

# **WESTERN SYDNEY** UNIVERSITY



## **Perceptions of Body Image and Its Influence on Cultural Practices Within a Gym Setting Among a Young Male Population**

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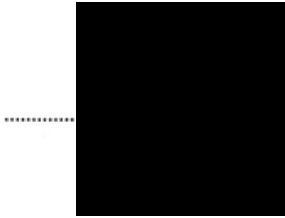
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## Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.



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## **List of Acronyms**

AAS	Androgenic Anabolic Substances
BDD	Body Dissatisfaction Disorder
BID	Body Image Disorder
IFBB	International Federation of Bodybuilders
NABA	National Amateur Bodybuilding Association

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine young male's perceptions of body image and their bodybuilding practice within a gym setting. Research on male body images suggests that more young men are turning towards negative health behaviours such as consuming diet pills, using anabolic steroids, and are internalising unrealistic media representations of an ideal male body. Using an ethnographic research method approach (i.e. interviews, observations and field notes), this study explored eleven young males' perceptions of body image and their bodybuilding practice within a gym setting. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of capital, this study adds to the understanding of how young males invest and accumulate their cultural, social, economic and symbolic capital in their bodybuilding practices. Furthermore, Connell's concept of masculinity was also employed to elucidate meaning to the approaches the young males performed in the gym. Implications for developing positive young male's body image and satisfaction and in relation to a critical inquiry approach to youth health are discussed

# Chapter 1

## Bodybuilding among Young Male's Population

### 1.1 Introduction

Negative body image concerns are becoming increasingly prevalent among young male populations (Goldman, Pope & Bhasin, 2018; Paxton & Heinicke, 2018; Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2018). For over 30 years researches have tried to understand and identify the key factors that would lead to a negative body image concern, however the majority of studies undertaken have focused mainly on women (Mills & Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, 2017; Varnes et al., 2013). Research indicates that body dissatisfaction is increasing in males and even young boys from the age of five are experiencing body image dissatisfaction (Heatherton, Mahamedi, Striepe, Field & Keel, 1997; Pope, Phillips & Olivardia, 2000; Walker, White & Srinivasan, 2018; Mclean, Wertheim & Paxton, 2018). Men with body image concerns are potentially at risk for low self-esteem, eating disorders, use of steroids, anxiety and depression (McCreary & Sasse, 2000; Cafri, Strauss & Thompson, 2002; Olivardia, Pope, Borowiecki & Cohane, 2004).

Bodybuilding is becoming increasingly popular among today's youth (Brennan, Wells & Van Hout, 2018). Bodybuilding and the associated discussions related to training, diet systems, have particularly gained popularity among the recreational exercise populations (Andreasson & Johansson, 2018b). There seems to

be a trend in the use of steroids, the value of hyper-muscular bodies and the idea of hard-core muscular men in this recreational community (Andreasson & Johansson, 2018b). To a certain degree, the hyper-muscular body is gradually becoming normalised and this bodybuilding culture has moved from the peripheral to the mainstream. What was once considered an extreme body is now a 'normal' body. This has created a new bodily ethos (Andreasson & Johansson, 2018a).

Despite the increased understanding of bodybuilding and bodily (hyper-muscular) appearances, very few studies have investigated what factors contribute to body image issues and how these might influence bodybuilding practices. Thus, there is a need to understand the various perceptions of body image and its influence on young males' health, amidst the emerging culture surrounding bodybuilding. One of the body image issues that relate to bodybuilding is an obsessive drive for muscularity (Bergeron & Tylka, 2007; Phillips & Diaz, 1997). In bodybuilding, researchers have identified negative body image as being linked to negative health behaviours (Grogan & Richards, 2002). These include, compulsive weight lifting, rigid adherence to diet regimes, avoiding situations where one's body is on display, and dependence or abuse of steroids (Cafri, Olivardia & Thompson, 2008). While there is an understanding of the drive for the ideal physique in terms of leanness and muscularity, it is not yet clear how young males talk about their everyday bodybuilding experiences and practices and how these practices may impact on their ideal body image and behaviours.

Like athletes, models and other occupations where the body is central to performance, professional bodybuilders make a living through bodily performance through which gendered is inferred (rather than ascribed or claimed) (Goffman,

1977). For the purposes of discussing gender, bodybuilding communities provide a useful context, and this is what Connell (1987) would describe as a practical transformation of the body. With the advent of a 'fitness industry' since the 1980s, body transformation has become a common undertaking. Men in particular, engage in bodywork and the effect this has on the body is symbolic of the social structure of gender (Connell, 2012). Likewise, the subculture of bodybuilding provides researchers with a particular context for understanding how cultural (bodily) capital is accumulated and monitored. This study is informed by Bourdieu and Wacquant's research on bodily capital within boxing (Wacquant, 2011). In their study it was apparent that the body was evaluated in highly diverse ways, and that the subculture of which one is a part alters one's aesthetic disposition, or self-preference. The context of bodybuilding aligns well with Wacquant's and Bourdieu's study. Finally, the study of bodybuilding enables researchers to understand the relationship a bodybuilder has with masculinity and whether this represents an exercise in conformity or resistance. This study will help unpack how bodybuilders discursively and physically manage their forms of capital within this specific bodybuilding field.

## **1.2 Research question**

The research focuses on the perceptions of body image of young males in bodybuilding and the role it plays in their bodybuilding practices within a gym setting.

- *How do young males perceive their body image in bodybuilding?*
- *How do young males' perception of body image influence their bodybuilding practice in a gym setting?*
- *How do young males talk about their body image in relation to social media?*

### **1.3 Significance of the study**

This study contributes to the understanding of young male's perceptions of their body image, the impact on their health, and how they approach bodybuilding relating to their perception of body. Results from this study can inform educators, personal trainers, sport coaches and others who work with young men, where body-work and working with bodies are central to performance. Moreover, this study can further advanced knowledge concerning men's health, masculinity in bodybuilding, healthy practice in bodybuilding and the promotion of health in young males.

### **1.4 Thesis organisation**

Chapter Two outlines the literatures that examined factors that impacted males' perception of body image. It then discusses masculinity and highlights Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity in relation to male's gender norm. This chapter also introduces Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of capital, field and habitus in relation to bodies and performance. Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach used in this thesis. Chapter Four presents the findings of the research, drawing on key themes associated with the research questions. This chapter analyses the results and discusses the implications for bodybuilders, exercise professionals and potentially health professionals. Lastly, Chapter Five integrates the empirical evidence with the current literature to offer new insights into this growing area of research. The topic provided an exciting opportunity to advance our knowledge around bodybuilding and young males' engagement with social media in relation to bodybuilding.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The following chapter begins with a brief history of bodybuilding and illustrates the changing nature to what it has become today. The importance of body image and associated disorders will be addressed in order to explain the implications that may surround a young male's bodybuilding practice, and their perceptions of masculinity and ideal body images. Masculinity is discussed and how it is performed in a gym setting, along with the role it plays in the formation, representation, and performance of the digital self. In particular, this chapter aims to elucidate meaning to bodybuilding practices one has, the way one uses social media, and how one exudes an expression of masculinity, aided by Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus, and capital.

#### **2.2 Brief History of Bodybuilding and its Development**

Bodybuilding has been practised for as long as sport and physical education have existed (Mosely, 2009) and it shares common roots with competitive weightlifting and gymnastics. Development of bodybuilding as a sport stems from traditions in the field of physical exercise (Stokvis, 2006). Bodybuilding's popularity arose in the 1890s with Mr Eugene Sandow, whom the Mr Olympia competition stature is modelled on. With the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, bodybuilding had moved

away from ancient traditions, such as stone lifting, practiced initially by ancient civilisations, and made way for a new system of training with an end goal (Klein, 1993b). Weightlifting had now found purpose in entertainment, signalling a new physical culture across Europe. Prior to the arrival of Sandow, proponents of physical culture were seeking to discover new ways to promote messages of a healthy lifestyle, which fell in line with this emerging phenomenon of weight training for the sake of physical demonstration (Chapman, 1994).

In 1901, the first major bodybuilding show known as the ‘big show’ was held in London, and formalities from this show are still upheld today (Gleyse, 2018). Those who wish to compete must place in a regional show before they can advance to the big show. Competitors were judged according to their attributes and symmetry more than just sheer size. This contest proved so successful that it spawned quite a few entrepreneurs to design and develop equipment for the average person to use at home to begin bodybuilding. Notably, Bernarr Macfadden, who is often regarded as the father of physical culture (Budd, 1997), went on to develop a chest expander and huge commercial success led him to establish ‘physical culture’ magazine and from there inspire others to take bodybuilding out of the gyms and into the homes.

One such devotee of Macfadden was Charles Atlas. Taking an exercise and bodybuilding program developed by Macfadden, Atlas had found fame and fortune by delivering this mail-order program to numerous persons and thus increased his popularity as an expert in the field of physical culture. Selling his program with advertising that featured a skinny guy being harassed by a bully on a beach, only to turn the tables after retreating to a world of physical development, served as



inspiration to many. As the general public had found a new desire to become fit and strong, the 1920s saw exercise products sold all throughout the world, with bodybuilding breaking away from weightlifting and becoming a worthwhile pursuit in its own right.

Bodybuilding was now entering its golden age, and with the 1930s gymnasiums were sprouting up everywhere, no where more prominent than on the Californian coast, at 'Santa Monica Beach Playground', now officially called 'Muscle Beach Venice.' Originally the place where displays of gymnastics were performed, the position of bodybuilding here had only intensified its popularity. With the establishment of the International Federation of Bodybuilders (IFBB) and National Armature Bodybuilding Association (NABA), bringing new competitions such as, Mr Olympia (IFBB) and Mr Universe (NABA), meant many great champions of the sport were crowned.

Drawing up many competitors, the sport had found who is regarded as the most influential bodybuilder of all time, Arnold Schwarzenegger. His career in bodybuilding was un-precedented, and a move into the Hollywood film industry, took bodybuilding and the muscular physique to a new level. The sport had found that the increase in bodybuilding competitions meant an increase in bodybuilders competing amongst themselves. This led to the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century where central bodybuilding practices like training and diet, saw an extreme approach to the emphasis on size in becoming more muscular. Competitors were engaging in the use of anabolic steroids, and though steroids had been used since the 1960s, it gave rise to the mass-at-all-costs approach, of which we see adopted by the top competitors of

today (Monaghan, 2001). Though, throughout the history of bodybuilding some scepticism remains about its legitimacy as a sport, however we are now finding ourselves in the midst of another boom within the sport (Klein, 1993; Richardson, 2012; Sawicki, 2016).

Recent developments in the field of sport research inevitably attract the attention of academics to historical events that may have been overlooked, yet often reveal the genesis of such developments. Research surrounding bodybuilding has mainly reported on the physical establishments where bodybuilding takes place, its basis as a sport, and the concepts and principles of bodybuilding. Yet, little attention has been given to value of the body of a bodybuilder, rather than valued based on the bodies' athletic performance (Nemeth, 2016). Liokaftos (2017) describes bodybuilding's transformation from one that had a small number of devotees, into a fashionable form of exercising for the masses. The purpose of bodybuilding as a distinct discipline varies between the more traditional and extreme development of the muscle mass and the more modern and general ideal of just lightly toning the muscles (Sawicki, 2016).

Team sports can earn respectability from its players and supporters through a collective goal (e.g. championship trophy), however in its variety of forms bodybuilding is considered an isolated sport, and as such, has the absence of a collective goal on which a claim to respectability can be based. To an outsider the sport may be perceived to present a strong narcissistic component, since the practice strives to achieve personal ideals with respect to the body and individual physiology (Locks & Richardson, 2013). Bodybuilding as a sport has become part of a general

rise in interest amongst the wider population and increased its popularity and gained respectability (Sawicki, 2016). As a consequence, some men have felt a need to develop their physiques to a greater extent than they had done so previously (Pope, Khalsa & Bhasin, 2017). Therefore, caring for a well-controlled body had thus become a way of expressing a new social pressure of achieving and maintaining self-control.

Work from Klein (1993), and his exploration into the study of the bodybuilding subculture revealed that whilst ideal body images have importance in society, within the bodybuilding community such body images are extreme. Universally bodybuilding is regarded as a sport; however there is an argument outside this company of devotees that suggests it is closer to beauty competitions or that of classical sculpture (Aranyosi, 2018). In phenomenology a classic distinction exists between the lived body (to be a body) and the body as an object (to have a body) (Aranyosi, 2018). In bodybuilding terms, the lived body is the body as experienced by yourself, as yourself. Example for this is reaching out to grab the weight, and feeling the muscles contract during the exercise phase. While it has been suggested that bodybuilding is a sport due to length of time it takes to perfect skills, it also demonstrates '*koerptellic*' (German for object) traits as primarily the sport is based on the achievement of mass, vascularity and proportion in musculature.

### **2.3 Bodybuilding, Body Image, and Health-related Outcomes**

Our perceptions and attitudes towards the body comprise of two aspects, which make up the concept of body image (Cash & Szymanski, 1995). They comprise of body image satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) and attitudinal, stemming from one's

perceptual body image. This results in a congruence (or discrepancy) between a self-perception and the relation to a perceived body image and an internalised physical ideal. In turn, attitudinal includes two components. Affective, relating to feelings a person has in relation to appearance of their body, and cognitive, which includes the thoughts and beliefs about their bodies appearance and body shape (Banfield & McCabe, 2002). Furthermore, the attitudinal aspect encompasses the behavioral, cognitive and emotional importance of the body for self-assessment (Cash, 2002).

The construct of body image is not merely a modern concept, as it has existed in many forms and many cultures for centuries. In recent history, concerns surrounding body image have usually been associated with women and associated eating disorders (Aubrey, 2010; Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008; Grogan, 2016). However, it has become apparent that men are experiencing body image issues related to weight, appearance, and body shape, which may lead to detrimental consequences both physically and emotionally (Harvey & Robinson, 2003; Maida & Armstrong, 2005; Schneider, Cockcroft & Hook, 2008).

Interest into body image from a psychological and sociological framework had originated from work by Paul Schilder (1935). Research prior to Schilder often focused on body image with studies exclusively limiting attention to individuals who suffered brain damage through injury and their subsequent distorted body perceptions (Grogan & Richards, 2002). Furthermore, in Schilder's *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (1935), he suggests body image is not to be viewed solely as a perceptual construct, but also as a reflection of one's attitudes and interactions

amongst others. However, since this work, researchers have moved forward and taken ‘body image’ to new meanings beyond that of the perceptual definition by Schilder. Work by Shafran (2000) had looked at previous studies in this field and had reported up to 16 different body image definitions that were used by clinicians and researchers. Descriptions incorporated elements including weight satisfaction, body esteem, appearance evaluation, appearance orientation, body schema, size perception accuracy, and body concern.

For it was not till the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that an awareness of body was perceived as a confusing mix of bodily sensations. Progressively researchers have recognised the importance a presence of an internal body representation can have, and an awareness of our bodies in orientating in the world. Bonnier (1905) was the first to talk about ‘body schema’ referring to the topographical and spatial mental representation of the body. Furthering on from this, Schilder (1942) and Slade (1988) defined the known concept of ‘body image’, which is the image of bodies as seen in our minds or a subjective representation of our body in our mind.

Since Bonnier’s work, concepts of ‘body-image’ and/or ‘body schema’ have been enriched by several psychopathological manifestations and taxonomies associated with body awareness, altogether reaching a complexity in adapting to the many ways we have in relating to our bodies. Nowadays the well being of people is becoming increasingly challenging by these psychological constructs, due to the growing focus on an aesthetic appearance in our society.

Cash and Pruzinsky (2002) found that standards of attractiveness might vary depending on an individual's ethnicity. When conducting studies on body image the extent that the person had adopted the values associated within their particular ethnicity was often not taken into account (Cafri et al., 2002; McCreary, Saucier & Courtenary, 2005; Vartanian, Giant & Passino, 2001). Current body image research on males of different ethnicities has led to inconsistent findings and may be presented as a generalisation to populations (Ricciardelli, McCabe, Williams & Thompson, 2007) and therefore maybe maltreated and neglect the overall serious nature this problem can hold.

Puberty and adolescence is an important time for teenagers in terms of physical and psychological change (Baghurst, Griffiths & Murray, 2018). Quite often individuals may struggle at this time with self-esteem and their body image due to the body going through many changes. It is with these changes and the feeling of acceptance from peers, which leads to individuals engaging in body comparisons (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2005). During these years the awareness of acceptance can intensify. In a society of media culture highly focused on appearance, body image dissatisfaction can become central to a young males development. As a result, a decrease may occur in self-esteem as an increase in body dissatisfaction occurs, leading to the possible onset of depression (Myers & Crowther, 2009).

It is important to also acknowledge, as current research indicates, young males and men may not only be prone to depression or low self-esteem, but also anxiety, eating disorders or use of anabolic steroids and other performance enhancing drugs (Murray, Griffiths, Mond, Kean & Blashill, 2016; Pope et al., 2000). Developing a

negative body image can have a problematic effect on the mental and physical states of a person (Noles, Cash & Winstead, 1985). Molinary (2010) states that a negative body image is not usually the root of the issue, and that poor self-concept and lack of confidence is often the core of negative body image. Most commonly it is the dynamic change in self-acceptance that changes one's negative self-concept and body image.

Our bodies, the way we dress, eat, and daily rituals to which we attend are considered indicative of one's culture. Research from Bordo (2004), claimed a clear contrast can be found between symbolic functions. The first function relates to a designation of the social position, involving class status or gendered role. Whereas, the second function relates to an indication of spiritual, moral or the emotional state of the individual (Bordo, 2004). However this message itself can be positive and indeed negative.

Though a need to follow standards of beauty encouraged by societies is not solely a product of our era; history in fact, provides widespread accounts. Grecian art often depicts an athletic warrior, for it is these persons who would be elevated to a godlike status. Pope et al., (2000) and their work with muscle dysmorphia had coined the term 'Adonis Complex', linking it to ancient Greek representations of the male body not merely depict an advanced knowledge of anatomy, however conveying a prevailing attitude towards masculine beauty. Male figures were frequently represented as nude to display the male form with musculature and grace, highlighting a central role of which the masculine body occupied in Greek culture and aesthetics.

Similar notions of this aesthetic ideal, has today given rise to hard bodied men exemplifying action heroes, as action films of our time perfectly define the masculine body ideal. Stemming from the late 50s when bodybuilding was entering its golden era, just having broad shoulders was not quintessentially the male body image; more was needed (Roach, 2008). Echoing characteristics of the ancient Greeks this brought a new wave of heightened masculinity where hitting the gym made you more of a man. Men who engaged in bodybuilding often chose to display their muscularity by dressing in revealing or tight fitting clothing, creating a complex transgression, which upended the collectively constructed notions of gender, sexuality, and masculinity (Mishkind, Rodin, Silberstein & Striegel-moore, 1986).

The effeminate look has since declined in popular culture, though with its beginning in the 1980s, the idea of the cut, very muscular man being the ideal has only increased over time (Grogan & Richards, 2002). Comic book heroes are often a point of reference to support the increasing focus for this current body image ideal (Baghurst, Carlston, Wood & Wyatt, 2007; Knoesen, Thai Vo & Castle, 2009). Comparing early portrayals of these characters to the most recent, whilst all depictions were in excellent shape, reveals that just being thin or athletic isn't good enough as the muscular physique has only become more extreme (Boyd & Murnen, 2017). It has been argued that action figures of these characters might be giving boys body image issues (Barlett, Harris, Smith & Bonds-Raacke, 2005).

Culture and media have portrayed body image and expected behavioural roles that are often aligned with status (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Lawrie, Sullivan, Davies & Hill, 2006). The early teen years are a time when young males become



more aware of media and celebrity images, in film or the sporting arena and they start to notice peers and how they look and how they themselves fit in (Lawrie et al., 2006). It is at this development stage in an adolescent's life that they may begin to compare themselves with peers, a cultural ideal and those images found in media. All of this can impact on how they feel and internalise body ideals as they are growing (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2005).

Obviously, mass media cannot be attributed sole responsibility as mentioned peers and parents also influence equally to body image. The Tripartite Influence Model (see Keery, Van den Berg & Thompson, 2004; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999) demonstrated a collective interaction between multiple influences including a connection through daily socialisation and through two mediational links. These links were an internalisation of societal appearance standards (Cash, 2002; Durkin, Paxton & Sorbello, 2007), or rather the internalising of the standards of "masculinity" the stimuli present, and the appearance comparison process (Durkin & Paxton, 2002; Durkin et al., 2007; Tiggeman & Slater, 2004). All of these contribute towards the onset of body dissatisfaction.

The value of the male physique is increasing, as evidenced by the growing number of products and advertisements aimed towards men. The ideal body shape with the muscular well-developed chest, big biceps, wide shoulders and the narrow waist, reminiscent of ideals in the past, has now become synonymous of a modern man. This evolution has produced a sort of paradox effect on the men of today. Divided between the increased pressure to obtain an impressive aesthetic appearance

and the worry of a gender-identity stereotype that would label men who care about their body/looks as feminine.

Research has reported that women have often received judgement according to their looks from other women and male counterparts (Aranyosi, 2018; Strong, 2003). Whilst researchers have identified this issue amongst men, many men may experience or manifest a body image issue differently than women due to a variety of factors (Bailey, Gammage & van Ingen, 2017). Such factors may include the pressure from peers and media representations to be physically tough and strong which is influenced by the societal 'ideal' that man must carry those traits of being strong, lean and muscular.

Common self-destructive behaviours, which may stem from a negative body image concern can include, fad dieting: with reports that 11% of Australian men are dieting at any given time (Glashouwer, Bennik, de Jong & Spruyt, 2018). Another is disordered dieting, with one third of all eating disorders diagnosed are male (Fewell, Nickols, Tierney & Levinson, 2018). Exercise dependence or 'exercise addiction' is also a common behaviour, which may lead to steroid use (*Eating Disorders Victoria*, 2018). Such factors create challenges for medical specialists, who may not have specific knowledge of the tendencies regarding body image, making it difficult to assess, diagnose and implement interventions for a male population (Alleva, Sheeran, Webb, Martijn & Miles, 2015; Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002; Halliwell, 2015).

A study by Edwards, Tod, Molnar and Markland (2016) revealed men are now more anxious about their bodies than they were five years before. Results suggested

that pressure to have a muscular physique and an internalisation of a mesomorphic body ideal were high in men with low autonomy. In their study, they found that men with low levels of autonomy were more likely to accept social messages and internalise them more than individuals with higher levels of autonomy. Variables that surround this internalisation are associated with a social pressure to be muscular and a drive for muscularity. (Edwards, Molnar & Tod, 2017; Giles & Close, 2008; Karazsia & Crowther, 2009). Male body-shaming is also now on the rise, though this is something women have been dealing with for decades, men are now getting near equal media pressure to have these unattainable superhero like bodies (Stratton, Donovan, Bramwell & Loxton, 2015; Young, Gabriel & Hollar, 2013).

McCabe and McGreevy (2010) had claimed men of all ages often relate body image with less focus on appearance and more on the functionality, overall fitness and health of their bodies. Whereas, work from Silva (2006) discovered younger men were in fact trying to enhance their physical image and were concerned more with their body shape (i.e. how they physically appear to others) than with their specific weight. Conversely, several studies have also found that men and adolescents who are involved in sports often feel pressured to conform to the body weight expectations based on the sport being played to aid in the competitive nature of such sports, as opposed to concerns about a specific body type or physical appearance (Galli, Reel, Petrie, Greenleaf, & Carter, 2011; Lobera, Cid, Fernandez, & Rios, 2011).

The modern ideal body image depicting a more muscular, toned, lean, physically fit, young, masculine, powerful, self-confident and sexually desirable is now commonplace (Filiault, 2007; Gough, 2018; Paxton & Heinicke, 2018; Schneider

et al., 2008). Notably, such modern portrayals of this ideal body image appearing in media has been receiving global attention, as men who internalise this ideal body image may experience various levels of body image dissatisfaction (BID) (Grieve, Truba & Bowersox, 2009). Additionally, research conducted by McCabe and McGreevy (2010) found male adolescents and men now feel more pressure to conform to a particular body type. Consequently, concerns related to body image is now occurring more frequently in males, with a variety of diagnoses and labels assigned to the symptoms that are presented.

As a result, medical classifications can be found in the recent *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013) such as body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), classified under obsessive compulsive and related disorder. Also, the *DSM-5* diagnoses problematic symptoms (e.g., body shame) and includes two new specifiers to this latest revision that deals with BDD. Firstly, *muscle dysmorphic specifier*, which deals with individuals who assess their body as being too small or insufficiently muscular: known amongst body building communities as 'bigorexia'. And secondly, *insight specifier*, which refers to the level of insight regarding the individual's beliefs about BDD.

One developing area in the field of body image research is evidenced by the increased focus of studies aimed towards the drive for muscularity in both males and females. Studies from Cafri et al., (2008), explored the factors that influenced the drive for muscularity in effort to understand the motivators and experiences behind them. As a result of this work, it led to developments in psychological measurement

scales, which were found to be successful in assessments of body image and body dissatisfaction (Hildebrandt, Langenbucher & Schlundt, 2004).

With a drive for thinness commonly reported by females, studies by Pritchard and Crambitt (2014) found males endorsed a desire to reduce overall body fat with a simultaneous increase in muscle mass. Researchers identified the sociocultural body ideals for males were characterized in expressions of leanness (i.e., low body fat) alongside muscularity, with specific importance on upper body musculature. Furthermore, Pritchard and Crambitt (2014) noted the impact of body dissatisfaction could influence male's psychological wellbeing resulting in cases of low self-esteem and depression possibly developing unhealthy behaviors such as overtraining, extreme dieting, and usage of performance enhancing substances.

Apart from medical diagnoses there are a complex amalgam of cultural, social and psychological factors that contribute to young males' health and wellbeing in bodybuilding (Sawicki, 2016). These have generated a wholesome drive to improve one's body alongside a determination to align with a social status and an increase in self-efficacy and self-esteem. On the other hand, the standard setting of body image has over time become distorted and has seen the prevalence of pathological conditions like BID.

Reports have shown consistency that the mean age for onset of BDD is 16years of age, with prevalence in about 1.9% of community samples, and about 5.8% – 7.4% under psychiatric care (Schneider, Turner, Mond & Hudson, 2017; Veale, Gledhill, Christodoulou & Hodsoll, 2016). Although, BDD is becoming an

issue for men, it can often go unrecognized because men are less likely to present with overt symptoms, and practitioners and other health professionals (e.g. sport coaches, personal trainers, counselors) may not identify any subclinical behaviours associated with BDD (Davey & Bishop, 2006; Filiault, 2007; Grieve et al., 2009). Furthermore, research addressing the extent of this problem and best treatment practices is lacking, also there is no single description of the symptoms of a body image disturbance that men may experience. However, from the little research surrounding this topic, it has shown that differences exist in the meaning and reaction to body image among various populations (Purton et al., 2018)

As a form of communication our bodies express who we are, yet as we live in societies often focused on physical identity we can become fearful of performing our identities through our bodies. Research by Warhaft-Nadler (2013) has established that children can adopt a societal view on ideal body shape and size by the time they reach five years old. Today young males are worrying about fitting in with the crowd, whilst attempting to generate individuality. Individuals are using appearance, bodies, apparel and their own style to express inner convictions, sense of pride, affiliations, insecurities, identities and their weaknesses (Hakim, 2018; Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017).

#### **2.4 The Impact of Social Media, Cultural Norms, and Popular Culture on Young Male's Bodybuilding Practices**

Media and sociocultural representations are becoming more visible and have changed the notion of an ideal male body that has led men to think more critically about their own bodies (Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015; Rutledge, Gillmor & Gillen,

2013). Instagram, a modern social media communication tool, assigns hashtags to connect users and the hashtag 'fitness' has over two-hundred-fifty million images all promoting an self-appointed body ideal (Vaterlaus, Patten, Roche & Young, 2015). However, in today's reality, having a healthy interest and placing an increased importance in our own aesthetic appearance can be seen as normal and adaptive (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2009).

The influence of media on body image perceptions has focused predominately on women (Andsager, 2014; Pritchard & Crambitt, 2014). However, studies that examine how young males perceive images on media, especially in relation to unreal muscular ideals are few, though increasing. Social media representations of males have often portrayed gendered stereotypes of men being the protector, enforcer or tough natured (Busetta & Coladonato, 2015). Subsequently, such portrayals leave them feeling if they look less than this ideal they will be positioned as weak, feminine, and possibly not suited to become role models for younger men. With the proliferation of social media (e.g. Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) people are able to choose their own representation of gender. The profile picture is considered the most prominent gendered post on social media (Enguix & Gómez-Narváez, 2017). And through these online representations of their identity, they are able to express their gender in different ways. For example, profile pictures are often the first point of call and can be displayed on all social media accounts and are mainly used to identify oneself to others.

The use of profile pictures on these social media accounts also raises further ethical concerns. With accounts able to have privacy measures, a profile's photo may

not always match the account holder. Studies from McKenna, Green and Gleason (2002) in the early stages of social media had suggested that people could have two identities: a true self and the actual self. Findings from Mckenna et al., (2002) further suggested that introverted individuals, who may find it difficult to converse in physical interactions, might find it easier to express them on an online forum. Within social media recent studies have shown that there has been an increase in use, especially amongst the age group of young men and more importantly those finding themselves living with austerity measures (Pritchard & Cramblitt, 2014). Posted pictures of men displaying their bodies in sexualised positions, as well as displays of strength (weightlifting, flexing, closed fists, etc.) are altogether common features in social media (Andsager, 2014; Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016).

As these social media websites may act as a sociological form of (gendered) expression, they are also considered a tool, which enable young males to express their gendered identities online. It is with this tool that is helping to increase our understanding in relation to our gender identities through the transmission of perceived cultural norms and values. Additionally, researchers have suggested that the cumulative use of social media can in turn impact young adolescent males making these social media websites an influential force in their life (Andsager, 2014).

Findings from research consistently supports that amongst users of social media, these platforms can act as a way to produce ideologies based on perceived gendered norms, which help navigate males who are attempting to negotiate their identity (Coles, 2007). Furthermore, studies of social media content (Kosinski, Stillwell & Graepel, 2013; Schwartz et al., 2013) have looked at textual data



generated by the users and have found success in positing users' interests and other identifying attributes. However, user generated image content has received little attention (You, Bhatia & Luo, 2016) and as images are not bound by barriers of language, it is suggested that simple human social network behaviours could be construed from sexual orientation, political views, ethnic origin, intelligence religion, and so on (Kosinski et al., 2013).

Males displaying their muscles on social media, and promoting the discipline of maintaining a low percentage of body fat, being physically active, and the projection of youth, vitality, strength, and power have become equated with the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Frayse & Mennesson, 2016). Therefore, it is wise to question if these common types of imagery posted do indeed reinforce these concepts of masculinity and only perpetuate the practice to do so amongst men. In response to this those men who may be in a subordinate position in the social order may not in fact feel marginalised or subordinated, due to their operation in the social domain they occupy. Furthermore, their position could be validated by a belief that their own masculinity is natural and true, and unconsciously forming part of strategies to get through everyday situations.

The majority of works today, concerning body dissatisfaction and body image have largely been on women, with strong indication of connections towards body image and various media influences as a leading factor in women and their physical activity behaviours (Alfano, Hildebrandt, Bannon, Walker & Walton, 2011; Lewis-Smith, Diedrichs, Rumsey & Harcourt, 2016; Perloff, 2014). Based on these studies media researchers might be compelled to explore impacts of social media upon a

growing generation consumed with a complexity of social media platforms and their feeling of a need to stay connected.

As more studies investigating the influences certain social media accounts have on men's body image and subsequent drive for muscularity, then today's technological mediums and possibilities of their use in future interventions should be strongly considered. With a generation increasingly exposed to fast paced technological advances, researchers today are privileged in being able to reach a much wider audience and increase opportunities to circulate their findings. Therefore, studies into social media and its influence on muscularity behaviours, will hopefully deliver strong recommendations in helping those affected and preventing body image in males becoming a potential health concern.

## **2.5 Connell's Masculinity and Bodybuilding**

Masculinity has been described as the pattern or configuration of social practices, which is linked to position of men in the gender order (Connell, 1995). These configurations of social practices are substantially a social construction. According to Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinities transform male bodies into symbolic tools. Connell suggests that systematic social arrangements and gender relations operate as forms of masculinity within social spaces (Connell, 1995). In describing hegemonic masculinity, Connell (1995) states it is "the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations." This notion was a continuance of Gramsci's (1971) idea of "hegemony," which described masculinities as seen through culturally accepted norms and values, tactfully observed by men, in pursuit of the patriarchal dividend and subsequent ascension to dominance.

Thus, implying hegemonic masculinities are malleable, extant with contradiction and difference as they compete with “lesser” masculinities for power (Connell, 1995, 2001).

Connell suggests that to become and remain a “real man” is dependent on the contextualised and normative meanings of masculinity (ies). These meanings are said to cultivate between intersecting perceptual and evaluatory judgments of diverse morphologies, produced by localised dominant masculinities desired amongst men in a particular milieu. As research has demonstrated, when compared to other cohorts, young adult males reported the highest incidences of body dissatisfaction and highest desire for greater muscle mass (Lynch & Zellner, 1999; Tager, Good & Bauer-Morrison, 2006). Furthermore, Cafri, van der Berg, & Thompson (2006) reported higher rates of AAS usage, depression and dysmorphic concerns for young males who participate in power sports.

Work by Olivardia (2001) suggested that perceived shortcomings in musculature might lead some males to pursuits to increase muscularity to compensate for the distress over their masculinity. Additionally, several studies explored low self-esteem and anxiety and masculinity and found strong correlations between these and perceived shortfalls in musculature (Bartsch, 2007; Bohne, Keuthen, Wilhelm, Deckersbach & Jenicke, 2002; Cafri et al., 2006). According to Pope et al., (2000) a “defining feature’ of traditional hegemonic masculinities is that of muscularity, hence it is imperative to this thesis, to understand as such, particularly given the setting of the gym. The gym is often a traditional setting for masculinity of physical dominance,

endorsing the pursuit of a muscular mesomorphology and awarding status within the social hierarchies (Robertson, 2003; Tager et al., 2006).

Research by Leit, Gray, and Pope Jr (2002), focusing on adolescent boys' interpretation of a masculine body image, found that continual exposure to more muscular bodies via media, led to beliefs their bodies were less attractive and puny and subsequent increase in body dissatisfaction (Bottamini & Ste-Marie, 2006). In this vein, a study by Adams and Govender (2008), claimed the process of learning to attain masculine self-fulfillment, is characterised by recognition of inadequacies. This is commonly seen in practices like bodybuilding, given the collective manifestations of masculinity and the male's body centrality in the individual (Govender, 2010). Hence, this supports Connell (1995) when advocating, the materiality of the male body acts as a referent for the configuration of social practices defined as masculine. In an attempt to operationalise the masculinisation of male (and female) bodies, as objects or agents of gendered practices, Connell coined the term body-reflexive practice (1995). Furthermore, this indicates that perhaps a particular morphology may only acquire meaning in context: for example, within the gym (Govender, 2010; Phillips, 2006; Ratele, 2013).

Building on Connell's body reflexive practices, it is argued that males construct, evaluate, and perceive their bodies in the attempt to anchor a sense of "self", as seen through, Giddens's (1991) "body projects" and Crossley's (2001) "reflective embodiment." To that end, like an adolescent's reflexivity experiences constraint within boundaries of a hegemonically masculinised social space, regulation of their

behaviour in accordance to social standards of traditional masculinity may problematise their body image construction (Martin & Govender, 2011).

Nonetheless, Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity is not without critique. Some discursive analysts maintain that males negotiate limitless contextual and contradictory identity positions on a social and subjective level, which they believe is far more nuanced than Connell gives credence (Blackbeard & Lindegger, 2007; Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2003; Moller, 2007). Connell (2001) responded by saying it is often scholars who fail to see the formation of hegemonic masculinity by adopting a solely discursive perspective. Adding, 'gender relations are also constituted in, and shape, non-discursive practices such as labour, violence, sexuality...' (1995, p. 7)

Under these circumstances, the male body in hegemonic masculinity can be seen both as a means and an end. The necessity to maintain a standard through one's bodily appearance and performance is vital to this masculinity (Shefer, Ratele, Strebel, Shabalala & Buikema, 2007). As a result, males with the mesomorphic soma may position themselves within particular social hierarchies as dominant (Lindegger & Maxwell, 2007; Phillips, 2006). Therefore, males who do not comply with these ideals may experience anxiety about their body image, and result in being branded as weak or effeminate (Connell, 1995; Govender, 2010; Hunt, Gonsalkorale & Murray, 2013). Current research indicates that the pursuit of these ideals has males engaging in risky behaviours, for example, extreme diets, over-exercising, and steroid use in order of being seen as a "real man" (Griffiths, Henshaw, McKay & Dunn, 2017; Griffiths, Murray, Krug & McLean, 2018; Griffiths, Murray, Mitchison & Mond,

2016; Martin & Govender, 2011). In consequence, it is in this environment where we find the male body is both the solution and the problem.

In lieu of this, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is subject to being overused or overemphasized by many researchers (Christensen & Jensen, 2014). As uncovered in studies of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) the uses of the concept have been inconsistent when used for the studying gender and gendered norms. Furthermore, the concept has been used in previous studies but more knowingly as a free-flowing concept, in contrast to Connell's original framework.

Connell's work on masculinity can be argued to be evident in modern social media (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Ricciardelli, Clow & White, 2010; Waling, Duncan, Angelides & Dowsett, 2018). Defining a relationship that exists between the body and a social structure is a simultaneous two-way practice. Henceforth, the practices themselves are formed by relationships from the formation in structures, from which the bodies become appropriated and defined. As such, concepts of the male body can often be quite varied in respect to the context of which they inhabit.

In the masculinity work by Connell, it was found that gendered norms are often contested, due to the right to account being acclaimed by conflicting discourses and systems of knowledge. Therefore, in society today, what practices are enabling this knowledge of gender? In the way that Bourdieu introduces a concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) and offers a different concept of capital, it is argued that men on social media display these concepts and inherently practice Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus along with

Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity complement each other in the understanding of struggles that may exist in men. However, hegemonic masculinity is absent with respect to its capacity to not include all forms of masculinity that display dominance and which may overlap in fields and subfields within the overall fields of masculinity.

## **2.6 Bourdieu's Field, Habitus, and Capital and Bodybuilding**

Bodybuilding like any sport requires investment by the participant, by way of skill acquisition, equipment costs, and transformation of the physical. With these investments, Bourdieu's theory of capital accumulation can help explain, how the various forms of capital are accumulated and transformed in other forms of capital by bodybuilders. Bourdieu had suggested that those who may be in a dominant position strive hard to preserve their rank in society by controlling definitions of masculinity and its importance through distributions of capital (Bourdieu, 1977). The concepts of capital are important to be considered when examining definitions of gender on social media as the significance of capital can have a possible influence to positions of gendered identity. Capital in general is a resource that is objectively struggled with whilst functioning with relations to social forms of power (Bourdieu, 1977).

Bourdieu's concept of field, notably regarded as the central concept, acknowledges many variants of masculinity to exist. Consequently, as there remains a plethora of fields of which masculinity can be found, so too could you find different versions of dominant and subordinate measures of masculinity. Within social media for instance, further studies are needed to identify all forms of perceived masculinity, and utilising Bourdieusian concepts, researchers may be able understand how the

male gender is represented online, and how the use of capital may create a perceived gender.

Our daily lives are determined by an infinite amount of interactions, e.g. discussions, negotiations or conflicts. To comprehend these interactions, it is important to first understand the circumstances and the places where these are produced. In other words, interactions have to be considered in their respective social space that is subdivided into different social fields (Bourdieu, 1996) all serving as arena of practice (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011). Social fields are the macro concept that structure Bourdieu's thoughts and that represent the entry point for Bourdieu's further concepts (Bourdieu, 1977).

Different social fields can therefore be distinguished, for example, fields of art, literature, science or careers we have, of which can be further subdivided into subfields, such as biological research or management research within the field of science. Bourdieu (1983) gave meaning to these social fields as being universal or a microcosm in which agents and institutions integrate and interact with each other in accordance with field-specific rules. Thus, explaining why concepts of field represents the more structural part of Bourdieu's theory.

Rules are not formalised but implicit in nature (Wacquant, 2011) and need to be internalised by the agent in order to exhibit appropriate practices and strategies (Bourdieu, 1983). The internalisation of field-specific rules enables agents to anticipate future tendencies and opportunities. Bourdieu compared this to good rugby players anticipating where the ball will land and who will therefore already be where



the ball fell before that ball falls down (Bourdieu, 1983). However, there is no global rule that applies to all fields, respective rules and conditions on a social field can only be discovered through empirical research (Walther, 2014). Therefore, Bourdieu (1966) argued that due to the uniqueness of rules, fields are considered autonomous. Though, he also qualifies that autonomy is only relative as fields are embedded in social spaces. For instance, the intellectual field may also be influenced by politics, economy or religions.

In addition to this Bourdieu went on to describe social fields as a locus of struggles representing a network of positions (Bourdieu, 1977). Work by Mayrhofer, et al, (2004) claimed that social fields have boundaries and it is here where their respective effect ends i.e. where impact of the game stakes are lost, it is at this point where the effects on another field begin. According to research by Iellatchitch, Mayrhofer, and Myer (2003), these boundaries are not pre-defined and have to be found out empirically. Agents constantly battle principally about the relative positions within fields, i.e. maximising capital, wherefore individual strategy to conform to the rules of the game is of necessity (Iellatchitch et al., 2003). It is the structure of objective relations between agents on a field that ultimately define dominate and dominated positions (Bourdieu, 1977) and thus creating a determining factor in what agents can and what they cannot do. A position that an agent will occupy on a field creates self-evident rules or doxa, determining a potential cruising radius, i.e. the parameters of social mobility within a social field (Bourdieu, 1977). This doxa forms our sense of place and the feelings of what is possible and what is not.

Alongside each individual's right to move around a social field, the capital structure may also determine the position an agent holds in the field or the social space in general. Bourdieu contends that positions on a social field are relative in nature. Volume and structure of the agent's portfolio are considered determinants in comparison to others on the same field, especially that of economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Through Bourdieu's work *La distinction* (1984) he arrives to a hierarchical formation of the social space with dominant and dominated class fractions. He continues to suggest that economic and cultural capital and the amount one accumulates as the most determining criterion in class distinction. It is in this respect that a dominant class with a higher amount of capital (e.g. medical professionals or academics) can be distinguished from the dominated classes.

In summary, we can view fields as places where power relations and practices of agents are not arbitrary but ascribed according to the distribution of capital. Once an understanding that all interactions are anchored in specific social fields, it can therefore be examined in how such positions on the respective fields are gained. Considering a basis that a social field represents the playground where certain rules apply (Bourdieu, 1977), agents need to be endowed with a specific quantity and structure of resources they can put at stake in order to obtain the right to enter a social field (Bourdieu, 1977). Each field values particular sorts of resources (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) that Bourdieu named capital.

Bourdieu (1977) claims that our habitus provides us with strategic ways of generating principle, which enable agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations. Therefore, habitus is said to guide our strategies like an unconscious

practice that aims to achieve our objectives (Walther, 2014) by investing appropriate types and amounts of capital upon a social field. The concept of habitus ensures that agents act uniformly with field specific rules, as all agents tacitly recognise the staked value of the game and the practical mastery of its rules (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

The possession of these particular forms of capital can help determine an individual's rank in terms of place further emphasising hierarchal construct. Along with all forms of capital, habitus being defined as the physical embodiment of cultural capital relies on our ingrained skills and habits that we have developed within our lifetimes. As these are continually shaped, individuals can then create strategies and traverse through daily routines. Thus, capital and habitus permit considerations into how individual's function within social structures to support or subvert a social order with focus on the strategies used to negotiate their position (Bourdieu, 1977).

Bourdieu distinguishes between four types of capital, namely economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Such capital is mobilised by agents in order to enter and move on social fields. While all types of capital appear to be distinct, in reality, they are closely linked towards each other and may be converted or traded for into other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). In this respect, one form of capital serves as currency that can be exchanged against others (Bourdieu, 1986), therefore exhuming the existence of a market for capitals.

Economic capital is related to an individual's fortune and revenue. It can be directly converted into money and may also be institutionalized in property rights

(Bourdieu, 1986). This form of capital is considered the easiest form of capital to be exchanged and transformed into other types of capital than vice-versa (Postone, LiPuma & Calhoun, 1993).

A person's social relations are represented in Bourdieu's concept of social capital. It is measured from the network of actual or potential resources legitimised by families, groups or class memberships and the allowance towards material and immaterial resources, information and knowledge (Bourdieu, 1986). His treatment of the concept is instrumental, focusing on advantages that possessors have of social capital and a deliberate construction of sociability for purposes of creating this resource. Bourdieu employs this concept to illustrate a mechanism for the generational reproduction of inequality. Thus pointing out that wealthy and powerful societies use their old boys network or other social capital to maintain advantages for themselves, their social class, and their children (Saegert & Carpiano, 2017).

According to Bourdieu, cultural capital can be found in three forms—embodied, objectified, and institutionalised. Cultural capital is principally transferred to us by family and through our education, and it extends to include institutionalised forms of educational qualifications. One's cumulative cultural capital can dictate the status and the relative position one holds within a social field. It exists in three forms. Firstly, the embodied (incorporated) state is a durable system of dispositions and is representative of the entirety of one's intellectual qualifications or human capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) it is the cultivation that presupposes a progression of embodiment implying a time-intensive labour of inculcation and assimilation

(Bourdieu, 1983). As such, acquiring incorporated cultural capital cannot be delegated. The labour of the acquisition is through the labour of oneself.

Secondly, cultural capital exists in an objective form, in the nature of material objects, e.g. books, paintings, instruments etc. each of which are transferable in their physical state. Lastly, cultural capital can also exist as an institutionalised form. Here, cultural capital constitutes certificates of cultural competence, for example, a formalised academic qualification that is socially sanctioned by an institution. According to Bourdieu (1986), institutions themselves can also institute cultural capital by enabling comparisons of the qualification holders, e.g. two persons having obtained their degree from different institutions.

In addition to those concepts the notion of symbolic capital is also recognised and is related to honor and recognition. It is not considered an independent type of capital within itself, but rather consisting the acknowledgment of capital by the entirety of the peer competitors on a specific field (Bourdieu, 1977). Hence, on social fields, economic, social and cultural capital is converted to symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977) that is worthy of being pursued and preserved (Bourdieu, 1977). Recognition of symbolic capital reflects the system's assumption about the usefulness of capital.

Depending on the rules of the field, symbolic capital reflects external and internal recognition, i.e. values accorded to us by the system and its actors (Doherty & Dickmann, 2009). As Sartre (1948, p. 98, cited in Bourdieu, 1966, p. 873) argued certain qualities can only emerge through judgments of somebody else. People are

seen now to have an increased tendency to place ever more importance on the body as constitutive of the self. For some, who may feel that they no longer have a strong self-identity, the body could at least appear to provide foundations for reconstructing a reliable sense of self (Bourdieu, 1984).

Following on from Bourdieu's original concepts of capital it can extend by adding to this a dimension of physical capital. Our bodies in modern society have become commodified in multiple ways and it is through this Bourdieu was able to analyse his examinations of the body. This refers not only to the body's implication in the procuring and selling of itself, but also refers to methods by which the body evokes a more comprehensive form of physical capital. Production of physical capital refers to the development of our bodies in ways we are recognised in social fields as possessing value. Conversions of physical capital arrive from the translation of bodily participation in labour, leisure and other fields into different forms of capital.

While Bourdieu has not defined his work as providing a theory of the body in society, Shilling extends Bourdieu's analysis of embodied and physical capital providing an approach to the sociology of the body. After examining Bourdieu's analysis of how bodies develop, attention by Shilling (1991) centered on the unequal opportunities people have for producing symbolically valued bodily forms and converting them into other resources. Bourdieu was not solely concerned with examining simultaneously the biological and social nature of the body in any detail. Bourdieu (2001) acknowledged acts of labour that turn bodies into social entities and how these acts can influence how people develop and overall physical shape of their bodies, and therefore learn how to present their bodies through styles of walk, talk

and dress. Far from being natural, these represent highly skilled and socially differentiated achievements that are learnt early in our childhoods. More specifically, our bodies bear the imprints from our social classes due to three main factors: the social location of the individual, formation of their habitus, and development of their tastes.

Using Bourdieu's theory, the concept of hegemonic masculinity can be built upon and used further to examine the struggle and contestations of a social position that may exist between men. Although the aforementioned forms of capital are each deserving of mention, physical capital, is another concept worth considering in argument of gender in a social media context. Pertaining to in this case the male body and the representations and expression of masculinity herein. Bourdieu had indicated in his work (Bourdieu, 1977) that this form of capital could be found in a materialisation of class taste, suggesting it is the manifestation of internalised bodily structures like that of posture, gait, and speech. Research by Shilling (2001) approached this idea by formulating arguments that postulated bodies were able to become forms of physical capital. This could be then seen to further contribute towards reproducing a notion of social inequality and reveal how the physical capital could further translate into additional forms of capital.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that young males are becoming increasingly susceptible to internalised body image ideals, through use of social media and from a pressure to uphold the hegemonic masculinity they feel is aligned with modern society. We are aware of what has been done from previous

studies, yet what we still need to find out is what young men are awarding higher value in terms of their capital. Studies such as this can help unpack the discourse among young male bodybuilders and underline the areas that need attention, to prevent negative body image concerns.



## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides the rationale for the chosen research methods used for data collection and data analysis. All ethical issues surrounding data collection, reflection on my position as a researcher, and the identification of the limitations of the study will also be addressed.

#### **3.2 Research Paradigm**

Earlier work by Guba (1990) argued that a research paradigm is mainly characterised by its epistemological, ontological and methodological dispositions, whereas Kuhn (2012) defined ‘paradigm’ as a set of common beliefs and agreements shared by researchers regarding how problems should be understood and addressed.

Crotty (1998) suggested that epistemological and ontological positions sit parallel, with each informing the theoretical perspectives and methods when conducting research. This study is underpinned by interpretivism and draws on qualitative methods, from my immersion into the field of inquiry in young males’ bodybuilding. Researchers acknowledge that their values and theoretical beliefs cannot fully be removed from their inquiry. Interpretivism aims to understand and

explain people and social reality and adopt a more flexible and personal research structure (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2001), increasing the receptiveness of capturing meaning in human interaction (Black, 2006). A strong connection exists between interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods. Researchers, who adopt an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods into their study design, do so to uncover reality from an individual's experience, and perceptions of particular phenomena (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

### **3.3 Methods**

#### ***3.3.1 Participant Recruitment***

The method of purposive sampling (Birk & Mills, 2011) was chosen to recruit the participants. The inclusion criteria were:

- Male,
- Aged 18 – 26,
- Participants needed to hold paid annual memberships with the gym.

Convenience sampling was also adopted as the participants were recruited from a Western Sydney gymnasium, where my part-time employment as a gym instructor was located. Eleven participants volunteered to participate in the research through their response to the recruitment poster, which was posted in the gym after university ethics approval was granted. Participants who expressed interest received an email outlining information such as the nature of the research, the protections to their identity and the purpose of the research. The participant information sheet (see Appendix A for participant information sheet) and consent form (see Appendix B for

consent form) were also included in the email. Participants were able to request a copy of the interview schedule (see Appendix C for interview schedules) prior to participation. Two pilot interviews were conducted with four colleagues in my enrolling institution. Feedback received from the pilot interviews formed the basis for revision for the actual interviews. This included for example, discarding and revising some questions to ensure it aligned with the interview focus and research questions.

### ***3.3.2 Data Collection***

From April 2018 to July 2018, I conducted a total of twenty-nine interviews with eleven participants. All the interviews were conducted at a variety of places within the gym premises. Each participant was interviewed at least once, and with nine participants completing a second and third interview. Interviews lasted up to 60 minutes, depending on the participants' availability. Upon completion of the second interview and after transcription of the audio files, it was decided that a third interview was needed to seek further information from the participants.

All nine participants were able to attend a third interview and university ethical approval was approved for this change. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview guides were developed for the three interviews (see Appendix C for interview schedules). The questions in the interview guides were constructed based on the literature, the theoretical concepts and my own experience in a bodybuilding community. This research project followed a semi-structured interview approach (Green & Thorogood, 2018). This enables the researcher to develop and use a pre-prepared guide, however it also allows the researcher to stray from the guide and follow any topical trajectory that may arise, where and when

appropriate (Grant, Rohr & Grant 2012; Green & Thorogood, 2018). From completion of the interviews all participants were assigned a pseudonym for anonymity in the discussion of data (see Appendix 1 for participant table 3.1).

### **3.3.3 Data Analysis**

The results were analysed using a six-step approach in qualitative thematic analysis, which drew focus towards the content or contextual meaning of textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Firstly, once each interview had been transcribed, I conducted a process of familiarisation with the data (Step 1). This consisted of several readings of the transcripts to get to know the data (semantic meanings), and to start taking note of any contextual points of interest to begin the first round of coding.

Secondly, the data were coded into relevant codes (Step 3) using NVivo 12. This procedure was performed for each interview transcript until all relevant interview data were coded. These initial codes referred to the most basic meaning of the raw data, which could be searched for in a meaningful way. These codes were coded by an inductive process (Lewis, 2015), that is, applying codes based on familiarisation of the field and literature review (e.g. Bourdieu's concepts, Social Media, etc.).

Bourdieu's concepts of capital (1984), field and habitus were used to help explain the data in this study. The concepts are used to explain the young males' meanings and social practices in bodybuilding. Furthermore, Bourdieu's concepts are

useful to examine the social hierarchy within the gym and how this has an impact on the participants' position within the gym. Alongside Bourdieu, this study also sought resources from Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity when creating codes. Use of Connell's concept is valuable to this study to uncover the hegemonic masculinity pertaining to the participants. Besides the manual allotment of text to these categories, the "Queries" function (e.g. searching text for "masculinity") was used to further identify any excerpt, which may hold relevance to the established codes.

Thirdly, codes were analysed at the broader level of themes (Step 3). This involved sorting the initial codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data into these themes. Fourthly, the last three remaining steps were conducted as one process by revising the themes, naming the themes and production of the report. Hence, these themes formed the result and discussion chapter. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2012) suggested that data analysis commences synchronously with data collection. As demonstrated in my research, my everyday experiences in the bodybuilding community, conferences, and meetings with supervisors all helped to initiate ideas and informed the analysis process. Thus, this stepped process ensured a rigorous analysis of the data were read and coded.

### **3.4 Methodological Trustworthiness**

This section discusses methodological trustworthiness, and identifies key components to ensure this measure was met throughout the study. Trustworthiness refers to the degree of credibility in the data, interpretation, and methods used ensuring the quality of a study (Polit & Beck, 2014). Criteria surrounding

trustworthiness include credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Each of criteria and the used procedures are outlined briefly below:

### *Credibility*

Credibility of the study is considered the most important criterion (Polit & Beck, 2014). Techniques used to establish credibility include continued engagement with participants, persistent observation if appropriate to the study, and peer-debriefing, member-checking, and reflective journaling. Participants had their transcripts emailed to them for validation, this allows opportunity for any errors to be corrected and challenge what they may perceive as a wrong interpretation. In the study, as an employee of the gym, my continued interaction and observations with the participants have assisted in enhancing the credibility of the data collected.

### *Dependability*

Dependability refers to the stability of the data over time and over the conditions of the study (Polit & Beck, 2014). Procedures for dependability include maintenance of an audit trail of process logs and peer-debriefings with a colleague. In the study, I have conducted regular meetings with the primary supervisor over the length of the study, alongside drafts being put forward for feedback and critique.

### *Confirmability*

Confirmability is the neutrality or the degree findings are consistent and could be repeated (Polit & Beck, 2014). Methods include maintenance of an audit trail of analysis and methodological memos. Qualitative researchers keep detailed notes of all

their decisions and their analysis as it progresses. A regular discussion with supervisors was also a way to ensure the data was interpreted accurately. These discussions prevent biases from only one person's perspective on the research. In the study, interview guides were constructed to guide the interview processes and the entire research design was noted if it were to reproduce in similar settings.

### *Transferability*

The nature of transferability, or extent to which findings are useful in other settings, refers to how applicable the findings are to other similar situations (Polit & Beck, 2014). Researchers support the study's transferability with a rich, detailed description of the context, location, and people studied, and by being transparent about analysis and trustworthiness. The findings of this study might be applicable to understanding other young males' bodybuilding experiences with similar demographics, age groups or level of gym experience.

### *Authenticity*

Authenticity is the extent to which researchers fairly and completely show a range of different realities and realistically convey participants' lives (Polit & Beck, 2014). Selection of appropriate people for the study sample and provision of a rich, detailed description are ways the researchers address this criterion (Whittemore, Chase & Mandle, 2001). This study attempted to represent the deep meaning of young males' bodybuilding practice so as to increase readers' understanding of the phenomenon.

The above criteria are mainstays of trustworthiness in qualitative research approaches, but additional considerations exist as well. Being reflective of the research process and the ethical implications of a study also affect its integrity which will be outlined below.

### **3.5 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity has been used to increase the level of integrity and trustworthiness of data analysis (Mason-Bish, 2018). Reflexivity is the engagement of continuous examination and explanation by the qualitative researcher as to how they themselves have influenced a research project. Bourdieu insisted on the importance of reflexive practice (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Researchers engaged in research require consciousness to the effects of their own position, own set of internalised structures, and how these are likely to distort or prejudice their own objectivity. According to Bourdieu (1990), researchers when conducting their research are influenced by their own habitus and dispositions. It is only by continual vigilance that a researcher can spot themselves in the importation of their own biases into their work. Therefore, reflexivity is an important stage in the research methods.

Reflexivity plays an integral role in many types of qualitative methodologies, including participatory action research, feminist research, hermeneutic and post-structural approaches, and ethnographies (Mauthner & Doucet, 2013). Although, the volume of reflexivity would depend on the methodological approach to which the researcher adopted for their study. To achieve reflexivity, Wall, Glen, Mitchinson, and Poole (2004) suggest a diary of thoughts and feelings that may have influenced methodological decisions throughout a study, be kept by the researcher. Throughout



this thesis notes were kept and several meetings were held prompting evaluation of chosen methodology in effort to cement a high level of trustworthiness and rigour to the study.

Being a male invested in bodybuilding for the last 10 years, I admittedly am an insider and have some prior insight of the research context. However, there are certain limitations associated with being an insider, as when examining the participants' body ideals. I have further shared these limitations in the results from observations that participants may have been reluctant to share experiences in complete honesty due to the sensitivity of the topic and that I may represent an ideal body they desire and therefore affect their confidence to share their story. As a result, the 'reality' or 'truth' represented in this study is inevitably based on the perceptions and beliefs collectively shaped by agents in the field of inquiry (Crotty, 1998).

### **3.6 Ethical Procedures**

To ensure ethical standards were upheld throughout the course of this research project, I attained ethical approval under approval number H12578 and complied with all the required guidelines provided by Western Sydney University. Participant information sheets accompanied by a consent letter, was given to participants for reading and signature to be involved in the research (see Appendix A, B). The participant information sheet clearly stated the purpose of the study, my role in the research, all ethical considerations (i.e. issues on confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity) and the expectations of the participants in the research process. Furthermore it also acknowledged the right to withdraw without prejudice at any time during the interview or the whole research project. Before the data collection period

participants were given pseudo names for anonymity (see Appendix 1). During the research process there was a second consent letter, which was added to reflect the third interview, which also gained approval by the ethics committee under the same approval number.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the methodological concerns, and the link between the research methods and research questions. Bourdieu's concepts were discussed and how they are useful to examine young males' bodybuilding practice in a gym setting. Issues of trustworthiness, reflexivity, and ethical considerations were also presented. The next chapter discusses the main findings, with a focus on the participants' perceptions of body image and bodybuilding experiences.

# **Chapter 4**

## **Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The results are presented in three major themes in this chapter. The first theme focuses on body image perception and participants' understanding and beliefs concerning this concept. The second theme attends to participants' bodybuilding practice and how their body image perception influences their practice. The last theme looks at social media impact and addresses how the participants engaged with online platforms, and address if any, influence using these platforms had over their body image perception and bodybuilding practices. This chapter also attempts to further examine the participants' perceptions and experiences in relation to Connell's masculinity and Bourdieu's concept of capital.

### **4.2 Context of the Gym**

The interviews took place within the gym premises. A diagram showing the layout of the gym can be found in this thesis (Figure 4.1). This provides a visual image of the gym and can assist us to connect with participants' narratives about their bodybuilding practices and their engagement in the practice. The gym is situated inside a leisure center and has a separate entry from the main entrance of the centre, which is always staffed and has a wall of windows between the foyer and the gym. Four zones make up the gym; Cardio, resistance machines, free weights, and a

stretching area. Though the zones themselves are unmarked, they are separated to allow for flow and proximity to other apparatus' of a similar nature. There is one wall, which has mirrors starting from the floor and reaching two and a half metres high, though some resistance machines are placed in front blocking access. However, there are free spaces for mirror use in the free-weight section. A studio where fitness classes take place is located adjacent to the gym, sharing a common wall.



Figure. 4.1 Layout of the gym premises.

### 4.3 Perception of Body Image

This theme focused on the participants' perception of body image. Overall, an increase in size was a dominant theme in the interview data, and appearance was everything to their bodybuilding practice. A variety of reasons were expressed, yet only one participant gave commentary as to using the gym for health reasons. Out of the eleven participants, nine expressed a desire to obtain a more muscular physique; one desired to be lean, with one wanting an increase in strength, though was not opposed to the size that would come with that. These data must be interpreted with caution because even though they seemed to be there for one thing only, to get bigger, it was interesting to discover the meanings behind what that increase in size, the aesthetic physique and 'bigger' appearance would bring to them. The participants expressed the reasons why they had joined a gym in the first instance;

*I joined because I felt very weak...and I felt very scrawny, like very, very small for my height as well, so I thought that I should bulk up a little bit*  
*(Luca)*

*I just wanted to get into better shape, so it was, into a better shape...more like the aesthetic part of it* *(Axel)*

This recurrent response highlights that a lean muscular body is favoured and resonates with that the dominant ideal (western) male body is one with low body fat and looks muscular (Cohane & Pope Jr, 2001; Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Klimek, Muray, Brown, Gonzales & Blashill, 2018).

Body image is defined as the mental image or subjective view of how we see our body (Cash & Szymanski, 1995). Billy and Luca shared similar comments that an increase in body weight would deliver an increase in body satisfaction. They both believed the more massive body size would encourage a more positive perception of self. It was notable that Billy felt with extra weight gain meant he would feel happier with himself, he said;

*If I had, like, an extra 10kgs on me. Like, I'm 70, if I hit the 80 mark, I'll probably be happy, and I'll probably look at myself more, like, flex more (Billy)*

All participants reported concerns over their body weight, with seven out of the eleven engaging in regular checks using weight scales at home or in the gym. Some reflected on weight, noticing no gain in kilograms, which led to dissatisfaction in the perception of their bodies, as they felt unable to link the work put into bodybuilding into anything tangible. These results corroborate with previous research regarding how weight is an important factor in body image perception, which may lead to body image dissatisfaction or depression (Goldschmidt, Wall, Choo, Becker & Neumark-Sztainer, 2016; Jackson et al., 2014; Kamody et al., 2018; Paans, Bot, Brouwer, Visser, & Penninx, 2018), Ryland explains;

*For me it's very hard to put on weight, and it's very frustrating waking up one morning and being a lot lighter than I was...it just adds to the paranoid aspect of getting back into the gym (Ryland)*

Lincoln and Billy expressed similar feelings of dissatisfaction regarding ideal bodyweight they said;

*I do feel pressure to maintain an ideal body weight, and if I haven't worked out...I do feel like I've let myself down a little bit (Lincoln)*

*Yeah. I'm always measuring my weight...Probably discouraged if I don't get too what I want (Billy)*

Notably, the mirror in the gym plays a major role in participants' perception of body image and their body building practice. Mirrors are often placed in gyms to create an illusion of more space; yet, they serve a functional purpose for new lifters to practice correct techniques. However, regardless of fitness level, shape or size, the mirror may become a distraction, forcing us to see how we look, and prompt comparisons to others in the gym around us. Participants were asked to indicate whether they ever looked at themselves in the mirror. Some revealed that the internalised mental image of their ideal body did not match with their reflection in the mirror;

*I never looked in the mirror...until you put the muscle on and you can earn the mirror (Adam)*

*If I look at the mirror I would probably think, Oh, I wish I had a bigger chest or bigger arms. So, I try to avoid any sort of temptations for negative thinking (Billy)*

*I definitely feel a little bit more like the pressure's in the mirror, cause I don't have the body I want yet (Walker)*

This finding resonates with Gronmark's (2018) research, which highlighted the effect of perceived barriers in relation to mirrors in a gym when it came to stages of exercise adoption, from *action* to *maintenance*. The mirror could potentially promote hyper-self-consciousness and therefore makes gym users embarrassed about their bodies and affect their self-confidence. It also seems that the mirrored image has promoted negative body image among some participants. However, others used the mirror to improve on their techniques and as a positive reminder of where they were at and how far they needed to go in order to achieve their goals;

*I guess I look more at my shape and just kind of compare myself to previous sessions to see how my development is going, but it's always hard. (Henry)*

*I focus more on the technique aspect, so I'll look in the mirror to see if I'm doing the exercises correctly rather than the musculature (Ryland)*

Approximately half said they seldom give compliments to themselves when looking at their reflection in the mirror. However, a third, talked about the feeling of the pump (*scientific term: active hyperaemia*), that is an appearance of fullness and an increased in muscle size (Joyner & Wilkins, 2007). In looking at the mirrors, this 'pump' feeling and the enlarged muscle images often left the participants feeling happy, but only when working out. Several stated, along with the brief muscle



increase from the pump, so did, come a short rise in confidence. As a result, many accepted its momentary value;

*Yeah, because in the gym you have that pump, but outside the gym, you're back to normal (Adam)*

*At the gym, you look a lot better at the gym! You've got your pump, and your results are at their peak...when you're at home you're not at your peak, and you just want to get back to the gym, I guess (Lincoln)*

This theme showed that the participants have constructed a relationship with their bodies based on their perceptions on an increase in body muscle size from the pump and the subsequent increase in confidence exacerbated by mirror reflections. This relates to the knowledge of our (bodily) reality relies upon distinctions between real images and unreal images (Grogan, 2016). Some participants had expressed a sense of disappointment with their current physiques, which may have prompted their drive for muscularity, however it has been documented that this disappointment may manifest into body dissatisfaction or potentially a body dysmorphic disorder among males (Cerea, Bottesi, Pacelli, Paoli & Ghisi, 2018; Soler, Ferreira, da Silva Novaes & Fernandes, 2018). Bodybuilding itself is often an individual sport, and a sense of accomplishment comes from lifting heavier weights or from a physical change (e.g., leaner or muscular). As several studies report engagement in bodybuilding and an increase of one's confidence is not necessarily problematic (Cash, 2004; Grogan & Richards, 2002; Wood-Barcalow & Casey, 2018). However, the boundaries between a

healthy moderation and an obsession for muscularity have become somewhat eschewed (Martin & Govender, 2011).

Other studies have examined effects of mirrors in gyms and their influence on body image perception. DeSpain (2017) found a higher relationship between the mirrors from those who engaged in higher surveillance while exercising. Likewise body shaming also held the same higher relationship from those engaging in higher surveillance. Interestingly though, the results came from DeSpains' experimental group who exercised in gyms that had their mirrors covered. This result concurs with research suggesting that men may attribute feelings of anxiety to interpersonal comparisons with other males (Rothberger, Harris, Czech & Melton, 2015). Furthermore, DeSpain suggested that males who experience body shame might be surveilling something else in the mirror other than their own reflections.

The process of 'body reflexive practices' as described by Connell (1995) highlighted that our bodies involve social relations, and within this process particular versions of masculinity are materialized as meaningful bodies (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In this case, the mirrors in the gym created a forceful effect on gym users to see their bodies and reflect on how they conform to the muscular body ideal associated with bodybuilding. According to Connell (1995) hegemonic masculinity takes different shapes and in their quest to become 'bigger' and more muscular there is the commensurate interest in greater capital. In accordance to Bridges (2009) gender capital relates to knowledge, resources and aspects of identity that permit access to specific gendered identities. He continues, in saying, that some forms of gender capital maintain similar value across social settings. Therefore, some

forms, are more trans-situationally durable than others. Bourdieu, claims this durability is due to capital belonging to larger fields, while Connell states that certain gender capital is just part of the gendered order.

Collectively, Connell's gender regimes and Bourdieu's bounded fields remain critically important in discussions of gender capital, stipulating that the values of gender identities may offer variances depending on setting and context (Bridges, 2009; Schwartz, Grammas, Sutherland, Siffert & Bush-King, 2010). In the case of bodybuilding, it is seen that, the capacity for gender capital to remain elusive is fundamentally what keeps individuals engaged in the sport and also what enables gender practices (Bridges, 2009; Stewart, Smith & Moroney 2013). The pursuit of a muscular ideal and the pressure participants place on themselves to match their strength with size is cause for concern. This interplay between the social and the body raises questions along the lines of bodybuilding and its increasing commercialisation as a phenomenon of gender: a notion to be discussed further in this chapter.

#### **4.4 Capital Building Through Bodybuilding Practice**

This theme focuses on the participants' bodybuilding practices surrounding their dietary habits, and relationships with other members and with the gym employed in their approach. The findings showed how participants initially approached the gym and their continued engagement with bodybuilding. The participants talked about the reasons that they had chosen bodybuilding as their primary form of exercise and if they are engaged in other sport. Soccer was the most common sport with seven participants having played in their youth; however only two were still in some form of

competition, and none of them talked about using the gym to enhance any current ability on the soccer field.

The findings are similar to studies that report body image perception originates from a young age (Grogan, 2016; Klein, 1993a). For most, they were being introduced to a gymnasium and bodybuilding in their adolescence, with some particularly focused on their schools' influences. Henry, in particular, went to an elite school, and he was given access to the school's gymnasium and access to a sports/conditioning program through his engagement in sport;

*I'd say my first interaction with was about year 9, year 10...we'd spend time in the gym weightlifting with strength and conditioning at least twice a week. (Henry)*

This experience laid the basis for Henry to understand the importance of strength training and participation in competitive sport and thus he continued bodybuilding in his adult years. Similarly, Luca, who also played competitive sport at school sought benefit from the school's gym, as he felt weak on the sports field and wanted to increase size and strength;

*Throughout high school, I hit a growth spurt...I started going to the gym probably around 14...I did go to the high school gym through the football team (Luca)*

Adam, mentioned his school years in the school gym and he felt a strong peer pressure on his use of the gym, he states;

*Came to the gym at 16 just because it was the thing to do; everyone in school did it...I didn't want to be the one left out; the skinny kid left out when everyone else is getting pretty big (Adam)*

Despite considerable evidence regarding peer influence at school age for exercise adoption (Lawler & Nixon, 2011; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2005), familial influence was also a critical factor in their decision to join the gym. A few participants either had a sibling or parent who joined the gym. The strongest brotherly influence came from Walker;

*It was more so under guidance of my brother; my brother's a bit of a gym junkie I suppose you could say, kind of forced me to go into that route, instead of playing sport (Walker)*

The council gym does not permit anyone under the age of 16 on gym premises. As most participants had developed a fascination with bodybuilding early, they had to set up necessary materials at home until they reached the permitted age, like Axel, for instance;

*Yeah I just started like exercising at home just because I wasn't old enough to join a gym. (Axel)*

Ryland felt that his physique was not progressing due to the equipment at home, which led him to join the gym;

*Basically, I felt at home wasn't sufficient enough, wasn't getting the outcomes that I wanted to. And I felt like it was more motivating moving to a gym (Ryland)*

Although transitioning from his home gym to a public gym did leave Ryland feeling a little hesitant, especially in respect to how others might perceive him in the gym;

*I was just a bit paranoid about walking into a gym and just basically being judged on my image. (Ryland)*

In relation to feeling being judged in the gym, Ryland spoke about the need to build his knowledge at home prior to using the public gym in order to avoid others' gazes. He expressed that he would be signaled out as a newcomer if he did not have a basic understanding before entering the gym premises. He explains;

*Basically my knowledge...I didn't want to walk into a gym with the knowledge that I had; I wanted to build my knowledge before going into a gym (Ryland)*

Some participants were currently enrolled in university degrees within the field of sport and exercise physiology and commented that they have developed a deeper understanding of how the body works from their acquired knowledge. They

discussed that they based their workouts and diet plans mainly on a scientific approach. All participants talked about engaging in some form of free-weight bodybuilding program. Luca, the longest trained, and preparing to compete in a physique competition explained his approach towards the gym;

*When I come in the gym I've got my routine...I've got to get my headphones on, I've got to set up my shakes, I've got to set up my BCAs...I don't feel like I train properly without them...all my gear has to be right (Luca)*

Billy, who has trained for three years, conveyed a more relaxed yet efficient approach to his time in the gym, he states;

*So, I used to have a structure...But now, I've been doing it for over two years, and I just rock up to the gym and I know what I'm going to do (Billy)*

Adam and Lincoln both believed they are compelled to bodybuilding in order to feel productive and motivated. This echoed Mata and Hertwig (2018) suggesting (vast numbers of) people who do not conform to normative standards of health fear being labeled irresponsible, lazy, or deserving of scorn;

*Just got legs today, just keep saying it, "Just got legs." Or if you're training shoulders or whatever you're training, just say during the day, "I've still got this to go." (Adam)*

*But it's good when you're at the gym, you feel like you're doing something, you feel productive, and if you decide to relax you don't feel as productive with your day, I don't feel productive unless I have worked out (Lincoln)*

Interestingly, most of the participants said they did not use the cardio and resistant machines in the gym. They often noted that the machines were avoided due to stereotypes; likening a perception of weakness, as beginners and the injured predominantly used these.

*Me personally, I think there is stigma as to using the free weights as opposed to the machine. There is a stigma that the dumbbells look cooler and whatever (Luca)*

*Like, if I stick to machines, like, if some person's looking at me and he's watching me train, on the machines, he'll probably think, "Oh, this guy is lightweight." (Billy)*

Not all participants viewed machines as a sign of weakness. Walker, in particular, advised he used them and liked how he felt more in control at times;

*I feel like I'm in more control when I use the machines, rather than free weights (Walker)*

Whereas Henry, did not regard the machines any different to other equipment's and just saw them as apparatus to use in his workout;



*Free-weights always has that danger of if you overload and end up in trouble...I think they play an important role in exercise...I think if anything people will look at you differently is using machines incorrectly (Henry)*

Likewise, Ryland acknowledged the use of machines, especially for his rehabilitation program coming from an injury, but also recognises the perceptions others may place on him;

*I don't feel small in particular, but I feel like other people view me as being smaller when using those machines...I think they look at you on a machine and be like, "Oh, you can't do this exercise anymore because you're weak"*  
*(Ryland)*

The participants did not want to be labeled as being weak when performing in the gym. This also accords with earlier observations regarding the mirror and that certain parts of the gym (those with machines) are avoided. This again evokes Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity that explains how these young males may have internalized the lack of power with the use of the machines in the gym. Power, in this instance, seems to be more symbolic rather than physical. Some participants responded that they actually felt stronger when using the machines rather than on free weights. Yet, they still preferred the free weights in order to avoid being seen as weak;

*I actually feel stronger in the leg press and more confident than the squats, but I would love it if I could feel the same with my squats because in my mind that's more of raw strength (Luca)*

*I feel stronger using the squat rack knowing that it's a compound lift, but at the same time there's that perception that you can put more weight on a leg press and perception wise you appear stronger on a leg press (Mark)*

Several participants reported peers' gaze on their bodies, dependent on where and how they exercised in the gym. They expressed feeling uncomfortable if someone more muscular than them was watching them in the gym. Sometimes, they also felt ambivalent towards these people as they could be either positive role models or negative ones who might have taken illegal supplements, as Luca discussed whether they are 'natural' or not;

*If they're lifting a big amount of weight that I can't do, it would be nice to see someone lift it...I'd just look at them and just sort of picture that, admire that. Like, 'Wow, this guy is strong. I wish I could be like that' So, that's motivating, so I want to be like that (Billy)*

*Sometimes I'm just looking at their form...or someone I perceive hasn't been training as long but progressed a lot further, or even just a sense of shock and awe with some physiques, and then comes a kind of depression...at first I'd sort of idolise him, and then I'd start to question is he natural or, yeah, pretty much, is he natural or not (Luca)*

Pila, Barlow, Wrosch and Sabiston (2016) examined two types of comparisons, downward social (comparison to a perceived inferior) and upward social (comparison to a perceived superior) and showed that when men make upward comparisons they expressed a higher desire to train and exhibited a decrease in self-worth. When downward social comparisons were made it revealed they produced a motive for self-enhancement and exerted self-protective functions in order to increase self-worth (Matera, Nerini & Stefanile, 2018; White, Langer, Yariv & Welch, 2006). A noteworthy comment made by Billy, alluded to the fact that he felt his non-muscular body would be more comfortable in his 'family gym';

*If I'm in a gym where it's more of a family-friendly sort of environment, I won't feel pressured...I would feel satisfied if surrounded by people the same body type as me... or people who look like me in a way...But if it's people who are different or bigger, I wouldn't feel comfortable. (Billy)*

As mentioned earlier, all participants' support claims that suggest bodybuilding is principally about building a more muscular and better looking body (Abbott & Barber, 2010). Although they each expressed certain benefits that felt they received from the practice itself, when categorised with Bourdieu's forms of capital, some striking variations were found. In today's modern society, cultural capital is still held to a high regard. Many people invest significantly into building their stocks of knowledge, and display their taste for elitist or esoteric indulgences. However, in respect to bodybuilding, the idea that you could accumulate institutionalised cultural capital provided little to no relevance amongst participants. Only one respondent commented alluded towards building their cultural capital;

*I search mainly just through research articles. Meta analysis and also a lot from uni as well (Ryland)*

Whereas in the search for cultural capital only two participant's commented;  
*I look at research from systematic reviews, and published articles and from my lecturers...I've got the training background. I've got the degree background (Billy)*

*I'm very confident, but that's just because of my background as a personal trainer and having the knowledge from competing (Luca)*

Having qualifications does hold a fair amount of social weight, however in bodybuilding, a basic knowledge is sufficient enough to obtain results in the sport. People who wish to work in this field can acquire further knowledge to use towards teaching others by becoming personal trainers and trade this knowledge for economic capital. Although, as findings came to show, participants did not place importance on a person's acquired knowledge, meaning size then is a proxy for being knowledgeable. This alluded to physical capital (Shilling, 1991) being awarded more value than the institutionalised form of cultural capital.

Several studies thus far have linked exercise and fitness participation as a prominent reason in desire to build social networks of friends (Skinner, Zakus & Cowell, 2008; Whiteman-Sandland, Hawkins & Clayton, 2018; Wiltshire & Stevinson, 2018). However, on the whole, participants did not indicate their decision

in joining the gym, in effort to forge friendships, as most stated a preference to train solo. Nonetheless, while each acknowledged the presence of other gym users, they saw this as part of using the space. For one, results revealed that no social interaction meant for a better workout, for example Kris states;

*I put headphones on, sometimes I wear a hat to avoid eye contact, and I prefer to train alone. I can concentrate more (Kris)*

Seven participants had no objection to training with a partner, giving reason to the times they trained not marrying up with their friend's schedules. However, two found it detracted from their goals by possibly becoming a distraction whilst training;

*I prefer to train solo...I used to train with someone else but it's very distracting and the gym sessions take a long time (Ryland)*

*Training with other people is fun, but it's not a good workout, because the intensity you need, I feel you can't get, when you're training with a different person because you're cracking jokes (Zeke)*

Very little was found in the data to say that participants built networks of acquaintances or institutionalised relationships, implying that social capital (Bourdieu, 1992) had little to no value amongst participants. For most they saw the gym as the ground for bodywork, and primarily an individual pursuit. This result is in contrast to other studies where developing a social network was a motivating factor (Skinner et al., 2008; Whiteman-Sandland et al., 2018; Wiltshire & Stevinson, 2018). However, it might be that this study's small sample and sole focus on bodybuilding in

one gym has led to the conclusion that the accumulation of social capital is not received as valued and sought after.

The data also revealed the role of physical capital (Shilling, 1991). Bourdieu described physical capital as the embodied state of one's cultural capital; contrary to Shilling (1991) who argued the physical (bodily) is a form of capital in its own right. Through particular sport and social practises, the embodied skills and strength of a person's physical ability can be seen to comprise physical capital. As with other forms of capital these can be converted in other forms (e.g. status, money, fame, likes in social media), yet like all forms of capital, such opportunities to accumulate and exchange is to some extent dependent on an individuals social characteristic (e.g. gender, class) (Metcalf, 2018).

Muscle building was mentioned numerous times as the primary goal from participants' gym work. All participants commented, that bodybuilding was a way to enhance their physiques and possibly reduce negative body image concerns. Physical capital was found to have received the highest value of all forms of capital. It also appeared that it is the most tangible in converting into other forms of capital. Participants would source information from many avenues in efforts to increase muscularity (physical capital) and through their passion for bodywork their knowledge of stock (cultural capital) would increase. Results from the data show a person is embodied with the acquired knowledge, which is enacted through physical capital, indicating that this practice may be exclusive and prejudicial (Fernández-Balboa & González-Calvo, 2018), as Billy and Adam state;

*If someone's skinny in the gym, I may not approach them, I would go up to someone more, you know, bigger (Billy)*

*I wouldn't get into conversation with someone who is not, big. I mean if they have all this knowledge then why are they still skinny? (Adam)*

The weighting and tangible quality given to physical capital may offer explanation as to why participants engaged in bodybuilding. The mere fact that a muscular body could be seen as having had the knowledge to build it and also the assignment of a higher status and respect in the gym could be a factor in attempt to overcome a negative body image. Although, nowhere more obvious, is the importance of bodily capital then that found on social media.

#### **4.5 Social Media Influences on Bodybuilding Practice**

Social media is a term given to websites or applications, which enable its users to create and share content within social networks. It is estimated by 2019 up to 3 billion people worldwide will use some form of social media platform (Lopez & Castaño, 2018). It has played a significant role amongst all participants, with each holding at least a two social media accounts (Appendix 1). Platforms such as Twitter, Snapchat and Facebook were used, yet these did not receive as much attention as Instagram. This application received the most interaction and where participants sought and received information relating to bodybuilding practices. Hence, due to its popularity amongst participants, the Instagram and its relation with bodybuilding practice was the focus in the second interview. Instagram allows users to upload videos and photos, and edit with different filters, and organise them by tags

(identifiers) and location information. Posts on a person's account may be publicly shared, or permissible to view by pre-approved followers. Users of this service can browse other users' content by using various tags and locations and view any material that may be trending. Furthermore, users can "like" photos, and receive the same; also they can follow other users to add their content to a feed. All participants had these platforms as they considered them just a must-have.

Searching the term #fitness on Instagram will deliver a return of just under 300 million postings. With images of muscular toned bodies now at our fingertips, there is no shortage in accessing fitness related information. There exists no policy on Instagram stating you need to display any qualifications, when posting a photo attached with health advice. In saying that, this was not cause for worry amongst participants, with several basing their assessment of acquired knowledge on bodybuilding on the person's appearance. The participants strongly associated a person's physique to the amount of acquired knowledge that individual may have. Similar expressions in other studies were found, which gave evidence towards a persons' image holding high value (Klein, 1986; Neville, 2012).

Though, not all participants concentrated their search for bodybuilding information on Instagram. Bodybuilding websites, magazines and approaching personal trainers or other members in the gym were other ways participants obtained information, or at least sought visual imagery. Research suggested that physical image is still quite significant in how people make choices in whom to trust in acquiring bodybuilding knowledge (McCabe & McGreevy, 2011). Perhaps this is why body shape and the assumption of 'knowledge' appear to be constant bedfellows in this



study (Boepple, Ata, Rum & Thompson, 2016; Carrotte, Prichard & Lim, 2017; Simpson & Mazzeo, 2017).

*I believe the results speak for themselves, because they have a physique that I would like or I admire... they would have obviously no reason to lie (Lincoln)*  
*Mostly because if someone looks good...you'd want to listen to them, but if it's someone off the street that looks like he doesn't train, obviously you wouldn't listen to them (Billy)*

A third of the participants acknowledged that some celebrities they followed on social media, and whom they turned to for advice, might have taken performance-enhancing drugs. However, they seem to admire them rather than condemning them based on their dedication in the sport, thus ascribing expertise, whilst eschewing risk;

*So I know, well obviously I know they're on some type of steroid, well every type of steroid, umm...but they do know what they're talking about, obviously they've built up from a state of nothing to what they are now, so they must be proof in what they preach (Luca)*

*But now, everyone's doing it, everyone's training and wants to be an athlete or whatever it may be. You know, you've got people using steroids just to look good. So, they're going that far just to look good (Billy)*

Murray et al., (2016) had reported a strong relationship between viewership of muscularity on websites and the internalisation of body ideals. Subsequent findings in

work by Burrow (2018) suggested when individuals seek advice from online forums, it is the plausibility of the information given in a nonchalant manner, and the perceived experience one may have through appearance that credits information sharing. Some of the participants remained sceptical when accessing information online, often referring to the possibility of the person self-marketing or being paid to present specific information;

*If there were people that I come across where it's not entirely obvious why they're suggesting this information, I'd just think they've got bad intentions or something. That they're trying to just get views or some kind of gain off it*  
(Axel)

*With no formal qualifications or background, then you take it with a grain of salt, you'd believe some of it if you know it is useful to you, (Mark)*

Adam highlighted that he based his opinion on marketing and monetary value with no mention of expertise, when he makes choices on whom to trust for bodybuilding advice on social media. Adam makes the point that one would not put their name to something if it were not true;

*Whatever their doing is obviously working, and they wouldn't be publishing what their not doing especially in stuff that you pay for...that eBook, cost me twenty bucks and I'd figured if you paid for it, it's obviously going to be the right thing (Adam)*

It appears that there may be a current school of thought that ‘expertise’ is mistrusted. Though as mentioned in chapter two, those individuals who may have low levels of autonomy and internalise a muscular body ideal, may adopt some of these messages at face value. This is a cause for concern, as research has shown that some websites, which supposedly are devoted to healthy pursuits, may in fact contain hazardous messages and dangerous content (Boepple & Thompson, 2014). It appeared that only Ryland was inclined to research further from initial advice taken from trainers or online mediums. He preferred to seek help from academic sources;

*Just literature that they provide and that they don't make a statement without backing it up, I don't follow it because other people say it's true. (Ryland)*

The nature of the bodybuilding related information participants searched for on social media was quite similar. Most searched for workouts or movement techniques. Some frequented other forums like YouTube, a video sharing website to view videos on movement technique. While some had mentioned Bodybuilding.com, a site that has received notoriety amongst the bodybuilding community for its range of exercise plans and articles for diet, supplements and competition preparation; Luca, who is a competitive builder used the website in his early stage as an athlete, now after several years offered a different opinion;

*I definitely don't use bodybuilding.com...it's, not a valid source. They have a lot of sponsorships I believe, so obviously they are going to push their own people that are paying their bills (Luca)*

Participants' beliefs regarding sponsorship and product placement consistently showed that a muscular image insinuated validity for the product. This view is consistent with literature, showing the increased effect of Instagram celebrities have on social media (Ferreira, 2017; Franchina & Coco, 2018; Neal, 2017; Noonan, 2018; Tran, 2013). Many admitted they had become consumers of these products as a result of the models on social media (Neal, 2017);

*Pretty much because other people use them with bodies that I would aspire to  
(Lincoln)*

*Umm...I don't know if they're right for me (laughs) I just bought them...but I mean if everyone's using supplements than surely it can't be that bad (Adam)*

Some participants who enrolled in university degrees not only followed bodybuilding celebrities but also sports exercise persons, physiotherapists and academics in the field of exercise, which helps to expand their information and knowledge base on bodybuilding. Whereas, those who were not enrolled or were not university educated, seemed to have followed the Instagram fitness celebrities mainly. It was common they followed these celebrities because they deemed them to have the ideal male body image they had wanted for themselves. As such it was interesting to further examine whether they would still consume these celebrities if they did not display the look (i.e., a skinny guy), several responded;

*Probably not...it's more perception than anything, I'm not saying they're not smart, so I shouldn't take any advice from them...but that may be a factor for me (Billy)*

*I mean don't trust the skinny chef... it's just a bit easier to take advice from someone you know who's big, and you know they're big and they're working out (Lincoln)*

Concerning their own social media account, the majority said they might post a photo while on holiday or a photo of a pet, but none would post their own body. All participants responded with a resounding 'no,' when asked if they shared a shirtless or flexing photo online. They did not feel confident in posting their own fitness and physique pictures;

*Nah...[laughs] ...no physique shots...I'm not big enough yet. I think I need to wait for a bigger change before I wow people (Kris)*

*I look pretty bad in photos; I'm not very photogenic, for one. Two I'm not at a position where I'd want to post a picture yet, so, pictures that I do post are not to do with fitness (Lincoln)*

*I might post meal prep ideas, and like routines...but I wouldn't post body pictures...but when I start to see improvement then I would...but at the moment I wouldn't feel confident (Adam)*

There seemed to be an inherent pressure from those who contemplated on posting their bodily pictures. For example Ryland, suggested if he posted his picture, then he might need to continue improving on his physique out of fear of ridicule;

*It makes me think that if my next physique shot isn't as good as the previous one then I wouldn't get the same comments, so it sets the bar at that level, and if I haven't progressed from there I won't get positive comments (Ryland)*

Statements here connect back to the ideas of capital and the realisation that capital is a relational term. When posting a picture of yourself on a social media platform the field you enter is a different one to the local gym where capital may be significant. However, Lincoln did have a shirtless photo of himself on his profile, which was taken at the beach and from behind. But, when questioned about any difference between posting a picture being shirtless at the beach and the same at the gym, he was hesitant to post the latter as he felt, posting a gym selfie inflicts more judgment than a photo at the beach. Which was interesting, indicating that it was perhaps a form of 'cover' that it was just a 'holiday or beach snap and not a posing picture:

*If you post a picture of you in a gym mirror, you're telling the world that you think you have a pretty ideal physique, whereas, if you posted a picture of yourself at a beach your not really making that projection, you're just at a beach, without a shirt on (Lincoln)*

Interestingly, Adam had started posting pictures of himself after the interviews, but had not received the attention he had hoped for, so in response, he deleted the post and reposted it at a different time of day, in effort to garner more likes. However, if a certain level of likes was not reached, he often considered simply leaving it or removing it altogether. Research by Sherman, Payton, Hernandez, Greenfield and Dapretto (2016) revealed that a photo with more likes are likely to collect more than those with few. Their study found that liking 'liked' photos promoted a form of peer endorsement, showing associations with imitation, reward processing, social cognition, and attention. Thus, suggesting a herd mentality, where adding a like would allow for more people to notice such action, advocating stronger self-promotion. Cialdini (2009) expressed that 'likes' provide us with opportunities for social proof or peer endorsement. This practice of posting at particular times of the day is not uncommon as for users of Instagram it is imperative in order to achieve the most likes on the post (Jang, Han & Lee, 2015):

*I posted it at midday actually, and it got no likes for about 5mins. So, I took it down and then posted it again in the afternoon...on primetime with no likes, it's embarrassing if you post and no one like it, or if there is like under 10*  
*(Adam)*

Youth today have an enormous amount of pressure when it comes to 'likes' on social media, considering that 'likes' are at the core of most applications (Sherman et al., 2016). This may explain the reluctance to post self-images or go even further to help explain feelings of body dissatisfaction when 'likes' are not received. As seen from Adam, the window of approval/endorsement and the notion of immediate

gratification is worthy of note. User interaction is negotiated strongly by 'likes' as Lincoln, and others described;

*If I get a lot of likes, I feel like it's a good picture and you'll feel more confident I definitely judge my post by the amount of people who have interacted with it (Lincoln)*

*Depends on how many likes I get?...yeah if it gets a lot of feedback then it does feel nice, you still get that sort of 'like-hit,' , but if you post something and you get one like in a week, you feel kinda s\*\*\* (Luca)*

Overall, the usage of social media is often coupled with a societal pressure to look in a certain way. Participants valued its convenience for access to information; however, some understood its connection towards promotion of a hyper-masculine physique. These responses are consistent with current literature highlighting the increasing value that society is placing towards the body (Frew & McGillivray, 2005; Shilling, 1991, 2017). The amount of fitness related content on websites is growing rapidly, with a majority of pictures and postings all placing an emphasis on appearance investment, however the central question around this is the degree of take up of the messages (Boepple et al., 2016). Messages that promote muscularity and stigmatise body fat, may put users at risk of developing a negative body image and subsequently descend into patterns of self-destructive behaviours.

A study by Taveras et al., (2004) shows support for this, as their results revealed that youths who strongly internalise media-based appearance standards have



higher rates of exercise adoption than their counterparts who do not internalise such standards. Therefore, it highlights a prevalent issue and questions where does responsibility lay in reference to the cultivation and reinforcement of realistic and healthy norms of appearance. No reference was found in the data that participants had made comments on their profiles in reference to any appearance investment. However data showed that they followed many people who did post commentary to that effect, which may still leave them susceptible to developing a negative body image (Taveras et al., 2004).

Within the topic questions relating to social media, data showed, trustworthiness was a trait or characteristic strongly connected to the aesthetic look. When searching for information, and also with participants' willingness to over look possible negative health behaviours (i.e. steroid use), it is evident from the data, that the physical body, is at risk of becoming more important than institutionalised capital. Once again this supports Shilling (1991) with his view that the body (bodily) should be seen as a form of capital in its own right. As mentioned, personalities on websites like Instagram, attracted participants interest based on physique, suggesting implications for those who wish to offer accredited advice on these platforms, that perhaps a healthy body, and the information alone may not be enough to reach your intended audience.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to provide recommendations that may support future directions in males' body image research. I will firstly focus on the significant findings, followed by summarizing how Bourdieu's and Connell's concepts were used to explain the participants' data in bodybuilding practice, and lastly, offer suggestions for future research and practice in relation to young males' body image.

#### **5.2 Main Research Findings and Theoretical Implications**

This study discussed the various factors that underpin an individual's perception of body image and subsequent negative health related outcomes. The study has shown that the overall concerning perceptions of body image are becoming prevalent amongst young males. This is because of their internalised ideals and influence from continual exposure to toned and muscular images on social media. The results revealed a muscular body was favoured, and showed what types of capital was more valued, and how a muscular body enabled an accumulation of the various forms of capital. The majority of participants felt that the achievement of this muscular physique would then create feelings of acceptance (from the bodybuilding community, and the followers on Instagram), and confidence (in themselves and perceptively from others). At the same time, they also felt a kind of dissatisfaction

towards this muscular body ideal, as they know they could always aim to become bigger in their muscle sizes. Overall the findings of this study concur with previous studies, which equate gym work, and specifically bodybuilding, to its capacity to make people feel more comfortable with their bodies (Stewart et al., 2013).

The results showed that participants seemed to battle amongst themselves and with each other in their accumulation and transference of capital, whilst attempting to embody the hegemonic masculinity. All forms of capital are acquired within their approach to bodybuilding; Economic – purchase of home gym equipment, purchase of fitness related books, or payment for personal training sessions. Social – establishing relationships with staff members/trainers, and the acquirement of ‘likes’ and followers on social media. Cultural – some held qualifications in sport and exercise physiology or personal training certificates, though everyone had researched and built up their stock of knowledge on basic bodybuilding principles. However, the majority of attention and drive was towards building physical (bodily) capital, which was deemed the most valuable in the field. Bourdieu described physical capital as the embodiment of one’s cultural capital, but as we have seen with the findings, the forms of cultural capital, such as institutionalised capital (e.g. credentials) and objectified capital are not held to the same regard as physical capital (Shilling, 1993).

Apart from cultural capital and physical capital, the participants also discussed feeling good and further explained about their emotional resistance and self-confidence when engaging in bodybuilding. This is what researchers later extended Bourdieu’s concept of capitals to the realm of emotions. Bourdieu explains emotions as ‘strategies’, integral as a mode of response to our actions in the world and of which

are grounded in a system of dispositions rooted in his term of 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977). Dispositions are made up of cognitive and affective structures, and thus Bourdieu uses his concept of habitus to explain how subjective perceptions and objective structures impact upon actions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Therefore, understanding the emotional pleasure coming from bodybuilding one can start to notice the emotional capital, transpose into the dispositions of the bodybuilder by way of habitus, like the way a bodybuilder would walk, look or stand (Zembylas, 2007).

This research also examined bodybuilding practice and the social construction of masculinity in this sport. The results showed that the accumulation of physical strength was one-way participants worked under the influence of hegemonic masculinity. Participants all avoided the resistance machines, and favoured the free weights as they meant more control, and when other gym users would see them they would not be labeled weak or less masculine. This showed consistency with how Connell talked about masculinity through practices (i.e. show of strength from free weights). As this study used just one category of masculinity, as per Connell's concepts, than inclusion of the other forms of masculinity (Perez-Rios et al., 2018) in future research may help explicate the data further.

Accumulation of physical capital (muscular bulk) through gym work and bodybuilding has never been more available to those who wish to do so, with numerous gyms locations, commercial or in the home. Subsequently, online information sources which aide body transformations allow for all people to access, build and convert to other forms of capital regardless of status or gender. As shown in this study, these young males accumulated predominantly social capital through social

media. Though most of the participants had established themselves on social media through e.g. Instagram, they made no mention by posting pictures or commentary that they were invested in bodybuilding practices. However, the participants used the social media sites as an educational tool, and a stock of knowledge surrounding bodybuilding exercises and collected training regimes for their bodybuilding practices. Interesting though was the personalities that were followed by participants were quite similar. Many followed the same fitness profiles, and this allowed them to integrate with others in the gym, and acted as a way to share knowledge based on the social connection to the social media personalities.

### **5.3 Conclusion and Future Research**

Results of this study highlighted that the increase in these young males' physical capital have contributed to their better position in the field (i.e. gym). This is explicated through other gym users approaching participants for questions, or training techniques, basing a perceived knowledge on their increased size; which was something that the participants would also do to bigger men in the gym.

The social media component of this study can potentially help educators, personal trainers and coaches in developing a positive body image and a positive masculine identity. For example, establishing a digital literacy program in relation to body image within school curriculums, which can guide users to look past the face value of social media posts, may help reduce negative body ideals. The results could also help understand how men make choices in relation to their bodybuilding practice, especially in the digital age. Such as, where their information on bodybuilding is sourced, and from whom. Also how they determine the trustworthiness of this

bodybuilding information. The use of social media sites such as Instagram is prevalent among the young males. They have used Instagram to search for health and fitness related content, and learn how to improve on their bodybuilding performance, and gain knowledge surrounding enhancing drugs.

All participants in this study were middle-class and white heterosexual males, so the data may have produced responses that cannot be transferable to understanding other classes and diverse groups. This points to the need for future studies to examine the intersections of social classes, sexual orientations, age, and ethnicity in young males' bodybuilding experiences. It is imperative that future researchers when conducting research on body image consider, what are the choices made by a person to engage in bodybuilding.

Lastly, this study reminds us to focus at the possibility of building positive male's body image and the importance of the social construction of masculinity. In drawing on Bourdieu's capital, the results highlight how the various forms of capital are accumulated and traded, and how the values of these capitals may change over time.

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**Appendix A:**

**Participant Information Sheet – General (Extended)**

**Project Title:**

Perceptions of body image and its influence on cultural practices within a gym setting among a young male population.

**Project Summary:**

This study aims to increase understanding regarding the concerns of male's body image and the impact on their health. Body image and body dissatisfaction has been linked to many negative conditions (Grogan & Richards, 2002). Research by Cafri, et al, (2008), identified examples such as, compulsive weight lifting, rigid adherence to diet regimes, avoiding situations where ones body is on display, and dependence or abuse of steroids. Several recent studies (Andsager, 2014; Perloff, 2014; DeFeciani, 2016) have explored these conditions and identified possible risks, however research has focused mainly on eating disorders and females' body image.

Body image has received noticeable academic interest over the recent years, with researchers becoming interested over factors affecting an individual's behaviour through personification and a related influence to body image and overall perception of self (Bardone-Cone, Cass & Ford, 2008). Body image has been referred to as the perception one has of their body and physical appearance and subsequently, the thoughts and feelings resulting from that perception (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). Such feelings could be both positive, negative or both.

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Daniel Fudge, Master of Research Student, School of Science and Health, Western Sydney University.

This research will be conducted under the supervision of Dr Bonnie Pang, Lecturer, School of Science and Health, Western Sydney University.

**How is the study being paid for?**

Daniel Fudge is conducting this research project. It is being funded by Western Sydney University.

**What will I be asked to do?**

Over the course of the study (6 months) the researcher will invite twelve young males aged between 18 -26 years of age and conduct 3 semi-structured interviews for each participant to explore perceptions and experiences of body image and drive for muscularity. Each interview will be about forty-five minutes held at the gym. In the semi-structured interviews, the aim is to understand participant's perception of an ideal male body, and to further examine a general consensus surrounding the impact



of body image perception in men. Additionally, questions may be re-worded, re-ordered or clarified to explore topics in further detail.

**How much of my time will I need to give?**

There will be three interviews each being around forty-five minutes, for which, participation will be invited commencing in March through July.

**What benefits will I, and/or the broader community, receive for participating?**

Results from this study could inform school curricula (e.g., more attention in HPE on the impacts of a negative body image), and may also inform practices of personal trainers working with young men. This study will advance knowledge concerning men's health and an overall response to promotion of health in men of all ages. Additionally, results will contribute to bridging gaps in literature and the growing body of evidence surrounding body image in males.

**Will the study involve any risk or discomfort for me? If so, what will be done to rectify it?**

If you do not wish to answer a question, you may skip it and go to the next question, or you may stop immediately. If you become upset or distressed as a result of your participation in the research project, the research team will be able to arrange for counselling or other appropriate support. Alternatively you may contact Lifeline on 13 11 14.

**How do you intend to publish or disseminate the results?**

It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. In any publication and/or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that the participant cannot be identified, except with your permission. The personal information that the research team collect and use may include and not limited to, age, weight, and place of residence. It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. In any publication and/or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

**Will the data and information that I have provided be disposed of?**

Please be assured that only the researchers will have access to the raw data you provide. However, your data may be used in other related projects for an extended period of time. This may include a PHD or publications and conference posters for up to five years.

**Can I withdraw from the study?**

Participation is entirely voluntary and you are not obliged to be involved. If you do participate you can withdraw at any time without giving reason.



If you do consent to participate, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the project, please notify a member of the research team before you withdraw. If you decide to leave the research project, the researchers will not collect additional personal information from you. You should be aware that data collected up to the time you withdraw might form part of the research project results. If you do not want your data to be included, you must tell the researchers when you withdraw from the research project.

### **Can I tell other people about the study?**

Yes, you can tell other people about the study by providing them with the Chief Investigator's contact details. They can contact the Chief Investigator to discuss their participation in the research project and obtain a copy of the information sheet.

### **What if I require further information?**

Please contact a research supervisor, should you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate.

Name	<i>Dr Bonnie Pang</i>
Position	<i>Principal Supervisor</i>
Telephone	(02) 4736 0592
Email	<i>B.Pang@westernsydney.edu.au</i>
Name	Daniel Fudge
Position	Lead Investigator
Telephone	(02) 4736 0592
Email	18238990@student.westernsydney.edu.au

### **What if I have a complaint?**

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email [humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au).

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form. The information sheet is for you to keep and the consent form is retained by the researcher/s.

This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is *[enter approval number once the project has been approved]*.



**Appendix B:**

**Consent Form – General (Extended)**

**Project Title:** Perceptions of body image and its influence on cultural practises within a gym setting among a young male population.

**I hereby consent to participate in the above named research project.**

**I acknowledge that:**

- I have read the participant information sheet (or where appropriate, have had it read to me) and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s
- The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

**I consent to:**

- Participating in three interviews*
- Having my information audio recorded and transcribed*

**I consent for my data and information provided to be used in this project and other related projects for an extended period of time.**

**I understand that my involvement is confidential and that the information gained during the study may be published and stored for other research use but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.**

**I acknowledge that if I do not understand any part of this research project I may contact a member of the research for further clarification and will also be under no obligation to participate in the research project.**

**I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without affecting my relationship with the researcher/s, and any organisations involved, now or in the future.**

**Signed:**

**Name:**

**Date:**





**The Human Research Ethics Committee at Western Sydney University has approved this study. The ethics reference number is: H12578**

**What if I have a complaint?**

If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email [humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au).

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.



**Appendix C:**

Participant Interview Guide One (To be conducted in April 2018)

Personal Information:

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Venue of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview conducted by: Daniel Fudge

Pre-interview: (5 minutes)

1. Greetings
  2. Check consent again
- Talking about your needs and experiences is an engaging experience. However if something upsetting does come up during the interview, you may take a break and resume to the interview immediately, or skip any questions without explanation, or leave the interview without explanation. Should you become distressed during the interview, you are at your right to end the interview and will be referred to contact Lifeline 13 11 14, if further counseling services are needed.

**• Introduce the project:**

1. Explain the purpose of the interview (The purpose of this study is to examine young male's perceptions of body image and their body-building practice within a gym setting.
2. Address confidentiality (no real names will be used in publication)
3. Explain the format of the interview (informal chat)
4. Indicate the time required for the interview (45 minutes)



**Interview: (35 minutes)**

**1. Introduction:**

Can you please tell me a bit about yourself? (00-5) For example can you describe your gym experience? What do you like most? What do you dislike most? Why?

**2. Interview questions:**

Now let's start with talking about your perceptions and experiences (5-35)

- a. Why did you join the gym?/Why do you do bodybuilding?
- b. Do you think there's an ideal male body? If yes, what is it like? What is your ideal body like?
- c. Do you feel you identify with that perception?
- d. Do you think having a muscular body is important for you? Why/Why not?
- e. Do you feel any pressure from society to look a certain way?
- f. What are your thoughts towards others that are in pursuit of this perceived body ideal?
- g. How do you feel when working out in the gym?
- h. Would you say you are satisfied with your body in the gym?
- i. Do you feel different with respect to your body when you're in the gym then when you're not?
- j. Do you feel you are more or less exposed in the gym than in other places?
- k. Would you say your drive to use the gym is based more on how the body will look rather than how the body will feel?
- l. Do you think other people in the gym worry about how they look?
- m. Do you worry about other people in the gym looking at you? How does that make you feel?
- n. How would you describe a good workout? How do you feel afterwards?
- o. Would you target a certain body part more than others?
- p. Do you look at other people exercising? What goes through your mind then?
- q. Do you notice yourself in the mirror?
- r. What do you think of when you observe yourself in the mirror when exercising? How do you feel when you see yourself lifting?
- s. Do you compliment yourself when looking in the mirror?
- t. Do you practice posing in the mirror?
- u. What do you think of when you see other people checking themselves out or posing in the mirror?
- v. Have you ever considered any competitions? Why/why not?

***Cultural practice questions:***

- a) Can you describe a typical training day? What do you do for example?



- b) How do you plan your gym days? How do you prepare?
- c) Do you train with anyone? Do you prefer to train solo or with another person?
- d) Have you ever been injured from training?
- e) Do you train whilst injured?
- f) How does it make you feel if you are unable to train due to injury?
- g) Do you skip any training session?
- h) Do you make up lost sessions?
- i) Do you repeat any session where you felt you weren't sore enough?
- j) What machines do you use?
- k) How do you feel using these machines?
- l) Do you feel there is a difference in using weights to machines?
- m) How do you feel when you use these similar machines?
- n) Do you keep track of your progress? How?
- o) Do you use scales and if so would you use them often? How do you feel when you see the weigh-in?
- p) Have you bought any fitness products? Belts, gloves etc.
- q) Do you feel that they play an important role in helping achieve your ideal body?
- r) Do you feel you could achieve the same without the need of such items?
- s) How confident are you at giving advice?
- t) Do you feel you need to look a certain way to be able to offer advice?

### **3. Conclusion (5mins)**

1. Do you have any questions that you'd like to ask me?

Notify the interviewee that after 2 weeks, they will be sent the interview transcripts to check the accuracy.

Thank you so much for your time.



Participant Interview Guide Two (To be conducted in May 2018)

Name of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Venue of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview conducted by: Daniel Fudge

Pre-interview: (5 minutes)

3. Greetings
4. Check consent again

- Talking about your needs and experiences is an engaging experience. However if something upsetting does come up during the interview, you may take a break and resume to the interview immediately, or skip any questions without explanation, or leave the interview without explanation. Should you become distressed during the interview, we would advise you to call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

- Introduce the project:

5. Explain the purpose of the interview, with this interview I would like to discuss your opinions on supplements and how you source information relating to bodybuilding, and your experiences using social media platforms.
6. Address confidentiality (no real names will be used in publication)
7. Explain the format of the interview (informal chat)
8. Indicate the time required for the interview (45 minutes)

Interview: (35 minutes)

3. Interview questions: (5-35)

- w. Could you please tell me about any specific diet habits/regimes/practice? What are they? What do you eat/not eat? (Full diet plan?).
- x. Do you use any nutritional supplements? What are they? Why did you use them? Why did you feel you needed to include supplements into your diet?
- y. Do you feel they are important to your training or is this considered just a part of training?



- z. Have you considered any other forms of supplements? Could you give some examples?
- aa. How do you obtain your information on supplements?

Social media:

- a. How often do you seek information regarding bodybuilding?
- b. Have you used social media to obtain bodybuilding information? Tell me more about that? What are some of the things you have learnt about bodybuilding?
- c. Do you yourself have any social media platforms? What are they? How often do you post? What material do you post?
- d. Do you yourself publish any bodybuilding related information on your social media?... How does it make you feel when you post?... What is your response to feedback/likes given to these posts?... How do you feel about that?... Who are the types of people who like you?... What do you feel about them?
- e. What are your thoughts to those who may not be accredited but publish bodybuilding information?
- f. Are there any particular bodybuilding role models on social media you refer too? Why do you refer to them? Why do you follow them? What makes you trust them?
- g. If you were to change anything in your bodybuilding practice what would it be? (Diet, body ideal, social media posts, information source?)

3. Conclusion (5mins)

- Do you have any questions that you'd like to ask me?

Notify the interviewee that after 2 weeks, they will be sent the interview transcripts to check the accuracy.

- Thank you so much for your time.



Participant Amended Interview Guide Three (14<sup>th</sup> June) (To be conducted in July 2018)

Name of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Venue of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview conducted by: Daniel Fudge

Pre-interview: (5 minutes)

5. Greetings
6. Check consent again

• Talking about your needs and experiences is an engaging experience. However if something upsetting does come up during the interview, you may take a break and resume to the interview immediately, or skip any questions without explanation, or leave the interview without explanation. Should you become distressed during the interview, we would advise you to call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

• Introduce the project:

9. Explain the purpose of the follow up interview, with this interview I would like to discuss your opinions on supplements and how you source information relating to bodybuilding, nutrition, and your experiences using social media platforms.
10. Address confidentiality (no real names will be used in publication)
11. Explain the format of the interview (informal chat)
12. Indicate the time required for the interview (45 minutes)

Interview: (35 minutes)

4. Interview questions: (5-35) (*amended in italics*)

bb. Could you please tell me about any specific diet habits/regimes/practice?

What are they? What do you eat/not eat? (Full diet plan?).



- cc. *How do you source your information on nutrition?*
- dd. Do you use any nutritional supplements? What are they? Why did you use them? Why did you feel you needed to include supplements into your diet?
- ee. *What would you say attracted you to these supplements?*
- ff. Do you feel they are important to your training or is this considered just a part of training?
- gg. Explain how the images/products make you feel?
- hh. Have you considered any other forms of supplements? Could you give some examples?
- ii. How do you obtain your information on supplements?
- jj. *Can you explain what are some of the things you've learned about nutrition?*

Social media:

- h. How often do you seek information regarding bodybuilding?
- i. Have you used social media to obtain bodybuilding information? Tell me more about that? What are some of the things you have learnt about bodybuilding?
- j. *What are you researching for?*
- k. *How have the things you've learned changed the way you approach bodybuilding?*
- l. Do you yourself have any social media platforms? What are they? How often do you post? What material do you post?
- m. Do you yourself publish any bodybuilding related information on your social media?... How does it make you feel when you post?... What is your response to feedback/likes given to these posts?... How do you feel about that?... Who are the types of people who like you?... What do you feel about them?
- n. *Do you feel you're not able to give advice?*





- o. What are your thoughts to those who may not be accredited but publish bodybuilding information?
- p. Are there any particular bodybuilding role models on social media you refer too? Why do you refer to them? Why do you follow them? What makes you trust them?
- q. If you were to change anything in your bodybuilding practice what would it be? (Diet, body ideal, social media posts, information source?)

























### 3. Conclusion (5mins)

- Do you have any questions that you'd like to ask me?

Notify the interviewee that after 2 weeks, they will be sent the interview transcripts to check the accuracy.

- Thank you so much for your time.

### Appendix 1: Participant Table

Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Level of Education	Years Training	Membership Status	Social Media Platforms
<b>Ryland</b>	20	Student	Completing Bachelor Degree	3yrs	3yrs	  
<b>Brock</b>	22	Teacher	Master Degree	5yrs	5yrs	 
<b>Billy</b>	23	Personal Trainer	Master Degree	2.5yrs	5mths	   
<b>Kris</b>	20	Student	Completing Bachelor Degree	3yrs	2yrs	 
<b>Walker</b>	19	Lifeguard	HSC	14mths	1yrs	 
<b>Mark</b>	25	Engineer	Honors Degree	4yrs	4yrs	 
<b>Luca</b>	25	Electrician	Cert IV	8yrs	1yrs	 
<b>Lincoln</b>	24	Paralegal	Bachelor Degree	6yrs	6yrs	  
<b>Axel</b>	19	Student	Completing Bachelor Degree	4ys	3yrs	 
<b>Henry</b>	22	Student	Completing Bachelor Degree	5yrs	18mths	 
<b>Zeke</b>	21	Retail	HSC	4yrs	3yrs	