



# Biosocial selfhood: overcoming the ‘body-social problem’ within the individuation of the human self

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**Abstract** In a recent paper, Kyselo (2014) argues that an enactive approach to selfhood can overcome ‘the body-social problem’: “the question for philosophy of cognitive science about how bodily and social aspects figure in the individuation of the human individual self” (Kyselo 2014, p. 4; see also Kyselo and Di Paolo (2013)). Kyselo’s claim is that we should conceive of the human self as a socially enacted phenomenon that is bodily mediated. Whilst there is much to be praised about this claim, I will demonstrate in this paper that such a conception of self ultimately leads to a strained interpretation of how bodily and social processes are related. To this end, I will begin the paper by elucidating the body-social problem as it appears in modern cognitive science and then expounding Kyselo’s solution, which relies on a novel interpretation of Jonas’s (1966/2001) concept of *needful freedom*. In response to this solution, I will highlight two problems which Kyselo’s account cannot overcome in its current state. I will argue that a more satisfactory solution to the body-social problem involves a re-conception of the human body as irrevocably socially constituted and the human social world as irrevocably bodily constituted. On this view, even the most minimal sense of selfhood cannot privilege either bodily or social processes; instead, the two are ontologically entwined such that humans are *biosocial selves*.

**Keywords** Selfhood · Cognitive science · Embodiment · Ensorialment · Body-social problem · Enactivism

## 1 Introduction

It seems like commonsense to claim that human selfhood must depend deeply on *both* an agent’s physical body and her social world. However, when it comes to

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individuating the human self, there is a tendency for recent cognitive scientific accounts to favour either bodily processes or social processes at the expense of the other. The problem with this is that individuating the self in accordance with either bodily or social processes risks downplaying the importance of the other set of processes such that the accounts of human selfhood on offer seem largely counter-intuitive and explanatorily hollow. We are each more than a body in a social context or a social construct in a random bodily vessel; both embodiment and engagements with others are essential aspects of the generation and ongoing preservation of selfhood. In other words, both bodily and social processes play constitutive<sup>[1]</sup> roles in the individuation of selfhood.

In a recent paper, Kyselo (2014) describes the issue of partiality towards either bodily or social processes as ‘the body-social problem’: the “mutual tension” (p.1) between *embodied* approaches to selfhood, in which the body often forms an isolating boundary from the rest of the world (analogous to the brain-boundary of orthodox cognitive science, which embodied approaches endeavour to overcome), and *socially constitutive* approaches to selfhood, in which ‘individuals’ are seemingly dispersed across myriad social interactions. Human selfhood is thus primordially either (i). an individualistic bodily phenomenon that is “merely” socially contextualised (ibid., p.4), or (ii). a social phenomenon that is merely bodily contextualised (or, at best, bodily enabled). Whilst there will be more on this in the next section, the broad scope of the body-social problem is that (i) and (ii) each respectively obscure important insights into the constitutive roles that I will argue social and bodily processes play in the individuation of the human self. Kyselo’s claim is that an enactive approach can overcome the body-social problem by designating the self as a socially enacted phenomenon that is bodily mediated. In spite of the positive aspects of Kyselo’s approach, I believe that her view of selfhood ultimately retains the ‘tension’ between bodily and social processes that she wishes to avoid.

In this paper, I will firstly provide a detailed outline of the body-social problem and Kyselo’s (2014) response to this. I will then introduce two criticisms that I believe Kyselo’s response must face. In light of these criticisms, and building on Kyselo’s work, I will offer a solution to the ‘body-social problem’ through a conception of the domain of human experience as constituted by inseparably entwined bodily processes and social processes, such that humans are *biosocial selves*. A *biosocial* account of selfhood has numerous benefits: it aligns with the commonsense notion that selfhood depends deeply on both an agent’s physical body and her social world; it is philosophically sensitive to the ‘embodied’ and ‘social’ turns in cognitive science; it toes the fertile middle-ground between pluralistic and essentialist theories; and it resists the difficulties that Kyselo’s account faces (see sections 5 and 6).

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this paper, and following Kyselo (2014), I will rely on De Jaegher et al.’s (2010) characterisations of *contextual*, *enabling* and *constitutive* factors for a cognitive system, such that for a given phenomenon X, “F is a *contextual factor* if variations in F produce variations in X, C is an *enabling condition* if the absence of C prevents X from occurring, P is a *constitutive element* if P is part of the processes that produce X” (p. 443).

## 2 The ‘body-social problem’

Kyselo (2014) suggests that cognitive scientific approaches to the question ‘what is the human self?’ entail a persistent tension:

On the one hand, embodied cognitive science risks a new form of methodological individualism, implying a dichotomy not between the outside world of objects and the brain-bound individual but rather between body-bound individuals and the outside social world. On the other hand, approaches that emphasize the constitutive relevance of social interaction processes for cognitive identity run the risk of losing the individual in the interaction dynamics and of downplaying the role of embodiment.

The tension is thus one of attempting to preserve a genuinely first-personal selfhood whilst not individualistically confining this selfhood to the organismic boundary of the body.

If one endorses an embodied view of cognitive science – that is, the view that cognition is not uniquely ‘in the head’, but is also deeply dependent on bodily processes – then there is the tendency to individuate the self in accordance with the bounded body. In other words, the self is designated as a bodily self, essentially independent from sociocultural norms and processes. This holds even if one contends that embodied selves are importantly embedded in a scaffolding environment, in that the ‘body’ in question is the organismic body and, as Kyselo (2014) explains, “there is nothing social about the organismic or the moving body *per se*” (p.4). In this respect, the body – no matter how heavily interlinked it is with social processes – is always separable in virtue of its biological autonomy and is consequently a permanent potential means of isolation from the (non-biologically autonomous) social world.

From the converse perspective, if one endorses a social view of cognitive science (also referred to as “the interactive turn” (De Jaegher et al. 2010)) – that is, the view that cognition is primarily intersubjectively dependent – then there is a tendency to individuate the self in accordance with social processes, such that one can become ‘lost’ in the relational dynamics that are generated through interactions with others (there will be more on this shortly).

However, once one has moved ‘beyond-the-brain’ to embrace the integral dependence of cognition on worldly features, either of these tendencies seems to prejudicially carve the cognitive pie, relegating bodily or social processes to merely contextual significance. Indeed, even if bodily or social processes play a crucial causal role in the individuation of the self (beyond a merely contextual position), this will still not fully satisfy Kyselo’s objective of integrating bodily and social dimensions into a coherent unity of selfhood (Kyselo 2014). Without clarity, bodily and social processes may seem mutually exclusive and attempts to unite them cannot do so in an equilibrating manner (ibid.).

As a primer to her solution, Kyselo quickly dismisses two possible approaches to selfhood that she rightly claims fail to address the body-social problem. Firstly, there are pluralistic approaches (e.g. Gallagher 2013), in which several aspects of selfhood (e.g. *minimal embodied, minimal experiential, affective, intersubjective, psychological/*

*cognitive, narrative, extended and situated*) form interrelated layers of a cohesive self. Such approaches sensibly acknowledge the great variety of self-related phenomena that seem to constitute each one of us, from having a basic bodily schema with its own sensorimotor contingencies to inhabiting a specific sociocultural world, or from incorporating worldly entities in one's physical activities to conceptualising oneself as the protagonist of a life story (and much else besides). Yet the difficulty is in accounting for exactly *how* these phenomena coalesce into a self-constituting pattern, in which no aspect of self is given executive precedence over others. Once we have a diversity of self-relating phenomena, it is crucial that the manner of their relations to one another is elucidated (Kyselo 2014). So, for instance, how might the *minimal embodied* aspect of selfhood relate to the *intersubjective* aspect of selfhood, and how does this relation vary in differing circumstances? Specifying aspects of selfhood seems to provide us with jigsaw pieces, but no robust account of how these fit together. For Kyselo, pluralistic approaches such as Gallagher's (2013) are consequently too "laissez-faire" (Kyselo 2014, p. 1), offering diversity but no sense of a self as a coherent explanatory 'unit'. What's more, Kyselo goes on to point out that not only do pluralistic approaches leave us with an incomplete theoretical picture of selfhood, they are also unsatisfactory from a practical perspective. An explanation of how self-aspects coalesce into a patterned self is essential for how a doctor treats a patient, how a psychologist conceives of pathologies of the self, or how any number of academics conceive of experimental subjects (ibid.). Without the coherence of self as a unity, there could be damaging attempts to isolate and independently deal with the various self-aspects that comprise an apparent pattern.

A polar opposite to pluralistic approaches is to focus on one aspect of seemingly multi-faceted selfhood and designate this aspect as *the* self. Following Gallagher (2013), Kyselo states that this kind of 'essentialist' approach suffers from two insurmountable problems. Firstly, there is minimal overall consensus on what aspect of personal existence could qualify as *the* self (or, at least, the most fundamental aspect of selfhood), with a great variety of well-argued claims being made for the brain (Churchland 2013), specific neural regions (Northoff and Bermpohl 2004), the organic body (Johnson 1987), the affective body (Colombetti 2014), narrativity (Dennett 1992), explorations of the environment (Neisser 1993), sociality (De Haan 2010), or a mystical soul. Secondly, within this discordant arena, each claim is inherently reductive and so restricts selfhood to some singular element of existence, which seems to dismiss the dynamic and protean ways in which lives are lived. Consider, for example, that one would generally consider oneself to be the same person, in at least some ways, even if one underwent a significant bodily transformation, or if one settled in a new culture, or if one underwent a 'life-changing' experience such as finding religion, swimming with dolphins or surviving a near-death event. Similarly, one tends to consider oneself as the same person, in at least some ways, as one was at birth, or as one perhaps will be at old age, even if suffering from memory loss.<sup>[2]</sup> The 'self', whatever it may be, seems to withstand significant changes throughout a life-time. Rather than being reduced to a specific feature, a theory of self should thus strive to account for the multifarious,

<sup>2</sup> These claims regarding our protean nature and our existence as a discernible unity notably correspond with the long-standing personal identity debate; see Jinpa (2002), Locke 1975, Noonan (2003), Parfit (1984) and Wiggins (1980) for a variety of major views within the existing literature.

interactive and persistent nature of self-existence, in such a way that a cohesive unity is discerned and preserved.

### 3 The body-social problem in enactivism

As far as Kyselo is concerned, enactivism provides the perfect conceptual framework within which a theory of self can be constructed – a theory that both appreciates the multifaceted nature of self and delineates it as a cohesive unity. Using the enactive paradigm, Kyselo claims that her theory of self can bridge between essentialist and pluralistic theories of self, as well as dissipating the tension between embodied- and social-focussed approaches to selfhood.

According to the kind of enactivism that Kyselo favours, a cognitive entity is one that is *autonomous*, *emergent*, *embodied* and *experiential*, so as to become a *sense-maker* (De Jaegher & Di Paolo 2007). If we accept that a self is a cognitive being then this means that we already have several aspects of selfhood that are assimilated within the very framework from which an investigation into selfhood is being made. What's more, enactivism inherently provides a "fruitful link" into analyses of selfhood because its conception of autonomy (discussed below) is one of individuation, such that any cognitive process is simultaneously a self-organising (and therefore self-individuating) process.

An entity is autonomous when it self-generates, self-preserved and self-identifies – and thus self-individuates – through the recursively propelling activity of its constituents, such that a systemic unity with established options for environmental interaction is manifest (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007; Thompson 2007). Central to this "perpetual self-renewal" (Jonas 1966/2001, p.80) is the idea that an organism's constituting parts necessarily require material resources to survive, but the organism's identity is a continuous "achievement" of emergence *from* these material processes (ibid.; Kyselo 2014). To put this more simply, the material resources of the environment provide substance from which an organism is constructed, and these resources are then organised and processed by the organism in the unique way that is necessary for its specific survival, so that it maintains its own "functional identity" that simply 'passingly incorporates' the outside world (Jonas 1966/2001). Jonas refers to an organism's dependence on material resources whilst simultaneously functionally distinguishing itself from its material environment as "needful freedom" (ibid., p.80). Due to needful freedom, an organism is incessantly interacting with its environment in order to survive and continually construct its own identity. Every living organism – even those that are only passively subjected to environmental perturbations – thus has its own 'perspective' on the world in virtue of the conservation of its self-constructed identity in the face of environmental perturbations (Jonas 1966/2001; Di Paolo 2005). If an organism goes beyond passive conservation and displays *adaptivity* in its maintenance of identity – that is, if it *actively* engages, in varying ways, with certain environmental perturbations so as to preserve its systemic viability (Di Paolo 2005) – then it encounters the environment as inherently valenced. This valenced appeal of the environment allows the organism to autonomously generate its own 'sense' of the world, thereby cognising as well as physically persisting (Kyselo 2014).

For humans, however, there is a complication to this enactivist description of organismic self-renewal as a means of maintaining an identity. This complication arises in virtue of our *social identity*; that is, the fact that we sense-make (and therefore self-renew and self-preserve) in a social world alongside the physical world. In virtue of sense-making in a social domain, we encounter a problem in the enactive framework that must be ironed out if a satisfactory concept of self is to be developed (ibid.). Looking at the theory of *participatory sense-making*, which is the most prominent enactive approach to social cognition (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007), Kyselo contends that it is unclear exactly how the autonomy of a human, who regularly interacts with other humans, persists during interactions. The central claim of participatory sense-making is that when two or more individuals interact with one another their intentional activity can become dynamically coordinated in such a way that a new relational system *with its own autonomy* can emerge between them (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007; Luhmann 2002). As this participatory process that emerges between interacting individuals has its own autonomy, it can be said to have a systemic identity of sorts, due to the fact that autonomy must ‘belong’ to a discernible structure of some kind. But once we have an autonomous ‘participatory’ organisation alongside ‘individual’ autonomy, a body-social tension arises, which Kyselo puts forward in the following way. On one interpretation, (a). individuals are ‘dissolved’ as constituents of the interaction because their “intrinsic purpose” seems to be directed at the generation and maintenance of interaction dynamics, which renders them *heteronomous* rather than autonomous. The resulting individuation, if there is to be one for the interacting agents, is of ‘parts’ within a social process that has its own autonomous (‘group’) identity (Kyselo 2014; Steiner & Stewart 2009). Alternatively, (b). each of the interacting agents “is individuated from others *qua* being embodied” (Kyselo 2014, p. 7), such that any delineation of ‘individuals’ is made in accordance with organismic bodies. Yet differentiating each individual from the other and from their jointly created interactive dynamics in virtue of their presence as bodily beings condemns the body as “a locus of isolation, not a means of connection and engagement” (ibid.). How, then, can we fairly make sense of individuation within the midst of these embodied and social autonomies? Should the interacting agents be individuated as bodily-organismic ‘selves’ who are constituting elements of the interaction process, or as social-relational ‘selves’ who are constituents of a ‘group’ autonomous structure? We are left facing a crystallised example of Kyselo’s *body-social problem*.

#### 4 Kyselo’s solution: social needful freedom

Kyselo’s view is that the remedy to these difficulties emerges from Jonas’s notion of *needful freedom*. Building on this notion, the self should be conceptualised as arising “*through and from a world*” (Kyselo 2014, p. 8), whereby

an individual identity reflects, in its structure and existential needs and concerns, the world *from* which it continuously emerges; but, in order to exist as an individual, it thereby also emancipates itself from the world *through* those very same processes (ibid.)

The core processes of this principle of needful freedom within human life are those of *participation* and *emancipation*.<sup>[3]</sup> To *participate* in the social world is to be organisationally self-individuated in accordance with social interactions (“virtual or actual interpersonal engagements” (ibid.)), such that one’s identity as a self is inherently socially relational. When individual agents participate in the social world, as an intrinsic part of the principle of human needful freedom, they are constantly achieving an identity, “jointly relying on behavior and action and on doing and being together with others” (ibid.). *Emancipation*, on the other hand, keeps an agent from ‘dissolving’ into this social world of participatory processes by transforming one’s relationship with the social world. Rather than engaging with social processes as a constituent of some ‘group’ identity, an *emancipated* individual ‘stands out’ against the social relations from which it is made. Analogously to Jonas’s biological needful freedom, Kyselo’s principle of individuation *through and from a world* construes social processes as the ‘material’ through which an individual identity is constructed, but also as that from which the individual distinctively identifies itself in virtue of its unique processing of that material. Thus, “just as an organism’s metabolism continuously exerts a choice by taking in only particular processes, while avoiding others” (ibid.), so does a socially organised human agent continuously exert a choice by taking in only particular social processes at any given time.

In order to clarify this notion of social needful freedom, Kyselo elaborates on her analogy. Whereas the autonomy of most organismic systems is dependent on the adaptive evaluation of the environment according to its potential to maintain the organism’s metabolic network, the autonomy of humans also requires the evaluation of the environment according to its potential to maintain a human’s network of social organisation. Rather than just requiring physical nutrition, humans are in need of *social recognition* as “the nutrient required to co-construct the boundary of the self” (ibid., p. 11). Drawing on Ikäheimo (2009), Kyselo goes as far as to claim that social recognition could be seen as the means by which human persons can be distinguished from mere animals, in virtue of surpassing the desirability and avoidability of a ‘pure state of nature’ and instead behaving in accordance with “mutually mediated intentionalities” (Ikäheimo 2009, p. 34). In other words, humans live beyond mere animal existence through recognition of one another as participants in the collective mediation of norms<sup>[4]</sup> – norms which are “constitutive of the lifeworld of persons” (ibid., p. 36).<sup>[5]</sup> Kyselo also points out that the ‘nutritional’ value of social recognition is perhaps evident in the severity of consequences that arise during social confinement (e.g. Guenther 2013; Rasmussen 1973) or in the difficulties that emerge with self-identification due to social exclusion (e.g. Williams 2007; Stillman et al. 2009). The idea is thus that just as an organism is generated and maintained through the ongoing metabolic processing of

<sup>3</sup> Kyselo frequently uses ‘distinction’ in place of ‘emancipation’; however, rather than using two terms interchangeably, I will retain use of the latter term throughout this paper for purposes of simplicity.

<sup>4</sup> Here, and throughout this paper, I am using ‘norms’ (and ‘normativity’) in a very broad sense, to capture those principles by which human behaviour (and cognition) is deemed appropriate. In this sense, norms are generally implicit and always socially permeated, such that they simply encapsulate *what one does*, as much as *what one ought* to do.

<sup>5</sup> As we will come to see later in the paper, I think there is something correct about Ikäheimo’s (2009) claim that we inhabit a world of collectively mediated norms. The crucial development that I will expound is the idea that the body is an active constituent in the generation, presentation and modulation of these norms.



physical matter (of which it is itself a part), so is a human self (co-)generated and (co-)maintained through the ongoing organisational processing of social interactions (of which it is itself a part) (Kyselo 2014). To be starved of social interactions in some way would be to lose the ongoing capacity to generate a self.

There are two crucial steps for Kyselo's principle of individuation through and from a social world that we need to briefly consider. Firstly, an individual's participation in and emancipation from social processes is a "twofold norm" of recognition (ibid., p.11). That is, in everyday interactions an emancipated individual is not acting as a solitary, socially void agent and a participating individual is not mindlessly 'lost' within social customs and practices. Rather, emancipation and participation should be seen as poles within an individuating spectrum that describes the extent to which certain social 'matter' is incorporated into one's present delineation as a self. Emancipation roughly equates to being oneself in one's own right and thus 'owning' one's actions (e.g. practising yoga, feeling nervous before an audience, romantic disconnection, or the pride or shame one feels at a successful achievement or embarrassing act); participation roughly equates to openly connecting with others as a constituent of some collective activity (e.g. falling in love, feeling partly responsible for a team or institutional achievement of failure, or being caught up in the momentum of a crowd). For an agent to be a self is to be present on this emancipation-participation spectrum.

Secondly, and interrelatedly, the fact that the principle of human needful freedom is relevant to emancipation from and participation in social processes should not, for Kyselo, mean that the role of the body is downplayed. Instead, the body "changes its status" during our social interactions (and emancipation from them) so as to become "the self's means and mediator" (ibid., p. 12). The body acts both as "an interface for connection" (ibid., p. 12), allowing us to engage with the world and be engaged with by others in specific ways, and as "an imprint of social engagement" (ibid.), shaping our cognitive responses to social situations in accordance with previous interactive experience. So, for example, adopting an expansive and open bodily posture can regulate an interaction by reflecting (and producing) a feeling of social power and dominance in the poser, thereby illustrating the body's role as a social "interface" (Carney et al. 2005; Hall et al. 2005). Reversing this relationship, the fact that one may blush during the recurrence of a formerly embarrassing situation indicates how social occurrences can imprint themselves onto the body (whilst simultaneously regulating the subsequent interaction). In other words, the body's expressive characteristics help to facilitate and regulate social interactions, whilst also acquiring new meaning through these interactions. The body is therefore inherently tied to *how* agents socially interact, from both a subjective perspective of others and from others' perspectives of a subject. Whilst openness and connectivity with others during social interactions are the key conditions for achieving selfhood within Kyselo's enactive framework, it is ostensibly vital to her theory that this openness and connectivity is only possible in virtue of the body's mediation.

In summary, Kyselo considers human autonomy, like that of all organisms, to be underlaid by the principle of *needful freedom*. Unlike other organisms, however, the needful freedom of humans requires recognition during interactions in order to preserve an identity as a self. This means that human autonomy is not only dependent on the metabolic preservation of the organismic body, but also on the interactive (self-other) preservation of a socially organised self-identity. By oscillating between the processes



of emancipation and participation during social interactions, the self's social autonomy is continuously co-generated and co-maintained. Crucially, this social autonomy can only be preserved with the mediation of the body, which is not a "random vessel" but the "means and mediator" (Kyselo 2014, p. 12) of social engagement.

## 5 Problem 1: 'social death'

Part of the motivation behind Kyselo's enactive approach to the self is a desire to unite the potentially disparate processes of bodily and social being such that neither set of processes is downplayed. However, it is unclear that Kyselo achieves the seamless integration of bodily and social processes that she seeks. Instead, there seems to be a persistent imbalance between the body and sociality, which is perhaps most apparent when considering the possibility of 'social death'.

As we have seen previously, Kyselo's enactive self relies not just on biological needful freedom, but also on *social needful freedom*, which describes the necessity of self-constituting social interactions and distinguishing oneself from these interactions. Preserving oneself as a social unity is achieved by negotiating the balance between participating in interactions with others and emancipating oneself from these interactions. However, Kyselo (2014) claims that a social unity is forever "at risk of dissolution" due to the potential to oscillate too far into the process of participation or emancipation, thereby becoming "stuck in the extremes of either of the two dimensions" (p. 10). If this occurs and one's unity of social selfhood is 'dissolved', then one suffers a *social death* (ibid.). Exactly how one would become 'stuck' at either the pole of participation or that of emancipation is not entirely clear, although Kyselo alludes to disorders of the self that emerge in schizophrenics (p.11). Notwithstanding this allusion to schizophrenia, I believe more accessible examples as to how one may succumb to 'extreme participation' or 'extreme emancipation' may be given without recourse to psychological disorders of the self.

Firstly, an individual could 'dissolve' into the extremes of participation if one were to embed oneself in intersubjective activity to the extent that one suffers a complete loss of individual agency. We could perhaps entertain the possibility of such an event in the case of cult members, in which persons reside in cult customs and the instructions of a leader to the point where the subjective ownership of actions seems entirely lost. Cult members would perhaps be best described as largely heteronomous with regards to their actions, undergoing governance that is established outwith their personal activity. At the other end of the spectrum, one's self is 'lost' to the dimension of emancipation when one becomes isolated from self-constituting social structures. A possible example of such an occurrence would be extreme social confinement or isolation (which Kyselo (2014) considers herself), or perhaps the unreality of the social world that one can feel when depressed, so that one feels completely estranged from meaningful social ties (Ratcliffe 2014, pp. 14–16). For Kyselo, such happenings would amount to a loss of the ability to oscillate between the poles of participation and emancipation, thus becoming 'stuck' in one of these polar dimensions.

However, there are difficulties with buying into the possibilities of 'extreme participation' or 'extreme emancipation'. If we focus initially on the alleged loss of oneself within the domain of participation – such as an individual who 'dissolves' into the

customs and ideals of a cult – then we will see that in spite of a cult member’s heteronomous activity, it is challenging to see this as a complete loss of selfhood. This is because a subject of ‘extreme participation’ does not seem to be truly excised of their self-owned subjectivity. As long as bodily autonomy and phenomenal consciousness remain, it would seem that there are always aspects of experience that are inherently *for the subject* (see Zahavi (2005, 2014, 2017) for more on the ‘for-me-ness’ of experience). So even if one becomes deeply embedded in intersubjective activity such that one’s agency is lost, one still preserves the subjectivity of one’s bodily autonomy and phenomenal consciousness. That is, an individual who is mindlessly immersed in the conformism of a cult still has bodily subjectivity that is importantly her own; her bodily sensations will withstand collective assimilation, even if her beliefs and thoughts yield to her cult’s ideals. As a consequence of this, the temptation would be to designate bodily subjectivity as primordial in the individuation of the self, thereby losing grip on a notion of self that treats bodily and social processes as cohesively united (such that the importance of neither is downplayed). In response, Kyselo could perhaps contend that the bodily subjectivity and phenomenal consciousness that persist in spite of ‘extreme participation’ would amount to an ‘identity’, but not genuine selfhood. However, this is problematic for two reasons: firstly, it could lead to a grey area between ‘identity’ and ‘selfhood’ (e.g. at what stage of social interaction does a neonate’s bodily identity become a self?);, secondly, it quarantines bodily subjectivity as seemingly non-essential to the constitution of the self in a move that mirrors the kind of conceptual isolation that Kyselo wishes to avoid (see section 2).

Focusing specifically on the dimension of emancipation, there are further reasons for doubting the possibility of a ‘social death’. For instance, even if one is socially isolated, one still preserves congruity with certain social norms. Taking the example of socially confined prisoners, we find that such isolated individuals may suffer from a broad range of psychological, sensorimotor, affective and interactional symptoms (Gallagher 2014; Grassian 1983; Guenther 2013). Yet as long as these prisoners survive their social confinement, then even in spite of severe symptoms, they still retain traces of living (and, therefore, thinking) in accordance with recognisable social practices and of being – to a notable degree – the same self.<sup>[6]</sup> This is not to downplay the abhorrence of social confinement as a form of punishment, nor to suggest that it is not an injurious experience for selfhood, but to suggest that socio-normative aspects of self can endure even extreme isolation from others. Prisoners will tend to preserve socio-normative connections to their pre-confinement world and sense of self, rather than suffering a ‘death’ in virtue of losing the ability to interact with others. Indeed, one could argue that it is connecting to certain fundamental social norms – such as those of being female, male, a parent, a partner, a prisoner, or as belonging to any other social ‘groups’ – that

<sup>6</sup> Guenther (2013) and Gallagher (2014) would disagree with this. Their view is that socially confined prisoners can undergo psychological, sensorimotor and affective harm to the degree that they may suffer “a destruction of the self” (Gallagher 2014, p.5). However, my point is not that individuals cannot be significantly transformed by social confinement, but that such transformation does not amount to a ‘social death’ in the sense of the loss of the ability to meaningfully interact with others. Socially confined prisoners may suffer a change in various psychological, sensorimotor and affective capacities, but they will retain various other pre-confinement capacities and will thus retain selfhood that is consistent in notable ways. As a bare minimum, for example, prisoners emerge from social confinement with biophysical bodies that are notably consistent with their pre-confinement bodies and, as we will see in sections 7 and 8, this alone provides meaningful normative connections to the social world.

facilitates self-identification and self-preservation, thereby allowing prisoners to rediscover social reality post-release from confinement. The pertinent question is how the pervasion of such social norms can be integrated with the two-fold process of ‘emancipation’ and ‘participation’?

To this end, Kyselo (2014) initially states that participation encompasses “virtual or actual interpersonal engagements of at least two individuals” (p. 8), but how far ‘virtual’ can be stretched is not entirely clear. If a virtual interpersonal engagement can involve interaction with the social norms of myriad relational groups (e.g. dyads, cliques, crowds, institutions, etc.), then it seems we can never be fully emancipated from social processes, in line with the aforementioned idea that meaningful existence is bound to certain social ways of being. If, on the other hand, a virtual engagement is limited to interactions in which individuals are not (directly) physically present to one another (e.g. via a video-link), or perhaps even to imagined discourse between at least two individuals, then it seems we are ‘fully’ emancipated whenever we are alone and not thinking of others. Social ‘deaths’ would then become a frequent occurrence, as we regularly extract ourselves from direct interactions.

Ignoring the vagueness of exactly *how* one succumbs to social death, it still seems that the notion is problematic for Kyselo’s account, in that it suggests a potentially troublesome imbalance between bodily and social processes. What I mean by this is that even if one were to suffer a social death, one’s body could still survive. A cult member who is ‘lost’ in the dimension of participation still has their own body with its own biological autonomy and a socially confined individual who is ‘lost’ in the dimension of emancipation would similarly still have their own body with its own biological autonomy. Conversely, if one suffers a bodily death, it is hard to see how any social self – that is capable of interacting with others or with social norms – could persevere. To put it simply, if one takes the view that ‘social death’ is possible, then there seems to be good reason to endow bodily processes with primacy when it comes to individuating the self, as bodily processes can persist in spite of a social death but social processes could not persist in spite of a bodily death.

The difficulty of social death also raises an ambiguity within Kyselo’s theory of an enactive self. As mentioned in section 4, what is arguably unique about human needful freedom is that we move beyond the biological autonomy of our organismic bodies and also live through the relational autonomy of our social interactions. However, the relation between these two forms of autonomy, or how they interrelate, is not entirely clear. For example, one could draw on the aforementioned issue surrounding ‘social death’ to suggest that one can lose one’s social autonomy and still survive, but one cannot lose one’s biological autonomy and survive. Again, this reformulates the claim that bodily processes (i.e. the biological autonomy of the organismic body) should be given primacy over social processes with regards to the individuation of the self.

Alternatively, one could argue that when engaged in extreme participation it is actually biological autonomy that loses out; for instance, if cult members engage in mass suicide then the relational autonomy of their cult interactions seems to have ‘overridden’ the self-preserving purposiveness of biological autonomy. This would (re-)endow social autonomy with some of its grip on selfhood. Indeed, it is an argument that Kyselo may welcome. However, it wouldn’t be entirely satisfactory because the suggestion here would be that biological autonomy and social autonomy are opposing poles on a spectrum, and any spectral polarity – particularly a polarity in which either

pole can fully ‘override’ the other – will continue to beget the difficulties that are being elucidated throughout this section and section 6.

Further to this, two final points will serve to underline the confusion that arises from the issue of ‘social death’. Firstly, without a greater deal of clarity, one could be forgiven for supposing that the spectrum of emancipation and participation is supposed to map onto a spectrum of bodily (or strictly biological) and social processes as two poles within a domain of enactive autonomy. So when one is emancipated one is engaging with the organismic autonomy of one’s individualistic body and when one is participating one is engaging with one’s social autonomy. Yet this assumption would only further complicate matters, in that one is seemingly capable of emancipating oneself whilst being highly socially autonomous (e.g. ‘owning’ one’s actions as the star member of a team), or being highly participatory whilst being biologically autonomous (e.g. recalling and employing sociocultural norms or interactions in order to survive as an isolated shipwreck victim).

Secondly, even with the issue of polarity set to one side, there is potential confusion in virtue of the fact that one’s social organisation can seemingly furcate within a situation. For example, dance performers on a stage need to collaborate in a coordinated and often intimate manner, exhibiting high levels of participation, but at the same time they may be sharply emancipated (or, at the very least, notably different in their participation) from their audience, as well as being potentially emancipated from or participating with various other groups such as stagehands, directors or accompanying musicians. The temptation would be to say that the on-stage interaction between the performers is ‘dominant’ and it is this participation that matters. Yet it seems undeniable that the presence and phenomenological relevance of the audience and other groups are certainly not negligible. Alternatively, one could claim that there are distinct spectra of self-organisation relative to the situation: that between the performers, and that between the performers and the various other groups. Yet this is also dissatisfying, in that the self either seems to be somehow split across constituting interactions, or the manner in which it integrates these forms of interaction is insufficiently explained.

We thus seem to have a number of competing and problematic options regarding participation-emancipation, body-social processes, biological-social autonomy, and how all of these concepts connect to one another. Without genuinely unifying the biological body and social structures, which will be my objective later in the paper, Kyselo’s enactive approach to the self seems to lose grip on the cogency that at first seems apparent.

## 6 Problem 2: Losing the body

A further issue for Kyselo’s account of the self stems from her claim that the body is the “self’s means and mediator” (p. 12). Whilst this suggests that the body has an integral, non-trivial role in the generation and maintenance of selfhood, the situation becomes somewhat muddled when we look at things more closely. Consider the following claim:

the self is not just a lo[o]se collection of aspects but has boundaries that are generated through interacting and being related to others. The self in its most

minimal sense, thus escapes the body. It is never fully separable from the social environment, but instead determined precisely in terms of the types of social interactions and relations of which it is, at the same time, a part. (Kyselo 2014, p. 12)

The emphasis here is clearly on the social individuation of the self, so much so that the body can in fact be ‘escaped’ from. Whilst Kyselo stresses that the claim is not in favour of “a disembodied conception of the self” (ibid.), the cited passage is telling of the fact that Kyselo’s self ultimately seems to be a social self that just so happens to have *this* body as its mediator, but could perhaps satisfactorily inhabit the world through any appropriate bodily medium. In this manner, Kyselo (2014) risks falling prey to her self-declared pitfall of “trivializing the role [that] sensorimotor structures and other non-neuronal bodily structures” (p.4) play in the individuation of the self. She seems so committed to overcoming the claim that the self *is*, in some way, the body that she ends up pitching herself in the camp of ‘the self is a social construction’. This obviously jars with her attempt to delineate a coherent notion of self that overcomes the ‘body-social problem’ by satisfactorily integrating bodily and social processes.

Kyselo’s treatment of the body as subordinate to social processes is exemplified by her description of a haircut as not merely being “a change to some biomaterial that grows out of my head” (p. 12), but rather as a change to “how I saw and now see myself and[...] how others have seen and now see me” (ibid.). That is, a haircut is a bodily change that transforms how one relates to the world. Importantly, however, the transformation of this bodily change only becomes significant through an “act of relationality” (ibid.): either how one relates to oneself or how one relates to (or is related to by) others. In many ways, this seems convincing, except for the fact that the body now seems to only be a contextual channel for social selfhood, which sits uncomfortably with Kyselo’s desire to neither downplay nor trivialise embodiment. The body certainly isn’t playing a truly *constitutive* role in the individuation of the self. Note, for instance, that the bodily change does not impact on one’s selfhood until it “acquires a social meaning” (ibid.) during some sort of interaction. This is, of course, in keeping with Kyselo’s claim that the body is “the self’s means and mediator”, as it suggests that the body does not directly impact self-individuation, but instead only has a mediatory impact on one’s social relationality. But the body is then dislodged from imminent self-individuating power, only having relevance as a medium of social activity. The primary problem with this is that the body’s role appears to be one of second-order assistance to the essentially social self, no different from the contextual influence of the physical environment, and such a position allows the body-social problem to loom large.

In Kyselo’s defence, there are points where she seems to treat the body as an integral constituent of existence – an existence that is permeated by socio-cognitive complexity. This existentially constitutive body is more than mere biological matter: it is an autonomous system without which cognition is impossible and through which all cognitive activity is manifest, as any cognitive process ultimately refers to the ongoing preservation of the body. However, as alluded to above, there are other points where Kyselo seems to treat the body as aligned with the purely biological organism, which is distinct from (albeit importantly interlinked with) sociality. For example, the principle of a human individuating herself *through and from a world* involves “bracket[ing] for a moment any role the body might play in the individuation of human cognitive identity

and[...] instead consider[ing] human individuation as a social process” (Kyselo 2014, p. 8). Such ‘bracketing’ suggests that the body is no longer existentially constitutive in a full-blown sense and is instead akin to a merely organic, causally influential medium.

The positive movements that Kyselo makes in favour of the body’s integral role in selfhood are thus undermined by its status as a *mediator* of a primordially important social self. In the phrasing of one of the earliest formulations of the enactive approach to cognition (Varela et al. 1991), Kyselo is successful in overcoming the image of the human self as an embodied being that is parachuted into a social world, but this success comes at a cost: namely, that Kyselo instead depicts the human self as a socially enacted being that is parachuted into a mediating body. Of course this body is non-trivial and plays an important role in social interactions, but this role seems to be one of structuring social experience in a contextual manner, rather than playing the constitutive role that I believe is needed.

As with the issue of ‘social death’, we once more seem to have just fallen short of achieving a tensionless integration of bodily and social processes. The ambiguities regarding the exact conjunctions between participation-emancipation, body-social processes and biological-social autonomy are now further stoked by the seemingly subordinate role of the body in the individuation of the self. Howsoever one construes the two-fold norm of participation-emancipation, one is seemingly left making concessions on account of either bodily processes or social processes.

Consequently, Kyselo still faces a body-social rift within the individuation of the self. Without genuinely unifying the biological body and social structures, Kyselo’s approach to selfhood is merely masking the body-social tension, not dissipating it.

## 7 The biosocial domain of human experience

I believe that the most promising approach to achieving the sought-after consonance between bodily and social processes involves a reconsideration of how humans navigate their existence, with ‘body’ and ‘social’ not being treated as distinct aspects of selfhood that just so happen to be closely entwined, nor as opposite poles within a spectrum of selfhood, but rather as a single ontological feature. The solution that I am proposing is the *biosocial self* – a mode of being in which the constitutive biological-bodily and social processes (i.e. ‘biosocial processes’) of selfhood are non-decoupleable. Accepting such a mode of being requires a re-formulation of the unique experiential space in which humans dwell.

Consider, firstly, the widely accepted idea that the demonstrable rationality of humans suggests that we experience the world differently to other animals. Maturana, whose autopoietic theory (Maturana 1975, 1995, 2002; Maturana et al. 1995; Maturana and Varela 1987) is an antecedent form of much modern enactivism, highlights this through his claim that *every* living species occupies a unique experiential domain. Through a recent exegesis of Maturana’s work by Villalobos and Ward (2016), we can see that this claim begins with the positing of two basic domains of existence for all living beings: (i). the *physiological* domain, which is constituted by the structural dynamics of the modalities and divisions of an organism’s sensory systems, and (ii). the *relational* domain, which is constituted by the behavioural interactions of an organism (as a totality) with its environment (Villalobos and Ward 2016). The



subsequent claim is that (i) provides an organism with basic sensory experience and (ii) provides an organism with a “characteristic mode of life” (Villalobos and Ward 2016, p. 209). This mode of life is generated through an organism relating to its surrounding world in a specific way and, consequently, undergoing specifically structured relational *experience*. Just as certain sensory systems are assumed to give rise to certain sensory experiences – for example, visual systems will generate visual experience, regardless of the exact mechanics of the involved system<sup>7</sup> – so, too, will an entity’s behavioural dynamics give rise to certain relational experience. This claim draws on the enactivist tenet that every living entity is *structurally coupled* to its environment, such that there is a history of recurrent congruence between the dynamic changes enacted by a living entity and related changes in the entity’s environment (Maturana and Varela 1987, p. 75; Thompson 2007, p. 45). Resultantly, the relational space occupied by a given species – say, cats – generates unique experience – ‘cat-experience’ – that is incommensurable with the relational experience enjoyed by other living entities, just as visual phenomena brought about by visual systems are incommensurable with sensory phenomena brought about by other sensory systems (Villalobos and Ward 2016, p. 209). Accordingly, humans enjoy a unique kind of ‘human-experience’ that is distinct from the experience of all other living entities.

Rather than defending these claims, I simply wish to appropriate the idea that there is a unique experiential world that humans inhabit. For Maturana, language is the mechanism by which the human experiential world obtains its complex character. That is, it is through initiation into language that humans enter into a unique relational domain of conceptual rationality (Maturana 1995, 2002). However, I do not think that our ability to form and act on conceptual thoughts – thereby to occupy a unique experiential domain of rationality – rests on our ability to use language. Instead, I believe such abilities, *including* the ability to use language, are subserved by the inherent social normativity of our bodies.

At a developmental level, this inherent social normativity is evident in the neonatal potential to recognise and interact with other humans, with our bodies being essential to the achievement of such social accomplishments. For instance, newborns have been shown to respond to human interaction within minutes of birth, often imitating facial gestures (Meltzoff and Moore 1977, 1983; Gallagher and Meltzoff 1996; Nagy et al. 2013) and certain hand movements (Nagy et al. 2005). Importantly, they imitate gestures only from other humans (Johnson 2000), suggesting that there is an inherent human disposition towards parsing the world into human and non-human entities (Meltzoff and Brooks 2001). After these nascent abilities to recognise and interact with others are established, newborns gradually begin to display further capacities such as gaze-following at approximately 9 months of age (Senju, Johnson and Csibra, 2008), joint attention at 9–14 months (Phillips et al. 1992) and comprehension of goal-directed behaviour at 18 months (Meltzoff 1995; Meltzoff and Brooks 2001). Such imitative abilities clearly support the idea that bodily activity is socially imbued, in that neonates

<sup>7</sup> This is not to deny the potential for plasticity in how experience is generated (see Bach-y-Rita et al. (1969) on the possibility of substituting tactile sense for vision), or the possibility of experiential variation through neurological abnormalities (see Baron-Cohen and Harrison (1997) on synaesthesia). The point is rather that (natural) visual systems are assumed to generate experience that belongs to the domain of visual phenomenology, whether these systems belong to fish, reptile, mammals, birds, insects etc. (Villalobos and Ward 2016, p. 209).



are inherently sensitive to social interaction from the first tentative moments of post-pregnancy life. The empirical data thus gives us two crucial pieces of information: firstly, human newborns seemingly have inherent embodied capabilities *for* social interaction; secondly, through these embodied interactions with others, infants begin to build a repertoire of increasingly complex cognitive capacities.

Of course, such neonatal abilities do not give an unequivocal answer as to when a foetus or neonate becomes a bona fide human self. Yet at whatever time one wishes to claim a neonate develops awareness of self, which is typically taken to emerge with basic bodily self-awareness (Gallagher 2005, pp. 72–85), one must also acknowledge that such awareness is simultaneously a modulatory normative process and, therefore, a social activity. The claim (as we will see in more depth shortly) is not that bodily (self-)understanding emerges *within* a social world, but that it is concurrently a kind of social (self-)understanding of one's own presence (and modulatory capacity) that belongs to the normative experiential world of biosociality. In other words, if one accepts the view that awareness of self emerges with basic bodily self-awareness, and combines this view with the empirically supported view that neonatal bodily activity is socially imbued, then one's fledgling awareness of self should also be considered socially imbued. Unlike Kyselo (2014), who claims that human selfhood emerges as our self-identifying biological bodies engage in social interactions, such that selfhood is "an achievement[...] *between* individuals" (p. 8), my view is that selfhood is not 'achieved' on the back of a nascent bodily identity, but is present with the earliest indicators of individuation. Any bodily identity is a biosocial self, in that human bodily processes always occur within the experiential space of normative biosociality. This means that the organic body is simultaneously a social body as far as the human self is concerned. There is no longer ambiguity over its ontological status: the body's organic persistence is concurrently an expression of lived sociality.

The point of the neonatal considerations is that whereas Maturana and others contend that human occupation of a unique experiential domain rests on language (in the traditional sense of verbal language), I am claiming that such experience is present from the earliest moments of life through our nascent capacity for bodily-social expression. As far as humans are concerned, our biological bodies are socially saturated from the first moments of life through to our very last moments, meaning that 'bodily' and 'social' processes should both be considered 'bodily-social', or *biosocial processes*. In terms of interaction dynamics, the idea is that bodily activity is permeated by social norms (or social 'ways of being') and these social norms then feed back into individuals' canalised range of potential bodily actions which will, in turn, generate and modulate further norms which will then instantiate further feedback (and so on). We are distinct from 'mere animals' because we inhabit an experiential world of social normativity that is in no way separate from our organismic bodies, but is instantiated and maintained by them. This normativity, which is literally embodied across collectives of individuals and to which we are inherently disposed, serves as a constant store of historically accumulated cognitive possibilities that are permanently in a state of dynamic modulation by intersubjective activity. We are human because we engage with this normativity, living through a biosocial world in which embodiment and ensocialment are unified.

To understand this claim in more detail, consider that any bodily activity will potentially modulate the normative possibilities of how that activity is executed, for

oneself and for others. This relies on the idea that just as the expressive embodiment of two individuals plays a *participatory* role in generating a dyadic relational domain that the individuals enact together, society-wide collectives of (embodied) individuals can be seen as playing *participatory* roles in generating society-wide relational domains that are enacted across a society. So the perceived bodily activity of any given individual is normatively laden so as to be a modulator of the various relational domains that we participate in (and emancipate ourselves from). To move one's body is thus not merely to perturb the physical world; it is also a communicatory perturbation of the socio-normative world that we enact.

Bodies, then, have more than a merely 'mediatory' role in the individuation of a socially enacted self: they are the tangible disclosure of the socially enacted world. As we will come to see, relevant to this disclosure is the idea that human bodies are inscribed throughout life with social meanings that they cannot but express, such that they are inevitably implicated in the self-other generation of relational processes that constitute the individuation of the human self. Humans are thus *biosocial* entities because we occupy a relational domain of experience in which our bodies are (socio-)normatively laden, so as to generate a holistic network of norms through which behavioural and cognitive dynamics are looped.

Running with this idea, one could claim that our bodies are close to being 'linguistic' in the sense employed by Cuffari et al. (2014), in that we are bodily sensitive to the social world in such a way that intersubjective activity is habitually rendered intelligible. Indeed, my view of human bodily existence being biosocial chimes happily with Cuffari et al.'s (2014) claim that our "world-engagement is an integrated whole of embodied interpreting[...] embedded in horizons of social normativity" (p. 1115). However, care needs to be taken in not underselling the fundamental nature of the biosociality that I am proposing. It is important that embodiment and ensocialment are not separable à la Kyselo's theory of selfhood. Unlike Kyselo's enactive approach, in which bodily and social processes ultimately seem to occupy separate spheres of activity that must be reconciled with one another, the biosocial approach to existence rejects the possibility of fundamental separation for bodily and social processes. Having a normatively laden body is not something that we gradually develop as we grow into a sociocultural world; rather, by occupying a relational domain of biosociality, it is something that we ontologically *are*. Our biological bodies and social environment belong to one and the same experiential space.

With this in mind, it is no longer enough to say that bodily existence involves a living body *in* a social world; instead, it is *being a living social body*. Human corporeality is always more than mere flesh: the body is ensconced in social purpose so that it simply *is* a social entity. The mistake that Kyselo (2014) rightly wished to avoid (see section 2) – that social or bodily processes are thought of as merely contextual – is now fundamentally bypassed. Without the body's entanglement with sociality, the meaning that an agent generates through its environmental activity would be little different from the basic self-perpetuation of sucrose-seeking bacteria or sunflowers (cf. Thompson 2007, pp.98–107; Varela 1991, pp.85–87). It is the imbrication of sociality and a lived body that distinguishes human ontological make-up from that of non-human animals, plants and basic autopoietic structures. For a body to be just a body in the strictly physical sense is for it to be extracted from the collectively mediated social norms that are constitutive of humanity's lifeworld (Ikäheimo 2009, p.

36). And without the body, there is no relational medium in which the generation and modulation of social norms can take place.

Having outlined biosocial existence, we can now consider how this concept can respond to some of the issues facing Kyselo's enactive approach to selfhood. Firstly, there is the fact that the concept of a 'social death' is now nonsensical. The idea that there cannot be non-socially normative bodily processes means that a 'social death' is simultaneously a 'bodily death', in virtue of 'bodily' being constitutive of one's biosocial existence (i.e. being 'Self-constitutive'). Once 'body' is appreciated as 'living social body', any loss of the capacity to socially interact is a cessation of Self-constituting bodily activity (and, conversely, a loss of the capacity for bodily action is a cessation of Self-constituting social activity). A true 'social death' would amount to a complete failure of, or wholesale transformation in, the capacity for bodily interaction, such as a standard death or irredeemable coma. The ideas of a cult member who is 'lost' in the social dimension of intersubjective participation or a socially confined prisoner who is 'lost' in the dimension of emancipation, so that each is allegedly suffering a social death, become untenable. Both cases, no matter how psychologically traumatic, preserve Self-constituting biosocial processes. Consequently, any temptation to view bodily and social processes as mapped onto the polarity between emancipation and participation actions is now removed. Emancipation and participation both involve enacting (body-)social norms through one's living (social-)body. 'Body' and 'social' are not opposing poles on a spectrum, nor are they in tension. They are conjointly foundational to the manifestation of one another, so that any attempt to distil the ontological 'essence' of humanness cannot be done without the imbricated notions of both body and sociality.

Secondly, the idea of the body being a non-specific mediatory vehicle of the primordial social self can now also be rejected. Due to the fact that we inhabit a biosocial domain of existence, the body is never merely a causal or contextual passenger to social experience; rather, it directly generates, discloses and modulates social norms. Even a seemingly trivial bodily change such as a haircut (see section 6) is a direct, constitutive part of one's socio-normative enaction of the world. Indeed, it is not just that the body is indispensable to human cognition, as it is for any entity, but that human bodies only ever take form in an intra-specific social world through which we generate meaning and make sense of personal existence. The extraction of bodily processes from social processes is simply impossible from the perspective of human selfhood.

With the simple step of elucidating the *genuine* coalescence of 'body' and 'social' into biosociality, we thus find that the problems facing Kyselo's account – 'social death' and 'the mediatory body' – can now be avoided.

## 8 The biosocial norms of everyday life

Not only does the notion of biosocial selfhood avoid the pitfalls of Kyselo's bodily-mediated and socially-enacted self, it is also reinforced by considering cultural 'mappings' such as gender. Gender is best viewed as not rigidly aligned with biological sex, but as the consequence of socially generated norms that

persist through the ongoing gendered treatment of what men and women are capable of and how they ‘should’ act (Valentine 2001). This is not to completely deny the importance of genetics in one’s lived world; rather, as Grosz explains, we find that our bodies are both “involuntarily marked” (Grosz 1994, p. 142) by our genetic inheritance and “tattooed” (Grosz 1993, p. 12) by our socio-cultural existence. What matters for present concerns is that bodily ‘tattooing’ is, in some form or another, inevitable and ubiquitous in human existence. The purposefulness of one’s world – what it affords and how one is poised to act on it through one’s living social-body – is contingent on one’s ‘tattooed’ existence. For example, as Young (1980) explains in response to the work of Straus (1966), the fact that some females will throw a ball with little lateral arm movement and minimal rotation of the body is not due to any innate ‘femininity’, but rather due to the situatedness of such females’ bodies within patriarchally gendered society. Such situatedness results in these females existentially relating to the world in a manner that differs from that of males: as burdened by their bodies, inhibited in intentionality and discontinuous in activities (Young 1980, pp. 145–148).

To put it simply, women often live through their social-bodies as ‘mere objects’ – as fragile entities that must be cajoled into activity and exist “*as looked at and acted upon*” (ibid., p. 148) – instead of as transcendent subjectivities. Women are ‘tattooed’ with the social normativity of gendered modalities. Their bodies become something other than a mode of lived subjectivity: they become normatively laden by societal expectations and mores.

In many societies across the world, there are thus marked distinctions arising in female and male behaviour due to modal expectations and enactments of ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ activity, with little biological justification for such activities to persist. So in many western societies, young boys will engage in all sorts of “games, sports, fights, challenges, and exploits”, whereas for young girls more “feminine virtues” are sought (De Beauvoir 1949/2011, pp. 341–343). With gendered mannerisms and dispositions being routinely adopted and encouraged by cultural mores, we find that bodily subjectivity is normatively permeated, so that young girls reinforce uniquely feminine modalities and young boys reinforce uniquely masculine modalities through their daily activities. It should also be noted that such modalities are *enacted* in the strictest sense; that is, the persistence of such modalities is due to the ongoing modulation of such norms through expected behaviours. This is crucial in that this discussion should not be misconstrued as endorsing the idea that gender is some sort of fixed social construction, but as highlighting the *active* role that individual agents play in generating and modulating social norms – in this case, gendering norms – that they are then modulated by.

Gender, then, provides a canonical example of the biosocial agent, in which one’s lived social-body is both a generator and generation of social norms. For gendered agents, bodily subjectivity is simultaneously social subjectivity, with both bodily maintained social normativity and socially maintained bodily activity being iteratively looped through one another. Importantly, there are innumerable other modes of existence that are entwined with and alongside gender, from engrained cultural dogmas to more subtle passing trends, all of which combine and channel the bodily activity of each biosocial agent into a unique pattern.

## 9 Conclusion

Whilst Kyselo (2014) is right to highlight and to try to resolve the body-social problem, her consideration of bodily and social activities as distinct processes leads to an inability to satisfactorily marry the two together. By elucidating the presence of a *biosocial experiential space*, which is propelled by the ongoing and simultaneous co-dependence of bodily generated social norms and socially generated bodily norms, we can see that humans are always more than mere physicality or mere sociality, instead being permeated by bodily-social power and purpose from the very earliest moments of life until its end. Human selfhood is being a bodily-social modulator of the biosocial experiential space.

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