



ARTICLE

## Reframing Bodies: New Coordinates of the Body Image

*Natalya L. Antonova, Sofya B. Abramova, Viktoria V. Polyakova*

Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia

### ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the results of a sociological survey of urban residents' perceptions of the beauty standards and their most desired body models. The survey was conducted in three cities of a large industrial Russian region ( $n = 1,077$ ). The body as a bio-social construct is now undergoing significant transformations in public consciousness. As our survey shows, however, beauty standards in Russia are fairly stereotypical: the ideal female body is expected to be sexual, well-groomed, and slender (we refer to this body type as an aesthetic body model or body as an object) and the male body to be physically strong, resilient, and fit (the functional body model or body as a process). Describing their desired body model, male and female respondents of different age groups often choose the functional body model, that is, they prioritize what the body can do over what it looks like. The survey shows mixed results regarding the effects of the pandemic on people's attitudes to their bodies and body care practices. Only a third of the respondents directly associate their individual bodily experience of disease with the change in their body care practices. Two-thirds of the respondents reported that during the lockdown they started taking better care of their bodies, paying more attention to personal hygiene, physical exercise, and sleep.

### KEYWORDS

body, body image, functional body, aesthetic body, male body, female body, body reframing, pandemic, health

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Viktoria V. Polyakova

[n.l.antonova@urfu.ru](mailto:n.l.antonova@urfu.ru), [s.b.abramova@urfu.ru](mailto:s.b.abramova@urfu.ru)

[vika.polyakova@urfu.ru](mailto:vika.polyakova@urfu.ru)

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## Introduction

In contemporary social sciences and humanities, much attention is given to human body. Body and its image are seen as a multi-dimensional construct encompassing behavioral practices, the perception of body, and emotional attitudes to body (Cash, 2004). The term “body image” refers to an individual’s internal representation of their appearance (Thompson et al., 1999), body image is often viewed through the lens of satisfaction or concern with one’s appearance (Jarry et al., 2019). T. F. Cash states that, when mentioning body image, we refer to our own perception, emotions, and beliefs regarding our appearance. At the same time, this evaluation is heavily influenced by the “outside view” (Cash, 1990).

Contemporary social studies of body image and corporeality bifurcate in two directions. The first area includes the analysis of socially acceptable bodies and beauty standards, including those set by the fashion industry, norms regulating grooming practices and appearance for people performing different social roles, and so on (Johnson et al., 2015; Pritchard & Cramblitt, 2014). The second area encompasses those works that investigate the methods and technologies used to expand the temporal boundaries of the body’s physical functioning, for example, body rejuvenation practices or human enhancement practices (biomedical interventions involving genetic manipulations and/or implants) (Fox, 2018; Palese, 2012). A significant limitation of the studies in both groups, however, is that they view the body from the perspective of its correspondence to cultural norms, for example, whether it is acceptable for plus-size women to wear a mini skirt, for a man to wear earrings, for a Muslim woman to leave her head and hair uncovered, for older people to have a circular face lift to look younger, and so on. Although the above studies make a significant contribution to the study of body image, they rarely address the question of how well the body aligns with the internal needs and sensations of an individual’s personality (such as whether the body should be aesthetically appealing, functional, or resilient).

The restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic affected not only people’s daily practices (e.g., wearing a mask on a daily basis, usage of antiseptics and disinfectants) but also their perceptions of their own bodies (Merenkov, 2020). The period of self-isolation has led many people to start reflecting upon and re-interpreting the position that their corporeality holds in the social space. Social restrictions applied to the infected (e.g., the requirement to self-isolate) and the unvaccinated (e.g., the requirement to show a certificate of vaccination to attend events) made people more aware of their body and its sensory signals such as the rising body temperature or the loss of the sense of smell.

During the pandemic, being successful was mostly associated with staying healthy rather than fitting into the beauty standards. The changing external conditions (e.g., lockdown) which affected individual and collective practices contributed to the re-interpretation of the body image and to the transformations in the perceptions of the body. Some researchers believe that there was a shift from the body seen as a factor of normative control toward the body as a factor of survival and effective functioning (Nolen et al., 2022).

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This study aims to investigate the perceptions of the body and its representations shared by inhabitants of large cities in Sverdlovsk region, Russia. Based on the data from our sociological survey, we analyze the perceptions of the desired body type (both male and female) and the factors that affect those perception.

## Theoretical Framework

In contemporary social systems, the human body is co-created by individuals and collectivities; it is a project that embodies a variety of interpretations of its functions and purposes. A. Giddens (1992) argues that not only is the body a biological entity, a “given”, but, much more importantly, it is also potentially open to reconstruction and (re)formatting, helping people pursue particular ways of life. More than before, people are now shaping and defining their bodies, constructing them in accordance with the idealized body images circulated in the public sphere (Giddens, 1990).

The cornerstone in the contemporary understanding of the body was laid by M. Mauss (1925/1990) and M. Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), whose works are seminal in the sociological, cultural, and psychological analysis of the body and corporeality. The body given by nature is “inscribed” into a specific socio-cultural system. This idea is further developed by M. Mauss in his discussion of the techniques of the body as he argues that the techniques of the body serve as a tool through which people explore the functions and capabilities of their bodies in different societies (Mauss, 1935/1973). According to Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962), body is our vehicle for being in the world. The ideas of the connection between the body and society were further developed by B. S. Turner (1989); he argued that the body should be the axis of sociological analysis. C. Shilling (2012) developed a sociological theory of corporeal realism, aiming to overcome the reductionist interpretations of embodiment and provide a more comprehensive approach, revealing the manifold nature of the body/corporeality. Shilling focuses on the body-society relationship: the biological body is seen as a medium for the constitution of society, while society, in its turn, constructs or models bodies as biological entities.

A. M. Pivovarov (2019) proposes a classification of the sociological concepts of the body, which includes structuralist, phenomenological, and integrative body concepts. In Pivovarov’s opinion, the structuralist research paradigm based on the understanding of the human bodies as being controlled by social systems is opposed to the interpretivist paradigm (bodily experience as a source of social interactions).

An integrative approach combines aspects of different approaches to show the mutual determination of social structures and bodily practices. This approach is based on the understanding that social structures influence people’s ideas and perceptions of the body while the body, in its turn, also affects the functioning of social structures. To perform their social roles and functions more effectively, people can “re-assemble” their bodies in accordance with the requirements of the social environment (e.g., build muscles, do endurance exercises, etc.). Thus, the choice of the integrative approach is determined by the fact that it enables us to gain valuable insights into people’s perceptions of the body and desirable body models.

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Body stereotypes are deeply embedded within social systems, in other words, society cultivates normative body standards. Physical attractiveness is the ideal aggressively promoted by the fashion industry, advertising, mass media, and social media. L. Smolak and J. A. Stein (2010) found that media influence and male physical attributes endorsement are important correlates of the drive for muscularity in adolescent boys. The modern ideal of feminine beauty emphasizes a thin, slender figure (Shagar et al., 2019; Sokhan', 2014; Zhang et al., 2018). These standards, however, are almost impossible to live up to for many people for a number of biological reasons (genetic makeup, metabolism, etc.). As people are bombarded with images of celebrities that often communicate unrealistic beauty standards, their body dissatisfaction increases (Tiggemann & Polivy, 2010). There is vast research evidence supporting the negative influence that the widely circulated body standards have on people's self-esteem and mental health (Hogue & Mills, 2019; Izydorczyk & Sitnik-Warchulska, 2018; Levine & Harrison, 2009; You & Shin, 2019). Attitudes to the body are influenced by the social milieu/reference groups: significant others can have a negative impact on people's physical self-perception and body satisfaction (Tiggemann, 2012). Moreover, there is evidence (Ormsby et al., 2019) that intensive exposure to social media has a negative impact on the acceptance and evaluation of one's own body and self-esteem. In their study of the visual body images in social media, M. Tiggemann, I. Anderberg and Z. Brown have come to the conclusion that presenting a more diverse array of female bodies on social media is likely to have a positive effect on body satisfaction and appreciation (Tiggemann et al., 2020).

Even though there is a lot of research investigating the influence of social media and reference groups on people's perceptions of their bodies, the question about the changing attitudes to the body during the pandemic remains largely underexplored, although there are some recent studies on this topic (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2022; Robertson et al., 2021). The post-pandemic era is commonly described as the era of the "new normal" (Kuriukin, 2021; Novaia normal'nost', 2020), meaning that the spread of the COVID-19 infection across the globe has become a foundation for a major revision of daily life practices and has led to a significant transformation in the system of social interactions. The pandemic places new demands and pressures on the human body and, among other things, engenders new perceptions and interpretations of the body as well as new body care practices.

We found that amidst the pandemic, young people started to attach more importance to personal hygiene and stress management. They were also looking for ways to boost their immune systems, for example, by taking vitamins and supplements (Antonova & Maltseva, 2022). There are reasons to believe that new hygiene habits will persist for some time in the future (Shabunova, 2020).

Not only did the pandemic contribute to the development of a more responsible attitude to body but it also brought to the spotlight the questions of body-power relationship in line with M. Foucault's disciplined body concept. Foucault (1975/1977) argues that in any cultural context the body is in one way or another controlled and disciplined through a variety of disciplinary techniques used to arrange and regulate human bodies and it is through these techniques that docile bodies are created in society. Control and discipline

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are internalized, that is, the attitudes from the social context are assimilated into the self and turn into self-control. In her review of the book *American Plastic: Boob Jobs, Credit Cards, and Our Quest for Perfection* by L. Essig, A. A. Temkina (2017) describes the motives behind people's decision to have breast surgery and explains that when feeling insecure and faced with uncertainty, individuals might resort to surgical body enhancement in an attempt to establish control over their future and increase their chances of success in life. Body care comprises practices aimed at staying healthy and attractive, at keeping the body flexible and agile for a more fulfilled and productive life. Body care has recently come to be seen as a matter of personal responsibility and self-discipline.

The above literature review has led us to identify the two main vectors of our analysis, which also determined the methodology of the empirical study: the first vector is the body as an object, that is, the main focus is made on the body as an aesthetic object with such qualities as sexual attractiveness, a well-groomed look, slenderness, flexibility/plasticity, and good muscle relief; and the second vector is the body as a process, in which case the body is seen predominantly in the light of its functional characteristics such as stamina, resilience, endurance, fitness, and strength. Following these premises, we are going to discuss the two body models: the aesthetic model (body as an object) and functional model (body as a process). The use of an integrative approach allows us to examine the relevance of body models in different domains (family, work, etc.).

## Methods

The above-described theoretical framework determined the following objectives for the empirical part of this study. These include the following: to conduct an analysis of respondents' perceptions of male and female body images; to determine the desired body model (aesthetic or functional); and to assess the influence of the pandemic on people's attitudes toward their bodies. To collect data, we constructed an online survey questionnaire using Google<sup>1</sup> Forms. The online survey link was shared via social media platforms and online portals of three large cities in Sverdlovsk region, Russia, included in the survey (Yekaterinburg, Nizhny Tagil, and Kamensk-Uralsky). We also sent emails to educational organizations and institutions in these cities. The resultant sample comprised 1,077 completed responses in the electronic database.

The survey was conducted in 2022 and covered working-age people from 18 to 60 years old living in the Sverdlovsk region. The Sverdlovsk region is one of the typical regions of the Russian Federation as it is located at a considerable distance from the capitals (Moscow and St. Petersburg) and has a megapolis as its centre. The territorial distribution of the sample is as follows: 55.7% of participants are residents of the region's capital, Yekaterinburg; 44.3% live in two other big cities of Sverdlovsk region, Nizhny Tagil and Kamensk-Uralsky. Thus, we were able to cover those central and peripheral economic areas of the region that have the most developed health care, physical training, leisure and recreation infrastructure, considerable employment opportunities, and a high level of Internet access.

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The survey relied on the river sampling technique: respondents were recruited via social media, websites, and survey invitation emails. There was a set of controlled parameters, which helped us build a sample reflecting the diversity of socio-demographic groups. The age and gender distribution of our sample led us to divide it into the following four cohorts: 18–21-year-olds (young adults with potential or precarious employment, 39% of respondents); 22–30-year-olds (young working adults, 15.6%); 31–45-year-olds (medium-age working adults, 24%); and 46–60-year-olds (older working-age group, 21.4%). In the sample structure, women accounted for 69.7% and men for 30.3%, which can be explained by the fact that women generally take more interest in the topics related to body and appearance than men. Of the respondents, 61.2% are not married; 39.0% have children. The sample includes various educational, occupational, and income groups of the population, which provides us the sufficiency of including different social groups of the working population. The sample cannot be considered representative of the population of the Sverdlovsk region and Russia as a whole due to its bias toward inhabitants of large cities of workable age.

We built linear distribution tables for all questions of the questionnaire, carried out a correlation analysis of empirically significant variables and a factor analysis, and calculated mean values and indices.

## Results

To investigate the respondents' ideas about the ideal female and male bodies, we requested them to select characteristics from the list comprising five functional and five aesthetic characteristics. We found that the aesthetic model prevailed in the respondents' views of the female body, while their ideas of the male body mostly corresponded to the functional model. However, many responses featured elements of both models, i.e., these were mixed body models (Table 1). The key characteristic of the ideal female body is that it should have a well-groomed look (85.2%), while for the male body, it is physical strength, which undoubtedly reflects established social stereotypes. While the female body is largely seen as a static, visually pleasing object to be admired, the male body is more often associated with the qualities related to the body's functions. Only a small proportion of our respondents described the female body in terms of physical strength (4.2%). Instead, they tended to choose the term "fitness" (26.2%). Endurance and stamina are seen as predominantly male qualities (48.6% and 53.5%, respectively). Only in 15.5% and 21.0% of the responses, respectively, these qualities were applied to the female body. Similar disparities are found in the respondents' perceptions of the ideal male body: only in 17.4% of responses such characteristics as slenderness and the harmonious body shape were used to describe the male body. For the female body, these characteristics, conversely, were mentioned by the most of respondents (66.4%). The majority of responses (69%) associated sexual attractiveness with the female body (for the male body, only 22.3%).

**Table 1**  
*Respondents' Perceptions of the Ideal Male and Female Bodies*  
 (% of the Total Number of Responses)\*

Body model	Female body	Male body
<i>Functional (body as a process), including:</i>	91.2	236.3
fitness	26.2	36.5
resilience	25.2	29.9
stamina	21.0	53.5
endurance	15.5	48.6
strength	4.2	67.8
<i>Aesthetic (body as an object), including:</i>	262.5	127.5
well-groomed body	85.2	35.1
sexual attractiveness	69.0	22.3
slender figure, harmonious body shape	66.4	17.4
flexibility, plasticity	38.3	3.7
good muscle relief, toned muscle look	3.6	49.0

*Note.* \*The sum of the responses is greater than 100% because respondents could choose multiple answer options.

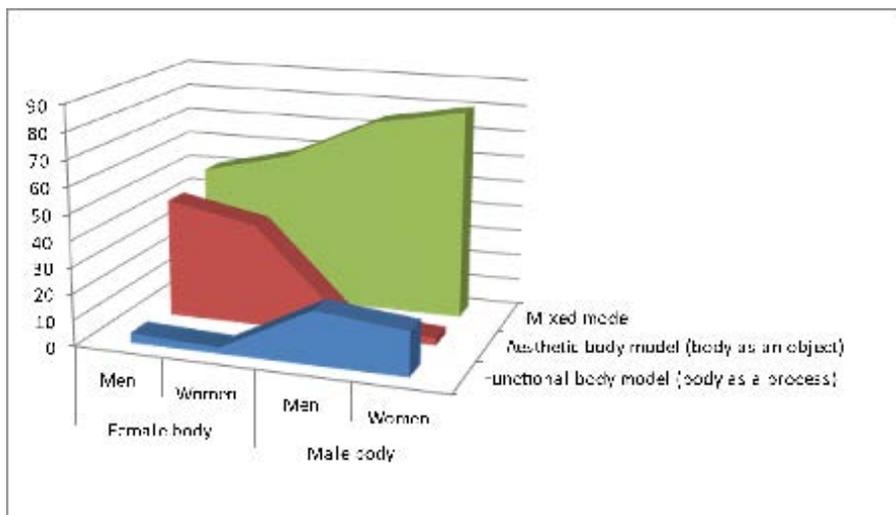
Some gender differences were identified in views on the male and female bodies: we found that women describing an ideal female body were more inclined to choose aesthetic characteristics over functional ones that is 88% in comparison with 77.8% of men. Women also often chose stamina as a quality expected of the female body (28.0% of women and 21.8% of men). Sexual attractiveness and flexibility feature slightly more often in men's responses. Women consider a muscular and resilient male body to be more attractive, while men mostly chose endurance and stamina.

It is quite obvious that the above-described models are based on traditional, stereotyped attributes of male and female physique. There are, however, two important points to be considered. On the one hand, functional and aesthetic characteristics often go together, which means that respondents mention both feminine and masculine characteristics. On the other, changes in the body perceptions may lag behind changes in other gender-related attitudes and values. Body evades reflection, which impedes the development of "physical self", in other words, it may be difficult for people to perceive the body as a whole rather than as a collection of specific parts (Tataurova, 2009), which is why they resort to traditional, stereotypical notions to solve this problem on a personal level.

Since the survey participants often mixed the qualities corresponding to the aesthetic and functional body models, we decided to build a secondary variable based on the combination of responses (Figure 1). The body perceptions of the majority of our respondents correspond to the mixed body type: for the female body, this type prevails for 56.2% of respondents; for the male body, this figure comprises 78.7%. About 41% of our respondents described the ideal female body only in aesthetic terms. The female body is viewed more stereotypically than the male one. The ideal female body is perceived by our respondents as well-groomed, sexually attractive, slender, and flexible (18.7% of respondents selected all of these qualities, while 10.8% only selected the first three). Thus, about 30% of our respondents consider the ideal female body mostly in aesthetic-stereotypical terms. While only 2.8% of respondents chose exclusively functional characteristics of the female body, for the male body, this proportion was much larger, 17.9%. The male body tends to be much less stereotyped and the descriptions given by our respondents were much more diverse: we found no similar combinations of answers (the threshold was 5% of choices).

**Figure 1**

*Body Models in Respondents' Evaluations (% of Male and Female Subgroups)*



In different age groups, body type preferences may vary. For example, men in older age groups demonstrate increasing preference toward the functional model of the male body: 28% in the group of 46–60-year-olds compared to 15.7% in the group of 18–21-year-olds. Among the female respondents, this tendency is less pronounced, although still present. Regarding the female body, the majority of men aged 22–45 give preference to the aesthetic model (55%). In the youngest and oldest groups, this figure is 39%. Among older women, in comparison with younger age groups, there is some decline in this preference: 48% in the youngest group against 23.6% in the oldest one. This can be interpreted as follows: the respondents in the older age groups tend to attach more significance to the functional characteristics of the male and female body alike.

In the choice of the preferred own body type, 58.5% of respondents prioritized the functional body model and 41.5% preferred the aesthetic one. Residents of the megapolis (Yekaterinburg) mostly would like to have a functional body (62.1% compared to 54% in other cities in the survey). The functional body model also becomes more important for older age groups (65.2% in the group of 46–60-year-olds). Men also chose this body type more often than women (79.2% against 50.5%). Another aspect that is worth special mention here is the influence of the following two factors on respondents' choices of the preferred own body type: their perceptions of the body standards and their evaluation of their bodies as fitting these body standards or not (Tables 2 and 3).

Women's choices of their desired body type are somewhat different from men's choices. There were two almost equal groups of women respondents: 50.5% would like to have a body that fits into the functional body type and 49.5% prefer the aesthetic type. The latter is surprising in the light of the prevalence of aesthetic characteristics in what the respondents describe as the ideal female body. Even though their choices of the qualities for the ideal body may be influenced by the body they desire to have themselves, this connection is by no means straightforward. Among those who thought that their body corresponded to societal body standards and who adhered specifically to the functional or aesthetic body model (not the mixed model), the majority tended to choose the same model for themselves. For instance, among those respondents who chose the aesthetic female body model considering their own bodies as fitting these beauty standards, 62.5% would like to have an aesthetically pleasing body. Among those who believe that their bodies do not meet these standards, the percentage of people who desire to have an aesthetically pleasing body drops to 49.2%. For those respondents whose ideas about the beauty standards pointed to the mixed model, we found no connection between the beauty standards and the body model they would choose for themselves. When asked about their desired body type, our respondents with equal frequency chose each of the two models, with a slight prevalence of the functional body type.

**Table 2**  
*Preference of Female Respondents for Their Own Body Type*

Body self-evaluation	Ideal body	Preferred own body type	
		Functional body model (body as a process)	Aesthetic body model (body as an object)
I think that my body fits the beauty standards	Functional body model (body as a process)	84.6	15.4
	Aesthetic body model (body as an object)	37.5	62.5
	Mixed model	53.0	47.0
I don't think that my body fits the beauty standards	Functional body model (body as a process)	60.0	40.0
	Aesthetic body model (body as an object)	50.8	49.2
	Mixed model	55.6	44.4

Men adhere more strongly to the functional model (79.2%), although every fifth respondent would like to have an aesthetically pleasing physique. Unlike women, men whose responses point to the mixed body model would more often choose the functional body type for themselves. It should be noted that the vast majority of those male respondents who believe that the ideal body should be aesthetically pleasing would also like to have such body themselves.

**Table 3**

*Preference of Male Respondents for Their Own Body Type*

Body self-evaluation	Ideal body	Preferred own body type	
		Functional body model (body as a process)	Aesthetic body model (body as an object)
I think that my body fits the beauty standards	Functional body model (body as a process)	95.5	4.5
	Aesthetic body model (body as an object)	42.9	57.1
	Mixed model	77.7	22.3
I don't think that my body fits the beauty standards	Functional body model (body as a process)	100.0	0.0
	Aesthetic body model (body as an object)	12.5	87.5
	Mixed model	78.6	21.4

Are there any signs of the transition from the prevalence of the aesthetic body model to the functional model in the post-pandemic world? To answer this question, we used factor analysis based on the principal component analysis. To this end, we applied the Varimax rotation procedure with Kaiser normalization (rotated component matrix). To process the “don't know” answers, we replaced the missing data with the mean of the corresponding variables (Table 4). The analysis included the responses characterizing the significance of attractive appearance (aesthetically pleasing body) and resilience/endurance of the body in different spheres of human activity. The respondents were asked to assess the significance of the given qualities on a 4-point scale: from 1 = *totally insignificant* to 4 = *highly significant*. Together these two factors explain 61% of the total dispersion of variables. As the factor analysis showed, all variables have high factor loadings (> 0.4).

Not surprisingly, the first factor, body functionality, included all the statements pointing to the significance of endurance and stamina. Daily household chores have the highest factor value and leisure activities have the lowest. The second factor, physical attractiveness or aesthetically pleasing body, includes the statements pointing to the importance of an attractive physique. Family relationships have the highest factor loading in this case.

For these two factors, we generated two new variables: the significance of the functional component in the body image and of the aesthetic component. The (factor) values of these variables fall within the interval from -3 to +3 (Table 5). The correlation

**Table 4**

*Distribution of the Factor Loading for the Significance of the Functional and Aesthetic Body Models*

Factor	Functional body model (body as a process)	Aesthetic body model (body as an object)
<i>Significance of endurance/stamina, resilience, and strength/fitness:</i>		
in dealing with daily household chores	.811	
in marriage (relationship with a spouse or partner)	.766	
in family relationship(s) with children/parents	.758	
in the professional sphere	.744	
in leisure activities	.669	
<i>Significance of attractive appearance:</i>		
in family relationship(s) with children/parents		.822
in dealing with daily household chores		.821
in leisure activities		.761
in the professional sphere		.658
in marriage (relationship with a spouse or partner)		.599
Proportion of variance explained	46.83	14.26

analysis of the variables with different characteristics shows that the importance of having an attractive body has a significant relationship with the socio-demographic parameters of our respondents, their attitudes to their bodies, and the impact of the pandemic. The role of the body’s functionality has a much weaker correlation with the other parameters. This can be explained by the fact that the functional body model is shared by a variety of socio-demographic groups while the aesthetic body model retains its stereotypical features and is characteristic of a limited number of categories.

**Table 5**

*Correlation of the Factors That Influence the Choice of the Functional or Aesthetic Body Model With the Socio-Demographic (Functional) and Substantive Variables*

Factor	Significance of the functional body model (body as a process)	Significance of the aesthetic body model (body as an object)
<i>Socio-demographic characteristics</i>		
Gender	.043	.102**
Age	-.028	.132**
Financial situation	-.028	-.041

Table 5 Continued

Factor	Significance of the functional body model (body as a process)	Significance of the aesthetic body model (body as an object)
Education	-.001	.117**
Occupation	.049	-.127**
Marital status	-.024	-.103**
Children	.011	-.119**
City of residence	.020	.035
<i>Perception of own body</i>		
Attitude towards own body (positive or negative)	.044	.0112**
Correspondence of the body to the beauty standards	-.062*	-.134**
Which male body type is considered the most attractive (functional or aesthetic)	-.068*	-.034
Which female body type is considered the most attractive (functional or aesthetic)	-.019	-.013
Preferred own body type (functional or aesthetic)	-.043	.138**
<i>Impact of the pandemic</i>		
The respondent had COVID-19	.025	-.044
Impact of the pandemic on the respondent's own body	.068*	.070*
Change in the attitude to the body	-.042	-.066*

Note. \*The correlation is significant at  $p = .05$  (2-tailed significance); \*\*The correlation is significant at  $p = .01$  (2-tailed significance).

In order to clarify the relationship between the two selected factors with other variables, we divided factor values into four equal percentile groups. The lower quartile (1) stands for the absence or minimum correlation between the factor and variable; the upper quartile (4) indicates the strongest correlation. Table 6 shows quartiles with the highest percentage for each of the values of the given variables within the selected factor: 1 corresponds to the first quartile, with no correlation between the variable and factor; 2 means a weak correlation (2<sup>nd</sup> quartile); 3 and 4, a strong or very strong correlation (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quartiles).

Table 6

*Distribution of the Dominant Quartile of the Factor-Variable Correlation Strength*

Factor	Functional body model (body as a process)	Aesthetic body model (body as an object)
<i>Sex (Age group)</i>		
Men (18–21)	1	2
Men (22–30)	2	1
Men (31–45)	2	2
Men (46–60)	4	1

Table 6 Continued

Factor	Functional body model (body as a process)	Aesthetic body model (body as an object)
Women (18–21)	4	1
Women (22–30)	3	4
Women (31–45)	4	4
Women (46–60)	2	3
<i>Financial situation</i>		
Too poor to afford food	1	3
Earns enough to buy food but not enough to buy clothes/shoes	2	1
Earns enough to buy clothes/shoes but not enough to buy major domestic appliances	4	4
Earns enough to buy major domestic appliances but not enough to buy a new car	3	2
Earns enough to buy a new car but not enough to buy a flat or house	4	3
<i>City</i>		
Yekaterinburg	3	3
Nizhny Tagil	1	2
Kamensk-Uralsky	4	4
<i>Marital status</i>		
Married	3	4
Single	1	1

The analysis of the strength of the relationship between the factors of functionality and physical attractiveness shows that there are no distinct socio-demographic groups upholding specifically one or another body model. There are several points worthy of comment. Men tend to choose mixed body models while women, on the contrary, tend to pursue more stereotypical body standards and their self-esteem is more dependent on whether their bodies meet these normative expectations or not. The older men are, the more prone they are to choose the functional model (quartile 4 prevails). Older women, on the contrary, are the least prone to choose this model (quartile 2 prevails). It should be noted, however, that for women, there is no linear relationship between the preferred body model and age. The strongest correlation with the factor of physical attractiveness is observed in the responses of female participants aged 22–45. The peak is reached at the age of 31–45 (quartiles 3 and 4 account for 57.8%).

The youngest group demonstrated impressive results: young men were the least prone to choose the functional model, while young women, on the contrary, gave most preference to the functional model. In other words, in comparison with young men, young women in the study regions attach less significance to physical attractiveness. This can be explained by the fact that young women seek to change the dominant body expectations in favor of more functional body standards. The influence of the natural beauty trend (Iskusstvonnaia krasota, 2023) may lead young women to feel more body positive.

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This agrees with the international research evidence that shows that women are now becoming less self-critical when evaluating their bodies (Issledovanie GfK, 2015).

Of the respondents, 32.6% said that the pandemic affected their attitudes to their bodies. In this group of respondents, 57.2% believe that they have started to take better care of their health and have become more attentive to their bodies' signals. Others think that the pandemic has made them feel more fatalistic about life, making them aware of the impossibility to control and contain disease (14.3%). The remaining 28.5% pointed out that the change in their attitudes to their bodies did not cause any real change in their personal health practices. In comparison with the data of 2021, where 53% of Russians reported changes in their attitudes to their health (Bol'shinstvo rossiian izmenili, 2021), in our study this figure is lower, which may signify that people are now less afraid of the negative effects of the pandemic and are less prone to maintaining the pandemic-induced body practices. At the same time, there still remains a group of people retaining the attitudes to their body and health they have acquired during the pandemic.

There were 55.9% of respondents who reported that they had COVID-19. Their personal experience with the pandemic was deeper. A total of 39.9% reported that being infected with COVID-19 caused them to reconsider their attitude toward their bodies and health (among those who did not have COVID-19, the figure was lower, 21.5%). We found, however, that the fact of having had COVID-19 has a weak influence on the respondents' ideas of the female and male ideal bodies, their perception of their own bodies as fitting these standards or not, and their desired own body type. Nevertheless, we found that in comparison with the pre-pandemic period, our respondents have become more conscious of contagions, and are sticking to their newly acquired personal hygiene habits (30.4%); they are now paying more attention to physical activity and sport (28.1%); they are trying to keep regular hours, including getting enough sleep (26.7%) and maintaining a good work-life balance (21.5%). Both the functional and aesthetic body models are equally associated with body care practices. The pandemic has not led to a radical shift in the desired body model but rather to the selection of practices that ensure effective and comfortable embodiment in both models. Therefore, studying the mechanisms that maintain the stability of body models even in social upheavals such as a pandemic may represent a further research interest.

## Discussion

Our research data show that for the most part, our respondents adhere to the stereotypical body perceptions. Interestingly, their ideas about the female body tend to be more stereotypical compared to ones about the male body: the female body is expected to be sexually attractive, well-groomed, and slender. There is evidence that such a model is internalized since childhood. For example, Staffieri (1967) found that overweight children have fewer friendships and have less chances of being included into collective games than children whose weight is within the normal range.

The male body is mostly viewed in functional rather than aesthetic terms, priority being given to such qualities as physical strength, endurance, and stamina.

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Nevertheless, our study has detected some signs of the shifting body standards: in the evaluations of male and female respondents mixed body models dominate, i.e., while the male body may to a certain degree be aestheticized, the female body, on the contrary, may acquire some functional qualities, making it fit for performing a range of social functions and roles. There is evidence that in the last 20 years, the dominant ideal of the male body has shifted towards a more muscular look, which means more sculpted, visible muscles (Lefkowich et al., 2017; McCreary, 2002). For the female body, however, the emphasis is mostly made on an aesthetically pleasing, thin, or slender body shape (Groesz et al., 2002).

As our survey has shown, older age and more life experience are the factors that influence people's ideas of the ideal body: the value of the functional body model increases together with the respondents' age. Moreover, in describing the body type they would like to have themselves, the respondents tend to appreciate body functionality more than appearance, placing more emphasis on what their bodies can do for them, the degree to which their bodies enable them to satisfy their social needs and pursue their interests in daily life. The respondents' views regarding the connection between the body model and different spheres of life show that functional body characteristics feature mostly in such spheres as household maintenance while the body's appearance plays a more significant role in the family sphere.

We found a relationship between the preferred body type and respondents' evaluations of the impact that the pandemic had on their attitudes to their own bodies, which may be a sign of post-pandemic body reframing. The factor analysis allowed for further clarification of the relationship between the preferred body model and such characteristics as gender and age. With age, women start to give more preference to the functional over the aesthetic body model. Nevertheless, in all age groups, there is a high percentage of women whose desired body type can be classified as functional (at least 41%). Male respondents in all age groups (at least 78%) choose the functional model. The strongest correlation with this model was observed for the 22–30-year-olds. Our findings disagree with those of H. Quittkat et al. (2019), who surveyed 942 women and 385 men aged 16–88 and showed that the importance of appearance remained stable for women of all ages.

The survey data showed mixed responses regarding the effects of the pandemic on people's attitudes to their bodies and body care practices. Every third respondent pointed out a direct connection between their individual experience of the pandemic and the change in their desired body image, highlighting the body's ability to withstand external pressures, remain active and physically fit, thus enabling them to do their daily routines and perform their social functions.

Some of the respondents see the pandemic as a challenge, undermining their feeling of control over their life, health, and body. While such characteristics as weight, in particular, can be controlled (Marszał-Wiśniewska & Jarczewska-Gerc, 2016; Styk et al., 2019), individuals cannot restrain the spreading of the coronavirus infection. However, we observed that in an effort to maintain control over their health and body, even after the lockdown, many of our respondents have continued to adhere to their new body care routines, such as hand hygiene, physical exercise, and good sleep.

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Slightly more than a fourth of our respondents said that the pandemic had no effect on their body care practices. The survey of Russian students conducted by N. A. Sterlyadeva and T. V. Chukanova (2022) showed that 28% of respondents tried to boost their immune system by changing their habits during the pandemic, a figure that is quite close to our results for working age adults.

A part of the COVID-19 survivors among our respondents (39.9%) report that their attitudes to their bodies have changed. We believe, however, that the whole pandemic situation has had a much stronger impact on our respondents' values and behavioral patterns than the mere fact of having been diagnosed with COVID-19. According to the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) (Postkovid, 2022), even those Russians who reported symptoms of post-COVID-19 syndrome did not resort to any rehabilitation therapy (80%).

## Conclusion

Our study has brought to light three body models that are prevalent in modern Russian society: aesthetic (body as an object), functional (body as a process), and mixed one. The results of our survey have shown that people have ambivalent attitudes toward the body: on the one hand, there are widely spread stereotypes about the ideal male and female bodies reflecting the division into the functional and aesthetic models; on the other, the body that people desire for themselves does not always coincide with the prevalent beauty standards. Moreover, people tend to choose mixed body models or their preferences may shift toward a different body model.

Women's self-assessed body image differs significantly from that of men, who tend to opt for a more functional body model. While having a functional body is considered to be more important in dealing with daily household chores, the aesthetic body model is more often preferred in the sphere of family relationships. When women's self-assessed body image does not meet common beauty standards, they tend to be more willing to switch to the other body type, prioritizing functional characteristics over aesthetic ones. The choice of the functional model depends on the "classic" socio-demographic factors to a lesser extent than in the case of the aesthetic model. This choice can be influenced by such factors as a self-assessed body image and the situation of the pandemic. Our study has registered changes in people's attitudes toward the body after the pandemic: every third respondent reported that they have started to take better care of their bodies through practices of personal hygiene, physical exercise, and maintaining a more consistent sleep schedule.

In general, there is a noticeable shift in the way the body is perceived. Despite the persisting stereotypes about the male and female bodies circulating in society, working-age adults are now more inclined toward the functional body model, that is, the body capable of realizing its functional potential (stamina, endurance, and resilience) in a variety of daily situations. We believe that the new reality is conducive to the change in the way people evaluate and perceive their bodies, particularly in connection to the functions and roles they perform in society, to the activities and interactions they participate in, and to the body's ability to withstand external pressures.

Our study has certain limitations. We studied only urban dwellers in a large industrial Russian region. Although our research data may be similar to the data collected in other areas with the same economic and social characteristics, capital cities (Moscow and St. Petersburg), as well as rural areas, may present a somewhat different picture. We did not include any materials for the analysis of people's attitudes and behavior in this study. Thus, we did not question our respondents about the motivations behind wanting to modify their appearance under the impact of the pandemic, fashion trends, and the development of digital technologies. The study of the prevalent attitudes to the body among people with higher and lower income, as well as the typical body care practices among the elderly and the impact of ageism on these practices, make promising avenues for further research.

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