

Class Clash: Unpacking Conflicts of Class Affiliation in the Bodily Practices of Polish Men Under 35 Years with Working-Class Origins

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Abstract: The article examines conflicts of class affiliation in the bodily practices of young Polish men of working-class origin. The empirical basis of the analysis is individual in-depth interviews with biographical elements carried out in 2022 as part of a study on the bodily practices of four generations of Polish men. The article contains the state of research on practices in the context of class affiliation. The theoretical framework is based on the concept of classist phantasm and middle-class hegemony. The study shows the critical importance of working-class backgrounds in shaping and controlling the body throughout the lifespan. The piggy bank ethos is one of the key categories emerging from the analysis, and research participants remain trapped in negotiating class identity reflected in bodily practices. In negotiating their class affiliation, men experience conflict with the values of the family of origin from their early teenage years. As they study and strive for advancement, they pay a hidden emotional cost, as they must authenticate themselves as deserving of their place in the middle class. Even if they are upgrading to the middle class (as working adults), they remain in the power of the piggy bank ethos. The study's main conclusion is that social advancement is only partly achievable. Climbing up the social ladder, the study participants still balance middle-class practices and working-class values, which become apparent in what they do about the body.

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The direct inspiration for this article was the preliminary analysis of individual in-depth interviews with biographical elements.¹ Some of the data revealed the potential of analyzing body practices through the lens of young men's working-class social background. The theoretical framework of the project was social practices theories. At the same time, the analysis presented here is based on the part of the data revealed in the study that surprised us. The research team considered the topic worth exploring. An adequate theoretical framework was searched for this part of the data. We were looking for a way that would allow us to inspect class and what individuals do about

their bodies more nuancedly—taking into account the aspirations, dilemmas, and conflicts accompanying participants of the study from childhood to adulthood. The article is divided into five parts. The first part reviews the literature on bodily practices in class-related contexts. In the second part, we propose the concept of classist phantasm (also discuss the advantages of phantasm as an analytical tool). The methodology of the project and technical aspects of the data analysis are presented in the third part. The fourth most extensive part of the article focuses on the research results. The first part of the analysis shows how working-class families instill cleanliness and presentability in boys, emphasizing stringent hygiene practices enforced mainly by maternal figures. It introduces the concept of a “piggy bank ethos,” highlighting the role of practicality and financial responsibility in the future life of boys. These practices shape attitudes toward hygiene and economic management, revealing internal conflicts that will accompany the study participants throughout their lives. In the second part of the analysis, we present

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how working-class teenagers use aspirational capital to strive for a middle-class lifestyle despite economic constraints. It highlights the influence of external reference points like peers, romantic interests, and the internet on their cultural capital and aspirations. This part of the analysis also addresses the conflicts between family practices and the desire to conform to middle-class norms. Then, we introduce the challenges faced by young working-class men attending university, focusing on their financial struggles, identity negotiation in a middle-class-dominated environment, and adaptive strategies in consumption and lifestyle choices. This part presents how study participants manage precarious jobs and urban living costs while navigating cultural and economic disparities. In the last two sections of the analysis, we look at the practices of adult study participants who have and have not experienced social advancement. Regarding men who have experienced social mobility, we show how they experience and negotiate upward social mobility in urban settings. This part highlights the influence of middle-class norms on their appearance, consumption habits, and health practices, emphasizing the role of female partners in shaping these changes. We also discuss internal conflicts and external pressures these men face as they strive to balance their saving heritage with the expectations and aspirations associated with their new social status. The last part of the analysis introduces the lifestyle and cultural practices of working-class men who have yet to experience upward mobility, focusing on their occupations, attitudes toward middle-class norms, and conflicts between practicality and aspiration. It details their dietary habits, hygiene practices, shopping behaviors, and attitudes toward health and physical activity, highlighting how economic constraints shape their choices and lifestyles. The section also explores their perspectives on the body image.

In the *Conclusions and Discussion* section, we present a focus on the most ground-breaking findings of the study and discuss possible research directions.

Literature Review

The body serves as a visible marker of class distinctions. By examining bodily practices and the meanings individuals assign to them, we can gain insight into how class relations are perpetuated. This literature review² is organized into several key categories: family and parenting practices, education and occupation, nutrition and food, and romantic relationships. The studies had little focus on Poland.

Family & Fitness: Inheriting Health through Body Reproduction

The social class of parents vehemently shapes the life trajectory of children. That is evident in how parents prioritize a child's development. A study on vacation time organization found that parents across classes want to develop their children's skills and talents. However, their actions depend on their cultural, economic, and social capital. Middle-class families can afford tailored sports camps, while working-class families opt for cheaper, nearby camps, often sharing summer childcare with relatives (Chin and Phillips 2004). Despite similar activities, this results in varied experiences, highlighting class inequalities that affect children's life trajectories and social mobility (Colagrossi, d'Hombres, and Schnepf 2019).

² In the studies presented in the literature review, social class is conceptualized through at least one (typically the intersection of a few) of the three types of capital: economic, cultural, and social. Economic capital involves financial resources such as income and wealth. Cultural capital includes knowledge and skills, with education as a key factor. Social capital is based on relationships and networks, affecting support and social mobility.

Research on children's physical activity and social class indicates salient differences between classes—upper-class parents consciously choose physical activities for their children and want a sense of agency in this regard.³ Whereas working-class parents question the idea of healthism and sports that have to be paid for are negated and treated as an unnecessary life luxury (Vincent 2001; Bodovski 2010; Organista and Lenartowicz 2019). Similar differences can be identified in the meanings attributed to specific physical activities—cycling can be seen as an expression of freedom and independence in the upper class, in the working class, it is a practical skill (e.g., enabling one to get to school) (Organista and Lenartowicz 2019) and in the middle-class, it is a sign of prestige presented through the prism of branding (Gdula and Sadura 2012).

Upper-class children engage in meticulously organized physical activities within private settings, where every session is designed with a long-term vision that encompasses not only physical fitness but also character development and discipline. Parents and professional coaches closely supervise these practices. In contrast, working-class children often enjoy spontaneous play in public spaces, with minimal parental oversight. Middle-class kids typically participate in accessible group activities, frequently involving team sports, where the focus is on camaraderie and collective effort (Organista and Lenartowicz 2019). Once again, we observe distinct meanings behind children's activities—ranging from deliberate personality-shaping endeavors to practical time management aimed at nurturing

physical development. Unsurprisingly, a child's social class often influences their physical capital, such as height, weight, fitness, or propensity for obesity. Notably, obesity is more closely tied to social class than to individual psychological factors, with children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds facing a higher risk of obesity in adulthood (Lasker and Mascie-Taylor 1989).

Having a socially acceptable body or lacking one is a salient factor concerning perspectives on health policy (De Pian 2012). In this context, the vital assets appear to be the economic, cultural, and social capital possessed by middle-class parents, which enables the implementation of healthy eating practices. Shaping and controlling adolescents' eating habits and tastes are top priorities as parents understand that future taste preferences hold significant social and cultural importance. Despite sometimes compromising on other aspects of family life, parents view managing their adolescents' diets as a crucial element of good parenting. It is vital to emphasize the evident moral foundation of such practice—the control and orientation toward the future signify being a good parent (Wills et al. 2011).

The phenomenon of social exclusion associated with normative bodily standards can be traced back to the family of origin. It involves the widespread acceptance and promotion of specific behavioral and appearance norms, leading to the accumulation of high "physical capital." Conversely, individuals whose bodies deviate from these norms experience reduced physical capital and may face social exclusion, identifying themselves as "others" due to not complying. That results in perceptions of incompleteness or deficiency, both internally and externally.

³ Education and conscious parenting (usually at a later age) affect the engagement of middle-class parents in the development and control of the sports interests of their offspring (Organista and Lenartowicz 2019).

Body & Bucks: Unveiling the Economic and Cultural Gymnastics

Education significantly influences body-related practices. The combination of higher education and maintenance of socially acceptable body weight leads individuals to embrace healthy lifestyle recommendations—not only for personal enjoyment but also due to the recognized importance of health in both family and professional spheres. Conversely, individuals with lower levels of education who are overweight or obese often view these same healthy lifestyle practices as misaligned with their preferences. They see them as unnecessary, stressful, and even detrimental to their health as they conflict with their social and family norms (Smith and Holm 2010).

Simultaneously, pursuing a university education offers members of the lower classes a pathway for social mobility (Bufton 2003). Social mobility signifies a lasting upward shift in social status, marked by improved material circumstances and the acquisition of new cultural capital. This transformative journey not only alters an individual's social standing but also redefines their relationships with both their social class and family (Ferenc 2012). For instance, students from working-class backgrounds often struggle to balance their academic identity with their class identity. As they immerse themselves in middle-class cultural norms to succeed academically, they may experience a sense of being caught between two worlds, leading to feelings of alienation (Bufton 2003; Merrill 2011).

Occupation is pivotal in shaping body practices, extending beyond mere economic capital. Employment dictates the quantity and quality of leisure time, daily routines, and access to health-enhanc-

ing resources within the workplace—moreover, occupational prestige consistently barometers social class across industrialized societies (Kohn, Scotch, and Glick 1979). Dorota Olko underscores the emergence of a predominant narrative regarding body care, synonymous with middle-class values. This narrative, bolstered by the cultural hegemony of the middle class, permeates working-class communities, resulting in the marginalization of irregular physical activities that do not align with the middle-class ethos of rational recreation and disciplined self-care. However, the working class places significant emphasis on movement associated with labor—whether physical or in caregiving roles—a practice that could be interpreted as a subtle resistance to the dominant discourse, fostering its narrative surrounding physical activity and healthcare (Olko 2018).

Additionally, time management exhibits a distinct class bias, with higher-ranking individuals declaring less leisure time as we ascend the class hierarchy. Being busy is positively valorized and associated with higher morality and discipline (e.g., submitting to bodily regimes) (Tarkowska 2016). Even passive leisure activities are not immune to class influence, as those with more significant cultural and economic capital spend less time watching television, rejecting entertainment programs in favor of educational or artistic ones (Cebula 2015).

The current state of research indicates that the upper classes, and to some extent the middle classes, engage in practices that transcend mere practicality, embodying loftier ideals such as intellectual and self-development or discipline. Moreover, the widespread stigmatization of bodily traits associated with the working class—deemed excessive, repulsive, or immoral—reinforces middle-class

norms and upholds the prevailing symbolic order (Olko 2018). For instance, the strong association of specific practices with the working class, like smoking, has led to a growing societal aversion to such behaviors (Graham 2012). However, it is imperative to approach conclusions regarding working-class practices with caution, given the conspicuous lack of comprehensive research focusing solely on the working class rather than as a mere complement to narratives centered around the upper or middle classes. This omission perpetuates dualistic notions of high/low, mind/body, reason/emotion (Rampton 2003).

Plate & Privilege: Navigating Social Class through Food

The topic of eating practices merits special attention due to its extensive literature. A study focusing on British teenage girls revealed that those from higher social strata exhibited a heightened inclination toward restrictive eating, body dissatisfaction, and distorted body image (Ogden and Thomas 1999). This trend finds an extension in research examining the prevalence of anorexia among British women. Here, parallels can be drawn between the “anorexic ethos” and the values espoused by the upper and middle classes. Notably, both emphasize stringent body control, contrasting sharply with the more resigned acceptance of the body prevalent among working-class individuals (Darmon 2009).

The interplay of cultural and economic capital distinctly shapes eating habits across social classes. Middle-class diets often showcase diversity, featuring a range of costly, low-calorie options like fresh produce and multicultural dishes. Here, aesthetics and food presentation hold as much significance as the nutritional value itself. Conversely, the working

class tends to prioritize simplicity and convenience, opting for quick meals to satiate hunger and fuel daily activities, sometimes overlooking long-term health benefits. Traditional cuisine holds sway, serving as a symbol of cultural belonging and fostering a sense of familiarity (Wills et al. 2011). It is essential to recognize that these tendencies are generalized and can vary depending on individual family dynamics and local socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, class divisions and dietary practices are nuanced; distinctions between classes are not always stark. In Poland, for instance, the upper class exhibits seemingly contradictory patterns—omnivorism, embracing food variety, and univorism, restricting oneself to select sophisticated culinary choices, hinting at the presence of multidimensional stratification (Domański 2016).

The practices of joint feasting, whether through hosting guests, being invited, or dining out with others, correlate closely with individuals’ economic and cultural capitals, being more prevalent among those occupying higher positions in the social hierarchy (Cebula 2020). For the middle class, organizing social dinners serves as a means of showcasing cultural proficiency and bolstering social connections (Mellor, Blake, and Crane 2010). Notably, those with significant cultural, economic, and social capital levels often challenge established norms and roles, including traditional gender roles associated with hosting duties (Skowrońska 2020). Furthermore, social capital plays a pivotal role in shaping the diversity of social circles, leading to varied cultural preferences and consumption patterns—individuals from higher social strata tend to boast more diverse networks, resulting in a more comprehensive array of contacts and an enriched cultural repertoire (Cebula 2011). This distinction is reflected notably in eating out, where expansive social networks, cou-

pled with high cultural and economic capital, often lead to dining experiences being intertwined with acquaintance and friendship gatherings rather than solely familial occasions. Such outings frequently serve as avenues for work-related, social, or cultural engagements (Cebula 2017).

Heart & Hierarchy: The Social Classes Tango of Love

Romantic relationships operate within a remarkably homogeneous marriage market, where individuals' choices of partners are heavily influenced by their societal position, as gauged by various forms of capital (Domański and Przybysz 2007). Moreover, "habitus compatibility" emerges as a crucial factor in shaping intimate connections, with cultural capital serving as a marker of class disparities, compounded by moral values utilized in evaluating potential partners (Johnson and Lawler 2005). The body, often regarded as the most overt reflection of class tastes (Bourdieu 1986), assumes a significant role in romantic entanglements. For instance, the upper class places a premium on meticulously caring for the body, often subjecting it to rigorous aesthetic treatments. In contrast, the middle class, embodying a blend of romanticism and pragmatism, strives toward a universal ideal of male beauty aligned with prevailing aesthetic norms (Kamecka 2019).

Beyond the Body: Unpacking Class Disparities

The literature review underscores a crucial finding—social class, along with its accompanying habitus, remains pivotal in molding and perpetuating distinct lifestyles across various domains, notably in realms of body-related practices. Values, dietary preferences, and body perceptions are not merely individual choices but are deeply entrenched in and

perpetuated by one's social class affiliation (Olko 2018). Furthermore, these practices hold profound moral and cultural significance as markers differentiating approaches to the body across social classes.

However, at the same time, significant gaps exist in the literature concerning the relationship between body practices and social class, which, in the researchers' view, renders the characterization of the area under analysis incomplete.

Firstly, most research focuses on describing differences between social classes and attributes these differences to varying levels of capital members of different classes possess. More in-depth analysis is needed regarding the differences in the sources of practice. Additionally, body-related practices are often characterized (usually unintentionally) as distinct from the class structure rather than as interconnected elements that strongly influence the reproduction of the class structure. That is evident in the inadequate characterization and analysis of tension and conflict between body-related practices (and consequently tensions between classes), which frequently emerge in the literature review. Therefore, there is a need to analyze body-related practices through the lens of social class to highlight how the body-related practices of specific social classes impact existing class inequalities.

The Concept of the Classist Phantasm

Research on social class and body practices often needs a comprehensive analysis of the intersecting practices of different classes and the accompanying conflicts. Introducing an analytical tool in the form of a classist phantasm can help focus research on these relationships while leaving room for empirical research. Phantasms are creative imaginings

based on actual events that serve to sustain world order (Pietkiewicz 1997). They help individuals and groups simplify complex social reality by displacing uncomfortable elements and justifying attitudes and behaviors. The mechanism for creating phantasms is not fully understood (Polak and Polak 2011), but it has salient implications for social research and the analysis of body and social class practices.

Malgorzata Jacyno, referring to Bourdieu's theory, notes that classism stems from a deep-seated, often unconscious belief in the incomplete and defective humanity of others.⁴ The origins of such understanding are phantasmagorical ideas and emotions, such as aversion and revulsion toward those perceived as lower in the hierarchy. The individual perceives others through feelings and reflexes ingrained in the body.⁵ Thus, we can speak of an embodied social hierarchy and the bodily basis of class conflicts. The body and its accompanying practices in food, hygiene, and physical activity form the foundation over which other characteristics of individuals, invisible to the eye, such as character traits, predispositions, and impairments, are overwritten. Jacyno (2017:5 [trans. AW, AJ, and ŁLJ]) concludes that "inequality in access to power and goods manifests itself in cultural practices and everyday choices that are a bone in the throat of civi-

lized people." Thus, the classist phantasm influences the reproduction of social inequality.

Jacyno (2017) attributes a crucial role to the middle class in attempting to change class affiliation. The position of the middle class between the working class and the upper class makes the middle class the referent for social advancement or degradation for the other classes. In addition, today, there is a middle-class hegemony dogging the organization of society through a shared culture that gives certain social groups an advantage over others. The concept of hegemony helps us to understand how culture and values influence relations between social classes and the dynamics of class conflict. It gives us a tool for analyzing processes of domination and conflict, showing that relations between classes are complex and changeable. Hegemony also creates an atmosphere in which certain groups feel superior. It should be noted that the privilege of the upper class is realized despite the hegemony of the middle class (Gdula and Sadura 2012).

Social advancement requires specific rituals (receiving an adequate education, gaining financial capital, and adjusting appearance, lifestyle, and relationships to meet class requirements). These rituals alter this essence, substantially bringing about a qualitative change in an individual. However, their very existence only allows for remembering one's class background. It remains the basis for questioning a new identity by the individual and their environment. Within this framework, the process of democratization in modern societies, influenced by the anxieties and aspirations of the middle class stemming from its hegemonic position, is characterized by the necessity of undergoing reclassification. This process only underscores their differences and distinctiveness (Jacyno 2017).

⁴ Jacyno refers to Bourdieu (2005:125) describing a monkey that, although trained to imitate human behavior, was still influenced by internal, uncontrolled reactions, indicating the primacy of nature over its body. As a counterpoint, humans, as culture creators, can control their reflexes and behavior, which is a manifestation of rightful humanity. An individual who demonstrates the ability to control their body is seen as a more "complete" person in society. That causes individuals who display less control over their physical reflexes, such as burping, clucking, or laughing aloud, to be placed lower in the social hierarchy.

⁵ An example is the automatic nose wrinkling at someone with an unpleasant body odor and shabby clothes on public transportation. This reaction is reinforced by a moral judgment, categorizing the person as incompetent or lazy, justifying the lack of empathy toward their situation.

As an analytical tool, the classist phantasm unifies the concept of habitus by adding a psychological and imaginative element, which enables a better understanding that the behavior of individuals is not only the result of objective material conditions but also of the perceptions and aspirations associated with social class. In addition, it broadens the interpretation of body practices, considering the relationship of the mental component to practices, and allows for a class analysis through the lens of perceptions to understand the background of the practices of individuals from different classes. The classist phantasm is also a tool for identifying mechanisms of maintaining social inequality by analyzing the perceptions and prejudices associated with social class and enabling us to understand the process of reproducing inequality.

Methodology of the Study

The analysis employed qualitative data generated by the project titled *Cultural Practices Related to the Body in Everyday Life of Four Generations of Polish Men. A Sociological Analysis* as part of a grant from the National Science Center in the Sonata 14 competition. The project's main aim was to identify and analyze everyday cultural practices related to the body among men representing generations: the so-called *Baby Boomers* (born between 1946 and 1969), generation X (born between 1970 and 1979), generation Y (born between 1980 and 1995), and generation Z (born after 1995, of legal age at the time of the study).⁶ Various types of

⁶ The literature on the subject identifies weaknesses in the practice-oriented approach (Nicolini 2017; Smagacz-Poziemska, Bukowski, and Kurnicki 2018; Kopczyńska 2021). Research on practices emphasizes their performative nature. That does not imply a break with other perspectives (cultural, psychological) because they somehow impose themselves on the research situation. Participants in the study often attempted to re-establish a perspective based on "ego." They sought to push away the perspective of "doing" in favor of sharing opinions and emotions.

qualitative research techniques were applied in the project, including individual in-depth interviews with representatives of four generations, with biographical interview elements on everyday body practices. The qualitative interview dispositions were divided into three main parts: (1) the biographical story, (2) the questions based on the biographical part, and (3) the in-depth interview. In the biographical part, research participants were asked to tell the story of their lives in the context of the body and the practices that relate to it. The second part asked them to complete the biographical story. In the IDI part, the following topics were discussed: practices related to hygiene, physical activity, health, clothing, nutrition, and the requirements for the male body. The biographical part of the interviews was crucial in the context of analyses related to the impact of the family of origin, the piggy bank ethos, or the motivations for current bodily practices. There are methodological risks associated with retrospectives. However, in this article, we analyze the memories of relatively young people. In addition, by the interview dispositions, biographical threads were developed and verified in subsequent parts of the interview (e.g., through questions about details of practices, specific activities, or artifacts). Despite the efforts made, it cannot be assumed that we have gained complete knowledge of the study participants' personalities, experiences, and practices. This fact should be recognized as a limitation of the method adopted to implement the study.

A total of 60 interviews were conducted in the project (14 with men of the *Baby Boomers* generation, 13 from Generation X, 16 from Generation Y, and 17 from

Kopczyńska (2021:36 [trans. AW, AJ, ŁLJ]) states, "This perspective involves shifts in problematization and conceptualization toward doing and saying as that from which social life is woven." It should be considered challenging, both from the point of view of the researcher and the participants in the study, but also opening up to new depictions of everyday human life.

Generation Z). Eight research participants declared rural origin, with three currently living in rural areas and the rest in urban areas. There was a predominance of working subjects with secondary education (15) and higher education (11). The majority of interviewees were heterosexual, while two men declared themselves as homosexual and three as bisexual. The health status of the interviewees ranged from people declaring themselves healthy to those with disabilities and those with experience of chronic illness, both physical and mental.

The present analyses are based on data from these interviews with men up to the age of 35. The sample was selected non-randomly—partly purposive (men meeting the selection criteria were interviewed) and partly based on self-reports of men meeting the selection criteria. The sample demonstrates variation regarding place of origin and residence, education level, occupational status, and psychosexual orientation (Gill, Henwood, and McLean 2005). Interviews were conducted nationwide between January and June 2022. Before the interview, preferences concerning the gender of the interviewer were established. With the consent of the participants, the interviews were recorded and transcribed by an external contractor. The researchers verified the quality of the transcription and identified passages for anonymization. If men so wished, they were provided with a transcription and asked to indicate passages requiring anonymization from their perspective, correct incorrectly transcribed information, and possibly make brief additions to their statements (Flick 2011; Surmiak 2018).

Twenty-six men under the age of 35 took part in the entire project.⁷ During the initial analysis stage, we

⁷ The literature review provided indicators of class position and the practices of specific classes within a capitalist society. Consequently, it is justified to limit the analysis to individuals up to

excluded 5 participants from the study group as they were identified as being of middle-class origin. The remaining 21 men were classified as having working-class backgrounds, which is the focus of our study.

We determined class affiliation based on economic and cultural factors, such as occupation, income sources, and education, gathered from participants. Additionally, we considered their social environment, body-related practices, and overall lifestyle.⁸

Various factors influenced the participants' lifestyles, including consumption patterns, leisure activities, and sports engagement. Preferences in cuisine, eating habits, openness to culinary experiences, and fashion trends also played a role. Health approaches, medical visits, body care, and hygiene practices were also considered.

Given the length of the interviews and the amount of data collected relating to both the past and current situation of the participants, economic-cultural indicators, along with indicators related to the social environment and lifestyle, allowed for the allocation of participants within specific classes, both in terms of their class origin and current class position.

The transcriptions were coded and compiled using MAXQDA software. The coding process was done using a pre-prepared code list in an open system. The first coding cycle was based on specific research objectives, and a literature review was conducted.

35 years old—generations Y and Z are the first to fully function within this capitalist system, which in Poland dates back to 1989.

⁸ Indicators of social context are characterized by a high degree of ambiguity. The characteristics of the participants' bodily practices that interest us are mainly manifested in consumption and spending patterns. Lifestyle privileges determine status and the roles available to individuals (Piotrowska 2000).

The codes were, after that, grouped, considering the interviewees' social class affiliation. Based on Polish research on bodily practices (Gdula and Sadura 2012; Cebula 2020; Skowrońska 2020), differences can be identified between the practices of working-class individuals and those of the middle-class (which are also reflected in a review of foreign literature). Within the working class, aspects of independence, irregularity of practice, orientation to the present, and lack of emphasis on health were highlighted. The middle class, on the other hand, focused on categories relating to control, regularity, planning, and emphasis on health. Based on open coding, contextualizing codes were extracted concerning aspirations, family influence, external points of reference, and areas of class conflict.

A pair of codes were also introduced on the values of practicality (simplicity) and sophistication. Consecutive coding cycles enabled the identification of relevant phenomena, the generation of new codes, and the deletion or combination of codes describing the same phenomena. The authors systematically revisited the coded documents, recoding them as the code tree developed. In the final stages of the coding process, the coded contextualizing fragments were described with a code relating to the values. The implementation of this approach significantly facilitated the subsequent categorization of information during analysis, enabling more precise and comprehensive inferences about the collected data.

Results of the Study

Cleanliness & Conflict: Family of Origin

Family serves as a source of economic and cultural capital. For men from the working class, both forms of capital in their childhood are at a low level com-

pared to later stages of their lives. Simultaneously, the conditions associated with childhood in the working class, with its specific living conditions, produce their original habitus, which will undergo more or less subtle changes throughout their life trajectory. However, at this stage, the conflict is already evident.

Childhood is characterized by stringent control over the body and body-related practices with particular emphasis on cleanliness, typically enforced by mothers or other maternal figures in the participants' lives. That stems from a phantasmatic conception of individuals lower in the social hierarchy as dirty and unkempt, unable to adequately utilize their resources to maintain cleanliness and grooming. It is important to note that such an appearance is simultaneously associated with character traits such as immorality and laziness. Moreover, due to the lack of capital necessary to adopt a middle-class lifestyle, the hegemony of the middle class is recognized through a strong negation of middle-class values (e.g., disdain for impractical clothing that expresses individuality).

Concerning working-class interviewees, the controlling influence of the family manifests itself primarily in memories of inculcating principles of hygiene, nutrition, and food preparation (not necessarily objectively healthy, but considered appropriate by the family), and rules regarding external appearance (both clothing and hairstyle or form of beard) and body care. Control over the practices of working-class men was or still is exercised by almost all family members. They are mainly women (with a predominantly maternal role) and siblings (of both sexes). In this account, the father rarely appears as the one who taught or controlled his son's bodily practices.

A unique place is occupied by shaving, among the hygiene practices indicated by working-class men. Research participants often recall when they learned to do this and emphasize the importance of doing it accurately to look good. That is one of the few practices in which the father intervenes.

The first person to show me anything at all, in terms of hygiene, was my older brother. He then, I don't know, at eighteen, seventeen years old, showed me how to shave. Y28(1) - [W-W]⁹

Research participants were particularly scrutinized when it came to body cleanliness. As children, for example, the fear of appearing dirty was inculcated in them, mainly when it involved contact with other people—representatives of significant others (family, school). Improper hygiene habits, in the family's view, were attempted to be corrected. However, some of the interviewees, now adult men, questioned the model brought up from home.

I was brought up by my parents with instructions that you have to wash every day, and lately, I feel like I've also been thinking more and more about whether it's really necessary to wash fully every day or at least whether you have to fully soap yourself. Y35(2) - [W-M]

Working-class interviewees have brought from home a strong belief in the importance of how others perceive one. The need to be clean but also neat and tidy (Polish *schludny*) was inculcated in them. It is worth clarifying the word's meaning as it has a strong class connotation. In Polish, the word usu-

⁹ The marks at the end of the citations should read as follows: Y, Z—generation affiliation, age; information in square brackets—the first letter denotes class background, the second letter denotes current class affiliation, where W denotes working class, M denotes middle class, UM denotes upper-middle class, and S denotes students.

ally appears in descriptions of people, objects, or spaces that are relatively poor but give the impression of being well-kept. Being neat and tidy is a trait that makes a person look clean and modest (*Schludność* [Neatness]).

When we went out to my grandparents for some kind of family celebration, I always remember my parents ironing our shirts, getting dressed, checking we looked good, and then letting us go as if together. Y35(2) - [W-M]

The clean and tidy appearance is perceived in contrast to such elements of working class everyday life as so-called dirty work, manual labor, and farm work. Washing off the smell and dirt and putting on clean and fine clothes is a kind of ritual of physical separation from the difficult daily work and is supposed to help be like others (implicitly, those who do not work physically). Being neat and tidy, as inculcated at home, is subject to confrontation in ever-new interactions. One of the experiences cited by interviewees from a working-class background is comparing the practices imposed by the family with those of children from other classes. That usually happens after entry into the education system. A man from a rural area is surprised that his parents are overly concerned with his clean and tidy appearance, more than the parents of middle-class children:

[...] my clothes, it was also as if you could see that they're tidier, they're neater, they've got their clothes ironed, for example, and it's like that practically every day, where I was surprised that why would anyone do that, and they were also cleaner by the way. Z21(2) - [W-S]

Working-class men believe that many body practices should be carried out at home (e.g., shaving,

haircutting). Knowing how to care for yourself in the comfort of your home is essential because the cost is lower than an external service. According to some interviewees, the customary simplicity of men's haircuts also favors homemade haircuts. Some men have continued the habit of self-cutting in adulthood, while others have begun to recognize the drawbacks (mainly aesthetic) of this solution:

For most of my life, I was actually shaved at home. When I was a kid, my dad would just shave my head with a hair clipper to zero, well, I mean to a few millimeters. Z21(1) - [W-W]

Piggy Bank Ethos

The source of conflict is the threat of being perceived as unclean or dirty in the eyes of significant others in the participant's family. In this case, these significant others are teachers (school), extended family (social gatherings), and the community in the place of residence (shopping, church¹⁰). There is tension between the low economic capital available to the family and the need to appear presentable in the eyes of others. As a result, strategies to cope with this conflict develop, such as cultivating and maintaining a piggy bank ethos. It is worth noting that while the participants may not have been aware of all the nuances of the conflict their family experienced during childhood, it was imposed on them through the control of their bodies and body-related practices, as well as the teaching of the piggy bank ethos.

The piggy bank ethos manifests itself as practicality, simplicity, and a focus on the material aspects associated with everyday functioning, the present. It is

an integral part of a way of thinking and behaving, passed down from generation to generation in this class as a tool for adaptation to economic conditions. Through the saving ethos, adults teach children independence, enabling them to make adequate decisions on their own, in line with available material resources. The practice is committed to a stable future. Parents try to teach self-reliance and financial responsibility by emphasizing the need to make rational choices in line with material conditions.

The piggy bank ethos covers five areas in the interviewees' childhood experience—clothing, food, hygiene, shopping, and health. The piggy bank ethos in clothing manifests itself in the practice of choosing cheaper things, wearing siblings' clothes, and shopping at the marketplace or from second-hand shops. Clothing decisions are an impulse to create an attitude of simplicity, steering toward having only necessary and valuable items of clothing, and emphasizing moderation in consumption.

Saving in clothing is economically essential, and values related to practicality, durability, and a prudent approach to clothing choices are shaped. At the same time, it is a manifestation of a practical approach, where the value of choice is more critical than mere possession, and the purchasing decision is accompanied by reflection, checking prices in different shops, and looking for special offers.

In my opinion, the financial issue was important because I was always sort of older than my brother, and my parents also communicated to me that there was no money for this, no money for that, and that you have to save money on everything. So, if some new clothes had to be bought, I didn't even look around for some branded clothes because I knew there was no money for that. Y35(2) - [W-M]

¹⁰ The Catholic Church plays a significant role in Poland's religious and social life, with over 90% of Poles consistently declaring affiliation with the Catholic faith since the 1990s (CBOS 2020).

Saving in the context of food is evident in cooking and eating at home. The mother prepares meals quickly and efficiently (usually) from scratch, using commonly available, cheap ingredients. It is characteristic to choose tried-and-tested, classic dishes that are filling. That shapes a strong preference in the research participants for home-cooked meals (pork chop with potatoes, polish pancakes [*naleśniki*], dumplings [*pierogi*], tomato soup). In contrast, the lack of experimentation in the kitchen limits new flavors, driven by a practical view of food—it is meant to be quick, not necessarily sophisticated, but to satisfy hunger. A reduction in the practice of eating out or ordering takeaway food can also be noted.

I've never had light food at home either because I was brought up practically, living all my life in ANONYMIZATION [a big city]; so, the cuisine was pretty much old Polish, so to speak, and still with Ukrainian influences, just heavy things to eat, tasty but heavy. Y34(1) - [W-M]

Saving in the area of hygiene primarily consists of the practice of minimizing water consumption and focusing on reducing expenditure on beauty care products. Several people bathing in the same water, taking short showers, and forgoing certain hygiene products are all methods to reduce expenditure.

If, for example, I stayed the entire day at home, my dad would often say that I fought no bullshit fight, so I didn't need a bath. Z21(1) - [W-W]

Baths were often taken interchangeably; that is, the bathtub was filled with water, and subsequent household members just used the same water. Z21(1) - [W-W]

Another aspect of the piggy bank ethos is postponing the introduction of new hygiene practices, such

as shaving or using deodorant. Saving money also means, as mentioned above, minimizing the use of hairdressing or beauty care services.

The piggy bank ethos in shopping is expressed through a significant reduction in the purchase of beauty care products and clothing while emphasizing the need to take care of the things you already own and use them sparingly (including repairing or mending them, if possible). This focus on the rational management of things is an integral part of shaping an approach of thrift to consumption. New things are introduced in moderation, and the purchasing process is usually planned in advance or even postponed.

I requested a deodorant. Well, my parents said, okay, you'll get deodorant when you get your first hair on your balls. So that's kind of the story of when you start using deodorant. Well, it was similar to the shaving razor. You will get one when you have a beard. Well, I've got a beard. No, it's not a beard yet. Well, that's how it was. Y35(2) - [W-M]

In this context, purchasing decisions, particularly those related to clothes and beauty care products, are often imposed top-down by parents without considering the child's opinion. It indicates concern for sound financial management and a focus on the utility of possessions, reflecting the main dimensions of the working-class piggy bank ethos.

The approach to healthcare is also firmly rooted in the piggy bank ethos. Interviewees see taking care of health in responding to current health problems, indicating a strong focus on the present. In the context of the realities of life for working-class members, there is neither time nor resources for preventive doctor visits—dental care is mainly neglected.

Teeth are often perceived as a part of the body that does not always cause pain, leading to the practice of delaying costly dental visits or parents questioning their child's feeling of pain.

I was rarely taken to the dentist; then, I had a few visits sometime toward the end of middle school, I think. And since then, I have not practically signed up yet myself. Z21(1) - [W-W]

We can distinguish two dimensions of the piggy bank ethos. **Passive saving** is characterized by practices imposed top-down. The initiative does not come from the child; saving results from an automatic process, independent of the child's will, part of the everyday routine. Examples include wearing second-hand clothes after a sibling, from the market or second-hand clothing retailers, eating traditional, simple dishes, and getting a homemade haircut.

In contrast, **practical financial education** manifests through a reactive approach in response to a child's specific actions, requests, or questions about, for example, buying new things. It is a proactive strategy for parents to make informed decisions, including reducing water consumption, deferring purchases, making children aware of the cost of living, and promoting independent cooking and saving. When exposed to practical financial education, a child begins to inculcate a strong awareness that products and services have a price, which becomes an essential aspect of their worldview. Instead of focusing only on the attractiveness or usefulness of an object or service, a child begins to analyze how much a thing might cost and whether the price is appropriate to the value it provides.

It is the mothers who often play a crucial role in cultivating passive saving practices, usually being the

ones who manage the household and finances. Their approach to saving is often geared toward using resources economically and practically. Fathers, often the so-called sole breadwinners, spend time away from home. As work limits their time spent with the family, fathers are involved in the resource management process temporally, for example, during dinner talks on weekends or holidays.

Well, just a little bit, and then just my dad telling me no, well, you're stupid after all—you're waiting for it, and what, you're going to have to shave? Do you know what the expense is? Do you know what the responsibility is? You're going to have to shave every day. And then it turns out I don't have to shave every day, the expense isn't that great either, but my dad was kind of right. Z21(2) - [W-S]

It is important to emphasize that these approaches are not exclusively the domain of one gender or the other but may reflect cultural roles or accepted patterns of behavior within a particular family.

Puberty & Problems: Negotiating Class Identity During Adolescence

However, economic capital remains unchanged; as teenagers rely on family resources for body-related practices, cultural capital changes. Significant others, as identified by the family, are replaced by significant others for the teenager. We have termed them "external points of reference" to highlight their role in the participants' lives so far. It is important to note that external points of reference are associated with adolescence, a period characterized by literal (physical) and metaphorical (mental) distancing from the family. Simultaneously, class identity is negotiated, as the original identity does not fully align with their aspirations. A crucial strategy to note is

that teenagers from working-class backgrounds acquire aspirational capital. Aspirational capital refers to the ability to uphold aspirations and dreams for the future, even when confronted with actual or perceived obstacles (Yosso 2005; Łuczaj 2022). It embodies a coping strategy in response to deficiencies in conventional and desired forms of capital, thereby influencing a shift in perspective. Aspirational capital serves as a reservoir of resilience, enabling individuals to pursue their goals despite challenges, thus fostering adaptability and transformative outlooks.

The negotiation of class identity, a process that begins with teenagers becoming aware of societal differences and social hierarchies, leads them to identify their place within the social hierarchy and recognize its inadequacy in their aspirations. As a result, teenagers make aspirational efforts to align themselves with the middle-class hegemony despite being constrained by insufficient economic capital associated with the middle class.

Instead of the family, external points of reference control the body and body-related practices associated with the expansion of teenagers' cultural capital. Simultaneously, there is a shift in perspective. Influenced by external points of reference, teenagers inadvertently and unconsciously adopt a vision of the working class marked by phantasmatic imagery. In this vision, the working class is perceived as individuals constrained by material resources, concerned with cleanliness and orderliness, simplistic, and possessing limited knowledge about presenting the body. Concurrently, they are seen as simple, tasteless, unimaginative, naive, and uninteresting. As a result, teenagers from the working class no longer want to distance themselves from the "dirty" but rather from those who feel the need to distance

themselves from the "dirty." They do not want to legitimize the working-class habitus through their practices. Thus, there is a negotiation of working-class identity, further fuelled by the hegemony of the middle class embedded in the external points of reference.

External reference points are broadly defined spaces and groups outside the local family environment that influence the formation of individuals' aspirations by presenting middle-class practices. Their influence begins between middle and high school when a boy moves from the countryside to the city or a larger town to continue his education. He then has a more socially diverse peer group around him regarding social class.

When adolescents are placed in a more **diverse social environment**, they compare practices and, consequently, shape their aspirations. These aspirations focus on the desire to advance to a more "humane," "middle-class" level by aligning with the characteristics and activities of the middle class and abandoning those associated with the working class.

I had this feeling of inferiority when it came to fashion. I looked at the B class and the fashion novelties with a certain admiration, simultaneously feeling that I was one of the inferior ones...all over the sweatshirt or all over the T-shirt smiling faces, with different mouth settings there, let's call it. And there was just a couple of months when New Yorker [clothing retailer] was releasing a lot of that, and many people in our school had those T-shirts. I also bought myself a set like that at that point, a sweatshirt and a T-shirt. And that's when I got a very negative reaction because there were just a couple of, I don't know how to describe it, such bullies, not bullies as such, well, very forward lads from that former class B somehow

teased me so much about the fact that I was copying their outfit, and so on. Z25(1) - [W-M]

We can distinguish between two key points of reference during the participants' adolescence—the peer group in the new school environment and the people the men want to please (usually female peers). Additionally, for Generation Z interviewees, the internet is a critical external point of reference that occurs even before the transition from middle to high school.

Internet and social media are widespread, easily accessible sources that shape aspirations and new practices. They enable interactive exploration of desirable lifestyles, fuelling the desire for a better future in the individual. Aspirational trends presented online often clash with the values and practices imbibed by the family, leading to tension and discomfort in the teenager's relationship with the family.

My father, for example, I can safely say that he would still be happiest living in the days of the good old beautiful communism, where everyone had a job. So, it just wasn't for him to present anything at all, like how you do not eat meat—well, if you didn't have anything to chew, you'd eat anything. Well, and I have heard such comments now and then. Z26(2) - [W-W]

Peer groups and potential romantic relationships significantly influence young men's practices, regardless of age. Older boys tend to identify with the **peer group** as a significant reference point. That is due to the change of school and the metaphorical and sometimes physical distancing from parents. During this period, the patterns brought from home become contested. A teenager begins to compare himself to others—in a more diverse environment,

and there is an awareness of his position in the social hierarchy. During this period, research participants become aware that their practices do not fit in with the peer group they want to be part of, which compounds their class aspirations. The need to conform to the group is initiated by peers who trigger the need for change by, for example, making fun of one's appearance and personally noticing areas for improvement, such as how one dresses. Self-reflection is reinforced by the control imposed by the peer group concerning, among other things, dress, body image, and how they spend their time.

Another external reference point is **people whom teenagers want to please**. As the study involves mainly heterosexual men, their experience will be discussed extensively.

Girls whose interest and approval are a target for young men influence the latter's behavior and choices. Compliments and positive reactions from girls indicate what is attractive and what is not to teenage boys. They rarely question a girl's preferences or opinions and try to realize them unreflectively.

Once I went, oh, because I've got a sister ten years older, well, my sister's more like that, and I was with my sister in general, and I bought my first shoes there, I remember, somewhere, original Puma shoes. My sister persuaded my parents to buy me original shoes, and I had white Puma shoes... But I generally paid attention, for example, I mean, at school, I generally paid attention to how I dressed, well even, well, there were funny situations where girls would say that always, oh, you're nicely dressed. Y33(1) - [W-W]

During adolescence, the source of conflict lies in the need to distance oneself from practices inherited from the family home by adopting new practices

characteristic of the middle class. This need is conflict-generating due to the teenager's dependence on the family for economic capital and the differing cultural capital between the family and the teenager. The family does not understand why the teenager needs money to look unkempt, which contradicts the phantasmatic image of how a young person should present themselves. Meanwhile, teenagers want to conform to their external reference points but need more economic capital. Consequently, they develop strategies to help them cope with the conflict. Adolescents analyze patterns of middle-class practices represented by external points of reference, which inspires teenagers to change their behaviors and aids in acquiring aspirational capital (they do not have money, but they know what they could do with it). Adolescents challenge parental authority regarding practices as their aspirations grow, expressing a desire for independence and building an identity aligned with these aspirations. Concurrently, they actively communicate their desires to introduce middle-class practices, negotiating changes in family practices. As class aspirations develop, the perception of parental practices shifts from neutral to negative. Adolescents mentally distance themselves from their families, rejecting imposed values in favor of those associated with the middle class. This mental separation allows them to maintain autonomy and independence, aiding in coping with conflicts between aspirations and familial practices. These strategies vary in intensity depending on the individual characteristics of the participants. The desire for middle-class affiliation leads adolescents to perceive family practices as obstacles to their aspirations.

Working-class teenagers are subject to scrutiny from multiple sources. External reference points (internet, peer group, or girls) are related to control

(of the body, appearance, food, and physical activity). The desired response to control by the environment requires financial resources to implement the required practices and to be perceived through the prism of desirable characteristics. The family piggy bank ethos involves control, albeit different—geared toward practicality, simplicity, and not looking ahead. These two types of control—coming from external reference points and the family—overlap.

Although conflict areas are closely linked to adolescence, it is important to note the difference between change in practices during this period and change motivated by aspirations related to the desire to fit into a particular reference group. The analysis shows that hygiene and cosmetics are closely and universally linked to adolescence. In contrast, areas related to food, clothing, and exercise/body control are significant conflict areas.

Studying & Stratification: Budgeting for Bachelor's Degrees

An intriguing subgroup comprises young men who were university students while participating in the study. Despite educational aspirations and growing cultural capital, their situation is often more difficult than at earlier stages of life. This financial strain often arises from the necessity of funding education in large urban centers, leading to careful management of familial support or resorting to temporary, precarious jobs. Consequently, the negotiation of class identity remains an ongoing aspect of these participants' lives, continually shaping their experiences within evolving contexts.

The university serves as another external reference point for the participants. Simultaneously, navigating the higher education system requires young

working-class men to submit to the middle-class's hegemony—either conform to middle-class norms or risk exclusion altogether. They become acutely aware, to varying degrees, of their deficiencies in cultural, physical, and economic capital, solidifying the need for distance from the working class acquired during adolescence (experiencing the impostor syndrome). The university controls the bodies of young men, for instance, through mandatory physical education classes. Here, two levels of control must be distinguished. The first is mental—the imposition of the value of body discipline, indicating its significance in a student's life. The second is physical—gathering young men in changing rooms and fostering comparisons of their bodies' appearances before moving to the field to compare physical fitness. Consequently, negotiating class identity predominantly occurs outside the family sphere at this stage. That implies that the newfound independence from family-imposed practices and the conflicts associated with them clashes with challenging material conditions—insufficient economic capital to engage in practices the participants perceive as desirable (you may have the freedom to pursue your desires, but often lack the financial means to do so).

I very rarely went for one particular steak and one old-fashioned...I used to go there once a month, and it was just this reward that I survived another month in my job. Z24(3) - [W-W]

As a result, students develop strategies involving compromises related to consuming desired products—utilizing thrift stores for clothing or meticulously seeking out the best promotions at retail stores. An exciting strategy involves adopting a rhetoric of snobbery regarding food products such as alcohol or meat—participants claim to purchase such products rarely. However, when they do, they

opt for the highest possible quality despite significant costs. They perceive this as a much better (perhaps more moral?) practice than regularly buying the cheapest beer or meat products. Another strategy involves rationalizing the absence of specific practices that participants perceive as desirable (especially regarding physical activity), resulting in a need to justify oneself.

The romantic partner plays a significant role in the hygiene practices of working-class male students, somewhat replacing the role of the mother in terms of control. Typically, this control pertains to body hair grooming and specific cosmetic products. It is worth noting that young men do not question their partner's control—they submit to her preferences and are guided by them in making choices related to practices.

On the chest, this shaving appeared once in my life only and for the first time in college because somewhere, well, it bothered my girlfriend. Z23(3) - [W-S]

The irregular weekly schedule powerfully shapes eating practices. Classes at university occur at various times, and the long breaks between them can make it challenging to plan regular meals. Additionally, students often combine studying with work, further complicating their schedule—the lack of a steady routine results in irregular meals.

As a result, some participants rely on ready-made meals such as fast food, milk bars [*bar mleczny*], university cafeterias, or store-bought ready meals to reheat. It is important to note a strong preference for practical solutions—these meals are readily available, inexpensive, and filling. Some, driven by the need to save money, have learned to cook for themselves during their studies.

During the university years, there is a significant increase in the social aspect of eating, especially in the context of consuming alcohol during various social gatherings. Students point out the development of a kind of ritual where, after consuming alcohol until late at night, they participate in shared outings for meals, most often in the form of kebabs,¹¹ in the company of friends.

Young men often view good health as having a fit, muscular body. Because of this, they try to stay physically active outside of mandatory physical education classes. Those who do not exercise regularly often feel bad about it, noting that they only worked out during required university classes. Interviewees talk about the signals from their environment regarding their need to undertake physical activity or change their eating habits (to lose weight). Feelings of shame are imposed on them because of the belief that they cannot adequately manage their bodies or dietary practices. Moreover, shaming men is considered unproblematic by the men themselves. In a group of men who are acquaintances, the rule is to conform to the rules imposed by the dominant individual.

Analysis reveals strong participants' willingness to change their class affiliation by adopting practices characteristic of the middle class. Despite these aspirations, they need sufficient financial resources to be forced to use adaptive strategies, such as buying second-hand clothes or unique offer products. Further, they save things and care for them (to make them last longer) as part of their conscious manage-

¹¹ In Poland, kebab is a widely popular fast food due to its affordability, large portion sizes, and easy accessibility. Despite the prevalence of kebab stands, which constitute approximately one-third of all restaurants in Poland, kebab is often associated with lower social strata, in contrast to other fast food options like pizza (Nowak 2020).

ment. The striving to identify with the middle class is also done through certain tricks (since I cannot afford expensive clothes, but I will at least drink some whiskey). This group of men experiences a strong sense of being between classes.

Adulthood & Ambition: Climbing the Ladder or Stuck at Base

The analysis allowed for the distinction of two types of experiences—men who, according to our established criteria (economic, cultural, and specific practices), experienced class advancement and men who did not experience such advancement.

Pride and the Hidden Costs

Men from the working class who have experienced upward social mobility emigrated from rural areas or small towns to larger urban centers, where they obtained higher or secondary education and entered the workforce. Their occupations often entail significant responsibility and involve supervising others. They are usually managers or entrepreneurs. That means that the people they surround themselves with at work become important external reference points due to the amount of time spent together and the power dynamics requiring the demonstration of professionalism through appearance.

Simultaneously, aside from co-workers, their partners exert control over body-related practices. Female partners (the majority of men identified themselves as heterosexual and described their romantic relationships with women¹²) often wield considerable influence over their partners, steering them

¹² There is a need to recognize the theme of non-heteronormative relationships and their role in shaping body practices in a class context.

toward behaviors associated with middle-class norms: healthier eating habits, more refined fashion choices, the use of higher-quality beauty products or fragrances, and better hair care, among others. However, conflicts occur among research participants and their partners in this area.

[My wife] knows that I don't know how to dress myself, so it's just up to her. Y34(1) - [W-M]

Entering adulthood also involves internalizing the middle-class disdain toward individuals deemed to lack taste (i.e., refinement, moderation, subtlety, discipline). Simultaneously, most middle-class practices are adopted due to the relevant cultural and economic capital of men from the working class. In this case, we can speak of an assimilated middle class. In this context, the internet serves as an essential reference point and source of standards to which adult participants feel obliged to conform. Men emphasize the role of male internet authorities with many followers on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok.

I generally follow a profile, Gentleman's Time [Czas Gentlemanów] it's called, on YouTube, and that's where the presenter is, whom I identify with a lot, and I get such inspiration from him in terms of clothing. (Z26(3) - [W-UM])

These online creators present themselves as experts in clothing, physical activity, or nutrition. They represent class patterns that the participants aspire to and highlight bodily practices associated with the upper social class, advocating for their adoption and (equally importantly) warning against undesirable practices. Thus, they can be called aspirational experts. Additionally, internet authorities play a reverse parental (fatherly) role, not restrict-

ing their followers but encouraging them to fulfill class aspirations through specific bodily practices. It aligns with middle-class practices, characterized by rigorous adherence to norms and the imitation of authorities to mitigate uncertainties regarding the appropriate balance between various practices (Gdula and Sadura 2012).

The central conflict identified within this group of working-class men is the attempt to reconcile a piggy bank ethos with the current lifestyle characteristic of the middle class. The area of clothing purchases highlights a deep-rooted piggy bank ethos among all surveyed men—they often emphasized the irrationality and absurdity of buying a T-shirt for 100 PLN (which comfortably fits within their financial means) when a T-shirt could fulfill the same aesthetic and practical function for 30 PLN. Consequently, they buy clothes from easily accessible and inexpensive fast fashion stores (such as H&M and Zara). Additionally, shopping is restricted by planning, cautious decision-making, and the practical (one-time!) purchase of multiple of a particular wardrobe item that works well. The choice of such a purchasing strategy by men who have achieved social advancement can be explained by the fact that during adolescence, clothes were one of the most potent sources of conflict between the piggy bank ethos and the desire to implement middle-class practices. The principles learned at home about saving clothes resonate more strongly with participants than others, and such an approach starkly contrasts their current practices in other areas.

There are still ingrained aspects from [my] childhood, which hurts me personally, sometimes I think that maybe I won't buy that shirt for 200 PLN...once, you know, you respected money because there was

no money for food, you know, it's better to have food than to buy a jacket. Z26(3) - [W-UM]

Although some men declare saving on food, the characteristics of their practices indicate consumption of products perceived as healthier and simultaneously more expensive than those eaten at their family homes—whole grain bread, whole wheat pasta, various “super-foods,” “good” coffee, or generally termed “organic” foods. Some identify themselves as being on a diet due to engaging in specific physical activity. However, they all share similar knowledge regarding the importance of regular meals, avoiding sugar, and reading food labels. They practiced dietary catering, cooking at home, and eating out.

Female partners and romantic relationships (including potential ones) are significant external reference points for men regarding hygiene. Even though female partners often exercise oppressive control over the participants, the men do not necessarily see it as problematic. Moreover, they appreciate that their partners are competent in appearance and beauty rules and what is considered attractive in the opinion of women. Leaving aside their partners' guidelines, the participants perceive meticulous care for the hairstyle as necessary. They frequently indicate that hair washing, grooming, and styling are part of their daily routines. That may stem from the need to present a suitable image in a work-related environment that requires a professional (well-groomed) appearance.

Partners also affect the clothing choices of study participants. However, this is less of an influence than in the case of hygiene and beauty practices. Their choices in shopping and clothing areas are mainly dictated by the need to mitigate the conflict between the piggy bank ethos and expectations regarding

the current professional and material situation. The professional sphere plays a significant role here because the participants emphasized that they opt for a “smart casual” clothing style to present themselves at work and demonstrate professionalism adequately. However, if they buy expensive clothes for this purpose, they feel bad about it. Therefore, they limit themselves to inexpensive chain stores or online shopping, where finding promotions is easy.

Regarding health, men express a very high level of trust in expert culture. That is manifested in regular consultations with doctors, physiotherapists, and trainers to monitor their health. According to participants, proactive action for a healthy body is essential. They self-educate themselves through online content on health practices published by individuals they perceive as experts. All men who experienced social advancement indicated that they began physical exercises, which they continue to this day. As a result, the current silhouette of the participants is muscular.

Status Quo

The research participants who did not experience upward mobility took up studies, but after graduation or dropping out of university, they returned to their hometown. Consequently, they took up jobs in smaller or medium-sized urban areas. Their occupations correspond to the typology of working-class jobs, as they typically perform manual labor, low-skilled service work, or odd jobs. Therefore, the workplace has a different impact on their practices compared to men who have experienced an advancement to the middle class. Instead of co-workers or a corporate dress code, it is primarily the family that controls the appearance of these men (some of whom live with their parents). This group of study participants, like

those who experienced advancement, share a phantasmatic aversion toward unkempt individuals. They also share with middle-class men a disdain for overweight bodies. They perceive a fat body as a symbol of a lack of discipline and inadequate control of needs while directing contempt toward themselves—some of them are obese.

If someone is fat and instead of saying, dude, get over yourself, you're fat and get over yourself, right? No, it's society's fault, I don't take care of myself, it's their fault...this degree of shifting normality, masculinity has gone in a strange direction. Y28(1) - [W-W]

The ambiguous attitude of this group of participants toward middle-class hegemony is surprising. On the one hand, they firmly reject middle-class body-controlling practices such as gym training, pointing to their absurdity. On the other hand, they are convinced of the effectiveness of other practices, such as cold showers (which strengthen the body), buying selected brands of clothes (but from second-hand stores), and using perfumes (however, they emphasize the rarity of this practice). The practices listed above are the economically accessible version of middle-class practices. They are mainly related to the body's placement in the public sphere rather than in a work context.

Working-class men who have not experienced social mobility struggle with an intense conflict. This conflict results from the awareness of socially desirable practices and acceptable body appearance associated with the middle class. The study participants know that to pursue middle-class practices, they would have to have more money.

Other men...can more easily take care of their appearance, hair, beard, and so on, they have more funds to

buy better cosmetics for themselves, visit that barber I mentioned...Nevertheless, a big part of taking care of yourself is money. Y29(1) - [W-W]

Class-based values significantly influence conflict areas in men's lives. A notable tension exists between practicality and the aspiration for sophistication. Men often favor straightforward solutions yet aspire to higher standards. Another source of conflict stems from the disparity between a lack of discipline and the desire for organization. While men acknowledge the importance of maintaining their health through exercise, they frequently encounter challenges in practical implementation. Furthermore, a persistent conflict exists between the impulse to save money and the desire for material goods or experiences. These conflicts underscore the continuous negotiation of men's class identities, with tensions between working-class and middle-class values.

A common phenomenon among the studied group of working-class men is the irregularity of eating practices. They emphasize the need to become regular in eating and preparing food but justify themselves by saying that their working conditions are challenging. That entails frequent skipping of meals, especially breakfast, due to irregular working hours and long periods without eating interspersed with episodes of binge eating. Research participants eat fast foods and ready-made meals; they also buy and consume chips, beer, and "junk food," calling this practice stress eating. Challenges associated with irregular work schedules, financial constraints, and stress contribute to unhealthy dietary habits in this group of men despite occasional efforts to adopt healthier eating practices.

Within this group of men, a pragmatic and minimalist approach to hygiene practices is observed. They

mainly use cosmetics specifically marketed “for men,” which is motivated by the availability and price of these products. Study participants sometimes buy cosmetics themselves and sometimes receive them as gifts. Working-class men have a simple approach to hygiene—they have been using the same proven products for years and do not like changes. Practical considerations also dictate hairstyle and hair care. That approach does not allow for beauty experiments or excessive reflection on one’s appearance. Practical aspects outweigh the aesthetic or pleasant aspects of the hygiene practices of this group of men. Not much has changed in the analyzed area since the childhood days of the study participants. The descriptions of the shopping practices of working-class men are dominated by the theme of promotions, low prices, and a typically pragmatic attitude. Promotions are perceived mainly as a way to save money and maximize the value of purchased items. The participants lack spontaneity when buying more expensive products, like perfume or shoes. They find it uncomfortable to make decisions about spending more significant amounts. Purchasing expensive goods is precisely planned and preceded by weeks of research (reading reviews, analyzing forums, comparing products in physical and online shops, and reading expert opinions).

Looking, reading. All the time, practically already a lady in Douglas, it’s already a good morning there. I’m already a regular there, these strips I mark for myself...you’ll go to the Douglas site, or Notino in general, that’s where, you know, people’s opinions, plus there are still some sites there, FrAGRANTICA, I think I remember quite well, and so I look for opinions. Y33 - [W-W]

Spontaneous buying tends to occur when men come across a “good deal” in a product category that is not perceived as expensive, such as T-shirts, socks, or

food products with a long shelf life. Working-class participants use newsletters, websites, and apps to aggregate special offers when looking for desirable shopping cheaper goods. They feel pride that they have hunted down the most attractive offer.

A lack of regularity and reliance on therapies outside the field of evidence-based medicine characterizes the health-related practices of working-class men. Participants from this group declare a lack of trust in doctors and therapy. They admit they are ready to choose suffering and so-called natural treatment methods instead of visiting a doctor, even for serious diseases.

Young representatives of the working class ignore preventive health activities. Their practices in this area are rare and irregular. They state that they have a low level of motivation for workouts due to fatigue from work and housework, and walking is an adequate alternative to regular sports. It is worth noting that men from this group are aware of significant (in their opinion) deficiencies in their physical and health condition, such as excessive body weight or low fitness level.

Conclusions and Discussion

Practices discussed in the article relating to childhood, adolescence, time of being a university student, and the current reality of the research participants reveal the relationship between the piggy bank ethos and aspirations in different life stages. The analysis indicates that practices related to conflicts in the lives of individuals change over time or sometimes accompany men throughout their lives.

Family upbringing and socioeconomic contexts heavily influence body practices among work-

ing-class men. Mothers are pivotal in enforcing stringent cleanliness standards, emphasizing presentability and social acceptance through personal appearance. These practices are shaped by economic constraints, leading to pragmatic approaches such as home haircuts and minimal expenditure on grooming products. A notable conflict arises between these familial norms and broader societal expectations in educational and social settings. The conflict highlights tensions as working-class study participants navigate between piggy bank ethos and standards external to their immediate environment.

External reference points, such as peer groups and media representations, heavily influence adolescent men's bodily practices. These influences shape aspirations and perceptions of attractiveness, contributing to conflicts with familial expectations and traditional values. Young men employ various coping strategies to reconcile conflicting influences, aiming to align with peer group norms while negotiating familial expectations. That process of identity formation through bodily practices underscores the dynamic interplay between personal aspirations and external pressures during adolescence.

Working-class university students often rely on familial support and precarious jobs to finance their education, impacting their ability to manage and express cultural and economic capital effectively. To cope with their limited finances, they adopt consumption strategies such as shopping at thrift stores, seeking promotions, and occasionally splurging on high-quality items. The university environment enforces middle-class norms, pressuring working-class students to conform or face exclusion. That pressure heightens study participants' awareness of their cultural and economic capital deficiencies. It often leads to feelings of impostor syndrome, making

it difficult for them to reconcile their working-class identity with university expectations. Romantic partners significantly influence university students' personal hygiene practices, indicating a shift from family to partner in control and decision-making in personal care routines. Irregular university schedules affect students' eating habits, making them rely on convenient, inexpensive meals. Socializing, often involving alcohol, plays a crucial role in their social lives, influencing their eating habits and interactions. There is also significant societal pressure to maintain a fit body image, which can lead to feelings of shame if they fail to meet these expectations. Financial constraints further limit their ability to entirely adopt middle-class consumption patterns related to diet and fitness. Overall, working-class male students navigate a complex interplay of aspirations, societal expectations, and economic realities.

Men experiencing social advancement often transition from rural areas or small towns to urban centers, pursuing higher education and entering managerial or entrepreneurial professions. That shift necessitates adopting middle-class norms and practices. Female partners significantly influence their behaviors toward these norms, encouraging healthier eating habits, refined fashion choices, and better grooming practices. These men internalize middle-class values, such as disdain for lack of taste and a preference for refinement and moderation. They often rely on online sources, including social media influencers and experts, who present aspirational middle-class lifestyles. Despite adopting these practices, they retain a piggy bank ethos, characterized by frugality and careful spending habits. They prefer inexpensive clothing from fast fashion retailers and practical shopping strategies to balance financial prudence with professional appear-

ance expectations. Health and physical fitness are strongly emphasized, with regular physical activity, consultations with health experts, and self-education through online content. Pursuing a healthy lifestyle is both a personal goal and a reflection of middle-class norms related to physical appearance and well-being. Professional identity is crucial, influencing their clothing choices (opting for “smart casual” styles) and grooming routines (meticulous care for hairstyle and appearance). They strive to present a professional image while adhering to financial constraints. Upward social mobility for working-class men involves significant adjustments in lifestyle, consumption patterns, and personal habits. While they adopt middle-class norms in various aspects of life, they often experience tensions between financial prudence and the expectations of their new social and professional environments.

Study participants who did not experience social advancement returned to their places of residence after graduation or never left their family home. They take jobs in smaller urban areas, typically in manual labor, low-skilled services, or odd jobs. That contrasts with those men who experienced upward mobility. Family significantly shapes the lives of that group of participants, influencing appearance and lifestyle choices. These men have a complex attitude toward body image, showing aversion to unkempt appearances while adopting a practical approach to their hygiene and beauty standards. This group of men is skeptical of modern medicine and expert systems in general. Having bad eating habits, the study participants justify themselves with work and household duties. Fast food and ready-made meals are typical diets of this group of participants. They categorize this practice as stress eating. They carefully plan purchases of more expensive items, highlighting a cautious approach to spending and

a preference for practicality over luxury. Men with no experience of social mobility have a nuanced relationship with middle-class values and practices. While they reject certain body-controlling practices associated with the middle class (like gym training), they adopt economically accessible versions of other practices, such as using designer clothes from second-hand stores or using expensive perfumes sparingly. Overall, the lifestyle of working-class men who have not experienced upward social mobility is shaped by economic constraints, family influences, and a pragmatic approach to health and appearance. This group of study participants oscillates between economic frustration, disdain for certain middle-class practices, and acceptance of their situation.

As per the concept of the classist phantasm, class advancement, widely discussed in the social sciences, is often only partially attainable. If individuals aspire to belong to a social class from which they do not originate, they often encounter non-formal difficulties. The men whose practices and experiences are described in this article unintentionally experience the consequences of so-called middle-class hegemony and constantly balance between classes. The incorporation of middle-class practices (to which membership remains a distant dream for many in so-called Western society) may be an attempt to achieve the life stability with which the middle class is associated.

As the study results discussed in this article have demonstrated, working-class men remain in a kind of limbo, trapped, as it were, in a constant process of negotiating class identity, even if they can be formally assigned to the middle class. That condition can be illustrated using the concept of essences, a set of characteristics defining a social class's identity.

Social advancement (although formally confirmed) still requires the interviewees' efforts, which does not allow them to forget their origins in the working class. The purchase of luxury goods typical of the middle class refers study participants to values (the piggy bank ethos) and practices their family accepts, often triggering an avalanche of emotions and reflections on their origins.

The classist phantasm captures the not-fully realized aspirations driving the desire to advance toward being "more human." That approach opens up social research to a broader context concerning the intimate aspects of bodily practices, as well as hidden meanings, extending beyond a simple characterization of the practices of a particular social class.

The findings of this study lead us to questions about the meaning of the idea of social advancement, its social consequences, and its effects on individuals (those who succeeded and those who did not). Work-

ing-class men, regardless of whether they experience upward social mobility, constantly navigate and negotiate their class identity throughout their lives. They balance between adopting middle-class practices and retaining their working-class values, often influenced by economic constraints, family upbringing, and societal expectations. That ongoing negotiation underscores the complexities and tensions associated with class advancement and the pursuit of middle-class stability.

The article may contribute to continuing this topic in other research projects, such as longitudinal studies on class identity negotiation to investigate how persistent or changing the piggy bank ethos is and its influence on personal and professional life decisions in the long run; research on the impact of the university environment on conflicts related to class affiliation and the desire for advancement; more detailed studies of the class dimension of selected bodily practices (clothing or eating) using the concept of class phantasm.

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