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'Look at you!': Disembodiment between ugly bodies and able minds.

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Abstract

Evidence points to embodiment being perceived as a lived human experience that bridges the natural and the cultural. Therefore, embodied social identities seem to be related with the way people perceive their body as beautiful/ugly, namely worthy/not worthy. Using data from interviews with employees with disability, this paper explores the process of shaping the body within the post-colonial masculine organizational culture. On these grounds, we argue that the above process involves taking decisions at three levels: firstly, one must decide what their body is, secondly, define what their body can be and thirdly, assume what their body will be. Further, the data revealed how those with “ugly bodies” construct their identities in relation to non-disabled colleagues. Our theoretical and managerial contribution includes a better understanding of how workplace and social life tend to be organized based on the ideal (able) body.

Keywords

Ugly body, disabled people, symbolic embodiment, social exclusion, bodies in organizations

Introduction

A growing body of literature critically examines disabled people’s experiences of work revealing importance of understanding the social relational aspects of embodiment, disability and ableism within organizational contexts (Williams and Mavin, 2012). Despite evidence of gendered aspects of disability (Haynes, 2012; Warner and Brown, 2011), its relationship with employment and gender remains under-researched, with accounts of experiences of disabled employees to be relatively scarce in the disability studies literature.

Drawing on feminist theories, Thomas (1999) has manifested the epistemological value of

recognizing individual experiences of disabled people as reflections of the macro social world. Additionally, dis/ability and the fe/male should not be viewed individually or as dichotomies, considering their relational characteristics (Goodley, 2013). These models are aligned with approaches of identity, which have diverged from considering individuals and identities as separate from the social world (Collinson, 2003). Instead, identities are socially constructed and relational, with the workplace a key place where this takes place.

Besides its functional role as part of the eco-system, the human body is present at the very core of a range of different embodied phenomena, which take place in the micro and macro social environment. Thus, the body is a social actor that experiences the world and a tool that may be used to identify and distinguish a person from the others (Hamermesh, 2011; Simpson and Pullen, 2018). Even though the internal anatomy and the biology of the body are about the same for the humankind, the external appearance may deviate from what is considered the norm. In addition, the norm is not the same across time and space; in contrast, personal and environmental factors such as culture, beliefs and stereotypes affect what is considered as the ideal body (Shilling, 2017). Thus, the acceptable shape and appearance of the human body have always been a hot spot, in the center of popular discussions. As a result, the body became the means to construct, revise and finalize one's identity; the development of identity though depends not only on how the body looks, but on how the owner of the body feels, and on what others think about it (Mays, 2006).

Feeling good about their body has been a long-standing goal for many people, since having a considered as acceptable body is related to increased self-confidence and self-esteem, extended social relations and -very often- better jobs (Szymanski and Parker, 2010). For this reason, people may focus on shaping their body so as to approach as closer as possible the allegedly ideal body. To this end, people usually compare their bodies to what is considered 'normal' in a society; then they decide what they need to do in order to shape their bodies, i.e. make them

like, or at least look like, the desired body, as imposed by the social norms (Heiss, 2011).

However, shaping the body, in order to reach the norm, is not always an option for all people. Thus, for some people such as some disabled people, having a body that is considered not 'normal' may be an unavoidable situation (McLaughlin and Coleman-Fountain, 2014). Thus, albeit not always, disability can produce a different kind of body, which is considered as lacking and needing repair if a 'good' life is to be made possible (Phillips, 1990). In addition, the impaired disabled body, i.e. the body that is considered less than whole, may be identified with the ugly and not worthy body in many cultures (Ghosh, 2010), including Cyprus (Symeonidou, 2009). Yet, the pressure to look 'whole' and beautiful, so as to become acceptable and worthy, and thereby get access to the 'dream world of the beautiful bodies', where there are better jobs and more opportunities for participation in social life, may be overwhelming for disabled people (Turner, 1996).

Drawing on both postcolonial and disability theory, we consider the proposition that ideas of such a normalized beauty underpin both disability and colonialism in Cyprus (Netto, Noon, Hudson, Kamenou-Aigbekaen and Sosenko, 2020). Colonialism privileges white, masculine perfection and wholeness in the same way that it can be perceived to engender the white man as the 'benchmark man' (Campbell, 2009: 111) for physical ability and normalcy. We argue that the process of shaping the body involves taking decisions at three levels: firstly, one must decide what their body is, secondly, define what their body can be and thirdly, assume what their body will be. We focus on this disembodiment that appears to exist between the ugly, disabled body and the beautiful, able mind , who does not fit the expectations of the norms of the contemporary post-colonial masculine workplace (Georgiadou and Antonacopoulou, 2020). On these grounds, this study aims to explore the implications of having an ugly body in the professional world by giving voice to adults labelled as having an ugly body as disabled people. Our theoretical and managerial contribution include a better understanding of how the

post-colonial, masculine workplace and social life tend to be organized based on a universal (able and thereby worthy) body, thus emphasizing and promoting a disembodiment between body and mind. In order to break the cycle of disablement in work and society and fill the gap beyond masculine post-colonial conceptions of worthiness at work, other layers of the body deserve to be explored in-depth, such as the bifurcation of beautiful-worthy vs ugly-not worthy body.

The critical analysis of the above entanglement is important, because of the theoretical and practical implications: at the theoretical level, the tensions between the perceived as beautiful and the labelled as ugly body could bring us closer to a comprehensive understanding of the experience of being excluded because of being different; at the practical level, the knowledge about the embodiment of perceived as worthy employee and citizen may lead managers to use the above knowledge in real work settings to manage effectively diversity and promote equity, as a social action of inclusion.

Therefore, this study explores three questions: (a) Who defines what the disabled body is? (b) How disabled people shape their body and embodied self in order to fit into social and work life? (c) What are the implications of acknowledging a disabled body as ugly?

Conceptualizing the (dis)abled body

Scholars are reconsidering the ontology of disability and present it as a constructed difference formed through social interactions, interpretations, or practices. This represents the so-called social relational model, whereby disability is not conditional on an impairment, but rather it is relational and dependent on relationships and interactions with others. According to Bourdieu (1984), social action takes place in a field, which represents the dominating system of power relations. Social positions in the field are not randomly allocated; in contrast their availability is depended on constraints and rules imposed by the most powerful. Extending the above

notion, we may assume that some disabled people are marginalized and pushed down to the lowest level of social hierarchy, as not 'fitting' the ideal body/worthy person (Shilling, 1991). The displacement of disabled people with impaired bodies then is evident not only in the workplace but also in family and personal life (Morris, 1999). Importantly, as Bourdieu (1984) argues, displacement may eventually become habitus, i.e. a long-lasting scheme of perceptions, which recycles the social order and reproduces unequal relations. When bodies are perceived as deviating from the (able) norm, they are often treated as problematic and disturbing the social order (Heiss, 2011).

A common route to overcome the consequent exclusion of the deviant/disabled body is to pursue medical intervention, aiming to achieve a better fit with norms of embodiment (McLaughlin and Coleman-Fountain, 2014). As a result, according to Davis (1995), medicine has developed the 'concept of the disabled body', according to which bodies are positioned as either normal and 'healthy' or abnormal and in need of medical interventions and treatment. The above normality is a product of medicine and therefore is actually fictional. However, many disabled people regulate themselves according to the prevalent masculinist approach of being responsible to be a healthy and productive citizen and thereby satisfy the needs of the neoliberal, post-colonial market (Holt et al., 2012); an approach clearly centered around embedded masculine values and assumptions within the organizational culture.

The body was initially defined in the context of the Western philosophical tradition, as an absolute 'objective' biological entity, and relied on the dualism between body and spirit; a polarity through which Descartes attempted to exempt the individual from the embrace of religious power (Rozemond and Rozemond, 2009). Body's physical basis defined it as an entity that, like the rest of nature, may limit human rational act. Then the human sciences, based on the distinction of body-mind, matter-spirit, real-non-real, scientificized body; thus, its biological, 'objective' status was legitimized as the only 'real'. The human body was identified

through its biological existence; hence anatomy was the certification of this 'objective' reality (Foucault, 1973). Foucault felt that we cannot trust the subject's gaze, as we know or see only what the language allows us. Like all forms of human knowledge, scientific discourse is a collection of metaphors, a great narrative, same stands with the coveted body. The language itself, based on conventionalities that have historically been adopted, arbitrarily describes the world. Different societies and different macro-environments have different conventionalities and therefore different realities (Turner, 1996). These views lead to the relativization of scientific medical knowledge. Thus, disability is not a normal 'objective' event, but a product of medical discourse highly context-related, which comes from the space-time specific language; in turn, disability reflects the dominant way of thinking, that of science, which in a Western, post-colonial environment, is driven by the prevailed masculine values . Access to scientific, therefore valid, knowledge gave doctors the opportunity to exercise power and determine what is disability (pathological) and what is non-disability (normal) (Williams and Mavin, 2012).

Although across time and space the ideal body was constructed in different ways, ableness and beauty have been common characteristics of the coveted body since ancient times. Thus, the able and beautiful body, known as *kallos* in ancient Greek, was considered as a fundamental virtue of the good and kind (*kalos kagathos*) citizen. *Kallos* constituted one part of a sacred triad, which included valor (*andreia*) and wisdom (*sophia*) as the other two fundamental virtues (Sachs, 2006).

In recent times, as early as 1956, the concept of elegance has been recognized as a global term, but the standards of comparison associated with an ideal aesthetic, can be defined quite differently in different cultural contexts (Seymour-Smith, 1987). Therefore, cultural relativity in terms of the concept of beauty can be elucidated considering that in a given society, specific standards or formal characteristics that describe beauty can be recognized; these standards are

incorporated through experience in the society in which they are expressed, and are also influenced by socio-cultural values and ideals. It could be argued that these hitherto conceptualizations, rely upon a masculinist approach of how those standards are generated and further promoted (Sang and Calvard, 2019).

In this vein, a significant body of feminist research demonstrates a direct or indirect relationship between the embodiment of the nature and meaning of beauty and the social experience. A plethora of authors (e.g. Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, 2006; Whelehan, 1995) address beauty drawing on the evolutionary perspective, emphasizing beauty's socially rewarding nature. Much of feminist thinking about beauty, however, deals with the dilemma of conceptualizing it as a phenomenon that promotes empowerment or oppression, usually of women. Postcolonial feminist theory highlights how the construction of masculinity stems power through imposing practices and processes of regulating and signifying (able) bodies; confirming that beauty (and therefore ability) lies at the core of postcolonial mastership (Saraswati, 2011).

The emergence of the second feminist movement has brought out an interest in how perceptions of the female body affect women's lives (Shilling, 2012). The social construction of women's bodies is the process through which perceptions of female bodies are formed and socially accepted. This process is essentially a political process that reflects, strengthens or contradicts the distribution of power between men and women. According to Foucault, a powerful array of disciplinary practices – internalized and external – is used to produce 'obstinate bodies', which willingly accept this social control. However, the person should not be considered a passive victim of these disciplinary practices. On the contrary, they may actively cooperate or resist their creation and preservation (Weitz, 1998).

Thus, we observe a theoretical dipole: on the one hand, there are feminist approaches, which

are mainly linked to the 'second-wave feminism' and treat beauty as a source of oppression, criticizing normalized beauty practices (Whelehan, 1995). On the other hand, through a mainly post-feminist perspective, beauty is treated as a legitimate means of empowerment and satisfaction (Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer, 2006). The body is at the heart of a variety of different and contradictory thoughts and considerations: it is familiar but at the same time alien. In the context of this contradiction, the body is approached both as a creation of various words and practices as well as a material entity, a source of experience and emotions, a place of desires and mediation of social expectations. The 'stigmatized' body is not sufficiently investigated until it acquires 'materiality', when the interest in it is rekindled mainly through the lens of phenomenology, post-colonialism and feminist theory (Merleau- Ponty, 2012; Foucault, 1991, 1998; Butler, 1993; Grosz, 1994; Bordo, 1995).

In the context of postmodernism, the body is perceived as something that is formed and reconstituted through constant modifications and redefinitions (Shilrdick, 2015). The new postmodern body is self-made. People are given means to transform their bodies into what seems ideal to everyone. The body is reconstructed according to cultural standards for natural beauty and natural perfection. So, the postmodern urge towards body perfection and self-improvement is not only a personal (internal) drive but also a cultural (external) pressure.

Since beauty was eventually identified with the desired and worthy, ugly became synonymous to having negative characteristics (Heiss, 2010). Looking back in ancient philosophy, Aristotle's ideas in 'About Poetry' (*Peri Poiitikis,* 1450b.36) that deviation from the norm can never be beautiful may be considered still timely. As the above philosopher explains, the beautiful cannot be anything else, but only normal and harmonious, because when something is less, it is not visible; likewise, when something is more, it is confusing and distracts the unity of the whole vision (Sachs, 2006). Likewise, contemporary social practice regarding disabled people seems to reproduce the above thinking, by assuming that the body that deviates from

the norm is ugly and not worthy, because it is either insignificant or annoying; therefore, it should be placed somewhere of less value, where all not worthy things and people are placed (Morris, 1999). In the case of disabled people, this place is the low level of social hierarchy, where people are less-privileged, usually employed in low-paid jobs or unemployed and deprived from equal access to social life and opportunities, with disabled women placed at the lowest level (Morris, 1999).

From a philosophical point of view, Plato in his dialogue *Phaidros* (250b-d) discusses further the concept of ugliness, postulating that people, who are disrespectful towards beauty, eventually lose it. Losing beauty is a misery for Plato, since beauty is the means for keeping the mind and the spirit in transcendent areas. Even though Plato underlies the dual nature of beauty as a visual and spiritual concept, he believes that vision is more powerful than the bodily senses; therefore, beauty has the power to render everything bright and loveable. Thus, the presence of beauty declares the existence of value, balance, fairness, kindness and all the ethical and logical situations. Hence, for Plato, beauty is an indicator of a fair society, consisting of conscious and active citizens (Jowett, 2010).

Ironically, the above notions are still prevalent in many contemporary cultures, where disability is translated as ugliness and an indicator of a problematic situation; thus, it is implied that a disabled person is a not worthy citizen. Within this framework, many disabled people assume that the ugly body needs to be reshaped and transformed, as a means to restore normality and get access to the world of able people, where there are more opportunities for better employment, richer social life and more likelihood to be attributed value and be included (Ghosh, 2010).

Disability, embodiment and social and work life

According to social scientists (e.g. Dale, 2001; Shilling, 2017), the body is essentially a project,

which people must manage, based on normative and moral accounts that guide them to alter and shape it accordingly, in order to fit in and become acceptable. In this way, how a body is perceived depends on its conformity with consolidated socio-cultural ideals, which act as control factors and define the permitted social relationships and the expected social status that matches the specific type of body. As a result, the body becomes the measure to determine one's worth and place in the social hierarchy and job market (Dale, 2001). Hence, it may be assumed that shaping the body towards the norm becomes a process of socialization and a means to transcend from a lower to a higher status.

Some feminist scholars have highlighted the importance of viewing beauty through its theory of evolution, justifying it as a biological matter. According to Etcoff (1999), beauty is a genetically granted virtue and therefore unjustly distributed among people. Etcoff agrees that the outward appearance actually has very little to say about a person's intelligence, personality, and abilities; however, she believes it is hypocritical to pretend that the ideal of beauty is a trivial social construct. Much of the literature (e.g. Heiss, 2011; Marks, 2014) highlights the socially rewarding value of beauty, citing the social status and benefits that beautiful people enjoy because of their inherent 'charisma'. This approach supports the beauty-as-worthy thesis, and emphasizes the halo effect, in which attractive appearance is associated with high positive expectations for an individual.

There is an expectation and conviction that beautiful people have more successful personal and professional lives, while beauty premium stresses that people who conform to cultural standards of beauty receive higher incomes than those who do not (Hamermesh, 2011). Beauty is seen as a means by which women, for example, empower their status and dominance in the social class. Beauty plays a role, not only on a personal level, but also on an institutional level, as attractive individuals enjoy greater social benefits in the workplace. On the contrary, unattractive people, who deviate from beauty standards, are more easily stigmatized and are

more often victims of discrimination at work (Griffin and Langlois, 2006).

In the case of the disabled body, which is often considered as deviating from the norm and being ugly, the intersection of gender and disability results to women being more often discriminated in the workplace and social life compared to men. Through social relational lenses of disability and gender (Sang, Richards and Marks, 2016), it has been found that although finding a job as a disabled employee is difficult for all disabled persons, for women is even more difficult and stressful. It is also noteworthy that, even though survey data indicate that disabled people in general are under-represented in professional and managerial positions, disabled women are overrepresented in clerical and working from home jobs, which are low paid and socially isolated, or unemployed (Barnes and Mercer, 2005).

According to the theory of social construction (Marks, 2014), disability is neither natural nor necessary, but rather is produced by society. The ways in which we usually perceive the world, the categorizations and the perceptions we have are rooted to a specific historical and cultural context. Social exclusion proves that our values and ways of seeing things are a social construct. This is why light should be shed, not on people with disabilities in general and in the abstract, but rather on how these labels are produced and reproduced during social interactions within established and cultural contexts.

The construction of models of disabled bodies is based on specific notions of normalcy within a postcolonial masculine culture that differentiate abnormal states from the normal and efficient ones. Drawing on Foucault's work, Tremain (2006: 186), refers to 'dividing practices' that follow the distinction and objectification of types for instance, the abled and disabled, the beautiful and ugly bodies.

The social model of disability places disability not in a disabled or impaired body, but in a restrictive and repressive social environment. The social model argues that many of the

restrictions imposed on people with disabilities are not normal or unavoidable consequences of their disability. In contrast, they are produced by a social environment that is incapable of taking into account disabled people (Oliver, 1996). Symbolic interaction views interpretations and meanings as social constructs; as conceptual elements that had been developed through the interpretation of human interactions (Blumer, 1986). The rendering of meanings is not a reflex. Human beings are social entities and thereby meaning develops through interaction and within a specific context.

To use this symbolic interaction perspective in order to conceive the meaning of a situation, one needs to look more at the group defining the object, the history and nature of the provided definition and process of deciding upon that definition, rather than merely the object itself. Theory goes beyond use of "truth", emphasizing the human experience as something subjective, not absolute. In order to understand and analyze the world, people define the self and their actions. Through this process of defining themselves, people try to see themselves as others see them. Thus, someone's *self* is a social construct, namely the result of perceiving oneself as an object and then developing self-determination through interaction (Marks, 2014).

Thus, through the symbolic interactive perspective lens, employees with disabilities do not absolutely exist. It's just a way of thinking and categorizing others. If some disabled people are treated as not able people has to do with the specific way others think about this situation. The way individuals define themselves around their alleged disability is a function and construct created through interaction. Whether people with disabilities feel ashamed, neutral or proud of their condition and bodies, that is achieved through their social interactions with significant others – family, colleagues, friends (Oliver, 1996). In order to understand the above process then and how the workplace interferes in the process of shaping the self and the body, it is important to listen to the voice of disabled people.

Methods

To address our research questions, we employed a qualitative methodology with the aim to gain in-depth accounts from key informants and thereby reach a better understanding about embodied phenomena. This research was guided by the feminist approach, which emphasizes the dualistic nature of the world (Rose, 1993). We focused on two dualistic counterparts, i.e. beautiful/ugly and worthy/not worthy, trying to inform scientific explanations that might help us understand and transgress the above intersecting bifurcations. Thus, the research explored the ways in which disabled people in Cyprus a) make sense of their body and b) shape their body in order to place it in the workplace, the social context and family. Discussions with the participants focused on what they thought about the characteristics of the coveted body; how they understood the process and the factors that defined the above characteristics; what identity they attributed to themselves; how they experienced their own body; which factors influenced their perceptions about their body; how others reacted to their body; how they shaped their body and why; where they placed their body and why.

Each interview lasted between one to two hours and was based on the informed consent of the participants. A grounded theory method was employed, aiming to develop theoretical concepts through the participants' narratives; thus, the interviews were driven by the participants' perceptions. We started by asking the participants to tell us their stories of disability. Then we used prompts and probes to steer the conversation through the following topics: the cultural aspect of disability, employment of disabled people, relations with family and others, personal identity, the bifurcation of beautiful/ugly and the implications of having a labelled as ugly body. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Even though we tried to remain impartial during the interview process, we acknowledge that our female gender and the friendly relations we had with some of the participants may have influenced participants' responses.

Data were analyzed with top-down thematic analysis. Within this framework, analysis was driven by the specific research questions and the analysts' focus. The process was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for doing thematic analysis. Thus, at phase one, we read the transcripts many times so as to become familiar with the data. Then we generated initial codes, each researcher independently. After that we compared and discussed our codes and retained the suitable ones (e.g. body as a source of pain). At phase three we separately searched for themes. At the next phase we discussed and reviewed our themes. At phase five we defined the final themes that represented the participants' experiences and beliefs on the one hand and answered the research questions on the other (e.g. factors related to socio-economic life). Finally, we wrote-up the analysis.

Sample

Macro-environmental differences (e.g., culture) that influence the experience of embodiment exist between countries. To limit the effects of such institutional factors in our study, we drew our sample from a single country (Cyprus). In total, our sample comprised of eight disabled people in Cyprus. The sample size is consistent with norms and suggestions for adequate sampling in management studies. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) suggest that five to 25 people represent an adequate sample for qualitative studies. Even though we cannot postulate that we selected a representative sample that reflects the enormous range of disabled people's experiences and perspectives, we tried to recruit a diverse group of participants with different backgrounds and socio-economic status. To this end, we employed a combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods. For confidentiality purposes, the participants are presented with pseudonyms.

Findings

Who defines what the disabled body is?

According to the participants in this research, the characteristics of the disabled body are imposed by external factors, which are then internalized by disabled people, through the process of socialization (Symeonidou, 2009). In this way, the bifurcation of the beautiful/worthy vs the ugly/not worthy body emerges and becomes a stereotype.

Culture and social stereotypes

The dominating culture in Cyprus dictates that persons with a deviant body are dangerous because they may have an infectious disease. Hence, they ought to be isolated, unless the others are reassured that their bodies are not put at risk to become ugly by being close to the ugly body. In this way, disability is magnified and exaggerated, leading to being considered an illness that renders disabled people incapable and less worthy.

> There were people that didn't come near me, and I could feel they were keeping distance; or when we were having coffee break at work they would stare and ask "what's that on your arm? Is it contagious?" (Anna)

Moreover, it is assumed that only the beautiful body is acceptable because the ugly body is pitiful, laughable, and condemnable. The gossip and the negative reactions of others prompt disabled people to participate less in social life.

> Cyprus' (society) feels uncomfortable when dealing with disability. Their approach is centered around "It's such a pity". (Giorgos)

> Cypriots love gossiping, so once they see you (being a disabled person) they start gossiping and laughing. This behavior has stopped me from visiting the shopping mall anymore. The mall has opened ages ago, and I've only been there twice. (Savvas)

Moreover, it is postulated that the ugly body implies less intelligence, lower skills and

incapacity, compared to the whole and beautiful and thereby coveted and worthy body.

> In Cyprus, people are still prejudiced against people with disabilities. Disabled people are still perceived as incapable of being educated like everyone else and hence are assumed not to be able to perform well in the workplace. (Koula)

Work environment

When the ugly body is set in the workplace, it is contrasted with the beautiful body that is considered more capable and skilled. For this reason, some colleagues do not support employees with ugly bodies, since it is believed that disabled bodies do not fit the workplace.

> (moaning) At the early stages of my career, I encountered hostile behaviors. My colleagues grew hostile to me, driven mainly by envy, and didn't help or support me about my problem. (Vyronas)

On the other hand, when people with ugly bodies have skills and better paid jobs, they are accused of lying or pretending that they are disabled, since the ugly body deserves a lower place in social hierarchy and a low paid job. Others' attitudes seem to be modified according to the disabled employee's gender. Thus, when the employee is a man, others assume that having a good job is related to nepotism and use of illicit means.

> Overall, their behavior would be like: "How come and you work here? You are too young, a fresh graduate, how come and you managed to get this position?". There is this need for justifying everything, all the time; justifying why you were eligible to work as a teacher based on special criteria. (Vyronas)

Being a woman renders the workplace a much harder arena, since employers attribute less abilities and mental skills more easily to the female ugly body.

> I have a professional certificate and I show this to various potential employers and

> just because they see I have a mobility impairment, they get confused and assume that I am mentally disabled. (Koula)

Family

Family has a crucial role in determining what the disabled body is, since it is assumed that the worthy body must be whole, able and beautiful. Thus, family reproduces stereotypes and recycles prejudice against the ugly body.

> This is a matter of improper discipline methods. Parents convey to their children a plethora of misleading information about people with disabilities, and hence the latter are repelled. This feeds a vicious circle. (Koula)

The coveted body for families then is the whole body; in contrast, when the ugly body is present in the family, distress and despair shadow family relations.

> When I was in bed, my mother would start crying in front of me, and had meltdowns roaring "This is such a pity". She gets anxious all the time. (Savvas)

Engendered bodies

It is noteworthy that the male ugly body is a source of greater sorrow, because it is not compatible with the Cypriot hegemonic masculinity standard (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), of being or at least looking, strong and competitive. For this reason, having an impaired and disabled male body evokes grief and despair. In fact, disability seems to have a greater effect on masculinity compared to other identities (i.e. femininity), for masculinity is constantly challenged and in need of proving (Sang, Richards and Marks, 2016), and that because of the accumulation of masculine capital, which disabled men may find problematic (Wilde, 2004). As Woodhams et al (2015) explain, disabled men cope with an increased pay penalty than other marginalized groups, including women. Indeed, there is a tension between hegemonic

masculine traits of autonomy and independence and the requirement for aid of others necessitated by disability (Shuttleworth et al., 2012). For men with visible disability, gendered interpretations of work can lead in being linked to feminized traits such as helplessness (Mik-Neyer, 2015).

> For my father, my accident was the end of the world. He couldn't accept my condition. He had dreams for me, and I was their only child, he wanted his son to be strong. I was going to become a football player. And then nothing. I could do nothing. (Vyronas)

How disabled people shape their body and embodied self in order to fit into the social and work life?

Data presented here suggests that disabled people compare their bodies with the 'normal' body and judge their abilities through social interaction and the others' reactions to disability. As a result, they develop a negative identity and they try to fit into the social and work life by hiding the ugly body. In contrast, some disabled people accept their ugly body and fit in by disclosing their ugliness, which is presented as an oxymoron characteristic of beautiful people or as a permanent situation.

Comparing the ugly with the 'normal' body

Comparison with the 'normal' body seems to define how people with ugly bodies perceive themselves and shape their identity, due to concerns that they would be compared to their previous "able" self.

> People knew me when I was normal. How can I face them now and see me like this? (Savvas)

Social interaction

Social interactions orientate disabled people's thoughts towards the realization that their body not only deviates from the norm, but also has negative characteristics. Since others believe that the disabled/ugly body is inferior to the beautiful body, others feel pity about disabled people and think that it is impossible for someone to live with an ugly disabled body.

> There are people who would feel pity for you, or sadness, or admiration; people who would come to you and ask you "Wow mate, how are you coping with this?" (Savvas)

Thus, the emotional state of people with ugly bodies may be defined by others, who focus on the ugly characteristics of the person's body and not their personality. As a result, disabled people feel uncomfortable, inferior and less worthy because of having a not acceptable body.

> People who want to socially interact with people with disability, should not think that they have disability! They should not keep reminding them of their disability, causing them to feel uncomfortable and inferior. (Koula)

Personal identity

Some participants in the current study reported that once they internalize that their body deviates from the norm, they formulate a personal identity of shame, embarrassment, and often guilt. Consequently, they decide that their ugly body is also not worthy and therefore it ought to be hidden and isolated.

> I quit school, because I thought that my peers would make fun of me; that made me feel inferior and led me to decide to never go back to school again. (Marios)

> By keep repeatedly talking about it (disability), I feel like I am trying to justify it. As if I am personally guilty of things that went irreversibly bad. (Vyronas)

Hiding the ugly body

Participants recounted how the negative stereotypes and the consequences that accompany the ugly body affects both social and working lives and hence they often people try to hide and conceal the ugly characteristics, even from their families.

> I dragged myself in the grocery store! I dragged my leg, and I assumed that had I told them, they would have fired me! So, I kept hiding and hiding. And it wasn't because of low self-esteem; I was just afraid that if I had revealed my disease, I would lose my job. (Anna)

> My parents have no idea. I just tell them that I have some problems with my vertebra, since they know that I always had some vertebral problems due to playing basketball when I was younger. (Giorgos)

> Yes. I didn't go anywhere! After I returned home (from the hospital), it took me so long to go out… I don't know, I felt that… That if I went somewhere, people would laugh at me, and I didn't like that… So, I stayed in the house. And I withdrew into myself. (Marios)

> Yes. People with disabilities are hiding in their shells. They hide it (their disability), they hide in their shells. They have a complex. Complex. That's clear. Inferiority complex. (Giorgos)

Other people try to imitate characteristics of the beautiful body in order to feel included. Usually the priority is to appear as whole.

> With the new hand I have, this artificial limb, you have to take a closer look to see it… Before (the prosthesis) yes, I used to have my hand always in my pocket, but after acquiring this artificial one, it doesn't bother me that much. (Ntinos)

> I tell them that I broke my leg. So, everyone who sees me with the crutches,

> assumes that I broke my leg. I went to the carnival and they kept asking me: "What are you dressed up like? One-legged man?" (laughing). And I told them, "yes; one-legged man" (smile). (Savvas)

What are the implications of acknowledging a disabled body as ugly?

Engendered stereotypes at the workplace

Lack of awareness and gender stereotypes may result to misperceptions of the ugly body, which, in the case of men, is considered by employers and colleagues as not worthy, not skilled and not functionable. Ironically, the criterion to judge a disabled male teacher's ability is not their level of knowledge but rather their strength and ability to move around, as a hegemonic male trait. There is therefore a disembodiment noticed in occupations where intellectual ability is required (i.e. academia); individuals' brains and bodies are treated differently and as separate entities (often the first without considering the presence and needs of the second).

> I once went to a school, before the principal even met me, he asked "can you go up the stairs?". I didn't know what to say. Namely, what matters is to be able to climb the stairs! (Vyronas)

> Well look, when they see someone with special needs, they imply that he is bad in his job, period. That's how they learnt to think; but that's pure ignorance. (Giorgos)

Being male and having a kinetic disability is also a source of disrespect on behalf of the students, who make fun of their wheelchair mobile disabled teachers.

> I had a friend who was a teacher on a wheelchair. He had many problems with his students. They used to laugh at him, make fun of him; they were very naughty and making so much noise that he couldn't teach. (Marios)

Ugly as weak and incapable

In contrast to the beautiful body, the ugly body is also considered weak, inferior and incapable. Therefore, it is believed that the ugly body ought to be excluded, as not fitting the normal, beautiful and capable world.

> It was my third day at school as a teacher, and they asked the School Inspector to check upon me and verify I could perform my duties well. That was the parents through the female School Principal. I felt devastated. That before having seen how I perform, they decided I wasn't worthy. I was so offended by this. Before they see me, "you are not good enough, you should go!" (Vyronas)

Exclusion may be induced through labelling, too.

> Well, there are people who see you like everyone else; others who see you and pitifully say "poor guy"; others who… Well, that's something I experienced three times at school. The teacher asked, "where is that lame?". That got me furious, and to avoid going after her, I left the classroom and she went "where are you going, lame?". Do you get my point? (Savvas)

However, acceptance and inclusion are important for people with ugly bodies as a matter of equity.

> So, when you find positive reactions, you are encouraged because you feel that they see you as normal, they don't see any difference, and that you enjoy the same service…(Koula)

Body as a source of pain

For many disabled people, the ugly body is considered a source of physical and mental pain and an unspeakable bad luck.

> Well, it's always on your mind that… There are times that you keep asking yourself

> "but why? Why do I have such a bad luck, and I am …". (Ntinos)

Body as a barrier

In addition, the ugly body may be perceived as a barrier to participation in social and work life, since it physically limits the person that lives in a world constructed by beautiful and not disabled people.

> It changed (my) life! My life is completely different because of the disability! There were other things I could do before it, and others after it. I am what I am… Nowadays, I know my limits. I don't do, I don't ask for anything beyond my capabilities… I can't want, what I can't do. (Vyronas)

When the ugly body is not a barrier for accomplishing tasks at the workplace, people with ugly bodies feel less uncomfortable.

> When you feel that you can do the task, you don't feel uncomfortable (anymore). (Marios)

Discussion

By drawing on the related theoretical development of symbolic embodiment, the data presented here reveal how the coveted beautiful body is constructed by cultural, social, economic, family and personal factors. Thus, immersion in the perceptions of disabled people disclosed the bifurcation of beautiful-worthy vs ugly-not worthy body that ought to be excluded, marginalized and hidden, in contrast to the former that is the coveted and cherished body. The study extends theoretical understandings of gendered experiences of embodiment, and the mechanisms by which gendered stereotypes of ableism are maintained. Specifically, the data suggests, within this context, that at the first level of the shaping process, the owner of the disabled/assumed as ugly body compares it with the norm, i.e. the acceptable body, and decides

what their body is, based on non-disabled people's judgements. If the owner of the body decides that it deviates from the norm and label it as ugly, as the norm dictates, then at the second level the disabled person explores the available shaping sources and means, in order to define whether the body can be not ugly and thereby reach the norm. To this end, the disabled person may try to hide or conceal their disability. At the third level, the owner of the perceived as ugly body evaluates the shaping efforts and assumes whether their body will eventually be or not ugly. If the person assumes that the body cannot change and will be ugly/not worthy, then they usually withdraw from social and work life. Importantly for disability and managerial studies, some disabled persons may overcome the oppression and decide to shape the meaning of the beautiful-worthy/ugly-not worthy body, instead of the body itself.

The picture is complex for disabled men and women, for example, as the effects of ugly bodies are not homogenous. Thus, for men, the perceived as ugly body is not worthy because it does not correspond with the hegemonic male ideal which in the post-colonial masculine society reflects the strong and 'whole' man, who is considered the head and the guardian of the family. For women, the perceived as ugly body is identified with the not worthy body, because it contradicts the prevalent notions about femininity; in the Cypriot context, femininity is based on external beauty and ability to nurture and serve the family. According to Ghosh (2010), the female disabled body is created "as an embodiment of corporeal insufficiency and a repository of social anxieties about control and identity" (p. 58). It is therefore imperative to further explore the historical and spatial differences, changes and stabilities in how bodies and embodiment are perceived and understood across time and space; in this way, it would be more likely to understand the intersection of gender, employment, social exclusion and the disabled/assumed as ugly body.

The tension between the beautiful and the ugly body reflects the philosophical debate about the relationship between the concepts of beauty and ugliness, i.e. whether they constitute two

independent and discernible categories or opposite extremes of one continuum (McConnell, 2008). It also extends the discussion initiated by ancient Greek philosophers about the importance of being beautiful in order to be included in social life and be entitled citizenship. Excluding the different was also a common practice since that time, as evident in the distinction between 'Greeks' and 'barbarians', i.e. 'non-Greeks'. Ironically, stereotypes and cultural ideals may serve as the knot that ties groups of people together (Gilleard, 2007). Even though not all stereotypes are of real value in contemporary Cyprus, the idea of the beautiful/worthy vs ugly/not worthy seem to have deeply penetrated not only the Cypriot *ethos,* but also the culture of other countries as well, eventually becoming *habitus.*

Although limited, the extant literature suggests that representations of disabled people as ugly and therefore not worthy portray subjugated bodies not only as inadequate, deficient and week but also as redundant and expendable (Mays, 2006). The current study reveals participants' concerns about being rejected by employers, partners, family and friends because of their bodies that did not fit constructions of the ideal body and could never reach the coveted body, despite their efforts to 'heal' or conceal the perceived damage. Thus, people with diverse bodies become subordinated, othered and perceived as less than whole persons. As a result of the oppression, people with perceived as ugly bodies are excluded from social interactions and have restricted access to resources; at the same time, they are influenced to shape a negative identity and make sense of their own experiences through the others' eyes (Oliver, 1996). However, some of the participants managed to resist the oppression by shaping the meaning of the disabled body instead of the body itself.

Conclusion

In conclusion, since the body is a locus where nature and culture meet (Shiling, 2017), it is not easy to distinguish the natural and cultural influence in the embodiment of social identity.

Based on our analysis, it seems that the perceived as ugly body may be framed as problematic in some cultures, like the Cypriot one, with implications for equality and diversity in professional settings. Since the body then constitutes a political site, it may be understood and experienced in relation to the social construction of what is normal (Mays, 2006). Thus, politics of appearance, representation and labelling in Cyprus seem to have been deeply rooted in a long-standing constructed normality that has been identified with the beautiful body. Besides the Western perspective that discusses white colonial interpretations (e.g. Simpson and Pullen, 2018), our study provides insights that explain the embodiment of social identity in a culture that resembles ancient Greek values about the importance of *kallos* in solving the bifurcation of good/bad and able/disabled.

Yet, representations of beauty impact both the social beliefs about the other's body and the individual perceptions about their bodies. In order to manage the emerging tensions between beautiful and ugly bodies, it seems important to consider, understand and negotiate the discourse that contributed to the defining of beauty (Heiss, 2011). In this way, it would be possible to create positive identities for the oppressed owners of perceived as ugly bodies and dismantle the barriers to inclusion in the workplace and social life of people labelled as ugly-disabled-not worthy persons.

This paper contributes to the literature in two ways. Firstly, it adds to understandings of the experiences of disabled men and women in other than the dominant Western -oriented context. It reveals experiences are complex and different based on gender, despite the fact that marginalization is evident. Secondly, the paper demonstrates drawing on social embodiment model the gendered and ableist aspects of social beliefs and working practices. Just as homosociality can be seen as a gender practice, related to hegemonic masculinity (Collinson and Hearn, 1994), the current study confirms it is also an ableist practice (Sang, Richards and Marks, 2016). This study suggests understandings of disabled people's experiences of social

and work lives, and how gendered exclusion at work is maintained, will benefit from drawing on both gender and disability theorizing. Doing so will help uncover not only gendered practices within organizations and societal values which underpin hegemonic masculinity, but also ableist practices (Campbell, 2008) which marginalize disabled individuals, and institutionalize a disembodiment between ugly/ beautiful bodies and able/unable minds.

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