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**Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being  
*Californian Medicine, Embodiment, Metaphysics,  
and the Absence of Love***

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

at

**The University of Waikato**

by

**Craig Hillgrove**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

**2021**

*“The thesis is erudite and impressive, highly publishable” and “illuminating”.*

*“This is very interesting analytical work and the candidate demonstrates very solid interpretive gifts in socio-historical reconstruction”.*

Anthony Elliott (PhD Examiner)

*“The unexamined life is not worth living.”*

Socrates (Plato’s *Apology*, 399 B.C.E., 38a5–6)

## **Abstract**

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Primarily, contemporary understandings of embodied praxis concerned with the reconfiguration and reinvention of the body and one’s identity are guided by biomedical and mechanical (the body/mind is as a biological organism and machine) or/and social constructionist (the body/mind is as a social being) worldviews (Birke, 2019; Butler, 1990; 2014; Canguilhem, 1992; 2008; Crossley, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Frank, 2012; Goldberg, 1984; Holmes, Murray & Foth, 2017; Kirk, 1997; 2004; Shildrick, 2008; Shilling, 2012; 2016; Turner, 2008). This study attempts to challenge and transgress these ontological and epistemological assumptions by drawing upon a postmaterialist (Beauregard, 2021; Miller, 2014) neo-Nietzschean understanding of embodiment and men’s body practices. Subsequently, I endeavour to theoretically and empirically reimagine how scholars predominantly analyse the self by taking the position that – life is an ongoing struggle between the wills, demands and phantasms of the soul, the physiological body and the moralities of culture (Nietzsche, 1882) – from which existential experiences and a desire to change one’s body image arise.

Inspired by Continental philosophy, my analysis of the soul-body-culture-praxis nexus is achieved by utilising and interweaving: a) the embodiment theories of Bourdieu, Nietzsche, Foucault, Freud, and Lacan, and b) poststructural and psychoanalytic discourse analytic techniques (i.e., Butlerian/Žižekian discourse analysis (Butler, 1989; 1990; 2014; Žižek, 2009)) to interpret the life histories and social milieus of a cohort of men (aged 27–40) living in (West) Los Angeles, California. Specifically, I focus on men’s use of synthetic androgens (i.e., AAS, Hch, hGH) to exacerbate, unravel and highlight the role biopedagogies play in managing the embodied ‘*tensions of the self and discourses of being*’ within a hyper-capitalist society that idealises the beautified celebrity body. Consequently, this postdisciplinary (Pernecky, 2019; Sayer, 2000; 2003) study provides an array of insights relating to men’s (mental) health, sexualities, desires, fears, identity and biopolitics, and the commodification of the self – a performative mode of being adopted to overcome and improve one’s social position and quality of life.

I conclude this study by summarising and contextualising my research findings within a theory that I have coined ‘*Displaced Humanism*’. This is a theory of embodied praxis describing how the body and soul become discursively subjugated by culture and the reflexive practices participants have adopted to awaken from and psychically transcend the sublime matrix of ideology to reconnect with the *authentic self* (Bourdieu, 1990; Kierkegaard, 1849; Nietzsche, 1886b; Winnicott, 1965; 1971; 2018).

## **Declaration by Author**

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This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, financial support and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my higher degree by research candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

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## **Acknowledgments**

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## **Keywords**

embodiment, psychoanalysis, desire, identity, aesthetics, androgens, Lacan, Freud, Nietzsche, Bourdieu, metaphysics, existentialism, body image, consciousness

## **Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classifications (ANZSRC)**

ANZSRC code: 1608, Sociology, 40%

ANZSRC code: 1701, Psychology, 40%

ANZSRC code: 2203, Philosophy, 20%

“It is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*”

Fredrich Nietzsche (1872, Section 5)



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# List of Abbreviations

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## Abbreviations

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<i>a</i>	object cause of desire
AAS	anabolic androgenic steroids
ADHD	attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
BDSM	bondage, discipline, dominance, submission, sadomasochism (erotic practices)
B.M.I.	body mass index
cc	cubic centimetre
DADT	‘don’t ask don’t tell’ (military policy of the United States of America)
<b>D</b>	discourse, discursive
DL	down-low (discrete homosexual interactions)
DMAs	designated market areas
DTCA	direct-to-consumer advertising
e.g.	exempli gratia (for example)
Etc.	et cetera
G/GHB	gamma hydroxybutyrate
GPS	global positioning system
hcG	human chorionic gonadotropin
Hch/HCH	hexachlorocyclohexane
hGH/HGH	human growth hormone
HIV	human immunodeficiency viruses
i.e.	id est (in other words)
<b>J/JΦ</b>	jouissance (a form of enjoyment/pleasure)
JAMA	Journal of the American Medical Association
<b>JO</b>	perceived jouissance of the other
Kg	kilogram
K	thousand dollars



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## Abbreviations

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L.A.	Los Angeles
LGBT	lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual
LGBTQI	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, intersexed community
Mk677	ibutamoren
<i>m</i>	material body
ml	millilitre
NCAA	National Collegiate Athletic Association
ng/dL	nanograms per decilitre
Rad140	selective androgen receptor modulator
RBT	reflexive body technique(s)
SARMs	selective androgen receptor modulators
<i>s</i>	soul
Test.	synthetic testosterone
T/Tina	crystal methamphetamine
TRT	testosterone replacement therapies
U.S.	United States of America
USD	American dollar
WEHO	West Hollywood (Los Angeles, California)
IX	nine
X	ten

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# List of Symbols

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## Symbols

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$\mathcal{S}$	tensions of the self/split subject
+	plus
=	equals
%	percent
<i>D</i>	discourse, discursive
<i>m</i>	material body
<i>s</i>	soul
$\longleftrightarrow$	embodied tensions
&	and
I, II, III, IV	1, 2, 3, 4
V, VI, VII	5, 6, 7
VIII, IX, X	8, 9, 10

---

*“In its barbaric jargon, in its legalistic syntax, in its statistical tables, in its obsession with the humdrum, sociology has made society as dull as it is at its worst. Indeed, sociology has exercised some skill in separating the yolk of contemporary man’s egg, and poking around in the white. It is time for sociology to wake up...and see if it cannot discover a little to laugh at, a little to blush at, in our world.”*

John Carroll (2015, p. 5)

## **INTRODUCING**

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### **‘TENSIONS OF THE SELF AND DISCOURSES OF BEING’**

Poststructuralist philosophy has attracted many critics since its adoption and widespread use during the 1950s – rationalists, empiricists, neo-conservatives, liberals, structuralists, humanists and others, who have criticized the movement’s inability to develop and translate its abstract concepts and logics into viable social and political theory (Howarth, 2013; Lemert, 1995). Others have critiqued its philosophical presuppositions of an absence of reality beyond language, its disregard for material matter, and its conceptions of subjectivity, agency, power and identity which typically exist as constructs of meaning within the realm of dialectics (Elliott & Frosh, 2002; Elliott & Prager, 2016; Poster, 2019; Seidman, 1995). Similarly, within contemporary scholarship, psychoanalysis has been pronounced ineffective and dead as a form of scholarly inquiry (Chancer & Andrews, 2014; Chodorow, 2014; Crossley, 2006; Elliott, 1998; 2020; Elliott & Spezzano, 2019; Frosh, 2016; Lupton, 2008; Weinstein, 2001; Žižek, 2006), perceived as:

outdated scientifically, in that, the Freudian model of consciousness has been superseded by neurobiology; outdated clinically where the talking cure has lost ground to drug treatment or behavioural therapy; outdated socially, where the idea that we are repressed by the norms of others is no longer stocked into today’s supermarket of free choices (Žižek & Grosz, 2017, 5<sup>th</sup> October).

However, in recent times, poststructural scholars like Slavoj Žižek, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz and Rosi Bradotti (Continental philosophers) have reinvigorated the philosophies of Freud, Lacan, Nietzsche, Hegel, Deleuze and Nietzsche to offer innovative insights and pragmatic solutions to address the complex issues of the modern neo-liberal world. Consequently, more and more scholars have become inspired to transgress the self-imposed ontological boundaries of the social sciences to offer new accounts of embodiment, consciousness, identity, culture and politics.

In doing so, the usefulness and importance of social and psychoanalytic theory as an analytical tool has been re-realized to “recommit to creative, ambitious and imaginative intellectualism”

(Redhead, 2017). This challenges the empirical dogmas of knowledge that have suffocated the production of new forms of scholarship for too long, encouraging scholars to re-imagine stale conceptualizations of humanity, space and time. In my opinion, given the political, economic, health and environmental challenges that the globe faces, now is the time to dare to think different; now is the time to use theory in innovative ways to come up with much-needed solutions to the problems of the world.

Grounded in Continental philosophy, this postdisciplinary (Pernecky, 2019; Sayer, 2000; 2003) study draws on the poststructural and psychoanalytic insights of Fredrich Nietzsche, reinterpreted via a postmaterialist ontology (*see Chapter 2*), to examine the ongoing struggles between the wills, demands and phantasms of the soul, the physiological body, and the moralities of culture (Nietzsche, 1882), from which the use of biopedagogies emerge. This is achieved by adopting a multivariant approach (Braidotti, 2019), methodologically and theoretically, to explore the various discursive, material, and psychic processes of embodiment and men’s lived experiences in relation to their use of body techniques, notably synthetic androgens. Žižek (2009) describes this kind of analysis, a common strategy used within psychoanalytic/poststructural research (e.g., Badiou, Bataille, Baudrillard, de Beauvoir, Braidotti, Freud, Grosz, Kristeva, Lacan, Irigaray), as the *parallax view*. This approach theoretically and discursively explores and dissects a subject, object, symptom, trauma, or/and phenomenon from various viewpoints. Within the context of this study, I am interested in how the embodied tensions and discourses of the self, produced by the competing demands of the soul, material body, and culture, a/effect a person’s subjectivities and body practices.

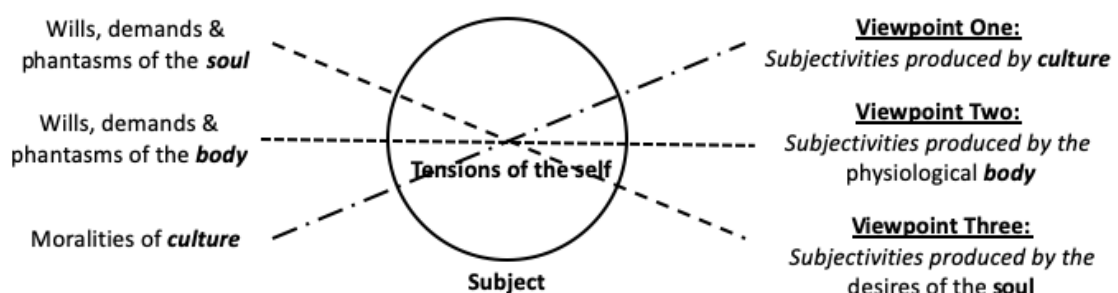


Figure A. The Parallax View: A Neo-Nietzschean Ontology

To support a neo-Nietzschean analysis of the *'tensions of the self and discourses of being'* I draw on a suite of theoretical tools conceived by, primarily, Bourdieu, Foucault, and Freud (*see Chapter 4*), reinterpreted and pulled together within a *'triads of being'* framework (*see Chapter 2*).

Žižek (2009) notes that by unifying seemingly opposite and contradictory theories within a multi-dimensional framework (i.e., *a parallax view, neo-Nietzschean worldview*), and examining how they fall into and conflict with each other, is how new knowledge genuinely emerges. Within this study, this allows for an analysis of the intersectionality of the embodied subject and their body practices from three distinct viewpoints – the wills, demands and phantasms of the body and soul, and the moralities of culture – from which tensions of the self are experienced. For Žižek (2009) and Cornel West (1989), among others, this approach overcomes the scholarly need for epistemological purity and the limitations of binary thinking (i.e., nature-nurture, structure-agency, free will-determinism) which only provides an incomplete view of the world and humanity, grounded in a naïve ontological ideology as opposed to any pragmatic scholarship.

In addition to the use of theory and *a priori* knowledge (knowledge beyond the empirical, material, and measurable, e.g., logic, conceptual, primordial knowledge), I utilise *a posteriori* knowledge (empirical observations) (Boghossian, 2001; Jenkins, 2012; Kant, 1787/1965; Plato, 1887) to reveal how discursive and cultural influences affect a person's lived experience and embodied praxis. Specifically, I attempt to achieve this by conducting life history interviews with a cohort of men (aged 27–40) and ethnographic observations of their psychogeography, (West) Los Angeles, California. This qualitative research, in conjunction with a theoretical framework, is then analysed with a variety of poststructural and psychoanalytic discourse analytic techniques (i.e., Butlerian/Žižekian discourse analysis) (Butler, 1989; 1990; 2014; Žižek, 2001; 2009) to bring to life the narratives of the participants engaged in this study (*see Chapter 3*). Unifying life histories and ethnographic methodologies with poststructural discourse analysis enables in-depth exploration and layered examination of the participants' lives, relationships, and body practices within (and beyond) the city of (West) Los Angeles (*see Chapters 5–10*).

A poststructural–psychoanalytic position facilitates an interpretation of the participants' narratives and their socio-cultural milieus that transcends beyond the illusions of the empirical (*a posteriori* knowledge and analytic philosophy). As demonstrated by *Plato's Cave* (375 B. C. E.; 2017), whereby the “educated mind” differs from reality, literal interpretations of a person's sense experience often fail to provide any guarantee of “truth”. From a poststructural and psychoanalytic perspective, discourse acts as a facade that displaces the realities, jouissance and traumas of the self and culture from being realised – the illusion of scientific truths, the abuse of power, the ego's denial of one's vulnerabilities, and the cultural conditioning of the subconscious mind (Braidotti, 2019; Butler, 2019; Elliott, 1998; Foucault, 1972; Freud, 1923; 1938; 1953; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Lacan, 1953; Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013; Sheldrake, 2012; Žižek, 1998; 2007). To overcome this discursive obscuring of a pre-discursive reality and the subjective mind, theoretical conceptualisations relating to the embodied subject, in conjunction with poststructural discourse analysis, are utilised to expose the

human experiences behind the embodied veil of symbolic meanings and significations expressed and represented within the participants' life histories. As a result, revealing the existential struggles of the contemporary subject and the role biopedagogies play in negotiating one's relationship with the self and their identity within a quickly changing neo-liberal globalised world that privileges immediacy, productivity, beauty, youth, sex, materialism, technology, identity politics, liberalism and 'free-market' economics (Elliott, 2008; 2009; 2013; 2015; 2019; 2019b; 2021; Elliott & Urry, 2010; Martschukat, 2021). Thus, turning the discursively displaced, suppressed, forbidden, empirically invisible, signified yet not said, private and intimate encounters of the self into the visible (i.e., the emotions of lust, love, fear, and neuroticism).

In addition to the theoretical and poststructural discourse analysis tools that I have used to explore the lived experiences of a cohort of men residing in Los Angeles - developed by studying art and design history, sociology, psychology and cultural studies - I draw upon my innate empathic and observational gifts. During my life, I have developed these personal attributes by working as a health practitioner within a diverse range of geographies, including New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, Italy, France, Spain and the United States of America. From these various professional experiences, I have gained invaluable insights into the lives of others – from the homeless to the ultra-wealthy – within a diverse range of cultures. Subsequently, developing a deep awareness and understanding of the relationship and tensions between the mind, body and culture and the a/effects on one's praxis (i.e., exercise and health regimes, drug, alcohol and sex addiction, body dysmorphia). Collectively, these skills and experiences have been critical to examining the inner and outer worlds of the embodied subject – *'the tensions of the self and discourses of being'*.

## **I. 'Hollywood' and the Production of the American Dream and the Commodified Symbolic Self**

One of southern California's most prominent chroniclers, Carey McWilliams (1946), observed that Los Angeles, Hollywood "exists as a state of mind, not as a geographical entity" (p. 330). Culturally detached from the conservative politics and values deeply ingrained within the cultural landscapes and the lived experiences of those who live within other parts of the country, it is an "island on the land" (McWilliams, 1946, p. 1). Today these observations continue to be pertinent, as most people initially become acquainted with the lures Hollywood and Los Angeles via the pluralistic images and discourses that are communicated and projected via the films and award ceremonies, which convey a world of glitz and glamour, beautiful women and handsome men, mega-mansions and sports cars. In the process, Los Angeles has established itself as a global city, producing and transmitting the ideals of American culture

– a hybridization of popular culture, postmodernity, and American capitalism, to a worldwide audience (Giovacchini, 2003; Gladstone & Fainstein, 2003). It is the epicentre of American and global visual arts performances and production, and the home to American performativity and the commodified self. The illusions of cinematography affirm, reaffirm and reproduce an American identity, signifying American exceptionalism and success, attracting aspiring artists, musicians, actors and directors to its politically progressive, yet cosmetically materialistic, social milieu (Szántó, 2003).

However, behind the celebrated visual spectacle of the discourses of the American dream lies the embodied realities, tensions, stresses and strains of the general population trying to live up to the symbolic expectations that have subliminally consumed their sense of being, truth and intentionality. In reality, the economy of Los Angeles reflects a highly skewed income distribution with large numbers of low-skilled migrant workers, low and under-paid employers, and homeless people (i.e., ‘Skid Row’) juxtaposed with the high earnings of a comparatively few investment bankers, real estate agents, tech-entrepreneurs, corporate lawyers, entertainers and motion picture professionals (Gladstone & Fainstein, 2003). Compared to other nations, Americans work more than any other country in the industrialized world, take fewer vacations, work longer days, and retire later (Bick, Brüggemann & Fuchs-Schündeln, 2016). Yet, despite their work ethic, many Americans are experiencing an ever-increasing sense of loss of social and economic mobility and job security (Bluestone & Rose, 1997; Ciulla, 2000; Gambles, Lewis & Rapoport, 2012). For the American middle and working-class of Los Angeles and beyond, their humanism, economic freedoms and quality of life that previous generations once enjoyed have seemingly eroded into the memories of yesteryear (Hedges, 2018; 2010; Reich, 2013; 2016).

To revitalize one’s sense of self – personal wills, drives and desires, overcome economic adversity and the inhibitive discourses of their past (i.e., ‘blue-collar’ upbringing), and compete in a capitalist ‘free-market’, ‘Californian/Appearance Medicine’ practices are commonly embraced by many Los Angeles residents to (re)brand, commodify and project the illusion of an identity ready for success (Albright, 2007; Elliott, 2018; 2013; 2008; Shilling, 2016; Reichert & Lambiase, 2013; Urban Reform Institute, 2021). Subliminally, in praxis, the self is induced into a symbolic performative self that mirrors the lives of Hollywood’s bourgeois, aristocracy and celebrities to attain similar success or/and just to put food on the table. Whilst simultaneously culturally subjugating the primordial pre-discursive needs of the body and soul as the self becomes something other than itself - a hyper-capitalist being. Thus, Los Angeles provides fertile ground to examine the ongoing struggles between the wills, demands and phantasms of the soul, the physiological body, and the moralities of culture (Nietzsche, 1882); and the role ‘Californian Medicine’ (e.g., synthetic androgens) plays in negotiating and managing the real, symbolic, and imaginary ‘*Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being*’.

## II. Testosterone the Wonder Drug: Fuelling Men's Desires Since the 1940s

Since the 1940s, synthetic testosterone has been the hormone of choice for physicians and their patients. “It has played all the major roles in which a charismatic hormone can function: it has been regarded as a rejuvenating drug, as a sexually stimulating drug, and as a doping drug that builds muscle and boosts athletic performance” (Hoberman, 2005, p. 1). Developed by competing pharmaceutical companies attempting to duplicate the already-established and lucrative female hormone therapy market, American scientists enthusiastically observed and reported in the 1942 *Journal of the American Medical Association* (*JAMA*) various metabolic improvements in “sexual function and stimulation”, “mental and physical vigor”, and “constitutional rehabilitation” amongst male patients injected with synthetic testosterone. “Over the next several decades, the growing use of testosterone and its derivatives, the anabolic-androgenic steroids, would demonstrate that many people were interested in using testosterone products for a variety of purposes” (Hoberman, 2005, p. 2).

Initially, once testosterone had achieved acceptance as a medical tool amongst physicians, ‘organ therapy’ became a fashionable form of treatment for “frigid” women, homosexuality, male menopause and unproductive ageing men (Hoberman, 2005). Thus, assisting individuals to fulfil their “social and economic responsibilities” (Thompson & Heckel, 1939, p. 452). Scientists and physicians then turned their attention to restoring men’s energy levels and libidos, with the intent of enabling men to perform their marital duties with renewed vigour and chutzpah (Werner, 1945). Taking note of these scientific discoveries, the influential American journalist Paul de Kruif (1945) popularized testosterone as a wonder drug in his book *The Male Hormone*. Following de Kruif’s lead, the news publication *Newsweek* promoted testosterone as “*Hormones for He-Men*”, a health tonic to “extend the prime life of men” (Newsweek, 1945, p. 90) – drawing attention and enthusiasm from the general public.

Despite warnings issued by the American Medical Association, due to popular demand, testosterone treatments became available in pill form for mass consumption throughout the United States, promoted by physicians as a ‘well-being’ drug. Consequently, “testosterone became a charismatic drug because it promised sexual stimulation and renewed energy for individuals and greater productivity for modern society”, and it remains a popular ‘stimulant’ to this day (Hoberman, 2005, p. 3).

Today, the ever-increasing use of ‘designer androgens’ appears to be primarily sustained by men's desire and need to enhance muscle growth, reduce adipose body fat and slow the ageing process – commercially presented as a hazard-free treatment with minimal effects (Hoberman, 2005; 2014;



2017; Pope, 2000; 2017). For most men (and women) who seek these physiological changes, underpinning these desires is the perceived opportunity to improve their physical appearance, sex appeal, health, and career prospects (Jordan-Young & Karkazis, 2019; Morgentaler & Traish, 2020; Pope & Kanayama 2018; Shield, 2015; Underwood, 2017). However, despite various studies reporting the potential benefits of androgens when administered in micro dosages (Amsterdam, Nutt, Phillips & Brink, 2015), medical researchers continue to have concerns that the consumption of exogenous testosterone may stimulate the growth of existing cancers and other significant health abnormalities (Pope et al., 2013; Pope et al., 2014; Vance, 2003). Exacerbating these health risks is the potential for individuals to consume synthetic testosterone outside of a regulated clinical setting. For example, various medical clinics and needle exchanges located in the United States and the United Kingdom have reported vials of testosterone derivatives sold on the black-market containing vinegar, olive oil, gasoline, rat poison and customized alcohol solutions leading to cardiovascular stress and premature deaths for those who have consumed them (Pope et al., 2000). Harrison Pope, a preeminent expert in the field, remains cautious and warns against the use of synthetic testosterone, illegal or otherwise, as the long-term effects remain unknown (Pope et al., 2013; Pope et al., 2014).

The prevailing and expanding, yet minimal, scope of literature examining (wo)men's consumption and experiences of synthetic testosterone, predominantly underpinned by positivist, interpretive and social constructionist perspectives (Locks & Richardson, 2012), offers limited one-dimensional insights which often neglect the complexities of an individual's psychic life. Often influenced by a negative bias, the majority of research exploring testosterone use focuses on the detrimental psychological and biophysiological effects of illegitimate androgens (Keane, 2005), acquired via the black market, amongst professional and amateur athletes (Pope & Kanayama, 2014), bodybuilders and non-competitive weightlifters (Cohen, et al., 2007; Grace, Baker & Davies, 2009; Keane, 2009; Monaghan, 1999; 2002; 2002b; Pope et al., 2000; Pope et al., 2013; Pope et al., 2014; Wright, Grogan & Hunter, 2000). Supposedly, as a result of increased scrutiny "being placed upon all young males in terms of the archetypal male body and what it should look like...from a variety of perspectives including popular culture, peers, and societal and cultural expectations" (Drummond, 2003, p. 132); and the competitive pressures and financial incentives of professional sport (Hoberman, 2011; 2014; Moller, Waddington, Hoberman, 2015; Newton, 2019; Waddington et al., 2013). Alan Klein (1986, 1993, 1995), exemplified these pessimistic attitudes towards testosterone users in his study investigating the competitive bodybuilding culture of four major Californian gyms, suggesting "bodybuilders are neurotically insecure and engage in a futile search for hyper-masculine body image" (1986, p. 138) and likened them to cartoon characters.

Moving beyond the propagated coercive a/effects of popular culture and its adverse relationship to (men's) body image (dissatisfaction) and androgen practices, British scholars have found testosterone

users are motivated by: curiosity, peer/role model influencers, social status and recognition, competitive sports and bodybuilding, health and wellness (Christiansen, Vinther & Liokaftos, 2016). Other motives identified by sociologists include – creating a better-looking body (Kimergård, 2015; Monaghan, 2002), developing a sexually desirable body (Shield, 2015), real and imagined increases in muscle mass and strength (Jennings, Patten, Kennedy, & Kelly, 2014; Monaghan, 2002), improved self-esteem (Mekolichick, 2001), heightened “sensuous bodily pleasure” during intense anaerobic exercise (Monaghan, 2002, p. 700) and having the ability to recover from training and injuries more efficiently (Van Hout & Kean, 2015). Mair Underwood (2017) suggests drug use “demands a more nuanced and contextualised analysis” than existing approaches allow as “drug use never occurs outside of culture, nor is simply located within cultural contexts. Rather, drugs are significant players in the formation of cultural and political landscapes as well as being formed by their involvement in the social world” (p.78). Drawing on a ‘social life of things’<sup>1</sup> approach to understanding the complex interplay between drugs, metaphysics and culture within a contextualised perspective, Underwood (2017) reports image and performance-enhancing drugs empowered (young) men to transform their lives by improving their social status and social confidence due to the schematic changes made to the materiality of their bodies’ image.

From this relatively small cadre of research one can conclude that “we know little about how the shift from competitive contexts to recreational contexts has changed motivations, use, and the experience” of androgens (Underwood, 2017); and the various socio-cultural, psychological and biological factors and desires that encourage young (wo)men to consume them. While some psychological and sociological research suggests the motives of testosterone users are driven by desires to increase their confidence and sexual attractiveness (Cohen, et al., 2007; Shield, 2015) researchers have not successfully discovered how these desires are shaped, manifested and experienced. In the next section, I attempt to reveal the embodied complexities of lived experiences in relation to men’s body practices by outlining the objectives, goals and scope of this project.

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<sup>1</sup> Developed within material culture studies for ethnographic research, a ‘social lives’ approach to drug use takes on meaning through common social experiences in the context of social relations, and as having implications for these relations (Whyte, van der Geest & Hardon, 2002) by challenging traditional dichotomies of person/thing, animate/inanimate and subject/object (Miller, 2010). A social lives approach sees drugs not only as signifying or representing us but as helping to create us, as it is through our interaction with the material world that we assume the norms we call culture (Miller, 2010).

### III. Objectives, Goals and Scope

Throughout this study, I adopt a poststructural multivariant approach (Braidotti, 2019; Žižek, 2009) (pp. 2-4) to explore a cohort of Los Angeles men's (testosterone) body practices and the exogenous and endogenous desires, imperatives and discourses that underpin them. In doing so, I challenge and move beyond traditional and limiting epistemological and ontological systems of knowledge to examine the relationship between the embodied subject and praxis. Specifically, this study endeavours to:

1. Examine how the human subject has been conceived within the existing literature from poststructural, psychoanalytic and philosophical perspectives centred around the writings of Bourdieu, Nietzsche, Freud and Lacan.
2. Theoretically explore the embodied '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' that underpin men's biopedagogics, grounded in Nietzsche's (1882) belief that *life is an ongoing struggle between the wills, demands and phantasms of the soul, the physiological body, and the moralities and discourses of culture*.
3. Examine the ways commercially produced androgens have (re)emerged as a popular American health and image enhancing practice, and question the 'truth' claims embedded within their use.
4. Explore the embodied a/effects of biopedagogics, notably synthetic testosterone, on the male participants' sense of self and their relationships with others.

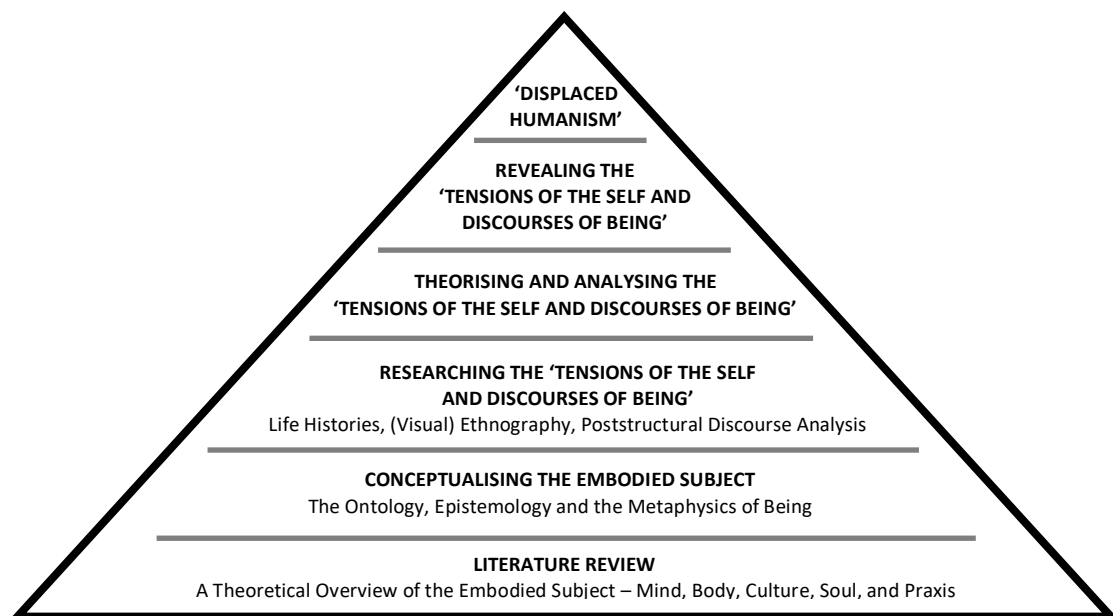
From an epistemological and ontological perspective, Richard Pringle (2016) rightly points out, scholars and theorists of the body and embodiment should be sceptical of essentialist biological deterministic notions of the self that pre-determine the outcomes of a person's lived experiences (i.e., based on a person's intelligence, gender, ethnicity, (dis)ability, sexuality, somatotype, age, and so on). However, as Steven Pinker (2002) notes: "if there are dangers in embracing too strong a doctrine of human nature, there are also dangers in denying human nature" (p. 69). He argues that the denial of human nature (i.e., biological functions, desires and inherited personality traits), encouraged by the development of postmodernism and the turn to linguistics in the mid-to-late-20<sup>th</sup> Century, has become a significant issue within the social sciences (Pinker, 2002). From his point of view, human beings analysed within socio-constructionist and poststructural frameworks have often been regarded as 'blank slates' on which coercive social processes of power are symbolically drawn, marked and embedded.

To overcome the dichotomy between the material and the discursive body, embodiment scholars are increasingly embracing somatic and a/effective turns (Silk, Andrews & Thorpe, 2017) to examine and theorise the relationship between subjectivity, corporeality and identity. Such achievements are represented in the writings of contemporary scholars including Loic Wacquant, Bryan Turner, Nick Crossley, Chris Shilling, Eric Anderson, Ken Plummer, Arthur Frank, Elizabeth Grosz, Rosi Braidotti, Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek. Each of these scholars reveal how the materialism of the body and its diasporic biological, psychic and social processes, desires, needs and modes of being play an important part in how subjectivities and identities are formed, and active/ageing/ill/sexed bodies are experienced. However, within this scholarship, the existence and importance of the human soul – as identified by postmaterialists (Beauregard, 2021; Beauregard, Trent & Schwartz, 2018; Groome & Roberts, 2016; Miller, 2012; Woollacott & Schwartz, 2019) – is principally ignored and dismissed. Subsequently, this project endeavours to challenge the assumptions made by present-day embodiment theorists by researching the tensions beyond the binary positions of biological essentialism and social constructionism by examining the interrelationship between the soul, body, culture and praxis. Thus, I attempt to give rise to new interpretations, discoveries and understandings of the embodied subject and their embodied pleasures, drives and pains.

From a poststructural-psychoanalytic perspective the role of an analyst is to take an individual's subjectivities, lived experiences, embodied angst, desires and anxieties seriously, and reveal their psychic and socio-cultural origins (Chodorow, 1994/2014; Elliott, 2013, 2016; Žižek, 2006). This form of analysis, I suggest, moves beyond dour empiricism, which often overly simplifies and displaces where the real issues lie and how anxiety is expressed, as it acknowledges that *'tensions of the self'* are complex, dynamic, multiplicitous, and displaced in different forms. Thus, this project – *'Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being'* – seeks to identify:

- a) how desire functions in contemporary society and,
- b) how desire takes form in contemporary culture via the body (i.e., aesthetics, body pedagogics), and endeavours to deliver a significant and original contribution of knowledge by introducing a dynamic (postmaterial) theoretical framework and methodological tools that critically examine the complexities and interplay between contemporary embodiment, (American) culture and 'Californian/Appearance Medicine'.

To lay a foundation for this study, I now give a brief overview, primarily from poststructural perspectives, of the literature, philosophies and scholars relating to the embodied subject consisting of a body, soul and culture (*Chapter 1*). Following the literature review, I outline the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this research (*Chapter 2*), the methodologies (*Chapter 3*), and the theoretical framework (*Chapter 4*) used to reveal, interpret, analyse and give an intimate account of a cohort of American men’s life histories. These life histories, which transverse the struggles between the discursive demands of culture, the wills and desires of the soul, and needs of the physical body, managed and negotiated with an array of body practices (particularly synthetic androgens), are shared in *Chapters 5–9*. The study concludes with my theorisation of the participants lived experiences – a process I have termed ‘*Displaced Humanism*’ (*Chapter 10*).



**Figure B. Research Overview of the ‘Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being’**

*“Embodiment is contextual, enmeshed within the specifics of place, time, physiology, and culture, which together compose enactment... inherently performative, subject to individual enactments, and therefore always to some extent improvisational”.*

Katherine Hayles (1999, p. 96-98)

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## **REVIEWING THE EMBODIED SUBJECT: MIND, BODY, SOUL, CULTURE AND PRAXIS**

### **I. Embodiment, Body Image and Psychoanalysis**

Drawing on Nietzsche's, Freud's and Lacan's philosophical and psychoanalytic understandings of embodiment, in this section, I give a concise overview of their work relating to the processes of, and the interplay between, consciousness, the body (image), desire and identity, which are relevant to this project.

#### ***Nietzsche's Embodied Subject: The Lived Experience of Human Beings***

Fredrich Nietzsche (1886) described embodiment as a process of cultural appropriation (*Aneignung*) (1878, p. 317) and domination (*Herrschaft*) (1886, p. 259) of the mind, body and soul. For Nietzsche, it is by this means of appropriation and domination that society and the individual seeks to overcome (or succumb to) the perceived and real antipathies and threats arising from its immediate physical and social environment. From his perspective, embodiment (*Einverleibung*) appropriates a process of life and ongoing struggle whereby hegemonic discourses of the self, the ideals of the other and the moralities of culture, are subliminally or consciously accepted and/or rejected (Nietzsche, 1883). “As such incorporation [embodiment] lies at the basis of the foundation of social and political orders where the exploitation, subjugation and domination of the other defines life in society with others” (Dries, 2018, p. 15.3). In short, according to Nietzsche, the body is the medium for embodiment and the most fundamental channel for experience and knowledge from which tensions of the self come into being – embodied tensions, which are continuously negotiated by the flesh, soul and consciousness of the human subject.

Throughout his writings, Nietzsche (1873; 1886) reflects on the question of how to bring forth the liberation of the individual from the oppressive discursive moralities of culture. This is what he calls the master/slave morality (Nietzsche, 1887). In order to overcome the dichotomy of the master/slave morality, which inhibits one's ability to be their authentic self, he suggests, the individual must set their own rules and conditions of existence. In essence, Nietzsche's works seek to unearth what is required to facilitate an embodied state of self-actualization whereby the authentic potentialities of the self can be realized.

From a utilitarian perspective, Nietzsche (1883-1885) believed that what characterizes a successful society is a culture that preserves the freedom and the spiritual growth of its citizens by fully incorporating the 'nutritional needs of life' for each individual.

All wisdom and reason in our life, is the result of the development of singular individuals who slowly imposed, forced, disciplined, *embodied* their wisdom and reason into humanity – in such a way that nowadays it seems as if they would have always belonged to the essence of the human being (Nietzsche, 1882, p. 90).

Thus, Nietzsche's end goal for the embodied subject was not a metaphysical state whereby the soul and essence of a person and society had become culturally and politically coerced and subdued, but an embodied state where they could find individual freedom.

### ***Freud, Embodiment and the Fantasies of the Body-Ego.***

Whilst Nietzsche was interested in the embodied processes of cultural appropriation and domination, Freud's interests lay in the embodied interconnection between consciousness, desire and symptoms of neurosis. Symptoms and signs, Freud (1985) noted, join in the conversation by taking bodily form. The body and the mind form a complex relationship with each other, which is the proper area of study for psychoanalysis. Throughout the psychoanalytic literature – Lacan, Klein, Frosh, Žižek, Butler and Grosz among others – the fantasies about the body's representations and its meanings, enactment, and sexuality, and the subject's consequent psychotic fragmentation are addressed in an attempt to extend understandings of the psychoanalytic traditions that have evolved in relation to Freud's discoveries (Tillman & Muller, 2007). Understandings of the mind-body nexus were first established and theorized by Freud (1915/1957) when he came to a realization that the fantasies of the mind were derived from the instincts of a biological soul. Consequently, he described egoic fantasies as an instinctual derivative and a representation of instinct (Freud, 1915/1957).

As early as 1899 letters between Freud and Wilhelm Fliess (1985) illustrate Freud was aware of the importance of fantasies and their relation to bodily symptoms; i.e., that is, physical manifestations of the body such as vomiting and blushing could be explained as the effect of fantasy. In 1899 Freud wrote:

you know, for instance X.Y. suffers from hysterical vomiting? Because she fancies that she is pregnant, because she so insatiable that she cannot put up without having a baby by her last fantasy lover as well...But she must vomit too, because in that case she will be starved and emaciated, and will soon lose her beauty and no longer be attractive to anyone. Thus the sense of the symptom is a contradictory pair of wish fulfilments (Fliess & Freud, 1985, p. 345).

In an earlier letter to Fliess (September 21, 1897), Freud famously abandoned his seduction theory of neurosis: “I no longer believe in my neurotica” (Fliess & Freud, 1985, p. 264), as he observed there is no indication of reality in the unconscious so that one cannot distinguish truths from fiction, or memory from fantasy. For Freud, it is the fantasy of the sexual encounter rather than its actuality that is the etiological factor in the production of neurosis – “in order for a fantasy to become pathogenic it must be reinforced by subsequent experience” (Fliess & Freud, 1985 p. 264). This shift in Freud’s thinking indicated a complex relationship between the fantasies of the mind, sexuality and neurotic symptoms enacted through the physical body.

Freud, contrasting fantasy with reality in his theory of the ‘*reality principle*’ (*see Chapter 3*) suggests one species of thought activity was split off; it was kept free from reality testing and remained subject to the ‘*pleasure principle*’ (*see Chapter 3*) alone – an embodied act of “phantasying” (Freud, 1911/1958, p. 222). “The strangest characteristic of unconscious processes is due to their entire disregard of reality testing; they equate reality of thought with external reality, and wishes with their fulfilment” (Freud, 1911/1958, p. 225).

Although Freud abandoned the seduction theory in favour of the pathogenic influence of fantasy as an explanation for neurosis (Fliess & Freud, 1985), he would later describe fantasy as an instinctual derivative or a representation (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1968). However, in doing so, “Freud was confronted with the mind-body problem (*see Chapter 2*). This is a problem that contemporary philosophy and neuroscience have yet to solve. If fantasy is a derivative of instinct, how does matter become imagination? (Tillman & Muller, 2007, p. 2). To explain the body-mind connection, Freud employed the political metaphor of ‘*representation*’ to account for the manifestation of a fantasy from sexual instinct. “A (Freudian) *representation* can be thought of as a delegation, as if from one body embassy to another, an ambassador from the domain of the body, which, to be understood, must speak



a language recognizable to the country of the mind” (Tillman & Muller, 2007, p. 2). Therefore, for Freud, the relationship between fantasy and sexual instincts can be understood as a bio-discursive interaction, where biological instincts are interpreted through the meanings of language from which fantasies of the mind materialize.

Elaborating on this view, in *'The Ego and the Id'*, Freud (1923) describes the structure of the ego as a corporeal projection of the self, driven by a person's need to acquire an underlying sense of unity and identity via a series of embodied processes of biosocial experiences, organized into patterns, identities and objects. “A person's own body, and above all its surface, is a place from which both external and internal perceptions may spring...The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface” (Freud, 1923, p. 26). Here Freud claims that the initiation of the ego is dependent on the development of the body's unconscious and instinctual sexual impulses, energies and flows of the soul, enmeshed within the materiality of the body, which is expressed and symbolized via body image investments. By symbolically beautifying the body in this way, Freud (1923) argues the body becomes an object of erotogenic zones available for physical intimacy underpinned by the phantasms of the ego. “The ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body...representing the superficialities of the mental apparatus” (Freud, 1923, p. 26). Therefore, Freud's insights suggest a person's unconscious ego is underpinned by impulsive desires and needs, personality traits and embodied tensions that re-emerge through an individual's corporeal schema of the self, expressed, represented or/and masked via their body image.

Freud's ego and the body image are dynamic configurations of inner psychical-biological agencies including sexual and a socio-cultural representation of an individual's physical and social environment; a subconscious pleasing of the 'o/Other', developed from an individual's erotic interactions with the mother during early childhood (e.g., breastfeeding). The 'other's' body provides a framework for the representation of one's corporeal schema, while simultaneously, the ego is an image of the body's significance or meaning for the subject and the 'o/Other' (Grosz, 1994). The body-ego thus becomes:

...a function of fantasy and desire as it is of fantasmatic dimension. This signifiatory, cultural dimension implies that bodies, egos, subjectivities are not simply reflections of their cultural context and associated values but are constituted as such by them, marking bodies in their very “biological” configurations with sociosexual inscriptions (Grosz, 1994, p. 38).

As illuminated by Elizabeth Grosz (1994), Freud's body-ego can be interpreted as a continuous complex and synthesised interweaving of embodied instinctual impulses and socio-cultural norms and tensions, which is challenging to manage. Particularly given that Freud's body-ego operates below the

conscious mind, within the depths of the subject's (biological) soul. Thus, subconsciously regulating the bio-sensual and egoic experiences of the self, one's body image and interpersonal relations.

In response to Freud's theorizing of desire, consciousness and the embodied subject, Grosz (1994) argues neuro-biological sensations alone do not offer an adequate conceptual framework to research and explain an individual's subjective experiences of their body image. For her, there are psychical and imaginary dimensions of the body-ego which exceed the biological sensations of the body that also need to be accounted for. To attempt to understand, and theorize about, the immaterial elements of the body-ego within this study, I draw upon the psychoanalytic insights afforded by Jacques Lacan, who argues a subject's subconscious, and the body image that emerges from one's subconscious desires, is determined by language.

### ***Lacan's Mirror Stage and the Illusionary Self***

In contrast to Freud, Lacan (1966/77) argues the ego has no prior status and only surfaces at the '*mirror stage*'. The mirror stage refers to a moment when an infant first identifies itself in the mirror or via the gaze of another (e.g., mother, father, another child), which facilitates the development of its human subjectivity. Consequently, Lacan argues the child's ego and identity becomes constructed via its fascination with an external image which is then reflected upon and compared against their own body. Like Freud, Lacan's (1966/1977) ego maps the subject's perceived and perceiving body image. The mirror stage functions to "establish a relation between the organism and its reality" (p. 24). The body image is an extension and projection of the ego that unifies with a fantasized image of the self, mirrored by the tastes, desires, meanings, symbols and social norms of a child's social network and social milieu. This is a stage of life when a subject first comes to an understanding of the embodied limits of its surface corporeality in space and the misrecognition of its projected body image that encapsulates their sensory and motor incapacities. It is also the initial stage where "an essential libidinal relationship with the body image" is established (Lacan, 1953, p. 1).

Lacan suggests, from this moment in a subject's life, the subject becomes an actor performing to the internalized images of meaning that produce individual and collective fantasies of the body from which performative and bodily modes of action are produced that relate to an individual's culture – social class, gender, nationality and (bio/identity) politics. As a result, Lacan theorizes this identification with a superimposed image of the self draws away one's connection to the 'real' elements of the self. For him, this leads to psychic disunity and distress as a subject becomes split between the 'real' me and the discursive 'I' – I am someone that I am not. "The ego is split between two extremes: a psychical

interior, which requires continual stabilization, and a corporeal exterior, which remains labile, open to many meanings” (Grosz, 1994, p. 43). Lacan (1953) proposes that it is this desire for a stable identity that may help explain a human’s fascination with their self-image and the human form. Grosz (1994) elaborates:

First, the ego is the result of a series of identificatory relations with other subjects, particularly the mother or even its own image in the mirror. These identifications are introjected into the ego in the form of the ego ideal, the idealized model of itself for which the ego strives. Secondly, the ego is a consequence of a blockage or rechannelling of libidinal impulses in the subject’s own body in the form of a narcissistic attachment to a part or the whole of its body...the ego is the meeting point between the body and the social. The narcissistic genesis of the ego entails that the subject cannot remain neutral or indifferent to its own body and body parts...The subject always maintains a relation of love (or hate) towards its own body because it must always maintain a certain level of psychical and libidinal investment...Its value is never simply functional, for it has a (libidinal) value in itself. The subject is capable of suicide, of anorexia, because the body is *meaningful*, has significance. (p. 32).

### ***The Lacanian Triad: The Real, Symbolic and Imaginary***

To examine the embodied functions and tensions between subjectivity, discourse and identity, Lacan (1975) divided the self as a construct consisting of three key elements: the ‘real’, the ‘symbolic’ and the ‘imaginary’. These three interlinking elements of a person’s psyche, which evoke understandings and meanings independent from each other, can be defined as the follows:

#### **The Real:** *The real properties of an object*

(i.e., the materiality of the human body – flesh, bone and blood). That which resists representation and language, what is pre-mirror, pre-imaginary, pre-symbolic, a ‘reality’ that cannot be symbolized.

#### **The Symbolic:** *The symbolic meanings, status and social position of an object that signal a specific attitude.*

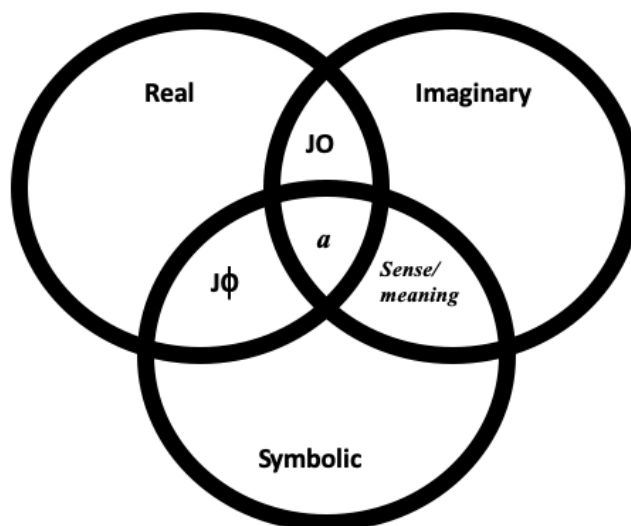
(e.g., the representations of the body (image) – gender, sexuality, social class and health). The symbolic involves the hierarchical formation of signifiers and language (the ‘*Symbolic Order*’), which determines the social value, and self-reflexive social acts, attitude and intentions of the subject/object. The ‘*Symbolic Order*’ functions as the way in which the subject is organized and perceived through its association with language, symbols and signifiers.

**The Imaginary:** *The (narcissistic) fantasies of the ego from which imaginary images of experience are created, which the subject desires.*

(e.g., the imagined experiences of pleasure when a person is thinking about purchasing an item of clothing – to become more desirable). The imaginary becomes the internalized image of the idealized self from which the subject seeks to unify the ‘real’ with the ‘symbolic’ to form a coherent and whole self, rather than a fragmented self between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’. The imaginary aligns with the ego and acts as a mediator between the internal and external world, “between the ego and its images” (Miller, 2007, p. 280).

(Homer, 2005; Lacan, 1975)

Lacan (1975) conceptualizes the triad of the real, symbolic and imaginary as a ‘Borromean Knot’ to demonstrate how the three registers of human subjectivity interconnect with each other. The ‘real’ cannot be experienced without the ‘symbolic’, and vice-versa; and the imaginary is the illusionary representation of what the real could be through symbolic representation. Situated within the centre of subjectivity, the cause of desire, that is object (*a*), is a manifestation of the intersection of the real, symbolic and imaginary, where meaning and language signify what is to be desired. In the desire of the subject, there is a psychic demand for the object (*a*) in pursuit of the experiences of, and to satisfy, (a phallic) *jouissance* (**J**) (a form of enjoyment/pleasure) which is experienced by satisfying the perceived needs of the ‘*other*’ (another person) or ‘*Other*’ (illusionary ‘Other’, virtues, morals, ideals, etc.) (**JO**).



(Lacan, 1975)

Figure 1. Lacan's Triad: The Real, Imaginary and Symbolic

Žižek (2017) illustrates the usefulness of ‘Lacan’s Triad’ in his observations of a personal friend – a physician who purchases a new Land Rover designed for ‘off-roading’ and driving up mountains (the ‘**real**’), yet he lives in the city centre and practices at the hospital 5-minutes away. So why a Land Rover? He wants to signal a particular attitude signified by what the Land Rover symbolizes: an upper-middle-class professional, wealth and success (the ‘**symbolic**’), an embodied attitude, his social position and status, which is declared to the public gaze (**JO**) to seek the *jouissance* (**J**) of recognition, which exists within the fantasies of his imagination (the ‘**imaginary**’). Therefore, the external objects of the body with which an individual frequently interacts also become incorporated as part of the body image in both an egoic and libidinally cathect sense (Grosz, 1994; Shilling, 2003; Turner, 2002; 2008). In short, from a Lacanian point of view, as illustrated by the symbolic realities of a postmodern world, humans desires are increasingly becoming an appendage to the fantasies of the material-discursive-symbolic experience. As Lacan puts it: “Symbols in fact envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him” (1953, p. 68). “Man speaks...but it is because the symbol has made him man” which “superimposes the kingdom of culture on that of a nature” (Lacan, 1966/1977, pp. 65-66). Thus, “fantasy provides the pleasure peculiar to desire” (Lacan, 1966/1977, p. 773).

To summarize, the psychoanalytic insights of Nietzsche, Freud and Lacan, offer theoretical tools from different perspectives, that facilitate a thorough exploration of the embodied tensions of a subject and the fantasies and desires that emerge and present themselves through their behaviours and the corporeal typography of the body. When used in conjunction with each other, the analyst frees themselves from the false dichotomy of a subject existing as either a biological or discursive organism. For example, the lived realities of the blind, who use body language to indicate a sense of shame (i.e., placing their hand over their face), which suggests an innate knowing of their emotions beyond Lacan’s discursive gaze (Raymond, 1988). Thus, this multivariant approach (Braidotti, 2019; Žižek; 2009) approach opens up new possibilities for interpreting and understanding the complexities and various registers of human behaviour and praxis.

In the following section, I continue to explore the literature relating to the processes of embodiment by reviewing some of the contemporary theories of gender and masculinity. Within modern society (and societies of the past), gender and masculinity are two critical social constructs that have defined the normative sex roles and identities individuals express, adopt or resist. Consequently, they influence how one’s embodied metaphysics, desires and *jouissance*’s – for oneself and another – are experienced (Lacan, 1975).

*How could we ever really know or love each other as long as we kept playing those roles that kept us from knowing or being ourselves?...*

Betty Friedman (1973, p. 386)

## **II. Gender, Identity and Sexual Desires**

Gender and (American) masculinity studies, underpinned by philosophical, sociological and psychoanalytic thought, is an expanding field of research undertaken by an increasing number of scholars over the last twenty years. In this section, I briefly discuss embodiment theories and scholars of significance relating to the theories of ‘*gender performativity*’, ‘*hegemonic masculinity*’ and ‘*inclusive masculinity*’. These are concepts that I have incorporated throughout my analysis to interrogate the dynamic and the complex nexus between the sexed body, culture, gender, sexuality, identity and men’s embodied praxis.

### ***Biology, Discourse and Gender Performativity***

The performative aspects of the body in relation to gender norms during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were initially articulated throughout the autobiographical memoirs of Simone de Beauvoir (2009; 2016). Within these writings, Beauvoir discussed the tensions between the physical body, desire, gender and identity politics, reflecting upon the many “possibilities of the body (sexual intercourse, menstruation, pregnancy) that were never spoken of, never admitted to that very world that was, in important ways, built around the biological differences of the body” (Evans, 2012, p. 22). In her book *The Second Sex* (2009), Beauvoir discusses the embodied mental and physical experiences of becoming a woman through the expectations and decision of others (i.e., men) and the a/effect this has on how bodies should and do behave – a process she refers to as ‘*learning codes about the body*’ (p. 5). That is, learning what is socially acceptable and what is not. “For Beauvoir the essential questions about the body are dual concerns of recognition (in what circumstances, and by whom, is both the body and its biological characteristics to be recognized) and control (the explicit, as well as the internalized, codes about the control of the body)” (Evans, 2012, p. 22); and agency (how as ‘owners’ of bodies we can transcend the limitations of the physical self) (Evans, 2012). Whilst Beauvoir recognizes the body as a socialized and coded instrument she also emphasizes the (binary) sex differences between male and female biology, and its impact on the human experience. As summarised by Mary Evans (2012), Beauvoir argues that “men, after adolescence, can be assured of relative bodily tranquillity, whilst for women physical existence is interrupted by an endless succession of bodily ‘events’” (p. 23).

Additionally, echoing the views of Fredrich Engels (1884), Beauvoir (1960; 2009) believed that heterosexual relationships are inherently unstable and ambiguous. From her personal experiences and observations, she notes that the emotions and desires for another, which emerge from within the body, cannot be controlled, and that a person's sexuality acts independently of an individual's choices, intentions and established social modes of being. For her, men's desires for one female always fade, and female desires continue to wander beyond their significant other. Similar to Freud, Beauvoir (2009) suggests that although the self is retrained through the social gaze of others, it is a subjects biology that ultimately dictates the angst of the body and the embodied human experience.

Building upon Beauvoir's (2009) claim that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p. 267), Judith Butler (1990) ties together phenomenological and Foucauldian perspectives to develop her theory of '*gender performativity*' in her celebrated and controversial book *Gender Trouble*. In contrast to Beauvoir, throughout her scholarship Butler has contested and criticised what she considers to be outdated perceptions of gender. Subsequently, arguing that traditional feminism erroneously believes that there is a natural, 'essential' notion of the (fe)male, sex and gender – that there is a distinct 'masculine' and 'feminine' essence that directly influences and determines a person's behaviours and practices. From this standpoint, Butler is critical of scientific categorisations of men and women and the claim that the outcome of one's life is grounded in biological determinism. Often misinterpreted as a social constructionist maximalist, Butler's concept of '*gender (and sex) performativity*' is an unconscious embodied social and symbolic performance rather than an expression of a prior (psychic/biological) reality. Butler (2011) explains:

...for something to be performative means that it produces a series of effects, we act, walk, speak and talk in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman. We act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or something that's simply true about us, a fact about us. Actually it's a phenomenon that's being produced all the time and reproduced all the time. So to say gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start ...Think about how difficult it is for sissy boys or how difficult it is for tomboys to function socially without being bullied or without being teased or without sometimes suffering threats of violence or without their parents intervening to say maybe you need a psychiatrist or why can't you be normal. There are institutional powers like psychiatric normalization and there are informal kinds of practices like bullying which try to keep us in our gendered place (*Big Think*, 2011, June 6).

In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler (1995) contests essentialist feminine and masculine modes of human behaviour with respect to sexual desire, proposing that there is an unconscious embodied grief experienced in mourning (a lack of) homosexual interactions in a heterosexual culture. However, in clarifying her 'performative' position she asserts individuals are not trapped within gender norms and expectations – they have free-will, as evident within the transgender community; but the

way individuals express their gender is culturally constrained, and the meanings of gender are fluid throughout time and space (e.g., societal expressions of gender continuously change) (Butler, 2021). In a sense, she argues that for humans to become a subject we have to subject ourselves to the power of the discourses of heteronormativity that police a person's (sexual, sexed and gendered) identity and personhood (Butler, 1997; 2011; 2020; 2021).

In an attempt to combat, challenge and overcome the socially constructed boundaries of gender and the established culture of heteronormativity, Butler (2011b) advocates for the use of '*inclusive cultural discourse*' and media representation. In doing so, she attempts to create a social environment, and thus attitude, that promotes increased acceptance of those who do not conform to the hegemonic categorisations of gender, sex and sexuality. This, she argues, would enable individuals to explore and express their unconscious desires with a greater sense of freedom.

### ***Hegemonic Masculinity***

To examine, theorise and define the embodied processes and hegemonic patterns of male behaviour that exists within the 'heteronormative matrix', Raewyn Connell (2011) describes the praxis of masculinity as:

...a pattern of practice. So it's not an attitude, it's not what's in peoples' heads, it's not the state of their hormones, it's what they actually do in the world...It has a relationship to your body and biology but not a fixed relationship. So women can behave in a masculine way, though usually it's men who do, and also there are different patterns of masculinity...and those patterns also can change over time...(2011, October 12).

From this perspective, masculinity is represented as a fluid and complex social process that operates at a non-conscious level, varying between cultural, ethnic, social class and religious contexts. This makes investigating and researching masculinities implicitly difficult to understand (Light, 2008). Despite the complexities of coming to an understanding of the social processes involved in becoming and being a man, Connell argues that within any particular given social milieu – local, regional or/and global – a hierarchy of masculinities develops. As a result, hegemonic masculinities emerge based on which patterns of male practices and behaviours are valued and respected most. These embodied practices of behaviour then enable an individual or group of men to establish and reassert their cultural status and power (i.e., symbolic and economic capital) (Connell, 2005; Connell & Wood, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).



For Connell, hegemonic masculinity does not refer to a singular embodied dominant male ideal, but multiple masculinities that have a hierarchical relationship with each other, with the most honoured way of being a man requiring all other men to position themselves in relation to it (Connell, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In this light, hegemonic masculinities may “not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men. Yet these models do, in various ways, express widespread ideals, fantasies and desires [and] provide models of relations with women” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.838) and other men – from John Wayne to David Beckham, Barack Obama to Clarke Kent.

### ***Inclusive Masculinities***

In contrast to Connell, Eric Anderson (2009) reports a cultural shift in men’s attitudes and how they express their masculinity amongst other men. Within his writings, he challenges the need for men to adhere to societal norms and the necessity to embody and perform hegemonic-heteronormative modes of masculinity. Thus, reflecting the cultural affectivity found in Butler’s (2011b) advancement of an *‘inclusive discourse’*. For example, drawing from his research examining American and British masculinities, Anderson (2016; 2014; 2014b; 2012; 2012b; 2009; 2005) suggests the increased acceptance of same-sex relationships and subsequent decline in homophobia has softened heterosexual masculinities. For him, this cultural shift permits (young) straight men to push the boundaries of heteronormativity, evidenced by the increasing numbers of men engaging in semi-sexual and ‘bromance’ interactions and relationships with other men – a male practice that he has termed *‘Inclusive Masculinity’* (Anderson, 2009; 2014; Anderson & McCormack, 2016).

Anderson (2009; 2014; 2016) concludes that there is an increasing number of sexually liberal social and private spaces in which men no longer feel they need to enact hypermasculine behaviours and codes of conduct to be accepted, enabling them to live without the fear of being perceived as gay or weak for engaging in what were previously considered homosexual and feminine practices. Furthermore, he encourages scholars to rethink and re-contextualize contemporary masculinities to reflect the current socio-cultural changes in men’s sexual behaviours that undermine traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity and its associated homophobia, which historically has influenced men to avoid certain ‘gay’ behaviours (Anderson, 2009).

Although Anderson’s insights suggest a social shift in men’s attitudes and practices with each other that challenge traditional heteronormative modes of being, many scholars have questioned the over-generalisations and simplicity of his work. Mark Simpson (1996) and Douglas Janoff (2005) note that transgressions of hegemonic masculinity and gayness into the mainstream which accompanied the

neo-liberal consumerism in late capitalist economies, does not necessarily mean that homophobia and discrimination against homosexuals has decreased. As has been evidenced by the writings of Michel Dorais and Simon Louis Lajeunesse (2005), *Dead Boys can Dance: Sexual Orientation, Masculinity and Suicide*; Tim Bergling (2001) *Sissyphobia, Gay Men and Effeminate Behavior*, and Michael Kimmel's (2008) - *Guyland: The Perilous World where Boys become Men*. Juxtaposing Anderson's theory of 'Inclusive Masculinity', Simpson (1996) suggests homoerotic acts amongst heterosexual males are often "adamantly presented as something that is not homosexual, and in fact proof of their heterosexuality—I'm so secure in my masculinity that ..." (p. 7). And, thus, it is not an act of heterosexual men "undoing" their homophobia as a result of decreasing homophobia (Martino, 2011). To overcome the oversimplification of men's sexualities, Wayne Martino (2011) suggests the need for a more thorough engagement with the various categories of sexual identification to "capture the complexity of the expression, enactment, and negation of same-sex desire" (p. 506).

In addition to Anderson's observations, Susan Bordo (1999) argues that the softening of American masculinities has occurred since the mid-1950s. In her book *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* (Bordo, 1999), which historically contextualises American masculinities within American film and advertisements from the 1950s and 1960s, she suggests men's bodies and subjectivities have continually conformed to the shifting topologies and schemas of what it means to be an American man. Within this study (Bordo, 1999), media representations of American hegemonic masculinities transitioned from a domesticated middle-class father providing for his family to a generation of attractive young actors, including Marlon Brando, James Dean and Montgomery Clift. "These actors played characters who displayed 'helplessness, dependency' that was at odds with other male ideals that privileged heroic action" (Cregan, 2012, p. 178). "Brando was 'queering masculinity in ways that James Dean and others would develop still further, and that have remained a constant undercurrent of macho masculinity'" (Bordo, 1999, p. 112). Thus, such characters introduced a particular (sexual) objectification of the male body into popular culture and a vulnerable male psyche to the fore.

To conclude, like many other scholars (Adams, 2011; Evans et al., 2008; Gray et al., 2002; Jachyra, Atkinson, Gibson, 2014; Potts, 2000; Scoates, 2017; Simons, 2010; Tidd, 2008), the various embodiment theories concerning gender and sexuality afforded by Beauvoir, Butler, Connell and Anderson are insights that have enabled me to tease out the tensions between the desires of the psychic, physical and social elements of the self relating to men's body image (and health) practices.

In the following section, I continue to outline the theoretical offerings by embodiment scholars that feature throughout this study that relate to the biopolitics and health (practices) of the human subject.

*“The pursuit of health is a symptom of unhealth.  
When this pursuit is no longer a personal yearning but part of state ideology,  
healthism for short, it becomes a symptom of political sickness.”*

Petr Skrabank (1994, p. 58)

### **III. Healthism: (Bio)Politics and the Neo-Liberal Agenda**

The human body and the collective (health) consciousness within the western world have become increasingly regulated and policed through the political discourses of healthism since the 1970s (Crawford, 2006). Introducing and building upon Foucault’s theory of governmentality and biopolitics, in this section, I discuss how the bodies and minds of the human subject have become embedded, contextualised and experienced within the discourses of healthism; and the a/effect this has had on people’s subjectivities and the biopedagogic practices they “choose” to utilise to symbolically embody what it means to be a ‘healthy’ citizen.

#### ***Foucault, Governmentality and Biopolitics***

The origins of the term healthism can be located within Michael Foucault’s (1991; 2008; 2010) concept of governmentality outlined during his lectures at the Collège de France between 1977 and 1984. Governmentality synthesises the terms ‘*governing*’ (the political and personal governance of a person’s/society’s conduct) with ‘*mentalité*’ (modes of thought and being) (Lemke, 2001). In Foucault’s (1978-179/2008) ‘*The Birth of Biopolitics*’, he defined governmentality as the ‘*art of government*’. The ‘*art of government*’ referring to the use of a wide range of governmental and self-imposed body (and mind) control techniques as a means to regulate and control the behaviours of human populations. Specifically, governmentality is a theoretical tool for examining the intersection between human biology and politics (*biopolitics*). Governmentality looks at how political power materializes and becomes embodied via government legislation and the dissemination of institutional knowledge and expertise (*biopower*), which affects how humans function cognitively and physically in society (Foucault, 2008). As Foucault (2008) puts it: governmentality is a “power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimise, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations” (p. 137) “to ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order” (p. 138).

Contemporary scholars including Peter Miller (2008), Nikolas Rose (1996), Bob Jessop (2018) and Mitchell Dean (2010), drawing upon an ‘Anglo-Neo Foucauldian’ perspective, suggest disciplinary systems of embodiment continue to be used by modern governments and advanced liberal democracies to facilitate the mass adoption of neo-liberal ideals (e.g., self-governance/reliance/discipline, independence from the state) and the acceptance of, and reliance on, the ‘free market’ (as opposed to the state) to solve social and economic burdens. Succinctly, ‘neo-liberal governmentality’ has become the *modi operandi* of governments to shape their general citizenry’s unconscious for the purposes of developing auto-regulated, corrective and productive populations to ensure continued economic advancement and growth within a capitalist and globalised economy (Burchell, Gordon & Miller, 1991).

### ***Healthism and Technologies of the Self***

To understand how the process of governmentality constitutes one’s sense of self, Foucault (1988) attempted to “sketch out a history of the different ways in our culture that humans develop knowledge about themselves: economics, biology, psychiatry, medicine, and penology” (p. 17). He achieved this by analysing the so-called “truth games” that lie beneath the facades of power and authority and the a/effects that discourse and surveillance have on how human beings come to understand themselves. To conceptualise his thinking Foucault (1988; 2010) argued the processes of governmentality materialise themselves through the human form and the collective consciousness via what he refers to as *‘Technologies of the Self’*. *‘Technologies of the Self’* are those “technologies imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired ones” (Rose, 1999, p. 52), the goal of which is to ensure societies and citizens are controlled and rendered governable.

Foucault (1988) identified four primary ‘techniques’/‘technologies’, each a matrix of practical reason, which interact to produce compliant, productive and self-governing citizens:

- (1) **technologies of production**, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things;
- (2) **technologies of sign systems**, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification;
- (3) **technologies of power**, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject;

- (4) **technologies of the self**, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and semis, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (p. 18).

Each ‘technology’ implies a specific mode of training, the acquirement and embodiment of a particular skill and attitude, which collectively modifies a person’s behaviour to ensure particular political objectives are achieved. For example, **‘technologies of power’** – “technologies imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired ones” (Rose, 1999, p. 52); **‘technologies of production/the market’** – the use, buying and selling of material goods to achieve a sense self-actualisation, to define and brand one’s identity, and fulfil one’s innate and commercialised desires (Rose, 1999); **‘technologies of the self’** refers to the biopedagogies (e.g., the physical training and grooming of the body (and mind) enacted to represent oneself in a particular way (i.e., healthy, productive, desirable); all of which become embodied and expressed through the cultural meanings of **‘technologies of sign symbols’** – signs, symbols, and language (Foucault, 1988), the schematic discourses of society and the self.

*‘Technologies of the self’* are grounded in the concept of expertise, which consists of three essential aspects. First, technologies of the self, such as exercise, healthy eating, and the use of prescription medicine, are legitimised via authoritative, objective scientific discourses that encourage self-regulation prior/over state intervention (Rose, 1999). Second, expertise can “mobilise and be mobilised within political argument in distinctive ways, producing a new relationship between knowledge and government. Expertise comes to be accorded a particular role in the formulation of programs of government and in the technologies that seek to give them effect” (Rose, 1996 p. 156). Third, expertise is embodied and performed through the self-regulating abilities of individuals, enacted through perceptions of a scientific truth, which binds “subjectivity to truth and subjects to experts” (Rose, 1996, p. 156). Or as Ulrich Beck (1992) puts it:

...in more and more fields of action a reality defined and thoroughly structured by medicine is becoming the prerequisite of thought and action... an insatiable appetite for medicine is produced, a permanent expanding market for the services of the medical profession (p. 211).

Accumulatively, expertise works through a logic of choice, through transformational technologies of the self, which inculcate “desires for self-development that expertise itself can guide and through claims to be able to allay the anxieties generated when the actuality of life fails to live up to its image” (Rose, 1999, p. 88).

Healthism, via ‘technologies of the self’, unites the “public objectives for the good health and good order of the social body with the desire of individuals for health and well-being” (Rose, 1999, p.74). However, this embodied process and form of human conditioning is not enforced via top-down mechanisms of governmental power, discipline and coercion but rather it is a process whereby “individuals are addressed on the assumption that they want to be healthy and encouraged to freely seek out the ways of living most likely to promote their own health” (Rose, 1999, p.86). Discourses of healthism have become established and legitimised with the developments and advances made by the medical and health sciences – (bio)medicine, biotechnology, nutrition and exercise science – over recent decades. These sciences of the human body have aided the political narratives of health(ism), self-imposing their hegemonic truths of corporeal (ab)normality, (ill)health and what a healthy body is and how it should be regulated, trained and managed (Burrows & Wright, 2020; Fullagar, 2009; Markula, 2018; Norman & Rail, 2016; Pluim & Gard, 2018).

David Le Brenton’s (1990; 1999) phenomenological and historical writings on the nature of ‘*du corps*’ (risky body practices) and its various manifestations during the last century point out that the increased ‘liberation of the body’ from conservative/religious/gender narratives of the body has involved cultivating a pleasant and attractive appearance through dieting, fashion, cosmetics, plastic surgery, the training of the physical body via bodybuilding, and the control of the sexual and reproductive body with contraceptives. Unsurprisingly, people’s desires to embody a cultural aesthetic ideal have increasingly led to cosmetic corrections (i.e., plastic surgery), the consumption of image enhancing drugs (i.e., diuretics for weight loss, synthetic androgens to increase muscle mass), eating disorders (i.e., anorexia, bulimia, compulsive eating) and body image issues (i.e., muscle dysmorphia, exercise addiction) (Brenton, 1990; 1999). As a result, the social and psychological aspects of the body and body practices have grown into a burgeoning area of interest for scholars to investigate and attempt to understand both the underlying reasons for these body practices and their health consequences; leading researchers in this area include Geneviève Rail, Michael Gard, Jan Wright, Lisette Burrows, Caroline Fusco, Deana Leahy, Dave Holmes and Simone Fullagar.

### ***Healthism, Neo-liberalism and the Healthy Self***

Popularising Foucault’s work on governmentality to explore the embodied experiences of the self within the modern world, Robert Crawford (1979; 1980; 2006) analysed healthism through the prisms of neoliberalism, which, he concluded, has situated the problem of health and disease at the level of the individual, and “the medicalization of everyday life” (Crawford, 1980). Similarly, Petr Skrabanek (1994), in his book *The Death of Humane Medicine and the Rise of Coercive*

*Healthism*, characterised healthism as a coercive political tool used by governments as a means to disseminate propaganda to establish and impose norms of health and “healthy lifestyles” onto its citizens; a form of health consciousness which becomes subconsciously embedded into society’s sense of reality and central to all aspects of our lives (Cheek, 2008). From Skrabanek’s (1994) perspective, healthism is related to the neologism “lifestylism” which connects statistical, political, nationalistic, and moral notions of ill health and disease to an individual’s unhealthy lifestyle – their habits, behaviours, and practices. However, he argues the pursuit of an absence of ill-health is an unnatural and unattainable goal, given that humans are biological organisms that are genetically predisposed to becoming sick and diseased (Skrabanek, 1994). In short, from these viewpoints, healthism is an ideological mechanism that distracts from the biological and societal stresses and realities of humanity, conditioning humans into becoming healthy by reducing their ‘risky behaviours’ and becoming productive neo-liberal employees to fulfil their role as economic beings.

Offering a more nuanced view, Nikolas Rose (2008) describes healthism as a doctrine that connects the “public objectives for the good health and good order of the social body with the desire of individuals for health and well-being” (p. 23). He argues that within a capitalist society, the process of healthism is not a coercive process, as argued by Crawford and Skrabanek, but an active and internalised process, via the influence of the “free-market”, whereby citizens choose to be “healthy” and choose to engage in “healthy” practices (Rose, 1999; 1999b; 2007; Rose & Miller 1992). This active and unconscious process, the shaping of the collective consciousness, is thus, to some degree, of our choosing as citizens adhere to corporate persuasion, societal surveillance and neo-liberal ideals of self-responsibility via the ideologies of the free-market, as opposed to state intervention (Rose, 1999b; 2007).

Although many critics view healthism as a coercive political tool, many exercise scientists and bio-medical scholars have embraced the new research and financial opportunities healthism has created since its introduction into the political, economic and social landscapes (Mairana, Levinger & Davidson, 2018). From their perspective, supported by empirical evidence, advocating for physical activity and ‘healthy’ eating as a form of preventative medicine has facilitated an improvement in societal standards of health, has increased economic productivity, and enabled governments to reduce expenditure associated with poor health (Mairana, Levinger & Davidson, 2018; Rose, 1999b; 2007). Additionally, newfound health and wellness entrepreneurs have capitalised upon the exercise and food as medicine phenomenon by offering new forms of ‘health’ treatments and services. These include: preventative and anti-ageing medicine (e.g., hormone therapy, vitamin injections, cryotherapy), appearance medicine (e.g., dental care, botox, plastic surgery) and alternative/eastern medicine (e.g., yoga, meditation, homeopathy) (Barcan, 2020; Elliott, 2008; 2013; Gough, 2018; Peterson, 2018; Ross, 2020). Consequently, this ‘lifestyle medicine’ (Egger, Binns, Rossner & Sagner, 2017) and

individualised health pedagogies are now offered by an array of professionals, purportedly enabling many to live a healthier lifestyle and manage their lives independently.

To summarise, the discourses and symbolic idealisms of healthism and biopolitics manufacture social and economic imperatives that encourage particular *'technologies of the self'* (Foucault, 1988) to constitute distinct bodies that signify a corporeal aesthetics of 'good health'. Throughout this study, my interest has been in how the various embodied metanarratives of the self shape human consciousness and behaviour and how *'technologies of the self'* (i.e., synthetic androgens) a/effect individuals' lived experiences, bodies, and psychic lives. This "necessitates working with, and through, conflicting researcher roles and paradigms" (Weist, Andrews & Giardina, 2015, p. 36) as signalled throughout the *Introduction* (pp. 1-4) and *Chapters II-IV* and during my analysis of the life histories provided by a cohort of male Los Angeles residents. "It is these (conflicting) positionalities and (competing) lenses that have the potential to take us somewhere new" (Weist, Andrews & Giardina, 2015, p. 36) and "hopefully somewhere better" (Grossberg, 1997, p. 254).

In the following section, I discuss the hegemonic, traditional and contemporary ontological and epistemological views of the body that underpin how body practices are theorised and studied. In doing so, I highlight the complex and innumerable embodied a/effects of biopedagogies (*'technologies of the self'*) and the critical role they play in managing the *'tensions of the self and discourses of being'*.



*“Our body is both something we are and something we have. It becomes the means of expressing our individuality and aspiration as well as our group affiliations. By focusing on our bodies and working on them for public displays, we turn ourselves into our own ‘project’.”*

Nettleton & Watson (1998, p. 1).

#### **IV. Body Practices and the Transformation of the Self**

Since the 1990s, the research relating to the body, embodiment and the regimes of the body has been narrated by two dominant world views: the body as a mechanical-biological organism and the body as a social being (Birke, 2019; Frank, 2012; Kirk, 2004; 1997; Shilling, 2012; 2016; Shildrick, 2008; Turner, 2008). Within this section, I briefly discuss how these two lines of inquiry have become increasingly used, simultaneously, to offer new theoretical and empirical understandings of the relationship between body techniques, the aesthetics of the body, subjectivity and one’s place in the world.

##### ***The Body as a Project***

Informed by bio-medico discourses, the ‘scientific’ view of the body frames and describes humanity as a biological machine – “We are survival machines – robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes. This is a truth which still fills me with astonishment” (Dawkins, 2018, p. 10). From this evolutionary perspective the physical body is malleable, adapts and evolves over time, it can be reconstructed, treated, fixed, and healed as an object of bone, flesh and blood to function and continue to survive (Kirk, 2004; Shilling, 1993) “without expectations of psychic consequences” (Shildrick, 2008, p.31).

In contrast, underpinned by a social constructionist framework within the social sciences, the body and its appearance are conceptualised as a social construct. From this perspective, the body is an unfinished project that can be (un)consciously reflected upon, changed and maintained through the lifestyle choices an individual makes or is socially coerced into (e.g., dieting, exercising, grooming regimes and practices) (Turner, 2008). In short, a person’s body schema is contextualised and constituted by social norms and influenced by the dominant hegemonic discourses that circulate within their immediate macro and micro social networks (Shilling, 2016).

<b>BODY PRACTICES</b>	
<b>The Bio-Medico Body &amp; Self</b>	<b>The Social Body &amp; Self</b>
<b>Body techniques concerned with the anatomical needs and functioning of the body, and with Improving a person's quality of life (e.g., Corrective/Replacement surgery).</b>	<b>Body techniques used to Improve the appearance of the self to adhere to social and cultural body image norms (e.g., 'appearance medicine' and beauty practices).</b>

**Table 1.** The Hegemonic Epistemological Discourses of the Body, Body Practices and the Self.

Shilling argues that the preoccupations with the body as a project are set apart from various treatments of the body in pre-modern societies by the conflation of physical appearance and self-identity, wherein the body is the flesh and blood manifestation of social and, more recently, individual identity (Kirk, 2004, p. 53).

Shilling (2016) and many other body and embodiment scholars (e.g., Atkinson, 2007; 2008; Coffey, 2012; Crossley, 2001; 2007; Elliott, 2008; 2013; Pringle, 2007; Shusterman, 2018; Turner, 2016) have highlighted the rise of society's preoccupation with improving their body image by employing an array of body modification techniques, to cultivate an ideal and beautified corporeal identity, within the present neoliberal era. Each of these scholars has demonstrated the various phenomenological a/effects that culture and discourse have had on how individuals experience their bodies and sense of self.

Richard Shusterman (2008) argues that the body has become increasingly detached from its bio-psychic essence and increasingly marked and signified by social meanings and binary distinctions of social status, (bio)power, and discourses of the body that people are encouraged to either avoid or embrace (e.g., the ill/healthy, poor/wealthy, (un)/attractive, (un)/productive, extroverted/introverted, (dis)/abled) body). Thus, body modification practices that enhance the aesthetics of the body have become an effective tool to mask and remove unwanted body significations and any associated emotions of an undesirable self, and thereby present an idealized image of the self to the world to improve one's social capital and likability. Understanding how desire functions in relation to the use of biopedagogies, and takes form in contemporary (Los Angeles) culture, is an underlying question embedded within this study.

## *The Commodified Body (and Mind)*

Karl Marx (1972) proposed that the distinction between bodies and commodities can become blurred within capitalism and capitalist societies. He noted that in societies driven by the profit motive, “people’s appreciation of their senses, of other people, and the world around them revolved around issues of who *owned* what...and reduced human life and nature to mere means for the production of value” (Shilling, 2016, p. 80). By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, bodies had become primarily used, and experienced as, commercialised and commodified objects and resources to be transacted for profit (Marx, 1972). Shilling (2016) explains further:

...the consequences of bodies being subjected to market processes were experienced globally with increasing intensity across all sections of society. Among the more privileged, this commodification was evident in the various ways people sought to cultivate their appearance to enhance their standing in the marketplace of work or personal relationships. The flesh here becomes a form of physical capital that can be utilized for economic benefit (pp. 80-81).

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) observed that the growing significance of appearance as a reference and mechanism to leverage value and capital within capitalist societies and markets, and the cultivation of distinctive tastes, manners, and speech, had become prevalent markers of social class and status. He described this socio-cultural process as the *‘pursuit of distinction’* – whereby individuals attempt to establish their social status, political capital, and success within a market-based society (Bourdieu, 1984). In reference to Bourdieu’s findings, Shilling (2016) summarises:

...visual appearance and other impressions ‘given off’ by the body are critical for people’s capacity to accumulate value *across* the various dimensions of social and economic life...if people are increasingly treating their bodies as projects...they are encouraged to do so in relation to the growing marketization of life (p. 84).

Since the beginning of this century, the commodification and marketisation of the body (image) has become increasingly prevalent in contemporary culture. The modern phenomena and evolutions of celebrity culture, ‘reality television’, social media technologies, and artificial intelligence, many of which originated in Los Angeles and Silicon Valley, have significantly impacted one’s lived experience within the modern world (Cerulo, 1997; Elliott, 2018; Ouellete, 2016; Wegenstein & Ruck, 2011). For instance, ‘reality television’ regularly presents cosmetically modified, reconstructed and exercised bodies to the public gaze (Žižek, 2007), as seen on *‘Keeping Up with the Kardashians’*, *‘The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills’*, and *‘The Sha’s of Sunset’*. These reality bodies are strategically branded

and symbolically mapped with discourses of *'distinction'* (Bourdieu, 1984), broadcasting and celebrating their real and imaginary personal wealth, success and achievements. Thus, establishing themselves as the epitome of, and the blueprint to, success within a neo-liberal 'free-market', providing their followers with a virtual pathway to realising and achieving the 'American Dream' (Elliott, 2011; Murray & Ouellete, 2004; Ouellete, 2016; Ouellete & Hay, 2008; Wegenstein & Ruck, 2011).

Because of society's engagement with these digital media platforms, technologies and identities – *'the digital revolution'* (Elliot, 2019) – the self has increasingly embodied a performative and psychic state of being in which the appearance of the self is showcased to, and judged by, a global audience. Individuals, consciously and unconsciously, seek to leverage their physical capital within that audience to establish and enhance their social status to acquire meaningful and beneficial (romantic) interpersonal relationships and often additional income (Abidin & Brown, 2018). Socially learned, performative behaviours are commonly transmitted via the social media platforms such as *'Youtube'*, *'Instagram'*, and *'Tinder'*, as individuals attempt to satisfy their psychic desires for increased recognition, status and love (Macon, 2017). And for some, become a micro-celebrity in their own right (Abidin & Brown, 2018).

### ***Biopedagogies and their Psychic A/Effects***

In an attempt to explain the experiences and practices of the body, French sociologists including Marcel Mauss (1872–1950), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961), Erving Goffman (1922–1982), Michel Foucault (1926–1984), and Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) have focused on the belief that the body, its identity, image and practices are socially and discursively produced. This cadre of work suggests body practices are influenced by various culturally embedded systems, institutions and beliefs but largely neglects the role that biological functioning plays in a person's and society's everyday experiences. However, within the last fifteen years, embodiment theorists, like Chris Shilling, Bryan Turner, Loic Waquant, Dave Holmes and Nick Crossley have increasingly borrowed from neuroscience and psychoanalysis to develop a model of subjectivity that is interested in *a/effective* experiences as an alternative to the traditional emphasis on social influences as the primary determinant of social life and social action. Consequently, social and cultural theorists have become progressively receptive to the biological constitution of being, and to the notion that biology is a crucial determinant of physical practices that lead to our everyday experiences (Newman, Thorpe & Andrews, 2020; Turner, 2012); they acknowledge that "...the body is as much social as it is a biological phenomenon, existing in culture and nature" (Kirk, 2004, p. 52). Shilling (2016) reiterates:

...it has become increasingly evident that society, in the broadest sense of that term, influences our physical being at the most profound levels, and that it is difficult to disentangle the social from the biological processes that affect what and who we are...physical and organic dimensions of existence, and how these are centrally significant to people's identities, actions, and relationships (pp. 4-6).

Nick Crossley (2005) overcomes these historical epistemological and ontological tensions of the past by interconnecting the physical and the social aspects of the body in his concept '*reflexive body techniques*' to comprehensibly understand the embodied processes of body modification and maintenance. He defines '*reflexive body techniques*' as those biopedagogies that are primarily used to reflect and work back upon the body, to modify, maintain or thematise it in some way within a society or social group. This concept merges the idea that the body and its identity can be treated as a biomedical and social being and an unfinished product continuously worked upon for social purposes. '*Reflexive body techniques*' (e.g., hairdressing, massage, dental work, the consumption of drugs, and cosmetic surgery) are performed by an individual or applied to them by other individuals, resulting in an embodied and immersive biopsychosocial experience. Crossley (2005) explains:

[Reflexive body techniques] entail a total immersion of the body into a stream of activity whose purpose is to modify or maintain that body as a whole. When I jog, for example, I launch my whole body into action, in an effort to increase my fitness, burn off fat/calories, tone up my lower body, etc. (p. 11).

The term 'reflexive', first established by psychologist and sociologist George Mead (1967), refers to seeing ourselves from outside of our biophysical selves, with the (un)conscious intention of presenting a socially accepted social-physical self to the world to achieve particular objectives. Thus, an unconscious split and distinction between the biological self and the social self is created. In essence, an unconscious persona is created and experienced as one's unwanted biological essence, and physical characteristics are often concealed. Thus, '*Tensions of the Self*' surface from within, which the individual seeks to negotiate and manage.

On this level we both '*are*' our bodies and we '*have*' a body. However, it is necessary to recognize this split as reflexive rather than substantial in nature. It derives from our acquired capacity to assume the role of another and thereby to achieve an outside perspective on ourselves, a process which generates a sense of our being distinct from the qualities we identify with our self when assuming this 'other' role. It does not indicate a substantial distinction between mind/self and body. It does not often even reflect the emergent stratification between the body as a biochemical structure and the body as a sensuous, active agent. 'My body', the body I 'have', is a moral, aesthetic, acting and sensuous being. I worry as much about its appearance, performances and transgressions as I do about its biological structure. The best work in the sociology of the body recognizes this. It challenges dualism, insisting that 'I'

am 'my body' and that body projects are therefore reflexive projects (Crossley, 2005, pp. 1-2).

Originating from the writings and observations of Marcel Mauss (1979), '*body techniques*' refer to the specific body techniques used by particular societies and cultures. "Women walk differently to men, the bourgeoisie talk differently to the proletariat, the French military march and dig differently to British troops and so on" (Mauss, 1979, p.8). Crossley (2005) suggests that to analyse these cultural differences, which produce particular embodied praxes, there are two essential elements to consider. First, body techniques are socially learned and embedded into the psychic and biological aspects of the self and thus become biopedagogically acquired until they reach an autonomous state of reflexivity:

...styles of walking embody a biological and psychological understanding and knowledge. Switching to 'tiptoes' when silence is required, for example, indicates a grasp of the conditions most conducive to minimizing noise, while walking a tightrope, and indeed walking per se, requires a practical grasp of principles of balance, force, etc. When we adjust our posture to steady ourselves we engage in practical physics. Finally, certain styles of walking, such as a proud march or arrogant strut, embody an emotional intention (in the phenomenological sense of 'intention') (p. 9).

Second, '*body techniques*' have historical and collective representations (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963), or "collective embodied forms of wisdom and reasoning which are pre-representational in form; that is, forms of pre-reflective knowledge (know-how) and understanding that consist entirely in a capacity to do certain sorts of things. Not mere movements of the body" (Crossley, 2005, p. 10). From Durkheim and Mauss's (1963) point of view, the embodied body techniques practiced within specific cultures, are in part, influenced by the genealogical cultural-histories of a civilisation. These are culturally and psychically induced normative behaviours and practices have become a part of one's inherited, embodied and unconscious daily repertory (i.e., mannerisms, gestures, posture, bodily movements). Or as Bourdieu (1977, p. 66) put it, "a feel for the game".

Put concisely, Crossley's (2005) '*reflective body techniques*', affords theoretical insight into the complex processes of the embodied subject, nature of 'body projects', and how bodies are fashioned, maintained, modified, and experienced in a holistic sense. To conclude this brief overview of the literature regarding body practices, I now discuss some of the findings pertinent to the bodies, identities and 'Californian Medicine' practices (i.e., '*Appearance Medicine*') commonly used amongst the American populous.

## *'Californian Medicine'*

In practice, the relationship between the tensions of the biopsychosocial self, bodywork, and the American way of life is reflected in Barbara Ehrenreich's (1989) book, *'Fear of Falling'*. Within this text, Ehrenreich (1989) documents the increasing insecurities of the American middle class and the pressures they experience to create and maintain a marketable body and appearance to remain competitive and employed within a hyper-capitalist economic system. For example, American citizens share their struggles of continuously feeling the need to scrutinize their body image and engage in ongoing body techniques (e.g., exercising and dieting) to meet the aesthetic demands and expectations of the labour market, and to maintain a youthful corporeal identity to compete against their fellow employees and any other potential competitors.

Shilling (2016) notes: "In California, complaints against age discrimination are reported to be higher than those associated with discrimination on the grounds of race or sexual orientation. Being caught in possession of a body that has a declining market value can indeed result in the loss of employment" (pp. 82-83). In the highly competitive high-tech hubs of Silicon Valley, Santa Monica, Hollywood's film industry, and those involved in professional services – waiters, personal trainers, bodyguards – growing numbers of Californian men are turning to anti-ageing treatments and plastic surgeons to improve their physical appearance in the view of improving their job prospects (Blakely, 2014; Shilling, 2016). Anthony Elliot and Charles Lemert (2009) describe this need for individuals to seek personal solutions to their social problems to survive and meet the economic demands of an increasingly globalised and competitive world as a form of *'new individualism'*. For them, *'new individualism'* is an embodied process whereby humans become shaped by the various modalities of the global transformations, producing an embodied experience of continual reinvention, instant change, speed, and short-termism or episodicity to keep up with the demands of modern life (Elliott & Lemert, 2009). Thus, highlighting the importance of self-transformation to overcome the precariousness of a new world in which a person's employment, income, family life, and acquiring the necessities of life – a home, food, and water, are becoming increasingly uncertain. And, *'tensions of the self and discourses of being'* intensified.

Jürgen Martschukat's (2021) historical analysis of the embodied significations of the American body, inscribed by neo-liberal imperatives, suggests modern preoccupations with the body can be contextualised within what he refers to as *'the age of fitness'*. *'The age of fitness'* referring to the historical and contemporary neoliberal discourses, introduced during the 1970s, that act as regulating forces in contemporary western liberal democracies. Subsequently, producing an embodied state of productivity and responsibility, which individuals feel compelled to relentlessly strive for

(Martschukat, 2021). From this perspective, ‘fitness’ is a dynamic ideology that narrates the minds and bodies of societies to optimise their health, performance, and quality of life. Within ‘free-market’ capitalist societies like the United States of America, where self-responsibility and competition are encouraged, a person's fitness, real or symbolised, determines who succeeds or fails and is recognised or excluded. Thus, the narratives of ‘fitness’ play a central role in all aspects of an individual’s life, including work, sex, and identity.

To negate life’s social pressures, Martschukat (2021), similar to Hoberman (2005; 2014) (*see Introduction, Section II*), highlights the critical role of the pharmaceutical industry, who offer products to improve one’s productivity, sexual performance and bodily aesthetics. In essence, this relationship between the body, discourse and desire illustrates the cyclical nature of capitalism. First, pharmaceutical companies produce imperatives that forewarn a person of their embodied lack – real or imaginary – causing the subject to be concerned about their health. Second, pharmaceutical companies offer a solution to the problem they have created, providing a potential customer with a sense of hope and relief – a renewed (mental) health, body, sex life, and career. This mind-body-neoliberal relationship is explored throughout this study (*Chapters 5–10*), particularly concerning men’s use of ‘Californian Medicine’ – androgens and other associated biopedagogies (e.g., exercise, dieting).

In summary, the phenomenon of treating the body as an ongoing project to establish one’s self within a market-driven and competitive world has become an increasingly significant part of many people’s lives in Los Angeles and beyond. Throughout this study, I seek to reveal the emotional experiences concealed behind the aestheticism of men’s social masks and the role and a/effect body techniques have on men’s lived experiences.

However, although many contemporary embodiment scholars define the self as consisting of a material body and/or a product of culture, the processes of the human psyche and how subjectivities arise within the mind remain unclear and elusive. Given this study is grounded in a (neo-)Nietzschean ontology – that life is an ongoing struggle between the wills, demands and phantasms of the soul, the physiological body and the moralities of culture (Nietzsche, 1882) – I attempt to address, clarify and define this missing link of the self (Carroll, 2008; Furedi, 2006; Solomon, 1988; Winnicott, 2018). To achieve this, in the following section (*Section V*), I outline how the soul/psyche/consciousness has been conceptualised within Continental Philosophy to establish what the soul could be. I then challenge these assumptions by drawing upon the latest findings of postmaterialists to propose my theoretical conceptualisation of what the soul is and its relationship to the mind-body-culture nexus (*Chapter 2*). This postmaterialist interpretation of the soul, anchored within a neo-Nietzschean ontology (*Chapter 2*), guides my interpretations of the participant’s lived experiences and the ‘*tensions of the self and discourses of being*’ throughout this study.



*“Psyche” is a Greek word and its German translation is “soul”. Psychical treatment hence means “treatment of the soul”. One could thus think that what is meant is: treatment of the morbid phenomena in the life of the soul. But this is not the meaning of this term. Psychical treatment wishes to signify, rather, treatment originating in the soul, treatment – of psychic or bodily disorders – by measures which influence above all and immediately the soul of man”.*

Freud (1905b, p. 281)

## **V. The Material, Discursive and Socialised Soul**

Poststructural and psychoanalytic interpretations of the soul/psyche are, primarily, represented in three distinct forms – the instinctual immaterial soul, the (impersonal) material, the discursive-socialised soul. In the following section, I briefly outline how these renderings of the soul have been conceptualised by Bourdieu, Nietzsche, Foucault, Freud and Lacan, which continue to shape academic discourse. I then challenge these assumptions by outlining my post-material interpretation of the soul in *Chapter 2*.

### ***Nietzsche’s Non-atomistic Soul of Biological and Cultural drives***

Rejecting the transcendent and/or atomistic soul of philosophers like Kant, Kierkegaard, Descartes, and Leibniz – a transcendent entity and agential force that directs a human’s behaviour and actions according to rationally calculated values – Nietzsche redefined the soul as non-atomistic. As Nietzsche puts it, “Let this expression [i.e., soul atomism] be allowed to designate that belief which regards the soul as being something indestructible, eternal, indivisible, as a monad, as an atomon: this belief ought to be ejected from science!” (Nietzsche, 1886, p. 12). In contrast, he adopts a neo-naturalist view and proposes the need to examine the soul, the act of being human and people’s ‘wills’, as a product of biological, evolutionary and cultural forces to explain how humans come to have values: “Willing seems to me to be above all something complicated...a plurality of sensations...feelings...thought...affect” (Nietzsche, 1886, p. 11). “The road to new forms and refinements to the soul hypothesis stands open: and such conceptions as ‘mortal soul’ and ‘soul as multiplicity of the subject’ and ‘soul as social structure of the drives and emotions’ want henceforth to possess civic rights in science” (Nietzsche, 1886, p. 12). Thus, for Nietzsche (1886), like Plato, a non-atomistic monad soul exists as a series of embodied drives and forces from which a subject’s values are acted upon beneath the surface of one’s consciousness.

Nietzsche (1886) differentiates ‘drives’ and ‘desires’ by suggesting desires are the feeling of wanting particular goals or objects in any specific space and time, while drives are the enduring psychological and behavioural dispositions that continually (re)affirm certain patterns and habits of behaviour. Drives are shaped and developed by “experience, education and culture” (p. 223). However, unlike Descartes, Leibniz and Plato, human drives, for Nietzsche, do not operate rationally, they are autonomous, governed by their own distinct motivational forces, like instincts, which constitute the self. In short, for Nietzsche, the soul and a person’s values are a manifestation of the multiple and dynamic embodied drives that reside and interact within them.

To explain human behaviour, Nietzsche postulates the various drives within, which he refers to as a “social structure” (Nietzsche, 1886, p. 19), selfishly compete for the ability to satisfy their own behavioural goals, motivating an individual to act in different ways. “Each one of [the drives] would be only too glad to present *itself* as the ultimate goal of existence and as the legitimate *master* of all the other drives. For every drive is tyrannical” (Nietzsche, 1886, p. 6). One example of this is feeling hungry at a social event yet resisting the need to eat to adhere to dignified social codes of conduct. Thus, each drive is motivated for its own selfish cause by the “will to power” and “tyrannical” in the sense that it seeks victory over all the other drives to feel satisfied. “In all willing it is absolutely a question of commanding and obeying, on the basis...of a social structure composed of many ‘souls’ [drives]: each drive tries to seize hold of the person’s cognitive capacities and monopolize them as much as is both possible and practical for seeing the world from its point of view” (Nietzsche, 1886, p. 193). The continual need for a drive to acquire satisfaction by gaining power and dominance over all the other drives results in a final “order of rank” to establish a hierarchy in which the various drives of the soul are positioned relative to each other (Nietzsche, 1886). It is this “order of rank”, whereby these drives interact as a unit, that constitutes “who he is” and what that person’s values are (Nietzsche, 1886 p. 6).

Contextualising and historicising the embodied drives, Nietzsche argues, that the shift of human existence as free and autonomous animals to members of a ‘civilised’ and socialised society led to a profound change in human behaviour – “the deep sickness into which man had to fall under the pressure of that most fundamental of all changes he ever experienced – the change of finding himself enclosed once and for all within the sway of society and peace” (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 16). Now situated within a civilized society, human subjects finds themselves conforming to social norms, restricting their drives to act freely and instinctively. Uncivilized drives, like a drive to aggression, are denied through a societal gaze that civilises the body’s, the souls’, and the mind’s behaviours and their satisfactions. “Instinct for freedom [was] forcibly made latent... driven back, suppressed, imprisoned within, and finally discharging and venting itself only on itself [and not outward]: this, only this, is bad conscience in its beginnings” (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 17). Despite this social conditioning of the self, the soul and its drives still want to exert their influence – “those old instincts had not all at once ceased to make their

demands! It is just that it was difficult and seldom possible to yield to them” (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 16). Consequently, Nietzsche believes this denial of expression leads to the ‘internalizing of man’; “for the most part [the drives] had to seek new and as it were subterranean gratifications. All instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn themselves inwards” leading to the illness and suffering of humanity (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 16).

To overcome the tensions between the soul, body and culture the goal of the individual should be to return to the soul state they had as a child, a period where the self and one’s consciousness and the soul was yet to be fully inhibited and displaced by cultural norms and expectations, when one was free to pursue what brought them joy.

Let the youthful soul look back on life with the question: what have you truly loved up to now, what has elevated your soul, what has mastered it and at the same time delighted it? Place these venerated objects before you in a row, and perhaps they will yield for you, through their nature and their sequence, a law, the fundamental law of your true self. Compare these objects, see how one complements, expands, surpasses, transfigures another, how they form a stepladder upon which you have climbed up to yourself as you are now; for your true nature lies, not hidden deep within you, but immeasurably high above you, or at least above that which you normally take to be yourself (Nietzsche, 1873, p. 129).

Similar to Nietzsche, Freud (1905; 1915; 1920; 1927), throughout his writings, explored the interplay between culture, consciousness, and biology to offer a different account of the soul, an account often obscured by mistranslations of his work.

### ***Freud’s Biological Soul: Misrepresented and Misunderstood***

When reading the edifices of Freud’s translated works in English, his insights into human behaviour and the complexities of the mind appear abstract, depersonalised, hyper-intellectualised and overly theoretical. “Instead of instilling a deep feeling for what is most human in all of us, the translations attempt to lure the reader into developing a “scientific” attitude toward man and his actions, a “scientific” understanding of the unconscious and how it conditions much of our behaviour” (Bettelheim, 1982, p. 52). Yet, the original writings of Freud tell a very different story as he rigorously documents the meaning and nature of the power of the unconscious and its relationship with the soul.

In the Vienna of Freud’s time, psychology was not a natural science (*Naturwissenschaften*) but a branch of philosophy (*Geisteswissenschaften*). *Geisteswissenschaften* means “sciences of the

spirit”, which was considered mainly speculative and descriptive, a humanistic hermeneutic-spiritual knowing and inquiry of the self, juxtaposing the positivistic-pragmatic ‘knowing’ of the natural sciences (Bettelhiem, 1982; Gallucci, 2001). *Geisteswissenschaften*, an idiographic science, was concerned with human history and individual ideas and values. The aim of psychoanalysis, within this field of a ‘spiritual knowing’, was uncovering and revealing the suppressed events of an individual’s past life, which varied from person to person. In essence, this was an archaeological unearthing of the deeply buried remnants of one’s life history and a combining of them with other accessible fragments of one’s being to speculate about the origin and the nature of the individual’s psyche and to understand a person’s development and behaviour. Psychoanalysis, within this context, was not a branch of medicine, but a therapy concerned with understanding a patient’s internal reality and reuniting them with their soul.

Throughout the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (Freud, 2001), Freud’s work is reinterpreted through a medical-positivist and materialist lens. The phrase, “die seele”, meaning “the soul”, is consistently translated as “the mind” or “mental”, and ‘*das Ich*’ as “Ego” when he was talking about the emotional connection to the “me” (i.e., soul). As Gerard Gallucci suggests (2001): “‘soul’ denotes the “ghost in the machine”, the thinking, feeling being that lives in our body – somehow connected to it – that we experience as our *real self*. The mistranslation of *Seele* as mind suggests that Freud was talking of physical events that occur somewhere in the brain. He was not” (p. 19). Furthermore, replacing ‘*das Ich*’ with “Ego” allows one to forget that Freud was not speaking about an element of (mental) anatomy but about one’s innermost self. Translating *das Es* as the ‘id’ deprives it of the emotional impact and alien feel of “it”, as in the common experience of a sudden feeling or emotion that “*it* just came over me” (Gallucci, 2001, p. 19). For Freud, and psychoanalysis during this time, the literal meaning of ‘psyche’ meant soul, and thus understanding the human psyche was concerned with understanding one’s relationship with their soul. “Unfortunately, nobody who reads him in English could guess this because nearly all his many references to the soul, and its matters pertaining to the soul, have been excised in translation” (Bettelhiem, 1982, p. 52).

The model of the soul that Freud (1915) presents is a dynamic theatre of operations, an inner conflict of embodied ‘drives’ (*Triebe*), ‘desires’ and ‘hungers’, firmly anchored in human biology and brought into being through millions of years evolution – a psychic force enmeshed within the flesh of the body that he calls ‘*It*’. The ‘*It*’ performs to the demands of the ‘*pleasure principle*’, which seeks to satisfy the unconscious primal pleasures of the subject’s being – *life and death instincts, sexual and aggressive urges, acts of narcissism* (Freud, 1920). These unconscious desires are regulated by the conscious mind and the ‘*reality principle*’, which modifies behaviour in relation to the authoritative social and cultural norms (Freud, 1920). Yet, seek to satisfy one's innate drives in ways that maximise gain and minimise pain, to master the ‘creature’ within, an internal guardian within the soul, the ‘*Over-*

*I* (superego) (Freud, 1920). Thus, throughout Freud's writings, the *Steele* (soul/psyche) is composed of three components:

- The *das Es* (*id*): the primarily unconscious instinctual drives of an individual, which do not respect the social rules of society.
- The *Over-I* (super-ego): a person's conscience and their internalization of societal norms and morality.
- The *das Ich* (*ego*): the conscious part of the soul which serves to integrate the drives of the *das Es* (*id*) with the prohibitions of the super-ego *Over-I*. It is this conflict between the internal-external drives, biology and culture, that causes neurosis.

Bettelhiem (1983)

Conceptualising the soul in this way, Freud illustrated that life is a spiritual journey and showed how the soul could become aware of itself by becoming acquainted with the lowest depths of psychic life and exploring whatever personal turmoil makes a person suffer. For Freud (1927), self-discovery is what makes humanity more fully human, it enables the self to break free from the dark forces within that enslave us to the emotionality and intentionality that reside within the dark forces of the soul. "By exploring and understanding the origins and the potency of these forces, we not only become much better able to cope with them but also gain a much deeper and more compassionate understanding of our fellow-man" (Bettelhiem, 1982, p. 52). In outlining his vision for the future of psychoanalysis in *In Future of an Illusion*, Freud (1927) wrote: "I want to entrust [psychoanalysis] to a profession that doesn't yet exist, a profession of secular ministers of souls ..." (p. 62), dedicated to the science of the soul, devoted to understanding as fully as possible "the world of man's soul" (p. 63).

In contrast to Nietzsche's and Freud's conceptions of a non-atomistic and material soul, I now turn to the discursive interpretations of the soul presented by Lacan and Foucault.

### ***Lacan's Illusionary Soul***

Influenced by Freud and Hegel, yet offering a different perspective, Lacan perceived the 'beautiful soul' to be a discursive metaphor for the ego: "the ego of modern man...has taken on its form in the dialectical impasse of the *belle âme* [beautiful soul] who does not recognise his very own reason to be in the disorder he denounces in the world" (Lacan, 1966/1977, p. 172-173). Thus, for Lacan the human desire to perceive that it possesses a soul illustrates a form of neuroticism, a paranoiac

misrecognition, which acts as an illusionary object and image of the self, distracting and denying the individual the duty of taking responsibility for what is going on around them (Lacan, 1966/1977). In this light, the ego's attachment to a beautified image of the self (one's soul), results in a lack of care for the actual self (one's material and social needs), which leads to a person's suffering. The self becomes a stranger to its own body and the ego prefers to live through the imaginary of the idealised and symbolic meanings of a soul, the idealised 'me', as opposed to acknowledging the 'real me' and all its imperfections. "One's body, one has it, but one has no degree [of understanding] to it. This is what makes one believe in the soul, following which there is no reason to stop there and one also believes one has a soul, which is a shame" (Lacan, 1966/1977, p. 175). In the Lacanian sense, the soul exists as an "element participating in the dialectic between body and mind and as the element representing in this dialectic the side of the body" (Ronen, 2017, p. 8). The purpose of the soul, in Lacan's eyes, is to distinguish itself from the mind and body, something that is better than these aspects of the self that the individual lacks control over – the inadequate vulnerabilities of the self.

### ***Foucault's Discursive Soul***

Whilst Lacan argues the soul is an illusionary egoic attachment to an idealised self, Foucault (1977) argues against this claim to suggest the soul is a function of regulatory discursive power with real embodied consequences:

It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished – and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized, over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives. This is the historical reality of this soul...The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body. (Foucault, 1977, pp. 29 & 30).

Foucault argues that the topographies of the body and the soul that inhabit the self are socially constructed forces that regulate and restrict the schematic expressions of the flesh and the psyche that are presented to the world. Immersed within the discursive politics of culture, the soul that resides within the human subject is inscribed by history and power, which exercises its regulatory force over a person's consciousness, ethics and morals. Thus, producing an entity that mirrors the time and space in which the actor is positioned. In essence, Foucault is suggesting a discursive soul that alienates the

individual from its mind and body. This is an embodied force whereby the subject becomes hostage, a prisoner, to the ubiquitous power relations that operate around and through the flesh of one's corporeality. James Bernauer (1999) notes: "Foucault presents a necessary spiritual art, a duty of self-relation, of going beyond how we have been created to experience ourselves as animated" (p. xiii), a 'cry of spirit', a rejection of dualism, a discursive and transcendental soul.

Foucault's ontology of the soul presents a spirituality of being that opens up a variety of avenues for self-exploration, beyond the immediate effects of power that shape the human form and human metaphysics, to explore the discourses of the self that influence and govern human behaviour. To continue a theoretical overview of the intersectionality of power, culture, the body and the soul, I now turn to writings of Bourdieu.

### ***Bourdieu, Religion, (Post)Modernity and the Loss of the Soul***

Bourdieu (1998) in *Pascalian Meditations* outlines his "idea of the human being" (p. 8), anchoring his writings on the social processes of embodiment and embodied praxis. Within this text, he describes the fate of the modern man as a consequence of the decline of divine social order and the increasing need for recognition from others and society – the "wretchedness of man without God", foreordained to be "being without a reason for being haunted by the need for justification, legitimation, recognition" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 239). Reaffirming Durkheim's (1912) observations of a cultural shift away from "a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things – beliefs and practices" (p. 47), which united communities, shaped the collective consciousness, and promoted camaraderie and solidarity in pre-modern times.

"Society is god", suggests Bourdieu (1998, p. 245), signifying the cultural reality that contemporary society has increasingly replaced their connection to God, the spiritual realm and intimacy with their inner spirituality and soul, with the need to impress and symbolically compete against the other. Subsequently, leading to a worshipping of the material and aesthetic, which in turn, as noted by Rupert Sheldrake (2017), has precipitated the loss and suppression of ancient spiritual practices that promote health and wellness. And, thus, the loss of a person's spiritual and transcendent psychic knowledge, abilities, and powers.

According to Bourdieu (1998), a society without firm divine order and an increased desire to influence their own fate and social position via status, and the ability to receive recognition from others, leads to a "symbolic struggle of all against all in which what is at stake is the power of naming, or

categorization, in which everyone takes his being, his value, the idea he has of himself” (p. 238). From this perspective, humanity exists within categories of valuation, an unconscious need to appear symbolically valuable to the other, whereby a person’s value is determined by their ability to embody and attain the symbolic significations that are valued within a specific social *mise en scène*. Thus, Bourdieu’s (1979) conceptualisation of social order consists of “categories of perception and appreciation” that he equates with “the social world itself” (p. 483). Society in this context is immersed within a symbolic hierarchical system of classifications and significations that determine, relationally, the legitimacy of an individual’s or/and group’s worthiness, morality and importance. Because of this system, a ‘*symbolic dominance*’ of aesthetics arises, whereby certain societal groups of society and their political interests are marginalised at the expense of others, (e.g., the sublimation and subjugation of the working-class by the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie) (Bourdieu, 1979).

Bourdieu (1998) argues the embodied affectivity of this symbolic struggle for political power and recognition, within an individual’s micro and macro social landscapes, is the struggle of life – a conflict that is experienced viscerally. “One of the most unequal of all distributions, and probably, in any case, the *most cruel*, is the distribution of symbolic capital, that is, of social importance and of reasons for living”, there is “no *worse* dispossession, no *worse* privation, perhaps, than that of the losers in the symbolic struggle for recognition, for access to a socially recognised social being, in a word, to humanity” (Bourdieu, p. 241). There is an emotionality to being recognized from which tensions of the self and discourses of being are felt. “Happiness” then becomes a state that is experienced when a subject is “capable of rescuing one from the sense of the insignificance and contingency of an existence without necessity”, “feeling oneself objectively, and therefore subjectively, endowed” (p. 241). When symbolic capital is distributed unequally, it affects and exasperates a subject’s desire to be recognised, to feel appreciated (Bourdieu, 1998). There is ‘*symbolic violence*’, a disruption to a subject’s being in the world, there is a suffering of the loss of the self to the symbolic, and the loss of one’s connection to their spirituality and soul, their health and well-being (Bourdieu, 1998).

In summary, Continental philosophers, albeit from different perspectives, all have something to say about the soul, human metaphysics, and how consciousness and subjectivities function within the minds and bodies of the human subject. However, influenced by Nietzsche’s desire to question and critically re-examine the soul hypothesis, in the following chapter (**Chapter 2**), I discuss and challenge these historical (and contemporary) understandings of the mind-body-culture union by drawing on the research findings of postmaterialists. In doing so, I redefine and reconceptualise how the human subject is defined, theorised and analysed, and in the process, outline the epistemological and ontological framework that underpins this research.



"For what is the body? The body is merely the visibility of the soul, the psyche."

Carl Jung (1965, p. 355)

## 2

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### CONCEPTUALISING HUMAN EMBODIMENT BEYOND MIND-BODY DUALISM: THE ONTOLOGY, EPISTEMOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS OF BEING

Over the last three–four decades, there has been an increasingly informed agenda by the social sciences and humanities to move beyond René Descartes’s (1641) mind-body dualism, the distinction and separation (yet unison) between the mind (soul) and the body’s senses, by prioritisation the former over the latter (Shilling, 2016). In contrast to Descartes, contemporary embodiment scholars (i.e., Nick Crossley, Loïc Waquant, Chris Shilling, Bryan Turner, Slavoj Žižek, Elizabeth Grosz, Margrit Shildrick and Rosi Braidotti) have begun to adopt eclectic theoretical frameworks to investigate how the embodied subject comes into being. Specifically, they have asked questions about how researchers come to ‘know’, analyse and understand the complexities of the embodied subject by focusing on the cultural, discursive and material dimensions of the mind, (active) body, physical cultures and personhood (Braidotti, 2019; Coole & Frost, 2010; Turner, 2012; Žižek, 2009). However, continue to ignore or/and deny the existence of a transcendent soul (Beauregard, 2021; Glattfelder, 2019; Sheldrake, 2012; 2017; Wallace, 2005; Wilber, 2000; 2001). The following sections discuss why it is necessary to challenge materialist and discursive assumptions about consciousness (*Sections I–IV*) and how the human subject is theorised and researched. Subsequently, I introduce a *neo-Nietzschean* (*Triads of Being*) ontology (*Section V*) to offer a different approach to examining the dynamic and fluid ebbs, flows, and tensions of self.

#### I. Challenging Mind-Body Assumptions

Simone Fullagar (2017) and Holly Thorpe (2014), among others, draw specific attention to the lack of critical attention that mind-body relations (and mental health) have received to date in the emerging debates around physical cultures and embodiment as a transdisciplinary project. Fullagar (2017) suggests:

The absence of critical attention paid to the embodied mind and mental (ill) health raises the question of whether the PCS [physical cultural studies] imaginary has simply reversed the mind-body dualism rather than troubling the hierarchical relation? Bodies are the object and subject of contextual analysis with respect to different physical cultures, yet the politics of our embodied entanglement with emotion, affect or mind are often left unsaid (p. 402).

I argue, this failure to critically question the entanglement between the mind, body and culture, or what I refer to as the '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*', and its relationship with mental health, is principally ignored because embodiment scholars often:

1. Ignore how the mind and consciousness comes into being and how it a/effects one's sense of self and the body;
2. Make assumptions that that consciousness exists as a discursive or/and material phenomenon;
3. Fail to identify, question and define what actually constitutes the mind/consciousness/emotions when conceptualizing and researching the embodied subject.

I propose, for scholars to overcome the epistemological and ontological biases deeply embedded within the collective academic intelligentsia, scholars must be daring enough to challenge the traditional splits between, and the conceptualisations of, the mind (soul), body and culture. They must be "open to different ways of knowing and disrupt manifestations of truth concerning embodied subjectivity" (Fullagar, 2017, p. 403).

To overcome the restrictions of the discursive/material mind-body rationality, I suggest scholars must: a) understand how consciousness has been conceived throughout history; and b) understand how historical conceptions of consciousness continue to influence and shape their subconscious assumptions, and thus, contemporary philosophies of embodiment, praxis, and the human experience. For example, if individuals engage in body practices to "look as good as they feel", where does this feeling of a lack of ageing (not reflected in the body) come from? Is this simply a matter of the subconscious mind being socially conditioned by hegemonic discourses that prioritise a youthful appearance? Or, are there other metaphysical explanations that explain this seemingly innate sense of agelessness, i.e., an ageless soul? Or is there an embodied tension between various aspects of the self, expressed and presented via the physical landscapes of a person's body image? These are the '*tensions of the self and the discourses*' of being that this study explores and examines — the interrelationship between consciousness, body, culture and praxis.

## II. Consciousness, Embodiment and Knowledge of the Self

The mind-body dichotomy is a philosophical problem that has persisted throughout history. Where does consciousness come from? The answer to this question remains unknown. Before and post Descartes (1641) scientific endeavours, various theories have been proposed to address the mysteries of consciousness. Predominantly from dualist and monist perspectives. Dualism or ‘Cartesian duality’ maintains a separation, yet interaction, between mind and matter; physical and mental substances are either fundamental or derivative (Gennaro, 2018). Monism suggests that only one substance or essence shapes our reality and existence, represented in the theories of physicalism, idealism, or neutral monism (Lin, 2015).

For dualists, consciousness is either formed via a distinct type of non-physical substance not regulated by the laws of physics (*substance dualism*) or exists in a singular form consisting of both non-physical mental properties (i.e., desires, beliefs, emotions) and physical properties that conform to the laws of physics (*property dualism*) (Robinson, 2018). Plato and Aristotle theorized that human, animal, and plant consciousness consisted of a hierarchical arrangement of perceptive souls of pain, pleasure, and desire (Caston, 2002; More, 1921; Sorabji, 1974). Plato, influenced by and the influencer of religious beliefs and spirituality, believed in metempsychosis – the soul’s transcendence into a new physical body (More, 1921). Plato’s student, Aristotle, thought all three souls perished when the living organism died (Caston, 2002; Sorabji, 1974).

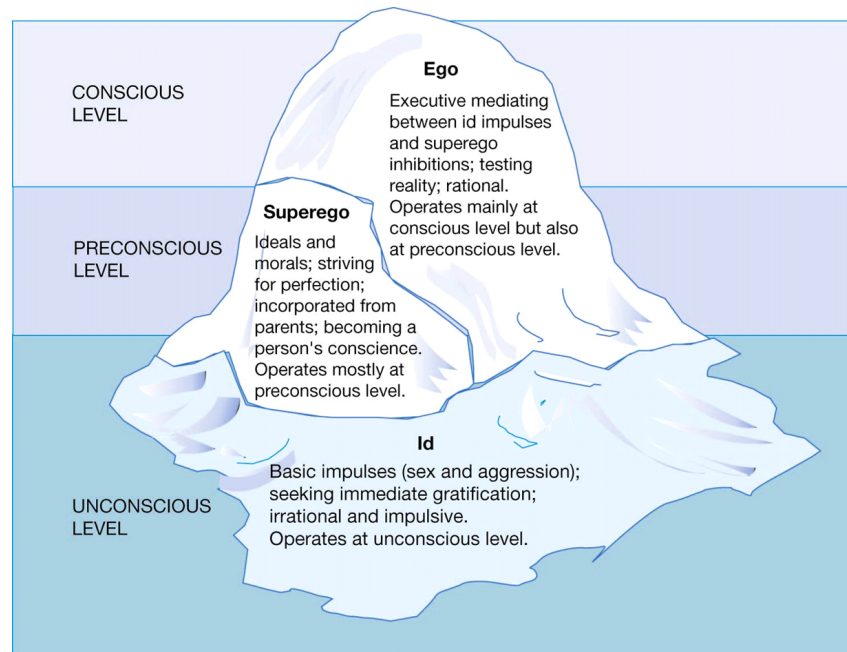
From a monist perspective, there are three schools of thought regarding consciousness. Firstly, consciousness emerges from material matter, as proposed by neuroscience, sociobiology, computer science, and evolutionary psychology – physicalists and materialists (Lin, 2017; Lewis, 1994; Pereboom, 2011), which underpins the traditions of the positivist philosophies of the natural world.

Secondly, consciousness is immaterial and exists without matter (Lin, 2017). Thus, consciousness is a mental or/and discursive construct; the materiality of consciousness, space, and time is an illusion, a prominent worldview within the traditions of Continental philosophy (*idealism*) (i.e., Hegel, Kant, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Foucault) (Bolender, 2001; Brinkmann, 2011). As noted by Hegel (1807) (the founding father of Continental philosophy) in his influential book *Phenomenology of Spirit* – consciousness exists before and is the pre-condition of material existence and is the origin and creator of the material world; all entities are composed of a mind/spirit energy. In honour of Hegel, the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964) wrote: “all the great philosophical ideas of the past century – the philosophies of Marx and Nietzsche, phenomenology, German existentialism, and psychoanalysis – had their beginnings in Hegel” (p. 63).

Finally, those who propose *neutral monism*, as introduced by William James, Baruch Spinoza, David Hume, and Bertrand Russell (*Analytic philosophers*), suggest mind and matter coexist to create a distinct singular essence that is neither mental nor physical (Banks, 2014; Linn, 2017; Persson, 2006). Ultimate reality is said to be neutral between the two. Thus, providing a solution to the mind-body problem by closing the chasm between consciousness's mental and physical entities. Similarly, Charlie Broad (1924), in his book *The Mind and Place in Nature*, outlined the theory of *parallelism*. Parallelism argues for interaction (*dualism*) and one-sided action (*monism*), whereby cognitive and bodily phenomena are perfectly coordinated, simultaneously independent yet inseparable, like a two-sided coin. In essence, when a cognitive event occurs, a delayed or pre-eminent corresponding yet non-causal physical effect occurs (Broad, 1924).

### **III. Freud, Lacan, Consciousness, and the Embodied Subject**

Opposing the Cartesian influenced mind-body theories of consciousness, Freud and Lacan developed alternative frameworks for analysing consciousness from a psychoanalytic viewpoint. As highlighted in Chapter one (*Section V*), Freud (1923) divided the human psyche into the conscious and unconscious mind. The conscious mind, primarily influenced by the ego – responsible for mediating a person's unconscious impulses (i.e., sex and aggression) with the preconscious morals and ideals of the superego (i.e., perfectionism, altruistic, honourable) (Freud, 1923). The unconscious mind, consisting of the *id* – the culturally unaccepted repressed irrational impulses of the material body and the traumas, fears, and memories that cannot be rationalised, confronted and overcome by the conscious mind. Subsequently, these embodied unwanted psychic phenomenon remain buried beneath an individual's state of conscious awareness, unbeknownst to the self, unconsciously, in part, governing one's behaviour despite the ego's best attempt to exhibit the self as normative and desirable. For Freud (1923) the mind is like an iceberg:



**Figure 2. Freud: The Ego, Id and Superego (Brooks, 2017)**

To explain how the conscious and unconscious elements of the mind interact with the external world Freud (1923) theorised that there is a *'perception consciousness system'*. The *'perception consciousness system'* is a psychic process that suggests sensory impressions of the external reality are initially absorbed by the conscious mind, then sorted and distorted by a person's internalised unconscious instinctual impulses and ideals of the superego. When the conscious mind receives information (i.e., visuals, linguistic, experiences, emotions) from the external environment that threaten the ego's idealisation of the self, the superego (unconscious mind) suppresses this undesirable information. This undesirable information is only made conscious through later reflections, dreams, or speech errors/*'Freudian slip'* (parapraxis), if at all. Freud (1976) clarifies the interrelationship, yet difference, between the unconscious and conscious mind in the following statement:

The real difference between an unconscious or preconscious representation is that the former is performed in some material that remains unknown, while the latter is placed in connection with verbal representations. This is the first attempt to indicate distinguishing marks between both systems, the Pcs [preconscious] and the Ucs [unconscious], in addition to its relationship with consciousness (p. 33).

In the book *The Ego and the Id*, Freud (1923) argues acoustic perceptions formed from sensory cues contained in speech signals constitute "a special reserve for the use of the preconscious...So the Pcs system has, as it were, a special sensory source" (p. 89). On the other hand, visual perceptions are not very suitable for making "thoughts" conscious (Freud, 1923). Visual

perceptions and their symbology are stored within the unconscious where other sensory information remains absent. From his perspective, it is through language that representations of reality, both internal and external, reach a person's consciousness. In this sense, a person's subjectivity is not merely a by-product of the needs and desires of the ego, superego and the Id; subjectivity is a by-product of how the politics and meanings of the semiotic world condition the un/conscious minds innate and culturally produced wills, fears, drives and fantasies.

Contesting Freud's mind-body-culture theory of consciousness, Lacan (1949) argued psychoanalysis put too much emphasis on the perception-consciousness model and the ego's capacity to correlate impulses from the *id* with the actual conditions of the subject's existence. "While he [Freud] can give a coherent, balanced account of the majority of other parts of the psychic apparatus, when it's a question of consciousness, he always encounters mutually contradictory conditions" (Lacan, 1954-55/1988, p. 117). "The difficulties which this system of consciousness raises reappear at each level of Freud's theorizing" (Lacan, 1954-55/1988, p.117). Lacan (1954-55/1988) argues Freud cannot locate consciousness within the realm of metapsychology and reserve for it some "special laws" (p. 45), the laws of a material soul.

In contrast, Lacan's model of consciousness, perception, and reality is immediately caught up in *méconnaissance* - the *misrecognition* of one's existence. Therefore, a person's perception of reality is filtered through and distorted within an internally divided ego and its relationship to others and the symbolic systems of culture. For Lacan, the subconscious mind is purely constituted by language and the meanings and subsequent fantasies of language. Lacan (1954-55/1988) states: "The core of our being does not coincide with the ego" (p. 44). The 'I' of the subject (the unconscious) is not the ego. "Literally, the ego is an object – an object which fills a certain function which we here call the imaginary function. This thesis is absolutely essential to technique" (p. 44).

When discussing consciousness, Lacan (1954-55/1988) "speak[s] of a phenomena of consciousness without reifying any kind of cosmic soul, nor any presence in nature" (p. 47). "However, we do know that consciousness is linked to something entirely contingent, just as contingent as the surface of a lake in an uninhabited world – the existence of our eyes or ears" (p. 48). Consciousness exists and occurs whenever "there's a surface such that it can produce what is called an image. That is the materialist definition" (Lacan (1954-55/1988, p. 49). Thus, for him, any image reflected onto a surface behaves like a mirror:

All that is needed is that conditions be such that to one point of reality there should correspond an effect at another point, that bi-univocal correspondence occurs between two points in real space...in this way you can realize that everything which

is imaginary, everything which is properly speaking illusionary, isn't for all that subjective... There are illusions that are perfectly objective, objectifiable, and it isn't necessary to make the whole of our distinguished company disappear for you to understand that (p. 49).

For example, taking a picture of a rainbow – the rainbow is an illusion, an image produced on a surface, but it is not subjective. Lacan's materialist definition of consciousness is not egoically constituted, nor is it a purely subjective phenomenon. A Lacanian worldview suggests the phenomenon of consciousness is psychically detached and replaced by what is real – the material, the symbolic or imagined and fantasized (*as discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1*).

Lacan (1954-55/1988) argues the concept of the ego should be replaced by what he calls the imaginary, “an object” that functions to alienate the self through identification. Rather than giving us the experience of consciousness, the ego creates tension between the *corps morcele* – the real body fragmented, and the unity of the image of the gaze of the ‘Other’. Rather than seeking unification between consciousness and the ego, the subject seeks unification through a virtual unity. Subsequently, the self becomes an alienated identity, caught between the realness of the body, discourse, and one's interpretations and fantasies of discourse. Lacan (1949) explores this virtual identification process within his theory ‘*the mirror phase*’ (*as discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1*).

The subjective half of the pre-mirror experience is the paralytic, who cannot move about by himself except in an uncoordinated and clumsy way. What masters him is the image of the ego, which is blind, and which carries him...the paralytic, whose perspective this is, can only identify with his unity in a fascinated fashion, in the fundamental immobility whereby he finishes up corresponding to the gaze he is under, the blind gaze (p. 50)...The subject sets itself up as operating, as human, as I, from the moment the symbolic system appears. And this moment cannot be deduced from any model of the order of individual structuration. (Lacan, 1954-55/1988, p. 52).

From a Lacanian point of view, the subject has to find and organize itself in the symbolic world. It is within the meanings of the discursive world where subjectivities become embodied and expressed. This symbolic dimension is the difference between the human and the machine – “for the human subject to appear, it would be necessary for the machine, in the information it gives, to take account of itself, as one unity amongst others. This is precisely one thing that it cannot do” (Lacan, 1954-55/1988, p. 52). For Lacan (1977), a psychotic symptom is “a metaphor in which flesh or function is taken as a signifying element” (p. 528). Therefore, the role of psychoanalysis is to restore a patient's sovereign freedom by facilitating a conscious realization that they are the master of the signifier (meaning), even if they are not the master of the signified (object, i.e., body (part)). Lacan (1977)

suggests that a more unified and peaceable self emerges once a subject learns to psychically detach from cultural meanings that inhibit their sense of self, which is the cause of inner stress and turmoil.

Critics of Lacan's relational, discursive, and social constructionist viewpoint argue that this form of episteme reduces the lived human experience to existing as a discursive phenomenon (Boghossian, 2006; Laclau, 1995; Woolgar & Pawluch, 1985). Similarly, this attitude is expressed within the writings of – Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, and many other Continental philosophers who also ignore or/and deny the existence of an internal essence. Butler and Barthes reiterate: consciousness and “bodies are constituted within specific nexus of culture or discourse/power regimes” (Butler, 1989 p. 602) and “there is no materiality or ontological independence of the body outside of any one of these specific regimes” (Butler, 1989, p. 602). There is no nature in the world. Nature is a social construct, and thus, an illusion (Barthes, 1994; 2013). The self is simply an object mapped upon by linguistics, power, culture and meaning, an idea initially proposed within Ferdinand De Saussure's (1959/1994) theory of the sign. However, materialist scholars of consciousness like Laclau (1995), Pinker (2002), Chomsky (2018), and Dennett (2017) argue these social constructionist explanations of consciousness reduce human behaviour to discourse, ignore the role of the subject, free-will, agency and the material realities of the body/brain

In an attempt to address the critiques and counter-critiques of the historical and contemporary philosophical conceptualisations of consciousness and the embodied subject, scholars from an array of disciplines (e.g., body studies, physical cultural studies, philosophy, sociology, and quantum physics) are increasingly moving towards unifying, as opposed to a separating, the various aspects of being – the mind, body, and cultural elements of the self. However, in the following (**Section IV**), I argue the marginalisation of a critical component of the self continues despite clear empirical and scientific evidence of its existence. The existence of Plato's and Descartes's transcendent and immortal soul that resides within and beyond the human body, which I suggest, underpins how ‘*tensions of the self and discourses of being*’ are experienced, which are negotiated and managed with various praxis of the self. Thus, within this study, I affirm Nietzsche's belief that life is an ongoing struggle between the wills, demands and phantasms of the soul, the physiological body, and the moralities of culture. Albeit a different kind of soul to which he had in mind.



#### IV. Post–Materialism and the Discourses of Consciousness

Joshua Newman and Michael Giardina (2014) suggest exploring the processes of embodiment and physical cultures can be achieved by examining the biopolitics of the body. For them, understanding the embodied subject requires a deeper engagement with a diverse range of theoretical perspectives across feminist philosophy, cultural theory, sociology, and critical psychology – an “*ecology of a kinesis affect*”, as they put it (Newman & Giardina, 2014). This approach “sutures both meanings of “affect” (to produce an effect upon; the conscious subjective aspect of an emotion considered apart from bodily changes) into a critical praxis of active embodiment” (Newman, 2013, p. 400). And, in doing so, encourages an understanding of the dynamic, fluid, fixed and complex forces of embodiment, cultural practices and ideologies that produce subjectivity – the biopsychosocial aggregation of thoughts, emotions and a/effects that present themselves within the discourses of life (Blackman, 2012; Braidotti, 2013; Burrows & Sinkinson, 2014; Fullagar, 2017; Grosz, 1994; Rose, 2007; Witherall, 2012).

In response to Newman and Giardina (2014), Fullagar (2017) calls for a critical examination of the embodied formation of the ‘inner world’ of the self that we have come to ‘know’ through the rise of the psy-disciplines – emotional lives (desires, pleasures, and sufferings), macro-immediate imperatives, and subjectivities of the contemporary (bio)citizen. Too often, the psy-disciplines, embedded within neoliberal ideals, have sought to punish the individual for their social and physical ills and have neglected the various social influences impinging upon their everyday experiences of health and well-being. Fullagar (2017) elaborates:

...mental health problems [tensions] are all too often imagined, felt and presented as ‘private troubles’ (chemical imbalances and personal failings) rather than understood as ‘public feelings’ that are shaped within the nexus of culture, power and inequality. Hence, there is a need for critical exploration of how sport, exercise and other physical cultures are increasingly positioned as ‘good’ for mental health. (p. 403).

Similarly, Rosi Braidotti (2013) advocates for an ‘*ontological rationality*’ to understand the contemporary processes of human embodiment. ‘*Ontological rationality*’ embraces a holistic approach to explore and appreciate the “formation of subjectivity through multiple desires and affects that connect culture, biology and technology through intelligent flesh and an embodied mind” (Fullagar, 2017, p. 404).

The growing trend of scholars adopting holism as a research paradigm, through a transdisciplinary approach, to study embodiment, physical cultures, and praxis, as illustrated by

Newman and Giardina, Fullagar, and Braidotti, reflects a strong desire to challenge traditional binary positions that have shaped academic thinking – masculine/feminine, culture/biology, health/illness, expert/patient, mind/body, object/subject, reason/emotion, abnormal/normal, reductionism/contextualization, spirituality/science among other dichotomies. Such an approach embraces and includes contemporary developments in neuroscience, evolutionary biology, critical psychology, and (bio)technology to advance and revitalize the social sciences to ensure they remain academically relevant in an increasingly complex, dynamic, competitive, and bio-technological global marketplace (Silk, Andrews & Thorpe, 2017).

However, despite these recommendations, the embodied subject existing as a spiritual being (e.g., the existence of a (transcendent) soul) continues to be marginalised by the dogmas of scientific discourse within the collective consciousness of the academic intelligentsia (Beauregard, 2021; Beauregard, Trent & Schwartz, 2018; Glattfelder, 2019; Sheldrake, 2012; 2017; 2019). Even though the study of the human psyche and subjectivity, within the fields of philosophy and psychoanalysis, was initially centred around understanding the soul's needs (e.g., the works of Socrates and Plato, c. 375 BC; Freud, 1905b; Jung, 1965). For example, in *The Republic* (c. 375 BC), in regards to the biopolitics of the body and soul, Socrates concludes that a person's ability to experience social justice influences the health of the soul: a just soul is a soul with its parts arranged appropriately, and thus a healthy soul.

Maurice Buckle (1901), William James, and Freud (1922; 1933), followed by Jung (1963; 1971), were amongst the first scholars to empirically document the existence of a transcendent and immortal soul when numerous patients of theirs reported having out-of-body and near-death experiences. During these experiences, individuals recalled their souls transcending the temporal boundaries of their bodies as they astral travelled through different planes of time and space, of earth and beyond, often whilst they were assumed clinically dead. Sceptical of such experiences, which challenged their materialist interpretations of the soul, Freud and Jung (Jung, 1963) pathologized their patients as expressing symptoms of fantasy, trauma, hysteria, neurosis and psychosis. However, Jung's (1963) own lucid out-of-body, near-death experience during a heart attack, in which he accurately foresaw the death of one of the hospital's doctors, forced him to reconsider his views. Despite Jung (1963) initially denying and disbelieving his out-of-body experience, this event would significantly impact his insights and writings on *depth psychology* – the psychology of the sacred inner worlds of the self, examining the relationship between the soul and the unconscious and conscious mind from a spiritual perspective. Jung (1973) writes: “[The soul] is of divine nature and therefore immortal; that there is a power inherent within it which builds up the body, sustains its life, heals its ills and enables the soul to live independently of the body” (p. 3297).

Since Jung's compelling insights and theorizations of the soul and the (sub)conscious mind, a growing anthology of scholarship has emerged to support his findings. This significant collection of empirical studies since the 1960s includes thousands of reports documenting and analysing life-after-death, near-death and past life experiences, experiences of the soul transcending the physical body or living the life of a reincarnated soul, from individuals living in North America, Europe and Asia (Fontana, 2007; Greyson, 2012; Holden, Greyson & James, 2009; Henry, 2005; Long, 2014; Parnia et al., 2014; Stevenson, 1997; 2015; 2016; Tucker, 2011; 2013; Williams, 2012). Individuals have also experienced out-of-body events during sport, music, and when consuming recreational and plants based stimulants (i.e., the use of Ayahuasca by indigenous tribes) (Aldridge & Fachner, 2006; Beaugard, 2007; 2012; 2017; Peláez, 2020; Sheldrake, 2017; 2019). Thus, as the French theologian and evolutionary theorist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1976) observed, humans are not human beings having a spiritual experience; humans are spiritual beings having a human experience.

Building upon the scholarly endeavours of the philosopher Rudolph Steiner (1861–1925) (1904; 1909; 1910; 1912; 1988; 1999; 2003; 2005; 2020) to scientifically analyse the soul, scientists from a range of fields (i.e., mathematics, neuroscience, psychology and physics) have been able to confirm the empirical research of Jung and others, by quantifying the existence of a conscious self that is transient and non-material (i.e., an immortal soul) (Artart & Obaid, 2017; Miller, 2015; Mohammed, 2019; Ryan, 2015). Scientists have discovered the existence of an ethereal soul by studying an array of out-of-body experiences. For example, remote viewing (as used by American intelligence agencies) (Puthoff, 1996; Swann, 2018; 2018b; 2020; Targ, 1996; 2010), astral travel/projection, out-of-body experiences during dreams, (transcendental) meditation (Crow, 2012; Fox, 2019; Myers, 2014; Wahbeh et al., 2018) and (transcendental) hypnosis (Facco et al., 2018). Commonly, individuals use these techniques in conjunction with each other (i.e., remote-viewing, astral travel and (transcendental) meditation) to transcend their physical bodies, travel throughout the universe, and view different places, persons, or events, in the past, present, and future (Beauregard, 2021; Brown, 1996, 1999; Bruce, 1999; Dane, 1975; Fox, 2019; Peake, 2016). Courtney Brown (2005), a scientific researcher associated with the United States military, notes the reality of outer –body–travel is not in dispute among a large body of respected researchers, both inside and outside of academia (e.g., the Central Intelligence Agency (C.I.A.), the Defense Intelligence Agency (D.I.A.)). Trained remote viewers verify their abilities by recalling specific objects, numbers, and codes in different locations anywhere in the world (Brown, 2005).

In the autobiography *The Intuitive Warrior*, Michael Jaco (2010), a former navy seal trained by Native American Indians, the United States Navy (14 years' service) and the C.I. A. (11 years' service), shares his insights and abilities to remote view and astral travel (intentional out-of –body experiences) during numerous military conflicts (e.g., Panama and Iraq) to predict violent attacks and

protect his fellow soldiers. Regarding his first out-of-body experience, which initially awakened him to the realities of astral travel and his ability to transcend his corporeality, he recalls:

Miraculously, no one had been injured in the nightly mortar attacks over the past several weeks [in Iraq]...during this time, I had what is called an out-of-body experience (OBE). During an OBE, you are completely awake and aware, but your awareness is *out of* your body. This is not to be confused with lucid dreaming...In a lucid dream, you are aware *in* your body...I remember the feeling of floating and being aware that I was above my body, and a thrill went through me as I realized what was happening...I looked down to see if I could view my body, and to my horror realized that the trailer was destroyed and what looked like bricks were strewn all around...this confused me. I looked closer in the darkness to see if I could find my body and saw that it was mangled and torn...I was seeing a dead body...and my spirit had departed it...a complete peace washed over my being, and then I saw a brilliant flash of orange light, and I awoke in my bed inside the trailer...Thankful to still be alive [although severely injured] (Jaco, 2010, p. 174).

Jaco now uses his 'psi' abilities to train other military and intelligence professionals and everyday civilians to remote view. The key, he suggests, is for people to connect with their natural intuitive thoughts, the inner soul, and to control the analytical mind, which seeks to over-rationalize, question, and doubt the psychic abilities that are freely available to everyone (Jaco, 2010; 2014).

For many, including former sceptics, the empirical and scientific evidence produced over the last 60 years is incontrovertible, and a refusal to accept the reality of psychic phenomena is itself *prima facie*, unscientific and untenable (Beauregard, Trent & Schwartz, 2018; Flew, 2009; Miller, 2014; Radin, 1997, 2018; Vernon, 2021). The evidence is clear. Anomalous activity, 'psi' activity, reveals that consciousness exists beyond the body's corporeality. The long-standing unsolved mind-body(-culture) problem, the mystery of consciousness, is finally being solved. Thus, the prevailing scientific assumption that consciousness exists as purely a material phenomenon of the brain, that the mind is matter, is simply an ideological proposition of the materialists' ego and desire to reinforce their empiricist worldviews. Particularly, given that they cannot quantify their claims (Goff, 2017; Hedman, 2017; LeDoux, Michael & Lau, 2020; Overgaard, 2017; Rose, 2013). In short, materialist views of consciousness have been extinct for decades. There is a soul, an embodied spirit, and consciousness is immaterial.

Despite these findings, materialists remain sceptical and continue to dismiss the existence of an immaterial soul and consciousness as pseudoscience (Boudry, Blancke & Pigliucci, 2015; Gardner, 2001; Hines, 2003; Park, 2008; Pigliucci et al., 2013; Wynn & Wiggins, 2001). Physicist James Glattfelder (2019) notes:

Within a scientific worldview, spirituality is mostly seen as being just as villainous as religiosity. Even the empathetic words of the physicist Carl Sagan – “Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality.” (Sagan, 1996, p. 29) – have not changed much about this attitude. However, slowly the scientific taboos are beginning to tumble (p. 538).

Consequently, bridges between psychology, mathematics, neuroscience, biology, philosophy, medicine, and physics are developing (Beauregard, 2017; 2021; Glattfelder, 2019; Miller, 2014; Sheldrake, 2017). To unravel the mystery of consciousness, researchers are also turning to the traditionally depreciated spiritual practices and wisdom of indigenous peoples, which have castrated from the hegemonic paradigms of knowledge within Western cultures (Narayanan, 2005; Plante, 2010; Sheldrake, 2017; 2019; Wallace, 2004; 2009; 2013; Wallace & Hodel, 2008; Wilber, 2000; 2001; 2007; 2016; Ward, 2011). Such developments have forced some sceptics, like Christopher French (2018), to conclude: “parapsychology at its best... appears to meet most if not all of the benchmarks of true science as opposed to pseudoscience” (p. 375). In light of modern science, scholars, like the world’s most notorious atheist Anthony Flew (2009), have been forced to concede and admit that they can no longer deny the existence of life beyond the material body. Thus, in agreement with postmaterialists, I argue, there needs to be reconsideration and reconceptualization of contemporary philosophies and scholarship concerning human metaphysics, embodiment, and life’s origins.

Cognitive neuroscientist Mario Beauregard (2009; 2012; 2018; 2021) argues that the postmaterialist paradigm, whereby the brain acts as a transmitter of thoughts instead of determining them, is the next great scientific revolution with far-reaching implications. Beauregard prophesy’s:

...it re-enchants the world and profoundly alters the vision we have of ourselves, giving us back our dignity and power as human beings. The postmaterialist ...fosters positive values such as compassion, respect, care, love, and peace, because it makes us realize that the boundaries between self and others are permeable. In doing so, this paradigm promotes an awareness of the deep interconnection between ourselves and nature at large. In that sense, the model of reality associated with the postmaterialist paradigm may help humanity to create a sustainable civilization and to blossom (Wallia, 2018).

However, despite the expanding reality of consciousness, for the most part, the transcendent potentialities of human consciousness, the (transcendent and immortal) soul, remains absent from contemporary conceptualizations of consciousness within the research concerning human embodiment, subjectivity, metaphysics and praxis. In agreement with Beauregard (2012), “along with an increasing number of scientists, I believe vehemently that *the materialist framework is not science*” (p. 3) and that the mind and brain are separate entities.

Subsequently, in the following section (*Section V*), this project attempts to overcome the hegemonic assumptions and limitations of (new) materialists and social constructionist knowledge by proposing a dynamic, multivariant postmaterialist approach to understanding consciousness and embodiment.

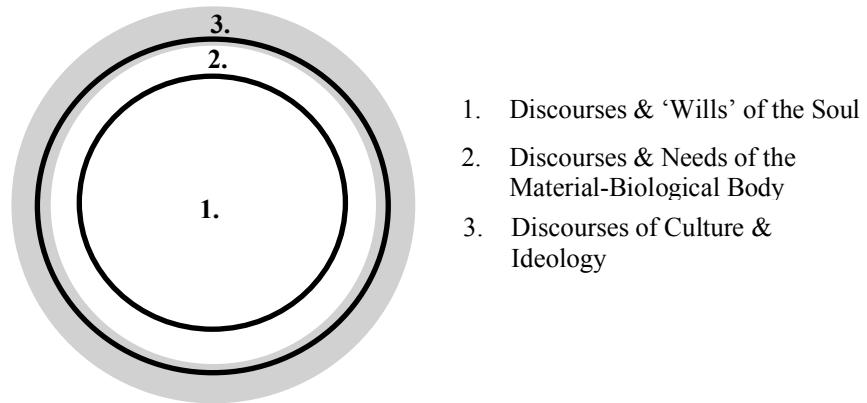
## **V. Introducing the ‘Triads of Being’: (Re)Configuring Human Embodiment, Consciousness and Subjectivity**

Bryan Turner (2016) suggests monolithic interpretations of the human experience that reduce the self to being principally discursively (e.g., social constructionists) or materially (i.e., (new) materialists) produced deny the diverse realities of the embodied subject. To overcome the limitations of these binary positions, Turner (2016) proposes the need to adopt a ‘*modified social constructionist*’ approach, or as Celia Roberts (2000) puts it, a ‘*co-constructionist*’ worldview, that acknowledges the biological and social aspects of embodiment. As Chris Shilling (1993/2012) notes:

...naturalistic views of the body have, since the eighteenth century, exerted a considerable influence on how people have perceived the relationship between the body, self-identity and society. Naturalistic views...deserve to be seen as a coherent approach as they share an analysis of the body which views it as the pre-social, biological basis on which the superstructures of the self and society are founded (p. 41).

Yet, any recognition of the soul of the self remains absent. Interweaving postmaterialist, materialist and social constructionist perspectives, as outlined above, the ontology that grounds this project argues that the processes of consciousness and embodiment consist of three elements – the *transcendent soul*, *material body* and the *discursive socio-cultural self*, which drive human behaviour and condition individual subjectivities. Thus, this study reflects a reinterpretation and updated version of Nietzsche’s (1882) ontological conceptualization of embodiment – that life is an ongoing struggle between the competing demands, wills, desires and needs of the soul, body and culture. In essence, a *neo-Nietzschean* ontology, which I outline and diagrammatically present in the following.

1. The self originates as a pre-corporeal transcendent form of psychic energy (soul/spirit) in which authentic desires and the ego reside.
2. The soul, one’s innate being, inhabits the corporeal material human self; it becomes a ‘human being’.
3. The soul and materialist energies of the self become conditioned by discourses of culture and ideology.



**Figure 3.** Discourses of Consciousness and the Embodied Subject – ‘The Discourses of Being’

Informed by the findings of postmaterial researchers, as discussed in the previous section (*Section IV*), a *neo-Nietzschean* ontology of consciousness and embodiment moves beyond a dualistic ‘*modified social constructionist*’/‘*co-constructionist*’ understanding of the human being. A *neo-Nietzschean* ontology acknowledges the existence of an emotive soul that precedes and succeeds the flesh of human corporeality – in which pre-material and pre-social, innate, and authentic desires and emotions are located (Beauregard, 2021; Radin, 1997/8; Sheldrake, 2012; 2017; Stevenson, 1997; Shroder, 1999; Wallace, 2005; Wilber, 2000; 2001). From this perspective, similar to Nietzsche, I propose what constitutes the embodied subject is a triad of needs, drives, energies and discourses that co-exist and often compete against each other when not in unison. This is an ontological position that I call the ‘*Triads of Being*’ – which refers to the specific needs of the soul, body, the social self:

1. **The authentic needs of the soul** (*intra/interpersonal relationships, emotional intimacy and meaningful connections to others, love, self-affirmation/ actualization/realization*).
2. **The needs of the material body** (physiological health and wellness).
3. **The needs of the social self** (*recognition, status, capital, knowledge, aesthetics*) and the embodied **a/effects of culture and discourse**.

Throughout this study, I demonstrate how the internalised ‘*Triads of Being*’ produce psychic and bodily tensions within a subject (e.g., mental stress, body dysmorphia, lust), and the praxis used to negotiate these tensions (e.g., synthetic androgens, exercise, recreational drugs, sex). In doing so, I reveal how mind-body-culture tensions are negotiated and managed throughout a person’s life, the

various discursive imperatives that displace and disorientate the innate needs of the soul and body, and the a/effect these embodied tensions have on a person's subjectivities, relationships and praxis.

To summarise, in response to embodiment and physical cultural theorists' call to action to produce critical work that transcends the orthodoxy of contemporary philosophical approaches to thinking (Braidotti, 2013; Coole & Frost, 2010; Fullagar, 2017; Newman, 2013; Pringle, 2016; Pringle & Thorpe, 2017; Thorpe, 2012), I attempt to transcend the nature/nurture, mind/body divide, and the absence of the transcendent soul, by adopting a holistic approach to analysing men's bodies, subjectivities, and body practices. I attempt to achieve this by adopting a postmaterialist *neo-Nietzschean* ontology, which disrupts what many contemporary embodiment scholars suggest constitutes a normative body and mind (e.g., a materialist or/and discursive body).

Thus, this study endeavours to reinvigorate the importance of the soul within psychoanalysis and the social sciences to explore the relationship between culture, the self, praxis, and mental and physical health, to provide an updated theoretical conceptualisation of the lived experience of the human subject. In essence, I am (re)returning the soul to the forefront to reveal the psychic realities that contemporary hegemonic paradigms of nature, the universe, and the human subject have displaced.

In the following Chapters (*Chapters 3–4*), I outline a dynamic suite of useful methodological tools and the theoretical framework used to reveal the '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' (*'Triads of Being'*), from which body practices emerge, in relation the lives of a cohort of men living in Los Angeles, California.



*“Life history data would put some valuable meat on the theoretical bones of the poststructural skeleton, which for some, has spent too long in armchair theorizing and little time interacting with the people.”*

Andrew Sparkes (1994, p. 12)

### 3

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## RESEARCHING THE PRAXIS OF EMBODIED ‘TENSIONS OF THE SELF AND DISCOURSES OF BEING’

In response to, and in agreement with, Andrew Sparkes’s (1994) critique of poststructuralism, in this chapter, I bring together qualitative methods (*life histories, (visual) ethnography*) and poststructural discourse analysis to analyse the lived experiences and body practices of a cohort of diverse men living in Los Angeles. I then bring these men’s lived experiences to life with the embodiment theories of Foucault, Bourdieu, Nietzsche, and Freud, reinterpreted via a neo-Nietzschean ontology (see **Chapter 2**), throughout the analysis chapters (*Chapters 5–9*).

### I. Selecting the Participants

To examine men’s embodied *‘tensions of the self and discourses of being’* that underpin their body practices – notably synthetic androgens, I selected and interviewed a group of twenty-four men between the ages of 24 and 40. For many individuals, it is during this stage of their lives (early adulthood) when experiences of psychic, biological, and cultural stress are likely to be heightened as they pursue their aspirations for love, a career, and social status (Smith & DeFrates-Densch, 2008; Sielman & Rider, 2017; Sugarman, 2004).

Developmental theorists (i.e., Erikson, Kohlberg, Piaget and Bronfenbrenner) suggest researching subjects between 18-40 years of age affords unique insights into a person’s social and psychic desires for intimacy, affiliation and love, and self-actualization (Erikson, 1994; Sielman & Rider, 2017). When these essential human needs are not met, often due to a lack of personal and interpersonal connectivity with oneself (soul) and others, *‘tensions of the self’* emerge within one’s psychical and corporeal being (Maslow, 1993; 2012; Sielman & Rider, 2017).

Unfortunately, within contemporary society, the academic evidence suggests that individuals are increasingly struggling to fulfil their basic needs because of a neoliberal culture that demands immediacy, fast love and provides economic insecurity and uncertainty (Lemert & Elliott, 2006; Elliott & Lemert, 2009). Thus, tensions of the self are on the rise. For example, some of the a/effects of the implementation of neoliberal policies and ‘*free-market*’ economics, particularly within large cities like Los Angeles, include a loss of access to affordable homes, food, education, health care, job security and leisure activities (Victor, Scambler, Bowling & Bond, 2005; Victor & Yang, 2012). These are ‘*tensions of the self and discourses of being*’ that can only be overcome by a person’s ability to earn a higher income. For many, achieving a higher income requires transforming their physical appearance (Elliott, 2013; 2015b; 2018b; Hoberman, 2005; 2017; Shilling, 2016; 2017).

Additionally, within the last ten years, the psychic of a neoliberal life have become increasingly mediated via technology. For many, this digitalization of the self and the lived experience has replaced authentic and meaningful connections within the physical world to the virtual – the artificial realm of the imaginary and the symbolic (Braidotti, 2013; Elliott, 2019; Kaplan, 2006; Tripathi, 2010). In short, what Elliott and Lemert (2006; 2009) refer to as the emotional costs of globalization, the technological revolution and a ‘new individualism’ (*see p. 37*).

To explore the relationship between desire, culture, the body and praxis, West Los Angeles (featuring the middle-class and affluent districts of West Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Bel Air, Brentwood, and Santa Monica) was identified as a location of interest. This part of Los Angeles and the United States is a psychogeography known for its (youthful) body image culture, influenced by the body image imperatives of Hollywood and celebrity culture, health and wellness, and a hyper-competitive free-market where good looks and a commodified self are often perceived to be critical to being noticed, desired, earn a good income and live a good life (Albright, 2007; Blakely, 2014; Elliott, 2011; Fredrick et al., 2007; Martschukat, 2021; Shilling, 2016).

### ***‘Snowballing’***

Once situated within West Los Angeles as a researcher, I began to seek out potential participants for this project. I identified and selected the participants using the qualitative technique known as ‘*snow balling*’ (Morgan, 2008). ‘*Snow balling*’ involved meeting and choosing potential participants, approximately thirty-five individuals, via the social fields and networks I interacted with (e.g., health and fitness clubs, social events, and acquaintances of friends). Those who expressed an interest in being involved in the research and met the selection criteria – 27-40 years of age, male, Los Angeles residents who had consumed image/health-enhancing synthetic androgens. I then short-listed

the potential participants for this study, primarily based on their availability to engage in ongoing interviews.

In total, twenty-four individuals gave testimonials of their life histories, sharing their personal stories about their lives and relationships with their bodies, identities, body practices, others, Los Angeles, and life in general. Due to the quantity of the data collected, the complexity of the life histories told, time limitations and word restrictions, I chose to focus on eight of the participants to ensure that these men's lived experiences were theoretically analyzed and contextualized with the vigour they deserve. There were two reasons why I selected these eight men: 1) for the rich data they provided within their life histories, and 2) individuals that I felt were representative of the diverse West Los Angeles populous, as reflected in various demographic reports (Warren, 2018; Census Reporter, 2019).

The participants featured within this project consisted of men from working and middle-class<sup>12</sup> upbringings, of various ethnic, racial, sexual dispositions and income brackets. For example: three individuals who expressed same-sex desires, a student, artist, accountant, personal trainer, porn star, and two entrepreneurs. The majority of the participants had relocated from other states within the United States of America (e.g., Illinois, Texas, Mid-West America). Two of the participants had grown up abroad (e.g., Iran and Mexico). Such a diverse range of men, reflective of the West Los Angeles community, enabled a range of discourses, imperatives, and tensions of the self, which underpinned their use of androgens, to be analysed and explored.

In the following section, I give a brief and introductory glimpse into these men's lives, personal biographies, and experiences (using pseudonyms), illuminated and expanded upon throughout this project:

### ***Erik***

*26 years of age, single, fashion student, born and raised as a child in Iran before moving to the middle-class district of Orange County, Los Angeles as an adolescent with his family. Erik currently lives in the middle-class district of Beverly Hills, where he has lived for two years, and works part-time as a fashion designer.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Working class*: workers who on average have lower incomes and less social mobility than those from middle and upper classes, experience a greater likelihood of poverty, less job security, unfulfilling employment and unpleasant working conditions, and fewer chances of a structured career.

<sup>2</sup> *Middle-class*: 'white collar' workers who often possess educational and technical qualifications, and enjoy more favourable working conditions and social mobility than the working-class but less so than the upper-class. Turner, B., Abercrombie, N. & Hill, S. (2006) *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*. Penguin. pp., 347-349, 426-427.

**John**

*34 years of age, single, entrepreneur, born in Mexico prior to moving to Orange County as an infant. During his childhood, he moved to the affluent district of Bel Air, Los Angeles and currently lives in the middle-class district of West Hollywood, Los Angeles.*

**Brad**

*35 years of age, single, personal trainer, born and raised in a small working-class town in southern Illinois. Moved to West Hollywood after graduating university in his early twenties.*

**Joe**

*29 years of age, single, accountant, born and raised in a conservative-religious small town in Idaho. Moved to West Hollywood at the age of 27.*

**Johnny**

*30 years of age, single, information technology professional, born and raised in a lower-middle-class town in New York State before moving to the middle-class district of Brentwood, Los Angeles at the age of 27.*

**Frank**

*39 years of age, single, artist (painter), born and raised by a working-class family in the conservative city of St. Louis, Missouri. During his early twenties he moved to a conservative-religious town in Utah before settling in the middle-class district of Santa Monica, Los Angeles, at the age of 26.*

**Luke**

*40 years of age, married with two children, entrepreneur, born and raised in the middle-class district of Santa Monica. Travelled throughout the world on a small boat for 5-years during his late*

*twenties and early-thirties, before returning home. Now transitioning to a new life in Mexico with his family.*

### **Chad**

*33 years of age, single, African-American, gay escort, and adult entertainer, born and raised by a working-class family within a small conservative town in Texas. Trained in the military after graduating university, and moved to West Hollywood at the age of 27.*

In conducting research with these men, a rich plethora of complex and interwoven narratives and lived experiences emerged to be deconstructed, interpreted, theorized, contextualized and presented to illustrate the various *'tensions of the self and discourses of being'* that have shaped – and continue to shape – their individual and collective subjectivities and their use of particular body/mind modification techniques. To demonstrate how the participants' testimonies and personal stories were gathered, revealed and analysed, I now discuss the methodologies I employed.

## **II. Life Histories Interviews: Gaining Insights into the 'Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being'**

Robert Park, an influential American sociologist during the 1920s, established the life histories interviewing technique as a valid and credible investigative tool when he gathered a rich array of data relating to American life – human ecology, race relations, migration and assimilation (Park, 1950; 1952; 1955; Park, Burgess & McKenzie, 1925). Within these studies, Park embraced subjectivity, co-created his research with his participants, and interpreted and presented their stories within a macro-local social and historical context. “By providing contextual data, the stories can be seen in the light of changing patterns of time and space in testimony and action as social constructions” (Goodson, 2001, p. 131). Thus, as will be evident with this study, life histories research is an effective tool to contextualise human behaviour within a socio-cultural and historical context, within a specific time and place.

Life histories researchers place themselves within the research. They seek to see the world through the participants' eyes to understand their lived human experiences (physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually). Life history researchers also acknowledge individual and multiple subjectivities, which has seen a revival within post-modern, post-structuralist times (Goodson, 2001; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995; Sparkes, 1994). Life histories allow for the participants' voices to be heard

through in-depth guided or informal interviews through which the researcher can gain deep and meaningful understandings of a person's psychic life, praxis and cultural practices within a specific social nexus (Sparks & Templin, 1992; Connell & Pearson, 2015). Life histories scholar Petra Munro (1998) reiterates:

The current focus on acknowledging the subjective, multiple and partial nature of human experience has resulted in a revival of life history methodology. What were previously criticisms of life history, its lack of representativeness and its subjective nature, are now its greatest strength (p. 8).

Since the 1990s, life histories has (re)emerged as an innovative methodological tool across academic disciplines. Subsequently, facilitating the exploration of a range of issues that relate to the embodied subject. For example, (ill/mental) health and disease, physical disabilities, drug use, ageing, gender and sexuality (Connell & Pearson, 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000; Frank, 2013; 2015; Plummer, 1990; Sparkes & Smith, 2008; 2008b; 2013; Smith, 1999). Scholars have increasingly found value in life history interviews as they enable the researcher to inspect 'a life' and provide an opportunity for people's lived experience and voice to be heard (Plummer, 1990; Sparkes, 1994). One of the most notable products of a life histories approach is Gary Dowsett's (1996) *Practicing Desire*, a nine-year Australian study giving a moving portrait of same-sex relationships in the era of AIDS. In this study, twenty respondents gave accounts about relationships and sexual practices, discussed the communities in which they lived, their jobs and workplaces, relationships with the wider world, and their connections with the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Regarding physical cultural practices, Andrew Sparkes, Joanne Bately and Gareth Owen (2012) give a compelling account of the complex emotional experiences of bodybuilders and their shared emotions of embarrassment, guilt, humiliation, and shyness. They also explore their motivations arising out of failure, criticism, sarcasm, inadequacy, or/and rejection to present an array of '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' that motivated men's reconstructive (mind)body techniques. Thus, life histories "work is not simply limited to documenting the consciousness of individuals. It has the potential to throw into sharp relief of the structural constraints that shape the construction of any life" (Sparkes, 1994, p. 165).

Life histories, in essence, provide the researcher with a qualitative tool that provides access and valuable insights into a person's mind, body and soul that are less likely to be revealed by employing quantitative and nomothetic methodologies (Andrews, 2008).

From my personal experiences, I found '*snowballing*' to be an effective strategy for recruiting participants and producing free-ranging life history interviews. Many of the people I met socially (i.e.,

through social engagements and gyms) were very willing to share their personal stories. For many, it was an excellent opportunity to release their embodied frustrations and stresses of everyday life. Subsequently, the participants often perceived that sharing their personal stories was a form of therapy. Finding emotional comfort from talk-therapy was no different than a trip to the local supermarket. From my perspective and observations of American culture, the positive attitude expressed towards and the destigmatisation of talk therapy signified their conscious and subconscious desires for self-transformation and improvement - an essential part of living within a pro-capitalist society. Compared with other cultures I have lived in, I found American men and women more open and less inhibited about their personal lives.

Once I established rapport with the individuals who expressed a willingness to discuss their personal stories, I informed them about the project and provided them with an information pack containing details of the study and a participant agreement form to be signed (**Appendix A.2 & A.3**). For the twenty-four participants who agreed to participate in the research, I made arrangements with each person to conduct interviews at a time and place convenient for them.

### *The Interview Process*

The process of gathering the participants' life histories involved conducting a series of semi-informal interviews over a six-month period during a Los Angeles spring/summer. Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis and varied between 30-minutes and 2-hours in duration. The number of interviews for each participant ranged from three to fifteen, depending on what they said and how much they had to say.

In a non-structured manner, I asked the participants to share their life histories. Specifically, I asked them to focus on how they experienced and perceived their body (image) throughout their lives, and the role body practices (i.e., exercise, dieting, and synthetic testosterone) played in managing and negotiating their own and others' expectations of their bodies, health, identities and relationships. These interviews took place in restaurants, cars, cafes, their homes, gyms and fitness centres, on the beach, and in their homes. Conversations with the participants also occurred via Facebook messenger, emails and phone conversations. I recorded these interviews with an audio recorder; hand-written notes were also taken.

To access the invaluable and dynamic insights into the structural constraints of 'a life', James Frey and Andrea Fontana (2000) note the importance of fostering a mutually respectful and nurturing relationship between the researcher and the participants. They highlight the importance of listening to understand people's experiences as opposed to listening to make judgements or merely explaining them: "to learn about people, we must remember to treat them as people, and they will uncover their lives to us" (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 374). Within my research, this was achieved by using a list of open-ended questions during the interviews to encourage discussion, when needed, and to investigate the *'tensions of the self and discourses of being'* that underpin the use of biopedagogies (**Appendix A. 4**). This approach ensured that the participants were not directed to any particular answers and enabled them to explore various topics that they felt were relevant to the discussion. I avoided closed-ended questions that would have limited and restricted conversations about their lived experiences relating to their body (image).

Despite the participants' willingness to engage in life histories interviews, it was often difficult for them to find the time to share their experiences. This dilemma was symbolic of Los Angeles life - long working hours, juggling multiple jobs and study, family/relationship commitments and struggles, traffic congestion, and a lack of leisure time available. For some participants, their inability to travel and spend time with me for a one-on-one conversation was overcome by discussing their life histories in their car on their way to work as they navigated the Los Angeles gridlock. Alternatively, participants would share their personal stories with me during or/and after work via phone calls, emails, and Facebook messenger. Being flexible and empathetic to the participants lived experiences and demands of Los Angeles life was critical in establishing a supportive, reciprocal, and mutually respectful relationship. My compassionate approach ensured profound, insightful, and meaningful discussions were recorded, ideal for analysing the *'tensions of the self and discourses of being'*.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Whilst the participants often perceived and experienced the life histories interviews as a form of therapy and moment of emotional support, similar to a Rogerian style of counselling "in that we listened, reflected back, asked questions which encouraged people to reflect on their actions and did not pass judgement" (Measor & Sikes, 1992, p. 226), Goodson (1992) has expressed concern about the therapeutic dimension of life history work:

The intersection with the psychological or psychoanalytical approach opens up...potentially perilous terrain...if the co-partners in a collaboration treat sessions as counselling or therapy sessions this has implications for the research



study...counselling/therapy in short would push us in one direction, research in another. This distinction must be made clear early in the collaborative pact (pp. 246-247).

To overcome any possible misconceptions with the participants, I informed them that I was not providing a counselling service at the beginning of the research. If the participants felt that they required a professional counsellor before, during or after the life histories interviews, I would have guided them to the contact details of counselling services outlined in the information packs provided at the beginning of the study.

However, as Sparkes (1994) points out, given the dynamic interplay that occurs during life histories interviews, knowing when research becomes therapy is often only realised upon reflection after the interviews are conducted. Consequently, the epistemological gap between research and therapy may be more ambiguous than Goodson suggests. As will become evident in the following chapters, life historians explore and expose profound aspects of the self, making it difficult and often inappropriate for them to position themselves as distant and detached, as some critics may seek. Sometimes empathetic involvement is required and needed to enact a duty of care towards the participants involved (i.e., to offer words of encouragement and support).

During my interviews with the participants, some of them expressed intimate details about their lives. Arguably, because of my interview skills and ability to establish friendships with them throughout the life histories interview process. Various narrative scholars have argued researching with friendships of any kind brings its problems, highlighting the closer the relationship, the riskier it is to tell the friend specific stories about oneself (Emmerson & Wortham, 2001; Grumet, 1987; Thomas, 1992). Others have pointed out an often unarticulated tension between friendships and the goal of research in which the researcher's goal is always to attain information (Cambell & Wasco, 2000; Josselson, 1994; Smythe & Murray, 2000). "Thus the danger always exists of manipulating friendships to that end" (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, 1983 p. 428), and "because the material is intimate, it means that the potential for harm is much greater" (Measor & Sikes, 1992, p. 210).

To protect and maintain positive and respectful relationships with my participants, each testimony was transcribed word for word after completing the life histories interviews, then handed back to the participants to read and authorize. Thus, the participants could make any alterations (e.g. removing or adding information) to ensure that their testimonies reflected what they wanted to say. This final process of the life histories interviews is essential for ethical reasons. It ensures that the participants are comfortable with what they have said, transcribed, and what may be published. Additionally, I provided each participant anonymity via the use of aliases and removed/altered any descriptions that identified them, and their friends/family, to any potential readers.

When engaging with participants, some researchers (i.e., Milner, 2007; Rose, 1997; Qin, 2016) argue that one's 'positionality' (personal biography, social status, identity politics) can act as a discursive barrier between the researcher and those being researched. From their perspective, a researcher's positionality often inhibits the researcher-participant(s) relationship and the quality of information shared and retrieved. However, from my personal experiences, I have found that the researcher's personality and ability to connect emotionally with their participants ultimately dictate what the participant does and does not share. Freud expressed these sentiments in his letter to Carl Jung (2 September 1907) – "I have always felt that there is something about my personality...that people find...repelling, whereas all hearts open to you" (Freud, 1974, p. 7).

Like Carl Jung and other notable scholars (i.e., Plato, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Spinoza, de Beauvoir, and Bourdieu), I am highly empathetic, observant and intuitive, sensitive to the physical, social and emotional stimuli that surround me (Myers & Myers, 2010). Subsequently, this allows me to connect to the participants and understand their lived experiences in a profound and meaningful way. Isabel Myers and Peter Myers (2010) note – highly empathetic individuals empathise and feel exactly what others feel, even if they have had entirely different lived experiences. This skill is a primordial gift that enables empaths to accurately receive and interpret another person's anxieties, thoughts, and motivations without the other person realising it. Because of this, Plato (375 B.C.E) concluded the highest form of knowledge is empathy, for it requires us to suspend our egos and live in another's world. Throughout the analysis chapters (*Chapters 5 – 9*), this will become evident as deeply personal lived experiences of the participants are revealed and explored, primarily because of my abilities as an empath. In short, as noted by the Canadian urban geographer (2008), who researches with Asian and Muslim communities, although a researcher's positionality can influence one's research, it is their personality, not their positionality, that matters.

To summarise, life histories work provided an effective means to gain an insight into '*the tensions of the self and discourses of being*' from which a range of embodied practices emerged for a cohort of men living in Los Angeles. In addition to using a life histories interview methodology, I also used visual methods to contextualise what they said and the themes embedded with their personal narratives. Combining these two methods illuminate the interplay and tensions between the body, culture and soul that underpinned their use of health and image enhancing synthetic androgens.

### **III. Visual Ethnography: Contextualizing ‘Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being’**

Visual ethnography is an innovative means of collecting and presenting data to contextualize and analyze participants’ lived experiences, expressions of active physicality and praxis (Rich & O’Connell, 2012; Young & Atkinson, 2012). In conducting visual ethnography, I adhere to what some scholars suggest are the key elements of investigating physical cultures: research that is examined within a contextual, theoretical, political, qualitative, self-reflexive, (bio) pedagogical, and impactful framework (Giardina & Donnelly, 2017; Markula & Silk, 2011; Silk & Andrews, 2011; Silk, Andrews, Thorpe, 2017) “to understand and expose the complexities, experiences, and injustices of the physical cultural context (particularly with regard to relations, operations, and effects of power)” (Cooky, 2017, p. 476).

As a methodological tool, visual methods are increasingly being drawn upon to provide different ways of ‘seeing’, looking at, and critically engaging with physical cultures, human practices, and behaviours (Azzarito & Kirk, 2012; 2013). “By encompassing a multitude of forms including photographs, videos, maps, diagrams, symbols and so forth, images can provide specific information about our existence. They can also act as powerful indicators regarding the multiple meanings embedded within our culture” (Phoenix, 2010, p.93). Furthermore, Sarah Pink (2004; 2006; 2012; 2013) argues visual images and technologies have become both a method of exploring and representing ethnographic knowledge. Thus, visual methods are a critical and creative methodological tool within this research to capture and reveal the embodied ambiguities and pathologies of a cohort of Los Angeles men.

In an ethnographic fashion, as part of the data collection phase of this project, I recorded and obtained visual photographs representing the participants’ immediate socio-cultural ecologies. The visual data that I collected during my time in Los Angeles included photographs of – the physical and environmental landscape, commercial activity, advertisements, fashion trends, nightlife, and ‘Californian Medicine’ practices that orientate and influence the participants’ behaviours and intentionality.

The participants also permitted me to draw upon the various digital images displayed on their social media accounts, ‘Instagram’ and ‘Facebook’, to gain an insight into their lives. However, to protect the participants’ identities, images that contained a clear picture of the person’s facial identity have only been used for my personal notes and will not be used in the presentation of this project to ensure anonymity.

Collecting visual data of the participants' social and physical landscapes and behaviours provided me with invaluable insights into their inner (sub)conscious and social worlds, experiences, thoughts, body practices and mind-body transformations. This approach allowed me to discursively analyse the symbolism embedded within the array of images, symbols, and text I collected, as is demonstrated in *Chapters 5-10*. Reflecting on the importance of using visual data within one's research, sociologist Paul Sweetman (2009) comments:

...visual methods of research may be particularly helpful in investigating areas that are difficult otherwise to verbalize or articulate. These include Bourdieu's understanding of habitus; our predisposed ways of being, acting and operating in the social environment that Bourdieu himself suggests are beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit (p. 491).

During my time in Los Angeles, I took a wide range of photos to capture and document the participants' cultural landscapes and (West) Los Angeles life – pool parties, beauty clinics, salad bars, vegan restaurants and fitness centres; mega-mansions, apartments, palm trees, congested high ways, and high-end fashion; 90210, Bel Air, Venice Beach, WEHO, Rodeo Drive, and the Hollywood sign; gay nightclubs, drag queens, go-go boys, and muscle tees; Universal Studios, Disney Land, red carpets, and the Hollywood stars; Latino, Mexican, Caucasian, African American, red, white and blue, American. Additionally, I also collected advertisement images, articles, and brochures that showcased the transformative and popular body practices and trends of Los Angeles - designer androgens, botox, cosmetic surgery, aesthetic medicine, health and beauty therapies, and so on.

Collectively, the visual images gathered, saturated in semiotic and discursive meanings, reveal the hegemonic narratives that orientate 'Left Coasters' collective consciousness and praxis – a liberal and consumer centred society. Thus, adopting visual ethnography with life history interviews provided me with multiple data sets and methodological tools to examine how certain behaviours and praxis are culturally constituted, valued, embodied and expressed, whilst other non-confirmative states of being become silenced and suppressed (i.e., perceived significations of weakness, stress, illness, abnormality, insensitivity, political incorrectness). JoAnne Kingsley (2009) reiterates:

...combining visual methodology with other qualitative methods (e.g. life histories) enhances the inherent strengths of each methodology and allows new understandings to emerge that would otherwise remain hidden if only one method were used in isolation (p. 534).

Visual ethnography and life histories research is an interactive and socially immersive process, requiring both the researcher and participants to be fully involved in the study (e.g., strong interpersonal

skills are required) (Sparks, 1994; Goodson, 2001). Furthermore, life histories and visual ethnography methodologies recognise and embrace the subjective biases and dynamic nature of narrative research, understanding that experience depends on the individual's unique interpretations of their lived experiences and sense of self (Burrows & Wright, 2004; Wright, 2004). Thus, it is the participants' versions of events and experiences shaping their subjectivities, engagement, and understandings of their bodies and sense of self that are important, rather than what may have *actually* happened. From this perspective, individuals develop their own embodied realities – something a '*triads of being*' approach addresses, interrogates and deconstructs. To cut through the performative discursive veil (Jachyra, Atkinson & Gibson, 2014) between the researcher and participant, and alternative realities that often conceal the realities of a person's lived experiences, it is essential that the researcher develops a positive and trusting relationship (Georgakis & Light, 2009; Drew, Duncan & Sawyer, 2010; Sparks, 1994). I attempted to achieve this by deinstitutionalising and casualising the interview settings, thus, breaking down the traditional 'subject' and 'researcher' relationship and creating a relaxed and mutually supportive environment.

### ***Observations and Personal Insights***

To complement the life history transcripts and the visual data I collected, I recorded personal observations of Los Angeles life in note form in several diaries in an ethnographic fashion. Within these diaries, I made notes on: how Los Angeles men presented their body image and behaved in various sub/micro-cultures (e.g., the gym, beach, pool parties, social events, nightclubs, social media); any epiphanies that occurred during my 6-month stay in Los Angeles; and my observations of other cities when travelling through different parts of the United States (e.g., San Francisco, Las Vegas, Utah, Arizona).

Raewyn Connell and Rebecca Pearson (2017) propose that providing personal insights via an ethnographic approach sounds easy, but it is hard to do well in practice. According to them, you need to know what you are looking for, refrain from judgement, be present in the moment, be open to new experiences and information, and be willing to see things that you did not expect to see. In other words, you do not want to predetermine your findings and thoughts. However, Loïc Wacquant (2004) argues it is not good enough to perform ethnography from observations alone. From his perspective, a researcher must be an active participant, actively immersed within the culture they are studying. The researcher must explore, observe, listen carefully, and record the cultural practices and attitudes that unfold and appear in front of them. This active practice of being and doing ensures a deeper understanding of a culture and its people (Wacquant, 2004).

To become an ‘active researcher’ and embody an open and non-judgemental state of mind, Chilla Bullbeck (1998) suggests social science researchers need to develop a ‘world-traveller perspective’. A ‘world-traveller perspective’ requires the researcher to learn how to empathise and see oneself as others see them and respect other people’s experiences.

From my point of view, I have found that a ‘world-traveller perspective’ is more easily acquired if the researcher has previously been exposed to, and lived in, cultures that are foreign to them. Before living in Los Angeles, my own ‘world-traveller perspective’ had been developed by living in a range of diverse (sub)cultures and countries (New Zealand, Australia, England, Spain and Italy), travelling throughout the world, working in a variety of socio-economic settings. Some of these lived experiences included working in: elite English private schools, with homeless teenaged victims of physical abuse and drug and alcohol consumption, providing physical therapy and counselling to middle-class Australians dealing with sexuality, relationship, body weight, ageing, illness and disease, drug, financial, and work issues. These experiences exposed me to the complex realities of life – personal struggles and hardships that everyday people deal with throughout the world. Thus, making it easier for me to adopt a ‘world traveller perspective’ – maintaining an open mind free from enmity, being genuinely curious about people's lives, and authentically empathising with the participant’s emotional pleasures and pains.

In the following section, I draw upon poststructural discourse analysis techniques to unravel and explore the diverse *‘tensions of the self and discourses of being’* that underpin the participant’s body practices. Specifically, I utilise an integrated approach that combines poststructural (Foucault and Derrida) and psychoanalytic (Freud and Lacan) tools.

#### **IV. Interpreting Men’s Life Histories: Poststructuralism and Discourse Analysis**

Contemporary poststructuralism as a form of analysis is grounded in the scholarship of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan. Their focus is on how texts (written, electronic, spoken texts, and images), discourses, practices and institutions produce particular subjects, bodies, subjectivities, praxis and social relations (Rasinski, 2011; Wright, 2004; 2006). From this episteme and ontology, poststructuralism provides a specific approach to analyzing, questioning, and critiquing hegemonic assumptions and an understanding of the constructed and (un)stable nature of “truth”, knowledge, and subjectivity (Butler, 2006, Wright, 2006; Scheurich, 1997). Or, as Friedrich Nietzsche

(1909-13), one of the original luminaries of poststructuralism, put it – an attitude that does not tolerate hard truths or a fixed reality.

Jan Wright (2006) argues critiquing well established “truths”, practices and theories is not always an easy or popular task. However, a reflexive approach to the assumptions that underpin research practice is required to avoid positions that continually endorse unquestioning, deep-seated biases based on the centrality of certain kinds of thinking such as Eurocentric, scientific, patriarchal, neoliberal views of the world (Wright, 2006). Poststructural analysis achieves this objective by critically questioning reality by drawing on specific analytical tools to interrogate “texts” via discourse analysis. From a poststructural perspective, discourse analysis is a process of identifying regularities of (embodied) patterns of meaning that represent specific forms of discourses, which in turn constitute aspects of society and the people within it (Taylor, 2001). The term “discourse(s), here, captures the relationship between meaning and power; it is used to refer to systems of beliefs and values which produce particular social practices and social relations” (Wright, 2006). In essence, poststructural discourse analysis examines the interrelationship between culture and subject, mind and body. And, from my neo-Nietzschean perspective – the ongoing struggle between the wills, demands and phantasms of the soul, the physiological body and the moralities of culture (Nietzsche, 1882).

Foucault (1972) described discourses as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak...discourses are not about objects; they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own intervention” (p. 49). From his perspective, it is through discourse that meanings, objects, subjects, subjectivities, bodies and (body and cultural) practices are (socially) conditioned, and thus, can be treated as “texts”. Therefore, a poststructural analysis of “texts” (visual, spoken, or visual) can be achieved by interrogating the discourses embedded within (life history) transcripts, journal notes, images, physical movements, videos and photographs, as they are constituted in and by specific social and cultural contexts (Angermuller, 2014).

Within the context of this research project, I seek to question how dominant discourses of knowledge and “truth” produce particular body schemas, which become “encoded and translated into pedagogical practices and with what consequences for identity and consciousness?” (Evans & Davies, 2004a, p. 207). However, as outlined in **Chapter 2**, the neo-Nietzschean ontological underpinnings that guide this study (*‘the triads of being’*) move beyond social-constructionism to redefine contemporary discourse analysis to examine the tensions between the soul and body which surface through a person's body image. To demonstrate how I achieve this, in the following, I briefly outline, then integrate, a set of poststructural and psychoanalytic tools used by Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud.

Continental philosophers (poststructuralists) often employ this integrated approach (i.e., *Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, and Slavoj Žižek*), as do I, to explore the relationship between culture, praxis, and a person's psychic life. For this study, I have called this poststructural technique – ‘*Embodied Discourse Analysis*’.

**‘*Embodied Discourse Analysis*’:  
*Redefining Discourse Analysis with Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, and Freud***

Metaphorically speaking, poststructural-psychoanalytic discourse analysis is like unravelling a ball of wool – one of many colours. When discourse analysis is interpreted in this way, the researcher's job is to carefully unravel the various interweaving threads (discourses) embedded within a subject. Within the context of this study, this process involves bringing to light the ‘*triads of being*’ (**Chapter 2, Section 5**) that live within – the embodied needs, wills, and desires of the soul, body, and culture. Thus, revealing how the various ‘*triads of being*’ intersect to produce a particular situated knowledge, lived experience, and praxis of the self.

Specifically, the various poststructural and psychoanalytic discourse analysis techniques that I employed to unravel the ‘*triads of being*’ and ‘*tensions of the self and discourses of being*’ – ‘*Embodied Discourse Analysis*’ – are as follows:

**a) *Embodied Discourses of Power: Foucauldian Discourse Analysis***

Throughout Foucault's work (1970; 1972; 1973; 1977; 1978), Foucault (1970; 1972; 1973; 1977; 1978) uses discourse analysis to unravel the ‘archaeology’ and ‘genealogy’ of knowledge production. In practice, he achieves this by investigating historical archives and documenting how the construction of knowledge changes over time. Subsequently, revealing how institutional power influences how knowledge shapes perceptions, bodies and behaviours within specific historical periods (i.e., the French revolution) (Ball, 1990), from which meanings of, and “truths” about, illness and abnormality and social problems arise (e.g., madness, immoral sexual behaviours) (Foucault, 1970; 1972; 1973). Thus, revealing the contradictions and ambiguities of “how different natural and social sciences have represented, classified and analysed their subjects of knowledge” (Foucault, 1977, p. 51). By analysing (bio) “power, one might understand...in what way a specific mode of subjugation was able to give birth to man as an object of knowledge” (Foucault, 1977, p. 24). Or as the cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall (1977) put it:



All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has real effects, and in that sense at least, 'becomes true'... Knowledge does not operate in a void. It is put to work, through certain technologies and strategies of application, in specific situations, historical contexts and institutional regimes (p. 21).

Hall (1997) classified Foucauldian analysis into six distinct components/queries of analytical inquiry:

- 1) **Statements** about the topics that *give us a kind of knowledge*.
- 2) **Rules** which govern what is sayable or thinkable.
- 3) **Subjects** who in some ways personify the discourse.
- 4) **Authority** How this knowledge about the topic acquires authority, a sense of embodying the 'truth' about it.
- 5) **Practices** within institutions for dealing with the subjects.
- 6) **Transformations and discontinuities** a different discourse will arise at a later historical moment, supplanting the existing one.

Although Foucault's earlier writings examining the archaeology of knowledge have empowered researchers to focus on how particular oppressive power mechanisms operate through multiple and competing discourses, his later works offered a different set of insights. In his groundbreaking books – *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976), the 'genealogy' period of his research, Foucault offered a more optimistic perspective on the role of discourse, power and embodiment, and the performative aspects of discourse emerged. In this body of work, Foucault acknowledges power is not just a negative, coercive or repressive pervasive force that influences human behaviour; power can also be a necessary, productive and positive force in society (Gaventa, 2003).

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production (Foucault, 1975, p. 194).

During his 'genealogy' years, "Foucault shifts our attention away from the grand, overall strategies of power, towards the many, localised circuits, tactics, mechanisms and effects through which power circulates... [as] a capillary movement" (Hall, 1997, p. 52). Thus, he highlights how power is institutionally distributed from the bottom up and dispersed horizontally, as institutional discourses (of the self) encourage individuals and societies to adopt particular 'technologies of the self' (praxis) to produce a specific socialised body (e.g., normative, healthy, obedient). In turn, Foucault demonstrates

how institutional knowledge and power constitutes the “nature of the body, the unconscious mind and the emotional life of [a] subject” (Weedon, 1987, p. 108) and the human population.

Maria Tambouka (1999) suggests a Foucauldian power/knowledge critique of the relationship between power, discourse, embodied knowledge, and body techniques require the researcher to focus on the historical dimensions and the institutional regulatory systems (re)producing and legitimised the phenomena under investigation (i.e., the ‘triads of being’). Tamboukou (1999) summarises:

It was in the genealogical project of *Discipline and Punish* that Foucault’s methodology made a decisive new step, abandoning the dualism of discursive and non-discursive formations and proposing the art of drawing a map or a cartography, to show how discursive and non-discursive [‘technologies of the self’] formations coexist in various forms or correlation, opposition or juxtaposition, pointed out by the cartographer (p. 23).

For Foucault (1980), a genealogical analysis abandons the need for universal generalisations. For him, discursive meanings of reality are dynamic and culturally determined and displace any sense of absolute “truth”. Thus, no systematic analysis of history can reveal any universal “truths”. Instead, Foucault was content to unpack and map the complex discursive and non-discursive formations of knowledge, situated within a specific time(s) and space, to reveal how (bio)power conditions human consciousness and praxis.

In addition to Foucault, I utilised (mind-body-culture) discourse analysis techniques Derrida, Lacan, and Freud formulated to decode the ‘*triads of being*’ (*Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being*) that underpinned men’s body practices.

#### **b) *Embodied Discourses of the Binary: Derrida’s Hierarchies of Power and Politics***

The poststructuralist Jacques Derrida (1967a; 1967b; 1967c), in a series of influential books – *Of Grammatology, Speech and Phenomena* and *Writing and Difference* – argued the universal truths embedded within Western thinking and language depict and construct human consciousness, and perceptions of reality, within a system of categories consisting of binary oppositions (e.g., nature/culture, male/female, life/death). To analyse this discursive phenomenon, Derrida (1967a) developed ‘*deconstructionism*’, a form of semiotic analysis to explore the (political) meaning(s) embedded within text.

Derrida (1967c; 1988) argued that the metaphysical concepts within a text (written document) coexist within an unequal binary relationship. Whilst some concepts relating to human nature are centralised, privileged and naturalised (i.e., heterosexuality), others are marginalised (e.g., homosexuality). For Derrida (1967a; 1967b; 1967c), this inequitable juxtaposition is underpinned by the hierarchies of power (e.g., patriarchy, imperialism) culturally embedded within text, language, and philosophical beliefs. Deconstructionism scrutinises, de-constructs, de-centres and de-stabilises the binary hierarchical structures within text to reveal the problematic nature of meaning and knowledge being shaped by ‘binary truths’ and their a/effects on human consciousness (Derrida, 1967c). “Deconstruction locates the fissures, fault lines and stress points in texts where rhetoric and authorial intention conflict” (Eagleton, 2003, p. 77) and deconstructs any fixed, authoritarian, dogmatic, or orthodox reading. Lotar Rasiński (2011) notes:

...deconstruction can be conceived of as textual labour in the form of a double reading. The first reading is a fateful attempt to follow the dominant interpretation of the text, its assumptions, concepts and arguments. The second reading consists in tracing its excluded, repressed and inferior interpretation that forms an undercurrent in the text. Establishing the textual hierarchy of two interpretations can demonstrate that the dominant interpretation is dependent on what it excludes (p. 11-12).

Thus, in short, deconstruction is a discursive analytical tool to dissect and explicate the ‘binary truths’ and the philosophies embedded within text to examine and question the metaphysics of consciousness and reality. In analysing the participants’ narratives, I attempt to demonstrate how binary positions mediate a person’s ‘*Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being*’, which are negotiated by various body practices. Thus, revealing what embodied discourses are desired and privileged over others (e.g., male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual, attractive/unattractive); and the impact this has on their sense of self.

To analyse the psychic tensions between the primordial wills and needs of the soul and (linguistic) ego – the part of the psyche constituted by the demands of culture (*see Chapter 2*), I borrow from the insights of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud. These insights, (re)-interpreted via a neo-Nietzschean lens, assist in analysing the participants’ conscious and subconscious desires, fantasies, and fears (throughout their lives) that influence their use of particular biopedagogies – notably synthetic androgens.

### **c) *Embodied Discourses of Desire: Lacan's Constitutive Lack***

Throughout Lacan's (1977; 1988; 1992) theoretical and psychoanalytic work, he suggests a subject's identity is never fully realisable; there is always a "constitutive lack", a missing signifier and a lack of being (*manqué à être*), which the self (and the ego) desires to become.

For Lacan (1977), this lack of being is at the heart of the unconscious experience; for example, the linguistic ego needing to diet to embody a beautified/healthified aesthetic to conform to hegemonic norms and imperatives of beauty, as signified by the 'Other' (individuals, text, language, and images). Thus, the idealised symbolic self that a person seeks to mimic and embody is always in reference to the 'Other'. This "constitutive lack" causes desires to arise (Lacan, 1961-62). "Desire is a relation of being to lack. The lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn't the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists" (Lacan, 1988b, p. 223).

However, these desires of the linguistic ego are unattainable because the desires of the 'Other' are a) fluid and b) can never fully be known. Subsequently, the idealised image of the imaginary is never fully attained and realised. Yet, always chased until a person accepts what they do not have (e.g., bodily perfection in the eyes of the 'Other'). In essence, the self is split between two binary opposites – between the per-discursive 'I' and the cultural 'me' (*see Chapter 1, Section 1*). For Lacan, identity is possible only as a failed identity; it remains desirable precisely because it is essentially impossible (Rasiński, 2011). "What we have then, if we want to be precise and accurate, is not identities but identifications, a series of failed identifications or rather a play between identification and its failure, a deeply political play" (Stavrakakis 1999, p. 29).

In conjunction with Derrida, Lacan's insights regarding the relationship between language, identity, and consciousness provide me with practical analytical tools to reveal the 'constitutive lack' that drives a subject's linguistic ego – the part of the psyche that is culturally determined – to utilise body/mind-enhancing practices.

### **d) *Embodied Discourses of Desire: Freud's Unconscious Drives Reinterpreted***

In contrast to Lacan, Freud's (1923) earlier writings claimed that "all sensations and feelings are conscious originally as opposed to unconscious" (p. 12), which are a by-product of the dynamic material drives of the soul (Freud, 1905b; 1915). Drawing on a postmaterialists (Beauregard, 2021) (re)interpretation of Freud's consciousness of the material soul (*see Chapter 1, Section V*;

*Chapter 2, Section IV-V*), I suggest the pre-discursive ('original') sensations and feelings of consciousness are located within the immaterial and transcendent soul/psyche/spirit. Thus, reflecting a return to the philosophies, insights and observations of Socrates and Plato (375 B. C. E./1998), Kierkegaard (1843), and Jung (1963; 1965; 1971) – an eternal soul that becomes lost to the discourses of culture, which is to be rediscovered to reconnect and align with one's authentic needs and desires. As noted by the psychoanalysts Maslow (1943) and Winnicott (1960), through the processes of socialisation, symbolisation, trauma and fear, a person's conscious awareness of their sensations, emotions and desires submerge into the un/subconscious. As a result, a person begins to experience a displaced connectivity to one's "true" authentic and spiritual self.

However, Freud (1999) argued the suppressed emotions, sensations and desires of the soul (and linguistic ego) subconsciously reveal themselves despite cultural taboos and attitudes attempting to expel them to the shadows of the mind. For him, suppressed emotions and desires ('*life instincts*') often revealed themselves via a person's speech (e.g., jokes, parapraxes/'Freudian slip'), body language, symbolic significations (e.g., body image, material possessions (see *Chapter 1, Section 1*)), obsessions and addictions (e.g., sexual perversions), and/or within dreams (Fliess & Freud, 1985; Freud, 1911/1958; 1915/1957; 1923; 1985; 1999).

'The Freudian slip', as outlined in the '*Psychopathology of Everyday Life*' (Freud, 1901), refers to a linguistic error, misspoken word, temporary 'forgettings', misreading or mishearing that reveal a subject's subconscious thoughts - typically forbidden in civil public discourse (i.e., sexual desires). Freud (1925) reasserts:

In the same way that psycho-analysis makes use of dream interpretation, it also profits by the study of the numerous little slips and mistakes which people make—symptomatic actions, as they are called [...] I have pointed out that these phenomena are not accidental, that they require more than physiological explanations, that they have a meaning and can be interpreted, and that one is justified in inferring from them the presence of restrained or repressed impulses and intentions (p. IV).

Freud (1905/2013) also argues that jokes and extemporaneous remarks embedded with hidden meanings and agendas reveal and reflect the difficult personal "truths" of the unconscious and human psyche otherwise left unsaid. Žižek (2014) suggests that jokes, and flippant remarks and gestures, bring us face-to-face with our sequestered pathologies by confronting both our reflexive impulse to laugh at the joke's object, as well as whatever self-serving incentives might motivate our emphatic denials of racism, sexism, homophobia and so on. Yet, simultaneously, one's confrontation with the seriousness of their political incorrectness is negated and softened by the coded meanings of jokes and the use of

humour. Jokes, ‘Freudian slips’, and other forms of uninhibited speech expose and make accessible the psyches sub/unconscious processes and subjectivities that other types of (controlled) speech cannot.

Additionally, Jung (1997; 2012; 2020) and other psychoanalysts (i.e., Winnicott, Lacan, Klein) extended upon Freud’s observations, which were often limited to that a person’s sexual drives and ‘life instincts’, to include a range of embodied fears and fantasies (e.g., memories, personal ambitions and inadequacies, guilt, social anxiety, relationships) to detect psychic imbalances. For example, depression could result from suppressing particular feelings and sexualities and leading a life that is not aligned with the authentic self. Thus, a person’s linguistic ego’s and primordial soul’s linguistic and bodily expressions can be drawn upon to gain insights into the human mind – ‘*The tensions of the self and discourses of being*’, provided the researcher with a diagnostic tool to analyse the relationship between culture, discourse, desires and body techniques

## **V. Coding, Thematising and Presenting ‘Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being’**

To unravel, deconstruct, organise and analyse the embodied tensions and discursive formations of the mind, body, soul that underpin men’s use of biopedagogies, I have used the methodological practice of ‘*coding*’. From a poststructural and psychoanalytic perspective, ‘*coding*’ identifies the patterns of relations within and across statements (i.e., in texts, language, images, and practices) to reveal the various embodied aspects of the self that constitute the human experience (Angermuller, 2014). Within the context of this research, theoretically, ‘*coding*’ is used to explore:

1. **Power/knowledge/doxa** (Foucault, Bourdieu).
2. **The metaphysics of being within the binaries of (ab)normality** (Derrida)
3. **Human desire** (Lacan, Freud)

In this sense, the ‘*triads of being*’ and ‘*tensions of the self and discourses of being*’ can be identified and coded as the embodied tensions between:

1. **Systems of representation that entail both language and practices (discourses)** that produce meaning, a sense of knowledge and truth, within a specific historical period that defines and produces subjects, objects, ideologies and human experiences and,

**2. the innate essence and metaphysics of being (soul)**, which is displaced by normative modes and discourses of human enactment, which have a performative a/effect – pain, pleasure and suffering (i.e., the *‘Tensions of the Self’*).

From a Foucauldian point of view, albeit reinterpreted via a Neo-Nietzschean ontology (*See Chapter 2, Section IV-V*), discourse analysis and interpretation is an ‘incomplete saturation’ and ‘increasing polymorphism’, a form of analysis that connects empirical observations with other social phenomena. Foucault (1980) clarifies:

One has to proceed by progressive, necessarily incomplete saturation. And one has to bear in mind that the further one breaks down the processes under analysis, the more one is enabled and indeed obliged to construct their external relations of intelligibility...The internal analysis of processes goes hand in hand with a multiplication of analytical “salient”. This operation thus leads to an increasing polymorphism as the analysis progresses. (pp. 73–86).

To identify and unravel the polymorphism of “text” and the various *‘tensions of the self and the discourses of being’*, the participants’ transcripts were coded with the prominent overarching grand and intermediate meta-narratives that constituted their sense of self and praxis. I employed this discursive practise to identify how a person's wills, drives and desires (i.e., anxieties and pleasures relating to love, lust, and self-worth) became manipulated by culture and the perceived desires of the ‘O/other’, and how biopedagogies were used to negotiate these embodied tensions and discourses of the self.

In addition to the various narratives that navigated the participants’ subjectivities and body practices, the emotional a/effects (i.e., pleasure and suffering) of the participants’ embodied internal-external conflicts between the soul and the physiological body and the moralities of culture identified/coded as they surfaced within the subjects’ testimonies.

Presented within the following table (*Table 2*), I illustrate how the various *‘tensions of the self and discourses of being’* underpinning the participants’ biopedagogies were identified and coded in practice. Within this table (*Table 2*), I outline some of the meta-narratives and displaced narratives of the self and the emotions experienced and expressed by the participants in their life histories, which led to their engagement with particular body practices (i.e., synthetic androgens).

<b>Identifying and Coding the ‘Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being’</b>		
<b>Privileged Discourses of Being</b>	<b>Tensions of the Self</b>	<b>Inferior &amp; Displaced Discourses of Being</b>
<b>Coded Grand Meta-Narratives of Being</b>	<b>Coded Tensions of the Self</b> <i>(the Embodied A/Effects of Discourse)</i>	<b>Coded Displaced Narratives of Being</b>
Neo-liberalism, ‘Free-Market’ Capitalism Nationalism, American Exceptionalism Christianity	<i>Desire, Anxiety, Guilt, Pleasure, Illness and Suffering, Depression etc (from which body practices emerge).</i>	Utilitarianism, Socialism, Communism Internationalism, Egalitarianism, Xenocentrism Religions of the other (e.g., Islam, Spirituality)
<b>Coded Intermediate Meta-Narratives</b>		<b>Coded Displaced Intermediate Meta-Narratives</b>
Social Conservatism Heterosexuality, Heteronormativity Masculinity White Ethnocentrism Medical/Pharmaceutical Science (positivism, materialism) Self-determination/ ‘Free-Will’ Youthfulness		Social Liberalism Same-sex conduct, Homoeroticism Femininity Cultural Relativism (Medical) Scientific Scepticism Social Subjugation Ageing  <i>Needs, Wills and Desires of the Body and Soul Beyond the Normative Narratives of Culture and Being.</i>
<i>Identified using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis</i>	<i>Identified using Lacanian and Freudian Discourse Analysis</i>	<i>Identified using Derridian Discourse Analysis</i>

**S** Subject Divided/Displaced by Discourse

**Table 2. Coding Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being:** The American Meta-Narratives of a Displaced Sense of Self and their Embodied A/Effects.

Once I had typed out the participants' testimonies, I identified and marked the various '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' as they surface within the texts and images.

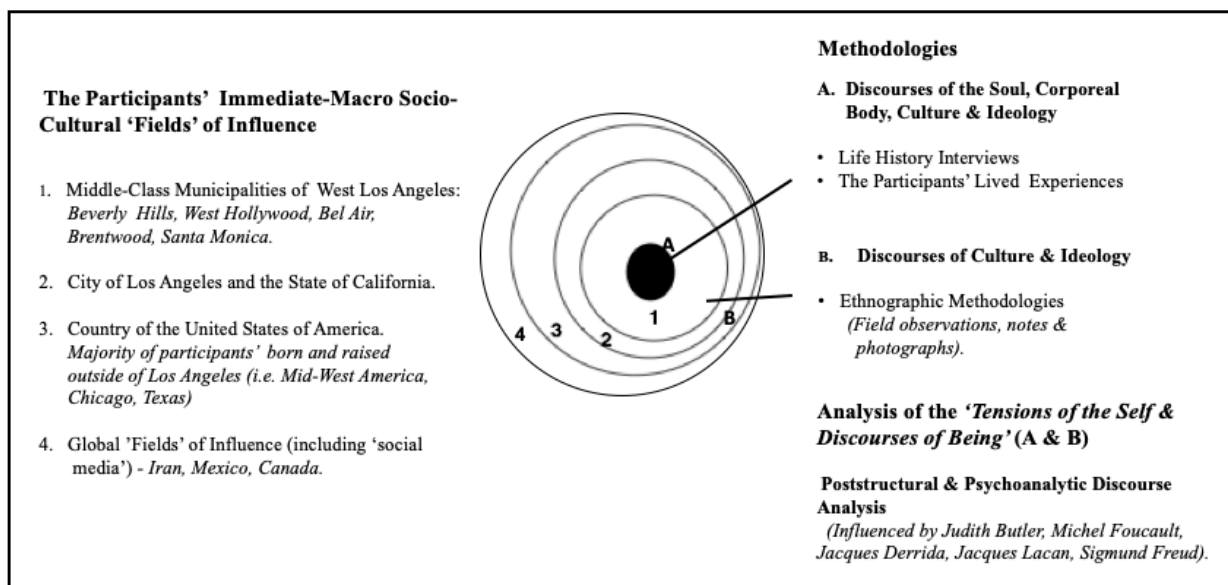


By coding the participants' lived experiences in this way, I was able to identify the myriad of embodied cultural discourses and tensions of the mind (soul and linguistic ego) (e.g., need for love, body and social anxiety), the physiological body (e.g., optimal health, injuries, disabilities, a/effects of synthetic androgens), and culture (e.g., imperatives of normative health and body) that surfaced within the participants' life histories. Following a life histories trajectory, in chronological order, I then organized the coded transcripts into the key themes that emerged within the men's testimonies throughout their lives. I carried out and completed this 'coding' process by performing the following three steps:

1. Identifying and organizing the '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' that were embodied and experienced during the participants' childhoods, adolescence (**Chapters 5 and 6**), and their (early) adult lives (**Chapters 7 and 8**).
2. Identifying the 'grand meta-narratives' and discourses, as outlined in the above table (**Table 2**), that a/effected the participants' subjectivities, body schemas and body practices.
3. Identifying the 'intermediate meta-narratives' and discourses, as outlined in **Table 2**, that a/effected the participants' subjectivities, body schemas and body practices.

Arranging the participants' narratives using this approach enabled me to illustrate how cultural discourses govern, subjugate and displace the: wills and needs of the soul (i.e., the need for meaningful relations, self-actualization); the physical form and processes of the material body (i.e., the a/effects of exercise, drug-taking) and; how individuals' use body practices to negotiated manage the embodied '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' – emotional and physical pleasures and pains.

To summarise, "since stories reveal the way ideas look in action, showing that experiences emerge when certain ideas are followed... analysing stories can allow a moral investigation of the practical consequences of beliefs and theories that are otherwise decontextualised abstractions" (Mattingly, 1991, p. 236). To retrieve, present, and share the participants' stories, within this study, I have utilised poststructural-psychoanalytic narrative research methodologies. Specifically, this involved discursively 'coding' and analysing the participants' narratives presented within their life histories, contextualised with ethnographic data and observations, to explore and critique how particular lived experiences and body techniques came into being. I overview and illustrate the methodologies adopted throughout this research in the following diagram (**Figure 3**).



**Figure 3. Methodology Overview:** Researching 'Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being

In the following chapter ('*Theorizing and Analysing the 'Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being'*'), I demonstrate how I theoretically interpreted and analysed the themes and discourses identified and coded within the participants' life histories. This chapter (*Chapter 4*) outlines the key theoretical concepts and the theoretical framework that primarily guides the exploration of the mind-body-culture-praxis nexus and the subjectivities that arise from these embodied dichotomies of the self.

*“I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area... I would like the little volume that I want to write on disciplinary systems to be useful to an educator, a warden, a magistrate, a conscientious objector. I don't write for an audience, I write for users, not readers.”*

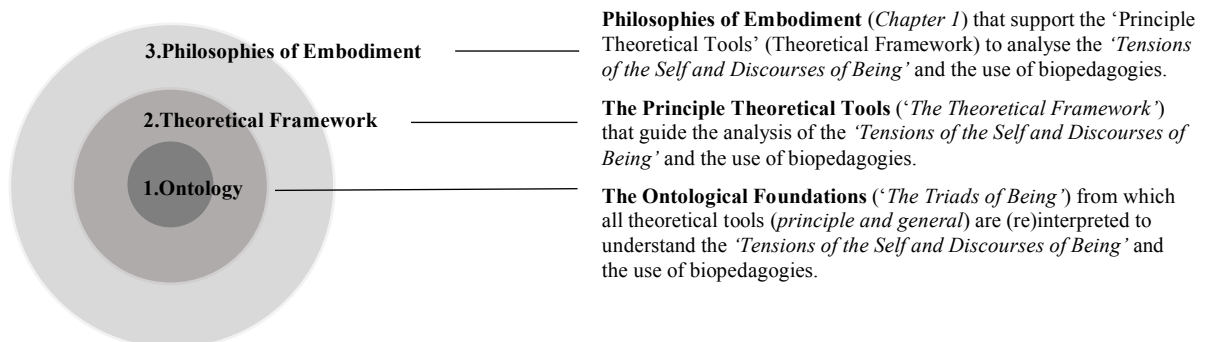
Michel Foucault (1974, pp. 523-4)

## 4

### THEORISING AND ANALYZING

#### TENSIONS OF THE SELF AND DISCOURSES OF BEING

In this chapter, I adopt and introduce Michel Foucault’s concept of a theoretical ‘toolbox’ (Deleuze & Foucault, 1972; Foucault, 1974; MacDonald & McCuaig, 2015; Nealon & Giroux, 2011) to employ a variety of theories to illuminate and examine, in poststructural–psychoanalytic fashion, the tensions between the soul, mind, body and culture as expressed throughout the participants’ life histories. The principal theoretical concepts outlined within this chapter, reinterpreted via a *‘triads of being’/neo-Nietzschean ontology (Chapter 2)*, anchor the analysis of the participants’ testimonies. Where necessary, I use these theoretical concepts in conjunction with the philosophies discussed in the literature review (*Chapter 1*) to better understand the complexities of being. The principle theoretical tools, the theoretical framework, guiding this research centre around Michel Foucault’s – *Power/Knowledge*, Pierre Bourdieu’s – *Social Fields, Symbolic Capital, Habitus and Doxa*, Fredrich Nietzsche’s – *Will to Power*, and Sigmund Freud’s – *Will to Pleasure*.



**Figure 4. Theoretical Overview:** The Theoretical Hierarchy for the Analysis of the ‘Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being’ and the use of Biopedagogies.

## I. Analyzing the Embodiment-Biopedagogies Nexus with a ‘Theoretical Toolbox’

From a theoretician’s mindset, theory should be practical, applicable, modified, and specific to the phenomenon, space, time, and context that is being questioned and explored (MacDonald et al., 2002; Pringle & Thorpe, 2017; Rabinow & Rose, 2003). Inspired by Continental philosophy and its ties to the arts and literature, the use of theory from a poststructural-psychoanalytic perspective is a fluid and creative process whereby conceptual tools and labels are re-generated and created to work for the researcher (Jeanes, 2006; Koro-Ljungberg, 2015; St. Pierre, Jackson & Mazzei, 2016). Giles Deleuze, in discussion with Michel Foucault concerning his antimethodology, states:

...theory is exactly like a box of tools...It must be useful. It must function. And not for itself. If no one uses it, beginning with the theoretician himself, then the theory is worthless or the moment is inappropriate. We don’t revise a theory, but construct new ones; we have no choice but to make others. It is strange that it was Proust, an author thought to be a pure intellectual, who said it so clearly: treat my book as a pair of glasses directed to the outside; if they don’t suit you, find another pair; I leave it to you to find your own instrument, which is necessarily an investment for combat (Deleuze & Foucault, 1972, p. 2).

Jeffrey Nealon and Susan Giroux (2011) note, “a theoretical toolbox shouldn’t tell you what to build but offer you opportunities to experiment” (p. 8). A theoretical framework is not to be used in a prescriptive positivist-interpretive manner but as a set of tools to be deployed when necessary. This approach gives the researcher the freedom to unravel the myriad of themes and interrelationships that surface to explain, predict, understand phenomena, and challenge and reinterpret existing knowledge (Abend, 2008). A theoretical framework permits an intellectual transition from simply describing an observed phenomenon to generalising and theorising about various aspects of that phenomenon (Swanson, 2013) (i.e., the *Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being*). By virtue of its applicative nature, good theory becomes of value because it facilitates the exploration of meaning, nature, and reality associated with the subject matter under investigation, from which new forms of understandings and knowledge emerge (Jarvis, 1999; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017; Trochim, 2006; Žižek, 2009). As John Carroll (2015) notes: a theory’s task is to illuminate everyday life, to get colour into its portraits, to gain access into the enthusiasm and disappointments, the insecurities and eccentricities, the attachments and the envies, of the people it studies.

In practice, as discussed in the *‘Introduction’* (p. 2), I have drawn upon Žižek’s (2009) idea of the *‘parallax view’* to dissect the discourses presented within the narratives of participants’ life histories and the socio-cultural environments. Influenced by Kant’s (1787) and Kierkegaard’s (1843;

1846) idea of ‘antinomies’ (the law of opposites), utilized by Derrida, a Žižekian ontology and dialectics take concepts that are seemingly polar opposites, like subject and object, noumenon and phenomenon, and instead of overcoming the gap of ontological and epistemological difference (the ‘*parallax gap*’) the researcher embraces and explores how these differences influence the discourse under investigation. In this study, the various theoretical tools and their ontological tensions are brought together via a *neo-Nietzschean* (‘*triads of being*’) ontology to demonstrate how subjectivities and praxis emerge from the ongoing struggles between the wills, demands and phantasms of the soul, the physiological body, and the moralities of culture (Nietzsche, 1882). I illustrate the theoretical approach I have used throughout this study in the diagram below (Figure 5).

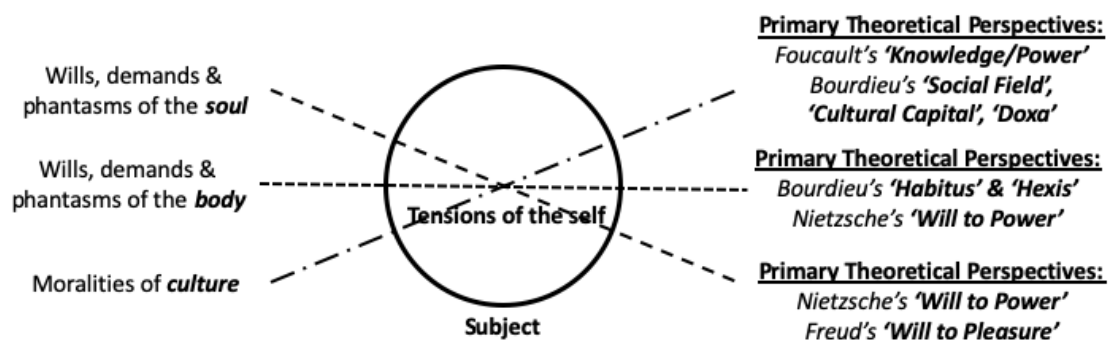


Figure 5. The ‘Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being’ Theoretical Framework: *A Neo-Nietzschean Ontology*

For the remaining sections in this chapter, I outline the principal theoretical concepts used throughout the analysis chapters (*Chapters 6-9*). Specifically, the theoretical ideas produced by Foucault, Bourdieu, Crossley, Freud and Nietzsche, which are (re)interpreted via my ‘*Triads of Being*’/*neo-Nietzschean* ontology (*Chapter 2*), to explore and analyse the participants lived experiences and image and health-enhancing practices. Thus, similar to Butler’s (1990) social-constructionist readings of Freud and the embodied internal-external tensions examined within the philosophies of: Nietzsche’s (1895; 1882; 1883-1885; 1886; 1886b; 1901) *Self-Overcoming*, Freud’s (1920; 1930) *Life and Death Instincts, Civilization and Its Discontents*, Lacan’s (1949; 1957; 1966/67) *The Mirror Phase, Symbolic Castration*, Deleuze and Guattari’s (1969; 1972; 1980) *Body Without Organs*, and Bourdieu’s (1977; 1993; 1998; 2002) *Hysteresis*.

## II. Continental Philosophy, Subjectivity, and the Illusions of the Material World

Continental philosophy, where poststructural scholarship resides, is dedicated to understanding consciousness in its raw form – taking first-hand subjective experience as its starting point rather than starting with the objective world of nature. It is an experientialist rather than a rationalist philosophy.

In its various forms – phenomenology, existentialism, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism – Continental philosophy focuses on the perceptions, emotions, and experiences of the mind, body and soul, the noumenal world that is real yet unknowable, phenomena which cannot be objectified (e.g., love, fear, lust, psychosis, the soul, the ego) (Critchley, 2003; 2017; Crowther, 1993; Sheratt, 2005; Solomon, 1988; West, 2010). For example, a rationalist (materialist) will study fear for the physiological changes that occur – the activation of the sympathetic nervous system (increased heart rate, blood pressure, and observable behaviours of fear); however, the continental philosopher focuses on what the actual experience of fear is like. The existentialist, phenomenologist, psychoanalyst and poststructuralist are interested in the fluidity, dynamics and interplay between consciousness and culture (and praxis). Whether the phenomenon of consciousness is a fantasy or a reality is irrelevant, the focus is on the interaction between phenomenon and consciousness. As observed and confirmed by quantum physicists during the ‘*double slit experiment*’, it is the perceiver, not the objective material world, that determines reality, and one’s lived experience (Bach, Pope, Liou & Batelaan, 2013; Kim, Yu, Kulik, Shih & Scully, 2000; Rossenblum & Kuttner, 2011; Wheeler, 1978). “[While a number of philosophical ideas] may be logically consistent with present quantum mechanics, ...materialism is not” (Wigner, 1995, p. 252). Thus, from both perspectives, reality is not a product of extreme realism as argued by rationalists; there is no objective reality beyond what is observed; the observer creates reality. Reality cannot be discovered by objectively studying the material world, as reality and how humans experience reality is subjective.

Continental philosophy is not about the external existence of an object(s) but about studying consciousness and how it interacts with the phenomena presented to it – discourse, culture, memories, dreams. The phenomenologist Edmund Husserl (1928;1939) termed this intersection between phenomena and consciousness *intentionality* – the study of the interplay between the content of consciousness (i.e., desires of the soul, discourse, language), the structures of consciousness (i.e., the ego, the subconscious, the unconscious), and how the human experience manifests from this embodied dichotomy of the self. Thus, the emphasis of Continental philosophy is on the different relationships consciousness can have with an object (e.g., the material world, geographical landscapes, culture, and cultural practices), the structures of consciousness, and the subjectivities that occur as a result of this

inter-relationship (i.e., the perceptions, memories, desires, protentions, retentions, negations, identifications, significations and objectification of the mind, body, and soul). Within the context of this study, these embodied tensions – the *'Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being'* (*'Triads of Being'*) (see **Chapter 2, Section V**) – are analysed utilising the methods outlined in **Chapter 3**, and the theories of the mind, body, culture and soul specified within this chapter (**Chapter 4**).

### **III. Michel Foucault's Power/Knowledge (and Truth): Understanding the Embodied Social Discourses of the Self**

Michel Foucault (1980) points to the inextricable relationship between power and knowledge when he suggests that not only do social discourses reinforce, produce, and reproduce power, but they also resist, expose and make power fragile to overcome it. Foucault (1980) argues that the ruling class's institutional and corporate hegemonic power ('the establishment') asserts, maintains and controls a population's collective consciousness by reinforcing and reproducing knowledge via discourses and narratives of 'truth'. For Foucault (1980), power is widely dispersed via discourse and operates intimately and diffusely through law and order, educational institutions, religious practices, medical discourse, and so forth. When established 'truths', and the social hierarchies of power that underpin these 'truths' – local, national and global (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) – are questioned and threatened (e.g., Karl Marx's (1979; 1988; 1993; 2018) critique of capitalism), dissenting voices are often publicly discredited through various power structures (e.g., mass media, establishment politicians). Thus, as pointed out by Orwell (1949) and Lacan (1957), it is language that directs consciousness and the information that is to be believed and suppressed within the public sphere. Stephen Ball (1990) comments, "discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also who can speak, when and with what authority" (p. 2).

This hegemonic control of knowledge affects how individuals (sub)consciously perceive themselves, each other, and the social practices they perform to ensure hierarchical structures of power and social class are maintained (e.g., wage labour and consumerism). Noam Chomsky suggests the hegemonic control and distribution of language acts to *'manufacture consent'* to produce certain (neo-liberal) behaviours (Herman & Chomsky, 1988/2002). Through the process of *'manufacturing consent'*, Chomsky demonstrates how (American/global) corporate media conglomerates, in collusion with multinational corporations and government, corral and coerce public consent through authoritative and indoctrinating propaganda designed to control political and economic narratives to produce politically subdued, obedient and consumer-driven citizens (Herman & Chomsky, 1988/2002).

Within the context of this study, Foucault's (1980) concept of knowledge/power, as empirically validated by Chomsky and Herman (1988/2002), helps to analyse the hegemonic discursive processes of biopolitics and the embodied subject. In an attempt to reveal "the fine texture of power and its 'productiveness', [and] the way power generates identities and practices" (Connell, 2015, p. 77) of the (male) body.

#### **IV. Bourdieusian Concepts: Understanding Embodiment - Culture, Symbolism and Capital**

Drawing on the theories of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Karl Marx and Marcel Mauss (among others), Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of capital, field, habitus, hexis and doxa reveal the dynamics of power relations within specific cultural settings (e.g., the French upper class, Kabyle people). His broad range of ethnographic studies explored, uncovered and emphasised the corporeal nature of social life, and the embodiment of social and cultural (body) practices. In doing so, Bourdieu devised a genetic structuralism, which recognises that the world is socially constructed by individuals but with instruments of cognitive construction that are themselves constructed by the world, that is, by history deposited in bodies, meeting with history, reified in institutions (Wacquant, 2018). Bourdieu also acknowledged agency, the cognitive intelligence and reflexivity of the individual to question and resist the various hegemonic and symbolic discourses acting upon them (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). From a Bourdieusian perspective, adopting a Freudian worldview, individual (body) practices are not necessarily limited by societal-cultural norms as they can also reflect, symbolically, the embodied psychic-corporeal essence of an individual, which may challenge established cultural norms and power.

Bourdieu's understanding of the influence and relationships between time, power, knowledge, culture, body practices and the symbolic-socialised body within societies is brought together and explained through his theories of practice articulated around the dynamic interplay of habitus, hexis, forms of capital, and field. "His ideas on body and practice were outlined in a series of important works such as *Practical Reason* (Bourdieu, 1998), *Pascalian Meditations* (Bourdieu, 2000) and *Masculine Domination* (Bourdieu, 2001)" (Turner, 2012, p. 69). Bourdieu's social theory is now widely viewed as the dominant paradigm in the sociology of the body (Shilling, 2007; 2012; Shilling & Mellor, 2007), ideal for understanding the interrelation between culture, the body (image), consciousness and bio-pedagogical practices, as I outline below.



### ***(Social) Field(s) and Symbolic Capital***

Bourdieu (1984) argues individuals occupy a position within a multidimensional ‘social space’ (which he refers to as ‘Field(s)’). A field is a setting within a specific cultural space and time in which people and their social positions are located within a hierarchical system (i.e., social class). The hierarchical position of an agent in the field is a result of the interactions between the specific rules of the field, the influence of social systems (e.g., social class, law, politics, and education) that surround the agent’s habitus and an agent’s capital (economic and cultural) (Bourdieu, 1984).

A field is a field of forces within which the agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they will take with respect to the field, these position-takings being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 30).

Within a field(s), individuals are both defined by their social class and by the various forms of capital they can acquire and use to their advantage within their social relations. Types of capital may include, but are not restricted to, social, cultural, economic, symbolic, physical, and sexual capital. Bourdieu (1984) proposes that accumulation of various types of capital represents the need for one to be distinctive, influential, successful, powerful, and to potentially have dominance over others. Individuals and/or groups of individuals use capital to align themselves with those who possess similar portfolios of capital (e.g., wealth, influence, and knowledge). The more capital acquired, the more elevated their status and power (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986; Kay & Laberge, 2002). Bourdieu (1984) suggests that individual or collective capital within specific ‘fields’ (e.g., finance, law, politics, education, medicine, or business) can be used to produce or reproduce inequality via the control of knowledge, politics, economic systems and power. For example, the corporatisation of food, housing, healthcare, pharmaceuticals, education, and politics, in pursuit of power and profit, can limit a population’s access to affordable and essential human necessities. Thus, the attainment of these basic needs, represented through the body schema, has become symbolic of wealth—Ivy League schools, private healthcare, organic food, and cosmetic beauty practices, among other examples.

In the following sections, I discuss how specific forms of capital can be adopted to enhance a subject’s social status via their bodies and personal appearance, by discussing Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘*habitus*’ and ‘*hexis*’.

## *Habitus and Hexis: The Processes of Embodied Praxis*

Building upon Noam Chomsky's theoretical concepts of cognitive and generative functioning, and on Jean Piaget's inter-relationship analysis between history and human memory (i.e., the unconscious embodiment, socialisation and normalisation of human (and structural) practices and attitudes within a specific culture over time), Bourdieu introduced his concepts of '*habitus*' and '*hexis*' to address the sociological problem of agency and structure. "Hexis refers to deportment (gate, gesture, or posture) by which people carry themselves and '*habitus*' refers to the disposition [body practices] through which taste is expressed. It is the habitual way of doing things" (Turner, 2012, p. 69). In addition, the concepts of habitus and hexis also include the embodied un/sub-conscious (abstract) psychic habits (i.e., perceptions, emotions, classifications, appreciations, and actions), shaped by cultural social structures and an individual's social/structural positioning (i.e., social class) (Bourdieu, 1977; 2000). These are often unconsciously reflected and expressed through people's bodily habits, practices and schema, subsequently simultaneously reinforcing and reproducing the social structures that influence their behaviours (Bourdieu, 1977; 2000). In a practical sense, a person's habitus offers solutions to cope with new situations and adversity – the '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' – guided by their subjectivities and intuitions (Bourdieu, 1987). From grooming to exercise, normative embodied forms of a person's hexis and habitus are culturally shaped and ingrained, and normalised over time. These apparent habitual and perceived 'natural' ways of being are predominantly acquired through the activities and experiences of everyday life (i.e., the processes of the socialised, civilised and surveilled body and self), as outlined in Bourdieu's (1984) study of the social classes in '*Distinction: A Social Critique of the judgement of Taste*'. Paul Sweetman (2009) writes:

...habitus refers to our overall orientation to or way of being in the world; our predisposed ways of thinking, acting and moving in and through the social environment that encompasses posture, demeanor, outlook, expectations and tastes...Although it may appear natural, habitus is a product of our upbringing, and more particularly of our class. It is class-culture embodied; an adaptation to objective circumstances that makes a 'virtue of necessity' through encouraging our tastes, wants and desires to be broadly matched to what we will realistically be able to achieve (p. 493).

Although the 'objective' established institutional systems of body-mind control within a specific cultural field inform and influence embodied knowledge, they do not predetermine human behaviour and practices (Bourdieu, 1984; Sweetman, 2009). Humans are subjective, dynamic, and often reflexive through time, space, and culture(s). How an individual or/and a demographic interprets and expresses their subjectivities and collective consciousness, embodied hexis and habitus, and agency,

depends on the free will that is permitted within their specific field(s) (e.g., a liberal democracy in compared with an autocracy) and their intelligence, awareness and sensitivities.

### ***Doxa: Embodied Knowledge and Consciousness as a Social Construct***

Bourdieu (1977) defines '*doxa*' as the experience whereby "the natural and social world appears as self-evident" (p. 164). Bourdieu (2000) argues that doxa, the social systems/structures and narratives of the world, defines the culturally dominated nature of the 'natural attitude' or practical sense of belonging to a particular way of being and its consequent mask of 'misrecognition'. As John Myles (2004) puts it:

The sense of one's place is a practical sense, a practical knowledge that does not know itself, a 'learned ignorance' (*docta ignorantia*) which, as such, may be the victim of that particular form of misrecognition, *allogoxia*, consisting of mistakenly recognizing oneself in a particular form of representation [e.g., working, middle or upper class]...The knowledge supplied by incorporation of the necessity of the social world, especially in sense of limits, is quite real, like the submission which it implies and which is sometimes expressed in the imperative statements of resignation: 'that's not for us' (or 'not for the likes of us') or, more simply, 'It's too expensive' (for us) (p. 185).

Doxa, similar to Lacan's (1957) '*linguistic ego*', is a subconscious process of being and social conditioning, informed by cultural narratives, that influence and restrict a person's embodied and perceived 'natural' movements, expressions, behaviours, expectations, thoughts, standard of living and what is accepted as normalcy and reality.

Bourdieu's eclectic style and dynamic theoretical concepts, informed by his ethnographic research, attempts to reconcile difficulties of understanding the subject within objective social systems and structures of a particular field(s). Throughout his work, he seeks to understand the complex relationship between the external social structures and the subjective-symbolic experience of the individual, and in doing so challenges the dominant epistemological and ontological objective-subjective antinomy of the social sciences (Turner, 2012). Effectively, he unites the divide between social phenomenology (the mind) and structuralism (social laws), an ideological and theoretical divide that remains pervasive and problematic for many traditionally minded sociologists. *Habitus* and *hexis* (the dispositions, practices and attitudes of the body and mind) and *field* (location, objects, social systems and cultural discourses within the social world) are theoretical tools that explore how the body

and mind, the embodied self, is expressed, experienced and used to acquire, maintain, improve and suppress an individual/groups status and power within specific historical-cultural time.

In summary, Bourdieu's conceptual tools have been pertinent to this study, as will be shown in the following chapters, to investigate the relationship between one's embodied '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' and biopedagogies. Of particular intrigue has been the discovery of what forms of capital are at stake for the men interviewed and the extent to which they are willing to invest and modify their bodies and why.

### ***Bourdieuian Limitations***

Despite Bourdieu's concepts being pervasively used by embodiment and physical cultural scholars, his critics argue that his cultural analysis ignored the actual lived experiences of those that he studied and that the question of practice and performance is often subdued and exclusively concerned with musical taste and conventional works of art (Turner, 2012). Shusterman (2008), a student/colleague of Bourdieu's, argues Bourdieu failed to provide an adequate sociology of experience, particularly aesthetic experience. Although "far from being hostile to psychoanalysis [Bourdieu] reckoned that there was no fundamental difference between his conception of the unconscious and Freud's...resistances, displacements, repressions, negations" (de Gaulejac, 2004, p. 83). Shusterman (2002) states:

No sympathetic attention is given to the phenomenological dimension of lived experience, its power of meaning, quantitative immediacy, and its potential for the transformation of attitudes and habits (p. 221).

Therefore, to study the experiential performances, practices and processes of the lived active body one must explore how cultural representations of the body become embodied and experienced. Schusterman, drawing on John Dewey and Bourdieu's work, achieves this goal by developing the concepts of *pragmatist aesthetics* and *somaesthetics* outlined in his books *Pragmatist Aesthetics* and *Aesthetic Experience and Somaesthetics* (Shusterman, 2000; 2018). Other contemporary scholars of the sociology of the body and embodiment have also produced notable works to ensure the experiences of the body are represented within the social science literature: Loic Wacquant's (2004) *Body & Soul*, Chris Shilling's *Body Pedagogics* (2011; 2017) and Nick Crossley's (2005) *Reflexive Body Techniques* are prominent examples. The latter, provides theoretical insights to overcome the limitations of Bourdieu's work.

## V. Reflexive Body Techniques: Understanding the Carnality of Embodiment

Although not employed directly as a theoretical tool throughout this study, Crossley's insights regarding the mind-body-culture-praxis relationship act as an undercurrent to pull the theoretical tools of Bourdieu, Foucault, Nietzsche and Freud together. Crossley's (1995) insights are helpful as he attempts to overcome sociology's traditional neglect of 'the body', which often constitutes the body as a "meaningful object within specific discourses, and subject to a regime of practices whose function is to regulate and/or transform it in a specifiable manner" (p. 43). He accomplishes this by merging the literature associated with the '*sociology of the body*' and Loic Wacquant's (2015) theory of '*carnal sociology*' to create and establish a new theoretical concept – '*reflexive body techniques*' (Crossley, 2005) to better understand and research embodiment, the body and body techniques. Crossley (1995) summarizes:

The sociology of the body addresses itself to epistemological, ethical and aesthetic technologies which variously discipline, adorn, punish, celebrate, etc. 'the body'. It is concerned with *what is done to the body*. Carnal sociology, in contrast...addresses the active role of the body in social life. It is concerned with *what the body does* and it stresses and examines the necessarily embodied bases of the praxical-symbolic constituents of the social formation (p. 43).

Furthermore, Wacquant (2015) defines carnal sociology as "a sociology not of the body as sociocultural object but from the body as fount of social intelligence and sociological acumen...the human agent is a sentient and suffering being of flesh and blood" (p. 5). From this perspective the visible surface of the visceral body and its inner circulatory of life are a part of a subject's emotive psychic and physiological functions, needs, desires, pains and pleasures embedded within the corporeal self. Carnal sociology "aims to detect and document the deployment of the practical schemata that fashion practice: the cognitive, conative, and affective building blocks of the habitus, whose layering and operations are fully open to investigation" (Wacquant, 2015, p. 5).

Crossley (2005) argues '*reflexive body techniques*' (RBT) facilitates an analysis of lived and active embodiment, societal and individual, within macro and micro fields (see *Chapter 1, Section IV*).

... [The RBTs] concept builds upon Marcel Mauss's (1979) concept of body techniques and upon my own earlier work on reflexive embodiment (Crossley, 2001). The concept of RBTs, affords a powerful analytic purchase upon the embodied and reflexive processes and practices involved in projects of body modification/maintenance and, indeed, upon the reflexive separation of the embodied I and me. (Crossley, 2005, p. 2)

RBTs, as I define them, are those body techniques whose primary purpose is to work back upon the body, so as to modify, maintain or thematize it in some way. This might involve two embodied agents. Hairdressing, massage, dental work and cosmetic surgery, for example usually entail that the 'body' is worked upon, physically, by another or by a team of embodied agents...[and] include such distanced and mediated interactions as those that connect the manufacturers of pharmaceuticals to those who distribute and use them. Pill-popping is a socially complex, distanced and mediated RBT (pp. 9–10).

Crossley (2005) proposes body modification practices, including the complexities of drug use, can be investigated and understood through a multidimensional biopsychosocial lens (i.e., *Triads of Being* (Chapter 2), which acknowledges the self as both a carnal and socially constituted symbolic being.

Here I am interested in the manner in which the concept [RBTs] simultaneously holds together social, corporeal and cognitive elements...First, it rejoins the concept of 'social facts', integrating it with a consideration of biological and psychological facts. Body techniques are social facts. They vary across societies and social groups. They pre-exist and will outlive the specific individuals who practice them at any point in time...At the same time, however, they presuppose biological structures and embody knowledge, reason and psychological properties...we can generate emotional intentions, putting ourselves into particular moods, by acting out the mood; that is, by performing the body techniques (partly) constitutive of it. This is a key function of body techniques within certain rituals. Thus, body techniques have a psychological dimension too (Crossley, 2005, pp. 9–10).

From this perspective, *'reflexive body techniques'* identify and emphasise the importance of socio-historical dimensions of body practices and the "collective forms of wisdom and reasoning which are pre-representational in form...pre-reflective knowledge (know-how) and understanding" (Crossley, 2005, p. 9). Thus, drawing on a *neo-Nietzschean*/*'triads of being'* ontology, I have reinterpreted Crossley's pre-reflective knowledge and understanding as a primordial understanding of the soul - the soul's primordial desire to optimise its physical body and psychic capabilities to negotiate and overcome the moralities of culture.

For practical purposes, Crossley (2015) recognises that individuals often use a repertoire of *'reflexive body techniques'* to achieve a symbolic representation of what is desired by the individual and the cultural field. *As he refers to them, 'Ensembles of reflexive body techniques'* are a set of techniques practised together for a common purpose (e.g., the beautification of the self) (Crossley, 2015). "Exercising', 'getting dressed' and 'putting on make-up' are all examples of this. Each refers not to a single body technique but to a set (an ensemble) of techniques" (Crossley, 2015, p. 11). Therefore, within this study, it is important to acknowledge men's synthetic testosterone practices

coexist within a set of other complimentary body techniques such as weightlifting, aerobic exercise, dieting, sun tanning, teeth whitening, and botox injections.

In summary, Crossley (2015) contends that body modification can be best understood and analysed by adhering to the following guidelines and principles. First, “the concept of RBTs entails that ‘bodies’ are maintained and modified by way of bodily effort and embodied competence. We thus avoid dualism and thematise reflexivity” (Crossley, 2015, p. 11). Second, *reflexive body techniques* encourage the researcher to identify the ‘mindful’ and socio-cultural aspects of embodied activity, know-how and understanding, and not to subordinate “those aspects to the symbolic meaning bestowed by representations, discourse, consciousness, etc., and not reducing embodied activity to mere mechanical behaviour” (Crossley, 2015, p. 11). Finally, *reflexive body techniques* can be utilised to accommodate different modes of analysis – empirical, (enactive)ethnographic, life histories, interviews, microhistory, historiography or/and statistical –quantitative methodologies – depending on the researcher’s intent and strengths, as long as the body is treated as a social agent that is embodied and embedded (Crossley, 2015).

Supporting Crossley’s (2015) and Wacquant’s (2015) assertion that the embodied existential experiences of the human subject require an understanding of a person’s desires, fears and inner drives, I propose this can be achieved (theoretically) with the use of psychoanalytic tools within a researcher’s theoretical framework. However, using psychoanalysis and recognising a person’s desires from a (postmaterialist) psychoanalytic perspective that is not obsessed with power and control has often been ontologically rejected by many sociology and poststructural scholars. Crossley (2005), dissatisfied with the sociological perspectives on psychoanalysis, argues “almost every perspective in sociology had something to say about psychiatry and in most cases, what they had to say centred upon issues of power and control” (p. 1). Crossley (2005), examining the history of the resistance to psychiatry between 1950 and 2000, noted these perspectives often included – Marxist, Foucauldian, feminist, and theories of ‘race’ and ethnicity. Yet, these critiques largely failed to identify the benefits of ‘psy – disciplines’, and the usefulness of psychoanalysis, and psychoanalytic theories (e.g., the writings of Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Jung, Rogers, Maslow, Winnicott), to recognise the agency, powers and desires of the individual.

In an attempt to highlight the importance of agency, the power of the individual and the desires (of the soul) within the social sciences, this study recognises the usefulness of psychoanalysis to explore the embodied *tensions of the self and discourses of being* – the conflict internalised conflicts between a person’s pre-discursive needs and wills and desires and demands of culture. From my perspective, the use of psychoanalysis permits moving beyond the ontological simplicity of a ‘social control’ and social constructionist worldviews, which has limited the historical and contemporary

understandings of mental (and physical) health. As noted by Elliott (1999), the use of Freudian (and other) psychoanalytic concepts enable in-depth understandings of identity and sexuality; the relationships between psychoanalysis and feminism; problems of epistemology and method; the temporal and spatial constitution of social practices; the interpretation of biography and autobiography; and the dynamics of modernity and postmodernism.

## **VI. Embodied Desires: Understanding the Psychic-Libidinal Discourses of the Soul**

To understand how human (sexual) desires (of the soul) influence a person's biopedagogic practices, I now turn to the psychoanalytic philosophies of Fredrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud. Specifically, Nietzsche's (1883-1885; 1901) '*will to power*' and Freud's (1923; 2010) '*will to pleasure*'. Nietzsche's and Freud's theoretical insights into the human psyche, which I have reinterpreted to be situated within a person's embodied immaterial soul (*see Chapter 2*), are used to unravel the interplay between the embodied tensions of the soul (e.g., need for self-actualisation and intimacy), the physiological needs of the human body (e.g. good health), the socialised-symbolic performative body (e.g., the aesthetic-athletic ideal), and (reflexive) body techniques.

### ***Nietzsche's 'Will to Power'***

Fredrich Nietzsche's (1883-1885; 1901) '*will to power*' is a concept central to his philosophies on consciousness and the meaning of existence, reflecting his fascination and influential insights concerning human subjectivity. The '*will to power*' underpins what Nietzsche believed to be the main driving force in humans (and the universe in general): achievement, ambition, self-overcoming and the striving to reach the highest possible position in life, the pursuit of happiness. In his book, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche (1883-1885) writes: "Whenever I found a living thing, I found the Will to Power... Only where there is life, is there also will" (p. 21). Nietzsche (1883; 1901) suggests individuals who embrace their '*will to power*' - pursue their passions, overcome adversity, discipline their desires, and achieve a sense of mastery throughout their lives – are the ones who experience a state of self-actualisation and happiness. According to Nietzsche, these are the defining characteristics of an *Urbemensch* (Superman) (Nietzsche, 1883; 1901), the name he gives to a person representing the ideal conscious state of being.



In his book *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche (1887) contextualises the ‘will to power’ as a metaphysical state pursued by two groups of people - the masters and the slaves. He argues that differing degrees of power exist within any given society, the *master* (who possesses social and economic power) and the *slave* (who possesses little/no power and is plagued by anxiety and uncertainty). The life objective of the slave is to creatively overcome his subordinate social position, fears, anxieties and suffering by learning to be disciplined and sacrificing the pleasures in life to become a master, an *Urbmensch*. Those who do not have the courage to embrace their ‘will to power’ succumb to the discourses of social obedience and slavery. (Sub)consciously, for these individuals, the lived experience becomes focused on survival and satisfying their psychic, egoic and physical desires (e.g., love, sex, eating, consumerism) (Nietzsche, 1887). In doing so, they sacrifice and deny themselves self-actualisation, meaning, pleasure and happiness, which suppresses their ‘will to power’ (Nietzsche, 1887). Thus, embodied ‘*tensions of the self*’, illnesses of the mind and body, and self-sabotaging habits arise. The self becomes fragmented between ‘*who I know I should be*’ and ‘*who I am told to be*’. Nietzsche (1887) forewarns: “all instincts which are not discharged outwardly turn inwards – this is what I call the internalisation of man” (p. 57), individual sickness is the result of “a forcible breach with his animal past” and “a declaration of war against his old instincts on which, up till then, his strength, pleasure, and formidableness had been based” (p. 57).

Esoteric, non-definitive and open to interpretation, for this project, I have (re)interpreted Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’ of impersonal matter as a pre-material transcendent embodied psychic energy, force and drive that exists within the human body (and mind). Thus, it is an pre-discursive energy of the soul that pre-dates and lives beyond the materiality of the human, reflecting the discoveries of contemporary science as discussed in **Chapter 2, Sections IV-V**. Therefore, this reinterpretation and re-reading of Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’ is, by default, in light of a postmaterialist worldview, a critique and modernisation of the Nietzschean soul discussed in **Chapter 1, Section V**.

Throughout the analysis chapters (**Chapters 5–10**), I attempt to demonstrate how a cohort of Los Angeles men’s ‘will to power’ (of the soul) is expressed or suppressed throughout their lives and how ‘Californian Medicine’ (i.e., synthetic androgens) is used to overcome, or succumb to, their ‘*tensions of the self and the discourses of being*’.

### ***Freud’s ‘Will to Pleasure’***

‘Will to power’ is often contrasted with Sigmund Freud’s (1923; 2010) ‘will to pleasure’. ‘Will to pleasure’ is a theoretical concept highlighting the importance of one’s subconscious (sexual) desires.

(Sexual) desire was a prominent theme that emerged throughout my previous research, *'Drugs, Sex & Protein Shakes'* (Shield, 2015), whereby I investigated the experiences of young Sydney men's experiences and practices of their bodies. Again, within this project, sexual desire reemerged as a dominant theme that orientated men's behaviour. Thus, incorporating Freud's (1923) *'will to pleasure'* as a theoretical tool to explore the *'tensions of the self and discourses of being'* underpinning men's biopedagogies proved critical.

Freud's (1923) theory *'will to pleasure'* (or *'the pleasure principle'*) suggests humans have an unconscious *'life instinct'* to seek pleasure, including sexual gratification, and the avoidance of pain to satisfy their biological and psychological needs (e.g., procreation and intimacy). For Freud, the *'will to pleasure'* is the driving force guiding the *id* (the mind's unconscious instinctual impulses for pleasure), which comprises two biological drives, *Eros* and *Thanatos*. The stronger of the two drives, *Eros* represents a life instinct that directs life-sustaining activities such as respiration, eating, and sex, forming an energy known as the libido (Freud, 1923). Whilst *Thanatos* (the death instinct) represents the destructive forces within a human being, expressed as aggression and violence toward others (Freud, 1923).

Freud (1923) contrasted *'will to pleasure'* with his concept of the *'reality principle'* – an individual's capacity to defer the gratification of a desire when social occurrences or norms of expected etiquette disallow its immediate gratification. In infancy and early childhood, Freud (1923) argues that the *id* (subconscious) governs a person's behaviour by obeying only the *'pleasure principle'* as an act of survival, reinforced by the mother's sexual intimacy with the child.

From an early age, a human's psychosexual desires and attention focuses on receiving immediate gratification from the 'mother' to satisfy their hunger and thirst cravings (e.g., breastfeeding, toileting). As the child transitions through adolescence and adulthood, the experiences associated with the sexualised body and one's behaviours (e.g., sucking via the mouth), from which psychic and physiological pleasure is experienced, becomes pursued and enjoyed in other ways (e.g., sexual intimacy with a stranger or romantic partner) (Freud, 1989). In *'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'* Freud (1920) states:

The pleasure principle long persists, however, as the method of working employed by the sexual instincts, which are so hard to 'educate', and, starting from those instincts, or in the ego itself, it often succeeds in overcoming the reality principle, to the detriment of the organism as a whole (p. 4).

However, reinterpreting Freud's concepts of the '*will to pleasure*' through a post-material *neo-Nietzschean* ontology (**Chapter 2**), I suggest the drives of the '*will to pleasure*' are situated within the psychic energies of a pre-material soul that become entangled within the biological body. Therefore, the '*will to pleasure*' is psychically determined by the primordial desires of the soul (e.g., the need for intimacy), as opposed to being physiological determined by the libidinal drives of the body (i.e., hormones) (*see Chapter 1, Section 5*).

This re-reading of Freud's '*will to pleasure*', and thus Freud's biological soul, suggests the libidinal drives and processes of the physiological body are a by-product of the soul's pre-material desires. For example, the body's production of semen or breastmilk is the manifestation of a person's psychic desires being acted upon. Thus, the material processes and outcomes of lust, love and intimacy (i.e., sex) are material significations and expressions of the soul's psychic needs for meaningful and intimate connections with others - as highlighted by Maslow's (1993; 2012; 2016) '*Hierarchy of Needs*'.

Freud's views, reinterpreted or not, thus, can be read through a Nietzschean lens (1887; 1901) – that life is an ongoing struggle between the soul, body, and culture that the individual must learn to negotiate to achieve maturity, to learn to defer the jouissance's of psychic, corporeal and social excitation. Echoing Nietzsche's sentiments, Freud (1916-17/1989) states:

An ego thus educated has become 'reasonable'; it no longer lets itself be governed by the pleasure principle, but obeys the reality principle, which also, at bottom, seeks to obtain pleasure, but pleasure which is assured through taking account of reality, even though it is pleasure postponed and diminished (pp. 402-403).

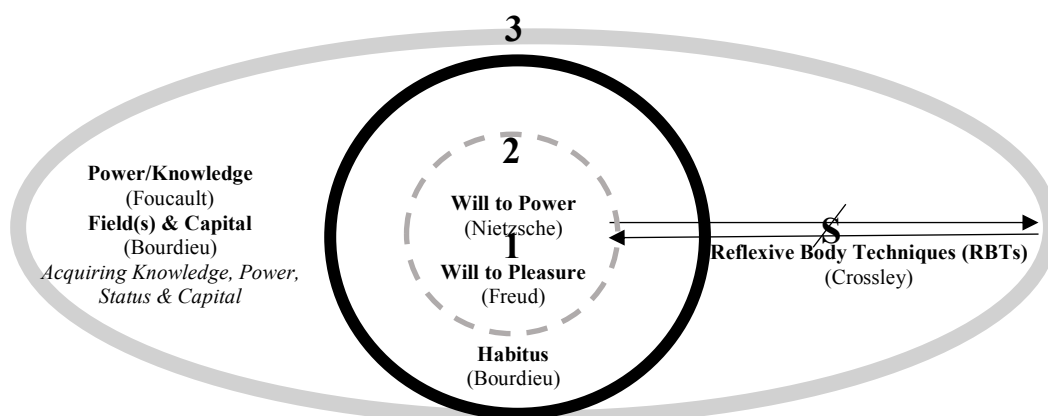
Accordingly, for Freud (1916-17/1989) and Nietzsche (1886), the individual can only realise meaningful experiences of pleasure and happiness once the tensions between the '*pleasure principle*' (soul) and the '*reality principle*' (culture) are overcome. For both Freud and Nietzsche, the art of overcoming the embodied split between the authentic 'I' and the symbolic 'me' requires a disciplining of one's pleasure-seeking desires that can easily lead one astray.

Throughout my poststructural-psychoanalytic analysis of the participant's lived experiences and praxis, utilising the theories of Nietzsche and Freud (and others), I am interested in how culture and discourse mediate men's desires of the soul (and ego) (*see Figure 6 below*), and the role biopedagogies (i.e., synthetic androgens) play in negotiating and managing these desires. Can men control their desires? Do biopedagogies help men get what they desire? And, can the embodied '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' be overcome?



**Figure 6.** ‘Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being’: Embodied Desires of the Soul, Body and Culture.

In summary, to support a *neo-Nietzschean ontology*, I adopt Foucault’s (1974) idea of a ‘*theoretical toolbox*’ and Žižek’s (2009) concept of a ‘*parallax view*’ to dissect and analyse the embodied ‘*tensions of the self and discourses of being*’, which underpin a cohort of (West) Los Angeles men’s body practices. Specifically, I draw upon a select set of theoretical insights conceived by Foucault, Bourdieu, Nietzsche, and Freud, to reveal the intersectionality between the ongoing struggles between the wills, demands and phantasms of the soul, the physiological body, and the moralities of culture (Nietzsche, 1882) (*see Figure 7 below*). This approach is utilized by many other contemporary embodiment scholars, including: Bryan Turner (*Bourdieu, Heidegger, Foucault*), Rosi Bradotti (*Luce Irigaray, Deleuze, Nietzsche, Foucault*), Chris Shilling (*Mauss, Dewey, Mead, Elias, Bourdieu, Durkheim*) and Slavoj Žižek (*Lacan, Hegel, Marx, Freud, Kant*).



**Discourses of the Self:** 1. Discourses and Wills of the Soul 2. Discourses and Needs of the Corporeal Body 3. Discourses and Temptations of Culture and Ideology.

**§ Tensions of the Self.** Embodied tensions between the Soul, Body and Culture, Mediated by RBTs.

**Figure 7. Theoretical Overview:** Analyzing the Tensions of the Self and the Discourses of Being.

In the following chapters, I begin my poststructural-psychoanalytic analysis of the participants' life histories by focusing on how the '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' come into being during childhood (**Chapter 5**). I then focus my attention on the participants' embodied struggles, pains, and pleasures during adolescence and adulthood and the role biopedagogies (i.e., synthetic androgens) play in navigating their desires, bodies, identities, and relationships with others (**Chapters 5-9**). My analysis of the participants' lived experiences concludes with a theory that I have coined '*Displaced Humanism*' (**Chapter 10**). '*Displaced Humanism*' draws upon the findings from this study and my reflections on the nature of metaphysics, embodied praxis, and culture.

“...the body is a site of incorporated history”

Pierre Bourdieu (1984, p. 435)

## 5

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### **EMBODIED TENSIONS OF CULTURE: FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADOLESCENCE**

To begin my *neo-Nietzschean* poststructural–psychoanalytic discourse analysis of the participants’ life history narratives, I draw on Bourdieu’s (1984) formation of the *habitus* and Foucault’s (1976) insights concerning *power/knowledge* to examine how various ‘*tensions of the self and discourses of being*’ initially became embodied and experienced during their childhoods and early adolescence. Subsequently, I highlight how the participants’ authentic soul’s and ‘character’ (Bourdieu, 1990), bodies, and ‘*linguistic ego*’ (Lacan, 1957) became socially conditioned and displaced to produce an embodied *doxa* (learned ignorance and ‘*incorporated history*’ (Bourdieu, 1984)) to privilege certain discourses and imperatives over others.

As a poststructural-psychoanalytic analyst (i.e., Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan, Irigaray, Kristeva, Žižek), I identify the discourses that produce particular cultural narratives, and a distinct embodied *doxa*, *habitus* and symbolic subconscious state emerge within the human subject. In doing so, I reveal how the ‘authentic’ self – body and soul – become subjugated and ‘split’ by discourse that manifests in a *lack of being* (authenticity and fulfilment) within the depths of the psyche (Freud, 1940, Lacan, 1966/1977). This loss of the pre-discursive self becomes apparent as the subject expresses their symptoms, truths and desires via their speech, body image, and behaviours (Žižek, 2006). As Lacan (1996) puts it, you will find the truth if you listen to the symptom.

This discursive process of a displaced self, from childhood to adulthood, is revealed by analysing the hegemonic narratives and discourses that present themselves within a subjects life history. As the ‘*tensions of the self and discourses of being*’ – embodied truths, symptoms and desires – reveal themselves, the discursive genealogies of the hegemonic power that enacts to displace a person’s humanism can be located and identified. Foucault (1976) suggests this embodiment of (systemic) *power/knowledge* consanguinity permits what is learned, spoken and enacted upon.

Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has effects, and in that sense at least, ‘becomes true.’ Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice (Foucault, 1977, p. 27).

Drawing from Foucault and Bourdieu, a displaced humanism, embodiment, and the formation of a culturally-induced performative self is a social process whereby habits and behaviours (the *habitus*) and feelings and perceptions (the *hexis*) results in a subconscious *mimesis* of normative cultural practices (Bourdieu, 1984). To illustrate this phenomenon, via the participants’ life histories, I demonstrate how human consciousness and (non)normative behaviours, “the body, physical activity, a healthy lifestyle and diet are enmeshed within relations of power and how they, weaved in discourses, provide a base for a certain type of knowledge construction” (Markula-Denison & Pringle, 2006, p. 55) from an early age – childhood.

## **I. The Early Formations of the Symbolic Self**

To commence my analysis of the prevailing themes, imperatives, and ‘*tensions of the self and discourses of being*’ that emerged within participants’ testimonies, I concentrate on how an institutionalised normative healthy self materialised at a young age. Thus, shaping their perceptions of what discourses, *habitus*, and corporeal facades were, and continue to be, culturally and symbolically valued.

### ***The Fat (Free) Body***

Since their childhoods, the men in this study perceived a ‘healthy’ fat-free body to be both a desired and a rejected subject position. For example, John and Johnny commented:

When I was born, I had the umbilical cord wrapped around my neck, you could see the veins through my skin. My body was out of whack, and I had a protruding belly. Ever since I can remember I’ve been fat. I came from a family of fitness fanatics. My mother fed me vitamin tablets when I was nine, but they were actually weight loss pills to make me lose weight! Looking back, I wanted to rebel. I didn’t realize that at the time, so I would just sit at home and eat, watch movies and not leave the house. It made me feel good. It didn’t occur to me that food was making me fat...Food was comforting...I was the short [5’6] fat kid (John).

I’m five foot six...stocky, I was always a little bit overweight, even when I was younger. I would say you know 15/16 [years of age] when I started paying attention

to what I was eating and I like lost a fair amount of weight, but at that point, I had already put actual stretch marks on myself that to this day are still there... At my heaviest, I was 198 pounds. I bought a scale one day, stepped on it, and decided that was the end of it. At 17 I started hitting the gym and by the time I was like 24-25 I noticed the improvements had just stopped (Johnny).

Both being short in stature, John and Johnny provided contrasting accounts of their embodied experiences of being overweight during their childhoods. For John, the medical complications he endured during his birth resulted in physical abnormalities of his body being “out of whack”, having “a protruding belly”, and exhibiting excess body fat. Surveilled through the eyes of his “fitness fanatic” mother, weight loss pills, which she promoted as vitamins, were secretly used to reconfigure his atypical materiality. John’s body had become controlled, subjugated and regulated by the discursive judgements of his mother’s panoptic gaze, reinforcing the medical and health imperatives (power/knowledge) that permeated throughout his social space. Discourse, as a disciplinary system, enacted through the use of vitamins, had been used “not to punish..., but to punish better, to punish with an attenuated severity perhaps...to insert power more deeply into the social body” (Foucault, 1977). Yet, the socialised mind, body and soul resisted.

Subconsciously objecting to his mother’s governance of his body and her desire to inscribe discourses of an acceptable somatotype symbolically, he engaged in emotional and excessive eating and television watching to “rebel” and overcome his subconscious lack of a desirable aesthetic. “[Food] made me feel good”, “was comforting”, yet “it didn’t occur to me that food was making me fat”. At an older age [31], this realisation suggests a psychic detachment from his corporeality, a lack of awareness about his physicality, as his temporality became consumed within the subconscious immersion of his mother’s symbolic rejection of his non-normative figure. Subconsciously, he used food to comfort his psychic needs for acceptance resulting in him overeating and putting on weight.

In contrast, Johnny consciously perceived being overweight as an embodied excess that needed to be removed. Despite being “depressed and single”, the bodily markings of “stretch marks” and a scale reading of “98 pounds” (corporeal and social significations of an overweight body) motivated him to engage in bio-pedagogies of dieting and gym work. However, after 7/8 years of dieting and exercise – “on the bike...regularly pushing my heart rate over 200 beats per minute...and weight training” his physical limitations began to inhibit his desire to symbolically inhabit a healthier self. Frustrated, the remaining “stretch marks” permanently etched onto his skin provide a constant reminder of the person he no longer wanted to be.

Other people I engaged with also observed the symbolic rejection and stigmatisation of body fat. An American military acquaintance (a non-participant) commented: “There’s a new form of



discrimination – against fat people. You’re not allowed to be fat, overweight, have a large body anymore. Especially in L.A.!” Similarly, Erik remarked: “People don’t want to be fat, skinny is more accepted. Some people find skinny attractive...”. Since the 1990s, the fear of fat and the war on obesity as a discursive and regulatory practice to reconfigure the appearance of the body’s surface (Boero & Thomas, 2016; Campos, 2004; Greenhalgh, 2015; Rich & Mansfield, 2018), has become “the vehicle of a moral and political agenda, an ideology, surreptitiously conveyed, in the name of science” (Gard & Wright, 2006, p. 9). From this perspective, science is used as an ideological imperative to change peoples’ behaviours and habits (*habitus*) to serve specific political and economic interests.

Obesity science, with little evidence, blames increased fat in children on their excessive immobility, on the arrival of virtual, video technology. It attributes our growing global fatness to the general decline of culture following the sexual revolution, even as it assigns ultimate responsibility for fatness to the individual in whom being overweight is a sign of gluttony and sloth, an index of humiliating personal failure. The interpretation of the causes and consequences of fat that emerges from the official use being made of epidemiological science is one that serves the political agenda of those who seek simultaneously to indict progressive culture, without engaging social issues, while constraining individual behaviour, in the name of public health, under the guise of doing it for your own good (Klein, 2006, p. 207).

From this perspective, the discursive surveillance of the fat body, enforced by the power and knowledge of public health authorities, washes the collective consciousness with discourses of fear to encourage acts of personal responsibility. In turn, these socially constructed fears inform the linguistic ego, the *habitus* – the bodily praxis – of the body significations that are to be accepted and avoided. This embodied *doxa* regulates what is (un)healthy and normative. Consequently, as illuminated in the participants’ statements above, a bodily aesthetics symbolically representing a lack of fat (i.e., an athletic appearance) is privileged and honoured over the large body, which has become increasingly marginalised by political and medical morality (Gard & Wright, 2006). The language of fatness (mis)informs society about the dangers of fat and encourages disciplinary practices that cultivate an embodied aesthetic that symbolises ideals underpinned by neo-liberalism. That is, self-disciplining bodies not only engage with perceived healthy body practices, they also entertain and attempt dangerous surgeries, crash diets, and harmful diet drugs to conform to hegemonic ideals of health and wellness (Gill, 2005; Hall, Grogan & Gough, 2014; Holliday & Cairnie 2007; Lefkowich et al., 2017; Oliver, 2006).

Despite empirical studies showing a moderately active larger person is likely to be far healthier (and to live longer) than someone thin but sedentary (Campos, 2004), health authorities continue to propagate a fear of fat to change societal attitudes and encourage behaviours that adhere to the demands of healthism and the panoptic gaze (Azzarito, 2009; Giovanelli & Osterlag, 2009;

Tischner, 2013). The embodied anxieties that result from this discursive gaze, linguistically informed by the power/knowledge of medical imperatives, threaten an individual's social and body capital if not adhered to. As previously expressed within the narratives produced by John and his "fitness fanatic" mother, Johnny, the military professional and Erik. These anxieties can reproduce a state of being is "constructed at the intersection of scientific knowledge and a complex of culturally-based beliefs, values, and ideals" (Gard & Wright, 2006, p. 168) whereby "the abhorrence of 'fat' has become the norm" (Burrows & Wright, 2007, p. 89). From this perspective, identity, in part, is thus constructed and experienced through the discursive processes of embodiment (Braidotti, 2002). I argue that through this process of socialisation, the non-discursive and innate embodied elements of the self, the material body, and one's connection to an authentic state of being (soul) become displaced by both encouraged and discouraged practices of being.

In addition to the discourses of fatness internalised during the participants' childhoods, the self continued to be discursively surveilled, conditioned and modified in various ways within the American education system.

## **II. The Schooled Body: Medicalising, Gendering, and Athleticising the Self**

Institutionally positioned within the American educational system throughout their childhoods/adolescences, several of the participants discussed how their understandings and lived experiences of their bodies, health and identity were subjugated by discourses of a perceived normality - mind, body, and soul.

I took amphetamines for 20 years to treat ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder] and dyslexia since I was a sophomore (15) – they ruined my life! I couldn't focus or concentrate, zoned out and subdued, my brain was all over the place. I felt terrible for a long time... I grew up in the 80s and 90s – to think children are still being given drugs to "calm down" [uses fingers to signifier quote symbols] at school is terrible. Creative kids like me being subdued because they are easily bored... I was basically poisoned for 20 years! (Jack).

Jack, a creative student who was easily bored, subsequently was diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia and treated with amphetamines since he was 15 to "subdue" his classroom behaviour. From his perspective, this schooling experience defined and ruined his life. Primarily because the effects of the amphetamines he consumed significantly affected his cognitive abilities – "I couldn't focus or concentrate...my brain was all over the place. I felt terrible for a long time." Self-identifying as a "creative kid", amphetamines were used to "calm down" his inquisitive nature and soul. Or from a

Nietzschean perspective, his *'will to power'*. His psychic dispositions had become displaced through what he perceived to be the intoxication of his grey matter. The formerly active and creative mind, spirit and body had become subdued and chaotic. The self had become subordinate to a set of institutional hegemonic 'scientific' and 'educational' discourses that suppressed his primordial behaviours and character because they were deemed uncivilized, unruly, and therefore, unnatural. Within the "walls, space, institutions, rules, discourses" (Foucault, 1979, p. 307), multiple systems of disciplinary power/knowledge define, exclude and abject those who are 'special', 'degenerates' or have 'learning difficulties' (Harwood, Muller & Ollssen, 2013). "This mode of thought on which this reconstruction [of the self] drew are not significantly different from eugenics and that in many ways eugenic modes of thought remain thoroughly ingrained within educational policy and practice" (Ball, 2013, p. 91). Similarly, Foucault (2003) argues:

This is again the realm of abnormality, of lepers – and the ways in which racism 'breaks in the species', functions not so much as the prejudice or defense of one group against another as the detection of all those within a group who may be the carriers of a danger to it (p. 317).

Because ADHD and dyslexia "often first become problematic when children face increased school expectations of discipline and conformity, some critics see the problem as one of regimented and unimaginative schools that are too rigid to accommodate the varied needs of children" (Hinshaw & Scheffer, 2014, p. xi). Contesting the material and positivist claims of pharmaceutical and medical science (Sciberras et al., 2017; Rubia, 2018; Pozzi et al., 2020), many scholars argue ADHD is not an actual disorder/epidemic. Those who are sceptical of the mass use of amphetamines for supposed cognitive disorders suggest the ADHD is a manufactured epidemic to serve the profit motives of the pharmaceutical industry who benefit from diagnosing and treating children and schools (and parents) who seek to maintain order (Armstrong, 2017; Hinshaw & Scheffer, 2014; Radcliffe & Timimi, 2004; Saul, 2014; Schwarz, 2017; Sing, 2004; 2005; 2008). Ken Robinson (2010) notes:

This is the modern epidemic, the plague of ADHD, and it's fictitious. Don't mistake me; I don't mean to say there is no such thing as Attention-Deficit Disorder... What I do know for a fact is it's not an epidemic. These kids are being medicated as routinely as we had our tonsils taken out, and on the same whimsical basis and for the same reason: medical fashion. Our children are living in the most intensive stimulating period in the history of the earth. They're being besieged with information and coerced for attention from every platform: computers, from iPhones, from advertising hoardings, from hundreds of television channels. And we're penalizing them now for getting distracted. From what? Boring stuff... It seems to me not a coincidence, totally, that the instance of ADHD has risen in parallel with the growth of the standardized testing. Now these kids are being given Ritalin and Aderol and all manner of things, often quite dangerous drugs, to get them focused and calm them down... It's a fictitious epidemic (4.0–5.35).

Like the war on fat, the (ill and medicalised) self has become positioned within a nexus of medical imperialism, social control, and corporate profit motives of the “medical marketplace” (Keane, 2013). In this light, the discourses of neoliberalism have produced a form of economics centred around the creation and treating of “health disorders”, whereby one in nine (6.4 million) American children are too “hyperactive” and in need of treatment (CDC 2014a, 2014b). Socially, psychically, and materially consumed by the imperatives of medicine, as highlighted by John and Jack, “medical styles of thought are internal to our experiences of contemporary selfhood” (Keane, 2013 p. 58), making us what we are as modern neo-liberal subjects (Rose, 2007b).

Disputing the existence of ADHD, behavioural neurologist Richard Saul (2014), drawing on 50 years of experience treating patients, argues ADHD, as currently defined by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), and as understood within the collective consciousness, does not exist.

Ever since 1937, when Dr. Charles Bradley discovered that children who displayed symptoms of attention deficit and hyperactivity responded well to Benzedrine, a stimulant, we have been thinking about this “disorder” in almost the same way. Soon after Bradley’s discovery, the medical community began labelling children with these symptoms as having minimal brain dysfunction, or MBD, and treating them with the stimulants Ritalin and Cylert. In the intervening years, the DSM changed the label numerous times, from hyperkinetic reaction of childhood (it wasn’t until 1980 that the DSM-III introduced a classification for adults with the condition) to the current label, ADHD...regardless of the label, we have been giving patients different variants of stimulant medication to cover up the symptoms. You’d think that after decades of advancements in neuroscience, we would shift our thinking (Saul, 2014b, p.1).

Today, the fifth edition of the DSM only requires an individual to exhibit five of eighteen possible symptoms in various settings to qualify for an ADHD diagnosis (*Table 3*). Potentially, under these subjective criteria, entire populations could be diagnosed and treated for characteristics that are a normal part of the human condition (Keane, 2013). In effect, “millions of kids today are labelled with a brain disorder they probably do not have, changing their self-image and personal narrative forever” (Schwarz, 2017, p.4). This medical practice is what some scholars consider to be an intolerance, and the unethical cultural pathologizing and *meducation* of American children, particularly non-conforming boys (Conrad, 2006; Diller, 2006; Mayes, et al., 2009; Pollack, 1998; Rafalovich, 2004; Sing, 2004; White, 2005).

### ADHD SYMPTOMS OF INATTENTION

- Makes careless mistakes/lacks attention to detail
- Difficulty sustaining attention
- Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- Fails to follow through on tasks and instructions
- Exhibits poor organisation
- Avoids/dislikes tasks requiring sustained mental effort
- Loses things necessary for tasks/activities
- Easily distracted (including unrelated thoughts)
- Is forgetful in daily activities

### ADHD SYMPTOMS OF HYPERACTIVITY/IMPULSIVITY

- Fidgets with or taps hands or feet, squirms in seat
- Leaves seat in situations when remaining seated is expected
- Experiences feelings of restlessness
- Has difficulty engaging in quiet, leisurely activities
- Is "on-the-go" or acts if "driven by motor"
- Talks excessively
- Blurts out answers
- Has difficulty waiting their turn
- Interrupts or intrudes on others

**Table 3.** American Psychiatric Association DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

In his clinical practice, Saul (2014), among others (i.e., Bock, 2021; Kemp, 2008; Sinn, 2008), identified over 20 conditions that can lead to symptoms of ADHD, which require individualised treatment plans. Such conditions include: sleep disorders, undiagnosed vision and hearing problems, substance abuse (marijuana and alcohol in particular), iron deficiency, allergies (especially airborne and gluten intolerance), bipolar and major depressive disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and dyslexia. All of these fit the ADHD criteria outlined by the DSM. In short, increasing numbers of (American) children are medicalised by a materialist-neoliberal ideology, which has rendered many bodies and minds subordinate to the discourses of biopolitics. As noted by Bradotti (2007), "the notion of 'life itself' lies at the heart of bio-genetic capitalism as a site of financial investments and potential profits" (p. 18), a genetic citizenship of the individual.

### ***Breaking Doxa***

Jack's experiences of pain and suffering for being "poisoned for 20 years!" eventually gave rise to conscious awakening, which enabled him to become aware of the detrimental a/effects institutional discourse, practice, and power had on his psychic and material existence. For Jack, his realisation of the misuse of institutional power and governance is a state of consciousness that is

becoming increasingly common. Jack forewarns: “I think people are starting to wake up about the American medical/health system, capitalism – the dam is about to break”.

While psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Jacques Lacan, and Pierre Janet argue individuals often do not know the underlying causes of their embodied traumas and behaviours and subconsciously exclude them from awareness (Edwards & Jacobs, 2003), Bourdieu argued otherwise. He suggests the embodied state that has become subconsciously compromised and alienated by the a/effects of legitimised institutionalised discursive and symbolic power is because of an unquestioned “primal state of innocence” (*doxa*) (Bourdieu, 2000). This state of unconsciousness only functions when those subjected to it do not question its legitimacy or the legitimacy of those who exert it.

Bourdieu (1977), like Nietzsche, suggests that discursive reflexivity and the questioning of “the universe of the undiscussed” (p. 167) occurs in times of crisis. For him, it is from the depths of one's despair, when corporeal and psychic modifications and disruptions occur, that a critical consciousness begins to question the nature of reality (Bourdieu, 1977). In Frank's case, as evidenced by his reflexive statements, the emergence of a ‘critical consciousness’ awakened him to the connection between American crony capitalism (Khatri, 2021; Reich, 2016) and the pharmaceutical industry, health care system and (bio)politics. This awareness of how knowledge/power operates within contemporary American society and its embodied a/effects on one's health and well-being is a discursive and material reality that was previously unquestioned because it lay beyond the notion of inquiry – hidden by the false institutional truths of discourse. However, for Jack, these discursive illusions of good health via prescription drugs, what he described, metaphorically, as a discursive “wall”, was beginning to be questioned by the collective consciousness. Thus, the unscrupulous realities and practices of the American health system were increasingly being exposed.

Like Jack, many of the other participants within this study found their authentic pre-discursive self – mind, body and soul – and their lived experience displaced by normative hegemonic discourses within the educational system.

### ***Gender (In)Différance***

Whilst Jack perceived his abnormal cognitive functions and behaviours to be regulated by discourses embedded within a bio-medical paradigm, for Joe and Brad, it was practices of institutionalised heteronormativity that surveilled their habitus and sense of being in the world.

At school [High School] I was a pretty nerdy shy guy, wore thick ugly glasses, and was very skinny. I wasn't the stereotypical guy [in Idaho]...a bit feminine. I never really thought about my body till around 15 I guess... when the jocks were getting bigger and I was the skinny fem geek. I was taunted a bit, teased, made fun of about how I looked. You know - fag, poof, girly boy, faggot, queer, you're going to hell and all that...I'm not going to lie, it was tough...not really into sports and that kinda masculine stuff (Joe).

I run on more female emotions at times - moody as a child but then I learned moods are a temporary state of being...I did get made fun of as a kid for being gay [at High School] but I handled it well. It kinda also left me always putting on a front for self-preservation (Brad).

At the age of 15, within the institutionalised space of his local high school, Joe engaged in comparative analysis as he became increasingly self-reflexive. In this instance, 'comparative analysis' involved comparing and contrasting his "nerdy", "ugly", "skinny", and perceived "feminine" body to the bodies of the school "jocks" who were "getting bigger". For him, his bodily schema lacked the cultural capital required to immerse himself within an idealised heteronormative matrix successfully (Butler, 1990), which privileges normative modes of masculinity (i.e., the school jock) (Anderson, 2011; Runfola & Sabo, 1980).

Within the paradigm of heteronormative male performativity, an invisible norm was privileged as a natural truth that defines everyone and everything as heterosexual (Butler, 1990). This norm inscribes other acts of embodiment as unnatural, deviant or/and invisible; it is rooted within the collective unconscious so that we no longer see it, and how it shapes what an individual considers to be (un)acceptable behaviour within their social landscapes (Bourdieu, 2002). Subsequently, Joe's symbolic lack of 'naturalness' subjected him to discourses of heterosexism, resulting in public ridicule. The "feminine" habitus he presented was perceived by others to signify characteristics associated with homosexuality – "fag, poof, girly boy, faggot, queer". These embodied discourses of the unnatural 'Other' conflicted and threatened the hegemonic norm of heteronormativity. As a result, where possible, he distanced himself and his nonconforming symbolic body and habitus by keeping out of public view to avoid harassment. The 'abnormal' self, had become invisible and silenced by the dogmatic and institutionalised discourses of normativity.

Similarly, Brad's emotional sensibilities rendered him psychically indifferent to the idealised heterosexual habitus that was privileged within his school. "Moody as a child", his emotionality signified a mind, body and soul that his peers perceived to be unnaturally feminine. Consequently, he was "made fun of as a kid for being gay." Brad's sense of self and emotional dispositions, situated within the heteronormative matrix of the educational system, had become discursively disciplined by a

restrictive binary system of gender (identity). And thus, intense social surveillance and scrutiny and heterosexualised control.

To overcome this regulatory discursive gaze, Brad perceived that he “handled” the situation “well”, despite having to consciously restrict his psychic and physical traits by “putting on a front for self-preservation.” To re-establish his cultural capital and status within the school field, Brad consciously embodied and enacted a heterosexual façade in an attempt to avoid further judgement and protect his emotional and physical well-being. Immersed within the knowledge/power discourses of the heteronormative matrix (Butler, 1990), the institutionalised field of the school illustrates how “symbolic power is a power of creating things with words...symbolic power is a power consecration or revelation, a power to conceal or reveal things which are already there” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 138). In this instance, Brad quickly learned to mask and conceal his innate psychic “moody” personality, perceived “feminine emotions”, and sexuality by engaging in symbolic heteronormative practices which displaced his true self. This embodiment of a heterosexual façade, due to institutionalised and horizontal peer-based surveillance, demonstrates how bodies and subjectivities are disciplined and controlled. In particular, identities that represent an embodied indifference to heteronormative attitudes and norms.

The processes of the symbolic socialisation of the self, which reinforces and (re)produces specific performative modes of being and hegemonic masculinities, was further fortified by the participants’ engagement in school sport. For many of the participants, it was when they participated in a sport that they became increasingly aware of the importance of embodying a specific type of body to acquire the cultural capital and status that their ego’s desired.

### *The Sporting Aesthetic*

For Chad and Brad, track athletics, an important collegiate way of life (Shulman & Bowen, 2000), proved a significant institutionalised cultural and body practice. This sporting and cultural practice shaped their (sub)conscious dispositions to produce a particular performative body schema that was symbolically honoured within the social space of the school and beyond.

I started thinking about my body back in high school. I was an athlete who competed in many state championships, both in cross-country and track and field. I was very muscular for my age as a result of strenuous training for sporting events and was very confident about my body. I began lifting weights religiously during college (Chad).



I was a track runner at [High] school. I wanted to be fast and lean – that’s when I first started to think about my body...I took a weight training elective when I was in college – that’s when I really started to get into [weight] training and working out, mainly to improve my performance on the track (Brad).

During high school, college track and cross-country running provided an incentive for both Chad and Brad to actively reflect upon the formation and functionality of their material bodies. Both men engaged in “strenuous training” and “lifting weights religiously” to manufacture a “fast and lean” physique suitable for competitive “sporting events” and to improve their athletic performances. Chad recalls feeling “very confident” about his body as he rigorously trained to meet the demands of competitive running. When the body had reached the desired state of athletic aestheticism, the body ego responded with an embodied sense of *jouissance*. And, in doing so, symbolically rendering his body with possible discourses of status and prestige, allowing him to enhance his cultural capital – real and imaginary.

The influence of sport on a person's sense of self, and the desire to embody a competitive athletic aesthetic, can be understood by revealing the context and social forces they emerge from. Since the 1980s, American competitive intercollegiate sport has been increasingly important in the education system, provided schools and their athletes with an additional source of revenue (Peck & Tickell, 2002). For example, top tier American university sports franchises operate with budgets between 30 to 60 million dollars to manage their staff, athletes, equipment, and stadiums (Vanover & DeBowes, 2013). And the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) collect close to 1 billion dollars from television, advertising, and licensing revenues (Vanover & DeBowes, 2013). As a result, college athletes receive seven times more economic capital than other students (Ryan, 2019).

Henry Giroux (1999) suggests the neoliberalisation of and the rise of 'corporate power' within American universities, guided by ‘profit-driven instrumental rationality’ and ‘academic capitalism’ (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), has impacted their core functions, how they generate value and the types of students they attract, reward, and produce. With millions of dollars on offer, the high performing athletic-sporting body has come to command inordinate visibility, resources, influence, and attention inside and outside many campuses (Shulman & Bowen, 2000). Inspiring feelings of confidence for those who symbolically embody the new religion of neoliberalism privileged by American schools, as they generate value, status and prestige for themselves and their school.

Beyond the influence of athletics, Chad's bodybuilding Aunt inspired him to increase his muscularity at a young age.

I've always been infatuated with muscularity. My aunt was once a professional physique competitor and I've always been amazed by what we're able to do with our bodies. I love having big muscles, and I enjoy looking and feeling strong (Chad).

Chad recalls always being infatuated with muscularity, citing how the presence of his bodybuilding Aunt during his childhood had a significant impact on how he viewed his own body. Visually, she offered an insight into the physical capabilities and possibilities of the material body. As a bodybuilder, she demonstrated how the aesthetics of the body could be manipulated, transformed and enhanced through 'body work', exhibited to, and celebrated by an audience. The direct relationship between disciplining the body, presenting a muscular appearance, and acquiring recognition within the sport of bodybuilding subconsciously made an impression on Chad at a young age. Thus, he decided to engage in physical training routines to mirror his Aunt's body schema. From being "amazed by what we're able to do with our bodies" as an observer to actively training and metamorphosing his material structures, he experienced enjoyment by "looking and feeling strong" and loving his "big muscles".

Chad, now engrossed in the visceral, sensory, and symbolic pleasures of the muscular body, post-college, he enrolled in the "United States Marine Corps Reserve from 2006-2014", which allowed him to continue to "train hard". However, his desires to compare and mimic the human aesthetics of others began to have detrimental effects on his self-worth as he became older.

I think that, in and of itself, it is an okay thing, but it can become an unhealthy obsession if one isn't careful. Every single day, especially on social media, we're overwhelmed with ideals of beauty and success and it tugs heavily at our insecurities. We feel pressured to achieve these things or else risk seeing ourselves as a failure. I speak from personal experience (Chad).

Juxtaposing his self-image in the reflection of others forced Chad's consciousness to focus on what his incarnated form lacked instead of appreciating what he already had. "Speaking from personal experience", the standards of beauty and success exhibited by others tugged heavily at his insecurities and his fear of failure as he felt pressure to live up to the symbolic representations of the ideal athletic-aesthetic signified within his social fields. Despite being consciously aware of the internalised tension between embodying symbolic ideals and accepting his current embodied state, it was a conflict that he struggled to manage and control. Such insights reflect Lacan's (1998) claim that "Man's desire is the desire of the Other" (p. 235).

The necessary and sufficient reason for the repetitive insistence of these desires in the transference and their permanent remembrance in a signifier that repression has appropriated – that is, in which the repressed returns – is found if one accepts the

idea that in these determinations the desire for recognition dominates the desire that is to be recognised, preserving it as such until it is recognised (Lacan, 2007, p. 431)

Desire, for Lacan, is based on a fear of misrecognition, being judged by what one lacks – a symbolic void that the egoic self desires to unify so it can acquire recognition from the Other. Lacan believes that this dependence on the o/Other for recognition is responsible for structuring not only our desires but also our drives:

To return psychoanalysis to a veridical path, it is worth recalling that analysis managed to go so far in the revelation of man's desires only by following, in the veins of neurosis and the marginal subjectivity of the individual, the structure proper to a desire that thus proves to model it at an unexpected depth – namely, the desire to have his desire recognised. This desire, in which it is literally verified that man's desire is alienated in the other's desire, in effect structures the drives discovered in analysis, in accordance with all the vicissitudes of the logical substitutions in their source, aim, and object (Lacan, 2007, p. 343).

From this perspective, Chad's subconscious reflects a desire that is both a desire for recognition and a desire for what he believes the 'Other' desires. What humans experience as their own desire originates from the 'O/other's' desire, from whom we desire recognition. In this instance, the symbolic lack that the self perceives it requires is filled by engaging in physical training that seeks to recreate the symbolic image and desires of the 'O/other' (i.e., the muscular athletic-aesthetic) to attain status and cultural capital. But, when the perceived symbolic ideals escape the embodied realities of the self, tensions and negative perceptions of one's identity and body image begin to surface within the psyche

Honestly, I have a very poor body image, which impacts feelings about my identity...as a gay man. A lot of this has to do with the culture in which I was raised wherein masculinity is celebrated and sports are the popular pastime (Chad).

“Overwhelmed” by his fears, insecurities, and his desires to embody the symbolic significations of an idealised embodied state, Chad's emotional state reaches a point of symbolic castration. His psyche, sense of self, and habitus are castrated between the authentic 'I' and the cultural 'me'. In his case, torn between the embodied discourses of his past – a heteronormative, Texan sporting masculinity to which he once ascribed – and the realisation and need to express his innate sexual desire and identity as a gay man now living in Los Angeles—signified by his quest for “freedom and the ability to fully accept [him]self”. Chad's conscious awareness of these embodied conflicts threatens his sense of self and identity. Consequently, from his perspective, these experiences led to him have “a very poor body image” as he struggles to live up to the expectations and “pressures” of these competing

hegemonic ideals of what being a man entails. Highlighting Freud's (1923) observation that "a person's own body, and above all its surface, is a place from which both external and internal perceptions may spring" (p. 19). This embodied tension between internal-external elements of the self is a process that I refer to as – *embedded embodiment*.

### ***Embedded Embodiment and Hysteresis***

Bourdieu (1977) argued that "in each of us, in varying proportions, there is part of yesterday's man; it is yesterday's man who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result" (p.79). Born into a set of predominant cultural narratives and 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1979), the formation of the habitus via the 'linguistic ego' is subconsciously seduced into a culturally informed state of *doxa*. Thus, taken for granted knowledge, shapes perceptions of what is objectively true, legitimising specific disciplinary practices and modes of performativity (i.e., a heteronormative sporting persona) over others. Such cultural discourses embedded within the everyday experiences of an individual's youth, therefore, shape the embodied practices and routines that they enact throughout adulthood. When these embedded hegemonic normative cultural discourses of being are threatened, as documented by Frank's, Chad's, Brad's, and Joe's internal energies of *différance* - a difference between the desires of the soul (i.e., the 'will to Power' and 'will to Power'), the physical body, and the discursive demands of culture – a person's identity often becomes precariously torn between the authentic inner and symbolic outer worlds.

Bourdieu (1977, 1980, 1998) described this embodied sense of dislocation as a form of *hysteresis* – when an individual finds themselves 'out of touch' with the time and place they are situated within. In other words, there is a disconnect between a person's soul/'character' (Bourdieu, 1990) and the social field(s) that constitutes them. The individual exists and experiences the world beyond the forces of *doxa*. Bourdieu (1998) likens '*the hysteresis effect*' to an effect of dissonance, a counter-adaptive 'lag' in the psyche and habitus that rejects conforming to the discursive demands of one's social context. Whilst Bourdieu (1980) argued that "the hysteresis effect thus means that in changed circumstances we maintain our already-acquired habitus/dispositions even when they are no longer adapted" (pp. 104–105) to the 'presence of the past' (p.105). Additionally, I suggest *hysteresis* can explain a conscious resistance against dominant discursive norms because an individual has an innate soul/essence that refuses to conform to the doctrines that pervade their social space. For example, to resist the act of suppressing one's non-normative sexual desires to adhere to heteronormative practices. Bourdieu (1977) acknowledged that this might lead an individual to have a

‘double life’, whereby one’s ‘character’ and pre-discursive desires are inhibited socially but expressed privately to avoid being publicly alienated. Bourdieu (1977) reaffirms:

...as a result of the hysteresis effect necessarily implicated in the logic of the constitution of habitus, practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that in which they are objectively fitted (p. 78).

Additionally, examples of hysteresis and embedded ‘*tensions of the self and discourses of being*’ were experienced when the participants became aware of and confronted with an embodied *différance* between the ubiquitous discourses of Christianity and needing to honour the innate desires of the soul that existed beyond the discursive realm. This embodied conflict significantly influenced their lived experiences, sense of self, and place in the world from an early age, as is illustrated throughout the remainder of this study.

### III. The Religious Habitus

“There is literally a church and religious book store on every street in the rural town I grew up in...of course it affects you...I was very conservative and religious before moving to L.A...now I’m much more open-minded...less judgmental”, notes Tom, a Los Angeles acquaintance (and non-participant) formerly from Massachusetts. Religious discourse, notably Christianity, is a critical bedrock of American culture, shaping and impacting many Americans’ consciousness, realities, and daily practices. Deeply ingrained within civic and political life, from Washington D.C. to the cinema, to the local diner, Christianity ubiquitously defines what is and what is not a normative state of (American) embodiment (Fessenden, 2011; Forbes & Mahan, 2005). The pervasiveness of Christianity within the public discourse and collective consciousness emerges as an internal dialogue, and often tension, in the participants’ life histories, affecting their habitus, and their psycho-social, psycho-somatic and psycho-sexual development and lived experiences.

I grew up in Idaho, a small conservative northwest state and very religious. My family is very religious, Christians, go to church regularly, pray to the lord and believe everything in the bible. It’s a completely different world to L.A. – the men like to be strong and masculine, hunting and fishing, farmers, that kind of thing (Joe).

I was raised in East Texas in a heavily religious culture that conforms extremely to traditional gender roles and heteronormativity. Growing up being a man often meant being masculine, providing for a family, being strong, emotionally repressed and independent. Much of that has been ingrained into my personality and is just a part

of who I am, but it isn't necessarily in accordance with what I believe. There is no objective way to be a man. I believe in freedom of the true self and the expression thereof (Chad).

From these statements, religion's social, political, and civic functions emerge as Christian discourse becomes intertwined with discourses of morality and masculinity. In this sense, religious discourses signify and restrict the male habitus to perform a specific role in the community: to "pray to the lord" and "be strong and masculine, hunting and fishing" and conform to "extremely to traditional gender roles and heteronormativity...providing for a family".

Max Webber (1904/2001) argued that Americans' desire to adhere to religious beliefs and practices functions as a signifier of respectability and trust in business and political affairs, leading them to happily proclaim their religious belonging in public settings. Church membership served "as an absolute guarantee of the moral qualities of the gentlemen" and "a certificate of moral qualification and especially of business morals for the individual". Within the church, the Christian doctrines of an equality of status and equal belonging required conformity of views and norms (Gerteis, 2012). In America, religious practice remains a symbolic signifier of trustworthiness, from the everyday person to the electability of potential American presidents (Gervais, Shariff & Norenzayan, 2011; Kenneth & Leege, 2010).

### ***Religion and its Symbolic Boundary***

Although Christian religious practices intend to facilitate a sense of belonging and inclusiveness within communities throughout the United States by creating a shared religious identity and collective consciousness through a commitment to cultural norms, it often excludes those who do not conform to its belief structures. When a person's behaviour positions them outside the discursive and moral boundaries espoused by the church through embodied acts of non-compliance (e.g., homosexuality), they lose their 'moral qualifications' and trust within the community. Nonconforming individuals lose social markers of 'belonging', and their status and cultural and economic capital are put at risk as the nonconforming entity is perceived to reject the shared values of the church. Religious discourse thus sets the hegemonic and acceptable modes of being throughout the country. The habitus, body, and consciousness become restrained in their expressions, actions and thoughts to ensure social capital and a sense of belonging is maintained. The embodied a/effects of not non-religious compliance are reflected in the following comment:

...being masculine, providing for a family, being strong, emotionally repressed and independent. Much of that has been ingrained into my personality and is just a part of who I am, but it isn't necessarily in accordance with what I believe. There is no objective way to be a man. I believe in freedom of the true self and the expression thereof.

For Chad, there is an evident tension between the discursive religious boundaries imposed and embedded within him from a young age and his sexual desires for freedom and authentic self-expression that exist beyond the borders of religious acceptance. Yet, it is a mode of being, a form of *'embedded embodiment'* that continues to restrain, repress, and limit the expressions of what I suggest are his soul's desires - the desires of his *'will to power'* (Nietzsche, 1901) and *'will to pleasure'* (Freud, 1920), in a Nietzschean–Freudian psychoanalytic sense. In short, as demonstrated by Chad and Tom, the Christian discourses that permeate the landscapes of American culture, consciously or subconsciously, have an a/effect on the judgements of the American collective consciousness and habitus whether it is realised or not. Beyond the participants' childhoods, the moralities of Christian discourse would continue to play a significant role in the participants' adult lives as they engaged in intimate relations with others. Particular those who experience same-sex desires, as is discussed in *Chapters 7 – 8*.

#### **IV. Embodying the American Dream: The Performative Cinematic Habitus**

Whilst institutional (i.e., medical, educational and religious) discourses of the self were often symbolically embodied, even if rejected. Thus, often a source of an internalised conflict, the cultural and political narratives embedded within American cinema also significantly influenced the participants' subjectivities, identities, and kinaesthesia. Jacques Derrida (2008) described this as the embodiment of the *'American attitude'* – "...cinema is America. It's more American than other things. Today, the world's experience of cinema is largely...shaped by American culture. *'American attitude'* refers to all the cinematic, journalistic, manipulative attitudes" (1.00–2.44). The (cultural) psychogenesis of the *'American –cinematic attitude'* and its embodied a/effects on the symbolic representations of the self, and its social conditioning of the linguistic ego, bodily habitus and hexis were revealed within Brad's testimony:

When I was five my mother auditioned me for a cinnamon toast crunch cereal advertisement – I caught the acting bug at a young age. I enjoyed performing and being in the spotlight, performed for radio stations regularly. I wanted to be known

for something...I would visit L.A. and Hollywood as a child and loved the vibe [atmosphere]. I always knew I would live in L.A. (Brad).

The '*American – cinematic attitude*' as a discursive and embodied phenomenon influenced Brad's identity and performative body schema from a young age. Enticed by the psychic and imagined possibilities of "wanting to be known for something", the desire to acquire social and symbolic capital, Hollywood signified an opportunity for him to achieve this goal through the cinematic body. Bourdieu (1979) argues that the desire for symbolic capital accumulates primarily from fulfilling social obligations embedded within the honoured socio-historical values within a distinct culture, which can be leveraged to a person's advantage within their social spheres.

Additionally, Foucault (1972–77) notes this obligatory symbolic process becomes ingrained within the discourses of power and politics, a 'meta-power' or regime of truth that permeates through society and is in constant flux and negotiation that informs, surveils and regulates human behaviour. "Power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production" (Foucault, 1991, p. 194).

For both Bourdieu and Foucault, the production and embodiment of the symbolic self is "not just a negative, coercive or repressive thing that forces us to do things against our wishes, but can also be a necessary, productive and positive force in society" (Gaventa, 2003, p. 2). Sub/consciously, Brad's idolisation of "Hollywood" as a symbol of, and location for, American success, is signified within the historical, cultural and political discourses of America, and the attainment of the '*American Dream*' (i.e., the opportunity for prosperity and upward social mobility) (Jilson, 2016) within a 'free-market-capitalist economy'.

The genealogy of the influence of American film on American culture, and the subsequent embodiment of the '*cinematic attitude*' and cinematic performative body symbolic of the '*American Dream*', came to prominence during the Golden age of American cinema from the 1920s to the 1960s. Ever since, and arguably before, Los Angeles/Hollywood has defined, narrated, and censored American attitudes, beliefs and identities, from race relations, gender identity, gay and women's rights, sexual and religious freedoms, youth culture, popular culture, social class, identity politics, economics, and American foreign policy (O'Connor & Jackson, 2016). These are cultural narratives that have cultivated societal trends, ideologies, tastes, desires and embodied dispositions. Sociologist Jack Lule (2012) suggests American identity is built around particular commonly held beliefs and ingrained *doxa* and *habitus*, disseminated and reinforced by film, television, and mass media:



One example of a popular American myth...dates back to the writings of Thomas Jefferson and the other founders, is an emphasis on individualism – a celebration of the common man or woman as a hero or reformer. With this rise of mass culture, the myth of the individual became increasingly appealing because it provided people with a sense of autonomy and individuality in the face of an increasingly homogenized culture. The hero myth finds embodiment in the Western, a film genre that was popular from the silent era through the 1960s, in which the lone cowboy, a seminomadic wanderer, makes his way in a lawless, and often dangerous, frontier...from 1926 until 1967, Westerners accounted for nearly a quarter of all films produced. In...films like Frank Capra's 1946 movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, the individual triumphs by standing up to injustice, reinforcing the belief that one person can make a difference in the world. And in more recent films, hero figures such as Indiana Jones, Luke Skywalker (*Star Wars*), and Neo (*The Matrix*) have continued to emphasize individualism (p. 8.2).

From this perspective, interpreted via a Nietzschean lens, the soul's drives of the '*will to power*' present themselves, and are encouraged, within American film and culture with discourses of individualism, overcoming, becoming, and freedom. The influence of American cinema on the collective consciousness is evidenced by Brad catching the "acting bug at a young age", as the allure of fame lured him to Hollywood during his youth. This imagined attainment of the 'American Dream' by becoming an actor was a means to overcome his "working-class background". Thus, with his linguistic ego culturally conditioned by the Hollywood power/knowledge nexus and a trained cinematic body acquired during his childhood, he was ready to move to Los Angeles in his early twenties.

Brad recalls: "I came to L.A. because I wanted to be an actor and a fitness model. I can remember strutting down the boulevard thinking I'd made it [laughs] – looking good and young." Even though he was transitioning from the imaginary to the (geographically) real for the first time, the discursive cinematic discourses had been inscribed within his psyche and body since he was a young boy. Immersed within the cinematic and performative discourses of Hollywood, which produced a sense of imagined success, he found himself "strutting down the boulevard" thinking he had made it – a corporeal intensity, created by a discursively "affective space" (Cataldi, 1993). Brad, the spectator, is aroused, activated, enhanced, brought into play (Rutherford, 2002) and physically and psychically displaced into the realm of the symbolic and imaginary. Transcendentally, one moves out from one's innate sense of self to physically and psychically cross and remake the inscribed boundaries between oneself and the world. There is a mimicking a/effect, a *mimesis* – a subconscious act of performing to acquire an imagined status yet to be attained. Subsequently, producing a complex visceral experience of an embodied porousness between oneself, one's own body, and the objects or images of the world (Taussig, 1993), signifying the possibilities of success.

The a/effect of *mimesis* is "not the mind's eye that reaches out to grasp or grope the image or space before me – it is my embodied self – locating, placing myself in the world which I am viewing.

Sentience takes us out of ourselves” (Taussig, 1993, pp. 25). There is a “visceral bond which connects the perceiver to the perceived in this mimetic process” (Taussig, 1993, pp. 28). It is the heightening of this sentience that gives rise to embodied knowledge, and an envisioned discourse of what Brad wants to become. The “cinema is not only telling a story; it’s about creating an affect, an event, a moment which lodges itself under the skin of the spectator” (Rutherford, 2003, p. 3).



**Figure 8.** Hollywood Stars, American Culture and the Glorification of the Cinematic Persona

## **V. ‘The Demand-Displacement Loop’**

To summarise, in this chapter, I have shown how the cultural subversion of a person’s consciousness and the habitus during childhood displaces one’s sense of self (mind, body and soul) via a “discursive system of regulatory power with propensity to impound knowledge within arbitrary and

exclusive boundaries” (Kinchole, 2001, p. 684). Thus, defining perceptions of (ab)normality, what is culturally valued, and consequently, one’s social position in society. As highlighted by Bourdieu (1977), the formation of a socially constructed habitus and identity occurs through the “pedagogic work” of the subconscious and erudition of the “strict rules” present within one’s discursive field. In turn, this social conditioning of the linguistic ego becomes embodied and etched within the consciousness of the mechanics and presentation of the fleshy body. This social process achieves a profound and lasting transformation of the self, as the pre-discursive self becomes consumed and displaced by the symbolic self. There is a conscious and subconscious suppression of one’s primordial desires (i.e., ‘will to pleasure’, ‘will to power’), character and behaviours. Ranging from one’s creativity to their sexual desires. Yet this process is not a static phenomenon. The individual’s ‘*incorporated history*’ is ongoing as they transition from one ‘field’ and one form of ‘*symbolic consciousness*’ to another. The self and its habitus, hexis, and materiality are in constant flux as it accumulates symbolic and economic capital throughout its life span. The self becomes “a product of social conditionings, and thus of a history (unlike character), is endlessly transformed” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 7), with a range of subjectivities being experienced. Thus, often subjugating, negating and repressing the desires of the soul as a consequence.

Echoing Bourdieu, Foucault and Lacan, Stuart Hall (1990) suggests the fluidity of identity formation and the lived experiences initiated during childhood implies a sense of incompleteness. There is always something or someone else that someone can become. From a Lacanian perspective, there is always a discursive induced *lack*, a sense of absence within the ego’s subconscious, versed by the semiotics and the discourses of culture. In turn, it is relentlessly tempting the ego to pursue an illusionary sense of oneness by adhering to the discursive demands of culture (i.e., to attain/embody particular forms of capital). This object of desire “is an object that can be perceived only by a gaze distorted by desire, an object that does not exist for an “*objective gaze*”. *The objet petit a* [object of desire] does not exist in itself because it is nothing but the en fleshment of the distorted gaze; a mapping of desire onto the contours of objective reality” (Žižek, 1992, p. 74).

Lacan (1966/1977,1968 ) argues this unconscious subversion into the discourses of culture creates the perception of an embodied *lack*, a *lack* that causes a desire to arise. However, I argue culture is not only responsible for the cause (and object) of an artificial discursively stimulated desire but also, simultaneously, for the suppression of one’s innate desires of the soul. This psychic process begins in childhood. In both cases, through various systemic forms of knowledge/power, the 'linguistic ego' informs an individual’s consciousness that this *lack* needs to be unified by adhering to the cultural demands of normality or/and (American) exceptionalism. This psychic process continues to exacerbate the displacement and disconnection from one’s pre-discursive sense of self and character (soul), an embodied process I refer to as ‘*The Discursive –Displacement Loop*’ (of desire) (**Figure 9**):

### 'The Discursive Demand-Displacement Loop'

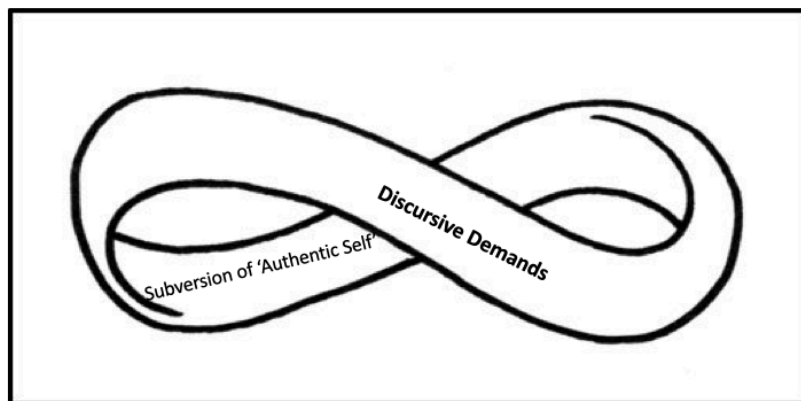


Figure 9. 'The Discursive Demand – Displacement Loop': Childhood and the Cultural Subversion of the 'Authentic Self'

The '*The Discursive –Displacement Loop*' (of desire) reflects the discursive distortion of a subject's perception and their metaphysical state, sense of identity, the desires of their soul, which become culturally conditioned by the linguistic ego. During this process of abstraction, the individual seeks to identify and attach itself to a particular habitus and body (image) of value and discard elements of the self that are not accepted. Often, this results in various embodied '*tensions of the self*' becoming embedded within one's body and psyche, which can become problematic (e.g., symptoms of neurosis envelop a person's consciousness).

As documented within the participants' life histories. On a subconscious level, the self is perceived as an unfinished product, continuously being regulated and transformed by normative cultural practices and the 'power/knowledge' that underpins them (Foucault, 1976, 1977; Hall, 2001; Hall & Du Gay, 1996). The performative act of being becomes a subconscious act of 'becoming', as the individual shapeshifts between different contexts and representations within various discursive fields. Thus, a false self is created to appease the discursive demands of culture, and in turn, the behavioural and normative expectations of others. Essentially, a normative and false self is created through a discursive gaze that continuously regulates, modifies, and suppresses the pre-discursive self – the soul and the material body. This ongoing and fluid process of embodying the discourses of culture, cognitively, physically and symbolically, and loss of the pre-discursive self, has been highlighted by many psychoanalysts' including Winnicott (1960; 1971), Klein (1932/1984; 2017) and Rogers (1961) e.g., the 'authentic self', 'higher self', 'true self', 'vulnerable self' contrasted with the 'false self', 'narrative self', 'inauthentic self', 'idealised self'. Or a process and outcome that Freud (1895; 1912) and Lacan (1966/1977) described as the 'split self'.

Like Nietzsche (1873) (*see p. 41*), child psychologist Alison Gopnik (2010), drawing on empirical evidence, suggests a person is most in touch with their authentic self (soul) during their early childhood:

Many of the feelings, experiences and intuitions, knowledge and truth that people have talked about [regarding] the soul...those experiences where we recognize the meaning and beauty and significance of everything that is going on around us...are the moments when we are most like children (Jacobvici, 2010, 43.00-44.43).

However, as children become increasingly exposed to, and subjugated by, the systemic and institutional power/knowledge structures of language and cultural norms, reinforced via peer-to-peer surveillance, subconsciously, they embody and exhibit behaviours that reflect the hegemonic modes of being that regulate their social environments. Thus, simultaneously suppressing and negating their authentic and personal truths and intuitions (Gopnik, 2009; Gopnik, Meltzoff & Bryant, 1997). The individual's connection to, and expression of, their primordial sense of being (soul) becomes lost. Thus, significantly influencing and altering one's cognitive development and identity, as illustrated throughout this chapter. Butler (1990) suggests this socialisation of the self leads to the self becoming performative, which I argue is often at odds with one's pre-discursive self and the internal essence of a person's soul. From my ontological framing, this is how existential '*tensions of the self*' come into existence.

From this point of view, I argue human consciousness transitions from a '*soul state of consciousness*' to a '*symbolic state of consciousness*' as humans learn to subliminally and overtly perform to the discursive demands of culture, as opposed to the needs and instincts of the soul, freely expressed during childhood. Drawing on, in part, a Lacanian (1966/1977) perspective, the subject becomes split by discourse and meaning, divided between the (pre-socialised) 'I' and the (cultural) 'me'. Thus, creating a void and subconscious sense of detachment from one's original pre-socialised state of being from which an embodied sensitivity to an embodied *lack* of authentic connectivity to the 'I' emerges. This journey of an '*incorporated history*' (Bourdieu (1984) and '*split self*' (1966/1977), from which a sense of *lack* is experienced, and the relationship between discourse, consciousness, the body, the soul, and desire, can thus be summarised by the following formula:

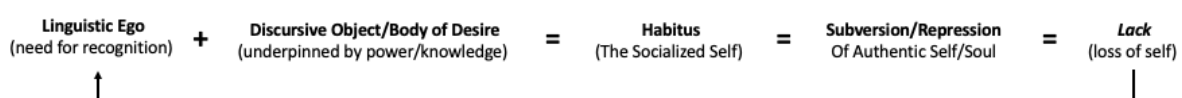


Figure 10. Embodying the Loss and the 'Lack' of the 'Authentic Self': Desire and the Social Conditioning of the Habitus

Traditionally many existential and poststructural scholars (i.e., Sartre, de Beauvoir, Foucault, Baudrillard) have taken a nihilistic view towards life to suggest human existence occurs within an irrational, meaningless and oppressive discursive-material matrix. For example, Jean–Paul Sartre (1943), in *Being and Nothingness*, claims life is absurd, makes no sense, has no purpose and has no explanation. Whilst Foucault, opposed to psychoanalytic worldviews, rejected the reality of a ‘true self’ (a non-discursive soul) and thus, believed there was no ‘true self’ to be discovered. Foucault (1978) comments: “from the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence; we have to create ourselves as a work of art” (p. 262). Thus, he infers that experiences of meaning within a person’s life can only be realised by immersively objectifying themselves through discourse, culture, objects and the fantasies of their imagination. “What I am, I don’t know. I am the simulacrum of myself” (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 1). Beyond systems of power/knowledge and the aesthetics of the symbolic and material world, life, and the self, seizes to exist (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2010).

Nietzsche (1886b) describes these nihilistic attitudes as a “*will to nothingness*”, a postmodern attitude that celebrates the death of God and divine order, and celebrates the rise of selfishness, the superficial and the symbolic, whereby life turns away from itself, as there is nothing of value in the world. When one becomes subjugated by the moralities of discourse, as illustrated by the men’s narratives in this chapter, their essence erodes into the superficial meanings of semiotics and language. An embodied (spiritual) void emerges as one’s connection to their authentic self becomes lost. From Nietzsche’s (1886b) perspective, nihilism is void due to Christianity’s absence - the absence of spiritual life.

“As we thus reject the Christian interpretation and condemn its ‘meaning’ like counterfeit...Nihilism appears at that point, not that the displeasure of existence has become greater than before but because one has come to mistrust any ‘meaning’ in suffering, indeed in existence...it now seems as if there is no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain” (Nietzsche’s, 1886b, p. 33, 55).

In contrast, this study rejects such nihilistic views and ontologically aligns itself with the philosophies of the existentialist Soren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard (1843; 1843b; 1843c; 1849), as highlighted by contemporary postmaterialists (Beauregard, Trent & Schwartz, 2018; Beauregard, 2021) (**Chapter 2, Section IV**), argues there is a self beyond culture and “eternal happiness” can only be achieved by “becoming a true self” through the salvation of one’s soul. Kierkegaard (1846) suggests truth is found in a person’s subjective experience and their relationship to the objective discursive-material world. The individual’s goal should be to return to their subjective truths (i.e., the subjective truths of one’s character experienced during childhood). Yet, as shown throughout the participants’

narratives in this chapter, this is a difficult task as the connection to one's authentic soul (and material body) becomes gradually displaced by the moralities of discourse and culture – educated, medicated, suppressed, repressed and normalised.

Hubert Dreyfus and Jane Rubin (1994) suggest, in an increasingly nihilistic age, the self has become ever-increasingly subjugated by, and addicted to, ideology, identity politics, neoliberal ideals, globalisation, popular culture and technology. Consequently, a person's soul and authentic being dissipate into the shadows of a narrative and false self, from which existential experiences (i.e., neurosis, anxiety, addiction, depression, repression) manifest themselves, as exhibited by John, Johnny, Jack, Chad, Joe and Brad.

Kierkegaard (1846b) describes this embodied process (i.e., **Figure 10**) as 'levelling': "levelling at its maximum is like the stillness of death...in which everything sinks, powerless...levelling, is an abstract process, and levelling is abstraction conquering the individuality (pp. 51–53). 'Levelling' is a discursive process of suppressing individuality to a point where an individual's uniqueness becomes non-existent, and nothing meaningful in one's existence can be confirmed. Within a world whereby the self becomes a part of the capitalist machine, the self as a soul and individual is reduced to an illusion of culture, religion, spiritual mysticism and pseudoscience (Baudrillard, 1976; 1981; Foucault, 1978; Kierkegaard; 1846b; Smith, 1759; 1776). As a result, discourse displaces an individual from authentically knowing oneself and others and from knowing reality altogether. Particularly a reality that lies beyond the discursive and material world.

However, Kierkegaard (1849) argues those who can overcome the *levelling* process are stronger for it and that it represents a step in the right direction towards "becoming a true self". In a neo-Nietzschean sense, one must call upon their '*will to power*' to overcome the internalised moralities of culture, to rediscover their authentic values from the depths of their soul. The psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1965; 1971; 2018) suggests this is achieved by reconnecting with the lost soul – the *authentic self*.

In the following chapter, I analyse how the embodied '*tensions of the self*' and psychic pathologies of this embodied *lack*, loss of self, continues to be negotiated and managed into adulthood. In particular, I focus on how biopedagogies, notably synthetic testosterone, are used as a reflexive tool to overcome a cultural absence of normality by transforming the body's materiality, and thus a person's psychic perceptions of and connection to the self. Or more specifically, within a *neo-Nietzschean* ontological framing, to overcome the existential tensions between the desires of culture (i.e., social/cultural capital, status) and the desires of the soul (i.e., '*will to power*' and '*will to pleasure*'), which play out through the participants' *habitus* and corporeal schemas.

*“It can be shown that every living thing does everything it can not to preserve itself but to become more...To have and to want to have more – growth, in one word – that is life itself [The Will to Power]”.*

Fredrich Nietzsche (1901, p. 688)

## 6

### **EMBODIED TENSIONS OF CULTURE: OVERCOMING AND BECOMING VIA ‘CALIFORNIAN MEDICINE’**

Now immersed within the social and discursive fields of (West) Los Angeles, beyond, yet not psychically detached from, the towns, states and countries that they grew up in, the participants encountered a new set of discursive pressures, which continued to reconfigure their bodies, habitus, desires, and identity. In this chapter, primarily drawing on Nietzsche’s (1901) *‘will to power’*, I explore:

1. The critical moments that predicated their use of ‘Californian Medicine’;
2. The embodied a/effects of the discursive imperatives specific to Los Angeles and their impact on the participants’ sense of self and health;
3. How biopedagogies were perceived to overcome various embodied *‘tensions of the self’*; and;
4. Critique the scientific truth claims regarding the benefits of synthetic testosterone that informed the participants’ aesthetic desires.

#### **I. Nietzsche’s Innumerable Health and the ‘Will to Power’**

Throughout his writings on the *‘will to power’*, Nietzsche (1882; 1883; 1901; 1908) conceptualised health as a health of the biological body and the soul, contextual and individual. Health for Nietzsche was dependent on a person’s ambitions, powers, impulses, mistakes and most importantly, the ideals and phantasms of the soul – one’s *‘will to power’* (Nietzsche, 1882).

Even the determination of what is healthy for your body depends on your goal, your horizon, your energies, your impulses, your errors, and above all on the ideals and phantasms of your soul. Thus there are innumerable healths of the body; and the more we allow the unique and incomparable to raise its head again, and the more we abjure the dogma of the "equality of men," the more must the concept of a normal health, along with a normal diet and the normal course of an illness, be abandoned by medical men. Only then would the time have come to reflect on the health and illness of the soul, and to find the peculiar virtue of each man in the health of his soul (Nietzsche, 1882, p. 120).



Although his views of health changed over time, a Nietzschean conception of health, which was just one aspect of his '*will to power*' (1882), can be summarised as follows:

- 1) The health of the body and mind are not only physiologically related, but operate according to parallel principles of life - resistance, struggle, and creative overcoming. The ability to harmonize and create order from chaos is a measure of individual power – the '*will to power*'. Therefore, the individual is healthy when he can challenge his principles and incorporate anomalies into new and expanded worldviews.
- 2) In the absence of truth, God, and absolute good and evil, one can only live well, looking for those values most useful to the good, powerful, self-creative life. Such resultant activities may range from aesthetic creation to warlike conquest in the name of such values.
- 3) Since self-creation involves constant redefinition in a changing environment, one must continually pose resistances to oneself and overcome them. The ability to do so represents health, perhaps even great health. The inability to do so reveals sickness.
- 4) There is no single static norm of health. The only constant of the many expressions of health is the degree of (will to) power which individuals expend successfully.

(Podolsky & Tauber, 1999)

For Nietzsche (1882), an accomplished philosopher and analyst, is a “physician of culture” and a “physician of the soul” who acts to challenge the prevailing discourses of the self that displace an individual’s biology, soul, and '*will to power*'. He suggests that new worldviews and learnings can be acknowledged and incorporated into the everyday practices of the ordinary person to achieve an idealised state of being – the '*Übermensch*' (the Overman) (Nietzsche, 1883). Nietzsche’s health was innumerable, not defined by something absolute or definitive, but by becoming and embodying the characteristics of the '*Übermensch*', a superior human being capable of pursuing the desires of the soul ('*will to power*') and chartering their own course in life (Podolsky & Tauber, 1999). For Nietzsche, an individual acquires an innumerable health via a process of unlearning the dogmas of the discursive power and knowledge that imposes sickness upon them. This reflexive process involves rejecting the concept of a medicalised-biopolitical 'normal' health, which ignores the needs of the soul and the negative influences of culture, which are the cause of illness (Nietzsche, 1882). From this perspective, as examined throughout this thesis, illness and disease can be represented as a function of embodied displacement – a dis-ease between the body, the soul’s purpose, and culture. One’s life and the pursuit of 'great health' thus becomes a human struggle of a striving organism, adaptation, and being able to overcome ongoing obstacles that inhibit the '*will to power*' and the potentialities of an idealised state of being –the '*Übermensch*':

Whoever wants to know from the adventures of his own most authentic experience how a discoverer and conqueror of the ideal feels...needs one thing above everything else: the great health – that one does not merely have but also acquires continually, and must acquire because one gives up again and again, and must give it up (Nietzsche, 1882, Section 328).

When an individual consciously denies and resists the corrosive effects of the discourses of an external force, which compromise the ‘*will to power*’, the expression of the authentic self, life becomes fuller, richer, and meaningful; one becomes healthier in body and soul. “Great health, therefore, results in the individual so powerful that he can not only withstand, but even look forward to, defeats from which he can recover and grow” (Nietzsche, 1882, p. 163).

In the following section, drawing on Nietzsche’s understanding of health and embodiment, in conjunction with the use of my theoretical ‘toolbox’ (*Chapter 4*), I focus on the life histories told by John and Jack, who both became subconsciously entrapped within an emotionality of rejection, which led to a pained mind, body and soul. And how these men attempted to overcome their suffering with various biopedagogies. The second part of this chapter focuses on the rise of synthetic androgens as a health and well-being treatment and the participants’ experiences of using them to acquire optimal health.

## **II. The Body in Crisis: Fat, Ill and Suffering**

Because of John’s overeating since his childhood (*Chapter 5*), his bodily organs became increasingly dysfunctional and began to shut down. The complexity of his strained physiology, and the absence of good health, abruptly revealed itself as a seriously ill body when he “collapsed in [Las] Vegas and passed out”. From this moment, he was temporarily placed under medical surveillance. The material and psychic elements of the self suddenly exposed themselves as in need of repair. Reflecting on this critical moment in his life, John commented:

[age 33]...I started to get sick. I reached 206 pounds [now 118 pounds]. I had diabetes, kidney and liver issues, problems breathing and ended up in hospital...I can remember overhearing the doctor talking to my mom on the phone. He thought I was asleep. He said: “you need to get down here fast because this is the last time you might see your son”. They thought I was going to die!...A close family friend...told me he would have nothing to do with me if I was back in hospital again. This was a big wakeup call! This was when I decided to start losing weight...there was no magic solution...It was about taking control (John).

The feelings of rejection that led to him overeating (*Chapter 5*), which had become lodged within his episodic memory, were suddenly awakened. In a fragile state, his body was forcing his conscious mind to take notice of the dire realities of his ill corporeality (“diabetes, kidney and liver issues”), violently brought into being with the realities (and illusions) of death. John, lying in a hospital bed, the ill body became physically and symbolically inscribed with discourses of ill health. His body had become signified as deviant, immoral, and unproductive as his materiality no longer reflected “healthy behaviour, the paradigm of the good living” (Crawford, 1980, p. 380). As highlighted by Nietzsche (1886), this “juxtaposition of the good/evil and good/bad dichotomies, may just as well have juxtaposed good/evil with healthy/sick” (Podolsky & Tauber, 1999, p. 158). With his ill body now being discursively vulnerable to and subjugated by discourses of immorality, John’s physical and social capital and status were exposed to threats of social rejection and irrelevance if he did not conform to bodily and social norms.

From a Nietzschean perspective, the lived experiences and fear of potentially losing his life, existing social relationships and a consequent sense of belonging awakened his inner ‘*will to power*’. The ‘*will to power*’ referring to an individual’s innate desire and ability to overcome adversity through a positive mindset and acts of self-overcoming. Or as Nietzsche (1883) puts it: “Life itself confided this secret to me: “Behold”, it said. “I am that which must always overcome itself.” (pp. 11-12).

Out of the birth of tragedy, pain and suffering, a different sentiment of life, a ‘*will to power*’ of the soul that is affirmative rather than life-denying, had arisen (Nietzsche, 1872). This new affirmative form of consciousness “stimulates the strong to overcome future sickness and attain greater health” (Podolsky & Tauber, 1999, p. 159). For Nietzsche, as illustrated by John’s embodied state, sickness is the life of a descending attitude rooted in pessimism or total nihilism, which can only be cured by tracing sickness and the symptoms to the very physiology of (wo)man (Nietzsche, 1886).

Confronted with subjectivities of loss and rejection, John was forced to “wake up” and consciously reflect upon how he could overcome his poor visceral state. As highlighted by Nietzsche (1908), “*Sickness* was what restored me to reason” (p. 77). In this life-defining moment, John found the ‘*will to power*’ to “start losing weight” by consciously “taking control” of the psychic and corporeal elements of the self to reconfigure the materiality of his overweight body to take back his life. In short, “intertwined with the body’s intentionality in ways that undermine facile claims of priority” (Leder, 1992b, p. 29), John’s biological infrastructure lays the foundation for his mode of being in the world. When the physical structures of his body were violently threatened, his interactions with the world abruptly awakened his consciousness to the realities of his physical deterioration. This shock to his

body and psyche reshaped his attitude to facilitate a conducive to overcoming illness and achieving an embodied state of good health.

Yonder, the immediate medical gaze of the hospital, the now pathologised and seriously ill body, became positioned within and isolated by the discourses and ideologies of healthism. This medicalising of the self facilitated John's desires and '*will to power*' to take personal responsibility and his need to adopt the bio-pedagogies of dieting and exercise without professional guidance.

[I] did not receive any guidance. I think there were things available but nothing was offered to me when I was in the hospital...[for me it] was about calories in and calories out...eating half and walking more.

Paradoxically, despite John's immediate medical care in the hospital, he was not aware of any continued professional support once his physiological state was restored. In an era where privatised (American) medical care is underpinned by maximising profits (Turrini, 2015; Leonard & Roberts, 2017), John's experiences reflect an attempt to attribute a more active role to the patient. This pervasive sentiment is reinforced by a clinical gaze embedded within medicine's disciplinary power, which becomes part of society's collective consciousness (Foucault, 1973). From this point of view, the modern clinical discourse is a localisation of an urgent pathological event within the acute physical boundaries of the body. Beyond imminent threats to the body, one must take responsibility for one's own health and wellness. Forced to internalise and accept the "dissemination of medical perception and ideology" (Crawford, 1980, p. 370), John's (sub)conscious perceptions of health, self-care and weight-management became subjugated within and informed by the dominant weight-loss narratives that were prevalent in his social network.

Consequently, John relied on advice from various 'experts', who commonly contest physician's prerogatives and engage in more humanistic and caring healthcare processes (Turrini, 2015). These 'experts' included: "personal friends" who were personal trainers, models, "health pros", and his mom ("it's not hard, just eat less"). From the accumulated knowledge that he collected from these various sources, he concluded that the best weight-loss strategy was about consuming fewer calories and walking more. These were body practices that involved taking away, in part, the object (food) that he had used to nourish the needs of his vulnerable soul and ego, the need for love and acceptance, and overcome the temporality of his mother's rejection of his portly childhood body. This approach is echoed in Nietzsche's (1882) statement: "if you want to decrease and diminish people's susceptibility to pain, you also have to decrease and diminish their capacity for joy" (p. 12).

### III. The Body, Body Pedagogies, and Symbolic Castration

As John became consciously aware of the physiological realities of his ill body, his consciousness shifted from focusing on internalised emotions of rejection to the shape, appearance and symbolic meaning of his body. “At the time, I didn't think I was overweight. I just thought I was a normal size...It wasn't till I started to lose weight that I realised how overweight I was.” As a result, a new set of subjectivities emerged, entrenched in disgust. “Since then, I've felt fat and ugly – the ugliest person in the world. I've always been fat [on reflection], I can't ever remember being skinny...Nobody likes you [is attracted to you] if you're fat, especially in L.A.”. John's identity and sense of self were thrown into crisis, symbolically castrated by discourses of abnormality, as he now realised what it meant to be fat. The “fat” body was now directly associated with “ugliness”, which varied greatly from the Mexican meanings of fat that had previously informed his 'linguistic ego', his subconscious, and the formation of his body.

I was born in Mexico and in Mexican culture it is endearing when children have bellies. Babies and children are referred to as *Gordo*, an endearing term for fat kids...it means you are healthy and loved.

Within the discursive field of a Mexican family, different hegemonic ideals of the (male) body image produced alternative forms of embodied knowledge that juxtaposed the body ideals that were privileged in Los Angeles. As explained by John, in Mexican culture, ‘*Gordo*’ is used as an endearing term to signify that a child is well-nourished, healthy and loved. Thus, that fat body is privileged over other corporeal formations. Now, temporally immersed within, and surveilled by, American meanings of fat, and consciously aware of being overweight, he (and arguably his mother) conceptualised his physical schema as “ugly.” American discourses of shame and disgust now invalidate the Mexican discourses of affection, love and vitality associated with a fuller body.

John rejects the Mexican term ‘*Gordo*’ because it is perceived to signify an object devoid of social status and capital within American culture, creating a sense of an embodied and symbolic *lack* of health and normality. The subconscious emotions of rejection that were previously repressed are now brought into his consciousness as he becomes fully aware of how others perceive his overweight body. Feelings of resentment fill his psychic energies, threatening his body ego’s idealised self-image. From a psychoanalytic reading on John’s embodied state, his identity is symbolically castrated – absent from the meanings of social acceptance and love that he subconsciously desires, from his mother and others, both real and imaginary. Language and meaning separate the subject from the immediate *jouissances* of the body (Lacan, 1958). Positive symbolic meanings of the body established in the fantasies of the body

ego and imaginary are replaced by negative depictions of *différance* of the self, an embodied lack and subjectivities of fear. The self has become fragmented by the meaning of being fat.

Like John, Jack's awareness of an embodied schematic *différance* in symbolic meaning, other than a mind and body intoxicated with amphetamines to treat his dyslexia and ADHD (*Chapter 5*), his '*will to power*' was unexpectedly brought into being through physical pain and suffering:

I had a rock-climbing accident when I was 22. Fell off a cliff and broke my back – spinal injury, paralysis in my legs. Life-changing!... People judge you on how you look. I'm sure people think I look like a weirdo with my wonky legs. The strange stares people give you. It does affect your confidence (Jack).

After his rock-climbing accident, Jack's anatomical structures and movements became permanently disfigured, suffering from a broken vertebra, paralysis and "significant muscle atrophy in both legs". Although still able to walk and ride his bicycle, his legs had become bent, twisted and turned in, leaving him unable to fully straighten his muscle-atrophied legs, resulting in a hobbled gait. This "life-changing!" (Jack) event exposed the vulnerabilities of his body-ego as he became increasingly conscious of the possible judgements of the societal gaze that he experienced via the "stares people give you". His lack of symbolic corporeal normativity left him consciously aware of the perceptions of others and affected his confidence as his physical capital had become significantly diminished. Ten years later, after being physically impaired, "battling from depression", and being chemically induced into a metaphysical state where he felt like a "zombie" from overconsuming pharmaceutical drugs to treat dyslexia and ADHD, a sudden epiphany and desire to transcend his existing embodied condition materialised. In a Nietzschean sense, his '*will to power*' had become revitalised, enabling him to transcend his su/re-pressed metaphysical state, encouraging him to stop taking his sedative medication and to repair and overcome his afflicted mind and body. To reclaim his inner sense of self and reconnect to the needs of his body and soul.

One day I just decided I'd had enough. To stop taking the drugs. To detox my body. Try different diets and to exercise more. Health shakes, vegan, vegetarian, low carb..I just wanted to feel healthy and normal again. It was time to take my life back..before I reached 40 [years of age] (Jack).

Rising from the depths of psychic and visceral suffering, after living in the absence of health for nearly 20 years, emotions of despair, from a Nietzschean perspective, were eventually overridden by his '*will to power*'. Jack's desire to overcome adversity and achieve greatness is achieved by reaching a state of *Amor fati*, an acceptance of everything that has happened in one's life, facilitated by taking care of the physiological nature of the body. As noted by Nietzsche: "sickness can actually be an energetic stimulus to life, to being more alive" (1908, p. 76).

It is crucial for the fate of individuals as well as peoples that culture begin in the *right* place – *not* in the ‘soul’...the right place is the body, gestures, diet, physiology, *everything else* follows from this...(Nietzsche, 1889, p. 221).

Nietzsche believed that taking care of the bodies physiology was critical in unleashing an individual’s ‘*will to power*’ to reach an embodied state of affirmation. For Jack and John, the desire to live, achieve ‘great health’, and to overcome adversity reflects the embodied characteristics of Nietzsche’s (1883) *Übermensch*. For an individual to have the ability to rise from sickness and aspire to and achieve a healthy metaphysical state that enables them to honour the drives and needs of the physical body and the soul. It is sickness, to a great extent, that makes it possible to escape into the psychic dimension of what it means to be healthy, and thus for Nietzsche (as illustrated by Jack and John) to reset one’s life purpose by committing to and pursuing a new set of values to live by. Further, to reclaim one’s essence, one’s ‘*stimulus of life*’ (Nietzsche, 1908), from the discourses of culture and the absence of normality.

To be able to look out from the optic of sickness towards *healthier* concepts and values, and again the other way around, to look down from the fullness and self-assurance of the *rich* life into the secret work of the instinct of decadence – that was longest training, my genuine experience, if I became the master of anything, it was this. I have a hand for switching *perspectives*: the first reason why a ‘revaluation of values’ is even possible, perhaps for me alone (Nietzsche, 1908, p. 76).

Sickness, from a Nietzschean reading of John’s and Jack’s lived experiences, enabled them to recognise the perspectival nature of life, which is the foundation for a revaluation of values - “the ultimate nature of man” (Brobjer, 2003, p. 66) – to promote life’s interests. From Nietzsche’s point of view, the criteria for making such a decision are ‘physiological’, as “[e]very naturalism in morality – which is to say: every healthy morality – is governed by an instinct of life” (Nietzsche, 1889 p.4). Health and sickness, interpreted in this way, are understood as both a physiological state and an ongoing embodied struggle. For Jack, like John, once his embodied *différance* and the absence of health was realised, body techniques were employed to re-establish a healthy physiology and his ‘*will to power*’ to overcome the embodied struggles between the soul, the biological body, and culture:

After a few years of lifting weights and trying different diets I wasn’t putting on weight [muscle] and seeing a difference. I experimented with steroids and then with testosterone...I’m top heavy - I work[out] my legs everyday. I want them to grow, to be able to at least push [leg press] my own body weight, plus another 100 pounds, to look more normal...I still get pain from my lower back but I try to manage it with good food and rest (Jack).

In an attempt to restore an embodied sense of corporeal normativity, “to look normal”, Jack utilised the body techniques of dieting, synthetic androgens and rest to improve his physiology and body image. In this respect, his decision to use body techniques is to achieve two distinct goals. Firstly, to overcome his lack of health caused by the toxification of his body through pharmaceutical drugs and the physical pain he continues to endure from his physical injuries caused by a rock-climbing incident. Second, to recreate a “normative” physical schema. Despite still suffering lower back pain from his injured vertebrae, managed with “good food and rest”, his innate drive (*‘will to power’*) to overcome his circumstances enabled him to overcome his physical limitations. He physically trained his legs every day with the aim of leg pressing his “own body weight, plus another 100 pounds” to increase the strength and muscularity of his disfigured legs. Consciously focused on reconstructing and improving his body (image) and physiology, Jack was determined to take his “life back”. In an attempt to regain the physical capital, status and confidence that he had lost amongst the horizontal surveillance of “strange stares” whereby he experienced life as a “weirdo with...wonky legs.”

Similarly, Erik experienced the embodied effects of a cultural-discursive *différance* and symbolic castration. Notably, he suffered from social anxiety, which produced a conscious desire to (re)configure his body (image) with various body techniques to ensure they conformed to (West) Los Angeles bodily norms.

I was pretty small, more feminine looking [in Iran] before I moved here. Now I don’t shave my body hair, have a beard and hairy chest. I look more masculine. I started going to the gym and put on weight 6 months after I arrived and tried steroids after a year of living in Los Angeles to boost my progress (Erik).

Before relocating to Los Angeles, from a genealogical perspective, Erik’s corpus had become signified by cultural discourses underpinned by biopolitics and the Iranian concept of *javanmardi*, introduced during the late 19th to the early 20th century (Baslev, 2019). *Javanmardi* represents an idealised and unifying Persian form of masculinity, meaning “young man” or “young manliness” (Bell, 2015) (i.e., the smooth hairless body). In Iranian society, this is an Aryan body image that is culturally valued because it symbolises Western European discourses of patriotism, good health and beauty (Baslev, 2019; Bell, 2015).

Young and athletic bodies became symbols of Iran’s rejuvenation, and Iranians were required to reform their bodies according to new aesthetic principles...the image of the male beauty as adopted and advocated in the 1930s is still widely accepted. Young, athletic, lean and smooth male bodies are the ideals one finds in commercial ads and as popular heroes (Baslev, 2019, pp. 288, 291).



Immediately after Erik transitioned from living in Iran to living in Los Angeles, his Iranian body, inscribed with the socio-historical symbolic meanings of *Javanmardi*, was confronted with a contrasting archetypal male physique that privileged a more muscular build. Consequently, the body ego had a new idealised body image to be desired, pursued and embodied. For him, the smooth lean Persian identity needed to be exchanged for an athletic-muscular physique to optimise his social status, capital and position within the discursive fields of (West) Los Angeles to assert himself into the symbolic realm of social and bodily acceptability. To overcome what was now considered a “feminine looking” persona, he engaged in the body techniques of gym work, (anabolic) steroids and letting his body hair grow to manifest a material identity that was more muscular to reclaim and maintain a masculinity that was desirable to him and others.

While Frank, John, and Erik were consciously aware of the effects of symbolic castration and an embodied *différance*, in general, the desire to embody symbolic representations of a perceived desirable normative self was predominantly a non-reflexive subconscious process revealed through their speech. In the following section, I discuss how individual subjectivities, bodies, behaviours, and synthetic testosterone practices continue to be shaped by the historical and hegemonic social discourses of healthism and biopolitics. I argue these are embodied discourses and praxis of the self that limit and facilitate, often simultaneously, the often contradictory expressions of a person’s psychic desires and needs of the soul (i.e., ‘*will to power*’, ‘*will to pleasure*’, optimal health) and the body/linguistic ego (i.e., status, capital, recognition).

#### **IV. Testosterone and Symbolic Aestheticism**

Embedded within the cultural discourses of (West) Los Angeles, the participants’ bodies and subjectivities often became performative to a valued hegemonic object of an imagined desire – a beautified (healthy) corporeal schema. Employing a Nietzschean worldview, their symbolic and physical desires were in part underpinned by a psychic need to manifest power and an insatiable desire for unending growth, the ‘*will to power*’ (Nietzsche, 1901). However, I argue that these desires are not authentic in their origins. Instead, the desires of the ‘*will to pleasure*’ and ‘*will to power*’ are stimulated and manipulated by the scientific promises of optimal health, (love) life and body image.

Like many other men (and women) living in Los Angeles (Elliott, 2013; 2018b; Hoberman, 2005; Martschukat, 2021; Shilling, 2016), the participants used various body techniques, including synthetic androgens and aesthetic/Californian medicines, to overcome their perceived physical and psychological inadequacies and embody a healthier and better-looking body. Synthetic testosterone, in

its various forms (e.g., AAS, hGH, Hch, hCG), was a drug of choice because of its proven ability to recreate a person's physical appearance and manifest an aesthetic–athletic physique (Pope, 2017; 2018; Pope & Kanayama, 2018; Pope et al., 2014). Thus, giving prospective clients confidence that the promises made by health and beauty professionals, and unregulated black-market dealers, are valid. Joe, reflecting on his personal experiences with synthetic androgens when he first moved to Los Angeles, commented:

I moved to L.A [from Idaho] when I was 28. All the guys here are good looking, have great bodies. I needed to put on more weight and started taking steroids. I'm now 95kg and want to get to 100kg. You know - get bigger. It's not easy for me to get big, I can't do it naturally like some people...but most people here are on something. It's very common (Joe).

After moving to Los Angeles from rural America, Joe's subjectivities and body–ego became surveilled by the dominant discourses of beauty signified by other men's "good looking" bodies. Like Erik, to conform to what he perceived to be the hegemonic idealised body with his new social environment, Joe began to use (unregulated) anabolic steroids. In conjunction with weight training and dieting, steroids empowered him to transform his corporeal schema to reflect the "great bodies" he noticed within (West) Los Angeles. This combination of body techniques enabled him to overcome his inability to "get big...naturally" by increasing his body weight from "150 to 165 pounds" to "220 pounds." Consequently, bring to life his ability to acquire and improve his cultural capital and social status – real and imagined – via an improved symbology of the body.

From a neo-Nietzschean perspective, I argue that this act of body transmogrification signifies a psychic need to overcome a discursive and real '*lack*' – the lack of being an object of desire (Lacan, 1964). This socially constructed sense of incompleteness is fueled by the insecurities of the body/linguistic–ego's that ruminate within the psyche. Additionally, the perceived ability for an individual to reinvigorate their lives by attaining an idealised body image of the self pulls at the heartstrings of the soul's '*will to pleasure*' and '*will to power*' – to experience the joys of love, affection, belonging, accomplishment and wellness. For many men, steroids are one of the biopedagogic tools to facilitate their ego's and soul desires. As Nietzsche (1901) observed: "In all living organisms, it can be clearly shown they do everything not to remain as they are, but to become greater" (Nietzsche, 1901, p. 689). "One must need to be strong – otherwise one will never become strong" (Nietzsche, 1889, p. 75).

Contextualised within my theoretical framing, Joe's '*will to power*' and '*will to pleasure*', the primordial desires of the soul, had become manipulated by the discourses and cultural norms of

(West) Los Angeles. For him to feel loved within his real and imaginary inner and outer worlds, he perceived it necessary to acquire an idealised body that was worthy of love – the aesthetic-athletic.

To enact becoming the idealised hegemonic of the self, Joe engaged with various forms of expertise, resources, and strategies to improve his understanding of how he could enhance his physical appearance. “[I] tried everything, reading fitness magazines, watching YouTube videos, eating six meals a day just to be bigger.” This use of various learning and educational materials and the influence of role models within popular culture and fitness magazines provided the imaginaries of the linguistic ego with a blueprint of a male schema to live up to and embody – digitally enhanced male bodies (Kerman, 2018; Ridley, 2017; Sheldon, 2010), often infused with synthetic androgens (Mazzeo, 2018; Monaghan, 2017; Underwood, 2017). Brad, who expressed a similar lived experience, reiterates:

I waited till I was older, 27, before I started taking steroids. I wanted to look like the fitness models on the magazine covers. I wanted to look strong, muscular, healthy, bigger... I learnt off a gym partner - how to take steroids, how to eat properly. I wanted to look like him. He was huge, very gook looking, muscular and attractive. Looking back, I would do it differently, I just wanted to look big, I put on 50 pounds in one and a half months (Brad).

Wanting to emulate the body images of fitness models, Brad used androgenic anabolic steroids to fill his symbolic void and embody a new envisioned image of himself. This ideal physique, for him, signified meanings of “look[ing] strong” and “healthy.” Like Joe, Brad used anabolic steroids as a body and appearance-enhancing tool to overcome his physiological limitations and successfully transition from an idealised aesthetic of the imaginary to the symbolically real. This body transformation was aided and supervised by a “huge...very good looking, muscular” “gym partner” who acted as a role model and taught him how to take steroids and eat properly to reconfigure his body to imitate the “fitness models on the magazine covers.”

### *Embodiment and the Illusions and Realities of Life and Popular Culture*

Michael Kimmel (2018) suggests the perceived need for many American men to emphasise the physical presence of their bodies in modern times is, in part, shaped and influenced by the loss of economic opportunities, power, and social status within a neoliberal society. And the subsequent effects of deindustrialisation, urbanisation, globalisation, political correctness, identity politics, gender equality, artificial intelligence, social media, gay liberation and the demasculinising and feminisation of men (Elliott, 2008; 2011; 2013; 2018b; 2019; 2019b; 2021 Elliott & Lemert, 2009; Kimmel, 2018).

Kimmel (2018), and others (i.e., Connell, Elliott, Lemert, Seidler, Walker & Roberts), argues these social trends have been occurring since the 1970s and the introduction of neoliberal policies, which have led to the disintegration of the traditional ‘nuclear family’ and many men relinquishing their conventional modes of control and power at home and within the workforce. Therefore, exasperating a real and illusionary metaphysical *lack*, and absence, void, and loss of oneself to economic and cultural discourses of the neoliberal matrix.

From a Nietzschean perspective, the cultural imperatives of life subjugate, displace and inhibit a person’s freedom to self-actualise, affirm, and attain a life in accordance with their authentic self. These embodied tensions between what I need and what society demands are the ongoing battle of life. The struggle between the wills, demands and phantasms of the soul, the physiological body and the moralities of culture (Nietzsche, 1882) from which existential experiences arise - which one’s ‘*will to power*’ seeks to overcome. As has been signified by the participants’ life histories so far, the psychic drives of the ‘*will to power*’ are (sub)consciously and expressed via the transformation practices of the body in an attempt to regain a sense of personal control, power, capital and status; and to overcome the embodied tensions of the self and oppressive (economic) discourses of life.

...if masculinity could not be achieved at work, perhaps it could be achieved by working out. Men’s bodies provided another masculine testing ground. Millions of American men participated in the health and fitness craze – dieting, jogging and bicycling, exercising, consuming health foods and various bottled waters, and purchasing high-end fitness equipment (Kimmel, 2018, p .260).

For Brad, once his visions of acquiring the ‘American Dream’ by embracing a cinematic performative body were confronted with the illusions and realities of the entertainment industry. He realised the importance of cultivating a physically fit physique became apparent when he decided to pursue a different career path, which required him to intensify his focus on attaining an aesthetic-athletic body.

I’ve been on reality and TV shows and did it for two years, most of the time you stand around doing nothing. I quickly got over the whole thing... I still see some of the same guys doing it, seeking fame and fortune but they still aren't making any money 10 years later – it’s kinda sad. After two years of acting in L.A. I changed my mind. The pay-off was not worth it - working long hours for low pay...That’s when I decided to get into the health and fitness industry...to be a personal trainer...I focused more on my body, being in shape to attract clients. The focus was on my body to show clients I can walk the talk, very ego based (Brad).

Disillusioned with the Los Angeles entertainment industry, in the act of symbolic *transference*, Brad's body ego desires shift from objectifying himself via the cinematic

discourses of Hollywood to objectifying himself via the discourses of fitness, health and beauty. Thus, a desire and perceived need to adopt the body image of a physically fit personal trainer to signify his validity as a fitness expert. Summarising Brad's shifting desires Bruce Fink (1999) notes: "For once desire is articulated in words it does not sit still, but displaces, drifting metonymically from one thing to the next. Desire is a product of language and cannot be satisfied with an object" (p. 178). "Desire is an end in itself: it seeks only more desire, not fixation on a specific object" (p. 29).

Brad's body ego, needing to reflect the perceived egoic needs of potential clients, identifies with a new set of symbolic signifiers that it needs to embody to enhance social status as a personal trainer and thus his economic capital. In his own words, to be "in shape to attract clients...to show clients I can walk the talk."

However, beyond Brad's superficial discursive and egoic desires, from a Nietzschean point of view, he engages in a re-evaluation of his values during this process of symbolic transference. This re-evaluation process enables him to align with the values embedded within his innate 'character': "I decided I would rather be known for helping people and changing their lives" and "focusing on the needs of others." Thus, he avoids what Nietzsche (1901) refers to as "the aim of lacking" (p. 9), the lacking of one's personal truth (p. 9), the complete subversion and devaluation of the self into the discourses of status and materialism that alienate the soul and suffocate the potentialities of a '*will to power*'. For Nietzsche (1886), this superficial process of being leads to nihilism – into the meaninglessness of the symbolic, which makes affirmation an impossibility.

Nietzsche, throughout his writings, believed aligning oneself to values that provided an individual with an authentic purpose and goals was necessary for the well-being of humanity and essential to the individual's existence. As he outlined in *Ecce Homo*, the goal of a person's life should be to "become what you are" (Nietzsche, 1908). For Brad, aligning himself to the career goals of a personal trainer was more in line with his values, morals, nurturing nature, an authentic sense of self – the metaphysical drives of his '*will to power*' and primordial soul. His use of anabolic steroids, in this respect, was utilized as a tool to make the most of his abilities and attract and acquire a customer base to achieve his personal, professional and financial goals.

Likewise, Luke's linguistic/body ego and habitus became influenced by the cinematic performative personas of Hollywood and the discourses of American popular culture. Born and raised in Seattle before moving to Los Angeles at the age of 24, the hegemonic masculinities of notable heroic film stars provided the imaginations of his mind symbolic ideals of what he could look like and who he could become. Consequently, these 'action heroes' shaped how he experienced his body and his desire to engage in body techniques "to get huge."

I wanted to look like Claude Van Damme when I was younger, in my early 20s, all those action films were big back then – Van Damme, Stallone, Schwarzenegger. I started going to the gym, taking steroids to get huge...I was pretty big but not massive or anything...but they worked and they were very effective (Luke).

Reflecting on his youth, Luke, now 40 years old, recalls the influence of 1990s action heroes like Jean-Claude Van Damme, Sylvester Stallone, and Arnold Schwarzenegger on his identity and desire to weight train. And, later, to inject anabolic steroids to embody the hegemonic discourses and symbolic significations of manliness. However, these action heroes were not merely cinematic projections of an ideal aesthetic to acquire social capital and status with his local domain. They also represented the importance of pursuing one's '*will to power*' and the *jouissances* of overcoming adversity. Michael Kimmel (2018) explains:

...though traditional masculinity's foundations and definitions were eroding, that definition was still the stuff of fantasy; books and films bolstered the masculine ego through fantasies of conquest and triumph against overwhelming odds...Hollywood regaled American moviegoers with a parade of testosterone-infused superheroes... a small, shy Austrian boy, Arnold Schwarzenegger followed the time-honored tradition of transforming his body in order to construct a masculine persona. Having conquered the world of competitive body-building, he conquered Hollywood as a hypermasculine hero. [Then] transformed into a politician...someone who would be tough and firm (p. 258).

As demonstrated by Arnold Schwarzenegger, the ability of a person to transform their lives by modifying the body, as often depicted within contemporary popular culture, is a symbolic call-to-action to others who want to pursue and attain the 'American Dream' – financial freedom. In contrast to traditional modes of social mobility – education, service to others and business – success and wealth can no presumably be acquired by commodifying and presenting a desirable body (e.g., the rise of reality television, social media influencers and body transformation professionals). Thus, the body is now perceived by many, as illuminated by the participants' life histories, the self, the body, and a person's life is often treated as something that can be continuously modified, objectified, (re)branded, and commercialised to meet the demands of a globalised capitalist society (Elliott, 2008; 2011; 2013; 2018b; Featherstone, 2000; 2007; Shilling, 2016; Warhurst & Nickson, 2020).

In the Nietzschean sense, the deliberate aestheticisation of the self can be interpreted as a person expressing their '*will to power*' via their body schema to negate and overcome the hardships of life. A longing for an otherworld in which suffering and hardship does not exist. The illusions and realities of fame and fortune via one's aesthetic labour shield against and distracts from pessimistic and nihilistic thoughts that stem from life's suffering and the necessities of personal wealth, which is an essential part of modern living. Thus, the aesthetic-athletic ideal is an imagined object conceptualised

by a symbolic lack that may or may not exist in the real, and that needs to be overcome to assert one's position within a symbolic and asset obsessed society.

Although the participants' initial use of androgens was primarily guided by a desire to imitate the hegemonic aesthetic bodies of others, enhance their physique, improve their social status, and acquire cultural and economic capital, in recent years, young men's attitudes towards such body-enhancing drugs had begun to shift. Within the metropolis of Los Angeles, designer synthetic drugs had reemerged as an elixir to rejuvenate men's physical and mental health, sex drives, and energy levels.

## **V. From the Underground to the Clinic: The Re-emergence of Testosterone as a Wonder Drug**

Historically, since the 1980s, men purchased synthetic testosterone via non-regulatory means of distribution for those who wanted to overcome their discursive ambiguities and anatomical limitations (Kanayam, Hudson & Pope, 2010; Kanayam & Pope, 2018). For example, Brad, reflecting on his experiences as a personal trainer, which also correlated with my observations and relations with fitness professionals and their clients in England, Australia, and New Zealand, explains:

I sell steroids to my clients but I never see them – I have contact with a guy who I pass details onto and he distributes them to the client...I don't know where he gets them from or what's in them... I just take a cut [percentage of the profit]. It's very common for personal trainers to sell steroids to their clients to supplement their income (Brad).

Brad's statement gives an insight into the black-market politics and commercial activity of synthetic androgens, which had become increasingly prevalent since the 1980s when the distribution of androgenic-anabolic steroids became a felony (Hoberman, 2014; Hoberman & Yesalis, 2017; Pope, 2017; Pope & Kanayama, 2018; Pope et al., 2013). Profiting from his clients' anxieties of a symbolic lack, Brad sold testosterone vials to his clientele via a third-party distributor to enable their imagined and real desires of embodying an aesthetic-athletic body to be realised. Perceived to be common practice amongst other personal trainers in Los Angeles, the selling of steroids was an important part of their business model to enhance their clients physical status and capital and increase their own wealth. Additionally, human growth hormones (HGH) had also become a popular body and appearance drug of choice, used to improve the corporeal facades of the general public (Conrad & Potter, 2004; Hoberman, 2005; MacGregor, Petersen & Parker, 2018). However, according to Brad, human growth

hormones on the black-market were often supplied by patients who required them for their medical conditions.

HIV positive men sell their HGH on the black market, often via PTs [personal trainers]. Many [HIV] patients only use half the amount [HGH] subscribed, primarily because they are prescribed more than what they need. The doctors profit, the drug companies profit, the personal trainers profit and the client [buyer of HGH] gets what they want (Brad).

Within the subtext of Brad's statement, the demand for human growth hormones was a biopedagogical practice that was beginning to influence Los Angeles men's subjectivities relating to their bodies and their conceptualisations of health. With the velocity and distribution of money freely circulating between the pharmaceutical, medical, and fitness industries, HIV patients, personal trainers and image-conscious Los Angelenos were all benefiting in various ways, from a free/black-market system in which human growth hormones were considered a valuable cosmetic commodity. Financially, pharmaceutical companies, wellness professionals, and HIV patients could exploit the system to increase their economic capital. And, those seeking to improve their body image (and health) could fulfil their body ego's desires for physical money and social approval.

After a while, I learned how to use steroids properly, dosage uses, what works well. I slowly stopped using them at the age of 30–31. Now I use testosterone injections, .3 cc, very small amounts, less than what a doctor would prescribe. A typical dose is 1 cc per week. I use it for maintenance to help my hormones stay in balance, for health reasons. I just take testosterone injections now and some HGH. I think its healthier, I don't have any of the negative side-affects I had when I used steroids. Although I have kept a lot of the muscle I put on - even though I'm not as big, I'm 180 odd pounds now (Brad).

After experimenting on his body with various dosages of black-market androgenic-anabolic steroids for five years during his early 30s, Brad decided to acquire his synthetic testosterone from medical practitioners. Suddenly, there had been a shift in his consciousness to protect his health. Nietzsche would argue that this is the will of the '*will to power*', informing a subject to continually overcome itself and prevent the onset of ill health: "Health and sickness: be careful! The yardstick remains the body's efflorescence, the mind's elasticity, courage and cheerfulness – but also, of course, *how much sickness it can take upon itself and overcome – can make healthy*" (Nietzsche, 2003, p. 78). To avoid and overcome the experiences of '*sickness*', Brad consumed small amounts of synthetic testosterone (.1 cc per week) and human growth hormones. In addition to using testosterone to enhance his body image, he now used testosterone "for maintenance to help my hormones stay in balance, for health reasons." Synthetic testosterone, prescribed within a clinical setting, was now



considered a “healthier” alternative than black-market anabolic steroids – an image and body enhancing treatment without “the negative side-effects.”

Despite losing some muscle mass due to transitioning from an unregulated market to a regulated market, taking prescribed ‘Californian medicine’ in the form of hormone injections eased his mind about any potential health risks. This cultural shift in how synthetic testosterone products were administered and consumed via health, wellness and beauty clinics, as a health and beauty tonic, appeared to have influenced the collective consciousness of Los Angeles citizens. Synthetic testosterone injections had now become a normative health practice, increasingly becoming detached from its historical taboos as an illegal performance enhancement drug (Hoberman, 2005; Moore et al., 2020; Pope, 2017; Undwerwood, 2017). In contrast, Los Angelenos were now presented with a myriad of body and wellness services and hormone therapies to appease their egos symbolic fears of feeling physically inadequate.

However, synthetic hormones as a health and wellness treatment were not as socially accepted or freely available in other parts of the United States. When reflecting upon the cultural differences between Los Angeles and other parts of the United States, particularly the “red states”, Jack commented:

I’ve noticed a difference between the healthcare in California and the red [conservative] states. I was in Utah for a few years before I moved to L.A. The doctors were all smart, intelligent people but the doctors here are more compassionate and caring, open-minded and willing to try alternative treatments... (Jack).

When Jack contrasted the healthcare services of Utah (a “red state”) with Los Angeles, he perceived Los Angeles medical treatments to be more innovative, “compassionate, caring, and open-minded.” Subsequently, these “alternative treatments” provided him with an opportunity to overcome his physical impairments and intoxicated cerebrum caused by consuming a steady diet of amphetamines to treat his dyslexia and (supposed) ADHD (*Chapter 5*). Within the geographical space of Los Angeles, healthcare and medical science had transcended beyond the traditional discourses of bodily illness and disease (Wade & Halligan, 2004; Yardley, 2013). Meeting the consumer's needs (and their socially constructed insecurities), ‘Appearance/Aesthetic/California Medicine’ was now available to improve the body’s appearance and delay the effects of ageing and treat legitimate physiological irregularities. In this sense, ‘Californian medicine’ reiterates and profits from a ‘feel good, look good’ approach to health and wellness (Edmonds, 2013; Elliott, 2013; 2015b; 2018b; Heyes & Jones, 2009; Krueger, 2013; Maio & Rzany, 2009).

Throughout Los Angeles, health and beauty physicians enticed potential clients with the potential benefits of synthetic testosterone and designer hormone treatments. Noticeably, from my observations, promises of good health via ‘Aesthetic Medicine’ were advertised throughout the physical and virtual space of Los Angeles – billboards, posters, window signs, and social media feeds (as depicted in the images to come). This semiotic bio-medical gaze reporting the benefits of androgen derivatives appealed to men’s desires to optimise their health, vigour and vitality. Subsequently, many men, like the participants in this study, checked into their local ‘Appearance medicine’ clinic to find out more.

I had my bloods and testosterone checked at a health clinic in Venice and discovered that my testosterone levels were low and I’ve been working with a kind and super smart 87-year-old endocrinologist ever since – using testosterone and have noticed a major difference...(Jack).

I’ve just started taking HGH as part of my health fix. So far, I’m feeling great (Luke).

I found that my testosterone was like 350–375 [ng/dL] naturally which is on the low end of normal, which means they don't have to give you anything because you're not technically diagnoseable but I felt that was low and wanted some (Johnny).

I noticed I was constantly feeling tired despite getting 10 hours of sleep and decided to get my blood and testosterone checked. Everything was fine but my testosterone levels were low 300 [ng/dL] when they should have been 700 [ng/dL]. I had a testosterone pellet injected into my ass which releases testosterone slowly over time, and then moved onto injections (Todd).

Informed by the knowledge, expertise and authoritative truths of medical science, many participants equated having low testosterone levels with a hormonal imbalance that needed to be corrected to improve their overall health and wellbeing. Thus, as Nietzsche (1878) suggests, appealing to the participants' unconscious drives of their ‘will to power’ to avoid ill health by attaining an optimal physiological state. This drive is the primary drive behind every aspect of life – the fear of losing one's health and avoiding unnecessary suffering, a state of being that the ‘will to power’ is driven to overcome (Nietzsche, 1878).

For many Los Angeles men, satisfying these needs and desires – the attainment of health and avoidance of ill health, both real and symbolic – is achieved through personalised hormone replacement therapy and testosterone treatments (Edmonds, 2013; Elliott, 2013; Hoberman, 2005; Krueger, 2013; Maio & Rzany, 2009; Moore et al., 2020). In this context, synthetic testosterone was often used as a “health fix” to correct the diagnosis of supposed low testosterone readings (i.e., “350–375” and “300”

ng/dL) by raising a person's serum testosterone levels by injecting micro-doses of synthetic testosterone into the circulatory networks of their body.

*Promoting and Profiting from the Anxieties, Hopes and Dreams of the Male Body*

Medical practitioners who administer micro-doses of synthetic androgens into the body imply that by doing so, they can treat, overcome and prevent a range of physiological and psychological issues. For example, some of the health claims made by 'Appearance Medicine' clinicians are presented within the following advertisement (*Figure 11*).



The advertisement features a muscular man on the left and four syringes of different colors (purple, green, blue, orange) on the right. The syringes have labels that are partially legible, mentioning 'Testosterone Enanthate'. Below the syringes is the logo for 'ROSENBERG PLASTIC SURGERY'.

**THE PROBLEM**

**MODERN MEN LACK TESTOSTERONE**

If you are suffering from low testosterone you may experience the following:

- 01** FATIGUE AND LOSS OF STAMINA
- 02** POOR SEXUAL PERFORMANCE
- 03** REDUCED SEX DRIVE
- 04** LACK OF JOY & HAPPINESS
- 05** MUSCLE WEAKNESS

Figure 11. Treating the 'Lack': 'Californian Medicine', Aesthetics and the Symptoms of Low Testosterone

Initially capturing the reader's attention with the materiality of the hegemonic aesthetic ideal, highlighting the corporeal capabilities of synthetic androgens, the reader is led to 'THE PROBLEM'. "If you are suffering from low testosterone you may experience the following": "fatigue and loss of stamina", "poor sexual performance" and "reduced sex drive", "lack of joy and happiness", and "muscle weakness". From a Lacanian view, the male ego becomes subliminally enticed by 'medical' narratives that propose a solution to common health issues that inhibit many men's ability to perform in the office and the bedroom. Testosterone is no longer merely promoted as a muscle-building supplement. It is an all-in-one wonder drug to treat a modern man's embodied tensions and deficiencies – an aphrodisiac, sexual stimulant, and mood booster.

Throughout Los Angeles, advertisements advertising the benefits of synthetic testosterone (e.g., *Figure 11*) influence men like the men in this study to consume hormone treatments to alleviate their real and imagined (body) anxieties and any potential threats of an embodied lack – a lack of one's optimal health. Consequently, advertisements like this, which have dramatically increased in the last ten years (Rao et al., 2017), construct a discursive illusion of an unhealthy identity by highlighting common problems that men experience on a day-to-day basis (Gabrielson et al., 2016; Hoberman, 2005; Mintzes, 2018; Walker et al., 2020). These are common male health issues that entrepreneurial wellness physicians claim can be treated with hormone replacement therapy. In turn, this process exasperates the internal struggles, tensions and anxieties that already exist within the depths of a person's psyche. Synthetic testosterone treatments serve as a solution to the illusion of the lack, the discursive image of a body lacking a 'great health' (Nietzsche, 1882). However, the remedy constitutes a conscious effort to conceal an unconscious lack in the subject that they cannot overcome because the object of desire – the metaphysical and physical state that men seek to embody – is an illusion created by discourse (Lacan, 1975; 1988b). Thus, at best, the remedy can only offer a subject a sense of completeness, a unification with oneself and the idealised healthy image of the self within the realm of their imaginary (Lacan, 1977).

Epidemiologist Bradley Layton (2017), commenting on the appeal of testosterone advertisements to American men's subjectivities and their desire to purchase testosterone treatments and products, states:

Increasing televised DTCA [Direct-to-consumer advertising] for testosterone therapies was observed across US metropolitan areas...both branded and condition awareness ads were associated with increased testosterone testing and initiation...advertisements were widespread and frequent during the study period; with cumulative ad exposures of close to 200 in some [designated market areas] DMAs, DTCA was associated with substantial overall increases in testosterone testing and initiation...While televised DTCA is the most common and influential

type of direct-to-consumer advertising medium, internet advertising was also widespread (Layton et al., 2017, p. 1163).

Whilst Todd reported that receiving testosterone treatments “didn’t really help” to significantly improve his energy levels after having a “testosterone pellet injected into [his] ass” and then receiving testosterone “injections”, Jack and Luke noticed significant improvements in their moods and sense of overall wellness. For them, testosterone treatments made “a major difference” to their physiology and attitude, resulting in them “feeling great.” Despite both men registering “normative” testosterone levels, which typically range between 300 and 1000 ng/dL for healthy men (Barret-Conor, 2005; Schatz et al., 2003; Vermeulen & Kaufman, 2002), men like Todd and Johnny perceived their testosterone levels to be inadequate and less than optimal: “I felt that [350-375 ng/dL] was low and wanted some.” From their perspectives, their testosterone levels and bodies were imagined and misconceived as a tank of petrol running low on fuel as opposed to their bodies existing in a perfectly normal range and physiological state. These embodied anxieties and desires, facilitated by medical discourses of ill health, driven by the profiteering of pharmaceutical companies and ‘appearance medicine’ physicians, rendered their bodies and desires susceptible to the exploitive motives of others. Consequently, Todd and Johnny, led to believe that their physiologies were less than ideal, sought to symbolically embody significations of an acceptable healthy aesthetic and mind by optimising their physiological state.

Perhaps, with this reasoning in mind, it is the act of manifesting the aesthetic and symbolic ideal, both imagined and real, that produces experiences of *jouissance* – experienced within the space of the linguistic ego as opposed to being biologically determined, a claim of most ‘appearance medicine’ professionals. As noted by Lacan (1975), *jouissance* is experienced when the subject struggles, again and again, to attain an object of desire without being able to identify why they desire what they desire. Enjoyment or *jouissance* is manifested and experienced when the ego senses the possibility of attaining the object of desire within the imaginary without ever acquiring it. This phenomenon, in essence, is a psychosomatic experience of the imaginary, created by the discursive narratives and illusions which continually saturate the ego as a person interacts with the world. To illustrate this point, Erik and Brad commented:

Steroids and gym [weight training] relieves my tension. It makes me feel good, sometimes I’m gym addicted, I go at midnight. Some nights I can’t sleep – thinking about going to the gym and what I should be eating. If I didn’t live in L.A. I would just go [to the gym] twice a week but here I feel like I have to go every day (Erik).

I also took steroids because I didn't want to be made fun of for being gay, wanted to be strong, more of a man, from being more quite to standing up for myself against bullying, being able to take people on – like: what did you say?! (Brad).

For these two men, synthetic testosterone, in conjunction with weight training and dieting, is a biopedagogical tool used to overcome the embodied tensions caused by the linguistic ego's need to adhere to the hegemonic aesthetic ideals that are ubiquitous in Los Angeles. Conforming to and moving towards these symbolic ideals in the imaginaries of his mind, and to some extent in the real (the material), Erik reports a momentary relief from these tensions, which makes him "feel good." However, soon after, these *pleasures* of attainment of the symbolic and real ideals of his imaginary are replaced with sleepless nights. His mind becomes anxious about the continuous need to go to the gym, eat well and take steroids to attain and maintain the appearance of the aesthetic ideal. Thus, it is the process of achieving the object of his desire from which *jouissance* is experienced. His subconsciousness has become entrapped by the discursive and cultural demands of (West) Los Angeles.

Additionally, Brad used androgens as a tool to overcome his naturally shy and quiet disposition. Psychically induced by the discursive promises of synthetic testosterone, within his imaginary, in his act of becoming the symbolic ideal, he adopted a more assertive persona that allowed him to stand up for himself when confronted with homophobia and ridiculed for being gay. Synthetic testosterone, as advertised, was an imagined biochemical and mind-altering apparatus that offered him the opportunity to improve his manhood, to become "more of man". In a Lacanian sense: "the body is the Other, and it is through the Other that an organism is transformed into a body, one that is extremely sensitive to signifiers and is divided by the drive... a spoken body, entangled in the network of signifiers, which can make it fall ill or bring it back to health" (Canellopoulos, 2010, p. 321). Fashioning a body requires an organism, language and an image – the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary (Lacan, 1966). As the self becomes more and more fragmented from its authentic self, and I argue, its soul, it mistakenly attempts to subconsciously be unified by the object of desire (Lacan, 1966).

Reading Brad and Erik's statements from a Nietzschean-Lacanian perspective, their '*will to power*' to overcome real and imagined threats of bullying and to achieve an envisioned state of optimised health, and the linguistic ego's need to conform to the ideals of a beautified physique to acquire social capital, is caused by the illusions of a symbolic absence/lack. The ego, unified by the '*will to power*' and the linguistic ego, becomes enslaved by the imaginary and symbolic ideals of the aesthetics of the idealised image of the self, in which one's rationality and being becomes lost. When the subject senses a state of symbolic unification can be attained, *jouissance* is experienced. But once this illusion dissipates, a state of anxiety takes hold of their consciousness and body. In this sense, the ego seeks to overcome perceptions of an embodied inferiority. The self becomes entrapped within a

constant act of overcoming a discursive *lack*. To highlight the omnipresence of the medical narratives concerning synthetic testosterone use and how such a psychic state of *lack*, and thus need, can be embodied by many American men, Beth Mohr (2005) writes:

There has been a dramatic increase in Direct-to-Consumer advertising – from only \$791 million in 1996 to \$2.5 billion in 2000. Injectable, transdermal, buccal and oral testosterone preparations are now available and widely advertised, exhorting men (who may experience symptoms such as fatigue, insomnia, impaired cognition, depression, irritability and decreased libido) to ‘Ask your Doctor about...’ Prescription sales of testosterone replacement therapies (TRT) have increased by more than 500% since 1993. Despite the rush to TRT for men...there are still no large-scale, well designed clinical trials of the clinical effectiveness and safety of TRT in men (pp. 64-65).

During the last 30 years, pharmaceutical stakeholders have increasingly devoted attention to the pharmacological management of the hormonal aspects of the male body, which have perpetuated the idea that low testosterone levels are responsible for the lack of one’s functional (and symbolic) health (Mohr et al., 2005; Hoberman, 2005). This narrative has shaped the public opinion to believe that there are health risks associated with having low testosterone. However, when analysing the power/knowledge embedded within the history of synthetic testosterone and the contemporary narratives used to promote them as a health tonic to enhance the mental, physical, and sexual powers of the human population, one finds that these discourses are both socially constructed and deeply ingrained to legitimise their use as a medical treatment (Hoberman, 2005; Dotson & Brown, 2007; Kanayam & Pope, 2018; Morgentaler & Traish, 2018). They thus, create the illusion of an embodied discursive *lack*, which many men seek to overcome. This embodied discursive *lack* of the male subject was signified throughout Los Angeles, as illustrated by the billboard (*Figure 12*).



**Figure 12. Treating the 'Lack':** The pharmaceutical and semiotic surveillance of the male body and psyche.

The genealogy of testosterone narratives can be traced back to 1935 when pharmaceutical companies first synthesised it, and hormone entrepreneurs used synthetic androgens to improve their clientele's cognitive and bodily functions and sexual fantasies (Hoberman, 2005; Hoberman & Yesalis, 1995). These scientific endeavours were “driven by a competition between three teams of researchers sponsored by rival pharmaceutical companies, all dreaming of a male hormone market that would produce profits like those of the already-established market for female hormones” (Hoberman, 2005, p. 2). Soon after, during the 1940s and 1950s, androgenic drugs became used as a tonic known for their psychic and metabolic effects.

Some of the benefits reported by pharmaceutical scientists included: stimulating a person's “mental and physical vigour” (Thompson & Heckel, 1939 p. 2128); enhancing their “sexual stimulation” (Werner, 1942, p.710), and increasing men's productivity to help them fulfil their “social and economic responsibilities” (Kruif, 1945, p. 208); re-energising and improving the moods of ageing



males, and providing performance-enhancing drug and muscle stimulants for Olympic athletes and military professionals (Grant, 1944; Kruijff, 1945).

As documented in this chapter, within contemporary society, ‘*Appearance Medicine*’ physicians continue to promote the medical narratives of yesteryear associated with the benefits of testosterone therapy for men. Thus, encourage men to receive hormone treatments to alleviate their anxieties, tensions and desires by optimising their testosterone levels. But are these promises of a rejuvenated self holding up to scientific scrutiny?

### ***Synthetic Testosterone and Illusions of Optimal Health***

Within the scientific, sports and fitness communities, there is no doubt that synthetic androgens effectively increase lean muscle mass and reduce adipose tissue (Brill et al., 2002; Corona et al., 2016; Corona, Giagulli & Maseroli, 2016; Schroeder et al., 2012). Erik and Joe reiterate: “It helps you put on muscle, and you don’t have to go to the gym as much”; “I’ve put on 5-pounds of lean muscle in 6-months”. However, there is little evidence to suggest testosterone therapies can improve men’s stamina, cognitive abilities, sexual performance, libido and mood (Amory, Watts & Easley, 2004; Carnegie, 2019; Institute of Medicine, 2004; Kesley et al., 2014; Mohr et al., 2004; Rhoden & Morgentaler, 2004). Subsequently, conflicts have emerged between profit-seeking pharmaceutical companies, entrepreneurial wellness clinicians and researchers.

There is tremendous confusion among clinicians, researchers and pharmaceutical industry professionals over what level of androgen deficiency requires treatment. Pharmaceutical companies have an obvious conflict of interest in proposing treatment levels. Without normal data, all definitions of ‘abnormal’ are suspect...there are still no large, long-term studies demonstrating the benefits of testosterone replacement therapy (Mohr et al., 2005, p. 69).

Given the lack of consensus, within the medical community, for what a healthy and (ab)normal testosterone level is, advertised claims of treating symptoms associated with testosterone deficiency (e.g., ‘andropause syndrome’ and ‘male menopause’) to (re)establish an optimal metabolic state appear to be illegitimate. Prescribing healthy men with synthetic testosterone, except for those who have hypogonadism, thus, seems to be driven by illusions of ill health and pharmaceutical companies and entrepreneurial physicians’ desires to profit from men’s body image anxieties (Hoberman, 2005; Mohr et al., 2005; Wentzell, 2017; \_\_\_\_, 2019). From this perspective, I suggest, the diagnosis and treatment of symptoms commonly experienced by men (e.g., mental and muscle fatigue, decreased sex drive) are used as a facade by pharmaceutical companies and entrepreneurial physicians to provide a product and

service that their patients desire – the discursive need to embody an aesthetic–athletic physique. As a result, health and wellness clinics are giving men a perceived opportunity to enhance their physical and social status within the psychogeography of Los Angeles. Consequently, there is a symbiotic relationship between the desires of the clinician and their patients. Whether this relationship is mutually beneficial or parasitic is unknown, as the long-term risks of androgen therapy remain obscure (O’Donnell, Araujo & McKinlay, 2005; Juul & Skakkebaek, 2002). Either way, the knowledge/power in which this discursive and embodied *lack* occurs, the perceived void of an absence of health and a desirable body and self, is controlled by the narratives of the ‘appearance medicine’ industry and their ‘free–market’ endeavours, as signified below (*Figure 12*).

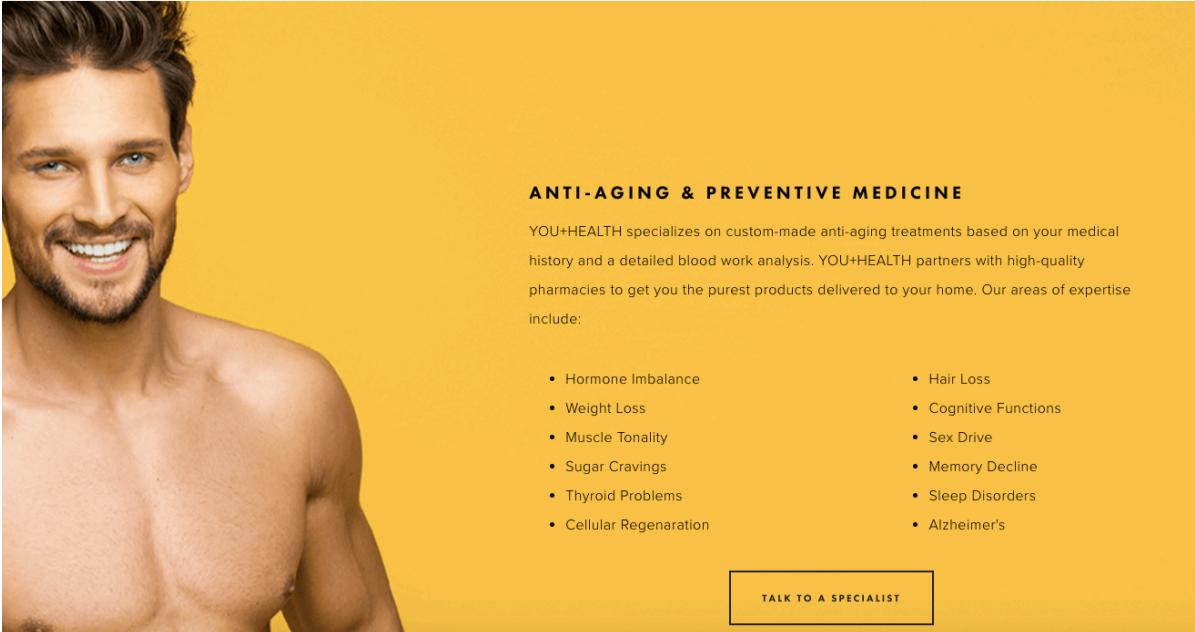


**Figure 13. Treating the ‘Lack’:** ‘Californian Medicine’, Aesthetics and the Manifestation of Men’s Corporeal Desires.

In addition to ‘*Californian Medicine*’ clinicians using testosterone to treat symptoms of (sexual) lethargy, they also claim they prevent and reverse the a/effect of ageing.

## *Delaying the Ageing Process: Scientific Truths or Science Fiction?*

First recognised for their anti-ageing properties during the 1940s and 1950s (Hoberman, 2005), synthetic androgens have since become known for their ability to reverse and prevent some of the body composition changes seen in older men. For example, hormone therapy for men has been shown to prevent and eradicate increased upper and centralised body fat, loss of muscle mass, and declining muscle strength (Bardin, 1996; Bhasin et al., 1996). Scientists attribute these biological processes of the ageing body to men's testosterone levels decreasing as they age (Bardin, 1996; Bhasin et al., 1996). Subsequently, within the last 20 years, there has been a significant increase in hormone anti-ageing treatments (Sansone, 2017; Medeiros & Watkins, 2017). Advertisements showcasing the supposed anti-ageing properties of synthesised hormones (e.g., testosterone, HGH, HCG) were prominent throughout the participants' social landscapes (*Figures 13,14 & 15*).



**ANTI-AGING & PREVENTIVE MEDICINE**

YOU+HEALTH specializes on custom-made anti-aging treatments based on your medical history and a detailed blood work analysis. YOU+HEALTH partners with high-quality pharmacies to get you the purest products delivered to your home. Our areas of expertise include:

- Hormone Imbalance
- Weight Loss
- Muscle Tonality
- Sugar Cravings
- Thyroid Problems
- Cellular Regeneration
- Hair Loss
- Cognitive Functions
- Sex Drive
- Memory Decline
- Sleep Disorders
- Alzheimer's

TALK TO A SPECIALIST

**Figure 14. Treating the Fear of the 'Lack': Anti-Ageing, 'Californian Medicine' and Growth Hormones - 'YOU+HEALTH'**



EliteSarms

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### ANTI-AGING

Our anti-aging products mimic the effects of growth hormone, a hormone that declines as we age. They also mimic the effects of testosterone another hormone that declines with age, resulting in revolutionary and safe anti-aging products.



Anti Aging



Elite Sarms - GH Pep (MK-67)

Figure 15. Treating the Fear of the ‘Lack’: Anti-Ageing, ‘Californian Medicine’ and Growth Hormones – ‘Elite Sarms’

Unsurprisingly, these anti-ageing narratives surfaced within the participants’ life histories and collective consciousness. In addition to their muscle-building capabilities, the participants often considered synthetic hormones to act as a health tonic to delay the physiological and material deterioration of the physical body. Luke and Brad commented:

Your testosterone goes down dramatically [as you age] so even an increase of 2,000 percent isn't a massive amount. I'm also supplementing some HGH with it and I just started doing a SARM's [body building supplement similar to steroids] which increases [your] HGH levels...I'm seriously getting ripped and I'm waiting till I get my six-pack which I've never had my life (Luke).

Testosterone decreases as you get older so I want to maintain my body, strength, and size (Brad).

For Brad and Luke, the ageing process and consequent decrease in testosterone levels, as reported by “health professionals”, was now a perceived corporeal reality that needed to be delayed and managed to alleviate a real or/and imagined loss of their youthfulness, symbolically and materially. Particularly in an image-conscious city like Los Angeles, as highlighted by Bill: “I’m seriously getting ripped, and I’m waiting till I get my six-pack which I’ve never had in my life”; and Joe: “I want to maintain my body, strength and size.” In the Nietzschean sense, there is always an unconscious desire, ‘*will to power*’, to delay the inevitable material decline of the material body, which signifies the eventual mortality of life as it is known. I argue, whilst Bill and Joe rejoice in the real and imagined material significations and meanings of a beautified aesthetic and perceived optimal health, they do so out of unconscious fear of the consequences of what they *lack* and what they want to improve. Guided into hormone therapy via transformational narratives that promise an illusionary optimised health, the youth of their past, and enhanced love life, the self is perceived to be incomplete; this is a discursive illusion that the ego and the soul (‘*will to power*’) seek to overcome by unifying the self via idealised discourses and significations of the self. In this case, the material-psychic experiences of the past, which is where they will always remain. In short, the perceived pleasures of material and symbolic self-actualisation are only fleeting psychic experiences.

However, with this being said, are the reported medical benefits of anti-ageing hormone therapy, in which men’s subjectivities of loss and hope are situated, credible, or supposititious?

Since the 1990s, the popular press has become enamoured with, and has resuscitated, the idea that synthetic testosterone and other androgens might be the “super-hormone” of choice to prevent or reverse the side-effects of ageing for men (and women) (Hoberman, 2005; Tenover, 1997). “The thesis that younger hormone levels are optimal (i.e., normal), and older, lower hormone levels are not, is now popular in the youth-orientated USA” (Barrett-Connor, 2005, p. 263). Science informs us that hormones, particularly androgens, and the embodied lack of them, are involved in the pathogenesis of many disorders that often develop in ageing men, such as erectile dysfunction, osteoporosis, and prostate disease (Schatzl et al., 2003). To address these health issues of the male body, hormone therapies promise an extended youth, vigour, and rejuvenation of a younger self, as encapsulated by the athletic models that promote them. This medicalisation of the body and self “has come to the ethical question of who we truly are and what our nature is as human beings, as life forms in a living system, as simultaneously unique individuals and constituents of a population” (Rose, 1994, pp. 67–68). Do humans need to be chemically stimulated to achieve an optimal state of being, or does society already

have all the resources it needs, or are medical discourses of the self displacing the real causes of the body's ill health - culture?

Increasing evidence suggests a person's health status is more likely attributable to lifestyle factors as opposed to their testosterone levels and the a/effects of ageing. Numerous studies indicate that illness, comorbidity, medication, diet, alcohol and hypertension have an impact on serum levels throughout a man's lifespan, rather than vice versa (Feldman, Longcope & Derby, 2002; Mohr et al., 2005; Swartberg et al., 2003; Morales, Heaton & Carson, 2000; Morley, 2001). Thus, the established and accepted truth that there is an age-associated decrease in serum-testosterone, from which men's desires to preserve their bodies with artificial chemicals emerge, appears unclear. Whether this decline in androgen levels causes the ageing process per se or by concomitant diseases, often present in older men, remains controversial (Morley, 2001; Schatzl et al., 2003; Morales, Heaton & Carson, 2000). As highlighted by numerous researchers, the risks of administering hormones to men could lead to the toxification of the body, notably causing the onset and stimulation of undiagnosed prostate tumours, infertility and erythrocytosis (Holmang et al., 1993; Rhoden & Morgentaler, 2004; Snyder, 2004; Tenover, 1992; Vermeulen, 2001). Although the potential market is vast, and the potential for individuals to benefit from synthetic androgens is large, so is the potential harm (Barret-Connor & Bhasin, 2004, p. 502).

To conclude this chapter, the habitus, body and soul that is initially re-constituted by cultural discourses during a person's early childhood, from which embodied *'tensions of the self and discourses of being'* are cultivated, continue to be negotiated and managed during adolescence and adulthood. As individuals age, the self becomes increasingly subjugated by cultural imperatives, particularly medical truths and rationales, that define what is healthy, (ab)normal and (im)moral. For many of the participants in this study, this socialisation of the self and the displacement of their pre-discursive authenticity positioned them as defective biological objects ill in health, mentally, spiritually and physically. When conditioned in this way, the psyche attempts to overcome this lack – the lack of an embodied object of desire – by utilising biopedagogies (e.g., synthetic testosterone) to re-establish itself as a unified and complete identity, in an attempt to mask the fact that it perceives itself as symbolically, spiritually and materially incomplete.

Whilst synthetic testosterone simultaneously creates, via subliminal messaging, this sense of an embodied lack – not having an optimal aesthetic and health – it also promises an illusionary cure. Hoberman (2005) and others (Doyle, 2018; Hooven, 2021; Jarrin & Pussetti, 2021; Jordan-Young & Karkazis, 2019) claim that these cures are grounded in fantasies of modern eugenics, transhumanism, ageism, and American capitalism rather than in a genuine need to improve a person's health or

overcome any real potential or actual pathological inadequacies. However, despite this scepticism and concern, many men like those in this study continue to find themselves psychically seduced and enamoured with the real, imaginary and symbolic offerings that steroids and hormone replacement therapy afford. These are reinforced and legitimized by the discursive authority, power and influence of presumed medical and scientific truth's, which often uphold synthetic androgens as the wonder drug for men. Thus, they facilitate a metaphysical state that enables men to rejoice in the mind's fantasies and jouissances, inspired by the illusion of attaining the unattainable object of desire – a permanent 'healthy' human aestheticism. Any health benefits received are often treated as a complementary dividend.

In view of synthetic testosterone use becoming a standardised body-enhancing practice amongst many American men (Barrett-Connor, 2005; Dotson & Brown, 2007; Hoberman, 2005; Kanayam & Pope, 2018; Mohr, 2005; Morgentaler & Traish, 2018; Tenover, 1997), in the following chapter, I examine the phenomenological pleasures, displeasures, and social opportunities that the consumption of androgens afforded the men in this study.

*“...given drug taking is such an embodied activity, the plethora of sociological literature on the body has paid scant attention to illicit drug use.”*

Sarah Nettleton (2010, p. 343)

## 7

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### **EMBODIED TENSIONS OF CULTURE: BIOPEDAGOGIES IN PRACTICE**

Beyond the advertised benefits of synthetic testosterone, the actual pharmacological a/effects of consuming androgens offered numerous dis/pleasurable embodied experiences. These chemically induced experiences produced altered states of consciousness, revealing the embodied self as a dynamic and complex process – “contextual, enmeshed within the specifics of place, time, physiology, and culture, which together compose enactment” (Hayles, 1999, p. 196). In the following, I continue to primarily draw on the insights of Nietzsche and Bourdieu as I explore the embodied a/effects of synthetic hormones and the lived experiences of those who use them within the social spaces they inhabited.

#### **I. Synthetic Androgens and the Self: Embodied Pleasures, Displeasures and Drives**

After the participants consumed illicit synthetic testosterone purchased via the black market, a range of temporal and corporeal sensations were experienced. Although the idealised athletic–aesthetic had begun to emerge through the alchemical materialisation of the self, simultaneously, often numerous unwanted side-effects constituted the human body as undesirable and unhealthy. Consequently, a new set of existential issues emerged, which a/effected their physiologies and psyche. Some of the embodied side–a/effects that the participants experienced that either displaced or/and enhanced their (pre–discursive) sense of self included: euphoria, depression, mood swings, paranoia, acne, hair loss, and being bloating. Such chemically induced and displaced states of being are highlighted in the following statements.



### *The Psychic Ebbs and Flows of Black-Market Steroids: From Euphoria to Despair*

When the participants discussed the effects illicit anabolic-androgenic steroids had on their bodies and subjectivities, several described experiencing a broad spectrum of emotions. For some, they felt euphoric (e.g., “like superman”), whilst others experienced feeling depressed, paranoid, and overly self-conscious about the inadequacies of their body image.

When I first tried steroids when I was young [24] steroids made me feel high...you know, invincible. Like superman...that I could take on the world...was a huge ego boost...but they also made me very paranoid, angry, short tempered and moody. Once I put on 12-15 pounds I stopped (Luke).

...definitely makes me a little bit more manic, less depressive (Johnny).

For Johnny and Luke, a body and mind imbued with unregulated synthetic testosterone elevated their arousal and energy levels to produce a heightened sense of self-expression and invulnerability. These experiences are commonly known as ‘*The Superman Syndrome*’ (Monaghan, 2000). Lee Monaghan (2001) suggests this phenomenon “is not considered a direct physiological effect of steroids. Rather, it is a socially mediated effect linked to changes in strength and appearance of the body” (p. 175). While the psychic experiences of a “manic” and “superman” state of consciousness produced a “huge ego boost”, experienced through the linguistic and body–ego, as the symbolic illusions of the aesthetic ideal materialized (e.g., Luke putting on “12-15 pounds”), contrary to Monaghan’s claims, these embodied experiences also appeared to exist beyond the ideologies of social constructionism. For instance, for the men I interviewed, psychic states of euphoria (and depression) were only stimulated by illicit steroids, the chemistry and potency of which was unknown and unregulated. As Johnny stated: “I have no idea what’s in this stuff...it does play with your head [emotions]”. However, such incidences were not experienced when synthetic androgens were prescribed by ‘appearance medicine’ physicians (as will be discussed later).

Although Luke and Johnny experienced an enhanced state of being, both in mind and body, once they had injected unlicensed anabolic steroids into their bodies, others had a different experience. Despite putting on weight, Joe, Erik and Chad experienced mental states that often fluctuated between feeling overly self-confident to being in a psychic state of despair.

Steroids made me super depressed. Sometimes I’d just stay home and cry...as I realised how lonely I was...One minute you feel great, the next you feel very low. They really affect you (Joe).

It made me depressed...played with my head...easily frustrated. I just didn't like it. ...I felt very unhealthy and I needed to stop and cleanse my body from the toxins. I don't think it made me feel more attractive at all. I put on weight quickly, about 12-pounds, but I lost it as soon as I stopped. So, I just stopped taking it (Erik).

I kept falling into bouts of depression when using them [steroids]. This is something that I have suffered from for a while... Sometimes I just have low moments where I feel I'm not good enough, maybe it's from being gay and feeling that I'm not measuring up to the hegemonic masculine ideals that I grew up with. It is something that I battle with - the norms of my past (Chad).

Far from the optimal state of being that Joe, Erik, and Chad, hoped to achieve, the pharmacological a/effects of illicit steroids invoked depressive emotions that exasperated thoughts of being socially unworthy and not good enough – both symbolically and socially. From a Nietzschean perspective, the fundamental drives of the '*will to power*' to maximise feelings of power and greatness had become diminished (Nietzsche, 1886). Nietzsche (2005) continues:

Whenever the will to power falls off in any way, there will also be a physiological decline, decadence. And when the most masculine virtues and drives have been chopped off the god of decadence, he will necessarily turn into a god of the physiological retrograde, the weak (p. 14).

As a result, the suppressed fears of the subconscious become known to the conscious mind as the physiological a/effects of anabolic-androgenic steroids triggered a deeper state of reflexivity and self-realisation of one's anxieties – a perceived lack of social capital and status. For example, Chad's experiences increased awareness of his perceived inability to live up to the ubiquitous "hegemonic masculine ideals" that surveilled his identity and shaped the desires of his linguistic ego. Despite his attempt to become the symbolically idealised masculine 'Other' by consuming steroids to improve his positionality within society, ultimately, it was a metaphysical state that he was unable to produce and enact. Consequently, various existential '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' (i.e., social anxiety, neurosis) consumed his mind, body, and soul. He considered his sense of self and identity to lack the cultural requirements needed to be valued accepted by others. There was an internalised struggle between the sexual desires of his soul ('*will to pleasure*') and the hegemonic heteronormative imperatives that demanded him to be something that he was not – a straight masculine Texan man.

Whilst Chad experienced identity issues, Joe's use of steroids and their a/effects on his psyche revealed a self that was "super depressed" and "lonely". This diminished state of being was not a

consequence of a symbolic *lack* of the aesthetic–athletic physique, but a *lack* of companionship and having meaningful relationships due to recently moving to Los Angeles. However, in his mind, experiences of depression and loneliness could only be overcome by embodying a physique that signified an image of desirability – an aesthetic–athletic body. “Nobody pays attention to you in L.A. if you are not good looking...that’s why botox, hormones, and facelifts are so popular” (Joe). Although on the surface, drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, Joe’s object–cause of desire (*objet petit a*) appears to be driven by the superficial values and moralities of culture that prioritise one’s looks over their character, the actual cause of his object of desire (the aesthetic – athletic body) is his desire to experience a sense of belonging and love within the (West) Los Angeles community he now lives.

Illuminating the participants' mind-body experiences, Lacan (1973/1974) notes, the *objet a* (object of desire) is a paradoxical "object" directly because of the relation between its emergence and loss. “This coincidence of emergence and loss, of course, designates the fundamental paradox of the Lacanian *objet petit a* which emerges as being-lost” (Žižek, 1997, p. 15). However, whilst Lacan (1973/1974) suggests the *objet petit a* only “exists” in the relation between humans and language, and the *objet petit a* is not an actual object one once possessed but, then, lost, as it is simply a desire that one imagines one previously had and continues to crave, I have a different perspective.

From my postmaterialist perspective, I argue that Joe’s transition from one community to another and the loss of a real connection to his family and childhood friends represents an actual loss - a spiritual connectivity to others that exists beyond the significations of language. This desire for connectivity, and the subsequent desire to overcome the loss of this connectivity by reinventing the body’s appearance, is underpinned by the soul's desires - the ‘*will to pleasure*’ and the ‘*will to power*’. Whether Joe’s memories have romanticised his past experiences and relationships with family and friends or not, he has still experienced a loss of a connection to others, relationships that he maintained over a long period during his childhood and adolescence.

Therefore, in contrast to Lacan, I suggest the loss of one's object of desire is not only situated within the realm of dialectics and the imaginary but also centred in the primordial desires of the soul (i.e., my postmaterialist reinterpretations of the ‘*will to pleasure*’, ‘*will to power*’). Thus, wherever the subject lives, there is a need to have meaningful connections with others to maintain or/and restore oneself to optimal mental and physical health.

However, as Lacan highlights throughout his writings, how a person derives meaning from their personal experiences of loss and their desires to overcome this loss is shaped by culture and language. Thus, from a postmaterialist perspective, the authentic experiences of the soul are always

interpreted via discourse. (This relationship between discourse, desire, the body, and love, is discussed further in *Chapters 8 and 9*).

From a *'triads of being'* ontology, the participants' ongoing struggle between the desires of the soul (i.e., *'will to pleasure'*, *'will to power'*) – to feel accepted, loved, and empowered – and the symbolic and cultural imperatives that subliminally encourage the need to embody a particular hegemonic mode of being. These struggles between the inner and outer world of the self are then played out through the body and mind, in this instance, to the detriment of one's physical and mental health. Failing to achieve the life-affirming physiology Joe, Erik, and Chad, desired, a physiological thriving as espoused by Nietzsche (2011), they began to question their place and value in the world. Seduced into states of depression, as questions concerning their relationships, identity and health consumed their consciousness, their use of unregulated steroids was deemed a "toxic" biopedagogical tool that produced unwanted side effects. For Erik, these unwanted side-effects were enough to make him stop, as he now perceived himself as less attractive than before consuming black-market steroids. However, for Joe and Chad, the need to use steroids to embody an aesthetic-athletic was still perceived to be worth it to attain their personal goals to acquire symbolic and cultural capital: "I still think it's worth I just need to learn how to manage my body better" (Joe).

Additionally, the participants' illicit steroid use evoked various bodily changes, impacting their sense of self. Although the idealised athletic-aesthetic had begun to emerge through the alchemical materialisation of the self, simultaneously, often numerous unwanted side-effects constituted the human body as undesirable and unhealthy. Consequently, a new set of existential issues emerged, which a/effected the participants' physiologies and psyche. The troubles and pleasures of the mind were now expressing themselves via the body. Some of the embodied side-a/effects that they experienced, that either displaced or/and enhanced their sense of self, included: euphoria, depression, mood swings, paranoia, acne, hair loss, and bloating. I now highlight and discuss these chemically induced and displaced states of being in the following sections.

### *The Corporeal Pains of Black-Market Steroids*

In addition to the participants experiencing both euphoric and depressive episodes once illicit synthetic androgens were absorbed into the body, various other somatic and cognitive *'tensions of the self'* emerged.

...sometimes I suffer from headaches, sometimes I feel like my brain is going to explode after a workout. Like all the blood rushes to your head...feel irritable and have really bad acne on my back, use acid bleach to get rid of it. I don't take my t-shirt off in public anymore (Joe).

Taking steroids definitely ages you. I would look younger if I hadn't used them. My hair is thinner and I have older looking skin... Steroids don't make you feel great at all (Brad).

I only tried it once and I didn't like it...the drugs just made me look and feel short and fat. It just made everything wider [demonstrates on biceps with hands] and my face bloated... I didn't enjoy it, the side-effects (Erik).

Far from embodying discourses of a desirable aesthetic that Joe, Brad and Erik had envisioned, the use of unlicensed anabolic steroids produced psychic and material reactions that reduced their physical capital and social status. "Headaches", irritability, chronic acne, thinning hair, ageing skin and bloating were some of the unwanted side-effects that caused these men to feel "not great at all" (Brad). Despite all three men increasing their muscle mass (e.g., Joe gained "40-pounds"), their body-egos remained fragile due to the various side-effects that captivated their minds, bodies, and souls. For Joe, his body anxieties continued to threaten his body-egos idealised sense of self as chronic acne, which he attempted to remove with bleach, rendered his back unworthy of public display. Subsequently, this limited his freedom to express and take advantage of his reconstructed physique.

Similarly, Erik became discontent with his physical schema as his consumption of anabolic steroids caused him to feel "short and fat." The body images of these men had become torn between the tensions of the symbolic ideal male body and the material bodies rejection of the toxins that flowed through their reconfigured synthetic selves. As a result of this process, I argue, their body images signified an incomplete object, split amongst the desires of the '*will to power*' and '*will to pleasure*' to achieve an optimal state of being, the realities and limitations of the material body, and the perceived hegemonic symbolic norms of Los Angeles' body culture. The imagined pleasures of the desired object of desire, the aesthetic-athletic, had suddenly become confronted by reality. Like Freud and Lacan, Crossley (2005) describes this tension between what is desired, yet unattainable, as the split between the 'I' and the 'me'.

Crossley (2005) suggests body techniques play a central role in the construction of a reflexive self (the 'I') ((re)interpreted as consisting of a soul and a material body) and a superimposed social identity (the cultural 'me'). The 'me', signifying the discursive, symbolic and performative self. When engaging with reflexive body techniques such as 'Californian Medicine' (i.e., androgens), concerning the various aspects of the self, the 'I' and 'me', Crossley (2005) notes:

We act towards ourselves in such a way that we become objects for ourselves. Qua active agent ('I') we act upon ourselves as a passive object ('me'). The rhythm by which we vacillate between I and me in these activities will vary according to the body technique in question. An agent on a long run might lose their self in their run for long periods, immersed in the pre-reflectiveness of the 'I' and never appearing before their self as 'me' until they finish. An agent who is cleaning their teeth, by contrast, might be rocking constantly between positions of the brushing 'I' and the brushed 'me' (p. 13).

From this perspective, reflexive body techniques induce the self into an ongoing immersive yet divided experience. "The two experiences never coincide...I never coincide with myself. I am always split" (Crossley, 2015, p. 13). The self and its body image fluctuate between the authentic 'I' and the desires of the perceived 'me': "'I' see 'my body' (me) but that external image does not coincide with the lived experience that confronts it" (Crossley, 2005, p. 13). Or, as Merleau-Ponty, drawing on Lacan, (1964) puts it:

At the same time the image of oneself makes possible the knowledge of oneself, it makes possible a sort of alienation. I am no longer what I felt myself, immediately to be; I am that image of myself that is offered by mirror...I leave the reality of the lived me in order to refer myself constantly to the idea, fictitious or imaginary me, of which the specular image is the first outline. In this sense I am torn from myself (p. 136).

From my neo-Nietzschean inspired ontological conceptualisation of embodiment, these men's embodied tensions of the self, the split between the symbolic self and the desires of the soul, are either overcome or exacerbated by the employment of body techniques. Drawing on Bill's life histories, his embodied split between the 'I' and 'me', the disunity between the symbolic, imaginary and real self (the body and soul), was reflected in his ongoing need and desire to manage and maintain his body image.

The reality of staying in shape and working towards your ideal body is one of the most mentally exhausting things I've ever done...it's not just a diet that is for 3-months, it's not something that's going to appear over a small amount of time, it's a lifelong commitment and it's definitely a lifestyle change. And lately I have been exhausted, I don't want to do a meal plan, but I do. I don't want to work-out, but I do...but at the end of the day if you have a desire to do something, you just do it (Bill).

With Bill's body and habitus inscribed and augmented by discourses of (bio)power, signified by his internalised struggles of a perceived need to stay in shape, the self is (sub)consciously driven beyond a state of physical and psychic comfort. As a result, he engages in body practices to recreate a

body (image) to reflect the hegemonic values privileged within his social economy (e.g., the healthy, fit, aesthetic–athletic self). This embodied struggle between pre-discursive ‘I’ and the cultural ‘me’, and the distinction between the different aspects of the self, is integral to understanding the embodied ‘*tensions of the self and discourses of being*’ – the processes of developing and adopting a performative symbolic self, and the consequential displacement of one’s ‘authentic’ self. In Bill’s case, his human experience, analysed through a ‘*triads of being*’ lens, has become orientated by socially constructed norms, discourses and imperatives. Initially, I argue, this embodied process is initiated by the desires of his soul (i.e., the ‘*will to pleasure*’, ‘*will to power*’), lured into enacting specific body regimes and symbolic performative acts in search of (self–) acceptance and an optimal state of being.

“The mirror, to use Merleau-Ponty’s expression, tears us away from ourselves but thereby gives us the distance from ourselves that allows us to see, perceive and form a perspective upon ourselves” (Crossley, 2005, p. 13). As one reflects upon the bodies image, real and imagined, (sub)consciously, the self can be appropriately adjusted, reconstructed and maintained to adhere to the perceived needs of the self (soul) and the desires of the ‘Other’. Bourdieu (1972) notes that this process of human affectivity, the connected relationship between appreciation and feeling appreciated, plays a critical role in forming the body and its habitus. Once the self is symbolically conditioned, the body (image) is used as a vehicle to enter into a relationship with the world, oneself, and others.

From these viewpoints, body practices are social tools that thematise the annexes of the corpus within an embodied state of intentionality. By utilising various body techniques, the individual immerses themselves into an inseparable relationship with a symbolic, imaginary and objectified image of the self, which mirrors their perceptions of the discursive demands of the culture(s) they are embedded within. Contextualising this mind-body–culture–praxis nexus within a ‘*triads of being*’ framework, I argue, this is a subconscious process whereby the soul is discursively coaxed into the potentialities of an illusionary and a false sense of fulfilment and satisfaction. This false and illusionary phenomenon, the discursive conditioning of the subconscious, informs the linguistic and body ego that the authentic desires of the soul (i.e., ‘*will to pleasure*’, ‘*will to power*’) and its yearning for love, belonging, acceptance, optimal health, and self - actualisation, can be met by honouring what culture demands of it (i.e., the beautified body). However, the authentic self is encapsulated with a neoliberal and materialistic illusion of artificial happiness that can never fulfil the genuine needs of the soul. Thus, a person’s experiences of a neoliberal induced *jouissance* are embedded within a false discursive reality instead of being a part of a meaningful and authentic reality needed to achieve an optimal state of being.

As illuminated throughout *Chapters 5–7*, the body, habitus and human consciousness become symbolically disconnecting from its authentic self. As Crossley (2005), and others, have observed, the self becomes split between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’. The authentic self (soul and body) is continuously juxtaposed against and displaced by the illusionary pleasures of the symbolic and commodified self. Drawn into the potentialities of contentment, individuals use body pedagogics to achieve a discursive idealised self to conceal, alleviate and manage the various (sub)conscious tensions that emerge from both their need and inability to attain such an embodied state (i.e., social anxiety, neurosis, body dysmorphia). By recreating the self through various biopedagogies, the self becomes symbolically performative to conform to the perceived demands of culture, whilst the authentic self becomes camouflaged and subjugated by discursive imperatives. However, when an individual’s pleasure of the idealised symbolic body and self are not realised (e.g., the unwanted side-effects of steroids that render the body unworthy), the self becomes an object of dissatisfaction. The idealised self remains obscured from reality, limited to the fantasies of the imagination. Thus, out of reach. But still desired as the soul’s needs (i.e., the ‘*will to pleasure*’, ‘*will to power*’) remain un nourished.

Drawing on Lacan (2005), the real of the object of desire “is precisely what we completely lack [i.e., self-love, love from another, optimal health]. We are totally separated from it...We shall never totally clarify the relationship between those beings-of-language */parlêtres/* that we sexuate as man” (pp. 93 –94). Reinterpreting Lacan’s writings via a postmaterialist lens, I suggest the object of desire is always elusive and unattainable as it is the real needs of the soul (i.e., a need for love, optimal health, opportunities for self-actualisation). From my perspective, this is what underpins one’s desires for the symbolic object – that exists in the symbolic, imaginary, and/or real, and not the object of desire itself. Thus, there is a displacement of one’s desire and what one desires, which has become distorted by the linguistic ego being saturated in the illusions of neoliberal imperatives that suggest that happiness, optimal health, sex and love can be solely achieved through the reconfiguration of the body.

Žižek (1989) describes this embodied process, the subjugation of the ‘real’ self, as the neoliberal/ideological formation of the object of desire which leads to a person desiring something other than what they desire (i.e., love and acceptance). As a result, the subject itself becomes a by-product of the ideologies of capitalism. Subsequently, instead of the subject pursuing and attaining a fulfilled soul directly, their sub/conscious desires are signified by and sought after via the object of the desirable body. Due to the influence of discourse, the realisation of what is actually required to achieve a state of happiness (i.e., a connection to one’s authentic self, authentic others, and authentic experiences) becomes distorted by one’s perceptions of the importance of the symbolic, and therefore, often remains buried within one’s subconscious.



Because of the ubiquitous and subliminal cultural narratives of hope which promise a unified self – a self devoid of dis-ease and displeasure – the discursively induced symbolic illusions of the ego's desire and the authentic needs of the soul continually pursue becoming the idealised external 'Other'. The self cannot avoid an embodied split between the 'I' and the 'me', yet, I suggest, it is a state of being that the ego and the soul want to overcome. The participants demonstrated these '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' as they sought out steroid alternatives (e.g., SARMS, HGH, HCH) from appearance medicine and wellness clinics, which they considered to be a healthier option, in an attempt to restore the health of their mind, bodies and souls. And, in so doing, enhance their status, physical and social capital. Thus, their pursuit of a beautified self continued.

## **II. Rejuvenating the Body and the Idealised Self with Synthetic Androgens**

Whereas illicit anabolic steroids exasperated the schism between the symbolic idealised self and the pre-discursive self (e.g., the material body and soul), regulated testosterone derivatives provided a perceived opportunity to overcome this existential experience. And, thus, revitalised their hopes of acquiring the idealised healthier self that wellness professionals led them to believe was possible (*see Chapter 6, Section*). From a neo-Nietzschean perspective, these medical narratives of an aesthetically complete, healthy, and unified self tug at the wills and phantasms of the soul - aesthetic ideals are not a denial of existence but rather an affirmation of existence by taking care of the soul, the 'will' and the body's physiology (Nietzsche, 1886). When an individual pursues an aesthetic ideal, an optimal state of being, whether it conforms to hegemonic norms or not, their '*will to power*' and will to live becomes maximised. Nietzsche (1886) suggests, when a person acquires optimal physiology and thus a healthy mind and soul, they are more likely to overcome experiences of adversity. The men in this study perceived that they could achieve optimal health by controlling their dosages of regulated synthetic androgens.

### ***Controlling the Dose***

The key is to get the dosage right. Too low and I start to feel more aggressive, too high and you feel like you're invincible, on a euphoric high. It can be quite addictive. ...More energy, power, strength, passion, I can focus and feel much healthier. I'll be taking testosterone till I die (Jack).

I'm super sensitive...once I found the right dose I felt more alive, more confident, better energy, healthier in general. If the doses are right for the individual. It gives you the confidence to be yourself...you don't worry about trying to be someone else, someone you're not. A healthy ego and confidence in yourself (Brad).

For Jack and Brad, navigating the pharmacological a/effects of prescribed and commercialised synthetic testosterone treatments was critical to discovering the correct dosage to aligning and reinvigorating their embodied energies and acquire the corporeality they desired. If the dose was too low, their embodied metaphysics became immersed within aggressive energy. If the dose was too high, they became overly “euphoric”, “invincible”, “more power, strength, passion”. Once Jack's and Brad's embodied sensibilities had become managed by ascertaining the correct dose, they experienced a range of positive a/effects. Initially, the *'tensions of the self and discourses of being'*, the split between the 'I' and the 'me', appeared to have evaporated as a new healthier and more desirable self emerged – “alive, more confident, better energy, healthier”; more “focus”.

Echoing the values of the *Übermensch*, Brad's use of prescribed synthetic hormones led to “a healthy ego and [self] confidence”, a state of mind that enabled him to transcend and rise above the social pressures of symbolic conformity by becoming the object of desire he aspired to embody. In *'Thus Spoke Zarathustra'*, Nietzsche (1883) explains the *Übermensch* is not the fulfilment of a higher body, for the body is the “seat of life.” By this, he means that when a superior state of being and more heightened awareness emerges, through the deliberate practice of self-disciplining the body, the *'will to power'* interacts with the world harmoniously and propulsively to one's benefit. When an individual embodies this kind of renewed and revitalised sense of self, in mind and body, the individual positions themselves to take on risks that maximise the self-actualisation process and their potentialities for success.

By improving his corporeality and body image, Brad no longer experienced himself as a person who lacked characteristics of a desirable entity. Consequently, he no longer had to worry “about trying to be someone else, someone you're not.” At this moment, he had overcome his perceived compromised sense of self. His self-confidence restored. His *'will to power'* was resurrected. Consequently, he now had the confidence to fully express himself (the real *lack* of his being that underpinned his aesthetic desires) – a self previously negated by discourse. Others also experienced these positive a/effects of commercialised androgens:

I have more energy, feel less tired, and it [Testosterone, hGH] helped to put on more muscle...I tried hCG [human chorionic gonadotropin] but didn't notice a difference (Todd).

My energy levels are much better, muscles are popping up everywhere. I've starting walking and weight lifting every day... a friend recommended it to me so I'm testing it out. It seems to be working...I'm starting to look jacked and ripped [muscular], I feel and look healthier. My erectile dysfunction is cured, I'm not as depressed...My eyes have changed colour and look brighter, I feel cleaner... some mornings I feel like I'm high on ecstasy. My wife thinks I look amazing (Luke).

Testosterone increases your red blood cell count and increases your muscle mass. It's better than any other drug I've tried and it's much healthier, it makes a big difference to your well-being. It's helped me to cope with my injury, be more accepting of my body and live more of a normal life...feel better about myself. I feel like a completely different person...I feel much healthier since I've started taking them. I have more energy, sleep better, have more of a masculine energy, like a man (Frank).

SARMS [synthetic androgens] are unreal. Mk677 and rad140. I only take 1 ml... I've seen great results...I have never been in better shape in my life...My health is great. I'm happy I found what worked for me... I'm never going to stop juicing, doing mild steroids (Bill).

Despite scientific scepticism around the positive a/effects of commercialised synthetic testosterone (e.g., AAS, hGH, hCG, SARMS) (*see Chapter 6, Section 5*), like Jack and Brad, other participants also experienced a range of positive bodily, psychological, and social outcomes from consuming prescribed testosterone treatments. As previously noted by Brad, once the participants identified the right androgen and dose, the advertised claims made by wellness entrepreneurs seemingly became realised. In contrast to the unhealthy side-effects of illicit steroids, prescribed androgens led to individuals feeling reinvigorated with increased “energy levels”, “muscle mass,” “sleep”, and experiencing an overall revitalised sense of health and well-being. “Muscles [started] popping up everywhere,” their eyes became brighter, previous physiological impairments improved (e.g., Frank’s muscle atrophy and Luke’s erectile dysfunction), and depressive thoughts became less significant. Thus, for many of the participants, their desires for the aesthetic-athletic body and optimal health, previously limited to the fantasies of the imaginary, began to materialise.

“Feel[ing] better” about themselves many of the men in this study now considered themselves to be in the best shape of their lives. Discourses of an embodied absence had become replaced with discourses that rendered the body complete. The embodied self now represented a unification between the needs of the soul, body and the discursive norms and expectations of culture. The participants had rediscovered their ‘*will to power*’ by achieving optimal health. Or, as Frank put it, the return of a “masculine energy”. By taking care of the body, “a new health that is stronger, craftier,

tougher, bolder, and more cheerful than any previous health” (1882, p. 382) of the soul and the corpus had surfaced.

Because of the body’s complexity, dynamic and fluid nature, as it continually adapts to the vicissitudes of life, the processes and drive of overcoming ill health, neo-liberal fatigue, and becoming healthy is forever present in the metaphysics of a ‘free-market’ and displaced citizen. In a Nietzschean sense, a ‘great health’ is conceived as an expression of the ‘*will to power*’, which is achieved by disciplining and caring for the physiological body: “what was at stake in all philosophising hitherto was not at all ‘truth’ but rather something else – let us say health, future, growth, power, life” (Nietzsche, 1882, p. 382). From this perspective, the self is experienced as a product of the coercive a/effects and tension between biopower and biopolitics (a ‘*will to knowledge*’) – a regulatory power whose ‘effects take the form of limit and lack’ (Foucault, 1976, p. 83) and the desires of the soul. The embodied tension between agency and structure. When these two embodied forces do not align to benefit the lived human experience, the self, the soul, and the body become disconnected and displaced by ideology and culture. This disunity of the self is an ongoing process of political subversion that the desires of the soul (i.e., ‘*will to power*’, ‘*will to pleasure*’) seek to avoid to preserve and protect the authentic metaphysics of the soul. To overcome these embodied ‘*tensions of the self and discourses of being*’, the participants’ often employed various strategies to achieve and maintain optimised health using synthetic androgens.

### ***Managing Risk***

Similar to Nietzsche and Bourdieu, Shilling (2008) argues that the embodied actions of the habitus are associated with the “relative equilibrium in the relationship between the social and physical environment, biological need and bodily potentialities” (p. 12). This embodied process requires individuals to discover body pedagogics that synthesise their psychic, corporeal and cultural needs and desires, manage and negotiate their social environments to advance their sense of self, physical capital, and status, and operate effectively. In this study, many of the participants’ perceived that the potentialities of the self, and the avoidance of ill health, could be maximised by researching and purchasing synthetic testosterone products and services to ensure that there were of high quality or/and administered by regulated wellness clinicians.

I only buy top quality goods and purchase them from a friend I trust. I research what I want, what works, then try them out. If I experience any seriously bad side-effects I stop. I haven't had any serious incidences yet, and only take them in moderation (Bill).

Mostly stick to hgH now, a little bit of testosterone, in very small quantities, from my doctor. He monitors my bloods closely and makes sure everything is okay (Brad).

Guys in L.A. are pretty fortunate not having to rely on some dodgy source to get their test[osterone]. Now you can just get it from a clinic without the risk. Sure the big body builders still get their roids from dubious sources to put on serious mass, but most guys just want to look athletic, cut and lean. Not huge. There are many legal products that you can buy now like hGH and SARMS which work great. Why take the risk? (Erik).

To avoid the detrimental pharmacological effects of illicit steroids, Erik, Bill, Brad, and others, made a conscious effort to ensure their physical capital was protected by acquiring their 'Californian Medicine' through legitimate sources. For Erik, the potential risks of synthetic testosterone use were brought to his attention as he observed the risky body practices of his peers: "I know lots of guys in L.A. who are getting everything and anything on the black market. They have no idea what's in them; they just want to get jacked; it's scary." In pursuit of an idealised human aesthetic, Los Angeles men often utilised risky body practices that had the potential to compromise their physical health, a danger that Erik wanted to avoid.

Concerned yet influenced by his peers to acquire image-enhancing drugs to improve his physical presence, Eric was aware of the downfalls of relying on his friends' advice and anecdotal evidence. Or what androgen users refer to as 'broscience' (Bilgrei, 2018; Underwood, 2017) or 'folk pharmacology' (Southgate & Hopwood, 2001). In practice, this type of experiential knowledge regarding the use of synthetic androgens was learned and disseminated through various pedagogical mechanisms such as word-of-mouth, online forums, and steroid handbooks (Underwood, 2017).

...drug users gather user-relevant information and share their drug experiences with others. These personally grounded drug experiences form the basis of experiential learning, sometimes referred to as 'broscience'... which concerns the user-generated knowledge that is maintained, contested and passed on through online communication. Within such communities, members may also express distrust of 'experts' and 'authorities' that provide official drug information, whom they perceive as lacking the specialist knowledge that they possess. Therefore, among drug users, user-generated information is usually rated as more trustful and reliable. As a result, community members seem to abandon traditional methods of determining credibility that are based on authority and hierarchy...(Bilgrei, 2018 pp. 2712-2713).

Although scholars have argued ‘broscience’ produces ‘indigenous knowledge’ that advocates minimising harm (Monaghan, 2001; Southgate & Hopwood, 2001; Underwood, 2017), Erik provides insights that suggest individuals’ often take a more care-free and risk-averse approach, disregarding the potential risks of synthetic testosterone.

Many of my friends don't do any research. They just take them and have no idea what they are doing...taking these drugs month after month. I try to guide them if I can. They put their bodies at risk without realizing it...just expecting everything to be okay. They don't realize the side effects, like they could have a heart attack! (Erik).

To overcome the ignorant attitudes produced through ‘broscience’, as exhibited by his friends, Erik “researched it [steroids] thoroughly before trying it...internet, doctors, medical reports.” By engaging in this type of ‘ethnopharmacological’ and medical research (Heinrich, 2015) to understand the possible toxicological effects on his corporeality and consciousness, he perceived that he could manage and reduce any potential side-effects that would put his health at risk. Unlike his peers, Erik effectively managed and controlled his fantasies and desires for an idealised materiality. When symptoms of an unhealthy self presented themselves – “headaches, bloated, feeling fat”, he/“I stopped.”

Fears of a compromised materiality were realised when Brad was diagnosed with “testicular cancer” – cancer often associated with excessive synthetic testosterone use (Ghedder et al., 2019; Salereno et al., 2018; O’Hagan & Walton, 2015).

I had a cancer scare last year and was worried it was from the steroids...but the doctor said that they wouldn’t have had an effect. Now I just stick to getting testosterone and hGH from my physician to protect myself and my health (Brad).

Confronted by the threat of his mortality, despite his physician reassuring him that illicit steroids were not the cause of his cancer, from this moment, Brad chooses “to protect” himself and his health by only consuming “testosterone and HGH” that is medically prescribed and supervised to ensure a ‘great health’ is restored and maintained. Although the participants often perceived that regulated hormone therapies were healthier than illicit androgens, they were often considered easier to manage and overcome when physiological and body image discrepancies did occur. Alternatively, health issues were either ignored or rationalised.

Sure, I get a little bloating around the face...buy I do hot yoga to get rid of that...I only buy premium quality, the best you can get so I don’t put my health in danger (Bill).

For Bill, consuming synthetic testosterone resulted in a range of physical abnormalities (i.e., bloating), which he perceived he could manage effectively by participating in hot yoga. Hot yoga enabled him to remove the excess water retention in his face, a common side-effect experienced by synthetic testosterone users (El Osta et al., 2016), to ensure a desirable and healthy corporeal aesthetic was achieved and maintained. Like Brad (and others), an unquestioned trust in medical authorities to prescribe premium and quality testosterone treatments gave him the peace of mind that his health was not put at risk. In addition to the participants' desires for an aesthetic-athletic physique and optimal health, this trust was enough to negate and suppress any unwanted side-effects that continued to persist.

From a Foucauldian perspective, Bill and Brad's assuredness in the medical expertise and treatments they received is underpinned by the relationship between discourse and power/knowledge. "The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power" (Foucault, 1980, p. 52), "to help and if necessary constrain them [individuals] to ensure their own good health" (Foucault, 1980, p. 170). In turn, the relationship between discourse and knowledge/power shapes perceptions of what an ill/healthy body is and what body pedagogics should and should not be used to restore and maintain a person's corporeality. The human consciousness, the body, and the soul become captivated by paradigms of an authoritative and hegemonic "truth" situated within the power/knowledge imperatives of scientific discourses, which may or may not reflect reality. Yet such knowledge is often believed and trusted, often without critique, due to the power of medical discourse to ubiquitous manipulate and shape reality and one's belief in that reality – a scientific reality of the world and the human subject.

The participants' trust and belief in the scientific "truths" relating to the potential benefits of synthetic hormones (e.g., their anti-ageing and muscle growth properties) signified a rejection of a previous "medicalisation without doctors" (Turrini, 2015, p.17) (e.g., black-market remedies). This transition from a black market to a regulated market was primarily because the men in this study sought to avoid the unwanted side effects of illicit androgens. Additionally, the increased availability of hormone rejuvenation treatments now available in many health clinics in Los Angeles and many other cities throughout the United States also made it easier for men to find what they were looking for (Hoberman, 2005).

This cultural shift and the transition from a black market to a regulated hormone therapy market can be interpreted as a return to the perceived safety net of medical expertise whereby men's aesthetic desires and anxieties can be safely managed by entrepreneurial physicians and their use of disciplinary biopolitics and biopower. A "power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimise, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations"

(Foucault, 1976, p. 137) – “a power whose ‘effects take the form of limit and lack’” (Foucault, 1976, p. 83).

In the context of the participants’ lives, the lack of the aesthetic-athletic and their desires of absence (i.e., love, belonging, confidence, health, beauty, self-actualisation) that underpin their desires for the object/body they desire. Thus, from this discursive lack, an absence of an embodied unity is manufactured, which may or not be present, but nevertheless is perceived as a threat to a person’s sense of completeness. This discursively induced existential experience is thus an embodied lack that desires of the soul, the ‘*will to power*’, innately seeks to overcome. As demonstrated throughout the participants’ narratives, from beneath the symbolic ‘me’, the soul’s desires seek to return to a pre-discursive sense of self, the original ‘I’, free from the embodied toxic a/effects of culture. For the men in this study to achieve an idealised state of being, regulated androgen treatments were the biopedagogical tool and elixir of choice.

Initially, prescribed testosterone treatments enabled the participants to overcome the limitations of their physical bodies and social narratives that positioned them as less than what they perceived themselves to be. By simultaneously optimising their physical, mental, and symbolic health by becoming the hegemonic idealised ‘Other’, many of the men in this study experienced a renewed sense of self which gave them the confidence to “be themselves” and to realign with their authentic character and soul discursively. Nietzsche describes this process as the drive of overcoming, achieved by transforming themselves through various acts and processes of becoming. As Nietzsche (1885) puts it: “Man is something that shall be overcome...Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman — a rope over an abyss. What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end” (Prologue, Paras 3-4). Contextualised within a ‘triads of being’ framework, synthetic testosterone has been used as a mind-body strategy to transition from an ordinary man, consumed and displaced by cultural narratives, to an *Übermensch* – a person who learns to master oneself, seeks optimal health, and does not fall victim to the moralities of culture (Nietzsche, 1885). Thus, synthetic testosterone practices (and associated biopedagogies) can be represented as “technologies imbued with aspirations for the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired ones” (Rose, 1999, p. 52).

Within the imaginary realm of the participants’ ‘linguistic ego’, yet symbolically real, many of them used ‘Californian medicine’ – synthetic androgens, exercise and nutrition – to empower themselves beyond a normative state of existence. In an attempt to affect a metaphysical change by optimising their bodies, and in turn, their subjectivities and the lived experiences of the soul, happiness was an embodied state that was often (momentarily) achieved through the material transformations of the body. And, in the process, facilitating a greater sense of wellness.



A person's desire to facilitate a greater sense of wellness is what Nietzsche's (1882) describes as the soul's journey, underpinned by a desire to overcome an embodied experience of ineptness and fatigue. For him, this is the '*attitude to life*'. Whereas the equation of the Socratic attitude of life is: 'reason = virtue = happiness', Nietzsche's philosophy to life is towards *amor fati*, or self-empowerment, self-transformation and self-actualisation. Represented as a formula, Nietzsche's '*attitude to life*', as exhibited by the participants in this research, can be calculated as: physiology = will to power = affirmation of life.

As has been illuminated throughout this chapter so far, men's desires to express, realise and manifest their potentiality, ingenuity, productivity and an optimised sense of self has been pursued and enacted by making changes to the physiology of their bodies. Once the participants perceived that they could effectively manage the risks associated with consuming androgens, many of them established a perceived healthier state of being and improved corporeal aesthetics and body confidence. The body, self, and habitus, benefiting from an enhanced physical capital, was now ready to be deployed, expressed and enjoyed within various social settings.

### **III. The Commodification of Being: Symbolic Capital and the Synthetic Aesthetic Body**

With the needs of the soul (i.e., the '*will to power*' and '*will to pleasure*') being expressed by the body becoming and experienced as an object of symbolic desire and a vessel of improved health, via the wonders of commercialised hormone therapy, the optimised self was now in a position to capitalise upon its enhanced somatotype. The modified synthetic self and its symbolic significations could now be utilised to build upon one's social capital, status and power within its social web of 'fields'. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) note: "The field... is a *field of forces* defined by the structure of the existing balance of forms between forms of power, or between different species of capital. It is also simultaneously a *field of struggles for power among the holders of different forms of power*" (p. 76). Throughout the men's life histories, this struggle for power and status, and the desire for recognition and acceptance, was an embodied process and experience often negotiated through their corporeal aesthetics. Primarily because within the social fields of (West) Los Angeles and beyond, the body was often perceived as a vehicle to achieve the social status and cultural capital the participants' desired and perceived to be necessary to compete and be accepted within a competitive 'free-market' economy.

For Brad, Erik and Joe, acquiring physical capital and power within the fields of (West) Los Angeles, through the acts of becoming and embodying the aesthetic ideal, enabled them to signify to others a body image of good health and beauty they could capitalise. This act of becoming gave them the confidence to increasingly free themselves from the discourses that once inhibited their self-expression, their lack of an embodied and desired corporeal aestheticism. Consequently, as perceived by themselves and others, the self had now emerged as an entity worthy of increased attention.

When I was a younger personal trainer I focused more on my body, being in shape to attract clients. The focus was on my body to show clients I can walk the talk, very ego based. Testosterone gave me the confidence to show off my body and grow my business (Brad).

When Brad employed body enhancing techniques, his physicality became signified with discourses of “being in shape” – good health, fitness, and beauty. His modification practices gave him the confidence, and the body capital, to establish credibility as a young professional personal trainer, attract a clientele and build a business whereby he transformed people’s health, physiques, and sense of self. In doing so, the discursive, synthetic, and reconfigured body had become a commodified object as he leveraged his ability to transform himself to produce a healthy physicality, which provided him with a stable income. The body had now confirmed itself as a symbolic object of value.

Bourdieu (1984) suggests the symbolic value of a body is bestowed upon particular bodily forms over others, legitimised by the hegemonic discourses that subliminally reproduce a particular habitus, hexis and body (image) within a specific social network. This prioritisation of a particular form of body over another confirms their and others’ social values and positions within society. Thus, individuals reconfigure their body image to reflect the perceived symbolic desires, which they often subconsciously interpret as their own desires. This sense of self-worth and value is not governed by individual choice but is a by-product of symbolic power (i.e., biopolitics) that regulates how human bodies are perceived, categorised and valued (Bourdieu, 1990). Through this process of symbolic symbiosis, “we make to ourselves pictures of facts...the picture is a model of reality” (Wittgenstein, 1922, p. 39). It is through symbolic power that idealised images of the self emerge within a subject’s consciousness. Subsequently, body transmutations begin, and the commodification of the self becomes normalised. Drawing on the psychoanalysis of Freud and Lacan, this produces an egoic attachment to the idealised image of the self, a body-ego, from which a person values themselves and others.

The art of transforming the self into an object of value and the desire for increased social and economic capital, and status, were important parts of living and prospering in (West) Los Angeles. A talent manager of models and ‘pop stars’ commented:

Businesses will pay you 10K just to turn up to your event, look pretty, take photos, take live footage of the event, and broadcast the event on your social media platform (Timmy).

Converting physical capital into economic capital made a significant difference to Erik’s quality of life. By commodifying his beautified somatic aesthetic, a process Bourdieu (1984) termed ‘*fatal attraction*’, he was able to appease his financial anxieties, study and live in Beverly Hills, an expensive district within West Los Angeles:

I often model, show off my body to make extra money. It’s not easy being a student...it’s really tough to get by. There are lots of opportunities to make money if you have a good body – bar work, modelling, acting, Go-Go boy, porn. If you’re not attractive nobody notices you...I’d be broke (Erik).

As with many other Los Angeles residents, Erik’s physical beauty enabled him to disrupt, overcome and improve his economic situation. At the same time, while he studied to improve his prospects in a competitive free-market economy. Within (West) Los Angeles, the individual’s interrelationships between the aesthetics of the body, economic capital and social mobility were inextricably linked and revealed the cultural and discursive realities that influenced how the habitus and human body was experienced. Bourdieu (1984) argued the way people treat their bodies “reveals the deepest [cultural] dispositions of the habitus” (p. 190). This socialisation of the body is evidenced in “most automatic gestures [and] the most insignificant techniques of the body” – including how the body is modified, stylised and enacted – “and engages the most fundamental principles of construction and evaluation of the social world” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 466).

From my ethnographic observations, the socialised and performative aspects of the self were deeply embedded within, and reflective of, a (West) Los Angeles culture that privileged the symbolic and physical appearance of a healthy athletic aesthetic, which cultivated particular embodied cultural ‘*tastes*’ (Bourdieu, 1984). Many Los Angeles residents demonstrated these cultural ‘*tastes*’ with an acquired ‘*taste*’ for ‘appearance medicine’ body practices from which an aesthetic-athletic body image could be cultivated and managed. The popularity and men’s use of designer hormones were signified by the plethora of ‘wellness’ and ‘beauty’ clinics within the middle-class nexus of West Los Angeles. For example, for many Los Angeles residents, the athletic aesthetic physique was often manifested by

consuming low-fat, low-carbohydrate diets evidenced by the number of health-conscious restaurants on offer. These included salad and juice bars, vegan and vegetarian restaurants, and low-carb ('keto') menus, neighbored by 'fitness', 'wellness' and 'health' centres where the physical body could be trained, modified and displayed.

Once individuals had worked upon the shape of their body with various body regimes, the body could be showcased to others. In particular, this was evident throughout West Hollywood and along the beaches of Santa Monica and Venice, where tight and/or loose clothing (e.g., lycra, 'booty shorts' and 'crop tops') revealed the flesh of well-trained and taught bodies. Additionally, the body's flesh became increasingly exposed during pool parties – a common social practice in (West) Los Angeles – or running through the suburban tree-lined streets or exercising on the Santa Monica/Venice beach to signify one's physical capital.



**Figure 16. Pool Party Bodies:** A Common Los Angeles Social Practice.



Figure 17. Active Athletic Beach Bodies: Santa Monica Beach.

Bourdieu (1984) suggests the adoption of normative body practices reflects “a class culture turned into nature, that is embodied...an incorporated principle of classification which governs all forms of incorporation, choosing and modifying everything that the body ingests and digests and assimilates, physiologically and psychologically” (p. 190). In essence, this cultural process reflects a social conditioning of the collective consciousness, whereby a person’s cultural tastes reflect their social fields’ (bio/identity)politics. Thus, leading to a (sub)conscious manifestation of the habitus, which a/effects the bodies orientation within a specific time and space (Shilling, 1993). Thus, the “natural body” is transformed into a “distinctive body” (Bourdieu, 1984). The symbolic ‘me’ displaces the original ‘I’ – one’s authentic character. To achieve an elevated level of distinction, the self-conscious mind engages in *tastes* and body techniques that construct a desirable corporeality for others. The body for others “is the visible manifestation of the person, of the ‘idea it wants to give of itself’, its ‘character, i.e. its values and capacities” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 367). As demonstrated by the participants, the embodied *tastes* one adopts and develops is influenced by their social field and desires to attain economic, social and cultural capital.

The desire, need, and importance of acquiring a particular embodied aesthetic, cultivated through specific *tastes* and body techniques, commodified within the workplace and a free-market economy, albeit in different ways, was highlighted by Joe and Chad.

Now people respect me, people listen when I speak, it's insane! I used to be in meetings where I would be talked over, even in a job interview. I got three offers at the same time this past year when I went looking for work and I had to turn two people down last minute because the third person to call me he had a juicier offer and everybody got mad...The world transforms based upon appearance...(Joe).

Now embodying a synthetically modified corporeality, Joe considered his athletic aesthetic critical to his newfound success in corporate America. Reflecting on his lived experiences as a short, overweight man, he recalls how people would "talk over" him during conversations. However, with an improved materiality and body image, people listened. From his perspective, modifying his body had enabled him to transition from an embodied state of symbolic inferiority to a body and habitus that signified discourses of distinction and symbolic power. Consequently, he now displayed a physical schema that commanded respect within his social networks and helped propel his career as an information technology professional.

Bourdieu (1991) suggests "symbolic power is that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it" (p. 164). Symbolic power is ubiquitous, socially determined, structured by language, culture and behaviour. It shapes human consciousness and how individuals experience their bodies and sense of self. By becoming the hegemonic and culturally valued aesthetic 'Other', Joe's 'tensions of self' – feelings of being physically inadequate – were partially overcome by embodying a physical presence that communicated dominance, power, knowledge and status. From his perspective, these aesthetically charged embodied discourses facilitated his rise within the social order of America's corporocracy. In this social landscape, embodied significations of strength and power are often rewarded (Connell & Wood, 2005, Luciano, 2007).

Within the social fields of (West) Los Angeles, the muscular aesthetic was perceived and realised in the workplace and beyond, a legitimate bearer of symbolic value. With the legitimisation of the athletic-aesthetic, unequal opportunities are afforded to those who (re)produce and embody symbolically valued bodily forms, as demonstrated by Erik, Brad and Joe. The internalisation of the symbolic and subsequent commodification of the self, informed by hegemonic discourses of the ideal body image, is thus regulated by the gaze of social surveillance. As Bourdieu (1991) puts it: "Symbolic power works partly through the control of other people's bodies" (p. 69). From this perspective, the normalisation of body enhancement practices reproduces symbols of power expressed through the objectification and presentation of the human body to acquire symbolic capital within a prestige economy – a social system that honours and remunerates status. However, the lived experiences of a

commodified body were also underpinned by values other than merely symbolic status and economic capital, as revealed by Chad.

I changed my look once I entered the porn industry...after graduating college... and living in L.A. Shaved my hair off and worked on building a larger, more muscular masculine physique. I didn't just want to be a porn star, I wanted to be a great porn star and that meant looking the part – having a highly sexualized erotic physique that looked amazing on camera. I enjoy the way it made me feel, it made me feel sexy, more attractive, stronger...(Chad).

On the surface, Chad's transformation and the commodification of his physique appear to be influenced by a desire to perform as an adult entertainer, which brings him enjoyment as he lives out the *jouissances* of embodying the symbolic ideals of a male body. But beneath the pleasures, fantasies and experiences of a newfound sexual hedonism, I argue, subconsciously, his actions originate from the need to unshackle himself from the oppressive hegemonic discourses that inhibited his ability to express his sexuality fully. Raised in a conservative, religious Texas town, then serving in the military negated Chads ability to explore his sexuality. However, once he had relocated to Los Angeles, the (sexually) liberal attitudes of (West) Hollywood provided Chad with an opportunity to freely express and immerse himself in sexual desires that were previously prohibited (e.g., the policy DADT<sup>1</sup>). By “performing in gay pornographic films” he was able to express his sexuality, eroticism and body in a social environment that had accepted and celebrated (commercialised) male sexual freedoms since the sexual revolution during the 1970s (Self, 2008). Robert Self (2008) elaborates:

...the commercial sexual revolution ultimately emerged as an imperative for those – including both liberal and conservative politicians, city officials, business interests and legions of citizens – who wished to ‘save’ and ‘revitalise’ Hollywood, one of the city’s most venerable, and profitable, districts...[and] to respond to their constituents’ increasingly libertarian views of sex and sexuality (p. 289).

Since the alliance of sex business entrepreneurs and a political movement that made sexual freedom and expression a new priority of Californian urban liberalism, human sexual pleasures, straight or gay, became more visible and increasingly accepted (Self, 2008). Consequently, Chad was able to discard a performative and symbolic habitus, conditioned by religious and political conservatism, in exchange for an eroticised performativity that enabled him to overcome and become an entity that could freely desire the aesthetics of another man with less fear of private and public prosecution.

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<sup>1</sup> “Don’t ask, don’t tell” (DADT) was an official United States Policy on military service by gay and bisexual men and women instituted by the Clinton Administration on February 28 1994 which prohibited any homosexual or bisexual person from disclosing their sexual orientation or from speaking about any homosexual relationships while serving in the United States armed forces (Department of Defense Directive, 1993).

### *Symbolic Power, Sexuality and Corporeal Affectivity*

Bourdieu (1996, 1998) argues that the transition and embodiment from one symbolic form to another is structurally induced by introducing, reproducing and reinforcing a new set of hegemonic discourses within a person's social environment that insist on compliance and conformity. From his perspective, actors adhere to the dominant symbolic forms communicated subliminally through visuals, speech, and attitudes, which become embodied performatively and habitually. Thus, the habitus and subjectivity of a subject exists within a structural and discursive nexus that produces a "modus operandi" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 55) whereby human affectivity comes into play. During this process of socialisation, where the subliminal and subversive effects of 'doxa' take hold (Bourdieu, 1972), an individual's physical, emotional and practical acts of being in the world become perceived as essential and natural (e.g., gay men expressing their sexuality through their bodies). To reiterate this social phenomenon, Bourdieu (2000) comments:

With a Heideggerian play on words, one might say that we are disposed because we are exposed. It is because the body is (to unequal degrees) exposed and endangered in the world, faced with the risk of emotion, lesion, suffering, sometimes death, and therefore obliged to take the world seriously (and nothing is more serious than emotion, which touches the depths of our organic being) that it is able to acquire dispositions that are themselves an openness to the world, that is, to the very structures of the social world of which they are the incorporated form (pp. 140-141).

Here Bourdieu foretells how discourses of value are unconsciously inscribed upon and signified by the human body "marked by affectivity and, more precisely, by affective transactions with the environment (Bourdieu, 2000, p.141), as illustrated by Chad's lived experience. Since late modernity, Bourdieu (2000) argues, this valuation system, in which the body and habitus become signified, renders people as valuable and desirable. This idea is elaborated upon in Bourdieu's notion of the bodily '*hexis*', which describes "a basic dimension of the sense of social orientation, a practical way of experiencing and expressing one's own sense of social value" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 474), "the values given body", embodied values as "placed beyond the grasp of consciousness" (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 94).

These embodied values produce affective states of desire manifested as "an immediate adherence, at the deepest level of the habitus, to the tastes and distastes, sympathies and aversions, fantasies and phobias which...forge the unconscious unity" (Bourdieu, 1996a, p.77) of the self. With Chad's sexuality now being conditioned with a new set of cultural discourses that encourage the expression of a homosexual identity, the self is no longer sexually inhibited within the gay-friendly spaces of (West) Los Angeles. The body and habitus are now free to explore the desires of the self that



were previously displaced by conservative attitudes and norms. Thus, affecting how the body, mind and soul are perceived, experienced, (sexually) reconfigured, expressed and interacts with the world.

Through a Bourdieusian lens, Chad's adoption and embodiment of a commodified and sexualised corporeality, as exemplified in the poster (Figure 18), represents an 'organised strategy' (Bourdieu, 1977) to enhance his social standing and value within the (West) Los Angeles gay populace. By embodying an archetypal gay body image that is seductively athletic, Chad's body image signifies an aesthetic that is desired and accepted within the gay community. Rob Cover (2004) argues men's (sub)conscious desire to conform to media representations and narratives of a hegemonic gay identity is underpinned by a psychic need for group visibility and acceptance:

Although such visibility drives are often linked with a political issue, they are necessarily reliant on the presentation of a *visually* unified group of people through recognizable stereotyping by fixing a visible body image to a set of ideas, attributes, behaviours or dispositions; a shared sense of identity corresponsive with the promotion of belonging (p. 81).



Figure 18. The Commercialisation of the Liberalised Body: The Eroticised Male Bodies of West Hollywood.

Thus, Bourdieu's and Cover's observations suggest Chad's symbolic expression of his sexuality is performative as he mirrors a hegemonic gay identity to appease both cultural and psychic needs and desires for acceptance, worth and self-expression. Bourdieu (2000) highlights the important relationship between social practice, value, affect and worth, and the material and the cultural in his writings:

...the important affective confrontation with the social world that can be understood in terms of a process of subject structure formation in the sense of forming a specific practical relation between the subject and itself in comparison to the world happens during primary socialization, and thus in accordance to the material and cultural conditions of existence (p. 134).

Accordingly, the self is embedded within discourses of societal value judgments, which mediate (un)conscious self-evaluations of the body (image) and its place in the world. The habitus becomes shaped by ongoing a/effects as the psychic and material elements of the self are confronted with emotions and tensions of the self as a person's being is induced into the ubiquitous realm of symbolic values and accepted performative modes of being. However, in Chad's case, the need to maintain a homoerotic physique that enables him to express and commodify his performative and innate desires and acquire a sense of belonging, acceptance and value within the gay community proved challenging to manage and maintain.

The porn industry made me more conscious of my body ...there is a constant focus on my body and feelings of insecurity given that I am constantly unclad in the public eye. This is often very stressful and feels like a constant struggle to keep up with and meet both my own beauty standards and those set by men in the gay community. I don't think this is necessarily always bad, but it is definitely unhealthy if moderation isn't adhered to...I'm very insecure about how I look (Chad).

Chad, consciously aware of the gay gaze that surveilled his naked flesh as a gay male adult entertainer, the pressure to live up to the body image expectations of his and others beauty standards produced a subjectivity that became increasingly consumed with feeling insecure and stressed about his body's appearance. Despite acknowledging the importance of managing his expectations, in reality, the pressure to maintain an aesthetically pleasing corpus proved to be a pervasive force that was often beyond his control. The body became continuously torn between the symbolic power of a gay hegemonic ideal and a desire to exist as an entity free from prejudice. Although Chad now felt as though he was free to express his sexuality through his body both on and off-screen as a Los Angeles resident, the pressure to live up to the gay community's beauty standards brought with it its own set of embodied tensions. The imminent pressure to embody the dominant value judgments and symbolic forms within the (sub)culture in which a person is positioned is often inevitable, particularly when one

seeks to be desired. Or, as Bourdieu (2000) puts it, there is a forever ongoing “search for recognition” (p.166) through the symbolic – a transactional process in which the individual “makes renunciations and sacrifices in exchange for testimonies of recognition, consideration and admiration”, “highly charged with affectivity” (p. 167).

Through a Bourdieusian lens, Chad’s experiences exhibit the incorporation of “the social in form of affects” (Bourdieu, 2000). There is an a/effective encounter with the social world whereby the self becomes socialised with hegemonic imperatives of being. The material body becomes symbolic and performative in its existence. The psyche and its emotions become conditioned by the systems and tropes of knowledge that permeate through them. Bourdieu (2000) clarifies:

I am thinking in particular of all the demands and taboos – those, for example, that are implied in all acts of nomination [...] – which, whether implicit, insinuated or simply inscribed in the practical state in interactions, are addressed...shape his representation of his (generic or individual) capacity to act, his value and social being (p. 218).

The ‘corporeal hexis’ becomes a visceral form of recognition of everything that constitutes an individual’s existence with to their relationship and status with others (Bourdieu, 1988, p. 56). Thus, the individuals ‘identity, truth, value, and place in the world are produced and reproduced to attain recognition from others.

To summarise, the affective embodied states produced by symbolic power and socialisation processes (re)moulded the participants’ subjectivities and performative gestures of the habitus as they became subliminally immersed within (West) Los Angeles culture. Subsequently, to reproduce the subliminal performative cultural ‘tastes’ required within the social fields of (West) Los Angeles and overcome any (perceived) discursive barriers of acceptance, the men in this study used body techniques to manifest a physical schema that conformed to hegemonic ideals of their surroundings to enhance their lived experience. From the healthified self to the eroticised self, the male minds and bodies in this study were continuously inscribed with the meanings of their symbolic worlds – real and imaginary - to assimilate, find acceptance, and be valued.

In the following two chapters, in my attempt to gain insights into and understand the struggle between the body, soul and culture – the struggle of life (Nietzsche, 1882) – I focus on the participants’ sexual desires of the soul. Specifically, in these two chapters, I am interested in the desires of the soul that transcend the symbolic realm which underpinned men’s use of ‘Californian Medicine’. The embodied phenomena of the self, which lies “underneath this reality in which we live and have our being”, the “altogether different reality [that] lies concealed” (Nietzsche, 1872, p. 21).

*Supposing that nothing else is 'given' as real but our world of desires and passions, that we cannot sink or rise to any other 'reality' but just that of our impulses – for thinking is only a relation of these impulses to one another: are we not permitted to make an attempt to ask the question whether this which is 'given' does not suffice...for understanding even the so called mechanical (or material) world?"*

Fredrich Nietzsche (1886, p. 25)

## 8

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### **EMBODIED TENSIONS OF LOVE, LUST AND DESIRE: IN PURSUIT OF RECOGNITION FROM THE OTHER**

For many of the men in this study, existing beneath the discursive and culturally constituted elements of the self, it was their sexual desires and their need for physical intimacy, love and meaningful relationships that ultimately gave them the impetus to amend their corporeal identities with (mind and) body-enhancing biopedagogies. Influenced by the writings of Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek in Chapters 8 and 9, I primarily draw on Freud and Lacan to examine:

1. The complex nexus between sexuality, the male body, (American) culture and bio-pedagogies;
2. How (sexual) desires are realised, experienced, expressed, suppressed, and managed;
3. The a/effect synthetic hormones (and other body practices) had on the participants' sexual desires.

#### **I. The Politics of Desire and the Sexual Body**

To begin with, I analyse when the participants' first realised that their sexual desires had an a/effect on their body image and how cultural discourses impacted their expression of their sexual identities. Freud (2011) argued a person's sexual drives and eroticised zones of the body develop at an early age through a series of psychosexual stages and acts. For him, initially, erotic pleasures are developed and experienced through the lips and mouth from breastfeeding (and consequent thumb sucking), the anus via toilet training, and the penis through the expulsion and retention of urine. As a result of these bodily acts, the mother becomes an object of desire as the infant/child learns to discipline

its body to gain pleasure and approval from its mother/guardian. However, Freud (2011) suggests the child replaces their desires for the mother for someone of a similar age during puberty. During puberty, sexual energies and pleasures orientate around the real and symbolic genitals/phallus, which thus, becomes the object of focus for one's desires – to receive and give pleasure (Freud, 1933, 2011). From his perspective, during and post-puberty, humans are orientated by biological drives to procreate and ensure the survival of the human race. Collectively, these psychosexual stages are mediated by what Freud (1933) calls the '*pleasure principle*' – an intuitive psychic force of the soul that seeks immediate (sexual) pleasure from any impulse and the avoidance of pain to satisfy human biological and psychological needs, which drives the unconscious mind (the *Id*).

It is the dark, inaccessible part of our personality, what little we know of it we have learned from our study of the dreamwork and of course the construction of neurotic symptoms, and most of that is of a negative character and can be described only as a contrast to the ego. We approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations...It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle (Freud, 1933, pp. 105-106).

Drawing on the life histories told during this study, Freud's psychoanalytic insights, reinterpreted via a '*triads of being*' ontology, provide a valuable lens to examine a critical part of the participants' lives. Namely, adolescence, which the men in this study cited as the phase of life where they consciously became aware of their sexual desires, urges and identities, and the role the body played as an object of desire.

### ***Sexuality, Adolescence, and Culture***

In the statements below, Erik, Joe and JT discuss how adolescence was a time in their lives when they became consciously aware of their sexual desires, sexuality and the need to be perceived as physically attractive to invite and form sexual relationships with others.

During adolescence I started to become attracted to guys. I don't think I was ever attracted to girls...at least sexually, that's when I started to think about my body more and more. You know - about how I looked. Since then it has been about how the guys that I was attracted to liked my body a certain way, and I would try to be that way. Like I remember I tried to be slim for a while because I thought that's how I would be more attractive [in Iran]. Here I definitely didn't want to be slim. I mean look at the gay community here and its norms [of muscularity] (Erik).

I didn't start to think about my body till high school...you know puberty. But I was overweight and knew I had to do something about it if the girls were to pay attention to me. I couldn't get any dates, so I started to work on my body. To get in better shape... There is a lot of pressure in [high] school to find a girlfriend. If you don't have one a lot of people assume there is something wrong with you, that you are not interested in girls. All the popular guys had girlfriends. I had nothing going for me – acne, short, pretty geeky. If you don't look good you won't get a girl...it's as simple as that. Nobody ever showed any interest in me (Joe).

During college you quickly learn – no peccs, no sex (JT).

Drawing on these men's perspectives, the relationship between adolescence, sexual desire and body image was clear. For Eric, Joe and JT, and many other participants, the embodied a/effects of puberty during adolescence seemingly gave rise to these men becoming increasingly aware of their sexualities and sexual identities. During this time, Erik started "to become attracted to guys"; Joe began to seek dates with the opposite sex, and; JT realised that if he was to have sexual relations with others, he needed to work on his erotic capital. From a Freudian perspective, these men's lived experiences reflect the 'genital phase' of a person's psychosexual development, a life stage when men begin to produce spermatozoa. Freud (2011) theorises that the physiological processes that stimulate the phallus produce a biological drive for men to procreate with the other sex, which underpins all men's desires. However, entrenched within discourses of heteronormative reproductionism, Freud's argument becomes subject to scrutiny as desires existing beyond the heteronormative matrix appear within Erik's testimony. Given Erik's homosexual desires and the lack of attraction he felt towards the female sex, there seemed to be other factors at play than merely an innate need for him (and others) to procreate.

Freud (1920) argued that the expression of one's '*will to pleasure*' and sexual drives are determined by the '*pleasure principle*' – "the method of operation of the sex impulses, which are not so easily educable, and it happens over and over again that whether acting through these impulses or operating in the ego itself it prevails over the reality principle to the determinant of the whole organism (p. 4). However, contesting the biological nature of sexuality, postmaterialist research (Beauregard, 2021) (*as discussed in Chapter 2, Section IV*) suggests desire exists beyond the body's materiality. Thus, indicating that the body's physiology does not produce desire. It is simply a vehicle for the expression of one's desire. Subsequently, drawing on a '*triads of being*' worldview, I postulate that men's apparent sudden sexual desires (their '*will to pleasure*') for intimacy with another during adolescence are culturally produced. Therefore, sexual desire is a performative response to and a reflection of language and discourse, which encourages young men (and women) to freely express the desires of the soul – human intimacy and connection. Human desire is not caused by men (or women) becoming fertile.

As noted by Freud (1920), from an early age, the oral phase of the child's psychosexual development, the desires of the '*will to pleasure*', are trained and disciplined. The expression of these desires (i.e., the sexual stimulation between mother and child) are prohibited from public discourse and considered taboo. So too are adult sexual relationships with minors, despite these relationships and desires being prevalent throughout (American) history and within modern society (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1998; Greenbaum, 2017; Reid & Strauss, 2019). However, once an individual reaches adolescence and puberty, intimate relations with others are culturally and discursively encouraged, and sexual relations between and with adolescents are permitted under the law. Lacan (1983), elaborating upon the interrelationship between the expression of a person's sexual desires, sexual identity, language, discourse and the judiciary system, comments:

...the Law which forbids the incestuous union between boy and mother initiates the structures of kinship, a series of highly regulated libidinal displacements that take place through language...speech emerges only upon the condition of dissatisfaction, where dissatisfaction is instituted through incestuous prohibition; the original *jouissance* is lost through the primary repression that founds the subject. In its place emerges the sign which is similarly barred from the signifier and which seeks in what it signifies a recovery of that irrecoverable pleasure. Founded through that prohibition, the subject speaks only to displace desire onto the metonymic substitutions for that irretrievable pleasure. Language in the variegated cultural production of a sublimation that never really satisfies. That language inevitably fails to signify is the necessary consequence of the prohibition which grounds the possibility of language and marks the vanity of its referential gestures (p. 85).

In this sense, the libidinal *jouissance* experienced between a boy and his mother become repressed and displaced through discourses of prohibition. As highlighted by TJ and Joe, the emancipation of their desire does not resurface until it is encouraged and expressed during adolescence. By their accounts, adolescence is when expressions of desire are realised and enacted due to interacting with others. Here, I propose, sexuality moves from an embodied state of repression to expression, which is culturally stimulated and deployed in adolescence. As Beauvoir (1949) declared, one is "not born, but rather *becomes*, a woman" (p. 267).

Similarly, I argue one is not biologically destined to express their sexuality during adolescence but *becomes* their sexuality and is sexualised during adolescence. Thus, during adolescence, the expression of one's sexuality becomes performative to appease societal expectations and cultural norms. There is a cultural compulsion to publicly seek the (heterosexual) admiration of another, whether there is a psychic need to be desired or not.

This view is present within the writings of Lacan, who proposes that a person's pre-discursive origins can never be realised because language prevents the speaking subject from the repressed

libidinal origins of its speech. In referencing Lacan, Rubin states: “The incest taboo imposes the social aim of exogamy and alliance upon the biological events of sex and procreation. The incest taboo divides the universe of sexual choice into categories of permitted sexual partners” (Rubin, 2011, p. 44). By extending this thought, I suggest that cultural discourses confine and prescribe sexuality into accepted categorisations of being that reproduce hegemonic narratives, reinforcing how and when sexuality is expressed. In terms of an individual’s sexuality and sexual identity, it is during adolescence when individuals like Erik, Joe, and JT enter into the sexual domain. During adolescence, they learn to (sub)consciously stylise and modify their bodies to manifest a particular body type that is perceived to be sexually desirable.

Lacan (1985) and Butler (2008) refer to this process of social appropriation as the *masquerade of being* – a performative production of a sexual ontology. For them, a *masquerade* of being is centred around a phallic economy ubiquitously underpinned by Freud’s theorising of (male) sexuality. Lacan (1985) pointed out that during adolescence, the phallus and the male body become a signifying object of desire. The mask of being “is taken on through the process of incorporation which is a way of inscribing and then wearing a[n]...identification in and on the body; in effect, it is the signification of the body in the mould of the Other who has been refused” (Butler, 1990, p. 67). The refusal of the ‘Other’ that lay behind the mask of becoming is apparent in John’s statement as he reflected upon his body image during adolescence:

On reflection, the first time I noticed a difference in my body to other guys was at a pool party, when I was in high school. From then I decided to keep my shirt on. I didn’t think of myself as fat, but my body didn’t look like theirs. I guess I felt inadequate (John).

Transitioning from a subconscious state to a conscious state of awareness, John’s corporeality that signified an embodied lack of an unwanted *différance*, feelings of inadequacy, led him to cover up his body to ensure he maintained a facade of normality, and his embodied *différance* concealed. As demonstrated by John and others, during adolescence and puberty, men’s body image becomes increasingly subject to meanings of desire. During this phase of their lives, suddenly, sexual desires are consciously pursued, and bodies become valued for their symbolic form, shaping how these young men perceive and experience their sexualities through specific bodily forms. Upon this (sub)conscious realization of the relationship between the body and its image, the desire to express one’s availability and value as a sexual object, the need to enhance one’s physical capital is identified as a mechanism for change to achieve an embodied state that another would desire.

Catherine Hakim (2011) suggests the desire to elevate an individual’s sexual capital has increasingly become an essential part of contemporary culture.



In the past, mating and marriage markets were relatively small and closed, with matches based on class or caste, religion, location and age. Matches were often decided or vetted by parents or relatives, based on family wealth and social connections. In today's self-service, open and potentially global mating and marriage markets, erotic power plays a larger role than ever before. Coming from a good family is no longer enough (p. 22).

In an ever-increasingly open and competitive globalised 'market', the traditional courtship practices and the social boundaries that once regulated who one could desire have increasingly becoming disestablished. The game of 'love' is now an experience that transcends the immediacy of one's social networks. Modern telecommunications, social media and dating services have made it possible for a person to interact and acquire intimate relations - real or virtual - with others from all over the world. Finding love, intimacy, and companionship has become a competitive sport with an ever-increasing playing field. In response to the globalisation of love and the technologisation of intimacy, many men (and women) have learned to cultivate and present an aesthetically pleasing body image to acquire recognition from the 'Other' and the intimate and romantic relationships they desire (Altman, 2001; Constable, 2003; Davis, 2008; Hirsch, Padilla & Munoz-Laboy, 2007; Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006). Subsequently, how a person's body image is aesthetically eroticised and exhibited has become an increasingly important part of modern life, transforming how people interact with others searching for admiration, sex, and love.

In short, the expression of one's sexuality appears to be regulated and controlled by cultural mechanisms - as evidenced by the men's testimonies. Despite this evidence, Freud's understanding of biology and the 'phallus economy' continues to shape the collective consciousness and public attitudes to explain and justify why people begin to express their sexuality during adolescence (Anderson, 2011b; Marshik & Pease, 2018; Storey, 2014). Consequently, these Freudian discourses have enacted particular performative subjectivities, reinforced by society and popular culture (Egan, 2013; Paasonen, Nikunen & Saarenmaa, 2007; Renald, Ringrose & Egan, 2016), seeking approval and intimacy from others while repressing non-conforming desires (e.g., incest).

However, although Erik, Joe, and JT experienced adolescence as a time in which their sexuality became known, identified and expressed through their body image, for others, their sexuality was something that remained ambiguous and uncertain. For some, their sexual identities remained displaced by language and culture, particularly subjectivities immersed within and shaped by a Christian religiosity. Among others, Brad and Derek (a non-participant) discussed this religious subliminal conditioning of the psyche and disunity with the sexual desires of the soul.

## II. Christianity, Desire, and Sexuality

Conservative Christian religious imperatives continued to feature throughout the majority of the participants' adult lives, significantly affecting how their sexualities and bodies were experienced, expressed and repressed. For one subject, in particular, his sexuality and sexual desires remained subconsciously prohibited by discourses of Christianity until others challenged him about his sexual identity.

I came from a very religious Christian family, it was something I never thought about. I was supposed to marry a Minister's daughter, who I liked, was attracted to, and wanted to marry. I started socialising with a gay couple that belonged to the same church. They used to say to me: "we think you're gay, we know our gaydar" and I would say [places hand on heart]: "No, I'm not gay". The more I socialised with them, the more I started to think about my sexuality. I had never spent time with gay men before. They introduced me to a guy from Israel but I didn't feel anything. Once they took me to a gay club and I noticed a very attractive man, he was amazing. We made eye contact with each other. For the first time in my life I experienced butterflies, an attraction to another man. Then we started dancing and kissing. It was amazing. Do I think I'm gay? I don't put a label on it but I do prefer guys now but maybe I just haven't met the right woman yet (Derek).

Socialised by Christian values from a young age, Derek's awareness of an embodied sexuality beyond heterosexuality was obscured from his consciousness until he was confronted about his sexuality by a gay couple at church. With his sexuality in question, Derek was introduced to the gay community, exposing him to a new world where other forms of sexuality and sexual expression were possible. In one moment, while at a gay club, his heterosexuality was abandoned as he found himself visually attracted to another man, resulting in the realisation of a different set of sexual desires. For the first time in his life, he experienced the physiological *jouissance* of lust ("butterflies") for another person. The discourses of Christianity that once shaped and confined his sexuality became fractured to the point where he now prefers having intimate relationships with men over women. Yet, discourses of heteronormativity continue to inhabit his subconscious as he resists the need to confine his sexuality within binary terms in the way it once was.

Well known for his criticisms of religion, Nietzsche's insights into its detrimental effects on a person's sense of self and well-being appear relevant in examining Derek's lived experiences. Nietzsche (1987) argued the highly virtuous and purified idealised character historically espoused within Christian religious practices led to a moralised guilt that threatens a person's psychological health. Specifically, Nietzsche (1987) claimed the religious moralisation of the self via the idealisation

of asceticism denies humans of their basic psychological needs through the abstinence of sexual pleasures. This religious disciplining of the self results in a religiously imposed denial of one's sexuality, making it difficult for a person of faith to have any genuine self-understanding of their sexuality and to imagine oneself living any other way. For Nietzsche (1987), as illustrated by Derek, the task of the Christian then becomes a journey of self-discovery – a '*will to power*'. To expunge the corrosive effects of religious morality from one's sexual essence by ruthlessly investigating, dismantling, and reconstructing one's understanding of themselves to reconstitute a healthier state of existence in the world – to have the freedom to act upon and realise and act upon their sexual needs – their '*will to pleasure*'.

In contrast to Derek's repressed desires hidden from his conscious awareness, Brad always knew he was gay. However, unlike Derek, who acted upon his sexual desires, Brad deliberately attempted to suppress and negate his desires to ensure that he obeyed the values of his Christian church.

I always knew I was gay...I grew up in the mid-west [Chicago], a conservative small town raised as a Christian, church three times a week – if you were gay you were going straight to hell!...but I couldn't shake the feelings or desires for men. I dated beautiful women – [i.e.] Miss California...I never had sex with a woman as I was conditioned to save myself for marriage. I grew up in the purity and abstinence era. I even signed a card to the church that I would reserve my sexual urges until I was married. I took it seriously. What's funny is the girls didn't...makes me laugh because everyone was having sex at a young age with a boyfriend or girlfriend...everyone but except me (Brad).

Although Brad's friends were freely experiencing the *jouissance* of their sexual drives, his non-adhering same-sex drives were energies he had to suppress and conceal. To overcome his homosexual desires and comply with Christian beliefs, Brad engaged in performative acts of sublimation by dating beautiful women to cloak his sexuality and distract himself from the non-conforming instincts that resided within him. From a young age, he was aware of the embodied tension between the wills of his sexuality and the cultural values of his faith. While Freud (1930) argued that "sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life" (p. 286), Brad's personal story reflects a very different lived experience.

I would take long runs around the lake in my home town and scream to God with tears streaming down my face. Asking: why me? Please take this from me. He didn't...I just felt this was going to be my struggle and I would somehow overcome it (Brad).

Instead of realising a higher state of being, through acts of sublimation, as Freud claimed was possible, Brad experienced himself as a being in emotional turmoil as he prayed for his sinful desires to be exonerated. Contrary to Freud's insights, from a Nietzschean viewpoint, Brad's affectivity represents an ongoing struggle between the soul, culture, and the body, from which the process of '*splitting off*' occurs (Nietzsche, 1987). '*Splitting off*' refers to the embodied drives, "which are not viewed as acceptable, typically because acting upon them would exact a painful retribution" (Gemes, 2009, p. 46), becoming repressed. However, despite this process, forbidden drives (of the soul) find their outlet, often in a disguised form that contradicts their very nature (Nietzsche, 1987), as evidenced by Brad's behaviour. Nietzsche (1987) proposes that acts of repression and the (sub)conscious '*splitting off*' of a person's internal drives result in *the* corruption of the soul and a disintegrated self, causing a person to be psychically and physically sick. For Brad, embodied sickness was caused by the tensions between his faith and sexuality, a tension of the self that he sought to overcome.

To summarise, the pursuit of asceticism within conservative Christianity includes denying the existence of bisexuality and homosexuality within its discourse. Thus, life within a Christian worldview limits a subject's being and identity to gender and sex norms within the heterosexual matrix, where other forms of sexuality are often forbidden. As Butler (2011) notes:

The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of "identities" cannot "exist" – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not "follow" from either sex or gender. "Follow" in this context is a political relation of entailment instituted by the cultural laws that establish and regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality (p. 24).

According to Butler (2011), drawing on Lacan, the language and binary restrictions within the heterosexual matrix operate to frame and formulate sexuality, limiting the existence of the "real" – a pre-discursive state of existence. For Derek and Chad, the "real", that is, their sexual desires, which were once forbidden, and consequently suppressed, could not be expressed until they had transcended, in mind and body, beyond the discourses of Christianity. For them, this process of self-awareness was achieved by entering into social landscapes where the potentialities of their sexuality could be explored. Within the gay community, from a '*triads of being*' perspective, the real *jouissance* of the soul could be fully experienced, tested and advertised via their body image.

### III. Liberating Oneself from Heteronormativity

Having the ability to liberate oneself from the regressive aspects of religiosity by moving to Los Angeles provided an opportunity for Brad and Chad to explore their sexuality with greater freedom. Brad comments:

I moved to Los Angeles in 2005 and still dated girls, or tried. In L.A. the guys were more “straight acting”. The very first guy I ever kissed was a marine. I knew after that moment there were other men like me who liked men that didn’t fit the gay stereotype (Brad).

Brad, geographically removed from the Christian discourses that narrated homosexuality as sinful and gay men as effeminate and mentally ill (Greenberg, 2008; Janssen & Scheeps, 2019, Adamczyk, 2017, Moore & Vanneman, 2003), found that moving to Los Angeles enabled him to meet other “straight-acting” gay men like himself who transcended the religious myths of what it was to be gay. With his being and sexuality validated by being surrounded by other men like him, Brad was able to increasingly release himself from the emotionality of being restrained by discourses of Christianity and explore his previously suppressed homoerotic desires. During this time, he was able to overcome his subversion into the discourses of a Christian-heteronormative morality as he learned to “recondition and reprogram my thinking after years of beating myself up over my feelings...it took many years to finally accept myself” (Brad).

For Chad, as previously touched upon (*Chapter 7*), sexual freedom was found by becoming and performing as a gay porn star.

Being a gay porn star isn’t just a job. Being a gay porn star represents sexual freedom. Personally, I take pride in my work, as a performer and as a symbol of sexual freedom...We, the LGBT community, are sexual deviants...Gay pornographic actors are symbols—gay sex symbols—representing our sexuality in its crudest form. As Stabile said in his *Huffington Post* piece: “We might scoff at porn theaters now, but looking up at that screen, a closeted man could see promise of gay life that was open and positive, with larger-than-life men who were bold and unashamed in ways he might only aspire to be” (Chad).

Aware of being perceived as a “sexual deviant” by engaging in same-sex acts, being a gay adult entertainer represented sexual liberation not only for himself but also for those who watched his performances. Chad took pride in his work as a gay porn star as he understood the struggles of coming

to terms with embodying desires that were commonly stigmatised as “deviant” and unnatural. In his eyes, and through the eyes of the *Huffington Post* journalist, being a gay porn star was an opportunity to inspire other men, less sure of their sexuality, to demonstrate that they too could break free from the dogmas of being gay. Gay pornography, as perceived by Stabile and Chad, represented a visual tool for men to overcome their suppressed homoerotic desires and imagine themselves as being brave enough to unashamedly take control of their lives and express themselves as freely as the men they enjoyed watching on screen did. By actively participating in the movement of gay liberation, Chad consciously challenged the conservative Christian values deeply embedded within American culture, which constrain a person’s sexual freedoms. By becoming a gay porn star, he was symbolically freeing himself and hoped to free others by overcoming assumptions about the “naturalness” of gender and sexuality.

Whilst Freud (1905) perceived sexuality as a fixed essence and believed the purpose of sexual pleasure was to acquire a state of human happiness, Foucault (1976) argued sex could also be viewed as an expression of complex, dynamic power relations in society. As illuminated by Chad’s, Derek’s and Brad’s lived experiences. For Chad, in addition to finding pleasure through sex, sex was used as a means to reclaim power from oppressive ideologies of sexuality and gender and to liberate his sexual desires. During this process of self-discovery and search for freedom, “the problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one’s sex, but, rather, to use one’s sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships. And, no doubt, homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable. Therefore, we have to work at becoming homosexuals” (Foucault, 1997, pp. 135-136). In the Nietzschean sense, Chad’s and Brad’s testimonies reflect a process of overcoming and becoming that must be done for those who do not conform to hegemonic social norms to reach a state of self-actualisation by becoming who one wants to be. Desires of overcoming and becoming, Nietzsche would argue, fuelled by the *‘will to power’*.

With individuals like Chad engaging in symbolic acts of freedom and building upon the historical victories of gay liberalisation of the past – from the decriminalisation of homosexuality to gay marriage – contemporary sexualities have emerged and increasingly accepted as non-binary, complex, varied and, multiplicitous **embodied states of actuality**. These lived experiences suggest that sexuality, as an expression of power, has changed over time. As society has gradually moved beyond the Christian meanings of sexuality, sexuality has become “associated with a range of human activities and values: the procreation of children, marriage, the attainment of physical pleasure (eroticism), personal intimacy, spiritual transcendence, or power over others” (D’Emilio & Freedman, 1997, p. xv), and fantasy – as revealed within Chad’s personal story.

## *Sexual Fantasies and Overcoming Gender Norms*

In addition to performing as an adult entertainer, Chad also works as a sex worker. Being a gay escort provides him with the opportunity to continue to live out his sexual fantasies beyond being a porn star and earn a regular income.

Being an escort is less of a job and more so indulging in sexual role – play for me. This is because escorting has always been something of a sexual fantasy of mine. It involves a high degree of—and is often purely—sexual objectification, which I find very arousing. My arousal in this instance has little to do with my sexual partners and more to do with the situation. Essentially, I’m aroused by the possession of a human being as another one’s plaything; a dynamic of dominance and submission, though, not in the typical BDSM sense.....sexuality is complicated. I honestly have no idea why I have an escorting fantasy, or more fundamentally, a fantasy so enthralled by power, domination, submission and sexual possession. Though, without said sexual fantasy, I’d have very little, if any, motivation to escort at all (Chad).

Chad, enticed by the erotic fantasies of his imaginary, uses escorting as a means to experience the *jouissance* of being sexually objectified, possessed and dominated by another man. Drawing on the theories of Foucault, Freud, Nietzsche and Lacan, Brad’s subconscious desires can be seen as symbolising a need to challenge, surrender and overcome the embodied performative a/effects of institutional power, which reproduces heteronormative and patriarchal constructs of gender, sex and sexuality. Within the confines of a ‘private space’, Chad can fully relinquish his power and the social constructs of gender and express elements of his sexual identity that do not conform to the hegemonic characteristics associated with being a man (i.e., being in control). In essence, I propose, the pleasures experienced by Chad during sexual acts of domination/submission role–play are stimulated by a psychic need to overcome as a means to escape from the social constructs and pressures of the performative aspects of being a man. Gayle Rubin (1984) noted that when people transgress hegemonic sex and gender identities, heterosexual modes of being begin to loosen, and other sexual identities and relationships emerge. For Chad, this transgression is facilitated through pay–for–play sex, in which pleasure is stimulated by overcoming the linguistic and symbolic discourses and expectations that repress his psychic and libidinal needs for an emotional and sexual experience that do not conform to gender norms.

Foucault (1988; 1990; 1998) proposes dominant/submissive role-play represents a subject of contingency, which produces experiences of subjectification (*subjectivation*) and subjection (*assujettissement*). Subjectification refers to the procedures by which a subject is led to observe,

analyse, interpret and recognise themselves as a domain of possible meanings and knowledge, and how “the subject experiences himself in a game of truth where he relates to himself” (Foucault, 1998, p. 461). Subjection refers to how a person who establishes a relationship to a moral code (e.g., Christianity) is bound to act according to it and moralise their behaviour in relation to it (Foucault, 1988; 1990). Subjection encourages individuals to conform to a normative code of ethics (Foucault, 1997). Foucault (1988; 1990; 1998) argues, erotic practices that involve dominant/submissive acts transgress these ethical boundaries, subvert codes of morality and gender norms, and operate to liberate the self and express one’s sexuality from discursive forms of oppression to achieve pleasure.

Although Foucault resisted essentialist understandings of embodiment and sexuality, I posit, as proposed by my reinterpretations of Nietzsche and Freud, that the self consists of internal psychic discourses (wills, needs, desires of the soul) that act through the material body. But, at the same time are often subconsciously restrained by cultural forces, attitudes and expectations. Therefore, the self is in constant flux between the desires of the ‘real’ (the soul) and the moralities of culture, which play out within and through the body. As Foucault defines sexuality as a regime of power-knowledge-pleasure, I interpret the participants’ experiences of their sexuality as a struggle between their primordial and essentialists needs and the subliminal a/effects of a heteronormative power-knowledge nexus.

In my reading of the participants’ experiences, real and meaningful non–performative pleasure is only experienced when the oppressive power-knowledge structures that inhibit essentialist elements of the self are overcome, realised and experienced. Thus, from my observations, via a ‘*triads of being*’ ontology, sexuality and sexual *jouissance* can be understood as predominantly a psychic experience and can be represented as:

1. A embodied psychic-material **tension**: between the (pre-discursive) soul ('*will to power*'/'*will to pleasure*') and culture ('*knowledge/power*').
2. An act of **overcoming**: the '*will to power*'/'*will to pleasure*' breaking free from the inhibiting embodied a/effects of *knowledge/power* = (*real/ised*) *pleasure*;
3. A **performative act**: discursively induced sexual fantasies of the imaginary are expressed, informed by culture and the linguistic ego.

As Alba Nabulsi (2013) notes:

Role-playing perfectly shows the prominence that performance can have in gender and erotic issues if we consider them as being built by discourses or, to better explain it, by a production of shared knowledge. It confirms that any sexual activity, any rule or symbol, tells us about made-up realities, which cannot be justified by biological or psychoanalytical arguments (p. 30).



The discursive and symbolic relationship between being (sexually) submissive/dominant and the performativity of one's gender identity was highlighted by Brad when he reflected on his adolescence: "Anytime I would come across porn I would focus on the men and actually fantasise about being the female...I run on more of a female energy...naturally submissive, passive." In deconstructing this comment, Brad perceives a submissive state of being representative of feminine energy. Conversely, Brad perceived dominant and assertive behaviours representative of masculine energy, as signified by his fantasies about male adult entertainers. From his culturally conditioned perspective, a person's sex and gender identity and expression (or energy) exist within two fixed dual domains, equating masculinity to being dominant and females and femininity to being submissive.

As Butler (2008) attests, the gendered self is "thus produced by the regulation of attributions along culturally established lines of coherence" (p. 33). In adhering to gender norms, despite being a (cis) man, the lack of dominant energy within Brad's body and psyche renders his consciousness to believing that he exists as feminine energy. The possibility that embodied energies are fluid and non-gendered does not occupy his mind (i.e., the possibility that it is perfectly normal for men to experience themselves as other than dominant). "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (Butler, 2008, p. 34). Beyond the private lives of both Brad and Chad, within the public domain, gender becomes performed, and the submissive "feminine" aspects of the self are masked by engaging in "straight-acting" (Brad) masculine heterosexual practices (e.g., gym work, sports, appearance, speech). The psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi (1916), observing this phenomenon, noted the straight-acting masquerade was a strategy used by homosexual men to exaggerate their heterosexuality as a "defence" against their homosexuality and fears of being exposed as effeminate and inferior when socialising amongst their heterosexual peers.

However, within the liberalised cultural fields of (West) Los Angeles, the perceived and real threats of being ostracised for embodying a presence outside of the boundaries of the heterosexual matrix appeared to have eased. Contemporary (West) Los Angeles culture now reflects a welcoming, inclusive social space of inclusivity where non-conforming gender and sexual identities can express themselves more freely compared with more conservative and religious localities within and beyond the United States of America, as noted by others (e.g., Anderson, 2010; Camicia, 2016; Gray, 2004; Raeburn, 2004).

### *Inclusive Masculinity and the Secret Desires of 'Heterosexual' Men*

In addition to gay men adopting a straight-acting masquerade to mask their femininity within conservative social spaces, this study also revealed the straight-acting masquerade of heterosexual men. However, within the liberalised psychogeography of (West) Los Angeles, the homoerotic desires of straight men and the jouissance of male-to-male physical intimacy was often explored within public and private spaces. Some Los Angeles locals commented:

I went for a work-out at Golds Gym and had a sauna. Suddenly all the guys started touching themselves, and then each other. I was thinking to myself: “really, are they going to do this while I’m in here?”. It took me by surprise and I didn’t know if they were gay, straight, or what was going on. I quickly left (Bob).

You have to watch out when you go to Golds Gym...if you know what I mean [smirk] (Luke).

I caught one of the guys at work in the gym showers with another guy. I banged on the door and said: “You have children!”. He is married with three kids! (Terry).

Definitely don’t have a sauna, you won’t make it out without someone making a move. It’s where all the “straight” married men go to get their fix (Paul).

Post-work-out, at three separate Los Angeles gyms, men’s changing room showers and saunas provided private, yet publicly accessible and exposed, spaces for ‘heterosexual’ men to engage in homoerotic activities. As one participant put it: “the main reason I work-out is to have great sex” (Jeremy). As identified by Terry and Paul, behind the closed doors of the sauna and showers, amidst the steam, ‘heterosexual’ and “married men” were seen expressing their sexual admiration for the gym bodies of other men. Homoerotic desires that were masked and invisible in open public spaces had now become visible within the confines of the men’s changing rooms. Sexuality as a performative phenomenon had become exposed, as “straight” men conformed to the hegemonic narratives of the heterosexual matrix within their everyday lives until they found an opportunity to release desires that they typically suppressed.

To explain these desires, Freud (1920) believed that all humans were bisexual, attracted to both sexes biologically (physical hermaphroditism) and psychically (the existence of a masculine or feminine attitude/energy irrelevant of sex). In his view, the origins of heterosexuality and homosexuality emerged from a bisexual disposition: “we have come to know that all human beings are bisexual in this sense and their libido is distributed between objects of both sexes, either in a manifest

or a latent form” (Freud, 1937, p. 261). However, most will limit themselves to monosexuality in fantasy and behaviour (Freud, 1905).

Expanding upon Freud’s theories, after interviewing hundreds of men about their sexual behaviour, Alfred Kinsey (1948) found that between 25% and 50% of the men he interviewed expressed behaviours of bisexuality, engaging in both heterosexual and homosexual sex to the point of orgasm. Kinsey (1948) summarised his findings by stating: “Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual...Not all things are black nor all things white...The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects” (p. 639). Like Freud, Kinsey recognised that it is a fallacy to think that people are their behaviours, and their behaviours, identities and desires are the same. Neither heterosexuality, homosexuality or bisexuality can be identified by a person’s attributes and mannerisms, given that a person’s sexual desire can be experienced as both a fixed and fluctuating force.

Any hormonal or other explanation of the homosexual must allow for the fact that both homosexual and heterosexual activities may occur coincidentally in a single period in the life of a single individual; and that exclusive activities of any one type may be exchanged... there is only a gradual development of the exclusively homosexual or exclusively heterosexual patterns which predominate among older adults (Kinsey, 1941, p. 428).

Contesting Kinsey’s (and Freud’s) theories regarding sexual behaviour, researchers have criticised their work for being grounded in biological determinism (Laumann, 1995; Lauman et al., 1994; Robinson, 1995). From a positivist point of view, they criticise Kinsey for being methodologically unpersuasive (Cochran, Mosteller & Turkey, 1954; Gay, 1986) and overestimating the frequency of non-heterosexual behaviours and attractions (Bailey et al., 2016; Balthazart, 2012; Lehmillier, 2018). However, Freud’s and Kinsey’s research and writings continue to influence contemporary understandings of sexuality and how individuals discuss, define, and rationalise their sexual desires and behaviours (Laumann, 1995). Again, the fluidity and fluctuating nature of desire were confirmed in casual conversations with some of the ‘heterosexual’ Angeleno men I met during this study.

I’m straight with a hint of bi. On the DL [down-low], and have a girlfriend (Zack).

Only have sex with girls but make out with guys and have body contact (Ren).

Never been with a guy before, but I’m open to it. It’s pretty common to experiment here [in L.A.] (Alex).

Within these statements, sexual fluidity reveals itself in the form of bisexuality, which orientates Zack's, Ren's and Alex's sexual desires for intimacy with those of the same-sex, albeit in different forms, beyond their heterosexual identities. However, despite having these non-binary desires, these men's sexualities and homoerotic acts are defined and regulated in a way that continues to privilege their heterosexuality yet simultaneously enables them to explore and fulfil their needs for intimacy with other men. For these men, their heterosexuality is maintained, and bisexual or homosexual identities are suppressed by maintaining a relationship with a female while they secretly and discretely ("on the DL") have intimate experiences with men and only engage in specific sexual practices (e.g., kissing). Their expression of their sexual identities and sense of self has become embedded within discourses of heteronormativity. Their same desires continue to be subconsciously regulated with an exclusionary code of practice that renders homosexuality a desire to be displaced by one's thoughts, language, and actions and carefully managed to ensure their legitimacy as a heterosexual male is maintained. From Butler's (2008) perspective, despite bisexuality and homosexuality being considered the primary libidinal dispositions with psychoanalysis, "heterosexuality is the laborious construction based upon their gradual repressions" (p. 105).

Given these findings, the hegemonic discourses of sexuality, which reinforce and naturalise heterosexuality as the dominant and accepted state of being, code men's sexual identities, and "the binary restriction on culture postures as the precultural bisexuality that sunders into heterosexual familiarity through its advent into culture" (Butler, 2008, p. 74). However, in saying this, it is also culture that makes bisexuality discursively known and acceptable to one's consciousness and thus the sexual practices one feels they are able to perform, particularly in private-public spaces. As Butler (2008) puts it, bisexuality is constituted by a matrix of intelligibility, through which bisexuality itself becomes thinkable. Although a person's sexuality, prior to being culturally conditioned, may exist in both fixed and fluid forms, as highlighted by Freud and Kinsey, how it is expressed or/and suppressed is a result of the cultural values and norms in which one is immersed within. In this context, language, law, and culture operate to frame a person's sexuality, which either enables or suppresses the expressions of their sexual desires. As evidenced by the participants' insights, there is an ongoing (un)conscious tension between the expression of one's authentic desires and the need to conform to the hegemonic norms of sexual behaviour. Thus, in the Shakespearian sense, "to be, or not to be" (Shakespeare, 1603, Act 3, Scene 1).

The 'I' and 'me' dichotomy is thus a (sub/un/conscious) tension between the choice to act upon one's desires discretely, openly, or to subordinate them altogether. Owing to the embodiment of compulsory heterosexuality, informed by a hierarchy of sexuality – heterosexuality (most accepted), bisexuality (less acceptable than heterosexuality, but more acceptable than homosexuality) and

homosexuality (least accepted) (Butler, 2008). As Butler (2008) points out, “the implicit construction of the primary heterosexual construction of desire is shown to persist even as it appears in the mode of primary bisexuality” (p.202). These embodied a/effects of the gender hierarchy and compulsion to identify as heterosexual, despite sensations of homoerotic desires, are misdescribed as foundations and signifying practices that render the self devoid of agency and a reality outside of the discursive realm. Interpreted from a Nietzschean perspective, human sexuality and the human experience can be conceived as a constant need to (un)consciously overcome the embodied discursive tensions of the self to realise the realities of the desires and phantasms of the soul.

In addition to one-on-one encounters, the liberation of heterosexual men’s homoerotic desires and their admiration for the male athletic-aesthetic was also observed and experienced in group settings within the sexually liberal city of Los Angeles. One of the participants’, Jack, a muscular heterosexual African American, commented:

It’s common for straight guys to circle jerk. A group of mates get together, admire each other’s bodies, and jerk off. They get off on it. There is no sex, mostly touching and wanking...It’s very hot...There’s a place in North Hollywood that I go to...many of the guys are really jacked [muscular] (Jack).

Jack’s insights reveal the existence of male-to-male erotic behaviour whereby sexual pleasure is experienced between a group of heterosexual men. In this instance, the *jouissances* of hetero-homoeroticism, the intimate pleasures of erotic play between men who identify as heterosexual, are stimulated by the psychophysical and physiological pleasures of mutual touching, masturbation and admiring of each other’s “jacked” physiques. To explain this phenomenon, Eric Anderson (2014) argues heterosexual men’s openness to discuss and engage in traditionally taboo erotic acts of male-to-male interaction is due to the absence of homophobia, often found in gay-friendly metropolitan cities like Los Angeles. “Whereas homophobia had traditionally restricted heterosexual males’ gendered behaviours, they are able to engage in once-stigmatised behaviours as attitudes toward homosexuality improve” (Anderson & McCormick, 2014, p.109). This sense of sexual freedom that Los Angeles offered was highlighted by Chad, also an African-American:

I am a gay male in a patriarchal, misogynistic, homophobic, heteronormative society. I grew up in the Bible Belt of the United States. It’s likely few things defy that more than an atheist, biracial male of black and white ethnicity expressing his gay sexuality on film for all the world to see. L.A. offers you the freedom to express your sexuality that doesn’t exist in most other parts of the country (Chad).

From these perspectives, as attitudinal homophobia decreases, so does homophobia. Thus, heterosexual and homosexual males are less concerned about being ridiculed and socially perceived as gay in settings where being gay is less stigmatised. For Anderson (2009), a male culture of inclusivity, a culture of ‘inclusive masculinity’, has emerged in cities like Los Angeles. Consequently, many heterosexual men have become more open-minded about their and others’ sexualities and how sexuality and masculinity are expressed. In doing so, gay men like Chad can access sexually liberalised safe spaces that allow them to represent parts of their sexual identity previously hidden within more conservative parts of America.

In theory and practice, men’s gender in contemporary and sexually liberal communities has come “to be founded upon emotional openness, increased peer tactility, softening gender codes and close friendship based on emotional disclosure” (Anderson & McCormack, 2018, p. 547). Thus, profoundly changing how men interact and engage with other men. As a result of this social trend, which transgresses traditional modes of masculinity and heterosexuality, sexuality is now recognised as existing on a continuum, with increasing numbers of men recognising they are not exclusively heterosexual or homosexual. For many living with gay-friendly spaces, same-sex desires are no longer detrimental to one’s social standing as a heterosexual man as they once were (Savin-Williams & Vrangalova, 2013). According to Anderson’s research in the United States and beyond, as evidenced so far within this chapter, increasing numbers of young heterosexual males are engaging in homosocial relationships which involve physical tactility – hugging and soft touching (Anderson, 2014), cuddling and spooning (Anderson, 2015) and kissing (Anderson, Adams & Rivers, 2012).

Further evidence of more open and inclusive masculinities was observed during my ethnographic research. While watching how Los Angeles heterosexual men interact in various social settings – bars, restaurants, nightclubs, private parties, pool parties and the gym – the softening of men’s attitudes towards each other became apparent. One noticeable observation of interest was how young (heterosexual) American men living in Los Angeles, 20-40 years of age, communicated and expressed their emotions with each other. During their conversations, many would openly discuss their financial, health, job and relationship struggles with each other and show their support through physical touch – a hug, a back rub, or placing one’s hand on a friend’s thigh to signify their support for one another. The softening of men’s masculinity, men engaging in physical contact, and the absence of homophobia and the fear of being perceived as feminine or/and gay within (West) Hollywood is symbolised in the photo (*Figure 19*).



**Figure 19. Significations of ‘Inclusive Masculinity’:** Challenging traditional acts of heteronormativity and male friendship the heterosexual co-owners of ‘Tom Tom’ bar and restaurant share a kiss which acts as a photo prop for their patrons.

Hanging on one of the walls inside the popular restaurant and bar ‘Tom Tom’, the two heterosexual co-owners and reality television stars of ‘Vanderpump Rules’ are photographed sharing a kiss to express their friendship and love for each other. This photograph signifies the progressive attitudes and values of inclusivity and heterosexual Los Angelian males’ openness to physical and emotional intimacy whereby love, care and solidarity is expressed between two men in a public or private space. As Anderson (2009) advocates, such changes in gendered behaviours appear to confirm a generational shift underpinned by increasing numbers of heterosexual men feeling secure and confident about their sexuality. In doing so, many men, particularly those living in ‘liberal spaces’ like

Los Angeles, are more open to freely express and engage in emotional and tactile acts to meet their own and others' psychic needs in ways that previous generations were not.

In light of the findings above, it appears evident that how men express and experience their sexuality and desire for each other depends on the pervasive discourses, language, and culture within their social spheres. As identified by many poststructural scholars (i.e., Foucault, Lacan, Butler, Žižek), language shapes a subject's sexual and gendered identity by determining the potentialities of their innate desires and psychic needs (i.e., the '*will to pleasure*'). This discursive process influences how men (and women) relate and interact with one another. When prohibitive discourses that restrict a person's freedom of sexual expression are removed through changes in legislation and cultural attitudes, new forms of intimacy begin to emerge. However, despite a developing culture of 'inclusive masculinities' developing and the acknowledgement and acceptance of one's sexuality existing beyond traditional and (Christian) heteronormative practices, ultimately what mattered most for the (gay and straight) men I interviewed was their ability to acquire a meaningful relationship with another and to be recognised as an object to be desired. The men in this study expressed their need and desire for intimacy and companionship via a modified body (image) to signal others they were ready for 'love'.

#### **IV. Initiations of Recognition: Corporeal Aestheticism and Desire**

In contrast to Nietzsche's (1886) examination of the embodied a/effects and interrelationship between desire, sexuality and the ascetic ideal, reflecting the hegemonic discourses of his time, in the following paragraphs (*and extending into Chapter 9*), I discuss the intersection between desire, sexuality and the aesthetic ideal. Specifically, I explore how the embodied aesthetic ideal, achieved via synthetic testosterone, is inextricably linked and critical to a subject's desire for recognition, intimacy, and love.

For many of the men in this research, the use of synthetic testosterone was initially initiated by an event of lust. These moments of initiation included instances of desire and sexual arousal due to their admiration of another man's physique and subsequently wanting to be recognised as an object of love by this person or others. Two of the gay men involved in this study commented:

When I moved to L.A. I met and fell in love with a guy for the first time. He was taking steroids and injecting all sorts of needles in my ass. I didn't care, I just wanted to look like him. I didn't know what I was doing (Brad).



I used steroids after going out with this guy. He was very muscular, and looked like he was using steroids so I asked him...He had some with him and asked if I'd like some. He injected some [steroids] into my arse, but just a little bit... I wanted to impress him and look like him...It's the only time I've tried it (Bruce).

Brad and Bruce, sexually induced by muscular and chemically enhanced physiques, embraided with meanings of erotic pleasure of the imaginary, were eager to embody, in the minds of the ones they wanted to impress, a similar physique to stimulate their own erotic response and experience in the minds of the ones they wanted to impress. This desire required a momentary surrendering of their human flesh to syringes full of steroids to create and embody a muscular somatotype for both men. From their perspectives, their need to enhance the appearance of their bodies was critical to establishing a body image that encouraged lust, sexual arousal and recognition to compensate for their embodied lack – a lack of recognition and being desired by the other.

Butler (1997a; 1997b), building on Lacanian psychoanalysis to critique the relationship between desire and recognition, argues schemes of recognition determine who is regarded as a subject worthy of recognition (Butler, 1997a; 1997b). “Recognition is set by the existing norms and powers, and the subject does not operate independently of what can become an object of recognition” (Willig, 2012, p. 140). Therefore, a subject’s cultural value and recognition are constituted by the hegemonic discourses that permeate their social and discursive geographies. These discourses of recognition inform the linguistic ego who and what is to be desired as an object of value and ‘love’. Thus, recognition has both a normative and a psychological dimension. For example, suppose you recognise another person with a desirable feature. In that case, you initially become aware of the feature, then attach a positive attitude to that person for having that feature (e.g., a muscular aesthetic). Such recognition manifests a mental state of respect where one becomes obliged, in a performative sense, to treat a person in a certain way when they are recognised as embodying culturally valued attributes. Butler (1997a; 1997b) describes this performative process of desire as the ‘*differential distribution of recognizability*’ – the struggle for recognition.

Drawing on Brad’s and Bruce’s lived experiences, desires of recognition are situated within the cultural value given to the muscular aesthetic. Embedded within cultural discourses that venerate the muscular body as an object that stimulates sexual desires, the muscular physique is perceived as an image to be embodied to meet the requirements of an established norm of intelligibility. The normative intelligibility of the muscular-aesthetic as an object of value that is recognised as (sexually) desirable within the social fields of (West) Los Angeles is evident in the following statements:

There is a lot of stress and tension in L.A., everyone is stressed, trying to impress. It's a toxic energy... Most of the guys I train are young gay guys, or older gay guys who have just come out and want to look good to impress the younger ones. The young ones tell me all their dramas... they want to look good on the [gay] scene. To look muscular, be confident, healthy (Brad).

It's becoming very popular now. Health and wellness clinics selling it [testosterone] to young and older guys. To boost their energy, put on muscle. All the guys want more muscle in L.A. The more muscles you have the more attention you get, the more sex you get (John).

Within Brad and John's statements, the relationship between desire, value and recognition is defined by an embodied lack of symbolic meaning. That is the lack of the muscular body they desire. For Brad and Bruce, this is a muscular physique that has been enabled through "steroids". Therefore, "steroids" becomes the body enhancing tool to which they subject themselves to fill this symbolic lack and achieve a corpus that fulfils their sexual desires. In turn, the body and self become sexually objectified by the cultural discourses that permeate through one's flesh and (sub)consciousness, which produces a particular praxis and performativity, underpinned by desires of need.

Combining Lacanian and Nietzschean ways of thinking, an individual's symbolic lack, created by discourses of desire, must be overcome to recapture the emotionality of lust previously experienced when in the presence of an aesthetically beautified individual stimulated the sexual desires of their soul. Therefore, for an individual to produce the sexual aesthetic inspired *jouissance* they once enjoyed, the idealised aesthetics of the desired other must be embodied to stimulate the same experience with another desirable other. Within this framing, a person's sexual desires exist within an internalised system and struggle for equivalence, a battle for recognition. To achieve a state of equilibrium, a form of mutual recognition, the internalised desires initiated must be matched to create those same emotions in another. The quest for the individual becomes one of overcoming, that is, to overcome a '*differential distribution of recognizability*'. "If recognition is fully lacking... a life is unrecognised... In this sense, the life and death struggle remains internal to the struggle for recognition. Indeed, without certain substantial forms of recognition, our lives continue to be at risk" (Willig, 2012, pp. 140-141).

In the context of Brad's and Bruce's lived experiences, the perceived potential loss of sexual intimacy, if the image of a normative object of desire is not attained, facilitates acts of submission in which the self surrenders to the hegemonic cultural discourses of desire. The subjects embodied submersion into discourses of lust, and the soul's ('*will to pleasure's*) need for affection renders life unrecognisable as one's identity and corpus become reconfigured to receive recognition from the (desirable) other.

### *Fears of Rejection and the Loss of the Self*

During my interviews with men living in Los Angeles, a theme that continued to surface was the adverse effects of the '*life death struggle*' (Willig, 2012) and the loss of the self as individuals surrendered their consciousness and bodies to others to be recognised and desired. For example, when discussing the relationship between his physical appearance, synthetic testosterone and his need for recognition, Johnny commented:

I feel as though I've got low sexual market value/social value in general because of my height. After taking anabolic drugs and noticing the difference in the way people act towards me I wonder if I've ever been respected before I took the plunge. I'm wondering if this is the fate that falls on men like me. I've realized there is no positive world for a small man. I earn six-figures and live in a major city and before my transformation I was never approached first, was regularly rejected and was often cheated on. Since I started taking drugs three years ago it's like I'm a different person. I got a fair amount of attention at the bar, had a year and a half long rocky relationship with my high school crush who previously friend-zoned me, had my first three-way and eventually met my current girlfriend who actually seems to value me. I've often battled feelings of worthlessness. I've recently begun to question if it was all in my head or if people actually looked at me that way...My current girlfriend once even drunkenly admitted that if I wasn't in the shape I'm in our first date might have gone differently. I feel stuck between a rock and a hard place do I keep risking my health for a life worth living or do I stop shrink back to my former self and go back to simply surviving (Johnny).

Johnny, positioning himself as someone with a low sexual market value and unrecognisable as an object to be desired because of his height, evidenced by previous experiences of rejection and betrayal from the opposite sex, was able to overcome a perceived symbolic lack of recognition by reconfiguring his body via androgenic-anabolic steroids. Although still short in stature, consuming synthetic androgens submerged his body and consciousness into an identity that now rendered him recognisable as a desirable being. With his myofibrils chemically enhanced, a new state of being emerged. This enhanced metaphysical state gave him the confidence to pursue and realise his sexual desires and fantasies.

However, despite Johnny engaging in performative and biopedagogic acts that produced the desired state of recognition, the lack of meaning in his relationship owing to the lack of acceptance of his pre-existing corporeal form left him battling with feelings of worthlessness. Aware of the superficial nature of his existence and relationships with others, because the recognition he received was limited to the symbolic meanings of his muscular physique, whilst his attributes that remained hidden behind his social mask, Johnny became torn between a perceived need to conform to male body ideals and the

desires of his *'will to power'* to restore his health by detoxifying his body from the detrimental side-effects of androgenic-anabolic steroids. His state of being had thus become orientated by fear, as he feared the loss of a desirable aesthetic would return him to living a life without recognition and love. For him, this potential loss of being perceived as an object of desire would put him in a state of being where he would be "simply surviving."

Similarly, Henry's use of testosterone as an initiation practice to acquire the perceived experiences of a metaphysical state of love to gain recognition and affection had a detrimental a/effect on his sense of self. This praxis of desire put his health and life in jeopardy:

I started with Test[osterone]. Moved to G[GHB]. Then to T[Tina]. Then to injecting. Preventing gate-A is profoundly powerful. I did drugs because it was the only way my ex would like me. He only found me attractive or sexual when he injected crystal into us. And for years I was so desperate for him to like me or tolerate me. I was the idiot that tolerated it and it took its toll. But it's been 3 years since him [ex]... and crystal. I'm so very proud to have beaten the addiction. It was severe. Like daily... For my final year or so, after the stupid attempt at self-harm [suicide] (and long before that) I'd only ever had sex when I was high on G or injecting crystal meth. I'm anxious I won't know what to do, or be sufficiently attractive, without the drugs...I associated sex with drugs... and in order to become healthy I said no to both (Henry).

In Henry's case, in addition to using synthetic testosterone to enhance the aesthetics of his body to receive recognition as a person of value, he used recreational drugs (e.g., sexual stimulants) to appeal to his partner's sexual desires and fantasies. Fearful of not being recognised as a desirable being and not receiving the attention he desired, he used recreational drugs (e.g., GHB, Tina, Crystal Meth) to engage in 'chemsex'<sup>1</sup>. This common praxis of gay 'love' was Henry's attempt to overcome the gap between his need to be desired and his partner's lack of sexual arousal towards him (Holmes & Murray, 2017; Holmes et al., 2021; Westherburn, 2017). Reflecting on the phenomenon of 'chemsex', Peter Weatherburn (2017) comments:

One highly valued effect of these drugs was their ability to enhance self-confidence and inhibit self-consciousness and doubt...[including] feeling unattractive and unworthy as an object of desire for other men...drugs enhance[d] sexual confidence by moderating the fear of rejection and ameliorating its effects. Men who normally lacked self-confidence or self-esteem frequently worried about whether others would be sexually or romantically interested in them. This acted as a barrier to engage in conversation or sexual contact because the perceived probability of

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<sup>1</sup> "a linguistic and sociological category loosely defined around the intentional combining of sexual activity and consumption of illicit psychoactive substances" (Weatherburn et al., 2017, p.2013)

rejection was high. Drugs served to remove this cognitive barrier and to lessen the pain if rejection did occur...While under the influence of drugs, competing cognitions (both aversive responses and personally held limits) were often disregarded...Drugs made other men seem more attractive and it heightened physical sensations, intensified perceptions of intimacy and facilitated sexual adventure (p. 204).

By engaging in 'chemsex', Henry's body and consciousness entered into a chemically altered state whereby his entity was recognised and treated as an object for sexual pleasures. However, although 'chemsex' enabled Henry to receive recognition from the one he desired, the recognition he did receive was experienced in an embodied state where his soul, sense of self, and self-worth became displaced and unrecognisable. Consequently, an inner struggle developed between his need to be recognised and loved and his need to set himself free from his drug addiction to restore his essence of being. Initially, this inner struggle was too much for him to overcome. He believed his desire to be recognised and valued as an object of love to be impossible without sacrificing himself to 'chemsex' to please his partner's sexual needs.

Consequently, these *'tensions of the self and discourses of being'* resulted in acts of self-harm and numerous suicide attempts. Eventually, after much emotional turmoil, he rediscovered his inner *'will to power'* to overcome his addiction and need for (what I call) *'toxic recognition'* – the pursuit of unhealthy love and desire for the other – as he garnered the courage to say no to his unhealthy love affair.

The need for recognition from others, particularly in a romantic context, as highlighted by Johnny and Henry, is underpinned by a need to reaffirm one's value and worth as an object to be desired. Psychoanalysts suggest this is a "vital human need" (Taylor 1992, p. 26), driven by perceived absence, a discursive lack of being, that makes one desirable. And thus, this embodied lack makes one unrecognisable to the other that they desire. This embodied lack often exists in symbolic form, exhibited by the real (e.g., the physical body). To overcome a perceived state of unrecognition because of the significations one perceives they lack, individuals reconstruct a physical identity that reflects the discourses of beauty they perceive others desire to attain recognition from the 'o/Other'.

Reinterpreting Butler's (1997a; 1997b) theory of recognition via a postmaterialist neo-Nietzschean lens, I argue, a person's desire for the object of desire - the aesthetic-athletic body – is a symptom and signification of the needs and phantasms of the soul – 'relationships of loving care' (Benjamin, 1988; Honneth, 1995) and the longing for physical and spiritual intimacy with another. I suggest this desire for love is initiated by the pre-discursive primordial drives of the *'will to pleasure'*, reinforced by the psychosexual stages of life where feelings of "security and of being loved, and thus

of being worthy of love” (Iser, 2013, p. 1) are (subconsciously) embedded within the subconscious. This relationship between desire, the body and praxis illuminates the importance and relevance of love and its affective dimension to the processes of recognition. In particular, how desire and the need for recognition relate to the body (image), biopedagogic practices, lust, sex, love and one’s identity.

Theories of recognition contend that to develop a normative or ‘practical identity’, individuals fundamentally depend on the recognition and affirmations, or lack thereof, from the subjects, institutions and cultures they associate or/and identify with (Iser, 2013). As reiterated by Freud (1970/2006) and Lacan (1966), desire manifests from a lack, and an absence, of love – both real, symbolic and imaginary. “Love is giving you what you don’t have” (Lacan, 1960-61, p. 129).

For Johnny and Henry, their perceived and real attributes that limited their ability to attain the recognition they desired (e.g., their body image) created embodied realities that needed to be overcome. Mattias Iser (2013) observed: “those who fail to experience adequate recognition will find it much harder to embrace themselves and their projects as valuable. Misrecognition thereby hinders or destroys persons’ successful relationship to their selves” (p. 1). Within the social fields of (West) Los Angeles, men, like the one in this study, commonly used synthetic testosterone to enhance the aesthetics of their bodies to prevent instances of misrecognition - an object lacking in sexual value.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, regulating, restoring and maintaining one’s relationship with their psychic needs - of the ego and the soul - is achieved by masking the symbolic void of misrecognition via body image-enhancing practices to acquire and initiate the positive affirmations of love and acceptance they desire.

Although the participants' desire to be recognised as an object of desire was a primary trigger for their use of health and body image-enhancing biopedagogies, the actual use of synthetic androgens also appeared to stimulate a range of embodied responses. The embodied responses that the men in this study did experience significantly affected their bodies, minds and sexuality.

## **V. Testosterone, the Aphrodisiac: Material Realism or a Stimulant for One’s Un/Subconscious Desires?**

While Freud (1910; 1923) argued that the innate drives of the libido (a psychic drive) govern men's behaviour, regulated by the id, the ego, and the superego, physicians have argued differently.

Throughout history, many physicians have asserted that the sex hormone testosterone is the life force of men's sexual desires and, thus, governs their sexual instincts (Hoberman, 2005; Hoberman & Yesalis, 1995; Morgentaler & Traish, 2020). This narrative of the testosterone-driven personality, the pre-determinants of manhood, dates back to Greek physicians' biological and medical texts, from Pre-Socratics to Aelius Galen (Bonnard, 2013). In these writings, Greek physicians attribute all the culturally perceived positive attributes of humanity (e.g., intelligence, strength, beauty) to the male body and the negative attributes to the female body. For them, the difference between the sexes was the presence/absence of testosterone.

Building upon the testosterone narratives established by ancient Greek physicians and philosophers, medical scientists from the 1930s onwards continued to espouse material realist worldviews with the assertion that a man's testosterone levels predicate their sexual desires, sexuality, and manhood. In 1935, German and Swiss chemical laboratories prepared to manufacture testosterone from sheep's wool to cure homosexuals (Hoberman, 2005). From the early 1940s to the 1950s, testosterone was hailed as a positive mood-altering supplement with the primary purpose of restoring the sexual and energy levels of ageing males (Werner, 1946). Despite warnings issued by the American Medical Association, testosterone treatments became available in pill form for American citizens and are still available today. Promoted by physicians as a 'well-being' drug, "testosterone became a charismatic drug because it promised sexual stimulation and renewed energy for individuals and greater productivity for modern society" (Hoberman, 2005, p. 3).

After the initiation stage of desire, to examine these claims, I now look at the lived experiences and a/effects that synthetic testosterone had on the participants' libidos. Drawing on the men's life histories shared within this study, I critique the premise that testosterone is the life force of men's manhood and sexuality and question the normalised and accepted truths of material realism promoted by contemporary 'wellness' physicians and the pharmaceutical industry. Is testosterone really what causes men to pursue intimate relationships with others, or is there a life force beyond that material that manifests itself in these men's consciousnesses?

In answering this question, as previously discussed (*Chapter 6*), it is essential to note that all of the men in this study had innate testosterone levels that were within a normative range. Yet when these men consumed pills or vials of synthetic testosterone, their sexual desires were a/effected in various and contrasting ways. For example:

**Joe, Erik, Bruce, Tim, and George noticed a significant increase in their libidos:**

It does make you feel more sexual, you like your body more, you know physically – it feels good to be bigger. I need steroids to give me that boost, make me more savage, sexually confident (Joe).

[steroids] made me too horny (Erik).

It had an instant affect. I became very aroused and couldn't sleep all night. I became very horny. Like I had just taken Viagra. It didn't change my body but it changed how I felt... super charged sexually and ready to go. He only injected a little bit (Bruce).

Did it affect my sex drive? Yes, for me quite a bit. Mike, off the Richter [scale]. Pete, not so much. Their sex drives were much higher than mine in general in the first place (Tim).

Me and my friends have been taking some testosterone injections lately, but we all had to stop. It was turning us into rabbits, suddenly you feel young again...it was too much of a distraction (George, older man in his 50s).

**Brad, Bill, and James noticed insignificant changes in their libidos:**

I didn't really notice a big difference. Amplifies your sex drive a little, but not significantly (Brad).

I haven't really noticed any changes (Bill).

On sex drive – I don't find a huge difference but I have always done low dosages, to be honest (James).

**And Johnny, who noticed a decrease in his libido:**

It also decreases your sex drive, and pleasure during sex (Johnny).

Although some of the participants noticed embodied sensations of a heightened virility (i.e., Joe, Erik, Bruce, Tim and George) owing to their consumption of synthetic hormones, others noticed insignificant changes to their libido (i.e., Brad, James and Bill). Or, as Johnny points out, experiences of a diminished sex drive and a lack of pleasure during sexual intercourse were also encountered. Yet, interestingly, for those who did experience a change in their sexual energies whereby erotic sensations were either elevated or displaced, these embodied sensations were often considered a distraction and hindrance to their daily routines and functioning as human beings. Consequently, the side-effects of feeling “too horny” or not being able to experience pleasure from sex were often interpreted as a call–



to–action to withdraw from using illicit or/and commercialised androgens. Thus, for many of the participants, it was not an experience or the potential threat of ill–health that caused them to stop taking synthetic testosterone. Instead, it was their inability to control their sexual desires.

Given the similarities and normality of the men’s innate testosterone levels in this study, I suggest their indifferent libido responses to synthetic testosterone may exist because of individual variances within their un/subconscious needs for intimacy and recognition (i.e., the souls ‘*will to pleasure*’), and the a/effective influence of the historical-cultural narratives embedded within testosterone. This position is congruent with various empirical studies (Cheng et al., 2018; Loughlin, Morales, & Carson, 2000). However, although scientific studies cannot confirm causality between the use of synthetic testosterone and an enhanced libido amongst healthy men, medical reports have documented significant increases in sexual interest, arousal and frequency of sex acts (Loughlin, Morales, & Carson, 2000). These findings suggest that there is a life force beyond the material.

Combining Freud and Lacan’s psychoanalytic insights, I propose that the expression of these embodied discrepancies is situated within a person’s psyche and immaterial soul and not their biology. Concerning the participants’ statements above, for many of them, their psyches’ and libidos suddenly altered once they had consumed synthetic testosterone products. From the perspectives of Joe, Bruce, Mike, Tim, and George, consuming synthetic testosterone resulted in sudden changes to their sex drives which manifested as an immediate need for sexual intercourse beyond what they would normally desire. Their desires for another had become exasperated by the needs of their soul (‘*will to pleasure*’) – love and affection, and the linguistic body-ego - attention, recognition, pleasure. For many of the men, these were desires that they could not control.

The participants’ unconscious drives for sex, intimacy, and connection had suddenly made themselves present to their consciousness with almost immediate effect. As these men's bodies and minds became overtaken by desire, chemically induced sensations that they felt needed to be acted upon and expressed through sexual acts. From a ‘*triads of being*’ ontology’, I argue the chemical affectivity of synthetic testosterone caused previously unconscious drives of the soul (‘*will to pleasure*’) to become known to the conscious mind – a discursive unshackling of one's primordial psychic needs. With the ‘*will to pleasure*’ seeking the *jouissances* of physical intimacy and recognition from a desired other, the agitation of these men’s psyches was relieved via the stimulation of their bodies’ eroticised zones. These experiences of chemically inspired sensations, I suggest, are interpreted via the linguistic ego, which demands such feelings be sexually acted out. From a Freudian perspective, this experience is an embodied praxis instilled within the subconscious during the psychosexual stages of their lives. Thus, the actions taken are performative rather than authentic.

“For Freud the ultimate psychological reality is the system of attractions and tensions which attaches the child to parental images, and then to all other persons” (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 192), which inform a person’s attitudes about love and sex throughout their lives. To overcome this “psychological reality”, embodied tensions are un/subconsciously discharged via the stimulation of the eroticised zones, from which psychic satisfaction and pleasure are experienced (Freud, 1905). Synthetic testosterone appears to heighten these embodied tensions of the psychic self, resulting in increased sexual arousal, and consequently, increased sexual activity. I argue, this psychic need for physical pleasure was more significant for some than for others. Specifically, this was the case for those who did not experience substantial changes in their libido as a result of taking synthetic hormones; this explains the difference in the participants’ embodied experiences.

In addition to my postmaterialist interpretation of Freud’s *‘will to pleasure’*, I also put forth that these men’s sexual energies and tensions are simultaneously reinforced, via the linguistic ego, by pharmaceutical narratives that sublime the linguistic ego’s need for sexual vigour and vitality. Illustrating this point, Hoberman (2001) states synthetic androgens have “captured the fancy of many people who, in quest of greater muscle strength and vitality, appear to have little difficulty obtaining hormones from entrepreneurial physicians, notwithstanding the failure of the scientific literature to support these uses” (Hoberman, 2005 p. 129). To ensure this lucrative market thrives “this market will continue to sponsor the kind of advertising that creates and manipulates hopes, anxieties, and expectations about intimate relationships and experiences that might be enhanced by drugs” (Hoberman, 2005 p. 125). For example, *Time* (2000) performs its role as a corporate promoter for the pharmaceutical industry with the title “TESTOSTERONE. It restores sex drive. It boosts muscle mass. And soon, you can get it as a gel. But it also can be dangerous. Is the edge worth it?” Followed by the claim that testosterone is a “bodily substance more fable than blood” and a “hormone that we understand and misunderstand as the essence of manhood.”



Figure 20. "It restores sex drive.": Testosterone and the Narration of Men's Sexual Desires

Despite critiques from medical scholars concerning the validity and ethics of the expanding alternative medical culture, the advertisements for various products to treat symptoms of low testosterone continue to appear in fitness, health and bodybuilding magazines, blogs, websites, and social media pages. Arguably, this is because "stories about successful hormone cures will inevitably have more popular appeal than reports of standard clinical trials that rarely offer dramatic evidence of the power" and effectiveness of testosterone derivatives (Hoberman, 2005, p. 129). Under the guise of medical science, pharmaceutical corporations and entrepreneurial physicians have successfully utilised

their authority, elevated social status, and technical jargon to persuade millions of (American) men that their symptoms of mental and physical fatigue, poor mental health, ageing and reduced sex drive are a result of insufficient testosterone levels that need rebalancing through hormone replacement therapy.

Seemingly, such ubiquitous and enticing media narratives advertising the benefits of hormone therapies and the medicalisation of sex since the 20th century have seen the gradual erosion of the social taboos of drug use and sex and the mass adoption of synthetic testosterone as a sexual stimulant (Elliot, 2010). Graham Hart and Kaye Wellings (2002) suggest the medicalisation of sex to enhance sexual pleasure and the mental-physical health of American men (and women) has exploded into a full-blown syndrome that affects the lives and lived experiences of millions of people. However, the efficacy of these claims, symptoms, and disorders are so ill-founded “they can disappear from public view and then reappear years later under a new rubric before vanishing from the media radar screen once again” (Hoberman, 2005, p. 122).

From a psychoanalytic view, the participants’ subversion into the significations of cultural discourse is stimulated by their needs and desires for physical intimacy and recognition; their internalised need to fill the void of an imagined and idealised sex life that may or may not exist. The ‘*objet petit a*’, an unattainable object of desire (Lacan, 1977), stimulated by predatory pharmaceutical narratives, provide men with a pathway to overcoming their fears of sexual underperformance and unrecognisability to the ‘Other’. Thus, temporarily, the needs and demands of the linguistic ego are appeased within the fantasies of the imaginary. Or, as Freud might put it, an imagined state of being that ignites men’s episodic memories of a return to the *jouissances* of sexual intimacy that they experienced during the early psychosexual stages of their development. That is when they were once loved unconditionally, an experience that they seek to recreate throughout their adult life.

Agreeing with Freud (1905), I argue the greater one’s need for recognition, the greater the need to seek sexual stimulation and comfort from another during adulthood. Therefore, the variances in men’s libido can be interpreted and understood as a difference in a subject’s need to be desired. This desire is satisfied by having intimate interactions with another – real and/or imaginary – reinforced by pharmaceutical narratives. Humans have evolved to be “at the mercy of language, man’s desire is the other desire” (Lacan, 1977, p. 628). “Desire full stop is always the desire of the ‘Other’” (Lacan, 2009, p. 38).

In Joe’s case, the affective relationship between discourse, testosterone and desire appears evident as his increased need for sexual intimacy seems to be driven by the cultural expectations associated with embodying a more muscular body gained through his use of synthetic testosterone. Now embodying discourses of desirability, the linguistic ego informs his subconscious to feel more “sexual”,

“savage”, and “sexually confident”. Consequently, I argue, this newfound confidence exasperates the need and desire for physical intimacy because there is now an internalised cultural expectation that assumes those with an aesthetic-athletic body are more desirable. Thus, this culturally induced feeling of superiority facilitates a psychic confidence that makes acquiring sexual relations easier to come by.

When men experience feelings of absence because they lack the sexual relationships they desire, they seek to overcome this real and symbolic absence. Once a person, like Joe, perceives that they have moved towards embodying the aesthetic physique they desire, synthetically enhanced or via another means, there is more urgency to attain a (sexual) relationship. To ensure that one maximises their physical capital and newfound embodied meanings of perceived beauty and that reinvented self does not become a lost opportunity. Thus, “the desire for recognition dominates the desire that is to be recognised, preserving it until it is recognised” (Lacan, 2007, p. 431).

To summarise, analysing the participants’ experiences of lust, love, and desire through a *‘triads of being’* lens, the *‘will to pleasure’* demands for intimacy, acquired through the recognition of the *‘o/Other’*, manifests and expresses itself via the aesthetics of a subject's corporeality. By the time individuals reach adolescence, when they are socially encouraged to become intimate with another, the pre-discursive self, the primordial desires of the soul and the aesthetics of the body have become fully immersed within and narrated by cultural discourses which position the body as an object of love. From a psychoanalytic perspective, these cultural discourses subliminally induce and exasperate a sense of an embodied lack – a lack of recognition and love – which the soul, the *‘will to pleasure’*, desires. Subsequently, the self subconsciously utilises performative biopedagogical acts to manifest real and imaginary experiences of a *‘love initiation’*. This manifestation of a beautified self signifies to the *‘o/Other’* that one is to be admired and consumed as a sexual object ready for physical stimulation and love.

With synthetic testosterone now disparately flowing through the visceral tissue of the participants’ male bodies, do men’s reconfigured bodies and minds afford them the erotic fantasies of the imaginary, as advertised by entrepreneurial physicians? Or will they be confronted with the realities and illusions of lust and intimacy – a lack of love?

“...from the point of view of the spectator, loving the illusion of the good in others may make us act politely in order to become lovable, which leads us to exercise our self-mastery, control our passions, and, eventually, to love the good for its own sake...”

Slavoj Žižek (2014, p. 62)

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### **EMBODIED TENSIONS OF LOVE, LUST AND DESIRE: ROMANTIC MISERY DESPITE EMBODYING THE AESTHETIC IDEAL**

With the body (image) reconfigured and synthetically enhanced as a beautified object of desire, what Lacan (1964) calls a ‘love-object’, from which erotic sensations become imagined, acquired, and experienced, the self and its image are primed for intimate interactions with the ‘o/Other’ – in the real, symbolic and the imaginary. However, in practice, does the embodied object of desire (i.e., the aesthetic-athletic) live up to the romanticised ideals of the imaginary? Or, are these imagined fantasies of fulfilment and unity via the recognition for desire (and love) from the ‘Other’ disrupted by the realities of what lies behind the mask of the *false self*? (Lacan, 1977). To answer these questions, I continue to draw on the psychoanalytical insights afforded by Freud, Lacan, Nietzsche, and others by revealing the embodied psychic pleasures and emerging pains as consequences of men’s *lack* of love (Freud, 1970; Lacan, 1977). “For that it is with this lack that he loves” (Lacan, 1962 Seminar X), which underpins men’s desires and the participants’ use of biopedagogies to attain what they do not have.

#### **I. The Body as a ‘Love-Object’**

Lacan (1960-1961) argued it is impossible to say anything meaningful about love because it is purely an imaginary phenomenon within the fantasies of the mind and the ego. From his perspective, the phenomenon of love is the subconscious symbolic enactment of the ubiquitous cultural narratives and imperatives of love. The metaphysics of love does not exist beyond the imaginaries of the linguistic ego. Love is performative, discursively induced, subliminally entrenched within the subconscious mind. “The only thing that we do in the analytic discourse is speak about love” (Lacan, 1972-73, p. 77). Thus, love is a phenomenon that can be decoded, conceptualised, explored, and analysed.

Lacan (1953-1954) described love as being autoerotic, grounded in narcissism – “it's one's own ego that one loves in love, one's own ego made real on the imaginary level” (p. 142). “To love is, essentially, to wish to be loved” (Lacan, 1964, p. 253). From his perspective, love involves imaginary reciprocity, reciprocity between “loving” and “being loved”, which constitutes the illusion of love. Lacan (1964) noted that this distinguishes love from the order of the drives (e.g., Freud's biologically situated ‘*will to pleasure*’), in which there is no reciprocity, only pure activity. For him, love is a metaphysical state that can exist in the absence of physical intimacy and a sexual relationship (i.e., courtly love) because it is a discursively induced state. Therefore, primarily, love is “a specular mirage, love is essentially deception” (Lacan, 1964, p. 200) as it requires “to give what one does not have” (Lacan, 1991, p. 147).

In contrast, I argue beyond the discourses of love and the subsequent linguistic ego's interpretation, fantasies and enactments of them, there is a ‘real’ element of love. From a ‘*triads of being*’ (**Chapter 2**) perspective and postmaterialist interpretation of Freud's (1923; 2010) ‘*will to pleasure*’, the ‘real’ and authentic desires of love are grounded in the needs of the immaterial soul. These needs of the soul (e.g., affection, belonging, acceptance) exist separately, yet interact – with or against, from the linguistic ego's fantasies of love. Thus, I argue love, as a metaphysical experience, is a consequence and interaction between culture, the imaginaries of the linguistic ego and the needs and drives of the prediscursive soul - the ‘*will to pleasure*’. Accumulatively, this gives rise to one becoming and projecting themselves as a ‘*love object*’.

For Lacan (1964), when asserting oneself as a ‘love-object’, one's love is not directed towards what the individual or the ‘O/other’ has, but what they lack. The desired object, which may be something other than a person, is valued insofar as it comes in the place of that lack. This *lack* is what Lacan (1957; 1966) refers to as the object-cause of desire (object *a*), *objet petit*, an unattainable object of desire that exists beyond the real because it is located within the dynamic and fluid realms of languages, the symbolic and the imaginary. Subsequently, one's desire to be desired, and thus wish to be loved, can never be completely satisfied. It is this discursively induced lack, absence of being, from Lacan's (1957) (and Freud's, 1970) perspectives, which manifests in the self becoming a performative erotic object, signified by one's desires, (body) language, body image, and fantasies.

The participants in this study symbolically expressed the self as a ‘*love-object*’ by cultivating an aesthetic-athletic physique from which erotic pleasures could be experienced. Erick discusses how he expressed his body image within the social fields of (West) Los Angeles.

I didn't really start lifting weights till I was 20...and steroids for a brief time at 25...but the attraction [to others] wasn't the only aspect that made me care about

my body. I recognised how your posture and clothes look nicer when you have a better and balanced [proportional] body...I like to use my body to seduce people [laughs]...have a handsome face [well-groomed], have nice clothes...I show my body off where I can...at the beach or occasional pool parties. I like to look good, show off my arms and chest with sleeveless, unbuttoned shirts. I feel better about myself if I look good.

Erik, immersed within the social life of (West) Los Angeles, consciously altered the presentation of his body image to embody a state of sexual recognition. Within this psychogeography, he recognised the importance of having a good posture, a well-groomed handsome face and wearing nice clothes that revealed his chest and biceps to arouse, seduce and stimulate attention from others. In particular, these praxes of the sexualised self were deemed appropriate and necessary in places where the naked aestheticism of the body could reveal itself to the onlooking gaze of others - the beach and pool parties. By employing an assemblage of body practices – exercise, dieting, androgens – that enhanced his physical schema, the psychic needs of his body ego<sup>1</sup> were comforted as he perceived himself as being an object worthy of recognition, which engendered emotions of “feeling better” about himself.

Similarly, Joe and Jack discussed the benefits of embodying significations of a ‘love-object’ – physical attractiveness – and having the ability to stimulate an aroused state from another via their body image. For some, this led to the *jouissance* of sexual intercourse.

Your body and appearance is very important here [WEHO]. You never see any fat people around, everybody looks athletic. It’s a very intense place to live, if you don’t have a good body you won’t have any sex...or at least with anyone good looking (Joe).

Steroids, testosterone, hGH are common down here [Santa Monica, Venice] – muscle beach. Guys want to look good in the gym, on the beach – enjoy the Californian lifestyle. Enjoy the women (Jack).

Both Joe’s and Jack’s commentaries reveal the perceived importance of one’s bodily form, and their ego’s desire and need to avoid embodied meanings that render the body unrecognisable as an object to be sexually desired (i.e., “fat”). For Joe, the absence and presence of particular body discourses were critical in securing the recognition that he, and other men, desired. “Steroids, testosterone [and] hGH”, in conjunction with weight training, were commonly utilised to create a desirable body schema to attract the ‘Other’ on the street, beach and gym and “enjoy the Californian lifestyle [and] the women”

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<sup>1</sup> Freud’s (1923), Body-ego: “a person’s own body, and above all its surface, is a place from which both external and internal perceptions may spring...The ego first and foremost is a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface” (p. 364). The “body ego tells you that you are your body, and how you take care of your body says everything about you” (Pam, 2013, p.1).



and to bring their sexual phantasies into fruition. Likewise, a WEHO barman reiterated the benefits of embodying significations that symbolised and positioned one as a sexually desirable object:

I get hit on every night and sort them [girls] into two categories. Those [girls] that will be around in 5 minutes [for sex] are marked with a pizza [emoji] and a star [emoji] is used for those that I would like to date...steroids are popular and they work (WEHO barman).

In his case, “steroids” enabled this individual to manifest an aesthetic-athletic physique and “render the whole of the male body into the phallus, creating the male body as hard, impenetrable, pure muscle” (Grosz, 1994, p. 224), which attracted the recognition of the bars female patrons. Enacting his sexual capital and the erotised significations of his body, phone numbers of female admirers were collected, recorded and organised within a codified system that reflected his sexual desires and intentions. Some women were coded with a “pizza” and others with a “star”. Reinterpreted through the meanings of popular culture, these symbols, in their semiotic form, signify the barman's psychic erotic fantasies, needs and desires. Pizza, a symbol for fast food, signifying “those [girls] that will be around in 5 minutes” (i.e., casual sex), and a star, a symbol of excellence, signifying his need for an ongoing intimate relationship beyond the instant *jouissance* and psychic-sensory gratifications of ‘fast love’.

From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, this act can be interpreted as an act of transference as the barman’s commodification, objectification and sexualisation of his body image, to acquire recognition and intimacy from another, is transferred onto the ‘other’ who also becomes an object to be consumed, primarily for sexual purposes.

Objectification theory argues that women are commonly viewed with a narrow focus on their body image (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and observed as a sexual object to be consumed, whilst other aspects of their humanity are ignored (Barkty, 1990). In this light, men are framed as sexual predators. However, as seen in the statement above, men like the WEHO barman also perceive themselves as sexual objects, a ‘love-object’ to be desired. Thus, men’s attitudes towards women can be seen as a projection of their own internal dialogue, which dictates how they perceive and treat women and what they think the primary purpose of a relationship is – to have intimate and sexual relations, meaningful or not.

### *Overcoming the Anxieties of Being a 'Love-Object'*

For many participants, the pharmacological and material a/effects of androgens on their bodies were critical to negotiating and overcoming their perceived sub/conscious fears of an embodied lack, rejection, and social anxiety. Now displaying a physique closer to what their body-ego desired (i.e., increased muscularity), a *'love-object'*, they became more confident within their social circles as their human form now adhered to the symbolic significations that they and others desired.

You feel more confident socialising with people, like – look at me, I'm looking good (Brad).

Feeling stronger, more masculine, increased my confidence and I thought I was better looking. People notice you more. Guys and girls hit on you more, that never happened before (Joe).

As illuminated by Brad and Joe, the embodied material changes induced by consuming synthetic testosterone enabled these men to subdue the anxieties of the body-ego, as their reconfigured aesthetic-athletic body image now signified an identity that masked their perceived lack of being. Consequently, this resulted in Brad, Joe, and others receiving increased recognition and attention and improving their ability to have intimate relations with others. For these men, synthetic androgens and other body-enhancing practices allowed them to psychically progress and transition from an embodied state of misrecognition to an embodied state of recognition where they could now realise their sexual phantasms of the imaginary.

Beyond experiences of social anxiety, more profound insights into men's psyches were unveiled, as the participants discussed how synthetic hormones assisted them in overcoming their neuroticisms stemming from a fear of rejection and a lack of being. Erik and Luke commented:

You think people will be more attracted to you [when taking steroids] and they were. You're not as afraid of rejection (Erik).

...Then I started working in my early 20s for a bank, longer hours, I had no time to go to the gym. I started going to the bars instead, bars, casinos, clubs...chasing after women. I used to drink a lot, especially socially and even up until recently. Looking back, I think I was socially anxious and needed alcohol, and before that steroids, to help me to interact with others, get over my anxiety. It helped me approach women (Luke).

Within these statements, rejection sensitivity – the disposition to anxiously expect, perceive and intensely react to rejections from another (Downey, Feldman & Ayduk, 2000) – acted as a

significant barrier to these men acting upon their desires and engaging with those they admired. To overcome their anxieties rooted in a fear of rejection, Erik and Luke used “steroids” (and exercise and alcohol), like many other men (Christianson, Vinther & Liokaftos, 2016; Jordan-Young & Karkazis, 2019; Morgentaler & Traish, 2020; Neighbors et al., 2007; Shield, 2017; Underwood, 2017), to improve their physical appearance. These praxes of the mind, body and culture boosted their confidence, enabling them to be less nervous, approachable and communicative, and receive more recognition.

To examine these men’s experiences and the intersectionality between anxiety, aesthetics and desire, I draw upon Lacan’s expansion of Freud’s (1953) idea that “the appearance of anxiety may be dependent on the satisfaction of the other person” (pp. 100-101). “Anxiety is the sensation of the desire of the Other” (Lacan (1962, Seminar IX, 4th April), a sensation that feels like an expectant dread, a trepidation that can take hold at any time without warning (Lacan, 2016). From Lacan’s perspective, “anxiety is linked to the fact that I do not know what object I am for the desire of the Other” (Lacan, 1963, Seminar X, 3rd July), and how the ‘Other’ perceives me. “Anxiety, it is said, is an affect without object but we have to know where this lack of object is: it’s on my side. The affect of anxiety is in effect connoted by a want of an object, but not by a want of reality” (Lacan, 1962, Seminar IX, 4th April). Interpreted anxiety in this way, anxiety is not caused by trauma or the loss and lack of something; it is the feeling of an over-proximity of the desire of the ‘Other’ (Lacan, 1986).

Theoretically, the threat of unwanted emotions is brought into being through a confrontation with the ‘Other’; that is, when the phantasms of the actor’s body-ego desires are confronted with potentially contrasting, and possibly real, judgements about oneself that exists beyond the symbolic ideals of the linguistic ego. In the confrontation with the other, harsh truths and realities of the self may become exposed and revealed to oneself and others. In a sense, this could be described as the unveiling of the ego’s insecurities that have been masked with the discourses and body practices of the athletic-aesthetic self. Along this line of reasoning, “anxiety occurs when lack *itself* lacks (Lacan, 1963, Seminar X, 28th November) and from the “essential moment when this image [of the self] is lacking” (Lacan, 1962, Seminar IX, 2nd May).

When the facade of and belief in one’s image is confronted and shattered by the judgements and rejection, the individual no longer perceives themselves as an object of the ‘others’ desire. The actor loses their perceived worth as an object of desire as there is no longer a reference point or identity to which the individual can attach meaning. Thus, this (un/conscious) fear drives men’s use of biopedagogies and their immersion into the imaginary of their ego and the sublime of the symbolic in an attempt to be recognised by the gaze of the ‘O/other’. It is this discursive falseness of the self, the projection of an idealised and symbolic self, as opposed to the ‘real’ me – the innate soul of one’s being

– that makes acquiring the desire of the other enigmatic and ultimately foreign to the individual who pursues the recognition of another.

In essence, one's desire to desire the 'O/others' desire ultimately forbids one from being desirable. This desire is always beholden to fantasies of the (body/linguistic) ego and not to the actual needs of the one who is desired. Or, as I argue, the authentic desires of one's soul - the desires of the *Eros*, one's life/sexual instincts, which he suggests are responsible for a person's drive for survival, cooperation, love, reproduction and pleasure, essential for sustaining human life (Freud, 1920). Freud (1920) proposes that by satisfying these internal drives of the psyche, positive emotions are experienced. These positive emotions, the satisfying of one's internal drives of the soul, is an experience that many of the participants sought to acquire and stimulate through the appearance of their bodies.

To explain this embodied tension between the varying internal-external demands on the psyche, which I suggest are negotiated by one's use of body practices, Lacan (1977) develops the notion of the *false self*. Borrowing from the Freudian (1938) concept, *Spaltung* (the splitting of the ego), a process whereby contradictory attitudes come to reside within the ego, Lacan (1977) attests that the subject can never be anything other than discursively split – divided and alienated from their pre-discursive self. This split is irreducible, can never be healed; there is no possibility of synthesis. There is always an embodied tension between the external (occurrent) and internal (dispositional) aspects that inform the body ego. For Lacan (1977), this split of the divided ego/subject denotes the impossibility of a fully present self-consciousness. In other words, the subject will never know themselves completely, as they will always be cut off from their own self-knowledge. For as long as a subject is a "speaking subject", they will remain split between truth and knowledge (*savoir*) (Lacan, 1977, p. 288).

Utilizing a *triads of being* ontology, I interpret this as a split between a knowing of one's inner primordial truths and needs of the 'wills' of the soul ('will to pleasure' & 'will to power') and the projection of a false self embedded within the performative politics of discourse. Theoretically, I have outlined this embodied phenomenon in **Figure 21** to illustrate the relationship between the external and internal demands on the ego, the materiality of the body and body techniques.

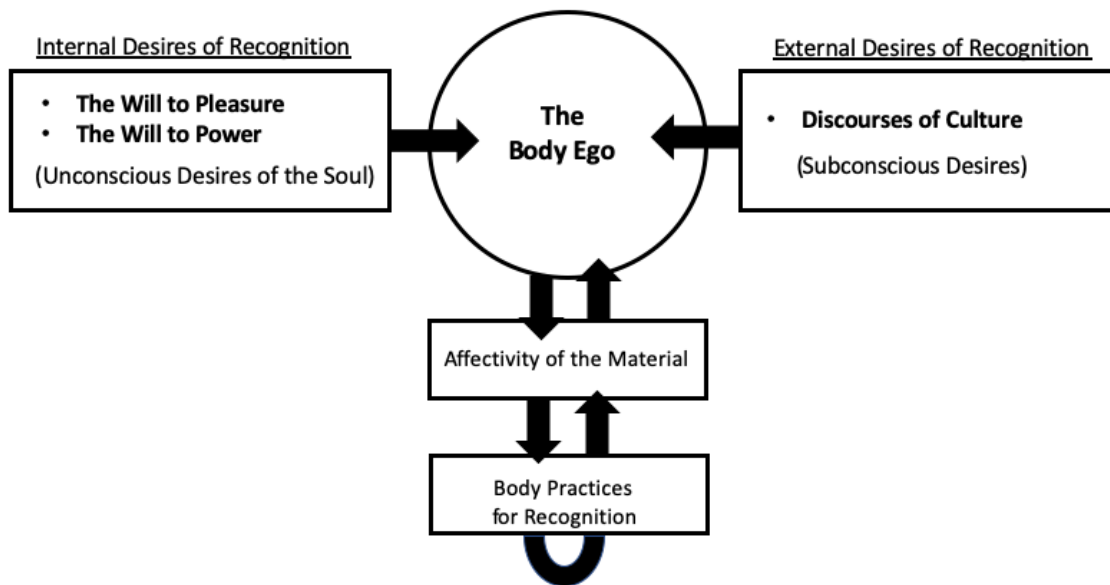


Figure 21. The Body Ego and Body Practices of Recognition.

However, instead of the 'split-self' being isolated within the unconscious realm, as theorised by Freud (1938) and Lacan (1977), I suggest the 'split ego' presents itself to the conscious mind, if only momentarily. From my perspective, this occurs when the subject's discursive and symbolic constructs of the self are confronted and dismantled by the judgmental gaze of the 'Other'. This type of confrontation, imaginary or real - is a psychic event that the subject seeks to avoid. At this moment, the ego is forced to acknowledge the vulnerable truths of oneself that they otherwise want to suppress (e.g., the forced revelation of a white lie or of an inadequacy/bias that one is reluctant to admit to). The fear of this potential experience evokes the dread of rejection, a lack of recognition because of an embodied lack of truth and legitimacy, which manifests itself as an anxiety about the threat of the 'Other' (*Figure 22*).

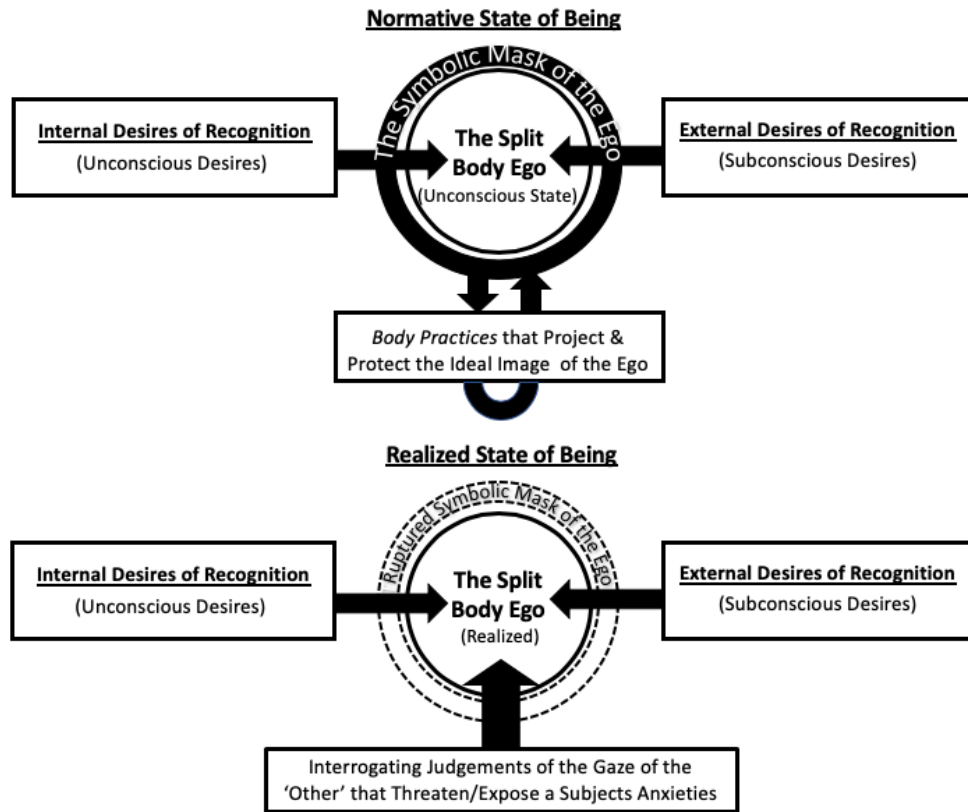


Figure 22. The Split Ego and the Rupturing of the Symbolic Mask.

In summary, men’s use of biopedagogies to negotiate internalised anxieties of the body ego is complex. Yet, from the participants’ testimonies, the overarching motive for men’s needs to produce a body image that is to be recognised appears to be clear – a un/conscious desire to be desired by the ‘O/other’ to unify what they symbolically lack – the embodied *jouissance* of the meanings of intimacy and being a ‘love-object’.

To improve their chances of recognition while simultaneously avoiding the cognitive a/effects of rejection, the men in this study regularly used social media technologies to manage and satisfy the desires of the body–ego. Both consciously and subconsciously, for these men, social media was often utilised to preserve and project an idealised image of the self - a ‘love-object’. In the following section, I illustrate how the men in this study strived to protect the ego’s insecurities whilst simultaneously projecting a body image to be desired by the ‘O/other’.

## II. Symbolic Entrapment and the Erotic Fantasies of the Virtual Body

For the majority of the men I interviewed, their pervasive connectedness with various social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Tinder, and Grindr) played a critical role in negotiating their embodied anxieties and fears of a perceived (and unrecognised) lack of recognition, and in their desire to be desired by the 'O/other'. In this context, social media was often adopted as an additional biopedagogical tool to curate, manage, enhance, and present (sexualised) physical identities according to the idealised fantasies of their body-ego. In an attempt to understand this modern phenomenon, I, like numerous other scholars (Johanssen, 2018; Özdoğru, 2019; Rufo, 2003; Warfield, 2014), draw on Lacan's (1977) psychoanalytic theory of the '*mirror stage*'.

Once a person is aware of the reflection of their mirror image during infancy, Lacan (1977) argues, an embodied process of symbolic entrapment induces apperception, whereby the individual begins to perceive and transform themselves into an object to be desired by the 'O/other'. During this process of self-recognition, a "libidinal dynamism" (the interaction between the psychic, emotional and instinctual drives of the psyche), the individual learns to reflexively identify with, and value, an idealised body image, pursued by the 'ideal-linguistic ego' (Lacan, 1953). Essentially, this typifies an essential libidinal relationship with the body image, where the child learns to identify with the image of itself, recognising itself for what by the meanings of its body image. In doing so, the subject assumes a (mirrored) identity they mistake for their own. From a Lacanian perspective, a person's identity and body image become a project of the imaginary and the result of an egoic illusion.

According to Lacan, this act results in the subject becoming split between the 'I' and the 'me'. The 'I' becomes alienated as the self becomes consumed by the creation of the 'me' in an attempt to be desired by the 'mother'. From this worldview, human identity is centred around the fantasies of what the subject thinks the other desires. Consequently, various neurotic tensions of the self are experienced, as one's subjectivities fluctuate between hatred and love for one's self-image through the perceived desires of the 'O/other'. As noted by Lacan (1973):

...desire is situated in dependence on demand – which, by being articulated in signifiers, leaves a metonymic remainder that runs under it, an element that is not indeterminate, which is a condition of both, absolute and unapprehensible, an element necessarily lacking, unsatisfied, impossible, misconstrued, (*meconnu*) an element that is called desire (p. 154).

Thus, the ideals of the ego can never be satisfied as the object of desire is elusive, continually shifting from one object to another as the compulsive need to be desired by the 'O/other' is an ongoing

affair. “The mirror stage is a drama...which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality” (Lacan, 1977, p. 180). Through this lens, the subject’s consciousness is enmeshed within a constant state of misrecognition, caught between the projection of the ‘ideal-I’ and ‘original-me’ to satisfy the desires of the ‘mother’.

### *Desires of the Illusionary Self and the ‘Other’*

During adolescence and into adulthood, as earlier illustrated within Freud’s psychosexual stages of development (**Chapter 8**), symbolic transference occurs, whereby the subject’s need to be desired by the ‘mother’ shifts onto something else – people, romantic partners, objects, pleasures, fantasies and so on. For many of the men interviewed in this study, making the most of their refashioned corporeal schema, their acts of transference were encapsulated in their use of (erotic) photographic images in an attempt to receive recognition from the ‘O/other’ within a virtual network. When discussing the presentation of the virtual self and the affectivity this social/body practice has on their body image and sense of self, Erik, Johnny, and Chad commented:

In photographs, online [social media], dating apps I wear sleeveless shirts to show off my arms, and reveal my chest and hair to look sexy and get the attention of others...it does boost your confidence when people notice you (Erik).

Occasionally I use social media, [I like] getting ‘likes’ and comments. it makes you feel good [pause] for a while. It’s like a drug sometimes, seeing who likes your pics. It makes you feel good...People like it when you show off your body, you get lots of attention (Johnny).

Being gay in the age of social media and dating apps contributes heavily to my self-image. I’m very conscious about my body online, living up to the beauty standards of the gay community (Chad).

As signaled by these men, the body’s image presented in a digital photograph, which is often digitally enhanced, is used as an object to receive the recognition the body-ego desires. In each case, the act of exposing parts of their (semi) naked male body (i.e., “showing-off” the “arms” and “chest”) attributed to receiving increased “attention” from the virtual ‘O/other’. This virtual experience is quantified by the number of ‘views’, ‘likes’ and comments their digital images receive. In turn, Erik and Johnny experience a temporal state of increased confidence and feeling good about themselves as



their desires for recognition become virtually stimulated. The subject experiences “a libidinal dynamism”, as their identification with their false image hand the creation of the fantasy of the “Ideal-I” or “Ideal ego” is reinforced and internalised (Lacan, 1977, p. 2).

Johnny likened this positive feedback loop of the ego as being like a drug. During this addictive social-psychic practice, the ongoing demands of the body/Ideal ego are nourished by the phantasies and anticipation of an endless supply of recognition from the ‘Other’. Drawing on Johnny’s insights, within the social web, subjectivities transcend their materiality as the agency of a person’s being becomes consumed by the virtual-digitised gaze, which produces a dream-like trance. With the guidance of algorithmic determination, one ‘follows’ and becomes followed by the virtual crowd, momentarily lost in time with the ‘Other’, as a subject’s desires become entrapped by their unconscious drive – as if in a dream (Crano, 2019). “What we see here, then, is the gaze operates in a certain descent, a descent of desire...the subject is not completely aware of it – he [sic]operates by remote control” (Lacan, 1973, p. 115). This assimilation into the jouissance of the body ego that social media offers enable the subject to temporarily fill gaps in their perceived lack of being that signifies the self as being unrecognised by the social gaze on which he finds himself unconsciously fixated.

In the digital (and public) domain, the projections of the body ego present themselves as an object, an externalised, unified image of the self whereby, “what might have formerly have been understood as ‘the subject’ once it had been divided within itself, broken down into discrete parts that are each representable as symbolic tokens, [is now] the subject digitised” (Franklin, 2015). This digitised mirror image creates an imaginary identity, informed by the “ideal ego”, that is managed, manipulated and presented as a form with a clearly defined outline that the subject identifies with – a projected idealised ‘me’. Noting the a/effects of embodying the idealised image of the self, Terry Eagleton (1983) states:

The human subject is supplied with a satisfying unified image of selfhood by identifying with an object which reflects this image back to it in a closed, narcissistic circle. In both cases, too, this image involves *mis*recognition, since it idealizes the subject’s real situation...Duly enthralled by the image of myself I receive, I subject myself to it; and it is through the ‘subjection’ that I become a subject (p. 173).

Lacan (1977) suggests it is this misrecognition that makes selfhood possible. The identity of the self is unified, made complete, by embodying an image of oneself that is desired and validated by the ‘Other’. The mirror image offers the ability for the subject to present themselves in a manner that elicits a specific response from the ‘Other’, which masks the “mess of uncoordinated movements and feelings” (Mitchell, 1974, p. 40) that often resides within. Thus, the ‘mirror’ opens the doors of the

imagination, helping one envision a world of new possibilities and fantasies for oneself, fulfilling one's need to be desired.

Instead, Lacan proposes that a subject's life is given meaning in the instant that a child recognises itself in the mirror and a false unifying image of the self forms, the *imago-Gestalt* – a “virtual wholeness, identified...by the infant in a jubilant moment of “Aha!”, [which] lays down the imagistic nucleus of the thereafter ontogenetically accreting ego as a series of self-objectifications in images and, soon after with the event of language acquisition, words too” (Johnston, 2018, p. 3); this offers a road map to one's life. The individual spends their entire life chasing an unattainable state of harmony and mastery of embodied narratives from this moment. These illusionary promises of the ‘mirror’, which in these men's case, are then reimagined and projected through the body's image and the circulation of curated simulated self-photographs.

However, a careful reading of the men's narratives above unveils an awareness of the split between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ of the egoic self, not fully unified as Lacan (1977) suggests, despite receiving recognition and validation from the virtual ‘Other’. In discussing their online experiences, evidence of a lack of unified image/identity is present within Johnny's and Chad's comments:

...it makes you feel good [pause] for a while (Johnny).

Social media and dating apps contribute heavily to my self-image. I'm very conscious about my body online, living up to the beauty standards of the gay community (Chad).

Within these statements, there is an acknowledgement of the superficiality of the virtual image of the self, a form of recognition and an illusionary relationship without meaning, which manifests as an internal sense of incompleteness. The ‘Other's’ recognition is out of reach, beyond any sense of a meaningful knowing. Thus, for Johnny, the *jouissance* of recognition only exists “for a while”, a fleeting moment in which the “drug” of desire quickly returns to a state of need. In this sense, virtual recognition lacks the authenticity of the metaphysical *jouissances* that are experienced when the materiality of another person is present.

Similarly, Chad is consciously aware of the influence of the perpetual digital gaze and the need to “live up to” the ideal image of the ‘Other’. His insight suggests the existence of a self beyond the imagined self – and egoic split between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’. In his case, the need to adhere to the hegemonic beauty standards of “dating apps” and the gay community (i.e., the aesthetic-athletic) is perceived as a normative part of being gay, which contributes “heavily to his self-image”. Thus, shaping

his perceptions of his self-worth and value to others - as an object to be admired, dated, and potentially loved.

As discussed by Freud (1915) in *Instincts and Vicissitudes*, there is an ongoing conflict between the sexual drives (*'will to pleasure'*), ego drives and an external reality, which from a Nietzschean perspective, the individual unconsciously seeks to overcome (e.g., the *'will to power'*). Chad attempts to resolve these tensions of the psyche by becoming the idealised-'I', an idealised image of the societal/virtual gaze, which obstructs and acts as a barrier to pleasuring his internal drives of the *'will to pleasure'*. By engaging in acts of identity performativity, he perceives that recognition is more likely to be attained, and a subsequent state of potential happiness can eventuate in the digital sphere and beyond. Yet, thus far, his corporeal virtual reality has only produced a temporality anchored in anxiety as his constant cravings for recognition go unfulfilled.

Thus, contrary to Lacan's (1977) claims, instead of a unified self that is attained by self-identifying as an object of an image, signified by the narratives of the ego, judging by these men's statements, there is a knowledge of a self that exists as a set of disparate energies, that are multiplicitous and fluid. Caught between what Freud (1930) referred to as 'conflicting desires' – the internal/external, subject/object, love/hate, life/death aspects of the self – "we are, first of all, unhappy combinations of conflicting desires. Civilization can, at best, reach a balance of discontents" (Rief, 1979, p. 377).

To illustrate how a subject's identity and possibilities of a romantic love change within the discursive matrix of the virtual world of social media and online dating networks, Slavoj Žižek (2015) states:

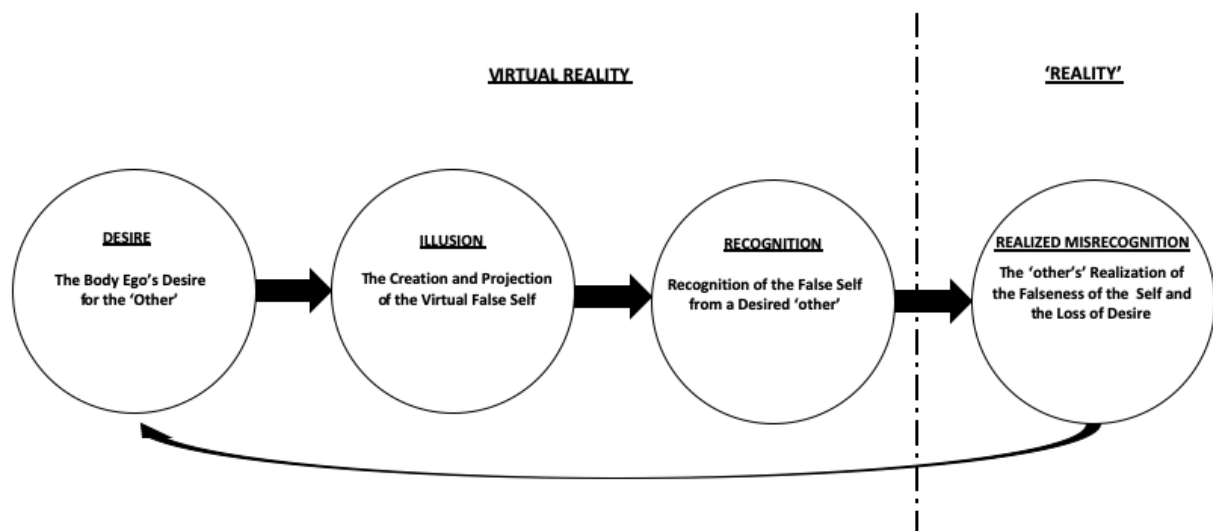
...online dating...automatically involves this aspect of self-commodification or self-manipulation. When you date online you have to present yourself there in a certain way, putting forward certain qualities. You present an image of yourself. You focus on your ideal of how other people should perceive you. But I think that is not how love functions, even at the very simple level...I think the English term is endearing foibles, an elementary ingredient on love. You cannot ever fall in love with the perfect person. There must be some tiny small disturbing element and it is only through noticing this element that you say: but in spite of that imperfection I love him or her...there must be some tiny element of imperfection.

In presenting an idealised facade of the self, in which the self is signified by discourses, embedded within the perceived desires of the 'Other' (e.g., sex appeal, wealth, success, and happiness), the person displaces themselves, and others, from the realities of their endearing points of difference. Consequently, the ability of individuals to meet the internal needs of their body ego, the needs of the soul, within 'dating apps', is a metaphysical state that is unattainable - authentic connections cannot be

attained within a virtual world. Joe highlighted this lack of authenticity within the virtual realm in the following statement:

Social media makes it very easy, yet very hard to find someone. You can have sex in minutes but relationships are virtually impossible. There is always someone more attractive around the corner, all you need to do is swipe left to find someone new. Relationships don't last long here. Or if they do many couples end up having open relationships, there is temptation everywhere. Even I've cheated on someone (Joe).

Entrapped within symbolic meanings, a person's ability to form real and meaningful interactions becomes impossible as interpersonal relationships originating online depend on the illusions of desire and misrecognition. Perceptions of the other become a function of one's projections of their own desires of what they perceive the other to be. While this symbolic interaction can be maintained within short periods of time and in moments of 'fast love', where fantasy supersedes reality, the illusion of the false self quickly evaporates. When the truths of a person's character begin to rise above the significations of the symbolic, which contradict the others initial cause of desire, the lust they once experienced for the 'Other' disappears. Subsequently, the processes of desire recommence within a loop of the misrecognition of another virtual and symbolic other, as illustrated in the following diagram (**Figure 23**):



**Figure 23.** Desire and 'the Loop of Virtual Recognition' within Online-Offline Relationships

### *Circumnavigating the Forbidden Desires of the 'Will to Pleasure'*

Although authentic relationships originating within a virtual space often proved to be difficult, social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, Tinder, Snapchat, and Grindr afforded many of the participants the ability to express their (sexual) desires via images of their bodies, language, and signs (emojis) in ways that would otherwise be forbidden during normal person-to-person interactions within a public space. With the physical self removed from one's interactions with another, fears of judgement and rejection could be managed and overcome; virtual interactions enabled men to live out their sexual desires, urges and fantasies that they would usually suppress. For example:

Instagram is great for dating. The sexier the pics the better – you get more likes, more attention and more sex...you swap naked photos so you know what you're getting (Bill).

It's all about the body on social media. As soon as you post a hot pic with your shirt off you get hundreds of likes and comments. You don't get any attention by posting normal [clothed] photos...if you like someone, you flirt, send each other dirty [naked] pics (Joe).

People send you everything on social media, especially if they like you – like photos of their [naked] bodies. It's like a mating ritual (Erik).

In psychoanalysing Bill's, Joe's and Erik's statements, the *jouissance* of social media and its "drug-like" effect on the psyche is revealed more explicitly as these men engaged in socially prohibitive "mating rituals" (e.g., freely exposing their naked parts of their body to a stranger). Reinforcing Freud's (1905) and Lacan's (1977) claims that desire is central to subjectivity, which can never be satisfied by one's agency, Bill, Joe, and Erik demonstrate how their subversion into the symbolic and sexualised meanings of their digitised body images, enables them to express their sexual desires and fantasies by exchanging "naked photos" with another virtual entity. This erotic digital praxis satisfies the internal-external needs of their body egos via the recognition of others, which is validated by exchanging erotic images, texts, and emojis. From a Freudian-Lacanian interpretation, within the ecology and spectacle of social media, the imaginary of one's '*will to pleasure*' exists within the imaginary playground of the virtual world where the digital self relinquishes itself from the normative and restrictive ethical codes and taboos of (sexual) behaviour, usually reinforced by the societal gaze of public life.

Culturally, past and present, when individuals communicate their erotic desires for each other, they are typically concealed and coded within the hidden meanings of particular objects and gestures (i.e., sexual innuendos) to avoid the discursive taboos of human intimacy. Slavoj Žižek (2019) suggests society “codify[s] sexuality, through all forms and manners, rules. But what this codification, cultivation tries to control is not nature. It is already some unnatural break from the disruption of nature...it is this deadly absolute passion. And the Freudian name for this is death drive...the experience of being a living dead” (18 April), the denial of the soul’s purpose (i.e., ‘will to pleasure’). Žižek (2011) demonstrates this point when he references the film ‘*Brassed Off*’ to show how the overt linguistic expression of sexual desire is negated within everyday speech:

The hero accompanies her to her home after their date, a young pretty woman, who at the entrance of her flat tells him: “Would you like to come in for a coffee?” He answers: “There is a problem, I don’t drink coffee”. She retorts with a smile: “No problem, I don’t have any”. What...you get through this double negation is probably the most, not vulgar, but open erotic invitation...I invite you for a coffee, then I negate coffee, and the result is not zero. The result is pure invitation (*Intelligence Squared IQ2 Talk*, 1. 31).

Here, Žižek demonstrates the discursive dance to negate the forbidden sexual desires underpinned by the internal and external needs and influences of the body ego – as represented by the participants’ virtual interactions with the ‘Other. The actors’ explicit linguistic expressions of their sexual desires are barred from speech, which American historians argue is a function of a ‘civilised morality’ (Emilio & Freedman, 1997). This term refers to the forbidden discourses (i.e., speech that directly expresses a person’s sexual needs and desires) that signify the subject as uncivilised.

In American culture, the narratives of a ‘civilised morality’ are embedded within the Christian belief that sexual desires are a product of the carnal and grotesque aspects of the biological body (e.g., the fluids and excrements of the body produced during orgasm), which are to be separated from the purities of the soul/mind/consciousness (Emilio & Freedman, 1997). Thus, historically speaking, speech associated with biological functions of the self, which includes sexual intercourse, has become collectively forbidden in individuals’ public narratives while the civil discourses of the mind (e.g., ideas, philosophy, art, culture, science, and morality) are encouraged. Within a civilised society, those impulses that conflict with the purity of the soul/mind are often silenced and removed from one’s vocabulary, and as shown by Žižek, eliminated from one’s speech to uphold the (Christian) moralities that orientate human behaviour.

However, as illustrated by the men’s lived experiences, the use of technology and the immersion of the self into the virtual realm permits individuals to momentarily liberate themselves from

the subconscious self-imposed discursive barriers that negate and inhibit their ability to directly and overtly express their erotic impulses for the 'Other'. Pervasively employed as a communication tool, the unregulated environments of social networks provide men (and women) with the opportunity to escape from and overcome the gaze of a 'civilized morality'. Once logged in, the subject becomes immersed within the 'immense spectacle' of the 'Other' with "no boundary, no frame, no horizon" (Lacan, 1973, p. 75), within a dreamlike utopia of images.

Within a virtual network, a person experiences disinhibition as desires of the psyche roam freely without fear, as their reputation, emotions and body ego are protected by the invisibility of the materiality of their actual selves (Suler, 2004). All that exists is an illusion of oneself that is divorced from the cultural and moral realities of the real world. Through the eroticised-virtualised image of one's physicality, the body ego escapes into the privacy of its own consciousness, where the souls and egos fantasies and desires can be lived out through the virtual gaze. Within the virtual medium of social networks, the body ego's thirst for recognition and psycho-somatic sensations of intimacy are temporarily quenched until the reality of an embodied state of absence of another or even loneliness is restored.

### **III. Loneliness and the Absence of a Meaningful Love**

Despite their search for experiences of an intimate and meaningful connection beyond the symbolic, in both the physical and the virtual, through the embodiment of the perceived object of desire of the 'Other' (i.e., the aesthetic-athletic body), the persistent absence of meaningful relationships proved, for these men, to be a state of existence that consumed their being while living in (West) Los Angeles. As a consequence, loneliness emerged as a significant theme within these men's lives. In continuing to utilise postmaterialist interpretations of the psychoanalytic insights of Freud, Lacan, Nietzsche and others, in the following section, I explore men's lived experiences of loneliness in relation to sex, love, the aesthetic-athletic body and the cultural struggles they endure.

Behind the beautified aesthetics of their body's image, many participants perceived loneliness as an experience caused by an absence of meaningful relations within the metropolitan districts of (West) Los Angeles. The phenomenon of loneliness was considered an enduring aspect of Los Angeles culture. Henry and John commented:

L.A. isn't love filled (Henry).

L.A. is a very lonely city, lots of people here are single and lonely. Sure, sex is easy, but it becomes meaningless after a while... L.A. is very shallow, sexualised and competitive (John).

On their account, (West) Los Angeles life is immersed in a melancholy culture fuelled by an absence of meaning, stable connections and love. John suggests this perceived absence of love is a manifestation of large numbers of young people living in the area (i.e., the lack of a family and community life) and a culture that values hedonistic pleasures and superficial experiences of meaningless sex. From his perspective, the immediate sensory pleasures of the material, experienced through 'fast sex', lures individuals away from relationships grounded in substance and authenticity, creating a culture that is "very shallow, sexualised and competitive." As Leon Hoffman (2005) puts it:

In our current oversexualized culture, sex has become a commodity, immaturity is often idealized, and sexual conquests have been valorized as sport. These pervasive exhibitionistic displays undermine the psychological value of intimate long-term personal attachments. While aspects of Sigmund Freud's theories have undergone revision, the central place the founder of psychoanalysis gives to sexuality and intimate personal connections remains valid. Freud's ideas teach us the value of intimate personal attachment and its key place in mature sexual fulfilment (5 August).

Elaborating upon Freud's (1916-1917) ideas, psychoanalyst Erich Fromm (1956) suggests loneliness is a by-product of culture. Specifically, as outlined in his influential book '*The Art of Lovin*', Fromm (1956) proposes loneliness is a cultural phenomenon whereby an individual's connectedness to their authentic self, an authentic other and the environment becomes displaced and eroded over time.

In a primitive society the group is small; it consists of those with whom one shares blood and soil. With the growing development of culture, the group enlarges; it becomes the citizenry of a polis, the citizenry of a large state...It is a union in which the individual self disappears to a large extent, and where the aim is to belong to the herd. If I am like everybody else, if I have no feelings or thoughts which make me different, if I conform in custom, dress, ideas, to the pattern of the group, I am saved; saved from the frightening experience of aloneness (p. 12-13).

I argue, within the social fields of (West) Los Angeles, the erotic zones of the physical body are easily satisfied, and the intimate needs of the soul are readily ignored. Kinsey (1948) noted that when one focuses entirely on sexual activities at the expense of the emotional aspects of intimate



interactions, the overall development of one's sexual life is put at risk. For the men involved in this research, despite acquiring a body (image) they desired meaningful relationships were absent. Subsequently, these men's inability to obtain the authentic expressions of friendship and love they wanted resulted in experiences of loneliness.

This absence of a personal and intimate connection with others, and the lack of a sense of community, within the geographical borders of (West) Los Angeles was discussed and elaborated upon by an acquaintance and television personality (non-participant):

...it's a city where people come in for a very short period of time so it's hard to build a sense of community. Everyone's there for a particular goal. The funny thing is when you're in L.A. you're unemployed because when you're working you're off on production somewhere. It's a really interesting city in the sense it can be really lonely because it's hard to build a community, but if you're passionate about the world of entertainment it's a great city to be in (BT).

Adding context to Henry's and John's observations and experiences of loneliness, BT discusses the social dynamics of Los Angeles as being transient, from which experiences of loneliness arise. The epicentre of film, television and entertainment, Los Angeles is where producers, writers, actors, and musicians live before their next performance, anywhere in the country. BT suggests that this constant movement of people makes forming relationships and a sense of community difficult. Although Los Angeles may be great for your career, it may not be great for your 'family' or one's love life. BT's observations of the dynamic and fluid nature of Los Angeles life helps explain and puts into context the participant's feelings of desolation and their experiences of a lack of love.

### ***Loneliness and the Role of Biopedagogies***

For some of the men in this study, their lack of meaningful relationships with others underpinned their use of various body enhancing practices, which they often used to overcome emotions associated with the absence of love. However, when aspirations of attaining meaningful relationships did not eventuate by reinventing their body image, their use of synthetic androgens feelings of loneliness became exaggerated.

They [Steroids] also make me very emotional, sometimes I'll just start crying especially when I feel lonely. L.A. can be a very lonely place, it's very hard to connect to people and make friends, friends that want more than sex. Relationships are very superficial here. I'm more emotional but I haven't experienced roid

rage...my emotions are all over the place – from feeling high to feeling low and depressed, and lonely. Some days I feel attractive and good and some days I feel like shit and don't want to leave the house (Joe).

Despite Joe significantly changing his body schema to appeal to the symbolic desires of the 'O/other', feelings of loneliness continued to occupy Joe's temporality as his desires for meaningful connections with another remained unfulfilled. For Nietzsche (1882), as demonstrated by Joe, loneliness involves being in a state of vulnerability, whereby "shades of distress", "weariness", and "gloominess" (p. 26) appear from the depths of being isolated from a meaningful connection with another. "We are vulnerable when lonely because we feel that something about our lives is missing or unfulfilled. Specifically, we are precluded from making certain connections that we long to establish, connections that concern who we take ourselves to be" (Remhof, 2018, p. 195).

Unable to overcome the superficial discursive demands of (West) Los Angeles (e.g., 'fast love'), despite (progressively) becoming and embodying the symbolic ideal – the aesthetic-athletic, the realities and perceptions of Joe's existence produced an emotional state of despair: "feeling low and depressed, and lonely." Echoing Freud's (1916-17) warnings of the dangers of loneliness – "loneliness and darkness have just robbed me of my valuables" (p. 3155). At this point in time, Joe's loneliness is directly attributed to his body image: "Some days I feel attractive and good, and some days I feel like shit and don't want to leave the house." In his mind, his inability to live up to the (West) Hollywood (and beyond) body image ideals inhibited his ability to confidently live a life free from the need to be desired and recognised by the 'Other'.

With his linguistic ego consumed by the discursive body ideals of the (West) Los Angeles gaze, experiences of being physically inadequate flooded Joe's consciousness rendering him unable to leave the house. "Loneliness encircles and embraces him [the free spirit], ever more threatening, suffocating, heart-tightening, that terrible goddess and her cruel desires" (Nietzsche, 1878, p.3). The self becomes constricted and inhibited by the pains of loneliness, which is commonly associated with feelings of alienation, emptiness, unimportance, and worthlessness—perhaps even shame, guilt, and regret (Weiss, 1973; Cacioppo, Cacioppo & Boomsma, 2014).

In Joe's case, his loneliness appeared to have occurred through the processes of what I refer to as '*symbolic entrapment*'. '*Symbolic entrapment*' referring to the psychic process whereby a person's (e.g., Joe's) metaphysical presence becomes restricted by his perceptions and needs to satisfy the imagined desires and fantasies of the 'Other', a yearning for recognition, a desire to be recognised as an object of love by another. Referencing the American film director Vincente Minnelli, the French

philosopher Giles Deleuze (1987) discusses the psychic process of becoming encapsulated by the perceived desires of the 'Other':

People's dreams are always devouring, and threaten to engulf us; the other's dream is very dangerous. Dreams have a terrible will to power and each one of us is the victim to the other's dreams. Even the most gracious of young girls, is a terrible devourer, not because of her soul but because of her dreams. Beware of the other's dream, because if you are caught in the others dream you are done for!

Looking back on his experiences of being entrapped within the realm of the symbolic and the desires and dreams of the 'Other', a state of being that he eventually overcame, Henry commented:

All the L.A boys are the same, same B.M.I. [body mass index], same colour spray tan, same level of loneliness...I was lucky enough to have family, friends and, well, perhaps God, to help me turn my life around. Drugs are a consequence of loneliness, isolation and lack of connection. Addicts need love... not law [enforcement] (Henry).

In congruence with Joe's lived experience, Henry illustrates how the self becomes emotionally detached and separated from its authenticity by embodying an idealised symbolic identity. The subject's psyche and body enter into a performative state, which mirrors the perceived desires of the 'o/Other' to receive recognition, which I suggest, masks the 'soul' essence and endearing foibles of the self particularly within a virtual network. This symbolic masking of the self - 'front stage behaviour' and 'impression management' (Goffman, 1956) - acts as a barrier between two people, prohibiting them from truly knowing each other. Thus, one's symbolic conditioning inhibits a person's ability to form a meaningful connection and a relationship with another within an environment that depends on the embodiment of particular significations (i.e., the aesthetic-athletic corpus, class distinctions), which define an individual's recognizability, status and value.

The superficial nature of relationships that existed purely within the realm of symbolic interactionism, devoid of meaning, within the social fields of (West) Los Angeles, was reinforced by Jeremy: "Friendships in L.A. are very transactional; everyone wants something or expects something in return for a favour. It's very impersonal. It's all about what can I get out of this as opposed to spending time with someone and getting to know them, with no strings attached." As also demonstrated by Joe, John, and Henry, I argue that this symbolic process of embodiment, emphasising a person's physical appearance, status, and social-economic capital, dictates one's willingness to engage with another authentically. In doing so, neglecting the soul's ('*will to pleasure's*') need for meaningful connections.

Subsequently, feelings of dislocation and loneliness emerge within some of the participants' consciousness.

For Henry, despite his best efforts to overcome these symbolic barriers by modifying his body image through various biopedagogies, his sense of self became lost within the desert of the symbolic and the riptides of loneliness, which led to sex and drug addiction. For some (West) Los Angelenos (particular those within the LGBTQI community), these biopedagogic methods of overcoming were not enough; there was a complete surrendering of the (physically-socialised) self. The a/effects of being castrated by the symbolic – mind, body and soul – was signified by the street sign, shown in **Figure 24**. This billboard, illuminating the a/effects a real and symbolic embodied non-heteronormative *différance* and a lack of meaning authentic connections with others, graphically brings to attention the detrimental a/effects of an embodied sense of loneliness and hopelessness. Consequently, some feel that their only option is to take their own lives to escape the misery of their suffering (Goldbach et al., 2018; Rusow, Srivastava & Rhoades, 2018; Toomey, Syvertsen & Shramko, 2018).



**Figure 24. The Significations and Consequences of Loneliness:** The Suicides and Deaths of West Hollywood, Los Angeles.

## *Metamorphising From the Despair of Loneliness*

As Fromm (1956) articulated, and as signified by the men's statements and the photograph above, loneliness can lead to an individual's undoing. As individuals become discursively separated from their soul's essence (e.g., 'will to pleasure', 'will to power') and essential need to connect with others, they become strangers to themselves. Fromm (1956) argues this is the true meaning of alienation—the inability to feel a kinship with others. However, despite the imprisoning and debilitating a/effects of loneliness, as demonstrated by Henry, solitude provided him with an opportunity to release himself from such separateness, caused by the addictive lures of the symbolic and material world that feed the (body) egos insatiable need for recognition. According to Nietzsche (1885), this enables the individual to focus on what matters. Fortunately for Henry, he overcame an embodied psychic state of nihilism, devoid of the internal and external meanings of recognition and love and meaning, by reconnecting with his “family, friends, and, well, perhaps God.”

While Henry was able to reconnect and identify with what was important to him – family, friends and God, Nietzsche (1878; 1882; 1885; 1886), Freud (1916-17), and Fromm (1956) argue the key to overcoming the toxic a/effects of loneliness is for the individual to learn to occupy their conscious selves and to understand that they are complete without the need for the 'o/Other'. This reflexive praxis of unification – reconnecting to pre-discursive self – facilitates a realisation that one is never alone; one always has oneself for company. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this is the only solution to the problem of the alienated individual, situated within the discursive tugs and pulls of the modern world that attempt to separate the 'I' from the 'me'. For humanity to be saved from the soul-destroying a/effects of loneliness, individuals must have the ability and courage to embrace their “authentic self” (Fromm, 1956) and to embody the ideals of the *Übermensch* – the inner drives of one's 'will to power' (Nietzsche (1885). it is from this act of overcoming the moralities of life and becoming authentic that a *jouissance* of inner peace is realised.

In Nietzsche's (1885) mind, loneliness offers a cognitive space for self-transformation. It helps the individual conquer their existence – in the “loneliest desert”, the “ion emerges to “conquer his freedom” and “be the master of “his own dessert” (p. 18), to let go of the symbolic morality that restricts and suffocates the drives of the 'will to power' and 'will to pleasure'. Furthermore, “to endure the idea of the recurrence one needs: freedom from morality” (Nietzsche, 1869-1889, p. 24). “Morality”, Nietzsche (1882) remarks, “is herd-instinct for the individual” (p. 116). In times of psychological distress, within moments of isolation, the mind is provoked to reflect upon one's life and the environments that they are immersed within.

Self-transformation can occur because one's disconnection from social life moves an individual like Henry to identify and embrace values that are genuinely their own. As Nietzsche (1885) attests: "lonely one...you are going the way to yourself [but] you must wish to consume yourself in your own flame: how could you wish to become new unless you had first become the ashes!" (p. 57). "It is out of the deepest depth that the highest must come to its height" (p. 266). In the Nietzschean sense, the isolation that separates an individual from the world can inspire authenticity. As alluded to by Henry, with the support of friends and family, the extreme moments of loneliness can enable the individual to embrace the eternal recurrence of the right spirit to work toward self-development and reignite one's renewed passion for life.

To summarise, in praxis, the psychoanalysis of loneliness reveals the embodied tensions and conflicts between one's intimate personal fantasies, the norms of social life, and the desires of the body ego that often suffer in silence behind a subject's symbolic identity. To overcome these tensions, as demonstrated by Henry, experiences of loneliness can be viewed as an opportunity to reflect upon one's values and recognise the necessity to develop strategies to control the fantasies of the body ego and reconnect with the authentic self – the soul. Lacan (1950/1966) suggests that moral sensibility revolves around the tension between the social necessity to symbolise and the resistance against this necessity. Thus, drawing on my 'triads of being' ontology, the tensions between the symbolic and the soul/'authentic-self', processed by the linguistic ego, are ongoing tensions that continually need to be negotiated and managed to maintain one's moral and spiritual sensitivities to avoid the authentic-self becoming overwhelmed by the symbolic world. However, although the detrimental embodied experiences of loneliness can be overcome, for some easier than others, the (West Los Angeles) culture of an absence of meaningful love remains.

#### **IV. The Absence of a Committed Love**

This absence of love, which underpinned the participants' experiences of loneliness and their use of biopedagogies, was presented as a significant point of frustration. Whilst Melanie Klein (1937) observed the realities of love as being "never a purity, it's always refracted through a prism of ambivalence, aggression, frustration and disappointment" (p. 105), within the imaginaries of the men I interviewed, 'love' was a metaphysical state that was to be pursued despite the difficulties they experienced in their attempts to attain it. For example, John and Erik commented:

Loyalty is not very common, guys want commitment but they don't want to commit to a relationship. There is always too much temptation. Most relationships don't last long - people get married two, three, four times here. Or open relationships, they are also common but also don't last (John).

Nobody wants to settle down, commit, there is never enough to keep them satisfied [in a relationship]. I tell my friends if you want a relationship find someone out of the city (L.A.) because it's less sexualised and less competition. They are more likely to be loyal...(Erik).

Within these statements, the tensions between the need to perform to the hegemonic narratives of love, the need to commit to monogamous relationships, and the inability to control the locus of the desires and drives of the '*will to pleasure*', manipulated by the linguistic ego, acted as a barrier for these men to form meaningful relationships. "Guys want commitment but they don't want to commit to a relationship" (John). For John and Erik, this perceived lack of control was an issue pervasive within the psychogeographies of Los Angeles. In this cultural landscape, individuals subject themselves to the immersive ideologies of hyper-consumerism and liberalised attitudes towards sex and relationships. Subsequently, these cultural attitudes embedded within (West) Los Angeles culture led to a subversion of love, whereby the pursuit of an 'authentic love' becomes the pursuit of superficial love. Similarly, Giddens (2013) referred to this pursuit of superficial love as the modern transformation of love - the evolution of a '*plastic sexuality*'.

Superficial love, I argue, is a love situated within signs, symbols, significations, status, and the cultural capital of the body. Whereby the self is commodified as a sexual object, an object of love, to adapt to changing cultural norms – multiple marriages, "open-relationships", and newfound sexual freedoms that attempt to satisfy the body ego's never-ending demands for recognition and the *jouissance*'s of intimacy and sex. As Erik puts it: "there is never enough to keep them satisfied".

Consequently, the only love experienced by John, Jack, and others, is one of dissatisfaction. As noted by Žižek (1997), there is an impossibility of attaining the *jouissance*'s of what one desires because the primordial narratives of the imaginary cannot match the realities of a person's object of desire. In short, a subject's desire can never be satisfied when the fantasies of the symbolic rule their consciousness and identity. For a meaningful love encounter to occur, there needs to be an authentic appreciation, connection, and love for the other person that exists beyond symbolic idealism – accepting what is undesirable, genuine and real.

### ***The Perversion of Love (without the Fall)***

Inspired by a dating agency advertisement, within an inflight magazine, claiming that "we enable you to find yourself in love without the fall", Žižek (2013) explains the nexus between discourse, desire and fear, the fear of a committed authentic romantic engagement, by suggesting:

...today, more and more, love, simply passionate love, is emerging as something dangerous and precisely subversive. Think about how you are addressed in your everyday life by society, what society demands of you. It's basically a kind of slightly spiritual Zeldan Buddhist hedonism – ideology is telling you be faithful to yourself, realize your true potentials and experiment with your life, try all different options, don't fixate yourself on a certain stable identity, life is dynamic fluid and so on (Lecture, May 16, 2013).

In this sense, ideology informs the discursive aspects of being, the linguistic ego, subliminally manipulating subjectivities to the point where love is perceived as an experience that will impinge upon one's freedoms and opportunities for self-discovery, vocationally, sexually, spiritually and so forth. Thus, love is something that has to be controlled and managed. The subject no longer transcends into an unexpected romantic love via a chance encounter. Instead, love is commodified as an experience that must fit into the existent flows, regulations, and systems of one's life and symbolic desires. In Žižek's (2013) view, the ability to authentically fall in love is ever-increasingly becoming displaced by the ideologies of love:

...the experience of passionate love, is the most elementary metaphysical experience...In the sense you lead your easy daily life, you meet friends, you go to parties...but then you passionately fall in love...The entire balance of your life is lost, everything is subordinated to this one person...I almost cannot imagine in normal daily life, outside war, a more violent experience than that of love. Which is why all the advisors that we need today are trying precisely to domesticate or to erase this excess of love. It's as if love is too poisonous. The trick they try to offer you, all the marriage agencies, dating agencies, is how to find yourself in love without falling in love.

I claim within economy, not only is stable love, passionate love, emerging as an obstacle to your authentic development, but even the crucial dimension of love is gradually disappearing (May 16).

For many scholars (Fromm, 1956; Kilbride & Page, 2012; Popenoe, 1993; Salecl & Žižek, 1996, Žižek, 2014e), “romantic love” in the modern age has become detached from the responsibilities of a traditional relationship that leads to marriage/monogamous commitment and replaced with sexual hedonism, where the possibilities of sex and sexuality are to be explored uninhibited from the restrictions of monogamy. For these scholars, this type of superficial love represents a return to preromantic, Victorian times, when relatives and counsellors determined love connections and marriages – a love without love, a safe love without the inconveniences of falling in love. Žižek (2014) notes:



We want brief safe sex and sexual encounters without the fall, without this fatal attachment... [which] is slowly emerging as the deeper dominant ideology... It fits perfectly this superficial consumerist attitude (November 30).

With the increasing absence of ‘traditional love’, or a love leading to a commitment of marriage and building a family (Popenoe, 1993; Kilbride & Page, 2012), modern love has become, for many, objectified for the pleasures of sex, free from attachment and responsibility. However, as earlier discussed by John and Erik, there is an emotional cost to this type of superficial, hedonistic love, a love that forgoes the violent disruption to one’s life encountered within an *event* of authentic love, an uncontrolled and unexpectant love event. The emotional consequences of a controlled and forced love, a love on-demand, was articulated by Brad:

Having a relationship in L.A. is very difficult. I’m drained from it. I can’t take anymore breakups, my heart aches every day and I know what it’s like to be happy in love. Every other aspect of my life is fine. It’s rare to find a normal relationship in L.A., a lot of people have open relationships... every night there is some event or some party, or you’re working overtime. I just want a normal life now. If I go through anymore heartache I am fucked. Seriously! I haven’t been well...I cried myself to sleep three times this week. I don’t want to be lonely anymore (Brad).

After suffering from a series of “toxic relationships”, which he acquired to satisfy his needs for physical intimacy and an emotional connection, Brad entered a psychological state of temporary despair. “I was attracted to toxicity, guys that were narcissistic, great bodies, a little wild. The sex was great, I liked the crazy mad passionate sex, but these relationships were toxic for my soul. It wasn’t what I needed.” Despite satisfying his sexual fantasies, the experiences of a superficial ‘love’ left him emotionally depleted and feeling isolated and alone. The lures of the cultural significations of desiring “great bodies” and the “crazy mad passionate sex”, generally discovered online, had displaced the possibilities and potentialities of an *event* of authentic love, a love that nourished Brad’s soul and that existed beyond the superficial desires which his linguistic ego craved.

## **V. All We Need Is (Authentic) Love**

Beyond the discursive significations of the aesthetics and status of the body’s materiality (i.e., to *fall* in love), the desire for authentic love was an expressed need and narrative that repeatedly emerged throughout the participants’ testimonies.

I want a proper connection, something more meaningful. That's harder to achieve here... I would love to have children one day. I guess that's what I really want, you know, a family (Joe).

I just want to go to a nice restaurant, come home, cuddle on the couch and watch a movie. That's all I want, but it's difficult to find. Everybody is always working, cancelling their dates and meetings (John).

Sometimes I think what's the point? I just go [to the gym] to maintain my body... all I need is a house, water, food and a big cock [laughs] (Brad).

For men to attract women is quite simple – they just want security, love, a home and family. They don't really care about all that superficial stuff... well, at least the good ones (Luke).

For these men, their desires and need for authentic love was expressed as a longingness to acquire and maintain a meaningful, intimate connection with another, to raise children to have a family, have intimate physical contact, and have access to the necessities of life – a house, food, and water. In the Nietzschean–Freudian sense, these are needs that reflect the instinctive drives of the '*will to pleasure*' and '*will to power*' whereby every human “instinctively strives for an optimum of favourable conditions, under which it can vent its power completely and attain its maximum feeling of power” (Nietzsche, 1886, p. 7). Yet, for all of the participants except Luke, who was married, authentic love was “difficult to find”, an experience they had yet to encounter.

Although these men were consciously aware of their romantic needs, the life instincts of the *Eros* and '*will to pleasure*', as Freud (1920) theorised, there remained an attachment to the meanings of the symbolic significations of the body, which acted as a symbolic barrier to achieving an authentic romantic relationship. This attachment to the meanings of the symbolic is an inescapable tension between the internal and external needs of the body ego, a narcissistic attachment to the significations of an imagined and idealised body that is required to receive romantic recognition from another, while also being aware of the superficiality and limitations of one's symbolic performativity. Brad accentuated this dilemma – “sometimes I think - what's the point? I just go [to the gym] to maintain my body.”

Despite creating an idealised body image, authentic love was something Brad had yet to discover. And, because of this, the worthiness of his body practices was brought into question. Despite this, the aesthetics and the health of the physical body still needed to be maintained. The latter demonstrates that the un/subconscious demands of the body ego are not easily relinquished. Instead, they are deeply ingrained within the subjectivities of the individual, continually informing the self of

what it means to be recognised as an object of love. The (body) ego impatiently and narcissistically demands to be loved. It does not wait to be loved. The ego does not patiently wait for an ‘*event*’ of love, in which one *falls* into love, to occur.

Building upon Lacan’s views, yet opposing a maximalist, socially constructionist ontology, and in agreement with Freud and Nietzsche and other psychoanalysts such as Fromm, Klein and Žižek, I argue for a self and a love beyond the discursive, symbolic and the imaginary. I argue for the existence of a psychic essence of being, which I suggest is situated within an immortal soul, that makes it possible to achieve an authentic love. That is a legitimate love between two souls devoid of the superficialities of the meanings of an artificial self.

Post the initial ‘*event*’ of attraction/love, Fromm (1956) suggests romantic relationships of an authentic meaning involve: a) loving one’s authentic self, the self that exists without the egos narcissistic needs for status and capital, and b) allowing a relationship to form by recognising oneself in the other through continued moments of affection, respect, and responsibility to earn the recognition that the ego desires. “Once one had discovered how to listen to, appreciate, and indeed love oneself...it would be possible to love somebody else...to fathom the loved one’s inner core as one listened to one’s own core” (Fromm, 1956, p. 18).

Thus, by drawing on these psychoanalytic insights, to achieve and receive the benefits of authentic romantic love, the individual must consciously transform from an object of symbolic love to a being of self-love. Or, as discussed in **Chapter 5**, to return to a ‘*soul state of consciousness*’. When authenticity and self-acceptance are achieved, the subject can authentically love another without the need to acquire a culturally-induced imagined or real symbolic status. Authentic romantic love transcends the web of meaningless significations that fail to nourish the basic needs of the soul, as well as the soul – the authentic self – of the other.

In this context, the linguistic ego’s need to displace the real ‘I’ with an imagined ‘me’ is managed to ensure the narcissistic needs of the ego remain obscured by the subject being comfortable with their authentic self, and thus comfortable with abandoning an imagined and symbolic ‘me’. All that remains is an authentic pre-discursive ‘I’ that can authentically interact with another, which increases the possibility of an *event* of falling authentically in love. Authentic love is no longer barred and displaced by the discourses of a symbolic order. Consequentially, as Nietzsche (1885) figuratively puts it, a ‘*garden of marriage*’, which promotes creative activity and a love “that should light up higher paths for you” to realise and establish a heightened and life-affirming state of being (Nietzsche, 1887, p. 24).

Moving onto the final chapter of this thesis, I now introduce a theory I call '*Displaced Humanism*', which contextualises the findings of this study, the '*Tensions of the Self and Discourse of Being*'. In this chapter (**Chapter 10**), I offer a different reading of the existing literature concerning embodiment to outline the theoretical underpinnings of '*Displaced Humanism*' and offer insights into how I think a '*Displaced Humanism*' can be overcome.

*“Why do our relatives, the animals, not exhibit any such cultural struggle? We do not know. Very probably some of them — the bees, the ants, the termites — strove for thousands of years before they arrived at the State institutions, the distribution of functions and the restrictions on the individual, for which we admire them today. It is a mark of our present condition that we know from our own feelings that we should not think ourselves happy in any of these animal States...In the case of other animal species it may be that a temporary balance has been reached between the influences of their environment and the mutually contending instincts within them...”*

Sigmund Freud (1930, p. 123)

## 10

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### PART I

#### THE PERSONAL ODYSSEYS OF A ‘DISPLACED HUMANISM’

When compared to the ingenious and instinctive lives of animals, humans live a relatively restricted life. While animals are free to feed, find shelter, mate, build a home, and socialise when they please, a human's ability to perform the same tasks is governed by the economic system and culture in which they live. Since the late 1970s, humanity has been organised by the pervasive narratives and ideologies of neoliberalism, a laissez-faire economic liberalism grounded in the ideals of free-market capitalism – privatisation, deregulation, globalisation, free trade, and austerity (Springer, Birch & MacLeavy, 2016; Varoufakis, 2016; Varoufakis, Halevi & Theocarakis, 2012). The narratives and power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980) produced by this type of (global) governance has created a discursive vortex with real-world consequences in which (American) members of society either ‘sink or swim’, a ‘survival of the fittest’, whereby the health and well-being of an individual (and the planet) is determined by their ability to perform within a competitive, commercialised world. Subsequently, “Western progress has been through the ego, sometimes at the expense of the soul” (Carroll, 2008, p. 11). Humans have become culturally conditioned to advance their ‘*symbolic dominance*’ (Bourdieu, 1979) and social status by accumulating various forms of symbolic capital - instead of leading a life aligned with the needs of their soul. For many, this commodification and objectification of the self has led to a rejection of the care of the soul, as 21st Century philistinism (Furedi, 2006; 2010; 2010b; 2013) and the discourses of nihilism – materialism, consumerism, and social constructionism – inform the individual that their ‘character’, primordial essence, is nothing but a discursive illusion (Baudrillard, 1976; 1981; Bourdieu, 1979; 1998; Dreyfus & Rubin, 1994; Durkheim, 1912; Foucault, 1977; 1978; Kierkegaard, 1846b; Lacan, 1966/1977; Trueman, 2020). Within this context, the soul’s innate drives for optimal health, meaningful relationships, self-actualisation, self-expression, authenticity, and freedom becomes suppressed and displaced by the socially conditioned ego. A (linguistic and body) ego that identifies with, imitates and desires the projected unfulfilling pleasures of cultural conformity, consumer culture and identity politics from which a range of embodied ‘*tensions of the self and discourses of being*’ are commonly experienced, managed and negotiated with an array of body practices (Elliott, 2008; 2011; 2013; 2015b; 2018; 2018b; 2019b; Elliott & Lemert, 2009).

## I. 'Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being': The Three Phases of a 'Displaced Humanism'

Drawing on a postmaterialist reinterpretation of Nietzsche's (1882) ontology that life is an ongoing struggle between the wills, demands, and phantasms of the soul, the physiological body and the moralities of culture, throughout this study (*Chapters 5–9*), I have illuminated how these embodied tensions have affected the lives of a diverse range of men living in Los Angeles by sharing, examining and exploring the narratives presented within their life histories. In doing so, I highlight a range of existential experiences related to the participants' identities, sexualities, body image, mental and physical health, sense of self, and relationships with others, (neo-liberal) ideology, and (American) culture. For all of the men in this study, albeit in different ways, their embodied angst between the needs of the soul (e.g., love, belonging, self-actualisation), the material body (e.g., optimal health), and the discursive demands of culture were managed, negotiated, exacerbated and (sometimes) overcome with various body practices (i.e., androgens, dieting, exercise, sex, prescription and recreational drugs, technology, social media).

In the following, I argue the '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' experienced by the men who took part in this research are a product and symptom of three key integrated life phases which have had a significant impact on their lives. The three key life phases, as experienced by the men in this study, can be represented as the following:

- **Phase 1:** The cultural subversion and conditioning of the soul, mind, and body. This is a metaphysical phenomenon that is initiated during childhood.
- **Phase 2:** The desire and drive for an individual to conform to, and/or overcome, the symbolic conditioning and biopolitics of the soul, mind and body. This is a metaphysical phenomenon that is initiated during childhood, and becomes heightened during adolescence and adulthood.
- **Phase 3:** The desire and need for an individual to be recognised as a '*love-object*' (Lacan, 1964), from which real and imaginary psychic and bodily pleasures of intimacy, lust, love, acceptance, and a (idealised) meaningful relationship are experienced. This is a metaphysical phenomenon that is initiated during childhood, encouraged during adolescence and continues throughout adulthood.

I argue, during these three interweaving phases of a person's life, from birth to adulthood, the primordial needs of the soul and the physiological functions of the body become subjugated and altered by cultural norms, beliefs and expectations. Subsequently, as these cultural discourses shape an

individual's sense of self and reality throughout their lives, various embodied tensions of the self emerge (e.g., feelings of social and body anxiety, lust, desire), which are expressed by, and experienced through, the physical body. These embodied experiences, both imagined and real, are then managed, concealed or/and conveyed, often subconsciously, with various body practices to project an illusionary image of unity to the world. This internalised sense of displacement of a person's pre-discursive sense of self, the internal tension between honouring the needs of the 'I' and the cultural unified 'me', was exhibited through the participants' life histories. I now provide an overview of how these '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' affected the participant's sense of self and praxis within the three key life phases of a '*Displaced Humanism*'.

### **Phase 1: The Cultural Subversion of the Authentic Self**

In addition to Lacan's (1953) idea of a '*split self*', which occurs during the mirror phase – when a child begins to identify with the discursive image of the self (e.g., the self becomes performative (Butler, 1990)) – I argue the 'authentic self' (soul) becomes physically and psychically displaced by the hegemonic and normative cultural practices within society. In this study, the participants' cultural subversion of their 'authentic self' – the mind, body, and soul – was highlighted when reflecting upon their lived experiences within the American school system (**Chapter 5**). During this phase of their life, their sense of self became increasingly institutionalised, disciplined, gendered and sexually repressed within a heteronormative matrix that valued obedience, rules and regulations, competitive sports, and where necessary, the use of prescriptive drugs "to calm down" an overly creative and curious mind.

Beyond the confines of an academic setting, the (childhood) self was further surveilled and regulated by body practices that included: being secretly fed dieting pills to produce a culturally symbolic 'healthy' body, religious traditions and praxis (i.e., church sermons, prayer) that condemned homosexuality, and a desire to commodify oneself to enhance one's social status and economic capital by adhering to cultural imperatives of popular and celebrity culture (e.g., the production of the *cinematic attitude* and body (Derrida, 2008) (**Chapter 5**).

Throughout the participants' childhoods, in numerous ways, their bodies and minds were socialised to conform to the hegemonic modes of being and "truths" privileged within their social networks – educated, indoctrinated, disciplined, medicated, controlled and normalised. The 'authentic self', the desires and needs of soul and body, had become coerced into a subdued performative state –

subconsciously surrendering to the moralities of culture that enforced conformity over individuality. The 'authentic self' had become discursively displaced.

## **Phase 2: Overcoming the Cultural Subversion of the Self**

As the participants transitioned from childhood to adolescence, their minds, bodies and souls continued to be discursively displaced by societal norms and practices (*Chapters 6 & 7*). Yet, simultaneously, at this time in their lives, many of the men in this study became increasingly reflexive as they began to challenge and resist the normative modes of being and cultural “truths” that inhibited their sense of reality, who they were, and who they could be. Significantly, for many of these men, this shift in consciousness had occurred because their physical and mental health had become so displaced (e.g., ill, injured, sexually repressed, medicalised) that the needs of their physiological body and primordial soul – optimal health, sexual desires, being one’s ‘true self’ – could no longer be repressed. The authentic ‘I’ was unwilling to continue to surrender itself to the cultural ‘me’. Succinctly, during adolescence, the participants had become aware of the split and difference between the authentic self and the symbolic self.

Julia Kristeva (1980), drawing on Freud and Lacan, describes this metaphysical realisation as a form of *abjection*. For her, *abjection* refers to the “I/Not I” dichotomy – when the embodied entanglement between the self, body and culture become separated to reveal oneself as a discursively corporeal marginalised, castrated and displaced subject. For example, two participants signified this sense of embodied disunity by commenting – “I am not who I want to be” and “I feel dead inside”. Kristeva (1980) argues this realisation of an embodied *differance* (Derrida, 1967a; 1967b; 1967c) leads to a subjective horror (*abjection*). However, drawing on Nietzsche's (1887; 1901) concept of the ‘*will to power*’ and the participants’ life histories, additionally, I propose this realisation leads to the awakening of one’s authentic and primordial needs. This awakening process, often in times of suffering (*Chapters 5, 6, 8 & 9*), leads to the realisation that one’s existential tensions from which spiritual, mental and physical anguish occur are metaphysical states that need to be overcome.

Although the participants desired to overcome the “I/Not I” dichotomy, their desire to achieve a harmonious balance between the competing needs of the soul, body, and culture is not easily acquired. This embodied lack of unity is because, fundamentally, the discourses and moralities of culture are pervasive and ubiquitous, which acts as an invisible web that continuously alters sense reality. This discursive web of social systems and cultural attitudes entraps the (linguistic and body) ego and the



embodied soul to identify with, seek, and attach to the cultural meanings and superficial pleasures of life – economic capital, status, consumption, and hedonistic behaviours. Thus, there is a constant ongoing struggle between the wills, demands, and phantasms of the soul, the physiological body and the moralities of culture (Nietzsche, 1882) that never dissipates. The ‘authentic’ self is constantly being conditioned to be something other than what it is – a neoliberal machine, a subconscious relational being symbolically performing to the discourses of conformity and neoliberal fatigue.

Increasingly, throughout the world, these embodied ‘tensions of the self and discourses of being’, the authentic ‘I/cultural ‘me’ dichotomy, and the resulting symptoms of neurosis, are commonly managed by men and women with an array of body techniques like botox, exercise, meditation, cosmetic surgery, and prescription drugs (Crossley, 2007; 2012; 2017; Elliott, 2008; 2011; 2013; 2015; 2021; Harman, 2016; Harman & Burrows, 2019; Ortega, 2015; Shield, 2015; Shilling, 2008; 2016; 2017; Waterworth, Nicholls, Burrows & Gaffney, 2020). In this study, the male participants attempted to overcome and simultaneously symbolically conform to hegemonic discourses of beauty, health and heteronormativity by experimenting with illicit and commercialised synthetic testosterone practices (i.e., AAS, hcG, Hch, hGH, SARMs) and other associated biopedagogies – health supplements, weight training, sun tanning, cardiovascular exercise and dieting. For some, these body techniques helped to negotiate the ‘I/me’ split, as an optimal health and desirable corporeal aesthetic emerged, which aligned with the needs and desires of the soul, body and (linguistic-body) ego. Consequently, these men rediscovered their self-confidence, which continued to grow as they benefit financially and socially from an improved body image.

However, for some men in this study, their use of synthetic androgens, particularly illicit steroids, lead to a range of adverse side effects (i.e., chronic acne, mood swings, bloating, migraines). With the bodies health, and subsequently, symbology, now existing in an undesirable state, the “I/Not I” tension was exacerbated, and feelings of despair, depression and (body/social) anxiety continued to detrimentally affect one’s consciousness and sense of self. Thus, despite these men’s best attempts, the desires and needs of their soul’s, bodies and (linguistic-body) ego’s remained unfulfilled as expectations of an idealised self and a self that could not exist free from symbolic performativity could not be realised. Reiterating Kierkegaard’s (1849) observation that “the most common form of despair is not being who you are” (p. 54).

### Phase 3: Presenting Oneself as a ‘Love–Object’

As the participants entered into adolescence and early adulthood, critically, consciously and subconsciously, they increasingly sought to be recognised as a ‘*love–object*’ (Lacan, 1964) – an object worthy of love and attention (*Chapters 8 & 9*). For the men in this study, to achieve an embodied state of recognition, their body's image was reconfigured to present a (sexually) desirable and beautified self to the ‘other’. Thus, in addition to using biopedagogies to attain optimal health and an appeasing corporeal aesthetic, biopedagogies were now used to acquire and experience the *jouissances* (Freud, 1896; 1950; Lacan, 1959-1960a; 1959-1960b; 1967; 1969-1970) – symbolic, imagined and real – of admiration, lust, courtship, sexual intimacy, and improved love life.

From a Freudian perspective, perceiving oneself and another person as a ‘*love–object*’ is metaphysically initiated, yet suppressed, during infancy when a child enters into a sexual relationship with the ‘mother’ (e.g., breastfeeding) (Freud, 1933; 2011). However, although the child and ‘mother’ establish themselves as desirable love–objects through various exchanges of love (e.g., feeding, toileting, bathing, nursing), the sexual nature of the mother-child relationship is culturally subdued (Butler, 1990). However, I argue, as evidenced by the participants’ lived experiences (*Chapter 8 & 9*), this culturally induced inhibition of the infants, then child’s, sexual development and desires (e.g., ‘will to pleasure’) changes as they transition into adolescence and early adulthood.

When a child enters adolescence, the self becomes increasingly exposed to cultural imperatives and media that encourage the presentation of an eroticised body and sexual behaviours that subliminally orientate and promote the expression of one’s innate desires for love, affection and belonging (e.g. the ‘will to pleasure’), often within a neoliberal and heteronormative context (Brown, Steele & Walsh-Childers, 2001; Collins et al., 2017; Lin, Liu & Yi, 2020; O’Hara et al., 2012; 2013; Peter & Valkenburg, 2011; Willoughby, Young-Petersen & Leonhardt, 2018; Strasburger, Wilson & Jordan, 2014; Tolman & McClelland, 2011; Ybarra, Strasburger & Mitchell, 2014). The adolescent self – mind, body and soul, now enmeshed within a hyper-sexualised contemporary culture, becomes objectified, conditioned for sexual promiscuity, and thus, sexually performative (Brown, Steele & Walsh-Childers, 2001; Hakim, 2011; Martschukat, 2021; Warhurst & Nickson, 2020; Trueman, 2020). Subsequently, as a person transitions from childhood to adolescence, there is a significant cultural shift in how their sexual desires and attitudes are socially conditioned.

Post-childhood, ‘love’ is no longer a state of being that can be assumed as the unconditional love experienced between a child and the ‘mother’ become superseded by an uncertain ‘love’ with an unknown ‘other’. ‘Love’ is something that must be sought after and discursively signalled. As a result,

a new set of embodied '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' emerge that need to be negotiated and managed. During adolescence, subliminally, a person learns that to be recognised as a '*love-object*' significations of love that are valued within their social networks (e.g., the aesthetic-athletic) need to be mimicked, embodied and expressed via the physical body (*Chapters 8-9*). Now discursively and psychically conditioned for 'love', lust and intimacy, the objectification and commodification of the body become an essential part of a person's praxis to acquire the intimacy they desire.

To cultivate oneself as a '*love-object*', the men in this study adopted various body practices (i.e., synthetic hormones, exercise) to enhance their physical and erotic capital (*Chapters 8 & 9*). As their human aesthetics transformed from a body and self that represented an embodied *lack* – a body devoid of meanings of 'love' – to a desirable '*love-object*', healthy and aesthetically pleasing, internalised perceptions of being unworthy of love began to dissipate. The cultural discourses that previously signified the body as undesirable (e.g., fat, short, skinny, geeky) had become replaced with discourses of attractiveness (e.g., taut and 'healthy'). Thus, the participants had, momentarily, satisfied the needs of the linguistic ego, and potentially the needs of the soul (i.e., the '*will to pleasure*'), as they now perceived that they were in a better position to attain the admiration, sex and love they desired. The body, objectified as a sexual object, had become an expression of love, lust and desire, a '*love-object*', to satisfy one's own needs and the perceived needs of another – a very different '*love-object*' than what one experiences when they are a child.

Yet, despite the men's best attempts to achieve a desirable body, their testimonies revealed that attaining and maintaining an authentic relationship and love life beyond casual sex was difficult to find (*Chapter 9*). From a psychoanalytic perspective, there was a disconnect between the participants' imagined outcomes of an improved physical schema – an idealised love life – and the realities of love – that authentic love exists beyond the superficial symbolic meanings of a person's body image (Žižek, 2015). As noted by Žižek (2015), for the metaphysics of genuine romantic love to occur depends on one's ability to accept and embrace their own foibles and foibles of the one they desire. Thus, a person cannot attain true love when their physical and psychic vulnerabilities are cosmetically masked. Subsequently, for many of the men who participated in this research, love was a metaphysical state that remained elusive, as they remained entrapped within the discourses of sexual desire and symbolic love.

Lacking the meaningful and authentic relationships the participants desired, experiences of hopelessness, unworthiness, sadness, and feeling unfulfilled consumed their consciousness (*Chapter 9*). The soul's needs for love (e.g., '*will to pleasure*') had become displaced by the external realities of discourse and the (linguistic) body–egos need for an idealised beautified self that was something other than what it was. Within this phase of their life, these men's emotions reflected the symptoms of a disunified, fragmented and displaced sense of self (Dreyfus & Rubin, 1994; Elliott, 2004; Freud, 1930;

Kierkegaard, 1846; Lacan, 1953; Nietzsche, 1886b). A self that I argue had become entrapped between the cultural demands of the dialectic realm and the authentic needs of the soul – authentic love. Thus, suggesting that the roots and development of the modern self as a sexual object and commodity is a symptom, rather than the cause, of the human search for meaning, identity and connection within an increasingly precariously expeditious and challenging world (Trueman, 2020).

Within the social milieu of Los Angeles, the men's experiences of a lack of authentic relationships, and subsequent experiences of loneliness, similar to many other metropolitan cities (Alberti, 2019; Fox, 2020; Laing, 2017; Miller & Sagan, 2017; Savelli, Gillett & Andrews, 2020; Shilling, 2017; Shield, 2015; Warhurst & Nickson, 2020), were exasperated by the cities transient and fast-paced culture and the use of social media (*Chapters 8 & 9*). Los Angeles lacked the sense of community, familiar faces, and close friendships that their souls yearned for. Particularly for those who were born out of state. Their soul's desires for a '*will to pleasure*' remained unfulfilled. Although the men attempted to overcome and mask their lack of cultural and interpersonal connectivity by using various body practices to enhance their physical capital, the imagined benefits of attaining authentic relationships did not eventuate. Paradoxically, by conforming to hegemonic modes of beauty and becoming an objectified cultural 'me', an illusionary and discursive self displaced from its authenticity, the relationships they did acquire mirrored the superficial self that they projected out into the world. As a result, 'toxic' relationships, 'fast-sex', and inauthentic friendships became the norm – pulling them further away from the authentic connections and experiences of love and affection they wanted and valued. They had become entrapped by the ego's need for symbolic beauty, which had negated their ability to connect with others mentally, emotionally, and spiritually authentically. The 'false self' had consumed the 'true self', which made connecting with others on a deeper level difficult. For many, this culturally induced process of the soul's subversion to culture and the manifestation of an isolated self led to experiences of neuroticism, despair and suffering, suicide attempts, and the use of recreational drugs. Whilst some overcame these experiences by reconnecting with their families, old friends, and animals, others still struggled to successfully negotiate the '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' that had taken hold of their (subconscious) minds, bodies and soul.

Many scholars argue loneliness is a metaphysical phenomenon that has become increasingly common and acute in modern society, a public health epidemic that health professionals are struggling to subdue (Berg-Wegner & Morely, 2020; Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018; Elliott, 2004; 2021; Elliott & Lemert, 2009; Holt-Lunstad, 2017; Jeste, Lee & Cacioppo, 2020; Kileen, 1998; Lemert & Elliott, 2006; King, 2018). Arriving at a similar conclusion, as evidenced by the life histories shared throughout this study (*Chapters 5–9*), I suggest, the rise of the loneliness epidemic is a by-product of society becoming increasingly commodified, objectified, technological, genetically modified, and posthuman (Braidotti, 2015; 2019; Braidotti & Bignall, 2018). The discourses of capitalism and neoliberalism have

subconsciously altered every aspect of one's life – from societal body image, eating and exercise norms and habits to how individual's fall in love, have sex and develop addictions for pornography, drugs and alcohol (Martschukat, 2021; Warhurst & Nickson, 2020; Žižek, 1989; 2013; 2014c; 2014d; 2017; 2019b; Zuboff, 2018). Yet, for most, this discursive abstraction of the self remains obscured from their conscious mind. In turn, shaping and distorting how a person perceives and experiences reality, themselves, others, and what they value. Whether they realise it or not, the individual will continue to be displaced by symbolic conformity or transcend the meanings of the semiotic matrix. Either way, their embodied praxis of choice – dieting, exercise, synthetic hormones, cosmetic surgery, sex, narcotics, meditation, and so on – will have a role to play.

In summary, drawing on the personal narratives of a cohort of diverse men, 26–40 years old, who live in (West) Los Angeles, I have theoretically and empirically explored the ongoing struggle between the wills, demands, and phantasms of the soul, the physiological body, the moralities of culture (Nietzsche, 1882) (*Chapters 2–9*). In doing so, I have revealed the existential pleasures, pains and challenges relating to a person's health, identity, sexuality, inter/intrapersonal relationships with others, and the a/effect these *'tensions of the self and discourses of being'* have on their praxis.

The Cultural Subversion of the 'Authentic' Self	Overcoming the Cultural Subversion of the 'Authentic' Self	Presenting Oneself as a 'Love-Object'
<p><b>The Symbolic and Corporeal Conditioning of the Child</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Biopolitics, Healthism and the Development of the 'Healthy' Child</li> <li>~ Identity Politics &amp; Cultural Conformity/Performativity (e.g., gender, race, religion, nationalism).</li> </ul> <p><b>The Schooled Self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ The Medicalized Self</li> <li>~ The Gendered Self</li> <li>~ The Disciplining of the Self &amp; Body (e.g., rules &amp; regulations, codes &amp; practices of civility, sports, punishing non-compliance).</li> </ul> <p><b>The Loss of the 'Authentic' Self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ conforming to the hegemonic cultural attitudes of nihilism, materialism, consumerism, neo-liberalism, &amp; philistinism.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Adoption of Body Practices to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Negotiate and manage the embodied tensions between the soul, body and culture.</li> <li>~ Overcome cultural narratives that position the self as undesirable (e.g., abnormal, disabled, unhealthy).</li> <li>~ Conform to the cultural narratives of a normative health and beauty, and identity politics (e.g., gender, race, religion, sexuality).</li> <li>~ Overcome the pain and suffering of a displaced body, mind, and soul (e.g., physical injuries, neurosis, the 'medical' toxification of the self).</li> <li>~ Restore one's mental and physiological health.</li> <li>~ Improve one's body image to attain social and economic capital.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Adoption of Body Practices to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~ Present the self and body as an 'love-object' to be desired by another.</li> <li>~ Manage sexual desires and tensions of the self (e.g., use of exercise, dieting, cosmetics, androgens, 'chemsex').</li> <li>~ Pursue and experience the embodied pleasures of being desired and intimate with another within one's physical, social and virtual spaces.</li> <li>~ Attain casual-sex relationships.</li> <li>~ Attain meaningful intimate relationship(s).</li> <li>~ Overcome experiences of loneliness.</li> </ul>
Childhood	Adolescence	Adolescence – Early Adulthood

**Table 4: Praxis of the Self:** Life Phases of the 'Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being' and Men's Body Practices

*“America...has introduced the religion of praxis and productivity; it has put the quest for profit, great industrial production, and mechanical, visible, and quantitative achievements over any other interest. It has generated a soulless greatness of a purely technological and collective nature, lacking any background of transcendence, inner light, and true spirituality. America has become a mere instrument of production and material productivity within a conformist social conglomerate”.*

Julius Evola (1934/2018, p. 374)

## PART II

### THE THEORETICAL ODYSSEYS OF A ‘DISPLACED HUMANISM’

In an attempt to theoretically conceptualise, articulate, and present my research findings regarding the relationship between human subjectivity, embodiment, discourse and praxis, in the following, I give an overview of my theory ‘*Displaced Humanism*’. ‘*Displaced Humanism*’ offers a point of difference to existing contemporary embodiment theories – ‘(gender) performativity’ (Butler, 1990), ‘somaesthetics’ (Shusterman, 2008; 2012), ‘new materialism’ (Coole & Frost, 2010), and ‘posthumanism’ (Braidotti, 2013; 2019) – by acknowledging that consciousness and desire continue to function beyond, and thus are not limited to, the influence of discourse and material matter (Beauregard, 2021; Groome & Roberts, 2016; Miller, 2014) (*See Chapter 2, Section IV*). Thus, I adopt a postmaterialist/neo-Nietzschean ontology to propose that the human experience and embodied praxis emerges from an ongoing struggle between culture, the material body and the wills and drives of the *transcendent* soul.

Embracing a Nietzschean-poststructuralist attitude, ‘*Displaced Humanism*’ is a working hypothesis rather than an article of faith or an incontestable presumption. It is a theoretical framework that attempts to contextualise the intersectionality and fluidity of human desire, the passions and suffering of humanity, the “reality of our drives” (Nietzsche, 1886, p. 231), and the cultural practices that individuals and/or societies employ to negotiate embodied tensions and present oneself to the world. To conclude this research project, I: a) briefly outline the genealogy and concept of ‘*Displaced Humanism*’; b) and c) continue to draw on the participants’ testimonies to illustrate how a person transcends the embodied a/effects of a ‘*Displaced Humanism*’; d) address the ideological cause of a ‘*Displaced Humanism*’ by offering an alternative vision to neo-liberal capitalism, and; e) offer my concluding thoughts.

## II. The Theoretical Underpinnings and Genealogy of a ‘Displaced Humanism’

According to Braidotti (2019), contemporary critiques of humanism have radically defined what it means to be human – as ‘posthuman knowledge’ (the use of multi-layered and multi-directional analysis) has been used to critically and creatively think about the processes of becoming. Primarily, ‘posthuman knowledge’ is a response to the rapid advances made in biogenetics, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and the global expansion of a knowledge-intensive capitalism (Braidotti, 2019; Elliott, 2019; 2021). However, I argue, despite scholars best efforts to theoretically reconceive the human subject, the hegemonic ontologies of materialism and social constructionism continue to dominate. Therefore, limiting how the lived experience is theoretically and empirically analysed and understood.

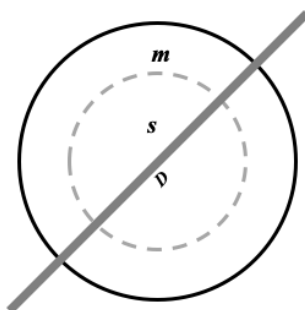
Abi-Rached and Rose (2013) suggest that the rise of a materialist(-discursive) interpretation of the human experience has advanced because of the gradual influence of neuroscience – neuropsychiatry, neuroeconomics, neurotheology and neuroaesthetics. Subliminally, this has led to a neurobiological “colonisation” of the social and human sciences, grounded in materialist assumptions, exaggerated claims and premature promises (Abi-Rached and Rose, 2013). Thus, in reality, the advancement of the (new)materialist movement appears to be supporting the latest ‘*technology of the self*’ (Foucault, 1988) – management of the mind – without even realising it. In this light, many poststructuralists and embodiment scholars seem to be reinforcing the dominant paradigms of *power-knowledge* (Foucault, 1980) rather than contesting the dogmas of the scientific method, positivism, materialism, and nihilism.

On the other hand, postmaterial and quantum physics researchers (i.e., Artart & Obaid, 2017; Beauregard, 2021; Groome & Roberts, 2016; Irwin & Watt, 2007; Miller, 2015; Mohammed, 2019; Radin, 1997; Ryan, 2015), who are genuinely challenging mind-body “truths” by discovering life beyond the material and discursive realm (e.g., the existence of a transcendental soul), remain marginalised because of the philistine attitudes and taboos within academia (Furedi, 2006; 2010; 2010b; 2013; Sheldrake, 2012; 2017; 2019). In contrast, ‘*Displaced Humanism*’ aspires to engage with the legitimate scientific and empirical evidence produced by postmaterialists (*see Chapter 2, Section 5*). Thus, authentically disrupt and transform contemporary understandings of embodiment and the mind-body-culture-praxis nexus.

Anchored in Continental philosophy, ‘*Displaced Humanism*’ ventures to modernise, reconceptualise, and integrate the insights afforded by Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan and Bourdieu, and others to reflect the present-day findings of postmaterialists. Subsequently, ‘*Displaced Humanism*’ can

be interpreted as a theory that advocates for the spiritual elements of a person's being – a transcendent soul, where a person's authentic needs and desires (i.e., unconditional love, belonging, self-actualisation) are located. Therefore, *'Displaced Humanism'* juxtaposes and contests Nietzsche's and Freud's claim of an 'impersonal soul of matter' (Orlie, 2010), and Lacan's (1966/1977) and Foucault's (1977) belief in an impersonal soul of discourse. Alternatively, *'Displaced Humanism'* reflects a revival of the wisdom provided by the founding fathers of poststructural scholarship Plato, Kant and Kierkegaard. Each of whom argued for a transcendental noumenal self and the "supersensible" – life and existence that lies beyond a person's immediate sense experience (Plato, 370 B. C. E./2016; 375 B. C. E./1998; Kant, 1787/1965; 1790/2000; (Kierkegaard, 1843; 1843b; 1843c; 1846; 1846b; 1849). Yet, a self that is not limited to Descartes's (1641) mind/soul-body dualism.

However, similarly to Freud and Nietzsche (and Kierkegaard), albeit from a postmaterialist ontology, *'Displaced Humanism'* proposes that one's 'authentic self' (body and soul) becomes subliminally displaced and negated by culture, through the subversive and immersive processes of socialisation, from which a false egoic narcissistic self – the linguistic ego and linguistic unconscious (Lacan, 1949; 1953; 1957) – is created and stimulated. The narcissistic self, in this sense, is the (un/conscious) pursuit of an idealised self-image to attain admiration from another person – symbolic, real or imagined. Subconsciously, this pursuit of recognition is a person's attempt to fill the *lack* of being that resides within (i.e., what the primordial soul or/and ego desires but cannot acquire). Thus, I extend Lacan's conception of the (discursively) split subject ( $\$$ ) by suggesting that the human subject consists of material matter and *a transcendental soul* that is discursively conditioned and fragmented. Therefore, human subjectivity, from a *'Displaced Humanism'* perspective, can be symbolically represented as the following:



The Displaced Subject ( $\$$ ) = the Discursive (D) displacement of the authentic Soul (s) and Material Matter (m).

Figure 25. *'Displaced Humanism'*: The Discursive Displacement of Subject 'Authenticity'



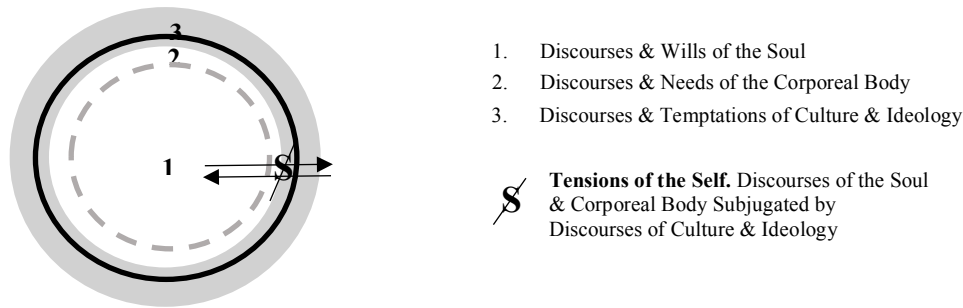


Figure 26. 'Displaced Humanism': 'Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being' ('The Triad of Being')

### *Desire, Love and the Narcissistic Body-Ego*

Narcissism, originating from Greek mythology, can be traced back to the story of Narcissus – a young hunter known for his beauty, who loved everything beautiful and became fixated on his body image after observing his self-image in a pool of water (Tzetzis, 2015). Not realising the reflection was a depiction of himself, Narcissus fell deeply in love with the image as if it were somebody else. Unable to abandon the seductive appeal of his body image, the eventual realisation that his love could not be reciprocated led to subjectivities of loss and despair and his eventual death (Kline, 2000).

Like Narcissus, the personal stories shared throughout this research provide insights into what happens when a person subversively loses themselves within the perceived cultural and discursive fantasies and idealised images of the 'o/Other'. Through an act of narcissistic becoming, the subject becomes the perceived desires of the 'o/Other' to receive the recognition the narcissistic ego and the immaterial soul desires. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the pre-discursive authentic self learns to identify with, and thus, becomes culturally conditioned by, the discursive-semiotic narratives and imperatives that permeate through the subject's social fields. In doing so, the narcissistic body-ego accepts, rejects, and attaches itself to real and fantasised cultural meanings associated with a person's body image, which are either valued or undesired within a subject's social network(s). The cultural meanings that a person embodies (e.g., the cultural meanings associated with being (un)attractive), therefore, for many, impact their perceived body capital – sexual, economic, social – and their ability to be recognised as an object of love. Subsequently, as highlighted by the participant's in this research, a person's subjectivities, identity and self-worth become entrapped within discourses of meaning which

they either accept or seek to overcome. Either way, the authentic self becomes entrapped and camouflaged by an illusionary discursive self – a self, judged by oneself and (initially) by ‘o/Others’ by the cultural significations they embody.

However, to one’s detriment, the authentic self is sacrificed by taking on an illusionary identity to satisfy the ego’s insecurities in an attempt to avoid negative emotions associated with misrecognition and rejection. The needs and health of the soul (and sometimes the material body) become ignored and displaced by a person’s desire to be loved by another (e.g., ‘chemsex’, depressive and suicidal thoughts, drug addiction (*see Chapter 9*)). As a result, fundamentally on an unconscious level, there exists an ongoing psychic tension between honouring the innate drives of the spiritual and biological aspects of one’s self (i.e., being loved, optimal health) and adhering to the (neo-liberal) cultural discourses of the self that demand the objectification, sexualisation and commodification of the self to be recognised. It is within this junction, between the internal and external discourses of the self, that embodied antagonisms occur, and the behaviours of a false self – addictions, dis-eases and biopedagogies – emerge.

***Lacan, Freud and Nietzsche:  
Reconceptualising Human Metaphysics, the Ego and Consciousness***

In the Nietzschean and Freudian sense, one’s consciousness and ego, for the most part, are neither awake (Nietzsche, 1882) nor open to acknowledging the indifferent quirks and foibles that exist within the vessel of the body (Freud, 1953) or the moralities that govern the collective consciousness (Nietzsche, 1882). Similarly, *‘Displaced Humanism’*, utilising a postmaterialist ontology, suggests that a person’s pre-discursive (soul) consciousness, identity and sense reality are engulfed and subverted by the demands of culture. Thus, a metaphysical state of ignorance – ignorance to the vulnerability of our nature and the spiritual self that exists beyond the material and discursive matrix – is produced. Subsequently, this discursive subversion of the self leads to the symbolic displacement of one’s authentic soul, consciousness and being – a *‘Displaced Humanism’*. The self becomes a stranger to itself, unable to fully reconnect and unify with the pre-socialised self, producing a spiritual lack of self-awareness. As the linguistic and narcissistic ego takes over, a person’s capacity to experience the world or themselves becomes limited. In other words, the unconscious and subconscious aspects of consciousness, now governed by discourse, dominate a human’s psychic life and behaviour. In agreement with Nietzsche (1882), it is for this reason that consciousness appears to be the weakest, last, and least developed of a subject’s instincts (as will be illustrated by the participant’s narratives

throughout this chapter). “The greatest part of our spirit’s activity remains unconscious and unfelt” (Freud, 1882, p. 333).

Like Freud (1930), I propose that the soul is at unity with its authentic self at the beginning of a subject’s inception into the world. But, through the processes of socialisation during infancy, the self “separates off an external world from itself” (p. 68). The self becomes a human being, whereby the spiritual element of the self becomes humanised. The self becomes embodied as two separate entities, constantly in flux with each other: the culturally produced **human** (socialised being) and a person’s innate **being** (spiritual being). Once the self becomes fragmented, as Freud (1882) suggests, the self exists in a metaphysical state of disunity – a person’s unity with their soul becomes lost. Although the individual may attempt to reconnect with the pre-discursive self (soul), they will always experience themselves as fragmented between being a ‘human’ and existing as a ‘soul’ because of the ubiquitous nature of discourse that continuously displaces a person’s authenticity.

Consequently, the culturally-induced narcissistic-linguistic ego seeks “to renounce all-embracing unity of nature as all of impersonal matter” (Orlie, 2010, p. 134). The essence of one’s authentic self becomes alienated and suppressed as it dissipates into the realm of the unconscious. Yet, beneath the material surfaces of the image of false discursive self, the needs and drives of the soul demand that they are realised and set free.

Lacan (2015) argues that once a person forms an emotional egoic attachment with an image or/and object(s) of meaning that signifies something to the individual, the individual fetishises the self-image they have created or the object they have obtained. This fixation of an idealised image of the self, the ‘false self’, or/and material object, then becomes a defence mechanism of the ego that protects the subject from confronting the difficulties of their life – “a defence against experiencing or acknowledging the impersonal forces that compose us” (Orlie, 2010, p. 120). Consequently, the self-image becomes a fetish object that one has or seeks to have acts as a protective measure owing to its perceived symbolic or magical power within the psychic fantasies of the individual. Throughout this study, the symbolism of the body’s image was used by men to: protect them from their fears of rejection and the absence of (self) love, to mask ill health, mental health issues, and unhealthy body practices (e.g., poor diet, recreational drug use, and smoking), to compensate for an undesirable body, and to conceal their economic and financial stress. These are all consequences of discursive subjectification of the self and a ‘*Displaced Humanism*’. Thus, demonstrating that the significations, cultural meanings, and body images that a person embodies, fixed and fluid, valued or rejected, are always partial rather than fully representative of the lived experiences they endure at any given moment. In short, from a ‘*Displaced Humanism*’ perspective, the body images that a person takes on, and the social mask(s) and performative act(s), obsessions and neurotic behaviours presented to the world (or/and in private),

reflects a discursively split humanity. Culturally negated, the essential needs of the soul (connectivity with others, self-acceptance, achieving one's full potential) are often ignored, displaced or/and denied – a denial of the authentic self and negation of life, which Nietzsche (1908) argues, is the “great danger to humanity” (p. 2).

However, while one's subversion into symbolic performativity may temporarily protect the psyche from the diverse and ambiguous emotions that live within, eventually, the illusion of happiness becomes disrupted when feelings of meaninglessness and loneliness – and an embodied *lack* of an authentic being – become too much to bear. As a result, the narcissistic linguistic ego's maintenance and defence of the false self breaks, forcing the ego to admit that not everything is okay. The emotional needs of the soul demand to be nourished. As a result, the symbolic façade of one's imaginary identity shatters. Suddenly, the individual's difficult realities and traumas of life need to be confronted – they do not like (among other things) where they live, where they work, their relationship(s), or themselves. The repressed chaos of disunity within cannot be contained by the superficial meanings of the symbolic world. All the individual can do is confront and address the soul's needs, which requires an act of overcoming, to challenge, become aware of, and think and act beyond the symbolic discourses that have displaced and inhibited the self-expression of one's authentic self.

In the following section, I draw on Bourdieu's (1977) concept of '*doxa*' and Nietzsche's (1889) concept of '*wakefulness*'. I use these theoretical psychosocial tools to explain how a subject's subversion into discourse shapes and influences a person's consciousness and perceptions of reality, truth, knowing and being, and what it takes to transcend an unhealthy normative symbolic state of being – a '*Displaced Humanism*'.

### **III. Becoming Aware of the A/Effects of Doxa and a 'Displaced Humanism'**

While *doxa* – a belief, unrelated to reason, that resided in the unreasoning, lower-parts of the soul – was initially coined and developed by Plato in 380 B.C.E in his book '*Theory of Ideas*' (Ross, 1963), Bourdieu (1977) redefined *doxa* to mean the taken-for-granted truths that circulate within a given social field. By which “the natural and social world appears as self-evident” (p. 164). For Bourdieu and Plato, *doxa* governs and limits what is thinkable and what can be said and represents the “universe of possible discourse” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 167). It imposes and appropriates a person's or group's social position, social mobility, “sense of one's place” (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 549) and the ego's attachment to a

particular embodied metaphysics (e.g., social class, gender, sex, and ethnicity). *'Displaced Humanism'* argues that *doxa* displaces the individual from its soul's innate sense of being and purpose.

To overcome the (detrimental) effects of *doxa*, of displaced 'truths' and a *'Displaced Humanism'*, Hegel (1812) encourages the subject to embrace their inner conflict by questioning what they believe be true. Hegel (1812) achieves this through his theory of *'dialectic analysis'*, a reflexive practice that promotes a critical exploration of the ontological 'truths' by contrasting opposing points of view. This philosophical, reflexive practice encourages a subject to enter into the contradiction, the lack of the heart of existence, the absence of authentic reality, rather than trying to avoid a sense of the real or to cover it up, to continue believing in the symbolic order of one's social field. *'Dialectic analysis'*, as also represented within Kierkegaard's (1843; 1846) *'law of opposites'* and Nietzsche's (1908) concept of *'self-overcoming'*, facilitates authenticity and inner peace by embracing doubt, adopting scepticism for what is real, walking into the darkness to find the light, and to walk in the wrong direction to get to the right place (Hegel, 1812).

For Hegel, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, it is via the reflexive process that the subject discovers that the world, humanity, and one's being is not at one with itself. The individual realises they cannot get rid of the chaos in their lives because they are the chaos. It is not until one finds the chaos inside that their life will be more ordered and that they will find the strategies needed to overcome the *lack* that they are trying to deny – the *absence* of the expression of the authentic self. It is through this process that peace is found.

### ***Nietzsche and the Praxis of 'Awakening'***

To find a sense of peace and awaken from the discursive illusions of *doxa*, a false sense of reality, Nietzsche (1889) proposes humans should engage in the task of *'wakefulness'*. *'Wakefulness'* involves awakening one's consciousness by transforming one's perceptions and interpretations of one's lived experiences; it is an awakening of reality beyond symbolic performativity to awaken from a *'Displaced Humanism'*. During this process, Nietzsche (1889) suggests, the individual begins to transcend the unconscious adherence to the necessities of moral judgments and learns to understand and reconnect with the soul's energies, needs, and desires. In other words, a person should learn to pursue, and to do justice to, what makes them laugh, energised, and filled with passion; to find states of being that enhance their understanding of themselves, the universe,

and others. To achieve a 'wakeful' cognitive state, the individual must learn to become an interpreter, not a victim, of their lived experience. They must learn to see what may not yet appear as self-evident and be open to the spiritual and material phenomenon revealed when engaging in acts of self, cultural and environmental reflexivity. Nietzsche (1889) elaborates:

One must learn to *see*, one must learn to *think*, one must learn to *speak* and *write*: the goal in all three is a noble culture. Learning to *see* – accustoming the eye to calmness, to patience, to letting things to come up to it; postponing judgement, learning to go around the grasp of each individual case from all sides. That is the first preliminary schooling for spirituality: not to react at once to stimulus, but to gain control of all the inhibiting, excluding instincts. Learning to see, as I understand it, is almost what, unphilosophically speaking, is called a strong will: the essential feature is precisely not to “will” – to be able to suspend decision. All un-spirituality, all vulgar commonness, depend on the inability to resist a stimulus: one *must* react, one follows every impulse. In many cases, such a compulsion is already pathology, decline, a symptom of exhaustion – almost everything that unphilosophical crudity designates with the word “vice” is merely this physiological inability *not* to react (sec. 6).

By engaging in a judgement-free reflexive praxis, a '*dialect analysis*' for '*self-overcoming*', the subject learns to see more clearly behind the veils of ideology and discourse. “One will have become altogether slow, mistrustful, recalcitrant. One will let strange, new things of every kind come up to oneself, inspecting them with hostile calm” (Nietzsche, 1889, sec. 6). In this sense, the '*awakening*' process occurs as a receptive praxis in which one learns to separate and detach their own authentic needs from the demands of cultural morality, ideology and the influence of others and to overcome the ego's need for constant recognition, which one will eventually learn to abandon. It is from this process that learning occurs.

Whilst the participants in this study primarily remained in an embodied state of '*symbolic consciousness*', for some, '*dialect analysis*' was used to question the embodied a/effects of the impersonal energies that *doxa* produced - the subversion of one's subconsciousness into the symbolic meanings of discourse. For example: how cultural 'truths' shaped their perceptions of reality and health, and how the economy functioned and for whom. Consequentially, this led to a desire and need to escape the hyper-capitalist, sexualised, symbolic, consumer culture of Los Angeles and transcend the embodied stress that the a/effects of *doxa* produced, from new potentialities of a healthy state of being emerged.

In the following sections (*Sections III-IV*), I draw on the narratives provided by Luke, Brad and Henry to highlight how the '*awakening*' process occurred within their own lives and the impact this had on their subjectivities and sense of self and place in the world.

## *Consciousness, Power, Politics and the Velocity of Money*

For Luke, the effects of *doxa* and the relationship between discourse, power, economics, business and wellness were abruptly brought into his conscious awareness during a time of financial despair, during the bust of the dot com bubble during the late 1990s. Consequently, this sudden shock to the American (and global) economy had significant repercussions for his health, wealth and state of consciousness.

...during the dot com crash I lost big time, lost my business, I lost everything. One day I was worth twenty million, the next I was worth nothing. My business partner jumped off a building – broke his back, spine, ribs, broken legs, but survived. I turned to the bottle and smoking cigars, cigarettes. What the hell happened!?...How did this happen!? How can you build a company up over several years and have it destroyed so quickly? A friend gave me the book *Jekyll Island*...about who controls America, the secret society. Then everything started to make sense... about how economic cycles, the [financial] market is controlled by government, the banks, a handful of wealthy people (Luke).

During this moment, the discourses and the pursuit of the American dream were suddenly confronted by the realities and illusions of the stock market's volatility. The discourses of 'free-market capitalism' that conditioned his consciousness, state of being and purpose in life had become fractured. His consciousness had become split between the perceived 'truths' of a sense of security and prosperity that capitalism supposedly offered and the realities of the illusions of wealth that could evaporate expeditiously. With the illusory image of the American dream shattered, his business partner attempted suicide, and he developed an addiction to alcohol and cigarettes. To make sense of his new world, Luke began to ask questions about the hegemonic *doxa* that he once celebrated and embodied by asking the simple question – "Why did this happen?"

From Luke's point of view, the best-selling book *The Creature from Jekyll Island* (Griffin, 2010) revealed the answers to some of his questions - a book exploring the levers of power behind the world's money supply. The latter is what some scholars refer to as the '*deep state*', the '*shadow government*' (Scott, 2014; Goss, 2016; Michaels, 2018), or the '*Masters of the Universe*' (Chomsky, 2017; Chomsky & Barsamian, 2018). *The Creature from Jekyll Island* takes a close look at the "mirrors and smoke machines, the pulleys, cogs, and wheels that create the grand illusion called money...[and the] cause of wars, boom-bust cycles, inflation, depression, prosperity" (Griffin, 2010). And how "billionaires like John D. Rockefeller and J.P. Morgan ran legislatures and courts as if they were subsidiaries of their companies" (Logfran, 2014, p. xii).

In contemporary American politics, the discourses of plutocratic influence continue to impact policy that influences the lives of the American (and global) populous. For example, issues of

plutocracy were highlighted by the political campaigns and rhetoric of Bernie Sanders, who sought to eradicate the influence of money in politics and promote economic policies that support ‘the many, not the few’. Similarly, Donald Trump proposed ending the political system’s corruption by ‘draining the swamp’. In contrast, the political discourse of establishment politicians like Hillary Clinton, Jeb Bush and Ted Cruz, and their political campaigns, continued to push for the status-quo, pro-neo-liberal government policies, representing the political interests of their donors – the oligarchs of American society (e.g., ‘Wall Street’ and corporate America) (Gilens & Page, 2014; Hertel-Fernandez, Skocpol & Sclar, 2018). This juxtaposition of opposing sentiments – the needs of the American people verse the desires of corporate America – was signified along the streets of America (**Figure 27**).



**Figure 27. The Sidewalks of America:** Significations of Politics, Power, Materialism and Corruption

For Luke, the insights provided by G.E. Griffin (2010) gave him the knowledge to continue to ask questions about his perceptions of reality, to explore the a/effects of *doxa* and its relationship with power, politics, the velocity of money; and to realise how neo-liberal imperatives had altered his consciousness, habitus and bodily praxis, identity, desires, health and well-being.



### *Consciousness, Biopolitics and The Illusion of Scientific Truths*

In questioning the subliminal a/effects of various cultural narratives, Luke entered into a conscious state of *'awakening'* whereby the symbolic and discursive nature of his reality began to fragment. This psychic event spurred his curiosity, causing him to explore previously unexplored truths and stirring a desire to pursue a new lived reality.

Over the last year I've learned to question everything. A journey of awakening I guess... I'm starting to realise how everything we do - what we eat and what we believe has all been programmed into us. I'm experimenting with different diets - eating just one or two meals a day, do we really need to eat all that food?...I've started to get into detoxing and turned into an obsessive health freak. My wife and my children think I'm nuts. I've cut everything from my diet, no alcohol, no cigars, no meat...I basically live on a diet of vegetables, fruits, nuts, naked sunbathing and meditation, fasting (Luke).

By engaging in his own form of *'dialectic analysis'*, Luke began to reconsider his previously held understandings of truth. He questioned how the hegemonic health imperatives within his social field(s) had negatively impacted and defined his humanity and governed his lifestyle, health and eating habits. He described this as "a journey of awakening." In learning to "question everything", in the Nietzschean sense, Luke had engaged in the act of *self-overcoming*. Drawing on the insights of Nietzsche and Freud, Orlie (2010) states: "whatever humanity we have achieved or may become capable of involves bringing to awareness some of what has hitherto been unconscious. We do so by subjecting to reflection, yet thereby transfiguring, what had heretofore been accidental, partial, and error-ridden in our psychic life" (p. 120). By engaging in reflexive praxis, Luke could visualise a new set of potentialities for his health. Correspondingly, he started to experiment on his material body by making lifestyle changes. These lifestyle changes included making changes to his diet, fasting and enhancing his spiritual-cognitive state through various meditative practices such as mediation and sunbathing to overcome an embodied state of a *'Displaced Humanism'*.

...To get rid of all the toxins in my body...all those years of processed and chemically filled food that your fed as a child. Toxic cereals, noodles, processed fatty sugary salty stuff that they call food, school meals, that you're programmed to eat. It's all a scam... and we're all dying from it. Every time I return to the U.S or visit Canada I cringe. We've all been conditioned to eat toxic foods, drink alcohol, take drugs, trust your doctors, get a job, it's all a plan to keep us subdued from realising what is going on - how Americans are enslaved by the government and corporate America...A lot of the wealthy, uber rich are leaving...they know what is coming. How corrupt and bankrupt America is and they are getting out too. The masses will be enslaved forever, by government and personal debt, politicians, and corporations (Luke).

Similarly, Brad and Joe began questioning the dogmas of truth relating to nutritional science by reflecting upon the physical health benefits of supposedly healthy foods.

Why the hell is carbohydrates at the bottom of the food pyramid. It's all a scam if you ask me. We should be eating more fruits, nuts, fish and vegetables...not all these carbs. It's making society sick and fat. I don't eat any carbs at all, there's no bread in my house. I don't eat any sugar (Joe).

...[the] weightlifting industry wants people to believe to drink four protein shakes a day that cost eight dollars each...we really don't need them in my opinion (Brad).

Within these statements from Luke, Joe and Brad questioned the established truths, discourses, and interrelatedness between normative eating practices, biopolitics and the toxification of the body. The promotion and mass consumption of alcohol, pharmaceutical drugs, fitness supplements, and carbohydrates – legitimised by the dogmas of empirical science – were now under interrogation. By questioning their consumption of various ‘food’ products, they increasingly became aware of how their biological bodies were becoming displaced. In this instance, how their bodies had become inflamed with toxic a/effects of sugar, which are known to cause somatic decay and illness - negatively a/affecting a person’s lived experience and psychological functioning (Jones et al., 2015; Kanter et al., 2013; Kaptoge et al., 2010; Ritchie & Kinane, 2003; Wang & Nakayama, 2010; Rethorst, Bernstein, & Trivedi, 2014). Yet, despite the war on saturated fat in recent decades (Walker & Parker, 2014; Walsh, 2014), the promotion and overconsumption of sugary foods and alcohol (Delker, Brown & Hasin, 2016; Shannon & Hopkins, 2019), and the over-prescription of pharmaceutical drugs (Mulinari, 2016), remains relatively unregulated. This lack of government regulation ensures the profit margins of food, alcohol and pharmaceutical companies and the ideological ideals of the ‘free-market’ remain intact.

For Luke, the realization that he was consuming substances that negatively a/affected his health became apparent once he had awakened from a symbolic state of consciousness and was aware of his ego’s need for recognition: “On reflection, I thought I was being cool with my cigar and drinking alcohol...I guess that’s part of the trap. To believe you’re doing something that’s cool...when it’s actually killing you.” In examining the *doxa* embedded within his body practices, he undertook a conscious effort to overcome, as I put it, a state of ‘*symbolic performativity*’ and ‘*symbolic entrapment*’, as he transitioned from a pernicious state of being to a healthy state of being.

Reiterating the lived experiences of the participants within this study, Sam Harris (2020), a prominent neuroscientist, demonstrates the influence of discourse, biopolitics and medical imperatives on consciousness when he reflects on the medical ‘truths’ and recommendations made during the 1940s and 1950s:

It used to be that physical exercise was something that only a very strange person would pursue deliberately, and smoking was considered a healthy habit. There were actually television ads in the 40s and 50s showing doctors smoking in their offices. The ads claimed that in a national survey of doctors more doctors smoked ‘*Camels*’ than any other cigarette. It’s possible for an entire society to be totally confused about something rather important (3.20).

As Harris (2020) points out, and as discussed by Joe, Brad and Luke, discourse, power and knowledge via authority, overtly or/and covertly, has the potential to subliminally condition the collective consciousness of an entire society to accept ‘truths’ and beliefs in the name of science, identity politics, or in whatever form *doxa* masquerades. Embedded within biopolitics and a capitalist morality, discourses of the self from authoritative figures, in the pursuit of profit, encourage cultural beliefs and ‘health’ practices that may be harmful to a person’s health and sense of wellness. In turn, these practices can displace an individual from a healthy state of being and from their humanism.

Once Joe, Brad, Luke and Henry had become ‘awakened’ to their subjectivation to discourses of power/knowledge (i.e., *doxa*), they began to imagine and pursue a life beyond the symbolic pressures that inhibited their ability to live a healthy, authentic life. For them, this was achieved by consciously transcending from fixed ontological and epistemological worldviews to being more open to the possibility of other truths and realities. In the process, this enabled these men to conceive and envision a new lived reality and experience a life with less stress by ensuring the body and the soul were adequately taken care of.

#### **IV. Transcending the A/Effects of ‘Displaced Humanism’: A Real and Imagined Life Beyond the Status Quo**

Now consciously aware of the symbolic beings that they had become, within the realms of Brads, Henry’s, and Luke’s imaginations, these men fantasised and planned to transcend their embodied subjectivities and tensions by imagining a life beyond the borders of Los Angeles. For these men, through acts of self-reflection, there was a ‘*will to power*’ to overcome the allures of status and consumerism, a ‘*Displaced Humanism*’, and to reconnect with the authentic needs of the self – the ‘*life instincts*’ (*Eros*) of the soul (Freud, 1920).

I just want to get out [of L.A.] and relax somewhere quieter where nobody knows who you are, where there isn't so much pressure to look a certain way or be a certain

person - look good, successful. It's draining...like San Diego or Florida where it is more relaxed and people don't care as much about what you look like (Brad).

LA and I aren't a good fit. I need something more peaceful and suburban. Away from all the pressure of living in the city. A healthier way of living...I know my non-social hermit life in L.A. is unhealthy. In fact, it's the extreme of unhealthy. One of the impacts of being a hermit, and free of drugs, was putting on a lot of weight on. The last few months I've regained control of that and am planning a new life out of the city, away from stress and the need to impress (Henry).

In the imagined and realised (through previous visits) psychogeographies of other cities and States. These places offered the potential for a life free from the pressures of symbolic surveillance – somewhere to achieve and experience a peaceful and healthy lifestyle, and to find opportunities to overcome their symbolic neoliberal fatigue. As Nietzsche and Freud would put it: they expressed an innate desire and drive to overcome the pestilence of a symbolic morality (capitalism) motivated by a desire for happiness, the satisfaction of needs and instincts (Freud, 1930), self-actualisation, and self-affirmation (Nietzsche, 1901).

While Brad and Henry were in the process of breaking free from the hegemonic *doxas* that had constituted and limited their sense of being and knowing, Luke had already extricated himself from American discourses of an embodied unease by travelling extensively throughout the world. In doing so, his consciousness became exposed to new cultures, belief systems and different ways of living, awakening his consciousness (i.e., 'cosmopolitanism') to lived experiences outside of what he had previously known and expected for himself. Reflecting on his journey of self-discovery and the discovery of a new embodied metaphysics and outlook on life, Luke commented:

I was unconsciously depressed...searching for the answers. I bought a boat and decided to go travelling for a year. One year turned into five years and I travelled to nearly every country on the globe. Country after country... finding out how other countries, people, live. It was sort of an awakening...like you're stepping outside of the matrix, figuring out how the world really works. Understanding how we are all enslaved – especially the U.S., and Canada, Australia is terrible... I would never live there. No freedom and a total police state. I have been in the process of moving to Mexico over the last few years. To get out of America, away from the brainwashed masses, the cult of popular-culture and programming of government. To find more freedom.

Mexico is great. You have so much more freedom. Fruit falls from the trees so you never go hungry and it's cheap. I live like a king. The American government and media tell you how dangerous Mexico is, high crime rates etc...but it's all propaganda. You don't see any mass killings in Mexico, people are dying every day in the U.S. but the people are so programmed to think the U.S. is the best place to live in the world. It's not. The average American would be shocked at how good it is in Mexico...the quality of life is very good. Sure, there are some dodgy neighborhoods...just don't live in them...be smart. You can find a decent apartment

for fifty dollars a week. I have a beautiful house - 4 bedrooms, swimming pool, sea view, privacy, a maid and a driver for about \$300 [USD] a week. I wouldn't live anywhere else...I hate it in the U.S., you have no freedom (Luke).

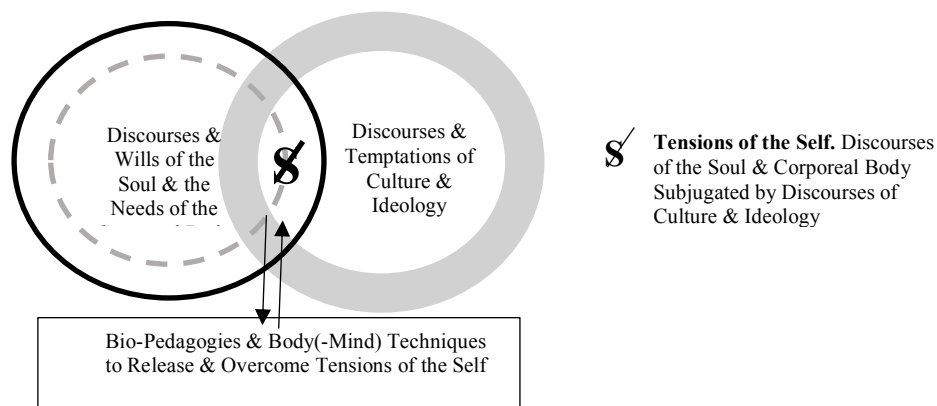
Robinson Crusoe-esque, by travelling throughout the world on a small boat, surviving on money earned via manual labour and gambling, Luke was able to sail and wander the globe, immersing himself into other cultures, which facilitated a reflexive praxis of *'awakening'*. Subsequently, he expanded his worldview, which simultaneously enabled him to let go of the *doxas* that had previously displaced his humanity and caused him ill health (depression). He let go of the need to adhere to the symbolic demands of American capitalism that had previously entrapped his body and soul. In the pursuit of new truths, Luke had purposely stepped outside of the hegemony of the American discursive matrix and discovered that a world beyond the propaganda of American exceptionalism afforded him the sense of freedom he desired.

After a 5-year journey of immersive learning, Luke recognised the values of a simpler life. He could now perceive life beyond symbolic performativity, as the ego's need for recognition via the consumption of material goods and popular culture had rendered themselves meaningless. Reflecting Lacan's (1957-58) insight that "the fashion in which desire must appear in the human subject, depends on what is determined by the dialectic of demand" (p. 11). By discovering cultures that inspired a re-evaluation of how he functioned in the world, an alternative state of being, free from the demands of a hyper-capitalist society, his desire to adhere to the superficial demands celebrated within American culture had become replaced with the authentic desires of the soul. This change in perspective allowed him to spend more time with his family and restore the humanism displaced by living in America. For him, this metaphysical transformation continued by settling in Mexico - a locality where he perceived that he could more effectively take care of his social, biological and spiritual needs.

Similarly, Brad and John, who moved to Dallas after completing this study, experienced a shift in consciousness. Now living beyond the borders of Los Angeles, they were able to reflect on how the Los Angeles culture had impacted their sense of self and lived experiences – "I'm so glad I moved. L.A. was not good for me. I would never move back to that way of life" (Brad).

While many members of society fail to realise how their social environments, and the *doxas* that exist within them, induce particular a/effective states of consciousness, which subjugate and negate their lived experience, reality, sense of self and understanding of the world (e.g., the participants not mentioned in this chapter), for those who do, this *'awakening'* process can be life-changing (Lock, 1989; Schneider, 2009; Watson, Batchelor & Claxton, 2012; Welwood, 2002). When individuals become aware of their subversion into ideology and symbolic performativity, they can take action to

improve their lives. As the philosopher Alfred Whitehead (1925) puts it: “We seem to be ourselves elements of this world in the same sense as are other things that we perceive” (p. 110). We see things not as they are but as what we are told they are. When individuals become ‘*awakened*’ to new forms of realities and the possibilities of an enhanced metaphysical state, they do so by being open “to learn more fully” and to contest what is “firm and settled” (Nietzsche, 1886, sec. 231). When one can abandon a fixed view of reality, this is when self-transformation can occur. To summarise, these men’s embodied journeys and praxis of an ‘awakened’ sense of self can be represented diagrammatically as the following:



**Figure 28. Biopedagogies and the Art of Overcoming:** Negotiating ‘Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being’

However, from a ‘*Displaced Humanism*’ worldview, although individuals may overcome the hyper-symbolic *doxas* of (West) Los Angeles by relocating to a different city/country, I argue that the self is always divided and alienated by the discourses of culture (e.g., neoliberalism). In contemporary society, the self perpetually exists in a displaced state of being – biologically, spiritually, and socially – entrapped within the discourses and ‘iron cage’ of consumerism, as highlighted by many other scholars (Baehr, 2001; Bauman, 2004; Elliott & Lemert, 2009; Weber, 1994, 2004; Jackson, 2017; Miles, 1998; Zuboff, 2019).

Invigorated by the philosophies that underpin poststructural and postdisciplinary research – to imagine the future, think the unthinkable (Darbellay, 2019; Lemert, 2007) – in the following, I briefly outline the economic ideologies that have led to a ‘*Displaced Humanism*’. I then propose and discuss how society can transition from a metaphysical state of a ‘*Displaced Humanism*’ and ‘*Symbolic Consciousness*’ to a ‘*Unified Humanism*’ and ‘*Authentic Consciousness*’. Thus, offering a potential solution to relieve the embodied ‘*Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being*’ that currently ensnare and seduce the innate needs of the soul and the human body of those living in modern capitalist society.

*“An economic policy which does not consider the well-being of all will not serve the purposes of peace and the growth well-being among the people of all nations”.*

Eleanor Roosevelt (Fleming, 2005, p. 77)

### **PART III**

## **UNIFYING A ‘DISPLACED HUMANISM’**

### **V. A Call-To-Action: Reimagining the World We Live In**

Although an individual can transcend to a better psychic, biological and cultural space - many do not - the self remains engaged and embedded within a neo-liberal system. Within this 'free-market' system, a person's ability to eat, build a home, and take care of themselves and their family depends on the ebbs flows of the velocity of money in circulation. When the distribution and value of economic capital become limited, for whatever reason (e.g., under/unemployment, ill-health, personal debt, inflation, the monopolisation of wealth), the ability for a person to meet their basic needs and live a life of decency becomes inhibited and less likely. These *'tensions of the self and discourses of being'* reflect the dialectical struggle between structure and agency, freedom and economics.

In America alone, at least 12-percent of the population experience a sense of desperate economic displaced humanism by living in poverty (United States Census Bureau, 2018). One-quarter of all Americans cannot pay for their healthcare because of skyrocketing costs (Saad, 2019). And, for those who do have sufficient employment to meet their financial demands, a clear majority are unsatisfied with their jobs (Clifton, 2017). Within the neo-liberal matrix, a person's health, wellness and humanity have been subjugated by the illusions, realities and promises of unbridled capitalism – prosperity for all (Brown & Baker, 2012; Esposito & Perez, 2014; Keshavjee, 2014; Labonté & Stuckler, 2016).

For many, these neoliberal *'tensions of the self and discourses of being'* are negotiated by objectifying oneself as a beautified commodified object – to make ends meet and desired by another – which deflects attention away from a person's internal psychic struggles. Whilst many conceal their inability to adhere to the economic and symbolic pressures of the globalised capitalist world from public life, behind closed doors, they suffer in silence – free from the scrutiny of social surveillance (*see Chapters 6, 8-9*). Unsurprisingly, since 1979 – the beginnings of neoliberal economics – there has been an exponential growth in drug overdoses. In addition to body image enhancing practices, millions of

Americans turn to recreational and pharmaceutical narcotics and stimulants (e.g., alcohol, opioids, Ritalin, and cocaine) (Jalal et al., 2018, Hedegaard et al., 2019) to numb the embodied pains of neo-liberalism, to cope with the loss of their dignity and freedom.

Paradoxically, whilst many people enjoy the temporary pleasures of the consumables capitalism provides, capitalism parasitically traps its victims within a cycle of incomplete satisfaction. From a '*Displaced Humanism*' point of view, the causes of an incomplete satisfaction are two-fold – an unsatisfied soul and an unsatisfied (linguistic) ego. According to the imperatives of contemporary culture, experiences of incomplete satisfaction can only be cured by the 'free-market', which continuously promises the desires of the ego something new, something better, and something more (Elliott, 2008, 2013; McGowan, 2003, 2016; Žižek, 1989). Consequently, the self becomes attached to the sublime object of ideology, the discursive illusions, and signifiers of capitalism and the 'American Dream' (Žižek, 2001; 2014; 2019b). In doing so, I argue, one's humanism – body and soul – becomes isolated, eroded and displaced.

To illustrate the embodied a/effects of a '*Displaced Humanism*' and an individual's inability to seek an 'authentic' intimate connections within a neo-liberal society, Erik commented:

[L.A. is] very expensive. I'm a student, work part time and live in the living room within an apartment. It's very difficult to have any privacy... not many people can afford to live on their own here. That also makes having a relationship very difficult...hard to get loved up. I'm broke...working as an intern. I go to sleep every night worrying about money.

Contextualising and expanding upon Erik's, and the other participants', lived experiences – the loss of life, the loss of love (*see Chapters 5-9*) – Cornel West (2020), states:

We are witnessing America as a failed social experiment...Americas failure, its capitalist economy could not generate and deliver in such a way that people could live lives of decency...Now our culture of course is so market-driven, everybody for sale, everything for sale, it cannot deliver the kind of nourishment for the soul, for meaning, for purpose. So, when you get this perfect storm of all these multiple failures, at these different levels...militarism...poverty...materialism...racism, and all of its forms, whatever form it takes. What we see in America now is these chickens coming home to roost. You reaping what you sow...it looks like the system cannot reform itself. We've tried black faces in high places, too often our...politicians...have become too accommodating to the capitalist economy, too accommodating to the militarization of the nation state, too accommodating to the market-driven culture tied with celebrity status, power, fame, all of that superficial stuff that means so much to fellow citizens (CNN, May 30).



Despite corporate and government efforts to mask the harsh realities of a neo-liberal way of life by creating an illusionary discursive sense of reality – the propaganda of the virtues of unfettered capitalism (Herman & Chomsky, 1988) – the “higher needs” (Nietzsche, 1882; 1886) of the body and soul, for most, remain unfulfilled by the temptations of materialism. As West (2020) concludes, neo-liberal (American) hyper-capitalism has changed the way humans bond; it is a ubiquitous force that has manipulated human consciousness and the narcissistic ego’s need for recognition. People’s psychic structures have become fundamentally restructured in ways that have displaced their ability to connect with others and express their authentic needs, as noted by the impacts of capitalism made on indigenous cultures (Crook, Short & South, 2018; Robbins & Dowty, 2008; Sissons, 2005).

In Nietzsche’s (1882; 1886) writings on ethics, morality and politics, he concludes that the mistake that pioneers of a capitalist democracy made (i.e., Adam Smith, ‘The Founding Fathers’ of modern America) was in their underestimating of the complexity of a person’s human needs. In ‘*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*’ (1883), Nietzsche argued:

We're all idiosyncratic, and our needs are not just for peace, warmth, food, exercise and entertainment, but self-actualization, which is an individual pursuit, and so is impossible to mass engineer. Having our more basic needs fulfilled without life-filling effort (i.e., full time jobs) would not leave us complacent but actually free to entertain these “higher needs”, and so to pursue the creative pursuits that Nietzsche thought were the pinnacle of human achievement (Linsenmayer, 2019, p. 1).

For Adam Smith (1776), the founder of classical free-market capitalism, the ‘higher needs’ of the soul, such as Nietzsche’s ‘*will to power*’ and Freud’s ‘*will to pleasure*’, were abandoned and replaced by a desire to produce economic activity via the production of goods and services. In his mind, improve society’s standard of living. During this time (1700s), the ‘higher needs’ of the soul had become exchanged for, and displaced by, material and monetary wealth. The collective consciousness, and one’s praxis, had transitioned from a ‘*consciousness of the soul*’ (embedded in religious discourse) to a ‘*consciousness of the symbolic*’ (embedded in the discourses of capitalism). As argued by Bourdieu (1998) (*Chapter 2*), capitalism had become legitimised as the new preeminent religion.

### ***The Displacement of the Soul: The Visions of Adam Smith, the Critiques of Karl Marx***

I argue the genealogical foundations of a ‘*Displaced Humanism*’, the suppression of the authentic self, was established by Adam Smith (1776), as outlined in his economic theories of capitalism in his magnum opus, *The Wealth of Nations*. Within this text, and others (e.g., *Theory of Moral*

*Sentiments* (1795) and *History of Ancient Physic*s (1795)), he replaced the notion of the ‘soul’ with the idea of the self being a ‘machine’: “Human society in a certain abstract and philosophical light” appears “like a great, an immense machine, whose regular and harmonious movements produce a thousand agreeable effects” (Smith, 1759, p.316). Every skilled employee is an “expensive machine”, with “improved dexterity” akin to a “machine...which...abridges labour...though it costs a certain expense, repays the expense with a profit” (Smith, 1759, p. 118-19, 282). For Smith, the machine and the augmentation of society represented increased innovation and economic activity, technology, beauty and aesthetics. In asserting his mechanical understanding of life, he affirms:

The Universe...as a complete machine, as a coherent system, governed by general laws, and directed to general ends, viz. its own preservation and prosperity, and that of all the species that are in it; the resemblance which it evidently bore to those machines which are produced by human art...thus, as ignorance begot superstition, science gave birth to the first theism that arose among those nations, who were not enlightened by divine Revelation (Smith, 1795, pp. 113-14).

Undertones of Smith’s economic philosophies remain deeply embedded within current systems of governance and political discourse in America and beyond, promoted via the ideologies of neoliberalism. In short, the needs of the soul and the biological body continue to be displaced by perceptions that the human species is merely a machine to be worked and aesthetically beautified, as demonstrated within the prevailing discourses of the men’s lived experiences throughout this research.

Marx (1932) also outlined the fundamental processes of a ‘*Displaced Humanism*’, the displacement of one’s innate needs and humanity, in his critique of capitalism. In his writings on the alienation of the capitalist worker, whereby an individual becomes separated from their authentic sense of self, he suggests this limits their ability to have a meaningful life. For him, this involved a person becoming alienated from nature, alienated from their ability to have an intimate connection with others and themselves, and alienated from their ability to pursue meaningful work (Marx, 1932).

As reflected in my findings, the discursive displacement and subversion of the authentic self occur via the (linguistic) ego's identification to and embodiment of discourse. Through this identification process, a person’s identity to the symbolic leads to an individual becoming a stranger to themselves, lost within the symbolic order of life. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the expressions of a person’s innate instincts (*eros*) – to love authentically, show empathy to others, and make the most of their capabilities – become reconfigured and inhibited by their unconscious submission to the demands and discourses of ‘free-market’ capitalism. I argue, by exchanging the realities of an authentic self for the illusionary realities of a symbolic-discursive ‘false-self’, the self becomes, often unknowingly, psychically and biologically stressed from a sense of being alienated and detached from

the needs of the soul, from an authentic connection to oneself, others and the environment. As Lacan (1977) puts it:

[The signifier]...proceeds from a deviation of man's needs from the fact that he speaks, in the sense that in so far as his needs are subjected to demand, they return to him alienated. This is not the effect of his real dependence...but rather the turning into signifying form as such, from the fact that it is from the locus of the Other that its message is emitted. What is thus alienated in needs constitutes an *Urverdrängung* [primal repression], as it cannot, hypothetically, be articulated in demand (p. 286).

To alleviate the sense of a '*Displaced Humanism*', I echo the principal ideals and values of American pragmatism espoused by Charles Peirce (1997), William James (2000) and John Dewey (1998). That is, research knowledge and theory should act as a tool and instrument to problem-solve. Or in the psychoanalytic sense, I attempt to address the underlying cause of societies' *lack* of being (i.e., the ideologies of neo-liberalism) by promoting and producing real-world solutions, as opposed to simply describing, representing, or mirroring reality; and thus creating research for research sake (Braidotti, 2013; Butler, 1997, 1997b; Chodorow, 2020; Žižek, 2006, 2014, 2019). As William James (1909) puts it, pragmatists contend that philosophical works that conceptualise the nature of knowledge, discourse, meaning, and consciousness are best viewed in terms of their practical application and success. Drawing on, and reflecting upon, the insights afforded from this research, in the following section, I outline a possible solution to address the ideological cause of suffering, the displacement and *lack* of one's being, and to alleviate the '*tensions of the self and discourses of being*' exacerbated within the neo-liberal matrix.

### ***Addressing the Ideological Cause of Suffering - Social Capitalism: Capitalism 2.0.***

To address the loss of the self to the ethics of capitalist consumerism, the ongoing threats of nihilism and existentialism, and the embodied and metaphysical angst of a '*Displaced Humanism*', I advocate that a new economic model is needed which promotes a human morality of authentic value and meaning. Like Nietzsche and Marx, and contemporary philosophers like Chomsky (2001), Singer (2011) and Braidotti (2013), economist Yanis Varoufakis (2015; 2016; 2020) proposes a more utilitarian form of capitalism in which individuals have a greater sense of freedom, meaning and self-determination about their lives. Nietzsche (1886) argues utilitarianism invites individuals and policy-makers to maximise happiness by abating the dis-eases of culture – illness, poverty, drudgery, servitude, and the ruination of the environment. In his view, utilitarianism should be a celebrated *modus operandi* in which society functions. Utilitarianism, for Nietzsche (1886), is the most ethical path. It is

not a matter of mere calculations, as humans thrive as “creators of values” and figure out for themselves what makes them happy, which adds value and meaning to their lives.

Varoufakis (2015; 2016; 2020), like many other scholars, argues that ‘free-market’ capitalism in its current form is an illusion, which benefits the few and not the many. Thus, change is needed. In his opinion, the notion of competitive capitalism Adam Smith referred to – capitalism limited to regional trades between members of society (the ‘brewer, the baker, the butcher’ as described in *The Wealth of Nations*) – died around 1870 or 1880. Primarily, this was because of the introduction of electromagnetics, which led to the beginning of the ‘*Technological Revolution*’, and the rapid standardisation and industrialisation of manufactured goods and services, and telegraph and electrical systems, the average person and company could not compete. Metaphorically and literally, ‘the brewer, the baker, and the butcher’ have increasingly been replaced by General Electric, Ford, Google, Facebook and other conglomerates. Varoufakis (2020) summarises:

That is not competitive capitalism. It is a market of monopolies. Because the companies are huge, they need a lot of money to finance them. So the banks consolidated. So you have megabanks and megacompanies. The way in which monopoly capitalism evolved created socialism for the bankers and for the very rich and the arena of the unfettered market for the many. So for the very few, when they have profits, it is their profits. When they have losses, society has to give them money (*DIEM25*, 22 May, 2020).

From this perspective, the neoliberal narrative – that wealth is produced individually by the private sector – is a fantasy, a political double-speak that misdirects the public’s attention away from the actual beneficiaries of capitalism: the plutocrats. In reality, society producers value together, collectively, via the business owners, the workers, the banks and governments. Varoufakis (2020) clarifies:

This [phone] has a touch screen. It’s got a GPS system. It has a Wifi system. Everything I just mentioned was produced by the state. Today, anything you go onto, your Google search engine, when you search for something you add to the capital of Google. When you carry your phone with you when you are driving, then Google maps knows how many people are on every street. The app becomes more useful to you because you know where it is congested. So people are contributing to the capital stock of Google. In other words, we are producing capital collectively but it is only Google that gets the profits (*DIEM25*, 22 May, 2020).

To overcome this one-sided distribution of wealth, Varoufakis (2015; 2020) proposes introducing a mandatory corporate dividend. This idea is similar to Andrew Yang’s (2018; 2020) ‘*Freedom Dividend*’, which he promoted during the American Democratic Party presidential primary

of 2019–2020. Within this economic system, monopolies contribute 10 percent of their shares to a welfare fund, which evenly distributes the dividends to every citizen. As manufacturing and production become increasingly automated through technology and artificial intelligence, and companies increase their profit margins, the dividend one receives increases in value. “If we start at 10%, we can push it to 20%, 30%, and think about it; the limit is 100%. That is communism without a state, communism without communists, Star Trek. We all own the machinery; the machinery works for all of us” (Varoufakis, 2020). In the way that Norway currently provides education, healthcare and social security for all of its citizens via an oil tax revenue (Aslani, Hamlendar & Saeedi, 2017), the technology monopolies of the world – Google, Amazon, Facebook - will be required to distribute their profits to the citizens of the world, compensating them for their contribution to the data networks that they have helped to create.

In essence, such an idea advocates creating a new form of human-centred capitalism (Yang, 2018). Instead of society being victims of big-tech surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2018), there is an opportunity to move beyond the threat/reality of a ‘nomadic’ ‘*posthumanism*’ (Braidotti, 2012; 2016; 2019) – a digitally and socially disconnected self (Nowland, Necka & Cacioppo, 2018). Thus, there is an opportunity to prevent the world’s citizens from being reduced to mere avatars of themselves. Instead, governments make a conscious effort to manifest a lived experience where humanity can thrive. In the words of Adam Smith (1776), a world where governments champion a capitalist economy that “promote[s] the happiness of those who live under them. This is their sole use and the end” (p. 316).

By accomplishing the vision of human-centred capitalism, supported by economic policies (i.e., concerning bank lending, food, alcohol, and housing) that facilitate a utilitarian experience, the alienation that so many individuals experience, in its various forms, will begin to dissipate. As people’s economic burdens of the past begin to ease, experiences of improved states of health and wellness and a greater sense of freedom and love for the self and the other will emerge. In the Nietzschean sense, when one’s accessibility to their innate drives and passions is discovered and reconnected, an unrestrained ‘*creative freedom*’ is experienced, a metaphysical state embodied by the *Übermensch* – the idealised goal and state of being for all humanity (Nietzsche, 1887). Like Marx, the achievement of an unrestrained ‘*creative freedom*’ leads to the self-realisation of a person’s potentialities, or the ‘*Will to Power*’.

To achieve a metaphysical state of unrestrained ‘*creative freedom*’, Nietzsche (1887) argues two parallel dimensions must be expressed:

1. ***The biological dimension*** – as the creative activity of life is spontaneity; and,
2. ***The cultural dimension*** – as the creative activity of life involves exceptional individuals.

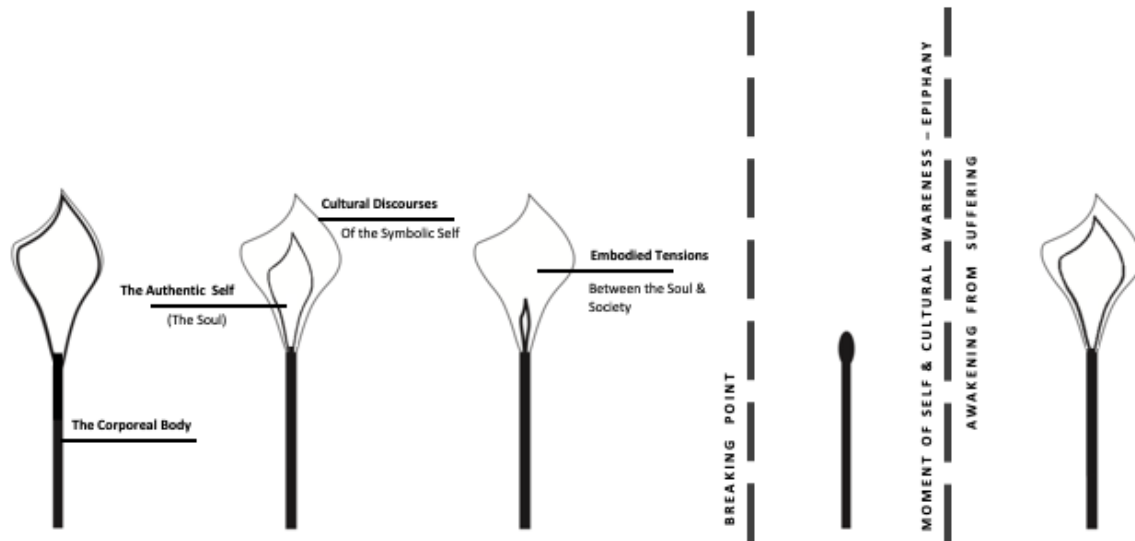
Additionally, given the ongoing discoveries of a transcendent soul as identified by postmaterialists (*see Chapter 2, Section IV*), I advocate for the importance of the expression of a third dimension:

3. ***The spiritual dimension*** – *as the creative activity of life, involves a connection to one's authentic soul, from which innate passions and desires emanate.*

Bringing together the insights of Freud, Nietzsche, Bourdieu and Lacan to contextualise (Los Angeles) men's (neo-liberal) lived experiences and use of biopedagogies, I argue, in this context (and others), creative subjectivity is affirmed when a series of psychic events occur within the consciousness of the individual:

- a) Cultural narratives that oppress one's health and 'authentic self' are replaced with cultural narratives that enable self-actualisation;
- b) Fixed epistemological and ontological realities and unconscious biases (*doxa*) are challenged by exposing oneself to new forms of knowledge and cultural experiences;
- c) The demands of the narcissistic ego's need for recognition are overcome by accepting the *lack* within (Žižek, 2007), 'enjoying what we don't have' (McGowan, 2013) and learning to love thyself before loving the 'o/Other';
- d) Engaging in reflexive praxis that empowers the processes of *becoming*, that is, 'becoming who you are'.

In the following diagram (**Figure 29**), I summarise the various life stages of a '*Displaced Humanism*' and acts of '*becoming*', informed by the life histories analysed throughout this research and the use of psychoanalytic and social theories of embodiment.



**1. Early Childhood: 'The Free Spirit'**  
(Chapter 5)

The phase of life when an individual has the most freedom to be their authentic self and is able to act upon the wills and drives of their soul, and their biological needs.

*'The child at play'*

**2. Childhood: 'The Socialisation of the Self'**  
(Chapter 5)

The phase of life when an individual becomes increasingly socialised to embody the discursive imperatives, and thus authenticity (soul) of the person becomes increasingly displaced.

**3. Adolescence – Adulthood: 'The Inhibited Performative Self'**  
(Chapters 5-9)

The phase of life when an individual becomes increasingly subjugated by a myriad of competing internal drives and external cultural demands:

- a) Sexual needs and desires;
- b) Symbolic imperatives to seek recognition, status and capital to appease the perceived desires of the 'o/Other';
- c) Adherence to economic demands to afford the basic necessities in life – food, water, shelter;

It is this layering of demands that manufactures embodied 'tensions of self', which alienates the soul to the point that the subject becomes a stranger to itself;

In an effort to overcome these embodied tensions, biopedagogies, with varying a/effects, are employed.

**4. Adulthood: 'The Extinguished Self'**  
(Chapters 8-9)

The phase of life when the wills and drives of the soul, the 'authentic self', become fully consumed by symbolic performativity (*the loss of the soul to the symbolic*) – which may lead to:

- a) Loss of sense of self and belonging;
- b) Experiencing physical trauma or/and neurosis;
- c) Self-isolation;
- d) Suicidal thoughts/actions.

**5. Transcending the Symbolic: 'The Fulfilled Self'** (Chapter 10)

The phase of life when the individual awakens to the embodied a/effects of hegemonic narratives (*doxa*) and to how cultural discourses are impacting upon their worldview, sense of reality, health and well-being.

Consequently, this may lead to the individual:

- a) Critically questioning the nature of reality and the relationship between knowledge, discourse, 'truth', and the lived experience;
- b) Removing themselves from a toxic environment – socially and culturally.
- c) Letting go of the need to perform to the symbolic desires of the 'o/Other';
- d) Learning to enjoy, acceptance and embrace the 'lack' and antagonisms of one's being and culture;
- e) Adopting biopedagogies that nourish the soul and biological body (e.g., meditation, consuming natural products and produce);
- f) Pursuing authentic acts that give their life meaning and honour the needs of their soul and the biological body – *a return to the child at play.*

Figure 29. The Life Stages of Symbolic Performativity: Transcending the 'Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being'

As demonstrated by *'The Life Stages of Symbolic Performativity'*, the various stages in which society/and individuals become displaced from their humanism is an ongoing process that does not become apparent to the conscious mind until it awakens to the influence and power of discourse and the self's subversion into the symbolic (*Stage 5*). Once a subject becomes consciously aware of the a/effects of discourse – the displacement of their humanism – they can take action to return to a more authentic state of being. During the process of overcoming, the individual acknowledges, accepts and feels “something unteachable, a granite stratum of spiritual fate, of predetermined decisions and answers to predetermined selected questions” that will guide them throughout their life (Nietzsche, 1887, sec. 231). The *'Tensions of the Self and the Discourses of Being'* can be alleviated from one's psychic life. From a psychoanalytic mindset, this is the struggle of life – to become, or not to become, who you authentically are.

In summary, a person's psychic life can be represented as a struggle between conforming to the symbolic ideals of the 'Other'. Life is about learning to come to terms with the unhappiness of life and enjoying the internal-external conflicts, struggles and antagonisms of the lived experience. The individual must find pleasure and opportunity in adversity and realise that meaning and a greater understanding of the self are located in the depths of darkness and within the joys of the light. This metaphysical process is the authentic odyssey of becoming, the art of existing beyond the imaginary realm of status and significations.

## **VI. Concluding Thoughts: Poststructuralism, Postmaterialism, and the Return of Psychoanalysis**

Embodying the spirit of the poststructuralists' desire to think differently, *'Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being'* is a postdisciplinary (Pernecky, 2019; Sayer, 2000; 2003) project that challenges the hegemonic assumption regarding truth, power, knowledge, metaphysics and embodiment. Utilising a postmaterialist ontology, I reinterpret the social-psychoanalytic theories of Bourdieu, Foucault, Freud, Lacan (and others) to understand the embodied tensions between the body, culture and soul. In doing so, revealing men's lived experiences, fears and fantasies that live beneath their discursive, symbolic and corporeal facade.

Throughout this study, beyond the material aesthetics of the body and bodily praxis, psychoanalysis demonstrates the value of also discovering the unconscious tensions at work in psychic life. My findings suggest that the ego is not its own master, and subjects do not know their own minds.



The (egoic) self is unconsciously governed and orientated by its imagined, fantasised, and real pleasures of romantic intimacy and the illusions and realities of neoliberal capitalism, and the fear of losing one's beauty, health, recognition, economic capital, and most importantly, love – the loss of the object of desire. For the participants in this study, this fear of failure and the soul's subversion into the idealised symbolic self led to significant embodied experiences of stress, pain and suffering – a *lack* of being. Subsequently, the mind engaged in various praxis and addictive behaviours (e.g., sex, drugs, exercise, eating, and dieting) to mask feelings of unhappiness, loneliness, isolation, a loss of meaning and purpose, and even suicide. Thus, the subject often becomes a stranger to itself.

These are the lived realities and understandings of one's psychic life that reductionist epistemological practices and literal empirical interpretations often over-simplify, decontextualize and sometimes conceal altogether. Drawing upon psychoanalytic insights within a poststructural toolbox facilitates a richer understanding of people's lived experiences and the embodied a/effects of the unrelenting demands and uncertainties of a quickly changing world. Such insights afforded by an innovative use of theory and discourse analysis provide different points of view which scholars can develop further and potentially used to enact solutions of change for the betterment of society. As also evidenced by the works of Ken Plummer (2002, 2016, 2019), Nancy Chodorow (1994; 1999; 2014; 2020), Margrit Shildrick (1998; 2002; 2009; 2015; 2017), and Dave Holmes (2017; 2018; 2018; 2019; 2019) these insights provide different points of view which scholars can develop further, and potentially enact solutions of change for the betterment of society.

### ***Limitations to Knowing the 'Real'***

Grounded in the poststructural position that there are no facts, only interpretations, as the possibility of truth is always obscured by power, knowledge and language, “the character of existence is not true, is false...there is no truth” (Nietzsche, 1901, pp. 540, 616). Thus, the notion of the ‘human’ remains open, contested and unsettled (Braidotti, 2019; Butler, 2012; Shildrick, 2008). This inability for philosophers to identify what constitutes the human is highlighted by Lacan (1982): “one thing that is striking is that in analysis there is an entire element of the real of the subject that escapes us...there is something that brings the limits of analysis into play, and it involves the relation of the subject to the real” (p. 4). From a psychoanalytic position, the ‘real’ (i.e., a person's sex, sexuality, materiality, trauma, and soul), or that which is located and remains within the irreducible realm of the non-meaning (Lacan, 1974-1975), is either repressed, negated, transferred or expressed through symbolically performative compulsive acts. Therefore, significations of meaning become embodied, which prevents the ‘real’ from being authentically experienced. The ‘real’ attaches itself to an object of signification

and meaning that either improves or diminishes an individual's capital, status and social position. This discursive displacement of the 'real' makes it challenging to locate, identify, and to understand how it functions. In short, in an attempt to understand the 'human' and the relationships between embodiment, metaphysics and human behaviour, theorisation is all the researcher has to make sense of the lived experience and produce new insights and forms of knowledge.

However, as demonstrated throughout this research, what the innovative use of social and psychoanalytic theory can reveal is the embodied meanings of discourse and the symptoms (the *'tensions of the self and discourses of being'*) within which the 'real' emerges (e.g., body practices, addictive behaviours, dis-ease, neurosis, body language, and dreams), which manifest in a *lack* of expression of one's authentic being (Freud, 1900; 1909; 1910; 1914; Lacan, 1985). The symptom is "the most real thing" that a subject possesses (Lacan, 1976, p. 41). Consequently, from this perspective, psychoanalysis should focus on solutions that release or eliminate the symptom from a person's being (i.e., self-acceptance, an egoic detachment from symbolic meaning and recognition, removing oneself from a toxic culture, talk therapy, developing close friendships, companionship through animals, the promotion utilitarianist government policies) to facilitate an enhanced spiritual and metaphysical state, and culture for living (Freud, 1925; Lacan, 1985; Nietzsche, 1901). Freud (1906/1974) suggests that what is required is an emotional closeness based on an immediate sympathetic comprehension of all aspects of the subject's soul, what afflicted it and why – a spontaneous sympathy and understanding for one's own and others' unconscious, a feeling response between souls. "Psychoanalysis is in essence a cure through love" (Freud, 1906/1974, p. 10).

*'Tensions of the Self and the Discourses of Being'* attempts to challenge and disrupt materialist and social constructionist ontologies to offer a different epistemology (*'Triads of Being'* – **Chapter 2**). This approach facilitated a theoretical and empirical understanding of embodiment, the tensions between the authentic and the symbolic self, and the management of these embodied tensions through the use of body (and mind) enhancing biopedagogies. Some of the men in this study became aware of these embodied 'tensions' and took steps towards returning their sense of self to an 'authentic' state of being. Others remained psychically entrapped within the pervasive narratives of symbolic performativity. Their subversion into the symbolic realm of the imaginary had displaced the 'authentic self' (soul), trapping it in the *'Discursive Demand – Displacement Loop'* (**Chapter 5**) and the *'Loop of Recognition'* (**Chapter 8**) – a phenomenon metaphorically articulated by R.E.M. (2001) and their song *'Imitation of Life'*:

Like a koi in a frozen pond  
Like a goldfish in a bowl  
I don't want to hear you cry

That sugar cane that tasted good  
That cinnamon, that's Hollywood  
Come on, come on  
No-one can see you try

You want the greatest thing  
The greatest thing since bread came sliced  
You've got it all  
You've got it sized

Like a Friday fashion show  
Teenager cruising in the corner  
Trying to look like you don't try

That sugar cane that tasted good  
That cinnamon, that's Hollywood  
Come on, come on  
No-one can see you try

No-one can see you cry

That sugar cane that tasted good  
That' freezing rain, that's what you could  
Come on, come on  
No-one can see you cry

This sugar cane, this lemonade  
This hurricane, I'm not afraid  
Come on, come on  
No-one can see me cry

This lightning storm, this tidal wave  
This avalanche, I'm not afraid  
Come on, come on  
No-one can see me cry

That sugar cane that tasted good  
That's who you are, that's what you could  
Come on, come on  
No-one can see you cry



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# Appendix's

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## Appendix 1. Ethics Approval

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### FINAL APPROVAL NOTICE

Project No.:

Project Title:

Principal Researcher:

Email:

Approval Date:  Ethics Approval Expiry Date:

The above proposed project has been **approved** on the basis of the information contained in the application, its attachments and the information subsequently.

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## **INFORMATION SHEET** (for 'Interview Participants')

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**Title:** 'Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being'

### **Description of the study:**

'Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being' is a study that investigates men's perceptions and experiences of their body image in relation to their use of various body practices – notably synthetic androgens.

### **Purpose of the study:**

Specifically, this study attempts to gain insights into the critical moments and desires throughout a man's life that underpin their engagement with various body practices – notably synthetic androgens.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

You will be invited to attend a series of one-on-one interviews over a 6-month period with a researcher who will ask you questions about your lived experiences in relation to the body practices, notably the use of synthetic androgens, that are used to improve your body image and sense of health and well-being.

Participation is entirely voluntary. The interviews will take about 60-minutes with one interview conducted every 1 to 2 weeks. The interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder to help with analyzing at the results. Once recorded, the interview will be transcribed (typed-up) and stored as a computer file and will only be destroyed upon the request of the participant.

### **What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?**

The sharing of your lived experiences will provide valuable insights into the relationship between the body, culture, body practices and desire which will be used to develop theoretical models on human behaviour. These insights may be used to develop educational materials and programs to enhance the professional practices of teachers and students.

### **Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?**

We do not need your name and you will be anonymous. Once the interview has been typed-up and saved as a file, the voice file will then be destroyed. Any identifying information will be removed and the typed-up file stored on a password protected computer that only the researcher (Mr Craig Hillgrove) will have access to. Your comments will not be linked directly to you.

### **Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?**

The researcher anticipates few risks from your involvement in this study. However, given the personal nature of the project some participants could experience emotional discomfort. If any emotional discomfort is experienced please contact the National Drug Rehabilitation and Support hotline **1-888-287-0471** for support /counselling that may be accessed free of charge by all participants. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the researcher.

### **How do I agree to participate?**

A consent form accompanies this information sheet. If you agree to participate please read and sign the form and send it back to me at:

**bodyprojectLA@hotmail.com**

Participation is voluntary. You may answer 'no comment' or refuse to answer any questions and you are free to withdraw from the interview process at any time without effect or consequences.

Appendix 3. Consent Form

**CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH  
(by interview)**

‘Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being’

I .....

being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate in the study as outlined within the ‘**Information Sheet**’ for the research project ‘**Tensions of the Self and Discourses of Being**’.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I agree to audio recordings of my information and participation.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet for future reference.
5. I understand that:
  - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
  - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
  - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
  - I may ask that the recording be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.
  - while information obtained will be treated with the strictest confidence, that anonymity cannot be guaranteed.
6. I agree/do not agree to the transcript being made available to other researchers who are not members of this research team, but who are judged by the research team to be completing related research, on condition that my identity is not revealed.

**Participant’s signature**.....**Date**.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

**Researcher’s name**.....

**Researcher’s signature**.....**Date**.....

*NB: Two signed copies should be obtained. The copy retained by the researcher may then be used for authorisation of Items 8 and 9, as appropriate.*

- 8. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a transcript of my participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

**Participant's signature.....Date.....**

- 9. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read the researcher's report and agree to the publication of my information as reported.

**Participant's signature.....Date.....**



## CONVERSATION TOPIC GUIDE

### **Background Information:**

**Age:**

**Ethnicity:**

**Place of birth:**

**Place of residence:**

**Social circle/geography:**

**Sexuality:**

**Profession:**

**Amount/Type/Frequency of body practices used:**

### **Key themes and questions to be explored:**

#### **Theme 1: Psychogeographies and Cultural Discourses of the Self**

Key Questions:

What do you think about LA? How does it make you feel? What are the positive and negative aspects of living in LA? How does LA differ from other places that you have lived in?

#### **Theme 2: The Male Identity**

Key Questions:

What does it mean to be a man? How should a man behave? What do you think about your own identity and body image? Who do you aspire to be and why?

#### **Theme 3: Critical Moments, The Body and its Image**

Key Questions:

When did you start thinking about and reflecting upon the appearance of your body and why? How did you feel about your body at the time? Has there been a change in how you think about your body throughout your life changed – from childhood to adulthood? And, why?

When did you first consider making changes to your body and what influenced you to do so? What methods have you used to alter your body and its appearance? What were your thoughts and feelings about this decision at the time?

## **Theme 4: The Lived Experience – The Body, Body Techniques and Subjectivities**

### Key Questions:

How does your body make you feel? What impact do various body techniques have on your body, mind and interactions with others? What were/are the positive and negative experiences that you noticed?

How has the use of body techniques, and the changes made to your body and appearance made you feel about yourself?

What influences you to continue or to discontinue use body techniques? Have you noticed any side-effects? And, what affect have they had on you?

What have you learned about yourself and others during journey of using various body techniques?

What impact have body techniques had on your life in general? E.g. career, relationships, personal success, mind, body.

## **Theme 5: Body Modification and Body Capital**

### Key Questions:

How have you used specific body techniques to reconstruct your body (image) and why? How does the process of working on your body make you feel and how have synthetic testosterone products made you feel during this process?

How have you experienced your social environments whilst using synthetic testosterone products? Do people treat you differently?

How do you use your body to your advantage?

How have synthetic androgens affected how you feel about and experience your body? What pleasures and displeasures have you experienced?

## **Theme 6: Personal Desires and Fantasies of the Self**

### Key Questions:

How have your personal feelings, beliefs and desires influenced your body image? Have you noticed a change within yourself during and after your use of certain body practices e.g. exercise, dieting, synthetic androgens?

What expectations did you have when you first started engaging in various body practices – exercise, dieting, synthetic androgens? And, have these expectations been met?

Is there a tension between who you want to be and who society wants you to be? And if so, have body techniques helped you to overcome these tensions?

## **Theme 7: The Processes of Engagement with Body Techniques**

### **Key Questions:**

Did you have to prepare yourself emotionally before you started to focus on changing the appearance of your body? And, when preparing to engage in certain body techniques like weight training, dieting and synthetic androgens?

What things did you consider when deciding what body techniques (synthetic androgens) to engage with/purchase? What emotional and physical experiences did you notice prior, during and after consuming synthetic androgens?

Do you target modifying specific areas of the body, and if so, why? Do different parts of your body have different meanings, and if so, what?