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THE FEATURES OF PRESENT-DAY YOUNG WOMEN'S
IDEAS ABOUT MOTHERHOOD

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to explore the contents of the image of motherhood in women in youth. There are two stages in this research: the first stage is devoted to determining the contents of the image of motherhood, and the second stage is to identify a preferable image of motherhood. 184 women aged from 18 to 23 years have been examined. The analysis of the essay "I am as a future mother" is conducted during the first stage. The results indicate that for the subjects the main functions of maternity are the emotional support of the child, formation of harmonious relationships within the family and provision of children's conducive emotional state. Based on some descriptions in the works, the typology of the seven images of mothers is proposed. During the second stage of the study the peculiarities of the preferable type of the realization of the maternal role are discovered. The most attractive image for women in youth are mothers focused on caring and building friendly relations with the child, and partner-oriented mothers who are in good relations with the man, that is, the father of the child. Summarizing the results obtained, the authors note that the preferable image of motherhood is associated with the existence of harmonious relationships, both conjugal and child-parent, and implies a supportive attitude of the mother toward the child.

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Keywords: Motherhood, child-parent relations, image, representations of maternal role.



1. Introduction

The modern-world trends such as birth rate decrease, society changes, transformation of parental position inside the family and the state in general have become the cause why researchers show more and more interest towards family and parenthood issues. Global changes in the life conditions of a modern woman make her face the need for integrating many social roles that she performs. Maternity remains an absolutely unique event in women's life that requires mastering means and methods for its successful realization. Maternity becomes only one of them. As well as other social roles, the mother requires mastering some special means and methods. The woman has to travel a long way of developing inner maternity position to be able to experience the joy of maternity described by E. Zakharova (2014) as: "A woman's form of reflection, acceptance and acquiring of her social maternity position". Young adults do not take the representation of the content of the parental role from special training programs but from their own experience of living in the family. But its realization depends on how young women treat the children, on the maternal role and her parental position. A. Spivakovskaya considers maternity with regard to parental position which she understands as "a real tendency based on the conscious and unconscious child's evaluations expressed in the ways and forms of interaction with children" (Spivakovskaya, 1986). Parental position implies a real interaction between the mother and the child and reveals itself through mastering methods and representations of the child's role in the woman's life. The parental position which includes the notion of a maternal role and the attitude toward it, determines the nature of the mother's behaviour. In cultural and historical aspects a maternal attitude is treated as a cultural development product that depends on both the maternity models and family model that dominates at this particular age and this stage of society development, i.e. social norms and values have a decisive impact on the display of maternal attitude. The formation of a maternal attitude begins long before the parenting happens and has its own features and development dynamics.

At the moment, there is a large number of studies on peculiarities and classification of parental position of women with children or of those who are to perform a parental function (during pregnancy). However, we believe that as a special social position the attitude towards maternity develops even earlier and is based on women's representations.

Over the past few years a number of psychological thesis researches touching upon the concept of maternity have been completed. They reveal the importance of existing maternity representations for further realization of parental function and psychological readiness for maternity as a determinant for harmonious relations between the child and the parent, etc. The studies of T. Paltseva are of a special interest. In these studies she examines the psychological basis for the development of reproductive attitudes in childhood and adolescence. The study shows that all the components of the reproductive system are formed by the age of eighteen, and its content starts to determine reproductive intentions (Paltseva, 2006). In the study of psychological features of maternity attitude of teenage mothers V. Volkova shows interdependence of immature attitude (system of parental attitudes) and subsequent relationship with the child. The author also develops a typology of maternity attitude (Volkova, 2005). In her thesis research S. Dozhdeva presents the author's program called 'Getting ready to become a mother' for the purpose to form a positive cognitive-emotional position regarding the upcoming maternity (Dozhdeva, 2010).

Despite the sufficient number of studies on maternity, the issue of sources, content, and – what is more – types of maternity representations by young women entering adulthood – remain to be open. And, in our opinion, it requires a comprehensive study.

Proceeding from the theoretical ideas of Y. Lotman, E. Artemyeva, V. Frankl, A. Langle, A. Asmolov, D. Leontyev etc about the origin of representations as components of world-view, there are following aspects influencing its content:

1. Sociocultural context of tradition and modernity.
2. Life relations which a person enters while acquiring cultural signs.
3. Practical world of activity of the subject.
4. Internal individual conditions that determine the nature of external impact on the formation of representations (Artemyeva, 1999; Asmolov, 1996; Leontyev, 1977; Lengle, 2004; Frankl, 1990).

2. Problem Statement

Thus, the maternity representations have a direct impact on the realization of a parental role and require a comprehensive psychological study aimed at possible corrective actions at the stage of their forming.

3. Research Questions

- 3.1. What are the main features of young women's ideas of motherhood?
- 3.2. What types of maternal role are more attractive for young women? Why?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this investigation is to study and classify features of maternity representations in young women entering adulthood.

5. Research Methods

The study consisted of two stages.

At the first stage we asked young women aged eighteen through twenty-three to write the essay titled 'Me as a Future Mother' (70-90 words). The purpose was to identify representations of maternity as a social role and activity. The study included 184 respondents who did not have children at the time of the study. We selected seven pictures of mothers corresponding to the types identified previously to distinguish some predominant types of a maternal role. For the study, we had to make sure that the selected images were accurately perceived by the participants. We asked the subjects to describe the demonstrated images by means of answering the question 'What kind of mother is this?'

During the second part of the study we asked the same young women to rank the mothers shown in the pictures according to their own preferences.

6. Findings

The procedure of content analysis of the essay was developed to make it possible to evaluate such aspects of the content as (Table 01):

Table 01. The results of the procedure of content analysis of the essay

Level of requirements to the child		Acceptance of responsibility		Self-confidence as a mother		Readiness for maternity	
High	Moderate	Acceptance	Non-acceptance	Yes	No	Yes	No
0.3%	3.9%	1.4%	1.4%	0.9%	2.7%	1.07%	3.05 %

- Values tendency
- Content of maternal activities (functions)
- Style of leadership
- Level of requirements to the child
- Acceptance of responsibility
- Self-confidence as a mother
- Readiness for maternity

The distribution of the statements of the selected components of the representations enabled us to determine the most significant features of maternity as a social role and a special type of women's activity (Table 02).

Table 02. Percentage ratio of the number of statements relating to each parameter of maternity representations of young women entering adulthood.

Value tendency		Content of maternal activities (functions)						Style of leadership	
Towards child's interests	Other	Development of harmonious relationship	Upbringing	Childcare	Support	Ensuring conditions for development	Ensuring a good emotional state	Egalitarian	Democratic
5%	0.9%	15.2%	8%	4%	18.7%	5.9%	14%	11.3%	5.7%

The content analysis of the essays showed that the main functions of maternity were presented in the form of a moral and emotional support of the child (18.7%). The essays often contained the following statements: 'I will help and support my children for them to feel they are needed', 'We shall learn understanding the child and help him in a difficult situation', 'I will be supportive for my child'. The respondents believed that the creation of harmonious relations between family members (15.2%) was also an important maternity function. This was confirmed by the following statements: 'We shall make our home to be the place where our children would want to return to', 'First of all, the child needs love and attention', 'The main thing is to be always beside your child so that he feels the family's support and love'. Another maternity function stated by the young women was to ensure a good emotional state of the child which is reflected in the following statements: 'My main task will consist in making my child happy', 'A mom shall do everything to make her child healthy and happy', 'As a mother, I shall help my children gain confidence

and happiness'. Childcare (1.4%), upbringing (6.8%) and ensuring conditions for development (5.9%) were secondary in the respondents' views on maternity. Such distribution of maternity representations demonstrated incompleteness of maternity image in young women entering adulthood. Despite the positive attitude to maternity revealed in 85% cases, the maternity representations did not contain the description of the ways and means of activities aimed at childcare and child's development. It was important to note the fact that the age of the child in the essays was often close to the age of the women themselves, which also highlighted incompleteness and discordance of maternity representations.

Based on the essay analysis, the preferred style of leadership was egalitarian (66.4%). The essay authors considered it to be necessary to create an equal and friendly relationship with the future child for a successful implementation of maternal function. These representations were reflected in such statements as: 'First of all, you must be your child's friend, a very caring one', '...be a loyal friend and person whom he will never be afraid to turn to', 'I will try to become the best friend of my child'. However, the respondents also considered the democratic leadership style (33.6%) to be acceptable. It implied a high degree of freedom in decision-making for the child and allowed to make partnership between the parent and the child. The essays did not refer to any other styles of leadership, such as authoritarian or totalitarian that reflected a high level of control over the child and a clear family hierarchy, where the parent was the only person to set norms and rules of functioning. This might mean that the respondents were focused on the creation of a close interpersonal relationship with their children as future partners and friends, which relates to the task of development of the young women entering adulthood.

It was also worth mentioning that the respondents' representations were more connected with the content of maternal activity rather than with the acceptance of a new social role. This fact might indicate that there was no internal readiness to accept this role, and there was discordance in the maternity representations.

The results of the essay analysis showed that the main maternity features revealed themselves in the representations of young women entering adulthood. They considered maternity to be a significant event in women's life implying a supportive and successful partnership with the child.

Based on the results obtained, we could identify several types of mothers shown in the respondents' descriptions:

1. Caring mother
2. Busy and businesslike mother
3. Housewifely mother
4. Sociable mother
5. Loving and partner-oriented mother
6. Attentive mother
7. Womanly mother

The basis of the topology was in accordance with the leading type of maternal function, and what place maternity took in the role structure of the woman's personality.

We selected seven pictures of mothers corresponding to the types identified previously to distinguish the predominant types of maternal role. For the study, we had to make sure that the participants perceived

accurately the selected images. We asked the respondents to describe the demonstrated images by means of answering the question ‘What kind of mother is this?’.

Based on the results of statistical analysis, we could conclude that the images we had offered were perceived by the respondents as follows:

Caring mother - 70.7% of the sample called this feature caring and supportive;

Busy and businesslike mother - 91.8% of the sample described the picture as working, managing and busy;

Housewifely mother - 64.9% of the sample described the picture as economic and practical;

Sociable mother - 69.8% of the sample described the picture as sociable and talkative;

Loving and partner-oriented mother - 74.7% of the sample described the picture as loving (beloved), family-close and in-love;

Creative and attentive mother - 90.4% of the sample described the creative and attentive.

As to Picture 7 showing a womanly mother, we could not manage to obtain consistent characteristics. We received a wide range of responses which indicated a mixed perception of this image.

After checking the prepared stimuli for consistency we could proceed with the main question: what are the preferences of particular maternity images? Analysis of preferences through pairwise comparison was presented in Table 03.

Analyzing the obtained results, we could conclude that the most attractive pictures (the highest level of identification) were No.1 (caring mother), No.6 (loving and partner-oriented) and No.4 (housewifely). At the same time, the tendency to evaluate (lower level of identification) picture No.6 (loving and partner-oriented) was associated with the **development task** for the respondents, i.e. establishing close relationship with a romantic partner. In the meantime, pictures No.1 and No.4 were close to the ideal mother image.

Pictures No. 2 (busy) and No. 5 (sociable) were least attractive. That is, mothers focused on career and satisfaction of social needs (communication outside the family) were less frequently associated with the ideal mother image. At the same time, variability of data for these two pictures were the least, meaning that the **estimates** were the most consistent.

Table 03. Results of pairwise comparison of the pictures’ ranking (the Wilcoxon criterion for dependent sample pairs)

	Picture_1	P_2	P_3	P_4	P_5	P_6	P_7
Picture_1		-6,333,000	-5,041,000		-6,458,000		
P_2				-5,181,000	-1,998,046	-5,996,000	-5,509,000
P_3				-4,077,000	-3,042,002	-5,321,000	-3,849,000
P_4					-6,149,000		
P_5						-6,230,000	-5,745,000
P_6							-2,152,031
P_7							

Therefore, we could note that the preferable maternity image was associated with harmonious relationship, both conjugal and between the child and parents. It also implied the mother's supportive and helping attitude towards the child. As a sign of taking the responsibility for the child, the respondents highlighted such mother's quality as being housewifely which corresponded to the generally accepted image of mother.

7. Conclusion

We have managed to achieve the research objectives. The peculiarities of the content of young women's representations of motherhood are found. The received data evidence the following:

1. In the representations of modern young women the maternal role is provided in a sufficient detail. In the most selective case the ratio is positive.

2. It is possible to make the conclusion about a low degree of preparedness of young women for the realization of the maternal role, since their conception is characterized by incompleteness and misbalance. The position on the child presented in the writings does not fully correspond to the parent. The position on an equal footing with the child is traced both in the preferred style of the commander and in the stressing the function of psychological support. We believe that the revealed ideas reflect the specificity of the interaction between the grown-up child-teenager and the parents. It is highly desirable in the actual situation for the respondents themselves.

3. During the formation of their own parental position, the representations of young women tend to such types of mothers as a caring mother and housewifely mother who seek to create harmonious conjugal and child-parent relationship.

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