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The Body and Work

1. Introduction

As Carol Wolkowitz writes in her groundbreaking book *Bodies at Work*, “we need to remember that although everyone has a body, not everyone has the same relation to its economic and symbolic significance” (2006: 6). The bodies of people from different professions – a construction worker and a professional athlete, a flight attendant and a pianist, a sex worker and a miner – are largely similar, yet they are used in very different professional contexts. Although we all have bodies, the work we do shapes our bodily skills, abilities, and habits in different ways. In this chapter I will present how doing different types of work shapes workers’ bodies. I will also discuss the body in industry, in the service sector, in sexual and reproductive work, as well as describe the relationship between the body and gender in addition to class. Additionally, I will present the most important concepts, notions, and research on this topic.

The subject matter discussed in this chapter is important in the context of the social changes of recent decades. Positions, employment conditions, workplaces, and professional identities are gaining importance in contemporary societies. Employees are often focused on competition, spending long hours at work, functioning in the context of organizational cultures that interfere with private life, as well as various motivational tools (positive and negative) aimed at increasing employee effectiveness. Ignoring these phenomena leads to the current epidemic of stress, overwork, and depression. To be able to counteract this, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that employees are embodied social actors. Their health and safety depend on their actions at work, both in the individual and macro-social dimensions.

The human body is deeply involved in every aspect of paid work, to which we often devote many hours a day. Performing a specific job plays a large role in shaping what Schatzki and Natter (1996) called “social and political bodies.” This is less deliberate than physical exercise, training or dieting. It often takes place unconsciously – through the implementation of social, group or interactional

norms. In carrying out professional duties, we constantly monitor and manage our bodies to match the requirements imposed by the performance of a given professional role. In turn, the organized and disciplined bodies of corporate employees contribute to the reproduction of their organizational cultures and the generation of its profits (Wolkowitz 2006: 55). For example, the introduction of appearance requirements by banks: an elegant jacket or suit, shirt, and well-groomed face and hands are not only aimed at building the company's brand as a trustworthy institution. Building trust in contact with a bank employee is also intended to cause the client to take out a slightly larger loan than initially expected, or to agree to apply for a credit card, even if they had not planned to do so.

The close relationship between body and work also has a global dimension. First, a significant part of production has been relocated to countries where wages are lower, and environmental protection or labor law restrictions are less rigorous. This is associated with difficult, sometimes even inhumane working conditions for residents of entire cities or regions. In turn, workers in wealthier Western countries are increasingly concentrated in the service sector, where issues of appearance or course of interaction are of great importance. This means that different types of individual experiences related to the body, as well as health problems resulting from work, are concentrated in different parts of the world. Second, a similar division applies to reproductive work (including tasks related to supporting and providing services for the current or future workforce, e.g., childcare). A large proportion of workers performing this type of work in wealthier countries now come from abroad, relying particularly heavily on labor migration from poorer countries (Wolkowitz 2006: 149).

The status of work in sociology of the body

The relationship between body and work is nothing new in the sociology of work. Nevertheless, for many decades it was treated superficially. This was due to several reasons. Traditional studies from the industrial period (e.g., by Karl Marx or Max Weber), now classic, focused on jobs performed by men. As a result, the issue of the body was unconsciously present, as if "by default" – the always similar, male bodies of workers did not attract researchers' attention. They did not show the impact of bodily differences (gender, race, disability, etc.) on the way work is performed. Also, much later studies on workplace relations initially focused on male workers. Classic studies of this type concerned fishermen (Tunstall 1962), truck drivers (Hollowell 1968), and workers in manufacturing and processing plants (Nichols, Beynon 1977; Burawoy 1979; Collinson 1992). It was not until the 1980s that researchers began to pay attention to the experiences of women working in factories (Pollert 1981; Westwood 1984).

It is not true, however, that no researcher has addressed the issue of the body earlier. This reflection existed, but it was less direct. The aforementioned Karl Marx (1996, first edition: 1867), whose work has constituted one of the first and key perspectives for the further development of this subject, drew attention to the mutually constructive relationship between the body and work: bodies are both the source of work and its products. He noted that tools, land, and the products of

human work are a kind of material record, an extension of the worker's body (Scarry 1985: 247). The worker transforms his body through work, providing himself with food and other useful goods. Thanks to the resources from work, he can provide his body with food, shelter, clothing, and renews his strength. Among the classics of the sociology of work, Max Weber also attached importance to the embodiment of social actors, drawing attention to its significant role in the analysis of charisma as a form of power. The period of industrialization was also marked by the activity of Frederick Taylor, who focused on increasing the efficiency of laborers' work, among others, by analyzing the movements, postures, and efficiency of their bodies (Morgan 1997).

As Pasi Falk (1991, cited in: Shilling 2012: 124) wrote, the lack of interest in the body in the sociology of work was the result of researchers focusing on the subject-object relationship, both in the employee-material relationship and the artist-work of art relationship. Therefore, the amount of work that people did on their bodies was underestimated. Chris Shilling (2012: 124) has pointed out that performing everyday work on our own bodies (e.g., washing it, feeding it, taking medicines, shaving, and applying make-up) brings us specific health benefits. It is worth noting that it is also an element of the reproduction of the social order, which requires control over one's appearance and the embodiment of values represented in society.

The absence of the body in the sociology of work can also be seen in the fact that in Western culture the body is associated rather with sensuality, play, pleasure, and spontaneity. We associate bodily issues much less often with work, often understood as coercion, routine, and duty (Scarry 1985; Wolkowitz 2006: 9). It is precisely the perception of the body as something natural, extra-cultural, and, therefore, pre-social; that is one of the important reasons why the body was indirectly present in the sociology of work. Chris Shilling (2012) called this phenomenon a "naturalistic" view of the body. The body understood in this way exists outside the power relations that affect it. Moreover, in Western culture, although not exclusively, most of the activities that directly serve the body have traditionally been carried out outside the labor market and the public sphere – by women in the roles of wives and mothers (Smith 1988; Wolkowitz 2006: 14). They were, therefore, not perceived as work.

As a consequence of the changes in many sectors of the economy, the 1990s saw the beginning of broader research on the organization of work in new, rapidly developing sectors: hospitality, retail, knowledge work, and cultural production. Work in these sectors involved new roles, relationships, and identities (Kunda 1992; Lash, Urry 1994; Adkins 1995; Macdonald, Sirianni 1996; Black 2004; Pettinger 2004). As women began to play an important role in these new sectors, the issue of gender in the workplace became more visible. Attention was also finally being paid to people in low-paid jobs in feminized professions (e.g., cleaners, waitresses, and supermarket workers). A significant contribution to understanding the realities of this work was made by female journalists who undertook such work themselves and described the experiences of female workers in the sector (Toynbee 2003; Ehrenreich 2002).

2. The most important theoretical concepts

The body and work in the concepts of sociology classics

The subject of work in the considerations of great sociologists, including sociologists dealing with the body, was not often been taken up. Nonetheless, one can find certain threads in the works of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Erving Goffman, and Anselm Strauss, which may be useful in considering the body in the situation of work. Below I will present this part of the achievements of the classics, and later in the chapter the works of two researchers – Marcel Mauss and Richard Sennett, who bring closer the relationship between the body and the performance of work.

Michel Foucault, mentioned many times in this book, has pointed out that the body is the basic object through which power influences the individual and governs social life. One of the most important concepts he introduced to sociology was biopower. This type of influence on individuals consists of the increasingly rationalized management of biological matter through surveillance technologies and expert knowledge (Foucault 1979). Looking at the contemporary world of corporations and employee control, we can see that this phenomenon manifests itself, for example, in routine urine tests for drug use by employees (Ehrenreich 2002) or appearance guidelines in service professions.

Biopower becomes a feature of the relationship between the employee and the organization, which wants to have as much information about their health as possible. The healthier the employee, the better investment they become, the longer and more effectively they can work for the organization. A subtle manifestation of biopower is, for instance, the promotion by the company of employees commuting to work by bike, e.g. by paying a salary supplement or other benefits. A healthy employee's body is a profit for the company.

In Foucault's works, we also find references to the dominant action of technology. The human body becomes submissive to it and passively endures regulations and supervision (Foucault 1991). This was clearly visible during the pandemic when the technology of thermometers or thermal cameras checked the body temperature of workers in factories and office buildings, who in addition were required to wear masks or gloves. Foucault, however, did not associate submissiveness with weakness, but rather with productivity. Power affects individuals, realizing its goals through them, not against them (Garland 1990). Foucault's works that may be useful in understanding the relationship between the body and work in today's world are those concerning power over the employee, realized through modern technological solutions, as well as the more subtle management of workers' bodies (Foucault 1979, 1991).

The second classic, who we often mention in this book, is **Pierre Bourdieu**, the creator of the capacious but also useful concept of habitus in research on the body in the work situation (Bourdieu, Passeron 1990). By creating this concept, Bourdieu

placed the body at the intersection of the social (structure) and the individual (agency, action). According to Bourdieu, society penetrates the body of an individual through the dispositions of the social structure that creates the framework for bodily behavior: body posture, body skills and competences, embodied aspects of language in the form of speech habits, vocabulary, accent, and so on (Wolkowitz 2006: 19–20). An example of this is the change in the way of writing that has taken place in recent decades. Owing to the development of technology, we write progressively less by hand and increasingly more often on a smartphone keyboard, using only two fingers, which in consequence causes, for instance, spine problems. The aforementioned dispositions also affect the workplace and work situation, and what is more, they can be an invitation or an obstacle when trying to obtain a specific position. The values embodied by the habitus of a representative of a class may be consistent with or contradictory to the values of an organization or the expectations of customers.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty is another scholar whose work has had great significance for the development of interest in the human body also in the context of work. He was a philosopher, phenomenologist, and author of classic works on the body or rather embodiment. He wrote that the body was given to us constantly, it existed on the margin of our experiences, and we did not become aware of its existence unless, for example, disease forced us to deal with it (1974). It is also the basic object through which we understand other people (Lussier-Ley 2010: 203). Through the body, which is constantly under the influence of consciousness, we experience reality in its various contexts (Merleau-Ponty 2005: 99, 208). This often happens in the context of work, a good example of which are the experiences of people providing sexual services described later in the chapter. The context of work causes the employee to enter a professional role, and their body experiences events from this very perspective.

The body and its experience are, therefore, not unchanging or static, but constitute a social phenomenon. We not only experience it in a situation-dependent manner, but also transform it into one that is consistent with social norms or the expectations of other “embodied entities” with whom we interact. This theoretical perspective can provide solutions for people working in modern organizations or in services, where the issues of the expectations of others, e.g., regarding appearance, are an important aspect of constructing a professional social role.

The work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty has provided researchers of the body in relation to work with an interesting perspective on the use of tools. According to Merleau-Ponty, by entering into constant, repeated interactions with objects, we incorporate them into the resources of our body and we attach new tools to ourselves (Merleau-Ponty 2005: 104, 166). Tools (of work) become part of our body, like a baton in the hands of a conductor or a steering wheel in the hands of a professional driver. This happens because knowledge about an object permeates the body with each successive use of the object. An individual acquires bodily habits and uses the tool as if it were part of their body. They can also become addicted to it. Each of us has felt at some point “as if without a hand” when we lacked the tool of our work (professional or domestic).

We can also apply Merleau-Ponty's perspective on the body to the analysis of the impact of work technology on the individual and their body. The concept of "body schema" (*schéma de corps*) proposed by him refers to the individual's experience of where their body is in time and space. The body, supplemented by embodied tools, is measured, valued, and objectified by economic organizations, incorporated into machines or computer systems that set the pace of work.

Erving Goffman's work is important for both sociology of the body and the sociology of work, especially from an interactionist perspective. From the point of view of the subject of this chapter, it is worth paying attention to that part of Goffman's work that refers to people's management of their bodies in the work situation (1955, 1963, 1971, 1976). He considered this aspect of the role an essential and constitutive element in maintaining social order (Crossley 1995). For him, the body also played a fundamental role in mediating the relations between one's individual identity and social identity (Shilling 2012: 86). This is evidenced by works on gender advertisements¹ or stigma (Goffman 1963, 1976). In the former, the author has focused on the differentiation of images of both genders in advertising, which symbolically assigns women and men to different orders, embodying different values, including work, professionalism, and profession. In *Stigma*, Goffman examined the influence of "spoiled identity," which is often rooted in disability, illness, and physical otherness, on interactions. It has a major impact on attributing stereotypical traits to stigmatized people, which are important, for example, when making decisions about cooperation, employment, or performing one's job. This concept can also be useful in the case of studies on stigmatizing professions (Wojciechowska 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Ślęzak 2016a, 2016b, 2018a, 2018b).

In the works of **Anselm Strauss**, the body is seen as one of the symbolic objects towards which social actors act. As a symbolic interactionist, Strauss has pointed out that the body is a symbolic object, just like its individual systems and elements. The social actor assigns specific meanings to each of them and takes action towards their body on the basis of these meanings. This means that the relationship with the body is not only individual or biological, but is the result of socialization. In interaction and action, interpretation is always present – one's own or someone else's. The body and mind of the social actor are inextricably linked; they are part of every action and every interaction, with the exception of purely impulsive reactions (Strauss 2017: 113).

Anselm Strauss and his colleagues (1982, 1985) studied the work of medical personnel and the experience of illness for many years. They analyzed, among others, work on the trajectory of illness, taking into account the interactional dimension of the treatment process. They drew attention to the multidimensionality of medical work, the mutual dependence of its various aspects, in addition to the actions taken by many social actors focused on treating the patient. They included medical technologies as important determinants of the course of medical work,

¹ This term refers to the representation of gender in advertising. The reader will find more about this in *The Body and Media* chapter.

but also the organization of hospital work understood as a set of work sites, thus drawing attention to the influence of the social context on the course of performing professional tasks. During this research, the concept of sentimental work, which is so crucial for the sociology of work and sociology of the body today, was also identified. Its detailed description can be found in the part of the chapter presenting the most important concepts. Anselm Strauss was also one of the co-authors of the book entitled *Boys in White. Student Culture in Medical School* (Becker et al. 1961), which describes the results of research on the process of becoming a doctor, taking into account not only medical aspects, but also the acquisition of manual or interactional skills necessary in this profession.

Marcel Mauss was an anthropologist who was one of the first to take an interest in the body. His work is described in the introductory chapter, and in this part of the book I will present the significance of his concept in considering the relationship between the body and work. In his classic text on the techniques of the body, he pointed to the importance of culture and cultural differences in the use of the body by people from different parts of the world. Mauss treated the body as a primary instrument that must be learned to use. And where there is an instrument, there is a technique for using it. At the same time, every technique using another instrument must be preceded by learning the technique of using one's own body (Mauss 1973: 75). Mauss cited many examples of different but effective uses of the body, differentiating them according to gender, age, and physical fitness (Mauss 1973: 83–85). He has emphasized that these methods translate into the structure of the individual's body. This means that performing work through the body transforms that body into one that meets the requirements of social norms functioning in a given culture (profession), but can also be consumed by that work.

Mauss' work on the issue of ways of using the body was introductory. Nevertheless, its significance was great because he has drawn attention to and supported his conclusions with evidence that the body and the ways of using it are similar to the use of an instrument. He has also pointed out that culture, upbringing, prestige, and other social phenomena enter the body and shape it, not only showing how to use it, but also that they have physical and biological consequences.

Another researcher who has drawn attention to the issue of the body in the context of work is **Richard Sennett**. From the perspective of this book, an important work of his is *The Craftsman*, in which he deals with profession, including its bodily dimension. When writing about professionals, Sennett has in mind people who share several common features regardless of the industry in which they work. A carpenter, a laboratory technician, a conductor, and a surgeon are professionals because they try to do their job well for the sake of doing it well; they are characterized by commitment and practical knowledge (Sennett 2008). The skills they possess are bodily in nature; they are a physical competence (or, using Bourdieu's language, an element of physical habitus), acquired through long-term practice. For Sennett, repetition is key in acquiring skills. In developing professional skills, exploration, including mistakes, is also necessary because it enables the development of

experience and understanding of the rules of work (Sennett 2008). Psychologist Daniel Levitin, quoted by Sennett, has calculated that the time it takes to prepare a professional is ten thousand hours of practice in a profession. This is how much time must pass before complex skills take root in the professional's body and turn into tacit knowledge (Sennett 2008).

Richard Sennett has devoted much attention to touch as a sense, but also as a type of competence developed by specialists. Through touch, a specialist enters into a relationship with the object on which he is working. In this way, he acquires material consciousness (Sennett 2008), that is, a competence that is difficult to verbalize, related to "understanding" by touching the density, structure, heaviness or fragility of the material.² Sometimes, when interacting with an object, a specialist anthropomorphizes the raw material or the object of their work. They give it human characteristics, primarily will, desire, accuse it of stubbornness, lack of cooperation, and when it does not want to give up, a disciplinary "conversation" with the object also occurs (Sennett 2008).³

From the perspective of a specialist's work, Richard Sennett considered the hand to be a key part of the body. It is so important because it is capable of performing the greatest number of movements subject to our control (Sennett 2008). At the same time, the hand is shaped to a very large extent through exercises, and in the vast majority of professions it does not require a specific anatomical structure. It is also a very plastic tool – with its help, specialists from various industries perform many different tasks. The system of the "intelligent hand" that allows the realization of professional skills comprises: the eyes, hand and brain (Sennett 2008).

Richard Sennett is a researcher who focuses on a slightly different topic than the authors described earlier. He observes the bodily phenomena that take place during the acquisition of a profession and the performance of work. Unlike Michel Foucault or Pierre Bourdieu, he does not talk about systems in relation to the body, but about the body in the situation of work.

Key issues and concepts

Above, I have presented the most important concepts of the classics of sociology, whose works have shaped the imagination of researchers for decades. Below, I will describe the issues and concepts concerning the relationship between the body and work in sociological concepts and research.

2 For example, the neurosurgeons I observed used touch mediated by surgical instruments to recognize the fragility of blood vessels, the hardness and cohesion of excised tumors, and their demarcation from healthy tissue.

3 During my research, I have often witnessed neurosurgeons, anesthesiologists or nurses having difficulty performing a task, address the object of their efforts in a way that indicated their anthropomorphization. This was often accompanied by negative emotions.

The industrial body

A very interesting issue from the perspective of studying the relationship between the body and work is its transformation during the period of industrialization. Of course, in earlier eras the body was also shaped by work or the performed profession. Nonetheless, this influence was not of such a mass nature, but rather manifested itself in local or regional norms and values related to the body. Industrialization was a breakthrough in the history of societies because in various places around the world similar technological solutions began to be introduced. The invention of the steam engine had not only economic but also social effects. It caused mass migration from the countryside to cities, most often unprepared for such a large influx of people.

The factory forced the individual to adopt a completely new way of working, in comparison to work in a craft workshop or in agriculture. Employees became part of the machine, having to submit to it, perform their tasks according to its dictates. Seemingly separate employees were gathered in one, closed workplace, arranged in space so that several controllers could observe many people at the same time. The individual became an element of the whole located in a specific place, moving and having an impact on the work of other elements (Foucault 1991: 164). The previous psychophysical system characterizing the independent worker has become unnecessary. It was replaced by the division of labor, in which the employee performed a small part of a larger process. This caused work alienation, stress, and fatigue, but, at the same time, it was more effective than ever before (Wolkowitz 2006: 58). Therefore, many concepts or management theories were created around this division of labor, which were supposed to improve it (Morgan 1997).

One of the most famous creators of such solutions was Henry Ford. He aimed to create a “new sort of worker” who could develop within the rigid framework of new production methods (Yanarella, Reid 1996: 182). The worker in his factory was to become an addition to the machine, as if one of its limbs serving the assembly line. Standardization, therefore, concerned not only the technology and the product, but also the worker.

Frederick Taylor used a similar approach to workers. Acting in accordance with the most important principle – standardization – through the design of machines, processes, and products, he considered differences as a problem that needed to be solved (Banta 1993). Workers’ bodies, as they could not be completely standardized, were perceived as anarchic, dangerous, and politically threatening (Bahnisch 2000). As Freund (1982, cited in: Shilling 2012: 118) has claimed, the body becomes a machine, but it is not able to endure as much as a machine.

The perspective in which a person becomes part of a large organization, a machine in which they perform a small part of its main task, became very popular in the 20th century. Whether in the manufacturing, bureaucratic or service sectors, these and similar solutions were adopted. George Ritzer (1996) described this phenomenon perfectly in *The McDonaldization of Society*. The employee’s body must submit, like other elements of an organization, to four main principles:

- predictability – by standardizing the appearance and demeanor of employees, including emotional reactions to difficult customer behavior,
- calculability – through such work organization, including the division of the day (e.g., night and day shifts forcing the subordination of sleep to work), it is possible to calculate how much work an employee can do and how it translates into the achievement of the organization's goals,
- efficiency – such fulfillment of the body's needs (e.g., a set break for lunch, to go to the toilet, for a cigarette) that will disrupt the functioning of the organization to the least extent possible,
- control – using solutions that influence people's actions, but which they are not aware of and that are often contrary to their interests, e.g., installing seats without a backrest so that one does not spend too long on a break.

The above-described ways of treating the body in industrial production, or more broadly, in machine organization, have become the object of interest of various researchers. Ernest Yanarella and Herbert Reid (1996: 200) have pointed out that in the production systems of modern factories, humans are increasingly adapted to the possibilities of microelectronics, and not the other way around. To describe this phenomenon, they propose the term “humanware,” which was first put forward by management consultants from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The second concept that reflects the way of thinking about the transformation of workers' bodies is the concept of “flexible bodies” (Martin 1996). This concept emphasizes the connection between the demands of a flexible labor market, as well as the emergence of new subjectivities and modes of embodiment (Wolkowitz 2006: 59). Workers have to adapt their bodies, sometimes multiple times during their working lives, to the constantly changing demands of a given job. This was very visible at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example during the transition to remote work.

Work and gender

The relationship between work and gender is probably the oldest type of the division of labor in human societies. In traditional societies, due to reproductive issues, women and men had traditionally designated roles. In most societies, women took care of babies, children, the home and the farm, as well as animals. Regardless of whether a society had this or a reverse division of labor, “professional” roles were strictly assigned to the gender of the person performing them.⁴ Class division was always embedded in the social roles performed by both genders. In Pierre Bourdieu's language, bodies have a class habitus. It is acquired in the process of socialization on the basis of various patterns present in an individual's social environment.

In Western societies, the male body was most often associated with work outside the home, paid and gainful, professionally performing public functions and power. An important model of the working class was the male body as strong and durable.

4 More on the relationship between gender and the body is described in the chapter *The Body and Gender*. Here I will describe the relationship between the gendered body and work.

Thanks to having such a body, a man could provide for his family, as well as ensure security (Thiel 2007: 241). This habitus was shaped from the beginning of industrialization and did not cease to exist after the collapse of the heavy industry in Western countries. The industrial body was from the beginning a white male working body. According to Banta (1993), the exclusion of both women and various minorities was a central element of the constitution of the body during industrialization (Wolkowitz 2006: 64–65).

The strong, masculine, industrial body was once a carrier of cultural capital. After the collapse of the heavy industry, it was torn away from its field of meaning. Work that ensured the maintenance of a “truly masculine body” no longer guaranteed it, and the old strategies ceased to work. As a result, the popularity of activities that can provide a field where such a habitus still commands respect, such as bodybuilding, boxing, and even male striptease, has increased among the working class (Charlesworth 2000, cited in: Wolkowitz 2006: 66).

Although the worker’s body is by default a male body, if we look at factory production as a whole, it turns out that women have played a significant role in manufacturing all over the world (Wolkowitz 2006: 66). Their work was of key importance for industry, for example, during the First and Second World Wars. When men fought on the front lines, women took their place in the heavy industry or armaments. This change was of great importance for the massification of women’s work outside the home, and its symbol is the heroine of the *We Can Do It!* poster by J. Howard Miller.⁵ Her image combines worker attributes – a blue shirt and a position indicating physical strength with feminine attributes – a red scarf on her head, well-groomed eyebrows, painted lips, and a curl in her hair. In Poland, the phenomenon of the massification of women’s work outside the home took place, among others, in my city, Lodz. The textile industry, which had been developing here since the beginning of the 19th century, resulted in the development of a professional group of female textile workers. They were hard-working and low-paid women whose history in Lodz, including the “bodily” one: living conditions, together with malnutrition, occupational diseases, miscarriages, sexual harassment, was described by Marta Madejska (2019) in her book *Aleja Włókniarek*.

The change in the work style in the last decades of the 20th century, resulting from, among others, the development of technology, caused an increase in the number of people doing office work. As in the case of manual workers, a male standard of appearance dominated in this sphere, mainly consisting of wearing a suit, shirt, and tie. The bodies of middle and upper-class men doing this type of work were shaped around slightly different values than those described above. Their appearance was to reflect individuality, competence, and professional success. Linda McDowell (1997) conducted research among men working in the City of London. Compared to older workers, young workers were distinguished by their youthful appearance, energy, activity, and masculinity, and they were also “seriously sexy, in a self-confident,

5 Also known incorrectly as Rosie the Riveter.

masculine way” (McDowell 1997: 185–188). According to McDowell’s research, almost all young men, like women, were aware of the importance of self-presentation at work, including hygiene, physical fitness, and choice of clothing. This indicates that the differences in the requirements for the appearance of women and men in corporations are decreasing. Appearance in a broad sense is becoming one of the elements of the habitus of an employee in a modern corporation.

This leveling of differences between women and men in corporations is the result of yet another process. The employee’s body is also sometimes treated by organizational discourse and practice as disembodied, non-sexual, and non-gendered, or, in an idealized way, as rational and obeying bureaucratic rules (Holliday, Thompson 2001: 117). Such a programmatic disembodiedness of the ideal employee sidelines and deliberately fails to notice embodied features such as charisma or gender stereotypes (including self-stereotypes) internalized by employees. However, this is only a kind of an utopian organizational assumption. The body, including gender, does not become unimportant or non-existent just because it is left on the margin of organizational life. It is sometimes included in the formal framework of organizational regulations of employment principles. This happens when minimum body “measurements” are established in male professions, and maximum ones in female professions (Shilling 2012: 126).

In turn, the role of women, as I mentioned, has always been associated with working at home, with taking care of dependent family members, i.e., children, the sick, and the elderly. Women taking up a place in paid work outside the home was a kind of protest against the traditional division of labor. Women performing male professions were controversial also because it required them to wear men’s clothing. This disrupted the bodily social order in which each gender was assigned specific role attributes through clothing. An example of research exploration (because they were not research studies in the strict sense) of this problem comprised the studies conducted in the second half of the 19th century by Arthur J. Munby on women mining coal in small English mines. He was fascinated by the physical characteristics of working women: thick skin, wide backs, ruddy faces, tanned skin, and work-worn hands and feet. They contrasted greatly with the delicate, white hands and smaller, more delicate feet of middle-class girls. These women, dressed in men’s trousers covered by aprons, stained by soil and coal, were a kind of counterculture in Victorian England, iconoclastic and threatening to degenerate society. Their work was not a short episode, however, because women mined coal for almost two hundred years. The first mentions of this phenomenon date back to the 17th century, while in 1842 a law was introduced prohibiting women from working underground in mines. Nevertheless, this did not cause them to withdraw from this work. They continued to do it dressed as men and also worked for lower wages.

Even today, in the 21st century, the presence of the female body in work outside the home is still characterized by a certain necessity to conform to standards created for the male body. Robyn Longhurst (2001) has argued that even a pregnant female

body is perceived as out of place in the public sphere because it causes some to fear the release of bodily fluids. Another problem described by Longhurst is the appearance of mothers of young children in the workplace. Evidence of childhood illness, tears, and sleepless nights is hidden, for example under make-up, rather than presented (Wolkowitz 2006: 91–92). In the case of services, the appearance of the employee is particularly important for the quality of the work performed. This results from the specificity of this type of task: the co-presence of the employee and the customer during the performance of the service. This means that interpersonal, embodied interactions with customers shape the work process to a greater extent and more directly in the service industry than in the case of industrial work (McDowell 1997, cited in: Wolkowitz 2006: 71).

An example of this phenomenon is the work performed by flight attendants, who are treated as embodied carriers of the organizational ethos, which Arlie Hochschild described, among others, in the book entitled *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Hochschild 2012). During the recruitment, training, and supervision of these employees, special emphasis is placed on the requirements regarding appearance, which is of a standardized nature. Fulfilling the requirements of “body work” by employees (Shilling 2012) requires a great deal of time, effort, and resources devoted to maintaining a specific body state and is part of their professional duties. The ability to adapt and standardize one’s appearance to the requirements of the organization and specific instructions is part of their professional training. In the past, they could also lose their jobs as a result of exceeding the permissible “measurements”: body weight, and the width of thighs, bust or waist. The standardized requirements for the bodies of flight attendants are not limited to their appearance, but extend also to their behavior: soft steps, a friendly smile, and eye contact with passengers. During the flight, flight attendants are almost constantly in the passengers’ view. This makes their work with their body particularly taxing. In addition to the work associated with ensuring the safety of passengers, serving food and beverages, helping to operate equipment, and other duties, they must constantly monitor their bodies and be aware of how they appear to passengers. This body image seen through the eyes of customers becomes internalized, and its internalization is part of the recruitment and training process. A flight attendant’s body is supposed to look and behave as if this standardized way of being was “natural.” There is no room for revealing its undisciplined or uncontrolled elements (Tyler, Abbott 1998, cited in: Wolkowitz 2006: 82–83). Such disciplining of bodies and their subordination to the requirements of work organization causes serious health consequences for the representatives of this profession, which include varicose veins, back pain, bunions, hearing loss, circadian rhythm disorders, weakened lung capacity, eating disorders, and early menopause.

The traditional division into female and male jobs and professions, despite the progressing equality on the labor market, still functions. It manifests itself somewhat less, also allowing women to perform “typically male” jobs and “typically female” jobs

for men. Nonetheless, this does not happen simply, but is supported by various types of legitimizing apparatuses. An example here is care work, which is predominantly performed by women. Interesting research among nurses was conducted by Urszula Kluczyńska (2017, 2021). She has drawn attention to caring masculinity, which is different from the definition of masculinity in mainstream culture, and also describes the process of men entering the feminized profession of nurses and the male career paths pursued there. An analysis of practices is important from the point of view of implementing professional tasks: the desexualisation of male touch, interaction strategies related to overcoming gender stereotypes, and building trust with patients and their families. Urszula Kluczyńska's research is important from the perspective of the changes related to the increasing transition of women and men to professions stereotypically reserved for the opposite sex. Usually, men performing care tasks professionally are either positioned as exceptions, such as doctors (Hughes 2002), or perceived as unmanly or as homosexuals. In turn, in certain types of professions or organizations, women may be recruited to "male" professions and men to "female" ones if they are willing to accept, at least to a small extent, the masculinized or feminized habitus that governs a given profession or workplace (Wolkowitz 2006: 85, 153; Kluczyńska 2017, 2021).

Another interesting issue is the influence of the gender of employees on business decisions. For example, in the British meat and livestock industry in the late 20th century, pressure began to appear to increase the employment of women. This was intended to soften the public image of the industry, including discouraging consumers from becoming vegetarians. As it turned out, this change also improved the taste of the meat. Decisions made by women resulted in the creation of slaughter conditions that gave the animals more peace (Leask 2000).

Sex work

Sex work has only recently become a subject of interest in sociology. I believe it is worthwhile discussing in this chapter for two reasons. First, the relationship between the body and the performance of sex work is direct, if only because it is often performed naked and involves the use of intimate body parts and functions. Second, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, each society makes its own definition of what is and what is not work. The recognition of broadly understood sexual services as "real work" is related to the cultural (media, social) redefinition of sex and human sexuality that has been taking place in recent decades.

The concept of sex work includes many types of paid work related to providing sexual services and contacts. It is, therefore, much broader than the concept of prostitution, which has a negative connotation. As Izabela Ślęzak and Urszula Szczepankowska (2018: 7) wrote, the term "sex work" was created by Carol Leigh (1997).

The concept of sex work encompasses "a variety of sexual activities undertaken as a result of a commercial transaction [...] such as various forms of prostitution, erotic massage,

telephone and internet sex, striptease and erotic dancing, acting in pornographic films, nude posing, and others” (Ślęzak, Szczepankowska 2018: 7).

In Polish sociological literature, the dominant approach to sex workers is focused on the normative dimension of such behaviors and treats them as a manifestation of deviation (Kowalczyk-Jamnicka 1998; Kurzępa 2001; Jędrzejko 2006; Pospiszyl 2008; Gardian-Miałkowska 2016). This approach focuses on sex workers as passive victims and on the ways of helping them (Kwaśniewski 2000: 92). Sex work is treated much less often as a profession, and the workers as active subjects acting in a specific social context (Wolkowitz 2006: 127). In Polish sociology, the representatives of this approach include Magdalena Wojciechowska and Izabela Ślęzak. In their works (Wojciechowska 2012a, 2012b, 2012c; Ślęzak 2016a, 2016b, 2018a, 2018b), they have drawn attention to the interactional,⁶ bodily, interpretative, identity, and organizational dimensions of the work of people providing sex services.⁷ Many aspects of sex work were also included in the thematic issue of “Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej” edited by Izabela Ślęzak and Urszula Szczepankowska (2018).

Sex work is not only performed by people who do it openly, providing sexual services. In other professions, especially in the service sector, there are informal and sometimes formal requirements to have sex appeal as part of one’s bodily habitus. This is more common for female workers than for male workers. Employers expect, although not always consciously, that female workers will use their gender and (hetero)sexuality to help grow their clientele and profits. Through the interactional strategies used by female workers who use their sex appeal, male clients derive pleasure from female attention and sexuality. This is a kind of supplement to the basic tasks associated with their work (Tyler, Abbott 1998; Hancock, Tyler 2000). One of the first studies in this area was a case study by Lisa Adkins (1995), which focused on women working in the hospitality and leisure industry in England. The author drew attention to the role of gender and (hetero)sexuality in the service sector (Wolkowitz 2006: 81–82). In Poland, Honorata Jakubowska (2018) dealt with the issue of sexualization, objectification, but also subjectification in the profession of hostesses working at sports events, especially motor sports.

6 Elisabeth Anne Wood (2000: 26) described an interesting experience of strippers from this point of view. It consists in attracting the attention of the men in the club, which gives them a sense of sexual power. They also gain a sense of power through the use of appropriate make-up, clothing, accessories, facial expressions, and ways of moving. Agency in interactions understood in this way is, of course, embedded in patriarchal, normative heterosexuality, focused on caring for the male ego (Wolkowitz 2006: 140).

7 Chapkis (1997) has pointed out that sex workers, like other people whose work involves paid emotional labor, are able to distinguish themselves from the roles they play at work (quoted in: Wolkowitz 2006: 129).

Reproductive work

Reproductive work is another type of work that has become a subject of study by sociologists of work relatively recently.

Please note that in the past, the work of domestic servants consisted largely in pushing aside, separating, factually and metaphorically, all kinds of evidence of the bodily, physiological functioning of their masters (from the upper class). The bodies of maids or cleaners were both metaphorically and actually polluted through this work, similarly to the case of the untouchable caste in India. Even a single instance of physical contact with members of this caste constitutes a stigma. It disrupts the social division of labor based on caste division. Contact with the manifestations of the physiological functioning of human organisms is limited to people from the lower classes. By fetching water for washing, handling stained laundry, and removing garbage or the contents of the chamber pot from the house, servants enabled the middle class to keep their own bodies out of the public eye (Wolkowitz 2006: 38).

Reproductive work, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality, constitutes all the tasks associated with supporting and providing services for the current or future workforce – people who undertake or will undertake productive work, including childbirth and raising children (eige.europa.eu). The term, therefore, refers to the workforce in the form of paid caregivers, cleaners, and beauticians working inside and outside the home. This work is most often provided to people working outside the home and involves meeting many life needs, including the physical needs of themselves and their children. In the past, it was mainly men who were able to avoid reproductive work, passing it on to wives, mothers or sisters, as well as servants (Wolkowitz 2006: 156).

The lack of visibility of this type of work in sociological research to date has resulted from several factors. First, it is usually less public than other service sector activities, and is, therefore, less frequently observed by outsiders. The procedures involved are often intimate and even when they are carried out outside the home, e.g., in kindergartens, hospitals, and beauty salons, they are usually undertaken “behind a screen” (Lawler 1991).

Their invisibility is reinforced by the fact that this work, e.g., cleaning offices, is often done at night or during night shifts. Moreover, this work is not always paid well, which means that it is more willingly performed by immigrants, including illegal immigrants, who want to remain invisible. Even if they work in modern organizations, they are treated rather as bodies to perform a specific task than as entities that are an important resource of the organization (Wolkowitz 2006: 67).

In Polish sociology, the topic of reproductive work was addressed by Anna Kordasiewicz in her book (*Usługi domowe. Przemiany relacji społecznych w płatnej pracy domowej*) (2016). The author addresses issues related to the history of this type of work, changing definitions of the domestic services, relations between people providing this work and their employers, as well as how this type of work is a manifestation of the interpenetration of different social orders.

The constructivist nature of occupational health and safety

The legal regulations related to occupational health and safety (OHS) is a rather neglected topic in sociological research. Research rarely addresses the topic of occupational health and safety, which has always concerned the body in the social context of work. One of the reasons for not including OHS in the sociology of work or in sociology of the body is that these regulations are based on a biomedical perspective on the perception of the body. The body is treated as a kind of a machine, thus, the individual experiences of individuals as embodied subjects are perceived as subjective. Consequently, they are considered inadequate to create “objective” laws based on exact sciences (Wolkowitz 2006: 107).

The organization of work itself, e.g., the requirements placed on the industrial body described earlier, has a major impact on the health of employees. Subordinating the body to the machine, or more broadly – to the economic and cultural norms of the industrial world, is not only situational in nature, but also affects the biographies of employees. Aida Edemariam (2005) has listed the types of health risks of working at night and stated that it is more harmful to health than smoking 20 cigarettes a day. In women of all ages, it carries a significant increase in the risk of breast cancer, and in workers of both sexes an eightfold increase in the risk of stomach ulcers. Working at night also raises the likelihood of developing coronary heart disease by 40%, while the risk of depression and mood swings is 15 times greater.

The regulations and principles that make up OHS, like other legal rules, are formalized social norms. Therefore, their shape is not objective or unchanging, and does not arise in a social vacuum. What is considered work and what is not, or what factor is considered harmful, is defined socially. An interesting analysis of occupational health and safety from the perspective of reports or descriptions of interpretations of accidents at work may be interesting for a sociologist of both work and the body. The possibility of applying for compensation depends on how a thing that happened in the past is defined (e.g., exposure to carcinogenic substances at work) (Wolkowitz 2006: 102).

Wolkowitz has pointed out that depending on the place of a professional group in the social hierarchy, its representatives are provided with greater or lesser guarantees of protection or compensation. For example, illegal or non-union workers, as well as migrants, are more exposed to worse and riskier working conditions, and are also more likely to work while sick.

The fact that OHS regulations are socially constructed based on the norms functioning in a given culture is evidenced by several examples. The first refers to the different treatment of health risks of work, depending on whether a given profession is masculinized or feminized. As Carol Wolkowitz writes (2006: 104), men are more likely to suffer from sudden, traumatic accidents, while women are more likely to suffer from diseases that develop over time (such as poisoning with chemicals used at work) (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work 2003). A similar situation

occurred in Poland, where occupational safety and health issues were much better secured in male professions in the heavy industry than, for example, in the textile industry dominated by women (Madejska 2019). A forced body position, noise, and work at night caused damage to the health of female employees, but not as suddenly as in the case of miners or steelworkers.

It is not only the regulations or interpretations of work situations as harmful to health that are influenced by gender stereotypes. Their implementation and application also have a similar dimension. As Paul Bellaby (1999: 91) has claimed, the application of external regulations in traditionally male professions is considered unmanly. During his research in English pottery workshops, he found that the men working there believed that “they must master their bodies with their minds, in order to sustain attendance to and performance in work, and that in so doing they would grow fitter and more resistant to invasion of their bodies by the work-environment and by germs.” This also indicates that occupations associated with risk are higher in the hierarchy of male professions.

Another example of the social construction of OHS norms is the need raised by Karen Messing, Lucie Dumais and Patrizia Romito (1993) to redefine OHS concepts and research methods in order to address women’s work-related health problems. To illustrate this they compare occupational diseases among chimney sweepers and sex workers. The discovery of the prevalence of scrotal cancer among chimney sweepers was a significant step in the study of occupational diseases. However, the prevalence of cervical cancer among prostitutes is almost never mentioned in the context of occupational diseases. Women sex workers also suffer from physical violence, sexually transmitted diseases, the side effects of hygiene products, and health problems related to night shift work. This shows that tacit assumptions about the concepts of “work” and “working bodies” have a major impact on the construction of OHS as a field of study and as a set of formal rules.

Other studies cited by Karen Messing (1998b) indicate that working fewer hours does not necessarily translate into a lower risk of illness. A study of bank employees found that women working part-time were mainly employed at the counter to serve customers during peak customer service hours. They were less involved in banking procedures that could be performed while sitting at a desk. This puts them at the same risk of musculoskeletal disorders as full-time employees, even though they work fewer hours. Two issues should be noted here. First, employing women in customer service positions is based on gender-based assumptions, which are discussed in more detail elsewhere in this chapter. Second, the requirement that customers be served by a counter employee is based on cultural or organizational assumptions about proper customer service.

The aforementioned, tacitly accepted concept of the human body as a machine, an object that can be studied objectively, beyond the subjective experience of the embodied individual, is the result of over two hundred years of the tradition of the industrial body, as well as the Cartesian dualism of body and soul rooted in Western civilization, described many times in this book. Nevertheless, new times,

new types of employment, and a new concept of the human body pose new challenges to the researchers of occupational health and safety. As long as the concept of the “work environment” was used in reference to industrial work, it was justified. Yet, as professions emerge, especially those involving customer service and service provisions, the subjective experiences of employees and the role of social interactions are gaining importance (Allvin, Aronsson 2003: 101). Working and employment conditions are also becoming increasingly flexible and diverse. These changes were very visible during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, when a large group of employees switched to remote work. This type of work did not disappear when the pandemic ended, but became a permanent fixture in many organizations. Another example is the increasingly frequent ergonomics training in many corporations, or a flexible workplace – a desk that enables work in a standing or sitting position, or work in a quiet zone. This means that the rigid concept of the work environment as something objective and material is no longer an adequate reference for statutory rules and regulations (Allvin, Aronsson 2003: 105).

Working on other people’s bodies

An interesting type of work in which the relationship between body and work is of particular importance is professional tasks in which the employee uses their body to perform a service on the client’s body or in contact with the client’s body fluids or excrements. In the section on important concepts, I described the distinction introduced by Wolkowitz (2006: 147) between bodywork – sports and aesthetic treatments intended to keep the body “in shape” and body work – work on the body. The professions described in this section can be classified as representing the latter category. It concerns those types of tasks in which the body is the direct “site” of work. The content of the work is often intimate contact with the body of a stranger, sometimes dirty, naked or semi-naked, or with its fluids. In most instance of such work, the employee expresses their willingness to undertake this “dirty” work, thanks to which the client’s body or its surroundings are cleansed (Wolkowitz 2006: 168). This work is performed close to the client’s body and it often involves touch. Performing similar tasks is part of a wide range of professions, including hairdressers, beauticians, barbers, fitness trainers, dentists, care assistants, hygienists of various specialties, doctors, nurses, medics, masseurs, cleaners, therapists, midwives, and many more.

The professions mentioned above, especially those that do not require higher or secondary education, have not often been the subject of interest for social researchers. This may be the result of an unconscious but internalized perspective of perceiving work based on Cartesian dualism. Work involving cleaning, contact with dirt or the human body is seen in this perspective as worse, less important, and requiring low competences. This is contradicted by, for example, research by Karen Messing (1998a), in which she presented the perspective of cleaners working in a Canadian hospital. Apparently, representatives of this profession encounter many problems, including the invisibility of cleaning, lack of respect,

the perception of cleaning as not requiring competences, and its particular ease. Cleaners do not receive support from the administration either, although they themselves try to combat these stereotypes. According to Messing, in the researched hospital, there was a hierarchy among employees based on professional status: at the top there were doctors providing treatment, slightly lower there were people (nurses, therapists) providing care and treatment. At the bottom of the hierarchy there were people responsible for maintaining cleanliness, including cleaners. Messing's conclusions were also confirmed by research that I conducted with two other researchers in a Polish hospital (Byczkowska-Owczarek, Kubczak, Pawłowska 2020). The disproportions in the status of employees were observable, for example, during interactions between people with different positions in the hierarchy (e.g., a conversation between a doctor and a nurse). It often happened, for example, that a nurse entered the doctor's room with a question for the doctor, who was busy with other tasks and did not answer her. It was also significant that there was almost no contact between cleaners and doctors. Another study conducted by Liz Hart (1991) among cleaning workers in a hospital showed that an element of their work culture was the distinction between work "at the top" consisting of dusting tables and shelves, and the more "dirty" "work at the bottom" consisting of washing floors and cleaning beds. This distinction was based on the division of space based on an imaginary line dividing the patient's body in half.

The work of the representatives of various professions on the bodies of clients is usually associated with performing emotional labor. It is burdensome, requires the control of one's own emotions, and often makes it difficult to perform the actual task. These workers construct various strategies for dealing with these problems. In medicine, especially surgical medicine, such a solution is to put patients to sleep, also in the case of procedures where general anesthesia is not necessary. The neurosurgeons who were the participants of my research on specialist work performed through the body claimed that operating on an anesthetized patient exposed them to a much lower risk of unpredictable reactions to surgical stress, and resulted in a faster, less risky operation (Byczkowska-Owczarek 2024).

Research conducted by Irena Madjar (1997) in a burns unit showed that nurses working there also developed various strategies for working with patients. Those who performed more painful procedures on patients developed a more depersonalizing attitude towards patients than other nurses. They also had more distance from the subjective reality of their patients. Pearl Katz wrote about a similar phenomenon, but concerning the entire professional group of surgeons, in her book *The Scalpel's Edge: The Culture of Surgeons* (Katz 1999). In it she has argued that centuries of working in contact with suffering patients, to whom surgeons inflicted great pain during operations, resulted in the development of a culture of the surgical profession in which one of the key protective strategies of doctors is emotional distance from the patient.

Even if the client's body is not injured, suffering, disabled or otherwise communicating its subordination to the procedures performed by the specialist, the worker uses other strategies to make the work easier. In addition to anesthesia, the

worker may immobilize the patient's body in various ways, recommend changing into a gown, putting on a compress or a face mask. In this way, the worker makes the client temporarily dependent on them and makes it difficult for the patient or the client to interrupt the procedure, get up and leave (Wolkowitz 2006: 164).

3. Key concepts

Body work and bodywork – a distinction introduced by Carol Wolkowitz (2006: 147). Body work is paid work involving “the care, pleasure, adornment, discipline and cure of other's bodies.” This term is used to conceptualize professions in which the subject of work is the body or its fluids or “waste.” The term bodywork is a non-sociological concept, referring to “hands-on therapies geared to health, healing and relaxation.”

Sentimental work – this concept is related to the interactionist theoretical perspective in work studies, and the authors of the concept created it in the context of research on medical work and the trajectory of illness. They argued that it is an ingredient in any kind of work where the object being worked on is alive, sentient, reacting – an ingredient either because deemed necessary to get the work done effectively or because of humanistic considerations. Sentimental work has its source in the elementary fact that any work done with or on human beings may have to take into account their response to that instrumental work (as with medical work); indeed their responses may be a central feature of that work (Strauss et al. 1982: 254).

The types of sentimental work include: (1) interactional work and moral rules, (2) trust work, (3) composure work, (4) biographical work, (5) identity work, (6) awareness context work, and (7) rectification work (Konecki 1988; Niedbalski 2012). Each of these types of work involves work through the body and in contact with the body of another person. It manifests itself, among others, through holding hands, a soothing touch, appearance adapted to the requirements of the interactional situation, facial expressions, and nonverbal communication during interaction.

Dirty work is a concept from the field of interactionist work studies, introduced by Everett Hughes in his 1962 text entitled *Good People and Dirty Work*. It refers to socially necessary professions that are simultaneously stigmatized by society. Dirty work is often physically demanding, sometimes considered immoral, and its performers are considered “dirty.” It can also involve performing tasks that burden the employee mentally, emotionally, morally or socially, as in the case of a lawyer defending a murderer. According to Everett Hughes, the most important feature of this work is the social reluctance to notice it, to admit that it has to be done. Representatives of dirty work include orderlies, executioners, gravediggers, and slaughterhouse workers (Hughes 1962; Lesiak 2019).

Emotional labor – Arlie Hochschild (2012) used this term to describe work that involves managing and manipulating one's own emotions in a way that is required by the employer. It involves showing or not showing emotions through facial expressions, posture, and body movements. Emotional work consists of three components: (1) direct contact, face to face, (2) evoking specific emotional states in other people, and (3) training and supervision of the employer over the emotions of employees. Emotional labor can take place on two levels: through surface acting or deep acting. Surface acting is primarily about hiding feelings, pretending to feel something different than in reality while deep acting involves actually changing what an individual feels during interaction (Hochschild 2012). According to Hochschild, emotional labor is predominant among feminized professions because women are socially considered to be more predisposed to focus on other people's emotions, care for others, and suppress their own emotions. Importantly, when mentioning emotional labor within employment, it should be noted that: (1) the employer's control over emotions is never total; employees find ways to vent emotions or various forms of resistance; (2) it is not limited to paid work, but is also performed in private life and is then referred to as emotion work (e.g., when we feel compelled to feel joy at a wedding), and (3) the rules of feeling certain emotions are socially constructed and changeable. Great emphasis is placed on performing emotional labor in the rapidly developing service sector.

Embodied knowledge – this phenomenon concerns the bodily nature of cognition, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Embodied knowledge is a type of non-discursive knowledge and is often described as body know-how. This knowledge is acquired as a result of experience, work, and training. It is acquired in practice, which is why it is also not fully verbalizable; it is also rather implemented, used in action than described or generalized. Despite this, the transfer of embodied knowledge is an element of secondary socialization in a profession. Its possession is necessary to perform the tasks facing the employee (Jakubowska 2017). Margaret Archer (2000) has indicated that embodied knowledge is one of three types of knowledge, alongside discursive knowledge and practical knowledge. The latter type of knowledge can be embodied and then becomes an element of embodied knowledge (Jakubowska 2017).

Cultural feminization – a phenomenon of increasing emphasis on physical fitness and appearance as an integral element of success in the workplace. It concerns both women and men. The specificity of this phenomenon is that under its influence men care about their appearance (e.g., through exercise, diet, self-discipline, and style of dress) and begin to assign importance to it in achieving professional success, which was previously the experience of mainly working women (Adkins 2001, cited in: Wolkowitz 2006: 94).

4. The most important studies

I have often illustrated the issues described in the chapter with examples of research from sociology and related fields. In this part of the text, I would like to introduce readers to other interesting studies conducted by researchers dealing with the issue of the body in the context of performing a specific profession or job. I have mentioned some of them earlier, and in this part of the chapter I will describe them in more detail. The aim of this presentation is to indicate how wide a range of the phenomena of interest to sociologists of work relates to experiences concerning the body. Owing to the limited scope of this study, the descriptions I have presented are in the form of a short summary of the issues described by researchers.

Studies on the standardized appearance of flight attendants, and restaurant and hotel workers – Melissa Tyler and Philip Hancock, with Dennis Nickson, Christopher Warhurst, Anna Maria Cullen and Anna Witz

I would like to add the brief conclusions of Melissa Tyler and Philip Hancock (2001) to the studies on the work of flight attendants described in this chapter. These authors have suggested that airlines use the bodies of their (mostly) female employees – flight attendants – as “material signifiers” of the brand. Due to the small differences between companies in a given sector (e.g., low-cost or luxury airlines), these signifiers enable companies to distinguish themselves from their competitors. These conclusions do not have to be limited to airlines, but also apply to hotels, restaurants, spas, and other entities offering similar services, in industries where it is difficult to distinguish oneself from another.

In a similar context, the appearance of restaurant and hotel employees was studied by Dennis Nickson, Christopher Warhurst, Anna Maria Cullen and Anna Witz (2001). They have claimed that the bodies of employees of stylish bars, hotels, and restaurants are treated as a kind of animated décor. Similar to interior design, tableware, and decorations, they are supposed to create a specific image of the place, on which its popularity depends to a large extent. In this sector, a large part of their work consists precisely of “looking good” and “sounding good” (the vocabulary used by the staff, tone of voice, etc.)

Research on bouncers in music clubs – Lee Monaghan, Stephen Moss

Lee Monaghan (2002) conducted research on bouncers in nightclubs. The results have indicated the importance of physical capital in this profession. Performing this job is largely dependent on the build of the body and the technique of using it. The values embodied by the representatives of this profession focus on gender stereotypes, primarily male physical strength. Physical fitness is not only strength, but also the appearance of a well-built body, emphasized, for example, by a tight T-shirt that highlights the muscles. Thanks to having these physical attributes, a bouncer can perform his professional role well, e.g., control the club’s territory or manage the effects of the club’s strategies for encouraging alcohol consumption.

The importance of not only strength but also appearance in the job of a bouncer has been confirmed by the findings of journalist Stephen Moss (2005) published in an article in the *Guardian*. In the text, he recounted his conversations with men working as bouncers in nightclubs. These included comments about his appearance as a potential bouncer. The comments Moss quoted included: “You’re well-built, but you don’t have the right look... You have the wrong kind of smile.” Moss’ body posture was also a problem, and he was told to hold his hands so that his stomach looked flatter. He also wore the wrong color shirt (blue, not black). Moss’ account of the self-conscious stylization of the appearance and preferences of bouncers is close to the problems of sociology of the body in the context of work. Styling activities can be interpreted as an image of the body being used as a “material marker” sending specific messages to the club’s customers.

Work in escort agencies – Magdalena Wojciechowska, Izabela Ślęzak

The research by Magdalena Wojciechowska and Izabela Ślęzak, which I mentioned in the section on sex work, is worth additional description. Both researchers study sex work as a profession, using the perspective of symbolic interactionism. In the context of using the body in work, these researchers observed many interesting strategies and experiences of people providing sex services. Magdalena Wojciechowska analyzes, among others, the issue of the sense of ownership of one’s body by people offering sexual services (2012a), the interactional aspects of selling sexual services (2017), and their use by clients (2015). In turn, the research by Izabela Ślęzak shows the relationship of workers with their own bodies (2018a). The author lists three types of relationships, depending on the context of action: the present, partially present, and absent body. As for other issues related to the body in the work of sex workers, in Izabela Ślęzak’s works one can also find references to their experience of sexual pleasure in contact with a client (2017b), alcohol use (2016a), and experiencing violence (2017a).

Exotic dancers at work – Carol Rambo

Remaining on the subject of sex work, it is worth noting the in-depth research of Carol Rambo. In her youth, she worked as a stripper during her university studies. Her works refer both to her own experiences of working in a club, where she describes strategies for inducing sexual arousal in clients (Rambo Ronai, Ellis 1989) or analyzes the issues of aging erotic dancers (Rambo Ronai 1992), and to broader cultural patterns related to the sexualization or commodification of the female and male body (Rambo, Renee, Mynatt 2006). The undeniable value of her works is the knowledge of the issues studied from the perspective of a person experiencing them, as well as great sensitivity to the problems of people involved in sex work.

Construction worker research – Darren Thiel

Another interesting study was conducted in London by Darren Thiel on construction workers. The author worked on a construction site for a year while conducting participant observation. In the book *Builders. Class, Gender and Ethnicity in the Construction Industry*, as well as in his other works (2007, 2012), he focuses on the analysis of the relationship between the socially created concept of masculinity based on work and physical fitness, the use of physical capital as a source of income, class division and economic order. In the case of men from the lower and working classes, the exchange of physical capital is aimed at gaining not only economic capital, but also respect and esteem in their own social environment. The concept of masculinity in these classes is based on physical strength and endurance, and, consequently, all its aspects, including sports exercises, strong alcohol, as well as heavy food, support this cultural construct. In his works, Thiel devotes a great deal of attention to the issues of physical work in relation to the embodied knowledge used in the work of construction workers, stereotypically associated only with performing physical work.

The research I conducted also belongs to the trend of research on work through the body. The first of them concerned ballroom dancers (Byczkowska 2012a). It focused on children and young people practicing this type of activity. To a large extent, however, it also analyzed the work of adults, e.g., those who work as ballroom dance trainers, run dance clubs or judge performances at dance competitions. In my research, I focused on the issue of the body in the everyday work of dancers, which translates into issues related to teaching body skills (Byczkowska 2012b), in addition to the interactions and relationships of dancers with their own bodies (Byczkowska 2012c).

The second of the studies on the role of the body in work was published in *Batutą i skalpelem. Ciało w zawodach wysokospecjalistycznych* [With baton and scalpel. Body in highly specialized professions] (Byczkowska-Owczarek 2024). The aim of the study was to describe and explain the regularities associated with work based on highly specialized theoretical knowledge, implemented through the body in the professions of neurosurgeon and orchestra conductor. Success in both professions is conditioned by manual or, more broadly, bodily skills and proficiency in using theoretical knowledge in work utilizing the body. Operating either a baton or a scalpel requires great awareness of one's own body and many years of practice under the supervision of teachers and practitioners.

5. Summary

As I have mentioned several times in this chapter, the body and work are not separate phenomena whose connection should be sought in an artificial or over-theorized way. This is a relationship that has always existed, but has only recently been noticed and consciously described by researchers. The interest in the body among the representatives of social sciences, as well as cultural and demographic changes,

have led to the inclusion of the subject of the body in the issues raised by sociologists of work. Economic changes, including the development of the service industry, the cosmetics industry, and the increased demand for reproductive work, have led to the need to include the issue of the human body in research on work. In recent years, resulting from, among others, the entry of younger generations into the labor market, standards regarding, for example, the appearance of office workers or the methods of communication between employees have been relaxed. Furthermore, although not only because of the COVID-19 pandemic, trends of the “holistic” treatment of employees are developing in corporations. People have begun to realize that a person is not a machine (not only in factories, but also in offices). The current trend consists in, among others: the fact that increasingly more training courses are appearing in the broadly understood scope of self-care – coping with stress, with emotions, healthy eating or combining professional and private life. This is caused by the observation of the phenomenon of professional burnout, which translates not only into the employee’s health or their comfort of life, but also their work efficiency. The inseparable relationship between body and work is also becoming noticeable to management practitioners.

In writing this chapter, I did not intend to provide an encyclopedic list of all the researchers and studies on the relationship between the body and work. My intention was to present various types of work, work situations, or the practices of the representatives of various professions, in order to show how inextricable and multifaceted the relationship between these two phenomena is. Over the centuries, through the industrial era, the cultural changes of the 1960s and 1970s, and the development of the service industry, this relationship has existed and been transformed. Despite the emergence of new professions and the redefinition of professions that have always existed (as in the case of prostitution and sex work), this relationship remains virtually inextricable. It has different dimensions, depending on the age, race, gender, or class of workers, but studying it is a fascinating activity. This is also because research on work, including its relationship with the body, has the potential to be used to improve working conditions. And since, as I have mentioned, contemporary people are very focused on work, devote an abundance of time to it, and construct their social statuses based on professional identities, such research can bring about real social change.

6. Review questions

1. List the reasons for the emergence of body issues in the sociology of work.
2. How did industrialization affect the physical aspects of factory workers’ work?
3. Compare the role of the body in manufacturing and service jobs.
4. Why are health and safety issues an important part of sociological research on the body-work relationship?
5. Describe reproductive work and its role in the contemporary economy.
6. Provide and discuss a definition of sex work.

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