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Tendons, Meat, Fat.

The Invisible Body in the Liminal Space of Podcasting

Andrea Hanáčková

Abstract

Questions of corporeality and body shaming are currently part of the concept of the body expansion and manifestation in the social space and power relations. Equally intrusively, they are becoming part of media discourses in the communication of beauty, body standards, self-acceptance, and self-evaluation. This study offers a glimpse of the contemporary podcast scene, which provides an ideal platform for presenting the psychologically sensitive topic of intimate issues of corporeality. Using the example of one English-Italian (*The Meat*) and two Czech podcasts (*The Lard*, *The Edge*), the author applies several theses of Michel Foucault, especially his notion of discipline as a mechanism of power. The space of the podcast is understood as a liminal space, a transitional bridging medium without images and precise contours, which allows for experiments with sound, greater intimacy such as intimacy of the message, and unconventional narrative practices. Grounded in the theory of Dario Llinares, the author explores the self-reflexive potential of the new medium of podcasting, with references to audio-narratological practices, demonstrating the possibilities of the podcast as a progressive phenomenon of auditory production.

Key words

podcast, body shaming, disciplining of the body, mechanism of power, liminal space, Dario Llinares, Michel Foucault

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Being in good shape has nothing to do with health, it's about getting laid. And getting laid is about finding someone to get laid with, and finding someone to get laid with is about falling in love once in a while, and falling in love is about sharing your life with someone else, and sharing your life with someone else is about having a family maybe, and having a family is about being surrounded by kids and relatives and a community, and all of this is about not dying alone.

Jonathan Zenti (ZENTI: 2018, EP1)

In 2016 Jonathan Zenti, a Milan-based audio and sound designer, created a documentary podcast *The Meat* about his body and his contentment in the body of a fat man. At the outset of this project he had already emphasised the word 'podcast' as a specific space in which it is possible to overcome a multitude of social judgments which he describes using words such as 'wall, cage, submissive position' (ZENTI 2018). While Zenti's terms imply an awareness of obstacles or subordination in power relations, the podcast as a genre offers, especially in the reflections of Dario Llinares, the concept of liminal perception of space (LLINARES 2018: 123–146). That is to say, a place where, conscious of boundaries but in a seemingly endless space on a wide-open platform, the free spirit of intellectual curiosity and deep exploration can fully unfold in a self-reflexive and self-discovering mode.

With this basic delineation of media space, this study engages with the theses of Michel Foucault and Sarah Grogan and explores the possibilities of the podcast to represent different manifestations of the body in relation to the concept of power. While Foucault relates the questions of the body and 'its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their "submission" to the interests of the ruling and controlling power' (FOUCAULT 1995: 25), Grogan specifies this power through the omnipresent media (GROGAN 1999: 94–97). In the present study, the way in which men and women construct and present their bodies in media discourse forms a fundamental argument for exploring the concept of disciplining power in relation to the body and its media image in podcasting. The commentaries on the three specific podcasts chosen for the study will explore the tension between these constructions of power exercised through the media over people's bodies and the looser notion of liminality in the podcast space.

The present study explores the theme of the expansion of the body in three podcasts *The Meat*, *Sádlo* [The Lard], *Hrana* [The Edge] which fully exploit the main characteristics of purely auditory expression, intimacy and messages designed for a single sense. The first of these, the Italian-English *The Meat*, in an individual freelancer production by a single creator, represents an autodiegetic narrative with a distinctly positive presentation of the body that does not conform to normative concepts. In the European podcast scene, it represents the first such bold auditory project with explicit erotic scenes and the authentic sadness of a fat man. The body as a transmitter of specific signals and a sensitive receiver of external stimuli is depicted in the second selected podcast, *The Lard*. It represents a large-scale public service media project (The Czech Radio) running in parallel on several platforms (podcast, theatre, exhibition, presentation in

schools, extensive public relations activity in magazines). It represents a more traditional documentary method of extensive research, a large number of interviewees fundamentally supported by an authorial approach and narration. The third representative (*The Edge*) targets the majority society from the position of the activist movement Hate Free Culture and purposefully raises the issue from a minority background. The homodiegetic narrator, a gay documentary filmmaker with personal experience of body shaming, homophobia, racial prejudice and living on the margins of society, speaks of the need to understand the subject of corporeality in terms of the 'socio-cultural pressures' on members of both majority and minority social groups in order to make sense of 'variations in body image' (GROGAN 1999: 165).

Self-regulatory strategies in matters of corporeality and body shaming are currently presented as a major social, medical, and psychiatric problem. Therefore, the study poses the question of how the topics and stories presenting corporeality resonate in the liminal space of the podcast. And also, how the self-articulation of life traumas complies with the (idealised) notion of the power of sharing with an infinite podcast community of mobile app and internet platform users, fat or thin.

Real punk or the body in radio broadcasts and podcasts

When Dario Llinares reflects on the communicative potential of podcasting, he speaks of a 'kind of positive destabilisation' (LLINARES 2018: 124). It lies in the instability and disruption of the boundaries between different fields of human knowledge and the media framework in which they are newly viewed. Llinares calls this new mediatory practice of the podcast the 'liminal praxis' and attributes to it the characteristics of creative freedom and authorial autonomy (LLINARES 2018: 146).

These predictions are absolutely crucial for imaging the body in auditory space. Radio programmes picking up the topic of corporeality have a long tradition, especially in the factual part of radio broadcasting. No one can count the number of women's audio magazines that have ever dealt with interpersonal experiences in communicating about beauty, cultural socialisation, and body standards, trends in advertising and physical (self)evaluation (see CASH and PRUZINSKY 2004). The most prominent, longest-running (since 1946) and in many ways normative case is the BBC's *Woman's Hour* (FORSTER 2015: 177–179). A large number of documentary programmes have explored individuals' personal engagement with the cognitive, behavioural, and emotional significance of the body for self-evaluation and self-esteem. Careful editing, judicious cuts, and sensitive directing are always present as well as a multitude of editorial debates and station codes setting out elementary ethical rules for otherness of all kinds.

It is clear, then, that the auditory medium directly implies the possibility to talk about intimate problems of corporeality, taking full advantage of the radiogenic form, absence of image, and anonymity of human voice (CHIGNELL 2009: 93). So far, we have been talking about classical linear broadcasting, which has one more essential characteristic, namely unidirectionality. Thus, while all the advice columns, touching

stories of slimming women, monologues of food lovers, and the recommendations of nutritionists contain the expert knowledge and truthfulness required by Foucault, they also imply a unidirectional, i.e., ideal, assumption of power over the lives of the listeners and also over their bodies. The media discourse composed of such parts of specific programmes and fragments of information, unsystematic and disjointed, can be understood as part of the ‘political technology of the body’ defined by Foucault, which cannot be located in a specific institution or state apparatus, but forms part of ‘a multiform instrumentation’ (FOUCAULT 1995: 26). So far, the consumers of such auditory content have not had many opportunities to influence the media discourse of corporeality set up in this way except through letters and emails.

In this respect, the podcast changes the user habits, the possibilities of creators, and the narrative of topics related to the physical body. Ridina Ahmed, the recipient of a huge number of responses to her podcast, theatre performance, school debates and exhibition, all under the title *The Lard*, reflects on this fact most intensely: ‘I detonated a bomb,’ she says, describing thousands of responses on social media, in e-mails and in personal interactions from women, men, and children reacting to the topic of body shaming in all its forms (ZAJÍČKOVÁ 2021).¹ Authenticity, the ‘unmeasurable, intangible, and subjective quality’ of the podcast, is an advantage of podcast respondents and narrators (SPINELLI and DANN 2019: 84). Another specific aspect is listening to headphones, just inches from the auditory centre of perception, in the closest possible contact with the protagonists’ confession, with maximum ‘attention and giving to another’ that reinforces the traditional categories of hearing, perceiving, and feeling (LACEY 2013: 13). It is the listening to headphones that enhances the immersive potential of the podcast and its communicativeness with users, something that Lukasz Swiatek (2018) calls ‘bridging’. Swiatek relates this feature of the podcast not only to the acquisition of new knowledge, but also – importantly for our topic – to ‘bridging’ and overcoming socio-cultural differences (SWIATEK 2018: 175).

The representation of the body in the interactive space of two-way podcast communication fully reflects the relations of power, including the topics of human commodification, disintegration of an individual, addiction, and diseases in the complex of various medical interventions. A social actress makes this quite explicit in one of the podcasts:

Being fat and not being ashamed of it is real punk. It’s terribly anti-system and anti-social. Almost no one will put up with it. It’s worse than having green hair in a Mohican cut and drinking bottled beer in an office. I find it more socially acceptable to snort coke in the bathroom than to be fat. (AHMED 2021: EP4)

If we understand the representation of corporeality primarily as a social activity, our considerations will indeed lead us to the body as a politically usable instrument of power. If the body is part of social discourses from birth through schooling to late adulthood, including the performance of a profession, it can also be understood in the

1 Unless indicated otherwise, all the translations from Czech are mine.

context of our topic as a subject that submits ‘in order to become docile and function as interchangeable units’ (FOUCAULT 1987: 85). In another reflection, the theme of the human body is related to its position in the hospital, where it is expected to be dismantled, reconstituted and incorporated into the system: ‘In a discipline, the elements [human bodies] are interchangeable, since each one is defined by the place it occupies in a series and by the gap that separates it from the others’ (FOUCAULT 1995: 145). I will demonstrate with individual podcasts how a simple holistic equation in which a healthy body signifies the characteristics of wholeness, while a sick body signifies conflict, and social disharmony is reflected in the political sphere (SCHEPER-HUGHES and LOCK 1987: 7).

Below I compare three podcasts, which were selected from the not very large number of titles dealing with the issue of corporeality. The podcasts selected and analysed feature the narratives which conform to the methods of documentary work, rather than simple talk shows. What they have in common is in-depth research of the topic, a large cohort of interviewees, authorial narration, and a deliberate subjectification of the view of the issue. The selection of podcasts is also inspired by the effort to introduce two attention-worthy Czech podcasts to the international audience. However, I will start by presenting the European or global context, as we will see shortly.

In fact, *The Meat* podcast was the first, or at least one of the first, to cover this topic in the podcast liminal space. It happened in 2016, when Italian documentary filmmaker Jonathan Zenti won the Radiotopia Podquest competition. This global challenge was launched by Public Radio Exchange (PRX), a non-profit web-based platform for digital distribution, control, and licensing of radio programs. Zenti succeeded here with his pitch, which was one of three winning pitches in a competition of 1,537 other entries from around the world. His audio podcast *The Meat* was selected as a narrative about a body that doesn’t conform to contemporary beauty criteria. It is an intimate search for a path to self-acceptance that encounters prejudice and pressure from the outside. Jonathan Zenti uses a time-lapse method to explore fatness as a phenomenon, a subject of society-wide discussion, an object of intrusive interest, and also, to speak with Foucault, mechanisms of discipline in which the individual voluntarily assumes permanent self-control:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes the play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (FOUCAULT 1995: 202–203)

Through replicas representing the perspective of close people and random participants in the interviews, he redefines his being within his family, circles of friends, and society. Through this ontological exploration he shows how a positive individual experience of one’s own corporeality is constantly disrupted by societal dogmas and stereotypes about masculine roles, beauty, and health.

The problem of corporality as part of the dispositif of power is also addressed in Ridina Ahmed’s six-part podcast series *The Lard* (2021). This vocal performer with

Russian-Jewish-Sudanese roots introduces themes of childhood and family, partnership and sex, motherhood, work and career, the ideal of beauty, and physical and mental health. The unifying idea of the podcast is the theme of body acceptance and body shaming in the testimonies of the all-female respondents. The intimate, often very emotional statements of women in the podcast correspond to the postmodern approach to the theme of the body with all its ambiguity, chaos, instability, and changeability (STEHLÍKOVÁ BABYRÁDOVÁ 2018). They relativise historical and current ideas of beauty and ugliness and offer various redefinitions of the ideal of beauty.

The images of Foucault's docile bodies which strive to achieve 'normality' in one way or another is presented in the third analysed podcast series, *The Edge* (2021). Its author, Czech journalist Lukáš Houdek has built the individual episodes as intimate portraits of famous personalities which he has supplemented with shorter interviews with their partners, or other respondents from social networks. The episodes tell the stories of a popular social podcast presenter, a successful Czech model, a fitness trainer, a singer, a fashion designer, all of them in a composition of comments centred toward the main storyline. While Ahmed dispenses with experts and authorities on physical body issues in her podcast, Houdek actively uses them. Ahmed's authorial narration and the abundance of personal information and interim partial summaries are replaced in Houdek's podcast by his assuming a role of a listening author who summarises the whole recording only in the last episode.

The three podcasts form a research field for the application of the idea of media space as a possible dispositif of power in constant confrontation with the assumed liminality of the space of podcasting and podcasters. Here, the limitations of auditory means collide with the unrestricted freedom of information and sharing to a vast international community through podcasting platforms. The freedom to reflect on one's own corporeality thus becomes the freedom of the individual creator to put some distance from the power and its contemporary practices by their own intellectual work, attitude, self-esteem, and creative act.

Make me become your meat: mechanisms of discipline

Foucault applies the techniques and strategies of discipline to the military, prison, and state apparatus in a number of his writings. Thus, the metaphors of the body with which he works extensively are most often formulated on the basis of real physiological processes experienced by individual bodies in the environments he describes, such as the body in the ritual of public torture and execution – bodies that are to be watched, exercised, used, or even punished (e.g., FOUCAULT 1995).

More relevant to our considerations, however, is the mechanism of discipline that the media and the new technologies establish. These too address the multitude of people as a global mass, seizing power over the body in a political sense and creating a new type of power for which Foucault uses the terms 'biopolitics' and a 'biopower' (FOUCAULT 2003: 242–243).

Bodies and corporeality are represented through the media and thus given respectability, importance, and normative form in the everyday process of signification. The significance of different forms of corporeality therefore depends on the way they are presented in the media. The podcast respondents and their authors as narrators describe perceptions of their own bodies entirely in terms of Foucault's mechanisms of disciplining, where the body is directly drawn into the political field and the 'power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs' (FOUCAULT 1995: 25).

The podcasts describe these practices of power mechanisms completely independently of gender and stereotypes, in which the topic of beauty was almost exclusively dedicated to women and the topic of physical fitness almost exclusively to men until recently (WOLF 2009: 7–8). Members of the gay subculture also have very specific requirements for beauty, as *The Edge* podcast discusses in particular.

According to Sarah Grogan, men experience beauty of the body as a relatively important topic and, when they are dissatisfied, they address it slightly differently than women but with the same intensity and desire for a 'perfect' body. Rather than dieting, they resort to exercise, weight training, muscle gain, and do not hesitate to use anabolic steroids and dietary supplements to shape the body and muscle tone more quickly. The muscular physique represents the ideal of male beauty 'because it is intimately tied to Western cultural notions of maleness as representing power, strength and aggression' (GROGAN 1999: 71). To a lesser extent, but in fact similarly to women, men do not hesitate to starve themselves or to seek more radical solutions through plastic surgery.

Both male authors of the selected podcasts, Zenti and Houdek, talk about these topics in different variations. *The Edge* podcast episodes cover individual stories. We hear testimonies of constant doubt, frequent fasting, and excessive daily exercise, as well as of the difficulty of sharing life with a person who has a pathological attitude to food, or of obsessive calories and weight control and morbid habits. 'So, then we stopped eating together,' sums up one of the consequences of the pathologies one of the respondents' partners (HOUDEK 2021: EP03) confirming a statistical observation that 'there may be a link between the increase in portrayal of attractive male bodies in the media and the increase in incidence of anorexia in males' (GROGAN 1999: 113).

We thus perceive a similar situation in Jonathan Zenti's *The Meat*, established in 2016. In a way, the stereotypical perception of a particular type of male character can be seen as the regulatory mechanisms described by Foucault. With their help the technology of power can ensure balance and maintain an average in the general population; Foucault compares this regulatory power mostly to the disqualification of death from public rituals (FOUCAULT 2003: 246). However, in relation to the topic at hand, we are not too far from such fatal consequences. In both *The Lard* and *The Edge*, many interviewees recount extreme experiences of dissatisfaction with their own corporeality, culminating in self-harm, destructive eating disorders and suicide attempts, naturally always in the utmost secrecy, with the feeling of obligatory self-punishment.

In *The Meat* Zenti explores fatness, a quantified situation in which his BMI reaches 44.8. In the author's narrative, he asks a number of questions and delivers predictable

answers representing the mainstream view of a fat body mostly through single-sentence statements of his Italian friends. He responds in English to the premise delivered in Italian, so he can do it without a simultaneously interpreting narrator. He refutes objections to fatness quickly and pragmatically: he is healthy, he does not like sweet food, he does not feel hungry 'all the time', he can sleep on his stomach, he plays sports, he can see his genitals in the shower over his stomach. The belittling of the physical manifestations of the body is complicated quite early on by the description of interactions with his *milieu*, in social discourses, and communication models that are not specifically regional, Italian, European, or American. Zenti thus constantly encounters what Foucault refers to as the norm derived from 'the normal' (FOUCAULT 2003: 39–40). If the population is repeatedly confronted with a 'normal' health profile closely related to a 'normal' physical profile and standardised shape of the human body during a certain epoch, the needs and desires in society change but society itself also changes. It becomes a subject that can be manipulated through defined needs and desires. If the media discipline individual bodies they become a natural part of the disciplining instruments of the entire society and co-creators of 'normality', including the normality of the body.

Auditory media where the image is absent offer the most intimate form of testimony about this. In the space that Marshall McLuhan has already described for users of the auditory medium as 'a private world for themselves amidst crowds' and hinted at the potential and power of radio as a medium that has the ability 'to involve people in depth' (MCLUHAN 1994: 298). When Zenti talks about his troubles at school, in the supermarket or on public transport, the lightness disappears and the humorous detachment turns considerably sour.

The ideal beauty as a fluid phenomenon depending on the cultural and social context can be perceived as a disciplining instrument as well. Similarly, Ridina Ahmed scrutinises it in her podcast, *The Lard*. She plays a key role in all the episodes. This singer, musician, and performer, born in Prague and growing up in Algiers, represents a significant counterweight to the traditional aesthetic understanding of the female body in the normative form shaped by lifestyle magazines and social networks in the monocultural Czech society. Ahmed's appearance, skin tone, curly hair, and pronounced overweight correspond to rather excessive expressions of the human body, including various extreme positions of the voice, gestures, and postures in vocal performances and in everyday communication (for example, in television appearances). The discourse of corporeality and body representation are thus a natural working tool for this artist and a lifelong theme of her work.

In *The Lard*, we view the topic of ideal beauty and its connotations with the mechanisms of power through the testimonies of seven women connected by the author's narrative of Ridina Ahmed. The first woman, Dita, shares with the audience the criticism of her surroundings on her 'too skinny' body, which is constantly compared to the 'ideal appearance'. Another respondent, Anna, describes the beauty ideal as a construct that is incompatible with good health. According to her, the cult of the body creates a need for a shared value in society, as religion used to do. Thus, in their personal

stories, women describe a process in which the mere emancipation of the body becomes a hypertrophic obsession to which the female personality fully submits and, in order to satisfy media discourses of corporeality, violates the laws of the real body, often to the significant detriment of physical and mental health. The need to subjectify the self and to engage with one's own body at the expense of other life needs and roles corresponds well to the triangle of power, right, and truth that Foucault characterises for the production and circulation of power relations (FOUCAULT 2003: 38). Ahmed selects stories of women that show how the gradual monetisation of the body's needs and the pursuit of an unattainable ideal drive consumption and consumerism, as well as the construction of self-image and the reinforcement of pervasive narcissism, especially on social media (STEHLÍKOVÁ BABYRÁDOVÁ 2018: 30–31).

This topic is exposed especially in the fifth episode of *The Lard*, which describes the pathological behaviour of women under social pressure. Quite in the spirit of the previously postulated Foucault's notions of disciplining mechanisms, through the analysed podcasts we can see how the media discourse of the ideal body is systematically created by simply talking about it and accepting it as an object of representation.

Even though every woman (and, as we demonstrate with *The Edge* and *The Meat*, man as well) rationally knows that she does not want to be compared against the media constructs of beauty, she nevertheless perceives the strong pressure of print magazines, TV shows, films, and especially social media. This media insidiousness lies in the promise of well-being and salvation, health, beauty, wealth, social admiration, and recognition if women consume all sorts of products and try to imitate the images (KOTIŠOVÁ 2011). In personalised feeds we mostly follow our acquaintances and friends; however, they too create their fabricated realities on the networks where they mostly show only happy lives and beautiful photographs. Exercising power through the media and social networks is thus transformed into the real struggles of the depicted women with their own bodies.

How strong can beauty be?, or the body obedient, disciplined, normal

Is my lard really mine, or is it kind of the lard of everyone who comments on my body and gives out unsolicited advice?

Ridina Ahmed (ZAJÍČKOVÁ 2021)

Foucault's *dispositif* examines how an individual is situated within a certain set of discursive techniques that include various political and scientific constructions as well as institutional regulations and norms. In the following paragraphs, I will be concerned with the power of the media presentation of the ideal body in relation to the weakness of the individual and the inability to effectively and freely defend oneself within the established discourse (FOUCAULT 1995: 62). I will show how this set of techniques manifests itself in distinct expressive images of the human body, and the powerful effect

produced by the concentration of these images in an auditory medium that, although lacking visual perception, possesses great suggestiveness and intimacy.

I have already demonstrated above how easily a relatively normal state can turn over into a pathology in the presented podcasts. Such moments are present in *The Lard*. In it we hear the story of Lucie, who talks about the toxic environment of elite sport and busts the myth of athletes as healthy individuals. Experiments with laxatives, a morbid desire for a flat stomach and permanent starvation in late childhood and teenage years are a cruel toll of 'healthy sport'. Another participant, Stela, suffers from binge eating and a morbid addiction to exercise. Bára permanently overeats and then vomits: 'I get rid not only of food but also of the feeling of aversion and the impossibility of reconciling with myself' (AHMED 2021: EP5). In this way Bára spells out one of the accompanying slogans of the whole podcast, namely that 'making peace with your own body is a life's work'. The youngest interviewee, Johanka, an extremely thin teenage girl, also shares her experience of self-harm. She punishes her body not only by starving but also by cutting it for not being thin enough. All the stories are accompanied by a strong sense of shame that prevents women from seeking help, getting a timely diagnosis, and receiving treatment. The marked discrepancy between what Grogan calls the socially represented ideal body (GROGAN 1999: 101) and reality leads to manifestations of mental bulimia, anorexia, and psychogenic overeating that led to the pathological and mentally twisted media discourse of the female body exhibited on every street corner, in every advertisement, and in the hundreds of photos viewed daily on social media (KVIATKOVSKÁ et al. 2016).

In thinking about the concept of the 'obedient body', Foucault sets out a series of disciplinary tactics by which the body can be organised, directed, controlled, and dominated. Once again, we find ourselves in a situation where the individualised body is merely a taxonomic part of vast power complexes in which the 'unique and the multiple' merge. The respondents of *The Lard* voluntarily and unreservedly implement on their bodies many of the measures that Foucault summarises as the legacy of controlling activities of exercising power: the strict timetable, the temporal elaboration of the act, the correlation of the body and the gesture, the principle of non-idleness, and the prohibition of wasting time (FOUCAULT 1995: 149–156). The aforementioned passages of *The Lard* not only provide an enumeration of the mechanisms that led women to self-destructive behaviour, but also describe the strict regimen of some women's return to acceptable eating habits, reasonably healthy exercise and the ability not to submit to the norms of media discourse.

In contrast to the large wave of female interest in sharing their stories that Ahmed encountered after a call on social media,² Houdek describes the recording experience with *The Edge* as stressful. His invited interviewees often failed to respond to his messages, they cancelled arranged recording sessions at short notice, and even tended to self-censor their accounts when the recorder was turned on (HOUDEK 2021).

² The Facebook page promoting all platforms of the *The Lard* podcast and *My Body is Mine* project has 5,100 followers (valid as of 16.10.2022).

The male protagonist of the first episode of *The Edge*, the popular presenter Čestmír Strakatý, is an example of downplaying one's own problem with a strong tendency to use clichés and phrases such as 'worse things happen to people', 'I am ashamed to say it', 'it's really stupid', 'compared to others, nothing happened to me' when talking about his difficulty with the perception of his own body and food intake (HOUDEK 2021: EP01). The level of self-reflection is considerably lower than what we heard from women in *The Lard*. Even the invited experts confirmed the insecurity of the wording, the unwillingness to publicly raise intimate issues and the feeling of inadequacy. They explain that despite the demonstrable increase in eating disorders in men, Czech society still views this diagnosis as primarily female.

In listening to the podcast, gender differences in self-reflection and self-insight are clearly noticeable. The individual men's statements in all the episodes of *The Edge* podcast are almost entirely concentrated in the present time and they often look back at past experiences using general phrases such as 'that wasn't good', 'I really couldn't handle that', 'pretty dark time', and 'you just don't deal with it'. The respondents' idiosyncratic statements often leave an aftertaste of inarticulateness, stereotypical and repetitive use of language, and reveal the pervasive nature of their problem. Much less than women in *The Lard* the interviewees are willing to talk about their childhood and failed relationships. Respondents in *The Edge* communicate, for the most part, a profound impairment in their ability to show affection to people around them, an anxiety-obsessive desire for perfection, and a significant impairment in reciprocal social interaction.

The Meat podcast approaches the matter even differently by combining and easily challenging stereotypes associated with both male and female perceptions of the body. Jonathan Zenti disproves the commonly held assumption that women perceive the shape of their bodies as the natural object of male desire. Zenti chooses this 'feminine' optic and explores the appeal of his own body and self to female counterparts. He does not complain about the lack of interest in relationships, quite the opposite. His empathic understanding of female emotions and the gentleness in expression and touch trained by his boyhood attendance at ballet classes provide ample opportunity for relationships and sex.

Zenti, using the method of close-up detail and intensive work with the perspective of the scene, offers an intimate excursion not only into his thinking about his own body but above all into the disciplinary mechanisms that freely circulate in society in prejudices, social discourses, and everyday situations. For example, there are not enough clothes in the shops for Jonathan's size; other people openly judge and criticise him because of his fatness; they warn him of social isolation, of lack of love, and of loneliness. They represent what Foucault refers to as 'the panoptic machine' whose effects of power we transfer to ourselves, since 'we ourselves are one of its cogs' (FOUCAULT 1995: 207, 217).

The protagonist, however, does not suffer from any of the stigmas described above. What troubles him is the very existence of prejudice. He is happy in his body and does not feel any limitations. It is for the sake of the other people that at the end of the

story he longs for a small space of his own where he would not be subjected to constant body shaming and references to his fatness, and where he could peacefully create his own agenda and live a life that he wishes for himself. The podcast ends with deep scepticism:

I can't do it because I'm still the object of disgusted looks, mean comments, shameless laughs, jokes about crushing chairs when I sit down or crushing girls when I have sex, odd advice about diets I should follow, sports I should sign up for, dreams I should give up on. (ZENTI 2018)

Zenti perfectly fulfils the thesis of podcasting as an ideal medium for intimate topics. Above all, he bridges distances. Despite the impossibility of a direct encounter, he offers listeners the most intimate moments of his bodily experiences and deep sorrows. In contrast to Foucault's panoptic machine, Zenti presents an active attitude of a creator and bridges the heaviness of self-reflexive confession with hyperbole and humour. Concerning the theme of liminality that the present study explores, Zenti's podcast also represents a remarkable genre hybrid between a first-person narrative documentary programme that could easily be intended for broadcast and an intimate podcast testimony that is, however, formally distinctly outside the usually much simpler forms of audio narrative. In this way, liminality can also be observed in the production scheme, in which instead of a large production team and the demanding post-production of a media house, a lone podcast creator sits at his computer and, without feedback and a multitude of other professional 'ears', produces his intimate account of his own body's perception. Although the production of *The Lard* podcast was taken over by a public service medium and the non-profit organisation Hate Free Culture was behind *The Edge* podcast, the starting point for the creators Ahmed and Houdek was very similar.

I didn't know I had a right to object

When the human voice vibrates, there is someone in flesh and bone who emits it.

Adriana Cavarero (2005: 522)

As for the issues associated with the topic of the body in podcasting, we have to think about the role of the authors-narrators and the sonic means by which auditory space typically depicts something that Foucault can depict with words and pictures in his books.

Jonathan Zenti in *The Meat* fills the role of a protagonist and narrator of the 'sense of "hyper-intimacy"', as Richard Berry (2016) describes the specificity of the podcast. Zenti chooses the narrative strategy of an observer at family festivities, a witness to parties, and one of the two participants in bedtime adventures. In closed plot segments,

he raises sub-themes of reflection on his body. Despite the multitude of voices of family, friends, stylised voices from social networks and experts that sound in the podcast, Zenti ensures narrative coherence within the autodiegetic narrative (CHATMAN 1978: 30–31). In contrast to the dynamic, often illustrative sound design, the static voice of the narrator creates a sense of linear narrative, even though the depicted sound episodes are fragmentary and closed. The quietly inquisitive timbre of Zenti's voice acts as both commentator through the additional use of voice-over and a direct participant in authentic situations. He rages, urges, remarks, shouts in a noisy room and whispers in a post-coital closeness under the covers. The intensity and intimacy of his voice are important for the perception of the podcast; according to Stacey Copeland, a particular human voice 'carries with it traces of age, sex, gender, sexuality, culture and many more facets of collective and individual identity' (COPELAND 2018: 209).

All levels of Zenit's role as a narrator work with a dichotomy in which the dominant telling is continuously combined with showing (CHATMAN 1978: 32; KUBÍČEK 2013: 68). In this way the podcast describes and interprets lived events in a subjective fashion and, at the same time, connects them with scenes, authentic snippets of reality, reportage, and sound-rich segments of a documentary podcast. In the listener's perception it fulfils the role of an intimate bridging medium: 'It is the sonically generated relationality of podcasting, in giving listeners the impression of directness and closeness, that makes it such a compelling way to bridge spatial and temporal divides' (SWIATEK 2018: 176).

One of the partial conclusions we can draw from this is that it is rare for a podcast to work in such a sophisticated way with narration and sound design. The practices described for the radio feature genre that has developed in Europe since the 1970s are much more typical. This style of work requires very laborious research, long-term collection of sound material, and sophisticated editing and sound composition. The traditional feature narrative is effective for communicability and listener imagination but for ordinary podcasters it is extremely laborious and usually unattainable in terms of audio material processing. It is symptomatic that the podcast planned as a multi-part series remains a torso, with only four episodes on *The Meat* site, currently dated 2018–2019.

In *The Lard*, Ridina Ahmed uses the podcast to bring up her lifelong theme and trauma. Being able to talk about it with dozens of interviewees, uncovering identical patterns in their childhood and adolescence, and both listening to and entering into the podcast's narrative allowed her to see the whole process as a therapeutic session, useful for anyone willing to undergo the same process while listening and perceiving. In this regard, Bill Nichols cautions against self-deception, and asks that the degree of authorial honesty, introspection, and self-inquiry not lead to a distortion or misrepresentation of the subject matter (NICHOLS 2001: 130–137). Ahmed, however, is very strict with herself as an author. She principally opts for a method of mirroring, summarising, and causal deductions from the narrative carried by her respondents. Knowledge and experience of one's own body are thus presented as an anchored, affective, and situational knowledge mediated through situations and direct actors, without the

presence of objectifying experts. The ever-present empathy underlines the powerful emotional impact of each podcast episode, enhancing its effect on the listener's imagination and engagement with the stories being told. *The Lard* fulfils the characteristic of a co-presence that is immanent to the auditory arts, just as the characteristic of 'silent privacy' is immanent to written newspaper stories (CHIGNELL 2009: 75).

Ridina enhanced the creating of a strong relationship with her listeners by giving dozens of interviews in all the media to promote her podcast and follow-up educational project. She created a crowdfunding campaign called 'My Body is Mine' which raised over 300,000 (12,000 euros) from 515 contributors. Such a strong response is not usual in the local podcast community. For some of the people who joined the fandom listening to *The Lard* was their very first experience with a podcast. The raised funds were used to create a comprehensive website that helps to educate the general public about how to respectfully communicate and think about their bodies.

The Lard started a large-scale initiative and, in our metaphor of liminality, opened a passageway to a free space for society-wide discussion. The platform offers workshops for primary and secondary schools with the motto 'My body is mine, even if I am still a child'. The Facebook profile 'My Body is Mine' is being very actively used by both the administrator and the followers and fans. Ahmed has formed a large community of people by choosing to share anonymous intimate accounts of women in a podcast series. This experience is confirmed by Dario Llinares in a completely different area of interest, but with the same intensity and passion: 'My experience of podcasting has also fostered a spirit of community, a forum for reasoned and informed debate' (LLINARES 2018: 124).

In *The Edge*, Lukáš Houdek chose a different strategy of contact with the target group and popularisation of the topic. He discusses the topic of body shaming with male celebrities and LGBTQ+ people as respondents of a social minority. While the inability to identify with the stories of famous and seemingly perfect men may pose a relative perceptual barrier, it also allows for an elementary acceptance of the topic and its first opening. In this context, Swiatek speaks of enabling 'sonic literacies' and the gradual creation of 'listening practices'. He argues that only the 'hyper-personal' sharing of information offers the precondition for empathy and the formation of a community in which 'para-social relationships become multi-social relationships' (SWIATEK 2018: 180). In the case of *The Edge* and its author and narrator Lukáš Houdek, Swiatek's observation has further connotations. Houdek is the coordinator of the government Hate Free Organisation which has been operating within the Campaign Against Racism and Hate Violence since 2014. He has repeatedly expressed in the media that without the existence of this platform it would probably not have been possible to present such a complex topic on *The Edge* at all, certainly not with such a heavy emphasis on the gay community and the generally poorly accepted otherness of body, race, and non-binary gender.

The name 'Edge', in fact, refers to the liminal nature of the chosen medium and platform, as well as to the important role of the host, the podcast author, in his self-defining role as a podcaster. It is filled by Houdek, presenting himself openly as a member of the gay community with low self-esteem because of 'some remark about a little flab', as

well as Ahmed or Zenti with their stout figures and lifelong themes of weight loss and body shaming. They all respond naturally to social demand and successfully fill a thematic void in the auditory universe of myriad topics for quick casual conversation and deep psychological probing. In doing that, however, they expose themselves, as Dario Llinares describes from his own podcasting experience:

In my own conversations with podcasters coming from different disciplines (and listening to podcast interviews) the specific move to identify oneself as a podcaster is infused with a range of purposes and motivations, but if a fundamental discourse exists it relates to a desire to forge independent, autonomous control and self-determination in shaping what might be termed the mediated self. (LLINARES 2018: 135)

Conclusion

Until recently, the discipline of power in relation to the body and its media image offered almost exclusively a one-way communication between traditional media and their users. The digitalisation of media and the development of social media in the last two decades have fundamentally changed this situation; now it is possible to establish an intense two-way communication on parallel media platforms. In this study, with the help of Sarah Grogan's theses, I have extended Foucault's traditional notion of the dispositif of power to include the dispositif most closely linked to the media discourse of body image and presentation. This is closely related to the notion of biopower and generates a number of normative strategies for the topic of corporeality that can be understood as traditional mechanisms of power.

Sarah Grogan's complex sociological-psychological approach has demonstrated a very close connection between the concept of power and the media discourse of the representation and presentation of corporeality. The desire for the 'perfect body' is communicated by men and women alike, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or social status, in the studied podcasts. Grogan also demonstrates an unquestionable link between the self-concept being permanently compared with the media's 'beauty ideal' and self-punishment manifested in eating disorders, serious self-harm, and attempted suicide. With the close proximity and, at the same time, the permanent tension between the Foucauldian notions of discipline and normality, body image in the media is treated in the same way as restrictive state administration or even military or prison regimes which exercised power over people.

As we have seen in specific examples, the podcast is an appropriate space for topics presenting corporeality. It is not constrained by scope, broadcasting schedule, or target audience. Liminality, as conceived by Dario Llinares, gives the podcaster a possibility to formulate and present themselves through their own voice. Podcasters found a safe space to structure their thinking about the body and corporeality using a combination of creative auditory experimentation and fundamental intellectual curiosity, affirming the distinct self-reflexive discourse of podcasting.

The liminal nature of the podcast is an experimental space where a new discourse of body presentation can be created with an unrestricted free creative gesture: liberal, tolerant, non-punitive, open, and free of stereotypes. The creators of this discourse are active podcasters who share their experience not only through the production of podcasts themselves, but also through broad-based social activity reaching far beyond the possibilities of a single documentary or series.

The liminal space of the podcast has not yet been affected by any regulatory mechanisms that would try to strike a balance in the spirit of Foucault's 'normality' while trying to implicitly discipline the individual creative act. At the same time, however, we have seen in the examples of *The Lard* in particular the interconnectedness of power relations and their circulation with the need to subjectify one's own body and to situate it within the current media discourses. Linked to these is the high risk of monetising podcast products and equalisation of the topic.

For the time being, the most valuable contribution is the opening up of a society-wide debate, which provokes contradictory reactions between advocates of routine media practices and those who profess the liminal nature of podcasting as a space that 'offers a profoundly valuable approach to understanding mediated subjectivity' (LLINARES 2018: 136). The responsiveness of social media to podcasts is a revolution in the traditional auditory work and the strong resonance of the topic, particularly with *The Lard*, shows the immense power that truly influential podcasters possess. Therefore, the podcast can become an initiating impulse for the creation of a larger and socially relevant platform. The 'My Body is Mine' initiative stemmed from *The Lard*, while the activities of the Hate Free platform and projects promoting a positive perception of difference are linked to *The Edge*.

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