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The Social Meaning of Motherhood in Russia Today

(“Only You Need Your Child”)

The Soviet state always emphasized and extolled the role of motherhood, or the woman’s “function” of motherhood as it was called in the 1920s. Symbolic incentives for bearing children for the state were very well developed, even though material incentives lagged rather far behind (see, for example, [1–4]). Now everything has changed: there is practically no state support, even symbolic, for mothers and children. It is interesting to determine, in this regard, what changes have taken place on the individual level, the motives for bearing children in today’s Russia, and the place of child bearing in the overall picture of women’s aspirations in life. The object of the present article is a picture of women’s child-bearing behavior in our country and their view of this area.

A qualitative methodology—more specifically, interviewing—seems to be the most relevant in any study of people’s ideas and

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perceptions. The present study was based on qualitative interviews with thirty women of child-bearing age. In one way or another, these women have confronted the necessity of deciding the motherhood issue for themselves. The oldest respondent at the time of the interview (1997) was thirty-seven, and the youngest was nineteen. The women had a wide range of attitudes toward motherhood (for more detail see Appendix).

In addition, there are *otkaznitsy* [“refusers” or “relinquishers”], who have given up their parental right to their child immediately after giving birth [4; 5].

In the tradition of gender studies, as well as in the framework of the feminist approach (in the field in question, as in so many others, it is difficult to separate these two traditions), attitudes toward motherhood are very contradictory.

Some authors think that motherhood is the basis of women’s inequality and exploitation by society; Shulamith Firestone [6] and Luce Irigaray [7] come to mind in this regard. Motherhood has also been declared to be an agent of the male factor in the female world and, on the whole, has been given a negative assessment, because it brings power relations and the desire to achieve that are intrinsic to the male world into women’s nonaggressive world of equality. After all, women are naturally proud of their children and view them as achievements. Additionally, a mother’s power over a small child is almost unlimited.

However, there is another point of view in the framework of the feminist approach. For some authors (for example, E.A. Kaplan [8], M.M. Kaplan [9], and A. Oakley [10]) the mother is not an agent of a hostile world or an object, but above all a woman, a subject [*sub’ekt*], and hence she deserves the same kind of attention from gender theory as any other woman. These authors view motherhood as an essential although not an obligatory part of a woman’s life; it gives her a great deal rather than taking everything away from her. Most of the other, nonfeminist theories of motherhood, however (psychoanalysis, biosociology, and state-supporting theories based on the ideas of Rousseau, including the approach adopted in the official Soviet ideology) viewed motherhood primarily as a duty, as work. The pleasures inherent in par-

enthood were simply not considered. By the way, certain modern “postfeminist” authors [11], conversely, believe that the anticipated pleasure from children in our own days is the main motive for having them, the role of children as a last “emotional anchor” being infinitely important for adults in a world where there are all too few solid emotional ties.

Many account for such substantial differences in attitudes toward motherhood, even within the framework of the same feminist approach, by reference to differences in the traditional status of the mother in the various cultures, which have affected the stance of authors from those cultures [8; 9]. The Russian Orthodox culture tended to attribute relatively high status to the woman as mother, though on the basis of her complete self-sacrifice in that role. It also needs to be kept in mind, however, that that culture was wholly infused with a zeal for self-sacrifice, and a man, as well, could count on achieving worthy status and self-respect only by serving others (see, for example, [12]). These “others” ranged from the tsar as Little Father and Mother Russia down to the suffering people or to a humanity in need of being made virtuous by way of world revolution. Essentially, one’s own family, one’s children, much less one’s woman, hardly counted at all in that regard. On the other hand, in extreme versions of perceptions characteristic of Russian culture, conversely, a woman ought to serve her man even at the expense of her children (a characteristic example: the wives of the Decembrists, who followed their husbands into exile and abandoned their children in Russia; many if not all of these children died as a result, and yet these women were extolled as the ideal of heroic self-sacrifice in the purely female meaning of behavior). In general, however, it was expected that for a woman, her children were the chief others, and it was her main duty to serve them in every way.

The great importance of the cult of the Virgin, of Saint Mary, to the Orthodox Church, specifically and particular as the Mother of God, rather than in other aspects of that image, as can be seen in the name given to her [Bogoroditsa = Mother of God] (this was noted by I. Aristarkhova [13]), could hardly fail to have an influence on the perception of motherhood in Russian culture. More-

over, the more the process of giving birth to and bringing up children approaches heroic feat and martyrdom, the higher a woman's self-respect and the more positively she is valued by those around her, in the spirit of paying reverence to saints (see [12–14]).¹ In the Soviet version, Russian culture characteristically extolled the cult figure of the mother of many children who then delivered them to the altar of the state (“The Motherland Wants You!”). The father is naturally absent from such a model (“men have other tasks in life,” as Alisa (9),² one of my interviewees, put it; see also [3; 4; 15]).

The initial assumption, namely that one's attitude toward motherhood and maternal behavior is not a psychobiological construct that has been shaped from childhood on but rather a variable that depends on the social situation, was confirmed by the study. Lada, for example (23) is very happy that she has become a mother; she was not able to do so earlier in her marriage, because she did not consider herself and her husband to be sufficiently mature and ready to be parents in the social sense (“he was like a little boy”). But when their baby came into the world, from her point of view it actually benefited their marriage, because it brought Lada closer to her husband once more. Nadia (3), a mother of four children with a generally positive attitude toward motherhood, had her children in her second marriage, with a partner who also has a positive attitude toward having children, whereas in the first marriage she had had two abortions: “In my first marriage my husband did not want to have children, and so I had to have abortions.” Vera (4) talks about her relatively frequent experience of encountering situations of single motherhood, where a woman over the age of forty decides to have a child after never thinking about the possibility previously: motherhood because of loneliness, after the death of her parents or other older relatives, whom she has been taking care of for a long time in their sickness and old age.

For the majority, in the long run, a deeply rooted motive to have a child wins out over unfavorable factors in their lives: even if they have “failed completely” in their effort to create “favorable conditions,” women try to give birth to a first, only child (or to keep the child in the case of *otkaznitsy*). For the majority, the difference between not having any children at all and having one child is a

matter of quality, whereas the difference between a mother of one child and a mother of two or even ten children is merely one of quantity.

On the other hand, the social conditionality of reproductive behavior is not universal. There are extreme groups of women who do or do not want to have a child, without any obvious functional connection to the conditions of their lives: “I had to have a child, I simply had to” (6). Among the interviewees, two women take “extreme” positions: Valia (18), who has kept her child in spite of the objective hardships of her life, and Kseniia (8), who gave up her newborn in spite of circumstances that were outwardly favorable. But there are not many “extremists” of this sort. For the majority, specific behavior with respect to motherhood at a certain point in time is determined by particular social factors. For example, having a child makes it possible to tie a man to her, or else all the people around her think that having a child is the duty of any woman in given circumstances. Or, conversely, a child destroys a woman’s familiar circumstances in life and leads to the loss of her male partner, to deterioration or breakup of relations with alternative “partners” at the present period of time, such as not only the woman’s parents, whether natural or adoptive, or even her older children. Having a child can complicate going to school; having a child can help to maintain or preserve peace in relations between husband and wife (“a child is an object that keeps peace in the family” [6]), and so on.

Further study of the interviews led me to the thought that the variety of factors that prompt women to have or not have children is susceptible to generalization. Most clear is a group of motives that can be designated as “the man”—when a child is brought into the world for the sake of some specific man or, more often and more indirectly, because of that man. Factors of this sort are generally expressed explicitly in the verbal accounts of interviewees. Such cases can include the situation of “fighting for a man” and also having a child because that is what a male partner who is important to the woman wants (“If certain family circumstances put pressure on her along those lines, if her husband wants children” [4]), as well as certain other cases.

A negative attitude toward a man, which is often based on real resentments, can be projected onto the child, who, as a result, is rejected by the mother: "If he [the child's father] does not want him, why should I [raise the boy]?" (7). A great many do not want a child if the child's father does not want it. In the majority of cases, on the other hand, if a woman wants a man then she also wants a child with him: many women connect their desire to have a child with their love for a specific man. In such cases, by the way, they usually want a son. What is involved, moreover, is the desire to have a child, which is not necessarily realized in practice. If it does occur, it is often in unfavorable economic and social conditions, because for some women that motive is very strong. The best expression of this attitude toward motherhood can be seen in a well-known line from a song by Veronika Dolina: "If we could live without hardship I would have children from anyone I loved, of every kind and sort" (by the way, the interviewees mention this song very often when they talk about the role that love plays in having a child): "Every new man [in my life] . . . makes me want to have a child by him," "a child wants to be born out of some beautiful feeling" (2); "I have girlfriends who have had children from men whom they loved, and even though the men refused to get married the girls love them so much that . . . they just . . . they couldn't do anything [have an abortion], they kept their children to raise" (3); "One girl, you know how the song goes, 'if we could live without hardship,' had two little boys that way and a little girl. She is simply not capable of controlling the situation" (4). That love may be the only one in the woman's life story, so that "everyone" she has ever loved add up to just one, making all the stronger her resolve to have a child from him and from nobody else. Alla (5) only wants to have a child from the man with whom she has had a relationship for many years, in spite of the fact that they cannot get married or even live together: "I know exactly, absolutely, whom I want to be their father. I cannot imagine anyone else as the father of my children."

It is true, of course, that a child might be wanted just for himself alone, not necessarily in connection with a man. For this reason I singled out a group of motives that I designated "the child." Some-

times a man has only utilitarian value as “the father of my children.” To some extent this approach is characteristic of Kira (24) and Iana (2). Moreover, sometimes a child is wanted, at first, as a kind of toy: “You know how little girls play with dolls, and I wanted something like that, my own doll for myself” (3). “I always loved to play dolls. I really loved it!” [in response to the question of why she wanted children], and even: “I think that if a person does not have something like that in them [a fondness for playing dolls], it is not normal” (5), but, in any case, as something separate from herself: “When you have two children you come to realize that children are independent and separate. You can see that they are very independent in their judgments, and you have to accept that” (2). The desire to have a child can go hand in hand with needs that are bound up with a man or something else, but it is also possible that it is only the child that is wanted, as in the case of Galia (6) or Alla (5). But even in a case where having a child goes hand in hand with other needs the child may be perceived as the more important of those needs: I have always wanted to have a first [child], a first is a first, after all!” (7). Interviewer (henceforth referred to as *I.*): “So does that mean that the child is more important than the man?” Respondent (henceforth referred to by *R.*): “Yes, more important” (7). And this is being said by an *otkaznitsa* (about her first child, not her second, whom she is placing in a children’s home!).

Some respondents simply like little children: “I have always simply loved children” (4). *I.*: “In general, then, you love little children?” *R.*: “I love them very much, and I always have” (6). There are those who are fond of childhood as such, and living together with a child enables them, to some extent, to experience their own childhood once again: “In this way [relating with a child] I can somehow go back to my own childhood to a much greater extent than I could if I didn’t have a child” (4). Some respondents have a desire to take care of something little that is their own: “Something that is mine, my own, dear to me” (3); “well, you see . . . , a child for myself, my own child, to bring up and feed” (8); “those were other people’s children, absolutely, it was something that I always felt [speaking of schoolchildren]. . . . Another thing that

I want is for them to be like me in all traits of character, even bad ones, and, okay, like their father whom I chose for them [speaking of the children that she wants to have]” (5). And even: “other people’s children, to hell with them, it’s best to have your own”; or, this time about her own: “a child, you know, no matter what he might be like, I could never give him up [speaking of adoption] . . . , as soon as I saw her I realized right away that she was the child for me, she was my child” (6). “If I should decide to do something more, it might be just to adopt one more child.” At the same time, “adoption is just for extreme cases like mine” (6); for a mother who gives up her child he is no longer hers: “I simply do not want to see it, it is not mine anymore” (7).

Sometimes the desire to give birth to children grows into a passion that cannot be resisted; it becomes a real pleasure: for Nadia (3) motherhood became, in a certain sense, something that was absolute after she had given birth to her first child. Nadia found that from now on it would be impossible for her to have an abortion: “I think it might be possible to have an abortion as long as you don’t have children, but after you do have a child you know what kind of enjoyment you get from living with a little one, and how could you deny yourself that pleasure? . . . I got pure pleasure and enjoyment from my child.” Incidentally, the joy that a woman feels when a child comes into the world can be accounted for by other things besides just the pleasure of living with a little one. A woman may sense the presence of higher, divine powers in giving birth to a child: “there is something in it that is like a validation of self . . . , it’s like, before there was nothing, and now there is a human being . . . , and so you could say that in all of this . . . there is some divine element” (2), or to place an equal sign between a child and one’s own life. Vera, for example (4), gives this reason for why she did not have an abortion after she got pregnant with a man whom she did not love and to whom she was not married: “It’s simply that I love life. . . . I thought what a mistake I would have made [having an abortion], my child would never have played in these puddles!” In the same spirit, those who do not want to have children are thought of as not loving life: “not to love, not to love anything that is living. . . . To love yourself alone” (6). The

response of *otkaznitsy* to this is a negative assessment of such motives for having children, as being irresponsible: “they don’t want to have an abortion . . . , they have the child, fine, let it live, but what kind of life it is going to live nobody seems to care” (7). From this point of view, clearly, living a life of poor quality is worse than not living.

It is quite difficult to distinguish the group of motives that I have designated by “I myself” from the group of motives that I have designated by “the child,” because a child may be wanted very much, and not in connection with a man, by any means, but rather for self-assertion, for example. It may be that what distinguishes these two groups of motives is a woman’s willingness to give up on her own interests for the sake of someone else’s interests, to feel compassion and sympathy, to feel the necessity of doing something for someone else. “They [those who want to have children] will have to be ready to deny themselves many things” (4); “Sometimes I want something but I realize that it would make things harder for my children, and so I deny myself” (3); “You know. . . . It’s simply that they [children] just happened. . . . [laughing] . . . and it would be a shame to give them up” (1); “The fourth was just . . . a mistake. . . . I just feel so strongly that this is life inside me, and I cannot kill it, I couldn’t stand to do that” (3); “to realize myself in love” (4); “the reason we got her [adopted her] is that everything we do in life, it will all be hers” (6); the desire to bestow a gift: “to give them the gift of life” (2). For some respondents it comes down to nothing more than finding it impossible to live just for themselves: “It was simply that we had already had it up to here with living just for ourselves. . . . It’s boring, that’s all, just boring” (6).

We also find cases where both the man and the child are on the periphery of the woman’s life and world; she wants something else even more. The most characteristic example of that philosophy of life is Maia, who claims that for her the most important meaning of life is to work on her consciousness, her intellect, and, most important, to leave this life in a state of consciousness that is more “enlightened” than the one in which she came into the world. Having children is not rejected, but they are not as essential in

terms of accomplishing the main task: “If it turns out at the end of my life that I have not had children it may be rather sad, but not a tragedy” (20). For Kseniia (8), getting an education is more important than children and husband, at this period of her life at any rate. Iuliia (26) has a child, and she does not experience negative emotions on account of it. But the child is not primary in her life and world, the center of which is creative effort, work, sex, associating with interesting people, and taking risks. Her child came into the world because Iuliia had a desire to experience everything that she could in her life.

It needs to be pointed out that even in cases where children (and/or a man) are not on the periphery of a woman’s aspirations in life, there is still something else that she wants. It may be simply free time: “What I want is just to have a little bit of free time to read” (3), or a job, a career, professional success, an education: *I.*: “Haven’t you ever wanted just to stay at home with the children?” *R.*: “Oh no, I don’t think I could stand just to stay home. There have been times, in fact, when the baby was just four or five months old and I left him with the older children and went to the farm to milk cows! And they put him in a baby carriage and brought him out to me in the cow barn” (1); “My father and I, we were always more interested in each other, and Daddy always expected that I would make some kind of brilliant career” (2); “Sometimes it seems to me that, yes, if I didn’t have them [children] my self-realization could be different than it is” (3); “In our organization we have [single] mothers who are not only holding down two jobs but also, at the same time, finding some way to go to night school . . . , or maybe take correspondence courses; in other words, they are neglecting their own health in these efforts, and yet somehow they are raising children” (4). Some are not much interested in a career: *I.*: “How about the desire for a career, some kind of professional development?” *R.*: “I have never had that desire” (5), or else they think that a career is incompatible with children: “I wanted to get away from that university as soon as possible in order to have the chance to just take care of my child the right way” (3). In the long run, however, what everyone always wants is a world around them from which the mother ought not to be isolated: “Chil-

dren should never be allowed to think that they are the only thing of interest in their mother's life" (4); "she definitely ought to involve herself in something else as well. Otherwise she will come to be . . . so much immersed in her child that she will spoil his life" (5).

"I myself" is in general a complex group of motives, and it can work both "against" and "in favor of" the child. This is the heading that I use to cover those causes prompting a woman to have a child, or not to have a child, which are related in one way or another to her own personality, which is to say, everything she consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, is counting on or hoping to get for herself (or to lose) in connection with bringing a child into the world. Those who want a child "for themselves" often hope to have a daughter rather than a son.

"Personal" motives vary a great deal: some of the interviewees talk of immortality, of continuing the race, or, in fact, continuing themselves: "Having one child means that you have 'copied yourself,' which is to say, you can see right there that you actually continue on, your concentration on your first child is very powerful" (2). "I think that we do not actually die, we live on in our children . . . and for this reason, yes, we do continue our own life" (3); "[we want the children] for ourselves, to continue ourselves" (7). It was mentioned that a child may serve the purpose of "holding onto" a man. This is also a rather "personal" motive in the sense that the woman is hoping to get a man for herself by having a child. A child may also serve to "ensure" companionship in old age, or to save the mother from loneliness right now: "What will happen with no children? In my old age who will bring me a glass of water?" (1); "women who give birth to children out of loneliness" (4). Having a child may be linked to hopes for a better life; a woman's own unrealized ambitions may be transferred on to her child. Kira (24), for example, expects that her son will become a millionaire and provide her with wealth at least in her old age, and also that he will be brilliant and, as a second variant of her life, realize Kira's own dreams of a creative and successful career.

In connection with the interests of the mother's personal development and plans in life the time factor is very important; just

how desirable it is for the woman to give birth to a child at a particular time? Even Nina, a village mother of many children, who, judging from her medical record, was always pregnant the whole time of her first marriage and always wanted to have many children, was found to have a fertility hiatus during one period of her life. *I.*: “And so after that [the death of her first child] you did not have children for two years. Why was that?” *R.*: “I simply did not want to! . . . it was only later on, after everything got back to normal” (1); in other words, after the suffering from the death of her firstborn had abated. For some women, time can even serve as the main declared reason for not wanting to have a baby (Kseniia [8]): *I.*: “And so you would not want to have children? None at all?” *R.*: “No, not at the moment, no. . . . I do not want to have a child, especially not right now.” A child is not always welcome in a woman’s life, and even women who do, at some period in their lives, begin to think that having a child is the only reason for living, like Alla (5), can deal resolutely with the life that is starting to grow in them if it comes at an inconvenient time: “An abortion. But you know that was seven years ago, and at the time I was just not ready to be a mother. And in fact I had that abortion quite deliberately.” It is when the time factor is involved that a conflict arises most clearly between the woman’s life, the “I myself” as a value, and the child’s life as a value. Moreover, both of these values, generally speaking, are present. In some cases the child wins out and the woman has to resign herself to the necessity of taking care of him, even if he comes into the world at a time when she would have preferred to deal with other problems in her life (for example, Vika [21], Kira [24], and Ella [16]). In other cases, it is “I myself” that wins out.

A particular array of motives of this group, and one that may be the most important for many, is what I would call “motherhood as identity.” In other words, motherhood is so essential in some people’s lives that it is possible to speak of it as a central aspect of the personality of a woman: “as a real woman [giving birth a second time] . . . I was quite stoic about it. In general, every female in the world does it” (2). “What? Everyone else has children, and I don’t, what am I, barren, or sick, or maybe I just can’t?” (1). Con-

cerning the core of her sense of social identity: “I really was not grown up enough, it was [motherhood] that made me grow up” (4). For many women, becoming a mother enables them to find their place in life, to find fulfillment: “My self-fulfillment is complete through my children, I have a son and I have a daughter” (2); it enables them to assert themselves and believe in themselves: “I became more serene, no doubt about it, my melancholy went away completely” (4); to be something in life, to find meaning in life: “All of a sudden I just felt that there was no more meaning in my life, the life I led in those years [and after that she had a child and] . . . my life had meaning again, new meaning, absolutely different” (4). “Now I simply had meaning in my life, I knew I had to do something for someone else” (6). Although motherhood thus serves as the core of identity for many women, nonetheless they do not think that it is a universal path to fulfillment that everyone ought to take. Quite the contrary: for those who really have found their way in life through motherhood it is seen to be rather an individual calling, a kind of profession for life’s work: *I.*: “Do you really think of it as work?” *R.*: “Yes, if you take it seriously” (3). As in the case of any profession, motherhood does not need to be everyone’s lot, because after all any calling means that there are other people who do not have that calling: “not every woman can cope with motherhood. A woman simply may not be able to, even though she might try very hard” (4). In this we can see one more manifestation of changes in the status character of motherhood: now it is coming to be a matter of the “professional pride” of “good mothers” who do a good job of performing their work with love.

The three groups of motives for having a child (or not wanting to have a child) as described above can, in certain cases, jointly exert an influence on the woman. In other situations, only one or two motives may be at work, while the others are not of serious subjective importance, or else may only be of instrumental importance, as a means of achieving goals from the value groups. Sometimes one of the groups of motives may have both instrumental and value meaning at the same time. For example, Lada (23) for whom having a child is very important as a source of pleasure, as a calling, and as a way to be in touch with the divine side of life, also attributed an

instrumental role to the birth of her daughter and tried to arrange things so that it helped to bring her closer to her husband, and waited for “favorable conditions.”³ For Kira (24) the problem was that she wanted everything, all together and all at once, and for it all to be superlative—husband, career, and child. And she has all that, but from her point of view it failed to be superlative. To give up on any one of the three, or at least to lower her requirements as to the degree to which all these things have been achieved in her life, is something that she cannot do and does not want to do, which is why she feels so tired and unhappy. What is important to Iana (2) and Alla (5) is the maturity of the woman herself at the time she brings her child into the world, which is to say, from their point of view, at a particular period in a woman’s life, giving birth to children becomes favorable for her personal development, whereas up to that time bringing them into the world would not have been right: “now at least I had something to give them [in this life]” (2); “[first] at least you need to grow up, for your own sake” (5). For Nadia (3), who loves children so passionately now (see above), an essential condition for bringing her sons into the world was a husband who was equally favorably disposed toward having children; she had four children and would not mind having more: “One time I was sitting there with him and he said: ‘Imagine if we had only one child, which one would we choose?’ ” Vika (21) had one son whom she always felt to be a burden on her, always feeling completely unhappy because he was in her life. From Vika’s point of view, giving birth is a demeaning and painful bodily experience, pregnancy is a temporary deformity, a disease that one wants to get through as quickly as possible and pay as little attention to as possible, and a child is an impudent little being to whom one has to subordinate one’s life. However, Vika sees the alternative routes, namely work or a career, as being too hard, they also demanded too much dedication and effort. But having a child, whom Vika frankly feels forced to take care of, has ultimately given her a place in life, self-determination, and a social identity. She brought her child into the world because her husband, whom Vika loves, wanted it (“I felt that I had to do it for his sake, because I could”); and yet she herself, deep in her heart, did not want children.

Let us summarize the reasons or motives that women take into consideration when deciding whether to have a child:

The child (as a value)	the man (as a value)	I myself (as a value)
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Either in addition to or instead of the value character, all these elements can have instrumental importance for achieving others in this aggregate:

The child (as instrument)	the man (as instrument)	I myself (as instrument) ⁴
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In a specific case only one, two, or all three of these elements may be present, in their value variant and/or their instrumental variant. In other words, a woman may give birth to a child to “get” the man she wants, or, on the other hand, she may get into a relationship with a man to give birth to a child she wants herself. As the study has shown, at the present time women prefer to do this in a partner relationship, as a result of the change in state policy and propaganda in favor of motherhood. A woman may strive to become a mother for the sake of her own personal self-development, to acquire a social identity that is valuable to her; in other cases her life, health, development, and career may seem to be in conflict with having a child. Sometimes the man whom the woman wants is “against” having a child; some *otkaznitsy* give their babies up to a children’s home under pressure from their male partner (among my interviewees this was true only of Lidiia [28] to a certain extent). It may also happen, however, that “I myself” gradually comes to be the instrument, while the child comes to be of paramount importance.

This article has presented a diverse picture of women’s explanations for their reproductive behavior. These are more than just self-explanations; to a considerable extent, the motives we have examined probably reflect the true reasons for giving birth, although it is rather difficult to judge the extent to which these are just their own conceptions and where their true motives begin.

And in fact it may be that there is no need to do this, because the purpose of this study was simply to determine what women themselves think about this aspect of their lives.

Appendix

Brief data about the interviewees

(1) Nina (born in 1958), mother of eight children; wanted to give up her last two, but kept them because her husband agreed to it.

(2) Iana (born in 1970), mother of two children born a year apart.

(3) Nadia (born in 1962), mother of four children.

(4) Vera (born in 1960), a single mother, founded the “Mama Alone” Association, an organization of mutual aid with a membership of fifty single mothers.

(5) Alla (born in 1965), experienced biological difficulties in her desire to get pregnant and wants to become a single mother from a specific man.

(6) Galia (born in 1959), experienced barrenness and adopted a daughter from a children’s home.

(7) Raia (born in 1962), an *otkaznitsa*, has a daughter thirteen years old and is giving up her premature son because the father of the boy, who initially agreed to raise the child with her, left her in her fourth month of pregnancy, after it was too late to have an abortion.

(8) Kseniia (born in 1976), an *otkaznitsa*, married, materially well off, a college student; is giving the child up because she does not want one now, she is not ready to be a mother.

(9) Alisa (born in 1978), an *otkaznitsa*; child premature, unstable relationship, unsatisfactory relations with husband and mother, “youthful rebellion.

(10) Nastia (born in 1976), an *otkaznitsa*, giving up her third child, her other two children live with her; all the children are from the same man, who has left her.

(11) Dasha (born in 1978), an *otkaznitsa*; her two daughters

were born out of wedlock, the first was premature due to an attempted late abortion and lives with her; her second daughter, premature and not wanted, is living with Dasha's parents, who are her custodians; her brother and her sister live in the same room.

(12) Inna (born in 1970), an *otkaznitsa* (temporarily gave up her baby), wants to be alone.

[No (13) in the original.]

(14) Larisa (born in 1960), an *otkaznitsa*, giving up her third son; wanted to hold onto a man, who left her at a late stage of her pregnancy; her first two sons, from another husband, are living with her.

(15) Zina (born in 1969), an *otkaznitsa*, gave up her second daughter, whose father is not known; her first daughter lives with her; she drinks and occasionally engages in prostitution.

(16) Ella (born in 1964), wanted to give up her second child and then kept it, without wanting to, on the insistence of her husband; thought that the child was born with ailments and at a bad time.

(17) Tamara (born in 1971), wanted to give up her first daughter but changed her mind; gave up her child temporarily because she lacked the conditions necessary for keeping the child with her; a college student, single.

(18) Valia (born in 1976), lives with her brother who is an alcoholic in a home where it is dangerous to bring a child; does not have a husband; she herself came from a children's home; did not give up her second daughter, who was born with a heart defect.

(19) Zhanna (born in 1968), gave up her child to her husband when they divorced.

(20) Maiia (born in 1967), would not mind having a child but is not trying very hard, because other things are more important in her life.

(21) Vika (born in 1965), has one child who is a heavy burden in her life.

(22) Valeriia (born in 1965), does not want to have children;

(23) Lada (born in 1968), has one child, is very happy being a mother.

(24) Kira (born in 1962), wants to have everything and does—a husband, a child, and a career.

(25) Polina (born in 1971), does not want to have children.

(26) Iuliia (born in 1970), bisexual, the mother of one son.

(27) Liuba (born in 1976), an *otkaznitsa*; she was brought up by her aunt, her natural parents gave her up, had conflicts with foster parents; lived with the child's father and his mother, who kicked her out; is giving up the child because she has no place to take it, even though she loves the child's father and does not want to give it up.

(28) Lidiia (born in 1969), an *otkaznitsa*, is unmarried but lives with a man; has one child, no money, no documents, depends financially on the man's parents; is giving up her second child under pressure from the man, although she does not want to.

(29) Ul'iana (born in 1963), has three daughters; is religious, is an artist and a schoolteacher; full of the joy of life in spite of her impoverished social and financial situation; would not mind having a fourth child; married to her second husband.

(30) Veronika (born in 1962), has a severe heart defect, gave birth to one daughter in spite of the advice of doctors who tried to stop her.

Notes

1. Vera (4), a single mother who was interviewed, had these comments to make about the claim of the high prestige of heroic motherhood, which some have interpreted to mean, in particular, single motherhood: "How can anyone compare us [single mothers] with the Virgin, because, you know, in all our cases some sin was involved in our becoming mothers!" In my opinion, however, there is no real conflict here. After all, the Immaculate Conception, followed by the birth and upbringing of the Child who was destined to sacrifice Himself for the sake of the social good, represents the religious ideal of female behavior. Actual situations in life can only approximate this ideal. And single motherhood represents a position that is closest to it. Paradoxically, the ideal is also approximated by the *in vitro* fertilization procedure, a conception that is completely immaculate, or at any rate devoid of sexuality.

2. See Appendix, containing brief information about the interviewees; all the names have been changed for the sake of confidentiality.

3. In general, "favorable conditions" can also be assigned to the "I myself" group, because if these conditions are in place motherhood becomes easier and more pleasant, and, at the same time, it comes at a time when it is not in conflict with the woman's other goals and plans in life. On the other hand, they can be assigned to the "child" group, because women who think that a

child deserves favorable conditions sometimes sincerely place the child higher than themselves (in the sense that “I can go on living this way, but my child ought to have a better life”). Sometimes waiting for “favorable conditions” merely serves as an excuse for women who actually do not want to have children at all but who prefer not to admit that openly.

4. “I myself,” the woman’s own person, may actually seem to her to be secondary or instrumental for the purpose of achieving other aims; for example, the woman may feel that the man is more important than she is; or, in the spirit of traditionalism, a woman’s own existence may be thought of as having meaning only in the light of fulfilling a woman’s only “destiny” on Earth, giving birth to children.

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