



# Body, Self, and Aging Experiences of Individuals Undergoing Aesthetic Surgery for Anti-Aging Purposes\*

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**Abstract:** Anti-aging intervention for the body have been increasing in parallel with scientific, technological, and medical developments. In this sense, the subject of the study is the aging experience of people who have undergone plastic surgery to eliminate the signs of aging that occur in the body. The aim of the study is to examine the body and self-perceptions of people involved in anti-aging intervention, their individual and social experiences that led to their intervention, and their perceptions toward aging, old age, and the older body. This study was designed with a phenomenological framework and adopted a qualitative research method. In-depth interviews were conducted with 29 people using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Content analysis of the obtained data was performed using the program MAXQDA 20. As a result, the study, has determined people who've intervened in the aging of their bodies to consider their bodies to be important as a living and perceiving entity, to have established a close relationship between their body and self-perception, and to have resultantly attempted to eliminate the manifestations of biological aging in the body. They perceive the older body to be weak, incomplete, defective, pathological, and disadvantaged and to evoke mortality. They were also determined to like a young wrinkle-free body, as it provides an advantage in the partner relationship and is preferred in the labor market.

**Keywords:** body, self-perception, aging, anti-aging, wrinkle-free aging

**Öz:** Bilimsel, teknolojik ve tıbbi gelişmelere paralel olarak, bedene yönelik yaşlanma karşıtı müdahaleler artış göstermektedir. Bu anlamda çalışmanın konusu, bedende meydana gelen yaşlanma belirtilerini ortadan kaldırmak için estetik cerrahi müdahale yaptırmış kişilerin yaşlanma deneyimine yöneliktir. Çalışmanın amacı; yaşlanma karşıtlığı müdahalesinde bulunan kişilerin beden ve benlik algısını, müdahaleye götüren bireysel ve sosyal deneyimlerini, yaşlanma, yaşlılık ve yaşlı beden algısını incelemektir. Bu çalışma, nitel araştırma yöntemi benimsenerek, fenomenolojik desen ile tasarlanmıştır. Amaçlı ve kartopu örneklem tekniği kullanılarak 29 kişi ile derinlemesine görüşme gerçekleştirilmiştir. MAXQDA 20 programı aracılığıyla elde edilen verilerin içerik analizi yapılmıştır. Çalışma sonucunda; bedenlerine yaşlanma karşıtı müdahale yaptıran kişilerin, yaşayan ve algılayan bir varlık olarak bedenlerini önemli gördükleri, beden ile benlik algısı arasında sıkı bir ilişki kurdukları ve bu nedenle biyolojik yaşlanmanın bedende cisimleşen belirtilerini ortadan kaldırmaya çalıştıkları tespit edilmiştir. Yaşlı beden; zayıf, eksik, kusurlu, patolojik, dezavantajlı ve ölümlüğü çağrıştıran beden olarak algılanmaktadır. Genç ve pürüzsüz bedenin ise beğenildiği, partner ilişkisinde avantaj sağladığı ve iş piyasasında tercih edildiği tespit edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Beden, benlik, yaşlanma, yaşlanma karşıtlığı, pürüzsüz yaşlanma

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## Introduction

The life expectancy of human beings has been increasing steadily with scientific and technological developments in the medical field. Meanwhile, perceptions toward age, aging, and old age are changing. Medical science contributes to prolonging human life and strives to prevent, delay, and eliminate the signs of aging in the body. One of these efforts is anti-aging aesthetic surgical interventions. In particular, anti-aging practices aim to prevent aging; to change one's lifestyle in medical terms; to eliminate the negative aspects of environmental, physical, and educational factors; and to increase both one's quality of life as well as life span using drugs and the methods of modern and alternative medicine. The use of anti-aging as a term is understood to involve direct interventions and applications to the body. The body forms the main concept of the idea of anti-aging as aesthetic surgery has made it a correctable and repairable object.

Aging is the process that begins with the formation of a fetus in the womb and goes on to occur in physical and social environments with birth. Harrison (2016, p. 19) expressed age and aging to be natural stating, "There is nothing on earth that has no age. If a phenomenon does not age, it does not belong to this world. What does not belong to this world is not a phenomenon." As can be understood from this explanation, aging is an inevitable natural process. Despite being a natural process, a significant increase has occurred in the population favoring anti-aging, namely favoring efforts to look young and wrinkle-free.

The search for rejuvenation and immortality has a long history. However, the most important difference between the past and the present is that technological developments have increasingly enabled interventions in the body (Mykytyn, 2006, p. 280). According to a report announced by the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS, 2022a), an increase of 11.2% occurred in 2022 compared to 2021 for procedures performed in the field of aesthetic surgery, with a significant number of these operations having been aimed at anti-aging. According to report, more than 14.9 million surgical and 18.8 million non-surgical procedures were performed worldwide in 2022. Over the last four years, the number of plastic surgeries increased by 41.3%, while non-surgical procedures increased by 57.8%. Among the countries that have seen the highest number of foreign patients, Türkiye ranked after Mexico, Colombia, and Thailand. According to another released report (ISAPS, 2022b), the most common surgical interventions for anti-aging in the world are eyelid surgery, breast lift, face lift, and neck lift. This report also included the interventions carried out in Türkiye, which ranked fifth in the world of countries performing the most aesthetic and surgical interventions. The three most preferred

anti-aging surgical interventions in Türkiye are eyelid surgery, facelifts, and neck lifts, respectively, while the most preferred non-surgical anti-aging interventions are Botox, hyaluronic acid, peeling, and non-surgical skin tightening.

Aesthetic surgery should not be perceived as a simple repair to the body. In Jones's (2008, p. 8) words, aesthetic surgery is "an attempt to go beyond the normal." As such, aesthetic surgery is a branch of medicine for people who want to modify their self-perceptions by changing the external appearance of their bodies. In this sense, having an in-depth understanding of perceptions of the body, self, aging, and being old regarding people who are to undergo plastic surgery for anti-aging intervention is important.

Actively participating in social life is only possible with a body. In the words of Merleau-Ponty (2020, p. 215), "I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather I am it." This is because culture, belief, value, emotion, thought, and behavior are embodied in one's body. Therefore, the body corresponds with many meanings from a sociological point of view. In the words of Synnott (2002, p. 1). "Our body is loaded with public and private, political and economic, sexual, moral and cultural symbolic meanings." Likewise, bodily qualities, functions, states, and senses are full of symbolic meanings. Although humans are in a world of objects through their body, shape, color, organic structure, and size, they are beings who are separate from objects and reveal their own form through consciousness. In this sense, the body is a place of expression (Merleau-Ponty, 2020, p. 210). Society as a body can be considered a network of bodily relations (O'Neil, 1989, p. 232). Noteworthy, the body has such sociologically important features, and aging is embodied in the body. This study focuses on the "experience of bodily aging" in order to deepen the understanding of the body as a living, perceiving characteristic in phenomenological body theory. This theory, considers the body to be an essential element of self. Although the body is a limiting point of human existence and consciousness, it is considered less important than the collective reality of the social world in which the self is placed (Turner, 2019, p. 34): It is the main symbol and primary determinant of the self (Synnott, 2002, p. 2).

The body is a material entity in which both aging occurs, and the self performs. In this context, the study has three important pillars (i.e., body, self, and aging) and includes these concepts in relation to one another. Studies focused on anti-aging are found in literature. However, these studies are generally discussed in the context of media, advertising, consumption, health, and power. The current study differs from others in that its focus is on the body and targets the experiences and self-perceptions of people who have undergone anti-aging interventions. The study will

provide information about how these people are involved in social life. The study has preferred the phenomenology approach to the body due to being action-oriented, and emphasizing social actors' human agency and lived experiences, whereas the social constructivist approach describes much about the body's social significance but falls short on what the body means.

### **Phenomenological Body, Self-Perception, Aging, and Anti-Aging**

Humans are born with a bodily existence, and bodies can be described in many different ways, such as young or old in terms of age; female or male in terms of gender; fat, thin, fit or skinny in terms of appearance; and sacred or impure in terms of religio. Many body typologies can be made based on different perspectives, such as healthy or diseased, living or dead, natural or aestheticized, social or individual, ruling or ruled, strong or weak, smooth or scarred, perceived or ideal, and stigmatized or applauded. Societies play a decisive role in the formation of these body typologies, because the body is the embodiment of the whole way an individual thinks about their belonging to society (Bozkurt & Koyuncu, 2023, p. 273).

While the body corresponds to human physical existence, embodiment refers to the physical and mental experience of said existence (Cregan, 2006, p. 3). Merleau-Ponty (2020) referred to a living, perceiving, feeling body. In an attempt to go beyond the categories of the classical soul and body problem and to eliminate conceptual ambiguity by attributing vitality and specificity to the concept of corps (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 2017; Kaylo, 2003; Leder, 1990). As the most important aspect accepted in phenomenological theory, the "living body" is one of the essential elements that make up the layers of the self. The embodiment of the body corresponds to "the process by which the object-body is actively experienced, produced, sustained and/or transformed into a subject-body" (Waskul & Vannini, 2006, p. 3). This is because identities need to be embodied in order to be reflected in the social world. Therefore, embodiment is closely related to the self (Crossley, 2006, p. 22). The attempt is to achieve not a body, but a body animated by consciousness. The body is with the person, and people are their body. Similarly, to the extent that one is in the world with one's body, perceiving the world with the body requires one, to reawaken the experience of the world as it appears to the person. However, by reconnecting with one's body and the world in this way, one can rediscover oneself. When perceiving with one's body, the body is a natural self and, so to speak, the subject of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2020, pp. 238, 283-284).

One exists through the body, and the body's desire for change and transformation is related to the self. According to James (1890, p.656), "A person has as many social

selves as the number of individuals who know him/her and carry his/her image in their minds.” According to Cooley, the self “emerges in a process of interaction with other people and society: “I” is impossible without “you”, “it” is impossible without “them” (Cooley, 1902, p. 184). Acquiring any sense of self is impossible except in relation to the other. In fact, the self can only appear in a relationship (Mansfield, 2021, p. 77). The concept of self can be defined as “all the feelings and attitudes that a person has about himself, his qualities and characteristics, value, abilities, limits, value judgments and goals” (Hortaçsu, 2012, p. 240). The self is something that evolves and not something that is innate. In other words, the self occurs as a result of one’s relationships with the social experience process as a whole and with the other individuals participating in this process (Mead, 2017, p. 165).

The body as an existential being is closely related to the issues of aging and old age. This is because the body is where aging is embodied. Aging is a natural, inevitable process, so much so that Marc Auge (2018, p. 56) made a striking comment on aging: “I am getting older, so I am living. I am old, therefore I exist.” Aging corresponds to a process, and old age corresponds to a period. With the acceleration of scientific and technological developments, anti-aging interventions have gained momentum against the wrinkles and sagging that occur in the body during old age. From past to present, different applications have been carried out for anti-aging (Fishman, et al., 2008, p. 1). The applications most commonly used today are cosmetic products, nutritional and vitamin supplements, sports and exercises, and aesthetic surgical interventions. People with physical deformations can go under the knife for plastic surgery (i.e., aesthetic intervention) or undergo interventions for skin-opening substances, toning the body, and rejuvenation (Goffman, 2019, p. 36) in order to remove the tarnished aspect of their social identity. The body plays a mediating role in the relationship between individual and social identity (Shilling, 2003, p. 73), because the body is the space where the performance of the self is embodied (Giddens, 2019, p. 86).

## Methodology

This study has preferred the qualitative research method due to its suitability for examining the “anti-aging experiences regarding the phenomena of body, self, old age, and aging” of people who’ve undergone anti-aging intervention. The main phenomena of this study are body, aging, and self. The study is based on the problem of how people experience the perception of aging through the body and self and how their perceptions transformed into the act of undergoing an intervention. The study uses the phenomenological research framework to examine the experience of anti-aging. Studies using the phenomenological research approach are carried

out with a group of individuals who have experienced a phenomenon in all aspects. Interviews were conducted until the data obtained reached a saturation point (Glaser & Strauss, 2006, p. 61).

After completing the theoretical readings, interview questions were created based on the basic problems and their sub issues. The researcher-created questionnaires were revised by taking the opinions of two experts in this field. The final version of the interview form was created after following their suggestions and criticisms, which was then used to conduct the interviews. The interview form was approved by an ethics committee, and interviews were conducted between January 27, October 18, 2022. Before starting the interviews, verbal and written consent was obtained from the individuals, which stated that they were participating in the study voluntarily. The vast majority of participants ( $n = 29$ ) were interviewed online, with 18 being interviewed using WhatsApp and two using Zoom. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with nine people, with seven interviews being held at the participant's workplace and two at restaurants. The interviews lasted a total of 1,395 minutes, at an average duration of 48 minutes. Once the data obtained during the research process began to repeat itself, the data collection process was stopped. As a result of analyzing the transcripts, confirmation was received from two experienced academicians that the data saturation point had been reached. While the interview form asked open-ended questions, the pre-determined statements and questions were not limited in detail. In this sense, the semi-structured interview form provided flexibility. The interviews were recorded, and the necessary notes were taken. After the interviews, the audio recordings and notes were deciphered and transcribed into a Microsoft Word file. Participants were reached through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The program MAXQDA was used to carry out the content analysis of the obtained data. During the interviews, codes W1 to W24 were given to the female and codes M1 to M3 to the male participants who'd undergone interventions, while the codes D1, and D2 were given to the doctors.

The subjects of body, self, old age, aging, and anti-aging fall within the most general scope of the research. However, these five concepts can be addressed in different ways and be the subject of their own research. The current study specifically limited to its focus on the "anti-aging experience" within the framework of the above-mentioned concepts. Anti-aging practices include many topics and practices such as adjusting nutrition, weight control, living in a clean environment, exercise and an active life, benefiting from cosmetics, keeping hormonal irregularities under control, looking at life positively, stress management, and most importantly, genetic risk diagnoses and counseling. For this reason, anti-aging as an expression can be understood to involve cosmetic and beauty applications directly for the body and pleasure. Aesthetic and surgical centers have become the main destinations for

anti-aging practices. Youths, adults, and older people go to these places and have rejuvenation operations.

This study's subject of aging is limited to the anti-aging experience and only those who've had an aesthetic or surgical anti-aging intervention have been included. This research was conducted with a study group of 29 people (24 females, 3 males and 2 aesthetic). A different interview form was prepared for the aesthetic surgeons, and the experiences of those who performed the intervention were enriched with their perspectives. This study is based on the sociology of the body, with the "phenomenological approach to the body being" the focus of the discussions. The participants have high education levels, four with postgraduate degrees, 12 have bachelor's degrees, four with associate degrees, and four with a high school degree. 11 of the participants are married, nine are single, and seven are divorced. In general, the participants' economic levels are middle to upper middle, and their ages range between 26-58, with an average age of 40. Before starting the field research, the plan had been to interview people aged 40 and older. However, upon being in the field, anti-aging interventions were found to start at a very early age. Of the 27 non-doctor participants, 26 had Botox first, while 1 person had lifting and hydrophilic interventions. The participants first had anti-aging interventions at an average age of 33. They come from different professional groups. Namely, the group has three teachers and three civil servants; two academicians, two nurses, two business managers, and two Pilates and yoga instructors; one unemployed, one housewife, one sociologist, one manager, one belly dancer, one hostess, one accountant, one babysitter, one cosmic energy therapist, one retiree, one retired employee, one caregiver, and one worker. The presence of people from different professional groups enriches the data obtained in the study.

## Results

This section evaluates the results from analyzing the data obtained from the interviews carried out within the scope of field research. The research findings are presented as themes, categories, and codes, with the expressions reflecting the codes being explained in detail. A total of two main themes emerged in the research: (1) the process leading to anti-aging intervention, and (2) "the sacred body: embodiment and self-repair." The section provides a detailed discussion and interpretation of the findings.

### Process Leading to Anti-Aging Intervention

This theme has the following three categories listed in terms of most-to-least frequently mentioned: individual experiences, social experiences, and the emotional



components revealed by individual and social experiences. The category of individual experiences is important in terms of conveying the experiences of people who have an anti-aging intervention. Table 1 presents the categories and codes for this “theme”.

**Table 1**

*Codes for the Theme of the Process Leading to Anti-Aging Intervention*

<b>Code</b> ( <i>frequency</i> )	<b>Category</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Masking death (25) Anxiety about being liked (25) Mirror as an allegory of transience (16) Freezing youth: not later, right now (10) Partner effect: Cheating and divorce (2)	Individual Experiences	The Process that Leads to Anti-Aging Intervention
Aesthetic interaction (9) Ageism (8) Age stigma (7) Being a woman (7) Occupation (4)	Social Experiences	
Unhappiness (18) Insecurity (6)	Emotional Components Revealed by Individual and Social Experiences	

### Individual experiences

The frequencies of the codes belonging to this category are as follows: masking death ( $n = 25$ ), anxiety of being liked ( $n = 25$ ), mirror as an allegory of transience ( $n = 16$ ), freezing youth: not later, right now ( $n = 10$ ), partner effect: cheating and divorce ( $n = 2$ ). Participants associated having an older body appearance with death. The older appearance of the body also makes people feel closer to psychological death. Therefore, they had preferred anti-aging interventions to mask death and erase the traces of death. The 37-year-old civil servant participant W? stated the following:

they say that as the body gets older, this person got on in years and they think that death comes with age. This person has aged physically, so they are also close to death. They usually say they have so many years of life left anyway. About the body, if the body has gone through too much like if it is worn out, people usually say so.



Participants stated having an anti-aging intervention because they were concerned about being liked by both themselves and others if they had an older body appearance. Pilates and yoga instructor W18 explained undergoing an intervention because she was concerned about not being liked by young people, not being socially preferred, and appearing to be natural, stating:

A young body means you feel beautiful; feeling beautiful means you interact with everyone. It is a young and social body. My logic is that however young I look, my social environment will also be as young, so I can have quite some fun with them.

Aesthetic surgeon D2, who has worked in this field for many years, explained that people who come for anti-aging purposes are concerned about being liked, saying:

They are trying to stay physical, to show “I am still standing, I am not dead, I am still useful.” They try to make me do it with thoughts so that they do not get upset and so that they look good to those around them.

As an allegory of transience, the mirror code corresponds to the fact that the participants chose to undergo an intervention because they see their own signs of aging while looking in the mirror, not because they received any negative comments from their social environment. In addition to mirrors, the fact that people constantly see themselves in the photographs that are taken caused them to think about their body. The 30-year-old operator W1 said she hadn’t been influenced by anyone and decided to undergo an intervention after seeing signs of aging, stating, “No one commented, I was not influenced by my environment. I was affected when I looked in the mirror because I could observe myself getting older.”

Participants stated that anti-aging interventions should be done at an early age. They have the idea of performing these procedures before their age progresses. At the same time, plastic surgeons encouraged anti-aging intervention at an early age, and people took the surgeons’ recommendations into account. Aesthetic surgeon D2, said that interventions should be performed at an early age, saying, “Botox should be performed after the age of 30 so that wrinkles do not increase or deepen. Of course, mesotherapy can also be done and vitamins can be used to prevent someone from aging.” 47-year-old nurse W7 explained that procedures such as anti-aging should be started at an early age and that these interventions are regular and continuous interventions, stating:

If you start with timely interventions and this process continues, you will not be in such a bad situation, so you don’t feel bad. But when you get it done, you feel good, and when the time comes, you want it done, something that has regularity and continuity.

Two participants stated undergoing an intervention due to the partner effect. One stated having had an anti-aging intervention because his partner had cheated, and the other stated undergoing an anti-aging intervention because his partner had made accusations made about his body after the divorce. 43-year-old accountant W6 stated undergoing an intervention after being cheated on, saying:

I was cheated on in 2015. I felt so bad with the psychological thing of being cheated on. I don't know, I tried to make myself beautiful. Did I want to steady my self-confidence for myself? At that moment, one cannot think. I mean, with that psychology, one thinks they'll be very beautiful or something.

Doctor D1, works in the field of aesthetic surgery and was asked whether a special event had happened that nurtured anti-aging, he explained going through a divorce and being cheated on to influential, stating:

Of course, there seems to be an increase after separation. Her husband is with someone younger than her and she wants to be young too. She pays more attention if he's going to be with someone younger than her. Cheating and emotionalization give great meaning to Botox.

Stating intensive anti-aging interventions to occur after divorce and being cheated on, doctor D1 stated these situations to be sensitive and to be subject to court proceedings for some reasons. People blame the external appearance of their body after being cheated on. People who want to change their lives believe that they can change their lives by changing their bodies, even if they couldn't do anything. Divorced males in particular have turned to anti-aging interventions to meet young women.

## Social Experiences

The category of social experiences contains five different codes listed in order of most to least frequent: Aesthetic interaction ( $n=9$ ), ageism ( $n=8$ ), age stigma ( $n=7$ ), being a woman ( $n=7$ ), profession ( $n=4$ ). The large number of people who have undergone anti-aging aesthetic surgery has led to this type of intervention being normalized for people who have not had or are considering having it done. Normalizing anti-aging interventions continue to increase. Teacher W17 stated being influenced by people who had undergone an intervention, and that they empowered her, saying:

I wasn't looking for perfection. When I saw those lines around my eyes, I decided to undergo it, and when I heard that the people around me did it, I wondered if I should try it too. You know, to see if it could happen. I was kind of impressed by them, I saw those who did it. It's like they gave me some kind of strength, I'd say.

Participants stated that society has a discriminatory attitude toward older people. The 58-year-old retiree W10 said, "Some people say, 'What are they doing here, they should mind their own business, look at them, etc. There is a perception that older people should stay at home.'" Participants stated being "stigmatized" by their social circles due to the signs of aging in their bodies and therefore had undergone interventions. The 39-year-old academician M3 explained being stigmatized by his social circle due to the signs of aging on his face, stating:

You can be the subject of the same ridicule about the face. From hair loss to wrinkles, this is the good state. Now it's like an analogy, you know, you're like a field. You know, even more so, forgive me, your face has turned to my ass, these conversations happen a lot.

Participants stated that society imposes the perception that women should look young and beautiful. Social pressure and the expectation of being liked have important places in women leaning toward undergoing anti-aging interventions. When asking the participants why women want to look young and beautiful, the 41-year-old teacher W16 stated that women were raised by society with pressure such as beauty, youth, and attractiveness being sought in women and young beautiful women being on TV and social media channels and that these reasons are why women chose to undergo anti-aging interventions, saying:

I mean, getting older, as a woman, of course, as a woman, I think every woman wants to be beautiful. Being old, I think nobody wants to get old. Women do not want it at all. There is a perception that a woman should be young and beautiful.

During the field research, women were much easier to reach than men D1, who has 15 years of experience in the plastic surgery department of a private hospital in Istanbul, stated that women performed more interventions saying:

In general, we can say that it is predominantly female, that is, 80% female, 20% male. In the last 15 years, there has been a decrease in the average age number of women and an increase in the male population during my working period.

Participants stated that their bodies should look young due to their profession or professional preferences. Flight attendant W24 said her intervention was due to her profession, stating, "[It] is a profession that is in public's eye. You are like a showcase, let me say that." Having an old or young body appearance can be positive or negative in people's professional preferences. W9, a 49-year-old housewife who applied to a workplace as a cashier but was not hired, said she was discriminated against and not hired because of her age, stating:

For example, I applied to a workplace as a cashier, he told me that your retirement was close. This is a very heavy accusation, so I got mad. For example, he asked me about my date of birth, he said that your retirement had come. They literally make us feel like useless human beings, that is, they put us in old age mode and make us feel like unnecessary human beings. You sit on the side, wait for your death, you can't produce anymore, you're a consumer.

## Emotional Components Revealed by Individual and Social Experiences

The category of the emotional components revealed by individual and social experiences refers to how the participants felt before the intervention. The codes that emerged in this category are in order of frequency: unhappiness ( $n = 18$ ), insecurity ( $n = 6$ ). The participants stated being unhappy and insecure due to signs of aging. The emotional components of unhappiness and insecurity have an important place in the participants' anti-aging response. M3, a 39-year-old academician who'd viewed signs of aging before the intervention as a source of shame, stated, "How to express it individually? It was psychologically uncomfortable. I want to describe it exactly. As a source of shame, I clearly saw it as a source of shame."

The signs of aging in the body caused the participants to feel insecure. Participants experienced emotional states such as inability to move comfortably, sexual unhappiness, feeling bad, and insecurity. W1, a 30-year-old business owner, stated that the signs of aging had created insecurity and that she had worn a mask comfortably during the pandemic because it covered the wrinkles on her face, saying, "I feel old and I have interventions for this. I didn't want to go out. I wear the mask more comfortably. I even gave up on makeup." Individuals who evaluate their appearance positively have high self-esteem. In contrast, individuals who evaluate their appearance negatively have lower self-esteem. In this context, the participants who'd undergone anti-aging interventions were observed to have had a low self-perception before the intervention. The low self-perception created by an aging body led people to undergo an anti-aging intervention.

## The Sacred Body: Embodiment and Self-Repair

Some of the sub-problems of the research involve the meanings the participants who'd undergone interventions attributed to their body and how they perceived themselves after the intervention. The participants were observed to attribute sacredness to the young, wrinkle-free body and to have a positive self-perception after the intervention, albeit with negative experiences also emerging. Table 2 presents the categories and codes for the theme of the sacred body: embodiment and self-repair.

**Table 2***Codes and Categories for The Theme of the Sacred Body: Embodiment and Self-Repair*

<b>Code (frequency)</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Beautiful (24) Happy (24) Young (20) Self-Confident (13)	Positive Post-Intervention Self Experiences	The Sacred Body: Embodiment and Self-Repair
The Hell of Sameness: A Tribute to Naturalness (15) Pretending It's Natural: I Had an Operation But "Keep It Between Us" (7)	Negative Post-Intervention Experiences	

The participants conveyed having positive experiences after their anti-aging intervention. In this context, the category emerged of positive self-experiences after the intervention with the following codes and frequencies: happy ( $n = 24$ ), beautiful ( $n = 24$ ), young ( $n = 20$ ), and self-confident ( $n = 13$ ).

### Positive Post-Intervention Self Experiences

After the intervention, a positive transition occurred from negative to positive self-perceptions, namely from low to high self-perceptions. The fact that the participants gained a positive sense of self after the intervention on their body confirms this relationship. The participants conveyed their positive experiences following the anti-aging intervention, with the category emerging of positive post-intervention self-experiences. Interventions on the body positively affected their self-perceptions. The participants responded that they had repaired and modified their body as well as their self. Most of the participants stated feeling happy after the rejuvenation interventions. W20, a 39-year-old cosmic energy therapist who was liked by others after her intervention, said, "You become happy. Being liked is something that always caresses the soul of human beings." A majority of the participants felt beautiful after the intervention. W18, a 32-year-old Pilates and yoga instructor, expressed feeling beautiful after the intervention, saying, "I saw myself more beautiful in the mirror and started to feel beautiful. I became happier and felt that I looked younger, brighter. And so it is, you are enlightened."

Pilates and yoga instructor W18, 32, who felt young after the intervention, also explained how her self-confidence had increased, how she received positive comments, and how her social media shares increased. She expressed that she would undergo these interventions again, saying, "My shares increased more. I think the reason for

the increase is related to self-confidence. Feeling young also instills self-confidence. Of course, some people think I look younger than before. These comments flatter me.” Stating having been insecure before the intervention, nurse W3 said that her self-confidence increased after the intervention, saying, “I had a lack of self-confidence before the intervention. Great comfort, self-confidence... I was more reserved before. I was reserved both psychologically and physically. I was introverted.”

## Negative Post-Intervention Experiences

Participants also conveyed having negative post-intervention experiences, with two codes having emerged: the hell of sameness: a tribute to naturalness ( $n = 15$ ), and pretending that it is natural: I had the operation, but “keep it between us” ( $n = 7$ ). Participants stated looking artificial after the anti-aging intervention and remaining young naturally by hiding the operation. These statements are described under the category of negative experiences. The hell of sameness is the code revealed by the participants who had undergone an anti-aging intervention saying everyone looked the same and conveying it as a system. Participants want to look young, but at the same time complained that it looked unnatural. W4, a 40-year-old manager in a private hospital, explained that everyone became the same and that she doesn’t want to be like everyone else, saying:

I think everyone can be operated on the spot they deem necessary, but there are many unnatural ones. They make Botox on the lips, they get fillings so that the face goes and something completely different comes. I don’t like it. I’m not against it, but everyone is the same. Everyone is becoming the same. I don’t want to be the same. Mine is really a need to make myself look a little younger.

Some participants disguised their intervention. The meaning underneath this secrecy is to claim that they remain young naturally. These participants have been evaluated under the category of negative experience because they concealed the unnatural nature of their appearance. W24, a 33-year-old flight attendant who told everyone that she had had an intervention, explained why people hide they had an intervention, saying, “Generally, people say, ‘I didn’t dooo anythingggg.’ I tell everyone. People generally claim that they are naturally beautiful.”

People who engage in anti-aging interventions talk about two important negative experiences. The most important of these is their discourse that these are unnatural. The second is that they keep their interventions secret. The demand to look young means accepting unification. The natural body leaves itself to an artificial, dull, and mimic-less body. Existing facial expressions disappear and create the perception of a mask on the face.

## Conclusion and Discussion

This study has been designed phenomenologically based on the thesis of the body living, conscious, and perceiving. It emphasizes the living body experience, contrary to the idea of the body being formed by political and economic discourses, powers, structures, and systems. Although this study was prepared by creating this theoretical background, it is not limited to this. Thus, the study has examined the body, self, aging, and anti-aging experiences of people who've undergone anti-aging interventions without ignoring the over-pacified and experienced dimensions of the body. The perceptions toward old age and aging of people who've undergone anti-aging interventions resemble the psychological, biological, and sociological types of aging. An older person is defined as one with no expectations for life and no plans or excitement for the future. In a sociological sense, people who are in need, unable to do their own work, and who avoid social relations and become lonely are defined as older. Societal perspectives toward older people and the old body have triggered the idea of people having a young body. Having a young, wrinkle-free body means eliminating fears of social isolation, because old age is perceived as a disadvantaged group. In other words, aging is perceived as a social distinction as well as a biological phenomenon.

When trying to erase the traces of aging in the body, the fact that the aging symptoms that occur in the body negatively affect one's self-perceptions before the intervention and positively after the intervention shows a close relationship to exist between the body and self-perception and draws attention to the importance of the body and aging. This tight relationship between body and self directly reflects the perceptions toward old bodies. Having an older body causes a low perception of self, as seen in various studies (Marshall et al., 2014, p. 206). Making a body young and wrinkle-free by intervening against aging is a practice of embodiment. Aesthetic surgery gives participants a new existence because the body is a frozen or generalized existence, and existence is a continuous embodiment (Merleau-Ponty, 2020, p. 236). Embodiment is found in the social world of social actors and is both a body-building as well as self-building process (Turner, 2019, p. 245). Individuals were observed to define themselves post-intervention as happy, beautiful, young, and self-confident, resulting in a positive shift from negative to positive self-perceptions (i.e., from a low to high perception of self). An old body is perceived as weak, incomplete, defective, and pathological. Therefore, the body becomes the focal point of anti-aging interventions by being transformed into a stock that needs to be invested in (Bozkurt, 2023, p. 168). At the same time, because anti-aging interventions require significant economic capital, having a young, wrinkle-free body is perceived as a



form of class appreciation (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 176). Featherstone (1987) made a class reading between the concept of bodily capital and the concept of the aged body. The upper classes unconsciously dress their age as a sign of status rather than a sign of decline. For them, having a youthful body means the nobility of life. Therefore, cosmetic surgical interventions are vitally important to them. People with older bodies are therefore seen as having low socioeconomic income. Judging people by their age (i.e., body appearance; Butler, 1969, pp. 243–246), negative beliefs, and stereotypes (Erber, 2018, p. 13) reveal age discrimination (McMullin & Marshall, 2001, p. 112). Another factor in the desire to push the old body aside is having been exposed to discrimination in society. The reason women turn to anti-aging aesthetic interventions stems from the pressures imposed by society regarding ideals of beauty, youth, and femininity. These interventions reflect both a search for individual autonomy and an effort to conform to social norms.

People have undergone aesthetic surgery for such reasons as to be liked, to erase the traces of death, to gain an advantage in their partner relationship, to be preferred in the labor market, to protect the young body, to not feel unhappy and insecure, to not be stigmatized, to not be discriminated against, to look young, and to stay wrinkle-free. An older appearance has been associated with mortality, both in the current research and other studies (Bulun, 2018; Demir, 2019; Slevic & Tiggemann, 2010). In addition, different situations in society can lead to aesthetic surgery. For example, body after being cheated or getting divorced and want to have a young, wrinkle-free body. People think they can change their life by modifying their body. Therefore, negative situations affect the self and body almost equally. Similar results were obtained in Jarrin's (2017, p. 4) study conducted on people who'd undergone aesthetic surgery in Brazil. One important results from the study is that beautification is not perceived as a matter of ostentation but rather as a characteristic at the center of social values and social mobility opportunities. Therefore, people turn to anti-aging interventions because having a young, smooth physical appearance means being one step ahead in the labor market. Individuals who have undergone anti-aging interventions perceive their class status to be preserved through their physical appearance or perceive this as a class transition. In other words, anti-aging cosmetic surgery is an effort to preserve or increase bodily capital by making the individual's body conform to socially valued norms such as youth, beauty, and health. In the context of Bourdieu, such interventions can be seen as a strategy by which one reproduces their own capital in order to maintain competitiveness in the social sphere.

Although this study was created using a phenomenological framework, the results have revealed structural reasons for undergoing an anti-aging intervention. For example, when considering both the results obtained here with the data in

the literature (Breton, 2018; Demez, 2012; Shilling, 2003; Ülker, 2021), the older body is seen to be marginalized and to involve gerontophobic expressions, while the young wrinkle-free body is encouraged by such forms of mass media as TV and social media. Therefore, the young body is blessed through mass communication, creating a smooth body project. In summary, three important structural situations occur: media and visual culture, medical discourses, and institutional actors (e.g., aesthetic clinics and the cosmetic industry). Through this project, aesthetic surgical interventions for modifying the body have become widespread. Studies addressing perceptions toward using anti-aging products (Muisse & Desmarais, 2010; Murakami & Yilmaz, 2021) have concluded the pressure to have a youthful body is imposed more on women than men. The fact that famous actors frequently share their appearances on social media positively influences the idea of other people undergoing anti-aging plastic surgery. Before the undergoing anti-aging interventions, individuals were found to have low self-perceptions (e.g., being unhappy, ugly, old, and insecure) and to have high self-perceptions post-intervention (e.g., being happy, beautiful, young, and self-confident). However, the facts that the young, wrinkle-free body that emerge post-intervention causes uniform body typology and that people feel artificial, dull, and mimic-less are negative aspects regarding anti-aging aesthetic surgical interventions. Suggestions for further research include a comparative study on the perceptions of aging for those who have and have not undergone anti-aging aesthetic surgery. The reasons that lead to ageism can also be researched under various contexts with a focus on the body.

## **Limitations**

All scientific research has certain limits. While the subjects of body, self, old age, aging, and anti-aging are within the most general scope of the research, these five concepts can be addressed in different ways and be the subject of their own research. This research was specifically limited by focusing on the experience of anti-aging within the framework of the above-mentioned concepts. The subject of aging was also limited to the anti-aging experience. In other words, the study only included people who had undergone anti-aging aesthetic or surgical interventions. This limited the research to the data obtained from the study group. Another limitation of the study is that it examined the anti-aging experience with a phenomenological approach in terms of the concepts of body, self, old age, and aging. Future research can examine aging and anti-aging interventions using other approaches and broader study groups, as well as through other related experiences.

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