

# THE LOOKISM OF A SENIOR CITIZEN'S AGEING BODY – UTOPIA OR REALITY? THE PERSPECTIVE OF POLISH ELDERLY WOMEN AND ELDERLY MEN

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## **Abstract**

Widespread worship of the human body as well as new opportunities to preserve its attractiveness, shape social expectations about human corporality regardless of age. Individuals whose appearance meets these socially promoted expectations gain social approval unlike those whose body is far from the ideal. These second group might experience discrimination on the grounds of their looks (lookism). Seniors might be an example of such people.

Based on a research project conducted in Poland among elderly people it might be said that, in the opinion of the respondents, lookism of an ageing body is not a utopia. Seniors notice the risk of the worse treatment of elderly people only because their body is different from the socially promoted model.

**Keywords:** Attractiveness; discrimination, body image; ageing body, elderly people

## **Resumo**

**Discriminação das pessoas idosas com base na aparência – utopia ou realidade? A perspectiva de mulheres e de homens idosos polacos**

O culto contemporâneo ao corpo e as novas possibilidades de preservar a sua atratividade moldam as expectativas sociais em relação à corporeidade humana, independentemente da idade. Os indivíduos cuja aparência é um reflexo de padrões socialmente promovidos ganham aceitação social em contraste com aqueles cujo corpo está longe do corpo ideal. Estes últimos podem sofrer discriminação com base na sua aparência.

Com base numa investigação realizada na Polónia junto de pessoas idosas, pode dizer-se que, na opinião das pessoas inquiridas, a discriminação de um corpo envelhecido com base na aparência não é uma utopia. As pessoas inquiridas percebem o risco de um pior tratamento dos idosos apenas porque o seu corpo difere do modelo socialmente provido.

**Palavras-chave:** Atratividade, discriminação, aparência, envelhecimento do corpo, pessoas idosas

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### Résumé

#### **Lookisme du corps vieillissant des personnes âgées – utopie ou réalité ? La perspective des femmes âgées et des hommes âgés en Pologne**

Lookisme, c'est-à-dire la discrimination en raison de l'apparence extérieure, pourrait être une expérience pour ceux dont l'apparence n'est pas le reflet de modèles promus par la société qui glorifient le corps attrayant, jeune et beau.

Sur la base d'une recherche menée en Pologne auprès de personnes âgées, on peut dire que, selon les répondants, lookisme d'un corps vieillissant n'est pas une utopie. Les répondants s'aperçoivent que les personnes âgées risquent d'être moins bien traitées simplement parce que leur corps diffère du modèle préconisé par la société.

**Mots-clés :** Attractivité, discrimination, l'apparence d'un corps, vieillissement du corps, personnes âgées

### Introduction

There are different ways of defining the beauty of the human body. It might be the mathematically determined proportions of the body – attractiveness was defined in such a way by ancient philosophers and sculptors (e.g. Polykleitos). It might also be anything considered attractive by fashion designers, the media or plastic surgeons (Pawłowski 2009, 2). Regardless of the way that physical attractiveness is defined, it is one of the most important qualities that determines people's social status (Nęcki 1996; Kramkowska 2018). It is also a quality that passes with time.

Widespread worship of the human body, as well as the new opportunities to preserve its attractiveness, shape social expectations about human corporality regardless of age. A beautiful, slim body which is also fit and well-dressed is currently promoted. Individuals whose appearance meets these socially promoted expectations gain approval in society unlike those whose body is far from the ideal. Whilst others might experience discrimination on the grounds of their looks. This can be called lookism (Rhode 2010, 24). Lookism is proof that beauty is, nowadays, an aspect by which an individual might be discriminated against in our politically correct world. Contrary to common beliefs, Deborah L. Rhode explained that it is not only a matter of taste:

appearance discrimination offends against principles of equal opportunities and individual dignity. As with other forms of prejudice, bias based on appearance often rests on inaccurate stereotypes. Assumptions that overweight individuals are lazy, undisciplined, or unfit are a case in point. Appearance-related discrimination also may stigmatize individuals based on factors at least partly beyond their control. (Rhode 2010, 11-12)

Seniors are an example of such people.

The latest analysis of the Central Statistical Office (GUS) in Poland states that at the end of 2017,

the population of Poland was 38.4 million, out of which 9 million were people aged 60 or over (above 24%). The share of people aged at least 60 in the total population increased by 10%, that is, from 14.7% in 1989 to 24.2% in 2017. In the subpopulation of old people, the largest group (almost  $\frac{1}{3}$ ) consists of people aged 60-66. (GUS 2018, 4)

This largest group of senior citizens are usually people born during the post-war baby boom in the years 1946-1964. Since 2006, they have been gradually entering retirement age, thus deepening the demographic ageing of the Polish population. The statistics also show that almost 18% of old people are aged 80 or over, which means that it is the generation of people born in the Interwar period or during the Second World War (GUS 2018, 40). Hence, it is clear that a double ageing process is occurring in Poland. On the one hand, there is a continual increase in the proportion of people aged 60 and over. On the other hand, there is an increase in the proportion of people aged 80 and over that is faster than the whole population of old people (Błędowski 2012, 12). This has led to considerable heterogeneity of modern senior citizens, not only when it comes to the number of cohorts of old people, but also in terms of socio-demographic features. Moreover, 'with every passing year, modern senior citizens have spent more time in the new conditions initiated by the transformation of 1989, which are based on more democratic social relations and on the market economy principles' (Błędowski 2012, 19). This certainly affects their beliefs and attitude to current social problems. One of them is the notion of the social perception of the senior citizen's ageing body.

Even though ageing of the body is a multifaceted process, that is, occurring on biological, psychological and social levels (Mann 2014; Katz and Gish 2015), it is the biological changes that people mostly pay attention to as they betray their age and classify people as senior citizens (Panek, Hayslip and Pruett 2014). This is not new given that humanity has been always searching for an anti-ageing antidote. It seems though that modern times are characterised by an exceptionally strong focus on hiding old age and its signs. There are also plenty of possibilities to do so. In the context of various behaviours that make up the phenomenon called cultural juvenilisation (rejuvenation), practices concerning the rejuvenation of old age are becoming more and more common. As a result, modern old people look considerably younger than their peers from previous decades (Konieczna-Woźniak 2012). Their faces seem to be less wrinkled and hairstyles more varied (Ward and Holland 2010; Twigg and Majima 2014). It is rare to see an old woman with a headscarf in the street. Modern senior citizens wear clothes that are more fashionable, colourful, or elegant (Twigg 2013). One question, however, remains. Does today's focus on youth and attractiveness of the body put pressure on elderly people? Are they the victims of lookism, that is, discrimination on the grounds of their appearance?

Are the actions taken to improve their appearance and attractiveness of an ageing body natural and independent of social conditions? The aim of this article is to find answers to such questions based on the results of my own research, as well as referring to the primary sources. The issue of the attractiveness of an ageing body was analysed, *inter alia*, by Susan Sontag (1972, 1979); Laura Hurd Clarke (2001, 2007); Abigail Brooks (2004), Julia Twigg (2007, 2013); Richard Ferraro with his team (2008), Patrycja Woszczyk (2009); Dorota Niewiedział (2014), Julia Twigg and Shinobu Majima (2014), Paul Panek with his team (2014), Ewa Malinowska with her team (2017); Emilia Kramkowska (2018), etc.

### Material and methods

In order to find out what elderly people think about current trends concerning the human ageing body and its attractiveness, and whether the ageing body is discriminated against, I conducted a research among old people from January to June 2018. The research was carried out using quantitative methods via a diagnostic survey, with the use of a questionnaire (to be filled in individually) consisting of 42 questions.

The respondents were chosen in a purposeful manner. People aged 60 and over were asked to take part in the study, that was carried out in accordance with the principles of anonymity and confidentiality. Each of the respondents voluntarily (informed consent) took part in the research. Some were residents of nursing homes (NH) in Białystok and others were members of the University of the Third Age (U3A). Therefore, two completely different groups of seniors were chosen.

The residents of nursing homes tend to be ill and inactive, they live far away from their families, in a «total institution» that has its rights (Goffman 1961). Their health condition as well as problems with eyesight lead to the situation that they needed help filling in the questionnaire. I helped some of the residents by reading the questions and ticking the answers given by them. Others filled in the questionnaire on their own. It took from 30 to 40 minutes.

Members of U3A are usually active and in good health. They received the questionnaires at one of the systematically organized lectures. Some of them filled it in at the same lecture, others brought it back for the next one.

In total, 118 questionnaires were collected from NH and 120 from members of U3A. The majority were aged 60-69 (54.2%), 37% were aged 70-79, and people aged 80 and over constituted 8.8% of the respondents. The interviewees were mainly women, who constituted 63.5% of all respondents. According to the statistics at the end of 2017, the percentage of women among Polish seniors was 58%. In the studied population, the proportion of female respondents was very similar.

*The aim of the work*

In the context of the issue analysed in this article, it has been assumed that the variable gender might differentiate senior citizens' perception of the human's ageing body as well as their opinions on the possibility of discrimination against seniors on the grounds of appearance. Taking into consideration the patriarchal definitions of femininity and masculinity, it is assumed that women, as the experts in the terms of determinants of beauty and attractiveness, are more likely than men to perceive negatively the ageing body, including their own ageing corporality. It is also assumed that the opinions of elderly women more often than the opinions of elderly men indicate the possibility of the occurrence of lookism towards the elderly in their social environment. Verification of such hypotheses is the aim of this text. The empirical data presented in this article are preliminary studies, undertaken to initially recognize the issue of the social perception of the ageing body.

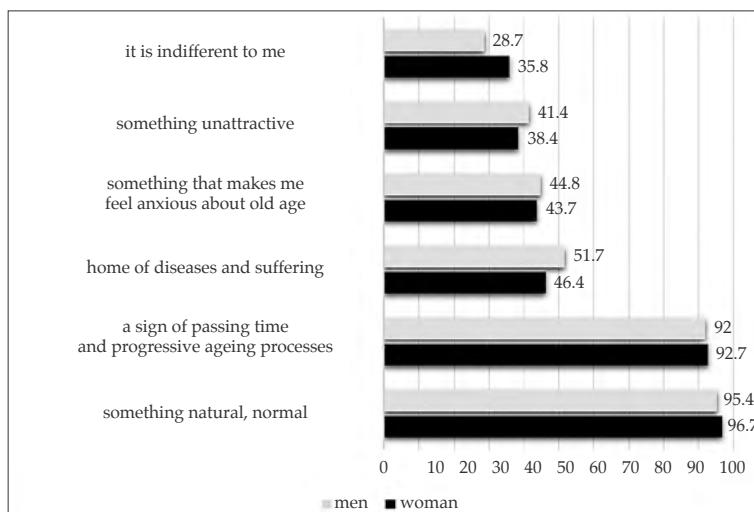
**Ageing body – what is it?**

In the primary sources we can read about the so-called double standard of ageing – being different for men and women. In the 1970s it was described by S. Sontag and to this day we can observe the validity of the theory of the researcher. According to Sontag, the essence of femininity is the notion of beauty (Sontag 1972). A woman should delight others with her appearance, posture, or image. Let's make it more precise – her body should delight. A woman is judged by her appearance and her ageing does not change anything in this matter (Sontag 1979; Niewiedział 2014). Yet, 'changes in one's appearance with increased age are more salient for women than for men' (Panek et al. 2014, 166). What is more, 'women in Western cultures normally gain status and value through their appearance. Thus, the perceived loss of beauty through the normal ageing processes could increase older women's susceptibility to body image disturbance' (Ferraro et al. 2008, 380). On the other hand, an elderly man is judged by his achievements and the amount of money he had earned. According to Sontag, masculinity means strength, independence, being active, self-confidence, leadership and reliability. The issues connected with the appearance and physical attractiveness slightly affect the social position of a man. Hence, they are of secondary importance for an elderly man (Pliner, Chaiken and Flett 1990; Lamb et al. 1993; Homan and Boyatzis 2009). If men took into consideration their corporality, it would be tied to the functionality of their bodies, that should be fit and efficient so as to meet the expectations traditionally set for male, regardless of their age (Sontag 1972, Kaminski and Hayslip 2006; Kluczyńska 2008).

Susan Sontag's theory reflects the patriarchal definitions of femininity and masculinity, which indicate that the social position of a man practically does not depend on his appearance, but on other features, because a man is dominant in patriarchal concepts. On the other hand, the social position of a woman – who is dominated – largely depends on her appearance (Malinowska et al. 2017). To what extent is the patriarchal concept of gender or S. Sontag's concept valid? How could it be related to the lookism?

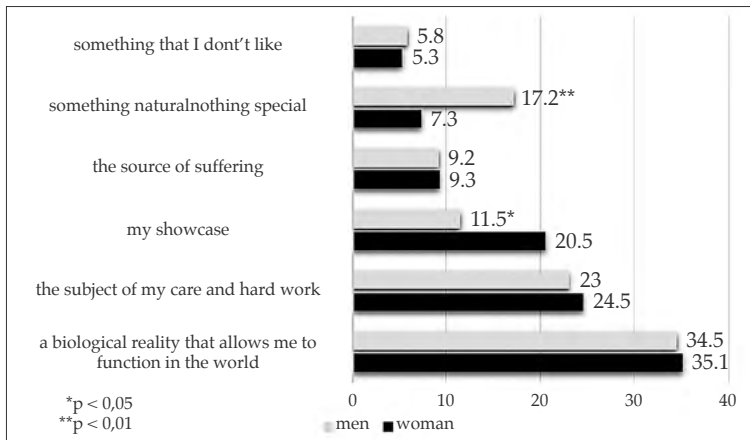
While analysing the subject of this article it is worth to start by discussing the answers of the respondents to two basic questions: What does the senior citizen's ageing body mean to you? (Figure 1) and What does your body mean for you? (Figure 2)

**Figure 1.**  
What does the senior citizen's ageing body mean to you? (%)



On the basis of this question, it might be said that the respondents' gender did not differentiate (was not statistically significant) their perception of the senior citizen's ageing body. Both women and men most often indicated that the ageing body is something normal/natural for them and it is also a sign of passing time as well as the progressive ageing processes. On the other hand, men (51.7%) slightly more often than women (46.4%) indicated that the ageing human body is the home of diseases and suffering. The answer «the human ageing body is something unattractive» was indicated by slightly more than  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the respondents from both groups, and slightly more men (41.4%) than women (38.4%) answered in such a way. It is surprising that the answer «the ageing body is something indifferent to me» was more often given by women (35.8%) than men (28.7%). These results are complemented by the data provided by Figure 2.

**Figure 2.**  
What does your body mean to you? (%)



More than  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the women and men indicated that their body is a biological reality allowing them to function in the world. More than one fifth of men and women said that their body is an object of care and hard work for them. Women (20.5%) answered a lot more often than men (11.5%) that they treated their body as their showcase ( $p < 0.05$ ), but men (17.2%) more than twice as often as women (7.3%) showed indifferent attitudes to their body and said that it is something normal for them, nothing special ( $p < 0.01$ ). Identical percentage of women (9.3%) and men (9.2%) indicated that their body is the source of suffering and something they dislike.

The general association of seniors with the ageing body is quite compatible with how they perceive their own body. Most often they said that they treat their body as a biological reality allowing them to function in the world, what seems to be related to the fact that corporality is something normal and body ageing is a natural process (Figure 1). Nevertheless, respondents' answers confirm the deeply-rooted assumption in women's minds that they are representatives of the fair sex. Women almost twice as often as men answered that they treat their body as a showcase. «Attention to appearance and the pursuit of physical attractiveness are key aspects of the feminine gender role and identity» (Hurd Clarke 2001, 441). Similar results were obtained by Richard Ferraro with his team, who conducted research among 25 old men and 27 old women aged 70 and over. They conclude: «the older women scored as significantly more concerned with their bodies than did the older men. In addition, older women, relative to older men, reported spending significantly more time in thinking about their body shape» (Ferraro et al. 2008, 387). As was mentioned above, men slightly more often than women indicated that an ageing body is something unattractive. Maybe it is an evidence that they also pay attention to the appearance of the body in old age. Perhaps they

had in mind the appearance of women's bodies because, when asked about their own body, they more than twice as often as women pointed to a rather indifferent attitude towards their own corporality and answered that it is something normal for them. Will it be too far-reaching to conclude that it is easier for men than for women to behave in a manner which betrays discrimination on the grounds of looks? Perhaps they do it unconsciously, guided by the convictions gained in the process of socialization that a woman is a representative of the fine sex and her body should reflect this truth? Perhaps it is an evidence that the patriarchal concept of gender is still valid.

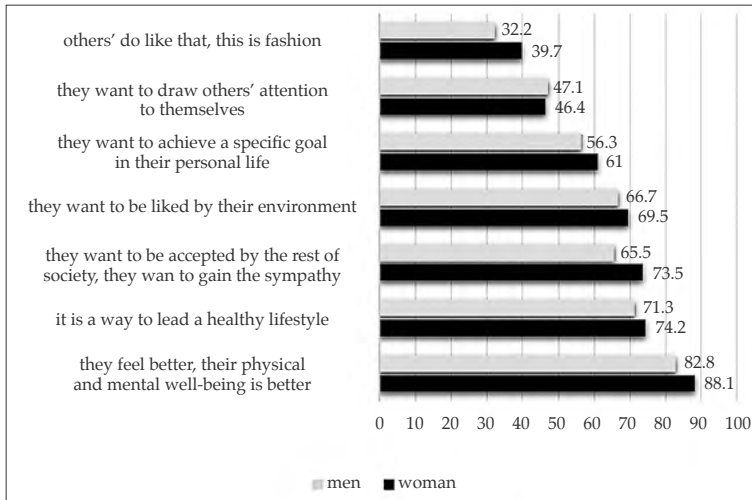
### **Is an ageing body attractive?**

Taking into consideration the modern focus on the attractiveness of the human corporality, it seemed interesting to ask whether senior citizens follow the current trends. Hence, the respondents were asked how, in their opinion, modern senior citizens care about their appearance. The research indicates that male and female senior citizens' opinions about this issue are quite similar. The answer most often given by both women (50.3%) and men (41.4%) was moderate agreement that modern seniors care about their appearance. Summing up strong and moderate support of the discussed opinion shows that women more often than men notice the behaviour of their peers, which confirms they care about their appearance. Men (39.1%) more often than women (31.3%) had doubts about this issue and answered, «It's difficult to say». It appears that women more often than men notice the will of modern senior citizens to meet the demands of contemporary times, *inter alia*, concerning care about appearance. The subject matter of this article requires that we pose the question about the reasons why modern senior citizens care about their appearance. What are their motives? (Figure 3)

It was assumed that there would be strong support for the opinion that old people take care of their appearance to be accepted by society and to be liked by their environment. Since so much is being said about rejuvenating in old age, in order to fit the surrounding 'youthing' reality (Brooks 2004; Hurd Clarke, Repta and Griffin 2007), it was assumed that senior citizens might point to those issues. And yes, they did but it was not the most frequently given reason. Respondents believe that the modern senior citizens take care of their appearance because they want to be accepted by society – women (73.5%) more often than men (65.5%) gave this answer – and because they want to be liked by their environment (69.5% of women and 66.7% of men). When looking at the results, one could conclude that modern senior citizens cannot be indifferent to lookism, that is, discrimination on the grounds of appearance. Women seem to be more aware of this than men. However, the physical and mental well-being of old people was the most frequently given reason, by both women (88.1%) and men (82.8%), regarding why



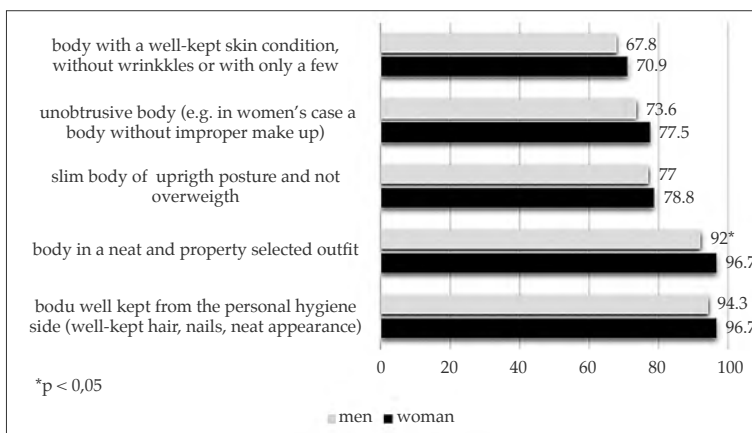
**Figure 3.**  
In your opinion, why do modern seniors care about their appearance? (%)



senior citizens care about their appearance. The next reason, given by 74.2% of female and 71.3% of male respondents, was that caring about their appearance was a way to lead a healthy lifestyle. Therefore, in the view of senior citizens, they and their peers do it for themselves.

The next important issue connected with the analysed problem is the question: what are the determinants of attractiveness of an ageing body? According to the respondents, seniors take care of their appearance. Hence, they were asked what the body of a senior should look like to be called attractive? (Figure 4)

**Figure 4.**  
In your opinion, what should the senior's body be like to be called attractive?



Looking at the answers shown in Figure 4, one might think that an attractive body is a kind of universal. It does not matter whether it is a young or old body that is being discussed, the characteristics defining the body as attractive seem to be the same. We could apply it to the patriarchal model of gender in which the attractive body is connected with youth, that is attractive in itself. Identical conclusions come from the research conducted by P. Woszczyk. Based on interviews with 24 women aged 65-89, Woszczyk concludes: «the respondents while pointing out the features of an attractive elderly woman refer to the aesthetic canon of woman's body beauty, which is typical for modern societies» (Woszczyk 2009, 197-198). This means that the common society's paradigms are confirmed irrespective of the respondents' age.

The senior citizens in Białystok focused, above all, on hygiene – well-kept hair, nails and neat appearance –, which, in their opinion, is the indicator of a senior's attractive body. It was mentioned by more than 94% of the respondents (men and women). The second most popular answer stated that a senior's attractive body means a body in a neat and properly selected outfit. Women (96.7%) more often than men (92%) selected this answer ( $p < 0.05$ ). J. Twigg explains that in every society there is a dress code, which should be followed. It also determines which clothes seniors should wear. Elderly people should not wear eccentric, too colourful or brave clothes. Hence, they usually have clothes in muted colours, or even sad – grey, black or white. Twigg believes that the accepted dress code guarantees seniors' invisibility and is a proof of their marginalization (Twigg 2007). Was this what the respondents meant by pointing to properly selected outfit? Perhaps. But the seniors' dress code is changing. Seniors are more interested in fashion, want to look young and are free to wear fashionable clothes, which is seen as empowerment and rejection of the traditional invisibility of the oldest members of societies (Twigg 2013). This is also observed in Poland.

More than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of women and men claimed that a senior's attractive body should be slim, of upright posture and not overweight. Body shape is a very important indicator of body attractiveness. More and more elderly people go to fitness clubs, research suggests (Chomiuk and Bernatek 2018). It is also a sign that the healthy lifestyle is spreading in Poland, which brings a lot of benefits to senior citizens, such as being more healthy and fit. However, the ongoing ageing processes change the human body and the efforts taken to keep a young-looking body at all costs might backfire. The respondents notice such risky behaviour amongst their peers. This will be mentioned below.

The least frequently given answer (70.9% of women and 67.8% of men) was that the attractiveness of senior's body is determined by its skin condition, without wrinkles or with only a few. The 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century saw the pharmaceutical and beauty industries widely spread the belief that old age is a problem, but there are possibilities to fight it. As a result, the beauty industry has focused on advertising anti-ageing cosmetics, which were to be an antidote

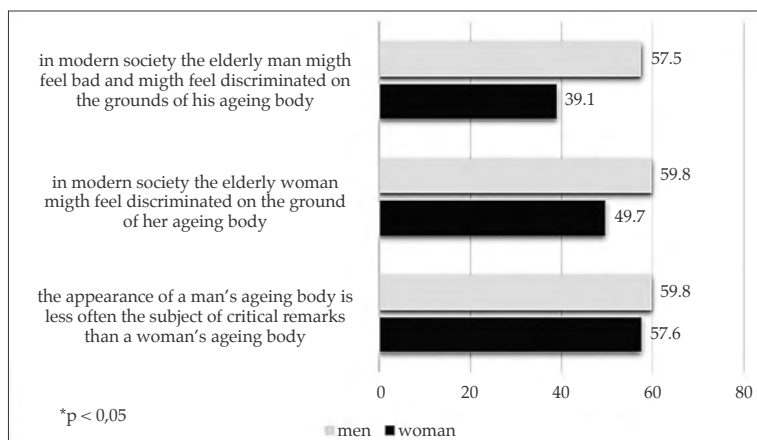
for old age portrayed as embarrassing and disgraceful. This conviction is still true nowadays, and seniors, especially elderly women, undergo various cosmetic procedures and even cosmetic surgeries. All of this is done to hide the disgraceful problem of old age (Twigg and Majima 2014). It seems that the respondents are aware that old age has its rights and wrinkles are a sign of their activity. That is why this determinant of the attractiveness of a senior's body was the least popular amongst the respondents.

A natural consequence of the question about the determinants of the attractiveness of the senior citizen's body is the question whether, according to the respondents, the ageing body of modern seniors is physically attractive. Opinions are divided in this respect. Women (42.4%) more often than men (36.8%) expressed support for the opinion that modern senior's ageing body is physically attractive. Men (41.4%) more often than women (31.2%) said that modern senior citizen's ageing body is far from being attractive. Hypothesis assuming that women more often than men expressed negative perception of senior citizen's ageing body has not been confirmed. In this case, men were more critical than women. This is also in line with what was mentioned earlier – men more often than women identified the ageing body with something unattractive.

### Ageing body in nowadays society

With the knowledge about the contemporary trends concerning person's appearance and focus on the body, the respondents were asked what they think about the social perception of senior citizens in terms of their corporality. Are they the victims of lookism? (Figure 5)

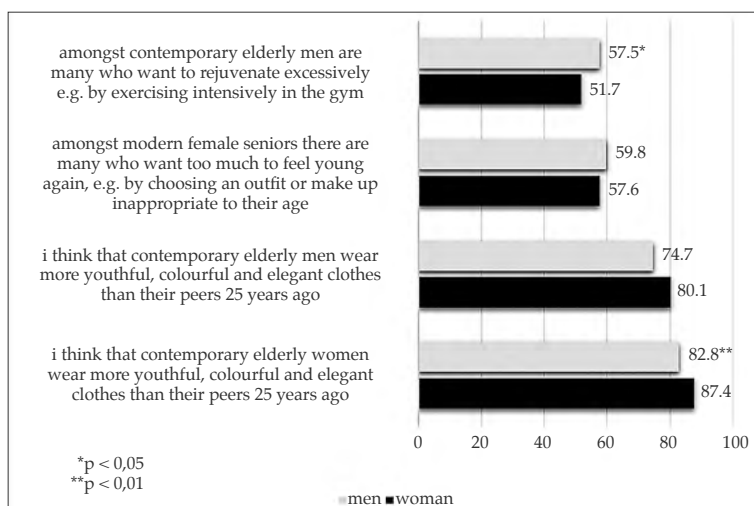
**Figure 5.**  
Opinions about social perception of ageing body (%).



The data collected in Figure 5 indicates that men (59.8%) more often than women (49.7%) believe that modern female senior citizen might feel bad and might feel discriminated against on the grounds of their ageing body. Moreover, men (57.5%) almost 1.5 times as often as women (39.1%) said that also modern male senior citizens might feel bad and feel discriminated against on the grounds of their ageing body ( $p < 0.05$ ). The statement that the appearance of a man's ageing body is less often the subject of critical remarks than a woman's ageing body was almost as often pointed out by women (57.6%) as by men (59.6%). It is safe to say that in the respondents' opinion the ageing body and its appearance might be the reason of discomfort felt by their peers. In the literature, one can read about similar observations of other researchers exploring this issue (Homan and Boyatzis 2009; Muhlbauer and Chrisler 2007, Kaminski and Hayslip 2006). Lookism of the ageing body is not a utopia after all. However, the hypothesis that women more often than men notice in their social environment discrimination on the grounds of appearance of the ageing body was not confirmed.

**Figure 6.**

Opinions about seniors' behaviour connected with their ageing body (%).

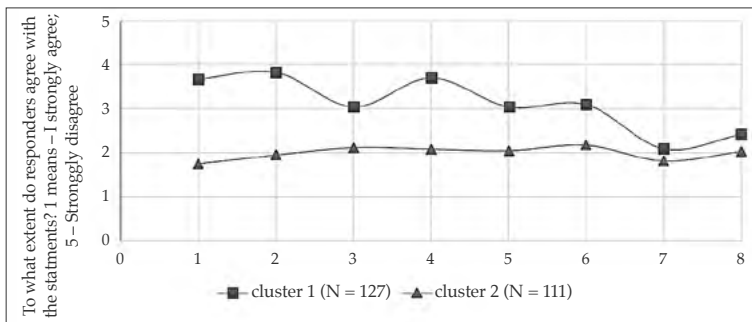


In terms of clothes, an important addition to the human body, women were also more positive than men (Figure 6). Female senior citizens more often than men notice that contemporary elderly women as well as elderly men wear better, more colourful and elegant clothes. On the other hand, men (57.5%) more often than women (51.7%) indicated that amongst contemporary elderly men there are many who want to rejuvenate excessively, e.g. by exercising intensively in the gym ( $p < 0.05$ ). Such risky behaviours might backfire (e.g. heart attack, stroke). The statement that amongst modern female seniors there are many who want too much

to feel young again, e.g. by choosing an outfit or make-up inappropriate to their age was supported by almost as many female respondents as male ones. Namely, seniors believe that it does not make a female senior citizen more attractive.

The respondents' opinions shown in Figure 5 and 6 could be interpreted in the context of lookism to the greatest extent. Since the subject of our interest is discrimination on the grounds of appearance, it was relevant to ask the seniors directly about their attitudes to the probability of experiencing lookism by their peers. In order to get to know better whether the gender of respondents differentiates their opinions in this respect, a cluster analysis was carried out, taking into account the statements presented in Figures 5 and 6. Two clusters were generated (Figure 7). Significantly, gender was a variable differently represented in each cluster.

**Figure 7.**  
Results of cluster analyses.



It seems that people from cluster 1 was definitely more positive about the statements they evaluated than people in cluster 2. People in cluster 1 were more likely to think that modern elderly woman/man is unlikely to feel discriminated against because of her/his body and does not feel social pressure to hide her/his age. The opposite opinion was expressed by people from cluster 2. Moreover, it was difficult for people from cluster 1 to state clearly that the appearance of a man's ageing body is less often a subject of criticism than the appearance of a woman's ageing body. For this group, it was also difficult to evaluate an opinion related with the excessive rejuvenation of seniors. Such dissonance in response was not experienced by the respondents from cluster 2, who rather confirmed the occurrence of this type of regularity. It is worth to mention that in cluster 1 the vast majority were women (70.9%), people aged 60-69 (55.1%) and 70-79 (33.2%) as well as respondents from U3A (51.2%). Cluster 1 was also made up in 58.3% by people who thought that modern seniors take care about their appearance, and 40.2% perceived an ageing human body as attractive. On the other hand, cluster 2 was represented by 55.0% of women and by 45.0% of men, though it seems that

**Table 1.**  
Statistics for cluster analyses.

Evaluated statements	Between SS	df	Interior SS	df	F	p
1 – elderly women may feel discriminated on the grounds of their body	218,701	1	143,047	236	360,814	<0,001
2 – elderly men may feel discriminated on the grounds of their body	209,530	1	133,865	236	369,397	<0,001
3 – the ageing body of an elderly man is less often criticised than the body of the elderly woman	50,379	1	250,281	236	47,505	<0,001
4 – elderly women and men feel the pressure to hide their age	155,390	1	202,900	236	180,739	<0,001
5 – many elderly women want to excessively rejuvenate themselves	58,561	1	229,578	236	60,199	<0,001
6 – many elderly men want to excessively rejuvenate themselves	50,495	1	232,614	236	51,230	<0,001
7 – elderly women are dressing better than their peers 25 years ago	4,506	1	187,074	236	5,684	<0,001
8 – elderly men are dressing better than their peers 25 years ago	9,023	1	235,801	236	9,030	0,003

the male voice is of great importance here. In cluster 2, 53.2% of the respondents were aged 60-69, but there was also a large group of people aged 70-79 (39.6%). In this group, more than half of the subjects were residents in NH (53.2%) and 10% believed that modern seniors did not take care about their appearance. In cluster 2, more often than in cluster 1, there were people who believed that the body of a modern seniors is not physically attractive (37.8%). Thus, it could be said that cluster analysis, which is a kind of look at the analysed issues from a bird's eye view, confirms that the respondents' gender differentiates their perception of the ageing body and opinions on the possibility of lookism in their social environment.

## Conclusion

Based on this study research, it might be said that, in the opinion of the respondents, lookism of an ageing body, which is discrimination on the grounds of appearance, is not a utopia. The analyses of the individual notions indicate that the respondents notice the risk of the worse treatment of elderly people only because

their body is different from the socially promoted model. The respondents pointed out that, in their opinion, their peers undertake various actions to adjust their body to the model of today's society, called contrarily by Anthony Giddens as the 'you-thing' society (Giddens 2009, 166). The beliefs of the interviewed women and men about the ageing body and current trends did differ, but a larger and rather different polarization of opinions had been expected. The hypothesis assuming more negative perception among women than men of the ageing body was not confirmed. It was also expected that women's opinion more often than men's would show that they noticed the possibility of existence of discrimination against the ageing body on the grounds of appearance. While women's views on the motives of senior citizens for taking care of their body confirmed this assumption, other questions did not reveal such a relationship.

In the patriarchal concepts, the appearance of the female body is highly important. Zbyszko Melosik put it very aptly when he said 'the male eye estimates a woman and her body and as a result men estimate and women look' (Melosik 2010, 21). Could we conclude – based on the study – that more positive opinions of women than men show that elderly women have re-evaluated their system of values and life wisdom hints them that appearance is not a crucial value? Perhaps the patriarchal definitions of femininity, in their opinion, apply to a lesser extent? Men, on the other hand, seem to confirm that the observations of the aforementioned Melosik are still valid and even in old age it is difficult for men to eliminate women's body estimation.

On the basis of this study research, someone might say that lookism seems not to be too common yet. In none of the questions, on the basis of which the existence of lookism could be deduced, did the frequency of support reach 90 or 100%. Usually it was more than a half of respondents, maximum of  $\frac{3}{4}$ . Perhaps the results obtained are the consequence of the fact that the modern generation of senior citizens is unique in many respects including their system of values and the peculiar attitude to different social issues. They are the witnesses of history, people shaped by various events, often difficult and painful. The generation of people who remember the Second World War is humble and their attitude to reality is not too demanding. They often accept reality as it is, even if it is not convenient for them. Perhaps the results obtained are also the consequence of the fact that modern senior citizens with every passing year have more time to experience their elderly age, in a world of tremendous, different possibilities (after the transformation of 1989 so transformation that followed the fall of the Berlin wall), but also in the world that is focused on youth and its attributes. It is possible that senior citizens have got used to the fact that they have taken care of themselves, even when they are old and it requires more effort.

The empirical data presented in this article are from a preliminary study. The issue of the ageing body is slowly being recognized in Polish science, but, according to my best knowledge, mainly qualitative researches are carried out in Polish

sociology of the body. My intention was to initially recognize the issue of the social perception of the ageing body using quantitative research to plan further, qualitative research. With the use of in-depth interviews, it is worth to ask senior citizens of different age, men and women, living in rural and urban areas, and with different levels of education how do they feel with their ageing body in nowadays society. Has their attitude towards own corporality been changing? It will be also interesting to find out what do the seniors think about the use of aesthetic medicine by their peers or their style of dressing. I also plan to carry out a comparative study among young and middle-aged people. This scientific activity will be undertaken in the near future.

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