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No andropause for gay men? The body, aging and sexuality in Turkey

Maral Erol^a and Cenk Ozbay^b

^aFen Edebiyat Fakültesi, İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Bölümü, İisik Üniversitesi, İstanbul, Turkey; ^bFaculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Sabancı University, İstanbul, Turkey

ABSTRACT

This article aims to contribute to the ongoing scholarly debate about the implications of andropause in the Gender Studies literature by decentring and complicating it further using the case of Turkish gay men. Aging gay men in Turkey struggle to remain young, healthy and 'cool' as they use their wittiness and emotional maturity towards younger men. All of these happen at the intersection of masculinity politics and homophobia within Turkish society and the profound ageism within the global gay culture. Our questions are shaped around andropause and its absence as gay men reject and disidentify with it: Is andropause a heteronormative concept? Through the active rejection of the external outcomes of aging and andropause, mid-life Turkish gay men present an idiosyncratic vantage point to explicate the relatively understudied intersection of masculinity, homosexuality and aging in the non-western contexts. Through interviews we contend that, unlike their heterosexual equivalents, mid-life gay men do not accept andropause, but instead they develop tactics to consolidate their socially capable, self-assured and well-integrated subjectivity within the fringes of the global gay culture. Looking closer at aging gay men and their multifactorial strategies provides us the chance to grasp the ubiquitous heteronormativity inscribed in the narratives of andropause.

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Introduction

It is a common belief that older people are marginalized and stigmatized in the youth-oriented and body-centred cultures of the Global North, while the elderly are deemed as sources of wisdom and guidance, and hence uniquely respected, across the non-western and indigenous cultures (Ahearn, 2002; Myerhoff & Simic, 1978). This difference in value placed upon age is complicated by the specificity of local cultures as well as gender orientation. In this article, we discuss that aging gay men in İstanbul, Turkey, struggle simultaneously to remain young, healthy, powerful, attractive and 'cool' as they tacitly use their wittiness, sagacity, past experiences and emotional maturity in their interactions with younger men that they enjoy being connected with.

This cultural process takes place at the intersection of a tangled masculinity politics and fierce homophobia within Turkish society and the profound ageism within the global gay culture (Wight et al., 2015), which are all discursive regimes to which these men are subjected. They govern their lives and find the relevant ways of self-making in the midst of Turkish particularities of gender and sexualities, an

emergent global gay culture, and the conceptions of masculinity while they are structurally excluded from the symbolic domains of power by their age and sexuality. In addition to the struggle at the axis of prolonged youngish appearance and inner astuteness, masculinity constitutes a critical disposition. Culturally held and exalted portrayals of masculinity tend to represent it through the capacities and attainments of young(er) heterosexual men. In this sense, midlife and aging Turkish gay men have another double-edged relation with the conception and embodiment of 'hegemonic masculinity'.

The LGBT population in Turkey has faced serious levels of homophobia and transphobia since at least the 1980s (Yuzgun, 1986). The oppression surfaces in different life domains and in variegated forms such as discrimination in work life and labour relations (Ozbay, 2015a; Ozturk, 2011; Yilmaz & Gocmen, 2016), exclusion through law and citizenship (Ataman, 2011), dehumanization within military institutions (Basaran, 2014), and disenfranchisement in the coming out process, identity politics and sexual activism (Ozyegin, 2015; Savci, 2016). As Ataman puts it, 'sexual orientation and gender identity have not been a criminal offense in Turkey. However, laws and regulations do not provide adequate protection for LGBT people,' (2011, p. 135). This precarious legal situation is parallel to the economic, political, social and cultural spheres, where LGBTs oscillate between silent acceptance and severe restraints throughout their lifetimes. Although there is an emergent literature on these compelling circumstances, there is an evident lack of research – especially on transphobia, everyday and institutional adversities that transgender people encounter.

In the context of the trepidations about maintaining heteronormative virility, straight men in Turkey may utilize the discourse of andropause (or, the 'male menopause') in order to find a legitimate way of 'doing gender' through their aging years. Straight men in andropause put a strong emphasis on potency, fighting against erectile dysfunctions, taking Viagra and other drugs to improve their sexual performance, rejuvenating their intimate lives by finding new, younger female candidates for second marriages, and experiencing fatherhood again as a reaction against andropause (Erol & Ozbay, 2013). In contrast, gay men's priorities are on physical, surgical, cosmetic and chemical interventions to keep their youthful and fit appearance,¹ integration with gay sociabilities and random sexual encounters with younger partners without long-term engagements. As feminist gerontology has indicated the need to expose differences between female and male aging, we have followed the questions a hypothetical queer social gerontology (Brown, 2009) would pose on the distinction between heterosexual and gay experiences of andropause. Our respondents avoid taking on the identification with andropause through a number of strategies and instruments of embodiment, sexuality and sociability that we examine in detail here. Hence, our basic questions are shaped around the process of andropause and its absence as gay men reject and disidentify with it: Is andropause a heteronormative concept? Is not there a similar aging process for all men, whether they are gay or straight? If gay men do willingly dissociate with andropause, what else do they do in order to prove their bodily and social conservation?

What Celil (early 50s) says represents the ambivalence towards the aging process among our interviewees:

We all have a fight against time. Time is our biggest enemy but also our closest friend. On the one hand, we try to preserve our looks – resisting aging and remaining young as long as we can. On the other hand, one becomes smarter as he matures, does he not? It [getting older] empowers [you]. One can better control others as well as himself, as he proceeds in time. So, yes, we try to look younger outside while we become more seasoned inside.

Through the active rejection of the external outcomes of aging and andropause and the embracing of their aggrandizing effects for their inner selves, mid-life Turkish gay men present an idiosyncratic vantage point for us to explicate the relatively understudied intersection of masculinity, homosexuality and aging in the non-western contexts. In this sense, this article aims to contribute to the ongoing scholarly debate about the implications of andropause in the Gender Studies literature by decentering and complicating it further with the case of Turkish gay men. We contend that, unlike their heterosexual equivalents, mid-life gay men do not easily accept andropause, but instead they develop a number of tactics through which they consolidate their socially capable, self-assured and well-integrated subjectivity in the fringes of the global gay culture.

Dominant logics of masculinity highlight that the normal male sexual functioning is marked by the ability to generate and sustain an erection, and to be able to engage in penetrative sex with women for mutual satisfaction. Andropause, or male aging, comes to mean the ultimate loss of the masculine sexual functioning across multiple discourses (Kampf, Marshall, & Petersen, 2013). Looking closer at the aging gay men in Istanbul and their multifactorial strategies against the signs and outcomes of aging provides us the chance to grasp the ubiquitous heteronormativity inscribed in the narratives of andropause. Gay men age, too. However, their assessment of the aging body and their subjectivity is not centred on the performance of the penis. Our gay male respondents grow older with an avowedly different script of masculinity than their heterosexual fellows, as they have always kept living and functioning in professional, intimate and social domains.

Gay men's experiences in the Turkish context bring a number of important issues to the discussion around aging, the body, sexuality and masculinity. Although the four types of strategies we recount below – bodily, sexual, social and technological, might be seen as elements of global queer culture; the increasing (and tactical use of) sexual flexibility and the expansion of sexual repertoire on purpose, the lack of the sense of (gay) community and the elder mentors, and the absence of any popular, democratic or legal support to LGBT rights might be considered as unique and local dynamics that adversely affect middle-aged and aging gay men in Turkey.

Studies on gay men, aging and masculinity

A prolific literature has emerged at the crossroads of women's, feminist, gender, masculinity and queer studies since the 1990s. There has also been a burgeoning field of study on the body, aging, and the medicalization of sex, gender and sexualities following, to a large extent, Michel Foucault's seminal work (1978) on how the subject is constituted through discourses by constellations of power-knowledge (Rabinow, 1984), and his concept of 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988, p. 18) on the self-regulation aspect of this subject-formation. Building on Foucault's ideas, Judith Butler (1990) famously highlighted the unstable and performative character of gender and sexuality as well as their relation with heterosexuality as a regime of legibility. Foucault's and Butler's theories triggered and promoted the de-essentializing tendencies in LGBT Studies, in which the idea of a unified and coherent sexual subject was gradually given up and differences within 'gay' and 'lesbian' bodies came into the agenda. She claims, 'The thought of sexual difference within homosexuality has yet to be theorized in its complexity' (Butler, 2011/1993, p. 183). A great number of studies since then have contributed to this implicit call by documenting the divergent aspects of contemporary queer life and theorizing the intricate and overlapping relations between sexual difference, gender positions, bodily performances and identities. An explicit focus on men and masculinities in the latter field of study is more recent and fewer in number.² In these studies, the Global North is seemingly overrepresented. The workings of gender, however, are deeply embedded in the local cultural codes and meaning systems of specific places and better understood through 'situated knowledge', instead of universal theories and presumptions (Haraway, 1988). So is age. The formation of masculine bodies, identities and performances across different ages and sexualities can be interpreted, and knowledge on gender can be produced only by examining local contingencies and contexts not only in the societies of Global North, but also specific places and non-western cultures in Global South, however fluid and ubiquitous some gendered effects might be.

Although they are disadvantaged in social relations of power because of their age and sexual identities, the men we have interviewed had certain channels of empowerment – including class, educational level, location, healthy and able bodies, and ethnic origin – when we think through the lens of intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2016). This does not change the fact that gay and elderly forms of manly identities and performances (Nardi, 1999; Kampf et al., 2013; Slevin & Linneman, 2010) are generally deemed to be subordinate types in the seminal framework of hegemonic masculinity developed by Connell (1995). In this sense, gay masculinities are equated with effeminacy (Hennen, 2008) and the elderly male body is seen as the example of de-masculinization in a superficial, generalizing and parodying way. Slevin and Linneman suggest that the ideal of hegemonic masculinity is tied to the idea of

productivity as opposed to consumption, saying 'the male body at the height of its productive capacities is held up as the ideal form of masculinity' (2010, p. 485). They argue that this productive capacity is most prevalent in the economic, athletic and sexual realms. In all these three areas, older men's masculinities are subordinated as they move from production to consumption: retirement coming with old age means moving from the economically productive workplace to the more feminized home; there is a decline in athletic capacities that force men to be the consumers of sports rather than performers; a similar decline happens in relation to sexual performance, which makes them the consumers of drugs like Viagra. Thus, as the authors state, 'at every turn, then, the aging male body faces the likelihood of de-masculinization' (2010, p. 486).

Andropause emerged in the early twentieth century, as a period of declined physical and sexual performance in the form of male climacteric (Lodge & Umberson, 2013). Its return to visibility, however, happened towards the end of the century, with the increased medicalization of menopause, and parallel to the medicalization of erectile dysfunction (Loe, 2004; Marshall, 2007). As sexual orientation is a major determinant in the configuration of masculinity, a difference in anxieties regarding the body between aging heterosexual and homosexual men is anticipated and recent studies show that the latter report significantly higher body dissatisfaction (McArdle & Hill, 2009). Even though both straight and gay men talk about their bodies as deteriorating and express concern about decreased functionality, gay men also mentioned concerns about bodily appearance (Lodge & Umberson, 2013).

In addition to the concerns for decreased functionality in different spheres and the loss of masculinity that accompanies it, gay and bisexual men also deal with the ageism prevalent in gay culture. Researchers have developed the concept of 'accelerated aging' in this regard, where homosexual men are considered old at much younger ages than their heterosexual counterparts because of the value placed on youthfulness in gay culture (Bennett & Thompson, 1991; Jones & Pugh, 2005; Lodge & Umberson, 2013). This concept is used to explain the intergenerational divide in gay communities and the isolation faced by older gay men because of ageism (Cruz, 2003; Hostetler, 2004). Another aspect of ageism in gay communities is the presence of the 'dirty old gay man', stereotype where aging gay men are portrayed as 'perverts, predators, and lonely, miserable failures' in homophobic popular culture and gay communities alike (Goltz, 2014, p. 1506).³

While some scholars mention the concept of accelerated aging as a problematic side to queer aging, others see the experience of being gay, thus having a 'marked' identity, as an advantage in older age, specifically in dealing with de-masculinization. In this regard, Paul Simpson came up with a contradicting concept of 'aging capital', which he defines as 'age-inflected knowledge of self and gay culture that works in various ways' (2013, p. 283). In his study of the responses of middle-aged gay men in Manchester's gay village to gay ageism, Simpson elaborates on the positive aspects of aging as well as the negative ones in men's accounts. For example, he recounts the descriptions of an 'authentic self' that is achieved in midlife that differs from 'the fashionable self-presentation associated with younger gay men and men's younger selves' (p. 286). According to Simpson, the idea of an aging capital integrates aging into the class-based concept of Bourdieu's habitus, and it can 'enmesh with different combinations of economic ... social ... and cultural ... capitals' (p. 286). As such, the aging capital provides an important vantage point in considering the intersectionalities of queer aging and masculinity.

Our research contributes to the existing literature on the intersection of gender, sexuality and aging in important ways. First, it highlights the fact that mid-life gay men may experience 'accelerated aging' and have 'aging capital' at the same time as they develop tactics to cope with them and to derive advantage from them. Second, in this article we show that sexual flexibility through aging provides wider opportunities to gay men than heterosexuals. They not only transform themselves from the production side (erectile functioning) to the consumption (erectile dysfunctioning and purchasing certain drugs) but they also play with their sexual roles as leaving 'top only' identities towards 'versatility' and 'bottoming', and hence expand their sexual repertoire. Lastly, we suggest that andropause is discussed in a heteronormative frame with an emphasis on fatherhood, marrying with younger women, and erectile potency in the Turkish context (Erol & Ozbay, 2013). Our study expands this knowledge by questioning

the relation between andropause and sexual identity and by presenting gay men's tactics to resist aging. After the next section on methodology, we will recount these tactics below.

Method

We conducted 20 semi-structured recorded interviews with middle-aged and aging gay males in Istanbul, Turkey – the biggest as well as the most cosmopolitan and globalized city in the country with a vibrant gay scene (Hocaoglu, 2002; Ozbay, 2015b). We had personally known 4 of our participants before and they referred us to 13 other men. We reached three more interviewees through our colleagues' networks. The data for this article come from a larger research project that concerns with queer spatiality and homes that gay men reside in. This gave us the opportunity to visit 15 homes in which our respondents live. The other five interviews took place in cafés, restaurants and a college campus. While home visits took longer (two to three hours), interviews we conducted in public places were generally shorter – around an hour. Throughout the article, we use pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of our respondents.

As we demonstrate in this article, age is a troublesome issue for gay men in Turkey. We have a sense that most of our interviewees had a tendency to hide their real ages and either did not clearly answer the age-related questions (e.g. 'I am somewhere between mid-thirties to mid-forties', and 'I am at the age that I look'), or they gave us incorrect ages, usually decreasing the number 5–10 years according to our assumptions. Instead of trying to learn their real ages, we focused on the ways they talk about age and the discursive constructions they make about aging. With these factors in mind, we can say that our respondents were aged between mid-thirties to mid-sixties.

It was very difficult to find and convince older gay men to talk about their intimate lives and aging bodies. They were not found at gay bars or on dating apps to the same extent as younger men. Thus, we followed a method of snowball sampling. We prioritized our participants' sexual identity (gay, homosexual and queer – no bisexual or heterosexual man⁴), age (eliminated those who were younger than 35) and social class (11 of them had college degrees, all had 'good' jobs, 3 retired, all with middle to upper-middle class living standards). All respondents were Turkish. None of them accentuated their non-Turkish, i.e. Kurdish, ethnic or racial background.⁵ Most of our participants were non-religious. Two of them said that they were practicing some requirements of (Sunni) Islam and another two expressed that they belonged to the Alevi sect, an unorthodox interpretation of Islam and the biggest religious minority in Turkey, without practicing piety in their everyday lives.⁶ One person said that he could not see well, two mentioned that they were slightly hearing-impaired, and another one said his left leg was in poor condition. Other than these, none of our interviewees indicated any disabilities. One respondent was HIV-positive during the time of the interview.

Our approach in the interviews was informed by the guidelines of life story method (Connell & Pearse, 2014; Linde, 1993) with a highlight on our interviewees' homes and place-making activities in addition to interrogations about their bodies, sexual lives, intimate relations, affective states, class and financial positions. In this article, we specifically analyse the parts our interlocutors told us on their responses to aging and the tactics that they deal with it.

Turkish gay men and aging

For our middle-aged and aging gay male respondents, de-masculinization, or the lack of masculine capital, due to age and sexual identity in the context of ageism and heteronormativity plays a crucial role in reshaping their selves, relations with their bodies and conduct with others. Given the fact that modern gay and lesbian identity started to emerge in Turkey in the early 1990s (Bereket & Adam, 2006; Tapinc, 1992), our respondents are among the first cohort who grew older as out gays. Unlike their western queer peers, these respondents did this without the same supporting institutions, communities, neighbourhoods or social networks. In this context, the men we interviewed responded to the idea of aging in two different ways. A minority of them seemed to accept aging and changes to their

bodies as in Halil's (early 40s) words, 'what is supposed to be natural and inevitable'. Some of them had a certain nostalgic attitude, reminiscing about the old days and complaining about how things have changed for the worse in the sexual culture over time.

We have had a very beautiful life. After the 1990s though, everything became visible and we lost the spell. Before that, everything was more private, more mysterious. You knew everybody [who was gay]. Times have changed and we have also changed. We are not young and attractive right now. Everybody has their own days; our days have passed, unfortunately. (Vural, mid 60s)

Members of the same group were also extremely worried about making a fool of themselves by acting or pretending younger than their age ('it is all illogical to make myself ridiculous after this age'), and stating that their bodily state and energy levels do not allow them to act as they did before ('honestly, I don't feel the energy inside' and 'darling, I feel like it is over for me'). Yusuf's (late 30s) words exemplify this sense of exhaustion and resignation:

I do not care anymore. In the gay world, after the age of 30, nobody is interested in you because of your looks or your body. Put on creams, get tanned, go to the gym, get Botox... Nothing really matters. And, I do not criticize this. I also seek younger types and fresh bodies... I feel tired of trying to be more attractive by revivifying my appearance (*cektirmek*). We started when we were 18, right? I am almost 40, so calculate it. I have been trying to look like a better version of myself since the Middle Ages. Now, I am done with that.

Some of the respondents elucidated that they were content with the aging process they were going through. This mood of self-satisfaction is generally connected to gender performances. More specifically, more masculine and sexually 'top' men do not necessarily complain from getting older. One of our interlocutors, Burak (early 50s) was rather explicit about this:

When I was younger, let's say before the ages of 30-35, I was always busy with proving my masculinity to my sexual partners. After a certain point it became an advantage for me. I started to look more mature, more masculine, like a real man, not a beautiful boy. As an active person [in sex] I very much needed this. Now, I still look younger [than my age] and I take care of myself but being perceived as a mature man does not bother me. It actually serves me.

Sercan (39) explained to us that the aging process is as an extension of his 'environmentalist-naturalist' personality. He loved being outside and doing adventure sports in nature. Alongside his political commitment to a leftist-ecologist movement in Turkey, he interpreted the aging process with slight deformations on his body (small wrinkles on his face, and an occasional gray hair) in a positive manner: 'As the world has its nature, we also have our own nature and we get to experience it in different ways.' Like Burak, he does not complain about his aging at all.

However, the majority of our respondents discern aging as a potential threat to who they are and something for which they have to develop smart and compelling tactics to fight against its tangible effects. In the remaining parts of this article, we will explicate the different aspects of this fight as gay men narrate it. Below, we assembled the strategies as bodily, social, sexual and technological. Most gay men we have talked with simultaneously employ many, sometimes all, of these tactics in order to resist aging, preserve their bodies as they are, sustain their queer sociabilities and lifestyles, and postpone andropause – or the end of their gay masculinity, as they envision it.

Coping strategies

The aging male body

The bodily strategies involve attempts to keep the body fit, fat-free and muscular in order to appear young, zestful and attractive. This is accomplished through intense exercise, diet, the use of supplements, cosmetic procedures and products. Most men we interviewed mentioned the importance of going to the gym on a regular basis and avoiding harmful foods in their diet in order to serve their ideals of physical fitness and sturdiness. Kerim (early 40s), for example, says 'I never eat anything after 9 PM For breakfast, I only have cereal and skimmed milk. I even forgot the taste of Nutella, which I used to love'. Osman (early 50s) makes a broader observation:

Now, it is a lifestyle to go to the gym. It does not matter if you are not really into bodybuilding or stuff. And for gays, there are certain gyms, which are cooler and more prestigious with which to have a membership. It is like a social club nowadays. [...] You can see the results of this trend. Many more people have better bodies than they did in the past. We [gays] were not used to exercise. It was considered as something too masculine for gays.

In addition to regular exercise and watching what they eat, some men talked about their heavy use of energy drinks and chemical supplements such as vitamins and ginseng.

With only regular visits to gym and eating the right food, you cannot gain and sustain muscles like mine. I always use supplements to protect my muscled look. It gives me my identity. (Feyzi, aged 37)

I always use a combo of vitamins and ginseng. Since I do not drink alcoholic beverages when I go out at night, I only drink soda and energy drinks, which also make you stronger and friskier. I can have up to three energy drinks in a row at one night. (Burhan, late 40s)

Part of this use of supplements was about keeping the body healthy and fit, while another side had to do with sexual performance. Several men talked about taking Viagra for prolonged periods in order to keep up with younger partners, and to continue, without erection problems, the level of sexual activity they had in their younger years. While some men opted for medical remedies such as Viagra, others preferred more traditional remedies such as grape molasses or aphrodisiac pastes made with spice and honey called 'macun' or 'Sultan macunu' (Sultan's paste) in local culture.

I also have *macun*. It gives you strength and makes your dick hard like a bone [...] I have used Viagra before but I am trying to keep myself away from it because I am afraid of my heart condition. (Burhan)

In the past, bottom guys did not need to get erections at all. Nobody even checked if they had one during sex. They were not judged by the lack [of erection]. Now, however, top boys look for your erection too, even though they do not use it. So, in order to show that you are okay, masculine, and healthy enough, you need an erection. I take Viagra, even though I am the bottom partner for most of the time. (Tugrul, aged 37)

Aside from body structure and performance, there are also anxieties about changes in appearance that require cosmetic interventions. Losing hair and getting wrinkles are signs of aging that gay men were trying to fight with rhinoplasty, eyelid surgery, liposuction, hair transplantation, breast reduction, chemical peelings, Botox treatments, collagen injections and microdermabrasion.

All gays, especially after the ages of 30-32, concentrate on their looks and how they can change it for the better... Hair is really significant for gay men, well, men in general, and you know in Turkey we lose our hair especially after our 30s. I guess it is about the genes. Many gay men smoke. It destroys their skin and teeth... Most of my friends have started to get Botox on their faces. I am still on the level of using expensive night creams, hoping that they will help. But if I think that it is necessary, I will probably get some Botox injection, too. Today, it is normal for straight men, let alone gay men. (Dogus, early 40s)

While not strictly related to the aging body, getting rid of unwanted body hair through laser removal or waxing was a concern for some men as well. Most of our respondents told us that an epilated, smooth body looks better, younger and sexier because it shows muscles, which men spend long hours at the gym to obtain. It is noteworthy that, like many other issues we are concerned with, in this article, our interviewees preferred to use heterosexual masculinity and its role models (i.e. singers, actors and soccer players) for legitimizing what they do with their bodies instead of the requirements of gay culture.

Of course you look better, you look younger [when your body hair is removed]. Singers also do that; they never pose with body hair. In the past, gay men used wax and a waxed body meant that he was passive. Now people use laser technology or creams that easily remove hair. And a shaved chest, even shaved legs, does not mean passivity [effeminacy] anymore. On the contrary, it may signal that you are into sports – a higher possibility for being top. (Halil, early 40s)

Hair on chest, just like the greyish beard, makes you look older immediately. If you are athletic enough and the color of your body hair is fair, you can trim it. It is also sexy. I think it gives a sense of masculinity that most Turks like. But generally it is better to get rid of it. It is cleaner, healthier and makes you look better, younger. It boosts your self-confidence. You do not look like your father this way. (Sercan)

Aging gay men's sociabilities

The most common social strategy adopted by our respondents against aging involved hanging out and forming channels of communication with queer men of younger generations. Such continued socialization and bonding with younger people made them feel less old, obsolete and anachronistic. It kept them knowledgeable about what is acceptable, fashionable and 'cool' in the contemporary youth culture, gay or otherwise.

Interviewer: Can you get along with younger people?

Engin (early 50s): Oh yes, I think I am a smart guy and I know what to do [to deal with them]. They do not need to be gay and we do not have to have sex. At the clinic, when they hire a junior doctor, I always approach him first [...] It gives you freshness; it gives you a new perspective. You know, I am at this age, and getting older. I must keep myself open to what the youngsters think and fancy. Even the language [they speak] is different [than mine].

My dear, my friends [of my age] do not know anything any more. They are stuck listening to Ajda Pekkan [a local pop music diva in her 70s] or Cher. It is history. They [the youngsters] prefer Justin Bieber or Rihanna. I spend my time learning from the younger gay boys. [...] It is true that I am sexually interested in them as well, but without being able to talk to them, presenting something attractive to them, you cannot have them either. Youth is something you cannot hold, it always goes in some other direction, and you have to keep chasing it. (Dogus)

Sometimes, being accepted in younger circles of friends proved to be difficult, particularly given the ageism in gay culture. Knowing this, gay men often resorted to acts of generosity, such as picking up the tab at social outings, or giving presents to the younger gay men with whom they spend time. However, it is important to note that these acts are considered different from sex work, even when there is a sexual relationship between the two.

I work really hard at my workplace. Twelve hours, six days. I come home, my partner comes, and we order food. After the meal we can survive for one or two hours at most. I am like the Marxist machine. My only pleasure is going out on Saturday nights and having fun on Sunday afternoons. [...] When I am with cool gay kids, I want to sparkle. I work in the communication industry and this is a plus. Young people love the stuff we do at work ... and of course I pay for their meals or drinks. If I am there, I pay for the entire table, as a rule. I make a lot of money that I cannot even spend. And paying for everybody all the time makes you an important customer. Everybody at the bar knows me and calls my name. It also makes me feel advantaged. And more manly; like, I am the boss here. I am the alpha-male. Then, people follow you. (Haluk, mid-40s)

Socializing with younger people required checking one's language, as Engin refers above, in order not to appear old – or remind younger men of one's age. In this effort to pass as young, tactical acts of speech are necessary. For example, older gay men tried not to use phrases like 'back in the days' or to talk about old times in a nostalgic manner. Turkish language is full of terms that were inherited from the old-fashioned Ottoman Turkish. Older people may be familiar with these terms as they grew up hearing them from their parents. Younger generations do not have knowledge of, or interest in, these words. Therefore, it becomes important what one says in addition to how one speaks as Burhan clarifies,

I never talk to them as I do with you now. I always control myself and show them what I want to show. I never get nostalgic or give history lessons. Who cares at which bar Zeki Muren [a deceased queer music star] was hanging out? Youngsters do not [...] My friends, who are checked out from sexuality, are so relaxed. They do not discipline themselves [to socialize with younger generations]. I am, on the contrary, quite watchful of what I say. I never use the old terms, the Ottoman words, or I never tell them if I remembered a past event, let's say the military coup in 1980. It is ancient for them! Always act as if you were born yesterday without any memories from the past.

Aging, sexuality and masculinity

The ever-shifting triangulation of top, bottom and versatile sexual 'roles' and the senses of identification, performance and the reputation derived from 'what you do in bed', are significant elements of the gay culture (Underwood, 2003). These 'roles', and their possible meanings, matter greatly to gay men in Turkey, where performing as a 'top-only' man may save one from the label of homosexuality (Ozbay, 2010; Tapinc, 1992). In the same vein, 'successful' and 'satisfying' sexual escapades with younger men alleviate the pressure originating from ageism for mature gay men that we interviewed. Being able to get

attention from, and having sex with, younger men corroborates the desired self-image of our respondents as charming, competent and healthy men in good shape. This understanding constitutes another step in the middle-aged and aging gay men's strategies that are deeply connected to the bodily tactics. However, this time the emphasis here is specifically on somatic encounters and erotic experiences. These encounters may involve one-time only, casual sex acts, regular sexual partnerships or 'friends with benefits' situations, but none of our informants conveyed interest in emotional engagement or long-term relations with sex partners from younger generations. Their sense of older gay masculinity, the idea of how a man of their age behaves appropriately and the self-vigilant discourses, i.e. 'not to make oneself ridiculous after this age', prevent them from falling in love with or developing emotions about younger sexual partners. Being in love with and exposing feelings for younger (and implicitly more masculine) men is read as another facet of the refrained de-masculinization.

More than half of our interviewees stated that they might abandon previous preferences for certain sexual positions, or 'roles', and were ready to accept being more versatile sexually. This flexible notion of sexuality generally extends to being more bottom, or 'bottom-only', as an automatic, or metabolic, outcome of aging.

Honey, being top or bottom matters only when you are young. At our age, just thank God that you have found someone. (Dogus)

The general trend is like this: people are more active [top] when they are younger. I do not really know if this is because of culture or age or the body hormones. Then, slowly you start bottoming occasionally. After the age of 30-35, you would get anything that comes up. (Onuralp, late 40s)

Aside from changing their roles in penetrative anal sex, aging gay men also sometimes switched to sexual acts that are outside of anal sex, like agreeing to perform oral sex instead. In other words, the cultural repertoire of sexuality expands and boundaries become less impervious as gay men grow older.

Now there is this new thing, they say 'let's have coffee together' or 'I will come but nothing will happen, we will just watch a movie'. You have to say 'okay, fine'. You play with their rules. If you say no and want sex, then, he would eliminate you and find someone else. After he comes here, I would do anything to have him. I would even give a blowjob, which I used not to do in the past. Which youngster would refuse a blowjob, right? (Yusuf)

It is more difficult, more emotional, or more meaningful for young boys to have anal sex as bottom. [It is] like *the kezban* ideology [lower class or peasant girls who protect their virginity before marriage]. They wait for a 'special one' even though they are not virgins any more. Still, they desist from doing it. At our age, it is like bread and butter. Then, you need to propose other things like cuddling and watching a movie together. Or, you must say that 'come, I promise there will be no anal sex'. Then he will come and give you head. This is what's written on the menu now. We have to adapt. (Kerim)

Aging and new technologies of gay intimacy

For our aging interviewees, having information on and using a variety of communication technologies and mobile applications constitute another remarkable aspect of 'fitting in' with the youth-oriented gay culture. Most of them said that they knew about, downloaded, and used such programs, including Grindr, Hornet, Tinder, Whatsapp, Instagram, Snapchat, Badoo, Skype, Swarm and Foursquare among many others. They had in-depth knowledge and mastery over these virtual mechanisms for socializing and sharing intimacy. After talking extensively about these applications and the communicative style via them, we came to understand that human contact for our interlocutors takes place primarily within these channels. In Osman's words, 'if you do not follow the latest technology, you are suddenly out of the game'.

Now, whomever you ask [among older gay men], they would tell you that they did not use these applications. They all lie. Not a single moment passes without checking your online accounts ... Now, real locations matter. Who's closest to you at that moment, keep checking. (Feyzi)

I have learnt the coolest apps from the youngsters. I was looking at Facebook and then one of the boys I see told me that Facebook is for grandmothers. He warned me to get Instagram and Tinder accounts. I did not even know these. It works well for me now. (Sercan)

Because looking young and presenting oneself as young, urban, and 'hip' is very desirable in gay culture – and what our respondents are keen about – the photos used in these applications are almost always manipulated with photo editing applications. Hence, proficiency in using these technological tools becomes another strategy for aging gay men to hide their age and boost their self-confidence.

Take a photo, but never use it in its raw form. It is so vulgar (*kiro*) to do that. I have five different applications to look better on photos. Photographs always tell lies; you better use it. (Haluk)

Even straights know how to use these programs and make themselves look more attractive. For us, it is vital because now everything starts and, for most of the time, ends with photos. If you have mastered processing your photos, you have a certain advantage ... I actively find places and catch the right light to pose and then use SnapSeed to look even cooler with faded colors and everything. (Bunyamin, mid-40s)

Conclusion

Gay men in Turkey assemble a number of endeavours and tactics to fight against the visible and hidden manifestations of aging. In doing so, they construct their own 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1988, p. 18) as they carefully distance themselves from the andropause discourse. Their avoidance of taking up the andropausal subject position reveals a significant, yet previously unnoticed, aspect of the definitions of andropause: How the concept is imagined heteronormatively and how divergent the paths for aging gay and straight men may be. The first generation of 'modern gay men' in Turkey are growing older without the legal rights, institutional protection or social inclusivity available to a certain extent in the Global North. As this occurs, they construct who they are through an ambivalence between the good and bad sides of getting older in the midst of a strong self-imposed ageism. This is evident in the devaluation of their memories, the dismissive approach to linguistic structures and their fears of becoming ridiculous as they attempt to remain young.

Aging presents specific cultural (gendered) issues to certain groups of a population. In the narratives of our respondents, 'accelerated aging' and the 'aging capital' seem to coincide and give an opportunity for them to navigate their way between the external outcomes of aging and to embrace the enriching effects aging has on inner selves. It is crucial to note that aging gay men are located outside the frameworks of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative gender ideologies – if not entirely marginalized and ostracized by them. We witness serious cultural translations from the heterosexual world into the gay vernacular, such as the legitimation of body hair removal and the use of photo editing applications. However, our respondents showed some unique perspectives towards the aging process. For example, they transform themselves sexually towards more flexible persons and celebrate new erotic possibilities as the male body moves from production to consumption phrases. Problems of potency might expose themselves for aging gay men, too; but their capability to expand sexual possibilities distinguishes them from their heterosexual counterparts.

We have discussed in this article that aging gay men in Turkey face marginalization, de-masculinization and ageism as their bodies show signs of failure and weariness and as their meaning-making activities seem dated or extinct. They, however, do not accept becoming the passive victims of the exclusionary aging process and they dissociate themselves from being medicalized subjects of andropause. Instead, they persistently keep investing in themselves through bodily, social, sexual and technological methods in order to maintain their integrated and connected, proud, and well-functioning personas in the margins of the global gay culture.

Notes

1. Gay men's anti-aging ventures look similar to the experiences of middle-class Turkish women of menopausal age, with deep concerns for losing a youthful appearance (and having marital troubles because of it), and were inclined to take hormone treatments as a remedy (Erol, 2014).
2. For some examples of this literature (see, Calasanti & King, 2005; Connell, 2012; Courtenay, 2000; Croghan et al., 2014; Cruz, 2003; Fox, 2007; Gardner et al., 2014; Heaphy, 2007; Hostetler, 2004; Jones & Pugh, 2005; Kong, 2012;

Lodge & Umberson, 2013; Marshall, 2007; Marshall & Katz, 2002; Mercer, 2013; Sandberg, 2015; Scott, 2015; Simpson, 2013; Slevin, 2008; Slevin & Linneman, 2010; Woody, 2014).

3. As a contrasting point about the desirability of older men, there is a trope of mature gay male, which has been an important theme of gay porn especially in the 1970s, and made a comeback recently in the subgenre of 'Daddy porn'. In this context, the 'dirty old man' stereotype is eroticized, sometimes in the enactments of predatory and abusive scenarios, and sometimes from the point of view of the younger men who actively seek older men as objects of desire (Mercer, 2013). Similarly, some bear and BDSM communities are places where older gay men are valued as sexual partners).
4. Two respondents mentioned that when they were younger they had bisexual orientations and one said he 'might still have a sexual interest in women' although he had never actually been with a woman.
5. For racialized older gay men, see Woody (2014).
6. The only source that investigates the intersection of Islamic lifestyle and homosexual men in Turkey is an article by Bereket and Adam (2008). They contend that, 'for many of the men interviewed here the tension between their sexuality and religious prescriptions was insoluble: they tended to lose religious convictions as they participated in the "gay scene"' (2008, p. 218). This distance from religious way of life in general, and Islam in particular, which is quite common especially among middle-class urban gay men in Turkey, is also confirmed through the interviews we have conducted.

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Notes on contributors

Maral Erol is an associate professor at Isik University in Istanbul, Turkey. She has a PhD in Science and Technology Studies from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and a BA and MA in Political Science and International Relations. After receiving her PhD, she completed her postdoctoral fellowship at Duke University. Her research interests are men and masculinities; and gender, science and technology relations with a focus on biomedical technologies and medicalization. She published on topics such as medicalization of menopause in Turkey, perceptions of osteoporosis and risk in menopause, discourses of normal and abnormal menstruation, and andropause and male aging.

Genk Ozbay is an associate professor at Sabanci University in Istanbul, Turkey. He received his PhD in sociology from University of Southern California. He is particularly interested in masculinities, sexualities, class, workplace, neoliberalism, globalization, the city and mobilities. His recent publications include the co-edited volume *The Making of Neoliberal Turkey* (Routledge 2015) and 'Nocturnal Queers: Rent Boys' Masculinity in Istanbul' (*Sexualities*. 13:5 2010).

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