

# Body as a Project: The Relationship Czech Prisoners Have to Their Bodies

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**Body as a Project: The Relationship Czech Prisoners Have to Their Bodies.** The text focuses on the relationship inmates have to their bodies during imprisonment. The data presented in this study are based on ethnographic research carried out in Czech men's high security prisons. The data set consists of interviews with partakers from the "world of prisoners", observations from prisons and analysis of documents relating to Czech prison service. The analysis shows there is a strong relationship between the physical body and the process of constructing manhood/masculinity in the population of inmates. The physical body is one of crucial components of the masculine/macho prison code/culture. The attitude inmates have to their bodies seems to be altering, depending on the stage of imprisonment in which they currently are. For the description of this alteration I use the concept of *the body as a project*, which may serve as one of the possible ways of understanding the importance of the physical body to inmates during their imprisonment and changing motivations to its further development.

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Imprisonment and the stay behind bars unquestionably mean a great shock and turn which subsequently affect the life of a person, whether released or repeatedly imprisoned. The time spent in prison can be seen on the body of such a person, in which the experience with life in prison is inscribed. (Moran 2012) This embodiment may have several basic levels. The first is unintentional in the form of involuntary assimilation and accepting the prison culture in the process of this prizonisation. (Clemmer 1958) During prizonisation, the prison environment can influence the mental state of the inmates. (Birmingham et al. 1996; Fazel – Danesh 2002) The second level is deliberate modification of the body, most often in the form of prison tattoo (DeMello 1993), deliberate self-harm, self-mutilation (Hewitt 1997) or working out in an effort to improve and accentuate the musculature. In both cases, the physical body of inmates plays one of the most important roles in their prison biography.

In this study I focus on the phenomenon of body building in relation to the physical bodies of inmates. I present the concept of *the body as a project* describing the relationship inmates have to their bodies and go on to accentuate what role body building plays as a source of physical strength and development of muscles and describe the significance the body has to inmates during their stay in prison. The presented results also include comparison between physical and educational activities with emphasis on the inmates' perspectives, their

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motivations and aspirations concerning their life after being released from prison.

I have been brought to the studies of corporeality in relation to body building in a specific environment of a total institution particularly due to the lack of sufficient amount of relevant researches on Czech prisons. Although the space behind the prison walls and bars represents a field that definitely is fertile for research in international context (Clemmer 1958; Sykes 1966; Wahidin – Tate 2005; Karp 2010; Becci 2012; Drake 2012; Drenkhahn et al. 2014), this type of research has been, with some exceptions (Nedbálková 2003, 2006; Dirga – Hasmanová Marhánková 2014; Dirga et al. 2015; Váně – Dirga 2016), largely omitted in the current Czech and Slovak sociological discourse. This study aspires to be a contribution to the international discussion concerning the importance of the physical body in the masculine environment of prisons (Sabo et al. 2001; Hua-Fu 2005; Karp 2010 and others) emphasising the changeability of the relationship inmates have to their bodies during their biographies in (Czech) prisons. This changeability in different stages of their incarceration is influenced by the masculinely standardised prison code as well as how inmates feel about limits concerning their reinvolvement in society. Masculinity is not always the same normative factor for all the inmates, but its “power” changes in time with respect to the stage of prison biography an inmate is currently experiencing.

The findings presented in this study are based on field ethnographic research carried out in men's prisons, category C, in the Czech Republic. When carrying out my research, I visited several prisons in the Czech Republic, interviewed key participants and observed the internal premises of the prisons. In the first part of my text I shall present the most significant theoretical approaches on which I have based my research and the subsequent data interpretation and I shall describe the research methods used. In the second part of the text I will present my findings.

### **Prison as a masculine environment**

Prison, whether we see it as a total institution (Goffman 1961), network of power relationships (Foucault 1995) or a state bureaucratic organisation (Wilson 1989) represents a specific type of social space characterised by its own set of rules, code and habits. The physical body of inmates, as a subject of countless interventions and control, has a significant position in this environment. Punishment in the form of imprisonment focuses on physical bodies of inmates since the very beginning. A physical body has always been the pivotal point on which different power technologies were demonstrated (Foucault 1995) in the form of interventions from the part of other participants in the world of prisoners (disciplination from the part of the prison system and

its employees or physical assaults from the part of fellow inmates) or as a demonstration of an individual's control over his own body (cultivation of the body). The physical body of inmates thus becomes a possible key to understanding the life behind bars from the perspective of its main participants.

One of the predominant characteristics of the men's prisons relating to the succumbing of the physical bodies of inmates is the all-pervading masculinity. (Britton 2002) Men's prisons represent a hypermasculine space<sup>2</sup>. (Phillips 2012) Masculinity is evident at every turn as a universal imperative, it is demonstrated in the social hierarchy of gangs (Phillips 2012), in social interactions between inmates, in sexual behaviour (Struckman-Johnson et al. 1996) or in how inmates spend their leisure time or what sporting activities they do. (Sabo 2001) At the same time, masculinity determines the preferred ways of everyday routine activities such as a way of walking or body posture. (Crewe 2009)

Masculinity thus determines the so-called prison code, which represents standards regulating the inmates' actions and interactions. The dominating value is the requirement not to show pain, weakness and vulnerability, while it is necessary to protect one's own newly constructed manhood. (Sabo et al. 2001) For protective reasons, inmates construct/create their prison identity, which they go on to promote and reproduce with performative actions. This prison identity differs from their non-prison identity (Jones – Schmid 2000) and follows from the values preferred by the prison code. Inmates put on imaginary armour which protects them from showing weakness, vulnerability and other risks which could undermine their “manhood”. (Karp 2010) Those who want to succeed in the prison masculine culture have to become “real men” and confirm it in everyday interaction. The main aspects, around which inmates construct their new identity, are their physical bodies.

### **What it takes to be a “man” in prison**

When trying to understand the world of men's prisons, it is important to realise that masculinity itself would not be understandable to inmates. Masculinity needs its antipole, which is in this case emphasised femininity. That means that the men's prisons function on the principle of dichotomous distinguishing between the preferred masculinity and inferior femininity. (Kersten 1990; Britton 1997; Schifter 1999; Nedbálková 2006) Active “rulers” dominating the prisons keep themselves in the position of a man, while they push their

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<sup>2</sup> Prison is a gendered institution (see Kersten 1990; Acker 1992; Britton 1997, 2002; Czech prisons are no exceptions – see Nedbálková 2003, 2006) and its hypermasculine character is linked to its patriarchal nature. (Kann 2005) Prison (as institution of society) mirrors society (Foucault 1995; Combessie 2001; Becci 2012; Drake 2012) and its gendered hypermasculine and patriarchal nature. (Harding 1986; Bourdieu 2001) Society prefers certain performances of masculinity, which are concentrated and intensified in (not only male) prisons.

“inferiors” towards the role of “women”. (Tucker 1982: 62) To achieve such demonstration of masculinity and dominance of a man over a man, they can use rape<sup>3</sup>. (Smaus 2003) In order to protect their manhood and remain “men”, inmates have to get as close as possible to the ideal of a masculine inmate, constructed by the community, and they need to demonstrate these “qualities” clearly and comprehensibly to the people around them.

The physical body in any society is an important aspect of how an individual is esteemed by the people around (Wolf 2002): The “right” proportions of the body may facilitate access to social benefits and thus contribute to inequality between people with the “right” and “wrong” bodies. The importance of the body and the form of related performative actions always depends on the context. (Sassatelli 1999) The physical body thus influences the way how an individual experiences the world and influences social interactions the individual is involved in. (Klemmer et al. 2006)

The physical body plays a similarly significant role also in prison. A typical feature of prison reality structuring its everydayness is the link between masculinity and physical strength. (Britton 1997) In this environment, an ideal “man” must actively participate in the (re)production of this normativeness, most often by building his body or using aggressiveness. With their performative actions, inmates play in Goffman's imaginary theatre and if they do not want to lose their manhood and position, they have to try to demonstrate hegemonic masculinity, which means they need to be active, merciless and tough aggressors (i.e. dominate their surroundings), they must not show weakness and they have to demonstrate their power (not only physical) using violence, if necessary. (Hua-Fu 2005) Inmates most often demonstrate their power, which has to be well visible, using their bodies: by body building, various kinds of ornamentation or tattooing. All-pervading concept of hegemonic masculinity thus very strongly determines the attitude inmates have to their bodies. (Kersten 1990) Their bodies serve them as a source of physical strength and also as a tool of self-presentation and demonstration of their “manhood”.

### **Body building as a way to the “right” body of a prisoner**

Under treatment programs, inmates participate in various activities focused on elimination of the causes of their criminal behaviour which often have a form of some addiction (Bahr et al. 2012), they attend group therapies (Wexler–Williams 1986), they may be employed (Saylor – Gaes 1997), they participate in education activities (Esperian 2010), religious activities (Becci 2012; Váně – Dirga 2016) or sporting activities. (Martos–García et al. 2009) Especially

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<sup>3</sup> This is not only an act of physical violence, but also of symbolic violence. (Comp. Smaus 1994)

sporting activities are favoured by inmates, although their reasons for participating may differ.

One of the main reasons why sporting activities are so favoured by the prison management as well as by inmates is its positive impact on physical as well as mental health and well-being of the inmates. (Meek 2014) Regular sporting activities contribute to good physical health by reducing health risks linked to imprisonment (Meek – Lewis 2012), while they reduce stress and create a platform for meeting fellow inmates and maintaining social contacts. They also enhance cohesion within a community, thus contributing to mental equilibrium of the inmates. At the same time, sport is a way of spending meaningfully leisure/“void“ time, so typical of life in prison. (Jones – Schmid 2000)

One of the most favourite sporting activities in the prison is body building (Harvey 2012; Dirga et al. 2015), a way to how to achieve better musculature and great physical strength. In the context of hegemonic masculinity, body building on this level may be considered as a masculine activity linked to aggression, strength and violence. In case an individual is not able to face the requirements, he is threatened by being excluded from sporting activities and his power position is weakened. (Bryson 1987) Negative consequences of misusing physical strength in prison are deviant activities such as bullying (Ireland 2002a), rape (Smaus 2003) or production and reproduction of unequal power relationships. (Ireland 2002b) Achieving power is also in many cases the reason why inmates aspire to increase their physical strength. In the masculine environment of men's prisons, where aggression and violence are the “law”, strength is an essential prerequisite for self-defence, but also a tool for subjugating weaker fellow inmates and manipulating the environment. (Ireland 2002a) If we relate once again to the above described ideal of hegemonic masculinity, well-defined muscles are one of the crucial features of the “right” prison body.

### **Research methods**

The concept of *the body as a project* is based on the data collected during my qualitative ethnographic research in Czech prisons, category C<sup>4</sup>. I limited my research to Czech prisons of category C in order to receive the permission to carry out my research inside the prisons and with respect to the fact that most

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<sup>4</sup> As of 15 March 2015, Czech prison system was divided into four basic categories for adults: category A (minimum security prison), category B (medium security prison), category C (high security prison), category D (maximum security prison).

inmates in the Czech Republic fall into category C<sup>5</sup>. From the perspective of the studied phenomenon, it is a type of prison where masculine values, especially physical strength, violence and well-defined muscles, are predominant.

I chose the qualitative approach with the aim to collect detailed views of the partakers from the prison world, who participate in it on daily basis and create it. In order to have better understanding of how the world behind the prison walls works, qualitative methods have been used since the time of classical studies by Clemmer (1958), Sykes (1966), Lombardo (1981), or current research by Deborah Drake (2012), Irene Becci (2012), Ugelvik (2014), Naylor (2015), Jefferson and Gaborit (2015) and many others. In the Czech Republic, the qualitative approach was used in the studies by Kateřina Nedbálková (2006), Lukáš Dirga and Jaroslava Hasmanová Marhánková (2014), Lukáš Dirga et al. (2015), or Jan Váně and Lukáš Dirga (2016).

With regards to the research question, I focused my attention particularly on the perspective of key respondents, i.e. inmates from Czech men's prisons. I complemented their testimonies with the perspective of some other partakers, prison guards, psychologists, educators and prison managers. The analysed data set consisted of semi-structured interviews, observation inside prisons and documents relating to Czech prison service. In total, I did 20 interviews with inmates, 15 with guards, 5 with prison managers, 3 with psychologists and 2 with special educators. Interviews with the respondents took place in 4 different prisons of category C in the Czech Republic. The data from interviews were complemented with some 70 hours of observation inside the prisons. I returned to these prisons several times and always spent around 10 hours a day in them<sup>6</sup>.

When collecting the data, the research proved to be rather difficult due to complicated access to respondents. (Compare Liebling 1999; Mahon 1997; Waldram 2009) For this reason I chose the snowball sampling method, which enabled me to recruit other respondents. I used this method of contacting respondents particularly when interviewing prison guards and people from the management. I found the first contacts inside my social network, then I went on to use the contacts received during my previous research of the Czech prison system. In every prison I had to win over the crucial gatekeeper, who helped me get the permission to access the inside of the prison, provided me with first

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<sup>5</sup> As of 15 March 2015, out of the total number of 19,259 inmates 9,254 of them were in category C, which is approximately 48 % (Source: Prison Service of the Czech Republic, quoted as of March 15, 2015, <http://vscr.cz/generalni-reditelstvi-19/informacni-servis/rychla-fakta/>).

<sup>6</sup> I would like to thank all the respondents who participated in this research. Without them I would have not been able to carry it out. I would also like to thank the people from the management of the prisons for their support and their permission to carry out my research in their prisons.

contacts to respondents and helped me to get my bearings<sup>7</sup>. Respondents from the group of inmates were always chosen upon a consultation with an educator, psychologist or special teacher.

I am aware of the restrictions of snowball sampling when trying to get to new research participants, which I tried to minimise by ensuring the highest possible degree of data heterogeneity on the level of prisons, but also on the level of demographic characteristics of the respondents and their experience from prison. The participants differed with their age and time spent in prison<sup>8</sup>. Interviews with prison employees usually lasted 90 minutes and 60 minutes with inmates. Interviews with guards, managers, psychologists and educators took place mainly in an informal environment: in their homes or in restaurants<sup>9</sup>. Interviews with inmates always took place inside the prison, usually in the office of a special teacher, with no other persons being present. In order to eliminate any disturbing influences, only the researcher and a respondent were present during an interview<sup>10</sup>.

Interviews with guards, psychologists, educators and prison managers were recorded using a voice recorder and then literally transcribed. Recording interviews with inmates inside the prison was forbidden, so notes were taken during the interview and they were further elaborated in a greater detail after the interview. A field journal was kept with notes from observations of collective activities of inmates, with special focus on leisure time activities, psychologically-therapeutic sessions, handing out of meals or working activities. Transcriptions of the interviews were then analysed using the

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<sup>7</sup> Obtaining permission to carry out my research inside prison environments were always long-term processes of negotiation with prison management (on the average length of 3 to 6 months), during which I had to explain the content and goal of research and negotiate conditions of my participation on everyday prison life. During whole negotiation and research conduction, I was in a position of "outside" researcher. It means that I wasn't an employee of the Prison Service of the Czech Republic, or the Ministry of Justice of the Czech Republic. As a strategy/way of negotiation I chose face-to-face interviews with members of prison management, which were mediated to me by abovementioned crucial gatekeepers who I had known personally from my civil life or from my previous researches. Strategy of sending official applications to prisons by mail proved to be ineffective. (As in the case of Kateřina Nedbálková's research – compare Nedbálková 2006) Gatekeepers provided me contacts to prison management members, who I afterward arranged personal meeting with. It is important to emphasize that there was no effort/pressure from the side of prison management to influence my research question, or results. It means that the process of bureaucratic negotiation didn't affect quality of my research. I also assume that my relationship to gatekeepers didn't markedly influence my stay behind bars, because during the stay in prison and during the interaction with respondents I acted (and at the same time was accepted/perceived by others) as the researcher-outsider (it means that I wasn't perceived as a part of prison authoritative structure). Gatekeepers helped me with first access to prison environment and provided me contacts to prison staff members, who accompanied me during my stay in prison. Further development of my research was based on interactions with respondents (prison actors) without any participation of gatekeepers.

<sup>8</sup> The youngest prison guard participating in the research was 21 and the oldest 56, the time they have spent working as prison guards ranged from 2 to 17 years. The length of the imprisonment of the inmates surveyed varied from 3 years to a life sentence.

<sup>9</sup> Informal environment was always chosen based on respondent's wish (especially for two main reasons: there was no time during their work shift to carry out interviews in respondent's offices, or they just perceived a non-prison environment as more suitable for interviews).

<sup>10</sup> During the interviews the highest possible safety was ensured in order to limit the risk when doing interviews under such specific conditions.

thematic analysis principles (Ezzy 2002) and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz 2006) using MAXQDA, a software for qualitative data analysis. In the data analysis I tried to interlink data segments with the objective to achieve higher levels of abstraction using continual coding and interlinking different data segments with wider context structures. In the following part of the text I will be presenting the key findings of my research and describing them comprehensively within the concept of *the body as a project* that will be supported by some extracts from the interviews and notes from my observations.

### **Prison body under construction**

I view the importance of the body to inmates using the constructivist/interactionist approach as a result of the process of (re)constructing “manhood” in men's prisons with strong reflections of masculine values regulating this environment. Similarly to international context, also in the Czech context the physical body is of immense importance to inmates. Most activities filling the empty time are focused on the physical body. (Alford 2000) These activities may take different forms ranging from ornamenting the body by tattooing to corporal mutilation or developing the physical musculature by body building. According to the respondents, body building is one of the most often used ways how to change the body so that they can make most of it in relation to imprisonment, which is why inmates dedicate a great amount of their free time to body building. (Compare Harvey 2012)

*Body building means a lot here, everything. If you don't want to go crazy, you must do something. Body building is great, as you can see the results: your muscles grow and you can check you're really getting better. Everyone works out here, all the time, everywhere. We're allowed to work out only an hour and a half a day and can lift only ridiculous weights, which is never enough. We work out in our cells and outside the designated hours. If you want to keep improving, that short time a day is simply not enough. (Petr, inmate)<sup>11</sup>*

The extract from the interview with Petr clearly shows that body building in an effort to improve the physical body is so important to Czech inmates they are willing to risk sanctions for breaching the limit designated for body building and despite a clear interdiction they work out in an “illegal” way<sup>12</sup>. Whereas body building is supported as a sporting activity, it is at the same time restricted in an effort of the prison service to demonstrate its power and regulate the designated ways and time for body building, although this effort proves to be ineffective. This may be one of the sources of the importance of

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<sup>11</sup> In order to maintain anonymity of the respondents I used pseudonyms that differ from their real names.

<sup>12</sup> Inmates in Czech prisons have in their so-called Time Schedule of each day a designated time (between 60 and 90 minutes), in which they can work out. Beyond these hours they are not allowed to do so.



body building in relation to the masculine prison code, since defiance of an authority is considered to be a masculine, i.e. preferred, value. Body building and the physical body of inmates become a battlefield where the prison service's effort to show authority and control over inmates (we will let them work out, but only a little) clashes with the defiance of the community of inmates, who turned physical strength (body building) into one of the key components of their prison code. The community of inmates are quite unambiguously the winning party (see below).

The fact that inmates like body building so much has many hidden meanings and motivations of inmates concerning their bodies. How do inmates relate to their bodies? How and why do they modify their bodies? Does the relation to their bodies change during the imprisonment, or does it remain the same?

In the concept of *the body as a project* I think of the inmates' approach to their physical bodies as of a project on which they systematically work with emphasis on using the body in everyday life in the prison, but taking also into consideration their future life after they are released from prison. This fact is evidenced by the emphasis Petr repeatedly laid on the need to keep improving. The analysis of the collected data indicates that the inmates' approach to their physical body and motivations for improving their musculature are – to a certain extent – transformed depending on in which stage of the imprisonment they currently are. The physical body keeps its great importance in all of the stages which I divided for the sake of analysis into the period shortly after entering prison, the main part of imprisonment (prison career) and period before the way out.

### **Entering prison**

In the stage shortly after entering prison, inmates start to become acquainted with the new environment and they start socialising within the new social group. Inmates get acquainted with formal and informal rules, they learn what is important and they gradually create their own strategies how to “survive” their stay behind the bars. (Creating imaginary armour, compare Karp 2010) Just like in any new environment, also in prison newcomers first have to learn to recognise the characteristic features of the surroundings, possible risks, assess their chances to “survive” and, if necessary, adjust the strategy of their self-presentation and interaction with the surroundings. (Compare Jones – Schmid 2000)

According to the respondents' testimonies, a newcomer quickly realises what the characteristics of the world in prison are; in Czech prisons these concern particularly violence, physical confrontation, mental pressure exerted

by fellow inmates and constant effort to manipulate other inmates with the aim to achieve various benefits. (Compare Phillips 2012)

*As soon as I arrived in the prison, several big guys walked up to me and they immediately started to bully me, trying to show me where my place was and threatened to beat me up. This is absolutely common here. Everyone is trying to get as much as they can and manipulate the others. Simply said, the one who wants to be on the top (of the prison hierarchy – authorial comment) must try to intimidate the others. From time to time somebody gets thrashed here (becomes a victim of physical violence – authorial comment). These fights actually test if others can be brash with you or not. You just have to manage to defend yourself, otherwise everyone will try to intimidate you. (František, inmate)*

A typical feature of prison everydayness is the necessity to fend off the fellow inmates' effort to gain the upper hand. This may involve mental manipulations or direct physical confrontations. The goal is clear: to intimidate others and to build a position in the hierarchy in the prison. (Dirga et al. 2015) From this point of view, Czech men's prisons can be, similarly to the context in other countries (compare Phillips 2012), described as a masculine environment with special emphasis on violence and self-assertion, where physical strength plays one of the key roles, as it can be very helpful when inmates need to defend themselves. The well-defined physical body thus becomes a tool which has the potential to develop the physical strength and minimise the risks during the imprisonment.

*It is always easier for those who have muscles and are strong. Nobody dares to intimidate them and they can be at peace. I figured this out during my first week in prison, so I started working out immediately. The bigger you get, the better you feel: you actually feel more confident. Personally, I like it a lot, I can see from my experience it pays off. I don't know what else we could be doing here. I need to kill time and big muscles often come handy. (Radek, inmate)*

As we can see, inmates form initial motivations to work out in order to ensure their safety and cope with boredom, which determines their relationship to the physical body as a tool for an easier and safer stay behind bars. These initial motivations are subsequently reinforced in the process of everyday interaction with other prisoners. Inmates personally experience the pressure of the surroundings in the prison and sooner or later they have to get involved in the routine of everyday rituals which test the readiness and determination of each inmate to maintain their position, or, in other words, not to get into the position of abused individuals. Respondents' testimonies and the findings from my own observation inside the prisons show that these abused individuals are primarily those with underdeveloped musculature. (Thin, physically weak, in

most cases they have a certain health issue – in Czech prison slang they are referred to as *workhorses or dandelions* – Dirga et al. 2015: 567). If an inmate does not want to become *a workhorse/dandelion*, he must make sure he will be able to defend himself: for this purpose the overwhelming majority chooses body building and increasing their physical strength that may be used to elicit respect but also in a possible physical confrontation.

### **Prison career**

What is crucial for reinforcing the interest in body building and motivation for long-term cultivation of the body during imprisonment is rather a simple access to weight lifting equipment. Inmates work out almost anywhere with anything. If they cannot use the gym and its equipment legally, they go for “Plan B” and work out in the halls, in their cells, during the yard walks. The tools they use are also quite sophisticated: these range from barrels filled with water for working out biceps to bars used for pull-ups, or to bench-press lifts, which are done using a bulk bed with fellow inmates sitting on it. Prison employees are aware of these illegal practices of body building and although they officially ban them, they admit there is actually nothing they can do about it, so they silently tolerate it<sup>13</sup>. The approach of prison employees to illegal body building activities of the inmates is described in the extract from an interview with Filip.

*They (the inmates – authorial comment) can work out in the designated hours and should not work out at other times, but they do it anyway. They work out all the time, everywhere. We (employees – authorial comment) know about it, but there is nothing we can do about it. You cannot catch them red handed and even if you do so, they start explaining they were not working out and it is hard to prove the contrary. Sometimes we find an artificially manufactured weight or something similar, so we throw it away. It goes on and on like this. I would say we tolerate it silently. As long as it does not hurt anyone, we do not deal with it. (Filip, prison guard)*

Inmates are aware of this prison employees' attitude, which opens them a way to almost unlimited body building, which quickly yields its results and enhances their motivation to keep developing their body project. During the main part of their imprisonment, which I refer to as “prison career”, inmates systematically cultivate their body, work on improving it and start using it in everyday life. After going through the initial process of socialisation most inmates form their own strategy for “surviving”, which is primarily dominated

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<sup>13</sup> This „illegal“ bodybuilding mirrors also power struggle between inmates and prison guards. (Dirga – Hasmanová Marhánková 2014) In this particular case (“battlefield”) inmates clearly win over guards, but this is not reflected completely negatively by prison guards. There is a partial loss of control over the prison environment on the one side, but on the other side prison guards reflect also positive effect of bodybuilding on everyday prison practice. Bodybuilding can be very effective way how to reduce stress and release energy for inmates, which positively affect guard-inmate interactions.

by having a well-defined physical body. As they acquire greater physical strength and their musculature grows, they start gaining various benefits.

*At the beginning, it was rather difficult here for me, I was a newbie, I did not have big muscles and almost any punk dared to confront me. I said to myself I could not stand this for long, as I would become a girl for everyone. I saw that nobody dared to challenge the guys who worked out and it was rather dandelions who became victims. So I started working out and the results arrived rather soon. My muscles grew up and suddenly they did not bother me that much. I liked that and started really enjoying it. If you have muscles, you can get almost anything here. (Matěj, inmate)*

More muscles mean easier life in prison. That is what most inmates think during their prison career. After gaining first benefits, their position in the prison hierarchy starts changing. Newcomers, who had to face the initial pressure, become experienced *stagers* who can be at peace and the approach to their body and working out starts altering. They still see their bodies as a tool for gaining benefits, but their targets are different now. Generally speaking, we can divide the motivations relating to using the physical strength into three basic categories.

The first category consists of active aggressors who try to control their surroundings and other inmates using the physical strength of their bodies. (Compare Britton 1997) Thanks to their body, these individuals win respect, which they go then use to manipulate others, gaining various benefits ranging from telephone cards to food. When we compare the Czech Republic with other countries, we come to an interesting finding concerning rape, which is in international context rather a common phenomenon, whereas in the Czech context rapes are – according to the inmates as well as prison employees – rather infrequent. Therefore, physical strength is not the main aspect of getting sex. (Compare Smaus 2003) Most sexual services are based on the principles of exchange trade. Having said this, the physical body still serves the active aggressors as a source for gaining and exercising their power against others.

*You either win or lose. If you want to be winning in prison, you must have muscles – without them you will never be the boss here. When you have muscles, you can do almost anything you like. I decided to become the winner and I do have everything I want. (Tomáš, inmate)*

The second category comprises inmates who are, thanks to their well-defined physical bodies, in a position where nobody dares to confront them, but they do not have the ambitions to become active rulers of the space around them. They only use their body for passive defence. This category is in majority in Czech prisons.

The third category of inmates is motivated by their excitement and effort to spend their free time meaningfully. In this respect, their body is used as a tool

for filling the void in a meaningful way, these inmates see body building as a sport in which they try to keep improving, pushing up their limits, compare their results with other prisoner or break their records.

These categories are not exclusive to each other, they actually very often permeate and there may be a combination of motivations to body building that an inmate has also in relation to his body. These categories are also not rigid ones, but they are connected to a context of masculinity performance.

Most performative actions are done in the gym or in a space of prison cells. It means that most performative actions are done during interaction of inmate with other inmates without supervision of prison staff. Inmate-inmate interactions can be described from this perspective as a “battlefield of masculinity”, in which using of all “weapons” is allowed. Physical body seems to be preferred and most important one, but not the only one<sup>14</sup>. (Comp. Dirga et al. 2015) Physical body is used with aim to get benefits and privileges (for example privileged access to the gym or to gym equipment, privileged access to bathroom, TV etc.). Inmates with big muscles have a privileged access to these “commodities” and if someone tries to challenge this privileged position, he has to take part in physical confrontation.

In different way masculinity is performed in interaction between inmates and prison staff. Inmate’s masculinity/power is mainly based on physical body (because inmates have limited institutional power; it means power delegated to them by prison authority/institution), whereas masculinity of prison staff (especially prison guards) is based on institutional power and there is very limited space for using physical power against inmates. It means that physical body of inmates is a part of this interaction, but it is not used directly in physical confrontation. Inmate’s body can influence inmate-staff interaction in a psychological way (as a part of showing someone’s qualities and psychological intimidation – posture, way of walking etc.), but not in physical way.

The performance of masculinity is very intense, because inmates spend most of their time in inmate-inmate, or inmate-staff interactions, but is it not absolute. There are some opportunities to stop to perform own masculinity, it is during visits. In interactions with family members or friends inmates can stop using their body as source of power/masculinity, because this kind of interaction is not a “battlefield of masculinity”.

Whatever the combination of motivations or categories is, the physical body determines, to a certain extent, the quality of an inmate's life in prison. This

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<sup>14</sup> It is also important to mention that physical body isn't the single one „weapon“. There are many kinds of capital used in inmate-inmate interactions. We can identify economic capital, criminal career/history or ability of psychological manipulation as sources of power/masculinity in prison environment, but physical strength (body) seems to be the most effective one. (Dirga et al. 2015)

does not apply only to those with the “preferred”, well-defined body, but also to those without. Karel is one of those and speaks about how these inmates live in prison.

*I also tried to work out, but, unfortunately, with my physique, my muscles will simply not grow (this inmate is very thin – authorial comment), no matter what I do. After some time I stopped trying, as I saw it was going nowhere. By being thin, others try more stuff on me, but I've accepted this role. I do what I'm told, otherwise I'd get beaten.* (Karel, inmate)

As we can see from the extract above, the physical body is of importance also to those who do not work out.

This fact is also connected with intersection between masculinity and social hierarchy<sup>15</sup>. Abovementioned categories mirror vertical stratification of inmate population in Czech prisons, which is divided to three basic positions: king, fool and workhorse. (Dirga et al. 2015: 567) The king is an active aggressor who tries to control his surroundings and other inmates using the physical strength of his body. His masculinity is based on ability to control (govern) prison space, whereas fool's masculinity is based on ability to defend himself. The fool doesn't control, but he is also not controlled (abovementioned passive defender). For both categories, kings and fools, serves physical body function of a main tool for masculinity construction/protection<sup>16</sup>. At the bottom of hierarchy of inmate population is a workhorse, who is someone with very limited source of masculinity. Masculinity is in this case tight to physical body (see Karel's testimony above), which is not a source of workhorse's masculinity, but an object of others masculinity performance. In prison the workhorse isn't connected to masculinity, but to femininity (comp. Tucker 1982; Kersten 1990; Britton 1997; Schifter 1999; Smaus 2003; Nedbálková 2006), and weak physical body is one of major reasons<sup>17</sup>.

Nevertheless, in this text I focus primarily on inmates who see their body as a project and try to develop it on a long-term basis. But what happens when inmates prepare for leaving the prison and for life in freedom? Do they stop working out and focus on other competencies instead? The interviews and observations suggest that the physical body remains important to inmates also in this stage of imprisonment and plans or aspirations concerning their free life are closely related to the physical body.

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<sup>15</sup> Masculinity is closely tight not only to social hierarchy/social class, but also to ethnicity. Unfortunately, I don't have relevant data for description of different kinds of prison masculinity based on ethnicity.

<sup>16</sup> The most important in this case is physical strength and this is the reason, why well-defined musculature can be in some cases replaced by heavy weight. But this is not preferred way, how to achieve physical strength, because for most inmates body is seen as a project focused on musculature growth.

<sup>17</sup> Weak physical body can be in a process of masculinity construction/protection partially replaced by other kinds of capital, especially by economic one. It means that in prison can be also non-muscular men with some power, but it requires lots of economic capital to „buy“ power/protection/prestige. Most inmates don't meet this requirement and this is crucial reason, why they try to find alternative (easily accessible) source, for example bodybuilding.

## The way out

The third phase starts at the moment when inmates start thinking of their life after release. Such thoughts usually occur in the second half of the imprisonment. In this stage they evaluate their competences for their life in freedom, which subsequently affects their aspirations to self-development in the remainder of their punishment. During their time in prison, inmates go through various socially-psychological trainings, therapeutic sessions, mental consultations, or they can participate in educational or requalification courses. Inmates need to evaluate their chances and aspirations for future life and then decide what activities they want to pursue in prison. Do these thoughts influence the attitude inmates have had until then to their physical body and body building?

In a simplified way, we could divide the activities in which the inmates may participate into activities focused on increasing their physical strength (body building) and activities aimed at developing the intellect (educational). Interested observations and interviews with inmates show that most of them do only body building and educational courses are almost of no importance to them.

*Most inmates prefer working out to attending, for example, an English class or anything similar. There is little interest in such activities. Some are compulsory, but even in these courses there is almost no interest in active participation. (Pavel, special educator)*

What are the causes of low interest in education activities and what contributes to the prevailing interest in body building? The primary reason is the inmates' aspirations to the manner of earn their living after release, where they are more likely to make use of physical strength rather than of their knowledge. I had the chance to participate actively in a socially-psychological training of inmates, where I pretended to be (upon the teachers' request) an officer from the labour office. There were 15 inmates who presented to me their job applications. During the training held before this meeting, in which I participated, the inmates were told to write their CVs, which they would then use as a part of their job application. In all of these fifteen cases the inmates wanted to get a manual job in construction industry, in a quarry, forest, etc. In a simulated interview I asked them a question why they wanted to work manually. Their replies reflected a strongly rooted opinion about the impossibility to get a chance to work otherwise but manually after their release.

*That's easy to tell why. Because after I leave the jail, no one will offer me another kind of work. When I'm out with a blot in my criminal record, no one is going to talk to me. At the labour office they will give me no other choice and*

*the only chance for me is working manually or resort back to criminal activity.*  
(Jan, inmate)

Jan's testimony reflects the presumption shared by many inmates, who, following from their previous experience, assure one another in believing it is pointless to aspire for a different type of work but manual. This is why they adjust their ambitions and focus on activities that may come handy once they are released. Inmates thus see the impact of their imprisonment on the symbolic level and physical level, when their imprisonment is inscribed in their bodies. (Moran 2012) On both levels they consider these inscriptions as a limiting (almost insurmountable) obstacle in getting different than a manual job. Whether it is a legal manual job, or return to their criminal career, in both cases it is more advantageous to increase their physical strength rather than acquiring knowledge. That is also the reason why they keep developing their project, their body, on the physical, rather than on the intellectual, level.

*Surely I will prefer working out to reading books. What would that be good for? Yeah, I read sometimes, a magazine or so, but attending classes and learning something? No way, I'm not into that. I plan to work with my hands outside anyway, so I'm trying to be as strong as I can. When you have big muscles, you're more likely to get a job than when you are a wimp.* (Roman, inmate)

The physical body remains important to most inmates also in the stage before their way out, when their aspirations and motivations for future life in freedom mix with the need to keep their position in the prison hierarchy for the remainder of the imprisonment. For these reasons the motivation to work out remains very strong even in the case of inmates in this stage of imprisonment.

## **Conclusion**

Following my research in Czech prisons, I tried to elaborate in this text the concept of *the body as a project*, which may serve as one of the possible ways of understanding the importance of the physical body to inmates during their imprisonment and changing motivations to its further development. The growth of musculature seems to be important to the respondents also with respect to their future life after release, in which they plan to use mainly their physical strength to earn living.

The importance the physical body has to Czech inmates is closely linked to the fact that Czech prisons are a normatively masculine environment. In the process of "manhood" construction, the body is seen as a tool that has practical use during the imprisonment and also afterwards, especially with respect to the requirement for physical strength and well-defined musculature. Inmates use body building not only as a source of power, but also as a way of demonstrating it. In the gym they show how much they can lift and thus demonstrate



their dominance. A gym becomes a place where the masculine code of the inmates is reproduced via performative actions. Those who do not enter this process with an initial capital in the form of a well-defined body must find a different option how they can – at least partially – get access to the goods they need and thus improve (but in fact only very little) their status. For this purpose, inmates use their bodies as a commodity. Inmates with poor musculature know that they will not get goods through respect and getting closer to the masculine ideal, so they try to get them by accentuating feminine aspects in the form of offering sex in return for remuneration. In the current context of Czech men's prisons the phenomenon of raping has been (in overwhelming majority of cases) replaced with sex as a voluntary and intended exchange transaction. Nevertheless, the concept of masculinity and physical body play key roles in both cases.

The research has methodological limits I am aware of and they need to be taken into consideration when interpreting its findings. These include particularly the limited time for data collection and the fact the research only focused on prisons of category C, which hinders comparing findings from different types of prisons. However, this restriction has a potential for a future research in which researchers could focus on comparing different types of prisons in the Czech Republic and on the international level.

Despite these limitations, I believe my research is original and unique when taking into consideration the lack of data and studies mapping the Czech prison environment. There is a space for analysing this issue, which has been rather omitted by socially-scientific research until now. I tried to contribute with my study to a better understanding of the life behind high prison walls with special emphasis on corporeality. After my initial contact with the new environment, from which I felt masculinity literally at every turn, I asked myself the question what role plays the physical body to inmates and whether there are any specific properties of inmates' relationship to their bodies. The preference of sporting activities with body building on the top proved to be the prevailing characteristic feature of the prisons I got the chance to visit, which motivated me to carry out a research that would, at least partially, answer my question. I believe I succeeded in accomplishing my goal, but I still consider my study as an initial step on the long journey towards the development of (not only) Czech prison research and an initial contribution to the international discussion from the perspective of Czech context. An interesting field for future research is the connection between physical and symbolic masculinity. There is also space for comparative research in the field of comparing body disciplination inside and outside prisons (in the form of working out, plastic surgeries, piercings, tattoos).

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