

## **Marketing of the Body: Policies and Strategies for a Limited Product**

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**Abstract.** It is accepted that, the idea of natural physical life's impossibility corresponds to the permanent mediation of culture through the body and to "every culture generated its own physical culture" determination. This response is supported by the argument, which states that the social power's political form always displays hegemonic body images, reflects ideal body criteria. Moreover, sovereign power and gender order also maintains the systematization of body. Especially today, need to be perceived as a large-scale political-ideological-economic project for the reformation of body. This study moves from the understanding of modernity's "free life of body" motto, also from the idea of body's multi-explanational structure consists of political demands. This means the colonization of body through technology and practises, which created some desires as; immortality, delaying of aging, prevention of a disease and physical collapse, "feasibility" of a healthy and youthful appearance. These desires operates according to "principle of hope" and promises a market that offers different opportunities for individuals. This study build it's basis to the assigned meanings of body by New Right and also problematizes the presentation of corporeality by marketing strategies. These assumptions will be carried out by the definitions of; Kreisky's, Haug's, Martin's, Bauman's "human model" theories.

**Keywords:** body, neoliberalism, postmodernism, body discourse, ideal body, health sector in Turkey

## **Introduction**

The body always serves the cultural, which might suggest that every culture produces its own bodily culture. If it is true that politics is engraved on human body, this could mean that the body reflects the history, and thus, neoliberalism's attempts at shaping the politics and political have a reflection on the body. Just as time and setting, or maybe more than they do, the political configuration of societal power reflects on hegemonic body images and ideal body size. The societal and political behavior expectations materialize on the body. The existing dominant power and the societal gender orientation are maintained on the "body's order" (Labisch, 1998: 524). Models of values and meanings are transferred through the body, and expectations and role models are expressed.

Neoliberalism, unlike others in the same category, should not be taken solely as an ideological rhetoric or a body of economic discourse. It should be regarded as a political-ideological project of the uncontrollable and aggressive capitalism. It is the continuation of capitalism with the radical methods of the market at any cost whatsoever. Therefore, what neoliberalism dictates involves all circles of life, invading our thoughts, emotions, and body. Neoliberal project goes beyond cognitive formations such as cultural standardization by aiming to improve, change, and even refigure the bodily, our bodies, and the bodies of the future generations. And this aim associates science with the government and enterprises, media with medicine, and cosmetics, sports, and nutrition sectors with each other. While such togetherness organizes lifestyles under the supervision of capital, it acts independently of such moral-ethical categories as "human pride".

The present study is based on the observation that neoliberalism has made the body an arena of societal and cultural struggle, and it claims that postfordist capitalism has taken away the societal benefit and public value of the body, changing it into a very private property and encouraging individual protection and development. As a result, "the body...has turned into one of the main battle fields where a society or community, or its institutions, captures its members to define and rule them" (1998: 530). Neoliberalism's emphasis on healthily running intact, perfect, and attractive body, which it considers a condition of a life suitable to the market, requires non-stop financial sources, isolating those who cannot meet this requirement and creating new class formations and differentiations by means of the body.

## **I. The Design of the Study**

According to a leading newspaper that belongs to the mainstream media group in Turkey, because of the European Cup, a popular wonder question of the spectators these days is how one of the highest-paid football players in the world spends his millions. The paper writes that this football player, who is financed by tens of brands from Nike and Castrol to Herbalife and KFC, spends a considerable portion of his earning on his physical appearance, maintenance of his healthy body, and special treatments. The same piece of news depicts the fit

and well-maintained body of the football player in front of his luxurious sports cars and ostentatious houses. This news text and the visuals together emphasize the numerical perfection of body size, its importance, the value it adds to life, the positive effect of healthy (fit and complete body) on personality, and especially the fact that medicine realizes miracles on human body.

Analyses pertaining to body have been subject to the major modern philosophical thoughts of the 20th century. These generally fall into three conceptual schools: Phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty), Psychoanalysis (Lacan), and Poststructuralism (Foucault). These three schools inherently have their own theoretical orientations and methodologies. Despite all the differences, however, the three schools condition one to believe that the body does not exist solely for natural reasons and thus enforce the production of meaning. Furthermore, even different from the conception of metaphysical naturalization of the body (the theories stressing the soul/body dichotomy), the three schools always regard the body as a part of sign and meaning processes, and doing so, they take it away from its pure biological-factual status. Considered from this point of view, it can be said that bodies are organized socially, that different cultural systems perform different policies on bodies, and that bodies, on the one hand, are the stages on which individuals display their cultural capital, and on the other hand, they are fields where class discrimination is set forth, or in Nietzschean words, where show of strength and power is put on.

Modernity, wherein interest in the body became obvious, aimed at the freedom of bodily life, as well as the explanation of subjective and bodily sensations. The pluralist approach of modern societies coincided with bodily symbols' demand for plurality. What lied behind this was not only relieving the body of deprivations but also the individual's autonomy over his or her own body (Kreisky, 2003). However, these expectations resulted in the exploitation of the body through technologies. Designs towards the prospects of technicalizing the body led to research into the possibility of remaking the body by technical means. Therefore, technological innovations, besides the developments in chemistry, biology, and medicine, became one of the impetus for social progress. As some popular literary works like *Frankenstein*, *Dr. Jekyll and Bay Hyde*, *Dorian Gray's Portrait*, *Dr. Moreau's Island* depict so well, a hysterical trend towards 'immortality' emerged; the ultimate goal was to retard bodily weaknesses, problems associated with old-age, and even death, to discovery ways for avoiding illnesses and deterioration of the body, and to find the eternal and healthy youth.

Because of the orientation towards health, fitness, efficiency, the hope for a life free from illnesses and weaknesses has now been within the state's and economy's field of interest. It is to such extent that neoliberalism which represents a different type of capitalism pronounced the body the arena of social and economic struggles. In the remaining part of the study, I will analyze the way political and societal aspect of neoliberalism have conquered the body, and then evaluate this form through the "postmodern body", "neoliberal ideal body", "flexible body", and "postfordist body" theories of postmodern/critical authors such as Eva Kreisky, Wolfgang Fritz Haug, Emily Martin and Zygmunt Bauman.

## **II. Capitalism, Liberalism, Fordism: Neolar's and Postlar's Perception of Body**

Neoliberalism has created body industries, which on the one hand inconsiderately disrupt social state organizations to conceal large-scale consequences preferably by camouflaging in body metaforms (Kreisky, 2003: 4) and on the other hand exploits and utilizes the potential of body with massive profit (Borbonus, 1999: 44). The basic assumption is that neoliberalism is not a simple rhetoric or an economic program; on the contrary, it is a political program in which social orientation is reversed, public sector is reduced, and the value given to benefit/profit is increased.

Neoliberalism and its leading representatives generate the entire individual and social life. In modern and postmodern times, all material properties as well as any kind of human act are produced as commercial entities within the understanding of service and efficiency. Even the most creative works of art feed commercials, which are a major symbol of competition. What followed was new capitalism's invasion of areas that were once outside the capital-economy, such as sports, travelling, leisure time, fashion, entertainment, art and education industries, which rendered psycho-social human needs a commercial object. The new capitalism furnishes the body, the "desired" symbolic capital, with beautiful and ideal concepts, and considers it as a prerequisite of success at one's career and private life, thus a prerequisite of acceptance by society.

Neoliberal body cult and the applications carried out on it are considered as a source of identity and meaning because "the entire body is thought to be at the service of the individual" (Labisch, 1998: 530). Fetishizing health, marketing bio-brands, a genuine upsurge in the number of muscle building and fat burning products are among the symptoms of neoliberal body cult. Moreover, neoliberalism seems to generate new types of body-classes. The body turns into a realm of social struggle, where elimination takes place in the capitalist social game which is becoming an increasingly fierce game to play. The pair of selection and obedience concepts is a compulsory element of capitalist social practices. Friedrich A. Hayek (1944/2001), one of the pioneers of Neoliberal Elite Group, asserted that any kind of social development lied on the foundation of "voters at the market", which is shaped by "filtration stages"; that is, people can only learn through experiences and disappointments. The aged, disabled, not-so-pretty, fat, unfit are obstacles to the progresses achieved by the so-called neoliberal values in all circles of life. The misfit or those who cannot catch up with the pace of neoliberalism are eliminated by the "protectors/guards". Neoliberal age deals with beneficial and (re)shapeable bodies that can be used radically and unconditionally.

Styling and popularizing a body that suits the capitalist ideal body cult has bred a new language of power through the oppression and isolation of non-ideal bodies in the media and dominant classes. In the body culture, in the competition of super muscles and perfectly shaped breasts, the bodily beauty has been equalized

to a good fortune and health - 'perfect' body turns into biocracy expecting to be profitable" (Reusch, 2001: 4). The recently increasing 'transformation in health' practices in Turkey have served the expectations of neoliberalism, changing the health sector into a commercial entity and building a sector revolving around productivity, efficiency, and preference concepts. With public sector having a diminishing place in health services, private sector and research institutions became dominant in this field. Moreover, in bio and gene studies, science institution, university, private sector, and state collaboration was initiated; foreign capital enterprises increased; projections were increasingly made by medical technologies. "Reborn" type of weight-loss reality shows on TV, beauty programs, newspaper columns for beauty tips, diet recipes on the Internet, weekly diets to lose weight, before and after-selfies, fashion shows, so and so forth were all that were taking place meanwhile, demonstrating the rising value of the body in neoliberal capitalism. This value formed the cliché that only an active and healthy body can guarantee an attractive life matching the expectations of the market. Moreover, the matchmaking shows on almost all channels create the prototype of the desirable young women and men beyond "keeping an eye on the dating process". Also, shows like "Fit-Stop" on sports channels host celebrities under the sponsorship of fitness studios who do exercise during the show, which points to the benefit of the "healthy" body in capitalism and the results of the sacrifices made to enjoy this benefit. Shows like "Be Healthy" or "Health Check" strengthen the idea that health is the reproduction of the body and a transformable commodity, and they highlight the development of plastic surgery which creates miracles.

Probably, the unemployed, homeless, disabled, single mums etc. cannot be the permanent customers of the "health and sports clubs" which offer activities whose names we have difficulty pronouncing and about which we have little knowledge like fitness, pilates, spinning, total body shape, cardio training. Even the healthy and natural diet market is closed to many of the people in these groups. Such an understanding of the body has been reversed in the new capitalist world: In the past, being fat and paunchy was the indicator of wealth, while today those who choose to eat low-fat meals, who take care of themselves and who are well-built, tall, presentable and fit represent willpower, neatness and success. This representation generates the assertion that "some of us have the immunity/body to survive through the mass infections or mass economic downsizing, while others are doomed to collapse" (Martin, 2002: 47).

### **III. Theoretical Framework of the Neoliberal Body Representation**

The supporters of the Marxist and critical theory Eva Kreisky and Wolfgang Fritz Haug argue that neoliberal capitalism brings with it not only the body cult but also the propaganda for a lifestyle that consciously accepts a regular income in advance. Thus, in this system, those who want to be successful in market competition (based on the fact that social and political collectivities of neoliberalism are dead and the irresistible victory of individualism is declared) are required to protect their health, vitality and productivity continuously and assuming full responsibility. While state and public welfare remain in the

background, health issue ceases to be the biological fate and starts to be viewed as individual responsibility and personal performance.

According to Kreisky, neoliberalism requires the body to be changed and transformed. She bases her assertion on the idea that the system which has eliminated all the societal assurances and which has deconstructed the approved mechanisms that ensure social togetherness makes an effort to reshape the body of the people in addition to reshaping their thoughts and feelings (2003). This provocative pursuit which refers to the elimination of feelings requires numerous “ego-motors” and a new type of relationship with “one’s own ego” to be realized (Bröckling, 2000: 132). Kreisky maintains that the “beautiful” and “ideal” body design of new capitalism creates “symbolic capital” (citing Pierre Bourdieu) desired by individuals, which is closely related to work and private life and social recognition.

Going a step further, Kreisky emphasizes that this is valid for both individuals and social-political collectivities. She further emphasizes that neoliberal discourse pursues this aim by using language and visuals and that body, organs and the functioning styles are used in the description of politics, economy and the government like “healthy or ailing Constitution”. She states that the body metaphor serves the aim of disregarding the gender of the state/government.

Haug, who examined the postfordist character of neoliberalism, maintains that with the postfordist transformation process, a specific type of the capitalist production style that is historically and structurally related to fordism emerged. Simon Graf (2013) gives “body building” as an example to this. In the postwar period, very limited number of commercial gyms mostly served male body builder customers. However, since the end of the 1970s, “fitness studios” have emerged, which changed the social origin of the visitors. While, in the past, body building was considered to be a job, it has recently been defined with new type of customer categories. Therefore, Haug (2011:152) states that fit and healthy body is closely related to postfordist conditions, that “being fit” can be linked to Darwin’s “survival of the fittest” theory, that is, to as far back as the 19th century, and that it is a part of the daily life of capitalist societies now. Haug further emphasizes that today working individuals are encouraged to be fit and healthy, and that like workers, company owners are also required to respond to this call to be able to survive in production relations. Like Kreisky, Haug also states that this call is not only related to the individual body but also to collective bodies like public offices, universities, and business enterprises which are also required to be “thin”, “fit” “elastic” and “autonomous”. Moreover, according to Haug, “in postfordist relations, the new cult, that is, the fit-healthy- beautiful body, is not only limited to the field of consumption”; rather, “the vision of keeping oneself fit is observed in every field” (2011:168). This vision determines hierarchy, power and submission, and it is even linked to the historical construction of man and woman.

Emily Martin, who deals with body from a feminist view on the new production technologies, points to the similarity between the reproduction of the female body and industrial production style, particularly by using the example of



transformation in the language of medicine. Martin (2000), who examined the change in the subjective body perceptions of concepts related to illness and health from the 1940s to this day, states that the concepts that were defined through “castle” and “integrity” in the past are now represented through “improving the immunity” or “performing small operations”. Martin, who states that neoliberalism paved the way for postmodern body tests “as a result of” radical regulatory policies, believes that today, the body which is used interchangeably with health is tried to be reshaped in line with the soul of the time. Thus, it must be our priority to develop and use new methods for the technical “maintenance” of the body.

“Today...people in the US (and in other places) are experiencing a dramatic revolution in perceiving their own body and bodily practices: from the bodies derived from fordism and conforming to the industrial age to bodies that are preparing for the new period of flexible accumulation and that are made to fit. We are not at the end of the body; on the contrary, we are at the beginning of a period when one collapses and the new postmodern model establishes itself” (2002: 30).

Zygmunt Bauman, who tries to analyse the postmodern body, focuses on the transition from health to fitness and the meaning of this. According to Bauman, productive/soldier modernity required obeying the imposed regulatory rules and the equivalent of this within the context of body was to act systematically in line with the regulations imposed by the environmental powers. As is the case in the mass production of fordism, the responsibility of the body was to respond to the external factors immediately. Being able to do this is called health, while obstacles are defined as illness. The main consumption was nutrition-based, which met the needs of muscle energy and the rest was considered to be luxurious. However, the postmodern body is the receiver of the senses; it accumulates and absorbs the experiences. The ability to be stimulated turns the body into a tool of desire (2007). While this ability is defined as fitness, being unfit is defined as exhaustion, indifference, repression and the reluctant reaction to stimulation. What is important in the postmodern era is not the performance of the body, but the exciting, attractive, fascinating and tempting feelings that accompany the activities of the body and that need to be satisfied. With the postmodern era, medicine which struggled with health and illness and with normal and abnormal in the past lost this feature as feelings could not be objectively compared. As a result, fitness turns into a process that cannot be terminated, and the feeling of inadequacy and the fear of having physical disturbances or losing charisma anytime are experienced (1995: 20). According to Bauman, while the productive/soldier body of modernity leads to collective experiences and collective resistance, fitness needs to be evaluated by itself (1995: 21), and thus, it is a part of the postmodern culture that renders the collective health efforts invalid. While this culture builds body on lust, it puts a book giving recipes for exotic meals at the top of the bestseller lists on the one hand and the books on going on a diet on the other. This naturally exposes body to a continuous threat and worry and creates an effort for continuous renewal and correction.

## Conclusion

Body discourse reflects knowledge and power politics. Thus, it is like a laboratory in terms of neoliberal tendencies. In this field, the newest technologies, and the latest tendencies and products can be practiced. The improvements in biology, chemistry, physics, physiology, gene and molecular biology particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century turned life, body and health concerns into a large sector, which includes the government itself, universities, media and companies. Such a sector helps maintain the dominant power and the gender mainstreaming system. The postfordist fit body understanding and ideal body cult are the representative examples and the result of neoliberal individualization discourse. Fit body design also reflects the achievable and accessible logic of the market economy. Neoliberalism shapes the life conditions of individuals in Turkey as well, suggesting that they should conform and obey. It reconstructs and defines the meaning of the world and individuals. In a period when conservatism is on the rise, neoliberalism targets body as the political-ideological project of the new capitalism. Various body-related concerns are highlighted in addition to the appearance of the ideal body, and body is turned into a distinctive benchmark. The idea that body can be worked on and reconstructed and that only the functioning and healthy bodies can survive in the present market conditions renders all the ethical and human dignity-compatible efforts exerted to add value futile.

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### **Biography**

**Fatih Keskin** is an assistant professor at the University of Ankara, Faculty of Communication, Department Public Relations and Advertising. He received his post graduate and PhD degrees in political science from the University of Ankara. He is the author of three books and many journal papers and has written two book chapters. His current research interests include politics, political communication, fascism, public relations and gender policies. He is a member of different non-governmental organizations.