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Sculpting physical form: Muscular gay men's subjective engagement with their bodies and training

by

Clinton Cameron

Submitted to

the University of the Witwatersrand

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of

Master's in Clinical Psychology

Supervised by: Professor Gillian Eagle

DECLARATION

This research report is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts (Clinical Psychology). I declare that unless specifically indicated otherwise the following is the result of my own work.



Clinton Cameron
March 2020

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In recent decades the focus on men's bodies has increased and intensified as the media has turned its gaze to the male body (Drummond, 2005b; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). The commodification and objectification of the female body have been well established and men's bodies have increasingly become subject to the same kinds of pressures (Drummond, 2005b). This has sparked concerns around men's body image and has an impact on the evaluation of men's bodies by themselves or others (Drummond, 2005b; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). Many men are faced with the veneration of an idealised body that is difficult to achieve and men's magazine's and depictions of desirable men affect the lives of both heterosexual and homosexual, or gay, men. For many gay men, the pressure to live up to body ideals translates into the expectation of acquiring athletic, muscular bodies stripped of body fat (Drummond, 2005b).

Muscular bodies became particularly desirable among gay men in the Western world with the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s (Bosley, 2011; Drummond, 2005b; Kane, 2009; Wood, 2004). Prior to this, being thin was associated with being desirable among gay men (Drummond, 2005b). However, thinness thereafter came to represent potential weakness and illness with its association with HIV illness-related weight-loss (Bosley, 2011; Drummond, 2005b; Kane, 2009; Wood, 2004). This led to gay men working on their bodies in order to appear strong, healthy and desirable to others, all of which attributes were considered as synonymous with being free from HIV (Bosley, 2011; Drummond, 2005b; Kane, 2009; Wood, 2004). In South Africa the AIDS crisis of the West referred to in the literature, might not have taken on the same meaning in the construction of the gay body and identity, given that homosexuality was generally more hidden and stigmatised and also given different intersectional aspects of gay male identity in the country. However, the cultivation of an obviously masculine body and strength may also have been desirable in providing ongoing protection from the homophobia that was and still is rampant within South African society (Brown, 2018).

The idealisation of a muscular, lean and athletic physique within the gay male community has continued and is present in young men that have had no direct exposure to the tragic time of the pervasive HIV epidemic in certain parts of the world in the 1980's (Drummond, 2005b). This ongoing value placed on particular kinds of body types raises questions around what it

means to be muscular and why muscularity is desired among gay men, both for themselves and for other men. The research study presented in this report looks at men who self-identify as gay and who engage in serious effort to achieve a muscular appearance as a particular sub-group within the gay community. This group is of interest as much has been written about the ideal body type among gay men (Bosley, 2011; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011; Schwartz & Grimm, 2016; Wood, 2004) and the impact that awareness of this ideal type may have on gay men, yet there has been minimal investigation into the relationship that gay men who achieve such muscularity have with their own bodies, identity and social positioning. In addition, although there has been research conducted into 'straight' men's psychological investment in exercise and bodybuilding activities there has been less research conducted into gay men who engage in forms of 'body-building'.

1.1. Aims and Objectives

The study aimed to focus on a particular group of gay men, men who work at cultivating their muscularity and to explore how they engage with practices related to achieving muscularity and tend to perceive their own bodies. The aim of the study was to deepen the psychological understanding of the motivations for engagement in the cultivation of muscularity and to better comprehend how achieving such a body felt subjectively for such men. The research aim also entailed exploring how 'muscular' men perceived their own bodies to convey or signify their gay identity. By exploring the experiences of gay men who were/are committed to building and maintaining muscle through regular engagement in particular kinds of exercise the objective was to better understand the idealization of the muscular body in the gay community more generally (Drummond, 2005b; Higgins, 2006; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011; Wood, 2004) as well as to deepen understanding of what it means and feels like to inhabit this body type at an individual level.

1.2. Rationale

The literature on gay men and their bodies tends to revolve around a common theme – reference to an ideal body that is muscular, lean and athletic (Bosley, 2011; Brown & Graham, 2008; Chaney, 2008; Drummond, 2005a, 2005b, 2010; Duncan, 2007, 2010a, 2010b; Flave-Novak & Coleman, 2018; Grimm & Schwartz, 2017; Higgins, 2006; Lambert, 2006; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011; Schwartz & Grimm, 2016; Wood, 2004). The word

'muscular' is present in the majority of the literature as a marker of a body type that is investigated and constructed in a number of ways. Much of the research on homosexuality and body image focuses on the muscular ideal and the impact that awareness of this ideal has on body dissatisfaction, eating disorders and muscle dysmorphia (Bosley, 2011; Chaney, 2008). In addition, there is interest in how the idealization of the muscular body is key to the construction and perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity within mainstream gay culture (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011; Martino, 2006; Wood, 2004), and on the ubiquitous presence of the muscular male body as an object of admiration in the media (Grimm & Schwartz, 2017; Schwartz & Grimm, 2016). While some studies have examined groups of gay men and the relationship they have with their bodies by making reference to the muscular ideal (Drummond, 2005a, 2005b, 2010; Duncan, 2007, 2010a, 2010b), the subjective relationships muscular gay men have with their own bodies and associated exercise practices is under-researched. While general commentary on and attitudes towards muscularity within male gay communities have been well researched, the voices of men who may be viewed as having approximated the muscular ideal are underrepresented – almost absent.

This research study is therefore important as it seeks to give a voice to the men that appear to manage to achieve and possess the muscular ideal, even if this entails engagement in particular kinds of effortful practices. Much has been written about these men and how they may perpetuate negative body image difficulties among other gay men or may contribute to adherence to hegemonic masculinity in mainstream gay culture (Bosley, 2011; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011; Wood, 2004). Research has also been conducted into how their achievement of this body type may impact their desirability to others, and also affects the general representation and idealisation of a stereotypic ideal gay male figure (Higgins, 2006; Lambert, 2006; Schwartz & Grimm, 2016). However, the personal experiences of these muscular men who navigate society, masculinity and gay identity from a particular position have been largely neglected. This sub-group of gay men have ironically been constructed in a rather objectified manner, as symbolizing a particular kind of ideological position, rather than as men with subjective experiences and perceptions of their bodies and identities. For example, it is likely that occupying such a body holds ambivalence and is associated with particular kinds of demand. It may also be that being seen as identified with an ideal is discrepant with the individual's own sense of himself. These and other kinds of tensions seem worth exploring in conversation with muscular gay men. Therefore, this study seeks to

foreground muscular gay men's subjective accounts of how they experience and make meaning of their bodies, including as associated with their sexual identity.

This research report sets out to review, investigate and discuss the research topic in a set order of chapters. Chapter 2, the following chapter, reviews the relevant literature and findings related to the research topic. Chapter 3 shows the research approach and methods used followed by Chapter 4 that presents the findings along with a discussion according to themes and sub-themes. Finally, Chapter 5 offers a brief summary of the most relevant findings and looks critically at the strengths and limitations of the research study.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review presents a selected body of material of relevance to the current study. It starts by addressing writing and research concerning gay men and the relationship they appear to have with their bodies and the male body in general. In reading the literature themes that emerged as particularly pertinent focused on how the gay male body is conceptualised, the influence of the media, body dissatisfaction, and gay men and hegemonic masculinity. Having addressed these broad themes within the literature, the review then focuses more specifically on muscular gay men and the relationship they have with their bodies and offers an overview of research findings on this topic.

2.1. The Gay Male Body

The gay male body is conceived of and conceptualised in a myriad of ways yet the literature focuses strongly on the notion of an ideal body and what this entails. According to Drummond (2005b) and Lanzieri and Hildebrandt (2011) value was first attached to thinness among gay men which then shifted over time to valuing of the overly muscular and athletic body type that is stripped of body hair and fat. Not only do gay men personally aspire to this body type, but in seeking sexual and romantic partners they also look for other men that fulfil this ideal body type (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011).

Race also plays an important part in the way gay men have assessed themselves and other men and appear to continue to do so. Drummond (2005a) interviewed Asian gay men in Australia and found that they were marginalised within the predominantly white gay community. Associations that were made with “Asianness”, included the idea that the Asian male body typically lacked muscularity and was viewed as generally less masculine and less desirable (Drummond, 2005a). Participants found the racism directed at them and the eschewing of them as less masculine to be prevalent in the larger heterosexual society as well (Drummond, 2005a). Hence for Asian gay men in Australia, their bodies and race defined their desirability within the context they inhabited (Drummond, 2005a). In this instance, the intersection between raced identity and sexual orientation produced a particular kind of scrutiny that rendered this sub-group of men vulnerable to negative evaluations. However, it

is also possible that racialised identities in other contexts might be associated with hypersexualisation as has been the case in relation to black male bodies in some instances.

Grimm and Schwartz (2017) found that gay men of colour are the most affected by body dissatisfaction and disordered eating. In their study, Grimm and Schwartz (2017) looked at images on blogs targeted at gay men and found that the majority of models were white men indicating an idealised racial preference in Western culture, in this case, in the United States. The observation that whiteness is perhaps over-represented in imagery of desirable gay bodies is supported by Lanzieri and Hildebrandt (2011) and Wood (2004) who put forward the concept of racial power structures that place whiteness as more dominant and desired within society relative to other raced identities. Depictions of black models occurred second most frequently and they were represented proportionally often in keeping with their demographic presence in the United States; however, Latino, and especially Asian, models were vastly underrepresented (Grimm & Schwartz, 2017). The fact that black models were reasonably well represented might be due to the assumption that if black men are portrayed in public images then there has been sufficient attention given to awareness of diversity in broader American society, however, the researchers remained cautious to attribute their findings to this reasoning (Grimm & Schwartz, 2017).

Grimm and Schwartz (2017) made use of content analysis and looked at images of male models that were added to non-pornographic blogs targeted at gay men (Grimm & Schwartz, 2017). The male models were either fully clothed or in various states of being semi-nude (Grimm & Schwartz, 2017). The body types of male models that were included in Grimm and Schwartz's analysis indicated the stereotyped and assumed, perhaps even desired, characteristics associated with different racial groups (Grimm & Schwartz, 2017). Black models were overly muscular with Asian models being the least muscular (Grimm & Schwartz, 2017). White and Latino models had conventional, contemporary ideal body types – muscular and lean (Grimm & Schwartz, 2017). The body types associated with black models appeared to be consistent with some racial stereotyping and often entailed depictions of aggressive and overly large males with a high sex drive, whereas the lack of muscularity of the Asian models appeared to confirm the effeminate and asexual stereotype ascribed to Asian men (Grimm & Schwartz, 2017). Latino men seemed to be depicted in a largely similar manner as white men as no specific stereotype had been ascribed to this specific sub-group of American men at the time of the study according to Grimm and Schwartz (2017). Thus it is

evident that what makes a body desirable is also associated with whether it is associated with a valued social identity, including whether this kind of body is associated with whiteness and with wealth.

It is not only the size and shape of a man's body that is idealised and becomes instrumental in perpetuating an accepted notion of masculinity, but valuing of particular attributes also extends to body hair as part of appearance and to extensions of the body such as to clothing and accessories that indicate success, such as expensive watches (Higgins, 2006). Drummond (2005b) found clothing to be an important factor in the maintenance of body image among young gay men. Clothes might serve as a way to hide perceived deficiencies, such as being overweight or too thin (Drummond, 2005b) but might also be used to show off bodies in particular ways. Clothes, as an extension of the body, also provide a means to appear more masculine and therefore more desirable within both the broader heteronormative community and gay culture (Drummond, 2005b). Clothing may be used both to reveal and conceal. Clothes, such as tight shorts and sleeveless vests, may allow for the display of desirable physical aspects, however, whether such display is viewed as acceptable is context-specific and in some societies might be viewed as taboo (Drummond, 2005b).

In gay interactions, online men share their statistics or 'stats' with one another in profiles or text (Lambert, 2006). The fact that 'stats' has become a popularised term among gay men on internet sites is a further indication of the fact that evaluation of attributes is commonly accepted as normative in assessing the attractiveness of individuals and their bodies. These 'stats' include body type, eye colour, race, penis size and circumcision status (Lambert, 2006). The presenting of these physical features contributes to the standardisation of what gay men desire and what they would like to provide according to a system where these 'stats' have a value attached to them and act as a form of currency (Lambert, 2006). The higher the individual features rank, the higher the score in desirability and access to interaction with other gay men (Lambert, 2006). This desirability of features is largely linked to what is considered and constructed as masculine (Lambert, 2006), as will be further elaborated.

A gay man's body is judged according to the cultural values of society and how he measures up to the perceptions of masculinity as defined by that society (Drummond, 2005b; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). Multiple factors, from being muscular to the way a gay man gestures or carries himself, determine how masculine a society judges him to be (Drummond, 2005b;

Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). Lambert (2006) argues that desirability among gay men in contemporary society is closely associated with the degree to which they conform to ideals of masculinity in general, not only in relation to developing muscular and athletic bodies but also with regard to their behaviour. Furthermore, cultivating and embodying an exaggerated form of masculinity provides easier access to society in general, where being gay can then be seen as purely incidental (Lambert, 2006).

For gay men, striving towards this determined body type and behaviour not only represents the search for the valued masculine, but also offers a way to disassociate from any aspect of themselves that might appear overly feminine and therefore lesser than, or is a source of shame (Higgins, 2006). For those gay men for whom this is possible, by appearing as masculine through their bodies they are able to blend in and to leave aside the aspects of them that are viewed as undesirable to society – those aspects associated with the feminine (Higgins, 2006). The sub-group of gay men that have control over their bodies can, in this way, claim a space based on the perceived validity of masculinity (Higgins, 2006). In contrast, within many gay circles, gay men who are overweight are termed ‘fats’ and this descriptor is often coupled with the word ‘fems’ (Joy & Numer, 2018). According to Joy and Numer (2018) this indicates how a male body with more fat becomes a feminised body. Resisting this kind of derogatory labelling becomes very appealing and may translate into the pursuit of a masculinized body through particular forms of exercise and diet.

The pursuit of the ideal body is mirrored in the strictures that striving for masculinity and failure exerts on many gay men. A body that betrays the concept of masculinity – soft or seemingly effeminate in appearance and behaviour, is deemed undesirable and is to be policed in some way (Martino, 2006). Men who feel that they fall short of the ideal may turn on themselves as evidenced in the use of harmful drugs, and excessive training and dieting – all rooted in and motivated by self-loathing (Higgins, 2006). According to Higgins (2006) the slavish following of the current male body ideal has led to many gay men developing clinical conditions such as eating disorders and serious body image disturbances. These problematic outcomes are due to the fact that most gay men cannot reach the ideal body type and the fact that those gay men that do not embody conventional masculinity feel inadequate and may be marginalised (Higgins, 2006).

2.2. The Influence of the Media on the Gay Male Body

Throughout the literature various kinds of media are cited as having a marked influence on body image and satisfaction among gay and heterosexual men (Brown & Graham, 2008; Drummond, 2005b; Grimm & Schwartz, 2017; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011; Schwartz & Grimm, 2016). Popular media enshrines a body ideal that centres around a body type valued by mainstream culture thereby reinforcing this ideal (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). In recent decades the ideal body put forward for all men is that of the muscular, athletic and lean man (Drummond, 2005b). The construction of muscles is viewed as a marker of masculinity and associated with the desirable definition of the male body (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). The media then perpetuates the idea that this kind of body is attainable through the use of images that show bodies indicative of this idealised masculine form and for gay men suggest that having this kind of body brings success in attracting potential partners, including those with the same body type (Bosley, 2011). Through the use of images showing an unrealistic body type that is desired yet very difficult to attain, gay men are led to feel inadequate in comparison. For example, Drummond found that younger gay men expressed negative evaluation of themselves in terms of their own bodies and their ability to attract men with the ideal body in response to typical media imagery (Drummond, 2005b). This affected their own body image negatively, had a negative influence on their mood and left them feeling worthless (Drummond, 2005b).

Gay magazines were found to consistently and almost exclusively represent a lean, muscular and athletic physique in the images they present (Bosley, 2011; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). Schwartz and Grimm (2016) studied a selection of images on a gay online platform and found that all of models had muscular bodies with low body fat. According to Schwartz and Grimm (2016) images were selected by gatekeepers thereby indicating the body types valued by mainstream culture which were therefore understood to be valued by the users of the on-line site, illustrating the way in which culture and media representations interact with that which is viewed as socially desirable in a somewhat circular manner (Schwartz & Grimm, 2016). Images of models with bodies that meet these unrealistic expectations in terms of being muscular and stripped of body fat were endorsed and encouraged by gay men as indicated by their comments which showed appreciation and confirmed desirability (Schwartz & Grimm, 2016). Another study by Grimm and Schwartz (2017) entailed an analysis of blogs targeted at gay men and showed the same results with images of lean and

muscular bodies being ubiquitous and generally viewed as both desirable and potentially attainable.

Furthermore, pornography has had an impact on the way men's bodies are constructed in terms of physical attractiveness and sexual desirability (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). According to Lanzieri and Hildebrandt (2011) pornography provides gay men with visual representations of gay sexual encounters and provides a means to view what might not be overtly represented within the societies they inhabit (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). The use of gay pornography is fairly pervasive within the community but pornography tends to contribute to further objectification of men and their bodies and also perpetuates the sexual desirability of the ideal muscular and lean body type (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011; Wood, 2004). It is generally the case that both or all of the male figures portrayed in gay pornography embody this same kind of desirable sub-type, suggesting that this form of body is almost normative. Both more general media forms targeted at men and gay men, such as men's health and fashion magazines, and more clearly sexual desire oriented media forms, such as pornographic images and films, reinforce the idea that there is a sub-category of male bodies that is particularly admirable and desirable. Such body types then become aspirational for many gay men.

2.3. Body Dissatisfaction among Gay Men

The literature suggests that gay men are at a higher risk of experiencing issues resulting from negative body image (Bosley, 2011; Drummond, 2005b; Schwartz & Grimm, 2016). Studies comparing heterosexual men to gay men have found that gay men are more prone to evaluating their own body image in a negative manner (Bosley, 2011; Brown & Graham, 2008). According to Bosley (2011) this is related to gay men having a heightened awareness of other men, in part as potential partners, and consequently evaluating their physical appearance in the same way that they evaluate the physical appearance of other men (Bosley, 2011). Body dissatisfaction primarily manifests due to this awareness and the possible deficiencies a gay man might perceive himself to have in meeting the requirements and expectations of an ideal body in relation to the body he actually possesses, and the body he imagines potential partners might admire and value (Bosley, 2011; Wood, 2004). Fear is generated by the possibility that potential partners might find his body undesirable leading to

rejection (Bosley, 2011). This results in gay men engaging in numerous compensatory behaviours, such as excessive exercising (Bosley, 2011).

A study by Brown and Graham (2008) examined excessive exercise as it pertained to heterosexual and gay men. They found that heterosexual men with high scores on a measure of masculinity displayed low levels of body dissatisfaction whereas gay men with low scores of masculinity showed the highest levels of body dissatisfaction (Brown & Graham, 2008). Brown and Graham (2008) attribute this to objectification theory, arguing that from an objectified perspective exercise and diet translate into having a more desirable body to other gay men leading to higher levels of body satisfaction and increasing a sense of masculine identification (Brown & Graham, 2008). This study also found that straight gym-active men valued the fun of training more than the goal of improving their physical appearance (Brown & Graham, 2008). However, gay men saw improving their bodies and thereby their physical appearance as more important than exercising for fun (Brown & Graham, 2008). The authors suggest that straight men in general do not evaluate their bodies in the same way that gay men in general do, nor do they feel the same pressure to conform to a rigid image of the body beautiful (Brown & Graham, 2008). It was also found that experiencing exercise as fun led to more hours in the gym and a sense of body satisfaction (Brown & Graham, 2008). It is then argued that creating gym environments that are less competitive and more affirming could benefit gay men in seeing the fun in exercising. However, Kane (2009) disagrees and suggests that this is not the primary reason that straight men are able to see exercise as fun in competitive environments and refers to a study by Edwards and Launder (2000) wherein developing the Swansea Muscularity Attitudes Questionnaire it was found that heterosexual men strive for muscularity in order to gain confidence and to feel attractive to others. Here the literature suggests that the distinctions between hetero and homosexual men with regard to being preoccupied with appearance and efforts to achieve idealised body forms are not as clear cut as suggested by Brown and Graham (2008).

Body dissatisfaction appears to be the link between being gay and the prevalence of eating disorders amongst men (Bosley, 2011; Flave-Novak & Coleman, 2018). According to a large number of research studies, gay men form a large percentage of men affected by eating disorders, which is inconsistent with their percentage in numbers relative to the general population (Bosley, 2011). Homosexuality is highly correlated with the risk of developing an eating disorder (Bosley, 2011). It is interesting that eating disorders in a large number of men

correspond not only with striving for a reduction in body fat, but also simultaneously with a desire for a radical increase in muscularity that is also experienced as compulsive (Bosley, 2011).

A strong desire and drive to be muscular exists among many gay men (Chaney, 2008). This manifests itself in the form of muscle dysmorphia among some of these men in which the drive to become muscular is consuming and contributes to impairments in psychological functioning (Chaney, 2008). In keeping with research already cited, Chaney (2008) also found evidence that gay men are more prone to muscle dysmorphia than heterosexual men in general. The study also found a relationship between muscle dysmorphia, levels of social integration and self-esteem with an increase in the symptoms of muscle dysmorphia related to higher levels of loneliness and lower levels of self-esteem (Chaney, 2008). This indicates that an extreme drive for muscularity may impact wellbeing or that muscle dysmorphia is more likely to co-exist with loneliness and lack of self-esteem in some gay men (Chaney, 2008). These kinds of patterns of concern also manifest differently along racial lines as seen in a study by Heinberg, Pike and Loue (2009) who found that African-American men who have sex with men (MSM) scored much higher in feeling a sense of incongruity with their ideal level of muscularity – three times more when compared to heterosexual bodybuilders. According to Heinberg et al. (2009) the presence of homophobia and racism that has been internalised may affect African-American MSM more adversely as a minority in the context of the United States of America.

The research on body dissatisfaction is largely based on the concept of body image with negative body image being associated with body dissatisfaction, eating disorders and muscle dysmorphia (Bosley, 2011; Brown & Graham, 2008; Chaney, 2008). Duncan (2010) views the experienced embodiment of gay men as being related to problematic physical aspects such as a preoccupation with excessive exercise or disordered eating. Thus he seems to suggest that gay men's lived experience of their bodies in many instances entails dissatisfaction and shame that translates into attempts to change or alter the body. This body unease is further entangled with their gay identity and how they conceptualise themselves socially, politically and individually and is implicated in the relationships they have with other gay men and their gay community (Duncan, 2010a, 2010b). In keeping with Bosley (2011) and other authors, Duncan (2010a) seems to propose that being a gay man entails greater self-consciousness related to appearance and an intensified awareness of

shortcomings relative to body ideals, perhaps because of operating within a community within which men constantly and openly talk about other men's bodies.

2.4. Gay Men and Hegemonic Masculinity

Gay men have to navigate and negotiate their masculinity in the dominant heteronormative sphere of general society as well as in the sphere of mainstream gay culture in which other gay men judge and determine whether they are acceptable and belong (Drummond, 2005b; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011; Wood, 2004). According to Lanzieri and Hildebrandt (2011) the image of the ideal male body is both endorsed and influenced by masculine gay men who are able to exert power within gay culture to shape the discourse into defining what is considered physically attractive Precisely because of heterosexist dominance of conventional forms of masculinity, rather than identifying alternative forms, the concept of what constitutes the ideal male body within gay circles has increasingly come to be defined by masculine gay men (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011), who perpetuate the hegemony of a desirable masculinity that is associated with strength and muscularity.

Lanzieri and Hildebrandt (2011) posit that gay men idealise and seek out other men with muscular, athletic physiques that are low in body fat due to the prescripts of hegemonic masculinity and its dominance within society. The ideal body type as represented in the dominant ideology of masculinity is therefore internalised by gay men as a means to dominate and to create a hierarchy of acceptability even within this sub-group of men (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). In policing the behaviour of other men hegemonic masculinity is often maintained through derision and bullying (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). Individuals who do not conform to notions of masculinity are punished through forms of bullying, such as teasing and ostracization, with profound negative effects (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011).

Therefore, conforming to the ideals of 'having' a muscular and lean body type becomes widely accepted and enforced in much the same way hegemonic masculinity enforces itself and polices men that do not conform to other attributes associated with hegemony (Bosley, 2011; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). Having a muscular physique becomes a status symbol and opens up pathways to increased attention and attraction from potential partners (Bosley, 2011; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). Furthermore, conforming to the ideal male body leads

to further acceptance within the larger heteronormative society which might speak to a hope of belonging in a society that previously was rejecting of one (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011).

Interestingly, Flave-Novak and Coleman (2018) found that pluralistic ignorance was present in many gay men as they privately reject the notion that the ideal body, lean and muscular, is the only attractive body type, yet assume that other gay men find this ideal body type to be the most attractive. Flave-Novak and Coleman (2018) also found some evidence for an association between body dissatisfaction and the aforementioned pluralistic ignorance among gay men who were not involved in long-term relationships. This indicates that gay men's perceptions of what is desirable to other men influence their own construction of an ideal body type, perhaps as informed by mainstream society, thereby creating the illusion that all men value a specific body type (Flave-Novak & Coleman, 2018).

The preference for masculine men and the inadequacy felt by many gay men regarding their own appearance and way of being that may not conform to conventional masculine depictions is reflected in the tendency to devalue effeminate men (Higgins, 2006). 'Straight-acting', as a descriptor of how a gay man 'wear' his masculinity, or what is also referred to as 'masc' (Wade, 2018) has become a signifier of what is valued and desirable in gay culture (Martino, 2006) and ironically tends to reinforce a very conventional idea of what masculinity encompasses. Being 'masc' becomes a way for gay men to establish their dominance in the gay world but also illustrates their conformity to the larger, heterosexual, society (Martino, 2006). According to Eguchi (2009) gay men internalise homophobia and misogyny which are part of the dominant discourse of hegemonic masculinity. This leads them to disassociate themselves from stereotypically gay or effeminate men and behaviour lest they be mistaken for being feminine themselves (Eguchi, 2009).

As hegemonic masculinity devalues effeminacy, gay men, who increasingly have come to subscribe to a similar version of hegemonic masculinity to 'straight' men, might seek out partners with the ideal masculine body type in order to avoid being associated with the feminine (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). Wood (2004) contends that it is the eschewing of the feminine that results in the discrimination and body dissatisfaction affecting gay men as other effeminate men regardless of their sexual orientation also experience high levels of body dissatisfaction. Therefore challenging hetero/sexism would include challenging the struggles gay men face in relation to conforming to masculinity (Wood, 2004). Internalised

oppression of gender nonconformity within the gay community is a complex issue to address as it might have repercussions that stretch further than internalised homophobia (Wood, 2004) and seems to replicate aspects of sexism in heterosexual society, even if this takes a different form.

Kane (2009) posits that gay men do not experience greater levels of body dissatisfaction than heterosexual men, rather their understanding of body image and the value ascribed to it might be different because of their need to be viewed both as objects and subjects of desire. Grouping gay men with heterosexual women has been accepted as the norm in the literature; however, this feeds into stereotypes of a shared obsession with body weight and gaining approval from men based on their appearance (Kane, 2009). Kane (2009) is also critical of the viewpoint that gay men are driven by the ideal of thinness and muscularity as this portrayal of gay men as a group invokes images of the narcissistic gay man obsessed with physical appearance and also carries associations with a kind of pathological preoccupation with appearance.

In considering the gay male body, the concept of narcissism is mentioned in a number of different ways in research on gay men and their bodies (Brown & Graham, 2008; Duncan, 2007, 2010b; Higgins, 2006; Kane, 2009; Moskowitz, Rieger, & Seal, 2009; Yelland & Tiggemann, 2003). For example, it has been hypothesised that gay men are self-absorbed and overly focused on their own appearance which, in turn, leads to their excessive striving for improved versions of the body beautiful (Higgins, 2006). However, authors like Duncan (2010a) and Kane (2009) have sought to look at this behaviour in ways that are less pathologising as discussed previously. It is also important to note that according to Freud (1914/1995) narcissism is a healthy part of human development and in later works Kohut (2009) posited that narcissism is a necessary part of early childhood development. By having their narcissistic needs met the child grows up to have healthy self-esteem as an adult (Kohut, 2009). Kane (2009) also challenges the stereotype of gay men as obsessed with appearance and male physiques and argues that gay culture is constituted of multiple sub-groups and a diversity of individuals, not all of whom fit this depiction. The majority of the literature explores the negative effects for gay men of attempting to live up to an often unattainable ideal body form. However, Higgins (2006) asks if the claiming of an ideal body type among gay men may be viewed as a celebration of what is found to be attractive.

Duncan (2007) explores gay identity and the body in terms of "reflective embodiment" (p. 335). Writing on embodiment allows for consideration of the body as not only constructed in the concrete and objective realm of the natural sciences but also as constructed in the interplay between the corporeal and the social (Tolman, Bowman, & Fahs, 2014). Embodiment signifies the "experience of living in, perceiving and experiencing the world from the very specific location of our bodies" (Tolman et al., 2014, p. 760). Duncan (2007) explores gay men's subjectivity by examining the ways in which people are able to reflect on their bodies through interaction with the way in which it is thought that society perceives them. Duncan's aim in drawing on the idea of embodiment as reflective was to move beyond the pathologising notion that the gay community is responsible for the rigid enforcing of the ideal body and consequent body dissatisfaction and rejection of the feminine (Duncan, 2007). In Duncan's research study, that involved in-depth interviews with four gay men, participants put forward the idea that having or cultivating an ideal body is a way in which social status can be derived from within the heterosexual world (Duncan, 2007). To participants, their bodies represented a space within which masculinity could be performed and provided a subjective identity that allowed them to relate to their bodies in a positive way (Duncan, 2007). Thus body awareness brought them pleasure and a sense of being grounded in their identity, which included their sense of masculinity, as opposed to being purely about chasing some inescapable construction of the ideal body.

Drummond (2005b) comes to the conclusion that gay men have a heightened awareness of their body due to constant self-reflection from an early age. For many gay men, this developmental awareness has led to an enhanced ability to reflect on their bodies and their own sense of masculinity as it is culturally located (Drummond, 2005b). Drummond (2005b) makes the case that this constant assessment of their own bodies and how others perceive them could be potentially positive for gay men. The origin of this behaviour might have been one of discrimination and homophobia, however, this capacity to reflect on their bodies might assist gay men in better negotiating their own health and standing in society (Drummond, 2005b). Thus Drummond appears to reframe the idea of negative body preoccupation to suggest that gay men may be 'wiser' in appreciating how their bodies operate and contribute to how they may be perceived by others than are heterosexual men who have not had to grapple to the same degree in general with their physical appearance and embodiment.

2.5. Muscular Gay Men's Experiences

The majority of the literature on muscular gay men focuses on their desirability and power within mainstream gay culture. As already discussed, Bosley (2011) and Drummond (2005b) identify muscularity as idealised and valued within gay culture. The research conducted by Drummond (2005b) focused on younger men who would not have had first-hand experience of the HIV/AIDS crisis and found that being muscular continued to play an important part in what these men viewed as healthy, strong and desirable. Muscular men were valued as they exude physical strength, physical health and virility, and in addition, are also seen as having control over their emotions (Drummond, 2005b). However, the importance of muscularity to gay men seems to link to physical attractiveness to other men and the status this allows as opposed to being primarily associated with aggression and dominance and the capacity to be physically violent with others if necessary (as might be the case for heterosexual muscular men) (Bosley, 2011; Drummond, 2005b). According to young gay men interviewed by Drummond (2005b) a strong emphasis is placed on the physical nature of attraction with men that meet the body ideal being seen as desirable, particularly for sexual encounters. However, these men were viewed as much less suitable for long-term relationships due to the fact that a lack of personality or intellect was often ascribed to them (Drummond, 2005b). Thus muscular men might be viewed as desirable sexual partners but were stereotyped in a different way by being associated with a kind of 'brawn over brains' persona. Drummond (2010) also found that gay culture tends to conflate a muscular physique with youthfulness and the ideal of a young man and his body is idolised compared to the waning attraction presented in the ageing man's body (Drummond, 2010). The young men in his study were aware of the youthful currency they carried and were focused on achieving muscularity as a means to express the ideal masculinity through their bodies. While older men may value the muscular body form they may feel less able to achieve this kind of body for themselves.

Interviews with gay men in Melbourne, Australia that were conducted by Duncan (2007, 2010a, 2010b) further elucidate how gay men negotiate the muscular ideal body type. Some of the participants do not describe themselves as muscular, but they do speak of conforming to and maintaining an idealised body (Duncan, 2007, 2010a, 2010b). One participant, although he did not self-identify as being muscular in particular, hoped for greater acceptance in conforming to the ideal body type (Duncan, 2007). He associated being muscular with a positive representation of himself as masculine in relation to his also being a gay man

(Duncan, 2007). As has been noted previously and confirmed by men engaged in muscle building training themselves, being muscular was associated with respect, desirability and status within the gay community and was also viewed as providing a gateway to being accepted within greater society (Duncan, 2007). To the participant, a "confident – out and proud – gay man, who embodies a socially desirable physical form – masculine, muscular and attractive – is a less threatening image of homosexuality" (Duncan, 2007, p. 341).

Overall it was evident that there was a limited body of literature and research on the experiences of gay men who actively engage in body-building or muscle development and who put energy into cultivating the kind of lean, toned body most desired in contemporary society. There, therefore, appears to be merit in continuing to expand research that looks at the experience of embodying that which is idealised and what kinds of associations this evokes for muscular gay men.

In summary, gay men view their own bodies in relation to the ideal body within the gay community. This ideal body type that is lean, muscular and athletic is something that many gay men look for in themselves and other men. In a way approximating this kind of ideal body becomes a prerequisite to accessing other men deemed as particularly desirable within the gay community. The ideal body is also framed in relation to race and other social identity markers, including signs of wealth such as in wearing designer label clothes and accessories. Furthermore, the media is cited as influencing gay men by presenting them with the ideal body as something almost normative in society. This seems to link with body dissatisfaction and the high occurrence of eating disorders and body-related disorders in gay men. The fact that the gay community operates within the larger framework of hegemonic masculinity within heteronormative society means that the value attached to the ideal body is also related to the body type typically more generally associated with masculinity. This subscription to a more dominantly hegemonic version of the ideal male body can contribute to some misogyny within the gay community as stereotypically effeminate gay men are shunned and the bodies of other gay men are policed so as not to be deemed fat, feminine and undesirable.

In reviewing the literature very little South African literature exists on gay men and their bodies. This might be linked to strong taboos regarding homosexuality in some parts of South African society that in many respects continue to exist despite some shifts. Therefore, literature from other contexts had to be primarily relied on in providing a conceptual and

research base for conducting the study. The absence of South African literature on this topic also means that issues of race and class that may be particularly pertinent in this context have not been addressed perhaps as deeply as is warranted. Nevertheless it seems useful to explore this topic further and to deepen understandings from a personal perspective of what it means to engage with pursuit and achievement of this kind of body ideal as a gay man.

CHAPTER 3
METHODS

3.1. Research Design

The research study was qualitative in nature. It was concerned with exploring the meaning that was attributed to a phenomenon by an individual or group, in this instance the phenomenon of interest being engagement in muscle building activity and having a muscular body as a gay man. The study was conducted through the use of thick description with text as data and relying on the emergence of themes (Creswell, 2014). Transcribed texts from individual interviews were used as the data corpus with the analysis emphasising the core themes that emerged and the meaning-making evidenced in discussion of the topic of interest. A qualitative research design was viewed as appropriate as the study aimed to capture something of the lived experience of occupying a muscular body as narrated by a group of gay men engaged actively in the cultivation of such a body.

3.2. Research Questions

The study aimed to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

> How do muscular gay men experience and describe their bodies and aspects of their identity related to being muscular?
>
> a. How do muscular gay men perceive their own bodies?
> b. How do muscular gay men view and relate to other men's bodies?
> c. How do muscular gay men experience living in their bodies?
> d. How do muscular gay men perceive their bodies to be related to their gay identity?

3.3. Theoretical Framework

The research was approached through the lens of a hermeneutic framework which considers the interpretation of the meaning and the context which gave birth to that meaning (Patton, 2002). A hermeneutic framework defines meaning as determined by both the cultural context in which it was made as well as the cultural context in which it is interpreted (Patton, 2002).)

Adopting a hermeneutic approach to the analysis was considered appropriate as the research aimed to explore the subjective experiences gay men have of their bodies while taking into consideration the context in which they were located, including, for example, media representations of gay men's bodies and the prescripts of hegemonic masculinity that they were aware of. The analysis aimed to move beyond description to make interpretive inferences about participants' account of their experiences. In addition, to following a largely hermeneutic approach some aspects of the transcripts were explored within a social constructionist framework which defines reality as constructed through the use of language and concerns itself with understanding how meaning is constructed as opposed to experienced (Willig, 2012). Social discourse is instrumental in the construction of reality (Patton, 2002) and in this case, it was understood that the way that participants spoke about their muscular bodies would be informed by social constructions of gayness, masculinity and muscularity (amongst other possible dimensions). Combining these two approaches allowed me as the researcher to make sense of meaning and context and to give some consideration to how personal meaning-making was perhaps shaped by discursive constructions related to the subject matter of interest.

3.4. Recruitment and Participants

A non-probability, convenience sampling technique was used as the study was non-random and relied on volunteers who met specific pre-defined criteria to participate (Babbie, 2013). The sample was purposive in nature (Laher & Botha, 2012) as only self-identified gay men who engaged in strength and/or weight training at least three times per week and/or who identified as fitting the descriptor of being 'muscular' were invited to participate in the study. Purposive sampling was appropriate as the study concerned itself with muscular gay men as a specific group within society and participants needed to be representative of this population (Laher & Botha, 2012).

A sample of seven men participated in the interviews in keeping with the initial aim to interview between five to ten participants. After initially easily recruiting four volunteer participants it proved unexpectedly difficult to source further participants despite reaching out through a range of networks. Ultimately a further three participants agreed to take part in the study and this led to the final participant group of seven interviewees. Relatively small numbers of participants are generally considered sufficient for the purposes of conducting in-

depth qualitative, interview-based studies (Laher & Botha, 2012) and in this instance, it was evident that sufficiently rich data for meaningful analysis had emerged from the seven interviews conducted.

The study relied on the recruitment of men who self-identified as muscular gay men and excluded those who did not identify as such. In addition, it was indicated that meeting the criterion of seeing oneself as muscular should be complimented by the fact that the participant engaged in strength and/or weight training at least three times per week at the time of taking part in the study. Volunteers who met the requirements were invited to participate through referrals from peers and friends. Snowball sampling was also used and some participants were invited in this way. Snowball sampling was appropriate as it entails participants approaching other participants who are then asked to approach other participants (Laher & Botha, 2012). Six of the seven participants met both the self-descriptor and training practice requirements. However, one participant did not meet these initial requirements for participation but nevertheless volunteered to take part in the study. While he did not engage in training in the gym he was very committed to running as a form of physical exercise to assist him in achieving a lean, fit and muscular body and appearance. Given that the fact that he did not meet initial selection criteria was only ascertained during the course of the interview, and further, given that the material he shared resonated in many ways with the subject matter obtained from men who emphasized body enhancement through gym training, it was decided to include his data within the study.

Aspects of the participants' demographic information can be found in the table below in order to provide some sense of characteristics of the participant group. Pseudonyms have been used to denote each participant in the interests of retaining confidentiality.

Demographic Information of Participants							
	Andrew	Brandon	Chris	Daniel	Leon	Oliver	Thami
Age	24	34	42	35	44	30	27
Race	White	White	White	White	White	Black	Black
Highest Level of Education	High School	Self-Taught	Tertiary Degree	Tertiary Degree	Tertiary Degree	Tertiary Degree	Tertiary Degree
Relationship Status	Single	Married	Single	Single	Single	Single	Committed Relationship
Out (Openly Gay as of this age)	Yes (16)	Yes (20s)	Yes (28)	Yes (20s)	Yes (25)	Yes	Yes

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants.

3.5. Procedure

After ethical clearance to conduct the research study was received from the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) of the University of the Witwatersrand, I made use of friends and peers to ask for possible referrals of individuals into the study. It was communicated that participants should not be people who were well known to me so that they would feel free to talk in a manner that was not influenced by any pre-knowledge of me. Once it had been ascertained via these networks that an individual was willing to be approached to possibly take part in the study they were then sent the participant information sheet and were invited to take part. Those that agreed to participate were subsequently contacted via email and/or telephone in order to set up a meeting time for the individual

interviews. Volunteers were all met in a private space where they felt comfortable and safe to share. Interviews took place either in an office at the Emthonjeni Centre on the university campus or at participants' homes. Interviews took 50 to 60 minutes on average. Where it seemed appropriate, some participants were asked if they knew of any other gay men who met the inclusion requirements and might be willing to take part in the research. The same procedure of sending participant information details, making contact and setting up interviews was then followed in relation to these further interviewees. Overall six of the participants came from referrals via friends and peers whereas one of the participants was referred by another participant.

3.6. Data Collection Instrument

The proposed research study made use of semi-structured interviews to collect data.
The seven participants took part in individual interviews which were based around a semi-structured interview schedule developed by the researcher and supervisor. The interview schedule was based on the literature review and the inclusion of relevant questions to elicit material on the topic of interest within the particular research study (see Appendix A). The interviews began with obtaining some background information in order to build rapport and then moved on to discuss the topic of muscularity and personal experiences related to this in a fairly open-ended manner. Depending on what had emerged in the discussion and the degree to which the participant looked to the interviewer to structure the conversation, specific areas were probed through more targeted questions. Semi-structured interviews were considered appropriate for this study as they allow for the structuring of a set of key questions yet provide flexibility to rephrase questions and provide prompts in order to facilitate open discussion (Fylan, 2005). The semi-structured nature of the interviews also allowed for interactive communication and meant that there was space for interviewees to introduce ideas that had not necessarily been anticipated in preparing the interview questions and prompts. The aim was to be open to how each man individually constructed his experiences and reflected upon this in the interview.

Following the interview sessions, the audio-recordings were then transcribed into written text. I conducted all of the interviews and transcribed all of the material. The transcription process was helpful in beginning to make some sense of the data. In addition to the interview transcriptions I also kept written notes of my observations of anything noteworthy that had

taken place during the interviews. For example, in one instance, despite having volunteered to take part the interviewee seemed to be rather uncomfortable and almost resistant to being interviewed. When I queried whether he was comfortable to continue he was clear that he wished to go on with the process. These kinds of observations provided some helpful complementary information that informed the analysis.

3.7. Data Analysis

Data analysis took the form of critical thematic analysis. Thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied to the transcribed interview data and the process of analysis consisted of the six phases that they describe as being intrinsic to this analytic approach. The initial phases involved familiarisation with the collected data by reading through the transcripts, creating initial codes and searching for potential themes within the data. This familiarisation with the data was carried out by both me and my supervisor and we then met to discuss possible themes that appeared to be emerging. Following this meeting and discussion of points of convergence in what we had both observed I re-read the transcripts to further refine a framework to capture core themes. After the sets of themes had been identified at this point they were reviewed in consultation with my supervisor and then refined, defined and named. Finally, the themes were presented in the results section of this research report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is an appropriate method of data analysis as it concerns itself with identifying differences and commonalities that constitute meaning around a particular the phenomenon, in this case, the phenomenon of the muscular body and how it is perceived among muscular gay men (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes identified reflected the most common preoccupations of the interviewees and areas of similarity (and difference) in how they represented their experiences in response to the interview questions. In keeping with the theoretical framework, the thematic analysis was approached with a hermeneutic lens and therefore involved both looking for meaning beyond that which was overtly or consciously stated and shared by the participants and reading some of the material through the critical lens of social constructionism (Patton, 2002). Themes were not only identified but were interpreted with a critical awareness of the reality within which they were constructed (Patton, 2002) where this seemed possible and appropriate.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) of the University of the Witwatersrand (see Appendix E) under Research Ethics Protocol Number MCLIN/19/001 IH. A participant information sheet (see Appendix B) was shared with participants indicating important information pertaining to the study and informing them of their rights. Informed consent was gained from participants by having them sign a hard copy of a consent form (see Appendix C) indicating their willingness to volunteer as participants of this study. Another form indicating their informed consent to be audio recorded (see Appendix D) was also signed. The audio recordings and transcribed material are stored in a computer and file folder that are both password protected and only I have access to the original audio files. My supervisor had access to the transcribed material from which personally identifying information had been removed. Participants also had the option to agree to the data being used for future research (see Appendix C). All of the participants agreed to make their data available for possible further future analysis with the understanding that transcripts would be de-linked from audio recordings, therefore copies of the interview transcripts will be kept in a password-protected folder and password protected computer such that they are available for further duly authorised research.

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and the right to withdraw any of their responses (Salkind, 2017). Participation was voluntary and participants were notified that they did not have to answer any of the interview schedule questions they felt uncomfortable with, without any negative consequences. Participants were not offered an incentive for participating nor were they disadvantaged in any way for electing not to participate (Salkind, 2017). I have maintained confidentiality in the write up of the study by not revealing the identity of any participants and by making use of pseudonyms in the reported data.

Participants were also informed of their right to request general feedback with regards to the findings of the study. A copy of the final approved research report will be available on the University of the Witwatersrand library portal. Some participants have indicated that they might ask for the report. If they do, they will be directed to the appropriate web portal of the University of the Witwatersrand.

While it was not foreseen that any potential harm would arise out of participation in the study, the phone numbers of the Emthonjeni Centre clinic and OUT, an LGBTQ+ helpline, were provided in the participant information sheet. None of the interviewees expressed any distress at having taken part in the interviews and the majority appeared to have welcomed the opportunity to talk about a significant aspect of their lives and identity with an interested party.

In writing up the study and in any further presentation or publication of the findings I am committed to remaining respectful of the perspectives of the participants. I also remain cognisant of the politics inherent in representing gay men in stereotypical or pejorative ways and the imperative to avoid reinforcing prejudices associated with alternative sexual identities and with gay men in particular.

3.9. Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative research studies is ensured by focusing on credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, as set out by Guba and Lincoln (1985). Transferability and confirmability were considered as important and possible within this research study. Transferability was aimed for with the use of thick description gained from numerous interviews in order to ensure that the findings could potentially be applied to other related contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Confirmability was maintained by considering self-reflexivity as a tool to understand researcher bias (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). In addition, the use of direct quotations to substantiate arguments lends further credibility to the research study whereas the fact that my research supervisor co-analysed and refined the thematic analysis also adds to the dependability of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter makes use of the data collected from seven self-identified gay men that describe themselves as muscular and engage in training to reach their goals for muscularity. The data is presented according to themes and sub-themes (Figure 1) that emerged from engaging with and analysing the data. Themes consist of the main thematic topics that emerged throughout and across all of the interviews. Sub-themes were identified as significant thematic content that fit within the overarching themes that were identified and warranted a sub-section to elaborate on their addition to themes. Furthermore, while these themes deal with distinct topics, as is often the case with thematic analysis, there is a degree of overlap in themes resulting at times in the use of the same quotation to illustrate somewhat different in thematic features in the data.

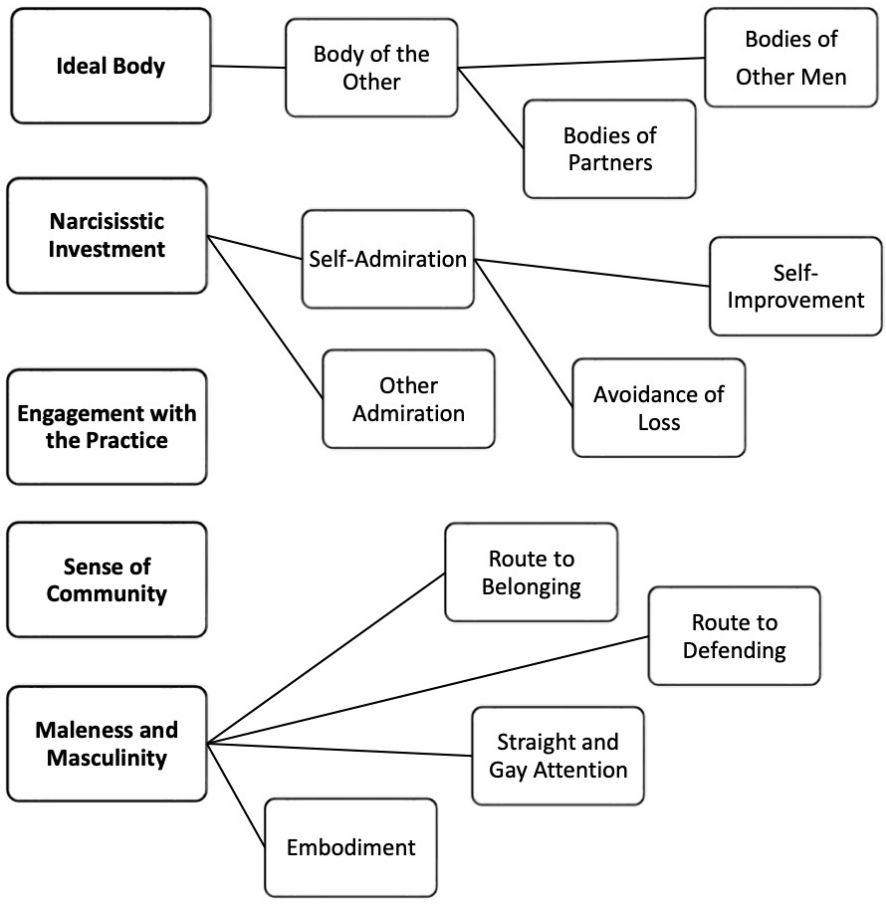


Figure 1. Themes and Sub-Themes Map

4.1. The Ideal Body – *Andrew: He looks like a god…*

This theme was identified as prominent in almost all of the interviews and concerned discussion about what kinds of bodies gay men might aspire to achieve and what consensually might be viewed as that which one hopes to attain. As the term suggests, an *ideal* body, is one that is elevated above the norm and represents something aspirational. Almost all of the participants recognised that their engagement in gymming, training and disciplined exercise was related to aiming to more closely approach an individual and collective, ideal body form.

For most of the participants, their understanding of the ideal body seemed to mirror what has been found in the literature on the topic and seemed to draw upon many conventional ideas about what makes a body admirable. Drummond (2005a, 2005b) suggested an idealised body type among gay men that is athletic, muscular and lean. The ideal body also represents maleness and masculinity through being muscular, athletic and toned (Higgins, 2006).

> *Andrew: No, it's not bodybuilder... It's more of an athletic big.*
>
> *Leon: And I can actually show you a picture. It's well-built athletic. I'm not interested in not having a neck, you know?*
>
> *Chris: …it could be bigger and a little bit… Definitely maybe leaner, definitely bigger. But to an extent more defined muscle as well.*

It is interesting that at this particular historical period the ideal body seems to be predicated on both weight and size (*bigger*) and is not identified solely with muscularity, although this is important to a degree. Participants made sense of being muscular, lean and athletic in a number of ways.

For one participant the lean and athletic factor was characterised as being attractive in that it was associated with being able to move freely.

Leon: You know, if you're just muscle, you know, cardio is hell, stretching is absolutely impossible. For me, my ideal body would be... It's more of a functional thing. No, it's aesthetics as well, of course.

and

Leon: Because it's no use training very hard in weights and then you can't fucking brush your teeth, you know. So there's a flexibility component to it.

For Leon the ideal body seemed to be muscular but only to the extent that the body could still be used in a functional way. Here the lean and athletic quality transcends the mere physical and visual characteristics of the body. It speaks of a body that has a kinaesthetic quality that makes it both visually appealing and meaningful in day to day life, and may be associated with an active rather than a passive way of being in the world.

Andrew described the ideal body in physical terms. He mentioned a particular model as an embodiment of the ideal body. Here there was an emphasis on the body being muscular yet well-proportioned in size. As this ideal body belongs to a tall man with muscles that are not "massive" there is reference to a muscular leanness that speaks of perfection.

Andrew: Yoh, he's tall as hell. He's, like, 190 centimetres. And his muscles aren't necessarily massive. But he just has the most beautifully shaped body. All his muscles are just, I don't know, in the perfect places and the perfect size. Yah. Don't know how to explain it. Very well-built. He looks like a god.

Andrew seemed taken with the idea of the body beautiful where this perfection translated into an absolute attraction. The term 'body beautiful' is used here for the ideal body as an icon of socio-cultural values and a means to assert social dominance and influence (Reischer & Koo, 2004). The ideal body also takes on the potency of something divine or to be worshipped, *like a god*. This is reflected in the literature where the ideal body is not only sought after by gay men for themselves but also as the type of body they desire in other men, particularly potential partners (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011), as will be discussed in a further sub-section. There is also a comparative element that is present as in comments about men with 'no necks', men who cannot 'brush their teeth' and men who have the stature of 'gods'. While for many of the participants their training was to achieve their own body ideal (relative to their previous body), there was nevertheless some indication that they could be both

denigrating and admiring of other bodies that had been subject to the same kind of regimen they were committed to. The ideal is/was to find a perfect kind of balance.

Participants seemed to switch between how they stood in relation to the ideal body. For some, the ideal body was something that was promoted by the gay community or society in general. Oliver referred to a gay dating application for smartphones (Grindr) that shows a lean and athletic body type to be the most popular within the gay community. As Grindr is mainly used for hookups that lead to sex this popular body type shows both that one is desirable and desired.

> *Researcher: Do you think that there is an ideal body type?*
>
> *Oliver: Definitely. It's the gym body type. I mean, I live in Joburg. I am a single gay man. I have Grindr. You know, I go on Grindr. I have hookups here and there. Because I'm single, I have that luxury of doing that. And the body type has always been, you need to be a gym bunny. You need to have a six-pack. You need to be skinny. You need to be sexy. You need to, you know, workout and have strong abs and all of those things. So there is definitely a body type that exists. And that body type always is the popular body type that every, not all of them obviously, but majority… If you are to chat to ten guys… Out of the ten, seven of them would be interested in a slim body, fit, masculine body, six-pack... All of those things.*

For Oliver the majority of men on gay dating apps, or looking in other contexts to have a sexual encounter with another man, would prefer the ideal, *slim*, *fit*, muscular body which he also associates with being a *masculine body*. Oliver makes use of the word '*need to*' implying that it is a requirement in order to perform at a competitive level in these spaces. The recurrent use of the term '*need to*' also suggests that there is considerable pressure to live up to this ideal and also little ambiguity about what is associated with the ideal (*so there is definitely a body type that exists)*. Thami also spoke of the idealization of the gym-going body that is tall and lean.

> *Thami: …but there is a huge drawing towards the lean, the tall and or whatever, like how that ideal person would look like. So, even when you try to come in close to that ideal person... People feel good about that.*

Thami makes reference to the fact that the ideal body is not only desirable in terms of visual appeal, it is also associated with some ideal version of personhood (*ideal person*). The body here seems to transcend the physical to deliver an ideal that defines a person. Thami suggests that people would be drawn to such a person and that it would provide them with validation (*people feel good about that*).

This ideal body is also something that is needed or required for desirability. This body type, as the ideal body, is a specific type which seems to be shaped by what others, in general, are assumed to be attracted to. There is also a sense that acquiring this ideal is something that is desired by the person for themselves, as well as that there is an appreciation of this kind of body type in others.

> *Thami: So there is that, kind of, you need to be lean, you need to look a certain type of way that you are more attracted to an individual. So I think that's why I think people would like to go to the gym because there's that attraction towards a specific body type…*

Chris refers to the ideal body in terms of general societal norms referencing a body that is sculpted to the point of complete perfection. It is a body that seems to require actively being made into something society looks at as the ideal. (The term 'chiselled' even references indirectly the notion of something that has been sculpted into perfection.) However, this is also a body that is not within everyone's reach adding to its exclusivity.

> *Chris: Obviously the ideal or… Society looks at these absolutely chiselled guys and I think that is kind of like the ideal for most people. But not everyone gets there…*

Chris then went on to refer to what he would like for himself, which moves from being something clear (***absolutely*** *chiselled)* and possibly unattainable to cultivating a body that is aspirant for him in terms of his current being but not at the level of the ideal society holds up.

> *Chris: I think maybe for a lot of people it's that… But for myself I know it would not be that, but somewhere in between what I'm now and what I look like and somewhere in between there…*

Despite being vague about the exact requirements Chris is clear that he is not seeking to live up to the sculpted body valued by society. Perhaps he sees the ideal as not realistically attainable. However, he still aspires to have a body closer to the ideal than where he currently experiences his body to be.

Leon makes a clear distinction between the ideal body he would like to aspire to for himself and the ideal body that is revered within the gay community. In terms of his own body, Leon refers to the balance between a body that is functional and a body that is aesthetically appealing.

> *Leon: For me, my ideal body would be... It's more of a functional thing. No, it's aesthetics as well, of course. Somebody said to me the other day, why are you training so hard? Because I want to look good. That's it. I want to look good. But it's a little bit more than that. It looks and **feel** good. But it's not the superficial look I feel because I want to be flexible and I, I want to be able to move. I want to be able to be in my body.*

Leon catches himself perhaps denying that the visual appeal is important and concedes that it is, in fact, significant (*it's aesthetics as well, of course*), but he emphasizes that he wants to feel embodied in a particular way. Here looking good visually goes hand in hand with 'feeling' good about himself (*to be able to be in my body)*. There seems to be a sense of deeper meaning and accomplishment related to the mastery of being able to move within a body that is experientially pleasing, in part because it is aesthetically closer to the ideal. The combination of these qualities or attributes appears to be his own ideal for himself. However, when it comes to the gay community Leon felt that the focus seemed to be entirely on the physical appearance of the body. To him, the focus on the ideal body within the gay community is purely based on the visual. This idealisation of the physical aspects renders the body devoid of emotion and as something that remains stagnant and lifeless.

> *Leon: The body is not just the way it looks. And I think for gay men it's a lot about how it looks instead of how it functions or how it looks while it's functioning. You know, there's emotion. A body is not a static thing. It feels like some of the guys actually take it too far and it becomes this static thing.*

Within the discussions, there was also recognition that the cultivation of the ideal body might be both for one's own self- satisfaction and for the purposes of attracting the attention of other men, particularly sexual partners, and that these two sources of motivation might be distinct and/or intertwined. Several of these threads that emerged in the theme of the ideal body are further elaborated in the sub-themes below.

4.1.1. The body of the other: Comparing and contrasting.

In addition to talking about bodies in the abstract participants also discussed the bodies of others in their social circle, and even more closely, in terms of their partners or potential partners. There was a sense that they were comparing their own bodies to those of others and in this regard perhaps aiming to assess where they fitted in relation to their abstract and personal understanding of the ideal body. There was also a difference in how they desired the bodies of potential partners as opposed to those of actual partners to look.

4.1.1.1. The bodies of other men – Leon: It looked ridiculous…

In reflecting on the ideal body and how that related to their own version of what was ideal, participants often mentioned the bodies of others in their social circle or with whom they were familiar. This often provided the foundation for comparing themselves and also what they found desirable in others. According to Bosley (2011) this kind of comparison is common in gay men and stems from the fact that they evaluate the bodies of other men as they do their own. It is posited that the fear of being rejected by other men for their own appearance and body type leads gay men to often negatively assess their own bodies (Bosley, 2011). This then influences how they perceive the bodies of other men as bodies that they might desire and wish to have or bodies that are flawed in some way (Bosley, 2011; Wood, 2004). The ideal muscular and lean body is also seen as leading to an enforcement of this body type through men policing other men's bodies in a similar way that hegemonic masculinity polices men's behaviour (Bosley, 2011; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011).

In considering the bodies of other men in the general sense Brandon expressed his admiration of people that live up to the ideal of the perfect body.

Brandon: I admire people who do achieve that perfect six-pack, and the perfect arms, and the perfect chest…

However, in reflecting on other gay men that he knew his admiration was not extended to the way they presented their muscular bodies to the world on social media.

Brandon: There's a couple that we know. Both very different builds, but both muscular. And they would be... Every day there's a post, I actually mute him sometimes, they would post themselves, their bodies, their... You know, the arms in a certain position and the veins and the what have you. And I'm, like, why?

Brandon mentions that both men are muscular even though they are built differently. He emphasises their muscularity by referring to their arms specifically. Their level of muscularity is described in a clinical and visceral way (*certain position* and *veins*). There is not a hint of desire in this description and it seems as if the way these guys are using their muscularity for approval from others strips them of the wholeness in which their bodies might be perfect. Brandon seemed quite disapproving of these men at this stage of the interview and he appeared to feel that their overt hunger for recognition besmirched the muscularity he had worked so hard to gain. It is possible that Brandon's negative evaluation of these men was due to his own internal dialogue of how a muscular bodied man should behave and the restrictions he places on himself in relation to showing off or seeking to gain admiration from others. There is perhaps also some discomfort at the possibility of one's muscularity becoming over-consuming and coming to define one. In the interview, Brandon sought to make clear that he dis-identified with this kind of practice.

Leon also criticised muscular men that he had known in the past and had initially found attractive. For him, they lost the status of being attractive when they became what he considered too muscular due to overtraining.

Leon: They were in their 50s. And they started gymming and I saw them and oh my God damn it, they looked impressive. I mean, I absolutely... I thought they were the most attractive specimen of men that walked the earth. And then I saw them five years later and I thought, "where the fuck is your neck?" It looked ridiculous.

In Leon's case, these men took away from what he was trying to achieve – a body that can move and that can 'walk the earth*"*. By isolating their necks (or the absence of them) in his commentary, he also removes from the wholeness and integrated feeling of being attractive. Their necks are described as absent, having drowned in an excess of muscle. For Leon, this seems to reduce them to something cartoonish (*it looked ridiculous*).

Leon also made reference to some of his friends becoming overweight. He was critical of this in others and it seemed to represent the body changing by gaining too much fat as opposed to too much muscle. This seemed like a more general concern for him as he would tell all of his friends (*even my straight friends*) that they needed to take themselves in hand.

> *Leon: Look, if my friends, even my straight friends, if they get fat I tell them you need to start doing something about that.*

Interestingly discussing weight gain seemed to be something he was willing to engage others within order to improve and this kind of body change did not evoke the same level of criticism as the guys that became too muscular, perhaps because in relation to muscularity there was a closer identification and therefore more sense of threat in potential alikeness.

Thami, on the other hand, spoke about a friend that is both feminine and overweight (*round* and *short*) and his admiration for his equanimity with this way of being. He mentions that his friend falls into a category labelled '*fats and fem*'. This is a well-known expression in the gay dating community that has existed for several decades and references men that do not meet the athletic and muscular ideal as 'fats' and those that display feminine behaviour as 'fems' (Scott, 2015; Signorile, 1998; Wood, 2004). These labels are often used together in a derogatory way on dating profiles as a way to exclude these men from making contact with the user (Joy & Numer, 2008). The phrase "no fats, no fems" (Joy & Numer, 2008, p. 53) is often followed by "no Asians" (p. 53) or other racial groups. It also suggests that being fat is to be feminine (Joy & Numer, 2008).

> *Thami: So he's like a bit short and a bit round. So there is that kind of thing. Is that like... And he's quite feminine also. So he does subscribe to the fats and fem thing, but like he's super proud of it.*

Thami described his friend as feeling confident within his body and way of being (*super proud*) and taking ownership of what is usually deemed as derogatory (*fats and fem*). Thami is also supportive of his friend as opposed to being critical of his overweight and feminine appearance.

Thami: I think he looks good, just that I just can't judge that. The fats and fem thing.

He expresses that he cannot make any judgements of his friend's appearance and suggested feminine behaviour. Thami also agrees with his friend and validates him for his appearance (*looks good*).

Thus it was evident that in defining their own commitment to muscularity and achieving a certain kind of bodily appearance, several of the participants sought to draw boundaries in relation to how they perceived others to engage with this kind of practice or body ideal. Some of them sought to convey that there was a point at which the pursuit of a muscular body could become counter-productive and others acknowledged that perhaps some men might feel comfortable in bodies that were discrepant from the ideal, even if they themselves placed some store on this.

In addition to talking about other (gay) men, in general, several participants introduced some discussion concerning bodies and sexual partners.

4.1.1.2. The bodies of partners – Brandon: Hey, you're hot for me.

In reflecting on the bodies of potential, past or current partners (sexual, romantic and long-term) participants indicated that they generally had little expectation that partners needed to subscribe to the ideal body in order to be found desirable. For some participants they preferred potential partners to be closer to the ideal, whereas for others their desire transcended this limited interpretation of what might make a body or a man attractive. In the literature, it is suggested that gay men strive for the ideal muscular, lean and athletic body for themselves and seek this ideal in partners as well (Bosley, 2011; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). This also plays an important part in their engaging with muscle training so as to have their own muscular bodies in order to avoid being rejected by potential muscular partners (Bosley, 2011; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). In their commentary, some of the participants

seemed to support this premise whereas others indicated greater flexibility in where they directed their desire.

The majority of participants did not express that they wanted their partners to have bodies that were very similar to their own. In fact, the majority had a range of what they found desirable, even if there were limits to what they would find attractive.

Chris viewed his attraction to partners as having a wide range that started at one end with a completely muscular physique.

> *Chris: What I'm attracted to is a broad spectrum from being absolutely muscled to being, you know, I don't know… I don't have that defined, all that clear rules…*

There was something clearly defined at the more normative end (*absolutely muscled*) whereas Chris struggled to define the other end of the spectrum. He was clear that there were no defined rules and that there was the possibility of attraction to other body types. Later on, Chris clarified what would qualify others to fall within his semi-defined range of attraction. This was presented as if the possibility existed in all men.

> *Chris: …if we're focusing just on the physical at the end of the day as long as there is, as long as there is sex appeal…*

For Andrew, there was also a range although it seemed to centre around a specific template that seemed to be closer to his own body type (*well-built*).

> *Andrew: All the people I've dated. Only one of them had a really good body. So, the body to me isn't the biggest thing, but obviously... It's, like, generally a… like, a nice guy, a well-built guy, but not... You don't have to have, like, abs and amazing arms and stuff.*

The fact that only one of Andrew's previous partners had a *really good body* suggests that he does not expect or need the ideal body type in a partner. Even though potential partners need to be well-built there is also an emphasis on the fact that they do not have to possess the sought after abdominal muscles (*abs*) or other attributes that constitute the 'body beautiful'.

With the use of the word '*obviously*' Andrew also states that there are clear limits as to what would be acceptable to him.

Both Chris and Leon stressed that their partners need to make an effort with their bodies by being healthy. This was more important than being muscular or having an ideal body. Their comments suggest that there is room for an average body type in partners as long as they are trying to stay healthy and active.

> *Chris: …as long as there is a consciousness of, you know, just to look after yourself and doing that, as opposed to kind of like just getting comfortable, letting go, and not doing anything… You kind of like have aspirations and ambition to... How can I say? It's just to be healthy.*

> *Leon: I mean, and this is something that I've always appreciated, is effort. That's it. I want you to do it. I want you to make an effort. I don't appreciate obesity. I've never.*

Leon's dislike of obesity was echoed in other interviews. For Andrew and Daniel, there was less of the strong aversion that Leon had but they nevertheless viewed being overweight as unattractive. Andrew ruled out dating or attraction to others that were overweight and in Daniel's case he somewhat cautiously (*wouldn't necessarily)* excluded *obese men* from the category of those he would find attractive. In the context of the interview, Daniel was perhaps aware of not appearing overly prejudiced against overweight men.

> *Andrew: I wouldn't date an extremely overweight person.*

> *Daniel: I wouldn't necessarily find obese men attractive*

Aside from referring to obesity, Daniel did express a clear interest in men that in gay language would often be referred to as 'bears' or 'chubs'. These terms overlap and refer to men that are hairy and stocky in the case of bears (Manley, Levitt, & Mosher, 2007) and are heavy in terms of their weight. Chubs also refer to men who see themselves as "big guys" (Whitesel, 2014, p. 1).

Daniel: I'm very much into bears. So I'm definitely what they would say. Your bear… chub chaser. Daddies, older…

and

Daniel: If anything, I prefer a nice belly. Yah. Lots of meat.

Daniel refers to himself as a *chub chaser* who finds chubs attractive, although he has a body that conforms to what is normatively attractive (Whitesel, 2014). Rather ironically the ratio of chubs to chub chasers in clubs tends to mean that chub chasers are usually the ones being pursued (Whitesel, 2014). This may partially account for the fact that Daniel feels comfortable in owning his taste for these kinds of men.

Daniel expressed views on attraction that were both well-defined and outside of the conventional. However, Daniel felt he had to justify his views to others as they find his preference *weird*. This was also reflected in his own words during the interview.

Daniel: I think in terms of body types, it's just something that baffles me, it's that. I have a type; people find it very weird and I have to explain myself.

Thami also expressed attraction that was outside of the norm yet more socially acceptable (*lean*) but not *muscular*. He expresses that muscularity is not a strong dislike (*turn off*), but that there is something about thin men that he prefers.

Thami: Lean, would be okay. I think the muscular part would be like, wouldn't say a turn off, just not like potential for me to date.

Thami also describes his current partner as fitting with the body type he finds attractive and juxtaposes his partner's leanness with his own as well as his height. His partner differs from him physically and this is attractive to Thami. The pair have been in a committed relationship for four years.

Thami: So even, like, my boyfriend is way… Super leaner than me and, like, super, like way… Not short, short, but like quite a height distance.

Brandon also contrasts his husband with himself in that he is not as muscular. However, this does not influence the level of attractiveness his husband holds for him.

> *Brandon: My husband, you know, isn't particularly well-built or anything like that, but every time he gets into the shower, I'm like… Hey, you're hot for me.*

Thus interestingly in this study, the majority of these men seemed to veer in the direction of attraction to partners that were/are somewhat or very different in body type without seeking similarity or matching, especially in the case of more committed relationships. According to Regan, Medina and Joshi (2001) while gay men in their study focused mostly on physical attractiveness for short-term sexual partners with long-term romantic partners they were more focused on how sensitive partners were interpersonally, their intellect and responsiveness

In addition to recognizing that their desire did not always follow expectations and prescripts for what is generally viewed as desirable within their gay communities, some men also spoke about the detractions of having a relationship with a partner who did live up to the ideal. Oliver shared his experience of previously being the partner of a man with a body much closer to the ideal than his own.

> *Oliver: When they made a comparison between us as a couple, he had the body. And when they look at the pictures, when they look at the Instagram account and they look at Twitter and Facebook, he had the body. So he would get the comments. I'd get the comments, oh my god you guys look great together and… But the comments would be, oh my god, your (partner's) body…*

Oliver stressed the comparison between himself and his previous partner to have been public and open for all to comment on via social media. His previous partner possessed something that was desirable (*he had the body*, as he states twice for emphasis), that Oliver was keenly aware that he did not possess. There is also a sense of competitiveness in that Oliver seems to have wanted the same recognition for his own body as his partner enjoyed. The relationship generated considerable pressure as he felt the need to live up to the ideal body, which, concurrently, was also expected of him by his partner and others. The use of the word

'*power*' came up a lot while Oliver discussed his previous partner. Here power is implied in both of them possessing celebrated bodies.

> *Oliver: He wanted great bodies, according to him. For both me and him, we were a power couple.*

Power also meant that his previous partner was seen and admired in both straight and gay communities. He possessed an acceptance that Oliver seemed to wish for, but also found he was lost in. His previous partner's body outshone his own and took up so much space that Oliver found it hard to distinguish himself as an individual within the relationship.

> *Oliver: And it gave him power whenever we went out to such spaces, especially in the gay community. But even in heterosexual communities, people would be like, oh my god your boyfriend has an amazing body. Oh, he's all just… Did you see his body? And I started thinking, oh my god, now I don't exist…*

Oliver's reflection on this period he spent in a relationship striving for joint perfection suggests that he eventually began to feel weighed down and unseen and appeared to be linked to his exiting the relationship and engaging in a more private form of exercise and muscle building.

Thus for the men in the study there was a common appreciation of what constitutes the ideal male body type and look, and how this was generally shared within the gay male community. The participants were clear that the ideal was not a muscle-bound man who could not move easily and also that muscularity and leanness went hand in hand for the ideal to be achieved (referenced in terms such as *chiselled*, *sculpted*, *slim*, *fit*, *beautifully shaped*). This is aligned with what has been identified as the ideal body (muscular, lean and athletic) in the literature and which is perceived as attractive within the contemporary gay community (Drummond, 2005b; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). Furthermore, it was evident that participants both subscribed to the ideal and wanted perhaps to appear discriminating in what they valued, demonstrating recognition that the ideal represented a stereotype of a kind. In identifying with their own aspirations towards the ideal many of the interviewees stressed that the achievement of a certain body type had intrinsic rather than extrinsic value, in the sense that it was about greater pleasure in embodiment rather than purely about appearing attractive to

others. This issue will be further elaborated in other themes. In addition, almost all of the participants recognized that the ideal was not necessarily easily attainable but that imagery of men (on Grindr, depictions of male models) that circulated in gay groups tended to represent such bodies as normative. This finding is in keeping with the findings of Drummond (2005b), Lanzieri and Hildebrandt (2011) and Schwartz and Grimm (2016) discussed previously. One other feature perhaps to note is that participants were largely unselfconscious in talking about male body beauty in a way that might not have been evident in a group of 'straight' men. The body ideal was easily identifiable and easily spoken about and described, suggesting that it exists reasonably prominently in the minds of gay men who engage in strength and weight training.

When it comes to the bodies of others in their social circle, the men in the study were either critical or encouraging of bodies that did not fit the ideal and prescribed body mould. Speaking about the ideal body in the abstract evoked admiration (referenced in terms such as *perfect, impressive, attractive specimen of men*). However, when the reference was made to other individuals in their lives there was an element of comparison. In seeing others make use of their bodies in ways that were deemed as too extreme or too strongly in need of affirmation participants feared that their own pursuit of a particular kind of self-ideal needed to be distinguished from such practices. Discouraging or accepting different body types, such as the overweight body, also relied on othering those that do not have an ideal body. Judgement or acceptance are both afforded to the other party with the expectation that they change or continue to be themselves. Participants that were critical of the bodies of other men had strong reactions often of disgust and this reflects a policing of other men's bodies, perhaps in a way to defend the hard work they have put into their own idealised version of their bodies.

In considering the bodies of potential, past and current partners the men in the study seemed to have a varied understanding of attraction. Most of the men did not require that for other men's bodies to be desirable they should be the same as their own. For some desirability was close to the consensually constructed ideal body (*well-built*, *muscled*) and for others, it was very different (*super leaner*, *chub*). Most of the participants stated that they strongly disliked obesity. It was interesting that in relation to body mass for some there was a preference for bodies that were not muscular and rather were either very lean or weighed more than average. The way in which participants answered the questions indicated that most of them felt

comfortable to acknowledge attraction to bodies that were in line with the ideal. For those men whose tastes were somewhat different, it appeared harder for them to define bodies that they might find attractive, and in the case of the one participant who named his alternate place of desire (chubs) there was a fear of being judged or shamed for his preference.

Another interesting point to note is that even though the majority looked for a body that was different from theirs, none of them necessarily spoke about preferring a partner with a body that might be assessed to be more attractive than theirs. In the case of one participant who had been in a relationship in which his partner's body was commonly admired more than was his, it was difficult to sustain the relationship due to the pressure and competitiveness involved. This suggests that being in a relationship in which there is a mutual drive towards achieving an ideal body may not contribute to compatibility as is assumed. Overall, in relation to the body ideal, the findings of this study tend to confirm much of the existing literature but also suggest that there is greater ambivalence towards, differentiation from, and critique of the idealization of certain body types within gay circles and the practices that are associated with this.

4.2. Narcissistic Investment

Material that could be related to the theme of Narcissism appeared on multiple occasions in discussion with the participants and in the transcribed interviews. The title of the theme was chosen as it best captured the content as conveyed by participants. However, it is recognised that 'narcissism' is often described in overly negative terms. One need only do a quick online search for the word 'narcissism' and a myriad of search results will appear referring to disordered personality, psychopathy, pathology, toxicity and so on. However, narcissism can essentially be defined as an investment in the self as an object or as a person. This is the sense of the term that resonated with participants' descriptions of what it meant to self-define as someone who was muscular and who engaged in activities to pursue this kind of appearance. This draws on the understanding of narcissism by Freud (1914/1995) and Kohut (2009) as a healthy and necessary part of human development which leads to healthy self-esteem. This kind of understanding of narcissism underpins how the theme is presented here where narcissistic investment refers to an investment in the self as an object or person, an investment that might be interpreted as typical ('normal'), and may have both positive and/or negative implications.

4.2.1. Self-admiration – *Leon: I'm working on this unique physique.*

In keeping with the theme of narcissistic investment, it emerged that participants often spoke of regarding and admiring their own bodies. This was termed self-admiration as the work they put into creating their own version of the ideal body gave them a sense of self-pleasure and satisfaction. All of the participants mentioned appreciating their own bodies to some extent, in a sense as observers of themselves. There was often a sense of pride in what they had achieved and visual gratification in seeing how they looked.

> *Brandon: It's lovely when summer comes and you can put on a vest and you go, "you did well". Like, you've... "You look good". But that's for me. I don't need the validation from anybody else. I look at myself and I go, yah, "you did well."(embarrassed giggle).*

For Brandon, there is something satisfying about achieving this body for himself without focusing on the approval he might gain from others. He suggests that he now feels his body is enough for him when he looks at it as it lives up to his expectations (*you look good*). There is also an element of admiring the effort that he put in to achieve this (*you did well*). In both instances it is as if one part of him speaks in an approving way to another part of him, reinforcing the idea that participants had become their own observers and assessors in relation to their bodies. Brandon also revels in the fact that summer and the resulting heat allows him to expose his body enough (*you can put on a vest*) for him to admire the effort and the look of his body. In examining this closely there is also a feeling of being seen. Not only is Brandon able to see his own body exposed by a vest in summer, there is also a hint that it will be exposed and therefore visible to others to share in the appreciation. Brandon maintains that he is doing it for himself without needing the validation of others, however, admiration of self often seems to be interwoven with admiration from others. This will be explored in a further sub-section.

Two of the participants made reference to looking at themselves in a mirror when approving their bodies. This activity represented a confirmation of what they saw as good as opposed to conveying an obsessive admiration of self.

Daniel: I think sometimes, yah, I would get out of the shower and I would stand in front of the mirror and be like, yah, "you look good. You're in shape, you look just fine."

Brandon: My body's changed. And, you know, when I look into the mirror, I'm happy with what I see.

For Daniel, the mirror displays something that is desirable and acceptable. In this instance, there is the suggestion of being exposed, but it is much more personal as it is only he who is gazing at himself in the mirror. For Daniel, this appreciation of his body and the way it looks (*good*, *in shape*) is followed up by *you look just fine*. As much as this suggests self-admiration it also seems to represent a form of reassurance to him. Looking *just fine* suggests that there might previously have been doubt about his appearance and that appreciating how his body looks now is both a reminder of this previous state and validation of the value he can now place on his visually pleasing body. Again, in this instance one sees one part of self take an assessing stance on another aspect of self in an approving manner. For Brandon, there is more of an assertion and the mirror becomes a confirmation of the ways in which his body has changed. Gazing in the mirror also provides him with a clear sense of pleasure (*I'm happy with what I see*) in the way his body looks now.

Other participants expressed a more qualified admiration of their bodies that were dependent on particular factors. For all of the participants having their own version of the ideal body was a condition that allowed them to indulge in appreciating how their bodies look/ed as they came to more closely approximate this personal ideal. Some of these prescriptions for warranting self-admiration were very clearly stated.

Chris: I do especially feel proud of, you know, when, when, when I do have a lot more muscle. Then, yah, if I put on some lean muscle then, yah, muscle mass. I think.

and

Researcher: ...what does it mean to you to feel like lean and proud of your body, what does that mean to you, how does it make you feel about yourself?

Thami: It made me feel good. I just think it made me feel good, yah, I just can't…yah, I was just like proud of my body and I just felt good about my body at that time, yah.

Chris implies that he already takes pride in the way his body looks by adding that this increases (*especially proud*) when he gains muscle mass. *Lean muscle mass* is of the highest value and therefore a condition to increase the amount of pride he takes in his appearance. For Thami admiring and feeling content with his body was something he experienced at a certain time in past (*at that time*). Similar to Chris there was something about being lean that made him take pride in his body and that was tied to experiencing his body as *good*. Thami also expresses a sense of loss when recalling that at a previous time he felt especially proud and by extension happy with his body. It was thus evident that participants held personal standards to which they held themselves accountable as part of their narcissistic investment in their bodies.

Andrew also expressed admiration and feeling content with his body. However, he was not completely satisfied as there was a sense that something was holding him back.

Andrew: Generally, I am happy though. Generally, I'm pretty happy with my body. Seventy percent of the time. (laughs softly)

For Andrew, there seems to be a part or parts of his body that is/are left wanting. It is evident from terms like *though* and *pretty happy* that his pleasure is qualified. His words suggest that if he could achieve a closer approximation to his ideal he might be happy more than *seventy percent of the time*. It is interesting that his level of self-admiration is quantified and has a numerical value assigned to it. Andrew also moves from a general sense of happiness to something more specific (*seventy percent of the time*). The addition of the phrase '*of the time*' also implies that his self-assessment changes. This might depend on his internal feeling states or the affirmation he receives from others. The specificity about what is required for full approval and admiration of his body also speaks of goals and aspirations where there is always room for improvement.

4.2.1.1. Self-improvement and the body under construction.

Andrew: Everything must just be bigger.

In considering self-admiration it appeared that adherence to a project of self-improvement was required in order to sustain approval of one's body. All of the participants expressed some preoccupation with self-improvement. For most, the wish was to build up something bigger and better. It was also a driving force in how they approached training and they seemed to conceptualise their bodies as ever-changing with the need for change to entail improvement rather than decay. This focus on self-improvement also spoke of a sense that whatever they achieved it might never be enough.

> *Chris: What is a perfect body that I would want or that I would be satisfied with? Uhm, right now as I sit here I still feel there's improvement. So the aspiration would be to improve.*

Chris clearly spells out that a perfect body is a constant work in progress and that the only way he will achieve a state of happiness with his body is if it is improved in some way. These kinds of comments, which were not peculiar to Chris, suggest that the *perfect body* and feeling *satisfied* are not static concepts. It seems that improvement in itself is the aspiration as opposed to achieving a fixed ideal. However, the emphasis on improvement links to the sense that this aspiration to become something even better remains beyond reach. Oliver spoke of an awareness of how unattainable goals may become.

> *Researcher: I'm wondering if you also have many, like, goals or aspirations?*
>
> *Oliver: Oh yes, (laughs) so I have but I can't seem to attain them. Obviously, the body that I was talking to you about, the one I was describing to you, I'd love to have my six-pack really, really, showing and just bam, there, hard rock abs, boof, you know.*

Oliver describes the body that he would love to reach and how that improvement would particularly mean well-defined abdominal muscles that have a striking visual impact. This can be seen in the way Oliver announces these *hard rock abs* with the words '*bam*' and '*boof*'. As concrete as these *abs* sound, they remain elusive and this is something Oliver is all too aware of (*I can't seem to attain them*).

With the use of the word '*better*' participants often expressed the vague and abstract idea of improvement. Thus narcissistic investment in the body, once operational, seems to set up further aspirations.

> *Leon: ...I just want to look as good as I can, better than I could have even imagined at this age or ever in my life*
>
> *Andrew: I see myself as a guy with a generally pretty good physique. Could be better. Could always be better (laughs).*
>
> *Chris: ...I'm still not in a space where I am happy. Where I look, not that I'm not comfortable, just not happy and I could look better. And I'm quite hard on myself.*

Leon and Andrew see improvement as gaining more than what they already value in their bodies. For Leon, this idea of his body being *better* is something that cannot even be captured in his mind (*better than I could have even imagined*). This ideal body that he is striving for seems to transcend the expectations of age or the entire time in which he has inhabited his body. As it is a body that transcends imagination and is portrayed in such an exceptional manner, it is the body that cannot be achieved but will always be wished for, setting up a kind of narcissistic longing to transcend limitations of body or effort. Andrew also uses the word 'better' and adds that his body, which is already to his liking, *could always be better*. Again there is the implication that it is hard to reach a point where one's body can be categorised as at its best (*always*). Chris speaks of an inner critic (*I'm quite hard on myself*), a voice that denies remaining satisfied with what one has achieved, something all of the participants mentioned in various ways. This inner critic is a driving factor for self-improvement and seems to shows little signs of abating once there is an awareness that one can affect change in outward appearance through exercise and diet. The quest for self-improvement remains a process in which participants hope to achieve a better state of body satisfaction and narcissistic enjoyment. The feeling of not being good enough also represents a form of narcissistic investment in self as Chris relates to his body in such a way that it determines how he feels about himself and in this instance his sense that he hasn't quite achieved what he should affects his self-esteem negatively.

Some participants were very specific about how they would like to improve. For both Brandon and Andrew it was about an increase in muscle and specifically looking *bigger*. There was also reference to specific parts of the body and how increasing their size in terms of muscle would either increase their happiness and approval of their own bodies or would aid them in responding to another critic – the community (both real and imagined).

> *Brandon: I think that there's a lot of competitiveness in the gay community. And I even see it myself sometimes, like, when I'm at the gym; shit, my arms could be bigger, or my chest could be bigger or I should... Maybe I should try what he's doing.*
>
> *Andrew: Always want it to be better though. Like, never happy. Everything must just be bigger.*
>
> *Researcher: Bigger?*
>
> *Andrew: Bigger arms, you know, bigger legs, bigger stomach, bigger chest, bigger everything.*

Brandon's improvement of his own body hinges at times on the competitiveness that he feels comes from outside of him. Comparison with others links to narcissism in how there is a need to feel valued, affirmed and even a sense of superiority in relation to others, in part to escape any shame that might be associated with falling short of what others can achieve. Self-improvement here is in response to not living up to the larger ideal that he assumes is held among gay men. (Here one sees that there is a powerful link between the theme of Narcissism and the Body Ideal theme). In response to seeing another man at the gym, sexual identity unknown, Brandon finds himself striving to live up to his achievements and here improvement would mean an increase in muscle mass in his arms and chest. However, Brandon also expresses that his feeling of competitiveness arises from a less self-assured place, venturing that by emulating the other man he might improve. This speaks of an internal policing that occurs within the individual as opposed to being externally enforced. Andrew repeats the idea that bigger is better and, like Brandon, also specifically refers to wanting to develop his arms and chest. It was interesting that Andrew included *bigger stomach* as this seemed to contradict the idea of leanness being valued. After being probed with regards to what he meant by *bigger* he added:

Researcher: So that's it. Just much bigger muscle...

Andrew: Yah, I won't say much but like... A decent amount, yah.

Bigger here is about an increase in muscle, with this muscle being **defined** as opposed to too bulky. This is interesting as it shows that the idea of self-improvement is to a degree uniquely personal, however much comparison plays a part. Each man's body ideal in which he is narcissistically invested might fall within the spectrum of the consensually understood ideal body explored in the previous section; however, it also remains a personal notion that for some is clear in denoting improvement but vague in what it might look like. That being said, it is also evident that for the men in the study the ideal body did not stray much from the shared ideal of attaining a body that appeared muscular, lean and athletic.

4.2.1.2. Avoidance of loss – Body, sexuality and desire.

Brandon: You know, you're going to lose everything.

Participants' self-admiration and desire for constant self-improvement seemed to be underpinned by a fear of losing what they had/have gained and attempts to retain their more acceptable bodies. Participants spoke of concerns about the consequences that would present themselves if they were to fall back. Investing in their bodies, and working to maintain and improve body shape was thus associated not only with a sense of personal triumph or potency but was also designed to ward off loss and what succumbing to a return to a less ideal-approximating body would mean. Thami expressed this as a fear of being feminised and cast out of society.

> *Thami: ...I think it goes towards that idea that I was speaking about, like the no fat, no fem, that idea that you don't want to be that outcast that's fat or fem. So, even like any kind of like masculinity that you can hold on to, and being so lean at the same time that you can avoid being outcasted in that kind of regard…*

For Thami leanness and masculinity needs to be held on to and maintained in order to remain accepted within society. Even though some might take pride in being *fat* and *fem* (as previously noted), the phrase *no fats, no fems* stands in juxtaposition to this and reflects greater society's rejection of people that embody such descriptors. For Thami the loss of leanness would mean the fear of losing masculinity and therefore lead to rejection from society. Avoidance of loss was also something that came up for some participants in terms of facing the process of ageing.

> *Chris: …there is definitely the aspiration to always look better. Even more better. Especially the fact that I'm now getting older as well, so there's a lot more to deal with.*

> *Leon: I don't know if my current trajectory is because I'm a gay male, um man, or holding on to youth or just the fact that I'm a 44-year-old man.*

For Chris self-improvement ties in with the process of ageing. Looking *better* becomes intensified (*even more better*) now that the ageing process adds additional obstacles and frustrates the work he puts into his body. Self-improvement for Chris becomes a way to avoid the loss that is associated with ageing. Leon mentions the impact of age as he reflects on the journey he has undertaken to achieve his version of the ideal body. He wonders whether it is a yearning to maintain his youth and the promise that held. However, he distinguishes *holding on to youth* from being a *44-year-old man*. By acknowledging his actual age Leon recognises that there is something about being 44 and that by working out he could be attempting to evade the ageing process and the loss of youthfulness that comes with it. These kinds of sentiments ventured by some participants are in line with findings from Drummond's (2006) study in which he found older gay men faced numerous difficulties with body image which affected their identity and confidence. These pressures were due to older gay men being confronted by a gay culture that particularly glorified youthfulness (Drummond, 2006). It is interesting that Leon also stresses maleness and being gay. This is something that will be explored in a further section. The avoidance of loss was also explored by Brandon and reflected a fear of losing the body he has worked so hard on and returning to the body he had before.

Brandon: I motivate myself. I actually pressure myself too much sometimes. As I said earlier, like, you know, I won't go to the gym for, like, I'll skip gym for a week because of other commitments that I have. And I feel... I would be so hard on myself in terms of, you know, ach god you'll go back to what you... What you were. You know, you're going to lose everything.

Brandon avoids the potential loss of his improved body to the extent that he chastises himself for not training. He admits that this is too punitive at times (*actually pressure myself too much sometimes*, *I would be so hard on myself*). However, he feels that there is too much at stake and that returning to his previous body, which in his case was thinner and less muscular, would mean the loss of much more than the body he has worked so hard for (*you're going to lose everything*). Following a continual rigorous training regimen at the gym means avoiding the loss of hard-won gains and the feelings of strength and control this brings, as well as avoiding the loss of the new self he has invested heavily in. There is a genuine fear that if he loses his body shape, by extension, he will lose the newfound sense of himself and the associated self-gratification it brings.

In keeping with the idea of loss, there is also something about retaining sexual desire. Oliver expressed the fear that losing his current bodily appearance would mean the loss of being desired sexually.

Oliver: …taking off your clothes in front of someone and they say, oh my god you have a bit of a tummy, alright, and you're like, oh shit…

Much like the other participants who suggest there may be value in exposing their bodies to others Oliver imagines a moment in which he might feel his current desirability would become compromised by some lack (*a bit of a tummy*). Again self-esteem is dependent on the gaze of the other person to trigger the validation or fear of denigration. Oliver's personal reference to what he believes would be seen as undesirable - '*a bit of a tummy*' - triggers a strong negative response of what seems like a surprise with underlying fear (*oh shit*). Loss of that leanness in the abdominal area means loss of being desirable to the other. It also comes at a time that is intimate and in which Oliver is vulnerable to the sting of rejection. With the pressure that comes from being lean with defined muscles, that are hard to the touch and clearly defined to the eye, it is highly probable that in his account (real or imagined) the other

person is policing or shaming Oliver's body. Both parties in this scenario engage in the dance of avoidance of loss of youthfulness or the body ideal. There is a reminder from the other person of what is at stake and a negative reaction from Oliver which impels him to train harder so as to ensure that he is not vulnerable to being shamed or found lacking in this way. In losing the ideal body Oliver would also lose his own narcissistic investment in his body and what he has achieved as well as the admiration from others which bolsters his investment in himself. The power of criticism or judgement from others to deflate his sense of self links to a fragile sense of narcissism and perhaps the fear of being easily injured in his own eyes and that of the community.

Leon associates his body with the retaining of his sexuality, particularly as a 44-year-old man.

> *Leon: So when you get into bed with a 44-year-old man, you need to expect a 44-year-old man. Hopefully, a 44-year-old man that looks the best that he's ever looked. (laughs).*

Leon is honest about his age and the limits that imply. He wants potential partners to know that this means (*you need to expect a 44-year-old man*). However, Leon mentions that physically appearing better than *he's ever looked* might mediate the negative impact age has on the retaining of sexuality. He would be able to retain the desire of the other by being the best version of his physical self despite the other party knowing his age.

4.2.2. Other admiration – *Oliver: Oh wow you look absolutely amazing…*

A different aspect of narcissistic investment that presented itself was what here has been termed "other admiration". As just discussed, the majority of participants engaged in self-admiration of their bodies and their training work, even if this admiration was sometimes qualified and was associated with vulnerability to failure. However, there was also discussion around the admiration participants received from others and the effect this has had on them as well as how they have made sense of their bodies. There was a considerable overlap between self-admiration and other admiration with the former often being dependent on or reinforced by the latter. Chris captures the relationship between these two concepts when he reflects on how self-admiration is influenced by other admiration.

Chris: This other day, this guy… Look you're pretty fine. Uhm but in, in, in some sense, I think everyone… Most people, I don't know, as people to… Can like feed, also feed off other people's response to how they look. And then it also kind of like has an influence in how you experience it to an extent and as I think… It also depends on how you then take that.

Most of the participants enjoyed the positive comments they had received from others. For some, the comments from friends provided a positive acknowledgement of how visually appealing they looked or how their hard training work was paying off.

Andrew: Most of my friends will always compliment, compliment me. And tell me how beautiful I am, which is really nice (short laugh).

Brandon: I enjoy the fact that people, my friends especially, when they go, wow, you've really done well.

Andrew particularly enjoys receiving compliments from the majority of his friends which he sees as a constant thing (*always*). It is interesting that his friends refer to him as *beautiful* as it is generally not a word associated with a ripped and toned male body. Yet here his body is associated with something picturesque, in essence, the body beautiful. For Brandon the compliments from his friends, more than others, provide a genuine acknowledgement of the effort he has put in. For both participants, the acknowledgement from their friends is meaningful because they are less complicated by the politics of desire as might be comments from other men, gay and straight. For Daniel, there is a continuation of enjoying admiration from others.

Daniel: When people say, "dude, I can see you've been working out" or "wow, you know, you look good", I mean, I'm really chuffed with myself, thank you. Yah, and yah, I better go back to the gym next week, we mustn't stop this.

Daniel finds satisfaction in the fact that his training at the gym has been made visible and other people are able to see this (*I can see you've been working out*) and in this way his bodily change is manifested as real to him. Daniel's delight at this is immediately followed

up by the fear of loss as he admits that if he stopped going to gym the visible changes will be lost and with this the admiration from others. Awareness of the desire for validation by others adds to the complexity of the situation as one wonders whether Daniel and the majority of the other participants are only able to fully confirm body changes through the reflection back of others or if their admiration is simply an added bonus that complements his own sense of self-worth associated with his altered appearance. This links to the narcissistic search for gratification through the sense of self-worth gained from other admiration (Freud, 1914/1995).

Leon recalls a time when a colleague saw him having broccoli and chicken for lunch. This colleague expressed her approval at his diet and acknowledged the value of the work that has gone into creating and maintaining his body.

> *Leon: …"look around you! You are already fucking gorgeous." (colleague) You know (laughing), it's maybe said in a jest, but I love that. It was a... even people at work are kind of seeing that I'm putting in an effort. And yah, look it makes you walk taller as well.*

The words of his colleague links with the fact that others at work are *seeing that I'm putting in an effort*. Leon changes the nature of the comment by adding that *it's maybe said in jest*. There is something about being praised in such a powerful way (*fucking gorgeous*) that perhaps makes it hard for Leon to accept this admiration even though he enjoys it. It is also important to note that this quote was shared with myself as the interviewer and should be understood within this context. It might have been part of a less serious exchange but it has still had an impact on how he feels recognised and seen by this colleague and others at work. The admiration of the *effort* he has put in is more acceptable to him. Again the idea comes up of others validating the change made visible and this kind of validation has such an impact that Leon is able to take up more space in the world (*walk taller*).

Andrew is very clear on what other admiration means to him. His honesty gives an interesting insight into how admiration from others drives him and gives him something that appears to be lacking.

Andrew: I feed off other people's energy. Definitely not an introvert (laughs) and I need that, like, what's the word I'm looking for..? Acceptance. And I want to draw people's attention. I like people looking at me and see them commenting and stuff. Makes you feel good so, yah, I definitely, I love it. It's my thing, yah. It makes me happy.

Andrew expresses a very primal response to the admiration of others. He gains energy and a sense of being alive from the appreciation others give him (*feed off other people's energy*). However, he adds that he yearns for *acceptance* and uses the word '*need*' indicating that this acceptance is something he cannot be without. There is a strong sense here of a need to belong and hoping for a sense of community as well as to find a supply for his own narcissistic investment (Fenichel, 1938). For Andrew this is found in the power he gains from others' approval of him based on his physique. He does not make it clear where the attention is coming from; however, his comments here speak of a man who wishes to be noticed by those around him. Andrew does not see his wish to be the centre of attention as a weakness and finds a sense of self and pride in being admired for his body (*it's my thing*). Gaining this power from the appreciation of his body is also very clear to him and he understands the currency attached to it.

Andrew: I know if I don't have a good body then... I rely on my body a hundred percent. Like a hundred percent. It's where my confidence comes from in everything. So, yah, if I don't have a good body I know... Nothing! Yah, there won't be any chances of, like, boyfriends or anything like that.

For Andrew, the absence of a good body means the loss of confidence and access to future partners that might sustain this confidence. His sense of self comes from his body and how that allows him to be appealing to others in all ways, it is his currency to relating.

Somewhat differently, Oliver comments on his need for admiration and that admiration from others remains something that he hopes to achieve. However, he is also honest in that he acknowledges that it is something that could only temporarily increase his confidence.

Oliver: …but I do have the aspirations of, of having a model's body and just taking my hand, my shirt off at the beach and everybody going, "oh wow you look absolutely

amazing". But that's in an egotistical level really [laughs] you know, just the ego to be boosted and for people to call you sexy and that's it.

Oliver imagines the day where he would be able to expose himself to the gaze of others by taking his shirt off. Being in public at the beach there is a hope that others will respond positively (*wow, you look absolutely amazing*). Oliver shows such insight into the reasons behind his aspirations when he acknowledges that his desire to be seen as physically *amazing* is further attached to how favourably he views himself (*just the ego to be boosted*).

However, for Brandon, there is also something negative and even hurtful in other admiration being tied to his physical appearance.

Brandon: I shouldn't all of a sudden be of interest to you, because (silent for a short period), things have improved.

After finally being noticed by someone he had romantic feelings for twelve years ago Brandon feels an emptiness in that only his body produced interest from this person. There is an acknowledgement that his own improvement is superficially validated and that he, as a fully realised person, has remained invisible. This might also explain why admiration from friends is so much more meaningful for him, as discussed earlier.

Considering the theme of narcissistic investment it was evident that the men in the study had invested in themselves as an object (body) or person who had come to possess this idealised body (or at least an approximation of it). This investment translated into overt self-admiration and by extension admiration for the work they put into sculpting their bodies. In reflecting on narcissism their bodies have become objects in which they have invested their sense of self-worth and from which they gain pleasure. This was clear in the words they used to describe themselves (*unique physique*, *did well*, *look good*, *in shape*, *fine*) and how they felt about themselves (*happy*, *proud*). What was important here was that this admiration was conditional on how the participants' bodies looked and performed, and was associated with achieving goals and standards that had to continuously be accomplished. This linked with self-improvement which was reflected in their *aspirations* for *better* and/or *bigger* bodies. It was also interesting that for the majority of participants self-improvement meant adherence to a process that could never be completed as the idealised version of the bodies they aspired to

could never be quite reached. With such high stakes, it is to be expected that participants would fear losing what they admire in their own bodies and the feelings of gratification this brought to them. The fear of loss was worsened by awareness of ageing and anxiety about losing the will to put in sufficient training effort.

The participants also enjoyed admiration from others which they received through compliments (*beautiful*, *pretty fine*, *done well*, *wow*, *good*, *gorgeous*) and being seen (*attention*). Admiration from others had a profound effect on participants which was mostly seen as positive and provided them with feelings of acceptance and happiness, However, there was also a different side to other admiration as some participants felt objectified by admiration or described it as something to *feed* off as if it provided something required in order to thrive. This links to others being a source of narcissistic supply that sustains their sense of self-worth (Fenichel, 1938).

What was interesting to note is that even though there was a distinction between self-admiration and other admiration, the two were interdependent and participants' admiration of themselves often relied on the fact that others would find them appealing as well. This could be seen in instances where participants admired themselves when their bodies were exposed after removing their shirts or wearing vests. The understanding here was that the fact that in their own assessment they appeared visually appealing this would mean that others might also view their exposed bodies as visually attractive. It was also seen that self-admiration or the lack thereof influenced how positively or not other admiration was interpreted.

Another interesting observation pertained to the manner in which participants spoke about their own bodies in a positive way. They were often embarrassed or explained that they were not being vain and maintained that they usually do not speak about being proud of their bodies but that the interview focus had invited this. For some participants speaking about themselves in this way was either culturally inappropriate or seen as socially conceited. This being said, the majority of participants were happy to engage in discussion about their bodies. However, they did not appear to admire themselves excessively in the manner in which they spoke during the interviews. This was also seen in how some made qualifying or joking comments about the self or other admiration and it was also apparent that they more easily took in positive commentary about their bodies if this was linked to an appreciation of the effort they expended to look the way they did. This indicates that for a lot of the men their

narcissistic investment did take on aspects of being more preoccupied with their bodies as an extension of themselves. However, the men understood their own failures and how being overly self-involved might perhaps be seen as something vain and conceited. This presents a more nuanced picture than the literature which often refers to narcissism in gay men as a self-absorbed way of being in the world where the focus on the body is purely for the sake of status and being seen as desirable (Duncan, 2007, 2010b; Higgins, 2006; Kane, 2009).

Lunbeck (2014) reviewed the differences in how Kohut and Kernberg considered narcissism. For Kohut there is a more positive conceptualisation of narcissism which involves "strivings for self-realization, legitimized worldly ambition" and "the pursuit of values, goals, and ideals expressive of the highest in human nature" (Lunbeck, 2014, p. 5). However, Kernberg focused on the negative aspects of narcissism such as "grandiose, entitled, ruthless, filled with rage and lacking in empathy" and comes to the conclusion that "beneath the seductive surface these narcissists were satisfyingly miserable" (Lunbeck, 2014, p. 5). Kernberg's conceptualisation of narcissism became the standard way of approaching the term and now occupies the mind of society and popular psychology (Lunbeck, 2014). For the men in this study their bodies have become a means to invest in themselves for their own satisfaction and for gaining satisfaction through the eyes of other admiration and appreciation. The narcissistic investment here seems to be more focused on ambition and pushing themselves further in their aspirations for themselves and the way they appear to others. The possibility of a self-obsessed vanity does exist yet it would be dependent on how their efforts are framed within broader society, which comes with its own bias, or whether their behaviour reaches a level extreme enough to be destructive. For the men in this study there are positives and negatives pertaining to narcissistic investment. However, the overall picture is far more complex and perhaps far more constructive than destructive.

4.3. Engagement with the Practice: Pleasure, Chore, Addiction

Andrew: For me it's just effort…

This theme was identified as it presented throughout the interviews in the way participants discussed their relationship to exercising and going to the gym. As the title of the theme suggests there are various ways in which men experience training and this then has an impact on how they engaged with the practice.

For some of the participants there was an element of pleasure and achievement gained from training. The experience of connecting his thinking with the way he inhabits his body gives Leon a sense of enjoyment.

> *Leon: There's certain exercises where, if you do cable rows, where you can easily lean into the shoulders. But then if you're doing chest, you need to lead with the chest. So, it's really connecting the mind with certain muscles that are... That we are actually unaware of. And that's what, what I'm connecting to at the moment in the gym that I really thoroughly enjoy.*

It is clear that Leon is very invested in training at the gym. He is able to refer to more technical terms such as *cable rows* and takes pleasure in explaining how certain muscles (*shoulders*, *chest*) are activated and the process with which each exercise connects a muscle with movement (*lean into*, *lead*) and how this requires him to actively think about his body and what he is doing. There is a sense of mindfulness as training allows Leon to be present in the moment and engaged with his body. This is also where he derives his pleasure from. There seems to be a way in which he is able to escape from the world outside by focusing his thoughts on the practice of training at the gym. Both Daniel and Brandon make clearer reference to this enjoyable aspect of training.

> *Daniel: I feel better, not so frustrated, my head's clearer, and so I really try regardless of deadlines to go two or three times a week.*

> *Brandon: But for me now, it's become a hobby. It's become a lifestyle. So, I'm quite ex... It's something I enjoy doing. It's actually, it's a form of escapism for me.*

and

> *Brandon: ...I'm doing something good for my body. And that's what I enjoy about the gym. And it's great stress relief.*

Aside from being a way to relieve himself of a stressful life outside of gym, Brandon also mentions that he is doing something that is healthy and that provides his body with something of value (*good*).

Brandon: You know when you're standing in the mirror? And, you know, you're exercising your shoulders or whatever it is and you're pulling up that weight, and you see the muscle growing. And... like, if you physically almost like, you know, you just... You know, you're doing something good to your body. And that is such a thrill. That is such a thrill.

Brandon becomes focused at gym and in that present moment he is able to see the weights move and a particular muscle responding and improving (*growth*). Here the mirror is not only a way to engage in self-admiration. The mirror also provides Brandon with a visual and dynamic image of his engagement with the practice of training and how his body responds. Brandon became very excited to explain how pleasurable this was which can be seen in how he struggled to find the right words before *you're doing something good to your body*. The pleasure in doing that is such a powerful driving force to him (*such a thrill*) and speaks of a true sense of exhilaration. Daniel also spoke of how pleasurable training is for him. However, Daniel also mentioned how difficult it was as well as enjoyable.

Daniel: ...he (a friend) introduced me to CrossFit and I simultaneously hated and loved it. It was really hard but then I just loved the way it was structured, it was programmed and everything, and so I continued.

Researcher: And would you say you now still equally love and hate it or..?

Daniel: Yah, definitely. It's hard, I hate doing it while I'm there, then afterwards I feel really good and the hour I'm there, I absolutely hate it, and afterwards, it was so good, I'm going back next time.

For Daniel, CrossFit provided him with a structured training programme that made the experience enjoyable (*I just loved the way it was structured*). Aside from the structure, Daniel stressed that it was enjoyable because it made him *feel really good*. However, feeling this sense of pleasure was inseparable from the hard work that he puts into his training session. The hard work is rewarded as opposed to being a chore which he wishes to be over. Daniel also enjoys the challenge and emerging victorious from each session.

However, for some participants training was only mentioned as being a chore.

> *Oliver: I'm terrible at waking up in the morning and going to the gym; I'm terrible at convincing myself to go to the gym after work.*

For Oliver there is often a general feeling that gym is something that needs to get done, but that it is hard work to pursue. Going to the gym seems to constantly be on his mind and is experienced as almost an interference in his life. There is something about going to gym that makes it seem like a job as opposed to something that is enjoyably challenging or pleasurable. For Chris there is also a sense of effort and hard work that seems to be driven by an inner critic that expects more of him.

> *Chris: Not the best. Can be better. I want to put in the effort, and the extra time and the diet. Which is the hardest part of it.*

For Chris the use of words like *effort*, *extra*, and *hardest* all sound suggest engagement in an activity that is difficult yet necessary to improve. Andrew echoes the use of the word '*effort'* when he speaks about training.

> *Andrew: Some people, like, love it. They really do love it. For me it's just effort.*

Andrew acknowledges that some people find pleasure from training. However, it is only hard work for him (*for me it's just effort*). When asking him a question to ascertain how he sustains going to the gym regularly, Andrew then explained that the gain was admiration. Training was therefore a means to an end, a chore that paid off in other ways.

> *Andrew: Yah, for me I gym because I want to look good. I don't gym because I love it and it's a passion of mine and... I gym because I know it's good for me and I want to look good. It's the reasons why I gym.*

Andrew is clear on his reasons for going to the gym. Much like an employee works for a salary Andrew trains in order to *look good*. He adds that similar to Brandon he knows that it is *good* for him yet this knowledge does not provide him with the same pleasure Brandon gains from training. Thami also referred to exercising as a means to an end.

> *Thami: Yah, so I try not to gain too much of weight, so I have picked up a lot of weight and I think that it's just like being lazy and being like being constrained of time, but like I try to exercise at least, like, let's say 3 to 4 times a week…*

For Thami, who engages in endurance training more than strength training, the reason for exercising is to remain lean. He mentions that he has gained some weight and attributes this to his own lack of self-discipline (*lazy*) or time constraints that are outside of his control. He uses the word '*try*' when referring to exercise which suggests it is something that requires effort and is not always possible.

There was also a sense that training had the potential to become addictive for some individuals. It seemed like the pleasure and the focus on one's body might lead to a person becoming engrossed in their training. Out of all the participants, only Brandon mentioned a period of time in which training took on this quality for him.

> *Brandon: I did at one point (twice a day), but I was wearing myself out. I was just... It wasn't sustainable. So now I go... I go four times a week. And then if I can, on the weekends.*

and

> *Brandon: Then started training four to five times a week. And then I obviously started seeing the results. And then it became an addiction.*

Brandon did not say much more on this topic and later on added that training is more of a hobby for him now, as seen in one of the previous quotes. For Brandon, the result from going numerous times a week was expected yet became a powerful enough reinforcement for him to label his training that followed *an addiction*. However, as negative as the assumption of addiction might be Brandon only mentioned that this intensity and thereby the frequency of practice was unsustainable. Leon also referred to training taking on an addictive potential. However, this was from his point of view as an observer of other men at the gym.

Leon: And I feel some guys actually lose that track of when do you... When are you actually going too far and it's detrimental to your overall health.

For Leon, the pleasure aspect of training has been stripped away and training actually comes at the expense of health. Leon sees these men as losing *track* of the reason why they go to gym and this might be due to reasons such as body dissatisfaction or the wish to gain more muscle regardless of their appearance. However, this is unclear as Leon only refers to these men as looking disproportionate and as being somewhat obsessed with their training regimen.

For the men in this study, there were varied experiences of their engagement with training with the two broad categories being training as pleasurable and training as a chore. Addiction as a category was mentioned but failed to manifest in a clear and distinct way as an experience of the men in this group. Participants were clear about how they engaged with the practice of training as either pleasurable (*enjoy*, *relief*, *thrill*, *loved it*, *feel really good*) or as a chore (*convincing myself*, *effort*, *hardest*, *try to exercise*). This contrasts somewhat with Brown and Graham's (2008) study which reported that straight men rather than gay men experienced exercise as fun. However, it also supports their study as it illustrated training for gay men as something that had to be done in order to reap the benefits of an improved physical appearance and therefore a chore, lacking in fun and to get out of the way. Another participant valued both aspects and so for him, the pleasure came after putting in the effort (*I hate doing it while I'm there, then afterwards I feel really good*). Engaging in training in varied ways also brought about the question of motivation. It was clear that some participants had a harsh inner critic that could either motivate them to return to the pleasure of training or enforce the high expectations they have of themselves that requires laborious effort. For some training was about the joy of feeling their bodies change and move whereas for others it was about improving their physical appearance by putting in the hard work and extended hours at the gym. Any mention of training as feeling addictive at points did not come close to what might be considered a pathological practice. What is interesting to note here is that frequency of training, or excessive exercise, is often used as an indicator to determine addictive behaviour due to body dissatisfaction. However, within this group of participants, there was a suggested link between pleasure and time at the gym that raises interesting questions around whether the frequency of exercising is always a valid indicator of an addictive propensity.

4.4. Community: Belonging and A Shared Experience

Brandon: none of us set out to become mates…

This theme came across in the way participants saw themselves and their interaction with others at the gym. Aside from speaking about the act of training and various exercises, it was quite pertinent that for some of the men there was a feeling of community at the gym they frequent whereas for others this was not the case. Not much literature exists on the topic which makes it an interesting area to explore.

For some of the participants being at gym surrounded by others with similar goals and aspirations through training felt like interacting with a community of individuals. There was both a sense of belonging and a sense of a shared experience. Leon felt particularly strong about the sense of community he found with others at the gym.

> *Leon: And that sense of community comes up for me. Like going to the gym, even if my trainer is not with me, I go there and they, you know, people that never speak to me will walk up to me and say, but where's Thato (Leon's personal trainer) today because you two are always together. You know it's like a community. I think the older I get, the more I start... I'm starting to value having these communities because I don't have a wife. I don't have kids. I don't have, you know, do the school runs and expand on my circle of friends by going to two-year-old birthday parties here. I'm finding that I'm actually doing that in, in the gym.*

Leon finds value in the interactions he has with others at the gym. Being seen and remembered by other people at gym, even those that he has not had any previous direct interaction with means that he belongs to a space. Others remember the times that he spends with his trainer and that sense of being together and people knowing about each other is of value and importance to him. This is clear in the repetition of the word '*community*' and Leon observes that being a single gay man has meant that his life has moved in a different direction from the way it might have if he had conformed to more heteronormative expectations. Without a *wife* and *kids* and all of the social interactions parents have with other parents (*school runs*, *birthday parties*) Leon finds connection and engagement with others at the gym. According to Kimmel, Rose and David (2006) some gay men find ways to choose their

own family, or in this sense community when they do not have access to a family of their own.

For Brandon there is also a sense of community to be found at the gym.

> *Brandon: It's just such a community. And we've got this... There's this group, we don't train together, but we're always at the gym at the same time. So you kind of do your rounds as you do your circuit, or whatever you're doing and you just say "Hi".*

Again it is being surrounded by others at the gym and feeling a sense of belonging in knowing that most of them would be there *at the same time* that is pleasurable to Brandon. Even though men at the gym are not training together they are still engaged in the same kind of training and there is enough familiarity to interact in a friendly way with each other. Brandon is also able to clearly define this sense of community as one that happens within the walls of the gym. It is important and meaningful to him (*camaraderie*, *friendships*) yet it does not extend into his life outside of gym.

> *Brandon: Like I said, I had not had a social experience with anybody at gym. Outside of the gym. But we... There's this sense of camaraderie and this, this, I'll almost go as far as calling it friendships, that you have. But it never goes beyond that. It's just at the gym.*

It emerges that the sense of community develops not only from belonging to a space but also from sharing the experience of training with others there. Leon mentions this twice as a crucial element to the sense of community generated a the gym.

> *Leon: You know, I don't have a family. You know, I don't have a wife and kids and, and to a certain extent it's like, it's like a family. Because we have this shared experience in the gym of, you know, training…*

and

> *Leon: You know, but still there's that acknowledgement of a shared experience. We are there at 5 o'clock in the morning, you know…*

Leon mentions the fact that he does not have a *wife* and *kids* for a second time and suggested that a sense of family can be found in the shared experience of training at the gym. Belonging is brought alive by not only knowing but also understanding the hard work that those who train with regularity put into looking the way they do. Sacrificing their sleep and free time shows dedication which outsiders simply would not understand.

It is important to note that Thami, Chris and Oliver did not mention any sense of community, related to being at their gym. This made Brandon and Leon's experience very different from theirs. Andrew did speak of the community that exists at gym, but indicated that this is not something that he wants to be a part of.

> *Andrew: I just kind of go in, train, mind my own business and leave again.*

and

> *Andrew: Like, when I'm in that kind of space I just work out and get out. I don't want to sit there and chat and extend this thing. Sort of get it over with.*

For Andrew going to the gym is for the sole purpose to train. He keeps to himself at gym with the aim to leave as soon as he is done. He admits that there is a sense of community others might engage in (*sit there and chat*). However, for him, this would simply increase the time he is at gym. The aspect of gym being a chore comes across strongly here and therefore engaging in any sense of community would simply prolong the job that needs to get done. This is interesting to note as the participants that found training more of a chore either did not refer to a sense of community at gym or in Andrew's case acknowledged it but did not want to be a part of it. The participants that found pleasure in training at the gym felt strongly about being part of a community and enjoyed this experience. It could be that finding training enjoyable makes them more open to experiencing a sense of community. However, the inverse could also be true in that it might be that having a sense of community at gym increases how pleasurable the activity is or becomes. It is more probable; however, that the two are strongly interrelated as opposed to having a cause and effect relationship.

For Daniel, the sense of community in CrossFit was something that existed. However, it did not seem to take on a personal sense of engagement or belonging for him.

> *Daniel: …that's the whole thing with CrossFit, it's about the community right, and I think before I moved back to South Africa, I was at a CrossFit gym in Hong Kong and there was more a community vibe. But yah, I think I've always struggled to find my community, especially now that I'm back. It's, like, but who is my community?*

For Daniel, in considering a more personal sense of community it does not lie with training for him. He looks beyond this and acknowledges that while he has needed to belong to a community he cannot seem to find one in which he easily fits in South Africa. It also seems that without an understanding of who he is he does not know where he belongs (*but who is my community?*).

The men in the study either expressed strong opinions concerning their sense that the gym provided them with a community or did not mention this aspect of training at all. For those that experienced a sense of community and shared experience, they found this to be valuable and meaningful (*camaraderie*, *family*). The gym seemed to fulfil a need to feel as if they were going through this experience together and in some instances was referred to as providing a family of sorts when there was no family available in the traditional sense. It was also clear that one participant acknowledged the existence of a gym community but rejected it (*I just work out and get out*). It is interesting to note that the participants who experienced pleasure from training found a sense of community at the gym. Another interesting point is that the larger theme of community for gay men came into play in this aspect of the discussion and opened up some conversation about where one might feel a sense of belonging as a gay man.

4.5. Maleness and Masculinity – *Andrew: just a bunch of boys…*

This theme featured significantly in the interviews as participants relayed how their gay identity has been influenced by the dominant discourse of heterosexual masculinity. As the theme suggests as men self-identified as gay, their maleness appeared to be transformed through possessing a toned and muscular body.

Duncan (2007) found that gay men he interviewed associated a muscular body with an affirmation of masculinity amongst gay men. Being muscular was associated with various qualities such as confidence, occupying a higher social status and being respected (Duncan, 2007).

Participants all had a sense of what masculinity stood for and for the majority of participants there was overlap in their constructions of what constituted a masculine appearance or body type. In exploring his thoughts on the topic Andrew painted a picture of what a masculine man looked like to him.

> *Andrew: If I want to describe someone as masculine. I'm seeing a big, tall guy, well-built. Straight-acting I assume. Proud, strong.*

For Andrew, a man that is masculine has a physical sense of being *big*, *tall* and *well-built*. Possessing these qualities makes the man in question a dominant force and this body is also embodied with qualities that are captured in the words '*proud*' and '*strong*'. Andrew also adds that his assumption would be that this man is *straight-acting*. The term 'straight-acting' is well-known within gay culture and defines gay men that do not engage in any stereotypical gay or effeminate behaviour (Eguchi, 2009). Gay men that are straight-acting rather behave within the parameters of what is considered 'normal' for men and acceptable within hegemonic framings of masculinity (Eguchi, 2009; Martino, 2006). According to Eguchi (2009) straight-acting gay men do not stand out as different from other men due to their same-sex attraction but fit more seamlessly into mainstream society.

What is interesting is that Andrew says this image of a masculine man is straight-acting as opposed to assigning a label such as gay, bisexual or straight. This means that whether the man in question is gay, bisexual or straight is seemingly irrelevant. However, acting implies not only appearing straight if one is but for gay men, it is often about performance and playing a role. Given the topic of the research, it is likely that Andrew assumes the discussion is largely about gay men. What counts here is the fact that this man who appears potent and proud with an imposing physique, and possessing that which captures the essence of a masculine body, is straight-acting.

Daniel also expressed a similar idea by explaining the politics of desire and masculinity in the gay social world.

> *Daniel: …when I engage with gay people and dating apps and gay social media groups, it's definitely the, you know, masc for masc. When I say masculine-masculine, it means you are straight-acting.*

Here Daniel makes the clear connection between being masculine and acting 'straight'. In this instance, he refers to the desire that exists within the gay dating world for men that embody this masculinity and appear to be straight. The more recent term '*masc for masc*' is mostly used within gay dating applications for smartphones to denote men that describe themselves as masculine looking for other masculine men (Conner, 2019). A participant in Conner's (2019) study refers to his disdain for the term and associates it with men that "*spend their life at the gym*" (p. 404). Using the 'masc for masc' descriptor is also a way to get around the more negative statement of 'no fats, no fems'. However, Daniel was quick to point out that a muscular body on its own did not necessarily translate into being viewed as a masculine man.

> *Daniel: …when I see a very buff man I will say yes, that's very masculine. But as soon as there's female mannerisms coming through, I'd be like, oh, okay. Yah, I don't know if I would categorise you or classify you as masculine anymore.*

This links with Andrew's earlier point about a masculine man having a well-built body and being potent and strong. As the well-built (*buff*) body denotes masculinity this association can also be revoked when feminine qualities are present. The majority of participants agreed with this and did not think that a muscular man always meant a man that represented the hallmark of masculinity.

> *Chris: You would assume that a big muscle guy is masculine, so I think that's the, that's the… that's the initial impression that you would have, but no it doesn't because I've come across big muscle guys that's as camp as can be.*

Andrew: ...you might look masculine, you know, but then you open your voice, you have this, like, extremely gay voice which won't be considered masculine to other people.

Brandon: I'm more muscular than my husband. But I'm not more masculine.

Thus it appeared that muscularity was necessary for a masculine appearance but was not sufficient as in order to be viewed as fully or acceptably masculine one also had to manifest behaviour, voice and mannerism that could be termed 'straight-acting'.

4.5.1. Muscular and masculine: The route to belonging.

Oliver: one of the boys…

It is important to note that the majority of participants saw a muscular male body as one that could belong in a heteronormative society. As evidenced in some of the interviews acceptance from straight men was particularly valued and the access they gained through altering their appearance towards a more normative masculinity seemed to give them better purchase in the world. For some, it meant blending in and being seen for their maleness and masculinity as one that belongs. For Thami this came across strongly in his reflection on being muscular among others in society.

Thami: I think those things such as being muscular or being feminine play a part in that because should a muscular guy sit across the table, sit around, that the assumption does not exist whether he is gay or not, unless they say so.

Throughout his interview Thami used the words 'muscularity' and 'masculinity' almost interchangeably. However, he was clear in making a distinction where he felt it necessary to illustrate particular points at times in the interview. In the above quote, it can be seen that he views muscularity as distinct from *being feminine*. When this *muscular guy* sits as an equal around a table or facing those that might question him he is accepted and his sexual orientation cannot be brought into question. This acceptance involves an ability to disguise gayness where being gay is equated with not being masculine. Muscularity combined with maleness makes it easier here to gain a sense of agency. The *muscular guy* is no longer outed

wherever he goes or by whom he is around. Rather he has a say in the matter and is able to disclose as and when he wishes to (*unless they say so*).

The use of the word 'gayness' above refers to the quality of being gay and acting gay or effeminate (Clarkson, 2007). The use of the word in this way is due to a societal attribution of being gay which has essentially fused gayness with femininity (Clarkson, 2007). This type of association particularly irked Andrew and he mentioned it numerous times during his interview.

> *Andrew: The only thing, the only link that you can say for gay men… The only link to me is, I like a man. I find men attractive and I have emotional attachments to men. That's all. That is it. They can't link anything else to it for me. Yah. Because that doesn't make any sense.*

Daniel mentioned the link between gayness and muscularity and how they seem to be negatively correlated with each other.

> *Daniel: But if you are more muscular it would be like, first of all if they don't know, they'd be like, oh, he's not gay.*

It is evident for Daniel that being *more muscular* also means that your gayness remains hidden and unknown to others. It illustrates how being muscular and masculine are equated with each other when participants were not asked questions that clearly allowed them to distinguish whether these two concepts go hand in hand. This indicates a dominant discourse that permeates the subconscious of a lot of gay men. The message is that muscularity in itself is masculinity unless it is tarnished through visible gayness (seen as femininity).

For Oliver having a lean and muscular physique, complemented by being masculine, allowed acceptance, safety and an added dimension of desirability for gay men.

> *Oliver: Women love you because of your body type, men kind of look at you and think, oh, this guy's quite attractive and because you're masculine they think you are their equal. They're more prone to invite you out for a beer or a drink; they don't feel that*

> *you are going to hit on them; they associate you as one of the boys so it's easier to be accepted in social heterosexual spaces.*

Oliver mentions that both women and men find this physique appealing and *attractive*. For women, there is a *love*, almost an adoration, in response to this *body type*. Men find a sense of attraction to this physique and interestingly Oliver does not distinguish whether they are gay, bisexual or straight. It seems as if they are straight because there is an implication that having this physique provides a sense of equality with men that are not interested in other men sexually (*don't feel you are going to hit on them*). This is interesting then as being found *quite attractive* by these men means that the word '*attractive*' is associated with an appeal that is not necessarily sexualized. For Oliver, his lean, muscular body type imbues him with a masculine quality that makes him an equal among other men. This automatically makes you *one of the boys*. Having a muscular male body, combined with masculine mannerism, speaks of privilege and automatic access to a heteronormative society.

For Leon gay men can compete to be viewed as fully masculine through training, which provided the opportunity for a more level playing field.

> *Leon: ...because maleness, you know, stereotypical straight maleness is all about maleness, it's quite nice to have this gymming, fit component to compete with that. It's like in your face.*

The feeling of equality his body brings for Leon allows him to overcome inadequacy he may have experienced in positioning himself relative to *stereotypical straight maleness*. Matching his appearance with both the strength training of *gymming* and the athletic *fitness* is a source of felt power and agency. The scales in a power imbalance between men of different sexual orientation can be tipped. There is also something vengeful in standing up to implied past injustice (*it's like in your face*). It is interesting that this balancing is achieved by becoming physically stronger and more powerful by going to the gym. For Leon belonging comes in being able to compete as an equal without being disadvantaged by social perceptions of gayness.

4.5.2. Muscular and masculine: A route to defending.

Daniel: they might think twice…

In keeping with the ability to assert themselves due to having a muscular, lean body the majority of the participants felt that this type of body would provide a sense of safety from homophobia or an ability to prevent attacks from other men. Only Chris and Leon did not reference having a sense of greater self-protective capacity as they did not feel threatened by homophobia in their day to day life.

Researcher: how do you think of it being like a protection against homophobia, for example, in a muscular body? Muscle?...

Chris: Yeah uhm, not in my mind, not in my view because I, it could be, but I wouldn't relate to that because for me it's not…

Leon: I don't like 'protect' because I've never felt threatened.

What is interesting here is that perhaps Chris and Leon feel safer as they are living in Johannesburg, a large city with more moderate to liberal views on being gay, and perhaps because of their working environments.

However, other participants had felt that there were threats particularly in smaller South African cities, towns or townships.

Andrew: …no one's going to guess that I'm gay. If they're not gay. They'll (gay people will) see it. But yah, definitely I think it can be a protection.

Daniel: …if you are more muscular it would be like, first of all if they don't know, they'd be like, oh, he's not gay. But if they do know then I think they might think twice before provoking or attacking or anything, as it's like I don't know, maybe this guy is stronger than me.

Oliver: Definitely, it is a protection against homophobia because also because if you come out as strong and masculine and people are afraid to fight you or attack you

because they don't think they will win that fight; this man goes to the gym so he must know a bit of Tai Chi or Karate or something you know.

Thami: So, society also is more accepting of like the more muscular gay than they are of the more feminine gay so I think that people also want to jump into that idea that I've got that kind of protection and it's not… I won't be gay-bashed as much as the other individual.

All of the participants referenced muscularity or appearing fit as something that might intimidate other men in some instances and would either protect them in remaining undetected as gay or if they were recognised to be such might mean that it was less likely that physical violence would be enacted on them.

Brandon also felt that his muscularity was a way to protect himself against attacks from men that appeared to be homophobic.

Brandon: …it felt so good because I could do that. I was strong enough to do that. So, yes, I felt incredibly masculine after that because I just hit the shit out of him. He was forced to leave the bar because they saw I didn't start the fight. But it was a good feeling to know that I was strong enough to do that. Not that I'm proud of the fact that I hit someone but, I mean, I was kind of protecting myself.

Here Brandon recalls a past incident where another man tried to attack him while he was out at a bar in Bloemfontein, the same city with a predominantly conservative population that Andrew refers to above. Brandon finds joy in being potent and strong enough to make use of his body in such a masculine way. He states that he did this to protect himself from being attacked (*because they saw I didn't start the fight*) and even though he indicates that he should perhaps not take pride in this behaviour he does feel proud of being able to stand up for himself and come out victorious. The attacker seems to be a straight man who was acting in an aggressive homophobic manner. The fact that Brandon could meet this masculine aggression with his own masculinity and strong muscular body has a profound meaning for him (*I felt incredibly masculine after that because I just hit the shit out of him*). Being able to answer violence perpetrated by other men with a violent response, due to his strength, means

that Brandon did not have to be the victim here. This provides him with, not only safety but a more dominant position within a power imbalance.

4.5.3. Straight and gay attention: Male gaze and gayze.

Leon: It's like a man admiring…

Some participants also found an appreciation for their bodies from other men that was different from the sexual desire they felt came from other gay men.

> *Andrew: I guess attention from a straight guy is more clean as opposed to… A gay guy might be a bit more flirty and, like, come from a different angle.*

and

> *Andrew: …when gay guys are looking at you they want to know what you look, like, without clothes (laughs). As opposed to a straight guy just kind of saying, oh that's a nice bicep, you have a really good trap, you know, that sort of thing.*

For Andrew, there is a distinction to be made between straight and gay male attention. The use of the word '*clean*' to describe straight male attention is particularly interesting as it implies there is something about gay male attention that subverts and soils an appreciation of the male muscular body. The sense of purity here is derived from the straight male appreciation being stripped of the sexual desire that is believed to come from gay men (*flirty*, *without clothes*). With a straight man, the attention to the muscular male body is centred on clear cut technical terminology and acknowledgement of the development of certain muscles (*nice bicep*, *really good trap*). It is as if the body being fragmented into separate muscles reduces the homoerotic association with appreciation from straight men. However, it is interesting to note that Andrew did not refer to gay sexual desire as dirty. Rather he seems to use the term *clean* to refer to a more clinical appreciation.

Leon also mentioned the difference between attention and acknowledgement between gay and straight men.

> *Leon: You know, you want... It is nice to feel that somebody would want you. And, and not necessarily want you in a sexual way. You know, it's nice to have a straight man look at you. I actually went to gym the other day and a straight guy came up... I think*

he was straight. And he actually, ach, he just made a comment about the fact that he sees me at the gym a lot and he's really seeing some fundamental changes there. You know, it's like a man admiring... So, it's not just desiring.

His use of the words '*somebody would want you*' entails desire that is not only sexual. The use of the word '*want*' is very interesting as there is something inherently sexual about it. Yet for Leon, a straight man at gym *admiring* the visible changes in his body is a way to feel wanted in a way that is *admiring* rather *than desiring*. There is also something about the idea of being wanted that speaks of a more competitive element. As opposed to possessing the other man's muscular body in a sexual way it is rather the desire to possess his muscular body as their own. Admiration then comes with the desire to **be** this body as opposed to **being with** this body.

4.5.5. Embodiment: Muscular, potent and strong.

Chris: It's just being a male.

All of the participants could see how possessing a muscular body provided them with a feeling of being equal, accepted or protected when they were among straight men. However, they were clear that these lean, muscular and ideal bodies had to be embodied with masculinity in multiple ways in order for them to ensure and assert a space within heteronormative society. Duncan (2010a, 2010b) speaks of a type of embodiment in gay men that is described as a way in which they are able to use their bodies to perform masculinity. This performance of masculinity allows them to redefine their social standing within heteronormative society (Duncan, 2010a). As a muscular body speaks of masculinity the embodiment thereof becomes a way in which gay men negotiate their identities and how they interact with the world (Duncan, 2007, 2010a). According to Duncan (2010a, 2010b) this provides a different way of understanding muscular and masculine bodies as opposed to the dominant discourse of body dissatisfaction and the shunning of femininity (Duncan, 2010a).

For participants inhabiting their own bodies had an impact on how they saw themselves and how they interacted with the world.

Leon: Even people at work are kind of seeing that I'm putting in an effort. And yah, look it makes you walk taller as well. I sat in a meeting today and I really did

experience a level of confidence that, that emanated from, from a different place than before.

For Leon, the hard work that he has dedicated to building a lean, athletic and muscular body has imbued him with confidence. The fact that his colleagues are able to notice gives him the confirmation that he has indeed changed. This adds to his confidence and possessing a muscular body is experienced as being embodied with masculinity. The change in relating happened due to the changes in his body. Confidence is associated with being a more active agent – how he is embodied becomes an aspect of his identity. For Brandon, there is also a sense of strength to be found in his muscular body.

Brandon: I'm not going to go looking for trouble. But if trouble comes looking for me, I'm not going to run away. So it has... It definitely has given me a sense of empowerment.

Brandon appreciates the greater sense of agency given to him due to the body he has (*empowerment*). For Daniel having a muscular body had a different effect on his way of being in the world.

Daniel: ...people would say Daniel, since you came out you have become a bit more, you know, feminine. It's there, it's much more noticeable now that you're out. I am trying to link it to what you said, I think it is that. Not necessarily the body, the buff, but the how I present myself using my body, has changed from making sure that I'm very straight acting, to it is fine, whatever it is now. How I sit and how I talk is okay.

Daniel speaks of a change occurring in the way he makes use of his body after he has come out to others. Even though his body is *buff* this in itself has not generated the change. Rather the way in which he inhabits this *buff* body and presents himself by making use of his body has generated change. Daniel has been able to let go of his fears around appearing 'gay' to others by no longer constantly ensuring that he is acting straight. His body along with being open about his sexual identity has led him to feel comfortable with the way in which he inhabits his body.

The participants saw a muscular man, when viewed as a static entity, as a man that is inherently masculine. This was referenced in words ascribed to the muscular and masculine man (*big*, *tall*, *well-built*, *muscle*, *buff*, *straight-acting*, *masculine*, *maleness*, *gymming*, *fit*, *strong*, *confidence*, *empowerment*). The use of the word 'straight-acting' particularly indicated how masculinity still fell within the domain of the heterosexual male and that gayness was constantly still potentially associated with the feminine. This did not seem to generate from a sense of misogyny in which the participants wanted to disassociate from femininity themselves, rather it reflected their awareness of a society imbued with hegemonic masculinity in which looking and acting 'straight' provided a way for a lot of participants to belong, integrate and protect themselves from a more threatening, often misogynistic, world. There was also a felt acceptance that came with the attention of straight men whether it was in how straight men paid attention to their bodies, found them interesting and worthy or allowed them into their spaces without questioning them. It was also evident that some participants were able to talk about how they felt differently embodied. Some revelled in the potency and strength provided by their bodies whereas others valued the confidence their bodies gave them to behave in a way that felt truer to themselves, whether that was perceived as gay or not.

4.6. Process Observations

Participants responded to me and to the interview questions in varied ways. Some of the most pertinent observations about how participants engaged within the interviews are highlighted here. Within the first few interviews participants seemed to have some difficulty with questions pertaining to the gay community or gay men. They stressed that they were trying to answer without generalising and one participant was quite critical of what he perceived to be some generalization inherent in the research aims. Once it was explained to participants that their subjective opinion was what I was interested in they engaged more easily in the discussion. It was as if participants feared that the interview might engage in othering or pathologising the gay community by perpetuating stereotypes and their fears were allayed through this discussion.

As a clinical psychology student conducting one-on-one interviews, I was aware that, participants often relayed their experiences in ways that showed aspects of their inner

struggles and turmoil. It was difficult to reflect in a way that was conducive to interviews and data gathering at certain moments and I tended to draw upon my experience as a trainee therapist in providing recognition and containment at these points. Participants often seemed to have felt heard and empathised with which led to greater willingness to engage with the subject matter in-depth but also allowed them to feel positive about the overall interview experience.

The one-on-one setting in which we discussed the male body was also interesting as I am a gay man who was aware of being engaged in discussion with men whose bodies are seen to be versions of the ideal. This awareness on both of our parts would lead to discomfort at points as participants were aware that my body was not the same as theirs and might be characterised as somewhat overweight. In discussing obesity or weight issues they made sure that the interview was a safe space for them to express their views and were at pains not to appear too pejorative. Furthermore, talking about desire and sexual experiences with another gay man also manifested in some participants being a bit flirtatious and perhaps aiming to present themselves in more desirable ways. In this sense, their embodiment was very much present in an enacted way in the room. While I was aware of these dynamics I aimed to retain a somewhat neutral presence in the room.

It is also important to consider my own impact on how participants are represented in the research. Being a gay man myself, with prior involvement in the bodybuilding world, I identified with a lot of what participants spoke about. This gave rise to the need on my side to avoid pathologizing training practices and to be protective of the participants. Through analysing the interviews I attempted to be aware of this potential problem with possible over-identification. The co-analysis of the interview data by my supervisor aided to some extent with this issue.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final chapter provides a summary of the research findings discussed in chapter 4. The chapter also raises possible limitations of the study and presents recommendations for future research that are aligned with the findings.

5.1. Conclusion

The research aimed to explore muscular gay men's relationship with their bodies and training practices by exploring how they perceived their own bodies and those of the men around them and the context in which they operated. The research also aimed to provide a voice to muscular gay men with regards to their own subjective experiences as they are often othered as privileged or alternatively pathologised in the literature.

It was concluded that the ideal body was both a collectively shared concept and one that had deeply personal meanings for each participant. It emerged that for the participants the ideal body is muscular, lean and athletic. Instead of the bodybuilder physique the men in the study valued leanness in the form of toned muscles with very little fat. They also particularly valued the fact that this body could move, which translated into a body that is athletic.

It also emerged that the men felt differently towards the bodies of others. Even though they admired the ideal body in the abstract sense they were not all critical of men that did not work towards having the ideal body. However, the majority of men were very critical of others being overweight and obesity in general. In addition, participants did not need their partners' bodies to look similar to or better than their own. For some, a partner's body did not have to resemble their bodies at all in order to be desirable. This illustrated how sexual attraction and long-term partner preference did not necessarily mean that these men were invested in partnering with other men that complemented their own bodies or increased the status attached to this.

Participants were all narcissistically invested in their bodies. This indicated an investment in their bodies as self-objects and in themselves as men inhabiting said bodies. Self-admiration was prevalent in participants yet it was evidenced more clearly in appreciation for the work

they put in than in a purely narcissistic preoccupation with their physical appearance. Admiration from others was a source of pleasure and strength for participants and affirmed the confidence they had in their bodies and themselves. It also emerged that validation from mirrors or others provided confirmation of the physical changes in their body. To some extent, other admiration made changes in their bodies real and noticeable for participants.

The need to constantly improve their bodies was clearly visible as participants always felt that their bodies could improve and look better. This linked with a fear of losing what they had worked so hard for and therefore awareness of the potential loss of current physicality due to ageing or lack of effort was a constant reminder of what was at stake. In exploring narcissistic investment the concept of an inner critic emerged as the men in the study were often very ambitious with their goals and exhorted themselves to continual effort. This was often a way in which participants could motivate themselves to continue exercising. It also led to some feeling that they would never reach their goals which intensified the fear of loss they already had.

Training was intensely pleasurable for some participants as they could revel in the activity that visibly improved their bodies. These men also found a sense of community at the gym as they were enjoying the sense of camaraderie and recognition they found at the gym. However, for some men training was experienced as effortful and dutiful. Training as a chore significantly changed some of the men's engagement with the activity. It reflected that going to the gym is a chore to achieve a better body for other admiration or health benefits, the completion of a necessary yet difficult activity. Consequently, these men were not interested in or even aware of the possibility of the training space becoming something of a community for them.

A muscular man signified a masculine man for participants. However, behaving in feminine ways strips the muscular body of its masculinity. Therefore, a strong muscular body is only strong when embodied in a masculine way for participants. Building a muscular body that is embodied in a strong and potent way provided a sense of belonging to within heteronormative society for some participants. For the majority of participants, it also provided protection and safety when faced with homophobic situations. The motivation to embody strength and potency did not appear to arise from a need to compensate for some previous lack for the men in the study (as has been described in the literature), but rather

provided a way to belong without fear. It also emerged here that participants' view of a muscular body as a form of protection against homophobia differed depending on whether they had faced previous experiences of discrimination and aggression from others.

5.2. Limitations

It is important to consider the limitations of the study as this could then be taken into consideration in the future implementation of recommendations.

The research study entailed conducting semi-structured interviews with seven participants. These participants were varied in age and race with the youngest being 24 and the oldest 44 years old. Five of the gay men who participated were white and two were black. The sample size should be considered as a limitation as seven participants make it difficult to generalize from the data. However, in qualitative research, smaller samples are usually relied on as the focus is more on the specific as opposed to the general. In this instance, it was apparent that experiences differed even within the sample but that some of the observations might well be transposable to other gay men. Another limitation is that the racial demographics of the sample do not represent those of the broader population of South Africa. The fact that the majority of participants were white is likely to be a consequence of my own familiarity with particular social networks but it should be acknowledged that interviewing a majority white participant group perpetuates a pattern in which white people's experiences have been privileged in South African research as opposed to the voices of the majority. However, the interviews with the two black participants provided rich data for the research and it should also be recognised that gay South African men also represent a population whose voices are less often heard.

The limitations in the sample size and demographics were due to the difficulty in recruiting participants and reliance on personal networks for initial contacts. It was also difficult to find men who were willing to participate perhaps because the community of bodybuilding men is fairly small. It is possible that those who volunteered to be interviewed had a less ambivalent relationship to their bodies and training than might have been the case for people who may have been reluctant to be interviewed. This may have introduced a positive bias in the self-representations of muscularity amongst gay men and should be borne in mind in reading the findings. The study involved a very specific sample of men that were comfortable speaking

about their bodies, being desirable and their admiration of the hard work that they put in. This might have meant that these men carried less shame about their bodies. Participants were also able to afford to go to gym and to train which might have influenced the ease with which they accessed training and the gym as a community.

Some of the possible limitations associated with the positioning of me as researcher have been raised in the section on reflexivity.

5.3. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the research conducted:

It is recommended that further research be conducted with a larger sample over a wide array of contexts. Further research could focus more on men from rural areas and smaller cities. Potential research might also compare populations such as men from urban areas and those from rural areas. Further studies could also focus on muscular straight men as compared to muscular gay men and/or include bisexual men (all self-identified).

As one of the findings pertained to the changing nature of the ideal body further research could be conducted into how the construct of an ideal body has changed and manifests itself in other populations such as men and women that are heterosexual or bisexual and the lesbian community. The ideal body as it is constructed in the broader queer and transgender communities could also be of interest. Within the gay male community, another possible area of research could focus on men with bodies different from the ideal such as bears and chubs.

Future research in the area of community and the way in which men engage with the practice of training at the gym is recommended. It would be interesting to conduct further research on how gyms may provide a community space for men of different orientations and how this may be related to training being pleasurable or a chore.

It is recommended that further research be conducted into the way gay men inhabit their bodies within heteronormative society. As one of the findings illustrated that muscular gay

men are able to assert belonging through bodily performance it could be important to explore this further.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule



University of the Witwatersrand

School of Human and Community Development

Department of Psychology



Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

This study aims to investigate the muscular gay man's relationship with his body and how his body is constructed through society and his sexual identity. Participants need to self-identify as a gay man, describe themselves as muscular and/or engage in strength training more days than not in order to be included in the study.

The following questions may be used along with any prompts deemed necessary:

Demographic questions (age, race, education, short family history, whether out or not, relationship status etc.)

1. What does masculinity mean to you?
2. What does masculinity mean to a gay man?
3. How do you see your body?
4. How do you experience your body?
5. What does it feel like to live inside your body?
6. When do you feel proud of your body?
7. When do you feel ashamed of your body?
8. Do you have any goals or aspirations for your body?
9. Do you feel any pressure or expectations from others with regards to your body?
10. What do you appreciate in a potential partner's body?

11. What do you think gay men value in their bodies?

12. What does it mean to have the ‘ideal body’?

13. What do muscles or being muscular mean to you?

14. Are there other factors that influence how you see your physical appearance?

Further probes will be used based on the material that emerges:

Differences they feel they might have with straight men

Whether their bodies are for desirability, protection against homophobia or other reasons

Whether they feel policed or police others when it comes to having the ‘right body’

Whether bodies and masculinity go hand in hand

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet



University of the Witwatersrand

School of Human and Community Development

Department of Psychology



Participant Information Sheet

Dear participant,

My name is Clinton Cameron. I am currently completing a Clinical Psychology Masters degree at the University of the Witwatersrand.

As part of the requirements of my degree I need to complete and submit a research report on a particular topic. My research is aimed at investigating muscular gay men's relationship with their bodies and how their bodies are constructed through society and their sexual identity. Participants need to self-identify as a gay man, engage in strength and/or weight training at least three times per week and/or describe themselves as muscular, in order to be included in the study.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Involvement would mean completing a semi-structured interview that will not exceed one hour in length.

The interview will be audio recorded with a recording device. Thereafter the recording will be transcribed by the interviewer. The audio recording will be destroyed upon completion of the study or, if the students has agreed to the data being used for future research, one copy will be stored in a password protected folder and computer. The transcription will be kept in a password protected computer and any hard copies will be kept in a locked drawer indefinitely. The only people that will have access to the transcription is the interviewer and the supervisors involved, Dr Nick Davies and Prof Gillian Eagle. Direct quotes may be used, but all identifiable information will be removed from the final essay.

All identifying information will be kept strictly confidential by the interviewer. The transcription and final research report will protect your anonymity by making use of a pseudonym. Therefore, the interviewer will be the only person to know your identity. Furthermore, the identity of any extraneous person mentioned will be protected by making use of pseudonyms.

The results of the study will be published in a research report as part of the requirements of a degree in clinical psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. The research may also be presented at a local or international conference and/or published in a journal and/or book chapter. Participants may

access the results of the research report on the Wits Electronic Dissertations and Theses website – http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/

Participation in this study is voluntary and by refusing to participate you will not be penalised in any way or lose any benefits you currently enjoy. Participation in this study is voluntary and by refusing to participate you will not be penalised in any way or lose any benefits you currently enjoy. The study does not provide any benefits nor any foreseeable risk to participants. You are free to withdraw at any time prior to, or during the interview. You are also under no obligation to answer any of the questions that might make you feel uncomfortable and the decision to do so will not impact you negatively in any way.

If participating in the interview has led you to experience any emotional distress, please note that there is a free counselling service at the Emthonjeni Centre on the east campus of the University of the Witwatersrand, Braamfontein, that is available if you are in need of support or help. Their contact number is 011 717 4513. Alternatively, OUT is a helpline for LGBTQ+ individuals that can be contacted on 012 430 3272. The helpline is accessible Monday to Friday (08h30 – 16h30) and reverse charge calls are accepted.

If you have any further questions, you may contact me via email at cameron.clinton@gmail.com or you can contact my supervisor, Professor Gillian Eagle, at gillian.eagle@wits.ac.za.

If you agree to participate in this research, please complete the two consent forms.

Clinton Cameron

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form



University of the Witwatersrand

School of Human and Community Development

Department of Psychology



Consent form for participation in research project conducted by Clinton Cameron for the degree of MA (Clinical Psychology)

Statement of Consent:

I, _____, have read, understood and agreed to participate in this interview. I fully understand that my participation is completely voluntary and that, should I choose to, I have the right to withdraw at any time prior to, or during the interview.

- I am under no obligation to answer questions that I do not wish to and choosing not to answer will have no negative consequences.
- All information provided will be kept confidential. In the event of direct quotes being used from my interview there will be no identifiable information.
- The study does not provide any rewards nor exposure to any risks.
- The interview will be audio recorded with a recording device and then transcribed by the interviewer in order to facilitate the completion of a MA Clinical Psychology research project.
- The research may also be presented at a local or international conference and/or published in a journal and/or book chapter.

I further consent to this data being used for future research

YES:	NO:

SIGNED: _____

DATED: _____

Appendix D: Consent for Audio Recording



University of the Witwatersrand

School of Human and Community Development

Department of Psychology



Consent to be Audiotaped

This consent form gives Clinton Cameron the necessary permission to audio record my interview for the writing of a research report and transcription purposes. This is simply a method that is used to maintain the integrity of the data and to make analysis easier.

I have noted the following:

- My identity will be protected, and I will not be required to give out my name in this recording.
- Access to these recordings will be restricted to the interviewer. No other persons will have access to these recordings.
- The recording will be destroyed at the end of 2019 if permission has not been given to use the data for future research.
- If permission has been given to use the data for future research, one copy of the audio recording and transcription will be kept in a folder and computer that are both password protected indefinitely.
- All identifying information will be removed from the transcripts and although direct quotes from the transcripts will be used in the final write-up, these will not be linked to any identifying information.

If I have concerns or queries regarding the audio recording of this interview, I can ask the researcher before we begin the interview so that the interviewer may clarify them for me.

I, (name) _____ give permission for my research interview to be fully audio recorded with a full understanding of the above statement.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E: Ethics Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MCLIN/19/001 IH**
PROJECT TITLE:	The muscular gay man's relationship with his body
INVESTIGATORS	Cameron Clinton
DEPARTMENT	Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	05 July 2019
DECISION OF COMMITTEE*	Approved

This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application

DATE: 05 July 2019

CHAIRPERSON
(Dr Esther Price)

cc Supervisor:

Dr Clare Harvey
Psychology

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)

To be completed in duplicate and **one copy** returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10th floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure, as approved, I/we undertake to submit a revised protocol to the Committee.

This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2021

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES