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Abstract

When we talk about health and health behaviour, we must take in account that it is an integral part of the broader notion of quality of life – a notion that is becoming more and more important for the discourse of modern philosophical anthropology and other humanities. Due to the technical progress in cosmetic surgery and increasing commercialisation of health care services, the issue of aesthetic body alteration has created a growing interest of human and medical professionals alike. The quality of life has gained a particular importance in the context of cosmetic (aesthetic) surgery where. Medical professionals see its importance in the process of overcoming negative body image, which is the cause of patient's suffering, while philosophers and anthropologists view it as an essential problem not only of individuals, but of modern culture as such. Quality of life has its own specifics in rapidly changing societies, such as new EU member states and in particular – in Latvia.

The statistics show that cosmetic surgery is expanding in Latvia in 4 directions: facial plastic surgery, especially laser skin resurfacing, breast augmentation, nose and ear surgery, body contouring surgery, very often liposculpture. What is the meaning of those practices from the viewpoint of philosophical anthropology?

- (1) The organism is the product of human will, by which it is interpreted and shaped.
- (2) The interpretation is indicative of a specific mode of life.
- (3) Human identity is the product of the social contexts within humans spent their lives.
- (4) We can understand bodies as a textless text into which outside meanings are read.
- (5) Social constructionism dominates as a metaphorical interpretation in the studies of human body.

Kenneth Dutton stresses that human body can be understood only in the context of the social construction of reality. The body itself is seen as a social construct, a means of social expression or performance by which our identity and value – for ourselves and others – is created, tested, and validated. Through cosmetic surgery women in Latvia have gained a possibility not only to overcome negative body image, but also create a new one, with more stable gender role, higher sexual status and self-appraisal. The public opinion, reflected and promoted by mass media, asserts that it is modern, it is “cool” to get a “surgical fix”.

Kathy Davis in her book *Reshaping the Female Body* (1995) is analysing cosmetic surgery from feminist standpoint. She claims that women who opt for “surgical fix” are not necessarily victims of ideological manipulation, and shows that cosmetic surgery is a dilemma: it is a symptom and a solution, oppression and liberation, all in one.

Within a consumer society a youthful and attractive body forms the dominant ideal, so beauty becomes a part of the concept of good life – it is viewed as a requirement of high social status and prestige. In Latvia consumer culture is still on the early stages of its development, thus its demands are particularly strong. Attempts to comply with media-constructed image of good life lead to a necessity to convert the material welfare into external welfare, i.e. a positive body image. Thus the actual quality of life becomes dependant on the successful individual embodiment of the social construct and aesthetic surgery becomes the necessity for achieving a good life.

Biography

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Area of discussion: Bodies, cultures and scientific metaphors