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A Practice-as-Research Project utilizing Butler's (1990) Feminist/ Post-structuralist theory of Gender Performativity, as well as Connells (2001) system of Hegemony, Complicity, and Subordination to Interrogate the Formation of Toxic Masculinities through Practice-as-Research and Live Art Methodologies

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Recommended Citation

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Cornforth, Charlie

Award date:
2021

Awarding institution:
University of Plymouth

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by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment for the degree of

RESEARCH MASTERS

School of Humanities and Performing Arts

March 2021

Acknowledgements

At no time during the registration for the degree of Research Masters has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

Presentations at conferences:

Multiple Conflicts (see: Appendix 2) presented at the Masculinity and Sex Culture conference in Birmingham and the TAPRA 2019 Conference in Exeter.

Final image (see: List of Figures 6) presented at the Research Image Competition at Plymouth University.

Word count for the main body of the thesis: 26,324

Signed: CCornforth

Date: 01/04/2021

Abstract

A Practice-as-Research Project utilizing Butler's (1990) Feminist/ Post-structuralist theory of Gender Performativity, as well as Connells (2001) system of Hegemony, Complicity, and Subordination to Interrogate the Formation of Toxic Masculinities through Practice-as-Research and Live Art Methodologies

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In the past twenty years or so, the concept of masculinity has come under increasing scrutiny. What used to constitute as socially acceptable behaviour for men to engage in, has increasingly become challenged by developments such as the MeToo movement. There are now stable grounds to argue that there is such thing as a toxic masculinity, an understanding that has been brought about through a series of questions that ask what grounds masculinity is constructing its position of authority and power upon, what behaviours associated with masculinity are bringing harm to both society as a whole, the individual man and how do we begin to hold men accountable for their actions associated with toxic masculinity? Although the possibility for gender expression is increasingly becoming more available, Western socio-cultural pressures to construct the male gender identity towards a traditionally heteronormative masculinity remains relatively the same. This project seeks to discover how my own masculine identity has conformed to these pressures and thus, encouraged me to pursuit acts of violence that are directly associated with toxic masculinity. By doing so, I seek to unpack the term toxic masculinity and address how toxic masculinity is not drawn from singular source but, multiple fragmentations of possibility.

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Introduction

To begin with a memory.

In the year of 2018, in the city of Plymouth, I signed up for the Ultra MMA eight weeks training in mixed martial arts (MMA). The training was part of a nationwide project to raise money for Cancer Research UK. Participants are offered eight weeks of free training and an opportunity to experience their first public debut, fighting another charitable participant, at a local venue.

The fight debut seemed to come around exceedingly fast. Next thing I know I am stepping into an octagon—the stage in where the fights are conducted—for the first time in my life. In front of me, I see a young man of the same age. The crowd are shouting both our names, complemented with clear instructions on how me and this young man should go about hurting each other. The referee brings us together, he explains the rules and checks that we are both ready. I give him a small nod to indicate that I am ready and so does the young man. Just before the referee signals the fight to begin, I lock eyes with my opponent and suddenly realise, that this is not a theatrical performance, I must now hurt this young man. In that moment, the very moment where I am about to spend nine minutes engaging in male on male violence, I discover that I do not enjoy hurting others.

This event coincided with research I was conducting as part of my undergraduate degree. Investigating how Carl Jung's archetype of the warrior, a dominant energy associated with the masculine (Moore and Gillette, 1990: 75- 95)—was having a problematic effect on how men construct and perceive their identities. In the later months after the fight, it became clear that by not possessing a desire to inflict pain on another, I did not have the capacity to affirm the traits of the warrior archetype within my own masculinity. In this sense, I had encountered what has been previously theorized within the sociological field to be a *crisis in masculinity.* An event that occurs when the individual is no longer able to affirm the ideologies or engage in the appropriate activities that define their masculinity. This creates a form of identity *crisis* in which the individual in question must reassess what ideologies and activities are now possible of them to express and affirm (Connell 1995, Macinnes, 1998).

This research project seeks to understand how and why this event occurred. What are the wider socio-cultural circumstances that lead to me (someone who does not like hurting people) to step into an environment that is specially catered towards acts of violence? How did this event relate to the construction of my masculine identity and what are the possible harmful effects that have emerged from the pursuit if toxic masculinity?

This project seeks to unpack the complex issue of *toxic masculinity*. A gendered construct that is theorised to be harmful to others within a given society and the individual who practices the expression of a toxic masculinity (Bosie, 2019: 14). By doing so, this project seeks to clearly identify, understand and clarify what constitutes as toxic masculinity, as well as, its relevance and application to the wider socio-cultural realm.

My methodological approach shall situate itself in a qualitative area. This method as Haseman (2006) observes 'encompasses a wide range of research strategies and methods, embracing the perspectives both of researchers and participants' (Haseman, 2006: 2). As such the methodology explores human action within specific socio-cultural contexts, usually through textual analysis.

However, to develop an understanding of my research topic I will be focussing on a Practice-as-Research methodology. This methodology generates its understanding through an engagement in practice. It is a form of knowledge generation where, in Nelson's (2013) words:

> the proposed inquiry necessarily entailed practical knowledge which might primarily be demonstrated in practice – that is, knowledge which is a matter of doing rather than abstractly conceived and thus able to be articulated by way of a traditional thesis in words alone. (Nelson, 2013: 9)

In this sense, it is the 'doing' that serves to generate a clearer understanding that numbers, figures or textual analysis just cannot capture in the same level of effectiveness. Nelson (2013) uses the analogy of how the act of bicycle riding evidences a clear form of *knowing-in-doing*. As such, 'knowing-doing is inherent in the practice and practice is at the heart of the inquiry and evidences it' (Nelson, 2013:10). For a Practie-as-Research methodology, as Smith and Dean (2009) observe, 'the 'as' makes a claim that the performance or theatre event itself may be a form of research' (Smith, Dean, 2009: 107). Therefore, my engagement in practice-as-research is designed to reveal research insights into the subject of toxic masculinity.

As such, the practice shall be informed by a rigorous engagement in gender and masculinity studies. These fields have already contributed significantly to understanding what masculinity is and how it functions as a part of the wider socio-cultural realm. The research that I will be

conducting shall be informed by two major theories relevant to the practice and also receive minor contributions from other relevant sources within the filed.

The first theory central to this study is Butlers (1990) theory of gender performativity. The theory allows insight into how gender is constructed. The emphasis that is directly at the heart of this research is that gender performance begins with a fictional idea that is brought into being through a repetitive engagement in activities that provide definition through the body. These activities are highly regulated by socio-cultural processes that interpret sexual identification as a natural position and as such, the activities that produce forms of meaning that are restricted depending upon the sexual identification (Butler, 1990: 141). This theory serves to inform both questions of *what* type of practice is going to be engaged in within the research and *how* is masculinity constructed. Allowing me to begin to gain an understanding of what activities may form a toxic masculinity. By gaining such an understanding should— by the end of this research project—allow me to begin to formulate both, an identification of toxic masculinity through a sustained engagement in practice and, begin to formulate ideas of how my work as an artist can begin to work towards undoing these activities of affirmation. Secondly, it is important for me to understand how the repetition of these activities—those ones that produce a meaning of toxic masculinity—function as part of a wider socio-cultural problem. With this in mind, the practice is also informed and developed through Connells theory of Hegemonic Masculinity (1995, 1999). Right away, Connell (1995) presents the understanding that I cannot speak of masculinity but, *masculinities* as there is no singular overall definition that might encompass all men. Having said that, Connell proposes that all men negotiate the development of their masculinity in response to hegemonic masculinity, understood as what the currently accepted and legitimate form of patriarchy is at the time of development (Connell, 1999: 77). Patriarchy is best understood as a socio-systematic process of dominance that privileges one specific group—often associated with the white, heterosexual, middle class male—over all other groups (Benjamin, 1978). In doing so, it becomes possible to understand that specific forms of masculinity, in particular that which could be understood as toxic, are directly constructed to repeat activities that produce meanings associated with subjects of dominance, control, power, authority, strength, toughness, stoicism and virility (Donaldson, 1993). In this sense, this serves to answer the question of *what* activities are being engaged in to produce meanings of toxic masculinity and allows me to locate my practice-as-research process within a wider socio-cultural problem of hegemony.

Lastly, I plan to construct the research via an engagement in violent practice. As such it is vital that I ground my engagement in the activities of toxic masculinity in a wider theoretical understanding of violence. For this I have chosen to be informed by the work of Kaufman (1987) who suggests that:

> The construction of masculinity involves the construction of "surplus aggressiveness." The social context of this triad of violence is the institutionalisation of violence in the operation of most aspects of social, economic, and political life (Kaufman, 1987: 2).

Kaufman suggests that the systematic process of patriarchy is what forms a triad of violence. That consists of forms of violence onto women, violence onto men and violence onto the self. The wider socio-systematic processes serve to cultivate a specific engagement in violent action and as such this better informs the link between violence and toxic masculinity. My primary focus in this research is violence onto men and violence onto the self. I have specifically chosen not explore violence onto women as I simply do not have the capacity within the research parameters to explore the subject in an authentic level of depth. Furthermore, to explore such a subject through a practice-as-research methodology places me as an artist within a highly complex situation that would have to be negotiated with extreme caution. Therefore, I have chosen to focus primarily on violence onto men and violence onto the individual man because those subjects carry significant relation to the development of my own masculine identity.

Furthermore, Wetherell and Edley (1999) make a specific call asking what does hegemonic masculinity or, being complicit to hegemonic masculinity look in like in practice. Their investigation seeks to understand what the mundane, daily activities look like. However, I believe that through an understating of the activities that shape the body to produce a specific meaning, it is not necessarily the mundane that needs to be reviewed. What does need to be reviewed is the activities that produces the substance of traits associated with hegemonic masculinity. What activities produce notions of dominance, control, power, authority, strength, toughness, emotional resilience.

This is where my position as a live artist becomes applicable. I am a live artist who uses practice-as-research, auto-ethnographic and autobiographic methodologies to engage in body-based research. The research informs how my body can be shaped as part of wider socio-cultural narratives of toxic masculinity. I then craft installation like performances that serve to exemplify the research. Taking into consideration that masculinity is constructed through the repetition of activities that shape the body towards a specific meaning, I engage in the activities of toxic masculinity whilst maintaining a rigorous process of self-reflection,

allowing me to begin to gather an understanding of toxic masculinity through lived experience.

Finally, the practice-as-research will be consisting of a two-part series of live art installations. They have been created as jumping points in which to discuss how the content of these installations reflect how my own identity has interfaced with socio-cultural expectations. The thesis shall illuminate a number of recurring themes related to the pursuit of a hegemonic masculine identity. Exploring how such a gender identity is constructed in different ways via the lens of class and hierarchy and seeking to reveal the subjective turmoil that arises from the failure to conform to such an identity.

<u>Chapter One</u>

<u>Exploring the Landscape of Toxic Masculinities through a Feminist, Sociological and Poststructuralist lens.</u>

The subject of toxic masculinities is a complex area, one that requires further interrogation before any discussion of my own social construction can begin. To this end, the following chapter will consider the conjoined territories of gender and masculinity studies, through the specific lens of poststructuralism. This will serve to better inform the position I—as a socio-cultural body—occupy when conducting my practice-as-research work in chapter 2.

To offer further guidance for the reader, this chapter will utilise various subheadings to shape the thesis. The section *Sex Roles, Gender and Masculinities* will present and discuss The *Sex Role* (Pleck, 1982).Which will allow me to explore the issue of gender through Butlers theory of performativity (1990) to discuss the way in which masculinity begins to function as a performative display that is constructed and re-affirmed through the repetition of acts influenced by an individual's socio-cultural context. The aim is to seek to move away from an understanding of masculinity as something that is natural, innate or essential and towards an understanding of masculinity as something that is nurtured into being through systematic processes.

The second section *Toxic Masculinities* shall explore the subjects related to toxic masculinities that have been addressed within the wider world of sociological research and that which has been identified in the practice-as-research process in chapter 2.

The first subject addressed is Jung's theory of *archetypes* and *shadow* masculinities (Moore, R. and Gillette, D, 1991). A subject chosen because it provides an introduction into the notion of a dark or toxic masculinity and also serves as an example of how men interpret the activities that constitute as masculine.

I then seek to begin to approach the problem of toxic masculinity through more grounded sociological research by looking at the notion of *patriarchy,* what it is and how it influences men to engage in acts of dominance and control (Kaufman, 1987 and Benjamin, 1978). I then aim to look at how men negotiate and construct their gender identity in response to these systematic processes through an understanding of *Hegemonic Masculinity* (Connell, 1995).

Lastly, I explore the effects post-modernity has had upon toxic masculinity. By taking a look at how the shifting tides of contemporary masculinities, has instigated a new perceived crisis in masculinity. The objective is to begin to capture how subjects of *precarious* process of masculine affirmation (Bosson, Jennifer, Vandello, Joseph , 2011) is truly the issue at the

centre of toxic masculinity. I expand upon how these subjects produce forms of toxic masculinity such as *hyper* masculinity that exaggerates the stereotypical traits of masculine behaviour and masks the insecurities or emotional turmoil that is going on behind the performance of masculinity (Pleck, 1982). Equally, we explore this subject in other avenues such as Lad Culture (Willis, 1993), the practice of—commonly young men—negotiating toxic masculinity through a violent, anti-feminist and anti-intellectual position. These subjects were chosen because they are the most consistent subjects regarding toxic masculinity that has kept re-emerging within the research.

I would also like to note that the theoretical contributions offered only scratches the surface of a wide and complex landscape of masculinity studies. There are many different angles, perspectives and approaches to consider as the subject of toxic masculinity is a multifaceted and rich territory. It is with this consideration that some of the material presented may create more questions than answers. It is with my best intentions that I aim for this not to be so, however, I am somewhat limited on my capacity to truly delve into the depths of the sociological research of toxic masculinities due to the restrictions of length placed upon this thesis. It is my intention to present the key avenues that are addressed throughout the research and somewhat summarise and set up their relevance for a viewing of the practice in chapter two.

Sex Roles, Gender and Masculinities

To begin, the term *masculinity* is fraught with controversy. When the term masculinity is mentioned, it is common to think straight away of the dominant narrative of manhood. The notion that individuals who own a male set of genitalia are meant to express and embody a specific set of traits associated with their biological position such as strength, toughness, courage, risk taking, success and emotional resilience (Donaldson, 1993).

Earlier, I applied a distinction between masculinity and masculinities. This is an important distinction to make because within the sociological field of gender studies it is understood that there is no longer a singular version of masculinity that can be referred to but, a wide variety of *masculinities*. The use of the term *masculinities* over *masculinity* is desired because it acknowledges that there is not one singular manifestation of masculinity but, multiple potential avenues in which masculinity may be expressed and produced (Connell: 1999). Distinctions have been clearly drawn between the masculine—the sense of maleness (sexed and biological)—and masculinity (expressive and performative) (Connell, 1999 and Butler, 1990, 2004). The seemingly *fixed* definition of what has come to be understood as *traditional masculinity* is concluded from an *essentialisation of* one particular method of identity

production. These positions become normalised by perceiving them to be an *innate* or a natural product of the biological position of male or female. It is this same understanding that excludes other possibilities for the expression of identity. The separation of male and female and thus, defining them into two separate categories suggests that there are only two different pathways for the expression of identity and as such, this produces the notion of a *sex and gender difference*. The false idea that men are specifically designed to perform one set of tasks and that women are specially designed to perform am alternative set. An understanding that within contemporary society has largely—but not completely—expired (Pleck 1982, Butler, 2004 and Connell:1995, 1999).

The term given to these seemingly fixed definitions of the femininity / masculinity difference were understood as *Sex Roles* (Pleck, 1982). A concept that serves to exemplify and explain the various behaviours and attitudes that—in the context of the *modern*ity and the *western world*—were understood as acceptable, appropriate, and desirable depending upon the biological position of female or male. These behaviours and attitudes would constitute what would be socially understood as *normative behaviour* in which individuals are encouraged to pursue if they wished to be socially accepted (Pleck, 1982, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003: 7-8). These behaviours and attitudes are introduced to the boys or girls from early childhood through *agents of socialisation* that introduce specific messages and values to the infant throughout their development into maturity (Weitz, 1977). The agents of socialisation consisting of such notable influencers on childhood development as parents, schools, institutions, peer groups, role models/archetypes and the media; play a substantial role in preparing the girl or boy for their transition into maturity. The sex role became an attempt to understand what constituted the pre-assigned expectations that the individual—depending upon their socio-cultural position—were required to engage in.

Thus, in the words of Butler (1993), '"sex" not only functions as a *norm,* but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls (Butler,1993:1). These forms of identification based on sex—feminine / masculine—are designed to encourage the occupier towards a specific position that allow social roles to be enacted. By engaging in such a position, the body is shaped through the repetition of these activities creating—through the context of *sexual difference*—the illusion that specific tasks and activities are better suited for one particular sex. The emphasis here is on the term regulatory practice, the notion that something is controlling how the practice is enacted, how the body is / should be constructed. The sex role

is meant to possess the capacity to *materialise* and/or produce meaning for the individual. Like that of an *actor* and a *script* occupying a means by which the social drama is set in motion, the wider social and systematic forces serve to ensure the script is adhered to, issue reward and positive reinforcement for those that achieve a successful engagement with the social script and punishment or negative reinforcement for those who do not, or are unable to align towards it (Connell, 1995: 47). If an individual is provided a social script to follow, then this only works if the individual in question is able to align with and perform the roles and behaviours expected of them. If they do so successfully, they experience *rewards* or *positive social reinforcement* and/or *social acceptance*. This may translate into a performative expression of how one thinks they should act as a result of their biological position.

From Sex to Gender

If sex may be understood as the foundational roles and behaviours that an individual is expected to engage in as a result of their biological identity, then, gender is the display or performance of the individual's identity. To continue in Butler's (2004) words, '[G]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler and Salih, 2004: 91). If one is raised under the sex role of the boy, then through the agents of socialisation, the individual is encouraged to perform, and display traits associated with masculine *(*biological) which translate to an expression of masculinity (gender). Through the repetition of *activities* associated with masculinity the gender identity may be—however temporary—*affirmed*. I apply the term temporarily because with the continuation of time, activities that once served to produce meaning for the gender expression may—to an extent—expire in their capacity to do so. In this sense, the notion that an engagement in specific activities temporarily produces a gender identity and so, gender becomes a largely *unstable*, *performative* entity. As Butler (1990) continues to observe:

> Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. (Butler, 1990: 141)

In this process, gender becomes a largely personal and/or societal fiction, a conceptual understanding of how one thinks they should express their identity.[1]This understanding is

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[1] This unstable, fictionality of gender expression presents a very large problem for the seemingly fixed position of traditional masculinity and this will be expanded upon later in this section.

brought into reality through the engagement of activities, a specific use of the body that produces a specific meaning. For example, a "strong man" is not born a strong man. He and his body slowly grow into the maturity, where he becomes recognised by social agents that he is becoming a man. As he too comes to recognise this, he obtains the conceptual idea that he wishes to be identified as a strong – man and so, he engages in activities that produce that specific meaning in the body such as the lifting of weights. This process is once again identified by himself and his social agents who then accept or reject the premonition that he is in fact a "strongman".

In this sense, if the individuals gender identity aligns with their sexual identification, their actions can serve to protect and perpetuate the *norm* they are enacting. Weems (1995) asserts that:

> [G]ender identity can act as a coercive ideal that exists principally to protect the norm of heterosexuality. It is in this sense, then, that gender, rather than being static and reactive, is inevitably performative, continually unfolding as a complex enactment of self-representation and self-definition'. (Weems, 1995: 4)

Thus, if the activities that the individual engages in aligns with a specific social script, the individual's actions then serve to reenforce and perpetuate these narratives of normativity. As such, the concept of the sex role has come under critical scrutiny. Sex roles are positioned as a result of biology which perceives specific constructions of identity as *fixed*, *innate*, *natural* and thus, unchangeable. Attempting to understand femininity/masculinity as *natural* or *innate* creates assumptions that all identities share common traits (Peterson, 1998: 3 – 25). Utilising the sex role as a core concept is limiting because it fails to acknowledge or include all aspects that circulate the notion of identity and gender expression. Connell (1995) offers four considerations to abandon the theory, largely because the concept consists of:

> voluntarism and inability to theorize power and social interest; its dependence on biological dichotomy and its consequently non-social conception of structure; its dependence on a normative standard case and systematic misrepresentation of resistance; the absence of a way of theorizing the historicity of gender. (Connell, 1995, 53 – 54)

It is important to note that gender identity often serves to contradict sexual identification (Butler, 1990). If the individual is unable to perform the roles and behaviours expected; or does not wish to align, conform or connect to these social scripts of normativity, then the individual is prone to experience negative repercussions in the form of *punishment*, *negative reinforcement* and *social ostracization* as is experienced with large majority of—within the context of a *heteronormative* society—*othered* (Women, Black, LGBT, Disabled communities). This process is understood as a heteronormative reinforcement and only serves to perpetuate privileged narratives of gender expression (whiteness, maleness,

heterosexuality, middle/upper class privilege). Although sex roles are problematic, they have not entirely vanished. Individuals depending upon their socio-cultural circumstance such as geographical location, class position, and the relevant discourses of understanding they provide, will still encourage a construction of identity to align closer to sex role and gender norms. Much of my own artwork becomes about recognising which sexual norms have been reinforced by the mentioned social agents throughout my own upbringing. In the process of doing so, I seek to discover what this normative dividend is, and, what role it is playing in the development of toxic masculinity. The subjects of pursing the heteronormative dividend and how these subjects of self-representation and self-definition might translate towards the activities of the body becomes the primary focus of chapter two.

1.1 The World of Toxic Masculinities

The Mythological Masculine Shadow, the Hegelian Subject and Violence

Now that I have presented the concept of the sex role and the notion that individuals may be socio-culturally encouraged to embody and express specific ideologies, I wish to expand upon the notion of how one might connect to a sexual identification, in particular that which is associated with the masculine. Within the sociological research it suggests that these ideologies are enforced by social agents whom seem to embody a sexed position, in the case of the masculinity, that would constitute as those whom embody traits of the masculine and in doing so, they become societal points of reference for how to possibly perform being masculine (Pleck, 1982, Butler, 1990, 1993 and Connell, 1995). One of these social agents that has become a rich territory of investigation for what constitutes as masculine is the Archetype. Drawn from psychoanalysis, the notion of the Archetype was developed by Carl Jung, and later further developed by Moore and Gillette (1991) who proposed the identification of four key positions associated with the biological position of maleness. The positions served to define the possible formations of masculine identity upon reaching maturity (Moore and Gillette, 1991). The field draws inspiration from mythology to serve as examples of how positions such as '[t]he King, Warrior, Magician, and Lover (…) have led to the naming of these archetypes as the four fundamental configurations which, in dynamic relationship, constitute the deep structures of the mature male psyche' (More and Gillette, 1991: xi). Mythology is one example of fictional socio-cultural narratives that provide the individual with a form of teaching that might better inform the practice of how to express their masculine position. The research of the archetype and that which might be understood as the *deep masculine* was popularised by the Men's Movement back in the period of the 60's

and 70's as a response to the rapidly changing social forces that characterised a *crisis in masculinity*. This mythical Men's Movement era believed the proposed crisis was a result of the 'disappearance of ritual *processes* for initiating boys into manhood' (Moore and Gillette, 1991: xv) in predominantly western culture. This disappearance of initiation rituals resulted in a large majority of men—or so they propose—to have never developed a fully mature consciousness that is defined by adulthood. This notion served to be a driving force behind a plethora of workshops and populist literature, as is seen in the work of Robert Bly (2001) that served to explain the journey boys travel through on their way to becoming men. In their writing they suggest that boys who do not experience these *ritual processes*, grow into men who maintain their *boy psychology* into later adulthood. This process can make them engage in 'abusive and violent acting-out behaviours against others, both men and women; passivity and weakness, the inability to act effectively and creatively in one's own life and to engender life and creativity in others (both men and women)' (Moore and Gillette, 1991: xvi). It was this characterisation of the failure to successfully develop into maturity that became the driving force of the men's movement.

Moore and Gillette (1991) propose that the pursuit of archetypal initiatory rituals served to absolve men of their immature patriarchal tendencies.

> We found, as these men sought their own experience of masculine structures through meditation, prayer, and what Jungians call active imagination, that as they got more and more in touch with the inner archetypes of mature masculinity, they were increasingly able to let go of their patriarchal self- and other-wounding thought, feeling, and behaviour patterns and became more genuinely strong, centered, and generative toward themselves and others—*both* women and men (Moore and Gillette, 1991: xviii).

What become of significant interest to my research and indeed, my own development into maturity, was this idea that a seemingly *religious* pursuit of the masculine—informed by largely fictional narratives of mythological masculinity—could serve to absolve men of their engagement in toxic masculinity. What I propose, is that this process holds the potential to become a false dichotomy that only serves to further the fictionality of the gendered expression of masculinity and result in the establishment of the *Hegelian Subject*. Though originally defined by Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit,* due to the complexity of the study I have chosen to understand the Hegelian Subject through Butler's (2004) interpretation who marks *Phenomenology of the Spirt* as the advancement through a series of stages of consciousness. Consciousness is understood as the state of being aware of and responsive to your surroundings, it is viewed through the senses and this information is interpreted in terms of your own position within the world. The Hegelian subject is primarily understood as 'a

study in fiction-making in which the Quixotic Subject sets off on an impossible ontological pursuit' (Butler and Salih, 2004: 40). The process becomes about the desire to transition from consciousness to self-consciousness, understood as an awareness of the self, their appearance and their actions in the world. I draw this to the attention of this research because the mythology of the masculine archetype has provided a lineage of activities that men can begin to pursue under the guise of cultivating this *spiritual transcendence*. However, through my practice-as-research process I have found that this pursuit if not properly understood serves to instigate a deeper involvement in practices of toxic masculinity and further increases the potential for a masculine crisis. As established, what constitutes as the *deep masculine* can mean a number of different constructions (kind, warrior, magician, lover). However, in contemporary society such language is used colloquialism to complement and affirm regular acts of masculinity. In gym culture for example, it is not uncommon to hear the term king used for the man who can lift the most weights at the gym or warrior for who he who can run on the treadmill the longest. As such a plethora of archetypal terms are applied to men through the use of colloquialism such as beast, mad dog, legend to define their regular acts of masculine affirmation. Furthermore, mythological narratives of the masculine become authentic grounds in which the male can engage in a serious pursuit of violent practice. For example, *Greco-Roman* mythology and its complementing socio-cultural philosophy, largely promoted the notion that a prolonged, calm and skilful engagement in violence, could serve to define what was a regular man as unique from the status quo and would even transcend to a level associated with godliness. The men in particular would engage in wrestling as a form of recreation and affirmation of masculine ideals such as strength and virility as they believed achieving such traits would contribute to this form of enlightenment (Foxhall and Salmon, 1998). Despite its historical and socio-political differences, it is possible to argue that in Mixed Martial Art (MMA) environments men engage in similar practices of transcendence of those that were experienced by Greco-Roman wrestlers. The men engage in a committed, ritualistic training routines that prepare them for their moment where they can step into an arena and prove their worth. Bowman (2020) observes 'MMA as a practice is often aligned with aggressiveness, violence, and hence forms of 'tough' and even toxic – implicitly masculine – subjectivities' (Bowman, 2020: 2). Thus, in contemporary society mythological titles equated with rich sources of deep masculine, or even shadow archetypes, are applied to the everyday world of heteronormative masculinity. It is this notion that begins to instigate engagement in potentially unhealthy environments to obtain an awareness of one's

masculinity and a connection to the deep masculine. A subject that is the rich territory of investigation in Chapter Two.

Traditional Masculinity, Patriarchy and The Socio-systematic Destruction of Expression and Nature.

Equally, it is not just mythological narratives that may instigate a pursuit of toxic masculinity but, indeed, a large collection of other social agents. Though this research is being conducted through the lens of masculinities, it is important to note that term *traditional masculinity* is still maintained and understood as the normative construct of masculine identity. There remains a general trend of ideologies, roles and behaviours that make up what is understood as *traditional masculinity* by the majority of men. Even those who do not align with heteronormative notions of masculinity still have a sense of what a man is or should be. Barret and Whitehead (2001) identified that:

> despite the evident multiplicity of masculine expression, traditional masculinities and associated values still prevail in most cultural settings. Countless numbers of men still act dominant and 'hard', deny their emotions, resort to violence as a means of self-expression, and seek to validate their masculinity in the public world of work rather the private world of family and relationships. (Barret and Whitehead, 2001: 7)

Much of the traits and behaviours associated with toxic masculinity are brought about by the pursuit of *traditional masculinity.* Ideologies of such a practice include domination, control, aggressiveness, assertiveness, stoicism and virility (Donaldson, 1993). These traits all vary in degree of severity depending upon the individuals socio-cultural position and thus, it is highly important not to draw attention to one singular version of masculinity that might be constituted as toxic but, instead address the forces that influence the construction of manhood and thus, encourage the man towards practices that are damaging to himself and wider society as a whole.

Traditional masculinity is increasingly associated with the collective term Patriarchy. Patriarchy was traditionally understood to be the essential power that the heterosexual, white, middle class. father possessed (Benjamin, 1978). Its focus was the father's capacity to engage in responsibilities to his wife and children, his ability to bring home financial income understood as *bread-winning*, make his wife happy and prepare his children for their growth into maturity. The role of the father was traditionally thought to be what provided the man—largely through biological determinism—his position of power and authority (Benjamin, 1978). However, shifting historical developments have changed this understanding of patriarchy, as the authority and power from which men draw their understanding and thus,

the capacity to engage in acts of dominance and control have transitioned away from the role of fatherhood. Benjamin (1978) observes:

> Robbed of his activity and authority in public life, deprived of his economic independence, the male father figure is no longer the mainstay, the ideal, the public representative nor the economic power of the family. The father as authority figure who could be respected, and with whom the child could identify, has been undermined by virtue of his helplessness under monopoly capital. And, even as the independent entrepreneur has been eliminated by monopolization, so the functions of the family have been taken over by the state and its institution. (Benjamin, 1978: 42)

The loss of power and authority associated with the role of the father occurred as a result of the increasingly unforgiving forces of states and institutions. An important shift that became the centre of understanding the wider socio-systematic learning and nurturing of values and ideologies that each man encounters through his lived experience. In this sense, patriarchy is not a fixed or innate understanding that all men possess but is, instead, what Kaufman (1987) identified:

> patriarchy forms part of the cement of societies based on the domination of some humans over others and of humans over nature—forms of social organization that have led to the coexistence of abundance and poverty, to the possibility of global nuclear destruction or ecological catastrophe, and to countless forms of oppression based on physical, national, religious, and sexual differences.' (Kaufman, 1987: xv)

Patriarchy shifts away from the role of fatherhood and towards the sociological, systematic and institutional problem of the perseveration and privileging of one group's ideologies and practices over all others. Patriarchy becomes the previously mentioned systematic favouring of specific constructions of masculinity occupying and embodying positions of power and authority over all others marking a transition away from biological and towards the systematic. Hearn (1987) believes that there are benefits to this shift in understanding from equating patriarchy to the wider systematic:

> [T]here remains a case for retaining the concept of patriarchy that is fundamentally social structural. It can prompt the understanding of possible social structures underlying both institutional inequalities and everyday action. The concept above all highlights the possibility of different social bases of control and thereby oppression *by men* (and indeed of and between men in some respects) from those that arise from industrial, capitalist organisation, and the socialisation of productive labour. (Hearn, 1987:43)

Patriarchy is thus, better understood as a specific social, cultural and economic system that ensures the dominance and control of one group of people over another by influencing subjects such of industry, capital, social equality and distribution of labour. However, the problem of industry and capital that come to form the method of development of our civilization is directly at the heart of this shift in how we might begin to better understand patriarchy.

As Kaufman (1987) emphasises in his work, it is these forces that are deeply ingrained into the fabric of western society and culture that are largely responsible for the rejection, manipulation and destruction of nature. These acts of destruction, the stripping away of all that is natural and turning into objective, mechanical and technological artifices are largely responsible for the restriction of other potential forms of gender expression and thus, the production of gender violence. Kaufman (1987) elaborates,

> But more essential is that our personalities and sexuality, our needs and fears, our strengths and weaknesses, our selves are created—not simply learned—through our lived reality. The violence of our social order nurtures a psychological violence, which in turn reinforces the social, economic and political structures of violence. The ever increasing demands of civilisation and the constant building upon inherited structures of violence suggests that the development of civilisation has been inseparable from a continuous increase in violence against humans and our natural environment. (Kaufman, 1987: 6)

The problem is not necessarily to do with the deep masculine but, the wider socio-systematic process of violence and destruction. The socio-cultural structures that we reside in directly influence the discourses of understanding that constitute both our psychological capacity to express ourselves and the physical way we shape and utilise our bodies. But, how might these largely complex and quite invisible forces begin to take hold of and influence our gender identities?

Hegemony, Complicity and Subordination

Connell (1995,1999) observes that all men negotiate the development of their masculine identity in response to *Hegemonic Masculinity*. Drawn from Gramsci's analyses of class relations, *hegemonic masculinity* is understood to be the 'configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy' (Connell, 1999: 77). In which, men are able to maintain the dominant position in private, social, economic and political realms. *Hegemonic masculinity* may be understood as:

> A social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes. Ascendancy of one group of men over another achieved at the point of a gun, or by the threat of unemployment, is not hegemony. Ascendancy which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/ taxation policies and so forth, is. (Connell, 1995:184)

These systems of bias are enabled through a system of hegemony, complicity and subordination. Hegemony would consist of the type of men who set the patriarchal frameworks. Popular examples of such include the footballer who plays in front of thousands of fans, gets paid an extraordinary amount of money, has numerous sexual partners and sets an example of how other less able men might construct their masculinity. An example of a

complicit man would be the man who is not able to go out and play football in front of thousands of people and so, he watches it from the comfort of his living room on the television. He will get the same hair cut as the footballer, talk like the footballer, even possess a great deal of knowledge on the subject but, he is not the footballer. The significant difference is the problematic assumption that the man who kicks the ball is more able and eligible for subjects such as sexual reproduction. The footballer's position of ability affords him numerous rewards, fame and social privileges. The complicit man though he cannot do any of these things may still benefit from the patriarchal dividend set by the footballer. The complicit man benefits from the patriarchal dividend but, does not fully embody the framework, therefore not leaving himself directly exposed and open to critique as can easily happen if the famous footballer slips up.

Hegemonic masculinity is directly constructed in relationship to *heterosexuality,* and through its position as being understood as normative holds the capacity to subordinate those who do not align with its normative understanding of identity. Whilst, hegemonic masculinity is upheld and enabled by complicit masculinities, both are enabled such a position of power because of the acts of subordination upon those outside of the framework labelled as the *other*. Simply put, those who do not align, identify with or conform to the frameworks of hegemonic masculinity such as women and LGBT communities, and those men who opt for less familiar performances of masculinity are deemed 'deviant'.

Hegemonic masculinity is not without its critics and for good reason. Wetherell and Edley (1999) produced a highly poignant article that relates heavily to this thesis. Though Connell (1999) provides a foundational understanding that men produce their identity by being *complicit* or *resistant* to the dominant masculine styles offered; Wetherell and Edley ask the critical questions of what do these acts of complicity or resistance involve? What do they look like? How do they influence and shape men's lives? Are men aware of what constitutes hegemonic masculinity? And a question that is at the heart of this thesis, 'How do men conform to an ideal and turn themselves into complicit or resistant types, without anyone ever managing to exactly embody that ideal?' (Wetherell and Edley, 1999: 337). To put in other terms, how might one begin to move away from understanding hegemonic masculinity as purely a concept and begin to understand what hegemonic masculinity looks like in a practical, interactional and mundane daily lifestyle. Wetherell and Edley (1999) place emphasis on the use of Imaginary Positioning as a phycho-discursive practice, the study of seeking to find common psychological themes amongst speech, text, images and everyday action. Their study served to explain how regular men may enact the norms associated with

fictional narratives of masculinity such as the heroism and warriorhood in a mundane daily lifestyle.[2] As Whetherell and Edley (1999) observe, '[i]t specifies an empirical site for investigation and can explain the conundrum of men who appear to be both hegemonic and non-hegemonic, complicit and resistant at the same time' (1999: 253). Although hero narratives and other fantasy based, mythological devices provide informative representations and potential gender related pathways to pursuit, this does not excuse the real, felt violence that individuals experience as a result of these subjects. Internally they may be enacting narratives of heroism and warriorhood but, externally they are still engaging in acts of male on male violence and abuse.

For me and that of Hearn (1998), the subjects of men's violence—emphasis here on a shift away from male violence (biological) and towards men's violence (gendered and socio-cultural)—is both personal and political. In being able to recognise that personal experience feeds into the wider social and political realm, I can recognise as Hearn (1998) does that 'violence is a reference point for the production of boys and men' (1998:7). As such violence itself is not something understood as innate or biological but, something that too is socially produced. A subject that is evidenced within my own practice in Chapter Two.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have since reformulated the theory of hegemonic masculinity to take into consideration gender hierarchy, the geography of masculinities, social embodiment and the different dynamics of masculinities. And yet, Hearn (2012) continues to critique the concept of hegemonic masculinity because of the difficulty to establish what hegemonic masculinity is within a context of masculinities. Hearn (2012) suggests that the concept of hegemonic masculinity has become itself a hegemonic discourse and as a result it may undermine issues of power and domination. Hearn (2012) writes:

> Hegemony has stopped being a configuration or social formation of political-cultural-economic social forces and ideological power, albeit contingent and contested, but is now something to be intuited hypothetically and described adjectivally (yet exactly how is unclear) in relation to masculinity, as configuration of practice, aspiration or cultural ideal, that legitimates gender domination. This shifts the focus of patriarchy from men to masculinity/ies, and to the primacy of the idea(s), and as such has had lasting, partly negative effects. Though this is not intended, this prioritization of 'masculinity' may be used as part of and incorporated into a reformist agenda to let men, and indeed other 'non-hegemonic' masculinities, 'off the hook' (of the complex issue of responsibility). It may diffuse critique of men, generically and specifically (Hearn, 2012:595).

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[2] For a further look into the how the notion of the hero see: Campbell, J., (2008). *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. Novato, Calif.: New World Library

Therefore, it is worth considering hegemonic masculinity but, also important to retain the understanding that what is being negotiated is not a singular dominant toxic masculinity but, a spectrum of complex social forces and ideologies that produce a wide range of toxic masculinities.

Hearn highlights a significant aspect that is only recently beginning to gather momentum within contemporary masculinities. The notion of the man taking *responsibility* for his own toxic masculinity. In being able to recognise the *ownership* of a certain display or performative expression of masculinity it might become possible to begin to understand the privileged, dominant and controlling position that is occupied. Moreover, such recognition then begins to allow an understanding of the damage such a position--with requisite behaviours and practices—is having upon both the self and those it subordinates. To become conscious of one's masculinity is the first step in beginning to undo the toxic gender matrix that has been constructed as a result of the plethora of wider socio-cultural influence and personal lived experience.

Shifting Social Agents

It is worth noting that some forms of agents of socialisation have begun to encourage this process. In 2019, Gillette produced an advert in response to the MeToo movement calling men to hold each other to a higher standard (Guardian News, 2019). The advert is an example of a much needed cultural-step change that instigates a shift in normative perceptions of masculinity. Within the advert, we see men rejecting normative narratives of toxic masculinity such as power in the workplace, violence to other men and the sexual objectification of women. When it comes to men's advertising there has been a long history of setting the precedent of toxic masculinity and thus, the division between the sexes. Men's advertising was constructed through the use the male gaze, a device which is known to remove or disrupt the agency of the individual who is being viewed, turning men into active *voyeurs* of women (Wernick, 1987). Later, shifting tides in equality between the sexes (though never completely equal) allowed men to become consumers of what were traditionally understood as feminine products (perfume, aftershave, etc). The method of advertisement then shifted to bring about a new trend of toxic masculinity in the form of the *narcist*, an identification of men who were becoming obsessed with the idea of their own self-image (Wernick, 1987). The later Gillette advert marks a very new trend of larger

companies beginning to use their platform to address important social issues.[3] Connell (1999) reminds us that:

> [S]ince the role norms are social facts, they can be changed by social processes. This will happen whenever the agencies of socialization – family, school, mass media, etc. – transmit new expectations. (Connell, 1999:.23)

The Gillette advert marks an important trend in the shifting tides of masculinities and does constitute as evidence that the subject of toxic masculinity and resistance to its practices and behaviours, is beginning to gather momentum and wider recognition within western society. However, socio-cultural step changes rarely transition in a smooth fashion without forms of resistance by those who seek to defend their position within the norm. Gillette's advert was received by audiences with no small amount of controversy, as strong opinions both for and against the advert were formed (Topping, Lyons and Weaver, 2019). This process means that depending upon the socio-cultural discourse of for and against, the new possible narrative can just as easily be rejected as it is accepted. It is this rejection of changing socio-cultural norms that begins to bring us towards an understanding of contemporary toxic masculinities.

Post-modern Fragility and the Murky Waters of Contemporary Masculinities

In this current moment, the western world is increasingly living in a post-modern / post structural era where stable definitions of identity and worldly events are becoming looser, more complex and much less easily defined. As Bowman (2020) observes:

> since the 1950s consumer societies have been in a period of post-modernity, in which societies are fragmented because of the proliferation of choice, increasingly commodified, exposed to globalization, and if not homogenized by all of this then at least increasingly technologically mediated. (Bowman, 2020:2)

It is this fragmentation and the increasing possibility of expression that has disrupted the seemingly stable, normative definitions of traditional masculinity. For example, upon attending and presenting work at the network launch for the *Masculinity and Sex Culture* conference in Birmingham. I was introduced to Finn Mackay who argues that anyone can identify with the traits associated with masculinity (Mercer, Smith and Sarson, 2019: 6-8). Finn Mackay expanded upon how the lesbian and queer adoption of masculine identity suggests that masculinity is more to do with appearance and the performance of the traits associated with masculinity, rather than part of a naturalised, innate function.

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[3] Though it remains unclear whether the company genuinely cares for the social issue or is utilising the popularity of the social issue to increase the positive publicity of the company for profit.

Thus, it seems there is a blurring between the fictional ideologies of what constitutes as masculinity and how these ideologies may be produced and expressed. As well as, how these acts of expression translate to real world events of dominance and control, power and authority, hegemony, complicity and thus, subordination. Kaufman (1987) continues:

> Masculinity is power. But masculinity is terrifyingly fragile because it does not really exist in the sense we are led to think it exists, that is, as a biological reality—something real that we have inside ourselves. It exists as ideology; it exists as scripted behaviour; it exists within "gendered" relationships. But in the end it is just a social institution with a tenuous relationship to that with which it is supposed to be synonymous: our maleness, our biological sex. (Kaufman: 1987: 13)

Therefore, it is important to understand masculinity not as a sexual construct or gendered performance that caters to one specific biological position, but, a collection of systematic ideologies, behaviours and practices that any individual may align towards and produce into a position of relative being.

But, as was seen with the opposing comments of the Gillette advert, the solidity of the masculine position continues to be reinforced largely through the application of populist social agents who seek to defend their position of privilege, power or authority. Populism though a complex and contested subject, is as Moffit (2016) suggests 'a political style that is performed, embodied and enacted across a variety of political and cultural contexts' (Moffit, 2016: 3). Its original design was for political actors to place the people against the elites. However, generally populism is the trend of preferencing to align with that which is currently popular rather than that which is factually, intellectually, academically or scientifically correct. Largely because the populist narrative is easier to believe than the difficult reality intellectualism often reveals. Through taking the stance of a specifically anti-feminist, anti-postmodern / post structural positions, the same may occur with social agents who provide guidelines for how to construct and express masculinity. For example, Jordan Peterson has become a prominent populist figure and has amassed a cult following the large majority of which are men. I know this simply because whenever I have discussed that I am researching toxic masculinity, the first thing men do is ask if I have read Jordan Peterson's (2018) book *Twelve Rules For Life*. The book provides a series of rules that Peterson swears are fundamental to living a successful, healthy and fulfilled life, once again drawing from positions of mythology and religion. His position as an academic and literary contributor have served as justification for populism to regurgitate his theories to justify an anti-feminist and biologically masculine position.

Peterson has not been shy about hiding his anti-feminist, anti-postmodern, far right position, actively arguing the separation between power and patriarchy[4]. An understanding that any basic reading of gender and poststructuralism—as has been seen within the research presented—directly points towards the notion of patriarchy being more about power, authority and institutions and how these forces nurture masculinity into being, rather than being as a result of biological position (Butler, 2004, Connell, 1995, Kaufman, 1987). Furthermore, as Reynaud (1983) argued that interpreting identity—particularly that of masculinity—through religious narratives such as that of Christianity may serve to further enforce the notion of sexual difference and further encourage the pursuit of virility, a trait that is increasingly equated with toxic masculinity.

The Guardian (2019) presented a potential case as to why that of Peterson has become such a popular role model for contemporary masculinity. They propose that his popularity is the result of another potential 'crisis' within masculinity. The original theorised crisis was born out of rapidly changing social, economic and political forces during the period of modernity. What were once solid foundations to build a masculine identity upon —such as the biological position, the capacity to labour and fatherhood—were either no longer socio-culturally accepted—such as innate biological position equating to power and authority—or were no longer available—such as the replacement of a great deal of manual labour with technology This provided a form of identity crisis amongst men as they were no longer able to engage in activities that affirmed their masculinity (MacInnes, 1998: 45).

Thus, I take a brief moment to return to Butler (1990) who stated that gender expression is a largely fictional concept that is brought into being through the repetition of activities. In this same sense, masculinity is not separate from gender and so, it becomes a largely fictional concept that has to be proven by engagement in repetitive activities that affirm the status of *manhood*. This concept leads to the notion of a *Precarious Manhood (*Bosson, Jennifer, Vandello, Joseph , 2011*),* the understanding that *manhood* is not inborn but, something that is acquired or achieved. The *boy* is not awarded the title of the *man* until he engages in painful and difficult initiation rituals that affirm his status. These vary from culture to culture, however, in western society there has become a noticeable absence of the socially understood initiation rituals and yet, the expectations placed upon the boy to become a man remain—within specific socio-cultural contexts—relatively the same. Thus, men are encouraged to

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[4] See: EducateInspireChangeTV, (2018). *Jordan Peterson Completely Destroys Feminist Narrative*. [video] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JB9sfe_mQ1I [Accessed 1 September 2020].

engage in more aggressive and assertive behaviours in a quest to establish and obtain subjects such as *honour* and other forms of status that are equated with manhood (Bosson, Jennifer, Vandello, Joseph , 2011). Understanding the status of manhood as something to be achieved allows for a greater emphasis to be placed, not upon the final manifestation of a masculine identity, but, the *processual journey* that boys and young men particularly have to go through to become men.

The Guardian (2019) suggests that Peterson is providing a form of pathway for men to negotiate the increasingly murky waters of what constitutes as socially acceptable masculinity within the age of MeeToo and political correctness. They interview Neil, a barbershop owner from the north of England who elaborates on the idea suggesting that the problem is due to a *feminisation of masculinity*[5], aligning with MacInnes (1998) assertion that:

> What were once claimed to be manly virtues (heroism, independence, courage, strength, rationality, will, backbone, virility) have become masculine vices (abuse, destructive aggression, coldness, emotional inarticulacy, detachment, isolation, an inability to be flexible, to communicate, to empathize, to be soft, supportive or life affirming). (MacInnes, 1998: 47)

It seems that since men have increasingly begun to be held accountable for their actions of toxic masculinity, the very same men are beginning to become confused and *disenfranchised* about how to construct their masculinity or at the very least, what might constitute as socially acceptable masculinity.

In the original theorized 'crisis' in masculinity, Brittan (1989) argued that the dismantling of sex roles—amongst other reasons—meant that men were encountering new forms of gender anxiety largely due to the increasing plethora of possibility of masculine expression and, simultaneously, the extinguishing of previous known and understood possibilities of expression. Brittan (1989) expands:

> The old certainties about the male sex role, the fragmentation of social life and consciousness means that old rules are no longer of much use because they are continuously rewritten and reinterpreted. (…) Now, all we can see is the spectacle of countless millions of men experiencing acute gender anxieties. (Brittan, 1989:27).

In the early years of boyhood, within many still prominent western socio-cultural situations, men are taught to pursue traits of the masculine. Social agents inform them to be strong, tough, dominant, to pick on the girls, to not take no for an answer, to man up, to not move an

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[5] See: The Guardian, (2019). *Why Jordan Peterson Is Filling The Void | Modern Masculinity*. [video] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYnO2wuIiBg&list=PLa_1MA_DEorHnYu0HjO2pTwtulpJu2YAW [Accessed 1 September 2020]. (5.40 – 6.50)

inch and it is only when they reach maturity that they truly begin to encounter consequences for engaging in actions associated with practices. Does this not begin to appear like a regurgitation of the men's movement, however, this time not seeking to work with feminism but, take a specifically anti-feminist approach? On one hand, this does appear that I am suggesting there is a contemporary crisis in masculinity, where men are negotiating a gender anxiety about how to be a man. However, the reality is less forgiving of the actions of toxic masculinity. There may be a number of men who are feeling "anxious" about their masculinity within contemporary society and this is largely a good thing. To be anxious of one's masculinity is to be conscious of what actions might be causing harm to both the self and the rest of society. However, toxic masculinity is a largely unconscious process and the actions of the world reflect this. In the Guardian (2019) documentary, Neil rather astutely observes the counter point to the Gillete advert, in that what is truly perpetuating a "contemporary crisis" in masculinity is more likely to be the *abandonment of responsibility.* He identifies this within *Lad Culture*, a very clear embodiment of an anti-feminist and anti-intellectual position. Observed in the 1990's was the beginning of a trend of young men rejecting feminist traits and subjects of sensitivity and awareness in favour of a *Lad Culture.* A culture that actively engages in and celebrates subjects of drinking, drugs, sexism, violence and racism (Willis, 1993). Lad culture is a popular example of the what Ging (2019) would categorise as the *manosphere*, a space that takes an anti-feminist position suggesting that it is these changing socio-cultural forces that are to blame for the problem's men are encountering. Lad culture becomes a space where men are able to freely engage in traits of toxic masculinity and simultaneously, affirm the traits of their masculinity. The space masks subjects of power and subordination by authenticating the actions under the guise of jokes and a good time. Ultimately, the influence of drugs and alcohol only exacerbates the severity of the acts associated with affirmation and subordination (Willis, 1993).

Though this has seemingly become a confusing time for men who grow up with socio-cultural narratives of toxic masculinity—deeply embedded within their identity—this step-change of what ideologies are acceptable for men to pursue represents a largely positive thing for wider society and indeed, men themselves. It is becoming less and less required for men to be strong, tough, emotionally repressed and this, is long overdue. For example, the pursuit or affirmation of heterosexual masculine ideals, particularly within the context of Lad Culture regularly result in the sexual objectification and subordination of women in an effort to a secure the definition. In the words of Holland, Ramazanoglue and Sharpe (1993):

> Young men do not need to have any intention, nor even any awareness, of subordinating women in order to exercise power over them. Their struggle to be successfully masculine, to emerge as young gladiators rather than as wimps, involve them in defining their sexuality in terms of male needs, male desires and male satisfactions, rather than in terms that might acknowledge and engage with female sexuality. (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, 1993: 32)

A large amount my work as an artist is constructed around the subject of repressing traits associated with femininity and homosexuality. The privileging of heterosexual male needs, desires and satisfactions is central to understanding toxic masculinity. The practice becomes about recognising these intentions and desires and to begin to question and recognise if the act is born out of a desire to fulfil a socio-cultural discourse of toxic masculinity. The rise of MeToo and political correctness is a direct socio-cultural response to the rapidly changing discourses of women and the relatively unchanging discourses of toxic masculinity, and this surely is where the perceived crisis truly lies. Though the methods in which men may go about engaging in a toxic act may change, the fundamental principles of dominance, control, power, authority, repression and objectification remain the same.

What truly needs to be addressed is the methods in which subjects such as strength, toughness, dominance, control, power and authority are being introduced to men through these populist social agents in the form of the *masculine ideal* (Glover and Kaplan, 2000). The masculine ideal can be drawn from range of sources both relative and fictional. Manifestations of hegemonic masculinity were originally drawn from a position of fantasy such as John Wayne, or John Rambo (Connell, 1995: 185). Peterson actively encourages it in his book through the employment of rules. The ideal is a gender-based philosophy that, in the words of Glover and Kaplan (2000) consists of a:

> highly charged bundle of ideas that (…) lay a renewed emphasis upon the perfectibility of the male body, which became an outward sign of a man's moral superiority and inner strength of character. The body was to be a locus of self-discipline and restraint, able so to concentrate its energies that any obstacle could be surmounted, any hint of emotional weakness could be held in check. (Glover and Kaplan, 2000: 59)

Men are encouraged through the numerous social agents available within contemporary society to pursuit an ideal state of being in which they are able to accomplish any task, without difficulty, lack of confidence, remorse or sensitive regard for their bodies. If they are unable to do so, they may lose their position within a given heteronormative social hierarchy, be labelled as *un-manly* or worse, begin encounter crisis.[6] And so, the activities that

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[6] Connell (1999) talks about the crisis that occurs from being unable to successfully pursuit hegemonic masculinity.

contribute towards the potency of the expression of masculinity have an innate value linked to idealism. The closer an affirmative activity aligns with a specific ideal, the more potent the "quality" of manhood is produced. Making the entire process of affirmation intrinsically hierarchal, highly *precarious* and even more unstable (Donaldson, 1993 and Bosson, Jennifer, Vandello, Joseph , 2011). This difficultly in pursing perfectibility of the masculine ideal can result in some quite severe physical and psychological damages to the men in question. For example, the pursuit of hegemonic masculinity on an unstable gender identity, where the individual does not necessarily align with traits of dominance and control or is negotiating forms of trauma, usually sourced from early childhood where social agents were either totally absent or aggressively reinforced masculine ideals, may lead to the development of a *Hyper Masculinity* (Pleck: 1992). Typically understood as an exaggeration of the stereotypical behaviour associated with the masculine, the practice tends to involve the expression and display of external physical aspects of violence, dangerous activities and sexual aggression. In the effort to place greater emphasis upon masculine abilities, an intense repression of behaviours and emotions that could be associated with weakness and femininity occurs (Pleck: 1982: 95 -115).

This was also revealed in *All Man,* the documentary by Grayson Perry conducting an investigation into the effects of macho masculinity within contemporary society (Fronczak, 2016: 5.55). Andy is a cage fighter from the northeast of England. He reveals that his love for the MMA space is because it provides him with an opportunity to release and escape from the anxieties of his regular life. Andy embodies all the traits of hyper masculinity by engaging in extreme forms of exercise, taking on multiple opponents and not being satisfied with his performance until he is physically unable to continue (Pleck, 1982). When asked to elaborate upon where he draws this feeling from, he reveals that he had a difficult childhood. When he was young, he moved from care home to care home, his only solace was that of his older brother who was like a father to him. Through tears, Andy reveals that his brother committed suicide and that Perry was the first-person Andy had shared that information with. He later reveals that if it was not for his participation in violent practice, he too would have taken his own life. Bowman (2020) provides an effective summary of this moment:

> Through this and other examples involving tales of male suicides, the programme
> moves in the direction of constructing northern masculinity as sedulous, taciturn,
> unable to communicate or indeed handle many emotions. This type of masculinity is
> constructed via a kind of denial (or foreclosure) of emotions, and even to be paranoid
> about communication as such. (…): real men don't talk; real men endure; and, if
> pushed, they fight. Indeed, in many instances in this programme, fighting is painted

less as therapy and more as only a temporary kind of pseudo-release from a deeper existential pain – maybe in the same way that self-harm or drug use is 'release': i.e., not in a very good way, because the release it gives from the symptoms of being screwed up is chimerical, short-lived, and does not tackle the cause of the problems. (Bowman, 2020: 9)

Andy's personal history and his motivations behind his severe engagement in violent practice suggest that his prolonged engagement in acts of violence is a release from the severe emotional turmoil within him that has been brought about by his personal historicity. It also aligns with the work of Kaufman (1987) who states that:

In adolescence the pain and fear involved in repressing "femininity," and passivity, start to become evident. For most of us, the response to this inner pain is to reinforce the bulwarks of masculinity. The emotional pain created by obsessive masculinity is stilted by reinforcing masculinity itself. (Kaufman, 1987: 12)

It seems that due to the individuals socio-cultural gender position he occupies—combined with his own personal enforcement of a masculine framework—Andy was not able to negotiate his emotional turmoil even in a private capacity but, was only able to do so when in a professional context, approached by a professional artist who embodies very few of the traits associated with toxic masculinity.

The prolonged engagement in violent practice provided Andy with a form of affirmative security that both reinforced the potency of his masculinity and allowed him to release his emotional repression. It was this engagement in violent practice that allowed him to not give into to his feelings of suicide. In this sense, Andy is caught up in a dichotomy between gender expression and emotional trauma. The engagement in violent practice allowed him to release the emotion but, it is the very foundations of his hyper-masculinity that prevented him from directly addressing the problem at hand. Engagement in violent practice thus, was only serving to reinforce the dichotomy of his manhood.

Andy's narrative reveals the last stop on the path of toxic masculinity, on the path of repression and on the path of crisis. Andy's brother committed suicide. An action that is in no way located with just the individual but, has become a sure sign of a wider-sociocultural problem of toxic masculinity. The Office for National Statistics have produced their latest report on the number of suicides recorded in England and Wales in 2019 where they reported that 'Around three-quarters of registered deaths in 2019 were among men (4,303 deaths), which follows a consistent trend back to the mid-1990s' (Manders and Windsor-Shellard, 2020: 2). The statistics mark a relatively unchanged trend of men in England and Wales continuing to have the highest rates of suicide. For me, this is irrefutable evidence that toxic masculinity (amongst a great deal many other reasons) has a role to play in those prolonged

statistics of male suicide. It is not just causing severe damage to othered communities but, indeed many men who reside within cultures of toxic masculinity. These statistics draw the conceptual problems of toxic masculinity into a position of reality. Throughout my experience as young man, I and numerous male friends I have had the pleasure of knowing—both young and old—have encountered depression, anxiety and other forms of mental health problems. I have witnessed the efforts to negotiate these feelings in an incredibly unhealthy way. A clearly defined refusal to acknowledge and address the problem, resorting to escape from it through avenues of labour, lad culture or violent practice. The reality only begins to truly sink in when the damage has been done. Whether that is damage to society, damage to friends/loved ones or damage to the self, it is always damage that without the presence of toxic masculinity could have begun to have been prevented.

All of this research suggests it is time to reflect on what aspects of masculinity are causing harm to the individual and wider society. What fragmentations of toxic masculinity are still engrained within the expression of masculine identity? It truly is a time in which to begin the difficult dialogues. The deeply difficult dialogues about what fictions of idealisation, of power, of dominance, of control, of strength, of stoicism, of success have been invested into, only to have that investment turn sour and begin to poison the very same vessel that tried with all its efforts to draw its conceptuality into a position of relative being.

Summary

Despite stating my wish to resist further perpetuation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, I do wish to provide a summary of it that encapsulates everything that is being negotiated. For this, Donaldson (1993) provides an effective summary of hegemonic masculinity as:

> A culturally idealized form, it is both a personal and a collective project, and is the common sense about breadwinning and man-hood. It is exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal, and violent. It is pseudo-natural, tough, contradictory, crisis-prone, rich, and socially sustained. While centrally connected with the institutions of male dominance, not all men practice it, though most benefit from it. Although cross-class, it often excludes working-class and black men. It is a lived experience, and an economic and cultural force, and dependent on social arrangements. It is con-structed through difficult negotiation over a life-time. Fragile it may be, but it constructs the most dangerous things we live with. Resilient, it incorporates its own critiques, but it is, nonetheless, "unravelling". (Donaldson, 1993: 645 – 646)

Donaldson highlights many of the key subjects related to this thesis. Firstly, that it is the *culturally idealized form* of what masculinity *should* be. It is not the man who engages in the frameworks of masculinity, but he who sets the precedents and enforces the frameworks upon

men and women to enact, comply with or be subordinated by it practices. Thus, hegemonic masculinity is exclusive to a select few individuals who have the *capacity* to set and enforce the frameworks in private, social, institutional, political and economic contexts. It is because only a select few men can embody hegemonic masculinity, that it negotiates strict forms of hierarchy, both internal—the man himself enforcing hierarchy perceptions upon himself —and external—the man enforcing his hierarchy on others through private, social, institutional contexts. The ideologies these men may feel they have to display and replicate such as toughness and dominance are often done through intense, often brutal and violent practices. The *pursuit* of which can be extremely anxiety-provoking and make men prone to experience forms of *masculine crisis.*

The key emphasis that is carried throughout all of this research is that whether it is hegemonic, hyper/macho, lad or ideal masculinity, all of this is enacted and affirmed through an engagement in practice. In the era of post-structural / post-modernity though wider socio-cultural forces do serve to influence the discursive construction of the subject, it does not excuse the agency of the individual who acts out these systems. In the words of Butler (2004), '[n]ot only are we culturally constructed, but in some sense, we construct ourselves' (Salih and Butler, 2004: 23). It is the personal engagement in *acts* that constitute the identification of masculinity, with reference to the wider socio-cultural framework that serves to explain how these forces flow through the individual's body to constitute the appearance of the substance of toxic masculinity. And so, I cannot not seek to resolve the wider socio-systematic problem of toxic masculinity, nor am I expected to do so, however, what I can begin to do is claim ownership of my own toxic masculinity in reference to the wider socio-cultural world and so, it is with this in mind that I move towards my own practice-as-research.

Chapter Two
The Appearance and Representation of Toxic Masculinity

Now that I have presented the theoretical and socio-cultural landscape of toxic masculinity, it is now time to explore how these subjects translate onto my body in terms of performance, display and representation. In the last chapter, it was concluded that masculinity—though part of a complex socio-cultural framework—is largely to do with the performance and appearance of the body. It is the body that receives definitions of masculinity and so, it is the body that can both reveal and affirm toxic masculinity through practice. As Connell (1995) observes:

> it should not imply that in general the body becomes a social agent as if from pure nature, from some standpoint outside society. The body-as-used, the body **I** am, is a social body that has taken meanings rather than conferred them. My male body does not confer masculinity on me; it receives masculinity (…) as its social definition. (Connell: 1995: 83)

Understanding that my male body is a receiver of social definition has allowed me to become aware of the process of shaping my body towards specific meanings associated with toxic masculinity. In response to this, my practice-as-research process has become about documenting the practices of the body that reveal and confer such meaning.

I have created two mediated, installation-like, live art performances to function as points of representation in response to the subjects mentioned. The material that is about to be presented explores how my male body has adopted and confers social meanings of toxic masculinities by conforming towards the appearance and display of specific heteronormative versions of masculinity that are present in my identity. By doing so, I have sought to be able to identify how subjects such as patriarchy, ideal masculinity, lad culture, hyper masculinity and precarious masculinity function and reveal themselves within my own masculinity.

Firstly, I created *Miscellaneous Male (2020)*, a live art performance that sees me shave my hair, beard and pubic region in order to conform to a heteronormative appearance. This performance serves to document my transition towards the socio-culturally perceived ideal of my version of heteronormative masculinity. The event was documented using two separate framing devices intended to begin to reveal how these socio-cultural messages of ideal/toxic masculinity may be received in a public space and begin to translate into private, more personal spaces.

Secondly, in seeking to continue with the theme of using performance and representation as a platform in which to explore my toxic masculinity through practice, a short live art film called *Multiple Conflicts (2020)* was created to allow a viewing of violent toxic masculinity in action. The film seeks to reveal how subjects related to Connell's theory of hegemonic

masculinity (1995) such as power, idealism, class, strength, precarity, virility and hierarchy affirm specific characteristics of identity through the use of representative clothing and a prolonged engagement in violent physical practice. This provides opportunity to reflect upon the wider socio-cultural narrative of toxic masculinity and in doing so, this seeks to reveal what issues arise from conforming to these representations.

Furthermore, as a part of my artistic engagement in the research I have captured each representation with photography. This has allowed a series of images to be presented alongside the film and serve as further points of discussion and analysis.

The two performances seek to present how shifting the perception of masculinity (singular, innate, natural) towards the perception of masculinities (multiple, socio-culturally constructed) holds the potential to understand that the individual does not just construct a singular masculine identity within a world of masculinities but, that the singular masculine identity itself comprises of—and is informed by—multiple *fragmentations* of masculinity.

Auto-Biographical Set Up

Before I go further, I must provide some form background to myself, this way it becomes clear to understand what environments my body has already encountered. Before this project began, I was living on at my family home, a farm on the moortops of Halifax, West Yorkshire. Right away, two forms of masculinity are identified, the first being that of the Yorkshireman and the second being that of a farmer. The Yorkshire man is stereotypically famous for its hyper-macho masculinity. It is common to equate a Yorkshireman with practices of extreme labour, the consumption of large amounts of alcohol, misogynistic, racist and homophobic behaviour, loud and exaggerated bravado but, in the very same context, also honourable, passionate, caring, loving in their own sense of these discourses and willing to sacrifice their own personal wellbeing for those they care about. Though this is equated with stereotype, for me I have this to be quite true, as this stereotype was in fact my socio-cultural sex role. My family occupies a long history of working-class labourers who actively and successfully embody their local socio-cultural sex roles of Yorkshiremen and women.

I was the first person in my family to attend university. I grew up with the understanding that "people like us don't go to university". Labour for us was a point of pride and a key defining element of our heritage, identity and thus, masculinity. As Kaufman (1987) observes:

> For a working class boy, the avenue of mastering the world of business, politics, the professions, and wealth is all but denied. For male power is often defined in the form of working class machismo. The power to dominate is expressed in a direct physical form. Domination of the factors of production is achieved through sheer bravado and muscle power. (Kaufman, 1987: 12 -13)

Though the class divide is not as severe as it was when Kaufman wrote that statement, it was still a reality for me. I have been raised to be both a labourer and a farm hand and this process does involve cultivating traits associated with toxic masculinity. Strength for lifting heavy objects, endurance of the long hours and the repetitiveness of the labour, stoicism to be able to continue working after striking your hand with a hammer, tolerate the harsh weather, move on after witnessing the death of animals, dominance so that I am be able to control the animals, control so that I am able to guide a heard of animals to a new pasture. After this work is done, I would never fail to be invited to the pub, where we would consume anywhere from three to eight pints of alcohol. Only to wake up the next day and do it all again. As a part of my working-class position you become acquainted with pub culture from a very early age and as a result, pub culture becomes a defining from of recreation for our identity. However, this also begins to lay the foundations for a deep involvement in lad culture. Though I have been somewhat constructed in a way to perform all of these tasks efferently, I never felt that I aligned with the life of labourer. I was always much more concerned with fulfilling adventures out into woodlands. I would pack a bag full of essentials consisting of paper, kindling, a wood axe, a book, a bottle of water, a bottle of beer and food. I would grab my staff (an old worn broom handle with no broom on the end), call my dog to my side and together we would set out onto the moortops or nearby woodland. Once we found a nice, secluded spot, preferably very far away from any form of civilisation, I would begin to train, applying much of the practices I have picked up over the years. Activities included an assortment of physical training, yoga, bush craft, reading, writing, singing, contemporary dance and always a more intense version of imaginary stage combat. Upon exhausting myself, the evening would end sat around a campfire reflecting upon the day's events, reading, writing, singing and meditating. Upon a later discovery realised within the research process, it seems I was trying to reach a form of enlightenment masculinity through a prolonged engagement in these practices out in nature. At the time, my body had become a healthy, muscular build from the repetition of these activities. I possessed a thick brunette beard with long, blonde tipped hair that stretched down to my shoulders, my voice was a booming masculine northern accent. It was all of these training processes combined with my constant interaction with natural settings (farms, woodlands, moortops) that cultivated an extremely strong connection to the deep masculine. Robert Bly (2001) recognised this as the *Wildman,* a man with hair the stretched all the down past his shoulders and was deeply attended to the ways of the world. Offering the notion that the deep masculine, that which

supposedly resides deep within the male psyche can be accessed through an engagement with nature and guide us through the difficult events of world:

> When a contemporary man looks down into his psyche, he may, if conditions are right, find under the water of his soul, lying in an area no one has visited for a long time, an ancient hairy man. The mythological systems associate hair with the instinctive and the sexual and the primitive. What I'm suggesting then, is that every modern male has, lying at the bottom of his psyche, a large, primitive being covered with hair down to his feet. (Bly, 2001: 5 – 6)

However, again, this notion that a pursuit of the deep masculine can resolve men of the issues of patriarchy are sorely mistaken. Upton (2005) argued against 'the notion that the increasing artificiality of our social relationships and personalities, due largely to the insane course of technological civilisation, can be made right again through a return to natural wilderness (Upton, 2005: 16).

Prolonged amounts of training in labour, acting, physical movement, stage combat, yoga and wilderness survival had cultivated what I believe to be deep connection to this masculine, wild man. My innate, natural perception of masculinity was informed by the several intense forms of masculinity I had encountered, my able bodies capacity to engage in the acts that affirm the position of Wildman and my connection to a natural, primitive landscape. However, I would always find my illusion of enlightenment shattered the moment I was required to return to civilisation. Returning to acts of labour, negotiating various social agents was only beginning to cultivate and exacerbate more toxic traits. I found myself with more *surplus anger* than ever, somehow less emotionally expressive and had cultivated a deeper engagement in practices of lad culture. Though it seems a successful integration with nature is in some way the answer, it proves to be ineffective on the individual level, when that individual still resides within the relevant socio-cultural discourses that perpetuates systematic toxic masculinity.

And it is with this notion, my original belief to have a connection to the deeply mythological masculine that I introduce in the first performance. For me, Miscellaneous Male became about the stripping away of the illusion of an enlightened masculine and beginning to work towards a relatively objective, systematic construction of a gendered toxic masculinity.

Miscellaneous Male - **The Actions and Practice of a Masculine Body in the Live Art Space**

> The doors open. The audience walk in and they are met by a man sitting in an illuminated square in the centre of the room. His hair is covering his face, masking his identity. In front of him, at the bottom of his feet is a mirror, next to him is a small pot of water, two electric shavers and a small container. The container holds a pair of scissors, a razor, several shaving clips and some aftershave. The man releases a series loud breath though the nose. Then, slowly leaning forward, he takes a moment to view himself in the mirror, reaches for the scissors and begins to cut away his hair.
>
> (See: Appendix 1 – *Miscellaneous Male*)

Miscellaneous Male marks the first live art installation in the two-part series. The performance sees me enact my own adaption of some common masculine acts associated with the grooming of appearance. These acts include the cutting/shaving of head hair, facial hair and pubic hair and were chosen to explore the shaping of my appearance to conform with wider socio-cultural dividends of toxic masculinity.

Exploring this through an understanding of Buter's (1990) repetition of activities that produce the appearance of substance, it became of note that at the time my long hair and beard, whilst successfully representing the *deep masculine* (Bly, 2001) did not represent what might constitute as a heteronormative appearance or display of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Thus, with the desire to strip away this representation of the deep masculine and document my conformation towards the heteronormative dividend, I first had to consider the same as Spatz (2015) that 'If the layers of gender that constrain daily choice are made out of "power" and "history," these are concretely realized in the body as technique: knowledge of what to do, ways of doing things, pathways through the world' (Spatz, 2015: 198). Thus, if it is these *gender techniques* that shape the body towards a particular appearance or representation of gender, then the techniques that shape the body towards a specific appearance need to be explored.

In seeking to understand toxic masculinity through ways of doing, I also consider Wetherell and Edley's (1999) proposition that:

> Hegemonic masculinity is not a personality type or an actual male character. Rather, it is an ideal or set of prescriptive social norms, symbolically represented, but a crucial part of the texture of many routine mundane social and disciplinary activities. (Wetherell and Edley, 1999: 336)

Conforming towards hegemonic masculinity is largely a complex series of automated actions, engaged on a daily basis without much thought, and thus—to an extent—it is a process of unconscious action.

With these thoughts been taken into consideration, it became logical to engage in the act of cutting the hair on my body that represent my masculine traits. Conformation to a toxic construction of masculinity begins with the manipulation of hair to establish subjects of maturity, sexual availability, male to male aggressiveness, hierarchy and social dominance (Dixson, 2017). For example, my ability to grow a full beard from the age of fifteen allowed me to talk my way into pubs and clubs without identification and so, begin an engagement in Lad Culture from a much younger age. In the set up to a social event, I would always engage in a series of personal grooming actions that the majority of men are able to recognise. It involves the grooming of the hair, the shaving or styling of the beard and the removing of the pubic hair. In the context of lad culture, this is designed to affirm maturity, communicate sexual availability and thus, prepare for a sexual encounter and give one the confidence to engage in the acts of hierarchy and social dominance (Dixon,2017). Thus, it became logical to document the repetition of these activities and in doing so, present how articulations of hegemonic masculinity shift and reproduce (Connell:1995).

In preparation from the performance, I looked at the work of Ron Athey (Johnson, 2013), a performance artist who utilises queer, sadomasochistic, religious and ritualistic practices within his installations. These practices were drawn from both his experiences of growing up as homosexual and his experience of growing up as part of the Pentecostal movement in which, he would perform and act many different religious practices (MacEwan, 2011). It is important to note that I do not occupy the same artistic position as that of Athey. I am a cis gendered, heterosexual male and as such I occupy a socio-cultural position in stark contrast to that of Athey. However, there were aspects of Athey's work that served to inspire and inform the development of my own art installations.

A great deal the power that comes from Athey's installations does so from his position and experience as a queer artist. He engages in sadomasochistic acts in the attempts to portray subjects relevant to his experience such as placing arrows through the flesh to recreate famous renaissance paintings from Christianity or place multiple needles up his arm to symbolise his relationship to drug use (Heathfield: 2004: 88- 89). The installations were quite discomforting for his audience who were permitted front row seats to the action. Johnson (2013) writes 'In its uncompromising excess, Athey's work reminds us that art and performance are most exciting and relevant when a work takes an audience up to and beyond

a certain limit: of the beautiful, the bearable, and other coded manifestations of decency' (Johnson, 2013: 10). Athey's work tended to represent a distorted, painful, image that managed to transgress the normative and transcend to an image that was difficult to process but, somehow represented a strange state of being within the twenty-first century.

Within the work of *Miscellaneous Male* (2020)*,* I was inspired at how Athey used autobiographical moments to inspire his actions on stage. In particular, his use of repetition and duration to begin to cultivate a sense of spiritual transcendence related to his Pentecostal upbringing. As well as, allowing his audience a front row seat to view these events unfold, providing them with an opportunity to absorb every detail of the performance. Within my work, I had no desire to begin engaging in overly explicit sadomasochistic acts, although arguably a large amount of toxic masculinity—as shall be seen throughout—does involve some elements of sadism. The performance art of Athey provided me with the idea of how to situate my work, by placing my body in a relatively empty, ambiguous space and engage in the repetition of acts that cultivate a specific sense of action in the world.

The use of hair in front of the face was in front of the face and breathing techniques employed were designed to try and further create this open, ambiguous atmosphere. I was further inspired by the work of Tetworth (2002) who describes the grooming of hair as a form of *life ritual,* one that encourages a specific mask of behaviour in which we perform in a social situation (Tetworth, 2002: 9 - 14). Before I can expand upon the term *life Ritual,* I must first expand upon the term *Ritual.*

Richard Schechner (1993) conducted a great detail of research on the intersection between ritual and theatre and performance. The term ritual can mean a number of different things. Schechner (1993) defines a ritual as:

> Ordinary behaviour transformed by means of condensation, exaggeration, repetition, and rhythm into specialized sequences of behaviour serving specific functions usually having to do with mating, hierarchy, or territoriality. (Schechner: 1993: 228)

Thus, a life ritual would be a common everyday practice that is designed to encourage the individual to engage in social performances that would potentially instigate sexual interaction or engagement/advancement within a social hierarchy. The life ritual is a preparation for the social performance, a performance that does not always align with our authentic intentions. For example, in lad culture, in an effort for boys and men to display subjects of toughness or hardness they will actively deny feelings that contradict the narrative such as fear or anxiety (Willis, 1993). In this sense, masculinity in many ways becomes a form of social mask where we display traits and expressions that are not necessarily our true feelings. I wanted to start off with the very clear sense of this mask, that this is something that seems other. The literal

masking of my face allows me to remain anonymous, suggesting that this is not derived from the actions of a singular male, but the actions of many males throughout society who conform to the hegemonic dividend.

Site, Shadow and Display

The space in the performance is notably shrouded in darkness. The only form of lighting within the space is a clearly defined square that illuminates an area just large enough to fit a chair, one person and some accessories used for the cutting of hair. The decision to create a space that employs a significant use of darkness was inspired by Jung's theory of the shadow. The notion that we have a darker part of our psyche, more feral unconscious part (Moore and Gillette, 1991). In doing so, I wanted to suggest that this was not just a regular grooming of the masculine appearance but, some form of ritual that draws the individual hegemonic ideologies such as dominance and control. Ideologies that—in Jungian terms—would be considered to be aspects of our shadow self.

Working in line with subjects associated with toxic masculinity and the social body, I chose to position the work in the territory of display, providing no opportunity for intersubjective exchange between the performer and audience. The clear separation of light and darkness creates the illusion of a void between the performer and audience. The notion of such a void was inspired by what Grayson Perry (2016) observed to be the *masculine void,* where he began to observe a trend of men retreating from their emotions rather than dealing with them (Fronczak, 2016:107 -121). Traditional definitions of masculinity prevent men from externally communicating about their emotions or subjective turmoil, due to fears associated with being marked as un-manly, homosexual or being unable to negotiate the feelings of vulnerability that incur in moments of emotion. Thus, the suffering is projected inwards. The traditional man takes it upon himself to negotiate these feelings, but the absence of open and external communication can lead to experiencing potent feelings of emotional isolation. This emotional isolation is very dangerous for men. In efforts to remain manly this may create a potent subjective numbness, which Bly (2001: 68 – 70)—amongst others—observed to be a trend of the masculine journey.

This emotional isolation or numbness is a side effect of toxic masculinity and is the contributing factor the increased number of suicides amongst men. Resulting in a plethora of new campaigns such as Phoenix Man's Counselling (Fierstein, 2010) and Andy's Man Club[7]

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[7] It is now common to see an advertisement for services such as Andy's Man Club in a male public toilet.

(Andys Man Club, n.d.) that seek to undo this process and prevent any further damage that might occur as a result. Thus, the live art material has been constructed to represent this masculine void, a space where the majority of this work resides, a place of masculine affirmation that is causes harm to the individual.

Public and Private Spheres, Vulnerability and Social Barriers

In the first half of the performance the filming team were documenting the performance in close proximity to myself. Allowing the audience to view the filming team document my process of cutting my hair and beard. After finished these two aspects, I stop shaving and signify to the camera men that it is time for them to exit. They leave and I proceed to begin shaving my pubic hair (See Appendix 1: 15.40). In the moment where the camera men leave and shut the door there was a significant shift that was felt in the tone of the performance. This was brought to my attention by an audience member afterwards and so, I sought to acknowledge and reflect this shift when editing of the film. I was informed that when the professional bodies—in this case the filming team—exited the space, the performance became a much more private viewing.

The term 'body' is understood to represent more than just that of the physical, mechanical object western thought tends to employ to perceive and understand the body. As Ramirez Ladron de Guevara (2011) observes:

> It is used in a great number of contexts and alluding to a wide range of different objects, organisms and concepts. In this way, it is possible to use the word 'body' to talk about *the body* of work of a director, *the body* of a wine, *the body* of a text, (…), an organization's *body*, a *body* of water, and, of course, of human *bodies*. (Ramirez Ladron de Guevara, 2011: 21)

In this sense, there were multiple forms of *bodies* present within the performance space. My body alone can be perceived in multiple formats. There is my *body-as-a-lived-entity* that is being perceived and mediated by the audience's senses (Ramirez Ladron de Guevara, 2011: 25). I am engaging in largely automated, mechanical process of hair removal and this is momentarily interrupted by the cut of my finger (See: Apendix 1: 09.00). In this sense, I am also functioning as an *ecstatic / fleshy body* (Ramirez Ladron de Guevara, 2011: 26). Furthermore, through my role as live artist, employing specific techniques such as positioning my hair in front of my face, being a body mediated through film and owning a specify construction associated with masculinity (which as was discovered earlier, is a largely fictional process brought into being through the body) I am also functioning as an *imagined body* (Ramirez Ladron de Guevara, 2011: 30). However, there was also another *body* present

within the space. The presence of a *professional body* provided a social barrier that is a publicly known and subjectively felt artifice between performers and audiences. Whalley and Miller (2017) make similar observations when back in 2012 they viewed Marina Abramovich's *The Artist is Present.* Miller's engagement with the work was interrupted because he was intrinsically aware of the surrounding gazes placed upon him by security guards and queuing audience members. The presence of these *spectating bodies* and their gazes directly 'informed the subjective position 'they' occupied' (Whalley and Miller, 2017:5). Though I cannot speak for my audience's subjective position, I can observe that my audience were notably hesitant to be in close proximity to me. It became clear that I had unintentionally created two barriers for my audience. The first was a luminal barrier created by my choice of lighting and the second barrier was a social obstacle brought about by the filming team. The act of the security guard in Whalley and Millers (2017) experience informed the audience that if you attempt to cross the line before your designated time, the individual in the security badge will make efforts to stop you. In my performance, the presence of the filming team created similar social preventions for the audience. They may not have wished to be on camera, or they may have wished to not interrupt the documentation, either way, the professional body had been given a privileged and as a result prevented my audience from gaining a closer interaction with the work, creating a public space with a clear separation between performer and audience. In the moment where the professional body exit, the social barrier is removed. From this point on, it was just me, my naked body and my audience in a dimly lit room. The shift felt from transitioning between a clearly public space to a more privatised area was acknowledged because in that moment, my representation shifted from the publicly represented man to the privately observed man. If I were to apply this in terms of a representation of masculinity, the difference would be the man who is filmed shaving versus the man who shaves. Which returns to Connell's (1995) explanation for the difference between the hegemonic man who sets the precedent for how men should construct their appearance and the complicit man who shaves to look like the man who is being filmed shaving (Connell, 1995: 79). This shift from public to private, hegemonic to complicit exemplifies the unstable nature of this work and just how quickly it may shift from one position of power to another, from one representative appearance to a different iteration.

Failure and Revealing the Patches of Hegemonic Masculinity

When engaging in the work I was challenged with a failure of the shaving equipment. Near the beginning of the performance the main electric shaver begins to run out of power, and I am forced to improvise and adapt. For the rest of the performance I was required to use the secondary shaver that was originally intended to be only used for my pubic hair. The secondary shaver proved to be less efficient at shaving through my hair, even causing small amounts of pain when cutting through the beard. As a result, the overall quality of the hair cut was—at best—blotchy and unfinished. There were great patches missing and the hair was cut unevenly. The failure of the equipment and the poor quality of the hair cut is symbolically representative of the failure to successfully achieve the appearance of hegemonic masculinity. My body looks muscular and well defined; my facial expression is stoic, and I rarely react to the blood and the hints of pain I experience throughout. The way I engage in repeated stoic acts that tear through my thick hair and beard are producing the appearance of a form of substance regarding toxic masculinity (Butler, 1990). In many ways I am communicating traits of power, dominance and control associated with hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Everything is performed how it "should be" and yet, the appearance of a solidified masculinity is shattered due to a minor failure of the equipment. I was not able to complete the job, fully conform and as a result was forced to perform the illusion of solidity. I perform and act whole but, within the appearance there are great big patches missing and areas that are incomplete. This failing illuminated the beginning of a trend with this project's exploration into my masculinity. In that moment, I appear to be caught in a space between hegemony and complicity and it becomes clear that the appearance is almost there but, it is never truly successful. At the end of the performance I function as the thing in-between. It is resisting both the hairy man of the deep masculine and a heteronormative rendition of my hegemonic masculinity. By occupying this position, I function not as an answer or solution to the problem of toxic masculinity but, do begin to expose the layer of damage and the state of dis-repair that is hidden by the performance and display of toxic masculinity. The performance does not go beyond toxic masculinity but, does begin to reveal the problems that are being negotiated.

It begins to appear that I can possess all the positive intentionality I desire to engage in hegemonic masculinity but, in my attempt to affirm the hegemonic position I have arguably done more damage to myself, my appearance and representation. The masculine crisis and the shifting of power was characterised by rapidly changing social forces that served to disrupt the appearance of stability and solidity of the masculine expression. As the rapidly

changing social forces shift, they serve to expose the cracks within the authenticity of the expression such as the claim of equating power with sexual division (MacInnes: 1998). This process exposes false claims to power and authority and as such the toxic behaviour is drawn into a position of visibility. In this context it would involve me claiming to present a successful transition to a complicit masculinity, when in fact the job has clearly failed. In another sense, this is representative of the damage that complying with narratives of toxic masculinity hold the potential to enact upon the individual. As I have stripped away my personal appearance, I am left performing the illusion of a solid and stable identity, when in reality it is quite highly visible that significant parts are damaged, missing or un-finished. It is with this thought that it is time to explore what this appearance, this body, might begin to represent when engaging in the repetition of violent acts that serve to affirm a specific rendition of toxic masculinity.

2.1 From Masculine to Masculinities: Exploring the Representation of Violent Action through a Phenomenological Engagement in Physical Practice

Cassils and The Wider Culture of Violence

In 2015, whilst performing *The Powers That Be* (Cassils.net, 2015) transgender and queer performance artist Cassils (2015) fights for her life in a parking lot in America. Car headlights illuminate Cassils as they desperately struggle to defend themselves against an invisible attacker. During the ensuing struggle they punch, kick, grapple and strangle their foe and intern, experience similar acts inflicted upon their own body. *The Powers That Be* is a performance that serves to represent—in the words of Cassils—'the cynical forces of violence which attempt to govern and regulate the bodies of "others"' (Cassils.net, 2015). The "others" in this context would be categorised as those whom do not align with heteronormative/hegemonic ideals and whom encounter acts of subordination as a result of this perceived *difference*. Cram (2019) observes:

> Drawing on conceptualism, feminism, body art, and gay male aesthetics, Cassils forges a series of powerfully trained bodies for different performative purposes. It is with sweat, blood, and sinew that Cassils constructs a visual critique around ideologies and histories. (Cram and Cassils, 2019: 130)

It is through these rigorous training processes that Cassil works to contradict and undo narratives around queer and trans representability. As Cassils (2015) states *The Powers That Be* serves as a representation of the 'radical un-representability of certain forms of trauma and violence' (Cassils.net, 2015). Un-representable acts of trauma and violence do not

necessarily just cater to the literal acts of subordination but, the subjective struggles of possessing a differed gender identity in an otherwise restrictively privileged socio-cultural framework. As Vaccaro (2018) states 'Representation is not an unequivocal sign of inclusion or political progress; it can be a tactical effort at surveillance and control' (Vaccaro, 2018: 115). Thus, much of Cassils work becomes about developing material that seeks to contradict or work to undo restrictive or controlling forms of representation within the wider mediated landscape. The acts of violence and trauma that are referred to by the work of Cassil's are connected to the very same frameworks of violence and toxic masculinity discussed in chapter one. In this sense, Cassil's *The Powers That Be* occupies a position in stark contrast of the material that I am to present in *Multiple Conflicts*.

As was mentioned when discussing my position in relation to the work of Athey, I do not occupy the same position as that of Cassils. However, in the development of *Multiple Conflicts* (2020) I sought to utilize the same creative methodology as that seen in Cassill's *The Powers That Be* to explore how ideal depictions of toxic masculinity and violence, have led towards the development of similar restrictive frameworks of masculine identity. To clarify, this is not in any way a response to *The Powers That Be* or an attempt to create the forces that Cassil's might be facing in their work. Instead, *The Powers That Be* serves as a reference point in which to begin to understand the forces of violence and subordination. *Multiple Conflicts* (2020) serves to exemplify how these similar frameworks of heteronormativity, hegemony and violence that occupy a different positions to *The Powers That Be* due to their extremely recognisable and common representations of masculine identity, hold the potential to produce further forms *crisis* for the men who are attempting to fulfil these narratives of toxic masculinity.[8]

In the performance, I apply similar techniques to that of Cassils using mimed stage combat choreography to explore the representability of acts of violence when engaging in the frameworks of toxic masculinity. In terms of understanding mime, I referred to the work of Lecoq (2000) who states:

> To mime is literally to embody and therefore to understand better. A person who handles bricks all day long reaches a point where he no longer knows what he is handling. It has become an automatic part of his physical life. If he is asked to mime handling a brick, he rediscovers the meaning of the object, its weight and volume. (Lecoq, 2000: 22)

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[8] These forms of crisis and trauma should be in no way associated to be in a similar fashion to the crisis and trauma experienced by the othered communities represented in *The Powers That be*.

Lecoq allows mime to be re-positioned as not just the re-creation of a physical task but, an act that provides an opportunity to explore and thus, cultivate a greater understanding of the embodied technique. To take a moment to return to Spatz (2015) 'if the topmost layer of gender technique is that which may be chosen on a daily basis—such as clothing, or some aspects of posture and gesture—there are countless layers of gender technique below this that are less easily altered' (Spatz: 2015 198). In the development of *Multiple Conflicts* I became interested in how these embodied techniques such as those developed through physical practice—namely the repetitive acts of violence that occur in environments associated with toxic masculinity—may serve to intersect with the top layer of gender—namely clothing, posture and gesture—to produce a temporarily stable meaning of masculinity or as will be observed, a series of possible masculinities.

Utilising the technique of mime and stage combat has allowed me to place myself in the context of a violent situation, without suffering the consequences of a live, violent event. In doing so, the film has been constructed as an attempt to understand my relationship to toxic masculinities through what Whetherell and Edley *(1999)* define as *Imaginary Positioning*. In this sense:

> imaginary positioning is one way in which identification with the masculine is achieved and, when it is heroic, this mode of identification fleshes out what might be meant by complicity with hegemonic masculinity. (Whetherell and Edley, 1999: 343)

By reconstructing imagined scenes of toxic masculinity from my personal life I am able flesh out a clearer identification of what complying towards hegemonic masculinity begins to look like. The employment of mime and stage combat presents the opportunity to reveal and thus, unpick these specific representations of toxic masculinity. Masculinity is a complex list of physical acts and so, it became important to be able to recognise what acts best define which representations of toxic masculinity. As Connell (1995) observes:

> The physical sense of maleness is not a simple thing. It involves size and shape, habits of posture and movement, particular physical skills and the lack of others, the image of one's own body, the way it is presented to other people and the ways they respond to it, the way it operates at work. (Connell, 1995: 84)

And so, this film is designed to present how these techniques and representations may function upon my masculine body.

As has been established practices of toxic masculinity increasingly renders the body as a objective, mechanical artifice. Equally, the restrictions toxic masculinity place upon subjective expression can also—to a certain extent—transform the subject into an objective state of being, one that does not allow himself to feel emotion (Kaufman, 1987). As such I

wanted to display how these increasingly objective processes of toxic masculinity may begin to be acknowledged through a representative engagement in physical practice.

Lastly, the work seeks to continue with the theme of Jung's Shadow as a device to communicate the presence of toxic masculinity (Moore and Gillete, 1990).

Representation - Patriarchy

Figure 1- Man One: Patriarchy

The film begins with the lights slowly fading up. At the back of the room a cold, emotionless man wearing an overcoat is revealed. He stands there without expression or any form of motion. His eyes are dark and hollow. For the rest of the film he remains in position above that of the other men, observing their events unfold, maintaining a presence over their actions. (See: Appendix 2)

The first representation is my attempt to answer the question: If I were to be an embodiment of patriarchy, what would I look like? As was presented in chapter one, patriarchy is understood not as something that is located in the individual but, is a socio-systematic collection of ideologies that encourage the dominance, control, power and authority of one group over all others (Connell, 1995 and Kaufman, 1987). In this sense, it is largely invisible and yet, still carries a significant presence upon men's lives. Thus, the question really became, if I embodied all the ideologies of dominance, control, power and authority, what

would I look like? A difficult question to answer, when discussing a systematic process rather than an individual production of identity. However, this process was made somewhat easier, as on the 18th May 2019, I watched *the Aakash Odedra Company* perform *JeSuis* at the House Stage in Plymouth. Inspired by the political dictatorship happening in Turkey, seven dancers—who originate from Turkey—sought to create a tribute to those who are still encountering oppression in subjects such as freedom of movement, speech, religion and general liberty (Aakash Odedra Company, 2018). *Aakash Odedra Company* used a creative assortment of movement, gesture, mime, props, lighting and costuming to communicate different modes of oppression employed by dictatorships. For example, they wrap one performer's entire face in clingfilm, signifying the restrictions to freedom of speech that has been experienced by the citizens of turkey.

Within the performance they employ the use of a grey overcoat to signify the autocratic, authoritarian power. This grey overcoat was repeatedly utilised in different ways throughout, being passed from performer to performer as they either reject ownership of the coat or take to its newfound powers with great enthusiasm. They also utilise a disposing of the grey coat to symbolise the overthrowing and thus, end to the authoritarian power.

Towards the end of the performance, I encountered a significant form of subjective affect where I began to weep uncontrollably. The lights come up, the audience leave and there I remain, sat in the auditorium still weeping with no end in sight. Such unlimited tears were brought about by my viewing the Je-Suis through the lens of patriarchy and thus, Connell's (1995) system of *hegemony*, *complicity* and *subordination.* After the performance, myself and a few other keen audience members discussed in depth with the performers and director about the realities they are currently facing in Turkey and so, for the performers their representation does in fact reflect and carry relevance to their lived reality.

I concluded that though patriarchy as a singular entity may have begun to dissipate, its ideologies and practices of domination, control, power and authority—though perhaps fragmented—are still carrying a profound presence and bearing upon the lives of individuals and indeed, societies as a whole.

In my own romantic representation of these patriarchal forces, the subject is entirely absent. Instead, a presence, a power emanates from him through the use of a passive silence and the employment of shadows. These forces have taken hold a subject who desired power, authority, control and dominance and the process of obtaining these objects of desire have resulted in a hollowing, where no subjective expression remains. The only thing that is left is

a husk of power, authority, domination and control. A husk that bears a permanent presence over the lives of the following men.

Representation - Ideal Masculinity

Figure 2 - Man 2: Ideal Masculinity

A second man fades in, he takes some time to roll up his sleeves and neatens his tie. Upon becoming ready, he flicks his arms, adopts a martial stance and then proceeds to fight multiple enemies. He defeats them all, during which not encountering a single strike to himself. (See: Appendix 2: 00.30)

This representation became about my relationship to the *masculine ideal*. This collection of ideologies that encourages men to engage in severe training processes that are designed to perfect of their able body and the develop of a form of impenetrability (Glover and Kaplan, 2000: 59). In the highly mediated landscape that western culture has become there is an unending wealth of sources in which to access the male ideal. Whether it is film, television, books, social media or our social agents, we are inundated with examples of how a young man should perfect himself. These ideals are largely unhealthy and are often false representations of the true capacity of the individual.

On the 13th March 2019, I viewed Vincent Dance Theatre perform *Shut Down* at The House Stage in Plymouth (Vincent Dance Theatre, 2018). The performance involved a group of men occupying various stages of maturity, engage in movement, poetry and dramaturgy to cover an array of subjects related to toxic masculinity. Fatherhood, stereotypes, misogyny, loneliness and emotional repression were all topics addressed within the performance. This performance presented an opportunity to reflect upon all the mentioned subjects and their relevance to my own masculinity. One trend that I observed to constantly reappear within this

performance and my own experience of masculinity, was the pursuit of idealism. *Shut Down* dressed all of their performers in suits to connect all of the men to the overarching theme of ideal masculinity. In their performance, it was possible to view multiple different narratives of how men have severely damaged themselves and those who are important to them such as family and friends. All the damages could be traced to the narrative of trying to embody the masculine ideal. Some men instigated personal crisis from their inability to successfully embody ideal masculinity and other men instigated crisis in their loved ones by embodying the ideal too successfully.

This section marked my own attempt to pursue the masculine ideal related to myself, an ideal which has always centred around the ability to be fluent in acts of violence. For me, it was the untouchable illusion of ideal masculinity in the form of the Hollywood/Blockbuster action hero and warriors. When engaging in combat scenes, the action hero and/or warrior, if embodying the male ideal, is able to defeat multiple attackers with relative ease, all whilst maintaining a calm, stoic and cool attitude.[9] By doing so, the hero/warrior affirms all the traits associated with ideal hyper-macho masculinity and we are never given the opportunity to view the insecurity or emotional turmoil that tends to lie behind the hyper-masculine expression (Pleck, 1982). In my attempt to recreate this, it became possible to view how poorly these scenes translate into a live and felt context. There is no such thing as a perfect masculinity, and this is revealed in the moments of slippage and mistake. My shoes make it hard to remain stable and so I slip about the floor as I desperately try to maintain the illusion of a solid and stable sequence. Though I did engage in an extensive training process for this performance, my body still appears to be lacking in flexibility and extensive use of elaborate martial art techniques. As such, my kicks are not straight, and my punches and blocks are vague. Like with the shaving equipment in *Miscellaneous Male* my body continues to reveal the cracks within the illusion of a seemingly solid, ideal appearance. I certainly look the part of the ideal man but, when engaging in acts associated with idealism, it is my body that reveals the artificiality of ideal masculinity. I return to Butler (1990) and the understanding that gender is rarely stable, but is instead, an ongoing process of production. At any given time, the illusion of the ideal is only temporarily secured. Extreme training processes may secure the illusion for longer periods of time but, eventually the bodies capacity to engage in

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[9] To see the male ideal in action, I would recommend viewing any fight scene that involve Jason Statham as he is a strong embodiment of the untouchable male ideal. See: *Transporter 3*. (2008). [film] Directed by O. Megaton. USA: TF1 Films Production.

the ideal diminishes and what is left in the wake of a diminished ideal is a performance full of highly visible cracks. These cracks break the illusion of perfectibility and it is through these cracks it becomes possible to look at the individual behind their performance and display of impenetrable masculinity.

The Working-Class "Lad"

Figure 3 - Man 3 – Working Class "Lad" Masculinity

A hooded man fades into view, he carries himself with attitude occupying a wide stance and holds his hands in his pockets. He loses his footing as if pushed from behind. Repeatedly, he turns to see what has pushed him, each time issuing more severe threats and then returning to his central position. Eventually, the pushes become too much, his temper flairs and after one push too many, he begins violently flailing his fists at every enemy available to him. Throughout the ensuing carnage he punches, kicks and throws many enemies but also receives many kicks and punches himself. He hurts his fist by missing his enemy and striking directly into the ground but, endeavours to carry on regardless, masking his pain and switching to his other hand. Eventually, he begins to smile, the rush of the fight allows him to almost begin enjoying himself as he yells ecstatically throughout the carnage. The enemies finally scatter, he checks his damaged hand and returns them to his pockets. Breathing heavily, he returns to his central position. (See: Appendix 2: 05.55)

This representation is drawn from my own auto-biographic experience of the working-class "lad" masculinity. Previously I mentioned my experience of growing up as a young man in a working class, labour oriented culture in West Yorkshire. By doing so, this culture has afforded me a deeply involved engagement in "Lad Culture". I have engaged in same narratives that are regurgitated over and over within "Lad" culture. Activities that are categorised as the consummation of large amounts of alcohol or drugs and a prolonged engagement in anti-intellectual, anti-feminist, racist, homophobic, behaviour, all under the guise of a "good time" or a "laugh" (Willis, 1993). What became of interest is the notion that working-class masculinity, in the words of Whiteman (2013):

> is highly visible in terms of representation (…), rendered *invisible* through its position as utterly normative (much in the way that whiteness or 'maleness' are rendered invisible) (…) (and) rests somewhere between hegemony and complicity. (Whitman, 2013:7)

The working class "lad" occupies a position of complicity in the sense that they are complicit to the practices of hegemonic masculinity such as, knowing lots about football but, never being the footballer themselves. Equally, they contradict this position by potentially occupying a localised position of hegemonic masculinity, such as being the star player on their local team. They might have been presented with an opportunity to ascend to the professional leagues but, found that they did not like the people they trained with, the more serious stakes or politics and bureaucracy of their level change. In this sense, they are caught between the forces of local, national and international hegemony (Connell, 1995). When reinforced with the practices of "lad culture" this becomes a highly turbulent and emotional time. *Surplus anger* becomes an ever-present norm due to their repression and imposition and it becomes all too easy to express this surplus anger in increasingly violent and damaging ways (Kaufman, 1987). In my experience, it was a prolonged engagement in violence upon other men (bar fights, martial arts, play fights) and violence upon the self (damage to the body through acts of unforgiving labour, wall punches, consumption of drugs and alcohol). Practices of which also damage the capacity to subjectively express. The presence of drugs and alcohol hold the potential to further the numbing process and exacerbate any unconscious, repressed feelings of anxiety, depression, fear and insecurity (Rethink.org, N.D).

However, I engaged in these practices because in the words of Willis (1993):

> In violence there is the fullest if unspecified commitment to a blind or distorted form of revolt. It breaks the conventional tyranny of 'the rule'. It opposes it with machismo. It is the ultimate way of breaking a flow of meanings which are unsatisfactory, imposed from above, or limited by circumstances. (Willis, 1993: 34)

What I am suggesting is the same as Willis, in that engagement in these practices of violence are a form of escapism from the restrictions of the socio-cultural position. The surplus aggression is a result of being caught between complicit and hegemonic masculinities, and the presence of less than hospitable social agents. For me this created a turbulence of internal and external conflict and I desired to represent this within the practice.

Furthermore, the figure of the "hoodie" has also become a topic for a wider socio-cultural debate. The stereotypical representation often associates the hoodie as someone who engages in criminal activity. In 2006, David Cameron gave a speech focussed on redesigning how the conservative party understood youth crime. In an effort to develop a greater understanding of the issues circulating young offenders, he proposed a call to "Hug a Hoodie". Observing:

> The hoodie is a response to a problem, not a problem in itself. We - the people in suits - often see hoodies as aggressive, the uniform of a rebel army of young gangsters. (…) But hoodies are more defensive than offensive. They're a way to stay invisible in the street. In a dangerous environment the best thing to do is keep your head down, blend in. For some the hoodie represents all that's wrong about youth culture in Britain today. For me, adult society's response to the hoodie shows how far we are from finding the long-term answers to put things right. (Hinsliff, 2006)

Cameron illuminates a critical observation regarding a class-oriented perception of young people in hoodies. He actively uses the terminology "We- the people in the suits", suggesting a disparity in class between him and his colleagues who make the decisions and the youth culture he is addressing. He makes the rather, easier said than done suggestion that all these hoodies need is a hug. Suggesting that the problem can be resolved through increased emotional investment within our youth culture. Though he is not wrong, in the sense that increased emotional investment in young men would help the situation to some degree, the problem is much more socio-culturally complex matter. As I have suggested, the problem lies in how young men are taught to negotiate their manhood. In their attempts to affirm definitions of toxic masculinity through acts of drinking, violence and crime a great many acts of subordination occur in the process.

The hoodie also serves as another form of *social mask* (Tentworth, 2002) in which to maintain a display of untouchability and social performance. A mechanism employed to hide feelings of weakness. Understanding the hoodie as a defensive tool to the harsh socio-cultural environment allows for the opportunity to recognise that these men are dressing in response to their environments. The hoodie serves as a social mask that effectively hides the suffering

that lies behind the hood. Thus, Cameron is not wrong when he places emphasis on the need to hug a hoodie. However, that is not the way to approach such a situation as the problem lies in how men are encouraged to negotiate their feelings through the conduit of "lad" culture. For me, the world of the *lad* occupies a constant threat of violence from other men. In the words of Kaufman (1987):

> [E]arly experience of violence caused an incredible amount of anxiety and required a huge expenditure of energy to resolve. That anxiety is crystallized in an unspoken fear (particularly among heterosexual men): all other men are my potential humiliators, my enemies, my competitors. (Kaufman. 19987: 18)

I feel am constantly aware of this potential threat of violence with other men. I am forever analysing the possibility for acts associated with dominance, complicity or subordination. I both analyse and am analysed. The physical body, its appearance, representation and requisite mannerisms are quickly assessed for their capacity to inflict violence or subordination. In response to this constant assessment, I find myself wearing hoodies as it allows me to hide from—rather than engage in—these constant assessments and the potential threats of violence.

Male Four – Hypermasculinity
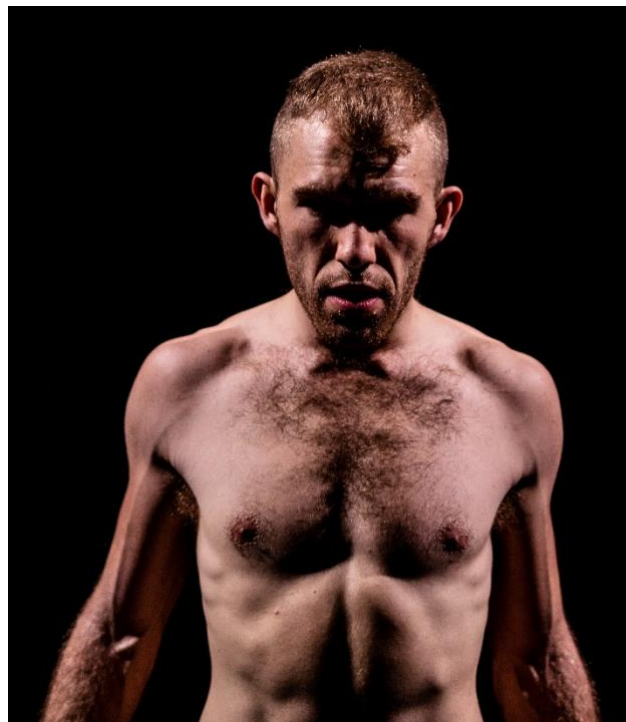
Figure 4 – Man 4 – Grecko-Roman

A fourth man fades into view wearing only shorts. He is breathing heavily and carries his body with a tense activation. He adopts a low, grounded stance and locks into a grapple. He fights to maintain dominance and control over his opponent as they switch back and forth between positions until eventually, the fourth man summons within him a newfound strength. He lifts his opponent high above his head and drops him unforgivingly onto the floor. Returning to his previous position, breathing heavily, he releases some final vocal breaths to communicate his victorious dominance. (See: Appendix 2: 11.30)

This representation has been constructed to depict the culture that instigated my first steps into the octagon. To take a moment to return back to this notion of mythological masculinity, I wanted to represent what I would look like if I chose to seriously pursue my narrative as a warrior. As has been seen so far, violence intersects with men's lives at nearly every stage of their development, whether that is early boy on boy play fighting, serious lad culture bar fights or absorbing the myths of masculinity and violence via film and television, all of this contributes towards the serious pursuit of violence. Thinking back to when I took my first steps into the MMA world, I had no doubt in my mind that I was trying to fulfil my own version of the warrior archetype (Moore and Gillette, 1991). It was yet another attempt to find a fulfilling meaning for my masculine identity. The men who are proficient in acts of violence always seem so secure and stable in their gender identity and this can be inspiring for a young man who is still coming to grips with his own sense of masculinity. However, what is rarely revealed is that—as was seen with Andy in the Grayson Perry documentary All Man—the serious pursuit of violence is not just an affirmation of masculine values—though it achieves this in abundance—it is also a form of escapism from personal suffering and trauma (Fronczak, 2016: 5.55). Just like what was mentioned with lad culture, the training process and the event of violence keeps you in a position of the here and now. Combined with the affirmation of masculine values such as increased strength, endurance, virility, hyper-masculinity becomes a seemingly solid foundation in which to construct masculinity upon. However, in the process it becomes all too easy to develop increased emotional instability, as the emotional problem is not directly addressed and repaired but, is instead further repressed. And so, as was seen with Andy and as has been true to my experience in the past year, the pursuit of the warrior holds the potential to become stuck in a cycle of masculine affirmation through acts of violence and prolong rather than undo the emotional suffering.

Male Five – Crisis and Emotion

Figure 5 – Man 5 – Crisis

> A final man appears onto the screen in the nude. Other men are in the background heavily breathing and occupying strong powerful stances over him. Suddenly the man begins to breakdown, he sits down and proceeds to hug his knees and cry in a fetal position. (See: Appendix 2: 15.05)

All representations up until this point have been an attempt to depict my conformation to specific notions of toxic masculinity such as patriarchy, ideal masculinity, working class lad culture and hyper masculinity. It is now poignant to ask the question; how did all of this make me feel? What effects did the process of construction have upon me? When I encountered failures and slippages in my process of affirmation what occurred?

When looking at the previous iteration—hyper-masculinity—the theoretical landscape suggests that behind the severe pursuit, display and affirmation of toxic masculinity there lies a deep emotional turmoil and insecurity about one's gender identity (Pleck, 1982: 95 -115). The last representation is constructed in stark contrast to the other iterations. The men from two to four have all been heavily *active* in their actions, which suggests they are engaging in the pursuit of patriarchal masculinity (Kaufman, 1987). Like that of the first man, this last iteration occupies a *passive* position. With the first man, my passive position due to my place atop of this hierarchy thus I was afforded a passive position due to being empowered by patriarchal forces. This iteration's passivity comes from my position at the bottom of this hierarchy.

This iteration was designed to represent the repression caused by these gender frameworks, resulting in a restriction to my ability to fully express and emotionally articulate. Passiveness and emotional upset suggest that—in the context of a heteronormative, patriarchal culture—I have stopped performing traits associated with the masculine (activity, dominance, control, aggression and repression) and begun to perform traits associated with the feminine[10] (passivity, emotional vulnerability) (Kaufman, 1987). By doing so, I no longer represent an enforcer of toxic masculinity, as is seen with the other iterations but, someone who is oppressed by these forces. This was my attempt to document the internal space that toxic masculinity fails to acknowledge. The moment when it becomes impossible to perform the traits of toxic masculinity

Here I wish to take a moment to return back to the studio, to the training process for this project. I chose to follow all the relevant self-help culture that would allow me to reach an ideal state of masculinity. I engaged in a prolonged physical training process that involved numerous amounts of press ups, sit ups, shadow sparing and stretching. One day in the studio, I find myself undone. I have run around the edges of the studio and just attempted my first press-up. This particular day the press-up feels like an impossible task, as if all the strength has left my body. I grit my teeth and attempt to push through these feelings in a way that is stereotypical to the narrative of toxic masculinity. In the sense that I refused to address the emotional problem because I had a job that needed fulfilling. No matter how hard I tried I was unable to execute any more press ups. This made me highly frustrated and in my *surplus frustration*, I began to scold myself with a self-hatred monologue. I will not repeat the terminology used but its subject focused on my position as a useless failure in that moment. After a brief pause to process the monologue, I curl up into a ball on the floor and begin to weep uncontrollably. The seemingly impossibility of the task combined with the severe pressure to be this ideal version of myself resulted in a dismantling of any and all the traits associated with toxic masculinity. There was no strength, no endurance, no dominance, no control, no emotional repression. There was just me, comforting myself as I pour with uncontrollable emotion. Emotion that seemed like it had been building up for quite a long period of time.

It was this moment within the training process that informed me that I had to construct myself in opposition to the other iterations. Up until now each man has worn a piece of

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[10] Though it is understood femininity is no longer a passive entity, within the context of the reading my passive position contradicts the active positions of the other men.

representational clothing encouraging a reading that aligns a specific version of socio-cultural masculinity. By aligning myself with these specific representations, I have been better able to reveal how specific manifestations of my identity are situated within a wider socio-cultural dividend of toxic masculinity. However, the last version of my myself has been removed of representational clothing. This decision was intentional, as it sought to symbolise that moment in the studio when all the wider socio-cultural aspects of dominance, control, power, strength and authority had dissipated, and what remained was just me, lying alone in a room pouring with emotion. My inability to successfully embody hegemonic, hyper macho traits created severe feelings of failure and shame. Negotiating feelings of shame is a significant aspect of masculinity that is overlooked when viewing toxic behaviour. The shame is born out of our experience with our agents of socialisation as is identified from multiple sources including Bly (2001: 164 – 165) and Urwin (2017: 109- 127). However, Kaufman (1987) truly identifies what is occurring when he suggests that all of these forces translate to a violence of the self:

> The continual conscious and unconscious blocking and denial of passivity and all the emotions and feelings men associate with passivity—fear, pain, sadness, embarrassment—is a denial of part of what we are. The constant psychological and behavioural vigilance against passivity and its derivatives is a perpetual act of violence against oneself. (Kaufman, 1987: 22)

At that moment in the studio, I become an enforcer of hegemonic ideology upon myself. Instead, of taking the time to adopt a passive position and allowing myself to address the evident needs of my body and mind, I choose to attack the integrity of my own self-image. Upon which the pressures become too much and the performance of masculinity collapsed. These pressures build through the pursuit of being actively identified as a man by both myself and social agents. I know that I carry with me a constant sense of what type of man I am "meant" to be, whilst also being aware of the man that I am currently unable to be. All of this translates to a restriction and thus, pressurising of my subjectivity and disrupts my capacity to emotionally express.

In the performance this emotional expression creates another contradiction. So far, the focus of the research has been on exploring objective action that creates a clear separation between bodily activities and subjective expression. When it came to this section, I desired to generate a flow of tears to represent this internal form of crisis. What I discovered was that I was unable to cry and so, I had to perform what it feels like to experience the moment of emotional overflow, when the pressures of the masculinity framework become too much. At first, the fact that I was required to perform tears rather actually produce tears does present

issues for the performance. The last section presents a dramatic shift to that of the other iterations, as it holds the potential take away from the authenticity of the performance. Each section has engaged in literal action and has in no way tried to perform what is being presented. Though this section is a contradiction of the style offered, it became clear that the problem encountered at the end of this performance is directly connected to the wider socio-cultural narrative of emotion and toxic masculinity. Inspired by the work of John Ross (2020) there is a multiplicity of men who do not actually cry but instead perform a silent scream. Within the spoken text specific sentences reveal just what is being encountered. Lines such as "Be strong, stand tall, be brave, man up", "My heads just above the water but, I'm drowning", "To stop the pain from flooding out, if I put it to the back of mind I suppose I don't need to face it. A lifetime of not expressing myself fully" and "My eyes are dry because boys don't cry" (Ross, 2020). The work of Ross expresses a long trend of men struggling to authentically express themselves as a result of "man up" culture. In the attempt to maintain the performance of toxic masculinity, serious emotional repression begins to build up, the previously mentioned feelings of numbness only become more severe and after a lifetime of practicing toxic masculinity accessing emotion becomes increasingly like a seemingly impossible task to achieve. This understanding begins to explain in some form as to why I had to resort to perform myself crying, rather than actually produce tears.

And so, the last iteration is too—like *Miscellaneous Male*—pointing towards the direction of pain, hurt and thus undoing. On many levels, I believe this performance works less effectively that the first performance to represent the layer behind toxic masculinity. It works less effectively because we still see the power of the other men and how this is overpowering the man who is attempting an emotional engagement. Through constructing this as hierarchal and positioning the man at the bottom, it suggests that the man with emotions is lesser of a man. Though this was my attempt to represent how these functions within the realm of toxic masculinity, what needs to be perpetuated is the notion that the man who freely encounters his moment of emotion, is in fact, more resistant to his heteronormative masculinity.

Final Image - Realising the Hegelian Subject and the Absence of Subversion

Finally, this film was also converted into an image for the research image competition at Plymouth University, where it won an award for best research image. It is worth taking a moment to view the image because it better captures the range of toxic masculinities offered and better encapsulates the summary offered at the end of chapter one. Placing a much more significant emphasis on the hierarchy associated with hegemonic masculinity and the effects hierarchal perception has had upon myself.

Figure 6 - Research Image

What becomes clear with the final image is that there is a multiplicity of toxic masculine potential. Though each man here may serve to represent a singular iteration of my masculinity, I occupy a position in all of these spaces. I am all of these men and more. It was my desire to create and represent the internal world of toxic masculinity and to allow audiences insight into the inner workings of how toxic masculinity goes about being formed. However, in the pursuit to better understand toxic masculinity through practice, I have found myself engaging in multiple environments that have further cultivated and affirmed my toxic masculinity. Through this desire to gain a better understanding I have failed to undo and dislodge the toxic masculinity within me. If fact, in the pursuit to accurately represent these

iterations I have instead served to exacerbate my own toxic masculinity. With each pursuit of meaning, I unintentionally re-affirmed definitions of toxic masculinity within myself and provided further substance to equating masculinity with power. It is through my choice of methodology—engaging in environments to better understand toxic masculinity—that I have become the Hegelian subject. With each attempt to understand my masculine identity, I establish meaning on a seemingly solid foundation and then, not long after, a new aspect is introduced and the foundation of understanding breaks apart and as it crumbles, so does my capacity to perform manhood. As Salih observes on Butler's interpretation of the Hegelian subject:

> Clearly the Hegelian Subject is not an entity on its way to completion, and Butler compares him (and she points out that *he* is always masculine) to a cartoon character, a Mr. Magoo who, encountering frequent and drastic reversals, fails, fails again, and fails better in a Beckettian spirit of never-ending and irresolvable ontological enterprise. (Butler and Salih, 2004: 40)

This statement encapsulates my experience of engaging in this research process. In an effort to open up the territory of a self-reflective engagement in toxic masculinity, I have only further served to develop my capacity and ability to be dominant, controlling, authoritative, powerful, strong etc. A large majority of this has happened at such an unconscious level, hidden underneath the desire to understand toxic masculinity through practice and through my position as both researcher and subject of research, there were multiple times when I could no longer distinguish the boundaries between researching toxic masculinity and being a toxic man. It has only been through the damage that this research process has cultivated that I have been able to recognise this blurring and understand that this performance can no longer be sustained.

Conclusion

Therefore, it is with a great deal of reflection that I believe it is time to stop traveling towards representations of toxic masculinity. This project began as an interrogation into the formation of toxic masculinity and in many ways, I believe I have achieved this. I now clearly understand how toxic masculinity is formed by conforming to ideologies, appearances and performative displays of toxic masculinity and in doing so, I can see how it functions as part of wider-sociocultural narratives of toxic masculinity that are associated with the masculine body.

However, by employing a practice-as-research methodology and using myself as the subject of inquiry, I have not only shaped my body and mind closer to that of a heteronormative iteration but, I have actively embodied the largely fictional narratives and definitions of patriarchal masculinity. As such, I have allowed its meanings and definitions to be produced and thus, attach themselves to my body, not just as a performer but, as an individual who resides within a given society. The original intentions of the research were chosen to cultivate awareness of toxic masculinity and to begin to work towards some form of resistance to its practices and by doing so, cultivate a form of undoing or detachment from my own toxic masculinity. However, what actually happened was I ended up replicating and even going so far as to idealising specific versions of toxic masculinity and further securing these definitions upon my own gender identity.

This has left me to consider an engagement with the idea of failure. Within the work I address the notion of a crisis that emerges from a failure to successfully achieve the masculine ideal. An alternative element of failure that emerged within the research was the failure of the researcher. Through a desire to cultivate meaning and understanding through lived experience, the research lost sight of its post-structural lens and as a result, I have often found myself lost in the world of toxic masculinity. I encountered a deeply internal struggle to distinguish the line that separates my role as a researcher—investigating the formation of toxic masculinity—and myself as a man engaging in acts of toxic masculinity. I think this has been reflected in the work crafted as there is a clear refusal to subvert the traits associated with the hegemonic masculinity and instead, I made a decision to travel towards them and claim ownership of these traits. By crafting live art performance to represent these elements of my toxic masculinity I reproduced the narrative of patriarchy on both a personal and representational level.

However, I believe it is not a coincidence that this problem happened to me. As a white, young, able-bodied, working class male I was already occupying a socio-cultural position

that aligns quite closely with subjects identified as key traits of hegemonic masculinity. These subjects were already deeply engrained into my sense of identity and as such I regularly encountered an active resistance to cultivating an undoing or letting go of these subjects through an exploration of practices designed to subvert the dominant narrative of patriarchy.

Post-structural performance is often constructed to undo and subvert narratives of patriarchal power and heteronormativity. Butler (2004) encourages the employment of gender imitation and parodying to destabilise the illusion of the norm or that which is to be considered be original. The parodying of the original gender identification serves to present the understanding that the original gender design is too a fantasy with no genuine origin. Parodying and imitating the normative origin caries a significant benefit:

> This perceptual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities. Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization. As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself. (Butler and Salih, 2004: 112)

Thus, by engaging in an imitation of the normative origin; the myth of originality, naturalisation and essentialisation are directly called into question. By doing so, the parodic imitation serves to de-stabilize the seemingly fixed or solid position of the gender identity. A parodic imitation calls the fixed nature of patriarchal culture into question and thus, may then cultivate the required awareness that can instigate a rejection or a moving away from the patriarchal narrative.

In my research I felt a resistance to parody the patriarchal narrative and I believe this to have happened because of the socio-cultural position I already occupied. I had already experienced a prolonged history with the subjects that have arisen when exploring toxic masculinity. These subjects were not just a collection of practices that I happened to be engaging in but, proved to be what made up the deep foundations of my socio-cultural identity. As such there became a blurring between researcher and subject and through this blurring, I became actively resistant to moving away from these subjects but instead acted upon a desire to travel towards these subjects and cultivate greater understanding through embodiment. I was/am very much still a young man who was/is still forming his own sense of masculinity. My masculine identity was already occupying an unstable position and so, upon reflection, a traveling towards further embodiment was the result of sub-conscious reluctance to further

de-stabilize an already unstable masculine identity. By already possessing an unstable masculinity, I was already often finding myself to be entering in and out of various forms of masculine crisis. The reason why I resisted parodic imitation and further embodied these subjects of toxic masculinity was actually because of a desire for this research to produce a stable masculinity. I believe it was this desire for stability that led to an investigation of the seemingly fixed definitions of toxic masculinity and thus, a resistance towards the truly difficult work of subversive undoing. Even in the performance material crafted, though my behaviours and actions are revealed to be relatively unstable, my literal bodily positions remain fixed. Thus, even the structural positioning of the performance is phenomenologically engaged the illusion of solid, fixed and stable gender foundations that are perpetuated by patriarchal culture.

Having acknowledged and understood the subject of failure within the research, it is also important to understand that this research has no way failed. Subversion was never the direct objective of this research.[11] Instead, the objective was to cultivate an understanding of how toxic masculinity is constructed and the harmful effects toxic masculinity is having upon men. It is with this objective in mind I believe the work has—to a certain extent—succeeded in cultivating an understanding of this process. I underwent a research process of representational formation and became aware of what problems were arising when trying to form and embody these various toxic masculinities. By placing myself in different contexts, I had successfully begun to present the notion that in a pursuit for meaning, the individual male can pursue and negotiate multiple fragmentations of toxic masculinity and that this very pursuit of toxic masculinity can further instigate notions of pain and hurt associated with the masculine crisis. It is with this understanding that I further encourage the use of the term toxic masculinities. As it becomes clear that a negotiation of toxic masculinity itself is not done so from a fixed position but, is instead is itself infinitely more fluid, unstable and complex artifice and it is this very desire to be fixed and stable that contributes to the problem of toxic masculinities.

From this current position that I find myself in, I must now ask where does the research go from here? I believe that now, I am presented with a plethora of opportunity as both a researcher and an artist. The research process I have undergone has cultivated an awareness of key subjects that arose from the failures encountered within the project. It has led to an inspired change in direction for how I function as an artist and how I engage in my practice

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[11] Although, I see clearly now that subversion should have been the main objective of the research.

and research. I now wish to reframe the practice to cater to more intersectional subjects, in order to prevent these encountered failures, reproductions and idealisations from re-occurring.

I desire to invest less time focussing on the development and understanding of my own toxic masculinity and instead, I wish to begin using the skills and knowledge that has been cultivated throughout this research journey to begin a prolonged engagement in workshops for communities of men who desire to begin the journey of acknowledging and undoing toxic masculinities. Moving forward, my research desires to expand and work towards fulfilling three new objectives.

- Engage in intersectional collaborations and dialogues with none heteronormative researchers and performers such as Black, Feminist, LGBT and Disabled communities to cultivate greater awareness of practices of toxic masculinities and increase artistic opportunity amongst underrepresented communities.

- Begin researching techniques and crafting performances that focus on the process of subversion and cultivate an undoing of toxic masculinities.

- Focus more on outreach. Too much of this research has happened in the privacy of the studio and the artwork now needs to begin traveling and develop a sustained engagement with local, national and international groups of men who are looking to discover methods to better understand, resist and undo their toxic masculinity.

These objectives have been chosen in response to subjects that have arisen within the research such as subordination, the absence of subversion, the regurgitation of the patriarchal narratives and the difficulties I encountered due to a blurring between researcher and subject. It is my belief that a large amount of these pitfalls could have been avoided if I had just engaged in extensive dialogues, research processes and performative collaborations with communities who are directly subordinated by these subjects. As well as reaching out to those men who are also negotiating the subjects of toxic masculinities addressed throughout. By doing so, it would have drawn greater attention to what is happening in my own body, what meanings were being produced through an engagement in specific actions and with greater attention it may have cultivated a different type of engagement with the work.

In the future, I seek to draw attention away from the notion of formation and travel towards cultivating an awareness of subversive practices and work towards dialogic and practice-based sharing and undoing.

It is with these three changes that I wish to become a positive contributing factor to shifting socio-cultural messages of toxic masculinities and no longer a self-orientated artist, who is unintentionally further perpetuating narratives of toxic masculinities.

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Appendix

Appendix 1

Miscellaneous Male

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https://vimeo.com/445625866/79bdd82e09 [Accessed 10 August 2020].

Appendix 2

Multiple Conflicts

Cornforth, C (2020). *Multiple Conflicts*. [video] Available at:
https://vimeo.com/445628139/9e538b5041 [Accessed 10 August 2020].