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The Body as a Private and Social Space. The Margins of Research Regarding Old Age and Gender

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Abstract In the conditions of late modernity, the body is a project realized in both the public and private spheres. The aim of this article is to review theories and empirical studies concerning socio-cultural issues and the subjective determinants of perceptions of physicality. The body has become the main instrument of experiencing the world and oneself, a significant area, a key element of an individual's identification strategy. The modern human speaks with and through the body, the person's identity is reduced to self-presentation, by projecting their physicality, they project themselves. The presentation and reception of body is dominated by an aesthetic perspective, organically bound with the tendency to aestheticize daily life in general.

The text is based on empirical data, analysis of 403 qualitative interviews conducted between 2012-2014 in Polish cities: Warsaw, Kielce, Chelmno, and Przemysl. The research shows that the emotional aspect of experiencing body, as well as the cognitive aspect within consciousness, the mental image of one's own body, differ according to the respondents' age and gender.

Keywords Body Image; Physical Attractiveness; Gender; Old Age; Culture

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Background

Our life begins inside the body, which is our first area of contact with the outside world. The dualism of mind and body proposed by Plato (Platon 1995) contributed to the devaluation of everything associated with the idea of the material because Plato considered the material body merely an imperfect reflection of an idea, a prison for the soul, and an obstacle in its drive towards perfection. However, the body is not just matter, it is a source of social and cultural tensions; it is not just a primary area for developing one's "self," but also an area of interaction with other people. In social studies, it is a multi-dimensional medium for the constitution of society. The presence of the body in people's experiences is intermediated by social practices. The idea of humanity depends on social forms of life, including the way in which we experience our bodies and the way others treat them. The body reflects the identity of a society, the mechanisms which rule it, and the knowledge it has about itself. According to Chris Shilling (2010:83), "the body has, in a way, been shaped, limited, and even invented by society."

The issues taken up in this article concern perception and treatment of the body in the public and private sphere, primarily in areas of identity, as well as the aesthetic and commercial. In the empirical field, this analysis is based on the results of qualitative studies conducted in age-diverse groups of women and men from Warsaw, Kielce, Chelmno, and the rural communities of Przemysl. The goal of the study is to show how gender and age are manifested in perceptions of the role of one's own body and the degree of satisfaction with one's physicality. Analy-

sis of empirical data shows that age and gender are significant in the process of developing body image in the cognitive aspect—through the regulation of activity, as well as in the emotional—through building a sense of individuality and discreteness.

Postmodern Body Metamorphoses

The Christian emphasis on the privilege of the knowing soul, over the based, sinful carcass caused the significance of the body as subject to fade in European culture, while in the contemporary world of consumption, the body is a goal in itself. A characteristic phenomenon in Western culture today is the individual nearly obsessively occupied with better expressing the needs of their body, making their own physicality a product and carrier of information. An order is being created, which Bryan Turner (1984) called "somatic society," one which makes the body a foundation and the most important area of human cultural and political activity, constantly referring in various ways to problems of reproduction, control of desire, regulation and placement of bodies in space. In somatic societies, the body is an important aspect of both social life, being an important area of scientific, political, and cultural activity, as well as the everyday existence of individuals. The body has been overly exposed, its presence multiplied, residents of the modern world are surrounded by its images, reproductions of its entirety or fragments. Jean Baudrillard (2006:167-170) calls the body the "most beautiful object of consumption," indeed a fetish. In the media-focused, capitalistic, consumer society, physicality is a system of representation and a carrier of social meanings of prestige, strength, power, and subjugation, sexual

availability, and unavailability, cultural refinement, creative attitude towards identity (Shilling 2010).

The existence of the post-modern individual is a bodily one. The body, as Anthony Giddens (2002) points out, has become a reflective project, a system of action, source of practices, and its active engagement in daily interactions is required to maintain a cohesive sense of one's identity. One of the aspects of physicality the author specifies is the regimen which the body undergoes, that is, various ways of cultivating or even creating one's own body. The contemporary popularity of managing physicality is associated with the tendency to aestheticize life, which carries the possibility of "creating oneself." In modern society, the project of "self" as a decrease in individualism has currently been replaced with a project of body, which is increasingly becoming a matter of choice. Its appearance, size, shape, and even composition are potentially open to reconstruction in accordance with the owner's intentions. Control of the body occurs more through fashion and consumerism than through religion (Synott 1993; Giddens 2002; Shilling 2010). Bryan S. Turner (1984) admits that, in Western societies, we are dealing with a form of "new anti-Protestant ethic," which defines early aging, obesity, or lack of physical fitness as the modern form of corporeal sins. Thus, he upholds the view that aesthetically-oriented forms of affecting the body are not spontaneous, but rather a realization of social norms.

The visual character of contemporary culture and the dominant role of image in creating social reality cause a person's outward appearance to be one of the basic indicators of status and identity (Featherstone

2001). The feeling of power over looks coincides with the sense of being able to transform it into the most characteristic symbol of one's individualized "self." Michel Foucault (1998:27-29) uses the term "political technology of the body," which is regulated by numerous discourses regarding physicality and knowledge about it. In popular culture, power over the body is manifested through self-control, which an individual imposes upon herself/himself. Highly developed consumerism is a form of power over the body, as it constantly creates new temptations and increasingly strict standards of the ideal. The need to perfect one's appearance is becoming stronger. The image conveyed by media forms aesthetic ideals of beauty and ugliness. The ancient Greek ideal of beauty was defined by the *kalokagathia*, a category combining *kalos* ("beautiful") and *agathos* ("good"). In modern Western culture, aesthetic judgments take on the value of ethical judgments and divide the world into that which is aesthetically beautiful, attractive, associated with moral good, and that which is ugly, and thus evil. A properly maintained body is currently evidence of possessing a certain kind of cultural competence, an expression of proficiency in "managing oneself."

Modern formation of the body is an adequate form of auto-creation and self-narration for postmodern culture. Physicality is treated here as a reflective project of technological, medical, or artistic intentions and transgressions, having to do with personal identity. The meaning given to the body reflects the character of social conventions and requirements regarding its appearance and maintenance increasingly well. Currently, the recommended identity configurations of a body are an athletic

body, disciplined body, attractive body, one having undergone physical procedures (such as tattooing or piercing), a body which functions online. Human physicality is presented as a text or surface for information, messages. While in traditional societies, these messages had a social dimension, a collective one, then currently the individual, or even the narcissistic aspect, is dominant, associated with need to constantly “self-update” one’s project of “self,” or “search for oneself.”

Managing one’s physicality has become a stressful activity for individuals, due to excessive affirmation of external attributes and the idealized images of youth, physical fitness, and beauty in mass culture. Bodily perfection has become too superficial, and even hazardous to one’s life or health. The line between reality and fiction is dangerously blurred—media create the illusion that perfection can be achieved, promoting retouched images of impossibly thin females and increasingly muscular males (Andsager 2014). The ideal of working on oneself has been replaced by working on the body. Adjusting one’s own body to the normative models generated by consumer culture and ideals regarding physicality seems to be one of the key conditions for being appreciated in public opinion (Crossley 2006).

The improvement, stylizing of the body, “body upgrading,” according to fashion and phase of life, mostly applies to women. According to Ellyn Kaschack (1995:77), the “physicality of female identity” is a result of the surplus of meanings which patriarchal culture attributes to the body, and transfers to women; thus, they later place their femininity within their physicality. It is they that are always

placed on the side of that which is physical—and thus less perfect, associated with sensuality, and regardless of the period, they live under pressure from the cult of appearance and lack of acceptance for aging. Women want to earn acceptance, they monitor their bodies, especially their weight. In the XIX century, just as today, “one cannot even presume that a woman has a stomach. Its place has been taken by a void” (Waydel Dmochowska 1960:320). Inspired by the philosophy of Foucault, Susan Bordo claims that female bodies are constantly disciplined, remain “docile bodies,” subordinate to the consumer regimen. The woman is being freed from the home, ceases to be a prisoner of the household, yet becomes a prisoner of her own body and “strives for all her life to decorate the prison” (Bordo 2004:17-18). In Bordo’s (2004:166) opinion, beauty is an instrument of oppression, controlling women, who are constantly subject to external regulation, always “corrected” by normalizing, disciplinary practices, regarding diet, makeup, clothing—practices which organize the daily time and space of many women. Sometimes this way of perceiving the female body is internalized by the women themselves. They observe and judge their own body, just as their environment does. The habitual, constant monitoring of one’s own appearance is called self-objectification. Constantly gazing at oneself leads to negative emotional and behavioral consequences, such as: shame, fear of gaining weight, guilt, concealing one’s body (Frederickson and Roberts 1997).

The tyranny of body discipline is currently also experienced by men (Bordo 1999:223; Armengol 2013). The dictate of “being perceived” rules, and so expectations towards men, their bodies, and appearance

have changed. Male beauty, neutral until now, absent, unnoticeable, is also becoming a subject of public discourse (Bordo 1999; Lehman 2007). The increasing presentation of male bodies in media, combined with growing economic anxiety (which causes us to focus on things we can control, such as our appearance), has led to a radical change in men's approach to their body (Kimmel 2015:451). In the past, one of the most important functions of a male body was creating, that which Arthur Frank (1991:69) calls the dominating body, that is, one that elicits respect and recognition from other men. Technology has freed the man from having to be physically strong. In the 1970s, men with well-developed muscles were labeled deviants (Kimmel 2015:451-452). Currently, the realization of masculinity is associated with striving to have a muscular body, which is perceived more as an attribute of male beauty, rather than a tool for fighting and intimidation.

While the discourse around a beautiful body refers mostly to women, the conforming role in relation to men is fulfilled by the discourse of body building. In the same way that womanhood is often defined in relation to physical attractiveness, manhood is stereotypically associated with physical fitness (Kluczyńska 2008; Baker and Gringart 2009; Reddy 2013). In Western culture, the male body, like the female body, is meant to be attractive. "The traditional image of woman as a sexual object has expanded: anyone can potentially be an object of observation" (Luciano 2002:12). An especially principled approach to weight and musculature is exhibited by homosexual men (Tiggemann, Martins, and Kirkbride 2007). They also declared a significantly lower level of satisfaction with these param-

eters of their appearance in old age, compared to heterosexual men (Levesque and Vichesky 2006). The conviction that men's and women's bodies should be healthy, firm, smooth, devoid of folds, wrinkles, and any signs of old age is becoming solidified. It is no wonder then that lack of satisfaction with one's body is ever present: both women and men speak of it, it is not just limited to Western culture or to a specific age group (Orbach 2009). Michael Kimmel (2015:446) argues that, "new surgical procedures, birth control, the Internet, have transformed the system of gender signifying, giving us a greater than ever awareness of our bodies and allowing new groups to reach for their materialized expressions, a kind of embodied democracy." The ideology of freedom and individualism also imposes personal responsibility for your own body and its functioning, including caring for your health, fitness, and appearance. The body is constantly subject to valuing review, judgment based on socially accepted criteria of health and sickness, correctness and aberration, beauty and ugliness.

Media culture constructs an image of elderly people who are attractive, preserve their youthfulness and physical fitness. Efforts towards maintaining the illusion of youth lead to an increasing disconnect from one's own body, lack of contact with one's physicality. We are dealing with a so-called double standard of aging. Society depreciates older women, who are seen as less attractive and sexy, while men, despite their years, are still presented as attractive individuals, desirable on the matrimonial market. The image of an old, well-kept man is better written into social scenarios, it also fits within conventions of visual culture (Sontag 1997).

Women display much more determination than men when attempting to preserve the image of a person younger than in reality (Muise and Desmarais 2010; Owen and Spencer 2010). They engage in strategies of artificial rejuvenation, they are more susceptible than men to various forms of “beauty work” (Furman 1997; Gimlin 2002; Hurd and Griffin 2008). Studies conducted in European and American countries show that older women utilize the expanding range of body forming services, application of fillers, liposuction, extending and transplanting hair, and invest in all sorts of cosmetic procedures (Brooks 2010; Kinnunen 2010). This tendency applies equally to heterosexual and homosexual women (Morrison, Morrison, and Sager 2004; Huxley and Hayfield 2012). In Western studies, 8% of men and 16% of women claim they would undergo a cosmetic surgery procedure in order to achieve the appearance of being younger (Bond et al. 2007:250-251). Women are prepared to make many sacrifices in order to enter old age without radically losing physical attractiveness (McLaren and Kuh 2004). Therefore, fitness and external appearance become the measure of a human’s social value. Mass culture together with cosmetic surgery (and soon also: transplants and cyborgization) exercise, limit, isolate, and medicate contemporary monsters: old age, sickness, disability (Wieczorkiewicz 2010).

The Body as a Subject of Studies

The human body, its place in the history of culture, and social consciousness is a subject that has been omitted in science until the early XX century. During the first half, the body starts to gain some interest from researchers, but beginning with the 1960s, we

indeed saw an eruption of work devoted to the subject. The body becomes one of Western culture’s obsessions, one of the great subjects of late modernity. The emergence of the topic of human physicality in social sciences discourse was caused, among other things, by the development of consumer culture oriented towards the body, the activity of feminist movements, demographics changes, medicalization, technification, and aestheticization of daily life (Abercrombie, Hill, and Turner 2006:33).

This article is based on previously unpublished research which is part of a wider empirical analysis of transformations in modern Polish custom (Arcimowicz, Bieńko, and Łaciak 2015). The presented segment of research concerns the image of body and physicality. I assumed the interpretive paradigm, where the methodological postulate is an understanding kind of cognition. The body exists in the actions and experiences of people and has those attributes which the active and experiencing people assign them within their activity and sensations. The studies had an exploratory character. The goal was to reveal meanings assigned by the interviewed to ideas of body and physicality and see how they apply them in specific actions (Silverman 2015). The most appropriate research perspective in this case is qualitative analysis, considering the subjective views accessible through direct conversation.

In my research, I applied the methodological rules and analytical strategies of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006). I did not set any initial thesis or hypothesis. I considered all early structurizations as detrimental, narrowing the perspective of the study. I took on the role of the “naive” researcher who does not impose

her conceptual network onto the interviewed. I treated division into categories of gender, age, and place of residence as additional information, which could serve as context for interpretation of the collected data. The process of collecting empirical data was not conducted in stages, phases, but alternately with parallel analysis and interpretation. The theory is derivative of empirical data analysis and emerges during systematically conducted field research, from the data which directly concern the observed segment of social reality. Terms and their properties were built, modified, and verified during the empirical research (Konecki 2000). This approach values the context of discovery, allows terms relevant to the studied reality to be worked out, and treats existing theories of the studied phenomenon not as models which determine the framework, but as an additional data source (Glaser and Strauss 2006; Corbin and Strauss 2008). The key role in this context is played by the coding process, that is, assigning labels to batches of material, which reflect the meaning given them by social actors and mapped out by the researcher, through procedures of theoretical sampling, constant comparative method, coding. When coding data, I took an approach based on a direct tie between data, assuming a gradual forming of analytical conclusions (data driven coding). According to the methodology requirements of grounded theory, materials collected in the research process were subject to analysis using objective open coding, which is assigning labels to elements of the observed reality (Konecki 2000:51-52). The other coding technique used was theoretical coding. This technique consists of describing mutual relations between categories. It allows for the setting of research hypotheses (Konecki 2000:51), verified in later phases of the researcher's work.

The data were collected during 403 in-depth individual interviews in four different Polish environments: a large city in the Masovian Voivodeship (Warsaw), a medium-sized city in the Swietokrzyskie Voivodeship with a population over 200 thousand (Kielce), a small city in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship with a population slightly over 20 thousand (Chelmno), and in the rural *gmina* (commune) of Przemysl. Studies were conducted between 2012-2014. Interviews with residents were held in the respondents' homes, the list of which was formed from a random sample of addresses. We were able to reach respondents from diverse demographics and attain a rich material, which was important, considering the study is qualitative, not statistical.

Due to the nature of the subject, it was emphasized that participation in the study was voluntary, that one may interrupt it at any stage, or refuse to answer specific questions; full anonymity was also assured. An audio recorder was used during the conversations. Fragments of interviews are quoted with permission from the interviewees. The symbols in parentheses next to each quote are the respondent's code: city of residence (W—Warsaw, K—Kielce, Ch—Chelmno, and P—Przemysl), respondent number assigned in order of interviews conducted, the gender and age of the person.

Significance of the Physical "Self" in Respondents' Lives

The body, or rather physicality or embodiment, is an experiential basis for an understanding of the world. This is knowledge that social actors consider obvious, yet it is difficult to formulate (Giddens 2001:89). Drew

Leder (1990) observes that a human makes constant use of their own body, without making it a subject of reflection or analyzing its method of functioning. In the studied group, this disappearance of body from the consciousness of women and men is visible. In many cases, respondents had difficulty with a question about the role of the body in their lives: "I can't answer it myself. So I can't tell you, it's hard for me to grasp it for myself even" (K-96, w-61); "I don't know. I'm too thick for a question like that" (Ch-78, w-71); "I can't explain it" (P-53, w-72).

The subject of body evoked emotions in the persons studied: "God, my body..." (P-42, w-45), but the question was generally considered "odd": "That's an odd question to ask. What role? Well, you definitely want to look good. You take care of the body. But, don't overdo it, right? You can't be staring at a mirror all the time" (Ch-79, w-50). Some respondents simply refused to answer: "What are these questions for? I won't answer" (K-19, m-27); "I would prefer not to talk about this subject" (P-45, w-48).

Especially older respondents demonstrated a low level of reflection regarding their own physicality, they admitted to never having wondered about the role of their body in life: "I've never thought about it. Well, I don't know what to say" (Ch-77, w-67). They pointed out that, at a certain age, one does not think about the body at all: "That's a question for young people, I don't have any special requirements, it's just how it is and that's fine" (Ch-71, w-70); "I'm old. I'm not a narcissist, I don't think about it" (K-56, m-77).

According to Kaschack (1995:78, 86), male sense of identity is less based on physicality. More often than

women, men signaled that the topic gives them some trouble, as stereotypically "not manly": "Oy, it's embarrassing for me, miss! Miss, me, a guy, confessing to you?" (P-20, m-55); "That ain't a question for a guy, no, I refuse to answer" [laughter] (P-48, m-43).

The most refusals to answer were noted among older people from smaller towns, with elementary or vocational educations. Answers negating any kind of role of the body in the lives of the interviewed also appeared most often in this group: "I don't know, it doesn't play any role" (K-6, w-56); "I don't know? A body is just a body" (P-31, m-61); "Generally, asking an old person about their body, that's not too polite" (W-41, w-74). The lack of a significant role of physicality was declared equally often by young respondents, those under the age of 30: "Body? I don't pay attention to the body" (Ch-81, w-29); "My body does not play an important role in my life" (W-28, m-30); "I think it definitely plays some kind of role, though probably not a very important one" (K-4, w-20).

The interviewed emphasized the significance of the bodily, physical, organic "self": "I feel alive" (P-7, m-68); "Well, a man lives because he lives. When he's gone, then that's the end. And there isn't much to talk about" (Ch-78, w-71).

Respondents touch reality through their body, but do not always stop on the body itself. It is instrumental for them, a tool, with which they perceive the world. The human body, according to the interviewed, is a material basis for existence: "It's very important. Without the body we wouldn't exist" (K-82, m-42); "Well, it's a basis for living, right"

(K-87, m-54); “Of course the body is important. I’m not the Holy Spirit” (W-80, m-40). The body is a physical shell: “My body is a sack of bones” (W-2, m-25).

The body is a live creation, a living being. Respondents point out the motoric aspect of physicality: “The body? The body does what the mind wants. That’s how I see it. Thanks to the body we work, move around, go places. I don’t know what else” (K-77, w-55); “If I didn’t have a body, then how could I live? Walk?” (P-26, w-75). In Przemysl area villages, the body is treated simply as a working machine: “I don’t know, for working [laughter] and that’s it” (P-37, w-48); “An ox for work. I gotta do mine. Miss, the worst part is, three days of holidays come and I’m sick because I’m not doing anything” (P-43, m-74).

In the declarations of mostly older respondents from smaller towns, the physical nature of humans is opposed to the spiritual. The body is not just a carrier of biological (physiological) information, it is also a place where the soul is situated: “The body? In Polish class, we had that, that the soul strives for what’s in heaven, and the body sins down here on Earth...I don’t know, it’s possible...” (Ch-24, m-18); “Physicality is important, if we understand it as an area of personal life, as satisfaction from your body. If we give it to everyone, then physicality is just the body, but if we connect it with our soul, then the physical is on a higher level and gives us many more important sensations” (W-36, w-47). In giving spiritual values primacy over bodily ones, only in one case were the body and mind treated as complementary values: “The body is not a goal in itself. The harmony of body and mind, balance, is important for me” (K-28, w-46).

In the respondents’ statements, the body is a point of reference to humanity, the body is simply human: “There is no man outside the body” (K-92, m-69); “I need the body to live! Like I said, the body is humanity, that’s all” (P-55, m-55).

A body may be limited to the role of tool for fulfilling one’s personal needs, but it may also be in communication with other people. The personality of respondents is expressed through their body image, which is the basis for social roles, shaping of identity in social relations: “The body is kind of for others. I think that, considering my age, it’s not too bad” (W-90, w-56); “My body allows me to function, without it I couldn’t be who I am” (K-59, w-41); “Reproductive function” (Ch-19, m-26).

Both women and men would like to feel good “in their bodies”: “It’s most important! Because if I felt bad in my own body, I’d be depressed. I’d get down on myself. Despite my years, if I hated myself, then I would walk around gloomy, no smile. Oh well. So, the body is most important!” (K-48, w-54); “And how do I say this—darn, I like to feel good with my body” (P-58, m-29). The respondents’ statements show that a positive body image, positive evaluation of the body’s role are tied to satisfaction in life: “I think that if you accept your body, your appearance, then you live better” (P-99, m-53); “My body is a tool for my heart to be happy. It’s a great joy to me and I am happy with my body” (W-32, m-40).

Perception of one’s own physicality is somewhat culturally “programmed.” Attractiveness (the degree to which a body conforms to cultural models considered current in a given society) determines

social relations. The body is treated as commodity, stylized in accordance with fashion and life phase, adjusted to one's self-image and shaped to give it the traits we want, in order to be noticed by others (Finkelstein 1991:105). Respondents are aware of the social message which clearly indicates what the body should be like, so that it may be admired and desired:

The body, physicality. I think it's pretty important. The appearance of a body as a whole. Let's say that in current times there is a certain stereotype of the ideal man or woman and everybody tries to stick to that and me too, I guess, like everyone. If it were different, then we would all be gaining weight, but we don't, because that's the stereotype and that's mostly because of television and all that. I won't lie that in my case, also because of what I see on the Internet, or television, which I rarely watch, but I can't lie that I don't like bodies which stray from those stereotypes. [K-40, m-26]

Well, in my life, the body plays a huge role because of me being overweight, I can't find proper clothing. It also influences how I'm perceived in my environment. Generally, in our community, one does not accept overweight people, people with medical conditions, people with limps, for example, disabled people and such. Like we just want to create a society purely out of beautiful, young people who don't get sick or age. [K-91, w-44]

It turns out that the body is universal enough an experience that it goes "unnoticed" in the day to day. Respondents register both an "internal" body, seeing it as if it were a functioning machine, as well as an "external body," which relates to appearance, move-

ment, and control on social ground (Featherstone 2001:171). For many of the interviewed, the body is their here and now, biological reality tuned into an organism and subject to its functions and specific rhythms. The body (physicality, flesh) is treated as an autonomous whole and differentiated from the mind, emotions, and will. Statements reveal a dualism of soul and body, and a substance-mechanistic understanding of the body, typical of Descartes' views. The body is a distinctly social creation, the interviewed break the traditional imagining of the body as pure physicality. They experience themselves as a whole, which is not at all identical with the body, on the contrary, the body is at its disposition. The way of experiencing oneself wavers between being and possessing a body (Berger and Luckmann 2010:75). In interviews, we encounter both examples of thinking about the body as something separate from consciousness—its experience and form of self-expression—as well as perceiving it in categories of the instrumental and objectified, transferred from the area of modern employment. Through the body the interviewed become individuals with identity. Appearance is described as a cognitive representation of the body, and it is evaluated with imposed social standards which determine the model to which the interviewed refer. Division into categories according to place of residence helped in differentiating the traditional perception of body, expressed especially by residents of the small town and village, as "given" and not "inflicted."

Gendered Physicality

In modern times, a woman's body is an object which is constantly subject to observation from

its environment. In recent years, the increasingly unrealistic requirements begin to be applied to men's bodies also, though they are less complex and therefore easier to fulfill. Interest in one's own body is the attribute of a "metrosexual" man, who in a consumer society bears all the traits that were traditionally regarded as threatening to models of masculinity (Forth 2008:222). According to the stereotype, masculinity means isolating yourself from one's body: "a real man should not know about his body, should not have full contact with it, but only angular, rough, unrefined contact, without grace" (La Cecla 2014:60). The statements of men interviewed contradict this stereotypical thinking: "one would want to be kind of a desirable lover type" (P-23, m-64); "My body? It should be decoration!" (Ch-9, m-29); "Appearance, aesthetics, I want to look nice" (P-6, m-68).

Western research shows that men dream of an ideal body (Campbell 2012), though compared to women, they are subject to less pressure concerning an attractive appearance. It is quite apparent that men in the interviewed group, regardless of age, have fewer complexes about their own physicality than women: "Yes, I like my body, I am happy with how I look" (K-58, m-22); "I think I haven't been disappointed with my body. It's alright" (K-82, m-42); "I like myself physically" (W-29, m-29).

Kaschack (1995:78, 86) claims that the physical aspect is not a signal of fundamental identity for men, which develops from inside outward, whereas for women this happens from the outside inward. A woman's value is determined foremost by her body, strictly speaking—her appearance. Depend-

ing on the study, 40-70% of young women and 50-80% of adolescent girls are unhappy with their own bodies (Levine and Smolak 2004). Declarations from women of affirmation for their bodies are definitely less frequent: "I love myself the way I am" (K-90, w-54); "I have accepted myself one hundred percent and still do...and I never had any reservations" (W-70, w-56). Many young women do not accept their appearance: "Looks influence contact with others, I have my insecurities and sometimes feel unsure of myself" (P-1, w-22). In their statements, we see ambivalence towards their own bodies: "something between contentment and disappointment" (W-3, w-23); "It depends on the day, whether my body is attractive or not. I have days where I think... oh, you look really nice, and other days where... ooooooh..." (K-60, w-26).

A woman's appearance determines how she is treated by those around her. Identifying with an idealized vision of oneself may lead to abandonment of the unacceptable real image, and thus to destabilization and "blurring" of a sense of identity. Women sometimes present absolute negation of their own physicality: "And what is there to like, dry bones and skin. As long as I can walk" (W-41, w-74); "I always notice that something is off, something is wrong, there's too much in one place, or crooked, I'm always unhappy" (Ch-15, w-50); "I don't like myself. I am not attractive. I'm fat, not like I used to be. I don't like my body. I remember what it was like when I was younger, so I don't like to look at myself now" (K-32, w-41).

Study results indicate that satisfaction with one's body decreases after exposure to idealized media im-

ages (Grogan 2008). Women who base their self-image mostly on their outward appearance are more likely to internalize the beauty ideal shown in media, which influences their dissatisfaction with their own body (Durkin, Paxton, and Sorbello 2007). Female participants emphasize, somewhat justifying themselves, that dissatisfaction with one's body is the domain of all women: "With the female gender there is always something that I'm not happy and it's normal, and something pleases me and there isn't much you can change about that, that's just nature" (Ch-44, k-20); "Well, like every woman perhaps, I am not happy with my own body" (W-101, w-28).

According to Naomi Wolf (1992:12), though "beauty is an attribute that exists universally and objectively, women must want to 'embody' it, and men must want to possess women who 'embody.'" An indicator of femininity is being attractive to men. That is why a woman identifies with her body, "with her appearance." Within the studied group, the main censor of female body beauty is the man: "The wife's body is important, it plays an important role and I am happy with it" (P-30, m-40); "I was liking kind of medium women, my wife was fluffy. A woman has to have a bit of body. On the beach I call it crematorium, bones, when a woman has no body. Breasts are another thing, but there should be some meat on there. A man's gotta grab on to something" (W-96, m-72); "Stereotypical beauty? Well, a tall woman, long legs, large breasts, slim waist. Round butt and so on. That's a combination of elements which rarely appears together. Well, unless someone has plastic surgery" (K-40, m-26).

Women mostly develop their self-image based on external messages (Kaschack 1995:77). Physicality

reflected in women's consciousness is relational. The studied females do not see their bodies with their own eyes, but attempt to take the point of view of others, whom they wish to impress. Female respondents declare that they "look at their reflections" in the eyes of their life partner: "The body is meant to attract the partner, it gives you confidence, lack of insecurities" (Ch-1, w-25); "Everyone has some flaws and assets. Some like slim, others like curvy ones. It depends if a woman is attractive to her husband. If she is, that means she's pretty" (K-47, w-65). The body of female respondents is an organism on display for others. They judge their physicality by comparing to their peers: "I'm not entirely happy, but I'm also not entirely unhappy. Because actually, when I see friends my age, after the last reunion, I say to myself, actually, I'm not so bad" (P-57, w-55); "There are chubbier ones, I take comfort in that" (W-83, w-64).

The body, in young women's statements, is a tool for achieving aesthetic pleasure: "it's meant to provide emotions and bodily-visual pleasure" (W-7, w-24); "It plays an important role, it's pleasure, I can still look at myself. The body is my decoration" (Ch-7, w-37).

For women, the body is an always unfinished, open "product" (Howson 2013:99). In the interviewed group, women are convinced that an obvious element of femininity is "working on one's body," very often they declare a desire to change or improve their own image: "Obviously, every person wants to change something or other about themselves, something they don't like because it's never that you like everything about yourself" (W-57, w-55); "Generally, you could say that I'm happy with my appearance, though you can always

improve something, of course" (K-49, w-19); "Obviously, you can always improve something, but, generally, I'm pleased" (W-77, w-35).

Being overweight or being slim are among traits perceived as significant for attractiveness, and so they may be the basis for social acceptance or rejection (Grogan 2008). In the past, stigma in the category of disposition was treated as having a "special mark" which lowers the value of a person for themselves and other people (Goffman 2005). Many of the interviewed women tend to consider being overweight as a certain kind of stigma in their life: "All my life I've been saying that I'm too fat. I've been dieting all my life...like every woman I would want to always be slim, elegant, I never manage to do it...It's awful" (P-57, w-55);

I'm always unhappy, I've already had my trials with dieting. They suspected anorexia, suspected I had bulimia, despite my figure. I have a sick stomach from vomiting, my kidneys are damaged, last year I ended up in the hospital, so, for me, my body unfortunately plays a huge role. I get crazy about it, I just don't let people know it, for me, it's just a tragedy, if I were to list everything. I feel that others always see me poorly because of me being overweight. [Ch-22, w-22]

Young and slim bodies are usually considered a personal and social "merit," which should be maintained throughout the whole life cycle of an individual (Turner 1984). It can also be seen as an expression of success or prosperity. Interviewees know that being slim is a basic element of female body beauty and they admit that trying various kinds of diets is a fixed element of their everyday reality. It seems

that, for the interviewed women, regardless of age, their body is never skinny enough: "Ever since I've been caring about my weight and eating healthier, I'm very happy with my figure, but, of course, you always want to lose those 3 kg, even when we lose them, it's another 3 kg" (W-42, w-30); "I've always been chubby and I've never liked it. When I was still 65 kg, that was decent, but now I weigh 77. So what can I do? I'm dieting, of course" (P-79, w-64).

In Western culture, 95% of women admit to dieting during certain periods of life, and 40% do it regularly (Grogan 2008). Losing weight is the most often (53%) desired change in Poles' appearance, according to respondents. Women want this decidedly more often (63%) (CBOS 2003). Nearly 20% of Poles (more often women than men) have dieted or kept a regimen in order to reduce their body weight, several times in their life, 8% a dozen or more times, and 9% have used over-the-counter dieting substances (CBOS 2009). The heroic stories of slimming, in the interviewed women's descriptions, bring to mind *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Fielding 2014): "When I lose weight, I'm happy, when I gain it, it's a tragedy for me" (K-75, w-64); "Well, I'm currently trying to slim down, but I'm not doing well. There was even a time where I started exercising, but that wasn't going well either. So, currently my body is resting. I'm in despair" (P-76, w-20); "I would definitely want to lose weight...I stopped adding sugar to my coffee, I've gotten so used to bitter coffee, that's my diet mostly. But, sweets, unfortunately I've tried, but you want something sweet so bad, it's ridiculous" (P-103, w-33).

For the interviewed women, a large body size is a symbol of personal and social failure, and exces-

sive indulgence. Young women explain their extra weight with a past pregnancy: “Now mostly disappointments, after the pregnancy I had more body left than I should. That’s the one thing I would change. Before that I think I was more attractive” (P-67, w-30); “I’m post-pregnancy...I have a tummy left, so I’m trying to get rid of it” (K-8, w-27).

Diet can be a way to gain the approval of others, to raise one’s self-esteem, not just considering looks. Bordo (2004:192) claims that being overweight is seen as a reflection of moral or personal inadequacy, or lack of will. Extra weight on women is a manifested undermining of stereotypes of beauty. Nearly one out of every two women, regardless of age or place of residence, was, is, or wants to be on a diet, to lead to a transformation in body and identity: “I like my body, but I could lose 10 kg to improve my shape, get a better job, snag a boyfriend. I’d be a different person! Better!” (W-31, w-26);

all us, girls, we got it together, made a resolution and now each one is trying to find the better miracle diet... we all jog...and stuff like that, because I think your figure is pretty important, but not even physically, more spiritually, I think. Even my mom went to a nutritionist, she lost like 15 kilos and you can see the change right away, physically, because 15 kg is quite a bit, but also mentally. She feels a lot better, she can find more clothes and friends too. Everything is different. [P-82, w-21]

Survey studies show that 72% of Poles believe that people care for their appearance and build because that allows them to feel better and have greater self-esteem. According to 45% of respondents, mo-

tivation to care for one’s appearance and physique is an expression of wanting to be attractive to others (CBOS 2009). Women diet to accentuate their sensuality and sexuality, and so they lose weight to look good and be attractive to others. Men follow a diet in order to preserve an attractive appearance and the results of effort put into working out their body, for as long as possible. Increasing numbers of men are dissatisfied with their bodies. More and more men show signs of eating disorders (Pope, Phillips, and Olivardia 2000). Among the men interviewed, there is the conviction that paying attention to one’s own appearance is not manly, but cultural pressure to slim down is also visible in their statements: “I quit smoking and gained probably 5 kilograms, so I have to get myself together” (P-14, m-50); “On the move all the time—work, eat a little something, just not too much, to not gain weight” (P-18, m-68); “I lost 20 kilograms. It started with a joke, with my girlfriends in the office, that I won’t eat sweets for one day. I did it, and that motivated me to keep going. I noticed that I started losing weight. I bought a scale and I control what I eat. I don’t go to the gym, but try to do sports” (W-80, m-40).

Traditional ideals of masculinity have been focused around physical strength and values associated with fighting. Christopher F. Forth (2008:169-200) claims that, in modern Western culture, this has taken on the form of a metaphorical perception of the correctly functioning male body as a capable machine. The male body must be a durable, resilient construction. Mature men consciously and regularly undertake activity intending to shape their own bodies, they emphasize the need for care in the areas of hygiene, health, and sport: “A body should be cared for,

nurtured, it should be enriched, hygienically. You should know a lot, read about your body, how to protect it from disease, from everything. Well, culture... That's your attitude to your body" (K-81, m-74); "The body is useful... You have to take care of it—do sports, appropriate nutrition. You have to, for it to be capable—sport: skis, bike, kayak; in the areas of everyday living, in the erotic sphere. The body has to have building blocks, fuel. Doctors say that you must eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, and that's how you take care of it. For this machine to function (K-64, m-52).

Popular culture imposes a method of creating one's own image. Athletic build is associated with health, energy, vitality. In Poland, the significance of a muscular and slim build is usually emphasized by men aged 18-34 (CBOS 2003). One in ten young Poles uses supplements meant to increase muscle mass (CBOS 2009). Within the studied group, an athletic, muscular body is a requirement among younger men: "I used to be more focused on working on this body, muscles. I ran a lot more, exercise, gym, swimming—I enjoyed it, that my own work was bringing results... But now, well, I feel so-so with my body. No mass, but that's a matter of time" (P-58, m-29); "I'm not entirely happy, that's why I go to the gym. Generally, I like to engage in sport, look like an athlete, have bulk. I used to do sport, you could say, professionally, extremely. I stopped, and, let's say, it doesn't last you your whole life, you have to start again" (K-40, m-26); "I don't have the bulk like I used to. I've neglected myself a bit. I used to exercise, I looked better, I intend on going back to that" (W-74, m-34).

There is a growing conviction in Poland that caring for one's build and appearance is associated

with a healthy lifestyle (CBOS 2009). In the studied group, men emphasize behavior associated with health more often, and descriptions of beautifying practices dominate in women's statements.

As Chris Shilling (2010) puts it, the body is a project. Study participants of both genders take responsibility for their appearance and try to realize the desired result, through appropriate exercises, diet, or procedures. The aestheticization and cult of a young, smooth, slim, and athletic body is reflected in the statements of the interviewed women and men. The body image presented is mostly a reproduction of gender roles typical for modern consumer culture. As the conversations show, the physicality of women and men are two different orders of experiences. Women are much more concentrated on their physicality than men; they also devote a lot more energy to it. Appearance is more an object of detailed analysis and comparisons among the interviewed women than in the case of the men. The identity of interviewed women is based on physicality, which is subject to aesthetic judgments. In the man's perspective, the woman is defined by her beautiful body. A slim figure, especially from a woman's perspective, is a synonym of discipline, self-control, social approval, and guaranteed success in life. The aspect of male physicality emphasized many times by men is brawn and physical ability. Their conviction is that a man's obligation is to accept his physicality, care for general physical ability and a fairly slim build. Apart from the aesthetic benefits of a slim figure, emphasized mostly by women, men emphasize the health aspects. A slimmer build among women is more often a goal in itself than for men, where it is a result of healthy lifestyle, associated with athletic

activity. Women and young people tend to be more strict in evaluating their own appearance, which may be explained by the higher social requirements set for them, concerning body image.

Vitality, Sexuality, and Asexuality of an Aging Body

Numerous studies argue that old age is more likely to lower self-esteem and good mood among women than among men (Baker and Gringart 2009; Hurd Clarke 2010). The social defining of masculinity and femininity largely relates to roles associated with physicality and sexuality. Physicality, called biological capital by sociologists, is attractive appearance, as well as physical and sexual ability (Jakubowska 2009:101). Catherine Hakim (2011) refers to “erotic capital,” being a combination of aesthetics and visual, physical, social, and sexual attractiveness. The author emphasizes that women especially develop and expand their assets in this area.

It is likely age is significant in this area, because within the studied group mostly older men, and not women, emphasized sexuality as a domain of physicality in their lives: “Physicality can be understood as lumbago, as well as male-female matters” (W-46, m-61); “You have to care for your appearance. That creates good self-esteem, which, in turn, improves contacts with people, that is also tied to sexuality” (K-10, m-57); “I like all kinds of chicks. And if I’m walking, for example, and a nice hmhmhm babe is walking, shaking her little ass. I like ladies regardless of age. Now I’m 74 years old and what should I look at? There are some flings now and then. If I could live another 10, 15 years, then yeah” (K-41, m-74).

The female body is treated as a sexual object which provides men with pleasant sensations. The interviewed men focus more on perception of the women’s body than on the sensations coming from their own body. Older men appreciate the character of experiencing pleasure through contact with a woman: “I think that the sensual experiences of our body, the feeling of intimacy with another person, warmth, hugs, or even kisses are the most pleasurable in life. Physicality is important to me and I would rather feel my wife than anything else... the body and nudity is beautiful” (W-8, m-63); “like hugging, touching—we have no problems with that. My wife also likes to hug, I think, and likes to be embraced, kissed, or caressed” (K-67, m-51).

A beautiful, healthy body helps attain pleasure in interpersonal contacts, not just one’s own body, but also the partner’s, which, on the one hand, is tied to caring for one’s physicality, and, on the other, with perceiving, even classifying another person according to their physical form. Mature men connect sex with health: “if the body is healthy, it’s all pleasant...you can do sports, sex, and everything is fine” (K-64, m-52);

the area of sexuality, for example, is maybe the foundation of humankind’s existence in general. However, I also treat it in categories of health. The point is not to torture the body, but also not make it lazy. Simply, everyone has some genes, some kind of predisposition, physical, I mean. Something that needs to be developed, to not be wasted. And so you have to keep up, let’s say walking, running, exercises. Not to mention looks, yeah, but looks, it’s women that look after that. Men, not so much, but they try as well. [W-59, m-68]

Physicality has a significant influence on women's perception of changes through aging, which they often associate with a loss of femininity. The beauty ideal in relation to women is identified with sexual attractiveness. According to Jean Baudrillard (2006:183), there is a "Great Aesthetic and Erotic Myth" organized around women. The aging of a woman's body is seen as the end of their life connected to sexuality. Older women speak of their erotic capital in the past tense: "I wouldn't go for any man now, even if he had half of Warsaw and half of Rome... some guys? That's it. I had a few in my life and it's over, I'm not drawn to that any more" (Ch-83, w-65); "As far as that's concerned, I had a good life. Now I'm an older lady and my workshop, so to speak, is closed down, but gestures like embracing or something are still nice. But, all my life I had a good sex life, meaning, when I was a young girl, I was aware that I have a great figure, slender legs, and sometimes when I went outside, men would turn to look at me. Or if I was going through the plaza to work, I had the impression it works" (K-38, w-60); "At a certain age you... don't have physicality, just respect" (Ch-59, w-76).

Women, especially elderly, internalize stereotypical convictions to do with physical attractiveness (Durkin, Paxton, and Sorbello 2007). The timestamp for an "asexual" thinking about one's physicality, among women, is sometimes giving birth and raising children: "Physicality or sexuality no longer plays any role, in my case. I've been raising children by myself for quite a long time, and it's not really a problem for me" (Ch-88, w-45).

Germaine Greer (1995:75) believes that an older woman, "though she was once tormented through

her excessive visibility, her current invisibility causes her to feel lost." Old age lowers self-esteem and confidence more often among women than men. In the opinions of the older women interviewed, their body becomes "transparent": "Today the body is not that important. It's a matter of age" (P-98, w-70); "Those years are behind me, of being attractive, the body is not all that important" (K-47, w-65). Women who attribute themselves physical ugliness, avoid looking at their reflection: "I used to like my body, when I bathed, I liked lotions. But now, when I'm putting on makeup, I close one eye and then the other, so I don't see myself, I don't want to keep the image of myself I see in the mirror everyday" (Ch-13, w-63); "I don't look at the mirror now, I did when I was young" (P-79, w-64).

Mature women, as a group, show a low level of satisfaction due to the transformations of their own physicality during this period, because they feel the internal and social pressures to remain physically attractive more acutely than men (Johnston, Reilly, and Kremer 2004). Women declare the need to accept their physicality at an older age: "somebody is thinking about some kind of plastic surgery, or Botox, and that, it would never cross my mind and I certainly won't do it. I'm just aware of my age, of my various imperfections, but that's who I am and I accept it, it's okay" (W-70, w-56); "I've made peace with my age. You grow out of that phase of attracting attention... now, years later, I can say that those are trifles" (Ch-47, w-52).

According to research by Laura Hurd Clark (2002), older women form a more realistic image of their desired body shape and thus do not compare them-

selves to the overly idealized figures, unlike women of younger age groups. The majority of female participants, however, have a problem with accepting an aging body: "Young bodies are pretty, I like them because in old age, you get to be so ugly" (W-19, w-62); "Right now I'm 70 years old, that used to be important, you took care of your body, showed it, tried to show it off. That's long gone, so to speak" (P-70, w-69); "What could a 70 year old grandma have that's attractive?" (P-64, w-69).

Maladjustment to social expectations at an older age becomes the reason for dissatisfaction on one side, and stigmatization and devaluation on the other. Older women miss their youth and past beauty: "I used to be attractive, pretty, and generally happy with my body, but now, bleh! Don't look at me" (P-19, w-80); "Ah, the body ages, because we do. And they're young so they have supple bodies, we're old now, wrinkled. We have different bodies now. I can't count on beauty anymore. I won't be pretty anymore. When I was young, I was a pretty girl then. But now, you know, a person gets old, wrinkles and everything" (Ch-78, w-71); "I'm getting fatter now, can't lose weight. My skin is sagging. Sometimes when I'm bathing, I miss my body" (K-25, w-62).

Older men long for former physical fitness: "I liked being active. I would play around with amateur sports. Volleyball. Used to be swimming, biking, then my son got me into tennis. I played a lot, only 5 years ago" (W-93, m-65); "It was always a source of satisfaction, but after illness it was disappointment. If I can't tighten a screw in the car. We had a flat tire when going on vacation and my wife had to go, get somebody next to us to do it, that's disappointing"

(W-89, m-62); "I was always physically able, always in the lead in school...At university I even stood out in sports, despite my 160 centimeters height with a hat on" (W-66, m-80).

Western research shows that throughout their whole life-cycle men are dissatisfied with their musculature to a similar degree as women are with their weight (Bessenoff and Del Priore 2007). Constant concern for a fit body, especially during old age, is clearly visible in the interviewed group of men. Unlike interviewed women of the same age group, older men emphasize the role of physical fitness, constitution, they praise the able body: "Well, first of all, you have to work on your fitness, to stay fit as long as possible. I like to ride my bike, I like swimming, taking walks. All that stress is relieved, you can forget about certain things. And the muscles are activated. So yes, that's important for me, to be able as long as possible, to not be a burden to someone later on, or not be dependent on someone" (K-97, m-66); "the body is very important, unfortunately, with age, certain things show up and sometimes you feel a pain, I would definitely prefer to be more fit: (W-4, m-63).

In the interviewed group, the body is seen as troublesome matter, old age as an unsightly defect, and visible signs of aging suggest the owner of the body has lost control of it. For older participants, male and female, the body is a source of disappointment and suffering due to illness: "if I were healthy then, I would be happy, and not arterial disease and diabetes, you get older, it hurts here, it hurts there. All the Egyptian plagues have got me!" (P-43, m-74); "The body and my physicality are something that

lets me down, causes me pain and unpleasantness... all those conditions..." (K-69, m-68); "Oh, I'm an old lady now, so my body is just pain, it's slow and doesn't want to listen" (W-41, w-74).

Older men are pleased with their own bodies more often than women, despite their illnesses and the aging they have felt: "A person is just glad to be alive" (P-56, m-70). Old age is a challenge for men: "I'm pleased with myself so far, two operations, I got sick last year, one after the other, but I came out of it, I can't complain. I don't complain" (P-66, m-69).

The older respondents are, the less likely they are to assign large significance to appearance. Studies conducted on a representative sample in Poland show that one's looks lose meaning with age, but even among respondents 65 or older, 80% declare that their own appearance is important to them (CBOS 2003). After turning 50, men have more perspective when it comes to them and their appearance: "A person gets old, and so he loses attractiveness. I'm not 20 years old. I'm aware of that. To some I can be attractive, to others not. Now I appreciate what's inside, more than the physical" (K-13, m-50); "I look in the mirror: I used to be beautiful and young. I'm young no more" (K-43, m-57); "I'm trying to lose a little weight, to look a bit better, dress better, I'm not quite an old grandpa yet, you know. When I'm walking, I can suck my stomach in a bit, so I look a bit younger" (Ch-57, m-55).

The likelihood of experiencing a sense of alienation related to the body (embarrassment, awkwardness, shyness) is higher the more disproportion there is between the socially desired body and one's own

(imposed on the body through gazes and reactions of others) (Bourdieu 2004:81). Turning 50, for a woman, is associated with menopause—the first significant signal for her that the process of aging has begun. A sense of the end of womanhood and a loss of physical attractiveness is felt. Interviewed women in this age range more often admit a lack of will in fighting for a slim figure: "That... not so much. Taking into account that I've gained weight—I also totally don't do anything about it, to be clear. I tried, nothing worked, and now I just put it down and I don't do anything, but I don't accept it" (W-88, w-54); "I am happy, but why do we have to get old so quickly? One could stand to do more for the body, the organism, but... don't feel like it" (P-17, w-59).

Though the idea of diet is culturally associated mostly with womanly care for appearance, older men, not only for health reasons, but also to increase their own sense of attractiveness, use the services of nutritionists and fitness trainers relatively often (Gough 2007). Within the studied group, regardless of age, men also declare a will to fight to maintain an appropriate weight: "I'm not happy because once I didn't yet have these here, fatty bits, but now I have to ride my bike 10 km a day, because I can't do more. In the morning, I wave my arms around, there's these various gymnastics exercises I do, because I know I have to pretend to not be an old geezer, but always be like, young of age" (K-42, m-73).

In a consumer society, a great emphasis is put on self-managing the body—maintenance, conservation, and parts replacement (Featherstone 2001), in other words, a return to the tool metaphors applied by Descartes. Even if the majority of interviewed

do little to submit their body to full self-control, they certainly are aware that they should. The clash of cultural beauty norms and real-life appearance of an elderly person leads to frustrations and becomes a potential source of suffering; within the interviewed group, this mostly concerns women. For older women, judged in aesthetic categories, looks are a basic indicator of self-esteem. According to the interviews conducted, the body is a vessel of pleasure and auto-expression mostly in the declarations of men. Women are less satisfied with their weight and age, compared to men. Mature women are a group which shows a lower amount of satisfaction because of changes in their physicality, because they feel internal and social pressure to maintain physical attractiveness more acutely than men. Not all older respondents feel discomfort about their appearance, the main source of satisfaction for them is not so much physical attractiveness, but—especially in the case of men—an able, healthy body.

Summary of Study Results

In the narration of the participants of both genders, physicality is a biological (physiological) reality, as well as a cultural text. Like in the studies of Charyl Laz (2003), in the quoted interviews, one can distinguish four distinct, though overlapping dimensions of embodiment, including: 1. activity, fitness, and health; 2. energy; 3. appearance; and 4. ailments and illness. Physicality can be experienced individually and socially, it is a phenomenon exhibited in various forms. In the respondents' statements, the body often undergoes reification, thus it is presented as an object, a shell, or collection of elements. The em-

phasis on human physicality is clear, the duality of human nature, parallel of soul and body, is pointed out less often. Separation into soul and body stems not only from religion, but from the progressing secularization and medicalization of the body, of which the respondents are aware.

Most statements contain an element of judgment, a large emphasis is put on the aesthetics of the body. In the studied group, caring for yourself is founded on caring for one's body, which turns out to be a pliable material. The respondents are "owners" of the body, which should be cared for and shaped according to one's own preferences and social, cultural ones. Working on one's body—upkeep procedures, physical exercises, dieting, and their result in the form of achieving the intended appearance, give a feeling of fulfillment and self-realization. On the one hand, respondents' activities in the bodily sphere are set on hedonistic goals, equated with leisure, on the other, care for one's body is associated with self-discipline and hard work. The interviewed, especially those younger, fulfill the model of the "disciplined" body, they subject their bodies to modification, and often it becomes an enemy, whose resistance (mostly weight) they must defeat. In the case of women, the process is subject to emotions, desires, and passions to a greater degree than in the case of men, who more often organize perfecting the body with rational control and instrumental procedures.

Similarly to other empirical analyses (Mirucka and Sakson-Obada 2013:94), in the studied group, there is a specific set of convictions, among women and men, about the body:

1. Physical beauty is the axial trait of a woman's appearance.
2. Care for one's appearance is one of the most successful strategies for building and controlling positive relations with other people.
3. Achieving physical attractiveness in the form of being slim (among women) and having defined musculature (among men) is one of the main life goals.

The tools with which the interviewed discipline their own bodies are, in the case of women—counting calories, and in the case of men—taking up sports. In the statements of women, the drive for social acceptance of the body is clearly noticeable. Young women live under pressure from the cult of beautiful bodies and lack of acceptance for aging. Both men and women give meaning to the physical-bodily aspect of “self,” however, in the case of women, this foremost concerns appearance, while men, regardless of age, definitely assign more value to models of athleticism and physical ability. Younger and older women reduce their value to physical attractiveness, it is worth emphasizing, however, that in the interviewed group, men also have the awareness of “being a body.” They are becoming increasingly conscious of their own looks and the benefits of maintaining themselves.

The cultural obligation of possessing a good looking body, flawless and young, brings with it embarrassment associated with old age. The opposition of young body versus old body seems very significant. The image of an old body is not a positive one with-

in the group studied. The physiological symptoms of aging are seen as a loss of beauty, sexual identity, visibility, and social significance. In the older group, men accept their bodies to a greater degree than women. This does not mean, however, that their appearance is a main source of life satisfaction for them. Men give lesser significance to their appearance than women, and most of all consider the functional aspects of physicality to be important, that is, physical fitness, strength, stamina, ability to perform work, potency.

Old age, weight problems, and the inability to maintain a slim figure become a stigma, as well as a significant indicator of the respondent's identity. Women, regardless of age, are less satisfied with their body and have a more negative cognitive-emotional body image compared to men. Women in the interviewed group more often define themselves through their looks and consider being slim and youthful as the most important aspects of their physical attractiveness. Especially in the statements of mature women, the stigma of being overweight or ill is especially prominent. The cultural requirements set for a female body are much higher than that of the male body, which may be why lack of satisfaction with one's appearance and body weight are a significantly lesser problem among the men interviewed.

The presented study results show that, in Poland, there are two opposing currents in the area of customs regarding the body. On the one hand, the liberal Western custom is reflected in the research, for example, in the new model of gendered physicality. Like in the narcissistic culture of the West, the body is meant to be a source of pleasure, and

physical attractiveness, tied strongly to youth, has become an element of life success. Men are increasingly concerned with the appearance of their bodies, especially when it comes to physical fitness and weight. They want to appear strong and athletic. They see their bodies the same way that women are taught to see theirs—as an ongoing project which requires work. This partly coincides with general care for health and fitness, but partly concerns youthful looks, because being elderly is not valued in Polish society. On the other hand, a traditional custom is visible, referring to religious norms, promoting the patriarchal model of female physicality marginalized in old age. Men's anxieties regarding their bodies reflect the anxieties of women. While women are absorbed with the idea of weight, men are absorbed with muscle mass and build—which means that everyone is absorbed in those aspects of men's and women's bodies which suggest and exaggerate the in-born biological differences between the genders. In light of the study results presented, however, control of the body seems to apply more to women, regardless of age, and to negatively affect their self-esteem and acceptance of their own physicality.

Conclusions

The body is the most intimate part of human existence and yet also the most common symbol, representation of its public manifestation. Body is one of the seemingly simple, concrete terms, which is hard to define. As Turner (1984:7-8) claims, it is something most permanent, and yet most elusive; concrete and metaphorical, always present and most foreign. Between the discourse of biological sciences, social

sciences, or law—to point out just three areas—there are serious discrepancies as to what “body” is exactly. Research shows that understanding that which is obvious is a complex thing. Body can be counted among the universal, indefinable terms (Karwatowska 2014:252). Polish Nobel prize winner, Wisława Szymborska, stated that, in the Polish language, there was actually only one word she did not like, due to its sound—the word “body” (*ciało*, IPA: [ˈtɕawɔ]). Contrary to the Latin “corpus,” in which, as she said, “you could hear the cohesiveness, the crunch of bones, tension of the muscles. In Polish it is sluggish, shapeless, too soft” (Rusinek 2016:90).

As the study results shown in this article illustrate, there are various functions, meanings, and uses for the body. The body is a space and simultaneously a point within it, a symbol, tool, image. Empirical landscapes associated with the term have expanded to huge proportions. Humanistic sciences have seen, in human physicality, a space formed by culture, taking on itself reflective functions, responsible for the shaping of human identity. However, as Bryan Turner (1984) points out, the term remains an “illusory” or erroneously defined category, often actually lost in the process of theoretical analysis. On the other hand, the body, due to its properties—changeability, fluidity, or ability to transform—is a considerable challenge as a subject of study and often escapes the regimen of sociological concepts. Rosi Braidotti claims that there is no such thing as the essence of contemplations of physicality, that area is empty. In the discursive structure of modernity, “the problem of the living body is linked with the loss of one, unified vision of embodied subject. Therefore, the issue of body is

as unavoidable as it is unsolvable...there is no consensus as to *what* the currently embodied subject is" (Braidotti 2009:77-78).

In modern humanistic sciences, the body is presented in various social orders: corporeal, interactive, genital, gendered, class, consumption, and material. Body, as an instrument of experiencing the world and a vessel for pleasure, is the central element of a modern human's identity project, a space of self-realization and self-expression. Mass media and popular culture make adventures of the body a prime topic, which organizes vast areas of discussion devoted to power, the erotic, violence, economy, politics, and art. In social reality, the body becomes

a place of various clashing narrations and value systems. The explosion of new bodily practices, from cosmetic procedures, to tattooing, to cosmetic surgery, cannot be explained by reducing human motives to simple causes, such as the influence of fashion, popular culture, increased wealth. We are entering a period where the technical possibilities of developing medicine and science meet with the pressures of the market, where the body is becoming a form of capital circulation, which, in turn, increasingly often elicits a desire to oppose this logic of changing intimacy into a commodity. This brings up the question, does the modern human overwhelmed with physicality, paradoxically, feel safer in non-bodily relations.

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