


Raging Piggy: Fatphobia and anger in *Cerdita* (Carlota Pereda, 2022)¹

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ENG Abstract. *Cerdita/Piggy* (Carlota Pereda, 2022) has garnered critical acclaim and commercial success. The film's focus on an overweight protagonist who confronts bullying and discrimination with anger is particularly noteworthy, given the underrepresentation of such characters and the horror genre utilized. *Piggy* is a relevant case study given the current moment of popular feminism and heightened visibility of female anger in response to violences. The article analyzes the film's representation of anger through three dimensions: the construction of the enraged subject, the causes of the anger, and its effects. It specifically examines the significance of a plus size teenager as the main character, fat-shaming and weight-based violence as triggers for her anger, and the social and symbolic consequences of her anger in terms of breaking with hegemonic, neoliberal, and postfeminist 'feeling rules'. Ultimately, the study offers insight into the potential significance of representing anger as a resource for social change for marginalized groups.

Keywords: fat-shaming; feeling rules; female anger; horror film; weight-based violence.

ES *Cerdita salvaje: Gordofobia y rabia en Cerdita* (Carlota Pereda, 2022)²

Resumen. *Cerdita* (Carlota Pereda, 2022) ha sido aclamada por la crítica y ha tenido un gran éxito comercial. Es especialmente notable que su protagonista, una adolescente con sobrepeso que sufre acoso y discriminación, reaccione con rabia, considerando la escasa representación de tales personajes y el género de terror elegido. Su estudio es particularmente relevante en el contexto actual, marcado por un feminismo popular y una mayor visibilidad de la ira femenina en respuesta a las violencias. El artículo examina la importancia de la protagonista, la humillación corporal y la violencia basada en el peso como desencadenantes de su rabia, y las consecuencias sociales y simbólicas en términos de romper con las 'reglas sentimentales' hegemónicas, neoliberales y postfeministas. En última instancia, el estudio ofrece una visión de la potencial importancia de representar la rabia como un recurso para el cambio social en beneficio de grupos marginados.

Palabras clave: cine de terror; humillación corporal; ira femenina; reglas sentimentales; violencia en base al peso.

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1. Introduction

In the last decade, we have witnessed the rise of popular feminism and the increasing visibility of female anger (and other discriminated groups), motivated by multiple forms of violence exerted

against gendered and racialized individuals, such as #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, 8M, #Cuéntalo and #YoSiTeCreo in Spain, among others. This openness towards the expression of negative emotions, especially if they come from certain groups, is worthy

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² In the title of the article, I retained the Spanish translation of the title given to *Raging Bull* (Martin Scorsese, 1980) in Spain, *Toro Salvaje*, which serves as the inspiration for the main title of this article.

of examination. Especially considering the affective injustice (Srinivasan, 2018) by which precisely the people who suffer injustices are required to regulate their emotions, that is, to control their anger, supposedly to facilitate discussions that lead to the end of their oppression. This impetus has been transferred to the world of media, resulting in an increase in the number of movies and TV shows that feature female protagonists expressing anger, although it is important to note that a significant majority of these characters are still mainly cisgender, middle-class, white subjects. Furthermore, when we consider body types, it becomes evident that women with non-normative bodies are even less represented. In this landscape, it is noteworthy to come across a film featuring a plus size girl as its main protagonist—being a girl a demographic favored by postfeminism—who is tired of enduring violence stemming from pervasive social fatphobia.

This article provides an analysis of the Spanish film *Cerdita/Piggy* (Pereda, 2022), examining its use of anger beyond the spectacle of violence found in the horror/revenge genre. *Cerdita* integrates elements from the horror, rape-revenge, and slasher genres, but it surpasses mere replication by subverting and transcending their conventions to offer a thought-provoking social commentary. This analysis delves into the film's narrative alterations and thought-provoking portrayals, showcasing how it empowers women and subaltern groups to transform and confront discrimination and violence without facing stigmatization or falling prey to neoliberal co-optation. Ultimately, the study provides valuable insights into the film's depiction of anger as a catalyst for societal change, particularly for marginalized communities. To achieve this, an analytical model will be applied, examining the construction of the angry subject, the causes behind their anger, and the subsequent effects it produces (Maseda García, Gámez Fuentes and Gómez Nicolau, 2023). I am interested in analyzing the significance of the election of a girl who is overweight and increasingly angry as the main character of the film, and how the angered protagonist is portrayed. Secondly, I focus on the exploration of fat-shaming and weight-based violence as triggers of her anger. Lastly, I turn to the social and symbolic consequences of her anger in terms of breaking with the hegemonic, neoliberal and postfeminist feeling rules by producing affective dissonances, raising consciousness, and re-imagining accountability.

2. What Carlota Pereda's *Cerdita/Piggy* (2022) has to do with horror

Piggy/Cerdita tells the story of Sara (Laura Galán), a teenager from Extremadura, Spain, who is frequently bullied by people in her town because of her body type. One day, while at the pool, three girls bully her and steal her clothes, almost drowning her in the process. A stranger (Richard Holmes) witnesses the incident. The situation worsens when Sara is forced to walk home in her swimsuit and a car with three teenagers follows her and begins to harass her. They exit the car and physically attack her before driving away, leaving her panicking and crying uncontrollably

on the bridge. She runs to a path beside the road to hide, where she sees a van. In the back, one of the bullying girls, who have been abducted, is gesturing for help. In the driver's seat, she sees the stranger from the pool. He offers her a towel, and she accepts with a fearful gesture before letting him drive away. When the bullies' families turn to Sara for answers, she is unable (and reluctant) to tell the truth. Despite pressure from the police, the parents of the missing girls and even Pedro (José Pastor), the boyfriend of one of the girls, she keeps the secret of their abduction to herself. Meanwhile, the kidnapper continues to exact revenge on those who hurt Sara, including her parents (Carmen Machi and Julián Valcárcel). Eventually, following the murder of her parents, she chooses to accompany the stranger. Nevertheless, a car accident ensues, resulting in her losing consciousness. After regaining consciousness, Sara finds herself in a slaughterhouse and comes across two of the bullying girls who are bound. Determined to help them, she attempts to free them, but her efforts are interrupted when the stranger reappears. Fearful for her life, Sara hides and makes a desperate escape. In the process, she finds out the dismembered body of the third (meanest) girl. The stranger tries to persuade her to join him in killing her peers and escaping with him. Sara, however, refuses to comply and kills him instead, then frees the kidnapped girls.

Cerdita incorporates elements from horror, rape-revenge, and slasher films, utilizing their stylistic choices, motifs, and narrative tropes. However, it goes beyond expectations and offers a fresh perspective, resulting in an enhanced critique within the film. While I won't delve into the debate of whether these are standalone genres or subgenres, or narrative structures layered onto other genres (see Read, 2000), it is insightful to examine how this film both reclaims and challenges these conventions. Rather than relying solely on shock value or gratuitous violence, it uses the horror genre as a vehicle to shed light on important issues, such as body oppression and violence. It takes advantage of the genre's capacity to evoke fear and discomfort, creating an unsettling atmosphere that serves as a metaphorical backdrop for its exploration of these topics.

Furthermore, *Cerdita* explores and engages with the conventions of rape-revenge films, known for its portrayal of sexual violence and subsequent acts of revenge. It is crucial to emphasize that Pereda's film does not depict rape towards the protagonist *per se*. In a departure from the common archetype of «young, white, attractive victims turned femme fatale avenger» found in many rape-revenge narratives (Henry, 2016, p. 4), Sara presents a distinct portrayal based on her physique. Additionally, in traditional rape-revenge films, acts of rape are typically perpetrated by a male gang or a group of repulsive individuals (Henry, 2016). However, *Cerdita* subverts this trope by featuring a group of attractive female teenagers, as well as members of the town and the protagonist's own family, as the abusers. This unconventional choice challenges the preconceived notions of who can be the perpetrators in such narratives, highlighting the complexity and diversity of those involved in abusive situations.

The film utilizes, nonetheless, the dual structure commonly found in rape-revenge narratives, featuring

the initial act of violence and the subsequent quest for retribution (Henry, 2016). This narrative structure aligns with the concept of *lex talionis*, where revenge is sought to restore justice following acts of rape or abuse (Henry, 2016). Claire Henry (2016, p. 1) argues that rape-revenge films can be considered a «feminist genre that provides its audience with a cathartic sense of justice through retributive violence». Similarly, *Cerdita* positions itself as a film that elicits a sense of satisfaction for viewers as they witness a form of revenge against the abusers, even though it may not necessarily be carried out directly by Sara.

This brings us to the question of a character typical of horror: the monster. In the realm of horror, normality is constantly threatened by the presence of the monster, an abnormal individual (Read, 2000; Henry, 2016). Initially, the stranger may be perceived as this character, disrupting the social fabric and committing acts of violence. However, we might also contemplate whether Sara, the female avenger, can be interpreted as such, given her animalistic rage that drives her to fatally bite the stranger on the neck, causing him to bleed. The imagery of Sara, with her bloodied appearance, wild hair, and barefoot state, further accentuates her animalistic nature, allowing for an alternative interpretation of her transformation into a monster. Applying Gustavo Subero's (2020) concept of queer monstrosity in Diment's *La memoria del muerto* (2011), if Sara is seen as the monster (as revealed in the final sequence of the film), she is not inherently monstrous but becomes monstrous as a result of circumstances; she must become a monster to survive. In other words, the fat subject must embrace monstrosity to assert their visibility within a system that denounces fatness as unnatural, sick, and deviant.

However, in *Cerdita*, it becomes evident that the most logical monsters are those who serve as the guardians of the normative social order. Fatphobia and its manifestation through bullying and seemingly 'gentle' harassment are presented as the genuine monsters, representing an oppressive force against overweight individuals. The actual monster resides within a social and political system that not only justifies but also systematically enables violence against individuals based on their bodies. According to Sonya Renee Taylor (2021), living in a non-conformative body while facing constant societal rejection results in a life filled with fear.

Lastly, *Cerdita* exhibits qualities reminiscent of 1990s slasher films, specifically those associated with the genre's revival that emphasized female protagonists and aligned with third-wave feminism and girlhood movements. Slasher films feature a psycho-killer who targets mostly female victims, with the last surviving girl ultimately defeating him. The killer is often portrayed as a human male with a troubled past, while the 'Final Girl' emerges as an intelligent and resourceful heroine (Clover, 1987). While we ignore the past of the most obvious killer, the stranger, Sara can then be identified as the final girl (as per Carol Clover's terminology) or the 'victim-avenger' (as described by Read), embodying the character typically most relatable for viewers. In line with Murray Smith's framework, this identification occurs through two key aspects:

alignment and allegiance. Alignment refers to the viewer's connection to the narrative world through a character's actions, thoughts, and emotions, while allegiance involves fostering a sympathetic involvement (Smith, 1994). By establishing these connections, viewers can better relate to and emotionally invest in Sara's perils and final resolve.

In summary, Pereda employs key elements of these genres while making alterations that serve as a powerful vehicle to provoke deeper examination of the pervasive social violence experienced by overweight individuals. Simultaneously, the film effectively engages the audience by presenting a character whose anger becomes a point of identification and alliance, as we shall see.

3. The multifaceted journey of an angered, overweight protagonist

Sara is not alone in portraying young female characters who express frustration and anger on screen in recent times. Ellie, from *The last of us*, Daenerys Targaryen and Arya Stark from *Game of Thrones*, Veronica Mars, Eleven from *Stranger things*, and Alyssa from *The end of the f***ing world* are just a few examples of other strong, complex female characters who exhibit these traits. Additionally, *Cerdita* notably shares the theme of bullying as a source of rage with *Carrie* (De Palma, 1976). Unlike Sara, however, none of these characters are defined by their weight, and their anger is not based on violence directed at them because of having large bodies. These examples, except for *Carrie*, are part of a recent trend in audiovisual fiction of portraying female characters who do not constantly monitor their emotions, especially those that society deems negative. This is a welcome development, considering both the patriarchal society and the influence of neoliberal postfeminism that have long urged women to suppress their emotions and maintain an optimistic facade.

Examining the growing acceptance of expressing negative emotions, particularly among specific groups, is crucial. Anger has historically been associated with negative connotations such as irrationality, sin, violence, hormonal imbalances, mental health issues, or excessive emotionality. This can be seen in the way that expressions of female anger are often ignored or dismissed by attributing them to biological responses like hormones or chemical imbalances in the brain, rather than legitimate cognitive processes. After all, not everyone faces equal levels of repression or condemnation for expressing it. The concept of 'affective injustice' (Srinivasan, 2018) refers to the societal demand for individuals who have suffered injustices to control their anger, despite the prevalence of violence and precarity in their experiences. As a result, they are forced to suppress their anger, and the legitimacy of its expression is often determined by the individual's gender, race, and class. For example, white men are frequently deemed justified in their anger (when defending their nation, honor, women, and even privileges against the advancement of minorities). In contrast, female anger is often stigmatized and condemned. Additionally, white, middle-class

women's anger is often treated with more leniency than that of women of color (Traister 2018; Cooper, 2018; Orgad and Gill, 2019; Phipps, 2021). Thus, it is worth considering how factors such as gender, race, sexual orientation, ability, and more may impact which forms of anger are deemed more legitimate than others.

On the other hand, the neoliberal and postfeminist values that are prevalent in contemporary Western societies subject individuals to an intense, metricized form of self-scrutiny, coercing them into engaging in a toxic behavior that is often portrayed as a free choice (Elias and Gill, 2017). According to Ana Sofía Elias and Rosalind Gill (2017), postfeminism and neoliberalism prioritize individualism and autonomy, emphasizing individual choice and agency. Women are portrayed as active, self-reinventing subjects in postfeminist culture, resulting in an emphasis on bodily discipline (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993), perpetuating a sense of dissatisfaction, the need for 'self-perfectibility' (McRobbie, 2009, pp. 62-63) and the discouragement of neediness and insecurity by psychologists and lifestyle coaches (Gill, 2007, 2009). In this postfeminist framework, women are encouraged to direct their anger towards themselves, due to their perceived inadequacy, low self-esteem, and dissatisfaction with the prescriptions of the dominant cultural narrative (Orgad and Gill, 2019).

Furthermore, feminist critiques have pointed out the body-image pressures that women face, as well as the promotion of body confidence as sexy, (Gill, 2007, 2009). This has led to a phenomenon known as 'fat talk', in which women make negative comments about their own and others' weight and attractiveness. However, there is a significant disconnect between the level of pain and distress presented in these discourses and the supposed 'simple' solutions offered. The film *Cerdita* challenges the double bind of trying to avoid being fat while also being confident with one's own body. What gives Sara confidence is not her reflection (or learning inspired by an influential figure) on «love your body» (a phrase often used in the context of body positivity and self-acceptance), but rather her frustration and her active embrace of her anger.

When it comes to plus-size characters with a fiery temperament, few are as memorable in Spanish cinema as Carmina Barrios from Paco León's acclaimed films *Carmina o revienta* (2012) and *Carmina y amén* (2014). Carmina proudly rejects societal pressures to change her body, embracing her 'excessive' size and rejecting self-hatred. Her unapologetic laughter and rowdy demeanor further demonstrate her refusal to conform to conventional expectations (Castejón Leorza and Maseda García, 2018). By being indifferent to the objectifying gaze of others, she neutralizes their power and appropriates their appropriation, as Pierre Bourdieu has argued (1984, p. 208). In a scene, we see Carmina proudly riding a motorbike with her son Alejandro, dressed in nothing but her undergarments. A passerby mocks her for her size by calling her Lady Gaga, but Carmina refuses to be shamed and responds with a fearless threat. This scene is reminiscent of the telling ending of *Cerdita*, in which the protagonist lets go of Pedro's waist (who is giving her a ride on his motorbike) and strikes a similar pose, demonstrating the same kind

of unapologetic confidence that Carmina embodies throughout both films. This becomes even more remarkable when we take into account the opening scene of the movie, where Sara gazes at Pedro with a longing smile from behind the counter of her parents' butcher shop. Speaking of 'unruly women' («too fat, too funny, too noisy, too old, too rebellious», and we should add angry), Kathleen Rowe explains that «they point to new ways of thinking about visibility and power» (1995, pp. 19, 11). In that regard, Sara is now a part of the social imaginary of powerful women.

The process of Sara's coming of age in this film involves identifying the violence committed against her (as a fat person), expressing anger and violence, and learning not to let anger control her. If we interpret the figure of her avenger as an embodiment of Sara's rage, then her rebellion against him could represent her process of growing up and gaining control over her emotions in a society that condemns women's anger. By ultimately killing him and experiencing grief, it can be interpreted as a form of mourning for the loss of the ability to express anger, which can be a useful tool in navigating a hostile society. This interpretation underscores the complexity of Sara's journey as she navigates her sense of identity and learns to stand up for herself in a world that seeks to oppress her. In my discussion of the third dimension of analysis, I will propose a different reading.

On the other hand, if we view the 'stranger' as a real character, the film also challenges societal ideas of romanticized criminal couples such as Bonnie and Clyde, Mickey and Mallory, Perdita and Romeo, Pumpkin and Honey Bunny, or Sweeney Todd and Mrs. Lovett, through the character of Sara's 'soulmate'. At first, it seems like Sara might form an emotional bond (not necessarily romantic or sexual) with this character, and the film might center on the empowerment of an overweight girl. However, the film ultimately rejects normative heterosexual discourse; Sara challenges the stereotype of women needing protection and staying in toxic relationships solely out of a sense of neediness for love. She challenges the idea that love justifies overlooking a person's character or behavior, asserting her worth, criteria and independence. Sara refuses to be manipulated or controlled by her supposed ally, the masked avenger, and even directs her anger towards him. When he hands her a knife and suggests they kill one of the bullies together, Sara becomes furious and attacks him, biting his neck and drawing blood. By subverting the trope of the damsel in distress and rejecting traditional gender roles, the film shows the complexity of Sara's journey and offers a powerful critique of societal expectations.

Although Sara's actions (and those of her possible alter ego, the stranger) are morally more than questionable and violent, she still manages to become a positive character who fulfills our fantasies of retribution.

4. Fat-shaming and weight-based violence

Cerdita makes a clear connection between the expression of anger and its underlying context. While some film critics have categorized it as a horror movie due to its violent and bloody scenes, the most

unsettling aspects are the bullying and harassment of the supposed victims of Sara. This creates an atmosphere of fear and unease, highlighting the broader contexts that give rise to anger. By avoiding a focus on Sara's personal characteristics, which could lead to essentializing and pathologizing her emotions, the film examines their relationship to societal norms and expectations, making visible the structural roots of anger.

Throughout the film, we witness Sara being relentlessly bullied by the village for her weight before the events take a violent turn. In the beginning, we see Sara spending a lot of time in her parents' butcher shop, where her peers mock her by making vomiting gestures, taking a photo of her and her parents and posting it on Instagram with the caption 'three little piggies', and even physically attacking her at the pool. However, it is not just the children who harass her, but also the adults. At one point, when Sara goes to a store and chooses some sweets, the cashier unsolicited remarks to her: «I'll sell it to you, but it's up to you». And, later, during a meeting of villagers at the pool, Sara's mother confronts her about lying, and Sara explodes, revealing that others in the town call her 'piggy'. In the background, a woman named Luciana confirms that Sara is «actually quite fat».

Sara's family, particularly her mother, serves as a powerful illustration of how even well-meaning individuals can inadvertently perpetuate fatphobia, leading to complicity in violence and oppression against their own daughter. Despite Sara's struggles, her parents lack the sensitivity required to provide adequate support. A poignant example of this is when Sara returns from the pool, her body bearing burns from the sun and having endured torment from her bullies. While Sara seeks solace in the shower, her mother abruptly interrupts, scolding her for her perceived foolishness, sunburn, and the apparent waste of time. In *Cerdita*, this shower scene is crafted in the vein of the horror genre, drawing inspiration from iconic works like Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), where the character Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) meets a tragic fate as she is brutally stabbed to death while taking a shower. However, it deviates from convention by introducing the mother as the unexpected intruder, rather than a monstrous or killer figure. This unconventional intrusion adds a chilling and unsettling element to the scene, subverting audience expectations.

Moreover, the shower scene in *Cerdita* also bears resemblance to a similar sequence in *Carrie*. In it, the protagonist endures relentless harassment and humiliation from her classmates, mirroring the mistreatment faced by Sara at the hands of her mother. Both scenes convey vulnerability and victimization, highlighting the introverted nature of the protagonists and underscoring the cruel actions of those around them. By incorporating elements reminiscent of *Psycho* and *Carrie*, *Cerdita* cultivates a haunting atmosphere, portraying a seemingly innocent high school girl as the target of incessant mistreatment, akin to the emotional and psychological torment suffered by the characters in these influential horror movies.

This parallelism serves to put in the right place what they do to Sara, despite society's distinction between plain bullying and what Ringrose and

Renold (2010) term 'normative cruelties'. These normative cruelties are viewed as mere «practices of differentiation and Otherisation» (Ringrose and Renold, 2010, p. 577). Unlike bullying, normative cruelties are accepted and legitimized, and they are even seen as well-intentioned gestures to encourage change. The movie shatters this distinction and traces the beginning of the harassment based on body size and the monitoring of physical appearance to an early age, specifically in childhood and within close-knit environments. This occurs even if these environments are characterized by affection (Ringrose and Renold, 2010) and always in the name of love (Navajas-Perregaz, 2021).

When Sara confides in her mother, hoping for support and understanding, she is met with a hurtful suggestion to go on a diet. Furthermore, from then on, her mother will prepare just greens for Sara. In another instance, when it becomes evident that Sara started menstruating, her mother reacts with disgust and openly exposes it to the popular Pedro and his father, subjecting her to shame through ridicule. Frustrated with her mother's lack of sensitivity, Sara screams at her mother passionately for the first time, crying out loud: «You don't understand me! You're just like everyone else! Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!... I hate you! I wish you died!» just before the murderer strikes and kills her.

The film powerfully illustrates the pervasive and insidious nature of weight-based violence, revealing how even supposed allies can become complicit in perpetuating harm. Despite her good intentions, Sara's mother participates in this violence by shaming her daughter's weight and dismissing her struggles. This lack of support and understanding contributes to Sara's intense feelings of loneliness and despair. This theme is further exemplified by the mocking and harassment Sara experiences from her peers and other villagers, ultimately highlighting how weight stigma operates on both individual and systemic levels.

The term 'fatphobia' is used to describe the discrimination faced by millions of people worldwide due to their weight. This discrimination is supported by the widely accepted biomedical discourse, and it continues to impact our daily lives. Fat women are subject to constant monitoring and surveillance, which has led to the medicalization of obesity, considered in itself a form of violence against fat people (Guthman, 2009; Taylor, 2021). Noortje Van Amsterdam (2013) refers to this as the 'big fat inequality', where exclusion and marginalization based on body size are similar to racist, ableist, and misogynist practices. The anti-obesity discourse dominates the media, supported by a public health framework that uses epidemic, crisis, and war on obesity rhetoric (Taylor, 2021). Magdalena Piñeyro's (2019) book, *10 gritos contra la gordofobia* (10 shouts against fatphobia), also examines how overweight bodies are viewed as inferior and outside the norm in Western societies. Ultimately, it can be argued that fat oppression is a form of violence against women (Royce, 2009). Surprisingly, there is still a lack of general understanding of fatphobia as a form of violence. In a study conducted about audiences' reception of different forms of violence, one of the most interesting findings was the frequency and vitriol

directed towards body image and eating disorders. The participants, who were university students and educated individuals, attributed blame to the victim based on a neoliberal ethos of either individual responsibility or self-surveillance (Maseda García, DeFeo and Kiliç, 2023). After all, the war against obesity have been addressed by health authorities in Western countries by adopting neoliberal logics of individual risk management that rely on the capacity of individuals to self-regulate (Harjunen, 2016; Navajas-Peretegás, 2021).

Inevitably, the violence fat people endure, whether it is plain bullying or normative cruelties, leads to the internalization of their oppression. Internalized fatphobia occurs when fat individuals absorb societal beliefs about fatness and perceive their identity as socially degraded due to their weight (Ratcliffe y Ellison, 2015; Navajas-Peretegás, 2021; Taylor, 2021). Sara is depicted as introverted and insecure; she eats in secret, avoids buying sweets in public, and only bathes when there is no one around, among other behaviors. The process of internalization is unavoidable, as explained by Foucault's understanding of the interconnectedness between 'technologies of power' and 'technologies of the self'. Technologies of power shape individuals through various forms of knowledge, surveillance, and training, while technologies of the self involve individuals shaping themselves according to specific ethical ideals and guidelines for living (Foucault, 2000, p. 225). Neoliberal logic relies on the capacity of individuals to self-regulate, linking losing weight and shaping the body to willpower, discipline, diet, and exercise. In other words, it involves voluntary practices on one's own body through which individuals constitute themselves as subjects by responsibly choosing beneficial lifestyles (Foucault, 2000). As a result, fatness is socially attributed to a moral defect, such as a lack of willpower or care. Sara challenges the notion of lacking willpower; she possesses unwavering determination, which she exhibits through her anger.

5. The power of anger: Harnessing productive outcomes

As we have seen, *Cerdita* introduces a teenage protagonist who expresses anger towards the social harassment of overweight people. The film incorporates a type of main character that is mostly absent from the audiovisual and denounces the violence that overweight people face. In the upcoming section, we turn our attention to the productive potential of anger in the film.

I will begin by exploring a more mundane aspect of the productivity of Sara's anger: her sexual desire. The film challenges prevailing attitudes towards fat individuals in several ways, including its portrayal of desire as a source of energy and impulse. There is a common stereotype in popular culture that overweight people are not sexually desirable or that they lack sexual desire altogether. This stereotype is often perpetuated in media and advertising, which tend to depict thin bodies as the normative standard of beauty and desirability. When society deems someone unattractive, there is an implicit assumption

that they lack desire themselves. In the film, however, when Sara is attracted to the stranger, it can be seen as a manifestation of her desire. In a moment where they finally meet face to face, a close-up shot set against the backdrop of fireworks illuminating the festival happening in the distance captures the intimate moment between the stranger and Sara, evoking a profound sense of connection and romance. Furthermore, if we interpret the stranger as a symbol of Sara's anger, her masturbation scene takes on a new meaning, as it reveals how she channels and thrives in her anger.

Audre Lorde's *The uses of anger* (1981) sustains that productive anger unveils inequalities and oppressive structures and practices, allowing us to identify the processes of systemic subjugation. On the other hand, unproductive anger is limited to individual behavior and only affects a specific situation, hindering anger's transformative potential as a social emotion (Maseda García, Gámez Fuentes and Gómez Nicolau, 2023). Therefore, productive anger leads to a recognition of the structural causes that give rise to it, promoting consciousness-raising and collective mobilization against injustice.

Drawing from Lorde's essay, it can be argued that Sara's anger is unproductive because it remains limited to her individual experience, which is also reflected in her desire as previously discussed. While rage can be productive in protecting Sara from abuse, humiliation, and control, focusing solely on the individual victim's response is problematic. As Shani Orgad and Rosalind Gill (2019, p. 5) caution, if we focus solely on what the victim can do with their own anger without addressing larger systemic solutions, we place the burden of change entirely on the victim's shoulders. Such a focus risks overlooking other responsible parties and absolving them of accountability. While it is crucial to center the victim's story, we must acknowledge that improving their situation is not their sole responsibility (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 133). Thus, while we can encourage victims to acknowledge and express their anger, we must also recognize our own role as actors and/or spectators in systemic change. And this is where the film fits.

I would like to argue that *Cerdita* can be productive by generating an 'emotional dissonance', which Clare Hemmings (2012) suggests can lead to politicization, emotional solidarity, and a transformative approach to society. Drawing on Amy Shields Dobson and Akane Kanai's (2019) insights, we can contend that this film stands out significantly by expressing a dissonance with the confident identities linked to neoliberal cultural narratives of girl power. The mythologies of girl power, as outlined by McRobbie (2015), underscore the pursuit of perfection and the need for confidence, as described by Gill and Orgad (2015). According to Kanai (2017), these mythologies also emphasize the adherence to feeling rules. These rules dictate that individuals should possess the correct emotions within specific contexts. When emotions deviate from these expected norms, individuals are expected to recalibrate them to align with the appropriate emotional responses, ensuring a delicate balance between resilience and approachability. Sara personifies the recognition of the mismatch between our own perception of ourselves and the judgments imposed upon us by the

world. She lacks confidence and, despite her efforts to resist consuming sweets and maintain control over her desires, a stranger (possibly her alter ego) taunts her with the very treats she attempts to refuse. The dissonance arises, hence, from two factors: first, the film's focus on a 'suffering actor' like Sara (Harris and Dobson, 2015) who differs from the typical powerful girl trope so beloved by postfeminism; and second, its portrayal of young women's anger, insecurity, and anxiety, which challenges exclusionary 'technologies of femininity' (Dobson and Kanai, 2019).

By creating this discordance, *Cerdita* opens up space for dissonant affective positions that align with feminist goals of social transformation (Hemmings, 2012). As Dobson and Kanai argue, «dissonance is crucial in disrupting processes that promote girls' and women's affective investment in patriarchal, neoliberal social systems» (2019, p. 777). Furthermore, we do witness Sara's transformation from a suffering actor to a powerful agent, but she doesn't display the neoliberal girl power we mentioned above, but the 'super powers' born out of the anger caused by those dissonances, to use Brittney Cooper's subtitle of her book *Eloquent rage. A black feminist discovers her super powers* (2018). In line with bell hooks' (1981) perspective, Sara's transformation from a helpless victim to a defiant individual who refuses to be continuously victimized underscores the constructive and healing potential of rage. As she empowers herself through this transformative force, Sara becomes better equipped to bring about positive change in her life.

Due to her overwhelming rage, those who subjected her to torment meet a grim fate, either through their violent murder or captivity. Of particular significance are the mean girls who embody the traits of neoliberalism. The film delves into the concept of holding these bullies accountable and envisions a form of retribution against those who perpetrate acts of violence.

As mentioned before, Pereda's film has been classified as a horror film, a genre that has long been criticized as patriarchal and misogynistic. However, it has been reclaimed by feminist theorists due to its potential to empower female viewers through their identification with the vengeful and violent protagonist (Heller-Nicholas, 2011; Halberstam, 1995). The film introduces a violent female character who embodies the 'final girl' who confronts and overcomes both her tormentors and her inner demons. As Judith Halberstam (1993) argues, female viewers can find a sense of satisfaction by achieving closure through acts of revenge and by holding perpetrators accountable. Nonetheless, *Cerdita* deviates from the notion of rage as solely a destructive and negative force, despite the destruction it entails, as we shall see.

Martha Nussbaum (2016), a philosopher who critiques the use of anger as a tool for justice, argues that anger poses problems and counterproductive consequences. She points out that anger is fundamentally retributive in its essence, as it revolves around a wish to cause suffering to the perpetrator/wrongdoer, encompassing a built-in urge for payback or retribution. Additionally, she claims that anger hampers efforts to combat social injustice because its retributive essence can lead to a deepening of

conflicts. In this context, it is intriguing to consider the research of Laura Silva (2021), who points out that empirical studies have demonstrated that perceiving a situation as unchangeable can be a significant catalyst for prompting destructive behavior. Examining Sara and Pedro's interactions, we can perceive them as a revelation to Sara that change is possible. As Silva notes, the nature of anger –whether it's retributive or driven by the quest for recognition– is closely intertwined with one's confidence in the feasibility of effecting change. This realization underscores the vital message that not all is lost, as even the perpetrators have the capacity for transformation.

Cerdita challenges Nussbaum's notion by illustrating that Sara's motivation is not driven by retribution but by recognition. When faced with the opportunity to seek revenge or incite someone else to do so, Sara ultimately chooses not to. When Sara is led to the stranger's hiding place and finds the mean girls tied and hanging from a hook, she tries to free them. The two begin to scream at her still using offensive words, calling her piggy, etc. This overwhelms her, and she cannot free them before the stranger returns. Despite her past grievances and present verbal abuse, Sara, resisting the pressure of him (or her anger) turns around against him, stabs and kills him by biting his neck. She then uses her father's hunting weapon to release her bullies, showcasing her strength and independence. Not all anger is retributive, but rather exists on a spectrum ranging from fully retributive to entirely forward-looking (Fricker, 2007; Srinivasan, 2018; Silva 2021). Silva (2021) suggests that anger towards social injustice is less likely to result in destructive outcomes due to the difficulty of seeking direct retribution against a single individual. When anger is directed at groups, institutions, or systems, assigning blame to a sole person is often insufficient. As a result, the emphasis shifts from seeking payback to driving substantial and meaningful change.

Cerdita succeeds in capturing the forward-looking aspect and sense of dissonance that can evolve into a profound feeling of injustice, ultimately igniting a strong desire for rectification. In that sense, it echoes the significance of recognition within the realm of fat activism, particularly through the concept of depathologization which strives to counteract the medicalization of fatness as a disease or disorder, and to foster the acceptance and comprehension of diverse body sizes.

In sum, while it may not be sufficient to be considered activism on its own, anger has the potential to unveil unconscious oppressions and take on a distinct political dimension.

6. Conclusions

María Unanue (2016) raises a series of pointed questions: How many novels, stories, songs, movies, or TV shows feature fat protagonists? As she indicates, when the answer is near zero, it highlights the pervasive discrimination and oppression faced by fat people in various domains, from employment and healthcare to bullying and harassment (Unanue, 2016; Ortí, 2019). She points out how these experiences

are not random or isolated, but rather the result of well-structured mechanisms that restrict movement and limit agency, leaving many feelings trapped and unvoiced. The pressure to lose weight is often presented as the only escape from this systemic oppression, leaving little room for alternative narratives or possibilities. *Cerdita* establishes itself as an alternative narrative or possibility by not only giving a voice to the marginalized but also by embracing subjectivity that exists outside the confines of neoliberal emotional norms. It creates space for emotions traditionally labeled as negative to be directed not towards oneself but towards others, who are often the root cause of the anger. In this context, our protagonist's anger is a powerful force that challenges societal attitudes towards overweight individuals and empowers marginalized bodies. The film's nuanced exploration of gray areas highlights the complicity of individuals, even well-meaning parents, in perpetuating harmful attitudes. In its essence, *Cerdita* is a compelling film that brings attention to the harmful consequences of fatphobia. It boldly confronts the individualistic and neoliberal narratives that promote self-monitoring, the superficial notion of Love Your Body, and the pressure to employ resilience strategies for mere survival and personal success.

In contrast with these narratives, certain emotions establish a link between feminine subjectivities and socially oriented feminist possibilities by tapping into affective experiences that challenge notions of confidence, empowerment, and perfection (Dobson and Kanai, 2019). These emotional incongruities, as described by Hemmings as 'affective dissonances,' are effectively expressed in *Cerdita*. The film features a protagonist who initially suffers as a victim of bullying but undergoes a transformative journey, exhibiting an active counterattack and embodying a constructive rage. In this way, the movie explores subjectivity and its intricate ties to systemic forms of inequality. As bell hooks (1995, p. 18) believed, victimization and anger are incompatible. As she writes, «When we embrace victimization, we surrender our rage. My rage intensifies because I am not a victim. It burns in my psyche with an intensity that creates clarity. It is a constructive, healing rage». For her, seeing oneself as a victim means surrendering, not only in anger but also in hope that things will improve. The position of the victim is one of passivity, diametrically opposed to the active counterattack that allows for anger. In this coming-of-age film, the evolution of our protagonist serves as a memorable figure to consider and inspire, and as a narrative possibility to embrace and establish as we move forward.

7. References

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