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The Body, Food and Eating

1. Introduction

As Georg Simmel wrote in his essay *The Sociology of the Meal*, satisfying hunger has an individual dimension: everyone acts in the name of satisfying their own hunger and thirst, but this action also has a communal dimension: because we all, as humans, have similar needs of hunger and thirst; the need to satisfy them unites and binds us together. According to Simmel, "of all that is common to humans, the most common feature is that humans must eat and drink," (Simmel 2006: 272). In the most literal sense, however, the relationship between the body and food comes down to keeping the physical being alive. This physicality or materiality of the body was quite problematic for the first authors dealing with embodiment.

Plato analyzed the relationship between the material body and the soul/mind, searching for a place in the physical body where the soul could hide. Descartes, whose thought is the starting point for contemporary considerations of the body in the social sciences, compared the body to a machine and a ship (one could risk saying that food would be the fuel for this machine). Edmund Husserl wrote about experiencing the body in two ways: as *Leib* (a living body) and *Körper* (a physical body-solid), while Helmuth Plessner claimed that a human being had a body and was a body at the same time (Wójtewicz 2014: 23–43). Regardless of the interpretation, what shapes this physical, and impossible to ignore, dimension of our being in the world is food.

Here we can speak of an almost intimate relationship. Jolanta Brach-Czaina (1999: 161–162) explained it using the example of eating meat.

> Meat gives us its essence, it demonstrates it to us, although we do not bother to think about it. It emanates its hidden meaning and we succumb to it unaware of our submission. And considering that we ourselves are slowly becoming meat, or maybe even already are, we should strive to analyze the hidden existential essence of meatiness, because it concerns our fate.

Food, therefore, builds our materiality. Resulting from the necessity of this practice, we are unable to ignore our physicality and the vast cultural meanings that are superimposed on it.

Our aim is to show selected connections between the socio-cultural construction of the body and eating, understood as a practice resulting from a biological need, at the same time culturally entangled. The consumption of food and beverages is socially regulated. Society influences the form of food, the type and amount of food, in addition to the rituals associated with eating. Regulations related to food also translate into body values such as body size, desired body shape or weight. Social expectations related to this change depend on the era and culture. Specific bodies, or rather their social constructions and functions, are "assigned" to eating – the body of a farmer, the body of a housewife, the body of an immigrant. Food also involves political and ethical disputes related to production, consumption, and health. The body is at their center – here, in recent years, the issue of healthy and unhealthy food for the body, the issue of meat consumption, the relationship between food production and climate change, but also the issue of how food is presented in the media have come to the fore. Given the vast amount of existing knowledge and research, the issues we have raised regarding the relationship between the body, food, and the practice of eating have been selected through discussion and necessary compromises. We hope that they will encourage readers to continue studying the topics proposed here.

2. The most important theoretical concepts

2.1. The development of reflection on eating in the context of the body

The topic of eating became a subject of interest for sociologists quite late, only at the end of the 20th century. Therefore, classic studies on eating as a cultural activity in the social sciences can be found primarily in studies on the culture of individual corners of the world and in cultural anthropology. Two classic approaches to this subject in anthropology, to which sociologists also often refer, are the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas.

According to Lévi-Strauss (2008), cuisine is the second, right after language, universal form of human activity. Looking at the principles according to which food preparation is organized in different cultures, one can see certain universally applicable principles. Their arrangement is well illustrated by the diagram of the culinary **triangle** (Fig. 1). The three vertices of the culinary triangle correspond to three categories: the raw, the cooked, and the rotten (Lévi-Strauss 2008: 36). These categories relate to each other: cooking is a cultural transformation of the raw, whereas the rotted is a natural transformation (*ibidem*). Here we are dealing with two types of opposition: between the elaborated/unelaborated, on the one hand, and between culture and nature on the other.

Food preparation must be done in a specific way before food is consumed. This applies to both cooked and raw foods, which always have to be prepared in specific circumstances (e.g., wine fermentation, cheese maturation). Two types of cooking are roasting and boiling. During roasting, food is directly exposed to fire, while

during boiling, it is placed in a vessel with water. Roasting is, therefore, on the side of nature, because we directly affect the food with fire, which can be considered a more "primitive" method. Boiling, by contrast, is on the side of culture, because it requires placing the food in a separate vessel with water, and the production of the vessel can be considered a manifestation of cultural development. In his essay, Lévi-Strauss has analyzed different attitudes towards roasted and boiled foods in various cultures, indicating, for example, that sometimes cooked or boiled is considered "female" food, and roasted – "masculine", while in other cases, boiled food is considered a type of "homemade" food, and roasted – prepared for guests.

Lévi-Strauss considered smoking as the third method of preparing food, in addition to cooking and roasting, which, in his opinion, complemented the other two. Smoking produces food that can be preserved longer than food prepared in any other way. When smoked, it is transformed into something natural as a result of a deliberate action towards "voluntary destruction." As Lévi-Strauss wrote, referring to the scheme he created: "the boundary between nature and culture, which one can imagine as parallel to either the axis of air or the axis of water, puts the roasted and the smoked on the side of nature, the boiled on the side of culture as to means; or as to results, the smoked on the side of culture, the roasted and the boiled on the side of nature," (Lévi-Strauss, 2013: 42). According to Lévi-Strauss, the culinary triangle diagram could be expanded by adding other ways of preparing food, such as frying, stewing, etc. This diagram is expanded to describe the entire diversity of the culinary system specific to a given culture. By focusing on the meanings attributed to culinary activities, it is possible to discover the economic and social relationships characteristic of a culture, to describe the hierarchy, religious or aesthetic values that prevail there. In this way, the culinary system becomes a kind of "language" that enables us to learn more about the specifics of a given society.

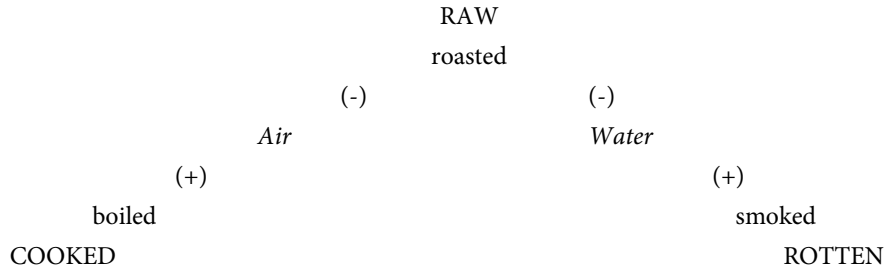

Fig. 1. Lévi-Strauss's culinary triangle
Source: after: C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Culinary Triangle*, in: C. Counihan, P. Van Esterik (eds.), 2008, Food and Culture: A Reader.

Mary Douglas also analyzed food as a **code** that recorded information about the patterns of social relations recognized in a culture (Douglas 1972). Douglas started from the statement that: "food categories encode social events," (Douglas 1972: 61), if we analyze why specific categories are used when talking about food, we will discover social patterns encoded in food (Douglas 1972: 61). Douglas tried to discover these patterns. For example, as she has managed to establish, meals are higher in the hierarchy than drinks – we usually drink beverages after a meal or they accompany it, but their consumption is less structured and subject to fewer rules than the consumption of food. "Meals require a table, a seating order, restriction on movement, and on alternative occupations […]. The meal puts its frame on the gathering. The rules which hedge off and order one kind of social interaction are reflected in the rules which control the internal ordering of the meal itself," (Douglas 1972: 66). A shared meal expresses a higher degree of intimacy than the shared consumption of beverages. Similarly, the types of dishes served in sequence during specific meals are also subject to structuring. They determine whether a meal can be considered ceremonial or ordinary. As Douglas wrote, every meal is a structured social event – it carries with it a certain repetitiveness (Douglas 1972: 69). In order to show how meals reflect the type of normative order prevailing in a given culture, Douglas also analyzed the rules of excluding foods that were in force in various cultures. As she has shown, these exclusions related to food, e.g., the classification of animals considered impure in Judaism, correspond to the general principles of social order adopted in the Jewish community of that time, and the main principle of hierarchy is the exclusion of what was considered impure. The rules governing the meal are, therefore, a reflection of religious beliefs.[1]

1 Analyses of rules excluding the consumption of specific foods and food taboos are among the classic topics concerning the symbolism attributed to food and the body in sociology and anthropology. Among the most frequently cited examples of food taboos is that concerning "sacred cows" in India (see, e.g., Fieldhouse 1995: 176; Harris 2007), and the prohibition of eating pork and its products in Islam (Tannahill 1973: 105). Religious food prohibitions often concern not only the consumption of specific types of food, but also the contact with specific types of food, which are considered "impure". Sociologists are also interested in how the consumption of food and drinks is differentiated by factors such as gender, age, place in the social hierarchy or dominant patterns of corporeality in a culture. The subject of sociological interest in food was well reflected by Jane Ogden (2011), referring to the classification created by Cecil Helman (1984, 2007). Helman distinguished certain universal classifications of food that could be found in almost every culture (Mary Douglas wrote about classifications related to the opposition "pure" – "impure", Claude Lévi-Strauss – about classifications of food related to the opposition "culture" – "nature"). Helman listed five types of such classifications of food that commonly occurred: (1) what is considered edible and what is considered inedible (different foods in different cultures, e.g., frog legs); (2) "sacred" and "profane" foods (allowed and forbidden according to the principles of specific religious beliefs); (3) the division into "cold" and "hot" foods – not related to their temperature, but because of their symbolic meaning in a given culture; (4) foods that perform medicinal functions and beliefs related to their effect on health; and (5) foods with social significance (eaten to strengthen social relationships, emphasize the status of specific group members, build a common group identity).

It is also worth mentioning here more contemporary directions of the development of anthropological reflection on food. One of its precursors was Sidney Mintz, who, in analyzing the history of sugar, described the creation of the global trade system and the beginnings of the world system, along with its centers and peripheries. His book *Sweetness and Power. The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985) is considered one of the most important works not only for **food studies**, but for anthropology as a whole. When looking for connections between the social construction of the body and eating in Mintz's work, attention should be paid to the thread of slaves from the Caribbean working at the harvest of sugar cane (the working body, forced labor), the consumer thread (the shaping of tastes under the influence of the popularization of sugar consumption in the so-called Western world) or the issue of gender relations and the so-called home economy (Mintz 1971). Today, anthropologists directly include the body, identity, sexuality, and ethnicity in food analyses (e.g., Probyn 2000; Counihan, Kaplan 2005; DeSoucey 2016).

Food studies – interdisciplinary research on food and its connections with culture, art, and history. Food studies deal with production, consumption and its ethics, as well as the aesthetics of food, and culinary traditions. Among the researchers identifying with food studies are sociologists, anthropologists, economists, and historians (Goszczyński 2016).

The examples we have provided do not exhaust the topic, they only serve to indicate the direction of further independent exploration and show that, especially in the approach of classical anthropology, food was treated as an artifact, an indicator, or a reflection of what was happening in society. This is, of course, not an accusation but rather a reflection of the way science was practiced in a previous historical periods. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that classical anthropology has set the direction for generations of social researchers dealing with the subject of food.

When looking at the development of reflection on food in the context of the body, it is impossible not to mention the so-called **neo-Marxist studies**. They originated from critical analyses of commodity production systems (e.g., Butell 1980, 2006; Friedland 1997). The main focus here has been the critique of industrial society, the problem of power distribution, and the relations between farmers and producers. Within these studies, food is treated as a commodity and consumers are rather passive participants in the social game. What is important for the subject matter discussed in this chapter is the fact that, in searching for an alternative model of development to capitalism, these studies have evolved towards the analysis

The cited examples indicate that cultural norms play an extremely important role in structuring our eating habits. Certain classifications, such as the separation of what is "edible" from what is "inedible," can be found in every culture, but at the same time we are dealing with a huge variety of these patterns: what is considered edible in one culture may not be in another.

of alternative systems and the so-called short food supply chains (e.g., Goodman 2004; Goodman, DuPuis, Goodman 2014). And this would be a good prognosis for the inclusion of the body in the analyses in the field of food studies, were it not for the fact that this research scope largely ignores cultural issues and simplifies the role of consumers. These studies do not cope with describing the complexity of the relationships between the body, identity, and consumption. This has led to the creation of the term **invisible mouth**. The aim is to draw attention to the need to analyze the role of consumers in both industrial and alternative food distribution systems (Lockie 2002). Following this line of thought, one could claim that in the analyzes of food production, distribution, and consumption, we were dealing not only with the invisible mouth, but also with the invisible body of the consumer.

As Warren Belasco noted, despite their importance, studies on rituals related to eating, the construction of cookbooks, and consumer practices are still on the margins of what we would call "serious research" (Belasco 2008). It seems that there are two reasons for this approach. The first is related to the dualism of body and mind. Food is treated as something stereotypically related to the satisfaction of basic needs. For years, researchers have ignored the obvious, that is, the fact that food is purchased, prepared, and served by someone for someone (and thus someone performs work of choosing, preparing and serving food, conditioned by many cultural factors). In this context, virtually all factors related to the cultural construction of the body are undeniably important – from health, to identity and appearance, or broadly understood lifestyle. Meanwhile, as Belasco has emphasized, the entire Victorian ritual of eating is associated with the deep suspicion of the "civilized" man towards this seemingly physical act. Another interesting clue in Belasco's work is the gender thread – food is connected with consumption, a female sphere which, unlike the male public sphere, does not deserve the attention of serious science (Belasco 2008: 3). This would explain the discrepancy between advanced studies on the technical and political aspects of eating and the timid attempts to break through studies on the cultural, identity, and physical aspects of eating and food. The final reason for the reluctance of the representatives of mainstream social sciences to study food may be the nature of this discipline which is deeply immersed in everyday life. What is important in food studies happens every day, in everyday rituals that maintain or destabilize the social order; in cookbooks and blogs, in the material equipment of the kitchen, and the divisions related to it. Focused on everyday life, food studies do not entirely fit into this model.

In summary, we can say that the problem with including the body in the scope of food studies stems from the fact that the representatives of food studies, trying to legitimize the existence of their subdiscipline and give these studies a serious character, probably not entirely consciously made a kind of cut-off from, the otherwise stereotypically perceived, body. Sociologists dealing with the body understand this problem perfectly well. It has its source in the fear of recognizing the body, of assigning it a place in the system of socio-cultural meanings within sociology. Anthropologists dealing with the representatives of traditional

cultures found it easier to notice the socio-cultural conditions related to the body concerning the way of defining maturity, treatment, nutrition, healing, fertility or physical attractiveness (see Malinowski 1958; Benedict 1966; Mead 1986; Douglas 1972, 2002). The aversion of the first sociologists to the body resulted primarily from the discipline imposed by the founding fathers. In treating the body as a natural (pre-social) phenomenon, they saw a chance to become independent from natural sciences and psychology. The consequence of this approach was the so-called absent presence of the body in sociological thought for years, in addition to a programmatic failure to notice the importance of social issues related to the body and largely involving women, e.g., the position of pregnant women, poverty, as well as the low status of women (this was also because in its beginnings, sociology was a male project) (Shilling 2003: 40). In fact, it was only the institutionalization of the sociology of the body and the emergence of researchers who treated the body as the central point of reference for their professional activity (Kurczewski et al. 2006: 31; Jakubowska 2009b: 132–153) that contributed to the creation of a climate of cooperation in analyzing the issues of the body and eating. An example of this type of collaboration can be found in research based on Elizabeth Shove's theory of social practices (Shove, Patnzar, Watson 2012; Mylan 2015), which analyzes the complex relations between society, body, and food, the (embodied) knowledge of social actors and the materiality of food. In this approach, food is not only an object, but also a subject shaping the body (Goszczyński, Wójtewicz 2018; Goszczyński, Wróblewski, Wójtewicz 2018).

2.2. The body, food and social inequalities

The ideal body preferred in a culture and eating patterns are related to each other. Sander L. Gilman, referring to social expectations regarding the ideal body, its most desirable size, shape or weight, introduced the concept of "to pass." In his opinion, the ideal body is a social construction: the symbolic meanings given to the body are culturally conditioned and are subject to changes depending on the historical time and place. Specific body features can be positively or negatively valued. They are usually organized into pairs of opposing categories, e.g., tall–short, fat–thin. In striving to embody the most desirable ideal body at a given moment, individuals try to "pass" from negatively valued categories to positively valued ones. For example, in some societies obesity may have a positive value as an expression of wealth, in others it will be interpreted negatively, as an expression of disease (Gilman 2001: 23).

One interpretation of cultural preferences favoring obesity rather than slimness is the explanation related to nutritional deficiencies. In societies where food was scarce, better-nourished individuals had an easier time enduring periods of deprivation. Usually, wealthier individuals with a higher economic status were better nourished, which was why in many cultures a rounded body shape was synonymous with affluence. In contemporary Western societies, many people have constant access to food. As a result, a slim figure is sometimes interpreted as an expression of control over appetite, and the ability to refrain from the pleasure of eating. The ideal slim

body is easier to achieve for individuals who have the opportunity to choose good quality food products. Conversely, those with lower incomes more often buy cheaper but highly processed food, the consumption of which can contribute to obesity. In general, the literature on the subject indicates that obesity more often affects the representatives of the lowest social classes (Paarlberg 2010: 94).

The body can be viewed as a tool through which we experience the world. This is the perspective of the "sociology of embodiment" (Jakubowska 2009a: 244). From this perspective, social inequalities concern the possibility (or lack thereof) of individuals adapting their bodies and the ways of using them to adapt to social expectations. This inability is manifested in the sense of inadequacy that accompanies individuals in certain situations, resulting from the inadequacy of their bodies to a social situation (Jakubowska 2009a: 248).

This topic was already described in the works of the classics of sociological thought. Marcel Mauss drew attention to the fact that society shaped the body, defining its most desirable features, as well as the ways of using it. The very act of consuming food takes place by means of the body, because "the body is man's first and most natural instrument," (Mauss 1973b: 70). Mauss analysis focused on the ways in which the body was socially shaped and used by society.

This thread can also be found in the works of other representatives of classical sociological thought, including Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu. In *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias focused on "the historically changing functions of the body," (Elias 1980: 63). Elias used the concept of *civilité*. In his opinion, it "has contributed to the formation of specific Western customs, i.e. civilization," (Elias 1980). One of the examples he referred to was the etiquette of table manners. Tableware and types of cutlery, as well as the ways of using them, become increasingly sophisticated with the progress of civilization, which is expressed, for example, by the abandonment of the custom of using a common bowl in favor of individual tableware (Elias 1980: 144). Knowledge of the rules of etiquette, defining the ways of behaving at the table, distinguished primarily the representatives of the higher social classes. Elias also touched on the subject of differences in the attitude to eating meat (Elias 1980: 159). Representatives of different classes ate meat with different frequencies: in the higher social classes meat was consumed in large quantities, in monasteries ascetic renunciation of it was obligatory, while among peasants meat consumption was limited, but this resulted rather from necessity: cattle were valuable and, therefore, mainly found their way to the lord's table (Elias 1980: 159).

The theme of the cultural shaping of habits related to the use of the body also appears in the works of Pierre Bourdieu. He introduced the concept of **habitus**, which is an embodied necessity, "internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions; it is a general transposable disposition which carries out a systematic, universal application – beyond the limits of what has been directly learned – of the necessity inherent in the learning conditions," (Bourdieu 1989: 170). It is a kind of learned pattern of conduct, shaped by the way of upbringing, experiences, and the environment

of the individual's life. Bourdieu also used the concept of *taste*. He defined it as the inclination and ability to assimilate (materially and/or symbolically) a specific class of objects – it is a generative formula underlying the lifestyle, a unified set of differentiating preferences. They are expressed in the logic specific to individual symbolic spaces, such as furniture, clothing, language or bodily *hexis* (Bourdieu 1989: 173).

According to Chris Shilling,

> Bourdieu assumes that acts of labour are required to turn bodies into social entities, and that these acts influence the way in which people develop and hold the physical shape of their bodies and learn how to present their bodies through the way they walk, talk, and dress. […] As it develops, the body bears the indisputable imprint of an individual's social class (Schilling 2003: 112).

When it comes to shaping eating habits, Bourdieu focused on the ways in which the representatives of the upper classes distinguished themselves from the lower ones. He drew attention to three issues: the availability of certain types of food depending on social position, their choice in the context of the preferred body ideal and available resources, and the formation of habits related to the use of the body during consumption (e.g., the use of cutlery, knowledge of the rules of etiquette).

For example, the choice of certain foods results from the different models of the body preferred in different classes. As Bourdieu wrote, "whereas the working classes are more attentive to the strength of the (male) body than its shape, and tend to go for products that are both cheap and nutritious, the professions prefer products that are tasty, health-giving, light and not fattening. Taste, a class culture turned into nature, that is, embodied, helps to shape the class body," (Bourdieu 1989: 190).

According to Bourdieu, representatives of the working class were distinguished by an instrumental attitude towards their own bodies. This was particularly visible in the case of working-class women, for example, in how they dressed at home (wearing clothes that were also suitable for housework) and in the effort they put into preparing meals. These were supposed to be cheap, nutritious meals that would not damage the household budget (Bourdieu 1989: 202). In turn, the dominant classes "have the time and resources to treat their bodies as projects," (Bourdieu 1989: 205). Slimness became one of the assets of the body for representatives of higher social classes, because the body is also valuable to them as a means of "presenting oneself."

According to Chris Shilling, there is a certain convergence between the works of Elias and Bourdieu: both described the processes that have had an impact on the body and the "effort" that individuals put into developing ways of using it that were consistent with social expectations. What distinguishes these two authors is the fact that "Elias is interested in the general processes that have had an impact on the embodiment of an individual," (Shilling 2003: 111), while Bourdieu's analysis focused on the relationship between the body and social inequalities.

One of the areas of social inequality, in which the difference in attitudes towards food and the body is also marked, is the difference between the sexes. Each of them is socialized in a slightly different way, and depending on the sex (and culture), we

may be encouraged to eat different foods. These beliefs are based on the symbolism attributed to foods: obtaining the most desirable sexual characteristics is sometimes associated with eating a specific type of food. This can be seen in the example of eating meat. As Deborah Lupton wrote: "Meat has connotations of desire, animal and male passion, strength and energy, but also pollution, anger, violence, aggression. Vegetables, on the other hand, have the meaning of purity, passivity, femininity, weakness and idealism," (Lupton 1996: 29).

Assigning preferences for different foods to women and men is also related to the ways in which they are eaten. This is evident, for example, in the belief that men prefer meaty foods that can be eaten in large bites, as well as nutritious and filling foods, while women prefer lighter dishes, foods with less fat (because of their cultural obligation to take care of their figure), and eat smaller portions. Men, by contrast, are served larger portions and foods that help them maintain physical strength, a feature considered one of the main attributes of masculinity.

In addition to the fact that women are believed to prefer more delicate tastes, they also have a preference for foods that are also given to children (e.g., sweet and smooth foods). It is also commonly believed that food considered to be typically "masculine" should not be served to children or the elderly because it may be harmful to them (Lupton 1996: 108). Women are also believed to be more interested than men in the aesthetics of food and the ethical issues related to it.

The patterns prevailing in the circle of the Western culture assume that women and men are bound by different body ideals. For women, the most desirable pattern is a slim figure, for men – a muscular one. It seems that the social pressure to meet this body ideal affects women to a greater extent. According to feminist authors such as Susie Orbach (2016), Susan Bordo (2004) and Naomi Wolf (2015), the social pressure to maintain a slim figure can be interpreted as a way of subordinating women to men and diverting their attention from reaching for power. Today, gender stereotypes are visible even in beliefs about what makes women fat versus what makes men fat. As Danuta Nowalska-Kapuścik wrote, according to the stereotype, "women are believed to reach for sweets and cookies more often, while men are believed to eat fatty foods, large portions and prefer salty snacks with beer," (Nowalska-Kapuścik 2014: 231).

Gender stereotypes are also visible in access to food and the division of roles related to food preparation: men have traditionally been responsible for obtaining food, while women have been responsible for preparing it (Fieldhouse 1995: 106). According to Carole M. Counihan, due to the traditional division of gender roles, in which men provide food and women prepare it, the representatives of both sexes can express their power in social relations in different ways. For example, men may refuse food prepared by women, criticize its taste or control food purchases. In turn, women may assert their position by refusing to cook or by cooking meals that men do not like (Counihan 1999: 11). As Paul Fieldhouse has noted, serving food is also a ritual that emphasizes the differences between the status and gender roles of women and men, e.g., in some societies women serve food and eat after men have finished

their meal; Fieldhouse gave the example of Chile, where men who did the hardest physical work also received the largest portions (Fieldhouse 1995: 115). In ancient Rome, during the serving of meals, women and men occupied different positions at the table: men ate their meals in a semi-recumbent position, while women sat, because lying down was considered inelegant (Zwoliński 2006: 25).

2.3. The body, food and media

Jürgen Martschukat in his book *The Age of Fitness* (2021) called contemporary culture "fitness culture". In his opinion, this culture affects individuals: the idea of body fitness has been used in it as one of the ways of supervising people (Martschukat 2021: 4). Following the thought of Zygmunt Bauman, Martschukat has claimed that such body features as fitness, slimness, and health have become socially desirable in modern times. Individuals with such bodies are rewarded for their ability to control themselves. Slimness and fitness are contrasted with obesity. According to the quoted author, the idea of fitness plays a regulatory and normalizing role – a slim, well-groomed, athletic body is a model for which one should strive. Obesity (fatness) is perceived as a pathological condition that can lead to diseases, as well as pose a threat to health, and, at the same time – by contrast – obesity appears as a manifestation of ignorance towards such valued fitness. Calling for maintaining a slim figure is also supposed to be a way to arouse in individuals an interest in their own health, awakening in them the responsibility for it.

Social pressure includes not only the pressure to have an appropriate figure, but also expectations related to knowledge of the principles of a healthy lifestyle, including the principles of healthy nutrition. Health is becoming one of the primary values related to the body in the era of "fitness culture" (Martschukat 2021: 4), because an athletic, well-groomed body guarantees that an individual will be able to cope with life's challenges. The responsibility for maintaining the body in proper condition rests with each of us individually.

As Martschukat has noted, as a consequence of the continued social pressure to maintain a proper figure and physical fitness, "proper" nutrition is also gaining importance, which for some individuals becomes almost an obsession (Martschukat 2021: 18). Nowadays, our attitudes towards food or food choices are increasingly subject to evaluation by others or are the subject of comparison with others. This can lead to eating disorders such as orthorexia. As the name suggests, orthorexia is an obsession with "proper" nutrition. Unlike anorexia, orthorexia primarily concerns the quality, not the quantity, of food consumed. An anorexic tends to focus on the ideal weight or body size, while an orthorexic tends to focus on defining and maintaining the ideal diet. Following its principles gives them a sense of moral superiority over others. In a world where health is one of the highest values and a healthy lifestyle has become a kind of norm, it is not difficult to find individuals who have internalized these commandments too much.

One of the negative aspects of the media's influence on food-related issues may be its contribution to compensatory behaviors: some authors dealing with the

subject of eating disorders indicate that the occurrence of anorexia, for example, may be influenced by the message about the need to maintain a slim figure. In turn, presenting food as a "pleasure for the palate" and encouraging people to "sweeten the hardships of life" by consuming it may lead to weight gain and, as a result, obesity.

In feminist interpretations of the causes of anorexia in contemporary societies, anorexia is sometimes presented as an expression of the oppression that patriarchal culture imposes on women's bodies (the order to refrain from eating in the name of the ideal of a slim body, see, e.g., Bordo 2004). The ability to refrain from eating is associated with self-discipline, the ability to control appetite – with the ability to control desire. This way of thinking, indicating the connections between food, desire and morality, has been present in European culture since the Middle Ages and found its expression in ascetic attitudes (abstinence from eating, fasting as an expression of piety) (see, e.g., Turner 1992: 217; Counihan 1999: 11). Nowadays, controlling appetite and body weight also has moral connotations: this ability is considered an attribute in a society that values slimness. Nonetheless, as Christina Van Dyke has noted, this requirement applies to all of us, and "telling people what to eat and what not to eat has become a billion-dollar industry." Those who profit from it want the average consumer to be confused, worried about the health effects of what they eat – and not to trust what they hear from others (Van Dyke 2018: 561–563). It is not surprising, then, that an attitude of distrust can lead to excessive monitoring of the quality or quantity of food consumed, and as a result – to eating disorders such as anorexia or orthorexia.

The media emphasize the aesthetic aspect of reality. This applies both to the appearance of the human body (the prevailing body model, appearance patterns) and the way food is presented. Especially in advertising, we are dealing with something that Christina van Dyke called "**food artified**" (Van Dyke 2018: 667) – presenting food in a stylized way, a composition modeled on a work of art, which is intended to attract the interest of the recipient – a potential consumer. This technique is often used in advertisements and is intended to emphasize the sensory experiences (aesthetic, taste) that are to accompany the consumption of a product. We are dealing here with a kind of contradictory message: on the one hand, we receive information on how important it is to take care of the proper appearance of the body and maintain a slim figure while, on the other, we are encouraged to enjoy eating and be guided by impulse when making a purchase decision. As Zygmunt Bauman wrote, the most frequently purchased books include two types. The first is cookbooks, and the second, weight loss guides: "Alongside cookbooks, like their inseparable shadow, [are] recipes for miraculous weight loss diets, objective and meticulous recipes for self-censorship and asceticism, inventories of pleasures that should be denied to the body. The latter books instruct how to heal the wounds inflicted by the former and remove from the body the impurities left by them," (Bauman 1995: 99).

A positive effect of the media's influence is certainly their contribution to increasing the recipients' awareness of the relationship between choices made in

the field of food consumption and one's own health (the message about food quality and consuming specific products in appropriate quantities). Thanks to the media, recipients also gain broader knowledge about the methods of food production and can take up issues related to, for example, the safety of this production or organize themselves into various consumer movements.

It can be said that the media, to some extent, create the needs and shape the decisions about "what to eat." Media messages can encourage or discourage recipients from reaching for certain types of food products, and the meanings attributed to them change over time or may have a different connotation depending on the target group of the product.

Let us give a few examples. From the once used advertising slogan "Sugar strengthens"[2] we have now moved to the perception of sugar as (in excess) harmful to health. From the perception of coffee as having an adverse effect on health in excess – to presenting it as a drink accompanying social gatherings, which can be consumed without restrictions (see: Barthes 2012). The same is true with the perception of meat. It was once considered a luxury product, and its frequent consumption could be afforded primarily by wealthy individuals. Today, we hear a great deal about the need to limit the frequency of meat consumption and the negative effects on health of its excessive consumption.

The advertising message may vary depending on the consumer group to which a given product is addressed. For example, yogurt advertisements aimed at women emphasize their positive impact on the figure, those aimed at children emphasize their positive impact on strong bones, and yogurts for men are advertised as adding strength and vitality.[3] Similarly, meat advertising – depending on the target group, the message about its properties may be shaped differently and by referring to other models of the body, which was aptly presented in their analysis of meat advertisements by Goszczyński and Wójtewicz (2018). In their analyses, sociologists looked at both how the symbolism attributed to specific products in the media changed, as well as what message about food was directed to individuals who wanted to achieve a specific type of figure. For example, Fabio Parasecoli analyzed food advertisements published in fitness magazines addressed to men (see Parasecoli 2005).

Over the last few decades, television programs on the subject of cooking have gained popularity, also in Poland, e.g., those presenting participants' struggles for the title of the best chef or presenting culinary recipes. The media's interest in food has many positive aspects. Presenting culinary topics in the media is an opportunity to convey knowledge about nutrition and its impact on health and the body. This educational dimension of the media's impact is mentioned as one of the most important ways to combat obesity. The presence of culinary topics in the media also has an educational dimension in a slightly different sense: "being up to date" currently also means following culinary trends. "Familiarity" with food

2 "Sugar strengthens" – a popular slogan advertising sugar in Poland in the 1930s.

3 We are talking about the yogurt "Bakoma 7 zbóż Men" – advertised as "the first yogurt for men."

is currently becoming an important social distinction (e.g., the ability to prepare, serve or consume specific dishes). This also applies to participating in consumer trends related to cooking, including not only food itself, but also kitchen accessories, cookbooks or cooking equipment.

Cooking shows provide opportunities to compare oneself with others, both in terms of appearance and lifestyle. There is often a thread of competition (between the participants), but there is also a thread of self-improvement – the participants' goal is to constantly improve their culinary skills. As a result, the number of topics related to food in the media is multiplying: in addition to the context of diet, nutrition, and healthy lifestyle, it also appears in the context of consumption, lifestyle, and entertainment.

Dietary regime and diet culture

Contemporarily, body shaping takes place within the framework of the so-called individual project of individual identity. This means that the individual is responsible for how the body looks and what experiences it provides. "We are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves," (Giddens 1991: 75). The unprecedented universality of the belief in the history of humanity that each individual is unique and can control their own fate means that modern humans are accompanied by an all-encompassing sense of the need to control the coherence of their own identity vision, which extends to the body and is directly related to how we feed this body. The body, as we know, is not only a physical object, but also a system of action, a source, but also a subject of everyday practices that serve to maintain this coherence. Among the aspects of the body of particular importance for shaping the individual's identity, body appearance, the way of being, sensuality and the so-called regimes are mentioned (Giddens 1991: 99–100). Regimes are defined as regulated ways of behaving relating to the preservation and cultivation of bodily features (Giddens 1991: 244).

For the purposes of our considerations on the connections between the body and food, we will look at dietary regime. The word diet (*diaita*), which comes from Greek, initially had a broad meaning referring more to lifestyle than to how we understand diet today (Berger 2010: 22–29).[4] Today's understanding of diet is associated with the treatments undertaken, most often as part of the implementation of an identity project, but above all with methodical self-limitation based on the guidelines of an expert, who is not necessarily a doctor or even another specialist in the field of nutrition. Today, therefore, a diet is more of a regime than a simple equivalent of what we eat. A **dietary regime** involves the active construction of identity and directly concerns the socially desirable appearance of the body.

4 A rich source of knowledge on the history of diet in the social context is the work *Historia diety i kultury odżywiania*, 2018, vol. 1 (edited by Bożena Płonka-Syroka, Halina Grajeta and Andrzej Syroka) and *Historia diety i kultury odżywiania. Praktyki żywieniowe w Europie w kontekście społeczno-kulturowym: ciągłość i zmiana*, 2020, vol. 2 (edited by Bożena Płonka-Syroka and Andrzej Syroka).

The undiminished popularity of literature and other sources of advice on diets means that for several decades consumers have been flooded with self-diagnostic tools for controlling body weight (tests, quizzes, questionnaires, registers of facts that we should know, planners, lists of forbidden and allowed foods, and lessons to be learned for each day are just a few examples).[5] Today, we should add to this list businesses run by diet and fitness gurus (who offer everything from diet and exercise to individual consultations, YouTube channels, and mentoring and motivational trips). A separate category is mobile device applications, which free a person on a diet from keeping a paper diary of consumed food in favor of enhanced (continuous) control over the process of achieving their dream body weight and figure. Diet regimes are popularized and reinforced by public figures and celebrities, who sometimes offer their own diets, write books or record television shows, or run social media channels about their own diets and private weight loss methods. In the context of dieting, the word "expert" has become a very broad category.

Owing to the wide range of options and virtually unlimited access to dietary regimes, regardless of socioeconomic status, body weight is constantly a subject of reflection for individuals who are watching over their identity project. However, Giddens (1991: 56) has pointed out that the fact that we seemingly so easily submit to regimes should not be reduced to fashion. He pointed to a range of factors resulting from the realities of life in a post-traditional world – the need to mitigate risk, the need to perceive oneself as a competent (and therefore having an adequate body) participant in social life, the need for self-fulfillment, and building social capital on a desired body.

It is worth noting that the idea of dieting, or rather of individuals being forced into a diet regime by culture, has its opponents. One of them is the dietitian and activist Brenna O'Malley, the founder of an online community she calls non-diet. O'Malley specializes in the so-called intuitive eating, body imaging, and helping people break away from dieting and disturbed eating patterns so that they can develop a healthy relationship with food and their bodies (see *The Wellful*; Bacon, Aphramor 2014). The academic world is represented in this group by Emma Laing, who uses the term **diet culture**. According to Laing, diet culture links how we look, what we eat, and even what exercises we do, with moral virtue. A proper appearance symbolizes important values, such as hard work and discipline. Therefore, if an individual is not perceived as slim, it is assumed that they must lack self-discipline. As a result, they experience harmful stigma. Laing believes that weight stigma is socially acceptable in food culture and can be observed in the workplace, at school, at home, and even among healthcare workers. Publications referring to the concept of diet culture and criticizing the assumptions of well-known diet regimes in favor of an intuitive diet have also begun to appear on the Polish internet (see Akkus 2021). "Diet culture

5 In this context, Anthony Giddens (1991: 100) cited the example of a very popular guide in the United States, *Bodysense* by Vernon Coleman (1990), which, since its publication, has convinced crowds of Americans to try to lose weight.

convinces us that we have to wait until we reach a certain weight, we will get the right body shape so that we can do the things we dream of," (Akkus 2021). Psychodietitian Małgorzata Akkus emphasizes that diet culture, which focuses our thoughts on food and the body, maintains a business based on products and services for individuals who want to lose weight. The author of the website "Intuitive Eating" also draws attention to the discriminatory nature of diet culture, seeing in it manifestations of racism, classism, sizeism, ableism, healthism, sexism, and ageism.[6] The author also suggests that diet culture normalizes eating disorders (Akkus 2021; cf. Brytek-Matera 2008: 24–33; Józefik 2014: 27–30, 34–38).

Diet in the modern sense is still a panacea in dealing with the risks of having a fat body. The multitude and popularity of diets, as well as the media careers of individuals who do not always have the appropriate competences in this area but call themselves dieticians, mean that a diet may appear as a desirable but also fashionable element of a lifestyle. From the vast number of available sources, a consumer can purchase a diet, e.g., in the form of a set of recipes and exercises, ready-made and delivered "to the door" meals, personal consultations with various specialists or simply install a free application. In the dietary mainstream, there is little information about the fact that for some individuals, a diet is a medicine in the strict sense, and not just another of many issues that can be chosen as part of the implementation of an individual identity project based on the body. For some patients, a diet is a necessity, not a matter of choice, for others it is even a condition of survival. It is estimated that about 12 million Poles suffer from the so-called diet-related diseases, which include, among others, obesity, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, osteoporosis, dental caries, some allergies, phenylketonuria, inflammatory bowel diseases, depression, and schizophrenia (Lis, Kołoczek 2020: 118–121). In the context of the cited data, it seems paradoxical that the issue of diet has been appropriated by the media and pop culture, as well as commercial entities from

6 The size and shape of the body preferred in diet culture is *de facto* the shape that is achievable by white people. Other body types, most often found in non-white people, are undesirable, hence the reference to racism. We are dealing with an approach that betrays **classism** when we ignore poverty and unequal access to food, treating it as obvious that everyone has access to, for example, fresh vegetables and good quality food. The **sizeism** of diet culture consists in treating one type of body as healthy and desirable – slim and athletic, while ignoring larger bodies. **Ableism** is a set of beliefs based on which individuals with imperfect bodies are treated unequally. We are dealing with ableism, for example, when we assume that appearance is a matter of choice, and exercise and the right motivation can change any body. **Healthism** is the belief that an individual bears complete, individual responsibility for their own health. Healthism abstracts from many sociological categories such as poverty or environmental pollution. **Sexism** in diet culture means that it is primarily women who are socialized in the cult of a body that meets social requirements – primarily slim, as a factor determining, for example, professional and personal success. Men are required to have a muscular body, as well as one devoid of fat tissue. **Ageism** is expressed in the belief that living according to its principles is a guarantee of "eternal youth." Youth is presented as the only acceptable state of the body, while aging and diseases resulting from age are treated as something that an individual should counteract in the name of individual responsibility (see Akkus 2021).

the beauty, fitness or food industries, when in reality it is primarily an issue for the health care system and medical professionals. Nevertheless, we listen to the latter less willingly than to celebrities (see Hajkuś 2022).

The fat body and the body positive movement

The fat body (in contexts related to overweight and obesity and eating too much food) has already appeared in our considerations, among others, when we took up the topic of the role of the media or looked at the dietetic discourse. In the next part, we want to draw the attention of readers to the so-called fat studies, look at research on fat individuals and the body positivity movement.

In sociological literature, the topic of body weight is most often taken up when discussing the social dimensions of eating disorders, in publications about food and lifestyle, and in studies presenting the fat body as a medical problem. The available studies present an image of the fat body as a social problem (requiring strategies and counteraction), resulting from overeating (and, therefore, a lack of control on the part of the individual), unhealthy lifestyle or disease (Brytek-Matera 2008; Ogden 2011; Józefik 2014; Lavis 2016; Himpens et al. 2018; WHO 2019; Maj 2020).

The classification and assessment of fatness is strongly culturally determined. Women and men categorized as obese are most prevalent in the Pacific Islands, the Middle East, the USA, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and parts of South and Central America. European countries are in the middle of the scale. Only in Sub-Saharan Africa is there no rapid increase in obesity statistics, probably due to the problem of hunger still present in this region (Brewis 2011: 274). Globally, there are progressively more overweight and obese individuals, mostly in the richest countries. The phenomenon of the spread of obesity around the world, called **globesity**, is strongly associated with industrialization and urbanization (Delpeuch et al. 2009: 46–50; WHO 2018b). In Poland, over 20% of the population is classified as obese by the WHO, in the case of both sexes (Himpens et al. 2018: 13). The relationship between overweight/obesity and the risk of disease, which is directly expressed in medical publications, is sometimes problematized in the literature (Campos et al. 2006; Bacon, Aphramor 2011; Brewis 2011: 22, 125). The slim ideal of beauty is a Western phenomenon (Walden 1985: 334; Bell, McNaughton 2007: 113–115; Delpeuch et al. 2009: 45; Brewis 2011: 96; Brewis et al. 2011: 269, 274).

The fight against overweight/obesity can be analyzed as simply a moral panic (Campos et al. 2006; Wann 2009; Warin 2015: 18–19; Ramos Salas 2015). Fatness is a bodily feature around which meanings are built. It is a manifestation of bodily diversity among people (Wann 2009: IX–X). In Poland, Zofia Boni (2014, 2017) has been involved in research on fat individuals in a non-medicalizing and non-pathologizing context. These are in-depth ethnographic studies, but they concern

children. The experience of the body among fat individuals has already been partially studied outside Poland (Joanisse, Synnott 1999; Ogden, Clementi 2010).[7]

The basis of fat studies is the belief that body weight cannot be understood without reference to gender, race, ethnicity, social class, lifestyle or sexual orientation.

> Fat studies comprise interdisciplinary reflection and research on fat individuals. Within their framework, researchers analyze the concept of fatness and confront the prevailing social rules regarding the fat body. The topics addressed in fat studies include living with a fat body, experiencing it, the social shaping of the fat body, but also the influence that fat individuals have on their environment, as well as the political dimension of fatness and the construction of identity. Fat studies use body size as a starting point for theoretical analysis and the explanation of how, in a historical perspective, society and culture describe and conceptualize all bodies and what political/cultural meanings are assigned to each body (Pausé, Taylor 2021: 1).

Researchers, mainly from the United States, draw attention to the fact that regardless of their own weight, people have a strongly negative attitude towards fat individuals, which is particularly evident in relation to women. Thanks to fat individuals, there is a huge market for the so-called diet foods, supposedly helping one lose weight, and other products intended de facto for individuals who are under social pressure to be dissatisfied with the appearance of their bodies (Rothblum, Solovay 2009; cf. Maj 2020).

The basis of what we know today as the **body positive movement** is the demand for the acceptance of fatness as one of many physical features that individuals have. The media career of body positivity began in Poland about a decade ago, but the enterprise itself originated from the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), founded in 1969 in the United States (specifically in New York). It is the longest-running organization in the world for fat individuals. Around the same time, in 1973, the Fat Underground organization was founded in California by feminist activists. NAAFA called for the acceptance of fatness, while the Fat Underground demanded, among other things, equal rights for fat individuals in all areas of life (under the slogan of fat liberation) and emphasized the harmful influence of the so-called diet culture in addition to industries operating under the banner of fat reduction (including the food industry). These movements grew on a wave of activism and civil rights over the following years, although NAAFA was accused at one point of only considering the white fat community to be a voice, considering, for example, the black community to be more accepting of fatness and, therefore, less in need of support. The 1980s saw the movement expand outside the United States, with the London Fat Women's Group forming in the UK. Although

7 More on this topic (in the context of stigmatization of the fat body): Bielska, Wójtewicz, Mańkowska 2023.

the term body positive was not used until the 1990s, fat rights activists were present in the media, organizing protests and boycotting fatphobic ads.

At the turn of the 21st century, the internet became the main space for activists. In 1996, the *Body Positive* website was founded, and its name became a popular slogan on social media, used not only by activists, but also by bloggers, influencers, and entities that had little to do with fat activists but promoted their products and services through this trendy slogan (see Osborn Tigress; The Body Positive. Our Story). Rachel Cohen and her colleagues (Cohen et al. 2019; Cohen 2020) wonder whether the concentration of body positivity activities on social media is actually a positive phenomenon and has the potential to bring benefits to fat individuals, or whether, contrary to the activists' intentions, it is becoming another opportunity to focus on appearance and treat the body as an object. Since this is a relatively new phenomenon in social media and we mainly have research on the impact that bodies which meet culturally imposed appearance patterns have on us, the recipients of online content, it is difficult to draw clear conclusions. Nonetheless, after reviewing existing research and the positions of experts in the fields of medicine and psychology, Cohen believes that obesity and eating disorders are a problem (psychosocial and for public health) that cannot be ignored and reduced to the slogan of fat liberation. It turns out that positive messages about the image of a fat body can, and even should, be an element of preventive actions to counteract the types of obesity that cause negative health effects (see Bray et al. 2018). Positive posts focusing exclusively on appearance, both in the case of fat and non-fat individuals, on the one hand, cause appreciation of the body, but, on the other, always have an objectifying dimension. However, if posts showing fat bodies focus not only on their appearance but also on the functional benefits (well-being, endurance) resulting from, for example, healthy eating or physical activity, they encourage the recipients of such messages to follow health recommendations (Tylka, Homan 2015).

2.4. The body, food and politics

Given the complexity of the issue of the relationship between the body, food, and politics, the topic can only be signaled and reduced to a few sample issues in this book. Nevertheless, abandoning it would deprive our considerations of the context, which will certainly gain in importance in the coming years, both within food studies and studies of the body.

In his book *Embodied Food Politics* (2011), drawing on the concepts of Michel Foucault and Bruno Latour, among others, Michael S. Carolan placed the body at the center of the discussion on the changing realities of food cultivation and production. He has drawn attention not only to "eaters" but also to the role of individuals such as farmers, breeders, and cooks. In his opinion, agri-food systems are embodied and relational. The bodies of individuals who co-create the so-called Global Food, perform work, eat, grow, and shape fashion and tastes. "Global Food […], through the embodiments it creates, helps foster particular knowledges, tastes, and feelings about food give support to conventional food production and consumption," (Carolan 2011: 7).

Julie Guthman and Sandy Brown (2015) drew attention to a different connection between the body and food with politics in the background. In March 2012, Arysta LifeScience decided to withdraw from the use of methyl iodide, used in strawberry cultivation, and permitted a year earlier by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation. This substance replaced the previously used methyl bromide – which destroys the ozone layer. The decision to replace one substance with another was controversial because the Department of Pesticide Regulation's research indicated that the substitute was also harmful – to farm workers and the environment. Nonetheless, it was not the concern for farmers, their families or neighbors that pushed the manufacturer to withdraw the substance from the market (the official reason given was the unprofitability of producing this substance). The key factors were the protests and comments on the internet (there were 53,000 of them in total). Some of the authors directly referred to their civil rights and consumer subjectivity in them. Concern for one's own health and that of one's family was indicated, and a personal consumer boycott of strawberries produced with the use of the controversial substance was announced. After analyzing the course of the dispute as well as the comments, Guthman and Brown drew attention to the fact that they have revealed a biopolitical division between those who deserve protection of their bodies and are responsible, and those who deserve it less (farmers and their families or illegal farm workers for whom strawberry cultivation ensures survival). The authors have emphasized that they consider such an individualized approach and the unforced emphasis on the value of one's own body and health to be at least disturbing (Guthman, Brown 2015: 9). Politics and economic issues also constitute an inseparable context of considerations on obesity. The main concern formulated by obesity researchers always regards the growth in demand for medical services and the generation of costs for the healthcare system. This narrative is accompanied by a thread concerning the need to change the population's eating habits and improve the effectiveness of prevention. The authors of the very well-known work *Fat Economics. Nutrition, Health and Economic Policy* (2009), pointed to a certain paradox related to the obesity epidemic – thanks to the development of medicine, obesity has become safer and fewer people die from complications related to it. From an individual perspective, individuals take fewer risks, so they are less motivated to prevent obesity (Mazzocchi, Traill, Shogren 2009: 159).

Practices leading to obesity are also facilitated by technological changes, i.e., the commonness of the so-called processed food, which individuals choose for economic reasons and because of a lifestyle in which there is no time for preparing meals. According to the authors of *Fat Economics*, such practices will continue to take place as long as they are profitable for both food producers and consumers. Therefore, they point to the need for solutions at the interface of economics and politics that would make them unprofitable (raising the prices of processed products, e.g., by imposing taxes – the so-called fat tax, but also putting pressure on producers to improve the quality of products) (Mazzocchi, Traill, Shogren 2009: 159–160). The cited authors believe that in the face of the obesity epidemic, even government intervention

in the market is justified, because obese individuals impose costs on the rest of society. Mind you, consumer choices should be free and their profitability should be left to the individual's decision. Another proposal is to link the higher costs of unhealthy food with subsidies for healthy food, which is supposed to be a procedure counteracting the growth of social inequalities and enabling individuals with a low economic status to buy healthy food (Mazzocchi, Traill, Shogren 2009: 161).

Economic behavior matters for obesity, given that the choices on what we eat and how we exercise depend on the relative prices of food and leisure. Effective policy at all levels requires that we adjust our perspectives to better integrate both human actions and their reactions to health risk into the mix of viewpoints guiding obesity policy (Mazzocchi, Traill, Shogren 2009: 161).

A final example, although certainly not exhaustive of the issue of the connections between the body, food, and politics, is the climate crisis, which we can also treat as a public health problem (Hellerstedt et al. 2017: 1–7; cf. Tummala 2020). As Ewa Bińczyk (2018: 40) pointed out, citing the IPCC report (2014: 12),

> Climate change is already having a negative impact on the economic and socio-political health of communities. It is jeopardizing food security and agricultural yields. The inability of communities to continue to make a living from fishing as a consequence of ocean degradation is also increasing the demand for grain. The report predicts that communities that are already in a more difficult economic situation will be the most at risk.

As indicated by the WHO (2018a), clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food, and safe shelter are direct determinants of health. It is estimated that between 2030 and 2050, climate change will cause about 250,000 additional deaths per year due to malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress. The direct health costs (i.e., excluding the costs in health-critical sectors such as agriculture, water, and sanitation) will be between 2 and 4 billion USD per year by 2030, while areas with a poor health infrastructure – mainly in developing countries – will not be able to cope without help. Extremely high air temperatures directly contribute to deaths from cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, especially among older people. They will also increase ozone levels and other air pollutants that exacerbate cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. Rising sea levels and increasingly extreme weather events will destroy homes, medical facilities, and other essential services. It is worth noting that more than half of the world's population lives within 60 km of the sea. This means that people may be forced to relocate (which increases the risk of a range of health effects, from mental disorders to infectious diseases). Increasingly variable rainfall patterns may affect freshwater supplies. A lack of safe water can compromise hygiene and raise the risk of diarrhea, which kills more than 500,000 children under the age of 5 each year. In extreme cases, water shortages lead to drought and famine (WHO 2018a). The WHO estimates that rising temperatures and variable rainfall are likely to reduce the production of staple foods in many of the poorest regions. This will increase the incidence of hunger and malnutrition, which currently cause 3.1 million deaths per year (WHO 2018a).

There are many examples of alarmist forecasts, but it is worth noting that the WHO estimates are considered cautious, and resulting from the availability of

data, they only take into account some of the possible health effects and assume constant economic growth, as well as progress in the development of medicine and medical technologies. There is no doubt, though, that climate change will affect all populations and will continue to contribute to the development of social inequalities, posing a direct threat to human physical existence, whether through a lack of or limited access to healthcare or good quality food.

3. Key concepts

Fat studies – a research trend that arose from the belief that body weight cannot be understood without reference to gender, race, ethnicity, social class, lifestyle or sexual orientation. It analyzes, among others, the concept of fatness in the context of applicable social rules, the experiences of individuals with a fat body, the impact of fatness discourse on identity formation, as well as the political and cultural dimension of fatness (Pausé, Taylor 2021: 1).

Food artified – styling, composing food products in the image of a work of art, in order to attract the attention of the recipient. A marketing technique used in advertising – the consumer receives the promise of multi-sensory experiences, which is supposed to be an impulse to buy (Van Dyke 2018: 667).

Food studies – interdisciplinary research on food and its connections to culture, art, and history. Food studies deal with production and consumption and related ethics, in addition to the aesthetics of food, as well as culinary traditions. Researchers associated with food studies include sociologists, anthropologists, economists, and historians (Goszczyński 2016).

Globesity – the phenomenon of the spread of obesity in the world, related to industrialization and urbanization, most visible in the richest countries (Delpeuch et al. 2009: 46–50; WHO 2018b).

Food as a code – a term coined by the anthropologist Mary Douglas (1972, 2007). According to Douglas, social patterns and beliefs are encoded in the ways of talking about food, organizing meals, and the type of dishes served. For example: a shared meal expresses a greater degree of intimacy than communal drinking; the type of food consumed indicates whether the meal is festive; and the products excluded from consumption (e.g., meat) may be an indication of the general rules that apply in a community.

Diet culture – a term used to refer to the realities of contemporary culture, in which the way we look, what we eat, and what type of physical activity we engage in to achieve an appropriate weight become moral virtues. Weight stigma is socially

acceptable in culture and can be observed in the workplace, at school, at home, and among healthcare workers. Diet culture, by focusing individuals' thoughts on food and the body, maintains a business based on products and services aimed at individuals who want to lose weight. It is believed to be discriminatory in nature and may contribute to the normalization of eating disorders (Laing Emma; Diet Culture; Akkus 2021; cf. Brytek-Matera 2008: 24–33; Józefik 2014: 27–30, 34–38).

Fitness culture – according to Jürgen Martschukat, author of *The Age of Fitness* (2021: 4), contemporary culture uses the idea of body agency to exert control over individuals. Body features such as fitness, slimness, and health have become socially desirable in contemporary society. Individuals with such bodies are rewarded for their ability to control themselves, while obesity is seen as a pathological condition.

Neo-Marxist food studies – they originated from the analyses of commodity production systems. They are critical of the industrial society, they analyze the issues of power distribution and the relations between farmers and food producers. They have evolved towards the analyses of the so-called short food supply chains, but largely ignore cultural issues related to food and the role of food consumers (Goodman 2004; Goodman, DuPuis, Goodman 2014).

Invisible mouth – a term that is a critique of neo-Marxist food studies. It is about drawing attention to the need to analyze the role of consumers in both industrial and alternative food distribution systems, as well as to emphasize the importance of the identity of consumers constructed by the body (Lockie 2002).

Dietary regime – the process of constructing a socially desirable body appearance through diet as part of an individual identity project. It results from the need to mitigate risk and perceive oneself as a competent (and, therefore, having an adequate body) participant in social life in addition to the need for self-fulfillment. Subjecting oneself to a dietary regime is accompanied by a desire to build social capital on a socially desirable type of body (Giddens 1991).

Body positive movement – a social movement that arose on the basis of the postulate of accepting fatness as one of the features of the human body. It originated from the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), founded in 1969 in the United States – the world's longest-running organization for fat individuals. Body positive activists demand, among other things, equal rights for fat individuals in all areas of life and emphasize the harmfulness of diet culture. Currently, the main space for the body positive movement is the internet (Osborn Tigress; The Body Positive. Our Story).

Culinary triangle – a diagram described by Claude Lévi-Strauss in an article entitled *The Culinary Triangle* published in 1965, in which the author attempted

to recreate certain universal principles organizing the ways of preparing food. Analyzing the verbal categories denoting the ways of preparing meals, he argued that they simultaneously set the boundaries between what belongs to the sphere of culture and what belongs to the sphere of nature (Lévi-Strauss 1972: 71–80).

4. The most important studies

The following research projects were selected by the authors from among many interesting and important analyses devoted to the body and food. We present them according to the thematic division: studies referring to social stratification; and studies referring to gender and studies taking into account the media context. The reader will find in this compilation a reference to the already classic studies of Bourdieu, which continue to inspire new generations of researchers, but also more contemporary projects, the authors of which place the connections between the body and food at the center of their considerations.

Social stratification and food choices

Bourdieu's analyses of the class divisions in the French society in the 1970s, described in *Distinction*, inspired research on the relationship between social stratification and food choices made by the representatives of various socio-professional categories. Studies of this type prove that there is a relationship between status determinants such as education, occupation, and income, and making specific choices when it comes to food consumption. For example, individuals with a higher socio-economic status are more likely to have healthier eating habits, while those with a low status usually eat less in line with nutritional recommendations, which contributes to their poorer health. In relation to the Polish society, such research was conducted by a team led by Henryk Domański in 2015 (see Domański et al. 2015). These studies have shown that "the middle class reflects a stronger tendency to adopt a pro-healthy eating style and avoid products that dietitians consider harmful to health, such as fats and sugar," (Domański et al. 2015: 94). As we remember, this is associated with the different body assets valued by the representatives of different social classes: while the representatives of the lower classes value physical strength above all, the representatives of the upper classes "turn to products that are tasty, good for health, light and do not cause weight gain," (Bourdieu 1989: 237). The representatives of higher social classes also tend to choose products considered exclusive more often – they choose lesser-known products and products from other countries, such as shrimp, artichokes, goat cheese, and Parma ham (Domański et al. 2015: 95). Wealthier individuals also more often choose beverages considered to have a beneficial effect on health, such as water or green tea, and avoid beverages with artificial additives. When it comes to such a status marker as eating meat (described as a distinguishing feature of individuals with a high social position in the aforementioned works of sociological classics), the opposite situation can currently be observed: a distinguishing feature of a high social position

is distancing oneself from eating meat. Analyses have shown that the representatives of higher social classes are more able to distance themselves from eating meat because they use less physical energy at work compared to farmers and workers. Avoiding meat also gives them an opportunity to emphasize their individuality, and be guided by health and ethical considerations when choosing dishes, as well as represent a reflective approach to diet (Domański et al. 2015: 71).

In the 1980s, a trend called **omnivorism** was noticed in the United States and Western countries. It consisted in the fact that the representatives of higher social categories did not limit their consumption choices only to foods considered sophisticated and luxurious, but combined preferences for both exclusive and expensive foods in addition to popular, simple and unsophisticated ones. Knowledge of both the former and the latter can be considered an expression of sophistication.

As Henryk Domański noted, "omnivorism is the effect of democratization, the development of tolerance and pluralism of values," (Domański 2016: 125, see Domański 2017). Its emergence has been associated with the changes in values that have taken place in Western countries over the last few decades, consisting in the gradual opening of the representatives of higher social classes to the pluralization of culture and a partial abandonment of exclusivity. According to Domański, "From the point of view of stratification, it is important that we are dealing with the emergence of a new dimension of culture, which in the opinion of some authors replaces the existing class hierarchy, and in the opinion of others – overlaps with it and both function," (Domański 2016: 124). Based on the results of research conducted by Henryk Domański in 2016, it can be stated that omnivorism also occurs in the Polish society.

Food and gender

Analyses have also been conducted in many European countries, as well as in the United States, on how eating habits are shaped by gender (Masella, Malorni 2017). Some universal regularities can be observed here: women usually consume more fruit, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains, but also more sweets and cookies, compared to men. Men tend to eat foods richer in fat and protein, drink more wine, beer, spirits, and sweet carbonated drinks. Generally speaking, they exhibit eating behaviors that potentially promote overweight and obesity (Masella, Malorni 2017: 60).

In the Polish society, there is also a traditional division of the roles related to food preparation, excluding men from cooking; this responsibility falls primarily on women (Domański et al. 2015: 207). Women are also more often left to decide on the composition of the menu (Domański et al. 2015: 209). Men living with women in the same household eat healthier than men living alone. Women can, therefore, be considered the initiators of dietary changes, which is related to the fact that they are socialized to exercise greater control over their own diet and that of the whole family, in contrast to men, who are allowed a greater degree of freedom and to rely on women's choices in the belief that they will adapt to their tastes (Domański et al. 2015: 209).

The body and food in the media context

Other research directions concern media coverage of the body and food. In addition to analyzing the discourses presented by the media relating to the ideals of the body, the so-called dietetic discourse has also become a subject of interest for sociologists – they analyze the symbolism attributed to both the body and food (Goszczyński, Wójtewicz 2018). The media participate not only in the dissemination of information about the prevailing patterns of the body, but also the ways of eating or dieting, and constitute one of the tools for advertising food products. Media coverage can, therefore, influence both the recipients' ideas about the expectations regarding appearance and their perception of specific food products. As indicated by Michael K. Goodman, Damian Maye and Lewis Holloway (2010), this is the case, for example, with the presentation of organic food in the media in opposition to mass-produced food. The former is usually valued positively, as having a beneficial effect on the body and health, the latter – vice versa. According to the above authors, the media, and especially culinary programs, educate viewers. Choosing a specific type of food also becomes a moral choice, examples of which include the call to prepare food at home instead of reaching for ready-made, mass-produced food, and the popularization of using crops from one's own garden as an alternative to mass-produced vegetables or fruit (Goodman, Maye, Holloway 2010). In this way, a kind of a categorization of food into "good" and "bad" occurs in the viewers' minds.

Similarly, the symbolism given to food in the media, e.g., through advertising, influences people's ideas about how a product can affect health and the body or what kind of body can be obtained by consuming a product. Depending on the customer to whom a given product is intended, it can be shown as an important element of belonging to a specific status group, gender category or ethnic group. An example is the way meat is presented in advertising, described earlier (see Goszczyński, Wójtewicz 2018).

Through the discourse on food, the media influences the way such categories as ethnic and cultural identity, gender identity, and gender relations, as well as class divisions are defined. For example, Nick Piper analyzed the series of cooking shows by the famous British chef Jamie Oliver, *Jamie's Ministry of Food*. According to Piper, such shows not only present a specific discourse on food, but also indirectly touch upon such issues as class, gender, and regional stereotypes. In their shows, famous chefs have the opportunity to speak on various topics as authority figures and can, thus, influence human attitudes (see Piper 2013). In one of the shows of his series, Jamie Oliver addressed the problem of children's nutrition in British schools. As a famous chef, who can be described as a "culinary celebrity," he contributed to drawing attention to the important problem of unhealthy food served in school canteens. The fact that someone important, and a man at that, has taken an interest in this issue also goes some way to contradicting the stereotypical belief that children's nutrition is an issue that is usually dealt with by women (see Piper 2013: 42). Jamie

Oliver's series of programs *Jamie's Ministry of Food* has also been analyzed in terms of regional stereotypes. Oliver's program contributed to the discussion on the responsibility of parents for their children's nutrition when one of the episodes, filmed in Rotherham, South Yorkshire in northern England, showed women giving children unhealthy food. As a result, the issue of negative stereotyping of certain regions of the country (Rotherham as a place where you don't eat "healthy") also appeared in the public debate.

Another well-known figure whose cooking programs have been analyzed is Nigella Lawson. She is a well-known British author of books and programs devoted to cooking. Joanne Hollows analyzed her books and programs to ascertain what kind of postfeminist identity she offered to women. Among others, it is about how we define the role of women in society. According to Hollows, Nigella Lawson's programs are aimed primarily at middle-class women. This is indicated by the most common problems they address: the problem of the lack of time in the face of the need for women to combine paid work and household chores (Hollows 2003). Nigella Lawson's cooking philosophy assumes that cooking should be enjoyable and should begin with the desire to eat (Hollows 2013). She treats it as an escape from the problems and challenges of the modern world. Importantly, in a way, she also confronts the stereotype of a woman traditionally burdened with the function of providing food for all the household members, as a laborious and difficult task that requires renouncing one's own needs. As Joanne Hollows has pointed out, the representation of cooking in Nigella Lawson's work emphasizes a woman's care for herself rather than for others and in this way provides an alternative way of presenting the pleasures of "domestic femininity" (Lawson argued in her programs that women should take on the role of "domestic goddess" – note by A. Maj) (Piper 2013: 42).

It is not only cooking that should bring pleasure, but also eating, which is a pleasure for the body. As Hollows has suggested, Nigella Lawson argues with the requirement that is binding among the representatives of the middle class, and particularly applicable to women, to control the body by refraining from excessive eating. She calls for women to treat their bodies as temples, and, thus, allow themselves to feel the pleasure of eating, without focusing solely on taking care of a slim figure or the obligation to feed others. Nigella also points out that eating does not have to be associated with care (understood as care for others and as a "burden"), but can provide joy.

5. Summary

This study does not exhaust the extensive subject matter covering the issues of the body and eating. Our aim was to signal the most important theoretical areas and research topics connecting these two spheres. After years of absence of the issue of the body (and eating) in sociology, this subject is now increasingly appearing among the interests of sociologists, owing to, e.g., the development of research

on cultural diversity in various corners of the world, in connection with the development of social awareness of the issue of leading a healthy lifestyle, changes in food consumption, the development of considerations on eating in the context of lifestyle, the growing number of people affected by obesity in the world (while, at the same time, a large number of people suffer from malnutrition), and the issues related to food security and the climate crisis in the world mentioned by us. All of the above-mentioned topics are the subject of research by sociologists and will certainly be developed in the near future. In many of them, the subject of the body and food appears in new versions.

6. Review questions

1. Describe the assumptions of the culinary triangle.
2. Why is food a cultural code?
3. Provide examples of cultural taboos related to food.
4. What was the source of the problems with including the body in social reflection on food?
5. What is a dietary regime?
6. What is diet culture?
7. What do fat studies deal with?
8. Describe the assumptions of the body positive movement.
9. What is the role of the body in the discussion about the realities of food cultivation and production?
10. How does social location determine food choices?
11. How do gender stereotypes define the division of food into "female" and "male"?

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