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УДК 614.253

CORPOREAL TURN IN HUMAN SCIENCES: CONTEMPORARY DIMENSIONS OF THE BODY

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Over the past decades, a person-centered approach has been widely used in human sciences which include both humanities and social sciences. Within this approach, an individual is studied comprehensively including their physical, emotional and spiritual health, communication and behavioral practices, moral values and ethical principles. Firstly evolved in western philosophy and aesthetics via practicing corporal intents, corporeal practices were later introduced into human sciences. The article defines corporeal culture and identifies the major development vectors which include physical, emotional and spiritual health, beauty, sexuality, comfort and diet. It also identifies underlying influences shaping the contours of corporeal culture which has a profound impact on generating human behavioral, social, cultural and communication practices.

Key words: a person-centered approach, human sciences, corporeality, human behavioral, social, cultural and communication practices

КОРПОРЕАЛЬНЫЙ ПОВОРОТ В ГУМАНИТАРНОМ ЗНАНИИ: ТЕЛО КАК ФИЗИЧЕСКАЯ СУЩНОСТЬ ИЛИ СОЧЕТАНИЕ ФИЗИЧЕСКОГО И ДУХОВНОГО?

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В последние несколько десятилетий в лингвистике отмечается преобладание антропоцентрического подхода, в рамках которого происходит становление новой, корпоральной парадигмы исследований, основанной на признании необходимости интегрированного подхода к рассмотрению человека, включающего единство языкового, физического, психического, духовного компонентов. Термин «корпоральность», первоначально возникший в философском и эстетическом сознании западной цивилизации посредством культивирования телесных интенций, со временем проник в языковедческую науку. В статье дано определение корпоральной культуры и рассмотрены основные векторы ее проявления, включающие физическое и психическое здоровье, красоту, сексуальность, комфорт и питание, которые в значительной степени влияют на формирование поведенческих и языковых практик индивида.

Ключевые слова: антропоцентрический подход, гуманитарные науки, корпоральность, поведенческие, социальные, культурные и коммуникативные практики индивида

Over the past few decades the human body has become a critical issue in both social sciences and humanities. The fact that the body has emerged as a key locus for various interventions including social, cultural, ethical, and even linguistic, is proved by a growing number of publications in which the body is included into linguistic, cultural, social, and ethical analysis of the body is undertaken. The body becomes embedded in different spheres of our life, not only health-related ones, which occurs through social and cultural events as well as political regulations and ethical standards. There has been a radical shift in understanding the aesthetics and the value of the human body, the attitude to the living body and the relations between bodies. For example, the feminist theory as the social phenomenon problematically opposes mind to body, male body to the female one, 'with the female body regarded as enmeshed in her bodily existence in a way that makes attainment of rationality questionable' [1]. As Elizabeth Grosz put it, 'women are somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men...' [2]. Such claims raise questions about a correlation between the body, mental faculties and spirituality in males and females, about the extent of mind and spirituality in females who are deemed to be more corporeal.

Comprehensive estimates on global trends in sociology (as sociology embraces trends) show that contemporary society is labeled as the 'culture of narcissism'. We have made a systematic review of literature which showed that narcissism is linked with consumer society and therefore, with consumer bodies. As Liz Jagger puts it, '...we consume according to who we are...' [3]; however, we would add that we consume according to how we think and what social class we belong to.

So, given the access to social and cultural resources for body modification and reconstruction, in contemporary times we witness the evidence of the rise of corporeal (somatic) culture which occupies a central place in popular culture and some theoretical forms of thought, primarily postmodernism.

Furthermore, we live at a time when the body is no longer perceived as a fixed unchangeable essence because the boundaries between different domains of our life and nature have collapsed and the body has turned into 'a life accessory, a thing to be sculptured, shaped and

stylized' [4]. M. Featherstone was the first sociologist to see how the body stopped being a firm and disciplined source of fixed meaning and turned into plastic capable, with appropriate body work, of increasing in value to the cultural and social credit of its owner.

It has become unfashionable not to improve what nature has created. And we are quite willing to take responsibility for designing our own bodies. The claim that the body 'has been transformed from a pure biological fact into a 'project' [5] and a 'performance' [6]' transforms our ideas of body and extends possibilities for its uses. All these have powerful implications for popular culture in general and biomedicine, ethics, sociology, cultural studies and human communication sciences, in particular. For example, the volume and range of cosmetic surgery raises questions about the ownership of the body, its boundaries and matter for moral concern. Calls for shaping body and soul via a range of techniques and therapies including dieting campaigns which advertise thousands of low-caloric food items, fitness and body-building programs, cosmetic surgery, pharmaceuticals have raised issues of lifestyle choice and identity which are thoroughly explored in social science, humanities and ethical research. As the assumption of positivist sociology and medicine, that bodies belong primarily to biology, has collapsed, now the meaning of the body and the link between corporeal characteristics, mental faculties and social role of the body have become a problem for social and cultural studies, linguistics and ethics.

Here, in this article we use a phenomenological approach to corporeality and set out to identify whether body is viewed as a combination of biological and non-biological characteristics within a person-centered approach in the human sciences or if it is regarded as a mere biological entity. And, surely, as in any person-centered approach, the body here figures as an important, even critical, point of reference but not the only one.

An overview of the latest academic writing from various disciplines, particularly social and human sciences, such as philosophy, cognitive science and linguistics, points to the importance of the interdisciplinary study of an individual including their physical, emotional and spiritual constituents, communication and behavioral practices, moral values and ethical principles. The need for an integrated approach to the study of an individual underlies a new paradigm in linguistics, the so-called corporeal

paradigm. Firstly evolved in western philosophy and aesthetics via practicing corporal intents, corporeality was not regarded as just depictions of the human figure in works of art, but rather it was defined as ‘physical embodiment, which specifically refers to properties such as weight, balance, containment, in-out, front-back, texture, line, colour, force, gravity and so on’ [7]. F. Pottgieter F. claims that these properties interact primarily with our corporeal, bodily existence, as aspects of works of art do.

Descartes’s so-called mind-body duality is often held to be the start of a tradition of Western philosophy that denigrated the body as well as the objective world, elevating the mind to a position of pristine intentionality. Much philosophy after Descartes did not extol the so-called mind-body duality, but endeavored to restore it. For example, I. Kant writes: ‘Intuitions [aspects close to the body] without concepts [the mind] are blind; concepts without intuitions are empty’ [8].

So, there has always been great debate about correlations between body [physical or biological] and mind [soul, spiritual or non-biological]. This debate has highlighted the need for a thorough discussion of corporeality, the modern phenomenon of the world’s culture.

In Western culture ‘*corporeality*’ (from Latin *corporeus*, *corpus* which means ‘body’) regarded as a form of bodily existence with a long tradition began in the postmodern era philosophy and aesthetics, developed into literature and more recently could be recognized in a range of social sciences and humanities. The emergence of corporeality chronologically coincided with the transition of western culture and philosophy to postmodernism which can be attributed to technical and cultural manifestations across the globe.

Modern communication technologies (TV, newspapers, magazines, radio, etc.) including distance communication (networking via the Internet, skype, etc.) as well as special forms of mass communication, such as advertising, movies, fashion, have made possible the dissemination of corporeal ideas. From a sociological perspective, the most important feature of modern communication technology is its capacity to expand novel ideas beyond the local community. Under these conditions, the idea of corporeality was included into social and humanity paradigm which can be regarded as a reflective response to the changes which are associated with the postmodern perspective.

The expansion of postmodern practices in culture and society has brought the human body with its attributes including bodily intentions, appearance, emotions, mind, beauty, sexuality, comfort, nutrition to the forefront of contemporary discussion. And, as such, cultural and social studies introduced the term ‘corporeality’ into philosophical, linguistic, ethical writing, thus marking the rise of a ‘somatic society’, with the re-emergence of the body as an important signifier [9] of not only social distinction but also of economic, cultural, linguistic, ethical practices.

In this relation, it is essential to define corporeality and focus on its significance for social sciences and humanities in which an individual is conceived as an integral entity rather than a biological one.

The preoccupation with the body is apparent in various discourses and practices including cultural practices which cover many aspects of daily life and influence behaviors of individuals and even entire societies. Cultural practices involve a broad range of activities, such as behavioural patterns, lifestyles, **spiritual practices, art, diet, interpersonal relationships,** fashion and entertainment, sex and sexuality, **etc. All these activities are cultivated and actualized through** a range of strategies and tactics based on conceptualization of your own body, not only as a purely physical (biological) substance, but as a physical substance linked with a spiritual substance; the significance of the body and relation of the body to other bodies are also taken into consideration.

The processes of cultivation, actualization and conceptualization of cultural practices (actions and attitudes) through the body and by means of the body are termed *corporeality*.

In the past few decades the term *corporeality* has been increasingly used in linguistics which studies language, and involves analysis of language in context, in different spheres of human activity, within different social classes. Language is thought to be inherent to our body as a mere biological entity and therefore, linguistic inquiry into the body may shed light on both human communicative and cultural practices. Having been conceptualised as simply one biological object among others, as part of nature, the body in linguistics is determined not only by physical features of the body which include its somatic

characteristics, but also emotional and spiritual attributes, communication and behavioral practices.

Corporeality as a complex phenomenon has its major vectors of development which include physical, emotional and spiritual health, beauty, sexuality, comfort and diet. These particular vectors are regarded as socially significant domains in the society as they contribute to the formation of cultural practices underlying ethical, social and communicative behavior. Maintaining particular behavioural practices usually influence a lifestyle choice.

And, we shall now consider briefly each of these vectors. In popular morality, physical health is usually given first place. Physical health is often depicted as a necessary condition of all other human attributes. For example, in a paean to the goddess Hygieia (Health) Ariplion of Sicyon (5th- 4th century BC) sang 'without you no one is happy' claiming that health alone makes possible the joys of wealth, children, political power, etc. This commonplace can be found in a variety of genres, including medical treatises. For example, the Hellenistic physician Herophilus depicted the actualization of all human attributes – the soul, the body and the external attributes – as dependent upon health [10].

Closely related is the popular association of physical and mental health with moral uprightness. It has been suggested that attaining and maintaining health is linked with preservation and restoration of physical health by means of a stable mode of living, including diet, exercise, bathing, and other regular habits. However, as Dr. Brock Chisholm, the first Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), put it 'without mental health there can be no true physical health' [11]. Mental health is defined as something that everybody experiences over their lifetime rather than mere absence of mental illness. The WHO defines mental health as a 'state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community' [11].

As we live in an extremely reflexive society, reflexivity in the context of health highlights awareness of your body and willingness to take care of yourself, particularly doing everything to avoid becoming ill. However, reflexivity may often lead to dissatisfaction with one's body, especially in comparison to those portrayed by mass media. People actively seek out ways to be beautiful

and strive to possess physical bodies that accord with the societal ideal. Therefore, the issue of beauty has become an increasingly popular topic in social, cultural, ethical and communication practices. Both men and women use beauty as a means of determining who is more attractive, as a way of attracting the opposite sex and even members of the same sex (given the possibilities for self-reconstruction have extended even to sexual identity). In an attempt to attain a high standard of beauty, to be aesthetically more attractive, we expose our body to the phenomenon called medicalization [12], the term used to designate the process of medical reconstruction or transformation, thus showing how medicine increasingly permeates different aspects of our lives.

Beauty indicates not only health but also fertility with the result being that beautiful women are more likely to be selected for mating. In this relation the term sexuality is used. It is used to denote human capacity for affection, communication and sympathy, i.e. physical and psychic sexuality, the quality of being sexual. Biological maleness or femaleness is considered to be an integral part of how we see ourselves and how we relate to others.

In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) highlighted the importance of sexuality. He argued that society used sexuality to gain access to the body in order to discipline and govern it. Today there is much more openness and freedom when the term *sexuality* or *physical sexuality* is concerned. To attain a high degree of physical sexuality, people are often guided not only by their sexual instinct but also by personal habits and behavioural patterns such as fashion, leisure, sex, which are emphasized in many different ways in the contemporary world.

Physical comfort is also among the core values which we treasure in our life, what makes our life meaningful. Our physical bodies do require a great deal of attention in the form of food and water, exercise and rest, clothing and shelter, health care, etc. One might think that these are just our physical needs; however at a time when everything is actualized and conceptualized through the body and by means of the body, resting on physical comfort becomes an obsession that can turn into a quasi-religious compulsion. Rather than keeping the physical or spiritual self in perspective people now see material perfection of their lives as the ultimate goal.

The spread of dietary practices in which diet is regarded as 'government of the body' brings about a

detailed self-regulation of the body to exercise more control over the self [13]. Today, dietary practices are closely linked with the revered ideal body – a tall and slender physical body known as the thin-ideal. This idealized body image has been constructed by the media via magazines, movies and advertising campaigns. They often bring about adverse effects, such that a great proportion of people especially females are troubled by certain aspects of their appearance. The preoccupation with their physical appearance has trapped Western women into subscribing to unhealthy narratives such as ‘I must be thin to be accepted and loved’, ‘A thin body will make me happy’, ‘Dieting will help me lose weight’ or ‘Thinness equals beauty’ [14].

The human body has been viewed in different ways depending on the particular theoretical approach of the observer (i.e. postmodern, sociocultural, phenomenological, etc.). For decades, scientific psychology supported ‘a strict division between body and mind, behaviour and experience’, with the separation of the mind from its bodily representation ignoring the subjective aspects of that representation [15]. Phenomenological approach offers a holistic viewpoint according to which the human being is regarded as ‘a unity of body and mind, behaviour and situation’ [15].

In the current study we attempted to identify and review the most important, from social, ethical and cultural viewpoint, vectors of body development which include all the spheres that a traditional phenomenological psychology covers. As the body acts in different spheres including physical, spiritual, emotional, social, etc., in recent times it has become the subject of a variety of social studies and humanities, the phenomenon that Bryan Turner and Hervé Juvin have called the rise of somatic society and its turn to the body.

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