

BABEŞ–BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF LETTERS
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HUNGARIAN STUDIES

**Norms of the Ideal Female Body Image and Body Taboos among Young
Women of Generation Y and Generation Z**

Supervisor:

Prof. dr. Tánczos Vilmos

Doctoral Candidate:

Miron-Vilidár Vivien

Cluj-Napoca

2026

The dissertation focuses on the study of the female body and body image, with particular attention to how the female body is constructed and interpreted in contemporary society. The research approaches the body not merely as a biological entity, but as a “front” filled with social and cultural meanings, through which an individual’s identity, self-image, and social position are expressed. Thus, the body functions as a medium of communication where social norms, beauty ideals, and power relations are reflected.

The target group of the research consists of young adult women, primarily members of Generations Y and Z. The dissertation specifically examines the body image of women in these generations and their relationship with their own bodies, taking into account that they have been socialized in a highly mediatized and digital environment. A defining characteristic of these generations is that the internet and social media are integral parts of their lives, significantly influencing their self-image and their relationship to body ideals. The research further divides the target group based on life situations: women who have not given birth, pregnant women, and women who have already given birth. This categorization allows for the analysis of how the relationship to the body changes across different life stages, particularly in relation to pregnancy and childbirth.

The choice of topic is justified from multiple perspectives. On the one hand, body image is a fundamental component of identity, shaping how individuals relate to themselves and to the external world. The female body is a highly regulated domain, shaped by social norms, expectations, taboos, and ideals. On the other hand, the contemporary media environment – especially social media – continuously conveys idealized body images that are often unattainable, contributing to body image disturbances, anxiety, and dissatisfaction. The research highlights that although representations have become more diverse, internal attitudes have not changed proportionally, making the issue still relevant. Furthermore, despite the increasing visibility of body positivity movements and critical discourses, many women remain dissatisfied with their bodies, and body image-related issues (such as anxiety and self-esteem disorders) continue to be significant. Therefore, the dissertation focuses on norms, expectations, and taboos related to the female body. The choice of topic is also motivated by personal experiences, which demonstrate how criticism, expectations, and contradictory feedback shape an individual’s self-image. Additionally, the research is scientifically grounded in its interdisciplinary approach, integrating perspectives from sociology, anthropology, psychology, and visual culture.

The dissertation employs a qualitative research methodology focused on exploring individual experiences and meanings. Its theoretical framework is primarily based on a

phenomenological approach, which interprets the body as lived experience and examines the meanings individuals assign to their own bodies.

The research consists of two main parts:

1. Theoretical and visual analysis: this section provides a cultural-historical overview of representations of the female body and examines body images in contemporary media, particularly on Instagram and in photography. The method used is qualitative content analysis, which allows for the exploration of visual and symbolic meanings.
2. Empirical research: this section investigates the body image of the target group through interviews and focus group discussions. Participants are divided into three groups (women without children, pregnant women, and women who have given birth), enabling the identification of differences across life stages. The interviews and discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The data were analyzed using content analysis, which considers not only explicit statements but also underlying meanings and nonverbal communication. The aim is not statistical generalization, but a deeper understanding of how women experience their own bodies and relate to social norms.

The dissertation provides a complex examination of the female body and body image by combining theoretical, visual, and empirical approaches. Its central finding is that although representations of the female body have become more diverse, it remains strongly socially determined, and women's relationship with their bodies has not become significantly more accepting. The aim of the research is to explore and better understand this contradiction.