart with one hand and the phone, with the shopping list, in the other. My body is used to being an "absent presence" [26] that I only pay attention to in pain situations. But in these pandemic times, easy tasks like opening a simple plastic bag with plastic gloves are now a titanic effort. I feel clumsy, my lack of skill makes me angry with my body. At the same time, I feel more empathetic to people with disabilities and physical difficulties, trying not to understand the body from an instrumental, functional, perspective, as an object that must function according to certain external ethics [27]. On the other hand, now the risk of having physical contact or proximity with other people is associated with the transmission of the highly infectious virus Covid-19. So I have to keep a safe distance, I cannot take the products I need if there is another person in front of me. This means that I have to adapt my pace to that of others. I get nervous, even though I have all day long I want to finish the shopping as soon as possible and go home. Again I force myself to be slow. Will it take the

woman long to choose which box of cereal to take? And that man, how long does he need to take the bread? It is like being on a motorway that allows you to go at 120 km/h, and yet I am forced to go behind a car that's going at 60 km/h. At times I am tempted to break the safety distance and stand next to other customers to save time. I reconsider the situation: Close contact is now a potential security threat. In this apprehensive and suspicious present [11], our daily practices have undergone changes that deny proximity between people. The situation, in any case, is not strange to me. The parallel with my profession as a physical educator is clear: In the supermarket, as in school, moral panic [28] forces the development of practices and guidelines that limit physical proximity between person and person, between student and teacher.

When it is time to pay for the purchase, an older woman comes closer to me than the safety distance allows. Immediately, one of the employees of the supermarket asks her to go further away. I look the woman in the eye, meaning that I have not felt uncomfortable with her proximity. I have the impression that, underneath her mask, she is smiling at me. I, feeling almost guilty for not wearing a mask as well, smile in turn and say goodbye with a slight nod. As I think about all this, I realize that I have been holding my breath ever since I became aware that the woman was approaching me, as if not breathing in a little air made me more immune.

On the way back I meet a friend. We are both happy to see each other, finally someone from the outside to talk to! Paradoxically, we do not quite know what to say, and almost automatically, we move away from each other to keep the minimum distance required. Perhaps it is my imagination, but I have the impression that we both, in talking to each other, turn our heads a little, in an attempt to keep the virus out of our mucous membranes. I guess we are all "suspects" now. It is hard to know who to trust. The day the confinement ends, and we can return to normal life, how will we act in our first contacts, will we greet each other again in a tactile way by kissing and hugging, maintaining close distances, or will we be reluctant to the "culture of contact"? In other words, what will the world we find on the day we are allowed through the door be like? Will it be more like Blade Runner and his dystopian vision full of artificial human beings, or will it be more like Mad Max, characterized by the economic crisis and social chaos? It is clear that the script is not Blade Runner's: We are not transhuman, we have not transcended our biological vulnerability; we are fragile, childish, fearful beings. Mere bodies of flesh and blood. Mere humanity.

We exchanged a few words, a superficial conversation: "How are you?", "how is your son doing?", "we hope to see you soon". Perhaps, after all, these worldly details are all we have to say to each other. What seems clear is that this is a turning point, life will no longer be the same. I wonder what will be the first thing I do when the confinement is lifted: The first walk, the first caress, the first embrace, the first smells perceived. Whatever it is, it will be something experienced with the whole body; small purposes but, now, lived as something great and unrepeatably. For how long? Once the storm passes, we may put the body back on standby.

Once I am home, I leave my shoes at the door and wash my hands. This is an everyday gesture, in these times of constant terror of catching the virus. The specialists say that you have to wash your hands following a specific ritual and about twenty times a day. Also, that it is convenient to take a disinfectant gel with us in case, we touch some infected surfaces. I wonder if this phobia will not make the flesh fall from our bones. Convinced that the virus is not the enemy that will kill me and my family, I do not follow the ritual to the letter, but neither do I avoid being prudent. Once the ritual is over, I run to embrace my wife and son. The virus has taken away all physical contact with the outside, but there is no safety distance between us. In this "time without hugs" I value more the physical proximity with my loved ones.

During the time I have been away, Marta and Marcos have been drawing and doing crafts. Marcos draws beautifully for his age, and is very skilled at making crafts. It is a talent inherited from his mother; The Police [29] seems to have her in mind when they composed the song "every little thing she does is magic". I like to watch when they are working: Marta advises Marcos, she guides him on



how to hold the pencil between his thumb and index finger, how to color the contours of the drawing, how to cut out. Dexterity, intelligence, and patience, qualities she shows as a mother and as a teacher.

My wife and I have never divided up our domestic roles, even during the pandemic. It is clear to both of us that the tasks of cleaning the house, caring for and educating our child, etc., are the responsibility of both of us. And although I consider that I spend a lot of time with my son and do a lot of activities with him, I feel a little sorry to know that I am not very good at those activities that Marcos enjoys most—drawing and arts and crafts. And although my self-esteem and sense of masculinity are damaged by the realization that I can barely screw a light bulb or draw a scribble, when I am with Marcos, I try to do my best.

“I have a meeting and classes online”, says Marta, so it is time for Marcos and me to get ready to play. In these times of confinement, I try to make several of our activities and games involve moving body. Maybe it is because of my professional training or maybe because I am convinced that confinement will be particularly harmful to the youngest: To their physical, emotional and social development. I do not understand why the political regulations imposed on us allow us, for example, to take a dog for a walk or to go and buy tobacco but, on the other hand, do not allow children to go for a walk. That is why I try to make movement and physical exercise the protagonists at every moment with Marcos: running, jumping, throwing, hitting, fighting... I do not care if the sofa becomes the new trampoline, if the vases can be the involuntary target of some ball hit or if the furniture is in danger under Marcos’ jolts: The important thing is movement for movement’s sake. Here I see an abysmal difference between my pretensions as a physical educator and as the parent of a child in a state of confinement: If my role as a teacher is aimed at learning through body and movement, here learning becomes incidental. There are few corrections that I make to Marcos in our activities (except for those that involve greater risk, such as tumbling or acrobatic exercises), my exclusive feedback being “very good, son, keep it up”. I find that the energy Marcos has as compared to mine is incredible! He does not save his strength, there is no rest, no room for rest. In the moments when I feel exhausted, I have no choice but to take turns in order to rest. Next to Marcos, I rattle like an old locomotive, ten years older than I should be. If I am not good at arts and crafts, if I am not good at drawing, if I am not good at too many things, I hope I can at least enjoy a few more years feeling motor competent, at least so I can play and have fun with my child.

Of all our physical activities—skill circuits, motor challenges, games and sports activities—there are two that are a daily constant: fights and baby games. They are two very different ways of understanding the body, play and masculinity. In both, the body is in the foreground, and it is the true protagonist of the activity. But in our fighting games, the environment is saturated with notions of hegemonic masculinity. This is expressed through exhibitions in which our bodily performances involve aggression, competitiveness, power, where one of the two bodies is victorious (usually my son’s), and the other is subordinated to it. It is a physical competition that is presented as the physical capital par excellence. On the other hand, our baby games involve another kind of masculinity. My role as a father requires me to be able to build a masculinity close to the role of the nurturant father [30]. With these games in which one plays the role of mom/dad, and the other one plays the role of a baby, I want Marcos to learn that being a man is not synonymous with being aggressive, brave, or a fighter; he has to know that there are other better ways to be a man. When we are embodied in daddy/baby, we connect emotionally and bodily: We learn to take care of each other’s bodies, to listen to each other’s needs, to stop paying attention to our own bodies in order to hear, see, and trust each other. Although I really enjoy all the activities that involve physical contact with Marcos, it is the latter that I give the most weight to, in an attempt to contribute to the development of a sense of masculinity in him in which sweetness, affection, care and weakness, among others, have a place.

When Marta finishes working, it is my turn to attend to my academic obligations. The intellectual work also arouses physical sensations: The noise of the keys under the pressure of the fingers, the reflection of the screen in my eyes, the pungent smell of the freshly printed paper, the tingling of the feet after being crossed for a few minutes. My eyelids feel heavy; my hands are typing without

having passed the filter of reason first, I find it difficult to concentrate. My head buzzes, I am not cut out for distance learning! If I like this profession it is because it invites company; a company in which looks, gestures, bodies, are present. In the distance, everything is cold, impersonal, soporific. In any case, I work hard and spend a lot of time on my virtual teaching. I know that, like me, other teachers at all levels are making massive efforts to create online courses and deliver them through the internet in record time [20]. I hope my work, my actions, help to alleviate many parents' concerns about their children's educational attainment by ensuring that school learning is largely undisrupted. At the same time, it is clear to me that the need right now on the academic level is not to follow a school curriculum full of content and skills, but to have the emotional support, the peace of mind and the need for family contact and closeness to overcome the fears and concerns that this health crisis has raised.

At eight o'clock in the evening, it is time for applause. This is a symbolic gesture with which we thank all the professionals, from health workers to supermarket cashiers, who are working with courage and tenacity despite the obvious risk of contagion. In addition to the symbolic nature of the gesture, it is a time that partly supplants our need to interact with others. We do not go out to applaud as much as we did the first few days, perhaps people have grown tired or perhaps they have stopped making sense of this symbolic gesture. We still go out, clapping and singing when one of our neighbors starts a song. I see smiles: It is funny, in spite of the circumstances, we all seem happy. Most of the windows are decorated with the symbol with which thousands of children ask for hope from their homes: Two clouds joined by a rainbow; one of the clouds has its eyes open, the other is winking. Both are smiling. I think of this symbol as the beginning and the end of our existence: We are born, we take a pleasant walk, and in the blink of an eye, we leave. I will try, with all my strength, to make my child's walk as captivating as possible.

"After the applause we connected to the video conference", we set up in our group of friends so that our children could see and talk to each other. It started out as a daily, long-awaited date, so much so that we wanted to see our friends again! Little by little, and in a tacit way, we have put aside our meetings. I think we all appreciate having friends in spirit, but the ones we really miss are the friends in flesh and blood.

Shortly before dinner, we spent a few minutes dancing. This is the excuse to do a little more physical exercise. Dancing, one of the activities that make me feel more disembodied. Why does dancing make so many men feel uncomfortable, despite being such a natural and legitimate activity? I am sorry to know that this activity arouses embarrassment and other unworthy activities, such as stealing, killing or fighting, are sometimes executed without consideration. My body faces my arrogance for thinking that man is not made for dance; I overcome the shame, the wood that my legs have become begins to feel the rhythm, while I am proud to see how well my son does.

Lying on the couch, we spend the last minutes of the day calling our relatives. Conversations revolve around the same topics as yesterday and the same topics as tomorrow. I watch Marta as she talks to her mother. The morning joy in her eyes is now replaced by tiredness and worry. Without her having to tell me, I know that she thinks our parents are getting older and older, and as a result, are more vulnerable every day to the accurate targeting of the damn virus. Nevertheless, her look is still intelligent and intriguing; the look of someone who knows life better than others.

"How are your parents? How is it going?" we ask each other after hanging up the phones. The answers are also the same as yesterday, and I hope tomorrow's too. We talk about how difficult it is for older people to cope with this global pandemic. Older people, who have given so much to us and helped us, are now taking a back seat. In our society, we are used to knowing that there are "first-class bodies" and "second-class bodies". We have made it known to refugees, immigrants, the poor, the excluded, that they belong to the second category, and as such, are undesirable to us. We are so accustomed to such frequent phenomena as acts of exile and marginalization that, at this point, they do not touch a single fiber of our system of emotions. Now that older people have been added to these "second-class bodies" we are more restless. A debate has opened up at the political level about the obligation to choose, judge and make decisions about people's lives, warning that the capacity of

health systems to care for older people is being challenged. In some parts of my country, the need to not care for those over 80 is already being raised. "Who should be cared for first by the health systems?"; "Who determines who should live and who should be left to die?"; "Is an unproductive body no longer considered valuable, and therefore dispensable?"; "What interests does the national health system serve?", Marta and I asked.

"The saddest thing, at this time, is the impossibility of accompanying our loved ones when they die", murmurs Marta almost to herself. The pandemic and the brevity now demand solitude. If we speak of death as uncomfortable, it is because it is an outburst, a loved one had a body yesterday, and they no longer have one today. When it happens, moreover, in complete solitude, death becomes an undeserved outburst. "You can't say this word, it is ugly", warns Marcos who, while playing, hears the word "death" from our lips. Death, the taboo subject that makes us so uncomfortable.

Marta and I are faced with these moral dilemmas, and as we speak, we begin to be suspicious of the uncertain future self that we will become. The questions give way to others such as "will we have enough autonomy when we are old?", "what will our quality of life be like?", "how will we cope with the bodily contingencies that arise?", and above all, "will we become a burden on our child?". We decided to be optimistic and opt for a successful narrative of aging (Lamb, 2014), one that emphasizes independence, longevity, and well-being. Perhaps the future will put us in our place, but now it is not the moment to dwell on the dramas. "Will you still love me when I am a toothless old woman?", asks Marta in an attempt to brighten up the conversation. "And you, will you still understand me?", I ask her in turn.

After a day with many mixed emotions, from the most exultant joy to the most unsuspected rage, Marcos sleeps. We arrive at the end of this Thursday; or Monday; or Saturday. No, not Saturday. Saturdays still smell different. The little one has literally exhausted us. Marta and I collapse on our bed and let our emotions run rampant; what unites us all at this time is the difficulty in discerning exactly what your mood is [3]. Tears, snot, red eyes, hiccups, untimely laughter, the most corporeal side of love and pain. All emotions at once, all at once, without letting the pandemic prevent us from moving as we should.

#### 4. Closing Remarks

Another sleepless night. Another one of many since the confinement began. Sleep deprivation (my night partner), sure enough, is an effect of confinement [3]. It is, in the early hours of the morning, with a blank mind, that the thoughts of the whole day come to me.

Marta is sleeping. I do not want to wake her up by making notes in my diary, so I promise myself I will try to keep all the thoughts that are now going through my head. No one around me believed that we could live a situation like the one we are living now, despite the many signals that Nature sends us and that are amplified by scientists (droughts, climate change, wars, refugee crisis). It seemed that we were able to control our lives, that we could control the unpredictable social and natural forces. Instead, we are living in an era of fear and uncertainty. Maybe my sense of masculinity forces me to try to be strong and brave at every moment. Maybe, I may not be afraid of the virus, but the truth is that I feel fear every day. I do not mean the fear of getting fat, or losing muscle mass, or getting old, or not being a good parent. I am talking about the fear of Marcos falling down the stairs, of what would become of Marcos and Marta if I got sick, of Marta no longer understanding me when I am old, and she keeps her teeth intact. Fear of what will happen to us people once the pandemic passes, of what human relations and the environment will be like in this uncertain future that is opening up before us. Fear of our triumphalist, self-indulgent and hypocritical society, merciless towards the poor and the elderly, more concerned with establishing a war of "all against all" than a spirit of "all together we shall overcome". The fear that the "new normal" will lead to a worse individual, institutional and social situation than the one that has brought us here. Fears, all of them, with a strong bodily substrate.

How do you handle a body with so many fears? How will they all affect me? To what extent is it not my own body that harbors and generates these fears? To what extent do other bodies contribute to increase or decrease my fears? And can't the mind help me overcome this frightened body?

Too many questions. I do not know if I will be able to remember them all at dawn.

## 5. Reflections on the Story

Throughout the narrative, the way in which the state of confinement in the face of a global pandemic affects me and the relationships I have with my own body has been recounted. I have tried to reflect on a body that is a source of questions to which I try to respond: What is being awakened in me on a corporal level; what feelings of motor competence/incompetence are appearing; what corporal dilemmas I have to face in this new and frightening situation; how I live conflicts with my own body and how I face them.

The body journal, as a tool for data collection, has helped me to question, reflect and investigate my lived and subjectively-charged body during all this time. Now I think I am in a position to say that the process of observation and investigation about my own body has been shaping an experiential vision of the purely bodily aspects and what this implies for my daily life. I have understood that, besides having a body, I am a body, developing a sensitive reasoning to think with and from the body. Thus, as reflected here, the body can be experienced and understood in very different ways. For example, there are times when the dominant feelings are of motor capacity and strength, while in others, the body is a source of intense emotions of shame. It is within my body as a territory that this narrative has been situated.

The story raises, in turn, questions about narrative imaginations: How could a different body give meaning to the events that took place during this crisis? How would I have told the story when I had a young body, or how I would have told it if I were old? What possibilities and bodily potentials would have been offered by other "ways of being a body"? And mainly, what form will this article take if the pandemic drags on? How will my fears and expectations evolve in the coming weeks, when the health crisis may still be present in our lives? The distant horizon is an empty space, and I can only dream of a better world than the one we have, for the sake of my child and the rest of the world's children.

This overlapping of different stories, as counter-narratives, can alter our experiences and serve as a corporeal resource to challenge some of the (self-)imposed tyrannies around the body [15]: Hegemonic masculinities, bodily ideals and/or threats around the body in the form of illness or aging.

Finally, I would like to point out the difficulty in putting words to the embodied experiences I have gone through. Still, it has been worth the effort to reflect and to be able to present a story that connects with other lives, ideas and contexts, contributing to creating a meaningful dialogue and a firm will to rethink ourselves physically, mentally and socially. All that I, as a man, have been able to draw from this story and this pandemic is knowledge and memories that maybe help to win this game against the virus and those that may come.

**Author Contributions:** Formal analysis, investigation, methodology, writing, review & editing: G.G.-C. Author has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Acknowledgments:** I would like to thank Juan-Miguel Fernández-Balboa, for being a superb friend and reader. Also, I would like to thank Marcos Arias-González and Marta Arias-Carballal, for being the characters of this story and the protagonists of my life.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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