


Emilia Kramkowska*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6420-7014>

SENIOR CITIZENS' CLOTHING IN A "YOUTHING" POLISH SOCIETY. THE PERSPECTIVE OF ELDERLY WOMEN AND MEN

Abstract. The way the modern-day senior citizens dress may be determined by their functioning in a "youthing" society, together with the legacy of the Polish People's Republic and the dress codes prevailing at that time. This article provides an analysis of the abovementioned issue in a gender context, as the described *age-ordering of clothes* in this text concerns women and men differently. The analysis was based on a diagnostic survey, conducted among people over sixty years old, who gave their opinions on their own and their peers' dress sense.

The responses given suggest that the trends characteristic for a "youthing" society contribute to rejuvenating the way Polish senior citizens dress. According to them, the elderly dress fashionably, tastefully and colorfully – which was stated more often by the women than the men. The survey results also confirm that the dress codes relevant to PPR times are deeply rooted in the seniors' minds. This was reflected more often in men's opinions than in women's.

The preliminary results presented in this article indicate that the way elderly people in Poland dress is beginning to be reshaped. The results require greater depth, and this could be facilitated through the use of qualitative techniques that might complement the collected material.

Keywords: clothing, seniors, senior citizens, the age-ordering of clothes, Polish People's Republic, "youthing" society.

1. Introduction

Analysing the history of clothing, Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat stated that the question "What induced the need of a primitive man to cover their body?" will most probably remain unanswered. Was it the result of a harsh climate and a desire to stay warm? Or maybe they felt the need to cover their arms and genitals? One thing is certain. "Somebody came up with a substitute material, ensuring the same function as fur, that we were deprived of by nature". The author also claims:

* PhD, Department of the Sociology of Knowledge and Education, Institute of Sociology, University of Białystok, Plac NZS 1, 15-420 Białystok, e-mail: emilka.kramkowska@wp.pl

And then, there was a moment in the history of the world, when comfort and grandeur of outfit had to comply with emerging social conventions, which later turned into “absurd principles”. Henceforth, societies were grounded on the principle of inequality, which was beneficial for the more powerful ones, who were able to demonstrate their wealth (Toussaint-Samat 2011: 11).

The symbolic meaning of clothing and the abovementioned social conventions have never disappeared. What is more,

for centuries clothing has served to emphasize social position, and has been an element of symbolic isolation from those whose social position was inferior. Not to mention the unlucky souls at the very bottom of a social ladder. Sometimes, subtle differences were about the colour, cut and make of clothing. Even its texture was symbolic (Szarota 2008: 175).

According to Malcolm Barnard (1996), clothes have always been ideological, due to the fact that they constitute a process in which social groups establish, maintain and reconstruct their position of power, dominance and submission of relations, making inequality seem natural, appropriate and rightful. This socially determined ordering of clothes can be discerned in relation to social classes, as well as age and sex (Twigg 2007).

Fashion and mode of dress is most commonly analysed in relation to women. They are more likely to purchase clothes and spend more money on shopping, however this trend is changing. Contemporary men also pay attention to their appearance. It seems that:

pursuing physical beauty has always been a source of constructive identity for women, and the basis for distinct biographic experience for them – in contrast to men (...). A woman’s appearance is always a basic, starting determinant of identification. It is an expression of the immutable expectations imposed on a female body by current standards and social norms (Gromkowska-Melosik 2013: 63).

Regardless of a woman’s age, she has to be beautiful in the way specified by those standards, somewhat in the name of an ideal embodiment of an “ageless woman”. Various social practices support this, and, as reported by Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik, citing the studies of Susan Bordo (2003), fashion and medicine play a crucial role in the social manipulation of a female body, “constituting an essential strategy in confirming the asymmetrical relationship between women and men, always to the disadvantage of the former” (Gromkowska-Melosik 2012: 18). This view is supported by Sheila Jeffreis (2005), according to whom fashion has always been perceived as imposing oppressive forms of gender identity, or the embodiment of practices which aim to objectify and constrain a woman, or even to lock her up in a defensive and inauthentic form of presentation. Analysing this issue with regard to the Victorian Era, Gromkowska-Melosik (2012: 21) asserts:

women outfits at that time accentuated their social position: lack of activity (encumbered body movements), submission and fragility (emphasized by a tiny waist, sloping shoulders

and a soft physique). A woman was expected to be an ornament to a household, as well as to demonstrate the wealth of a husband or a father.

The appearance of a contemporary woman is an excellent example of her submission to a man. Is it the past? Not necessarily. Karol Więch (2015: 230–231) claims:

a female body was a mirror for artists, a mirror which reflected a religious doctrine, an aesthetic canon or generalization concerning the gender stereotype. The Gothic style idealised the vertical, impersonal, sanctified depiction of a female body. In Baroque art, which was supposed to captivate the imagination and provoke feelings, a woman herself seduces the viewer with her eroticism and becomes entirely "fleshy", gravitating downwards, hence to what is natural and physical. Symbolic violence, as Bourdieu notices, is a form of power, which concerns the body directly. The depiction of the female body, created by men over the course of centuries and today, provides relevant examples confirming the sociologist's thesis.

I am therefore of the view that analysing the issue of clothing in the context of gender is legitimate. The cultural concept of gender allows us to analyse femininity and masculinity in relation to certain social roles, personality traits or appearance. Patriarchal definitions of femininity and masculinity imply that a man's social position (of dominating status) is not defined by his looks, but by his intellect and professional achievements. On the other hand, a woman's social position (of dominated status) depends, to a great extent, on her appearance. Simone de Beauvoir (2003), after analysing the situation of women, concluded that in a patriarchal culture there is no space for a woman's wisdom and intellect. This patriarchal pitfall seems to be most cruel to elderly women. "An old, wise woman does not fill anybody with admiration, but rather with anxiety. The moment she tries to escape her age and the invisibility attributed to old age, she becomes ridiculous" (Grajewska 2008: 268). Therefore, in this patriarchal order, wisdom and life experience are men's privilege, whereas a woman should focus on her appearance and physical attractiveness. However, a fear of old age may lead to the infantilisation of their behaviour and views. Does this also concern their dress sense? I will look into the issue of clothing with regard to an individual's gender, as well as age.

In the international scholarship, we can encounter the term *the age-ordering of clothes*, which can be understood as matching one's clothing to one's age, or, in other words, a dress code characteristic for people of certain age. It is contingent on the stage of development, or the culture of a given country, part of the world or religion. A British sociologist, Julia Twigg, who has been analyzing – for many years – the issue of clothing and fashion in relation to elderly people and the fact that societies are ageing, explains that the age-ordering of clothes determining the way seniors dress is slowly changing. To her mind, senior citizens were always associated with a more covered style, longer and shapeless pieces of clothing, higher necklines, darker colours, which made them somewhat invisible in the social area, and certainly inconspicuous (Twigg 2007; 2013; Gibson 2000; Greer 1991).

At this moment in time, although a lot is changing in this area, this issue has not yet been thoroughly analysed from the perspectives of sociology or gerontology. Clothes and fashion often interweave with physical attractiveness and sexuality, and few attribute/attributed these features to the elderly and their bodies. Elderly people are/ were more often considered as unattractive and unsexy and, what is more, not interested in fashion. However, the fact that the senior population is growing resulted in them being more visible in the social area and the factors determining their choice of certain garments have become the subject of scientific research for sociologists (Twigg 2013; Slevin 2010; Szczepański et al. 2008). This is of particular interest in relation to trends characteristic for modern societies, which Anthony Giddens calls “youthing societies”. On the one hand, demographers raise the alarm and warn us against the consequences of European societies undergoing dramatic ageing. On the other hand, this spreading juvenilization of our culture commands us to discipline old age, to subordinate it to emergent norms, where successful ageing is viewed as ageing that does not indicate senility. Old age must be rejuvenated. And according to the definition, “a ‘youthing’ society is a society where the life-habits of older people merge with those of the younger generations” (Giddens 2009: 170). Old people are becoming younger in many respects, and this seems to be most noticeable in terms of their appearance, including how they dress. What about the age-ordering of clothes?

In this article I will look into the dress sense of contemporary senior citizens – women and men. Based on research conducted among people aged sixty and above, I will be looking for an answer to the following questions: What do modern seniors think about clothes? Does living in the present-day, I mean, “youthing” society influence their views in this regard? To what extent do their responses reflect social rules regarding the age-ordering of clothes relevant to women and men, typical for the years of their youth, which were the times of the Polish People’s Republic (PPR)?

2. Female and male fashion in the Polish People’s Republic

The question of clothes cannot be analysed without referring to fashion, after all, it significantly determines what women and men wear. I would like to illustrate this issue in the context of the times of the PPR, which cannot be overlooked. Its impact on numerous areas of Polish people’s lives and on their attitude towards various social matters is still noticeable today.

The majority of today’s Polish seniors were in their prime during the times of the PPR. According to the statistics, at the end of 2018 the population of Poland totalled 38.4 million people, including over 9.5 million people over sixty (nearly 25%). In the subpopulation of elderly citizens, the most numerous group (nearly 1/3) constitute people between sixty and sixty-four years old (GUS 2019: 4), that

is, people born during the post-war baby boom of 1946–1964. Since 2006, these people have been gradually reaching retirement age, which contributes to the ageing of Polish society. Nearly 18% of Polish seniors are people who are at least eighty years old, that is, they were born in the inter-war period or during WW II. Irrespective of which particular subpopulation we are discussing, we can state with complete confidence that they lived a significant part of their lives during the specific and troublesome reality of the PPR times.

The end of the war in May 1945 marked a fresh start for Europe. From Szczecin to Trieste, the Iron Curtain divided the continent into two uneven parts, which for the following years determined economic and political life, as well as the customs (including the fashion trends) of the citizens inhabiting particular countries (Williams, Sołtysiak 2016: 11). In the western part of post-war Europe, a new lifestyle was introduced by the victorious American army, whereas the politics of the Polish authorities sought to enforce the idea of fighting against everything that was American – America became a synonym of a forbidden lifestyle. Consequently, the styles presented at fashion shows in France, London or New York were presented by the Polish propaganda as a manifestation of a moral decay and corruption. Communism declared war against fashion, as it reflected values of the “external world” and the longing of Polish citizens (Szarota 2008: 16). The leitmotif of clothing in the PPR times was egalitarianism and modesty.

Right after the war, the way people dressed was dictated by poverty. Men's fashion was dominated by a military style, and in the early 1950s the rebellious beatnik style emerged. On the other hand, there were Polish women, who were forced to wear berets and headscarves instead of hats, low necklines were unacceptable (until the Khrushchev Thaw) and workers wore controversial trousers. After analysing the PPR fashion, Dorota Williams and Grzegorz Sołtysiak found that, despite the rough conditions “Polish women did not lose what they had been renowned for before the war, and this continued under communist rule: good taste, elegance and the ability to create trendy apparel out of what was at hand” (2016: 19).

The 1960s ushered in the beginning of a sexual and aesthetic revolution. When the contraceptive pill became available for women in the USA, this put them on the road to emancipation. Trousers were considered unfeminine and, thanks to a fashion designer Mary Quant, the miniskirt started its reign (Szarota 2008: 64). Kalina Jędrusik, who by the way was created to be a sex bomb by her husband¹, was the Polish counterpart of Marilyn Monroe – the most celebrated sex bomb of the late fifties and early sixties. Polish society of the PPR was not ready to accept the image of a woman presented by Jędrusik. She was accused of

¹ As indicated before, in the context of a woman's submission to a man's imagination or to patriarchal conceits, the example of Jędrusik is very interesting. The artist's husband was a screenwriter, fascinated with Hollywood. One could say that Jędrusik, who was styled by him, was a carbon copy of men's fantasies and expectations in terms of sexuality.

“vulgar sexuality”, and wives complained that she was corrupting their husbands. “The socialistic reality had not prepared them for this kind of sensual temptation” (Szarota 2008: 64). Eroticism was a taboo in the public sphere.

Men’s fashion of the sixties was dominated by the style (and the music) of The Beatles. Long hair, flared trousers, turtlenecks and jackets. A man of style could be recognized from his wearing certain types of shoes – trainers, or a pair of jeans – which were officially unavailable on the Polish market (Williams, Sołtysiak 2016: 162–163). In the late 1960s, flower power took over the world. The hippie style enlivened Polish streets, making them more colourful, energizing them with a promise of freedom and liberty. It also “provoked” an orientation towards greater individualism, not only in fashion, but in the daily life of Polish people.

“The beginning of Edward Gierek’s era, after the years of suffocation and so called, ‘little stabilization’ seemed to mark the beginnings of the PPR entering the big world of consumerism” (Williams, Sołtysiak 2016: 203). The 1970s are referred to as colorful. Denim, freedom of dress, flannel shirts and long hair were all the rage at the time. Women’s liberation was under way. It was also the time when a beard and moustache were the fashion – the “trademark” of Lech Wałęsa.

The twilight of the PPR times were the joyless 1980s. The streets were grey, or even dark, once again. Women’s figures disappeared, as they were dressed in baggy, shapeless clothes. Leggings were fashionable among women, and track-suits among men. A trend for manifesting opposition to the authorities, by wearing elegant and smart clothes, ties, ironed suits, coats and hats, prevailed. The “common people” preferred jumpers, flannel checked shirts, classic trousers and windcheaters (Szarota 2008: 142–143). This was the situation until the end of the PPR times, i.e. 1989.

In the 1990s, the economic transformation was introduced, and that in turn enabled the gradual domination of the western lifestyle, forbidden for so many years in Poland. It was precisely in consumer culture, which was finally allowed to become a reality in our society after the transformation of ’89, that clothing became a way of expressing oneself and one’s identity (Twigg 2007: 297). However, do senior citizens view clothing as playing such a role? Felicjan Byłok claims that nowadays elderly consumers have become an attractive target group for producers.

The development of social security for old age (pension schemes, pension funds and the like), and their children being independent, resulted in the fact that elderly people have more and more money to spend on consumer goods. Previously, there was a common stereotype of elderly people being lonely and poor. Nowadays, this stereotype is fading, presenting a new image of an elderly person as an active consumer, interested in life (Byłok 2013: 124).

Do the behaviour and opinions of senior citizens confirm this, in the context of the goods and services related to appearance (including clothing) they purchase? To what extent does their experience from the communist times, paired with the prevailing ideology of those times regarding clothing, influence modern seniors?

3. Research methodology

The research presented here was conducted in June 2019, among people aged sixty and above. I applied a quantitative strategy, the method of diagnostic survey and the technique chosen was a distributed survey entitled "Our clothes", which comprised fifteen questions.

The participants of a project named *The Academy of the Third Age*, which is being conducted between March 2019 and December 2020 at the University of Białystok, were asked to fill in the abovementioned survey. The project's main idea is to allow senior citizens, especially those who never had such a chance before, to participate in educational activities. The seniors involved in the project attend workshops, lectures and concerts, increasing their knowledge, improving their skills in order to prevent them from being excluded from various spheres of life (www.atw.uwb.edu.pl). During the workshops I conducted, the participants were asked to take part in the research. I view this research as constituting preliminary studies and an introduction to research employing qualitative techniques.

I collected one hundred and thirty-four surveys in total. This was a sample of convenience. Among the respondents, female senior citizens dominated (67.2%), while male senior citizens constituted just under a third (32.8%) of the group. The most numerous group consisted of people between sixty and sixty-nine years of age (49.3%), slightly older respondents (seventy to seventy-nine y/o) numbered 42.5% and people over eighty y/o and above were represented by 8.2% of respondents. The majority of them held a university degree (47%), while 37.3% had completed secondary education. Additionally, 47.8% of the seniors assessed their health state as good, whereas 44.7% described it as average. 7.5% claimed to be in very good health. The primary variable I will consider in my research is the gender of my respondents (W – woman, M – man).

4. Seniors' clothing – reality and preferences

In his analysis of the psychology of clothing distinctive for post-war Polish citizens, Piotr Szarota describes elderly women as follows:

Women stop looking after their appearance, hygiene and households (...). They can sit by the window all day, listen to the radio or watch television. Going out to the cinema is not for old people, nor is paying attention to their appearance, as a proverb says: *An old person cares about comfort, not fashion*. They pay attention to the practicality of their outfit. It has to be comfortable, warm and, above all, dark-coloured (Szarota 2008: 166–167).

To what extent is this belief still current?

When introducing the topic of the survey to the senior citizens, I asked them what clothes they most frequently buy (Chart 1), and what clothes they would like to wear, what clothes they dream of wearing (Chart 2)?

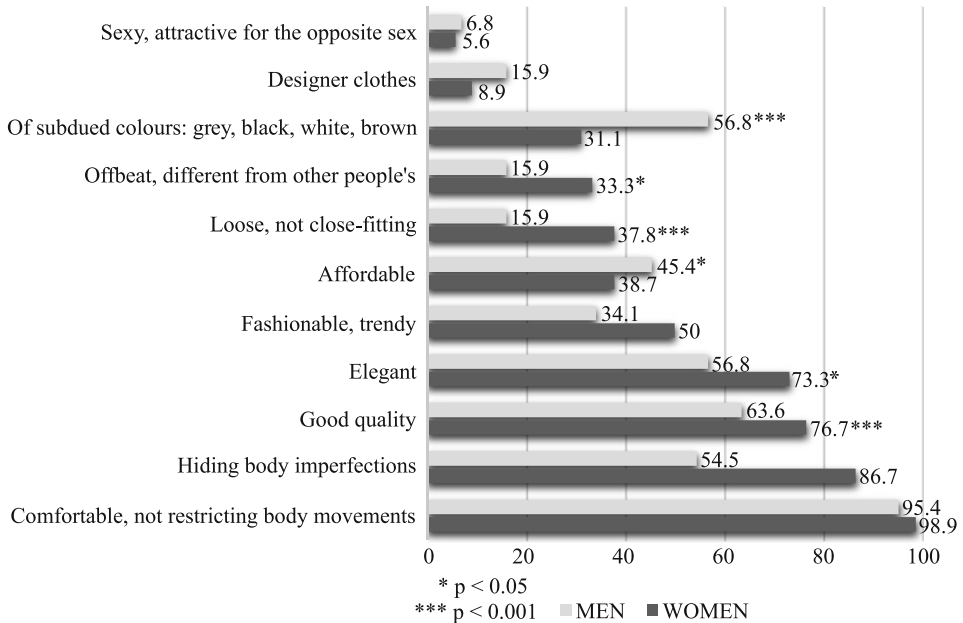


Chart 1. What clothes do you most frequently buy for yourself? (%)

Source: author's own study

Almost all respondents buy comfortable clothes which do not restrict their movements. An important aspect of clothes for the elderly is their good quality, as well as elegance – in both cases, these properties were more often indicated by women, rather than men. The characteristic of attaching importance to the quality of the products bought has been confirmed in a research conducted by Bylok, which was aimed at analysing the consumer habits of the elderly. The author concludes: “it is a surprising finding, considering some common opinions regarding senior citizens, as being interested in cheap, second-hand clothes” (Bylok 2013: 137). Most certainly, a new profile of senior citizens is being shaped, however it is a slow process, as the abovementioned proverb still prevails. Less than a half of respondents claim that they buy fashionable, trendy, clothes – this was more often by women (50%), than men (34.1%); or offbeat clothes, different from what others buy (W: 33.3%; M: 15.9%). In chart 1, two more significant tendencies are distinguishable in the answers. The second most frequent was the answer “hiding body imperfections” – it was more often indicated by women, by far, (86.7%), than men (54.5%). Elderly female respondents responded that they buy loose clothes which are not close-fitting, twice as often as male respondents, while men (56.8%), more often than women (31.1%), stock their wardrobes with clothes of neutral colours: grey, black, white or brown. Seniors’ preferences in the matter of clothes are also interesting (Chart 2).

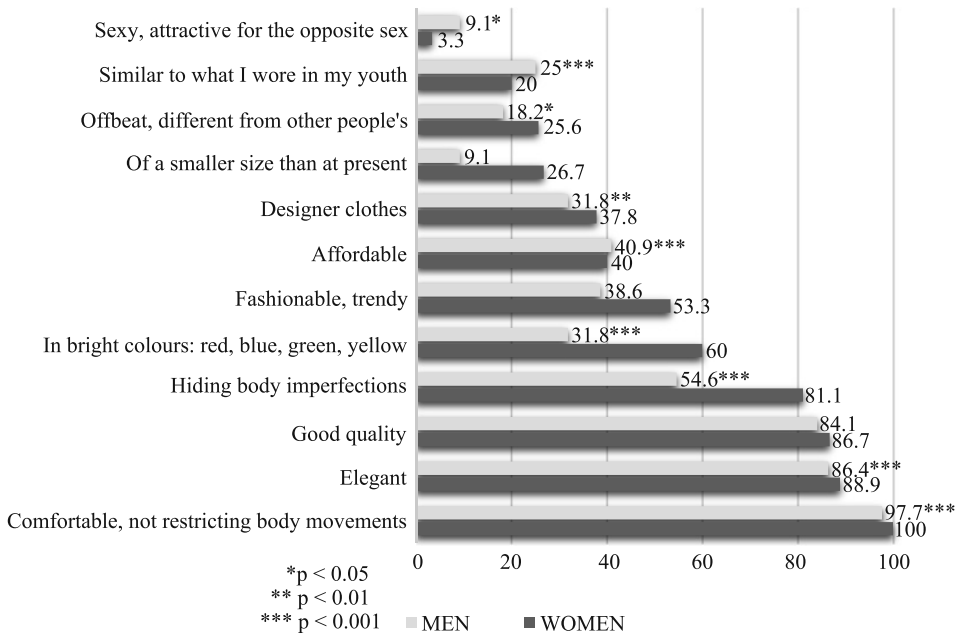


Chart 2. What clothes would you like to wear? What are your desired clothes? (%)

Source: author's own study

The top three features of clothing that senior citizens would most like to wear are: comfort, elegance and good quality. The remaining responses reflect significant divergences in their preferences, and perfectly fit the gender context. Female senior respondents, more frequently than their male counterparts, prefer wearing clothes which enable them to hide body imperfections (W: 81.1%; M: 54.6%), which have bright colours, e.g. red, blue, yellow (W: 60%; M: 31.8%), are trendy (W: 53.3%; M: 38.6%) or which would be of smaller size than they wear at present (W: 26.7%; M: 9.1%). Men in turn (25%), more often than women (20%) would like to wear clothes similar to those they wore in their youth, or sexy apparel, which would help them attract the interest of others (M: 9.1%; W: 3.3%). The fact that men are more inclined to buy clothes of subdued colours may be treated as a manifestation of their more conservative attitude, a nod towards the socially defined age-ordering of clothes and the traditional (patriarchal?) image of a man, who should be characterised by dignity. Subdued colours can be of help in this respect. Female seniors seem to be more open-minded when it comes to the trends suitable for the "youthing society", i.e. colorful, trendy and original clothes – they more often responded that they desire this kind of clothing. At the same time, they are aware of the fact that "women are judged, to a great extent, through the prism of their ability to adapt to widely accepted beliefs regarding their physicality" (Gromkowska-Melosik 2012: 18). After all, they answered that they dream of "wrapping" their bodies, hiding imperfections, or wearing clothes of a smaller

size than at present – which could also make them look younger. The responses of both male and female respondents seem to fit into the aforementioned gender framework.

Within the confines of the consumer topic, I also asked the senior citizens if it is easy or difficult for them to find appropriate clothes in terms of size, fashion, taste or price in the shop assortment. It turned out that finding the appropriate size, worn by a female senior (65.6%) or a male senior (56.8%) is relatively easy (answers very easy and easy in total). More than a half of the respondents of both sexes have no problem with finding clothes in their price range or in a suitable fashion appropriate for their figure. The retail offer gives elderly people the opportunity to buy clothes that suit them aesthetically, i.e. clothes that they simply like in every respect, least frequently (41.8%). Females find that sort of clothing more frequently (57.8%) than males (43.2%).

Are women less particular than men? Perhaps, they are more resourceful, as in the times of the PPR they learnt how to create “something nice” out of what was close at hand at that time. It is worth mentioning that Polish seniors do not belong to the groups who spend spare money on clothes or shoes. Based on his own research, Bylok claims that

in the first instance, elderly consumers spend their spare money on culture (94.7%) or goods and services aimed at improving their health and physical condition (93.2%). The next priorities for spending were rest – travelling for tourist purposes (75.9%) and buying a car (72.1%). Senior respondents rarely expressed a preference for purchasing food (27.3%) or clothes and shoes (25%) (Bylok 2013: 133).

Therefore, the consumption of durable goods, and those connected with leisure time, tends to come first, whereas the consumption of goods and services connected with appearance seems to be of less importance.

5. Respondents’ opinions regarding their peers’ clothing, in the context of the Polish “youthing society”

The fashions of the PPR times described above, which were current when today’s senior citizens were in their prime, revealed a gradual change in the age-ordering of clothes of female and male citizens which was “learned” by today’s seniors. However, for the last thirty years, we have had a democratic system and the consumer culture is gaining ground, influencing the lives of Poles. To what extent, do the past and the nowadays condition the way respondents view the clothing of their peers?

I asked the respondents what they liked and disliked about the way modern female and male seniors dress?

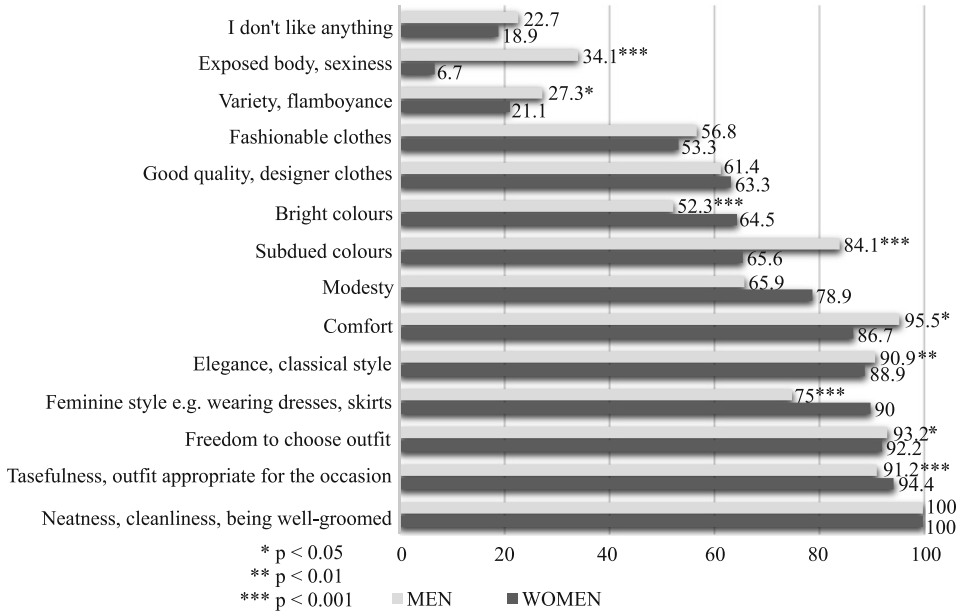


Chart 3. What do you like about the way FEMALE SENIORS dress nowadays?

Source: author's own study

Let us start with female clothing (Chart 3). All the respondents answered that what they like about present-day female senior citizens is their neatness, cleanliness and being well-groomed. A close second were their tastefulness, wearing clothes appropriate for the situation (W: 94.4%; M: 91.2%). Freedom of choosing their outfit came third (M: 93.2%; W: 92.2%). Both men and women gave almost identical responses to "elegance, classic style". However, senior female respondents much more often like it when their peers wear feminine garments, skirts, dresses (W: 90%; M: 75%), a modest style (W: 78.9%; M: 65.9%) and bright colours (W: 64.5%; M: 52.3%). On the other hand, when describing female outfits men more frequently than women indicated that they prefer comfort (M: 95.5%; W: 86.7%), subdued colours (M: 84.1%; W: 65.6%) or even an exposed body, sexy clothes (M: 34%; W: 6.7%). Yet again, two issues appear – the aforementioned colour scheme of clothes and the sexualisation of clothing. What do respondents think when it comes to male seniors nowadays? (Chart 4).

When considering their male peers, male and female respondents view the following in an almost identical way: tastefulness and a choice of clothing that is appropriate for the situation, comfort and a sporty style. Regarding other issues, however, distinct answers were given. When assessing male senior citizens, neatness, cleanliness and being well-groomed are more to women's liking (W: 100%; M: 95.5%), as well as his elegance and a classic style (W: 86.7%; M: 81.8%), wearing suits,

shirts and ties (W: 78.9%; M: 70.5%), modesty (W: 74.4%; M: 65.9%), trendy outfits (W: 57.8%; M: 52.3%). Moreover, women (47.8%) are greater supporters of bright colours than men (20.5%).

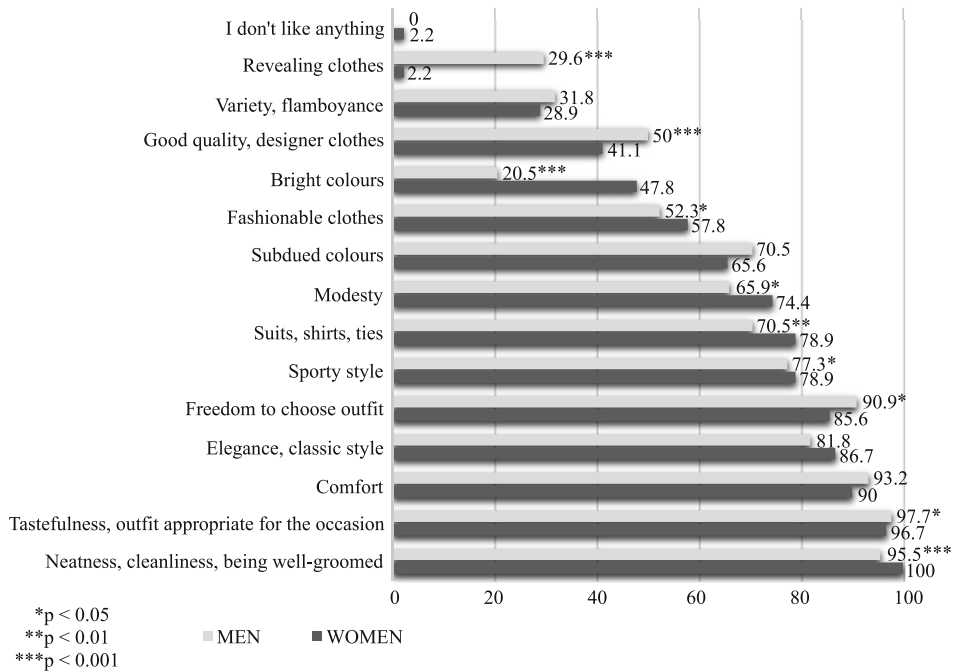


Chart 4. What do you like about the way MALE SENIORS dress nowadays?

Source: author's own study

When it comes to the style of their male peers, male respondents preferred freedom of choosing clothes (M: 90.9%; W: 85.6%) and subdued colours (M: 70.5%; W: 65.6%). Male senior citizens pay attention to the high quality of clothing/ wearing designer clothes (50%) more frequently than female seniors (41.1%), and they claimed that they like outfits that expose the male body (e.g. muscular) almost ten times more often than the female respondents.

Beata Łaciak believes that in the times of the Polish People's Republic such features as beauty, charm and elegance did not fit into personal patterns. Concern for appearance merely meant care for hygiene and daily washing of the whole body (Łaciak 2006: 74). Today's generation of seniors were taught this, and probably it explains their preference for a tidy and clean appearance/ the neat clothing of their peers. The change of the Polish political system in 1989 created the possibility of taking care of one's body and appearance in a variety of ways. Did this opportunity became a must (?), especially considering the female body and looks, regardless of the woman's age?

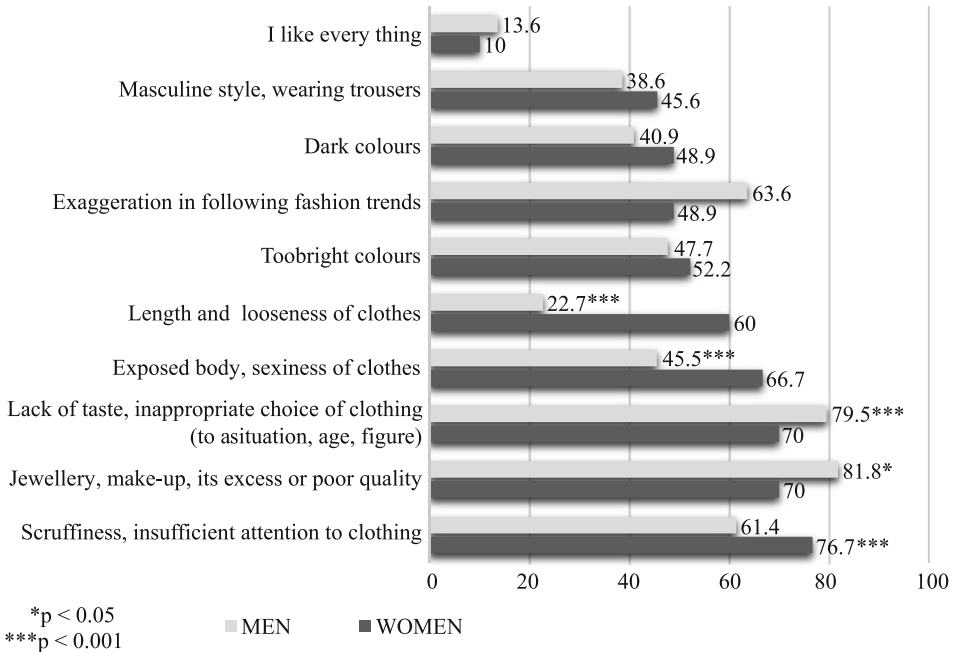


Chart 5. What do you dislike about the way FEMALE SENIORS dress nowadays? (%)

Source: author's own study

I asked the respondents what they dislike about the way female senior citizens dress nowadays. This question brought very disparate answers (Chart 5). Women (76.7%), more frequently than men (61.4%), dislike insufficient attention being paid to clothing, as well as scruffiness. Obviously, everyone should take care of their looks – this is just a fact. However, the answers given by female respondents may reflect certain patriarchal notions functioning in their conscience. A woman is a representative of the fairer sex, therefore, she is supposed look after herself, and the process of getting old, and the difficulties and ailments associated with it, cannot be treated as an excuse for any negligence. After all, the post-transformational Polish reality provides plenty of opportunities in this area. Female seniors (60%) were also much more critical than male seniors (22.7%) of the length and looseness of their peers' clothes, towards exposure of the body and sexy outfits (W: 66.7%; M: 45.5%) or wearing dark colours (W: 48.9%; M: 40.9%). They also did not like the masculine style, meaning a woman wearing trousers (W: 45.6%; M: 38.6%). Answers given by the men suggest that, according to them, the make-up and jewellery (excess or poor quality) worn by elderly ladies, leave much to be desired (M: 81.8%; W: 70%), as do lack of tastefulness and inappropriate choice of clothing regarding age or figure (M: 79.5%; W: 70%) and exaggeration in following fashion trends (M: 63.6%; W: 48.9%).

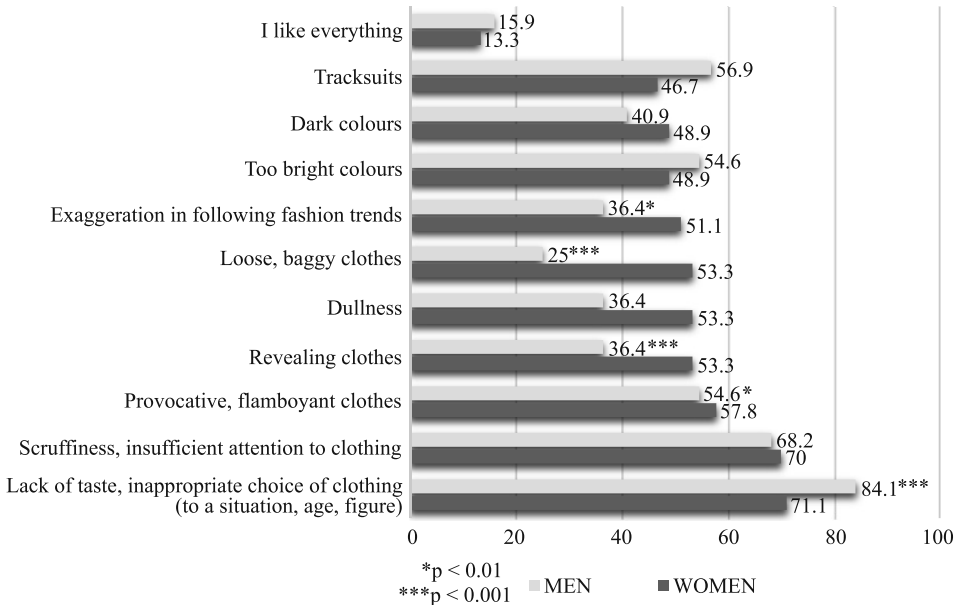


Chart 6. What do you dislike about the way MALE SENIORS dress nowadays? (%)

Source: author's own study

When asked about what they dislike about the way elderly men dress nowadays, all respondents agreed on only one feature – neglecting clothing and looking scruffy. Women are more often bothered by a provocative, flamboyant outfit (W: 57.8%; M: 54.6%) and revealing clothes (W: 53.3%; M: 36.4%). By extension, revealing clothes, which win approval of male seniors, does not appeal to their female peers. Women were also much more critical of their peers' loose clothes (W: 53.3%; M: 25%), their dullness (W: 53.3%; M: 36.4%), wearing dark colours (W: 48.9%; M: 40.9%) and, maybe surprisingly, towards exaggeration in following fashion trends (W: 51.1%; M: 36.4%).

Interestingly enough, all things considered, the respondents claim that their male and female peers' fashion sense appeals to them. However, exaggeration when it comes to fashion raises concerns. Women give a green light to female senior citizens who follow fashion trends, though they are more judgmental when male senior citizens do the same. The findings are identical in case of men: the study suggests that they do not mind when their male peers wear very trendy outfits, yet they disapprove when women do the same. Is exaggeration in following fashion trends understood as adopting a provocative style? As, for instance, Calvin Klein's lingerie campaign, starring the seventy-three year old model Lauren Hutton, or making an eighty-one year old Helena Norowicz the face of the Bohoboco campaign? Or was it following the appeal of an eighty-four year old former-model Dorrie Jacobson, who exhorts people on her blog: "Wear what you want! There

is no such thing as inappropriate for women of a certain age. Times have changed. Mature fashionistas do not intend to step out of people's way just because they turned sixty or seventy. They do not want to wear shapeless outfits, in order to perfectly fade into the background" (Jacobson 2019). Observing the Polish reality, one can notice certain examples of various pro-age campaigns (within the area of fashion, cosmetics or cosmetology) which seem to be an answer to Jacobson's appeal. We also have Plus Age bloggers (e.g. Krystyna Bałakier), familiarising the elderly with the secrets of current fashion, and proving that one is able to inspire others at all ages. Are these all examples of what the senior citizens considered going too far when following fashion trends?

Returning to chart 6, the data suggests that, generally speaking, men are less critical than women when it comes to the clothes chosen by their peers (males). They do not like three things: lack of taste, choosing an inappropriate outfit for the situation, age or figure (M: 84.1%; W: 71.1%), excessively bright colours (M: 54.6%; W: 48.9%) and wearing tracksuits (M: 56.8%; W: 46.7%). Grażyna Bokszańska asserts: "A suit symbolizes traditionalism, hierarchy, conformism and, obviously, money. A man wearing a suit signals clearly his position and demands appropriate respect" (2004: 69). Does this opinion explain the disapproval felt when their peers wear tracksuits?

The scholarly literature provides us with examples of certain positive consequences of seniors participating in the rejuvenation of culture (Twigg 2007; 2013; Konieczna-Woźniak 2012). Using rejuvenating strategies, elderly people are able to, among other things, cope with ageing, overcome daily difficulties associated with restricted mobility, or express the youth which is still present in their minds, bringing them closer to young people (Kolibabska 2009: 62). Therefore, I asked the respondents two questions that were to help them solve the following issue: How does functioning in a "youthing" society influence their views on their peers' clothing?

The respondents give positive feedback on the rejuvenation of today's senior citizens through the appropriate choice of clothes. What is more, the opinions of women and men seem to be very similar (Chart 7). Respondents also agree (over 90% of the answers in both groups) that today's female seniors dress better than their peers did thirty years ago. When it comes to men and their dress sense, in comparison to thirty years ago, male respondents (86.4%), more often than female respondents (77.8%), notice a positive change. Twigg arrives at similar conclusions (2007; 2013), as well as Kathleen Slevin (2010) does. The senior citizens who spoke to the authors explained that their interest in fashion is due to the fact that they would like to know what clothes could help them look younger, however they do not treat this as a burden. They confessed that appearance is significant and therefore it requires relentless work, due to the fact that there is no special treatment for anyone of us – everyone fights for a beautiful body. Katarzyna Pawlikowska (2014) states that the historical and economical circumstances

(i.e. PPR) enabled Polish men and women to become savvy with the fashion world. The 1990s gave them access to European and global culture. Today we begin to dress in a way which expresses ourselves. It seems that this might also be the experience of the elderly – mostly those who can be called “healthy connoisseurs”. They have relatively little experience with old age and when it comes to consumption they behave like young people (Bylok 2013).



Chart 7. Respondents' opinions regarding the dress sense of senior citizens nowadays (%)
Source: author's own study

Chart 8 features a lot of interesting data.

In his volume *Customs in Poland*, Tadeusz Czekalski describes old age in the 1970s: “The Polish threshold of old age was customarily associated with retirement age, which is, in most cases, in the seventh decade of life. Moral pressure on people in old age, especially in rural and small-town families, only permitted a certain way of dressing and hindered entering into new relationships” (2008: 364). The author, unfortunately, does not specify what ways of dressing were allowed, but one can guess that they had to be modest and appropriate. Analysing the answers given by the respondents, included in chart 8, we can reach the conclusion that the old times have not passed. Accepting the rejuvenation of old age seems to be selective, and the patriarchal way of viewing a woman is doing well, at least among the surveyed men.

As we can see in Chart 8, none of the men likes the fact that we can observe elderly women with low necklines in our streets (whereas 13.3% of female respondents have nothing against this), a female senior citizen wearing a miniskirt (8.9% of female seniors have no problem with this) or elderly men with tattoos (8.9% of female respondents are not bothered by this). When it comes to the remaining answers, a cer-

tain number of men gave positive responses to, for instance, elderly men with long hair (M: 4.6%; W: 11.1%), or with dyed hair (M: 2.3%; W: 6.7%), although we can observe a disproportion between male and female support of these practices.

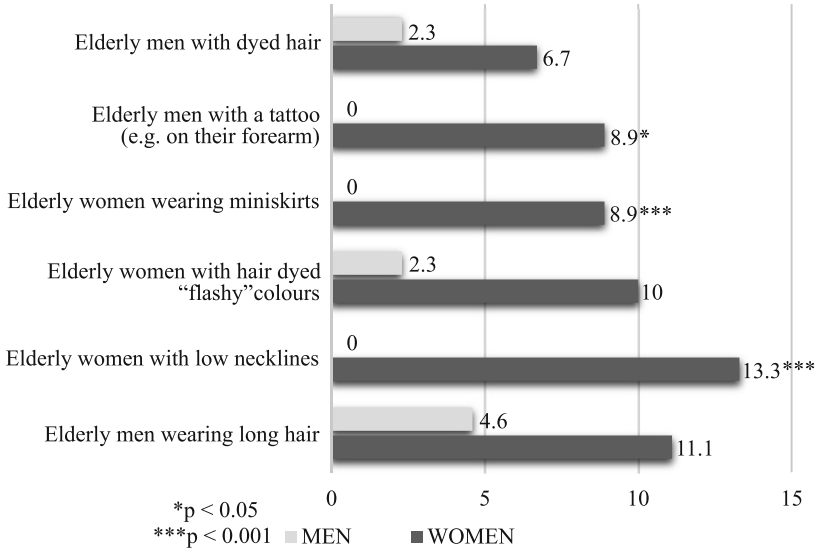


Chart 8. Do you like or dislike the fact that nowadays we can encounter in the street (%)²
Source: author's own study

As I mentioned above, in the 1960s a miniskirt became a symbol of profound social changes and the emancipation of women, like K. Jędrusik's deep necklines. It seems that female respondents have less of a "problem" with accepting these "rejuvenating" clothes among their peers than the male respondents. Do the answers from chart 8 given by the male senior citizens reflect a deeply-rooted patriarchal understanding of male-female relationships? According to M. Toussaint-Samat, in patriarchal societies the duty to wear a modest outfit "became almost natural and transformed into a customary law. This modesty, which should be related to shyness, is a sign of the shame which an individual would feel when they exposed (or witnessed) certain parts of the body" (2011: 32). The author adds: "If feeling ashamed later became a duty, it was because of the fact that a man was holding power. In order to retain control over a woman, he appropriated, by virtue of a powerful law, the control over pursuing freedom, controlling a body that he wanted to employ for his pleasure" (Toussaint-Samat 2011: 34). Does this explain the disapproval of female senior citizen's shameful garments? Yet, on the other hand, they also like exposed bodies and sexy outfits, as I mentioned before...

² The chart presents only positive answers.

It would also seem that the male respondents' negative attitude towards tattoos and the long hair of elderly men stems from the ideology that prevailed in the times of the PPR. At that time, a tattoo was characteristic for the world of crime. Often found on forearms, tattoos were mainly popular among prisoners and sailors. On the other hand, men wearing long hair led to the saying: *long hair – short brains*. Perhaps, these popular assumptions conditioned the male respondents' opinions towards the tattoos and long hair of their male peers, presented in Chart 8.

6. Conclusion

I consider all the study results discussed in this text to be a preliminary exploration of this subject matter, however they allow us to notice certain regularities. The answers given by the respondents suggest that the trends representative for a “youthing” society, as well as the ideology of Polish People's Republic, are the two dominant factors which seem to precondition the fashion choices of Polish senior citizens nowadays and allow us to analyse this issue considering these two points.

When asked to assess their peers' dress sense, respondents appreciated their neatness and being well-groomed, but also the modesty of their clothing. The idea of female senior citizens wearing dresses and skirts (feminine style) and male seniors – suits, shirts and ties, appealed to them. Rules regarding the age-ordering of clothes, characteristic for “the old days”, still exist in the conscience of the elderly. It is reflected by the male respondents' answers, claiming that older people should choose clothes with inconspicuous colour schemes – including grey, black or brown. On the other hand, the women who took part in the study expressed their “attachment” to what is traditional, pointing out more frequently than men that they purchase loose garments which can help them hide the imperfections of their ageing figures. What is more, women, more often than men, would like to wear clothes in a smaller size than they wear at present. After all, patriarchal definitions of femininity assume that a woman's social position depends to a great extent on her appearance. And an attractive figure is a slim figure. Still, the best example of a deeply rooted way to perceive the age-ordering of clothes typical for the PPR times were the respondents' answers expressing the opinion that it is inappropriate for an elderly woman to wear a miniskirt or a low neckline, and an elderly man to have tattoos and long hair. These answers were more frequently given by male respondents, rather than female. Therefore, it seems that the PPR legacy concerning the age-ordering of clothes regarding both men and women still exists in the minds of the people who grew up in those times. The “package” of an ageing body, according to the respondents, should meet certain criteria. What is significant is that this is applied more often to a female body than a male one.

Nonetheless, thirty years of a new democratic system, together with the trends characteristic for a "youthing" society, considerably condition how seniors perceive their own clothing and that of their peers. Female seniors seem to be more open to novelty than the males. They more regularly buy clothes in bright colours (red, yellow, blue), trendy garments or clothes that are offbeat and different from what other people buy. Females prefer to see their peers in fashionable clothes more often than males do, and do not mind the fact that they try to rejuvenate their looks choosing appropriate outfits. However, when it comes to following contemporary trends, female senior citizens are selective, because they do not approve of elderly people exposing their bodies and accenting their sexuality. Men are at variance on this issue.

The way that "youthing" societies perceive clothing contributes to a gradual shift of the bygone age-ordering of clothes concerning elderly people. The female and male respondents' opinions presented above indicate that the changes transpiring today are partial, and some solutions appeal rather to women (bright colours), others to men (revealing clothes). M. Toussaint-Samat argues that: "The physical shape of clothes derives from technical feasibility, but it is also a creation of a human mind – an aesthetical, personal and cultural message" (2011: 310). It seems that the human intellect heads towards empowering senior citizens and rejecting the traditional culture of their marginalisation. Instead, it proposes making them equal members of our society, allowing them to create their own image, including their clothes, according to their individual taste. Functioning in a "youthing" society gives a number of possibilities in terms of defining their appearance and outfit. To what extent do the opinions given by the seniors from Białystok reflect the opinions of other people of the same age? My intention is to explore this issue during a further study, including in-depth interviews, where I will ask senior citizens how they feel in a "youthing" society, what opportunities and dangers of existing in such society they notice, what their approach towards "packaging" their bodies is, and what it means for them. The findings will constitute an excellent complement of the empirical data gathered here.

Bibliography

- Barnard M. (1996), *Fashion as Communication*, Routledge, London.
- Bokszajska G. (2004), *Ubiór w teatrze życia społecznego*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Łódzkiej, Łódź.
- Bordo S. (2003), *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, University of California Press, Berkeley California.
- Bylok F. (2013), *Strategie zachowań konsumentów seniorów na rynku dóbr i usług konsumentów*, "Problemy Zarządzania", no. 11/1(1), pp. 123–142.
- Chmielińska A. (2014), *Moda – między konformizmem a przekraczaniem granic (w świetle koncepcji Georga Simmla)*, [in:] W. Bobrowicz, D. Kubinowski, Z. Pakuła (eds.), *Moda w kulturze, sztuce i edukacji*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin, pp. 67–78.
- Czekalski T. (2008), *Czasy współczesne*, [in:] A. Chwałba (ed.), *Obyczaje w Polsce. Od średniowiecza do czasów współczesnych*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa, pp. 340–424.

- de Beauvoir S. (2003), *Druga pleć*, Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, Warszawa.
- Gibson P. (2000), "No One Expects Me Anywhere": *Invisible Women, Ageing and the Fashion Industry*, [in:] S. Bruzzi, P.Ch. Gibson (eds.), *Fashion Cultures: Theories, Explorations and Analysis*, Routledge, London, pp. 79–90.
- Giddens A. (2009), *Europa w epoce globalnej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa.
- Gilleard C., Higgs P. (2000), *Culture of Ageing: Self, Citizen and the Body*, Prentice Hall, London.
- Główny Urząd Statystyczny (2019), *Informacja o sytuacji osób starszych na podstawie badań Głównego Urzędu Statystycznego*, Warszawa, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszarytematyczne/osoby-starsze/osoby-starsze/informacja-o-sytuacji-osob-starszych-na-podstawie-badan-glownegou-rzedustatystycznego,1,1.html> (accessed 4.08.2019).
- Grajewska A. (2008), *Hasło: feminizm*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, Poznań.
- Greer G. (1991), *The Change: Women, Ageing and the Menopause*, Hamish Hamilton, London.
- Gromkowska-Melosik A. (2012), *Ciało, moda i tożsamość kobiety epoki wiktoriańskiej – dyskursy piękna i przemocy*, "Kultura – Społeczeństwo – Edukacja", no. 2, pp. 17–30.
- Gromkowska-Melosik A. (2013), *Kobieta epoki wiktoriańskiej. Tożsamość, ciało i medycyna*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków.
- Jacobson D., <http://www.seniorstylebible.com> (accessed 2.08.2019).
- Jeffreis S. (2005), *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*, Routledge, London.
- Kolibabska K. (2009), *Trwanie w młodości. Strategie odmładzające stosowane przez ludzi starszych z warszawskiego centrum usług socjalnych*, [in:] H. Jakubowska, A. Racinińska, Ł. Rogowski (eds.), *Patrząc na starość*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań, pp. 49–63.
- Koniczna-Woźniak R. (2012), "Odmłodzona" starość – implikacje podmiotowe i społecznej, "Studia Edukacyjne", no. 2, pp. 249–262.
- Łaciak B. (2006), *Obyczaje dotyczące ciała w Polsce okresu transformacji*, [in:] J. Kurczewski, B. Łaciak, A. Herman, D. Dzido, A. Suflida, *Praktyki cielesne*, Wydawnictwo "Trio", Warszawa, pp. 69–111.
- Pawlikowska K. (2014), *Modne Polki, czyli prawie każda zna się na trendach*, [in:] K. Pawlikowska, D. Maison (eds.), *Polki. Spełnione profesjonalistki, rodzinne panie domu czy obywatelki świata*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa, pp. 124–144.
- Slevin K.F. (2010), "If I had lots of money... I'd have a body makeover": *Managing the Aging Body*, "Social Forces", no. 88(3), pp. 1003–1020.
- Szarota P. (2008), *Od skarpetek Tyrmanda do krawata Leppera. Psychologia stroju dla średnio zaawansowanych*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa.
- Szczepański M.S., Pawlica B., Śliz A., Zarębska-Mazan A. (eds.) (2008), *Ciało spieniężone? Szkice antropologiczne i socjologiczne*, Śląskie Wydawnictwa Naukowe, Tychy–Opole.
- Toussaint-Samat M. (2011), *Historia stroju*, (transl.) K. Szeżyńska-Maćkowiak, Wydawnictwo W.A.B., Warszawa.
- Twigg J. (2007), *Clothing, age and the body: a critical review*, "Ageing & Society", no. 27, pp. 285–305.
- Twigg J. (2013), *Fashion and age. Dress, the Body and Later Life*, Bloomsbury, London.
- Więch K. (2015), *Si(ł)ni mężczyźni? Aktualność stereotypu kobiety jako ofiary przemocy stosowanej przez mężczyzn*, [in:] W. Jakimiuk-Sawczyńska (ed.), *Metamorfozy kobiecości w życiu i w literaturze*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Białystok, pp. 219–234.
- Williams D., Sołtysiak G. (2016), *Modny PRL*, Świat Książki, Warszawa.

Emilia Kramkowska

UBIÓR SENIORÓW FUNKCJONUJĄCYCH W „MŁODNIEJĄCYM” SPOŁECZEŃSTWIE POLSKIM. PERSPEKTYWA KOBIEI I MĘŻCZYŹN W STARSZYM WIEKU

Abstrakt. Funkcjonowanie w warunkach „młodniejącego” społeczeństwa, jak też spuścizna czasów PRL i panujących wówczas zasad ubioru, mogą warunkować sposób ubierania się współczesnych seniorów. Niniejszy artykuł stanowi analizę tego zagadnienia, osadzonego w kontekście genderowym, gdyż opisywany w tekście porządek ubioru (*the age ordering of clothes*) w odmienny sposób dotyczy kobiet i mężczyzn. Podstawą prowadzonej analizy są wyniki sondażu diagnostycznego przeprowadzonego wśród osób w wieku 60 lat i więcej, opiniujących sposób ubierania się ich samych oraz ich rówieśnic i rówieśników.

Odpowiedzi badanych sugerują, że trendy charakterystyczne dla społeczeństwa „młodniejącego” przyczyniają się do odmładzania sposobu ubierania się polskich seniorów. Ich zdaniem osoby starsze ubierają się dziś modnie, gustownie i kolorowo – częściej był to głos kobiet niż mężczyzn. Wyniki sondażu potwierdzają też obecność zakorzenionych w świadomości seniorów zasad dotyczących sposobu ubierania się właściwych czasom PRL – bardziej odzwierciedlały to opinie mężczyzn niż kobiet.

Opisane w tekście wstępne wyniki badań sygnalizują dokonującą się zmianę sposobu ubierania się osób starszych w Polsce. Wymagają one pogłębienia poprzez zastosowanie technik jakościowych, mogących uzupełnić zgromadzony materiał.

Słowa kluczowe: ubiór, senior, porządek ubioru, Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, „młodniejące” społeczeństwo.