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BECOMING A GOOD MOTHER: RESPONSIBILITY BETWEEN STATE, EXPERTS AND MOTHERS IN RUSSIA

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BECOMING A GOOD MOTHER: RESPONSIBILITY BETWEEN STATE, EXPERTS AND MOTHERS IN RUSSIA²

The working paper represents a study of motherhood as a specific semantic construct in contemporary Russia. The author analyses the ways in which knowledge about motherhood produces specific maternal experience. The general theoretical framework is the Foucauldian concept of discursive power based on knowledge. At the same time, motherhood is viewed as a class differentiated practice. The primary focus of the analysis is motherhood as experienced by Russian middle class women. The paper discusses how motherhood is discursively produced in the Russian context. The author is interested in the knowledge and discourses that Russian middle class women employ in order to become aware of their motherhood and describe themselves as mothers. The paper describes critical sociological theories of motherhood connecting this phenomenon to such concepts as power, social order and social inequalities. These critical approaches deconstruct the motherhood discourse and reveal that the mother becomes a point of production of social and political order of the modern societies. The analysis of the Russian discourse on motherhood in the political and cultural context is presented by the author as well. The paper elaborates upon the category of “responsibility” as the primary meaning component of middle class motherhood. In the conclusion the issue of why and when Russian mothers are considered “responsible” is discussed.

JEL Classification: J13.

Keywords: motherhood, child care, discourse, subjectivation, middle class

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Introduction

Contemporary parenthood in the West is a complex discursive field. A modern parent is supposed to possess a significant amount of knowledge in such domain as medicine, pediatrics, child psychology, nutritional science etc. He or she must also be a competent consumer of goods and services for children in order to conform to common understandings of “good enough” motherhood and fatherhood. Similar trends in the sphere of parenthood can also be found in Russia. In the Russian context parenthood is semantically identified with motherhood, which represents a result of Soviet gender policy and is inscribed within contemporary Russian gender culture. Mother is perceived as the primary parent and the spokesperson acting on behalf of the child in his or her best interests [Zdravomyslova, 2009]. Moreover, actualization of mother’s identity represents a powerful symbolic and discursive instrument of legitimization of women’s activity in the public space [Danilova, 2004], [Ushakin 2009]. At the same time, we know rather little about the way motherhood is produced on the subjective level and what discursive practices are at work in the process of Russian women becoming mothers.

This working paper represents a study of motherhood as a specific semantic construct in contemporary Russia. I analyze in which ways knowledge about motherhood produces specific maternal experience and shapes particular ways in which it is experienced. The general theoretical framework I use is the foucauldian concept of discursive power based on knowledge. At the same time, motherhood is viewed as a class differentiated practice. The primary focus of my analysis is motherhood as experienced by Russian middle class women. The goal of the paper is to answer the following question: How is motherhood discursively produced in the Russian context? I'm interested in the knowledge and discourses that Russian middle class women employ in order to become aware of their motherhood and describe themselves as mothers. In the beginning of the paper I discuss sociological theories of motherhood connecting this phenomenon to such concepts as power, social order and social inequalities. These critical approaches deconstruct the motherhood discourse and reveal that the mother becomes a point of production of social and political order of the modern societies. Then I present analysis of the Russian discourse on motherhood and describe the political and cultural context of its formation. In this part of the article I elaborate upon the category of “responsibility” as the primary meaning component of middle class motherhood. In the conclusion I describe the issue of why and when Russian mothers are considered “responsible”.

Empirical data and method

The article is based on an empirical study of parenthood in modern Russia conducted in 2012-2013³. The current text is based on an array of various sources. First, in order to analyze the Russian discourse on motherhood a piece belonging to the genre of network or amateur literature was studied. The text, titled “Translations from the dolphin language” [Mironova, 2013], was conceived by the author as a literary novel. Publishing it proved to be impossible since the publishers found it to be a mediocre piece of “feminine literature”. In August 2013 the author placed this text on one of Internet parent's forum, allowing for not-for-profit usage and publishing. Second, in order to study the processes of consumption of motherhood discourse as well as processes of self-identification of Russian mothers, the discussions on the Internet parent's forum were analyzed. The forum topics on child rearing and upbringing for the period 2012-2013 were chosen for the analysis. The parents' discussions on the novel, mentioned above, were studied as well. Third, the analysis of the novel and parents' discussions was verified on the basis of analysis of interviews with parents, activists of parent's communities, and experts. Interview analysis allowed to draw some conclusions about the ways and extent to which discourse of motherhood presented in the novel and parents discussions are typical for Russian mothers. In the analysis of all the data sources the primary attention was paid to categories in which maternal experience was described, as well as to the type of knowledge on motherhood.

The study was limited to the middle class parents since its representatives most actively take part in the Internet forum and parent communities. They also most active and competent consumers of various good and services for parents (courses of preparation for pregnancy, family counseling, and psychological trainings). It was assumed that the middle class in Russia is the social environment that represents the space of social innovations in parenthood. The middle class in Russia is composed by urban dwellers with higher education, average or above average income level, employed in such spheres as IT, engineering, design, education, science and consulting etc. The social space of middle class in Russia is also characterized by a specific lifestyle, consumption and organization of private life [Levinson, 2008], [Shpakovskaya, 2012].

³ The article is based on the materials of two projects: “Parenthood in contemporary Russia: policy, values, practices” (Scientific Foundation of Higher School of Economics, Russia, 2012-2013, grant No 12-05-0017) and “Parents' educational claims as mechanism of social inequality reproduction” (Scientific Foundation of Higher School of Economics, Russia, 2014-2015, grant No 14-01-0162).

Reflexive motherhood: the issue of knowledge and choice

Contemporary social theorists suggest that individual biographies are gradually “liberating” from mores and traditions that used to define the course of one’s life. In the Modernity identities were constructed on the basis of prescribed roles and belongings to class and gender. In post-modern societies people must constantly reflect upon who they are and who they would like to become in the future. They face the necessity to make decisions related to education, professional life, family, and lifestyle. For examples, such biographical events as choosing of partner, marriage, child planning and childbirth, parenthood style and styles of child rearing are open-ended questions. Individuals decide not only whether certain events will – or will not - take place, but also when, where, and how they will be realized [Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002], [Giddens 1991]. An individual perceives him- or herself as responsible for his or her own life, social success or failure. Social inequalities and social problems are viewed as a result of psychological dispositions, personal inclinations and abilities. That is why the role of social agents that produce and disseminate knowledge, assign meanings to practices, grew significantly. Doctors, psychologists, social workers, various consultants and trainers got important status of experts. They help make competent choices, provide advice, and offer ways of problem-solving on the basis of various knowledge systems [Walker, 2011: 25].

In Russia and the West researchers point out that family and parenthood are undergoing significant transformations [Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002], [Bjornberg, 2001], [Giddens, 1991], [Connell, 2002], [Isupova and Kon 2009], [Chernova 2008]. They note that the meaning ascribed to parenthood is changing; the traditional parenthood is being replaced with modern or responsible parenthood. Modern parenthood is constructed around the quality of child-parent relations, is connected to reflexivity, emotional work and special attention to building parental roles and identities. The ways of getting knowledge about how to be a “good” parent and how to socialize into that role, are also changing. In a traditional society a multigenerational family was the channel through which information on the contents of parental role was transferred [Mead, 1970: 58-60]. Contemporary parenthood becomes the result of individual knowledge reception from a multitude of source.

The normalizing discourse of motherhood: power and knowledge

According to Michel Foucault, the increase of importance of individual choice and of the role of experts as assistants in making a choice is connected with transformation of the forms of power and governance in contemporary societies. The systems of expert knowledge, agents who transmit them, and ways of transmitting them represent relatively new forms of population control and management which appeared in the early 20th century. Foucault calls these forms of control *biopower* [Foucault 2003: 202]. Biopower is understood as a set of techniques of normalization and control of human bodies, which have a goal of making them more docile and productive [Mckee, 2009: 466]. It is embodied in various procedures of collecting information about population: statistical data on death and birth rate, life expectancy, health etc. Doctors, teachers, psychologists, social workers give recommendations on diet, daily routine, hygiene, techniques of communication with others etc, and therefore provide this power. They produce understandings of norms of child development, intellectual abilities, bodily characteristics and normal behavior of 'healthy' individual.

Governance through media, social policy, education, healthcare and social work has an explicit goal of building a special type of individual subjectivity [Lawler, 2000: 2]. Individuals act not on the basis of direct control of the State or other agents, but may control themselves and their behavior on their own, regulating their reactions and emotions using prescribed examples of normality. However, individuals are not just "compliant" bodies and minds, they do not just "swallow" information they receive from experts. They adapt and re-interpret it in accordance with their needs and knowledge level. A "struggle for meaning" is always taking place in a society [Walkerline, 1990: 12]. Motherhood is at the intersection of a plethora of rivaling discourses which struggle for defining what constitutes the "interests of child", "proper" parental practices and "good care" [Kremer, 2006: 262]. In this struggle an important role is played by parental communities, often virtual, where mothers (and sometime fathers) discuss and make sense of their relationship with children, carry out their own expertise of the advice of doctors, pedagogues, goods for children, and produce their own collective opinion on the issues [Assonova, 2010: 84], [Chernova and Shpakovskaya, 2011: 99].

In her study of motherhood, Stephanie Lawler shows how contemporary technologies of power redefine contents and meaning of motherhood. A mother becomes an especially discursively important figure since she is positioned by expert knowledge and political discourse (both liberal and conservative) as the primary agent responsible for child rearing and maintenance of family relations. Women are viewed as responsible for the emotional climate in the family and for

housekeeping. It is women who are blamed for their inability to safeguard family relations, to compromise and make concessions, for their lack of desire to devote themselves to the family due to career plans or striving to destroy traditional familial values and relations. Normative full heterosexual family is assumed as the basis of social order and social stability. At the same time, proper upbringing and good childcare are viewed as conditions in which a socially competent individual and citizen is formed. Therefore, woman is ascribed with responsibility for producing “good society”, “good citizens” and social order in the wide sense (Lawler 2000, p. 38-39). Political and intellectual interest for motherhood is to a significant extent inscribed within this discursive construct.

As a producer of social order mother is constantly scrutinized by scientists, experts and politicians. The mother is expected to be competent, to possess necessary knowledge about “proper” care and upbringing, and to follow expert advice. On the basis of knowledge that she has and the expert directions that she receives, she constantly supervise and control her child’s behavior and manage the family relations. Motherhood is discursively normalized and at the same time represents a powerful instrument of women’s subjectivation [Nartova, 2012: 301]. Norms of mother’s behavior are produced through explicit evaluations of health, welfare, and knowledge level of the woman by experts and representatives of state institutions. However, processes of production of normality often are hidden and masked by rhetoric of personal choice and personal striving to give to child “all the best” [Lawler, 2000: 26].

The discursive model of motherhood is inscribed into the model of the child which is complementary to the first one. Childhood, as a separate stage of human lifecycle, which demands special treatment from adults and possesses independent value in culture, has become one of the discoveries of the era of capitalism [Aries, 1996]. Within this cultural-historical construct, parenthood as a complimentary got a meaning connected not only with satisfaction of biological necessities but also with upbringing, personality formation, emotional care for the child.

Contemporary European model of a child assumes it as essentially “good”, talented and possessing unique individuality. The parents’ task, then, is just to develop these qualities. If a child turns out to be “bad” (for instance, mentally or physically inferior, or inclined towards delinquent behavior), this happens because the society and the parents (primarily mother) did not provide him or her with necessary conditions to realize his or her potential [Lawler, 2000]. For example, popular books and magazines for parents in Russia admonish readers do not punish their children and advise support and develop them.

Therefore, motherhood as a discursive construction and practice in contemporary society is involved in complex social and political relations of power, control and knowledge production. It defines everyday life and produces subjectivity of women, men and children. Meaning limits of normal and good mother are produced and transmitted by a multitude of agents who participate in a symbolic struggle, but are often presented as a result of personal choice, competence and wishes of women themselves.

Class and motherhood

Feminist scholars underline that the experience of motherhood is socially differentiated, located at the intersection of such categories as gender, class and ethnicity. This article focuses on the class dimension of this category. Contemporary theorists revisit the classical definition of class, underscoring that the previous analytical schemes prove to be useless for analysis of contemporary society [Anthias, 2005: 26]. “New class theory” approach is applied to studying social differences of parenthood and organization of childcare. This approach insists on analyzing cultural aspects of class [Devine and Savage, 2005: 2]. Works written within this approach are united by the common interest in everyday life, identity and subjectivity. They underline the following aspects of class: 1) class as subjectivity 2) class as representation 3) class as resources.

1. Class as subjectivity. Classical studies of social stratification both in Russia and in the West have been devoted to the problem of empirical analysis and methodological study of social positions, criteria for defining them. Structural positions were defined primarily in terms of income and employment. The questions of culture and everyday life organization appeared in relation to questions of class consciousness, collective action and class imagination. Most classical stratification studies were blind to questions of gender, ethnicity, organization of privacy, and experience of those whose life passes outside of the sphere of paid employment [Devine and Savage, 2005: 5].

An attempt to develop a new angle for analysis of the class inequality problem are represented by the works of feminist researchers, often of working class backgrounds, who in the 1990s started writing about social class from the viewpoint of subjectivity and everyday life organization. These studies use qualitative methodology, are often written from the anthropological point of view and draw upon autobiographical data. They try to tell a story of what does it mean to live in certain economic conditions, a certain location and time [Steedman, 1986], [Kuhn, 1995], [Walkerdine, 1990]. In particular, researchers show that practices of motherhood are interwoven with life experience of women in the public and the private spheres. For example, open and direct

power which mothers of working class wield, is a reflection of their everyday experience of hard labor, poverty, and poor living conditions. While the conception of child's autonomy and sensitive motherhood of the middle class are based on the experience of bourgeois family life and specific understanding of social world. Mothers transmit their life experience, thereby preparing their children for a specific life trajectory [Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989: 138]. Motherhood is presented as various experiences of women, as subjective perception of different life conditions. In this sense it is socially grounded and class-differentiated.

2) *Class as representation.* In this case attention is turned to the processes of symbolic production of class, as well as ascription of moral value to it [Skeggs, 2005: 46]. It is stated that class does not exist automatically and it is not a representation of an existent group of people. Class represents a community, whose meaning and borders are constantly contested. This does not mean that class does not exist materially, but material conditions become signs which are discursively produced [Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001: 13]. Processes of symbolic class production are enacted in political discourse, in mass media, in systems of expert knowledge which shape limits of normality. As a result, certain lifestyles, practices and relationships are marked as normal, morally acceptable, while others as pathological, abnormal and hazardous. For instance, practices of workers and representatives of ethnic minorities are evaluated negatively while middle class behavior are constructed as a cultural norm. Types of masculinity and femininity typical for different classes receive different moral evaluations [Skeggs, 2005: 26]. Similarly, practices of motherhood are morally marked in different ways. For example, working class mothers are often discussed as inattentive, harsh, authoritarian and illiterate [Gillies, 2008]. They are blamed for producing children who are inclined towards crime and who exhibit physical and mental health deficiencies. At the same time, middle class motherhood enacted through sensitivity, democracy, orientation towards naturalness, is positioned as the only normal one [Lawler, 2000: 39]. Thus, motherhood is inscribed in systems of expert knowledge and political discourses that produce meanings for practices of childcare.

3) *Class as resources.* Discussion of subjectivities, practices and moral evaluations of motherhood is connected with analysis of resources that set conditions for their realization. Analysis uses the Pierre Bourdieu's approach to class analysis. It associated with studying the capitals that individuals can invest in actions directed toward achieving certain goals, for example, organizing one's lifestyle, education, social mobility etc. From Bourdieu's viewpoint, the most widespread types of capital are the following: economic, social, cultural and symbolic. However, in certain spheres of social life specific capitals are used, for instance, academic, political or administrative capital etc. Special role is played by cultural capital since it is involved in the process of social

distinction on the basis of aesthetic judgments and tastes [Bourdieu, 1984]. Possession of cultural capital is accumulated as a result of a long process in which family upbringing, social experience outside of the family, as well as education and socialization in educational institutions all participate [Lamont and Lareau, 1998: 154]. Cultural capitals of the working and the middle classes have different contents and different degrees of legitimacy [Bourdieu, 1984].

Feminist researchers, developing Bourdieu's ideas, underscore the leading role of family in the process of cultural capital transmission. In the family, children acquire certain ways of thinking, sets of cognitive dispositions and preferences. At the same time the central place in transferring of cultural capital is associated with mother since she spends the most amount of time on taking care of children, child rearing and upbringing. Care performed by the mother reflects her cultural, economic and social capitals [James, 1989], [Oakley, 1993], [Reay, 1998]. Practices of parenthood, types of upbringing and ways of care organization are class-differentiated not only because they are defined by different economic capabilities but also because they embody (and transmit) knowledge, experience, values and tastes of a certain social environment, embody "cultural competences" of parenthood, participate in social differentiation. Ways of organizing childcare acquire different degrees of legitimacy.

Class relations of motherhood are also present as inequalities in accessing knowledge on parenthood. Thus, middle class mothers with university education, often employed in professions related to knowledge about childhood (pedagogy, medicine, psychology etc) find themselves in the position of experts and supervisors in relation to working class mothers. Working class mothers represent a group that is constantly under scrutiny of those "who know" [Lawler, 2000: 29].

Therefore, the new class theory underscores not only that motherhood is socially differentiated and experienced differently in different social environments, but also that types of parenthood are inscribed within different systems of expert knowledge and receive different moral value. They are also enacted due to divergent resources, participate in intergenerational transfer of family capitals, and reproduction of social inequalities. Discourses on motherhood and childhood as well as power relations in the sphere of parenthood are interpreted, adapted and used in different ways depending on the social environment.

Discourse of responsible motherhood in Russia

Reflecting of the Russian context, researchers suggest that the model of responsible or non-imperative parenthood is becoming widespread in post-soviet period [Chernova, 2008], [Mayofis and Kukulkin 2010], [Isupova and Kon, 2009]. It appeared as a result of responsibility

reconfiguration between the State and family in respect to performance of childcare, elimination of “direct” State intervention in private and family life of citizens and taking childrearing as primarily the parent's responsibility [Assonova, 2010], [Sveshnikova, 2010]. This model of parenthood has a non-essentialist meaning, it is understood as a result of a choice of a type and style of upbringing, presupposes an active civic position, and aspiration to get together to define parent's interests and rights [Chernova, 2012], [Shpakovskaya, 2013]. Formation of this type of parenthood becomes possible as a result of public institutions (i.e., healthcare and educational institutions) losing monopoly over production and transmission of knowledge on contents and ideology of parental roles, upbringing practices and childcare. A set of new actors have started playing an active role in (re)defining parenthood. Among them are media (popular science literature for parents, specialized glossy magazines, advertising, internet etc), the market of goods and service for children, which includes the private segment of medical and educational services connected with family planning, childbirth, and early child development. These actors compete with each other and, together with the offered goods and services, (re)produce ideologies and practices of parenthood and motherhood, thus governing and controlling parental behavior [Chernova and Shpakovskaya, 2011].

Non-imperative parenthood is a result of a long-term process of reconfiguration of technologies of power which participate in (re)production of the gender order. Soviet gender policy assumed that the mother was the primary agent of family rearing and care, thus putting an equal sign between parenthood and motherhood [Zdravomyslova, 2009]. The official discourse of motherhood prescribed women to fulfill two types of responsibilities: childcare in the private sphere and work in the sphere of public production with the help of State childcare services [Aivazova, 2001], [Temkina and Rotkirch, 2002]. At the same time, family upbringing was under suspicion. In her analysis of Soviet pedagogical discourse, Yulia Gradskova found out that parents were positioned as incompetent and as bearers of harmful behavioral models. Public agencies were assumed to be the most reliable agents of care and upbringing, since their used knowledge of pedagogy and medicine as well as implemented ideological orientations in education. The needs of a child were formulated in such categories as hygiene, discipline, and physiology. Based on scientific approach to upbringing, pre-school institutions effectively participated in shaping of future Soviet citizens and society [Gradskova 2010a: 274]. Similar ideas may be found in the conception to discussion of public upbringing which became one of the leading issue in the educational policy of 1960s-70s [Liegle, 1986].

Gradually, technologies of governing population behavior were changing. In the 1970s the official discourse defined parents as primary agents of childcare and child upbringing. Various measures of educating parents and controlling their behavior were undertaken [Gradskova 2010a:

280]. Upbringing was more and more often perceived not as a public phenomenon connected with the State need in qualified cadres and politically competent citizens, but as a means of developing personal abilities of a child. The movement of innovator pedagogues in the 1980s not only criticized the Soviet educational system but also suggested to revise the relationship between the State (and State educational institutions), pedagogues, parents and children. The innovator pedagogues popularized children early development which is impossible without active involvement of parents in child upbringing from the very first months and years of the child's life. New educational methods encouraged building personality-oriented, partner relations between parents and children as well as teacher [Shpakovskaya, 2013: 241]. At the same time soviet sociologist noted formation of a new type of family relations – a child-centric family whose main characteristic was recognition by the spouses of the significance of private life and of child's value [Golod, 1998: 118]. Such a family represented a social basis of values of non-imperative parenthood and motherhood.

In the post-Soviet period citizens are discursively defined as fully responsible for childcare and child upbringing. The backing off of the state from this sphere set conditions for social innovations and liberalization within it. Researchers also note the “parental boom” [Mayofis and Kukulin, 2010: 6] that started in the 2000s, which was associated with widespread of parents issues discussions in media, growth of demand for family consulting services and market of the good for children etc. At the same time, family and privacy become politicized, and started to be a point of intervention of State power and control in individuals' everyday life [Rivkin-Fish, 2010]. This politicization is marked by the discourse of “demographic doom”, pronatalist family policy, and childhood support policy.

Societal reaction to politicization of privacy takes double form. On the one hand, it takes the form of civil activism which unite parents in order to defend their rights and realize their liberal values and practices of non-imperative parenthood. On the other hand, it assumes the air of conservative reaction from the side of the Russian Orthodox Church and State elites, as well as conservative mobilization of parents [Sherstneva, 2013]. Sociologists also discuss the post-Soviet reconfiguration of motherhood and fatherhood. In general, they note changes in the direction of a more significant involvement of fathers in everyday childcare [Angelova and Temkina, 2009], [Kletsina, 2010], [Avdeeva, 2012]. However, researchers suggest that these tendencies concern a rather limited part of the population which are educated inhabitants of big cities, representatives of the middle class. They also mention lack of legislative and institutional fatherhood support which prevent father's involvement in childcare [Avdeeva, 2012], [Chernova and Shpakovskaya, 2010], [Malyshev and Parfenova, 2012]. Women in the conditions of reduction of public childcare services as well as revival of traditional gender ideology remain the primary agents of childcare and child

upbringing [Gradskova, 2010b]. Polarization of incomes and lifestyles that took place in the 2000s, turns maternity into a class differentiated practice.

Motherhood as consumption and lifestyle: middle class practices

The main heroine of the novel “Translations from the dolphin language” [Mironova 2013] which was chosen for the analyzes of motherhood discourse is Alina – a young woman who lives in St Petersburg and belongs to the middle class. The text contains multiple descriptions and references to conventional consumption patterns and lifestyle characteristic of the Russian middle class such as specificities of organization of housing, leisure, cultural consumption, medical services, financial behavior and education for children [Gladarev and Tsinman, 2009], [Radaev, 2003]. Alina lives with her husband and three-year-old son in a large apartment that her husband bought by getting a mortgage. Prior to the pregnancy and delivery Alina and her husband spent all their free time, restaurants, night clubs, spa-salons. They also spent their vacations and sometimes even weekends abroad.

Alina’s husband in the novel is presented as an ideal middle class partner – a successful scientist who created and patented an innovative pharmaceutical technology, thanks to which he works in the private firm and earns income from his patent. His job is prestigious, not exhausting and well-paid. Alina perceives herself as a successful and attractive woman. Throughout her life she made significant upward social mobility. She was born in a village, got admitted to a university in a large city, and after graduation starts working as an office manager in a private company where her future husband is working. In order to describe Alina’s appearance, the author relies on conventional images of middle class femininity. She wears short skirts, clothes with lace, high heeled shoes. She maintains her body according to relevant standards, attends fitness clubs, spa-salons, beauty parlors, gets her hair fixed and her nails done. Comfortable life and middle class consumption standards constitute the ideal she strives for.

Pregnancy 'at the best age of her life – twenty five' turns out to be unexpected and cannot be inscribed within the life plans of the young woman who has 'an easy job, a loving well-off husband, friends, discos, beautiful clothes'. Her life project is rather typical of young educated urbanites and falls into two parts: 'life for myself' and 'life for the family' [Zabaev, 2010], [Chernova and Shpakovskaya, 2010]. Alina lives the 'life for herself', practices the hedonist ethic, and postpones pregnancy to '*sometime later, when she gets old, when she is thirty or even thirty-five*'.

Alina's pregnancy was unplanned. But Alina did her best to keep it by using of paid medical services. The possibility of taking advantage of paid medicine serves as an important marker or

social position and element of social identity of the Russian middle class [Rivkin-Fish, 2009: 80]. Throughout her pregnancy, Alina attended private clinics and visits the best doctors. 'The best observation of highly professional gynecologists in the recently opened medical center "Scandinavia", and delivery in a luxurious private ward.' Right after the childbirth a 'good' medical insurance for their child was bought for the baby, thanks to which '*Vova [son] even got the shots at home*'. Alina also hired a maid and a nanny for her child. She was oriented towards consumption of the best for her child, and predicted that in the future he will have a successful educational career in a prestigious Maths school, university education and subsequent successful professional career.

Control, power and responsibility

Initially Alina perceived motherhood as a burden since it did not let her lead the previous lifestyle and maintain the identity of a successful attractive young woman: '*Now she and her husband could not, like they used to, dine till late at a restaurant, and then go to a club. Going to Paris on the weekend or even spending the whole day at a spa salon was no longer possible.*' The hardest and most problematic feeling she experienced was 'responsibility' (*otvetstvennost'*). The text contains the following description of this:

No one prepared her for this terrible responsibility that suddenly landed on her. She could not stop thinking about the child, she woke up in the middle of the night just to feed him or just to check whether he was breathing. She called the doctor at the slightest sneeze or the most insignificant redness on his chubby cheeks. She was constantly on guard and could never truly relax.

Alina also felt the fear connected with the baby's health: '*She was afraid of diarrhea, of dysentery, she was afraid of infection.*'

Responsibility was experienced as a subjective feeling coming from within, anxiety that did not let Alina sleep at night and constant fear. How does responsibility can be sociologically interpreted? To whom and how is the heroine held responsible after becoming a mother? We may suppose that having become a mother she gets entangled in complex power relations based on control and supervision from a multitude of external agents. In the body of the novel such observers are the doctors, junior medical personnel, daycare teachers, mother-in-law, neighbors, juvenile officer and random passers-by. They all supervise, check and control realization of the norms of child behavior and development. Normality of the child serves as a confirmation of normality of the mother. Realization of normal motherhood becomes an especially salient task for Alina, a middle

class woman oriented towards confirmation of her social successfulness through organization of her private life in accordance with a number of standards of consumption.

Finding herself in complex relations of supervision, accountability, and control, the mother becomes the subject of power who acquires the necessary systems of knowledge about parenthood, performs on their basis monitoring of behavior and health of the child, and in case of detecting problems notifies the experts about them, corrects her behavior in accordance with the experts' instructions, thereby avoiding criticism from the observers. For example, Alina followed medical instructions: *'throughout her pregnancy and breastfeeding she did not smoke a single cigarette and did not drink a single glass of wine, having systematically complied with doctor's directions'*. She possessed basic knowledge of physiological and psychological development of child's organism at the same time being guided by diagnoses and instructions of doctors. Doctors came to the conclusion that the development of her son is 'ideal':

From the viewpoint of the doctors the delivery was ideal, and the newborn baby Vovka – 3 900, a real athlete – was also considered an exemplary infant. For the whole first year of his life he did not cause any alarm among the doctors. And even when he started walking at 8 months, and at 9 already held a ball in his hands, an experienced neurologist wrote in his records: “advanced psychophysical development” and went at great lengths to praise the clever boy.

The novel also contains a detailed description of Alina coming to a full self-identification with the role of a mother, and identifies her interests with interest of the child. This process took place on the basis of the knowledge, feeling of responsibility and guilt. Alina continued monitoring the state of her son's health, and soon the events take the turn of a nightmare. All her fears become a reality as the child and the mother lose the status of normal as a result of the former being diagnosed with autism. Alina felt guilty:

Horrible feeling of guilt crushed her: what a worthless mother she turned out to be! Of course, motherhood did not really bring her any particular joys, but she used to think that she was at least fulfilling her responsibilities well. Vova was stylishly dressed, the table was always served with fresh food, he had a separate room and tons of toys, the best medical service and a decent daycare... She thought she had done everything she could. And now it turned out that she had done nothing, nothing for her only son. God, worse than nothing! She grew cold.

Having felt herself a mother, Alina fully devoted herself to taking care of her son and believed that her goal was to cure and rehabilitate him. Alina gave up her job in the sphere of paid employment and spends all her time visiting the doctors and rehabilitation centers, engaging in

home developmental exercises, and acquiring new additional knowledge on parent's Internet forums and reading specialized literature. Alina also restructured her attitude towards herself, her looks and lifestyle: *'Now for some reason the club bustle, bright blinking lights, crowds of people all seemed obtrusive and boring. She felt annoyed at the thought of these senseless hopping eat tons of time that could be spent on something truly useful.'* Alina started contemplating her attitude towards her son in terms of love, devotion and self-sacrifice. Therefore, knowledge in the sphere of medicine as well as normalizing judgments of the experts became the mechanisms of subjectivation of motherhood.

Responsibility as a subjectivation tool

The category of responsibility is common in the interviews with parents. Responsibility is interpreted in such categories as knowledge which provides consciousness and readiness to take care of the child. For example, activists of parent communities noted that one of the problem of contemporary parenthood in Russia is the lack of responsibility or readiness of parents to assume a parental role connected with knowledge, conscious choice of parenthood, type to care and child upbringing. President of the charity foundation “*Roditel'skij most*” (Parent's bridge) occupied with problems of adoption and social orphanhood prevention, described irresponsible parents in categories of 'psychological' readiness for caregiving: *'There are adults who are either not really adults but actually are children of different ages. That is, it is difficult to, say, take a seven-year-old child, hand him a baby and say “you are going to be a responsible parent”.'*⁴ One of the primary goals of the organization is to increase the level of 'psychological knowledge' on the specifics of child-parent relations, especially in case of adopted children. This type of knowledge should ensure parent's responsibility. Activists of the foundation organize group trainings and individual counseling aimed at 'raising' parents, providing them with necessary 'psychological' knowledge and skills, on the basis of which, in their opinion, parental consciousness and responsibility can be formed.

Non-governmental organization “*Papa-shkola*” (Daddy School) sets the goal of *'educating responsible fatherhood in the interests of the child'*.⁵ Responsible fathers are understood as fathers who have become aware and conscious of their role, fathers who are knowledgeable, competent and capable of actively participating in caring for and bring up the child. In order to achieve this goal, instructors of the school organize regular meetings of the future fathers. During these meetings the fathers discuss their practical and emotional problems that are relevant for them. Experts are

4 Marina Levina, president of *Roditel'skij most* (Parent's Bridge) foundation, 20.05.2012, St Petersburg.

5 Sergei Zkharov, instructor of *Papa-shkola* (Daddy school), 14.04.2012, St Petersburg.

invited to these meetings, such as psychologists, pediatricians, obstetricians. These experts conduct the meetings that aim at giving the future fathers knowledge about parenthood.

It is possible to suppose that the processes of self-identification of middle class parents are connected with familiarizing with expert knowledge in child medicine and psychology. Interviews with middle class parents suggest that practices of attending various courses for future mothers, reading of popular literature for parents, and participating in parent's Internet forums are typical of them. Throughout their pregnancy women attend courses for future mothers which are aimed at providing them with knowledge that is supposed to be used during the delivery and the subsequent childcare. Gynecologists, obstetricians, neonatologists, pediatricians and psychologists give lectures at these courses. These courses are meant primarily for women (they may however presuppose that some meetings are attended by both partners). Such courses as a rule are open on the basis of municipal public maternity public clinics or private centers for early child development. In their majority such courses cost a free, and attending them is at one's own discretion and is voluntary. For example, in St Petersburg around 7500 organizations offer such services. After the delivery women have access to services of breastfeeding consultants provided mostly by private organizations. The young mother and her baby are constantly monitored by doctors from public polyclinics, as well as doctors from insurance companies and paid private medical centers. Therefore, being a mother woman becomes a subject of power and complex relations of control and supervision.

Parent communities are an important source of knowledge on parenthood. Their representatives re-interpret expert discourse, and in some cases openly criticize it. Such communities may be virtual or real (offline). They solve a wide array of problems from psychological self-help, joint leisure to collective evaluation of goods and services, and information exchange [Chernova and Shpakovskaya, 2011]. In the novel that was analyzed above, communities of parents of autistic children are represented as an ideological and informational counterbalance to "official medicine". They not only expand, but also reinterpret the diagnoses and the offered therapy, but also suggest their own ways of treatment and rehabilitation.

On the basis of interview analysis the following categories that describe the zones of specific responsibility of mothers can be identified. The responsibility in all cases is built on expert knowledge and associated with the idea of its implementation into practice. This categories also describe specific mother's competence which is different from father' or parental in general.

- *Emotional bond (emotsional'naya sv'yaz')*. This category characterizes a special type of mother-child relationship. It assumes mutual emotional and intuitive understanding as opposed to

rational knowledge about the needs and physiology of the child. But in fact *sv'yaz'* is built emotionally on the base of knowledge. The emotional bond starts taking shape during the pregnancy, when woman gets know the stages of baby development inside of her body. There are a lot of technologies of fetus subjectivation, from ultrasound screenings with showing the process on the large screen to the advises of popular psychology to talk with the future baby, to touch the belly where it is etc. The “connection” also is established as a result of a natural delivery, is strengthened during the first year of the baby’s life, and later it becomes the basis of the mother-child relationship. Women receive instructions on methods of establishing this “connection” from popular literature for parents and by attending parent's courses. The problematic of establishing “connection” with the child is also widely discussed in parents' virtual communities.

- *Monitoring of the child’s condition (otslezhivat' sostoiyanie rebenka)*. Mothers believe that their task is to monitor the state of health, psychological development and emotions of the child, as well as early problem diagnostics. Mothers perceive themselves as agents who must be the first ones to notice the first signs of a disease or any deviation from the normal behavior or development, after which they should immediately consult a professional. Early diagnostics demands a certain knowledge level in the sphere of medicine, child physiology and psychology. Mothers receive this knowledge from a multitude of sources such as the Internet, popular books for parents, glossy magazines and parent courses. Many mothers testify that the period of pregnancy was a period of active self-education. Here is a typical narrative about this life stage: *'During the pregnancy I read a lot, I read everything I could, a pile of magazines, about how to bring up a child; I downloaded tons of psychological books'*.⁶

- *Understanding child’s wishes (ponimat' zhelaniya rebenka)*. Mothers believe that the presence of an emotional bond also helps them understand the wishes of the child. They see their task in learning to respond to these wishes. For example, they think it necessary to feed, put to sleep, offer educational games and exercises to the child in accordance with his or her wishes. Wishes are understood both as physiological and cognitive and emotional needs. The question is posed, then, to which extent the mother must take into account the child’s wishes. It is a common topic of discussions on parent's Internet forums. In the interviews the mothers state that they would not like to “break” the child, that they want to let him or her “be him/herself”, and that orientation towards the child makes mothers efforts most effective since the mother only helps “uncover the abilities” of the child.

⁶ Lyuda, 30 years old, married, son 1.5 years old, 25.06.2012, St Peresburg.

- *Early development (rannee razvitie)*. Ideology of early development which is as a rule shared by middle class woman is connected with the idea of instilling in the child cognitive and motor skills as early as possible. For example, it is suggested that by the age of three the child can learn to read and master some counting skills. Aside from that, he or she may learn to draw or get acquainted with music. Mothers also believe that already in the first months of the infant's life (or even during the pregnancy) it is necessary to let him or her listen to classical music, to read him or her aloud classical Russian literature and poetry. Ideology of early development in the Russian variant positions the mother as the primary figure in this process since it is the mother who can guess the wishes of the child on the basis of their emotional connection, which allows to develop the "inner potential" of the child.

Conclusion:

How is motherhood discursively produced in the Russian context? How – and for what – do Russian mothers feel responsible? In this article it was shown that motherhood represents a complex information field with a multitude of actors. On the individual level the feeling of responsibility is a component of the experience of motherhood and a way of identification with the mother's role. Mothers not only feel that they are responsible for health and well-being of the child, they also find it necessary to supervise and control the slightest and seemingly insignificant from the outsider's point of view reactions of the child such as the first signs of an illness, emotional states and non-verbalized wishes. In this capacity they realize strategies of biopower. However, the question of distribution of zones of responsibility of mothers, fathers, society and the State in the Russian context demands a more detailed analysis. In the Soviet society there was a policy according to which reproduction and child rearing were viewed as a zone of state responsibility. In the post-Soviet period State technologies of power underwent significant changes, with the state withdrawing itself from the private sphere and rejecting the direct control of citizen behavior. Indeed, in the 1990s and early 2000s privacy and parenthood represented a sphere of polarization of models of behavior and knowledge. In the second half of the 2000s privacy and reproduction again became the point of state power intervention [Rivkin-Fish, 2010]. Political discourse on maternity has been restored. Motherhood, from the official point of view is presented as a biological activity. In the contemporary official discourse women are viewed as responsible to the State for reproduction of the population and for biological production of physically and psychically healthy citizens. Upbringing and childcare are maintained as the zone of citizen responsibility and become an important sphere of self-realization for middle-class mothers. The responsibility, knowledge and orientation at high consumption and lifestyles standard in childcare, education and healthcare

compose the parts of middle class women identity. The filings of responsibility and guilt are related to their desire to fulfill all the standards and requirements to a good enough mother.

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