

“HOW TO HAVE A PERFECT FIGURE LIKE GWYNETH”

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE FITNESS SECTION OF POLKI.PL ONLINE WOMEN’S PORTAL

EWA BOZENA ZAJAC



“HOW TO HAVE A PERFECT FIGURE LIKE GWYNETH”

**CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE FITNESS
SECTION OF POLKI.PL ONLINE WOMEN’S PORTAL**

EWA BOZENA ZAJAC

Final Master’s Thesis
15th September 2011

First Supervisor: Prof. Teresa Ortiz Gomez, Universidad de Granada

Second Supervisor: Prof. Eva Fodor, Central European University

Image on the cover: Gwyneth Paltrow and her personal trainer Tracy Anderson in a promotional photo for Anderson’s fitness studio,
<http://www.futurecelebritygossip.com/2010/12/gwyneth-paltrow-tracy-anderson-fitness.html>

“HOW TO HAVE A PERFECT FIGURE LIKE GWYNETH”

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE FITNESS SECTION OF POLKI.PL ONLINE WOMEN’S PORTAL

EWA BOZENA ZAJAC

Final Master’s Thesis
15th September 2011

First Supervisor: Prof. Teresa Ortiz Gomez, Universidad de Granada

Second Supervisor: Prof. Eva Fodor, Central European University

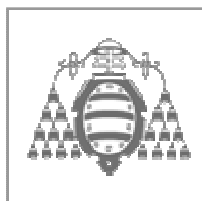




Gemma

Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree
in Women's and Gender Studies

Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Gender and
Women's Studies GEMMA
2nd edition, 2008-2010



Universidad de Oviedo



“Enjoy your body. Use it every way you can. Don't be afraid of it or of what other people think of it. It's the greatest instrument you'll ever own. Dance, even if you have nowhere to do it but your living room. Read the directions, even if you don't follow them.

Do not read beauty magazines. They will only make you feel ugly.”

“Everyone is Free (to use sun screen)”

Graduation Speech

Written by Chicago newspaper columnist, Mary Schmich –
recently recorded with music by Baz Luhrmann)

<http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/lyrics/graduation.htm>, last accessed 24/06/2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / AGRADECIMIENTOS / PODZIEKOWANIA

Me gustaría dar las gracias a la Profesora Teresa Ortiz por su confianza y apoyo en el proceso de escribir esta tesina.

I would like to thank Professor Eva Fodor for the inspiration and for taking my questions seriously.

Many thanks to my partner Mark for his love and for helping me realize that I too was afraid of my upper body becoming “too muscular for a woman”.

Dziękuję Mamie i Tacie za wsparcie w każdym znaczeniu tego słowa i Moniczce za to, że jest najwspanialszą Siostrą.

Dziękuję Oli i Agacie za przyjaźń i konsultacje motywacyjno-naukowe.

Muchas gracias a Carelia por haber sido mi compañera de trabajo y por sus buenos consejos.

“HOW TO HAVE A PERFECT FIGURE LIKE GWYNETH” CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE FITNESS SECTION OF POLKI.PL ONLINE WOMEN’S PORTAL

Keywords: Women’s bodies, Exercise, Fitness, Beauty ideal, Body ideal, Health imperative, Healthism, Commercialization of discipline, Consumer culture, Discipline, Women’s health, Self-surveillance, Transformation of the body

ABSTRACT

The main argument of the proposed thesis is that the promotion of exercise in popular women’s magazines that form part of the online portal Polki.pl, even though in some cases framed as promotion of health, is in reality aimed at convincing women to conform to current beauty ideals through exerting discipline over the body perceived as always imperfect.

Foucault’s notions of disciplinary power, Crawford’s notion of healthism, Dworkin and Wachs’ notion of body s capital, Sassatelli’s concept of commercialization of the keep-fit culture and the feminist analyses of self-disciplining of female bodies by Sandra Bartky and of the tyranny of slenderness by Susan Bordo, form the theoretical background, while on the methodology level critical discourse analysis is used to identify the dominant themes of the fitness section of Polki.pl – an online Polish women’s portal which contains a selection of articles from various magazines sold in Poland in a printed version. The following prevalent themes are identified in the discourse analysis: fragmentation of the body and promotion of types of exercise appropriate for women; the glamorization of fitness taking the form of the presentation of celebrities and their personal trainers as models; the commercialization of fitness reflected in a) promotion of specialized products and services, b) expert advice and c) motivational tips that serve the interests of fitness industry; and the subordination of women through self-surveillance in exercise. The discourse analysis of Polki.pl also encompasses a brief discussion of how themes of health and ‘body obsession’ are covered in Polki.pl follows. The main thesis conclusions are that the dominant discourse on exercise promotion in Polki.pl has more oppressive than empowering potential due to its almost exclusive focus on conformity to dominant feminine beauty ideals; and that women’s reading of the texts should be the direction for further research.

“HOW TO HAVE A PERFECT FIGURE LIKE GWYNETH” CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE FITNESS SECTION OF POLKI.PL ONLINE WOMEN’S PORTAL

RESUMEN

El argumento principal de la presente tesina es que la promoción del ejercicio físico en revistas populares para mujeres que integran el portal Polki.pl, aun cuando, en algunos casos enmarcada como promoción de la salud, está en la realidad dirigida a convencer a las mujeres a conformarse con los actuales ideales de la belleza femenina a través de la disciplina ejercida sobre el cuerpo que se percibe siempre imperfecto.

El marco teórico está formado por las nociones de *disciplinary power* de Foucault, de *healthism* de Crawford y de *body as capital* de Dworkin y de Wachs; por el concepto de *commercialization of the keep-fit culture* de Sassatelli; por los análisis de las practicas auto-disciplinarias sobre los cuerpos femeninos de Sandra Bartky y de la tiranía de la delgadez de Susan Bordo. A nivel de metodología se utiliza el análisis crítico del discurso para poder identificar los prevalentes temas de la sección *fitness* de Polki.pl - un portal web polaco para las mujeres que contiene una selección de artículos de las versiones impresas de varias revistas del mercado polaco. Los principales temas identificados en el análisis del discurso son los siguientes: la fragmentación del cuerpo femenino y la promoción de tipos de ejercicio apropiados para las mujeres; la exaltación de glamour de *fitness* a través de la presentación de celebridades y sus entrenadoras personales como modelos; la comercialización de *fitness* reflejada en a) la promoción de los productos y servicios especializados, b) las recomendaciones de los/as expertos/as y c) los consejos para la motivación, que sirven a los intereses de la industria de estar en forma; y la subordinación de mujeres a través de la auto-vigilancia (*self-surveillance*) en el ejercicio físico. El análisis del discurso de Polki.pl contiene también una breve discusión de cómo se habla en Polki.pl sobre la salud y la “obsesión por el cuerpo”. Las conclusiones principales de la tesis son: que el discurso dominante en la promoción del ejercicio en Polki.pl tiene un potencial más bien opresivo que emancipador debido a su casi exclusivo enfoque en la conformidad con los ideales de belleza femenina dominantes; y que la lectura que las mujeres hacen de los textos que publican debe ser el objeto de las futuras investigaciones.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Theoretical introduction	8
1.1. The female body in feminist thought.....	9
1.2. Health imperative, healthism and the moral responsibility of being “fit”	12
1.3. Body as capital	18
1.4. Roberta Sassatelli's notion of the commercialization of discipline	19
1.5. Exercise promotion aimed at women as targeting the imperfect body that needs to be improved.....	21
2. Methodology	24
2.1. The starting point.....	24
2.2. The discourse analysis	25
2.3. The sources	27
3. The emerging themes	32
3.1. Fragmentation of the (fit) body with focus on improving the “problematic” areas	34
3.2. Glamourization of Fitness	38
3.3. Commercialization of Fitness.....	41
3.4. Promotion of exercise types appropriate for women.....	48
3.5. Subordination of women through self-surveillance in exercise	52
3.6. Health promotion.....	53
3.7. ‘The body obsession’	56
4. Conclusions	58
5. Bibliography	62

1. Theoretical introduction

The promotion of exercise and physical fitness are increasingly popular themes in the popular culture and the media. In the general keep-fit discourse, promoted in fitness magazines, tv-shows, and commercials, and widely publicized on the internet, the main denominator of being ‘fit’ is to possess a healthy, resistant, slim, lean, proportional and well-defined body, which can be attained through a specific exercise and diet regime. Gym and fitness club attendance is currently one of the most popular ways in which people in the so called First World countries engage in physical activity, men and women alike. The popularity of fitness clubs is ever-growing, with the trend spreading out from the United States of America to other countries and regions, such as Japan or Western and Eastern Europe. Within the last two decades, there has been a very significant growth of consumer goods which are somehow related to the transformation of the body (see for example Sassatelli, 2001).

This thesis explores how exercise and different ‘fitness’ activities with the leading element of gym and fitness club attendance, are promoted in women’s magazines represented by the online portal Polki.pl, and how the message of the need to transform their bodies according to the dominant beauty ideal is conveyed. The questions I am trying to answer, at least partially, are: how is exercise promoted for women? What are the main characteristics of the dominant discourse on physical activity for women, represented by the mass-media available on the Polish market? What kind of exercise is considered feminine-appropriate or feminine-desirable? What is the message women receive about what exercise is and what it serves for?

My personal motivation for choosing this subject comes from the fact that I have been concerned with the relationship of my own body to exercise ever since I can remember. The messages I was receiving from the members of my family, neighborhood and school were ambiguous: on one hand I was encouraged to be physically active for health, but on the other my being a woman was frequently brought up whenever limitations to my physical expression were posed. My grandmother used to say, for example, “don’t jump or else there will be problems with your menstruation”. As a child I found “girly” pastimes to be boring as what I liked the most was climbing trees and playing football with the boys from the area. Later on in high school, as sports classes were separate for boys and girls, I would get frustrated at the lack of physical skill of the girls in my class (after all, I was used to playing basketball with the boys outside of school) and the fact that they refused to try harder because they felt ridiculous when running or because their hair and make-up would get messed up. I intended to organize sports activities for other girls but there was very little interest. Playing together with the boys became much harder when we all entered adolescence and the gender segregation

became evident. This was how, gradually, I stopped practicing ‘sports’ and discovered ‘fitness’, which at that time (late 90’s) was becoming popular in Poland. I recorded television programs with exercise routines demonstrated by TV fitness presenter Mariola Bojarska – Ferenc, a Polish equivalent of Jane Fonda, and exercised an hour a day at home. I keep practicing ‘fitness’ to this day and even managed to complete a fitness-instructor course, but my attitude to this type of physical activity is very ambiguous – I like it and loathe it at the same time.

My analysis of the fitness promotion discourse in a Polish women’s portal is also an intent to systematize the theoretical knowledge I have acquired during the 2 years of Erasmus Mundus Master’s Degree in Women’s and Gender Studies GEMMA and to apply it to the context of my own exercise practice, so I can adopt an informed attitude to this and other forms of physical exercise. I chose the Polish context due to my own nationality, but also because it was virtually impossible for me to find any scholarly works on the subject of exercise for women in Poland. My aim is to fill this gap in knowledge production and introduce a feminist-informed perspective in the understanding of the growing fitness promotion in my country of origin.

In the theoretical introduction, I first present a brief overview of the female body in feminist thought, with a special emphasis on the physical activity and sports domain. Chapters 1.2 to 1.5 introduce the key concepts I will use in the analysis of Polki.pl. In chapter 1.2 I draw on Foucault’s (1984) notions of health imperative, biopower and disciplinary power and on Crawford’s (1980) notion of healthism in order to provide a framework for understanding why contemporary Western culture puts so much emphasis on attaining a ‘healthy’ body and on individual self-improvement in this domain, which is imbued with moral qualities of being a good citizen. I then (in chapter 1.3) introduce Dworkin and Wach’s (2009) concept of body as capital in the postindustrial society, supported by Sassatelli’s discussion of the body as energy reserve. Chapter 1.4 introduces Sassatelli’s (2001) concept of commercialization of the keep-fit culture and discusses the involvement of the fitness and beauty industry in the ‘working out’ of the perfect figure. The last chapter (1.5) of the introduction is based on Sandra Bartky’s (1998) discussion of the new female body ideal – slim, lean, but not too muscular physique, and on her work on the self-surveillance and self-disciplining that women are expected to perform. This chapter also introduces the main ideas that Susan Bordo (1993) included in her ‘reading of the slender body’.

1.1. The female body in feminist thought

The female body and the cultural meanings inscribed in it have been one of the crucial issues in the feminist thought throughout the decades. The central place of the body in feminist writing has to

do with the fact that historically women have been determined by their bodies in a constant competition of the individual feelings, actions and experiences with the social and cultural representations of the female body (Conboy, Medina, Stanbury, 1997). As Simone de Beauvoir stated in the 1949 treatise *The Second Sex*, woman is made rather than born – femaleness is a construct of a culture that considers male bodies as directly and objectively connected to the world, while simultaneously seeing female bodies as entrapped in the biological processes of childbirth. This culture assigns female bodies to “‘nature’ and delineates ‘natural’ female bodily characteristics (narrow waists, small feet, long hair, for example), which have required the most unnatural maintenance (corsets, foot-binding, products for straightening or de-tangling).” (Conboy, Medina, Stanbury, 1997, pp. 2). The social construction of male and female bodies is not equal: women as a group (although many feminists argue that no such thing as ‘woman’ really exists, see for example Riley, 1988) have been oppressed and discriminated against on the basis of their biological constitution.

The ideas of what is natural of a female body have been changing and have always been intertwined with categories such as race, class, sexuality etc (although this interconnectedness was not always recognized by the feminist theory). Sojourner Truth’s 1851 speech at the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention pointed to the fact that the 19th century ideas about women’s frailty, passivity and need for male support, which were used to separate the public sphere of men’s activities from the private sphere of women’s activities and to justify the male monopole on the civil rights, did not in fact apply to women of color, who were expected to work in the field just as hard, or even harder than, men. What is important for the purposes of this thesis, is that, as we will see in the following chapters, the preferred female figure continues to be one informed by the 19th century ideal of slenderness and small size. Even though physical fitness is now expected from women, big muscles such as those developed by Sojourner Truth in hard physical work (and demonstrated publicly as a proof of her physical strength), are not considered ‘natural’ and attractive in women (see for example Choi, 2000).

As Susan Bordo (1993) points out, female bodies have been subject to practices of discipline and normalization which served the purposes of social control, although in different historical periods different prescriptions for bodily practices were given to women. At the end of 18th century, when Mary Wollstonecraft was writing *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1998), women were condemned to sedentary lifestyle and light housework as the only type of physical activity. In contemporary Western culture women are expected to perform exercise on a daily basis because the slender and ‘tight’ body type became so extremely important in the consumer culture threatening bodily boundaries with unrestrained consumption (Bordo, 1993). Bordo argues that feminism of the second wave (1960’s and 1970’s) viewed female body as a victim of oppressive inscriptions of the patriarchal culture, and as a “socially shaped and historically ‘colonized’ territory” (Bordo, 1993, pp. 21), which reinforced the binary dichotomies of victim/victimizer and oppressed/oppressor. However, feminism

should go beyond such a limiting classification and include the differences in class, race and socio-economic status into the analysis of the contemporary situation of women and recognize women’s resistance to the patriarchal pressures. With regards to female bodies, these are very much influenced by the cultural ideas of femininity, conveyed to women through the representational codes and techniques and particularly through standardized visual images. These cultural codes influence the way in which bodies are experienced by women and should be resisted.

Sandra Bartky (1998) explores the particularly feminine modality of embodiment produced by disciplinary practices in the contemporary Western society. She argues that “we are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine” and that the feminine body ideals imposed by our culture result in creation of bodies that are recognizably feminine in gesture and appearance while at the same time influencing the female identity and subjectivity. Bartky distinguishes three types of disciplinary practices which in her view are symptomatic of the modernization of patriarchal domination: practices aimed at the body’s appropriate size, at a specific repertoire of movements, and at the body’s “display as an ornamented surface’ (pp. 132). I will discuss Bartky’s argument in more detail in paragraph 3.5 on the new feminine body ideal and the self-surveillance of the female body.

Both Bartky and Bordo’s feminism is informed by the poststructuralist rejection of the binary oppositions (for example, male-female, speech-writing, rational-emotional, sign-signifier), and specifically by Foucault’s understanding of power as not something that is owned by some over others, but rather as a complex matrix of disciplinary procedures that exist in discourse and influence the individual from various axes. Post-structuralism is a term coined by American scholars for an intellectual movement that appeared in France in the 1960’s and the 1970’s and was represented by various intellectuals such as Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and Kristeva. The common element and a main characteristic of post-structuralism was its opposition to structuralism, rejection of the previous systems of knowledge and emphasis on the use of various approaches and perspectives in the reading of a cultural text in order to explore different or even contrasting interpretations. The development of post-structuralism went on a par with a proliferation of philosophies, such as feminism, Marxism, anarchism, phenomenology and nihilism, which were critical towards dominant Western philosophy and culture (Poster, 1989). Post-structuralism encompasses various strands of theory and is not a uniformed movement: in the context of the feminist understanding of the body it is important to note that Susan Bordo, whose work informs the perspective I have chosen for this thesis, highlights the embodied nature of knowledge which is always produced from a material standpoint, in contrast to Judith Butler whose theory tends more to a postmodern notion of a body being pure text constructed by regulative discourse as a ‘natural’ heterosexual subject (Butler, 1993). Even though Bordo and Butler disagree on the ‘nature’ of the body and knowledge production, a common element I have identified

and adopted for my work is the notion of femininity and the feminine subject as constructed in discourse through the use of representation.

The construction of the female body in relation to physical exercise has been researched by Precilla Choi in *Femininity and the Physically Active Woman* (2000). Choi draws on research results in the field of psychology to show how dominant ideas about femininity pose a barrier for women to engage in sports and physical activity, contributing this way to the problem of insufficient physical activity levels in the population of the developed Occidental countries. Choi argues that ‘the sporty type’, i.e. active, capable, agile, strong and competent, is constructed as masculine, while girls are educated to be passive and pretty. Even for female athletes, the ‘hegemonic femininity’ rules enforce the adaptation of their bodies to the heterosexual attractiveness imperative. “Bodily differences between men and women mean visible differences between masculinity and femininity” (Choi, 2000, pp. 9) and this is why in the context of sport, which implies a certain degree of undress and visibility of the body, differences must be reinforced rather than diminished in order to maintain the gendered social order. For ordinary women, the definitions of what a feminine body is/should be (slim, beautiful, small, clean, prepared to please the observer) and what it is not/should not be (big, powerful, sweaty, used for one’s own enjoyment) become the lenses through which physical activity is perceived, and influence women’s decisions on how, when, and in what type of exercise they want to engage. I will come back to the issues of feminine-appropriate exercise in chapters 1.4 and 1.5, but first I would like to provide a wider framework for the discussion of exercise and fitness in the contemporary Western culture by introducing the concepts of health imperative and healthism, which are the subject of the following chapter.

1.2. *Health imperative, healthism and the moral responsibility of being “fit”*

In an era when obesity and sedentary lifestyle are becoming one of the most serious public health concerns, we can also observe the growing importance of the moral imperative of maintaining a ‘healthy’ and good-looking body. Discipline in exercise is seen to be indicative of discipline in work productivity leading to economic success.

French philosopher Michel Foucault’s work is frequently cited in the feminist analyses of practices of disciplining of the bodies (see for example Dworkin and Wachs, 2009; Bordo, 1993; Markula, 2001). In my study the concept of the health imperative proves particularly useful in shedding some light on the phenomenon of the growing popularity of physical fitness. Foucault uses the strategy of “genealogy” – tracing the origin and the historical moment for the creation of and qualitative change of dominant discourses. The underlying assumption is that social change is not a linear process, but rather a series of eras and periods that all produce their own local knowledges, while be-

ing engaged in political struggle (Foucault, 1984a). The history of health is also a history of changing discourses: the concept of health comes into the picture when a need for the management of the population (demography, health levels, longevity etc.) is combined with the political practice of liberalism, which values autonomy and self-management of individuals: health becomes the individual responsibility of each citizen, and women in particular are held responsible for the health of the entire family (Foucault, 1990). This “health imperative”, in Foucault’s view, results from “the emergence of modern capitalism [which] is linked to the rise of nation-state, which is concerned to deliver a docile and healthy labour force for business.” (Miller, 2001, p.98). The social body is governed by means of “obeying the imperative of health: at once the duty of each and the objective of all” (Foucault, 1991, p.277). This includes dealing with problems such as infectious diseases, egg. Cholera, prostitution and hygiene maintenance. “The emergence of the health and physical well-being of the population in general as one of the essential objectives of political power” (Foucault, 1991, p.277) results in wide-scale health promotion practices. Foucault (1990) sees power as existing and operating with discourses which define what can be accepted as truth in the social reality. Power is then exercised through production of knowledge, truth and reality, which are different for each historical period. The 18th century marks the shift towards the notion of a human being as rational and autonomous – a citizen who can be managed efficiently without the use of force or threat of death. Sovereign power gives way to producing disciplined and docile bodies, aided by the surveillance methods, such as Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon - a prison where the watchtower is placed in the middle with the cells surrounding it in a circle, in a way that the guard based in the tower can see all prisoners at any time. The prisoners cannot see the guard, because the watchtower has mirror-reflection windows, and as a result, they never know whether they are being observed or not. This impossibility of finding out when control is exercised over their behaviour, the prisoners end up controlling their own behavior at all times (Foucault, 1984b, 1984c). The key term here is self-surveillance: a person surrounded by authority in the form of prescriptions, orders, rules, habits, etc. begins to internalize them and control his or her own behavior in order to continuously comply with the norms.

Biopower brings “life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and makes knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (Foucault, 1990, p.97). Bodies are now managed as part of governing the country due to their identification with politics (Miller, 2001). History produces bodies; there is no body that exists outside of history. There are certain types of individual bodies and then certain types of bodies of bodies of bodies which constitute the ‘molar body’ – the population. The body is a medium on which the history is written (Foucault, 1984a). The modern body is supposed to be healthy and fit and these qualities of the body point to high moral standing of the person as well, because they allow the person to work efficiently for the common benefit. The individual bodies are regulated socially in accordance with the economic imperative based on the idea of what constitutes productive work. Individuals who don’t work are considered idle, and idleness is the

source of all evil (Foucault, 1984b, 1984c). Therefore, in order to be considered valuable members of society, individuals must keep their bodies healthy and disciplined to assure their productivity.

What is interesting is that, according to Rose (2001), the second half of the 20th century marks a change in the understanding of health: it is not merely lack of disease or premature death, but an “optimization of one’s corporeality to embrace a kind of overall ‘wellbeing’ – beauty, success, happiness, sexuality” (Rose, 2001, pp. 17). The change goes hand-in-hand with citizens becoming clients who seek advice and expertise on how to fulfill their personal aspirations for health, which in turn brings about new possibilities for business to provide products and services for the self-management of risk. Jette points out that “the emergence of the fitness industry in the 1970’s and its growth into a multibillion-dollar industry by the 1980’s is also indicative of this trend toward personal responsibility for health” (Jette, 2006, pp. 336).

The health imperative is widely present in the media and in medical discourse. People are encouraged to take care of themselves, adopt a healthy diet, quit smoking and do exercise on a regular basis, as a means of maintaining their health and well-being. Of course, this promotion is very closely linked to advertisement of all sorts of products available on the market which help us to reduce cholesterol, provide the necessary vitamins and minerals, improve our sleep, or reduce body fat. Exercise machines and videos are advertised continuously on every tv-shopping channel, promising the maximum results in minimum time. Importantly, possessing a healthy and fit body is associated with positive moral characteristics of a person, such as strong will and self-control, but also with high social status, prosperity and generally with being a well-adapted and successful person. Whoever does not comply with the health imperative, as is the case of overweight people or heavy smokers is considered a morally deficient individual who has failed in their personal responsibility for maintaining a healthy body (Jette, 2006).

Feminist writer Sandra Bartky, in her discussion of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, says that:

“more is required of the body now than mere political allegiance or the appropriation of the products of its labor: the new discipline invades the body and seeks to regulate its very forces and operations, the economy and efficiency of its movements. The disciplinary practices Foucault describes are tied to peculiarly modern forms of the army, the school, the hospital, the prison, and the manufactory; the aim of these disciplines is to increase the utility of the body, to augment its forces.” (Bartky, 1998, p.25).

In my view modern gyms can be included as one of such spaces in which the disciplining of the bodies occurs, while women’s magazines become the carriers of the disciplining messages.

Shannon Jette (2006) in the introduction to her “Fit for Two? A Critical Discourse Analysis of *Oxygen Fitness Magazine*” draws on Foucault’s notions of disciplinary power and biopower in order to trace the changes in the dominant discourse on the issue of physical exercise for pregnant women. Up to the 1980’s any type of exercise more strenuous than a light stroll or low-intensity housework was discouraged on the grounds that the pregnant body was perceived as fragile (Jette, 2006). The situation changed in the 1980’s due to two factors: second-wave feminists, a generation of women who claimed equal rights to participate in sports, wanted to continue being active while pregnant, plus the general fitness movement was developing in North America, including the commodification of the “hard body” (Bordo, 1993). Research laboratories started investigating the relationship between pregnancy and exercise and on the basis of their findings, instead of risks of over-exertion the risks of not exercising were now highlighted for pregnant women. The shift in medical and scientific discourse went hand-in-hand with the development of a new sector of the fitness commodities market – one aimed specifically at exercising pregnant women. Jette concludes her analysis of *Oxygen*’s regular tips column for “fit pre-mama” with an observation that two strands of discourse are present, working together

“by creating norms for which the contemporary mothers-to-be (and new mothers) should strive [both discourses] play on the vulnerabilities of pregnant women, promoting not only self-surveillance of the body but also the purchase of the magazine” (Jette, 2006, pp. 346).

One strand is the “fit for two” notion, i.e. that the mother is responsible for the health of her unborn baby and should exercise in order to fulfill this (moral) obligation, and the other strand is based on the beauty imperative that dictates the particular outward appearance that women should strive to achieve (“mastery of the self”, Jette, 2006, pp. 346).

Parallel to the health imperative, the concept of healthism is one of the most important concepts used in Shari L. Dworkin and Faye Linda Wachs’s *Body Panic: Gender, Health and the Selling of Fitness*, published in 2009. In this fascinating study (one of the leading positions in the available literature on the subject of exercise in women’s magazines), the authors analyze a broad selection of women’s and men’s fitness magazines published in the United States between 1974 and 2005 and their main focus point is the construction of gendered social relations and how they are linked to the neo-liberal imperative for individuals to engage in consumption and take moral responsibility for their own health and self-improvement. Dworkin and Wachs relate that the concept of healthism was first introduced by Robert Crawford in the famous article “Healthism and the Medicalization of Everyday Life”

(1980). The main argument of the article is that, in a consumer society, new health consciousness is reflected in the fact that health is addressed on the level of the individual and not on the level of the society, which makes the health promotion strategies ineffective. Moreover,

“by elevating health to a super value, a metaphor for all that is good in life, healthism reinforces the privatization of the struggle for generalized well-being” (Crawford, 1980, pp. 365).

Dworkin and Wachs argue that

“the singular focus on personal responsibility within the text and imagery of health and fitness magazines reproduces discourses of healthism and operates to promote neoliberal ideologies that obscure the impact of government and structural contributions to health disparities” (Dworkin, Wachs, 2009, pp.11),

but at the same time it aids the selling of various products and creates multi-million dollar profits. The media participate in promotion of healthism mainly through publicity, where (privileged, i.e. white, heterosexual etc.) men’s and women’s bodies are objectified and reinforce notions of superior moral value and the performance of citizenship. The production of body panic by the media is evident not only in the imagery that is used (firm, shapely, muscular bodies) to invoke individualized feelings about the body, but also through the choice of signifiers which legitimizes the system and the privileged categories within it, while simultaneously stigmatizing individuals who fail to succeed in the “endless quest for bodily perfection” (Dworkin, Wachs, 2009, pp.13). As a result, efforts to produce solutions to the health problems are centered on an individual, and not social, level. I argue that this individual focus is reflected in the promotion of health and fitness for women and reinforces competitive comparisons and external (goal-based) motivation, which hinders long-term engagement in and enjoyment of, physical exercise.

Media disseminate discourses on body and health and the bodily ideals and the promoted

“body shape is a corporeal metaphor for health [...] not just medico-scientifically ‘good’ but also morally ‘good’ ” (Kirk and Colquhoun, 1989, pp. 430).

In a cultural setting where possessing a healthy and fit body is associated with positive moral characteristics of a person, such as strong will and self-control, but also with high social status, prosperity and generally with being a well-adapted and successful person, individuals are expected to comply with this imperative if they want to be respected. Whoever does not comply with the health imperative, as is the case of overweight people or heavy smokers, is considered a morally deficient

individual who has failed in their personal responsibility for maintaining a healthy body (Dworkin, Wachs, 2009; Crawford, 1980). Thus, doing exercise in the gym has also a guilt-reducing aspect. Guilt is induced by the fact that for the majority of women it is virtually impossible to attain the superimposed body ideal and they are deemed to fail in their efforts, because bodies are by definition different and women represent a variety of shapes and sizes. However, as possessing the ideal body is imbued with so many other qualities attributed to the personality and moral standing of the individual, gym becomes a plausible excuse and means of defence. A woman can defend herself from judgement by others and reduce her own sense of guilt and shame for not having achieved the ideal body with the claim that she goes to the gym on a regular basis, therefore it is not her fault if her body does not resemble the ideal one. After all, she is doing what she is supposed to and she is doing what the health imperative requires her to do. Women who regularly attended gym classes were interviewed by Recican and Hadley (1988) and while they saw the gym as an environment where they could demonstrate their fitness level, enjoy a sense of achievement and climb the fitness ladder a bit higher, they simultaneously experienced feelings of guilt and laziness whenever they failed to exercise regularly.

In the Judeo-Christian culture, guilt can be assuaged by confessional practices tied to redemption through a spiritual figure the sinner confides in. Dworkin and Wachs (2009) provide examples of how various features of popular fitness magazines act as a confessional for individual readers: failures to achieve gendered body ideals are confessed on the pages of the magazine, followed by a constant search for remedies that will make it possible. The confession is, however, only available to some and not to others:

“While middle-class bodies are able to use fitness magazines in the process of confession and redemption to produce pleasurable and fulfilling identities, those unable to fully participate in the consumption necessary to attain redemption are stigmatized through the use of a number of cultural tropes — with ‘immorality’ being a popular one. One can see examples of this in the current ‘obesity epidemic’ and the framing of its attendant effects. While corporate profits in the food and diet industry soar, consumers negotiate a morass of mixed messages. (Dworkin, Wachs, 2009, pp. 14).

The importance of maintaining a ‘fit’ and healthy (or, better said, healthy-looking) body lies in the moral value attributed to corporeal self-discipline, which in the dominant discourse is very tightly related to the consumption of certain goods and services. Conscious citizens consume in order to attain an ideal body, which in turn promises a possibility of stepping up the social ladder. The continuous investment in one’s body is the reflection of another important characteristic of the contemporary understanding of fitness – body as capital.

1.3. *Body as capital*

In the capitalist society, the fitness regimes directed at restructuring bodies contribute to the body of an individual becoming his or her capital, a sign, a fetish to be looked at by other people and judged in moral terms. The resulting alienation from the body in turn spirals the consumption of goods and services – the body is put on display in order to maintain or acquire position and identity. The body ideals produced in mass media are inevitably bound to consumption and, as such, do not speak to all kinds of bodies, excluding some while making others seem “natural”. Fitness magazines, as part of the postindustrial economy media, are vehicles of advertisement of the products and transmit messages whose objective is to create cultural ideals and then encourage readers to self-surveil their compliance with those ideal and buy products that are supposed to help them achieve it. (Dworkin, Wachs, 2009).

Ideal body becomes a marker of the self and morality in a postindustrial society:

“Control of the body remains a central organizing principle in postindustrial society. The need to control the unruly body emerges in the postindustrial world as a marker of the self. Linked to personal displays that demonstrate success or failure, the presentation of the body in the twenty-first century signifies a variety of meanings, not the least of which is one’s moral worth. While the fat body remains stigmatized as lazy, undisciplined, or as a poor member of the social body, the fit body becomes a metaphor for success, morality, and good citizenship.” (Dworkin, Wachs, 2009, pp. 38).

Roberta Sassatelli describes how, for Italian gym goers independently of their gender, “a body with a well-defined outline, erect posture, more muscle and less fat is also appreciated as a ‘sign’ of the subject’s ‘energy’, ‘vitality’ and ‘strength’” and it also acquires ceremonial properties. The author writes:

“A fit body, which manifests its energy externally, capable of sustaining a broad range of gestures, movements and exercises, tells us something about the subject. Although body language is not the object of working out in the gym, a fit body acquires a symbolic value. In particular, as we shall see, it hints at a strong subject, a subject in control of him/herself.” (Sassatelli, 2001, p.403)

This working out the body is characterized by instrumentality – the body is defined as an energy reserve which can be exploited later in everyday life and the workout is a way to maintain this energy reserve in good shape and functioning. Exercise in a fitness club is perceived as a natural way

of transforming the body in order to mould it to the healthy and lean ideal, as opposed to plastic surgery or make-up. Gym-goers experience feelings of heightened self-esteem and satisfaction for ‘making the most of what they got’ in a natural way. Exercisers are aware of the boundaries to the body’s plasticity and of the fact that there is only so much they can do to change and ‘improve’ their bodies, which in turn helps them accept their non-ideal bodies. They report being happy about the fact, that they are doing something good for their health in a ‘natural’ way. According to Sassatelli, one must not forget that fitness clubs are commercial organizations which

“acquire value by referring to individuals as subjects who choose according to their own needs and who are responsible for their choices. The subject which fitness sets up as a model is an autonomous subject with specific goals, who takes action to achieve them and who believes that the best way to reach them is to act directly and rationally, following the advice of experts and carrying out specialist practices. It is a subject who must build him/herself in a special way, making him/herself into something that can be calculated and foreseeable, and at the same time present him/herself as the only true and natural source of irreplaceable value.” (Sassatelli, 2001, p.407)

1.4. *Roberta Sassatelli's notion of the commercialization of discipline*

Roberta Sassatelli (2001) develops the concept of commercialization of discipline in the introduction to her study of Italian gym-goers. In comparison to state-organized physical activity, characteristic of the 19th century nation states, the modern gyms (which are part of the fitness industry) cater to individual consumers and provide an environment where each consumer can pick the activities that they find desirable and create their own exercise routine. The shift from the collective politicized gymnastics, whose objective was the creation of good citizens, to the individual depoliticized personal fitness routines based on the exerciser’s desires, can be observed progressively since World War II. It is accompanied by the commercialization of goods and services that are being provided to the consumer. Disciplinary bodily practices enter the sphere of leisure and their meaning changes as the body is perceived as a prolongation and an expression of the ideal self:

“The commercialization of techniques for disciplining the body implies, however, that people pay for the time during which they exercise. By appealing to people who pay and who can always decide that they no longer need the gym, fitness emphasizes the personal strategic dimension and thus presents itself as an expression of personal willpower. [...] In today’s collective consciousness, a more docile and more useful body is an enhancement of the individual,

who, before being a subject, citizen or worker, is first and foremost a sovereign sacred entity from which desires and choices emanate.” (Sassatelli, 2001, pp. 399)

Physical fitness culture has also another aspect: that of style and highlighting one’s individuality. As Celia Lury (1996) argues, in the post-fordist society, in which production contributes to the expansion and consolidation of the so-called middle class looking to secure a separate identity in their pursuit of liberated and expressive lifestyles, there exists a very strong commitment to fashion and a rapid and playful transformation of style. Consuming means experimenting with self-identity, but may also produce anxiety, such as is the case of new petty bourgeoisie, which is uneasy with their own bodies and resorts to health and body maintenance. In the words of Dorothy Smith

“as mass media evolve, image and doctrine become pervasive and invasive. Through the discourse of femininity, the fashion industry coordinates or seeks to coordinate the multiplicity of local sites within which desire is translated into demand for the commodities it produces.” (Smith, 1995, pp.173)

In the particular case of popular women’s magazines, it is evident that as commercial publications largely dependent on advertising, they aim at convincing the reader that obtaining physical fitness and attractiveness is possible through the purchase of particular clothes, shoes, training gear, diet products and body-perfecting services. As Celia Lury (1996) argues, the use of consumer goods is increasingly structured by their symbolic or expressive aspects, rather than by their utility and practical or instrumental value. This process of stylization (through choosing of a particular range of goods) in contemporary societies allows people to demonstrate their individuality and personal style and

“[...]is seen to be a central life project for the individual. As a member of a particular lifestyle grouping, the individual actively uses consumer goods – clothes, the home, furnishings, interior décor, car, holidays, food and drink, as well as cultural goods such as music, film and art – in ways which indicate that groupings’ taste or sense of style.” (Lury, 1996, pp.80)

The commercialized fitness needs to be purchased in order to transform the flawed body into a desired and culturally acceptable one. According to Dworkin and Wachs (2009), the contemporary “culture of lack” which is created in the dominant discourse, delivers the message of an unacceptable imperfection of the body that needs to be transformed through various types of body work:

“Thus, media forces in particular, and advertising specifically, conspire with more diffuse notions of power in contemporary society to simultaneously produce a ‘culture of lack’ and an

endless array of products to assuage the lack, or at least the stigma of possessing it.” (Dworkin, Wachs, 2009, pp. 11)

In the culture of lack, we are frequently told that our bodies need to be transformed into slim, well-toned and tanned bodies oozing health and well-being. ‘Natural’ bodies are not acceptable, as the average lifestyle of our era is too sedentary and unhealthy and as such produces flawed bodies with too little muscle and too much fat tissue. Bodies need constant discipline and work in order to counteract the inherent imperfection, and fitness products and service are offered as a remedy. Paraphrasing the words of Roberta Sassatelli (2001) we can also talk about the commercialization of the keep-fit culture - a process in which physical fitness of an individual becomes a commodity, or rather becomes achievable through a purchase of certain commodities (such as exercise equipment) and services (such as gym memberships).

Sassatelli also observed the creation of a self-determining subject, aware of his/her body and its limitations, but ‘making the most out of what they got’ through the exercise routine selected on the basis of expert knowledge and rational decision-making. In terms of gender differences in fitness promotion, Sassatelli argues that the ideal of fitness for men and women is very similar and is based on the compact and toned body with a good muscular definition. While cellulite is the biggest aesthetic problem for women, fat around the waist area is the “threat” for men. Men and women alike report declaring a war on fat and claim to exercise in order to substitute the fat tissue with muscle tissue. The reduction of body size is not perceived as important, and “every shape [is accepted – EZ] when it is toned” (Sassatelli, 2009, pp. 401), because the aesthetics is based on functionality of the muscle which allows a person to move and look in a more harmonious and flexible way. While inter-gender comparison is not the aim of this thesis, in the next chapter I will look at Sandra Bartky’s concept of new female body ideal and discuss it in relation to the exercise promotion targeted specifically at women. I will also present Susan Bordo’s arguments on the society’s fear of female fat as fear of female power and on the modern bulimic personality, which is created in a system where people are continuously encouraged to engage in ceaseless consumption but at the same time self-restrain and self-discipline are highly valued on a moral level.

1.5. *Exercise promotion aimed at women as targeting the imperfect body that needs to be improved*

It is well-documented in feminist writing (see for example Bartky, 1988; Blood, 2005, and Bordo, 1993) that the ideals of female bodily appearance have been changing dynamically throughout the 19th century. In contemporary Western culture, the body to strive for is becoming ever thinner and more toned, although still retains the ‘typically feminine’ features such as large breasts. If there is one

common element that characterizes the female body ideal, it is that there has existed some form of it or another depending on the historical period. Susan Bordo (1993) traces how the current aesthetic of slenderness has its roots in the late Victorian era, when rich aristocrats started dieting in order to distinguish themselves from the bourgeois *nouveaux-riche* middle class whose newly acquired wealth was demonstrated by their round stomachs. The ideal was taken up by the middle class, and today’s preoccupation with fat, diet and slenderness “may function as one of the most powerful normalizing mechanisms of our century, insuring the production of self-monitoring and self-disciplining ‘docile bodies’ sensitive to any departure from social norms and habituated to self-improvement and self-transformation in the service of those norms.” (Bordo, 1993, pp. 186)

The disciplining practices are described by Sandra Bartky in “Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power” (Bartky, 1998). The author highlights that even though both women and men are subjected to the same disciplinary practices, there exist specifically feminine practices that aim at producing a “body of a certain size and general configuration” and especially ones that “are directed at toward the display of this body as an ornamented surface” (Bartky, 1998, p.27). The female experience is shaped by the pressures to conform to a current beauty ideal. When this ideal is a slim and small silhouette, resembling an adolescent boy or a prepubescent girl, the ensuing practices will include dieting as a means of reducing the body’s size and the discipline unravels itself in suppressing the body’s appetite. Bartky further argues that a current aesthetic of femininity requires a female body to be slender, fragile and devoid of muscular strength, which in turn results in lower possibility for women to resist physical abuse from strong and muscular men. This aesthetic perpetuates the subordination of women to men in other spheres of life. Although she sees the modern exercise regimes as allowing women to “develop more muscular strength and endurance that was heretofore allowed” (Bartky, 1998, pp.35), she still insists that women, according to the aesthetic regime, must by no means become more muscular than men, or become large. Female bodies are more limited than male bodies when it comes to the amount of space they can occupy and the boldness of movements they can legitimately exercise.

All types of exercise serve as a means to maintain health and conform to the demands of the health imperative. But the way in which exercise for women is designed does not offer real possibilities of exploring the capacity of one’s own body and of the enjoyment of various types of movement and ways in which the human body can be transformed and used. If female-appropriate exercise doesn’t fully serve the purpose of maximising the female body’s potential, as would be logical if we were to follow the health imperative, what constitutes the obstacle? According to Sandra Bartky (1998), it is the subordination of women that shapes women’s experience of their bodies.

Susan Bordo, throughout the essays that compose her influential book *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Bordo, 1993), explores the contemporary tyranny of slen-

derness from a gender and philosophical perspective, in relation to consumer culture and the proliferation of eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia, together with the problem of obesity. Bordo develops her analysis primarily on the media representation of female bodies. Her main point is that it is not low body weight and small size itself that are expected from women in contemporary Western culture, it is rather the trimness and slenderness of the body, the lack of unsightly “bulges” and “flabs”, the contention and disciplining of the body evident in its tight and smooth profile that forms the body ideal in the current era. This ideal can either be “demonstrated through sleek, minimalist lines or firmly developed muscles” (Bartky, 1993, pp. 211) and is symptomatic of the need to control and suppress desire in a consumer culture where abundance of goods and constant encouragement of unrestrained consumption elevates self-discipline and the possibility to repress one’s bodily desires to a higher moral level. In other words, in a culture where an average person is bombarded with advertising inciting the careless indulgence in consumption of goods, one who does not give in to the pressure and is able to contain the wants of their own body, gains an uplifting feeling of self-mastery and being better than the rest. The connotation between the suppressing of the body’s hungers and other desires and the elevation of the spirit is very well rooted in the Western philosophical thought, dating back to Plato and Augustine, and based on the body-mind dualism as expressed by Descartes and the ascetic practices of Christianity. By resisting the body’s hungers one gains virtues typically categorized as “male”: control, self-management, power, being the captain of one’s soul, the triumph of the soul and mind over the body and the resulting moral superiority. While this is true for both men and women, women’s bodies are subject to greater pressure of bodily discipline for two reasons: one is that, historically the hierarchical dualism has constructed the dangerous and appetitive principle of the body as “female” (women as more bound to the body and nature through their bodily constitution, hormones, menstruation, menopause etc.), while the strong will and the supremacy of the mind over the body as “male”; and the other reason is that women’s (bodily and other) desires and expansion are met with greater anxiety in an era when the traditional gender configuration is being challenged and women enter the traditionally male areas. Following Foucauldian understanding of power as working also “from below”, Bordo highlights that women gain a sense of empowerment from transforming their bodies through diet and exercise regimes, as they “associate slenderness with self-management, by way of experience of newfound freedom (from a domestic destiny) and empowerment in the public arena” (Bordo, 1993, pp. 212).

Before I go on to explain the method and the purpose of my analysis of Polki.pl, I would like to point to the tendency of mass media and women’s magazines to focus almost exclusively on a beautiful body, as illustrated by Dworkin and Wachs (2009) in the history of *Women’s Health and Fitness* - the only magazine incorporating the feminist stance, available on the US market in the time-frame covered by the research period (approximately 10 years, 1999-2009) of the authors’ *Body Panic* book. The uniqueness of this magazine was reflected in the choice of images, topics and approaches to wom-

en’s sport: not too flesh-revealing pictures of women, without the intention to please and seduce the viewer, articles on women athletes and improvement of sports performance, and coverage of key debates in the field of sports from the feminist perspective. After the acquisition of the magazine by a large publisher Condé Nast, the focus of the magazine changed from addressing social and cultural change to prescriptions of self-improvement, and from promotion of sports activities to fitness and beauty-oriented ones, accompanied by publicity for new athletic gear. After this initial change, in the year 2000 the magazine was discontinued and replaced with *Self* – a magazine with a fitness and beauty profile. As the authors comment, “replacing a magazine that covered women’s sports with one that focused on fit aesthetics raises a number of broader cultural questions and reflects contemporary societal currents” (Dworkin, Wachs, 2009, pp. 131)

In the context of exercise promotion in women’s magazines, the gender difference in disciplining practices as discussed by Bartky (1998) manifests itself in the kind of exercise that is deemed “appropriate” for women: narrow range, low-exertion exercise with many repetitions but little of no weight attached, which is intended to make women’s bodies slim, proportional and lean, but not too big nor too muscular, and not too strong either. Very energetic exercise on a large surface, involving the body’s expansion in space, is rarely advised. Therefore, the typically female exercise is directed towards sculpting a perfect feminine body, even though it is advertised as a means of achieving health and physical and psychological well-being, in accordance with the health imperative. Women are expected to follow this imperative by self-policing of their diet and exercise habits.

2. Methodology

2.1. *The starting point*

The purpose of this thesis is to explore, through the analysis of discourse of the fitness section of women’s online portal Polki.pl, how the health imperative and its emphasis on regular exercise as one of the means to achieve health, merges with the culturally prevalent female body ideal and with the commercial interests of the developing fitness industry and is translated into disciplining of women’s bodies in the fitness promotion.

Women’s magazines in the context of women’s fitness have been quite a popular object of analysis for feminists (see Dworkin and Wachs, 2009; Blood, 2005; Jette, 2006). Naomi Wolf in her influential book *The Beauty Myth* (1991) argues that women’s magazines provoke extreme reactions of women due to the extreme contradictions between the positive and the negative elements of the magazines’ message. They are trivialized but represent women’s mass culture in a generally male-

oriented culture: “women’s magazines are the only products of popular culture that (unlike romances) change with women’s reality, are mostly written by women for women about women’s issues, and take women’s concerns seriously” (Wolf, 1991, pp.71). Wolf further argues that women recognize as their own the split between feminism and beauty myth, i.e. the necessity to pay for scope and power of female liberation with beauty thinking. This is reflected in the formula of magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*: “aspirational, individualist, can-do tone that you should be your best and nothing should get in your way” combined with “the deadliest version of the beauty myth money can buy” (Wolf, 1991, pp.69). My analysis was therefore informed by the feminist theory in how I looked for how exercise is promoted for women with a special emphasis in the beauty issue and on the possible empowering and oppressive aspects of the dominant discourse.

2.2. *The discourse analysis*

I have decided to use Wetherell, Potter and Edwards's (Wetherell, Potter, 1992; Edwards, Potter, 1992) method for discourse analysis. In Wetherell and Potter’s view, the context of the discourse and the social practice of its use (‘situated use’) should be examined by discourse analysts, focusing on the implementation of the discourse in actual settings. The difference from Foucault’s approach to discourse (as described in the introduction to this thesis) is that discourse is analyzed in everyday conversations and texts instead of “attempting to derive ‘discourses’ from some set of materials, and then consider how those discourses work together and against one another in the abstract” (Wetherell, Potter, 1992, pp. 90). The authors coined the term ‘interpretive repertoires’ which, unlike ‘discourses’, refer to:

“[...] broadly discernible clusters of terms, descriptions, and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images [...], systems of signification, such as the building blocks used for manufacturing versions of actions, self and social structures in talk.” (Wetherell, Potter, 1992, pp. 91).

Interpretive repertoires allow for understanding of the content and structure of discourse. They can also act as ‘common sense’, taken-for-granted sets of meaning that do not require further explanation. The relationship between discourse and subjectivity is characterized by the fact that identities and subjectivities, in the same way as realities, are being instantiated in and constituted by discourse in a particular cultural setting – interpretive repertoires provide people with subject positions that can be occupied and appropriated (Blood, 2005, pp.62). Sylvia Blood shares the view “of the body and subjectivity as discursive products – a view in which all human experience is understood as cultural and social practice” (Blood, 2005, pp.43).

Sylvia K. Blood (2005) applied Wetherell and Potter’s method in her analysis of the practices of subjectification and the interpretive repertoires in “body image” discourse in popular women’s magazines. As Blood highlights, the common term “discourse analysis” has been widely used over the recent years in relation to various research styles (see the description of Dworkin and Wachs’s approach below) and in the described approach one of its main assumptions is that language, understood as people’s everyday talk and writing, cannot be taken to be the mere representation of personality traits, cognitions, attitudes existing in the individual mind, or of objects and events that exist in the external world. Instead, discourse analysis understands language as an action-oriented medium of construction of reality, highlighting its functional and constitutive nature. In order to construct a solid and factual reality, language is organized in ways which make particular reality appear ‘real’, while undermining the alternative realities. This approach has been developed by drawing on traditions of ethnomethodology, literary theory, linguistic philosophy, rhetoric and conversation analysis, and post-structuralism (Blood, 2005, pp.60). Fran Tonkiss (1998, pp. 246) defines discourse analysis as involving “[...] a perspective on language which sees [it] not as reflecting reality [...], but as constructing and organizing that social reality for us.”

Shannon Jette (2006) in her research on representations of pregnancy, fitness and health in Australian *Oxygen* magazine also uses discourse analysis to demonstrate how medical discourse that encourages individual health management and moral responsibility is merged with the concept of an ideal female body and accompanied by publicity for health products to suggest that through discipline and consumption a woman can become a ‘fit’ mother. Jette, in a similar way as Dworkin and Wachs (2009), adopts an approach based on examining the text in its specific context, a more “ground level approach” to discourse analysis, which “makes use of linguistic analytical methods to examine how texts are implicated in power relations (Mills, 2004, pp. 34). The difference from the Foucauldian approach lies in analyzing texts as embedded in the specific context, rather than on the basis of the broader perspective of the effect produced by texts in a given discourse. Jette examines the text focusing on “the type of world being created in the text and the overall thematic organization” (Jette, 2006, pp. 340), acknowledging that even though texts as polysemic are open to interpretation, it is possible to identify the dominant or preferred meaning that producers of a text encourage in readers with similar cultural backgrounds (Lewis, 1991).

The third major piece of literature that served as inspiration and theoretical and methodological basis for my investigation, Dworkin and Wachs’s *Body Panic: Gender, Health and the Selling of Fitness* (Dworkin, Wachs, 2009) is yet another example of discourse analysis method being used in the context of popular magazines, the added element being the intersectionality perspective.

“Using content and textual analysis as the method, we focus on the cultural assertions underlying the text of articles and imagery. [...] This technique was central to our being able to examine the ways in which women’s and men’s bodies are differentially and relationally constructed while paying close attention to intersectional analysis — the ways in which class, race, and sexuality are implicated at the same time.” (Dworkin, Wachs, 2009, pp. 25).

The authors borrow the concept of “studying up” on the contemporary cultural ideologies from Kane and Pearce (2002) – at the level of textual analysis, this consists of the open coding scheme for subsequent mapping of the emerging themes, with special emphasis on references to gender, race, sexuality, class, etc. In contrast to “studying down” on the moral panic of the behavior of the oppressed groups, the “studying up” approach is an innovative way to produce arguments on body panic:

“we instead used the method of studying up to identify the signifiers and images that constitute idealized discourses of ‘health.’ We argue that body panic works through discourses of healthism and the way in which media constructs the relationship between what is included and excluded in the media frame — through the preferred meanings and images that are marked with moral codes of citizenship, motherhood, manhood, womanhood, and more. (Dworkin, Wachs, 2009, pp. 26).

Discourse analysis is a method that allows the identification of the dominant meaning of the texts published in women’s magazines as reproduced in the Polki.pl online portal. The aim of my analysis is trace the main emerging themes, or interpretive repertoires, paying special attention to what aspects of exercise are considered important, what the aim of the exercise is, what types of exercise are promoted, what arguments are provided for validation of the fitness advice and who the fitness experts are, i.e. who is speaking and from which perspective and position.

2.3. *The sources*

An online Polish portal for women www.polki.pl (eng. The Polish Women) was chosen for analysis of the fitness-related publications. The portal belongs to Edipresse – an editorial which publishes various women’s magazines in Poland - and as such includes articles from these magazines. Edipresse is a publishing company based in Lousanne in Switzerland, currently publishing around 180 titles (mainly dailies and magazines) in several European and Asian countries. According to the publisher itself,

“Edipresse Group is a multicultural and multilingual federation of publishers that respects national traditions and standards. It entrusts control and responsibility for its publications to re-

spective national branches. Each branch enjoys full latitude to create periodicals that best relate to customers within their respective countries and each title published by Edipresse has its own individual character and style.”

(http://www.edipresse.pl/index.php?/pl/le_groupe/a_propos_d_edipresse, last accessed 23/06/2011)

The Polish section of the group, Edipresse Polska, has been a joint stock company since 2000, fully owned by Swiss capital. The publishing focus of Edipresse Polska are women’s magazines and publications focused on the family, “periodicals of a family shaping nature” as we can read on the publisher’s dedicated website. Edipresse prides itself in setting new trends on the Polish market by launching two completely new magazines, the designer “Dom & Wnętrze” (House and Interior) and “Party” – glossy on the life of celebrities, while two of the magazines that are currently in Edipresse’s portfolio have been published in Poland since the 1960’s: “Przyjaciółka” (Friend) and “Twoje Dziecko” (Your baby). The coherent portfolio which includes lifestyle, parenting, design, people, tips and true story magazines, 19 titles in total, is according to Edipresse responsible for its press market success and the second position on the Polish market in terms of both individual sales and advertising revenue. (http://www.edipresse.pl/index.php?/pl/le_groupe/a_propos_d_edipresse, last accessed 23/06/2011)

Polki.pl has been available online for over 10 years, since 2000 and according to the publisher, it is “the best website for active women”. The target group is “young, active and curious” women between 20 and 34 years old. Its mission is to give advice and help in the most relevant problems in the areas of beauty, fashion, health, psychology and culture

(http://www.edipresse.pl/index.php?/pl/produits_et_activites/internet/polki_pl, last accessed 23/06/2011).

The common portfolio of Edipresse and Polki.pl includes 3 magazines about maternity and babies: Mamo to ja (Mommy it’s me), Twój Maluszek (Your little one) and Twoje Dziecko (Your baby); one magazine dedicated to house decoration Dom & Wnętrze (House and Interior); two magazines with tips and advice regarding the household and other “feminine” preoccupations: Przyjaciółka (Friend) and Pani Domu (The Homemaker); one beauty magazine Uroda (Beauty), one magazine dedicated to health Vita and two magazines about celebrities Viva and Party. The portal contains articles from all these magazines, divided into several main sections by which to browse them, such as Uroda (beauty), Zdrowie i psychologia (health and psychology), Moda (fashion), Dieta (diet), Fitness (fitness) Kuchnia (kitchen), Dom (home), Rodzina (family), Seks (sex), Horoskop (horoscope), Kultura (culture), Finanse (finances). Curiously, one of the main sections is Rossman – a Dutch chain of drug and beauty products stores. When clicking on the Rossman tab, we are redirected to a different web-

site, www.rossnet.pl, containing tips and news about the beauty products; while when we click on other sections, we are presented with a list of articles to read, again divided into small sub-sections. Articles are pre-assigned by the publisher to the particular category and can also be browsed and selected on the basis of the tags. i.e. key words, such as for example “instructor’s advice” or “running”. When clicking on a tag associated with a particular article, the website displays all other articles associated with the same tag, in order to make it easier for the reader to find articles that might interest them.



Figure 1. Screenshot of Polki.pl homepage with pictures and links to articles.

(<http://polki.pl/>, accessed on 08/07/2011)

For the purposes of this research, only articles available under the Fitness section were included in the sample. The Fitness section has a home page (Strona główna) and 7 sub-sections: Fitness video (Fitness video), Odchudzanie (Weightloss), Płaski brzuch (Flat stomach), Zgrabna pupa (Shape-ly bum), Nogi (Legs), Cellulit (Cellulite), Joga, tai chi, pilates (Yoga, Tai Chi, Pilates). There is also a link to access a blog website with notes from other internet users about their experiences with diet and fitness, http://bloggerki.pl/dieta-i-fitness_bfd.html



Figure 2. Screenshot of Polki.pl fitness section, articles and pictures available in the sub-section “Legs”. (http://polki.pl/fitness_nogi.html, last accessed 08/07/2011)

All the characteristics described above make the Fitness section of polki.pl a very complete source for the analysis of discourse on women’s fitness in popular press. The portal contains the full-text electronic version of articles that appear in the traditional printed versions of the Edipresse women’s magazines, but conveniently grouped by keywords and easily accessible online.

Another important factor that makes Polki.pl a good choice for my analysis is that the popularity of the website has been growing quite quickly in the past few years. In September 2008 Polskie Badania Internetu Sp. z o.o. (Polish Internet Research agency, PBI) and a research company Gemius SA, conducted research on the popularity of Polish internet portals measured by the number of visits on each website, Megapanel PBI/Gemius (2008)¹.

¹ Source: Megapanel PBI/Gemius, September 2008. According to this publication, the aggregation was authorized by Gemius SA and the thematic categories were established and accepted by the Research Council of the Megapanel PBI/Gemius. The ranking presented applies to the portals grouped under the Lifestyle thematic category, where the number of subjects was N=16530 and demographic structure data from NetTrack Millward Brown SMG/KRC analysis was used. (Megapanel PBI/Gemius, 2008, http://files.gemius.pl/Case_Studies/gemiusUsability/portal_polki.pl_skuteczność_badan, last accessed 23/06/2011)

Ranking witryn według zasięgu miesięcznego					
STYL ŻYCIA					
	Nazwa	Użytkownicy (real users)	Liczba odsłon	Zasięg	Audyt site-centric
1	Onet.pl - Styl życia	4 264 655	202 890 349	27,37%	tak
2	o2.pl - Styl życia	3 714 350	232 846 547	23,84%	tak
3	Wirtualna Polska - Styl życia	3 189 367	241 042 054	20,47%	tak
4	Gazeta.pl - Styl życia	2 623 417	61 634 864	16,84%	tak
5	INTERIA.PL - Styl życia	2 342 889	85 841 316	15,04%	tak
6	kozaczek.pl	1 225 606	19 645 017	7,87%	tak
7	we-dwoje.pl - styl życia	1 020 452	7 099 482	6,55%	tak
8	wizaz.pl	980 648	21 711 573	6,29%	tak
9	G+J Guj.pl - Styl Życia	754 529	13 139 181	4,84%	tak
10	dlastudenta.pl	686 829	8 454 865	4,41%	tak
11	Grupa Styl.fm	531 882	39 159 826	3,41%	
12	Grupa medigo.pl	529 316	2 140 310	3,40%	
13	gotowanie.wkl.pl	472 795	6 708 685	3,03%	tak
14	polki.pl	453 354	6 665 291	2,91%	tak
15	rynekmedyczny.pl	447 868	2 758 812	2,87%	tak
16	sluzbazdrowia.pl	408 505	2 994 315	2,62%	
17	poradnikzdrowie.pl	405 015	1 614 266	2,60%	tak
18	zeberka.pl	389 526	5 075 988	2,50%	tak
19	Grupa Studentnews.pl - Styl życia	374 099	2 186 192	2,40%	tak

Figure 3. Megapanel RBI/Gemius 2008 research results table, with data corresponding to various online portals grouped under the “Lifestyle” category.

([http://files.gemius.pl/Case_Studies/gemiusUsability/portal_polki.pl skuteczność badan](http://files.gemius.pl/Case_Studies/gemiusUsability/portal_polki.pl_skuteczność_badan), last accessed 23/06/2011)

The number of “real users” (defined as the estimated number of users from the target group who have displayed the website at least once during the past month) was 453 354, while the number of individual single displays of the website) was 6.665,291. Reach, defined as the ratio of the number of users who visited the given website at least once a month in the past month to the total number of internet users in the same timeframe, was estimated at 2,91%. It is the only portal included in the Lifestyle category (Styl Życia) that is specific for women and includes a fitness section, and it appears that the readership is wide enough for this analysis in comparison to the estimated monthly readership of the individual magazines. The wide national reach of Edipresse women’s magazines in Poland is further demonstrated in the data from April 2011, where the Megapanel PBI/Gemius research design grouped Polki.pl together with other Edipresse editorial portals under a common category Grupa Edipresse.pl – Styl Życia (Edipresse Group – Lifestyle). The number of “real users” rose to 2.699.894 out of which 2.118.200 were women, the number of displays to 45.017.749 and the reach to 14,20% (Megapanel RBI/Gemius, 2011, <http://pbi.org.pl/index.php/ida/2/?aktualnoscID=146&p=1>, last accessed 23/06/2011).

My analysis of Polki.pl was based primarily on articles marked with the “Best evaluated” description, which refers to the evaluation that readers can give each article they read by choosing the appropriate number of stars for it, according to whether they liked it or not. The articles with this de-

scription were not only the most liked by women who read them, they were also longer and contained a more detailed structure of argument than many other articles available in the fitness section, which were pretty much limited to instructions of how to do a certain exercise. I looked specifically for articles that gave a bit more of a background and theory to the recommendations of physical activity, rather than being just recipes for particular exercise routines. The results of the analysis are discussed in the next chapter of this thesis.

3. The emerging themes

Inspired by Precilla L. Choi’s work and specifically by Chapter 5 of her book *Femininity and the Physically Active Woman* (2000) I looked at the fitness articles in Polki.pl with a particular focus on the oppressive and empowering factors of the exercise promotion. Choi highlights the fact that in contemporary society, physical activity (along with diet and cosmetic industry and surgery) is commercialized as an element of the beauty culture and women’s motivation to exercise and their choices with regards to exercise type are likely to be influenced by the “modern day body beautiful” (2000, pp. 64) which is slender and toned. Thinness has been equated with health and physical activity is seen as a way to achieve beauty related weight loss, resulting in physical activity being perceived as a beauty activity rather than a health one. As I will demonstrate in the discussion of the results of my discourse analysis of Polki.pl, this popular women’s portal uses the same beauty-oriented discourse with very few elements that could be considered to have an empowering component.

On the basis of the literature reviewed for this work, I expected the promotion of exercise in popular women’s magazines, represented here by Polki.pl online portal, to be in many cases framed as promotion of health, while in reality to be aimed at convincing women to conform to current beauty ideals through exerting discipline over the always imperfect body. Foucault’s notions of health imperative, Crawford’s notion of healthism, Dworkin and Wachs’ notion of body of capital, Sassatelli’s concept of commercialization of discipline and feminist analysis of the tyranny of slenderness (Bordo) and of self-disciplining of female bodies (Bartky) form the theoretical background of this thesis, and my preliminary idea of the interconnectedness of these concepts was the following: in contemporary Western culture, health has been defined not only as lack of disease, but as a full realisation of the potential of the individual. Maintenance of good health came to be understood as the individual and moral responsibility of every person, while succeeding in the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle became equated with success in other domains of life, such as economic and social position. In an era where obesity is becoming one of the major health problems, pressure is put on individuals not to engage in over-consumption and war is waged on fat – slenderness becomes the desired characteristic of the body. The body is every person’s capital which has to be invested in, because

attractive appearance and high energy levels guarantee achievement of other goals the person sets in their life. Physical exercise is one of the most efficient ways of achieving and maintaining a slender body and this is why contemporary capitalist culture provides instant response in the form of a specialized fitness industry – the keep-fit culture is commercialized. Up to this point the situation is similar for both men and women. Gender comes into play when the ideal body is defined differently for men and for women, the latter being expected not to develop “too much” muscle and engage in sports that are “feminine appropriate” thus limiting the female experience of one’s own physique and not allowing women to develop strength, agility, team play skills, enjoyment from being active outside of the imperative of heterosexual attractiveness.

What I found in the fitness section articles in Polki.pl was in fact an almost exclusive focus on beauty, with little mention of health or the benefits that could be achieved from possessing a healthy and fit body in terms of success in other areas of life. The importance of exercise for women was highlighted mainly as a means to achieving the perfect appearance, with an accompanying fragmentation of the body and different types of exercise prescribed for sculpting of different body parts. Glamorization of fitness and promotion of specialized products, services and expert advice serve the interests of fitness industry, while exercise adapted to the personality type is an element that links the commercialization of fitness with the ethic of self-improvement as individual responsibility.

Through the analysis of the contents of 43 articles of the fitness section of Polki.pl, selected on the basis of the level of complicatedness of the text (I rejected articles that were limited to specific instructions on how to perform certain exercises), I have identified the major emerging themes, which I discuss in detail in this chapter:

1. Fragmentation of the (fit) body with focus on improving the “problematic” areas
2. Glamorization of fitness, where celebrities are used as role models for beauty and fitness
3. Commercialization of fitness, reflected in promotion of specialized products and services, the use of expert advice and the motivational tips aimed at adjusting the training to every person’s needs
4. Promotion of exercise types that are considered appropriate for women
5. Subordination of women through self-surveillance in exercise

Aside from these main themes, I paid particular attention (and performed a specific search of the articles) to the issue of health in the fitness section of Polki.pl. I wanted to explore how the articles handled the subject of health, due to the fact that a large part of the theoretical background of my thesis is based on this concept. Finally, I added some remarks on one particular article about “the body

obsession” which I found to be interesting as it deals with the apparent problem of over-exercisers obsessed with their body image, making references to the kind of publications the article itself belongs to.

3.1. Fragmentation of the (fit) body with focus on improving the “problematic” areas

The below image is a print-screen of the fitness section home-page accessed on the 08/07/2011 (<http://polki.pl/fitness.html>). The first thing that drew my attention are two pictures where hands are placed on a woman’s behind, in one case they are male hands and in the other they are female hands. I have chosen this particular image because it illustrates in a very vivid way the main conclusion I drew from my analysis of the webpage – that the idea of fitness adopted by Polki.pl is one of exercise as a means of transformation of the imperfect female body in order to make it more desirable for the male gaze (and eroticized touch). It is important to note how the pictures show only certain fragmented parts of the woman’s body, how it is an anonymous body as in 3 out of 5 pictures we do not see the model’s face, and how all images are completely static even though they appear on the site dedicated to physical exercise.



Figure 4. The main page of Polki.pl fitness section (<http://polki.pl/fitness.html>, last accessed 30/08/2011)

The fragmentation of the body is evident in the layout of the page itself. As described in paragraph 2.3 of the present work, the available sub-sections of the Fitness section of Polki.pl are Fitness Video, Weight loss, Flat Stomach, Shapely Bum, Legs, Cellulite and Yoga, Thai Chi, Pilates. There is

a further categorization of articles via the use of tags (website descriptors that make it possible to search articles by the key topics). The Fitness, Exercise and Sport directory contains tags such as [Exercise for...] Slender Arms [Szczupłe ramiona], Straight Back [Proste plecy], Firm Bust [Jędrny biust], Flat Stomach [Płaski brzuch], Hard Stomach [Twardy brzuch], Wasp Waist [Talia osy], Shapely Bum [Zgrabna pupa], Firm Buttocks [Jędrne pośladki], Slender Thighs [Smukłe uda]) and Perfect Figure [Idealna sylwetka]. Exercise is uniquely perceived as a method of sculpting of the body in order to give it the desired proportions and shape. Readers are encouraged to scrutinize their bodies part by part, identify what needs to be transformed in each part and then choose appropriate exercise type that will help achieve this goal. The goal is always an aesthetic one (for example, to flatten the stomach or to have firmer-looking arms) and very rarely a strictly sports performance related one (for example, increasing the resistance or strength of a particular muscle group). We are told, in one of the many articles of this sort, that “flat bum looks a little sad and is not very sexy. It is recommendable to round it up a little.” (http://polki.pl/fitness_zgrabnapupa_artykul,10010452.html, last accessed 30.08.2011)

Readers are also encouraged to “get ready for the bikini”³ (http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,7392298.html, last accessed 30.08.2011) as “there is still a little time left to slim down the waist and the hips and to strengthen the arms”. We are given a short 5-minute session aimed at working the particular body parts: arms and shoulders and bust, narrow waist, slender thighs and flat stomach, firm buttocks. The description of each exercise is accompanied by pictures:



Figure 5. Illustrations for the “Get ready for the bikini” article (<http://polki.pl/fitness.html>, last accessed 30/08/2011)

It is worth noting how the woman portrayed in the pictures, prototype-like as no facial features are discernible, represents the “perfect” bikini body and is used here as the point of reference for the

² Płaska pupa wygląda odrobinę smutno i nie jest zbyt sexy. Warto ją trochę zaokrąglić!

³ Przygotuj się do bikini! Jest jeszcze trochę czasu, aby wysmuklić talię i biodra, wzmocnić ramiona.

body-transformation we are told to endeavor. The need to sculpt the body is taken for granted to such an extent that the vast majority of articles published in the fitness section of Polki.pl are exclusively focused on specific training routines for a specific body part and hardly contain any other text, that is to say, it is assumed that readers visit a particular section of the website because they are looking for “solutions” for an imperfect part of their physique that needs immediate and efficient transformation. The article quoted above, chosen here as exemplary, is no exception to this rule. Body parts are identified (arms, legs, buttocks), given a beauty adjective (firm, slender, toned) and the detailed instructions for a particular exercise, intended to achieve the beauty objective, follow (“Sit down with your knees bent, your core straight, leaning back on your arms”).

In conversations with friends and colleagues that formed part of the process of writing the thesis, many of them pointed out the similarity of the described fragmentation of the female body to the fragmentation of the body characteristic for bodybuilding – both female and male bodybuilders talk about their bodies in terms of sculpting them into the desired shape and use specific machines or ways of lifting weights that allow them to increase muscle size and definition in a given area. The difference in my view, however, is that bodybuilders develop the entire array of muscles existing in the human body, while female readers of Polki.pl are only encouraged to work on the areas considered ‘problematic’ and ‘strategic’ but at the same time most desired from the point of view of the dominant female body ideal. Flat stomach, firm bum and shapely thighs are the objects of masculine hegemonic (i.e. heterosexual, white, middle- or upper class etc.) desire, while wide and muscly back and shoulders in a woman are not. Readers will not find tips on how to increase the size of their back, while stomach is considered “one of (or very often the most) problematic areas of the body”⁴. Stomach can resist the flattening and toning efforts to such an extent, that at times in spite of a rigorous diet and exercise regime, a woman will have to reach for a “more radical solution” – plastic surgery. (Plastyka brzucha, http://polki.pl/fitness_plaskibrzuch_artykul,10013655.html, last accessed 20.06.2011). Fat on the stomach is labelled „traiterous rolls”⁵ (Talia superkobieca, http://polki.pl/fitness_plaskibrzuch_artykul,10001048.html, last accessed 23.06.011), “hated flab” (*Żegnaj brzuszku, już na zawsze!*, http://polki.pl/fitness_plaskibrzuch_artykul,10004174.html, last accessed 30.07.2011) and “unattractive ruckles” (Talia Twoich marzeń, http://polki.pl/fitness_plaskibrzuch_artykul,283469.html, last accessed 01.08.2011) and war is to be declared on such a dangerous enemy.

⁴ *Jest jednym z najbardziej problematycznych obszarów ciała. Jeśli więc pomimo stosowania kolejnej diety i ćwiczeń oponka na brzuchu nie znika, warto pomyśleć o bardziej radykalnych rozwiązaniach.*

⁵ *Zdradzieckie wałeczki*

The fragmentation of the body and the focus of exercise promotion in Polki.pl on sculpting of the body to achieve the female body ideal are very well illustrated in the following photo that accompanies the article titled “Be slender”⁶ (comments from top left to bottom right are: “rounded and firm bust”, “flat and slender stomach”, “tempting hips”, “perfect legs”, “ideal arms”, “superfeminine waist”, “buttocks are sexy”).



Figure 6. Illustration for the “Be slender” article

(http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10001088.html, last accessed 30/08/2011)

Readers are given the most explicit image, resembling those from anatomy books, of how their bodies should look, with corresponding comments and arrows instructing which parts of the body must be sculpted and to what measure. The tone of those articles is imperative and normative rather than informative (although information is provided on what steps to undertake in order to achieve the advertised figure), readers are told that everyone can achieve the ideal body if only they accept the challenge and are motivated and disciplined enough:

⁶ *Bądź zgrabna*

“Almost every one of us has some objections with regards to her figure. Do you also belong to this group? That’s fine, but it’s about time to stop moaning about it and start acting.”⁷

(http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10001088.html, last accessed 30/08/2011)

„Excuses” for not doing exercise, such as lack of physical prowess or lack of adequate facilities for sports, are dismissed on the grounds that it “only takes” exercise that is simple but correctly designed by a specialist, some free space in a woman’s living room and some affordable exercise equipment (weights, mat, fit-ball) to be able to “take care of oneself”⁸ ((http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10001088.html, last accessed 30/08/2011). This combination of the fragmented body discourse with the motivation issues and the imperative tone demonstrates the links between the fragmentation of the body and other aspects of exercise promotion in Polki.pl, which will become more evident as we go on with the analysis.

3.2. *Glamourization of Fitness*

The modern-day norms are personated by not only models but also actresses and singers (particularly the A-list celebrities, ‘Hollywood Hotties’) and their bodies are presented to the public as the norm, even though it takes great effort and economic investment for the celebrities to be able to achieve those bodies. Those resources are not available to the ‘ordinary’ women, yet celebrities and their personal trainers are offered as inspiration for readers to begin or maintain the body work.

“How to have a perfect figure like Gwyneth”⁹

(http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10017494.html, last accessed 30.08.2011) is a phrase that best exemplifies how celebrities are involved in the promotion of fitness (physical activity whose main aim is to transform the imperfect body). The phrase that I chose as a title for the thesis, comes from an article which reproduces the fitness advice from actress Gwyneth Paltrow’s personal trainer, Tracy Anderson. The latter has lately reached celebrity status after being PT to Madonna, Jennifer Lopez and other celebrities, including Gwyneth Paltrow. Her ‘achievement’, as described in the article, is being the one that “friends Madonna and Gwyneth fought over as the fitness club opened by Tracy and

⁷ *Prawie każda z nas ma jakieś zastrzeżenia do swojej sylwetki. Też zaliczasz się do tej grupy? W porządku, ale najwyższa pora przestać się nad tym użalać i zacząć działać.*

⁸ *Wystarczy jeden rzut oka na prezentowane przez nią ćwiczenia, żebyś przekonała się, że jesteś w stanie je wykonać. Wszystko, czego Ci potrzeba, to kąt wolny od mebli, duża piłka, specjalne ciężarki zakładane na nogi i 2–4 hantle o różnej wadze.*

⁹ *Jak mieć idealną sylwetkę jak Gwyneth?*

Gwyneth is competing against the Hard Candy fitness clubs chain owned by Madonna”¹⁰ (http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_galeria.html?galg_id=10009145&ph_center_01_page_no=1#galer_y_place , last accessed 30.08.2011). Anderson and other personal trainers are thought to be ‘responsible’ for the Hollywood beauties’ perfect figures. The popularity of Anderson in my view has to do with having based the marketing campaign on a glamorized image of fitness, as physical fitness became yet another element of the female beauty ideal currently promoted in the mass-media. Being able to achieve the appearance personified by Tracy Anderson and her famous clients in the publicity photos is the ultimate and central goal of fitness training, much more important than any other possible benefit, and indeed the actual reason and motivation source to even start exercising in the first place. Polki.pl subscribes to such understanding of fitness, and including advice from Tracy Anderson in their featured articles is proof of it. Motivational aspect comes into play again, in how Anderson’s programme requires ultimate discipline and dedication, practically impossible to achieve by a person outside of the millionaire celebrity social sphere (I will come back to this issue later).

The glamorization of fitness is further reflected in the popularity of the fitness tips and regimes that are supposedly employed by the famous female actresses and singers and that help them (or so we are told) to achieve and maintain their “perfect” figures. In case of Polki.pl, the stars are mostly imported from the USA, although some national celebrities also appear. Articles offer advice from the best personal trainers that celebrities employ and the advice is usually centered on “achieving results” of the training, i.e. transforming the body in order to make it look more like the bodies of celebrities, as in “The best advice of the trainers to the stars”¹¹ article (http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_galeria.html?galg_id=10009145&ph_center_01_page_no=1#galer_y_place, last accessed 30.08.2011). Together with the motivational tips and the expert advice, the celebrities help to sell fitness to the wider public and the element of comparison and envy is frequently exploited in this pursuit:

“Exercise your body as the most beautiful and the most famous women of the world do and see the overpowering results! The fact that Jennifer Aniston has a fantastic figure is not a surprise to anyone. Ever since she transformed herself from a nice, but too chubby ‘friend’ into a slender beauty queen of the romantic comedies, her silhouette (especially the arms) is the ob-

¹⁰ *Osiągnięcia: To o nią pokłóciły się przyjaciółki Gwyneth Paltrow i Madonna. Studio fitness, otworzone przez Tracy i Gwyneth, konkuruje z siecią siłowni Hard Candy Madonny.*

¹¹ *Najlepsze rady trenerów gwiazd*

ject of envy of women all over the world”¹² („Budokon – the secret of the figures of the stars, http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10020259,0.html, last accessed 30.08.2011).

I have chosen this particular quote because it illustrates several themes discussed by feminist authors in their analysis of the contemporary female body ideal and women’s magazines. The references to “the most beautiful women in the world” and the world-wide jealousy that women feel in relation to Jennifer Aniston’s body is an illustration of how the beauty ideal promoted in the mass media creates an notion of a global female culture, as discussed by Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth* (1991): all women share their interest in attaining the beauty ideal which is universal, and share the broad array of feelings associated with it and the subjectivity it creates. The transformation that Aniston undergoes is not limited to the body itself – she is no longer an approachable, ordinary neighborhood friend, she is now a beauty queen and an emblem of success in romantic relationships that other women envy her. Later in the article it is revealed that Aniston’s fitness regime and the ensuing change in her physique helped her to get over the break-up of her marriage to Brad Pitt. Exercise is then presented as a vehicle of change of one’s self, a change that has (positive) repercussions over one’s life in aspects seemingly unrelated to being “fit”. The Aniston article is a very clear example of how fitness is glamorized and impregnated with meanings that go far beyond the physical exercise itself, or even beyond its direct effects on the body, such as the increase of muscle mass and decrease of the percentage of body fat. The relation between celebrities and exercise is complex: celebrities are presented as role models for women – celebrities have special diet and exercise regimes that help them maintain their bodies in an aesthetically “perfect” shape – celebrities get recognition, fame and money and achieve personal goals through their figures – women should follow the same fitness regimes as the celebrities in order to improve their own life situation. Importantly, no other aspect of the celebrities lives receive such intense attention, for example, we are not told how Jennifer Aniston secures her roles or what she invests her money in. Beauty is the sole focus and the sole path to success for a woman, and a well-tailored fitness regime is one of the key components to achieve beauty. This is why articles in Polki.pl outline exactly what kinds of food celebrities eat, what their portion size and frequency of meals is, what their favorite types of exercise or specific training routines are, how often they train, how many repetitions and sets of a given exercise they perform and how long each exercise bout is as in “How the stars work on their figure”¹³, http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10020153.html, last accessed 30.08.2011). Presumably, readers can pick the celebrity that most appeals to them in terms of ‘who would you like to look like?’

¹² *Ćwicz ciało i umysł jak najpiękniejsze i najstynniejszej kobiety świata i zobacz zniewalające efekty! To, że Jennifer Aniston ma świetną figurę, dla nikogo nie jest niespodzianką. Od czasu, kiedy z sympatycznej, ale zbyt pulchnej „przyjaciółki” przeobraziła się w smukłą królową komedii romantycznych, jej sylwetka (zwłaszcza ramiona) jest przedmiotem zazdrości kobiet na całym świecie. – Budokon, sekret sylwetek gwiazd.*

¹³ *Jak gwiazdy dbają o figurę.*

and then follow the same route to a perfect body. They can therefore pick the somewhat ‘personalized’ fitness regime, which is discussed in more detail in paragraph 3.3. Exercise routines of the stars are promised to help readers approach the beauty ideal represented by the likes of Liz Hurley, Eva Longoria, Jessica Alba and Angelina Jolie with once again the fragmentation of the female body is reflected in the text as Hurley personalizes “slender legs”, Longoria – “sexy bum”, Alba – “flat tummy”, and Jolie – “sculpted arms”. Stomach is said to be “the weakest link” of the female body and special attention should be paid to regular abdominal training

(http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10002285.html , last accessed 30.08.2011). Celebrities “admit” that their bodily perfection is the result of long hours spent on regular training, often with the help of personal trainers, who are elevated to the role of new fitness experts (as different from doctors or scientists, for example). As the publications on Polki.pl aim at “helping” women to achieve the ideal body represented by the celebrities, tips and training methods employed by personal trainers to the stars are very often included in the articles, as will be discussed in the paragraph on expert advice within the more general theme of commercialization of fitness.

3.3. *Commercialization of Fitness*

The promotion of goods and services in the form of publicity is evident and nothing surprising in a commercial publication whose main goal is to receive funding from advertisers. Articles in Polki.pl are accompanied by various advertising spaces which offer and advertise services, such as cosmetic surgery or gyms, and products ranging from cosmetics and fashion through to pharmaceutical products and baby food. The advertising is done both through direct commercial messages that the editorial publishes in the advertising space for a fee from particular companies, and indirectly, through the articles themselves, as they can be said to take for granted the absolute necessity of purchase of specialized fitness commodities – and they remind readers about it frequently. This second aspect – the indirect publicity in the form of speaking to the readers as if it was obvious that they need particular goods on offer – is what I mean by the commercialization of fitness. I have paraphrased the term ‘commercialization of the keep-fit culture’ coined by Roberta Sassatelli (2001) (and described in paragraph 1.4 of this thesis) in order to include, aside from the selling strategy for modern fitness clubs which are Sassatelli’s primary focus, three aspects of the commercialization that I observed in Polki.pl as a publication available to wide readership: specialized products and services, expert advice and motivational tips or fitness adapted to personality.

3.3.1. Specialized products and services

Exercise promotion in Polki.pl is practically inseparable from the promotion of specific products such as fashionable and ‘professional’ clothing, exercise equipment, diet supplements in the form of pills, drinks or specialized foods, and gym memberships. For example, the „Sport is trendy”¹⁴ article (http://polki.pl/fitness_wiosenneprzebudzenie_artykul,10001146.html, last accessed 29.08.2011) encourages women to follow the latest trends when practicing sports: quality equipment, supergadgets, colourful clothes and good cosmetics are said to provide additional motivation to exercise. Cardiovascular activities such as walking (which speed up metabolism and help us lose weight) will be more entertaining with a pace-meter, mp3 player and comfortable shoes. Gadgets are perceived as a necessary element of exercise. The article does not argue why we could not do without them, it just pronounces them as a necessary investment:

“Invest in goodies such as a watch with a heart rate monitor, speedometer with distance count for your bike, etc. They are costly, but really indispensable.”¹⁵

(http://polki.pl/fitness_wiosenneprzebudzenie_artykul,10001146.html, last accessed 29.08.2011)

Fashion is also an important element of exercise as promoted in Polki.pl:

“Buy 2-3 identical sport tops. You can then easily change them without ruining the concept of your outfit.”¹⁶ (http://polki.pl/fitness_wiosenneprzebudzenie_artykul,10001146.html, last accessed 29.08.2011)

And so is the choice of correct equipment, such as the right type of a bike for different types of routes, or the right kind of shoe, as in the following quote:

“Always buy special models for women – they have deeper cuts for the ankles. Try the shoe on with the socks that you intend to wear for running or walking. Go shopping in the evening, when your foot is slightly swollen after the hot day. Shoes should be 0,5 cm larger than your

¹⁴ *Sport jest trendy.*

¹⁵ *Zainwestuj w takie drobiazgi, jak: zegarek z tętnomierzem, licznik kilometrów do roweru itp. Są kosztowne, ale naprawdę niezbędne.*

¹⁶ *Kup sobie 2–3 identyczne sportowe koszulki. Wtedy możesz swobodnie je zmieniać, nie burząc koncepcji stroju.*

foot.”¹⁷ (http://polki.pl/fitness_wiosenneprzebudzenie_artykul,10001146.html, last accessed 29.08.2011)

Female consumers are being given very precise instructions on what to buy, where and how. Instructions are made in an imperative tone, speaking from an expert position and often authority figures are brought into the discourse in order to strengthen the argument, as in the case of running shoes again:

“– While you do not need special shoes for cycling, they will be necessary for running or marching – says Janusz Mikołajewski, orthopedist from the Lux Med clinic chain.”¹⁸ (http://polki.pl/fitness_wiosenneprzebudzenie_artykul,10001146.html, last accessed 29.08.2011)

The promotion of specialized products and services can have a positive result in women being better informed of the available goods and thus being able to choose the products that best suit them, making exercise easier and more enjoyable and decreasing the risk of injury, but it may also reinforce the image of women as incompetent in the domain of sport and exercise, unable to make informed decisions about their own participation and always needing external guidance. Another aspect of the promotion of goods and services that may be interpreted as oppressive rather than liberating, is the virtual impossibility to escape from the consumption of those products. The market provides solutions for everyone, even for the most ‘lazy’ women, as ‘effortless’ figure shaping is possible through electrostimulation of the muscles by a special machine:

“No effort. If you don’t like sweating in the gym, you can use muscle electrostimulation”¹⁹ (http://polki.pl/fitness_zgrabnapupa_artykul,10010452.html, last accessed 29.08.2011)

It is also important to note that aside from exercise techniques and equipment, cosmetics and plastic surgery are promoted in the fitness section of Polki.pl as aids in the quest for a perfect figure, such as lipolaser (http://polki.pl/fitness_plaskibrzuch_artykul,10013776.html, last accessed 31.08.2011) or cosmetics that promise to tighten and firm up the stomach (http://polki.pl/fitness_plaskibrzuch_artykul,10013543.html, last accessed 31.08.2011). The two latter products are particularly popular in the sections on flattening the stomach, considered to be the most

¹⁷ *Kupuj specjalne modele dla kobiet – mają one głębsze wycięcia na kostki. Mierz buty na skarpetki, w których zamierzasz biegać lub chodzić. Na ich zakup wybierz się wieczorem, kiedy stopa jest nieco opuchnięta po gorącym dniu. Powinny być o 0,5 cm większe od stopy.*

¹⁸ *Chociaż do jazdy na rowerze nie potrzebujesz specjalnych, do biegania lub marszu już będą konieczne – twierdzi Janusz Mikołajewski, ortopeda z sieci klinik Lux Med.*

¹⁹ *Bez wysiłku. Jeśli nie lubisz pocić się na siłowni, możesz skorzystać z elektrostymulacji mięśni.*

problematic area of the female body (as was described in paragraph 3.1), and on combating the cellulite – the second most ‘unaesthetic’ characteristic of the body.

3.3.2. Expert advice

Expert advice, as identified by Sassatelli (2001) in the article described in paragraph 1.4, is one of the central elements of the fitness discourse. Sassatelli argues that individuals are expected to rationally make use of the scientific findings in the field of physical exercise and optimize their workouts so as to achieve the maximum results in minimum time. Physical fitness is something that can be purchased, either through workout dvds or through personal training sessions. The exercise becomes structured, organized, measured, timed and targeted at specific goals (eg. flat stomach). Modern day fitness is purchased in gyms and the fitness promotion goes hand-in-hand with the growing market for sportswear, sports accessories, diet supplements and other related products. In a system where consumers demand maximum gain for minimum expenditure (“get your value for money”), the commercialized exercise is promoted as a means to an end of achieving and maintaining a slender and fit body, instead of as a pleasurable and beneficial activity in itself. The commercialization of fitness brings massive financial benefits to this growing business.²⁰

The fitness section of Polki.pl subscribes to the selling of expert advice through the very frequent employment of tips and opinions of different personal trainers – the search of the fitness section with the key-word ‘trainer’ (pl. trener) returned 68 articles where trainers were mentioned. Personal trainers act as experts on exercise and readers are expected to follow the training routines devised by them. If the trainers are female, their own bodies serve as the guarantee of their expertise and ideals that women are expected to desire:

“Do exercise with Denise Austin. She is one of the women who we look at with admiration and - let’s be honest – a little bit of envy. Her figure is the best guarantee of the efficiency of the exercise that she has been presenting for many years now.”²¹

(http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10001088.html, last accessed 31.08.2011)

²⁰ There exist specific publications on how to start and successfully managed a fitness-industry business. See for example “Making Money in the Fitness Business” by Thomas Plummer, published by Coaches Choice Books in 1999, or “The Business of Fitness: Understanding the Financial Side of Owning a Fitness Business” by the same author, published in 2003 by Healthy Learning.

²¹ *Ćwicz z Denise Austin. To jedna z tych kobiet, na które patrzymy z podziwem i – bądźmy szczerze – z odrobiną zazdrości. Jej figura jest najlepszą gwarancją skuteczności ćwiczeń, które od wielu lat prezentuje.*

As was the case of glamorization of fitness discussed in paragraph 3.2, here also a famous person is presented as the achiever of the ultimate perfect body that all women are assumed to desire and envy her. Importantly, her athletic ability is not the focus of the discourse, it is only the appearance that counts, and we are presented with a photograph as a proof of the great looks:

Denise Austin jest znanym na świecie ekspertem od fitnessu. Mieszka i pracuje w USA. Promowaniem zdrowego stylu życia zajmuje się ponad 25 lat. Wydaje książki i kasety wideo, doradza w czasopismach i występuje w telewizji.



Figure 7. [Denise Austin is the world-famous fitness expert. She lives and works in the USA. She has been promoting healthy lifestyle for over 25 years. She publishes books and videotapes, gives tips in the magazines and appears on television.]

Illustration for the “Be slender” article

(http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10001088.html, last accessed 30/08/2011)

There is also another important characteristic of the female personal trainers quoted in Polki.pl: they serve not only as models, but seem to claim that bodies like theirs are in the reach of any woman. Tracy Anderson, the personal trainer mentioned in paragraph 3.2 on the glamorization of fitness, claims that any woman can achieve the perfect (i.e. the done-up Anderson-like) figure, no matter what her genetic constitution. The only (sic!) thing necessary is complete dedication and adherence to Anderson’s rules: at least 30 minutes of specific training (for example, no heavy weights and no running as both cause the bottom part of the body to bulk up), 6 times a week, combined with diet. Anderson stresses that the genetic excuses for a round stomach are not valid, as all women can have the body they want if only they are sufficiently disciplined

(http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_galeria.html?galg_id=10009145, last accessed 31.08.2011). Unfortunately, work and family obligations are not mentioned, as Anderson makes her living training with million-dollar movie stars whose resources are far beyond imagination for an absolute majority of women in the world, even if we limit the concept of world to the developed countries. Polki.pl does not hesitate in presenting Anderson and the like trainers as the ultimate reference in the area of physical exercise, which does not do any favors to the women who are not able to dedicate so much time

and effort to their fitness routine. It also reinforces the beauty focus of physical activity, further instated by the fact that the role of experts is sometimes undertaken by current “miss fitness” winners of national and international competitions.

3.3.3. Motivational tips – fitness adapted to personality

Throughout the analyzed articles the adjustment of exercise to one’s personality and temperament is a common theme. In the “Sport is Trendy” article, mentioned in the section on products and services (http://polki.pl/fitness_wiosenneprzebudzenie_artykul,10001146.html, last accessed 31.08.2011), we are reminded that the continuing motivation for exercise depends on the atmosphere of the fitness club (interestingly, no mention is made of other types of exercise that do not require a gym membership) and that we should aim at finding a club that best suits our personality. If we are extrovert, we will most likely feel comfortable doing high-intensity workout in a busy, lively club, while pilates and yoga in a quiet and discreet environment will be more appropriate for introverts. A (male) psychologist speaking from an expert position advocates the biological origin of our temperament, which we are not able to change. Instead of trying to adjust our temperament to our choices of activity, we should choose the activities based on how reactive we are to external stimuli: low-reactive persons will enjoy coordination and “wellness” types of exercise, while high-reactive persons will appreciate a dynamic training with frequent changes of tempo, muscle group, etc.

The adjustment of training to the personality is one of the motivational tips frequently given to women in Polki.pl. “Report: How to start exercising”²² (http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10010827,1.html) is a good example of such a motivational article, where exercise is presented as a habit which needs to be developed with the help of motivational tips, since otherwise there is great risk of dropout:

“Outline the reasons for why you want to exercise and imagine just how great you will feel and look when you improve your physical condition.”²³

(http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10010827,1.html, last accessed 29.08.2011)

Implicit in the article is the assumption that women find it hard to start an exercise regime and that boredom and other negative emotions might arise very quickly. Ironically, in an indirect way,

²² *Raport - Jak zacząć ćwiczyć.*

²³ *Wyliczaj powody, dla których chcesz ćwiczyć, i wyobraź sobie, jak świetnie będziesz się czuła i wyglądała, kiedy już poprawisz swoją kondycję.*

articles which aim to promote fitness actually admit gym and fitness oriented exercise to be tedious and uninteresting for a typical person. Exercise however is only discussed as gym attendance - other types of physical activity are hardly ever mentioned, which in my view supports the argument that exercise promotion in Polki.pl is dictated by the commercial interests of the fast-growing fitness industry in Poland.

In a discourse that sees exercise as primarily an activity that aids women in attaining the dominant beauty ideal of a slender body, goal setting is a very important element of a successful exercise plan. Physical activity is not undertaken for pleasure or bodily exploration, its ultimate goal is the transformation of the imperfect body in order to make it as close to the ideal as possible. Readers are being addressed in an imperative tone:

“When you have a free moment, sit comfortably and imagine that you look exactly like you would like to. And if you want to strengthen the effect, repeat ‘I am slim, self-confident and happy’”²⁴. (http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul.8048470.2.html, last accessed 31.08.2011)

There exists an apparent contradiction between claims that engaging in regular training is not such a difficult enterprise and that “just a little bit of self-abnegation and some simple moves are sufficient to be able to sculpt a perfect bum, thighs and legs before your holidays” and all the motivational tips that are given with the implicit assumption that keeping “fit” is not such a pleasurable activity and women will not engage in it out of their own choice. Readers are told that it is “not such a big deal” to train regularly and that they need professional advice on how to adhere to their routine, and the two messages go hand in hand. However, I think this contradiction is only superficial, as the overall picture that can be reconstructed from those two discourses is that the figure-transforming exercise which is being promoted for women is essentially a boring, tedious and unpleasant activity that can only be sustained by powerful external controlling factors, such as the cultural pressure for women to have an ideal body and take personal responsibility for its creation. Those who fail, face social sanctions or at least negative moral judgment, because it “only takes” self-discipline and some products and services widely available on the market, to be able to adhere to the perfect body ideal. Women are expected to discipline their bodies in their quest for bodily perfection and perform exercise specific for the female body:

²⁴ *Jeśli masz wolną chwilę, usiądź wygodnie i wyobraź sobie, że wyglądasz dokładnie tak, jakbyś tego chciała. A dla wzmocnienia efektu powtarzaj: ‘Jestem szczupła, pewna siebie i szczęśliwa’.*

“It only takes a little self-discipline and simple moves, in order to sculpt a perfect bum, tighs and legs by the holiday period!”²⁵

(http://polki.pl/fitness_zgrabnapupa_artykul,10014230.html , last accessed 31.07.2011)

The link with the commercialization of discipline discussed in previous chapters becomes evident here. Dworkin and Wachs (2009), drawing on Featherstone’s (*Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, 1991) arguments, sum it up in the following fashion:

“Defining the body in terms of appearance does, however, serve an important function. It allows the body to become an object of consumption in addition to a site from which to consume.” (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009, pp. 23)

As demonstrated by the three aspects of exercise promotion in Polki.pl that I identified: specialized products and services, expert advice and motivational tips, the portal does seem to subscribe to the discourse that defines the body - and physical fitness - in terms of appearance, which in turn serves the growing fitness industry to sell their products.

3.4. *Promotion of exercise types appropriate for women*

As another important characteristic of the exercise promotion discourse analyzed in the present thesis, I have observed that the choice of exercise that is considered appropriate for women and promoted in the fitness sections of Polki.pl is the following: exercises that tone the body, but rather reduce its size and shape it up than make it bigger and more resistant, and activities of low to moderate energy expenditure that are enough to accelerate the heart-beat and oxygen consumption but not enough to significantly improve the body’s cardiovascular capacity. Thus, exercise is seen as something purely instrumental, it is an aid to a diet regime and a useful fat-burning strategy, it is also an effective way to shape the body and mould it to the dominant body ideal, much cheaper and less invasive than plastic surgery for example. Certain body parts, such as thighs or the stomach, will need to be shaped accordingly to the perfect silhouette advertised by the media. Modern fitness promotion offers a range of exercise activities specifically for women, with special emphasis on reducing the “problem areas” where fat is most likely to accumulate.

Dominant type of “femininity” and the female body ideal is a factor that informs the choice of activities that are considered appropriate for women, in line with Priscilla Choi’s (2000) argument.

²⁵ *Wystarczy trochę samozaparcia i proste ruchy by do urlopu wyrzeźbić idealną pupę, uda i nogi!*

References are often made to women’s real or assumed preoccupation of their bodies becoming too muscular and, as such, too “masculine”. On the one hand, Polki.pl along with other fitness publications in women’s magazines convince their readers that this preoccupation and the resulting reluctance to do weight training by women are unfounded, as due to our genetic and hormonal constitution it is virtually impossible for women to become as muscular as men:

„Girls are afraid of the excessive growth of this part of the body [arms], because their figure might become less feminine. These fears are unfounded – it is much harder for women to build a muscular silhouette due to a hormonal system different than that of men, which efficiently prevents the increase of muscle mass. Our arms need a specially devised training, so that they can look slender and feminine.”²⁶ (http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10021615.html, last accessed 23.06.2011)

On the other hand, typically “feminine” exercise is often described and instructions are given on how to perform it. For example, “Perfectly adjusted training”²⁷ article (http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10001883.html, last accessed 23.06.2011) provides expert opinion on how some of the most common gym exercises have their origin in the body-building training of Arnold Schwarzenegger and the like and are not the best suited for an “average woman”. The article tells us, once again in an imperative tone:

“When in the gym, do not train as a bodybuilder! Exercises devised specifically with women in mind will be much better for you.”²⁸

The apparent advantage of these special kinds of exercise lies in their greater efficiency when it comes to reducing and firming the body’s contours and in a smaller risk of injury. “Problem areas” are usually defined as stomach, thighs and bottom, as the areas of the female body where most fat is stored and where flesh is “sunken” or “wiggly”. However, some of the articles also mention arms as the area which, especially for women over 30 years old, becomes fatty and loose and therefore unaesthetic. As women are wary of exercising this part of the body, fearing that their figure will become less

²⁶ *Dziewczyny boją się nadmiernego rozbudowania tej części ciała, bo ich sylwetkamogłaby stać się mniej kobieca. Te obawy są bezpodstawne – kobietom jest dużo trudniej wypracować muskularną sylwetkę ze względu na inny niż u mężczyzn układ hormonalny, który skutecznie zapobiega budowaniu tkanki mięśniowej. Nasze ramiona wymagają specjalnie opracowanego treningu, aby wyglądały smukło i kobieco.*

²⁷ *Trening idealnie dobrany*

²⁸ *W siłowni nie trenuj jak kulturysta! Znacznie lepsze dla Ciebie będą ćwiczenia opracowane specjalnie z myślą o kobietach.*

“feminine”, female arms remain weak and soft. Special exercise for women’s arms is a remedy, as presented in the article “Feminine training for the arms”²⁹

(http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10021615.html, last accessed 23.06.2011). Once again, readers are addressed in the imperative tone:

“Do not neglect this part of your body, because you reveal it often! Especially in parties and in the summer!”³⁰ (http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10021615.html, last accessed 23.06.2011)

In a similar fashion, readers can find out that the primary advantage of jogging is that it will allow us to lose 3 kg in one month and visibly improve our figure. A (male) expert, rehabilitation specialist, advises that once we are able to jog for a few kilometers without experiencing short breath, we should add sprinting up and down the hill to our routine, as this has influence on the sexy shape of legs. Cycling is the number one winner when it comes to combating cellulite, therefore we are encouraged to engage in this sport in the summer (“Sport is Trendy”, http://polki.pl/fitness_wiosenneprzebudzenie_artykul,10001146.html, last accessed 31.08.2011). Women are also encouraged to build muscle, as muscle mass speeds up the metabolism. Interestingly, the types of muscle-building sports that are then listed are not bodybuilding or weight-lifting, but jogging, swimming and ball games, while it is commonly acknowledged by exercise specialists that these sports belong rather to the cardiovascular category. This example illustrates how fitness is adapted to the requirements of the dominant femininity, where slim and lean figure is much more desirable than large muscles and large size.

Even the kinds of activities that are usually associated with holistic health and whose objective is the general well-being of the person rather than specific body-transformation are discussed from the beauty ideal perspective. In “Yoga for stress”³¹

(http://polki.pl/fitness_jogapilatastaichi_artykul,10012089.html, last accessed 23.06.2011) yoga is presented as an activity that lowers the level of stress hormone cortisol, helping us not to snack between meals, reducing appetite and leading to weight-loss. The article puts emphasis on the slenderness to be achieved from yoga as one of the most important benefits:

“Be relaxed, serene and...slimmer”³²

(http://polki.pl/fitness_jogapilatastaichi_artykul,10012089.html, last accessed 23.06.2011)

²⁹ *Kobięcy trening na ramiona*

³⁰ *Nie zaniedbuj tej części ciała, bo często ją odstawiasz! Zwłaszcza na imprezach i latem!*

³¹ *Joga na stress*

³² *Bądź zrelaksowana, spokojna i... szczuplejsza*

On the rare occasions when other types of exercise aside from gym are mentioned, these are also subject to the utility-for-beauty criterion, as in “Slide and burn calories”³³ (http://polki.pl/fitness_zgrabnapupa_artykul,10010452.html, last accessed 23.06.2011), where ice-skating, cross-country skiing and sledding is an alternative to gym-based exercise. Emphasis is made on the fact that these activities burn many calories and allow us to exercise the ‘crucial’ muscle groups for women: stomach, waist, hips, arms, in short: the typical areas women’s magazines consider ‘problematic’.

Dworkin and Wachs (2009) emphasize that discourse in the popular magazines is constructed not only on the basis of what is included in the published texts, but also on the basis of what is excluded and absent from them. Exercise promotion directed at women is focused on losing weight and dropping dress sizes, while success stories of women who managed to battle eating disorders, or whose goal was to gain weight and increase their size, are hardly ever mentioned. The authors also point out the contradictions in the texts: even though the impossibility of losing fat in only one area of the body is widely acknowledged in the magazines, the titles of individual articles defy it, offering readers workouts and diets that will allow them to have a fat-free back, stomach or arms.

Women are encouraged to engage in exercise as a means to achieve and maintain a beautiful body, and, as a closing remark of this paragraph, I will risk saying that the ultimate goal of the entire pursuit is the heterosexual attractiveness. In the course of the analysis, one of the articles particularly caught my attention for being very honest and straightforward about it:

“Which sports impress men. Guys dream of Pamela Anderson in the role of the lifeguard. But a girl playing beach volley or riding a motorbike also turns them on. Hundred percent sure!”³⁴ (http://polki.pl/fitness_wiosenneprzebudzenie_artykul,10003752.html, last accessed 30.08.2011)

Women’s choice of sports is meant to be motivated by how sexy they will appear to men while engaging in a particular activity, and interestingly this is one of a very few articles that mention any other sport different than running, cycling or gym exercise. It seems that the only reasons for women to engage in physical activity, according to Polki.pl, is either to be pretty(ier) or to impress and attract a male partner.

³³ *Ślizgaj się i trać kalorie*

³⁴ *Jakie sporty imponują facetom. Faceci marzą o Pameli Anderson w roli ratowniczkini. Ale dziewczynka grająca wsiatkówkę plażową lub jeżdżąca na motorze też ich kręci. Na sto procent!*

3.5. *Subordination of women through self-surveillance in exercise*

The last theme identified in my analysis is the most oppressive/least empowering of all themes that I discussed so far. My main argument here is that in many cases physical exercise, as promoted in Polki.pl, is a means of subordination of women through self-policing of their bodies. The disciplining of female bodies is meant to be performed through exercise in the gym, dieting practices and beauty routines.

Women are encouraged to use virtually every moment of their day for exercise that will “firm up the body and strengthen the muscles”. “Fitness everyday”³⁵ article (http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10021298.html, last accessed 25.06.2011) provides a great example of the tyranny of the imperfect body transformation: those who are too busy to visit a fitness-club for the compulsory one hour a day of exercise, can use everyday routine activities to shape up various parts of their bodies. Morning shower is to be accompanied by a few stand up push-ups, while making breakfast can be turned into a calf-firming exercise if only we rhythmically raise both heels, alternating one leg and the other. When driving to work, traffic jams are a wonderful opportunity to suck the stomach in and out repeatedly in order to make it flatter. In the evening, instead of lying motionless on the sofa, we are supposed to raise each leg 10 times and hold it in the air for about 10 seconds while simultaneously reading or watching TV. Telephone gossiping with a friend (stereotypically “feminine” activity) should be performed while balancing on a fit-ball, and finally we can also do a few crunches when brushing our teeth. Time spent at work in the office (interestingly, women who perform other kinds of work are not included in the target audience) is not free from the fitness imperative either: women should always take the elevator instead of stairs, flex their gluteus while waiting for their turn at a photocopier, and squeeze a book between their thighs when sitting at their desk. Virtually the entire day, from 7am to 10pm, we need to “take care of our bodies” in this way. Women are never free from the disciplining gaze, it must be always present in the back of their minds that their bodies are imperfect and need to be corrected, to the absurd level where even the time of the day reserved for rest and leisure is meant to be employed for exercise.

Exercise also takes form of self-surveillance of one’s posture: narrow hips can be optically rounded up with appropriate body posture. The person talking from an expert position here is a choreographer from a modeling agency, who advises women to bend their body into the shape of letter S in order to give them more sex-appeal. Women are encouraged to practice in front of a mirror in order

³⁵ *Fitness na co dzień*

to achieve a natural, gentle “push out” of their behind, because a „rounded butt is sexy”³⁶ (http://polki.pl/fitness_zgrabnapupa_artykul,10010452.html, last accessed 23.06.2011)

Another article, this time on how to achieve a flat belly (5 sposobów na płaski brzusek, http://polki.pl/fitness_plaskibrzuch_artykul,10018702,1.html), also reminds the reader of the benefits of looking at one’s posture in a mirror: we are told to straighten our back and see how immediately we look 2-3cm taller and how the stomach appears to be flatter. The only problem – says the article – is how to maintain this posture throughout the day. It is apparently no longer necessary to practice walking with a book on our head, as long as we “only just” remember about straightening our back as many times during the day as possible. The same article makes a direct reference to one of the emblems of the disciplining practices for female body, used in the 19th century: the corset. In the modern day abdominal muscles work as a corset, holding the stomach in its correct position – “tucked in”, flat, and plain.

3.6. *Health promotion*

Due to the fact that after my first reading of the best rated articles in Polki.pl I was not able to identify themes related to health, while healthism and health imperative were some of the most important concepts that informed my theoretical approach, I decided to perform a specific search of all other articles published under the fitness section with a key word ‘health’ (pol. zdrowie). The search returned 29 articles which mentioned the word ‘health’ either in the title or in the contents, but only 9 of them were articles which focused specifically and exclusively on health benefits to be gained from regular exercise, while all the other articles could be classified as “beauty equals health” type of discourse, where health is only mentioned in combination with beauty outcomes which are given more importance and are often considered synonymous with health. I have identified an important difference with regards to “health” and “beauty” articles: ones that focus exclusively on health were shorter, more concrete and listed the health benefits related to regular exercise in an informative tone:

“Some of the indirect effects of physical activity are the improvement of the physical stamina and muscle strength, and the ensuing improvement of the quality of life. There exists a direct correlation between the individual’s health level and their level of physical activity. The more sports, the longer and more comfortable life.”³⁷

³⁶ *Zaokrąglona pupa jest sexy.*

³⁷ *Bezpośrednie efekty aktywności fizycznej to poprawa wydolności fizycznej i siły mięśni, a co za tym idzie poprawa komfortu życia. Stan zdrowia jednostki, mierzony długością życia, koreluje bezpośrednio z poziomem aktywności fizycznej. Im więcej sportu tym dłuższe i bardziej komfortowe życie.*

(http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10013917.html, last accessed 31.08.2011)

Notably, those type of articles use a scientific-medical discourse, which is characterized by the use of professional vocabulary difficult to understand for readers who do not have a background in statistics and research methods (in the example above, the authors talk about a ‘correlation’). References are often made to the results of scientific research and medical doctors or scholars in the field of medicine and sports science are given the role of experts – in the provided example it is the director of the Centre for Sports Medicine and leader of the Medical Commission of the Polish Olympic Committee. These articles contain information about the positive outcomes of regular physical activity, such as lower risk of cardiovascular disease or stronger bones. Improved mood and lower proneness to depression are also listed.

The rest of the articles focus on attaining the ideal body and often introduce some health benefits in the general beauty-oriented discourse. I have chosen the below excerpt from “Cycling for health”³⁸ article, as a good exemplification of the beauty-equals-health argument:

„We want to look good. Clothes, make-up, cosmetics are not enough. Our organism also needs appropriate care. And several dozen minutes of dynamic cycling will be sufficient to achieve it. Every woman aspires to be liked. It has been like this for a long time. Our beauty canons make us like slender, sporty figures, and this requires regular physical activity.

Everything for health: Regular cycling combined with balanced diet allows your body to become more slender each time. Aside from that, it not only allows the improvement of the looks, but is also a good training for the spine and an exercise for breathing, which many women have problems with. On one hand we take care of our health and figure, and on the other we can belong to the special group of women with a common goal. Go ahead, be cycle chic.”³⁹ (http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,10022800.html, last accessed 23.06.2011)

It is very characteristic of the articles exemplified in the above quote that beauty, understood as slenderness, is the primary concern and the most important objective of the exercise program that

³⁸ *Rowerem po zdrowie*

³⁹ *Chcemy dobrze wyglądać. Stroje, makijaż, kosmetyki to nie wszystko. Nasz organizm także potrzebuje odpowiedniej pielęgnacji. A do tego wystarczy kilkadziesiąt minut dynamicznej jazdy na rowerze. Każda kobieta dąży do tego, aby się podobać. Tak jest od dawna. Nasze kanony piękna sprawiają, że lubimy szczupłe, wysportowane sylwetki, a to wymaga regularnej aktywności fizycznej. Wszystko dla zdrowia: Regularna jazda na rowerze w połączeniu ze zbilansowaną dietą pozwala na to, by twoje ciało było coraz zgrabniejsze. Poza tym to nie tylko poprawa wyglądu, ale także trening dla kręgosłupa oraz ćwiczenie oddechu płucnego z czym wiele kobiet ma problem. Z jednej strony dbamy o nasze zdrowie i sylwetkę, a z drugiej możemy należeć do wyjątkowej grupy kobiet, które łączy wspólny cel. A zatem bądź cycle chic.*

the article advertises. The goal is to lose weight and trim down the body, and exercise serves as a tool to do just that, providing side benefits for the health, such as improved breathing or relief of back pain. The quote makes a direct reference to “doing something for one’s own health and figure” which is where the health imperative discussed in paragraph 1.2 of this thesis merges with the female beauty ideal of a slender and trim body, as discussed by Bartky (1998) and Bordo (1993). The necessity to take care of oneself is implicit but taken for granted, it is the beauty aspect that need to be argued and legitimated. While articles focusing on health are free from “ideology” statements and limited to listing of the benefits of exercise, articles that focus on beauty use an array of techniques that aim at convincing women to engage in the beauty pursuit. These are: references to the general ‘female’ condition of wanting to be liked and desired (“every woman aspires to be liked”) in order to convince the reader that she belongs to the target audience; references to the social and cultural pressure exercised on women’s appearance, but references that make it seem unchangeable, eternal and impossible to escape from (“it has been like this for a long time”); the usage of the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘our’ that suggest women’s conformity and identification with the beauty imperative (“we want to look good”, “our beauty canons”); suggestion of belonging to a special, privileged and superior group of women who “have a common goal”, thus providing a sense of a shared women’s culture discussed by Naomi Wolf (1991) and described in the theoretical introduction. Personal trainers to the stars, often elevated to the celebrity status themselves, play the expert role in these kind of articles.

Here I want to highlight the frequent conflation of what is considered a healthy body and a beautiful body. The fitness content of women’s magazines promotes a certain type of physique, which, although in many cases might go on a par with the individual’s health, is not equivalent to a healthy body. This ideal physique is very hard to achieve, and becoming harder every time due to the fact that the more perfect the ideal body, the more products and services must be consumed in order to achieve it. For example, a moderately physically active person is doing what is considered by the medical profession to be a sufficient amount of exercise for them to maintain strong bones and a good cardiovascular health, and prevent the civilization diseases associated with sedentary lifestyle. Moderate exercise alone is not sufficient however to maintain very low levels of body fat necessary for good muscle definition, neither will it prevent cellulite in women or produce a slim, lean physique that is being promoted. The lower the body fat level required in a perfect physique, the more diet and exercise supplements must be consumed in order to aid fat loss. Cosmetic surgery and/or other non-invasive beauty procedures are also necessary and the complete circle closes that links health with beauty, beauty with slenderness represented by celebrities as role models, slenderness with exercise, and exercise with consumption of an ever-growing number of specialized products. Fragmentation of the body and its objectification are accompanying factors and unfortunately everything together does little favor to the promotion of exercise as a healthy habit whose goal is to explore and enhance the body’s possibilities and overall fitness.

3.7. *‘The body obsession’*

As a closing remark to the discussion of the main emerging themes in my analysis of Polki.pl, I want to briefly discuss the article titled “The body obsession”⁴⁰, which was one of the articles returned in the search with ‘health’ as keyword.

The same magazine that contributes to the creation of the perfect fit body frenzy by articles, images and publicity, also features articles on the dangers of “overdoing” exercise. The hypocrisy is inherent – the objective is to convince readers that the publication they are reading is a socially responsible one, a magazine (or website) that addresses the problems related to the fitness imperative. In a parallel fashion as occurs in the body image disorder discourse (Blood, 2005), the fitness addiction in “The body obsession” article in Polki.pl is presented as something characteristic to individuals who take their fitness routines to the extreme by exercising “half a day”, obsessively counting calories and increasing the workout difficulty and duration while simultaneously diminishing the food portions. By giving such extreme examples, the article takes the responsibility away from the messages conveyed by the mass media and from social pressure and puts it – again – in the hands of the individual. The underlying assumption is that a person who is somehow morally deficient, for example lacking in strong will or self-discipline, will end up failing to comply with the fitness imperative, either by not doing enough exercise or by doing too much of it. There is a fine line between each of the options: not exercising enough vs. exercising just the right amount, and exercising just the right amount vs. exercising too much. Female readers subject to the fitness discourse, are expected to figure out on our own just how much commitment to fitness is “just right”. The authors of the article admit that

“the border between the pleasure from practicing sports and addiction is in fact hard to grasp”⁴¹ (http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul.8091021,1.html, last accessed 23.06.2011).

Readers are also warned (from the expert knowledge perspective represented by a German sports doctor) of health risks related to over-training, such as hormonal imbalances, bone and ligament inflammatory changes, diminished libido and lack of menstruation. However, as is typical for the healthism paradigm which holds the individual responsible for his or her health, female readers are left to their own judgment to decide when enough exercise is enough. The article concludes with the statement that

⁴⁰ *Obsesja ciała*

⁴¹ *Granica między przyjemnością uprawiania sportu a uzależnieniem jest w zasadzie trudna do uchwycenia.*

“as the pressure of the environment does not seem to point to the perfect figure ceasing to be nearly the most important thing, the number of Adonises full of complexes and women always dissatisfied with themselves will keep growing.”⁴²

(http://polki.pl/fitness_odchudzanie_artykul,8091021,1.html, last accessed 23.06.2011)

Here again, the hypocrisy is evident in how the publication does not recognize forming part of this “environment” that promotes the obsessive control over one’s body in order to mold it to the prevailing ideals, which in case of women mean beauty ideals.⁴³

The very presence of this single article (which was also very highly rated by readers and included in the best rated category) is a very interesting phenomenon, comparable to body image disorder discourse analyzed by Sylvia Blood in the context of women’s magazines. Blood (2005) makes a critical reading of an article featured in leading New Zealand’s women’s magazine *More*, which features pictures of ‘ordinary’ women in an attempt (on the surface) to convey a message of self-acceptance for women whose bodies do not fit in the idealized frame. In reality, the article is based on the rhetoric of a false free choice between obsessing about one’s appearance or accepting oneself the way the person ‘naturally’ looks. Blood (2005), drawing on the work of Spitzak (*Confessing excess: Women and the politics of body reduction*, 1990) highlights that the choice is illusory because the two options are not given the same validity in contemporary Western culture – women are expected to look in a *certain* way, not just *any* way. The sales of the magazine and the products advertised in it depend on women feeling inadequate and willing to ‘improve’ their faults:

“The visual and verbal text of the magazine covertly and overtly supports the self-improvement reading of the editorial. The rhetoric of free choice of self-determination decontextualises and depoliticizes women’s experiences. Inevitably, women’s failure either to accept themselves or to emulate the ideal rests with the individual alone.” (Blood, 2005, pp. 82).

Similarly, the visual and verbal text of the fitness section of Polki.pl conveys a dominant message of the constant need for improvement of the imperfect female body, improvement which can be achieved through self-discipline and the purchase of specialized products and services. At the same time, the rhetoric of free choice is supported by “The body obsession” article which contrasts the

⁴² *A ponieważ presja otoczenia raczej nie wskazuje na to, by idealna sylwetka przestała być niemal najważniejsza, liczba zakompleksionych Adonisów i wiecznie niezadowolonych z siebie pań, będzie systematycznie rosnąć.*

⁴³ Interestingly, the argument of exercise promotion for women as aimed primarily at achieving the beauty ideal is also reflected in the fact that most articles in the fitness section of Polki.pl came from Uroda (Beauty) – the magazine on beauty in Edipresse’s portfolio.

‘normal’ pursuit of fitness with the ‘abnormal’, excessive and unhealthy behavior of a person obsessed with their body. Both discourses in the long run serve to sell fitness as the individual responsibility of each woman.

4. Conclusions

The pressure exerted on women to conform to a current beauty ideal, is also connected with the commercialization of fitness through advertising that accompanies the articles in Polki.pl, either inside of the actual text of the article or on the side. Fitness clubs, specific training gear, cosmetics, plastic surgery interventions, beauty treatments and other products and services are directly or indirectly advertised in Polki.pl. Health imperative, the middle class morality and the notion of a self-defining subject merge with the existing body ideal, maintaining the oppressive emphasis on the shape and size of a female body. The new element is that, in comparison to female body ideals from just a few decades ago, now the body is meant to be well-toned, trim and flab-free, aside from slender, hairless, young etc. Exercise types labelled typically “feminine”, such as dance, running, walking, light weight training or pilates, are presented as a beneficial alternative to plastic surgery in women’s quest to achieve perfect bodies. The dominant discourse in Polki.pl makes it clear that the desired outcome of exercise is not empowerment, but objectification of women’s bodies and their compliance to existing beauty ideals.

With regards to healthism and the health imperative, two concepts that formed the theoretical basis of my analysis and its starting point, the situation is complex, as Polki.pl, at least in its fitness section, makes relatively little direct mention of the health issue. The discourse of Polki.pl is so clearly focused on beauty that health benefits from exercise are rarely highlighted, and even if they are, they are often limited to the slimming effects of exercise due to faster metabolism and higher calorie output it brings. Healthism, as understood by Crawford (1980) and Dworkin and Wachs (2009), is visible rather indirectly, in how being able to achieve the slender and toned body free from flab (which, according to those authors is synonymous with health in contemporary culture) is perceived to be the personal responsibility of each woman. This message is particularly strong in what I named ‘glamorization of fitness’ and ‘commercialization of fitness’ – these two themes come together very clearly in case of celebrities who are offered as models for slenderness and ‘fitness’ and the advice of their personal trainers, who insist that no excuses are valid for not having a perfect body, when it is only necessary to have self-discipline and the right exercise knowledge/equipment.

This is a surprising finding as, according to the theory, I was expecting that, hand with the dominant slender, toned and glamorous body ideal promotion, health would be conceptualized as syn-

onymous with a certain type of physique and ‘ideal weight’, independently of physiological health indicators such as the resting heart rate, muscle strength or pulmonary capacity (VO₂). The importance of maintaining a healthy (i.e. slim, lean, fit, well-nourished) body should also be associated with positive moral characteristics of a person, such as strong will and self-control, and with desirable high social status and prosperity.

On the contrary to the ‘body as capital’ notion described in chapter 1.3., Polki.pl does not subscribe to the selling of the ‘individual style’ of a hip, young, fit, successful and attractive person. As physical fitness is seen to determine one’s general adaptability and self-disciplining skills and improve one’s self-esteem, magazines make use of those types of connotations in its marketing strategy, putting a strong emphasis on their models’ highly valued determination and control over one’s own body. I did manage to find this element in the fitness advice from personal trainers to the stars, offered to readers of Polki.pl as the ultimate models for enviable self-discipline and the ensuing perfect figure. Aside from that, the success and attractiveness of a ‘fit’ person are implicit in the message – articles in Polki.pl seem to just assume that all women desire the same body ideal and their role is to provide readers with means and information on how to achieve it, rather than actually convince them that it is worth achieving in the first place.

My analysis of the fitness section of Polki.pl did not reveal the self-determining subject, characterized by experiences of satisfaction, happiness and self-worth for being in control and ‘doing something for themselves’, as described by Roberta Sassatelli (2001). Interesting as the concept is, in fitness articles published on Polki.pl I failed to identify a woman fully in control of her body, being able to change and mould it as she pleases and thus giving herself reasons to be proud of herself, whose body serves as evidence of her hard work and determination and of her ability to achieve the goals she sets for herself. Instead, the dominant discourse is centred on exercising and reflecting the outward pressure towards the self-disciplining practices necessary to achieve the perfect looks. Perhaps this is due to a different nature of the text analyzed, as Sassatelli based her analysis on interviews with male and female gym-goers, while my analysis is based on a mass-media articles aimed at women. Looking at women’s actual experience of exercise and at their reading of the texts published in Polki.pl might be an interesting direction of further research, in order to find out to what extent ‘fitness’ activities are empowering for women and what they actually make of the mass-media messages.

As the inter-gender comparison was not the focus of this thesis, I am not able to agree or disagree with Sandra Bartky’s (1998) argument that the subordination of women is reflected in how women’s bodies are disciplined (and self-disciplined) differently than those of men. However, on the basis of my analysis of the promotion of types of exercise appropriate for women (jogging, cycling, gymnastics) and the accompanying omission of all other types of sports that women could engage in

but that are not even mentioned in Polki.pl, it seems justified to conclude that women are not being offered a full spectrum of physical activity and that not all female body types are perceived to be desirable and attractive. As Bartky argues, the dominant discourse in Polki.pl does not allow women to become too muscular (it even goes further in asserting that women are not able to develop muscles due to their hormonal constitution) or too big, and that female bodies are supposed to be small, slender, toned and disciplined rather than strong, powerful, speedy or capable. Bartky’s argument on the self-disciplining as a means of achieving a particular feminine bodily aesthetics is reflected in Polki.pl in how women are encouraged to watch what they eat all day long and to use any free moment to do a few toning exercises that will make them look better. Looking good is what matters most, while expansion and exploration of the possibilities of one’s body, as well as competitiveness and achievement through sport, are completely left aside. Polki.pl, as I demonstrated in the analysis of “The body obsession” article, can be said to belong to the same type of popular magazine as the one analyzed by Shannon Jette (2006) and described in paragraph 1.2 – by prescribing a particular type of desirable physique, backing it up with pictures of celebrities and their personal trainers as models and providing a range of tips and techniques for women to self-discipline their own bodies, it plays on women’s vulnerabilities and at the same time encourages them to keep visiting the website.

In the dominant discourse, the utility of exercise for beauty and for sculpting of a perfect physique is highlighted most frequently, taking almost a complete prevalence over any mention of sports for health, enjoyment or longevity. Exercise is seen to be instrumental in the quest for a heterosexually attractive body, and as a consequence the portal highlights the efficiency of particular routines in shaping different body parts. Exercise is also perceived as boring and not too enjoyable, therefore specialized products, gadgets, and gym memberships ought to be bought and advice from personal trainers to the stars followed, in order to aid the fading motivation. Celebrities serve as role models and inspiration for women to engage in the transformation of their own imperfect bodies. When health is mentioned, it is either conflated with beauty or treated from a purely medical perspective through the usage of technical and unattractive language.

The general conclusion from my analysis of the prevalent themes present in fitness articles in Polki.pl, is that the promotion of exercise for women in this online portal is oppressive rather than empowering for women. This is due to the following reasons: its almost exclusive focus on beauty and achieving a particular figure that is required from all women; the imperative tone; the employment of celebrities and personal trainers as models; the encouragement for women to self-discipline their bodies to the extent bordering on absurdity; the fragmentation of the body that serves the quest for sculpting of the perfect figure; and the almost complete lack of alternatives to ‘feminine-appropriate’ sports

that would allow women to enjoy themselves and explore their bodies in the domain of physical activity.

The direction in which the research should follow is the actual reading of Polki.pl and other similar texts by Polish women and the possible strategies of accommodation and resistance the women might employ (as described by Dworkin and Wachs, 2009), together with the different feelings and experiences that the promotion of physical activity in its current shape might inflict.

When analyzing discourse in women’s magazines in general, and in Polki.pl in particular, it is important to remember that we are dealing not with real women in real exercise settings, but with the media representation of women exercisers. Their image is constructed in a certain way in order to make it appealing to the viewer who desires all or most of the qualities previously discussed in this paper, qualities that form part of the keep-fit culture (healthy and fit body, self-determination, sense of style and individuality, physical attractiveness and so on). These images are created in order to make the viewer’s desire shift from the qualities to the advertised products, and to help build the brand which now becomes imbued with those qualities and starts functioning as their embodiment (Klein, 2009). Therefore, the ensuing research should examine women’s reactions to discourse in Polki.pl and to similar publications in order to find out which qualities of those publications can have a positive and empowering effect and which do not. It is important to examine whether, and to what degree, the meaning that is extracted by female readers from this type of articles corresponds to the preferred or dominant discourse that I identified in the present thesis. Another possible direction for further research would be to try to find alternative, non-mainstream media, in which a range of body ideals circulates and examine how female readers interpret, reproduce, use or challenge the message these media carry and portray.

5. Bibliography

- Bartky, S. L. (1998). Foucault, femininity and the modernization of patriarchal power. In R. Weitz (Ed.), *The politics of women's bodies: Sexuality, appearance, and behavior* (1998). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Blood, S. K. (2005). *Body work: The social construction of women's body image*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bordo, S. (1993). *Unbearable weight: Feminism, western culture, and the body*. University of California Press.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of “sex”*. New York: Theatre Arts Books.
- Choi, P. Y. L. (2000). *Femininity and the physically active woman*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Collins, L. H. (2002). Working out the contradictions: Feminism and aerobics. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 26(1), 85-109.
- Conboy, K., Medina, N., & Stanbury, S. (1997). *Writing on the body: Female embodiment and feminist theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Crawford, R. (1980). Healthism and the medicalization of everyday life *International Journal of Health Services : Planning, Administration, Evaluation*, 10(3), 365-388.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1949). *The second sex* (1997th ed.). London: Vintage.
- Dworkin, S., & Wachs, F. (2009). *Body panic: Gender, health, and the selling of fitness* NYU Press.
- Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive psychology*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Featherstone, M. (1991). *Consumer culture and postmodernism*. London: Sage.
- Foucault, M. (1984). The birth of the asylum. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (1984). New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1984). The great confinement. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (1984). New York: Pantheon.

- Foucault, M. (1984). Nietzsche, genealogy, history. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (1984). New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1984). Panopticism. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The foucault reader* (1984). New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, M. (1991). Governmentality. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon & P. Miller (Eds.), *The foucault effect: Studies in governmentality* (1991). The University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, M., & Hurley, R. (1990). *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Jette, S. (2006). Fit for two? A critical discourse analysis of oxygen fitness magazine. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 23(4), 331-351.
- Kane, M. J., & Pearce, K. D. (2002). *Representations of female athletes in young adult sports fiction* State University of New York Press.
- Lewis, J. (1991). *The ideological octopus: An exploration of television & its audience*. New York: Routledge.
- Lury, C. (1996). Habitat and habits. In C. Lury (Ed.), *Consumer culture* (1996) Polity Press.
- Markula, P. (2001). Beyond the perfect body. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 25(2), 158.
- Miller, T. (2001). *Globalization and sport: Playing the world*. London: Sage.
- Mills, S. (2004). *Discourse: The new critical idiom*. New York: Routledge.
- O edipresse / grupa edipresse / strona główna - edipresse* Retrieved 6/23/2011, 2011, from http://www.edipresse.pl/index.php?/pl/le_groupe/a_propos_d_edipresse
- Poster, M. (1989). *Critical theory and poststructuralism: In search of a context* Cornell University Press Ithaca.
- Riley, D. (1988). *Am I that name? feminism and the category of women in history*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rose, N. (2001). The politics of life itself. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 18(6), 1-30.
- Smith, D. E. (1995). Femininity as discourse. In D. Smith (Ed.), *Texts, facts, and femininity*. Psychology Press.

Spitzack, C. (1990). *Confessing excess: Women and the politics of body reduction*. State University of New York Press.

Tonkiss, F. (2004). Analysing discourse. In C. Seale (Ed.), *Researching society and culture* (pp. 245-260). London: SAGE Publications.

Wetherell, M., & Potter, J. (1992). *Mapping the language of racism: Discourse and the legitimation of exploitation*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Wolf, N. (1991). *The beauty myth: How images of beauty are used against women*. London: Vintage Books.

Wollstonecraft, M. (1792). A vindication of the rights of woman. In A. S. Rossi (Ed.), *The feminist papers: From adams to de beauvoir* (1988). Boston: Northeastern University Press.