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The gym as a place of constructing masculine corporeal identity

In the modern, rapidly-developing societies of the West, with their cultural crisis and moral revolution, the picture of masculinity and femininity is undergoing redefinition. Within an individual lost in the image of gender, a need arises to consciously create their gender in a variety of ways. The bodily, visual aspect has become a drawing board where one's image can be created, where one can follow fashion or swim against it, where gender can be stressed or unified. Nancy Etcoff (2000) considers appearance to be "the most public part of the self". According to her, lookism is the most common and at the same time most concealed prejudice which unconsciously functions in the society. Appearance is treated as a source of pleasure, shame, and/or information. According to the researcher, the reason behind working out at a gym or improving nature through plastic surgery is the drive to be not only a work of nature but also a work of art. The fitness club has become on one hand the space for self-creation, for the constructing of one's bodily "self", and on the other, the place for a bodily regime – a kind of panopticon, where one is one's own guardian, critic, and prisoner at the same time. In postmodern culture there is a possibility of the social "negotiation" of one's role, identity, attitudes, and bodily image. An "error margin", a deviation from fulfilling traditional roles, is permissible. Deciding upon self-creation has become not only acceptable but even required. Easy juggling of identities allows to create oneself anew, as if from building blocks. Retaining the traditional elements does not exclude the introduction of cultural novelties. Individuals create themselves ostentatiously more often. They create self-display on the social stage.

This article presents a fragment of research on the perception and creation of masculine identity by men working out in the gym. It is an attempt to portray men creating their visual, corporal, ostentatious identity. The article quotes testimonies of the interviewees on the selected issues. The problem required the analysis of not only behaviours, but above all the feelings associated with being a man in the modern world. The interviewees see the gym as a place containing the tools to construct their subjectivity. For them, it is a place of construction and destruction.

A bodily armour is made, while weakness and fragility are crushed. The symbol of muscularity gives them a feeling of stability, immersion in the traditional dimension of masculinity. According to Raewyn Connell (1995, p. 54), masculinity is a model of cultural gender, a set of practices initiated by the body, oriented towards the body, and related to it. The body as an object of social and cultural practices becomes a participant to these processes. Connell (1995, p. 86) defines the elements of the gender regime – they are the relations of power, relations of production, emotional structures, and symbolization. She is a supporter of understanding masculinity as a gender design which is a response to the existence of a number of models of masculinity. Pierre Bourdieu (2001, p. 52) claims that the mechanism of constructing gender is based on the proper arrangement of the body in the system of social practices, the incorporation of the relation of rule. Cultural distinctions are the ones that direct the individual's choice of the shape of their own corporeality. Differentiation is based on undertaking bodily behaviours and creating a specific image of one's own body. One's existence in the world is of a corporeal character. Fundamental dispositions impose the social adjustment of a body, which undergoes permanent reproduction. According to this, the body is a showpiece, it becomes the expression of the place one takes in the social and gender order. The gender body is a social and political body, while masculinity is a dynamic concept.

Characteristics of the interviewees

The research was conducted on twelve men, aged 20 to 55, regularly working out at a gym, and exhibiting sporty, athletic bodies. The project used the quantitative strategy, with the case study as a tool. The sample was oriented at maximising the information gain – the selection of cases based on the expected information allows for the maximum utilisation of the information from small groups and individual cases (Flyvbjerg 2006). The research was performed on men with a specific body build, proving their regular physical workout. The selection criteria were: the history of the workouts (minimum 2 years of regular workouts at the gym), and body build (showing the physical workout). Six of the interviewees have higher education, five – secondary, with one being a student. Four of them consider themselves entrepreneurs. They work in entertainment, trade, electronics, and insurance. Three are bodybuilding instructors (two of them work at gyms). One is a salesman in a specialist shop and one works in finance. Another one is a lawyer, and one is an owner of a mechanical workshop. Half of the group are residents of Zielona Góra, the other half – of Warsaw. The research employs the quantitative strategy. The final research material was acquired in twelve narrative interviews and during observations. The limitation of the number of participants allowed to reduce the emergence of issues related to excessive research material, which in turn would disable reaching the deep sense of the interviews during analysis. The analysis is a time-consuming process and with large quantities of research material there exists a possibility of merely a surface character of analysis. With each participant,

a meeting to conduct an interview was arranged as well as a meeting to perform (participatory) observation during a workout. Contacts were arranged through people working out in the gyms. Interviews were conducted according to prepared guidelines, identical in every case, but not limiting the flow of narration. During the interviews, the participants were directed towards talking about a specific stage of life or a topic. The quantitative strategy allowed to reach the deep sense of the interviews when performing the analysis of the material. The analysis was a two-stage process, with exemplative and typological analysis (Paprzycka 2012, p. 57).

Constructing the masculine visual identity

In traditional societies, masculinity and femininity are precisely defined. The process of socialisation and self-nurture drives towards an identification of an individual with the image of a man or woman which functions within the culture. Lack of fulfilment of social expectations creates a situation of a "misfit", subject to assessment by the system of social control. There appears a normativity-driven construct of gender, reproduced in social discourse. The construct of masculinity in the traditional culture generates the libido of masculine domination. The identity of the individual depends on their own belief as to who they are, where they are heading, and the ability to sustain specific narrations. Gender perceived as a social category becomes information, based on which judgements are made. The ways of defining masculinity by the interviewees, their feeling of being men, are determined by definitions functioning within society. The recreation of the dominant patterns is determined by the society-embedded definitions. Repeating of the existing patterns occurs when one's own feeling of sexual identity aligns with that which functions within the society. The interviewees, underlining those features which are stereotypically assigned to masculinity, seem to confirm the words of Bourdieu (2004, p. 67), according to whom despite masculinity being potentially staged within the theatre of the gendered society, it cannot be completely changed or replaced. The interviewees seem to repeat the traditional patterns of masculinity. Their feeling of their own identity translates to their identity as a whole. This may be the reflection of a thesis by Eugenia Mandal (2010, p. 204) on gender identity as a subsystem of identity. Openness to corporeality may be the result of the redefining of masculinity within society.

The interviewees define masculinity through a prism of physical and psychic features. In their narrations, they indicate the importance of the traditionally-defined masculine features in defining masculinity. This is related mostly to personal and character traits. Such understanding of masculinity may be the result of fixed mutual interactions between the cognitive, behavioural, and environmental determinants (Bandura 1977). When asked about the definition of masculinity, the interviewees needed to think the question over. The question was a surprise. They largely reacted with saying "a man is a man". This may be proof of an unreflective copying of cultural patterns and playing out gender roles. They, however,

stressed the importance of building one's image, a visual identity. The willingness to make a defined impression on others is one of the chief motivators for them. Self-presentation is the fundamental condition of successful personal and professional contacts.

Mandal describes self-presentation as an intentional process of managing or driving home the impression one makes on others during social interactions. The author claims that one of the simpler methods of self-presentation is the use of props and decorations (clothes, hairstyle, scent, interior decoration, choice of physical workout and sports disciplines, suntan, type of diet). The willingness to adjust one's image to the expectations of the environment is strengthened by the fear of negative assessments (Mandal 2010, p. 64). Andreas Schneider explains how people become collectors of identities organised into a hierarchy of importance. He claims that people create the image of themselves based on the reactions of others. According to him, the building of self is a process of reaching unclear objectives with the use of limited tools. It requires involvement, being an actor, and reflecting upon oneself (Schneider 2007, p. 5). According to Alicja Kuczyńska (1983, p. 9), one uses their own bodies as the fundamental means of expression. Corporeality shaped canons of all aesthetics in the past. According to the author, an individual may feign situations, pretend to be someone they are not. They may exhibit values they do not possess, while concealing others. This occurs thanks to things, material objects, behaviours, and/or spiritual contents. People supplement corporeality with newer objects that camouflage its primary matter. Monika Bakke (2000, p. 9) perceives the body as a place of transition for the stimuli incoming from the external world, as well as those that leave the body, constituting visual proof of change as the rule of the world, a field of individual and group inscription. Elisabeth Grosz (1990, p. 25) claims that it is fragile, sensitive, and inspiring, adding that old age, disease, and death are natural to a human. Magdalena Sarnińska-Górecka (2008, p. 163) uses the metaphor of a "body-costume", which she uses in reference to sexuality. The idea of a costume was borrowed from gender performativity theory, which assumes that femininity and masculinity are costumes that contain elements characteristic to the given gender category. Both genders define themselves through the style of being, the way of constructing one's identity, with the border of freedom being cultural norms and social limitations. The costume of "real masculinity" is perceived in contemporary culture in a traditional way (the alpha male). A lot of men lock themselves to the changes related to defining masculinity – changes that may be considered beneficial only to women. Emancipation freed women from the rule of men and from this point of view men have suffered a loss. However, as many authors suggest (cf. Brannon 1996; Renzetti, Curran 2008) men gained, among others, the right to show emotions, to be pacifists, to be weak on occasion, to be loving fathers and caring partners. According to Linda Brannon (1996), the current stereotypes are rooted in 19th-century culture. For centuries, masculinity was presented as being opposed to femininity, as its contradiction. Building up muscle can be considered the continuation of this image (masculinity – strength, femininity – weakness).

Example narrations:

A man must be a man in his character, so he needs to be psychologically strong, hard, needs to take care of himself and his closest. If we talk about appearance, he needs to be clean and physically fit (Janek).

The intent to fend for oneself and others can be associated with the skill of guaranteeing survival for oneself and one's family, which is typical of the traditional approach to the role of a man. The interviewee, while stressing the importance of the traits of character in being a man voices his attachment to the tradition of masculinity. Albert Bandura (1977) explains this by the fact of the learning and copying of the patterns that function within society. The interviewed men also indicated the importance of corporeality in being a man. The outward appearance is important, as well as the way others perceive men. Corporeality and the way of dressing are important to the participants of the study.

A man needs to look good; he should be athletic. Even if he has nice hair and clothes but he has a limp body, what kind of man is he? Although, if he acts cool, not like a pussy, has good clothes and looks good, then even if he does not work out, he is OK. I don't like those who don't care for exercise and construct a philosophy around it, saying they do not have time.

The second half of this testimony can indicate the preferences for fashion options accessible to men. A skilful choice of clothes, according to the interviewee, could be used to conceal bodily deficiencies. Such an approach may be the result of the pressure from the fashion and cosmetic industries on contemporary men. Media-imposed requirements towards men can become inaccessible ideals. The interviewees associate masculinity with the physical aspect:

If a woman sees a man who looks kind of OK, he is clean, well-dressed, smells good, they go right to it. He undresses and underneath there are those awful slabs of fat – you could just start screaming and scam. A man needs to have all things where they belong (Sebastian).

Fear of having a fat-laden body appeared in most of the narratives. This can be associated with a body dysmorphic disorder, such as bigorexia.

The interviewees may construct their own image by imitation or realising their own representation of a pattern of masculinity. Their deficiencies can be masked by a game of pretences, putting on various masks (Leary 1996). The interviewees create a facade of dominance, by creating their visual identity. According to Erving Goffman, an individual plays out their role only in the presence of others. Observation shows that most of the research participants try to play their role even without being aware they are being watched (Goffman 1956). Their way of expressing themselves is associated with daily labour, effort, regularity, and self-discipline. Working on oneself, one's corporeality, is their way of building their "self". This

allows to transmit a specific image of oneself. Consistent building of the image of oneself is something Bartek pays attention to:

A man needs to take care of his image, he should be beautiful – well, not to exaggeration, but he should give his body a chance, and needs to get dressed somehow, too. Elements of cosmetics need to be put in place. If the Maker or your genes did not give you good looks, good body proportions, then you will get nowhere even if you chew nails and spit tacks. But one should always try.

This narrative may indicate his compulsive care for his appearance. This may be the effect of submitting to a media dictatorship. In the testimony, there appears the topic of genetic injustice. He considers people who were given ideal bodily proportions to always be attractive. This may suggest the interviewee referencing canons of fashion and attempting to tackle the ideals. His tone of voice may suggest, however, his lack of satisfaction from the achievements. He also points at the hierarchy found at the gym:

You know how it is in the gym – you are new, you pay your dues. You are an old-timer – you get all the respect.

Further, the interviewee speaks about his age:

As time passed, I had some injuries, you know, you need to look after yourself more, the body does not regenerate to the same degree. The body is fatigued, loses its firmness, you put on fat, so at a certain age you need to take a wise approach, not all gung-ho, like in the old days. All needs to be carefully considered: diet, training, so that you still look good, not like an old man.

This testimony shows a professional and well thought-over approach to the workout. The research participant, bearing in mind the passing of time, tries to adjust the workout to the capabilities of his body. His skills in correcting workouts and the need to have good looks may be associated with the type of work he does:

If I sat there, obese and disgusting, everyone at the gym would take me for an idiot, not an instructor. This post requires professionalism. People believe in what the instructor tells them, as long as they see he is well-kept. How would I be able to convince someone to take up diet, exercises, assure him that it will be OK because of these things, if I did not represent what I said? That would be a farce.

The interviewee points at the need for the corporeal image to be consistent with that of the profession. His approach fits the definition of image and manners of its execution. PR trainers accentuate the meaning of conscious self-creation.

Hegemonic masculinity is realised through the use of violence towards women and the weaker representatives of the same sex. It is supported through the system of law-making, as well as legal, and political mechanisms¹. Hegemony is

¹ Relying on masculine authority, acceptance from the subjects.

reproduced through the process of nurturing. Connell (1995, p. 76) supports the understanding of masculinity and femininity as gender designs. She draws attention to the processes and relations that induce women and men to do gender. According to her, masculinity is “a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture” (Connell 1995, p. 75). She puts forward a thesis on the existence of a number of masculinity models which come in specific historic, topographic, and cultural conditions (they undergo change and evolve). She characterises the structure of masculinity in culture, distancing it from the concept of the biological domination of gender. She also claims that the body is also a participant to social processes, an object of practices which create these processes. Each form of masculinity is rooted in the structures of relations subject to historic modifications.

The main cultural notion of the cultural-sociological conception of gender, according to Bourdieu (2001), is the habitus situated in the moment in which the body comes in contact with society. The habitus is related to an individual body, but it is a sign of belonging to a social group. This notion is used to differentiate between social groups, characterise their lifestyles, and determine their position in the gender relation. Monika Szczepaniak (2010) points at the mechanism of constructing gender according to Bourdieu’s concept, founded on the proper arrangement of the body in the system of social practices, on the incorporation of the relation of power. She notes that Bourdieu exposes symbolic knowledge which works using habituated patterns, with no control of will and self-reflection. An individual follows the prohibitions, suggestions, etc.. Bourdieu (2001, p. 9) writes about the process of the somatisation of relations, where “the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it”. The body constantly reproduces itself. Fundamental dispositions impose a social tuning of the body. Szczepaniak (2010) stresses the construction of gender by Bourdieu in the pre-discursive space, on the plane of spontaneous activity determined by the gender, social, cultural, and ethnic practices inscribed into the body. The body, as a showpiece, becomes the expression of the place taken in the social and sexual order. According to the author, in the light of both concepts, the sexual order appears not as a model rooted in corporeal structures. Edith Wölfl (2000, p. 104) formulated a thesis which says that masculinity as a project remains a historic category, while as a type it remains the dowry of the body. As social practice, masculinity is especially fragile, unstable, and full of contradictions. There is no escaping the body, as it is constantly defined and formulated. This mutual relation of social and corporeal aspects causes gender to be a dynamic and complex concept, escaping essentialist, positivist, normative, and semiotic interpretations (Szczepaniak 2010).

The research participants build the “costume” of their gender identity out of muscles. They create a visual identity which allows them to fit the traditional masculine discourse. The gym becomes a place where the rules of hetero-normativity become reproduced. The further section of this paper will attempt to present the fluctuation of the borders between the definitions of masculinity provided by the gym-goers, where the constitution of the patterns of modern masculinity takes

place. In the area of two paradigms of masculinity, one can differentiate between many models of masculinity. When turning towards the corporeality, a man is faced with compulsions and prohibitions related to it. Corporeality becomes a seat of traditional patterns and a generator of feminised masculinity. In the area of the corporeal approach, the patterns of gender binarism can be broken and the pluralism of gender construction can be developed. This approach can also amplify and emphasise gender differences. The crisis of masculinity is defined through the prism of changes associated with the new situation of men in the social arena. The changing power setup and feminisation of society destabilised the historically fixed position of men, which caused a feeling of threat. The paradigm of the new man entails that the above features are the stereotypical view of men, who have the right to show emotions, feelings, weaknesses, empathy, i.e. features that were previously associated only with women. A man is increasingly often portrayed as a fashion expert, a well-kept, friendly being who, uses creams for his care and visits the spa². The diversity of new models of masculinity, coexisting in the social space with the stereotypical views, may lead to problems with defining oneself. For many, masculinity is associated with sexual potency, an attractive sexual build, and/or domination. The crisis of the traditional notions and patterns of masculinity and femininity caused the emergence of a difficult situation in the self-definition regarding one's role.

The body as a place where meanings are inscribed

Corporeality and thinking about it have undergone many metamorphoses in all the world's cultures and societies. This caused changes in the area of meanings assigned to human corporeality and therefore a disturbance in the unambiguous feeling of sexual identity. It is the human body which makes one of the chief elements of subjectivity. It is a carrier of biological and cultural gender differences. In its area, identity is created. In the process, an individual holds no power over the corporeal social techniques. Social discourse delineates the area of the possible use of the body. The central point of defining one's identity, according to Sarnińska-Górecka (2008, p. 164), is assigned to individuality with corporeality – which is given to an individual and which the individual creates. Through corporeality, the individual can make themselves, create their image, steer the way this corporeality is perceived by others, and find (or fail to find) their sexual identity, their social gender, which, according to Judith Butler (2006, p. 123) is the carrier of the compulsory, determining, forced practice of the embodying of norms. Instincts and reflexes become muted in favour of civilising the body, improving and perfecting it, according to the existing norms, while the attributes of both genders become fluid between the genders. Dominika Dzido (2006, p. 172) notices that one's own body may turn out to be previously unexplored. This has become a topic of reflection in the discourse of many sciences. The question on the matter of corpo-

² Spa (*sanitas per aquam* – health thanks to water) – resorts which have relaxation-cosmetic water treatments as part of their offer.

reality provides many answers. There emerges a category of the disciplined body, following the current trends and patterns of beauty. The saturation of a body with specific contents causes it to become a sports creation. The problem of a body as a work of culture is undertaken by men's and women's studies, currently differentiating bodies which are discursive and material, physical and communicative, consumptive and medical, individual and social. The abovementioned author, in her discussion on corporeality, undertakes the idea of a gendered body, filled with cultural contents. She formulates this notion of a gendered body which encompasses issues and ideas associated with the meaning of gender within a body. Cultural sexual identity is called "gender", a theoretical construct introduced by feminism. According to Butler (2006, p. 220), the cultural norm is realised on the surface of the body. Balejko (2001, p. 136) calls it the "embodiment of the norm". Different behaviours, poses, and ways of constructing images, are characteristic of women and of men. An individual is subject to gender-based meanings. The gender perspective allows an insight into the social reality from the viewpoint of the cultural identity of gender situated in the body. According to Bourdieu (2001), schemes of acting, characteristic of defined social groups, are inscribed into bodies. The ways of using the body tell a lot about the belonging to a given class. The variety of preferences can also be seen in the body – practiced sports, clothes, or care for instance are the expressions of belonging to a specific social context. A body equipped with signs also produces signs. Belonging to a group or identifying oneself with a group states one's attitude towards one's body. Having a certain taste, according to Bourdieu (2001), is seen in everyday practices, such as eating, getting dressed, moving around. The body is a reflection of tastes. The language of the body, clothes, body care level, and sportiness of the body inform about one's social space of life. The author sees the differences between men's and women's approach towards their bodies. He used the word "habitus" to describe the everyday expression of "corporeal practices". Kaufmann (2003, p. 65) writes that habits are not found in a body but rather in the extended body, inscribed in the social universe. Zygmunt Bauman (2004, p. 163) claims that the body becomes a field of practices of a special meaning to the identity of an individual. Making the body more attractive serves to shape a specific image. According to Krajewski (1997, p. 67), identity is made synonymous with a visual signal-clue which can be seen by others and whose meaning may be recognised according to the sender's signal. The signals may relate to the shape of the body, adornments, the home, and visiting specific places. Frequenting fitness clubs can be synonymised with reflective designing of one's identity, appearance, and image. According to Philip Zimbardo (1977), people make great efforts to achieve advantages in the form of being noticed by others, and gaining respect, love, and admiration. According to him, this is associated with the need to be socially approved, thanks to which one can gain the sense of one's identity.

Example narrations:

In his narration, Marcin points at three stages of the approach to a (more or less) muscular body:

- 1) a muscular body as an attribute of a sportsman;

- 2) a muscular body as an attribute of a bandit;
- 3) a muscular body as an attribute of a trendy man.

The interviewee also speaks about the need to exhibit his skills:

I was on holiday once and I went to the gym. I was hoping to do a light workout but some guys came, quite muscular but nothing to surpass me. Complete dodgers, so I thought I would teach them a lesson. I worked out so that their faces fell. I know there is something of an animal instinct at play here. I needed to show off my tail, just like a peacock would.

The next part of his testimony shows the attempts to mask his deficiencies with a muscular body:

I always wanted to be totally buffed-out. I am not a tall, good-looking dark-haired man, so I thought that chicks would go for the muscles. Well, it wasn't so. Chicks look at the guy's material standing these days. Really money-oriented.

We may conclude from the above that one of the chief reasons for taking up attempts at improving the interviewee's corporeality was his sexual drive. The need to win women became his motivator, and he seems to be disappointed with the lack of expected results. Mateusz seems to be happy with the stereotypical approach to muscular men:

I need to admit that a sporty look, muscles underlining the shirt, that makes an impression on people. They don't know what to think. They often associate such looks with bandits, so they prefer to step aside.

From this narrative one may conclude that the reason for the interviewee's workout is his will to scare people. The interviewee bases this on the stereotypical approach to muscular men. The bad press of the "beefcake" seems to be an advantage for him. This may be the result of the pressure from the environment in which he functions. Social learning influences the choice and recreation of specific behaviours (Bandura 1977). A muscular body and being tall make Sebastian's interpersonal relations more difficult:

My looks were always a problem. I bring up the problem myself always when I visit someone to do business – there is always a wall I need to crash through. People consider my looks as if I was thick-skinned, boorish. When I say something in a firm voice, they tell me not to shout. If you are well-groomed and elegant, they think you're a rich man and that makes relations difficult.

The interviewee feels sorry about people judging others by appearance. In his opinion, people assess a newly-met person through stereotypes. Dominik associates masculinity with being muscular:

I think that a muscular body adds masculinity to men; well, that's what people think. You can be surprised, though; I know that gays also look after themselves, they can be

muscular and so on but that is not visible, so people also think gays are a hundred per cent men. Well, it's a shame; I would prefer if it weren't so.

This testimony is full of negative opinions on people of different sexual preferences. The interviewee wants muscular bodies to be associated only with heterosexual men, which can indicate his homophobia. Further, he reveals his expectations as to being muscular:

When a man walks down the beach in the summer, no slabs of fat, muscular, tanned, oiled, women look back and men just swallow, they are afraid to look because they can get a fist on the nose and they are afraid for their women, that they will lose them for sure.

This testimony shows the participant's attitude towards a muscular body. It gives him the sense of having an advantage over other men. It becomes a protective suit, giving strength and self-confidence. Krzysztof makes the following testimony about trying to meet his expectations:

I am not interested in fitting into anything, but rather in being satisfied with myself, being free of complexes, and I will get that if I say that I achieved something. The stereotypical look will be an addition, I don't think about it at all. This will come by itself, someone will say I am a hundred per cent man. I don't care about it too much, above all I want to be happy with myself, it's all I care for.

The interviewee has a need to be perceived as a true man. This may be served by undertaking physical activity. Further, he speaks about the advantage over other men provided by appearance.

If you are large, other men look at you and feel respect. They prefer not to come closer. They need to know their place, the wimps. I have been feeling very good at the gym for some time; especially after a few months of diet I am starting to feel better because my figure is changing. When I looked worse, I felt worse at the gym. The worse a man looks, the worse he feels. If I go to the gym at 6 a.m. so that I have time for the kid in the evening and there are just three of us, there is no hierarchy, but when I visit the gym at other times, there is. More buffed folks stick together, and no one talks to the wimps.

He associates feeling good with looking good. He translates satisfaction with the corporeality with life satisfactions. Aleksander makes the following statement regarding trust that sporty men provoke:

An elegant, well-kept, sporty man creates more trust.

This can be treated as a testimony that breaks the myth associating muscularity with strength.

I look good and I know it. Most women look at me and I can say they fancy me. I see it, their body language says it all. At work, whenever there is a difficult lady-customer, the bosses call me because they know no woman can resist me. I don't feel the need to fight, I feel better than some men; well, I may not be a model but all is OK.

Borys testifies to the advantages of working out:

A few years ago when I started working out, friends were surprised: a lawyer? Frequenting places associated with criminals? They did not understand it that this is simply a place to work out. Now they visit the gym because it started to be trendy, even compulsory, because a lot of things can be talked over, decided, just there, at the backstage, in the jacuzzi, on a bike, in the sauna, etc. Well, it's not so easy at first, it was hard for me, a man is afraid he will get laughed at, expelled, but I was fixed on being there and it seems like my place now.

The interviewee sees the connection between the look and the practiced profession:

My profession requires that I am elegant and well-kept; this makes relations with others easier. Huh? Well, not always. Depends on the social group I talk to; if those are people from, let's say, a lower class, with lower education, they see you as someone who is somehow better than them. I sense other men my age looking at me with jealousy. I feel better than them, I know that I look good, feel great, and they are some kind of senile farts.

When working out, the interviewee became satisfied with his appearance, and through this, he gained self-confidence and an advantage over his peers.

The response to the androgenic pattern of masculinity and feminisation is, in the cases of a lot of men, hyper-masculinity. A hyper-man is the alpha male in the traditional understanding. The "hyper-" prefix accentuates all his features. Such a man is strong and muscular. He crosses the limits of muscularity, and he puts his body on the pedestal of beauty and physical strength, which he often achieves with the help of supporting chemical substances – all this for the price of sexual capacity, internal breakdown, and the euphoric-depressive states that are the result of taking anabolic substances.

Bauman (2000) assigns the name of identity to the work of art formed from the fragile matter of life. He makes it synonymous with harmony, logic, and coherence, which people lack in "the flow of [their] experience", and he understands the search for identity as "the ongoing struggle to arrest or hold down the flow". What is called identity, the author calls "spots of crust hardening time and again on top of volcanic lava which melt and dissolve again before they have time to cool and set. [...] The experienced, lived identity could only be held together with the adhesive of fantasy, perhaps day-dreaming" (Bauman 2000). It is the reason behind the popularity of temporary identities that allow for their quick change. The life of an individual has become uncertain, lacking solid foundations. In the face of the lack of long-term feeling of security, according to Bauman, immediate satisfaction is a solace, and the world becomes "an aggregate of products for immediate consumption" (2000). Creating temporary definitions of oneself allows to avoid disillusionment. Tomasz Leszniewski (2001, p. 55) draws attention to the feeling of boredom. This is a reference to Bauman's aforementioned model of a post-modern man. The changing balance of powers within society results in the feeling of dan-

ger among a lot of men. Fearing the change of the order in which they have been brought up, and internal crises which can occur to them, they seek salvation in anti-androgenic attitudes. Borders between masculinity and lack thereof have become fluid. Men lose themselves in the rapid inflow of information, which is one of the reasons of the crisis of masculinity. The body becomes a connector between the traditional hegemonic masculinity and its modern version. Elements embedded in tradition give the interviewees the feeling of a stable identity.

Summary

According to Melosik (2006, p. 156), the post-modern approach to gender is a starting point for the interpretation of the social contexts of the body. It becomes a text into which the social meanings of masculinity/femininity are inscribed, and through which they can also be read. The interviewees want to be perceived as strong and efficient dominators. In their opinion, a muscular body is a showcase of strength that gives them an advantage over other men. The body has become an industrialised product. The term "industrialised body" was used by Lionel Tiger (2000, p. 29) to describe the industrialisation of societies on the level of the citizens' bodies. The author, one of the main promoters of the concept of male studies, believes that the contemporary humanity ignores or completely rejects their own roots, nature, and the fact they are *homo sapiens*. He writes about the ignorance of prehistory, which continues to live in genes and the body of human beings who have an old portfolio of needs and reflexes. Man's failure to listen to their inner selves, and their blind following of the current trends, are the results of industrialism, requiring an absolute involvement in being part of the great machine.

The need to arouse respect and fear may be rooted in childhood complexes. In the narrations of the research participants, the aspect of the domination associated with being and possessing specialist knowledge also appeared. One of the interviewees feels no need to compete with others, as he feels better than the rest. Two of the subjects claim that aggressive behaviour and work as a security guard at the disco caused problems in their life. There were also testimonies breaking the stereotype associating muscles with strength. Three of the interviewees said that large muscles were not sufficient, as martial arts skills are also required. This confirms the opinion of Lopez, Hodson, and Roscigno (2009, p. 26), who consider that men wish for power not only over women but also over other men. The will to keep this power and to dominate may lead, according to Sallaz (2002, p. 98), to harassing other men, e.g. at the workplace, at the gym, etc. The author claims that domination over other men takes place by feminising them or by the imposing of the dominant gender norms. The situation is carried over to the general male-male social relations. Perceiving themselves as muscular, dangerous men, gives the subjects a sense of self-confidence and power over others. Corporeality is for them one of the fundamental means of expression. Thanks to it, it is possible to exhibit values which in reality one does not possess and at the same time conceal the deficiencies (Kuczyńska 1983, p. 9). The interviewees decorate their corporeality with mus-

cles. This confirms Kuczyńska's thesis on camouflaging the primary nature of the body. The observation of the research participants during workouts revealed that they take physical exercises seriously. At the gym they are well-known, appreciated, and they feel at home. Thus, they build self-confidence, and feel satisfaction. Most of the research participants are gym experts. They possess large knowledge, and are old-timers. They have a proper figure and an opinion they have worked to gain for years. This gives them the feeling of power and control over others. They do not pay attention to other people, or the beginners working out at the gym which look at them with awe. They only hold conversations with similar colleagues. This confirms the hierarchy of the gym. It is a specific place, where people, working out side by side, create a more or less integrated group staging a play (Goffman 1956). Each of the members has a role and if he plays it badly, this can cause all the performance to fail. Social relations are born through the exchange of dramatically elevated activities and reacting to activities. All are subject to socialisation based on learning to master the "grips". The observations prove that the research participants, to stress their position at the gym, use the following tactics: loud conversations, laughter and doing workouts, walking all around the gym and stretching, ostentatious choice of weights, changing of workouts so as to present their strength to others, tensing their muscles in front of a mirror, opting for proper clothes (large t-shirts widening the figure, sleeveless shirts showing the arm muscles, waist belts, gloves, knee breeches).

The research participants feel confident at the gym. Thanks to their knowledge, muscles, and long-term workouts they feel they are on the top of the hierarchy. They exercise with full involvement, not allowing themselves longer pauses and conversations. During workouts, despite high concentration, they are aware of the surrounding people and the need to constantly build their image. Erect bodies show high self-confidence. It is important for these men what they look like and what impression they make on others. They claim that their sporty, muscular bodies allow them to be perceived as real men. All the men who work out are tanned and smell of designer perfume. This testifies that they also take care of their bodies from the aesthetic and cosmetic perspectives. The use of treatments (e.g. cosmetics, the solarium) can also be the reflection of a new approach to masculinity. The research participants drew attention to the health aspect of physical exercise. Those who are over 40 consider having a sporty figure to help them retain fitness, good looks, and therefore – youth. Being afraid of being old, they invest in their bodies.

The main cultural notion of the cultural-sociologic concept of gender, according to Bourdieu (2001), is the habitus situated in the moment of the body coming in contact with society. The habitus is related to an individual body, but it is a sign of belonging to a social group. This notion is used to differentiate between social groups, to characterise their lifestyles, and define their position in gender relations. Career, the possession of immaterial goods and power are, according to the subjects, the inherent elements of masculinity. A man who is not financially fulfilled, or who is not on his way to increase his material wealth, is not a complete man in their eyes. They feel mobilised in their drive towards riches which, according to Goffman (1956), is motivated with the drive to cause an impression leading

to achieving the set goal. The goal can be an attempt to take control over others. Foucault (1995, p. 84) writes about the dispersed power working as an aerosol mist, which governs an individual. It causes people to join specific clubs, possess specific objects, and generates the need of being, thus creating a specific, Goffmanian decorative façade. A few of the research participants do not want to talk about money, claiming instead that money is to be multiplied, not talked about. They share the opinion of others, that a true man must be rich. Their reluctance to talk about material possessions may prove their loyalty to the traditional ideals, according to which a gentleman does not talk about money. It may, however, also be an attempt to escape an inconvenient topic. Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk (2000, p. 70) indicate, as the moment of renegotiating gender identity in the post-1989 Poland, "the return of a man with a capital M". The picture of masculinity was articulated as that of a person who is physically fit and attractive, strong, powerful, individual, earns well, is properly dressed, self-confident, and independent. The research participants talked about the need to have prestige, which Bourdieu (1992) called the patriarchal dividend. In his opinion, through prestige and power, men gain profits from the patriarchal system, even if they are at the bottom of the hierarchy. The reproduction of these behaviours takes place through the process of nurture. The author refers to the male libido of domination, and he treats the gender order as a model rooted in the structures of the body. The presenting of one's dominant "self" by the interviewees is done consciously and deliberately. The input into achieving the male identity can be the proof of submitting to the pressure of the media or an attempt to play the role of a real man. Goffman (1956) writes about more or less deliberate and conscious playing out of one's role. It is associated with the feeling of compulsion from the society, e.g. in a specific group. According to Leary (1996), while demonstrating an attitude, an individual transmits a specific image of themselves. Controlling the played role sets the stage in the information game. The research participants, presenting themselves in sharp, clear ways, may be subject to stereotype assessments. The self-presentation of the researched men is a conscious act. It is a process of the individual controlling the way they are perceived by others. It makes for the fundamental and inevitable aspect of social life. While demonstrating specific attitudes, the individual conveys a vision of self. Making the desired impression on others has serious implications. It may increase the number of rewards and decrease costs (Leary 1996).

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Summary

The gym as a place of constructing masculine corporeal identity

This article explores the role that the gym plays in the formation and negotiation of masculinities for men: how bodybuilding serves as a masculinizing practice. It maps the set of practices, manifestations and implications for masculine corporeal identity.

Keywords

masculinity, physical strength, body, bodybuilding, identity

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