Navigational Capital, Transgenerational Resilience: Motherhood and Gendered Identity in Western Siberia in 2018

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Abstract

This thesis draws on in-depth, biographical interviews to explore the gendered negotiations of twenty-one women in Tyumen, Russia as they navigate systems of power, expectations, and identity related to their potential and capacity for reproduction; in other words, related to their relationship to "motherhood." This project contributes to literature that furthers understandings of the daily gendered dynamics within communities in Russia beyond the metropolitan centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Building on the working assumption that everyday gendered practices and norms are not imposed exclusively from above but are also shaped by the active participation and choices of individuals and communities, this thesis offers a reparative reading of motherhood, creating space to carefully consider its meaning and value among the women interviewed. It also considers the familial and social mechanisms that make up the institution of motherhood as experienced by these women in Tyumen, depicting multi-layered pressures to become mothers as well as a social precarity regarding acceptable expressions of motherhood. Drawing on stories of navigating reproductive, obstetric, and pediatric health care services in Tyumen, the thesis additionally considers the impact of a long history of pro-natalist policies and ideologies in the Soviet Union and Russia, and the influence this has on the lives and decision making of the women. The project ultimately highlights how high levels of expertise, navigational capital, and mutual support among the women I interviewed allowed them to be resilient in the face of institutional adversity and to negotiate for improved gender dynamics within their families. Finally, it illustrates the transgenerational nature of this resilience, shifting and adapting to – or even in spite of – changes within the broader society.

Аннотация

Работа основана на подробных биографических интервью с целью изучения гендерных переговорных стратегий 21 женщины в городе Тюмень (Россия), в ситуациях когда они взаимодействуют с системами власти, ожиданиями и идентичностями, которые им предписываются в связи с их возможностью и способностью к репродукции; другими словами, феноменом "материнства". Работа вносит вклад в понимание ежедневной гендерной динамики в российских сообществах за пределами столичных центров – Москвы и Санкт-Петербурга. Основываясь на предположении, что повседневные гендерные практики и нормы не навязываются исключительно сверху, а формируются благодаря активному участию и предпочтениям индивидов и сообществ, в работе делается попытка предложить альтернативное понимание феномена материнства, которая создает пространство для внимательного рассмотрения его значения и ценности среди женщин в рассматриваемом контексте. В ней также анализируются социальные механизмы, которые составляют институт материнства и показывают различные виды давления на будущих матерей, а также установки, которые отображают социально одобряемое поведение в отношении материнства. Основываясь на истории служб репродуктивного, акушерского и детского здоровья в Тюмени, работа также рассматривает влияние пронаталистской политики в Советском Союзе и России на жизнь и решения этих женщин в Тюмени. В работе исследуется, каким образом высокий уровень знаний, социального капитала и взаимной поддержки среди женщин позволяют им быть стрессоустойчивыми перед институциональными трудностями и находить гендерный баланс в своих семьях. Проект также демонстрирует межпоколенческую природу этой устойчивости, способность к изменениям в более широком контексте.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word counts for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 24,469 words

Entire manuscript: 36,060 words

Signed: _____ (Kathryn L Burns)

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis explores the gendered negotiations of twenty-one women in Tyumen, Russia as they navigate systems of power, expectations, and identity related to their potential relationship to their reproductive capacity; in other words, related to their relationship to "motherhood."[1]

The project is based on a series of in-depth biographical interviews conducted in June 2018. The seeds of the project took root a few years earlier in 2013-2014 when I lived and worked in Tyumen for ten months on a Fulbright grant, conducting research on informal networks of support between women.[2] At the time, issues of family change, gender, and sexuality in Russia were receiving international attention due to political developments including the implementation of significant family policy changes such as the 2006 "maternity capital"[3] program, designed to stimulate childbirth in the wake of a declining population, as well as by the 2013 "gay propaganda bill," criminalizing "propaganda for non-traditional sexuality."[4] Yet despite this increased attention, I found that many gendered aspects of life as I had observed it in Tyumen were not been well captured by academic literature. For one thing, the growing body of literature on family policy, sexuality and gender roles in contemporary Russia seemed disproportionately prone to addressing the lives of women and mothers from top-down perspectives: focusing on analyses of the effects of pro-natalism, biopolitics, or gendered nationalism.[5]

[1] As I will discuss further in my conceptual framework (2.3), I adapt Adrienne Rich's dual definition of motherhood to define it here as 1) "the potential relationship" of an individual to their "powers of reproduction and to children" and 2) the institution of motherhood, which I emphasize to be historically and culturally specific. Adrienne Cécile Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (Bantam Books, 1977), xv.

[2] I applied to the Fulbright program in part as a means of conducting research on informal networks of support for victims and survivors of domestic violence in Russia. I had been working in crisis intervention and advocacy at women's crisis centers in Portland, OR, home to the second largest Russian diaspora in the United States. While my project changed over time, my original intention in moving to Tyumen was to improve my Russian language and cultural competence in order to better serve Russian immigrant women in Portland, who often faced high barriers to accessing resources and support at the agencies in which I worked.

[3] The maternity capital, which was renewed in 2012, offers financial incentive equivalent to $10,000 (adjusted for inflation) for giving birth to their second and subsequent children. While the "maternity capital " [materinskii kapital] was officially is officially called the "maternity (family) capital," the word family is dropped in popular discourse and the subsidy program is widely discussed as aimed for mothers. As noted by Ekaterina Borozdina et al., "Using Maternity Capital: Citizen Distrust of Russian Family Policy," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 23, no. 1 (February 2016): 62, https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506814543838.

[4] See Emil Persson, "Banning 'Homosexual Propaganda': Belonging and Visibility in Contemporary Russian Media," Sexuality & Culture 19, no. 2 (June 2015): 256–74, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-014-9254-1.

[5] For examples of some such top-down approaches, see Francesca Stella et al., eds., *Sexuality, Citizenship and Belonging: Trans-National and Intersectional Perspectives*, Routledge Advances in Critical Diversities 1 (New York London: Routledge, 2016); Michele Rivkin-Fish, "Conceptualizing Feminist Strategies for Russian Reproductive Politics: Abortion, Surrogate Motherhood, and Family Support after Socialism," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 3 (March 2013): 569–93, https://doi.org/10.1086/668606; Anna Rotkirch, Anna Temkina, and Elena Zdravomyslova, "Who Helps the Degraded Housewife?: Comments on Vladimir Putin's Demographic Speech," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 14, no. 4 (November 2007): 349–57, https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506807081884.

Additionally, even within ethnographic material, academic literature frequently treats Russia as a "centralized country," relying on research and data from Moscow, Saint Petersburg and the surrounding areas to draw conclusions about the broader country.[6]

In June of 2018, I returned to Tyumen to conduct oral history interviews, guided by a number of questions I found underrepresented in literature on the region. My main research questions were: To what extent do these women understand motherhood to be a part of their gendered identities, and how do these understandings develop? How do women in Tyumen relate to state policies and institutions? What strategies and resources do women in Tyumen rely on to support them in their decision making about motherhood and reproduction?

This project aims to contribute to the "decentering, displacing quality that transnational feminist theory can effect on cultural and economic politics, as well as the politics of knowing and doing feminism."[7] It contributes to literature that bridges gaps in understandings of the daily gendered dynamics and negotiations of identities in Russian communities beyond the metropolis. I additionally aim to challenge essentializing and highly politicized perspectives that are often perpetuated by Western-centric approaches to research in Russia. As I elaborate further in my conceptual framework, I do so by offering a reparative reading,[8] creating space to carefully consider the meaning and value of motherhood and the choice to prioritize family among the women I spoke with.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I will briefly give a historical overview of changes to family structure in Russia starting from the pre-Soviet period and conclude with an outline of the thesis structure.

1.1 A Brief History of Family Structure and Gender Roles in the Former Soviet Union

In 1879, August Bebel published his influential book *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (published in English as *Women and Socialism*), which advocated for not only economic but

[6] This trend of "metronormativity" was first termed by queer theorist J. Halberstam and has been utilized to describe trends within literature on Russia several scholars Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (NYU Press, 2005).. For one discussion of metronormativity and the "politics of in/visibility" in Russia see F. Stella, *Lesbian Lives in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia: Post/Socialism and Gendered Sexualities* (Springer, 2016), 112–13.

[7] David Rubin, "Situating Feminist Epistemology in a Global Frame," 2009, 456..

[8] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," in *Touching Feeling*, by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ed. Michèle Aina Barale, Jonathan Goldberg, and Michael Moon (Duke University Press, 2002), 124, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822384786-005.

also legal and political equality for women.[9] The book emphasized women's "self-liberation" as key to the success of socialist goals. Following this, Friedrich Engels' 1884 text *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* described the nuclear family as a "microcosm of capitalist society," arguing that the institution of marriage was centered around property laws in bourgeois society and that the "bourgeois wife is a prostitute… hired for life rather than a few hours."[10] These early thinkers laid the framework for conversations and changes that were to come. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Bolshevik agenda was predicated on women's emancipation as essential to the enactment of socialism.[11] "Women's liberation" within socialism meant participation in production outside the home, as well as equal political and economic status. To achieve these goals societal structures that rendered women the primary caretakers for children had to be reconceived. The introduction of social welfare programs tailored for mothers, becoming popular across Europe at the end of the 19th century, began to gain steam in Russia.[12]

The Bolsheviks advanced important changes for women from 1917-1918 which were shaped by the ideological shift from motherhood and family as private affairs to public duties. These changes were implemented as part of the first Soviet Code on Marriage, the Family and Guardianship (1918) which established motherhood as shared, collective responsibility.[13] Women were to be given "protection" (state welfare) and "independence" to work and make choices for themselves, in exchange for fulfilling their duties to the state of bearing children, working, and keeping the moral peace in the family. Contrary to traditional patriarchal structures of family, Soviet women's direct relationship with the state as mothers and workers was emphasized, while men's roles (at least in terms of reproduction and parenthood) were diminished. Labor scholar Sarah Ashwin has argued that the state alliance with women was in fact

[9] August Bebel, "Woman and Socialism," in *The Feminist Papers*, ed. Rossi (New York: Socialist literature Cie, 1910), 3–7 and 466–72.The original English translation, published in 1904, was entitled Women Under Socialism (as noted by Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, *Women in Soviet Society: Equality, Development, and Social Change* (University of California Press, 1978), n. 51.

[10] Alfred G Meyer, "Marxism and the Women's Movement," in *Women in Russia*, ed. Dorothy Atkinson, Alexander Dallin, and Gail Warshofsky Lapidus (Stanford University Press, 1977), 91–92.

[11] See for example Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989).

[12]Yulia Gradskova, *Soviet People with Female Bodies: Performing Beauty and Maternity in Soviet Russia in the Mid 1930s-1960s* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2007), 84.

[13] Olga Issoupova, "Motherhood: From Duty to Pleasure?," in Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia, ed. Sarah Ashwin (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 31. As also discussed by Anna Krylova, "Bolshevik Feminism and Gender Agendas of Communism," in *The Cambridge History of Communism*, ed. Silvio Pons and Stephen Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 425, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316137024.020.

an inversion of traditional state alliances with men, noting that during the early Soviet period, women were also reimagined as the bearers of improving culture and accountability.[14]

The manner and success by which "liberation" for women under socialism was achieved in practice has been a topic of extensive scholarly contention. Historian Anna Krylova recently argued that a distinction must be made between the state-sanctioned "family structure" breakdown and the continued vision and impact of the Bolshevik vision of socialist womanhood.[15] The 1936 decree "On the Protection of Motherhood and Childhood" identified the family as the basic unit of society in the Soviet Union, which many scholars have argued foreclosed on the "ideal of family-free society" and likewise on women's emancipation.[16] Krylova suggests, however, that even after this decree visions of socialist womanhood and gender norms continued to push the envelope. She argues that, given the economic and resource constraints and the decentralized nature of power in Russia following the "civil" war,[17] the social institutions necessary to support radical changes brought by a breakdown of traditional family structure (anticipated by the 1918 "Family Code") proved to be very difficult to implement and sustain.[18] This overarching historical narrative of resources being unequal to the task of bringing Bolshevik visions to fruition is consistent throughout scholarly literature on the subject. Scholars coming from a variety of perspectives note junctions of compromise, when original Bolshevik plans were shifted to accommodate material challenges.[19] Institutional limitations in resources, as well as the resistance and non-uniform compliance of the people, brought unexpected challenges to fulfilling state ideological goals.

Understanding this historical background is an important grounding for my research, in part because a review of Bolshevik approaches to women's emancipation provides a basis for understanding the historical context from which later, post-socialist changes to gender and

[14] While some authors, including Olga Issoupova and Ashwin (Ashwin, 3) frame shifting gender ideology as the backbone of Bolshevik restructuring, others, such as Helene Carlbäck et al., frame it as only one piece of a larger puzzle of societal changes which led to the restructuring of the family. These editors cite "state control over economic production, geographic and social mobility and the secularization and ideological rejection of traditional gender roles" as factors involved in familial restructuring during this period. Helene Carlbäck, Yulia Gradskova, and Zhanna Kravchenko, eds., And They Lived Happily Ever after: Norms and Everyday Practices of Family and Parenthood in Russia and Central Europe (Budapest ; New York: Central European University Press, 2012), 3-4.

[15] Krylova, "Bolshevik Feminism and Gender Agendas of Communism."

[16] As Issoupova points out, "hero father" was not introduced. Indeed, as previously discussed, throughout this period there is very little mention of "fatherhood" in the state-mother-child triad. (2000, 38). Issoupova, "Motherhood: From Duty to Pleasure?," 38.

[17] As Francisca de Haan suggested in a lecture for a Communism and Gender course at CEU, the term "civil" is a problematic framing given the multiple international forces involved. See also David S. Foglesong, *America's Secret War against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War*, 1917-1920 (UNC Press Books, 2014).

[18] Krylova, "Bolshevik Feminism and Gender Agendas of Communism," 437.

[19] Another example of such compromises and concessions was state nurseries, as discussed above,. Issoupova, "Motherhood: From Duty to Pleasure?," 37.

family norms would come. As Helene Carlbäck et al. argue in the introduction to their 2012 book on family and parenthood in the post-socialist region, research that takes "post-socialism" as a defining feature of analysis without actual attention to the socialist past may fail to understand "particular characteristics of the state socialist system such as official norms of women's emancipation, predominantly female responsibility for family matters in everyday life, and a strong emphasis on an all-embracing welfare state of a specific authoritarian kind."[20] Yet perhaps more important than a historical background of the state socialist system alone is Krylova's emphasis that the legacy of Bolshevik feminism has been an "uneven and contradictory impact on Soviet society and its generations."[21] She goes on to suggest that "the construction of state socialism in its 1930s Stalinist-totalitarian variety relied on varied and blatantly contradictory ways of viewing and instituting gender norms and, consequently, enabled varied and contradictory ways of imagining and enacting socialist ideals of womanhood and manhood."[22] The implication of this assertion is that neither socialist nor post-socialist gender norms and roles should be taken for granted as uniform or centralized, but rather as varied and contradictory in their enactment and in the ways they have changed.

1.2 Thesis Outline

In Chapter 2, I move into a historiographical discussion which examines scholarly approaches to framing gender roles and motherhood from the end of the Soviet period to present, concluding with the working conceptual framework on which the remainder of my analysis will draw. Chapter 3 outlines my use of in-depth, biographical interviews as a feminist qualitative research method, as well as the design and execution of my research, issues of positionality, research ethics and technical notes. Chapters 4 and 5 explore the contours of my interviewees' narratives about their lived experiences, attitudes, and expectations with regards to motherhood and reproduction. Chapter 4 examines expectations as well as dissatisfactions with gendered and family roles and norms within the narratives of the women I spoke with in Tyumen, how these roles and norms play into their thinking and decision making around motherhood, and some of their strategies for addressing dissatisfaction. I begin the chapter by sketching out these women's perceptions of gendered roles and norms, the material and familial structures of their lives, and how they relate motherhood to gendered identities. I then examine the social power of motherhood, as well as the some of the policing mechanisms that delineate

[20] Carlbäck, Gradskova, and Kravchenko, *And They Lived Happily Ever After*, 2.
[21] Krylova, "Bolshevik Feminism and Gender Agendas of Communism," 425.
[22] Krylova, 425.

appropriate and inappropriate claims to recognition for the "achievement" of motherhood. In Chapter 5, I explore the interplay between women in Tyumen and institutional distrust, through the lens of encounters with medical institutions. By tracing how the women I interviewed establish (precarious) trust, seek physical, psychological, or emotional support from medical professionals, and respond to negative experiences, the chapter examines the ways in which personal experiences shape and influence these women attitudes and decisions around medical care. I argue that women's strategies illustrate a reinforced prioritization of self-reliance, cultivating knowledge to be their own experts and developing and sharing high levels of "navigational capital."[23] I conclude with a brief discussion of the implications of my analysis, as well as my perspective on the project's scholarly contributions.

[23] I borrow this term from Tara Yosso, as I discusse in Chapter 5. Tara J. Yosso, "Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (March 2005): 69–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006.

Chapter 2. Historiography, Review of Literature and Conceptual Framework

Following from the historical background discussed in Chapter 1, this chapter provides an overview of the literature and scholarly debates in which a project on women's roles, motherhood and decision making in Russia must be situated.

In the introduction to their 2012 book, editors Carlbäck et al. delineate three main levels for understanding norms and practices in family and parenthood: 1) "to critically analyze family norms as captured in legislation and public-policy regulations and partly also to study the implementation of policies," 2) "to provide an account of changing discourse and norms with respect to gender roles, the gender division of labor, parental duties, and state intervention in family life" and 3) "to conceptualize actual patterns of reproduction, the division of household labor, and childcare."[24] I find these authors' divisions of concepts to be a helpful starting point for approaching the historiography on change and continuity in norms and practices of motherhood and gender roles. By analytically delineating between changing top-down (policy) goals for reproduction and family, how gendered roles are changed and normalized via discourse, and the change and continuity in actual lived experience, the authors allow space to highlight the overlap and discontinuities between the three spheres, as well as space to unravel how societal change might function at varying speeds, with lived norms and practices not usually changing in unison (nor in direct correspondence) with state and policy level shifts.

In the following section, I historicize scholarly understandings of gender and motherhood from the late Soviet period through the post-socialist transition (2.1). I then review contemporary approaches and challenges to exploring motherhood and gender roles in Russia, in order to reveal scholarly gaps and situate my project alongside the work of others (2.2). Finally, I offer an overview of the working theoretical and conceptual frameworks which will guide the analytical chapters that follow (2.3).

2.1 Historiography: Motherhood and Gender Roles in Russia

The end of the Soviet Union marked a dramatic rise in academic research regarding social, cultural and political life in Russia.[25] In her 2015 historiography of English-language scholarship on motherhood (from pre-revolutionary Russia to present), Natalya Mitsyuk argues

[24] Carlbäck, Gradskova, and Kravchenko, *And They Lived Happily Ever After*, 1.

[25] According to Natalya Mitsyuk, the increase in research was first primarily done by foreign scholars, who were later joined by local Russian academics. N. A. Mitsyuk, "Historiography of Motherhood in Russia" Historical Psychology and Social History, no. 1 (2015): 128–46.

that the 1990s brought a particular increase in scholarly attention towards Soviet and post-Soviet women's places in the family and in society. She suggests that this intensification developed in large part due to the newly heightened availability of resources for research (including Russian archives and libraries), new access to so-called "living witnesses of the era," and material from oral history interviews in which women could offer first-hand accounts of the features of family life during the Soviet period.[26]

Scholarship from the decade of the 1990s is marked by uncertainty and tenuous claims, many of which would later reverse themselves.[27] This is likely a reflection of the atmosphere of the country and, indeed, the whole former socialist region at the time. Looking at once towards the Soviet past, as rapid political and economic shifts made entire societal frameworks turn over in the space of a few years, and towards an uncertain future, it was too early to tell the extent to which societal and political expectations might change or stay the same. As Anne White suggests, "some of the 1990s Russian and English-language research should perhaps be regarded as snapshots of the period rather than necessarily indicative of longer-term trends."[28] The contributions of authors of this time are nonetheless valuable in that they laid the framework for conversations about changes in attitudes and experiences of motherhood that were to come, as Russia's economic and social spheres were steadily transformed from a welfare state model to privatized, market capitalism.

By tracing the ways in which changing structures, discourses and lived practices related to family and motherhood in the Soviet Union have been described, starting with literature published in the early 1990s.[29] Building primarily on the historical discussions of scholars such as Sarah Ashwin, Olga Issoupova, Natalia Mitsyuk and others, I will expand upon what I see to be the primary similarities and conflicts in the historical interpretations of the changes in policy and social expectations during the transition from socialism to market capitalism.

[26] Mitsyuk, 168.
[27] Anne White, "Gender Roles in Contemporary Russia: Attitudes and Expectations among Women Students," *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 3 (May 2005): 429–55, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130500073449.
[28] White, 431.
[29] In my analysis, I have relied first on articles related to motherhood from any discipline (gender studies, sociology, anthropology, history) which include a historical contextualization substantive enough to be compared alongside one another (such as a developed historical introduction or literature review). Although I have also included literature with less historical grounding, it is necessarily of a more limited usefulness for the present discussion.

2.1.1 Motherhood in Late Socialism through the Transition: Change and Continuity

"In Soviet society, the family and demographic policies were, in fact, synonyms."[30]

-Zhanna Chernova, 2012

As discussed in Chapter 1, fundamental to many of the narratives regarding motherhood and gender history of the post-Soviet period is the working assumption that the Soviet Union institutionalized a distinctive 'gender order,' and that with the fall of the Soviet Union came an end or (by some accounts) even a reversal of this "experiment."[31]

> "The problem of motherhood [has been] considered in the context of the transformation of gender roles in the family and in society, sexual relations, matrimonial and reproductive behavior, 'the women question,' female education, and labor activity."[32]

In the above passage, Mitsyuk historicizes what she identifies as the starting point for most scholarship on motherhood in Russia. Her description of the literature is not without her own critique. Importantly, she maintains that scholars have been too focused on "the influence of sociocultural factors on mothers, but not vice versa," which she argues erases the "active participation of mothers in the historical process."[33] She also critiques the scholarly trend to focus primarily on major milestones of "women's liberation" in order to integrate the history of Russian women into larger historical trends of European and US women's history.[34] Intended or not, the focus on such major milestones may have a tendency to promote a picture of quick, widespread change and turnover to beliefs, attitudes and behavior. While economic and political policies and ideological messages may have shifted rapidly, particularly at the beginning of the 1990s, cultural and individual change generally happened in much slower and more diverse ways.

[30] Zhanna Chernova, "New Pronatalism?: Family Policy in Post-Soviet Russia," Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia 1, no. 1 (2012): 88.
[31] For example, Sarah Ashwin, ed., Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia (London and New York: Routledge, 2000)., 1.
[32] Mitsyuk, "Historiography of Motherhood in Russia," 168. In support of her argument, Mitsyuk specifically cites (Waters 1992; Farnsworth , Viola 1992; Buckley 1997).
[33] Mitsyuk, 168.
[34] Mitsyuk, 173.

What Mitsyuk and other scholars agree on is that the gender order[35] established under Soviet rule was undermined during the transition of the early 1990s. Citing the "erosion" of state benefits, the removal of guaranteed work for women outside the home, and motherhood being "redefined" as private institution (rather than a concern shared between women and the state), interpretations of societal changes in the early 1990s suggest that when these foundational building blocks were removed, Russian society could not sustain the Soviet family structure.[36] The sphere of the family became private and privatized, and, for the first time in nearly a century, largely independent from the state.[37] These upper-level shifts were accompanied by changes to prevailing gender ideology and renegotiations of trends in mothering, gendered family roles, and gendered work patterns.

Sarah Ashwin, Helene Carlbäck, Yulia Gradskova and others have argued that changes in gender norms in the post-Soviet period followed directly from a history of problems and contradictions in gender roles starting from the communist period.[38] These contradictions have been traced from the top, state level down. Ashwin contends that from post-WW2 through the end of the Soviet Union, fundamental conflicts between Soviet ideology and Soviet lived experience with regarding gender, family and motherhood were ubiquitous. She writes that the initial "demographic crisis," proclaimed in the 1970s when birth rates fell below replacement level created a conflict between Soviet economic and demographic concerns that was never resolved. Her suggestion has similar implications to those of Anne White, namely that changing gender roles and declining demographic trends in the 1990s can be understood to be an acceleration of what was already happening near the end of the Soviet period, rather than a reversal or turn away.[39]

Likewise, while Soviet society placed great emphasis on ensuring the full employment of all women and offered a myriad of welfare services to mothers, there is scholarly

[35] I use the term "gender order" to discuss what Anna Temkina describes as "the dominant type of gender relations in a particular society. It denotes the explicit and implicit rules, reciprocal responsibilities and rights that define the relations between women and men, between different generations and between the spheres of production and reproduction." Anna Temkina, "Childbearing and Work-Family Balance among Contemporary Russian Women," *Finnish Yearbook of Population Research*, 2010, 84.

[36] Ashwin, Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia, 31. 29. As Chernova describes, the "marketization of childcare" (76) and move away from welfare did not mean a complete abandonment of state family policy: the "National Family Policy," introduced in 1991 and officially instated in 1996. Chernova, "New Pronatalism?," 77–78.

[37] Larisa Shpakovskaya, "How to Be a Good Mother: The Case of Middle Class Mothering in Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 10 (November 26, 2015): 1574, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2015.1101210.

[38] For examples, Ashwin, Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia, 23., Carlbäck, Gradskova, and Kravchenko, *And They Lived Happily Ever After*, 10.

[39] Ashwin, Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia., 23. .White, "Gender Roles in Contemporary Russia," 429.

disagreement as to how fully these factors actually served to improve gender equity in practice. Carlbäck et al. emphasize this point by noting that while "on the one hand, the state socialist regimes actively brought women into the public sphere […] on the other, gender relations in the private sphere remained unreconstructed and thus created the double burden…"[40] Since Soviet working mothers were still considered the primary caregivers of children within the family, they continued to have more to balance than their male counterparts, in spite of increased welfare support. The extent of overwork and exhaustion of Russian women was brought into public discourse in the 1970s by Natalya Baranskaya's short work of fiction "A Week Like Any Other," which offered a poignant social commentary in its depiction of an overworked Soviet woman who raced from morning until night all week attempting to meet the many demands placed on her.[41]

Following from this, Ashwin suggests that motherhood during the transition era of the 1990s was marked by conflicting desires for women, which can be traced to their Soviet past: on one hand a Soviet-era-legacy woman "who works, runs a household and takes pride in her ability to do so" while on the other hand expressing desire for relief and rest.[42] Likewise, in the wake of exceedingly high unemployment rates in the early 1990s, Ashwin and Bowers describe a shift in Russian public discourse that reprioritized labor, such that "men should be given jobs first and women should return to what Gorbachev called their 'purely womanly mission'" (to be mothers and wives).[43] Yet, Ashwin, White, and others point out, such rhetorical changes did not immediately result in any trend of a "retreat back to the hearth": on the contrary, women in the post-communist 1990s maintained similar employment rates to men.[44]

As a number of scholars writing in the 1990s and early 2000s have noted, the Soviet legacy and changes to public policy and discourse, while important, were not the only factors which influenced the reframing of gender roles and norms. Corollary influences on young people coming of age after the transition included the vast increase in media and advertising, and,

[40] Carlbäck, Gradskova, and Kravchenko, *And They Lived Happily Ever After*, 10.

[41] "A Week Like Any Other" was first published in 1969 in the Russian literary journal Novyi Mir. It was published in English for the first time in 1974. Natal'ia Baranskaia, *A Week Like Any Other: A Novella and Stories* (Virago, 1989).

[42] Ashwin, Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia., 23. .White, "Gender Roles in Contemporary Russia," 429.

[43] Sarah Ashwin and Elaine Bowers, "Do Russian Women Want to Work?," in Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge University Press, 1997). (get actual copy of book for page number, first page of chapter)

[44] Ashwin, Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia, 31; White, "Gender Roles in Contemporary Russia," 430. Ashwin notes that while 1992 was marked by a "dramatic" fall in "labor force participation" by women in their 20s, there was no evidence that this fall was related to a desire to return to the home. Particularly since it corresponded with a similar fall in employment for men of the same age, most scholars attribute these changes to transitionary market hardship and a turbulent economy.

particularly, the influence of foreign (Western) messaging.[45] Ashwin argues that whereas during Soviet times gendered socialization was the direct result of a "heavily ideologized and organized" public sphere, the 1990s offered a much greater plurality of information.[46]

In the midst of these changes, the extent to which women's attitudes have shifted or remained relatively consistent over the years have been harder to measure and indeed have posed a great deal of methodological challenge to scholars of motherhood and family change in Russia. While historical accounts of the late socialist period through the 1990s in Russia may tell a fairly consistent account of the policies and social changes effecting mothers, historical narratives regarding the causes and origins of these changes differ, and interpretations conflict—and perhaps also, as Mitsyuk suggests, obscure the agency of mothers themselves.[47] Likewise, a focus on political milestones may have a tendency to promote a picture of quick, widespread change.[48] While national politics, policies, and ideological messages may have shifted rapidly, cultural and individual changes would have happened in ways that were much slower, more diverse, and more difficult to track.

Issoupova emphasizes the difficulty of judging continuity and change in the private perceptions of women and mothers, stating that while a shift from motherhood being a "state duty" to being a "personal responsibility" is evident in the media and political discourse "what is harder to assess […] is whether women themselves perceived having children as a civic duty in the Soviet era."[49] White echoes Issoupova, suggesting that:

> "A knotty problem, when one is trying to assess how much attitudes are changing, is that the starting point is so unclear: there was no clear Soviet line on many gender issues, shared by officials, scholars and society, but rather a muddle of often contradictory beliefs among all three groups. The constraints on sociological research made it hard to assess how Russians 'really' thought during the Soviet period. It is therefore hard to map how much has changed, and in what directions change has occurred."[50]

[45] Ashwin, *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, 35.
[46] Ashwin, 35.

[47] Mitsyuk, "Historiography of Motherhood in Russia," 168.
[48] This point echoes the historical notion that there are different layers of society that do not change simultaneously. One of the first thinkers to formulate this point was Fernand Braudel of the famous Annales School with his conception of plural temporality. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (University of California Press, 1995).
[49] Issoupova, "Motherhood: From Duty to Pleasure?," 47.
[50] White, "Gender Roles in Contemporary Russia," 431.

White's point aligns with Anna Krylova's observation that Soviet gender roles were "varied and contradictory."[51] Likewise, White notes the post-Soviet stratification of experience across Russia, noting that "extreme socio-economic diversification" in this period meant that women of varying ages, geographical locations, etc., are likely to "hold different views and to have experienced very different degrees of change in their lives during the post-communist period."[52]

2.2 From Maternity Capital to Neo-Traditionalism: Motherhood, Family and the "New" Pronatalism (2006-2019)

By the 2010s, perhaps because of a longer view on the changing relationship between the family and state, academic scholarship retrospectively took a slightly different perspective on post-socialist family policy and changes to gender norms than scholarship in the preceding two decades. Chernova suggests that an increase in the number of actors involved in family policy (from unions to foreign organizations to an increased diversity of political parties), combined with somewhat contradictory influences in shaping new policies made policies of the 1990s more representative of "an attempt to identify some possible areas of state action toward the family" than any clear new direction.[53] Larisa Shpakovskaya takes a slightly less charitable stance, using a Foucauldian bio-political framework to suggest that the 1990s marked a shift from "direct regulation" to "regulation through media and experts' advice," implying that state control is deeply present in both models.[54] Authors writing in this period also tend to emphasize the ways in which discourses around family policy in the political and media realms remain highly nationalist. To this extent, Chernova suggests that the aims of family policy in the Soviet and post-Soviet Russia state remained relatively consistent: increase the birth rate, strengthen the "family institution."[55] What has changed, she argues, is the form and ideological couching of the policies.

The 2006 implementation of the "maternity capital" program marked what academic scholarship has taken to be the starting point of a "new" era for Russian family policy, as well as a turning point in how gender norms and the family have been discussed in public discourse. In the section that follows, I take Chernova's assertion (cited above) as a starting point for considering continuity and change, reviewing scholarly approaches to understanding of the

[51] Krylova, "Bolshevik Feminism and Gender Agendas of Communism," 425.
[52] White, "Gender Roles in Contemporary Russia," 430.
[53] Chernova, "New Pronatalism?," 78. Chernova suggests that conflicting influences of social-democratic, liberal, and old Soviet regime models made the 1996 National Family Policy contradictory and inconsistent in its aims. (76-78)
[54] Shpakovskaya, "How to Be a Good Mother," 1574.
[55] Chernova, "New Pronatalism?," 88.

new pro-natalist policy and rhetoric in the first section, and examining family structures and implications for motherhood in the second section.

2.2.1. The New Wave of Pro-Natalism in Russia

In the wake of low and falling birth rates, aging societies, and so-called "demographic crises" (often declared in response to national fertility rates in decline), pro-natalist policies and rhetoric have become a trans-European phenomenon in recent decades. As Spike Peterson notes, though "the forms it takes are historically specific, shaped by socio-religious norms, technological developments, economic pressures, and political priorities, all groups seeking multi-generational continuity have a stake in biological reproduction."[56] Despite the questionable efficacy of policies designed to stimulate population growth,[57] the perceived need to boost demography has driven states and state agencies across Europe to tailor policies and campaigns in order to tackle just that.

Russia has been no exception to this trend,[58] implementing rhetorical and family policy changes which reached a crescendo in 2006, with the introduction of a new "demographic program" coupled with political rhetoric from President Vladimir Putin, which Rotrich et al. describe as the first time "post-socialist gender politics have been so clearly outlined in Russia."[59] As noted in the previous section, the new pro-natalist program has in many ways been a continuation of trends in Russian family policy that have aimed at raising birth rates since the 1970s. Indeed, sociologists Borozdina et al. argue that the new "demographic program" of 2006 resembled policies of the 1970s and 1980s in its focus on offering increased benefits for mothers. The authors argue that the new wave of policies differ, however, in that they rely on "a somewhat different gender ideology" than in Soviet times.[60] While Soviet period state welfare "aimed at facilitating combining wage work and motherhood," the new policies and rhetoric acknowledge that "child care weakens women's position in the labor market," taking for granted that mothers are the primary childcare providers during a child's early years, and

[56] V Spike Peterson, "Sexing Political Identities/Nationalism as Heterosexism," in Women, States, and Nationalism, ed. Sita Ranchod-Nilsson (Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2000), 44, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203361122_chapter_4.
[57] An extensive body of literature exists examining the effects of pro-natalist policy on birth rates. See for example Peter Mcdonald, "Low Fertility and the State: The Efficacy of Policy," Population and Development Review 32, no. 3 (September 2006): 485–510, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2006.00134.x.
[58] As the historiography (2.2.1) demonstrates, while the features of the new demographic program are unique and new for the post-socialist period, a number of scholars have pointed out that demographic concerns have been continuous in the region since the socialist period, and pro-natalism has been a coherent trend since that time. See for example Chernova, "New Pro-natalism?"
[59] Rotkirch, Temkina, and Zdravomyslova, "Who Helps the Degraded Housewife?"
[60] Borozdina et al., "Using Maternity Capital," 62.

offering monetary compensation in the form of the maternity capital for women's losses in the public sphere.[61]

From a state policy level, Zhanna Chernova suggests that whereas the 2000s were a period in which a "vertical social contract" was developed between the state and its citizens, by the end of the 2000s, the government redefined the social contract and began to "shape a different agenda, talking about traditional family values, about some kind of proper upbringing."[62] The introduction in 2006 of the maternity capital, for Chernova, marked a turning point in which this "contract" between the state and citizens once again shifted. "The exchange of non-interference in politics for non-interference in family life was violated by the state. The state began to lay claim to not only regulate fertility, but also to control how young citizens are brought up: this is a surge of patriotic education, and a statement to make a single history textbook."[63]

Since the adoption of the maternity capital and accompanying changes to Russian family policy, a number of scholars have looked at the impact of the changes on family norms as well as on demographic trends.[64] Following the initial, primarily quantitative studies published with relationship to the effects of the "maternity capital" itself,[65] more recent scholarship has focused attention on the implications that broader sexual and reproductive politics have had on views of mothering and motherhood in Russia.[66] Central interventions along these lines have been feminist analyses of Russian state policy, legislation, and legal discourse through lenses such as gendered nationalism and biopolitics.[67] The scholarly consensus is that the "new" gendered contract in Russia is accompanied by "intensified propaganda promoting traditional family values and roles."[68] Neo-traditionalism in Russia is characterized by images of a nuclear

[61] Borozdina et al., 62.
[62] Zhanna Chernova, Yazhemat': stanut li roditeli politicheskoy siloy? [IAmAMother: Are Parents Becoming a Political Force?], Online Magazine, September 5, 2018, https://www.opendemocracy.net/ru/stanut-li-roditeli-politicheskoy-siloy/.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Rivkin-Fish, "Conceptualizing Feminist Strategies for Russian Reproductive Politics"; Michele Rivkin-Fish, "Pronatalism, Gender Politics, and the Renewal of Family Support in Russia: Toward a Feminist Anthropology of 'Maternity Capital,'" *Slavic Review* 69, no. 3 (2010): 701–24; Chernova, "New Pronatalism?"; Antu Sorainen et al., "Strategies of Non-Normative Families, Parenting and Reproduction in Neo-Traditional Russia," *Families, Relationships and Societies* 6, no. 3 (November 17, 2017): 471–86, https://doi.org/10.1332/096278917X15015139543996; Nelly Smulyanskaya, "Why stimulation of early fertility in Russia is unpromising," *Woman in russian society* 3 (September 25, 2018): 121–32. Borozdina et al., "Using Maternity Capital."
[65] One of the primary studies, published in 2013, is based on statistical analysis. Fabian Slonimczyk and Anna V. Yurko, "Assessing the Impact of the Maternity Capital Policy in Russia Using a Dynamic Model of Fertility and Employment," 2013.
[66] Stella et al., *Sexuality, Citizenship and Belonging*; Anna Temkina, "The Gynaecologist's Gaze: The Inconsistent Medicalisation of Contraception in Contemporary Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 10 (November 26, 2015): 1527–46, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2015.1100371.
[67] Rivkin-Fish, "Conceptualizing Feminist Strategies for Russian Reproductive Politics"; Stella et al., *Sexuality, Citizenship and Belonging*. Rivkin-Fish, 2013; Stella and Nartova, 2015.
[68] Carlbäck, Gradskova, and Kravchenko, *And They Lived Happily Ever After*, 5.

family model made up of a young, heterosexual married couple who live together with their biological children. Stella and Nartova highlight that "discourses about national interest, national identity, and patriotism in contemporary Russia promote a specific brand of sexual conservatism as a shared value" and that "the meaning of Russian 'traditional values' is constructed in opposition to European 'sexual democracy.'"[69]

Feminist scholarship has additionally traced the manner by which gendered norms associating "motherhood" with "womanhood" have developed in official discourse, as Russian nationalism and national identity have been reworked and rebuilt over the course of the past two decades. Most scholars agree that, as Stella and Nartova put it, in the contemporary period as in the past the public discourse in Russia demonstrates that "women are valued first and foremost as reproducers of the nation, although not all models of motherhood and family are equally legitimized."[70]

In addition to changing public discourse and modifications to welfare and family policy, a number of scholars have highlighted additional means by which pro-natalist state goals have been furthered. Central among these are what Anna Temkina has referred to as the "medicalization of reproduction."[71] Temkina argues that the female body in Russia is medicalized and controlled, with gynecologists serving as "important agents of reproductive control."[72] She likewise notes that pro-natalist policy orientation incentivizes caring for pregnant women over others. "In interviews doctors say that they prefer to care for pregnant women, and they receive additional payment, if only a small amount, for every patient. Pregnant women are mostly not required to wait in line, but can immediately see the doctor, while other women are still waiting."[73] Temkina's analysis goes on to report that gynecologists in the study identified "caring for pregnant women and treating illness and infertility are their priorities."[74] The "disciplining medical discourses and professional practices" of gynecologists in the present pro-natalist context are oriented towards "ideas of properly reproductively healthy women."[75] However, she notes, such practices are "characterized by inconsistency."[76]

[69] Stella et al., *Sexuality, Citizenship and Belonging*, 47.
[70] Stella et al., 48.
[71] Temkina, "The Gynaecologist's Gaze," 1528.
[72] Temkina, 1527.
[73] Temkina, 1542.
[74] Temkina, 1543.
[75] Temkina, 1527.
[76] Temkina, 1527.

2.2.2. Gendered Identity and Family Structure: Mothers, Fathers, Grandmothers

Ethnographic work in recent years which examines changing norms in family structure and support, while relatively limited, has nonetheless been a key contribution to scholarship on motherhood in contemporary Russia. Building on earlier research regarding the changes in state services and family structures during the post-socialist transition,[77] discussions of gendered negotiations of caregiving in Russian families, the experiences of single mothers, and how state and "intergenerational negotiations for support" contribute to childrearing [78] have helped to develop a more coherent picture of what one author describes as "Russia's gendered transition to capitalism."[79]

Post-Soviet motherhood trends are characterized by "universal and early" childbearing, with extremely low numbers of women choosing to remain childless, and the mean age for a woman to give birth to a first child being 24.[80] Finnish sociologist Anna Rotkirch argues that "both in Soviet times and in contemporary Russia, becoming a mother is an integral part of Russian female identity."[81] She goes on to suggest that specific ubiquitous elements to views on motherhood today, such as conceptions of ideal family size and the understanding that motherhood is an "integral part of Russian female identity," remain rooted in a Soviet cultural legacy.[82]

Yet while early and universal childbearing may align with contemporary political discourse on the family and motherhood, family structure norms are less easy to characterize as "neo-traditional" in practice. As Finnish Gender Studies scholar Antu Sorainen notes, "despite state and public support for the traditional family model, the Russian family is often considered the women's family. This means that the family is maintained by working mothers and grandmothers who care for children, while husbands remain either literally or physically absent."[83] Olga Issoupova emphasizes this point, suggesting:

> "The new family ideal in which the man plays a key role does not as yet match reality. Women are continually disappointed by men, something which can result in a mother relinquishing her child if she does not have sufficient support

[77] Temkina 2013; Sakevich and Denisov, 2011
[78] Churilova, 2015; Jennifer Utrata, 2011
[79] Utrata, 201: 635
[80] Anna Rotkirch and Katja Kesseli, "'Two Children Puts You in the Zone of Social Misery.' Childbearing and Risk Perception among Russian Women.," in *And They Lived Happily Ever after: Norms and Everyday Practices of Family and Parenthood in Russia and Central Europe*, ed. Helene Carlbäck (Budapest ; New York: Central European University Press, 2012), 151.
[81] Rotkirch and Kesseli, 151.
[82] Rotkirch and Kesseli, 159.
[83] Sorainen et al., "Strategies of Non-Normative Families, Parenting and Reproduction in Neo-Traditional Russia," 477.

> or can lead to single motherhood. This is not surprising, given that the Soviet state had usurped the role of men in the private sphere to such an extent that it had all but ceased to exist. The retreat of the state, meanwhile, though it may have contributed to raising women's expectations, has not had an immediate impact on male behavior."[84]

The "literal or physical" absence of men in Russian families today is rooted in Soviet legacy. As discussed previously, the "working mother" contract in the Soviet Union imagined childrearing to be a responsibility primarily shared between women and the state. Likewise, catastrophically high losses of men in WW2 left several generations of families made up of primarily women. Today, the increasingly high rates of single mothers[85] in Russia are attributed to several factors, including depressed male life expectancy due to alcoholism and suicide rates as well as a high divorce rates which make for nearly one third of births being non-marital.[86]

Rotkirch and Kesseli's emphasize that "the traditionally low level of childcare provided by Russian fathers and the quasi-automatic way a mother gets full-time custody in case of divorce contribute to this emphasis on the woman's own strength and resources."[87] The authors likewise suggest that "both official ideology and lay values still assume almost exclusive female decision-making in child-bearing and -rearing." They suggest that Russian family policy doesn't address key issues for mothers, because what is needed, from the perspective of these authors, is "more shared parenthood, with fathers who are more practically involved" to "alleviate the exhaustion and the isolation experienced by many mothers."[88] Some scholars suggest that trends of male participation in the family may be changing, but the change is inconsistent and difficult to track. Indeed, Anna Avdeeva suggests that while male participation in childcare may be increasing slightly in recent years, there has not been large scale research on "contemporary time budgets."[89]

From the picture painted in scholarship on the issue, there appears on the everyday level of family structure and motherhood to be relative continuity since Soviet times. Yet scholars have noted that lessened welfare support and increased emphasis on individualism have shifted

[84] Issoupova, "Motherhood: From Duty to Pleasure?," 50.
[85] By "single mothers" I refer here to women raising a child or children without the father. According to the women I interviewed, the Russian state provides financial support for single mothers only in the case that a mother is alone and unmarried since the birth of the child.
[86] Jennifer Utrata, "Babushki as Surrogate Wives: How Single Mothers and Grandmothers Negotiate the Division of Labor in Russia," *UC Berkeley: Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies*, 2008, 7.
[87] Rotkirch and Kesseli, "'Two Children Puts You in the Zone of Social Misery.' Childbearing and Risk Perception among Russian Women.," 159.
[88] Rotkirch and Kesseli, 160.
[89] Sorainen et al., "Strategies of Non-Normative Families, Parenting and Reproduction in Neo-Traditional Russia," 477.

the strategies used by mothers and families to negotiate their circumstances. Even if "men are linked more tenuously to the household through paid work,"[90] relying on kinship networks and transgenerational support is an increasingly "important source of social and economic stability."[91] US Sociologist Jennifer Utrata describes the relationship between mothers and grandmothers in contemporary Russian family formations as reciprocal, with grandmothers helping working mothers (especially single mothers) with the "second shift" of housework and childcare.[92] A number of other scholars reinforce this understanding that in contemporary Russia "family support means everything"[93] and "intergenerational support remains an important source of social and economic stability."[94] Indeed, some say reliance on kin has become an increasingly important strategy[95]

2.3 Conceptual Framework

2.3.1 Motherhood in Russia: The View from Below

As the historiography at the outset of this chapter demonstrates, histories of motherhood in Russia overtime have largely centered around welfare policies and changing forms of state support. Likewise, sociological and historical scholarship have tended to approach the topic from a top-down perspective, such as biopolitics or gendered nationalism. These frameworks are useful for understanding the cultural and historical conditions of particular institutions of motherhood. As Susan Gal and Gail Kligman show in their book *The Politics of Gender After Socialism,* "the politicization of reproduction benefits political contenders in four important ways: 1) it enables the redesign of relationships between the state and its residents; 2) it facilitates the symbolic redefinition of the nation, including its boundaries of inclusion; 3) it helps reconstitute the political legitimacy of the state; and 4) it constitutes women as particular types of political actors."[96]

The drawback of such approaches, however, is that they tend to reinforce a sense of state hegemony rather than examining the effects that pro-natalist policies and changing discourses on gender and family might be having in the lives of Russian women. Indeed, it may

[90] Utrata, "Babushki as Surrogate Wives: How Single Mothers and Grandmothers Negotiate the Division of Labor in Russia," 8.
[91] Carlbäck, Gradskova, and Kravchenko, *And They Lived Happily Ever After*, 5. Also discussed by Sorainen et al., "Strategies of Non-Normative Families, Parenting and Reproduction in Neo-Traditional Russia," 479; Utrata, "Babushki as Surrogate Wives: How Single Mothers and Grandmothers Negotiate the Division of Labor in Russia."
[92] Utrata, "Babushki as Surrogate Wives: How Single Mothers and Grandmothers Negotiate the Division of Labor in Russia," 7.
[93] Sorainen et al., "Strategies of Non-Normative Families, Parenting and Reproduction in Neo-Traditional Russia," 479.
[94] Carlbäck, Gradskova, and Kravchenko, *And They Lived Happily Ever After*, 5.
[95] Sorainen et al., "Strategies of Non-Normative Families, Parenting and Reproduction in Neo-Traditional Russia."
[96] As cited by Rivkin-Fish, "Pronatalism, Gender Politics, and the Renewal of Family Support in Russia: Toward a Feminist Anthropology of 'Maternity Capital,'" 705.

be easy to draw the conclusion from reading academic literature on the topic that Russian women (especially those living outside Moscow and Saint Petersburg) are either largely in support of neo-traditionalist state discourse, largely indifferent, or somewhat helpless.

In this project, I aim to de-center the search for the influence of family and welfare policy and politics, acknowledging them as factors in the lives of individual people rather than as starting points. As Gradskova and Morell point out, to regard state socialism as though it had been "a unified system of norms" would be a mistake since "diverse national and local conditions formed and shaped the institutions through time and national variations on gender regimes."[97] Likewise, there has been a stratification of experience across Russia in the post-Soviet period, as a result of a number of factors including "extreme socio-economic diversification" in the post-Soviet period. As sociologist Anne White points out, this means that women of varying ages, geographical locations, etc., are likely to "hold different views and to have experienced very different degrees of change in their lives during the post-communist period."[98] My project follows two working assumptions: 1) that gendered norms instituted by the state during and after the Soviet Union, while important, have not been experienced in a universally consistent manner and 2) that both during and after the Soviet period, gendered norms and regimes have not been the consequence of exclusively "top-down" or externally imposed ideals, but rather have been "produced, reproduced, and challenged in the process of communication."[99]

2.3.2 Gender and Motherhood

In her influential 1986 text, historian Joan Scott argues that in order for gender to be constructively utilized as a category of historical analysis, scholars "need a refusal of the fixed and permanent quality of the binary opposition, a genuine historicization and deconstruction of the terms of sexual difference."[100] Scott's assertion rests on the understanding that rather than being related to something biologically innate, ahistorical, or universal, gender is contingent on the construction and organization of sexual difference within particular societal and

[97] Yulia Gradskova and Ildikó Asztalos Morell, *Gendering Postsocialism: Old Legacies and New Hierarchies* (Routledge, 2018), 3.
[98] White, "Gender Roles in Contemporary Russia," 430.
[99] I adopt this approach following from Gradskova and Morell's introductory chapter to their 2018 collection Yulia Gradskova and Ildikó Asztalos Morell, "The Gendered Subject of Postsocialism: State-Socialist Legacies, Global Challenges, and (Re)Building of Tradition," in Gendering Postsocialism: Old Legacies and New Hierarchies (Routledge, 2018), 2.
[100] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 14, https://doi.org/10.2307/1864376.

historical contexts. Thus, in order to be used as a lens of critical historical analysis, the "concrete manifestations"[101] of gender must be carefully examined and carefully historicized.

In the chapters that follow, I draw on Joan Scott's framing of gender as a critical lens of analysis by examining and historicizing the relationship between gendered identity and motherhood within the narratives of the women I spoke with in Tyumen. I take Adrienne Rich's two, embedded definitions of motherhood as a starting place, first as "the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children" and second as "the institution [of motherhood]."[102] As US historian Annelise Orleck argues, familial, social, and institutional mechanisms serve to "regulate acceptable behavior, restrict expression, and designate appropriate spaces for action" for mothers within a particular cultural and social milieu,[103] meaning that a woman's "potential relationship" with motherhood is in large part mediated by their environment. While the historiography and literature discussed earlier in this chapter make clear what some such regulatory mechanisms around motherhood are within the broader contemporary Russian context, my project looks more carefully at how individual women I spoke with in Tyumen perceive and respond to them. In my analysis of the biographical interviews in chapters 4 and 5, I explore nuances, similarities and contradictions in how expectations, power dynamics and policing mechanisms with relation to the institution of motherhood function in the context of contemporary Tyumen. I additionally trace some of the ways that these dynamics and mechanisms can impact and interact with women's own understandings of their reproductive capacity, what strategies they utilize to navigate obstacles and pressures they face, and how they make choices about whether, when and how they will become mothers.

2.3.3 Agency and "Making Do": Locating Negotiations with Power

At the outset of this chapter, I highlighted Carlbäck et al.'s breakdown of the varying levels from which to examine family structure: from changing top-down (policy) goals for reproduction and family, to how gendered roles are changed and normalized via discourse, to change and continuity in actual lived experience. As I have described above, the analysis and discussion of my interviews in the following two chapters will deal primarily with the third level: the everyday negotiations and choices women make around their potential toward motherhood. Zhanna Kravencheko notes that "the conventional approach to the study of social

[101] Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: Still a Useful Category of Analysis?," *Diogenes* 57, no. 1 (February 2010): 9, https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192110369316.
[102] Rich, Of Woman Born, 3.
[103] A. Jetter, A. Orleck, and D. Taylor, *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right*, Shakespearean Originals-First Editions (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 5.

policy treats the family as an object of intervention, 'as basically reacting to changes in the macrostructure of society'"[104] Yet, as Mitsyuk suggests, lived norms and practices do not change uniformly, nor do they change at the same speed (or in direct correspondence) with state and policy level shifts. Thus, rather than looking exclusively to policy and rhetoric, an exploration of lived family and gendered practices can instead look to what Kravencheko describes as the ways in which families "embrace the structural opportunities embedded in the design of family policy, translate the established hierarchical principles of gender organization in society, and at the same time create room for *maneuvering and sustaining practices* that are efficient for families depending on their individual circumstances."[105]

In Chapter 5, I draw on Michel de Certeau's conception of tactics and strategies of "making do" to explore some of the "maneuvering and sustaining practices" women described to me in Tyumen. Certeau theorizes "making do" as calculated actions by which everyday people manipulate power relationships or take advantage of opportunities not directly inscribed in official institutional channels. His conception offers a means of understanding "the relationship between structural elements of culture and the practices that both enact and modify them."[106] They emerge from an "analysis of the ways that ordinary individuals tactically employ elements of the imposed systems in which they live their daily lives and thus exercise their agency as users and interpreters of culture."[107] In other words, by examining subtle, everyday choices to comply, negotiate, or resist social norms around motherhood, a more nuanced picture emerges of how currents of societal change and sameness may function.

Distrust of institutions and the state has been a well-established feature of post-socialist Russian society in sociological literature over the past few decades.[108] Likewise, a number of scholars have described in detail the corresponding "grey economies" and informal networks of social support which have carried over from Soviet times to serve as important means of

[104] Zhanna Kravchenko, "Everyday Continuity and Change: Family and Family Policy in Russia," in *And They Lived Happily Ever after: Norms and Everyday Practices of Family and Parenthood in Russia and Central Europe*, ed. Helene Carlbäck and Yulia Gradskova (Budapest ; New York: Central European University Press, 2012), 187.
[105] Kravchenko, 186. Emphasis added.
[106] Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2004), 213, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203335697.
[107] Spiegel, 214.
[108] Richard Rose, "Getting Things Done in An Anti-Modern Society: Social Capital Networks in Russia," in Social Capital: A Multifaceted Perspective, ed. Partha Dasgupta and Ismail Serageldin (World Bank Publications, 2000), 147–71; Olga Shevchenko, "Resisting Resistance: Everyday Life, Practical Competence, and Neoliberal Rhetoric in Postsocialist Russia.," in Everyday Life in Russia Past and Present, ed. Choi Chatterjee and et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 52–71; Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, "Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War," Comparative Studies in Society and History 51, no. 01 (January 2009): 6, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417509000024.

societal functioning.[109] Richard Rose suggests that social capital networks – "networks of people who come together for the production of goods and services" are a critical feature of Russian society and are widely used to compensate for "organizational failure and the corruption of formal organizations."[110]

Rose's extensive description of informal mechanisms and "tactics" of making do in Russian society corresponds well with some of the strategies I heard about among women's navigation of reproductive health care. As I discuss further in Chapter 5, when navigating reproductive and pediatric health care, the women I spoke with consistently took responsibility for their own well-being and interests and navigate systems of power in highly strategic and acutely skilled ways. However, I contest Rose's overall framing of Russian society as "anti-modern,"[111] which reproduces the highly problematic and ethnocentric binary which positions a particular type of "modernity" as the global standard and thus describes the post-socialist region as backwards or behind. As Russian decolonial theorist Madina Tlostanova emphasizes, the Western-centric coloniality of knowledge is perpetuated by "the rhetoric of modernity because modernity above all is a knowledge generating system and not as much an objective historical process.[…] It is an idea that describes certain historical processes in particular ways and manages to force everyone to believe that it is an objective ontological reality."[112] In the following, final section of this chapter, I will briefly address how this project aims to contribute to decentering this type of trend in literature on the region.

2.3.4 Decolonial Approaches to Post-Socialist Russia

While the relationship between the "West" and Russia does not fit neatly into Edward Said's conception of orientalism[113] or a post-colonial genealogy as such, US Cold War constructions have mirrored orientalist forms of "othering," discursively imagining Russia and the post-socialist Central Eastern European region as developmentally "behind."[114] Such

[109] Jeremy Morris and Abel Polese, The Informal Post-Socialist Economy: Embedded Practices and Livelihoods (Routledge, 2013).
[110] Rose, "Getting Things Done in An Anti-Modern Society: Social Capital Networks in Russia," 147. "
[111] Rose, 147.
[112] Madina Tlostanova, "Can the Post-Soviet Think? On Coloniality of Knowledge, External Imperial and Double Colonial Difference," *Intersections* 1, no. 2 (June 22, 2015): 39, https://doi.org/10.17356/ieejsp.v1i2.38.
[113] Edward W. Said, Orientalism (Vintage Books, 1979).
[114] Particularly within the contemporary political climate, I would argue that the "cold war" constructions I am referencing here are as relevant today as ever. Likewise, as discussed in my historiography, a legacy of Western anti-socialist sentiments have played a significant role in the shaping of academic discourses since the Soviet period. For further discussion of this phenomenon, see for example Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)," *Women's History Review* 19, no. 4 (September 2010): 547–73, https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2010.502399. Chari and Verdery, "Thinking between the Posts"; Stella et al., *Sexuality, Citizenship and Belonging*; Tlostanova, "Can the Post-Soviet Think?"

undertones are often evident in political and media discourse, and also impact academic literature in English related to the region. Within this framing, women in neo-conservative or neo-traditionalist societies are often represented as victims, powerless, or apathetic.

Madina Tlostanova notes in her 2012 article "Can the Post-Soviet Think?" that the "post-Soviet space and it's social sciences and scientists" are rendered invisible by "the refusal of the global North to accept the post-Soviet scholar in the capacity of a rational subject."[115] While her observation is in direct reference to academic gatekeeping which delegitimizes scholars and scholarship from former-Soviet spaces, the logic can additionally be extended to frame a more general analysis of post-Cold War attitudes towards Russia and Russians within Western literature on the region. Like Rose's framing of Russia as "anti-modern," Western literature has frequently both explicitly and implicitly used paternalistic and ethnocentric framing that positions the post-socialist subject as inferior to its Western counterpart. Feminist scholarship on Russia has also sometimes fallen into this paradigm. Such readings can explicitly or implicitly frame Russian women in terms of victimhood, whether by describing the Russian state in authoritarian all-powerful terms or by directly describing Russian women as hopeless or without options.[116]

This thesis attempts to offset such trends, however preliminarily. First, as mentioned in the introduction, it takes a "reparative"[117] reading of motherhood. A "paranoid" feminist reading of many of the narratives and opinions shared by the women I interviewed might lead to an immediate analytical jump, dismissing neo-traditionalism or the desire to prioritize motherhood and family as "false consciousness" or "internalized patriarchy" without taking the time to understand the values and motivations driving actual women's choices. A reparative reading

[115] Madina Tlostanova, "Postsocialist ≠ Postcolonial? On Post-Soviet Imaginary and Global Coloniality," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48, no. 2 (May 2012): 38, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2012.658244.

[116] In my own research on motherhood in Russia, I came upon this trend a number of times. Some cases were subtle, framed in conversations about the difficulty of making feminist theory "travel." More troubling, from the perspective of working towards a decolonial praxis, are those works which draw direct comparison between Russia and the West, such as the introduction to Jennifer Utrata's book on single mothers in Russia, which spends two out of three of it's first pages making unqualified comparisons between the US and Russia. Jennifer Utrata, *Women without Men: Single Mothers and Family Change in the New Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 1–3.

[117] Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You," 124. Eve Sedgwick defines reparative reading as a theoretical approach in search of "recovering meaning" (Sedgwick, 124). Using a psychoanalytic framework as her guide, she argues that especially in recent decades, academics (and particularly feminist and queer theorists) have approached theory and knowledge from a single, unified perspective which she calls "paranoia" (125). Paranoid reading is stalwartly cynical: it is about uncovering conspiracy, systemic oppression, and sinister elements to social life which are either not visible or too normalized to be noticeable. It is set on destabilizing, uncovering, and reawakening readers to the truth, the revelatory act of exposing the truth is meant to be elevated to an end in and of itself, from which will follow the necessary social changes (presumably) (138). Sedgwick's main objections to this type of paranoid reading: 1) that as uniform methodology for "seeking, finding and organizing" knowledge, paranoid reading obscures nuance of knowledge by jumping to critique and fault finding too soon and thus dismissing information before it can be fully considered. (130) and 2) because of its emphasis on inevitability, paranoid reading does not allow for historical and future contingencies (147).

of these narratives allows space for critical analysis and exploration of motherhood, identity, and decision making that are historically and culturally contingent. My exploration of individual narratives pursues the form of decolonial feminist knowledge production advocated for by Tlostonova, who emphasizes that scholarship must be "grounded in restoring memories, local histories, and epistemologies in a complex and dynamic interplay with and a resistance to modernity" [118] and "based on a careful differentiating and empathic grasping of particular values and sensibilities born in particular historical and cultural contexts."[119] In addition, I ground my analysis in the historiography of chapter 2, which draws from both Russian and English language literature.

[118] Madina Tlostanova, "Between the Russian/Soviet Dependencies, Neoliberal Delusions, Dewesternizing Options, and Decolonial Drives," *Cultural Dynamics* 27, no. 2 (July 2015): 267, https://doi.org/10.1177/0921374015585230.
[119] Tlostanova, "Can the Post-Soviet Think?," 9.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This thesis is based on twenty-one semi-structured interviews about motherhood, identity, and decision making,[120] conducted over the course of two weeks in June 2018 with women in Tyumen, Russia. As Canadian historian Joan Sangster notes, in order to contextualize oral histories it is essential "to survey the dominant ideologies shaping women's worlds; listening to women's words, in turn, will help us to see how women understood, negotiated and sometimes challenged these dominant ideals."[121] I contextualize the narratives I heard in understandings and analyses that have been informed by an ethnographic spirit: observations I made during my fieldwork, insights from living in the Tyumen four years prior, and long-standing relationships with several of the women I interviewed.[122] In this chapter I describe my research approach, design and implementation, as guided by feminist and decolonial theory and method.

3.1 Methods

The use of in-depth, biographical interviews as a qualitative research method "tell us less about events than about their meaning."[123] They can cast new light on the experiences of the non-hegemonic classes, the many members of society whose lives may not be meaningfully included in written histories. Traditionally, most history has been constructed as unified, collective memory.[124] This type of collectivity highlights certain shared experiences but can silence and erase individual memories that are outside the constructed identified "norms." And while official histories may be aimed at capturing events, the analysis of oral history sources can instead focus on the processes by which people reveal, make sense of, and give form to the past, setting themselves in context.[125]

[120] Valerie Raleigh Yow, Recording Oral History : A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2nd ed. (AltaMira Press, 2005), 3. Valerie Yow categorizes oral history as a qualitative research method under the umbrella of ethnography which consists in "the recording of personal testimony in oral form." Yow's step-by-step guide for using oral history as a method was invaluable to me in the design and execution of my project. The semi-structured interviews I conducted bore many of the qualities and features of oral history, but were more focused and less in depth, due to limitations of time and project scope.

[121] Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," Women's History Review 3, no. 1 (March 1994): 10, https://doi.org/10.1080/09612029400200046.

[122] While the limited length of my fieldwork did not allow for the use of in-depth ethnographic methods such as participant observation, I lived and worked in Tyumen, Russia for ten months in 2013-2014, on a Fulbright ETA Fellowship. The relationships I formed and maintained during this fellowship also affected my positionality going into this fieldwork, as I will discuss further below.

[123] Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in Oral History, Oral Culture, and Italian Americans, ed. Luisa Del Giudice, Italian and Italian American Studies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2009), 36, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230101395_2.

[124] As noted by Anna Green, "Individual Remembering and 'Collective Memory': Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates," Oral History 32, no. 2, (2004): 35–44.

[125] Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 37.

I designed my interview project in Tyumen with the aim of contributing to bottom up, unofficial histories of Russian women. As I have discussed in Chapter 2, my project contributes to filling a gap in the literature by exploring the lives of women outside the metropolis and their contemporary understandings of motherhood, identity, and decision making. My hope is that such work is useful to both Russian and foreign audiences: offering a limited, partial[126] analysis of these women's narratives from a critical gender perspective. The perspective I offer is one of a cultural "outsider,"[127] guided by decolonial approaches towards feminist knowledge production which aims to decenter dominant ethnocentric approaches. The goal of such a project is neither to determine "objective,"[128] clear cut facts, nor generalizable conclusions. My methodological approach is also informed by the ideas of US historian Joan Scott, who suggested that it is not the job of historians to utilize observations and narratives to capture "the reality of objects seen" but instead to try to "understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced, and which processes themselves are unremarked and indeed achieve their effect because they are not noticed."[129] As I have discussed in my conceptual framework, my presentation and analysis of these interviews in the present form is thus to explore some of the "varying, uneven and contradictory"[130] ways in which attitudes and identities related to motherhood are developed, understood and negotiated among women in spoke with.[131]

3.2 Research Design

My interest in conducting research on the lived experiences of Russian women outside of the metropolis was informed in large part by the ten months I spent living in Tyumen in 2013-2014. Tyumen is a city of approximately 700, 000 located in Western Siberia, six hours

[126] All knowledge is, as Haraway points out, necessarily limited, partial and relational, and must be framed as such. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," Feminist Studies 14, no. 3 (1988): 575, https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066.

[127] As ethnographic debates have extensively discussed, the position of "outsider" is a double-edged sword for researchers. On one hand, as native anthropologist Shannon Speed notes (Davis and Craven, 62) an outside perspective may offer a distance that allows for noting dynamics that might be naturalized or invisible to an "insider." But being "outside" the culture of study can also lead to misinterpretation, misunderstanding, and delicate power differentials. Dana-Ain Davis and Christa Craven, "Debates and Challenges in Feminist Ethnography," in Feminist Ethnography: Thinking Through Methodologies, Challenges, and Possibilities (Rowman and Littlefield: Lahnam, 2016).

[128] Challenges to the notion of objectivity have been a key element to feminist scholarship for decades. I designed my research with an eye to Donna Haraway's assertion that "feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge," and must therefore be grounded in the time, place, and positionality of the researcher and research. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 583.

[129] Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," Critical Inquiry 17, no. 4 (1991): 792.

[130] I borrow Krylova's description of experiences of gender in the Soviet period to highlight my argument of historical continuity in the non-generalizable nature of post-soviet gendered norms and experiences (as discussed in my theoretical framework). Krylova, "Bolshevik Feminism and Gender Agendas of Communism," 425.

[131] Green, "Individual Remembering and 'Collective Memory': Theoretical Presuppositions and Contemporary Debates."

east of the Ural mountain range by train. The capital city of what is informally known as the "oil and gas region" (Tyumenskaya Oblast'), the city is relatively wealthy and had an economic growth rate twice that of the overall country in the period of 2016-2018.[132] Tyumen likewise has a steady influx of population growth, as well as eight universities and over 100, 000 students.[133]

While relatively large, the provincial city is remote in relationship to the larger metropolitan areas of Moscow or Saint Petersburg. From an ethnographic perspective, the main feature that distinguishes Tyumen is it's well-developed and growing economy. The relatively high salary averages mean that residents of Tyumen have greater financial resources than in many other parts of Russia.[134] Likewise, in 2018 Tyumen was ranked among the five cities with highest quality of life Russia. The ranking was based on six features, including quality of medical care, quality of education, and development of cultural and social services. While the findings of my research are not meant to be generalizable, these features of Tyumen have an impact on the options available to the women I spoke with, particularly in terms of the advantages in employment, childcare facility options, and diversity of medical care facilities.

The relationships I had maintained in the city made finding women to interview relatively straightforward. In the months leading up to my fieldwork, I wrote a brief description of my research interests and contact information and sent it to friends and acquaintances, who shared it with friends, family, and neighbors.[135] This form of "snowball sampling" worked quickly: I received a number of messages on social media and by phone in the weeks leading up to my trip.[136] I did not limit my selection of participants, seeking to listen to narratives about

[132] "EMIISS (Russian Federation Federal Statistics)," accessed June 4, 2019, https://www.fedstat.ru/. "City of Tyumen Official Web Page [in Russian]," Tyumen City Administration Official Page, accessed June 3, 2019, http://www.tyumen-city.ru/.
[133] "City of Tyumen Official Web Page [in Russian]."
[134] In 2017, the average salaries in Tyumen were approximately 30% higher than the average across Russia. In the education sector, the average salary in Tyumen was 38, 841 rubles while the Russian national average was 26, 323 rubles. In Government administrative work: 60, 488 Tyumen (42, 186 Russia). Natural Resources: 87, 583 Tyumen (66, 973 Russia). "EMIISS (Russian Federation Federal Statistics)."
[135] The description of my research (translated from the original Russian): "My name is Kathryn Burns and I'm a US American currently completing my master's degree at the Central European University in Budapest. I lived in Tyumen in 2013-2014, and worked in the Construction and Architecture University in the Department of Foreign Languages. I'll be returning to Tyumen in June to conduct research on the topic of motherhood. Research participants can be of any age, and it is not important whether or not they have children. I hope to interview a broad range of people, across generations and lifestyles. The goal of my research is to hear personal stories, experiences, and thoughts. The interviews can be one-on-one or in small groups (between 2-3 people, such as friends or mother-daughter pairs)."
[136] Several spontaneous interviews were also arranged during my stay thanks to ongoing support and suggestions of friends in Tyumen, one of whom even brought me along to her manicure appointment to interview stylists at the salon in an effort on my friend's part to help me diversify the demographics of the women I was speaking with.

knowledge production and reproductive decision making from a variety of women from different backgrounds, family structures and stages of life.[137]

The women I interviewed ranged in age from eighteen to fifty-five. Out of twenty-one interviewees, thirteen had children and eight did not (although, as I will discuss further in Chapter 4, every woman I interviewed expressed a desire or plan to have children, without exception). Two of the women also had grandchildren. All participants lived in Tyumen, though there was a great deal of variation in where they had grown up.[138] Although I did not directly ask questions about income, based on our discussions of family history, education and professions I estimated that the group came from fairly diverse class backgrounds but was fairly uniform in terms of their present socio-economic situations, which I would characterize as urban, educated, middle to middle-upper class.[139] Most of the women had higher education, though very few were presently working in the profession in which they had been trained.[140] Throughout my discussion and analysis in the following chapters, I aim to provide relevant details about class, occupation, and family structure as relevant, particularly given that many of the strategies and day-to-day negotiations women identified in interviewed were necessarily embedded in and reflective of their access to financial, material, and familial resources. Specific demographic details for each of the interviewees are also provided in Appendix 1.[141]

When arranging to meet, I left the choice of location up to interviewees, based on their comfort level or practical considerations.[142] At the beginning of each conversation, I explained

[137] I was also contacted by two (self-identifying) men but chose to limit the scope of my study to individuals who identified as women due to my interest in firsthand, personal experience and narratives.

[138] See figure 1, at the end of this section.

[139] One of my former colleagues posted my call for participants in a closed social media group for residents of her neighborhood, a newly constructed area in a developing part of the city. I received a number of responses based on the post, which contributed in part to the uniformity of class among my interviewees. As I mentioned above, however, the family histories of the women varied greatly, and many had grown up with very little money or in rural areas.

[140] As of 2010, 24.4 % of women and 17.8 % of men in Tyumen had higher education. "Federal Statistics on Tyumenskaya Oblast'," accessed June 4, 2019, http://tumstat.gks.ru/.

[141] While the nature of this project does not necessitate a sample size or demographic diversity that allows for generalizable conclusions, I nonetheless find it important to firmly locate the voices being heard and those absent from the present thesis. As I will note in the demographic appendix, the women I interviewed were by and large ethnically homogenous (of Russian or Ukrainian descent). Further study which speaks to ethnic diversity in the region would be interesting and is sorely needed. Likewise, none of the women I spoke with identified themselves to me as non-heterosexual, and most referred to male partners or spouses. There is an active LGBT center in Tyumen, and I sent my research call for participation to one of the coordinators there in an effort to include perspectives of non-heterosexual women and parents but did not receive responses. After this initial attempt I did not follow up in reaching out to the community. Given the "anti-gay propaganda" legislation of 2012 in Russia and consequent rise in violence against the LGBT community, the inclusion of queer or non-cis women in an academic project such as this would be extremely interesting, but would likewise necessitate additional time, preparation, and sensitivity which I felt were ultimately outside the scope of my ability given the limited nature of my fieldwork. Finally, while class and economic background is only estimable, the women I interviewed were of a roughly similar socio-economic standing. Further details included in the text and in the appendix.

[142] With women I was meeting for the first time, the venues ranged from an unoccupied language school classroom in an office building, cafés, a hair salon, and a park, whereas my friends and acquaintances usually met me in their homes.

the goals of my research, and emphasized that I was most interested in hearing personal stories, anecdotes, and opinions. The interviews took the form of a series of open-ended questions (beginning with family history and moving chronologically),[143] and the topics varied slightly depending on whether the woman I was speaking with had children, as well as depending on what topics organically emerged. Most interviews took place individually, with a few taking place in pairs.

I conducted all the interviews in Russian[144] and in a portion of my interviews met and spoke with women on my own. In another portion of the interviews, one of two interpreters accompanied me to support with clarification. The first was a twenty-year-old university student working on a BA in interpretation and translation.[145] Her participation in the interviews was often quite brief; she helped me with answering any questions at the beginning of the conversations, and then sat listening unless a need for greater nuance or a follow-up question arose, in which case she provided direct interpretation.

The second interpreter was my close friend Vika Igorevna[146] who accompanied me to interviews with her mother and some of her own friends. Her presence served as more than an interpretative aid: while other interviews were conducted in an office building or in public spaces, these interviews were conducted in more intimate spaces (kitchens and living rooms). Vika's presence served to establish an ease and trust which might otherwise not been possible. Still, the power dynamics and authority in these interviews were sometimes visibly altered: split three ways (between myself, the women I interviewed, and my friend) there were moments in which the direction and dynamics of the conversations became somewhat complicated and unpredictable. Rather than simply serving to clarify or interpret, she was often an active participant who "shared authority"[147] in these conversations: interjecting, adding her own opinions, challenging others' answers, and sometimes even asking her own questions.

As extensive discussions of feminist qualitative research have noted, narrative construction is a joint project between the listener (interviewer) and the story teller (interviewee).[148]

[143] Yow, Recording Oral History : A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences.
[144] I am deeply indebted to my friends and classmates, particularly to Anya and Azamat, for their support and assistance in formulating my questions in Russian and preparing for these interviews.
[145] I offered her a small stipend in exchange for assisting me, and addition to financial compensation offered to write professional references for the student who helped me should she need one for future employment or education.
[146] Pseudonym. Vika appears in the text both in her role as interpreter and as an interviewee.
[147] Ruth Behar, "The Vulnerable Observer," in The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).
[148] For further discussion of this, see A. Freund, "'Confessing Animals': Toward a Longue Duree History of the Oral History Interview," Oral History Review 41, no. 1 (December 1, 2014): 11, https://doi.org/10.1093/ohr/ohu005.

Having a third party in the room further mediated the construction of the stories being told, which in turn necessitated greater care in observations and greater attention to non-verbal reactions during the interviews. Following the lead of other feminist scholars, I chose the strategy of "embracing unpredictability,"[149] and did my best to observe interpreter interactions with the same orientation towards "vulnerable listening"[150] that I strove to adopt with all the women I interviewed. In this way, I allowed these interactions and changes of course to become part of the fabric for later analysis. After interviews in which I had been accompanied by an interpreter, I also took time to discuss their impressions and jot them down alongside my own, noting discrepancies and similarities in order to help me later in building on the framework of "situated knowledges" that Donna Haraway, David Rubin, and others have advocated for.[151]

3.3 Positionality, Sharing Authority and Ethics

As I discussed in the previous chapter, as a US American woman choosing to conduct qualitative research in Russia for my MA thesis, I stepped into an epistemological and political history which is complex and fraught with tension. While the genealogy of scholarly work in English is unlikely to have directly affected the perception of my research of those I spoke with, other factors will have. For one thing, my position as a foreign researcher coming to Russia positioned me as a cultural "outsider." Political events between the United States and Russia leading up to my research also had the potential to affect how my research intentions were perceived.[152] While no one brought up international politics or indicated any association during my interviews, I was acutely aware that the political backdrop could very easily have affected who chose to reach out to me in the first place.[153] I tried to be as transparent as possible

[149] In her article discussing the challenges of sharing authority with a third party (interpreter) during oral history interviews, Nadia Jones-Gailani suggests this strategy of incorporating an "embrace of unpredictability" into vulnerable observation. I am indebted to this article as well as to Nadia's guidance as one of my advisors on this project. Nadia Jones-Gailani, "Qahwa and Kleiche : Drinking Coffee in Oral History Interviews with Iraqi Women in Diaspora," Global Food History 3, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 84–100, https://doi.org/10.1080/20549547.2017.1278347.

[150] Behar, "The Vulnerable Observer."

[151] Haraway, "Situated Knowledges"; Rubin, "Situating Feminist Epistemology in a Global Frame."

[152] Starting in March 2014 in response to the annexation of Crimea, the US and Europe levied an ongoing series of economic sanctions against Russia. While the effects of the sanctions on Russia's GDP have been debated, the strength of the Russian ruble against the US dollar and the euro fell considerably during the period. The economic sanctions and tensions were highly politicized in the media (both within Russia and in the United States). For more see Konstantin A. Kholodilin and Aleksei Netšunajev, "Crimea and Punishment: The Impact of Sanctions on Russian Economy and Economies of the Euro Area," Baltic Journal of Economics 19, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 39–51, https://doi.org/10.1080/1406099X.2018.1547566.

[153] After my call for research participants was posted in one neighborhood group on social media, I received a message from an angry (male identifying) individual asking why I was interested in "problems" with Russian motherhood, and who I was to be doing this research. I took the opportunity to be as honest as possible, explaining that I was not looking into problems at all, and expressing that his message reinforced my motivation to conduct research that might contribute to increased understanding between the US and Russia. After a series of interactions aimed at helping to clarify my research aims and questions, we eventually seemed to reach an understanding. He later stated in a public post to the social media group that his initial anger and suspicion had been against the backdrop of political events (such as new economic sanctions) that he had seen in the news.

throughout my interactions, introducing myself and my research at the beginning of each interview and making time for questions. Mainstream anti-feminist discourse in Russian culture[154] as well as right-wing "anti-gender" discourse as a popular international tactic[155] meant identifying as a gender studies student (much less a feminist researcher) would come with a high risk of misinterpretation. As one Russian friend of mine once put it, my own understanding of a word like "feminism" was so different from meaning and connotations of the Russian equivalent in a place like Tyumen that the two words could be understood as "false cognates."[156] I instead chose to introduce myself initially as a master's student studying Russian women's history and oral history as a method.[157]

As noted in the introduction of this section, the short duration of the fieldwork which became the basis of the present project did not allow for in-depth ethnographic research. Likewise, due to time constraints, I met each woman for only one interview. Had time allowed for subsequent, follow-up interviews, the project would have doubtlessly benefited from added complexity in the narratives present. I also would have had the potential to develop greater repertoire and trust with narrators I was meeting for the first time.[158]

To address these and other issues of positionality and power differentials, and in order to stay as authentic to the voices of the women I interviewed and the process by which I came to conclusions, I follow the lead of Kennedy and Davis and attempt where ever possible to

[154] Feminism in contemporary mainstream Russian discourse (as in the political discourse of many neo-nationalist and neo-conservative factions globally), is often associated with homosexuality, and the breakdown of the family. As Riabov and Riabova note "The hegemonic discourse of Russian nationalism depicts Europe as a degenerate civilization best manifested in the collapse of the traditional gender order: the triumph of homosexuals and feminists, the legalization of same-sex marriages, and the destruction of the family." Oleg Riabov and Tatiana Riabova, "The Remasculinization of Russia?: Gender, Nationalism, and the Legitimation of Power Under Vladimir Putin," Problems of Post-Communism 61, no. 2 (March 2014): 29, https://doi.org/10.2753/PPC1075-8216610202.See also Janet Elise Johnson and Aino Saarinen, "Twenty-First-Century Feminisms under Repression: Gender Regime Change and the Women's Crisis Center Movement in Russia," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 38, no. 3 (March 2013): 554, https://doi.org/10.1086/668515.

[155] While the Russian word gender [гендер] does not (to my knowledge) hold any mainstream stigma within Russia, on a transnational level "anti-gender" discourse has been incorporated into the popular imaginary as a political tactic by right-wing and nationalist figures. Indeed, the gender studies department was targeted by the Hungarian government shortly after I completed my fieldwork. For more on "anti-gender" see Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe : Mobilizing against Equality (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), http://hdl.handle.net/2013/ULB-DIPOT:oai:dipot.ulb.ac.be:2013/243988.

[156] The direct Russian translation, феминизм [feminizm], is not, as this friend suggested, a false cognate in the linguistic sense of two words which sound the same but have completely different meanings, but rather in a political sense, due to the vastly different political landscapes and the migration of the word and concept to Russia from the US and Europe. The connotations of the word feminism do, of course, vary greatly even in English given the highly politicized nature and history of the concept.

[157] After this introduction, I was never asked any follow up questions regarding my field of study. What did prove necessary to clarify was whether I myself was a mother, how I had chosen to conduct this research, and what my perspectives were on differences between the US and Russia with regard to mothering trends.

[158] As noted in the beginning of this chapter, a portion of my narrators were friends, friends' family members, and friends of friends, while a greater portion were strangers who I met for the first time during the interviews.

"leave visible the seams by which the story is constructed."[159] As they suggest, not only the stories themselves but the process, the problems, the gaps, the inconsistencies, who spoke and who stayed silent all have the potential to give a different perspective about the way narratives are given their power and how stories are told.[160] I try to keep my own voice, interpretations, and positionality as visible as possible throughout my analysis. I also worked closely with Russian friends and classmates (both before, during and after my fieldwork), discussing ideas and impressions in hopes of keeping my understandings as grounded as possible, and to stay aware of my own "partiality" of vision.[161]

Finally, in line with feminist qualitative practice, I worked to the best of my ability to mediate any potential risk associated with my project. I chose to utilize short informed consent forms, explaining that all interview questions were optional, and that participants could chose to stop or withdraw participation in the research at any time before, during, or after the interview. All names are replaced by pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality and privacy of participants.[162] I took the additional precautions of encrypting my laptop hard drive prior to beginning research and of transferring and encrypting all interview audio files each evening.

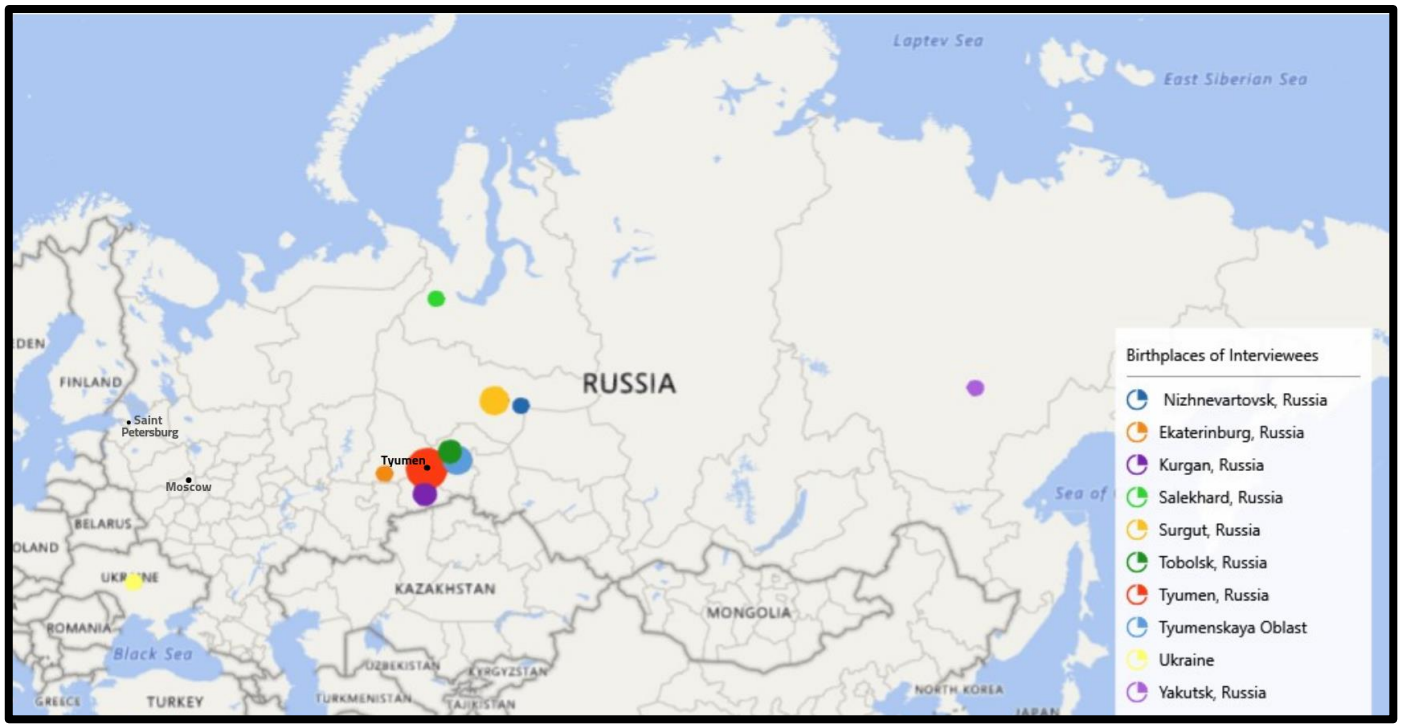
3.4 Writing, Analysis and Technical Notes

Over the course of the six months following my research trip in Tyumen, I gradually processed the interviews I had collected. Using an open coding technique,[163] I organized my interviews thematically, using both my original research questions and organically emerging topics as guideposts. I then selectively transcribed portions of the interviews directly into English.[164] While all 21 interviews I conducted shaped the understandings and interpretations presented here, some narratives were incorporated more than others into the final thesis. In choosing which stories to highlight, I aimed to demonstrate nuance within the perceptions of the

[159] Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (Routledge, 2013), 25.
[160] Kennedy and Davis, 25.
[161] In keeping with feminist citational practices, insights and acknowledgements of the intellectual labor and support of these friends are occasionally noted in the footnotes of this thesis.
[162] While a number of the participants indicated that they were happy to appear under their own names, I chose to pseudonymize all interviewees in the interest of consistency. The forms of the pseudonyms are designed to given reflect my relationship to the interviewees in conversational Russian. I use the short form of names of friends I interviewed, the first name of women my age or younger, and the full name and patronymic with older women.
[163] In coding and organizing themes, I utilized the qualitative software Nvivo. I followed the open-coding strategy described by Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 143.
[164] Throughout this thesis, all translations are my own. However, I am deeply indebted to friends and classmates, especially to Azamat, Anya and Asya, for their patience and assistance in helping clarify and double check meanings as I slowly worked through this process. Where applicable, I transliterate Russian words according to the standards set by the US Library of Congress.

women, highlighting both similarity and difference of perspective, age, family structure and other factors.

Figure 1: Birthplaces of Interviewees



Chapter 4. Being a Mother, Being a Woman: Gender, Identity and Negotiations with Power

4.1 Introduction

By tracing approaches to recording and examining histories of motherhood in the post-Soviet period, I demonstrated in Chapter 2 that scholars have relied on the working understanding that the Soviet Union institutionalized a distinctive 'gender order,' and that with the fall of socialism came an end or (by some accounts) even a reversal of this "experiment."[165] I likewise demonstrated that while a number of authors have noted the "uneven and contradictory"[166] manner by which post-socialist gender and family norms have transformed, the literature has leaned heavily on top-down analyses of public policy and changing discourse to understand these transformations, which can fail to account for the lived experiences and the agency of women and mothers, particularly those living outside of the metropolis.

The chapter that follows builds on the working assumptions, established at the end of section 2.3.1, that everyday practices and norms related to motherhood are not "exclusively imposed from the outside"[167] but also shaped on the level of individual and social communication and negotiation by the active participation of mothers and families.[168] Drawing on Joan Scott's qualification that gender as a category of analysis must be historicized and predicated on contextual analysis, I explore the "concrete [gendered] manifestations"[169] of norms and expectations related to motherhood among my interviewees in Tyumen, both as they relate to individual women's "relationship of their powers of reproduction"[170] and to the external pressures and expectations placed on women within their familial and cultural context. How did the women I interview experience these norms, expectations, and pressures? (4.2). I then review the interviewees' narratives about the material and familial structures of their lives, with a focus on the gender dynamics within families: what strategic choices do these women make in order to address expectations of motherhood as well as dissatisfactions with gender dynamics and with present familial norms? (4.3). In what ways does transgenerational support, emphasized in the literature on family structure in contemporary Russia, support the women I interviewed in Tyumen in navigating gendered norms and expectations, and what forms does

[165] For example, Ashwin, Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia., 1.
[166] Gradskova and Morell, *Gendering Postsocialism*, 3.
[167] Gradskova and Morell, 3.
[168] This argument follow from the astute observations of Natalya Mitsyuk, as discussed in Chapter 2. Mitsyuk, "Historiography of Motherhood in Russia," 168.
[169] Wallach Scott, "Gender," 9.
[170] Rich, Of Woman Born, 100.

this support take? (4.4). Finally, what are some of the limitations to the socially acceptable usage of motherhood as social capital, and how are these limitations regulated and policed at a familial and social level? (4.5). I conclude with a brief reflection on my findings.

4.2 Motherhood: Life Calling, Life Meaning and Life Pressure

Sitting at her dining room table drinking tea with her eighteen-year-old daughter, Nastya, Natalia Vladmirovna described her experience of motherhood to me as the most fulfilling part of her life. At forty years old, Natalia works as an entrepreneur, and said that her only regret is not having had more kids and sooner. She recounts that her grandmother had a lot of children and her mother had three, so from a young age Natalia always expected that she'd have a family and have a lot of kids. "But I got wrapped up with Nastya, I was always near her, and then when I realized she was already grown and I should let her be a bit I understood that it wasn't too late for me, and that's when I gave birth to my second, when Nastya was 14."[171]

"I've spent my life raising my children," she went on fondly, gesturing to her younger, three-year-old daughter pushing a toy shopping cart around the living room. "The meaning of my life has been children. That's why, when you ask Nastya when she's leaving home, for me that question is catastrophic… no matter when she leaves." Natalia Vladmirovna smiled at Nastya, and jokingly suggested that perhaps after university her daughter will marry, and she and her future husband can continue to live at home with Nastya's parents. Natalia Vladmirovna looked pointedly at her older daughter as she explained that her advice to someone without kids would be "first of all, have kids!" "Children are good," she said. "What is there to add? There should be a lot of children, it's never boring, you're needed… what do people without kids do with themselves?"

Natalia Vladmirovna's perspective, while somewhat more singular in tone than that of many of the women I spoke with in Tyumen, resonated with much of the general feeling I heard: most women regarded children as providing not only meaning to their lives, but purpose as well. Natalia's narrative, echoed in many others I heard, also underlined that her expectation of motherhood in her own life came in large part from the example of her mother and her grandmother. Meanwhile, Natalia's daughter Nastya, a quiet, soft-spoken girl who was finishing her final high school exams before university during the week of our interview, echoed her mother's perspective and contended that being a mother must somehow amount to the meaning of being a woman.[172] But Nastya had little to say about her thoughts or expectations of

[171] Natalia Vladimirovna, age 40, June 8, 2018.
[172] Anastasiia Alekseevna, age 18, June 9, 2018.

motherhood, saying simply that she hadn't thought much about it yet, as her mother nodded approvingly, jumping in with "one should be patient with this." Natalia Vladmirovna added emphatically that everyone must "do this" on their own time, after studying, travelling, and starting a career.

Like Natalia and her daughter, a number of women I interviewed in Tyumen expressed that they felt motherhood was an essential part to realizing their roles as women. Tatiana Nikolaiovna, a thirty-six-year-old lawyer and mother of a fourteen-year-old boy, echoed similar sentiments.

> "It's a woman's role in life to be a mother. It's a woman's calling, an important role that every woman should fulfill. Of course, now you meet more and more people who are 'childfree,' but it seems to me that every woman should become a mother, because this is something unforgettable."[173]

Aside from Tatiana, several other women brought up the 'childfree' movement[174] – which they described as a new social trend in which women and couples choose not to have children. No one I spoke with, however, had any close friends or family members who had chosen this lifestyle, and thus expressed not knowing much about it.

"I can't say that a woman is not a woman if she is not a mother," Sofia Yuyevna told me. "I have an acquaintance that is 'child free.' I didn't ask her about her reasoning, but we had acquaintances in university, they lived in Israel six years, they didn't want kids, they wanted to travel, be hippies, be free, and… [trails off]"[175]

Sofia's articulation corresponded with what most women I interviewed identified as the mainstream understanding of motherhood. As I discussed in Chapter 2, a so-called "maternal mandate" has been deeply ingrained in the societal conception of Russian women's identities since the Soviet period, with women giving birth early and almost universally to at least one child.[176] As such, recent trends of delaying or abstaining from having children, while relatively limited in scope, have nonetheless received attention as being unusual.[177] Two thirds of the women I interviewed had one or more children and among the eight women I spoke with who

[173] Tatiana Nikolaevna, age 36, June 11, 2018.
[174] The use of the English phrase "childfree" in speech suggested to me a correspondence to a movement from abroad, though I had not heard this particular phrase before beginning my interviews. Several women agreed that they understood this social trend as something that had come from "Europe."
[175] Sofia Yuryevna, age 22, June 16, 2018.
[176] This is noted by a number of authors, including Rotkirch and Kesseli, "'Two Children Puts You in the Zone of Social Misery.' Childbearing and Risk Perception among Russian Women.," 151; Temkina, "Childbearing and Work-Family Balance among Contemporary Russian Women," 83.
[177] Sorainen et al., "Strategies of Non-Normative Families, Parenting and Reproduction in Neo-Traditional Russia."

did not have children, all of them expressed desires or plans to become mothers, without exception.

Likewise, women I spoke with who did not yet have children by the societally deemed "usual age" made clear that they experience external culturally formed pressures and expectations from within their families to become mothers, especially from their own mothers. "I'm already twenty-seven, and you know, that's already old for us in Russia. I would say twenty-five… that's probably the average age to start having kids,"[178] my friend Vika explained to me one afternoon. Many women I spoke with made similar comments, remarking that 25 would be about the average age to have kids. Others, like Kristina and Oksana, mentioned being "quite late" in starting a family at twenty-seven.[179]

Aleksandra, a thirty-one-year-old social scientist, has had medical setbacks that have prevented her from carrying a child to term, despite her hope to become a mother someday. She described the difficulty of receiving unsolicited "reassurances" from family member that she hinted served more as a pressure than a support.

> "Ah, yes, of course. Well, in the first place, it's all connected to the fact that we still don't have kids, and so there are an infinite number of stories—that you know we had an acquaintance, they were such and such an age, and for so long they didn't manage [to have kids] and then suddenly had two—and so on. So yeah [laugh], they talk!"[180]

Nadya Mihaleovna, a thirty-five-year-old university professor and former colleague of mine, explained to me that she wants to have children but doesn't know when. She expressed similar feelings to those of Aleksandra about the pressure within her family, saying that she often feels as though she is under scrutiny.

> "Yes, unfortunately, [the women in my family] talk! [rye laugh] They say, how old are you now? You're already old! How long can this go on? Your number one task is to have a child—this is urgent."[181]

While cultural and familial pressure may position motherhood as an essential element of being a woman, many women I spoke with explained that, for them, it is not the entire meaning. Many women also understood motherhood to be connected to traits they considered innate to womanhood: a "natural capacity to serve others," a "huge amount of love," and natural strength and self-sufficiency. Aleksandra explained that a large part of her desire to have

[178] Victoria [Vika] Igorevna, age 27, June 12, 2018.
[179] Kristina Valerievna, age 31, June 17, 2018; Oksana Igorevna, age 31, June 17, 2018.
[180] Aleksandra Dmitrieva, age 31, June 16, 2018..
[181] Nadya Mikhalkova, age 35, June 17, 2018.

children is that she feels that she has a large amount of love inside and has no one to give it to. When I asked Aleksandra whether she had considered other options for having children, she explained that she had researched IVF (in vitro fertilization) could be a possibility, but at this stage she was afraid to try it as she had seen the toll it takes on women's health.[182]

Olga Davidovna, a thirty-nine-year-old mother of two, expressed that to her, there are other avenues of utilizing what she understands to be qualities innate to women. "Someone, a woman who can't have kids—she's still a woman, there are other ways for her to give back. She can take care of kids who don't have parents, she can teach, she can give her love some other way."[183]

Nadya Mikhalkova explained that for her being a woman is much more complicated than any single role. "Motherhood, that's like an element… it's one of the components [of womanhood], but only because a man can't be a mother, biologically."[184]

Meanwhile, Kristina Valerievna a thirty-one-year-old mother of three young children, expressed that although she now takes great joy in the role, motherhood took some getting used to. She described her life up until her first daughter's birth as running according to a program.

> "In our family, I think it's a carryover from the soviet period, there are things a woman must do, like my mom herself said….you should finish school, enroll in the university, finish, get married, so that then you can have kids. I did follow this program, I met my husband, as though someone waved a magic wand, we lived together before the wedding... in my family, it wasn't a catastrophe, but my mother kept asking when is the wedding? And then, when are the kids, kids…I honestly don't even know, was it my sincere desire, or if it was all according to this program, you must do this, that, that… I simply knew that I should give birth, and after half a year I did get pregnant."[185]

Kristina's narrative demonstrates the strength of the multi-layered pressure to become mothers present in many of these narratives among women in Tyumen. Several other women recounted a similar "program" of expectations, manifesting in an almost abstract "knowing" that motherhood must be part of their plans. Olga Davidovna recounted that although she never had a "strong maternal urge" she nonetheless knew from an early age that she would be a mother. "I don't know why or how I knew it; I just knew it was supposed to happen."[186]

[182] Aleksandra did not mention adoption as an option, and our conversation moved on to a longer discussion of options for IVF within Russia at this point. While I do not wish to draw any strong conclusions from this omission, in listening to our interview later I wondered if her emphasis on means in which to physically conceive a child herself could suggest an importance of motherhood and womanhood as biologically connected for her.
[183] Olga Davidovna, age 39, June 15, 2018.
[184] Nadya Mikhalkova, age 35..
[185] Kristina Valerievna, age 31.
[186] Olga Davidovna, age 39.

As the narratives I have highlighted in this section demonstrate, the desire to become a mother was ubiquitous among the women I interviewed. Likewise, it is clear from many of the women's reflections that the familial and societal pressure to become mothers significantly impacts them. In this regard, the gendered expectations with regard to motherhood that these women expressed do not appear to be unique. Indeed, as the literature I reviewed in section 2.2 demonstrated, the women's narratives are consistent with historical and contemporary formulations of the Russian "institution" of motherhood,[187] which constructs reproduction as a biological imperative for women. In the following sections, I will explore women's active strategies to comply with, negotiate or resist these gendered expectations around motherhood in order to demonstrate how they address expectations as well as dissatisfactions with gendered family and caregiving roles.

4.3 "Women Are Tired": Negotiations with Gender Roles, Work, and Care

When I asked her about the main differences between her own upbringing and the way she is raising her children, Natalia Vladmirovna suggested that the primary differences have been material. "We didn't have clothing stores, and we didn't have groceries, we didn't have pampers…" The youngest child of three, Natalia was raised primarily by her mother, as her father was a driver and often away. They lived in a rural area, without running water or indoor plumbing. The home Natalia now lives in is visibly different from the upbringing she described. While most families in Tyumen live in apartments, Natalia Vladmirovna and her husband live in a large, multi-story house with their two daughters. She explained that financially she was always taken care of, since her husband was fifteen years older and was already working while Natalia finished university. Natalia's choice to stay at home with her child was facilitated by her family's socio-economic standing, which appeared to be considerably higher than any of the other women I interviewed,[188] and available family support. The fact that her husband was working, her status as an entrepreneur, as well as considerable help with her daughters from her husband's mother and her own mother all facilitated the decision. She expressed feeling lucky to have had the flexibility to work from home and spend a lot of time with her children

[187] As introduced in my conceptual framework in section 2.3.2, I draw here on Adrienne Rich's distinction between a woman's personal relationship with her "powers of reproduction and to children" and the "culturally and historically specific "institution of motherhood" which constructs and regulates societal expectations for a woman's use of this potential.

[188] As noted in Chapter 3, while I did not ask any questions about class or finances, I was able to draw some conclusions based on information in interviews and impressions. In this case, the economic resources available to Natalia and her family were visibly evident upon entering their house, which was innately decorated in a manner unprecedented for Tyumen. An acquaintance of mine explained that in addition to being entrepreneurs, Natalia and her husband were the owners of a commercial retail center in a neighboring city which brought in considerable income.

rather than "letting a preschool raise them." This flexibility, she commented, was not something her mother had had.

> "[My siblings and I] all went to preschool, and mom went to work, and then of course my grandparents lived at home all together with us. And I never ... I wanted to raise my kids myself, never left them in preschool. We grew up in the preschool. From morning to evening we were there. When I went, I didn't like it. It wasn't scary... it was just a strict schedule, sleeping, eating, not comfortable. And it's not absolutely necessary like school."[189]

From my perspective, Natalia's story seemed to illustrate the impact her working Soviet mother's busy life had on Natalia's choices in raising her own children. As discussed in Chapter 2, the double burden of Soviet women meant that many mothers were extremely busy, with little time to spend with their children.[190] This would have been particularly true for those like Natalia's mother who were raising their children without their husbands, relying instead, as Natalia notes, on institutional and transgenerational support. In the case of Natalia's family, the legacy of this well-documented feature of Soviet life is that she has chosen to prioritize keeping her children at home until they are school age.

Oksana Davidovna, a thirty-one-year-old mother of two, expressed similar motivations for her choices in navigating work and childcare as those of Natalia Vladmirovna. I interviewed Oksana together with her friend Kristina.[191] The two were friends from university, where they had studied together and received degrees in library science, though neither was working at the time of the interview. Both married, their husbands' earnings gave them each the ability to stay home with their children beyond the standard maternity leave if they wanted to. Oksana explained that since her husband was making enough money as a programmer at an oil company to allow her to stay home, she made the choice to remain with her children rather than send him to preschool. Speaking quietly so as not to wake her daughter, who had fallen asleep while breastfeeding, Oksana explained that she practices a form of what she described as "natural" mothering, an intensive form of parenting which entails, among other features, mothers being with their children as constantly as possible through their infancy and toddlerhood. Like Natalia Vladmirovna, Oksana explained that she and her siblings were raised by a single mother with the help of her grandparents. She described her mother working a lot, and changing jobs

[189] Natalia Vladimirovna, age 40.
[190] As I will discuss more below, Anna Avdeeva points out that since the 'working mother' was the only gendered contract available to women during the Soviet period, intensive parenting and time with children was not a possibility for mothers of that era in Russia. Sorainen et al., "Strategies of Non-Normative Families, Parenting and Reproduction in Neo-Traditional Russia," 474.
[191] Kristina Valerievna, age 31.

several times during difficult economic periods. Oksana expressed that being with her children brought her great joy, and that she was happy to have the option to stay home with them rather than leave them with someone else.

Kristina, on the other hand, recounted that she had chosen to return to work once her son was old enough to attend preschool, and would return again once her infant twins were older. After the birth of her first child, she explained that she had suffered from post-partum depression, finding the isolation of staying at home to be very difficult to adjust to. When I asked her whether it was difficult to reenter the workplace and whether she had to search long for a job, Kristina explained that in her case things had worked out how they are "supposed to." Her position had been saved for her so that she could return to work after taking three years leave. She also explained that she thinks the routine of preschool is good for children, but that more importantly, that she doesn't think that it's good for her kids or for her if her life revolves around them.

> "A child needs to understand at some point that Mom has her own life, she has her own things to do [...] I sat at home with each of them until they were three years old, I didn't leave them anywhere before that. But at a certain point, the child should know that not everything revolves around him, he's not first in line..."[192]

Tatiana Nikolaevna expressed similar feels to those of Kristina, explaining that she couldn't stand to remain sitting at home after her son was born and returned to work after five months, hiring a nanny part time and receiving help from her mother the rest of the time. According to women I spoke with in Tyumen, Tatiana's ability to hire a nanny was unusual; an option that is both rarely utilized and rarely affordable. Like Natalia, Tatiana's financial resources gave her options when navigating issues of childcare and work. Still, she stressed that nowadays "prices are insanely high," making it difficult to have a child and not to work.

> "Before, [the government] paid a "care allowance"[193] for the child, so that after birth every month they paid money until the child was three. But now they pay until one-and-a-half-years old, the child can only go to preschool at three years old. What else are you supposed to do for that one-and-a-half-years? And if the mother is alone?! It's absolute nonsense, it makes my hair stand on end. I have a friend, she's raising a daughter alone, and I asked her, how did you survive? Her aunt and her mom supported her...financially... I can't imagine."[194]

[192] Tatiana Nikolaevna, age 36.
[193] Posobiye po ukhode
[194] Tatiana Nikolaevna, age 36.

While none of the women I interviewed were presently single mothers,[195] the women I spoke with who had less financial security utilized more complicated strategies of balancing work and caregiving. As Tatiana described, after the birth of a child, the current family welfare policy allows for Russian women to take one-and-a-half years of paid maternity leave. Then, starting at age three, children can attend state run preschools until they are of age to enroll in school. The one-and-a-half-year gap between when the maternity leave payment ends and pre-school begins was cited as a major obstacle for many women throughout the interviews. As discussed in Chapter 2, Russian women are by default considered to be the primary caregivers for children, navigating this gap is largely their burden to bear.[196]

Karina Vadimova, a twenty-two-year-old new mother, told me that she has a different plan in mind. At the time of our interview, Karina was on maternity leave but attending night school for Early Childhood Education while her mother or husband stayed home with her child in the evenings. She explained that with the new degree she would be able to work in a pre-school, which would allow her child to attend before the usual age of three. Vika mentioned that Karina's strategy has historical precedent. Vika's mother, Svetlana Valerievna, had made a similar choice in the early 1990s. "When my brother was born-- we have in Russia this kind of tradition-- there was no room in the nursery so they told her if she wants her kid in the nursery she should come work there too. So, she did."[197]

Meanwhile, for Nadya Mihaylovna one of the main factors in her choice to delay having children was financial. Nadya lives with a partner, but they do not have plans to marry or have children together. Since Nadya strongly believes that a mother should stay home with her child for the first few years, she explains that it would be essential that she had the financial ability to do so. Nadya explained that in her ideal world, it would not be her to overcome this obstacle.

> "… so the man answers for the finances, he should earn money, and the woman should create an atmosphere at home so that when he comes he wants to return home. Then, that's a real family, if the man wants to come back home […] A family is when there's psychological support. And that's fostered by the woman."

[195] By this I mean women who, at the time of the interview, still had children living at home. Both Vera Ivanova raised her daughter alone after divorcing her husband and Svetlana Valerievna finished raising her three kids alone after the death of her husband, but both women were in their 60s with grandchildren by 2018 when I conducted these interviews.

[196] Anna Avdeeva notes that the reasons for the gendered nature of childcare in contemporary Russia are not only related to the traditional role of women as primary parents, but also related to the structure of the labor market. She remarks that "At first glance, it appears that this is because of the father's reluctance to actively parent; yet this is not the primary or only prerequisite for such a state of affairs. Current Russian gender roles significantly limitthe extent and position of a father's participation in childcare. That is, inequality in the labour market (for example, the gender pay gap) and the lack of real state support for citizens with children renders men the primary breadwinners." Sorainen et al., "Strategies of Non-Normative Families, Parenting and Reproduction in Neo-Traditional Russia," 478.

[197] Victoria [Vika] Igorevna, age 27.

Nadya's described her point of view as the "traditional perspective." Nadya's description of her ideal marriage and gender dynamics within the family is centered around the idea that her ideal relationship would *not* be 'reciprocal.' She explained that her "traditional" views in any idea that women are less capable or inferior to men—just the opposite. Importantly, she instead suggested that the place of women in contemporary society is not ideal, that women are overworked and taking an undue proportion of the responsibility.

> "… women do a lot in Russia, and that's why there's this traditional view that a man should do more. Why? Because women are tired. And they want men to do more. And Cinderella[198] for example, everybody wants to be a Cinderella, but Cinderella did that in the beginning... she did absolutely everything, she cleaned, she worked at home, and then as a reward she was given a prince. And sure, the godmother came and gave her everything so she could go to the ball, but she did something to earn that... it seems to me that many women in Russia have already done so much, and now they're waiting, asking where is my prince, who will decide everything so I can go around in a blue dress and not do anything."[199]

Nadya Mihaelovna's self-proclaimed "traditional" perspective mirrors much of what scholarly literature on the Russian state's ideological turn to neo-traditionalism has discussed, but with a twist. Her statement above emphasizes a unique feature of Nadya's gendered ideal: equating independence and self-sufficiency with exhaustion and too much responsibility, Nadya says she would prefer to choose to give up some her independence in order to achieve rest and reprieve. Although not yet a mother herself, Nadya is dissatisfied by the gender dynamics she has experienced and describes that she thinks she could achieve better conditions by reverting to traditional roles. In this sense, the image of "traditional" gender roles is also a direct expression of dissatisfaction with the current state of gender norms.

In their text "Decentering agency in feminist theory: Recuperating the family as a social project," Borovog and Ghodsee suggest that it is essential to "culturally contextualize women's preference for improvements in the social conditions of their lives—even when these come at the expense of individual autonomy."[196] As my discussion of contemporary Russian gendered norms and family structure in Chapter 2 demonstrated, the reduction of state welfare support for families in post-socialist Russia created a shift in the options available to women regarding balancing financial stability and motherhood. Likewise, as a number of scholars have pointed

[198] Zolushka
[199] Nadya Mihaelovna, 35, interview with the author.

out, shifts in gendered and family dynamics have been slower to occur.[200] Nadya's viewpoint is striking in that it not only highlights a continuity in the exhaustion and double burden recorded in Russian women's history since the late Soviet period, but also demonstrates that her idealization of neo-traditionalism is a direct response to this exhaustion, and to her dissatisfaction with the gendered dynamics she sees.

Nadya seemed to view gender dynamics as a space that could be negotiated to achieve more desirable circumstances. Still, when she spoke to me about when she thought she might have a child, she was pragmatic. Her timeline wasn't contingent on having a man to support her, or even being married. She suggested that she could consider having a child if she were to have enough savings to take time off or have a business that continued to bring in income.

Although Nadya was the only woman I interviewed who expressed explicit support for the "neo-traditional" gender roles presently promoted by the Russian state, her expression of women's exhaustion and desire for men to "do more" was implicit in many narratives about the gender dynamics within families. In discussing potential differences between motherhood in Russia and motherhood elsewhere in the world, Sofia Yuryevna suggested a similar perspective to that of Nadya.

> "It seems to me that, for example, Greeks, Turks, men are closer to the children than ours are here. […] Well, it's all relative but there's the fairly widespread point of view is that a man earns money, and thus he is tired. But again, amongst my acquaintances, there are more ideal cases, all the fathers play with their children, everyone is so surprised, and everyone says wow, look at him, what a father he is."[201]

Sofia Yuryevna's explicit gesture to men "ideally" being more engaged with the family is significant, echoing Nadya's declaration that there is general consensus that the state of gender dynamics and, especially, men's active involvement as fathers is dissatisfactory. The surprise Sofia Yuryevna describes surrounding fathers who are engaging with their children is likewise noteworthy: it highlights that this is not the norm.

Vika's mother, Svetlana Valerovna, was raised in the 1960s and 1970s by her mother and grandmother, after her mother left her father. We chatted at her kitchen table, Svetlana still in her pajamas while Vika made bliny and chimed in her thoughts or added missing information. Svetlana explained that her mother moved the family to Tyumen to be closer to

[200] Sorainen et al., "Strategies of Non-Normative Families, Parenting and Reproduction in Neo-Traditional Russia," 477. Issoupova, "Motherhood: From Duty to Pleasure?," 50; Rotkirch and Kesseli, "'Two Children Puts You in the Zone of Social Misery.' Childbearing and Risk Perception among Russian Women.," 151., issoupova, 50, two children puts, 151

[201] Sofia Yuryevna, age 22.

Svetlana's grandmother because her father drank and went out too much. "Like me!" Svetlana exclaimed, laughing. Vika groaned at her mother's joke and shook her head with a smile. Svetlana's own husband died young in a workplace accident when her three children were all still living at home and she didn't remarry. Her advice to Vika, which she reiterated to me, was simple: "Get a man young so you can train him."[202]

While lighthearted in tone, the exchange hinted at a broader underlying reality. While about half of the women I interviewed were married, there was marked dissatisfaction among many regarding the balance of work and caregiving. The women I spoke with were largely pragmatic about men's limited role in family and partnership and made decisions accordingly. In their narratives, like in that of Nadya, this often meant taking responsibility for their own role and negotiating in hopes of achieving their desired outcome.

Kristina Valerovna's account of her decision to have a second child mirrored this theme. She explained that when she had suffered from post-partum depression after the birth of her first child, her husband had been working out of town. After leaving her job and staying at home with her new child, Kristina felt that in many ways her life had suddenly been restricted. Her husband was working outside of Tyumen as an engineer, and while he was very eager to have another child and expand the family, Kristina wasn't ready to stay at home alone with another child.

> "With the second child I said, if you, dear, are not going to help me with the child, I'm not having a second. It's up to what you want. And he really wanted a son. So then, the person simply changed. When the twins were born, he really helped, he would get up in the middle of the night to help."[203]

Kristina's story demonstrates how she, like others, negotiates her gendered role within the family. It shows that in this case she could use motherhood as a form of familial leverage that allowed her to negotiate for her interests and meet her needs. Within her family, Kristina understood that her husband wanted to have a child, and that as the mother she had the power to say no, and thus had a bargaining tool.

While negotiations between ideal and lived gendered roles for men and women within families may be taking place to varying degrees such as the instances outlined above, men remained in the background of almost all the narratives of women I spoke with in Tyumen about their experiences with motherhood. Grandmothers, on the other hand, were front and center. As the narratives and descriptions of Kristina, Nadya, Aleksandra, and others

[202] Svetlana Valerievna, age 52, June 20, 2018.
[203] Kristina Valerievna, age 31.

demonstrate, while women had differing perspectives on the meaning of motherhood, the expectation that they would have children was a ubiquitous and often "urgent" backdrop to their early lives. And while the expectation (as well as the pressure) to reproduce was often being passed down from their own mothers and grandmothers, these women likewise identified their mothers as their primary role models and sources of support. In the section that follows, I will further examine transgenerational knowledge production and support among women, and how it functions as a means of navigating and overcoming material and familial obstacles for women in Tyumen.

4.4 Mothers Take the Lead: Family Structure and Transgenerational Support

> "Our grandmothers believe they should help with everything, be constantly involved. Imagining our lives without grandmother—it's like, how? There's no way. In Germany, from what I know, grandmothers come to see their grandchildren but then they leave: they travel, they have their own lives. And with this information I just… I can't understand how that works."[204]

That grandmothers serve as an essential support for mothers in raising children in Russia is a well-documented feature of the society and a carryover from the Soviet period.[205]As I discussed in Chapter 2, literature on family structure and practices since the 1990s has shown that relying on kinship networks and transgenerational support has become increasingly important for the "social and economic stability" of families and mothers in Russia.[206] Indeed, as one woman I spoke with noted, grandmothers' involvement in family life is so deeply ingrained and normalized it's hard to even notice. And while many of the women I spoke with expressed thinking this particular feature of family life might be something unique to Russia, they likewise expressed difficulty imagining their lives otherwise.

The importance of grandmothers was deeply connected in women's narratives to the central role that their mothers had played since their own childhood. Almost without exception, women overwhelming identified their mothers as their role models and examples. But while individual mother-daughter relationships varied, clear themes emerged regarding the main features that they appreciated about their mothers, looked up to, and hoped to emulate. Among these were strength, self-reliance, independence, and being "with the children."

[204] Oksana Igorevna, age 31.
[205] Jennifer Utrata, "Youth Privilege: Doing Age and Gender in Russia's Single-Mother Families," *Gender & Society* 25, no. 5 (October 2011): 616–41, https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243211421781; Anna Kuleshova, "Dillemas of Modern Motherhood (Based on Research in Russia)," *ECONOMICS & SOCIOLOGY* 8, no. 4 (December 20, 2015): 110–21.
[206] Carlbäck, Gradskova, and Kravchenko, *And They Lived Happily Ever After*, 5.

"Men think about themselves; women are thinking for their families."[207] Nadya Mihaelovna explained. Sofia Yurevna's description of her mother was similar. "I just marvel at my mom's wisdom, astonished by what good decisions she makes. Her love for our whole family is what unites us." Vika likewise extolled her mother as a role model "I want to be like my mother. She's cool… she's strong, she soothes us, she still talks things over with us even though we're grown adults."[208]

For mothers to serve as a primary role model in many families came as second nature. Twelve out of the twenty-one of the women I interviewed had been raised by their mothers, always with the help of their grandmothers.[209] As noted in Chapter 2, the prevalence of single motherhood in Russia is high.[210] Tatiana Nikolaiovna was one of many women I interviewed who was effectively raised by her mother. Like Natalia Vladmirovna, Tatitana's father worked as a truck driver and was away most of the time. "My mother was the role model of kindness. I didn't really have a real role model for work or education, but my mother was still a role model in the sense of always encouraging me and cheering me on."[211]

Oksana Igorovna's was also raised by a single mother, who brought up four children with the help of Oksana's grandmother. Oksana explained that her mother's love for children had served as her own model for wanting to have a lot of kids.

> "My mother is my role model. Because although it wasn't easy for her, she raised us alone, without a father, there were many of us. My mother believes that children better the life, they are what live is worth living for, the meaning of what it is to be a woman. For that my mom is my example, I also want to have a lot of kids, four at least, maybe if we hadn't had so many, I would also think that one is enough."

When I interviewed Irina Mikhailovna, 34, and her mother Vera Ivanovna, 65, their close dependence on one another was evident. "We had a small family," Irina explained. "I was the only child and my parents got divorced when I was seven and then, it was my mom, grandma and grandpa. We all lived together for a while, then my mom bought an apartment and we moved and lived alone when I was 13, but it was a small town so I'd often go to my grandparents." "Yes," Vera jumped in. "We spoke constantly." Irina nodded. "Yes, I think it's

[207] Nadezhda Mikhalkova, age 35.
[208] Victoria [Vika] Igorevna, age 27.
[209] Among the women I interviewed, the circumstances varied as to why fathers were not in the home. Reasons included long distance work (such as several truck drivers), death, alcoholism, and army service.
[210] See Utrata, *Women without Men*; Sorainen et al., "Strategies of Non-Normative Families, Parenting and Reproduction in Neo-Traditional Russia."
[211] Tatiana Nikolaevna, age 36.

something specific to Russian families, grandparents help, they help a lot, and my mom helps me a lot, my husband's mother helps, and so yes, in general, they took part in my upbringing."

While women frequently mentioned the involvement of both maternal and paternal grandmothers stepping in to support them, grandfathers were almost entirely absent from their narratives. Meanwhile, many women also spoke of their mothers moving from other cities to be closer when their grandchildren were born and being intimately involved in upbringing from the beginning. Yet, even from a distance, grandmothers still find a way to have their impact.

> "Oh they're involved—they love to interfere. [affectionate laugh] My mother—and my husband's mother also—they live far away. And in general, when I was pregnant the first time they'd say everything is our choice, we're grown adults… but then afterward my mom said 'no, next time I will keep everything under better control…' I'm a grown woman with two children, but that's not how she sees it, as a grandmother."[212]

Only two women, I interviewed were themselves already grandmothers, but the presence of grandmothers at every stage of life was ubiquitous in the women's narratives. Women with children's first and primary support during and after pregnancy? Their mothers and mothers-in-law. Advice, reprieve to rest, help with sick children? The same. "My mom was helping with everything, she was always here, she gave help immediately if the child was sick or anything happened."[213]

Several women also indicated viewing their futures as grandmothers as a critical element of their identity and orientation in life. Natalia Vladmirovna, whose mother technically lives in a neighboring town but who has not left Natalia's family home for a night in months, brushed past this point. "Of course, our mothers help a lot, but what would we do in retirement except help our kids?"[214] Tatiana Nikolaiovna spoke similarly when she imagined her life without kids. "Yes, I mean, we would work… we would probably have travelled more, and maybe have had more time… but then what? What is there to look forward?"[215]

[212] Kristina Valerievna, age 31.
[213] Natalia Vladimirovna, age 40.
[214] Natalia Vladimirovna, age 40.
[215] Tatiana Nikolaevna, age 36.

4.5 Aggression and Entitlement: The Limitations of Motherhood's Social Status

As some of the examples above have shown, the status or potential of motherhood can serve as a bargaining tool on the familial level. In this final section, I explore the limitations of the social power of motherhood within women's narratives, as exemplified by the policing of "entitled" mothers.

Early in my interviews, women began mentioning a trend they saw developing in Tyumen: aggressive mothers. A few of my interviewees described seeing these "aggressive" women in places like playgrounds and in shopping malls. The described the women as ruthless and demanding, behaving in public as if the world owes them a favor. As my interviews went on, another trend arose in conversation: "#yazhemat'"[216] mothers.

As my interviewees explained, the viral social media hashtag #yazhemat' (meaning "I'm a *mother*") was popularized on social media and has gained a negative reputation. When researching the online trend after it was first brought up in my interviews, I discovered that the origin and development of the hashtag was difficult to track. One article online entitled "I am a mother, and you all owe me everything"[217] which described #yazhemat' as a response to the "childfree" movement in Russia. As I discussed earlier in the chapter, the trend to live 'childfree' is new and unusual for Russia. By the account given in the article, the #yazhemat' hashtag was first popularized by women in order to highlight situations in which they felt they were not being respected in public settings by (childfree) people who didn't understand the difficulty of parenthood.

However, if these initial uses of the hashtag may sound as though they could have gained sympathy from women like those I interviewed in Tyumen, social connotations of entitlement and "aggression" had since developed which rendered #yazhemat' to be a symbol of women who take things too far. The #yazhemat' hashtag signifies an expectation of being recognized and treated with respect for the achievement of motherhood and has the political dimension of putting out a claim that if motherhood is to be a social value, women who become mothers should be likewise rewarded. But it was clear from women I interviewed that, whatever its origin, the hashtag had now become a symbol of what not to do as a mother.

[217] Ul'yana Skoybeda, "Ya mat', i vy mne vse dolzhny [Я мать, и вы мне все должны]," KP.RU - сайт «Комсомольской правды», March 12, 2010, https://www.kp.ru/daily/24454/617812/.

Sitting in the kitchen with Vika's mom, Svetlana Valerovna, I asked Vika if she would ask could explain the "yazhemat'" hashtag. Vika laughed wryly, and explained to her mother:

> "[#yazhemat'] is about the times when women come somewhere, to some store or somewhere else, with children who are running around like crazy, and people are angry and ask why you didn't leave your children home. And these are crazy mothers who say like 'I'm a mother, I gave birth, everything is owed to me.'"[218]

Vika's description, clearly positioning herself on a particular side of the #yazhemat' phenomenon, offering an explanation colored by her own negative perception of the trend. Svetlana had not heard about the viral hashtag but nodded sympathetically at her daughter's description.

> "Well, yes, you know we had this type of thing when I worked at the clinic... like, for example, when a woman was pregnant, and everyone should just run around her, I for example, don't think it should be like that. You have a husband, you wanted this kid, have him be running around for you... you're not sick, you're a healthy woman, just because you're pregnant doesn't mean anything is owed to you... everyone tolerates pregnancy differently, some people take the whole thing badly, well if it's horrible go to the hospital and lay down, or stay at home and be tended to there." [219]

Svetlana attributed the #yazhemat' trend, which she understood from her daughter as an attitude of entitlement, to the way social services are now framed. "Let's say that in my time, we gave birth only for ourselves."[220] Vika's description of #yazhemat', coupled with her mother's response, serves to illuminate their shared understanding of the importance and value of self-reliance, and their own perceptions of appropriate standards for what mothers should expect from society.

As I discussed in my conceptual framework in Chapter 2, Annelise Orleck argues that the institution of motherhood is constructed by familial, social, and institutional mechanisms which serve to "regulate acceptable behavior, restrict expression, and designate appropriate spaces for action" for mothers within a particular cultural and social milieu.[221] The negative perception of the #yazhemat' mothers, shared among several interviewees, seemed to

[218] Victoria [Vika] Igorevna, age 27.
[219] Svetlana Valerievna, age 52.
[220] This statement is interesting because it runs contrary to one mainstream historiographical narrative. For example, Elena Zdravomyslova has observed that mothers socialised in the Soviet era tend to claim that their children were something they 'gave the state' (rodila gosudarstvu) in return for which they expected certain benefits Sarah Ashwin, "Introduction," in *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, 2000, n. 29. Likewise, in "From Duty to Pleasure" Olga Issoupova suggests that in the post-socialist era "in place of a concept of duty, there is a new emphasis on individual choice, responsibility, and even pleasure" Issoupova, "Motherhood: From Duty to Pleasure?," 40.
[221] A. Orleck, "Introduction," in *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right*, ed. A. Jetter, Shakespearean Originals-First Editions (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 5.

demonstrate an important precarity in the social tolerance for women's use of their social status of mothers to their own ends. While that fact that all women are expected and, indeed, pressured to become mothers is registered as a social necessity and norm, mothers demanding respect so overtly is not really acceptable. Indeed, several women I interviewed positioned themselves in contrast to this trend, saying they were not like the yazhemat' mothers because they took care of themselves and their families, and didn't demand anything from society or the state. The #yazhemat' mothers seemed, to women I spoke with, to cross the line of what is seen as appropriate behavior, seemingly by failing to first live up to the values of self-reliance that threaded through the narratives. The example serves to place in relief many of the characteristics that women I spoke with had described throughout their interviews as admirable and valued, particularly when describing their own mothers. Strength, self-reliance, pragmatism, and kindness were all positively associated with motherhood and, indeed, the exhaustion and overwork of several generations of mothers were acknowledged and lamented. Yet, as this trend suggests, for women to claim to be entitled to more from society or to overtly demand respect was deemed inappropriate and heavily policed.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored how women I interviewed in Tyumen related their gendered identity of being a woman to their reproductive capacity of motherhood. The chapter has likewise focused "familial and social mechanisms" that make up the institution of motherhood, as experienced by these women in Tyumen. The women's narratives clearly depict the multilayered pressure to become mothers as well as the social precarity regarding acceptable expressions of motherhood, as exemplified by the discussion of entitlement in the final section. The narratives also serve to reinforce the point that transformation and continuity in family structures and gender norms are not experienced or enacted directly according to top-level changes in policy or political ideology.

My discussion and analysis have illustrated that women make active (and individual) choices to negotiate gendered norms to serve their interests. The concrete strategies that women employ in navigating gaps between ideal and lived gender roles are varied and highly dependent on the resources they have available to them. Their experiences were stratified by their access to financial resources, marital and family support, as well as by their personal desires regarding work, family roles, and childrearing. The narratives discussed also served to underline the varied "speed" at which change and continuity in familial and gendered norms are experienced, even between women and families living in the same city. Some women, such as

Natalia Vladmirovna and Oksana Igorovna had the flexibility to choose very different life strategies than those of their mothers and stay at home with their children by choice. Other women described certain transgenerational similarities in their own experiences and those of their mothers, as exemplified by the contemporary continuity in exhaustion and the "double burden" of work and caregiving that some women discussed. I find that many of the challenges faced by the women I spoke with, such as the double burden of work and caregiving, appear similar to those discussed in literature about women living in the Soviet era, and that the transgenerational nature of support, emphasized in the literature on family structure in contemporary Russia, is extremely important for the women I interviewed in Tyumen, too.

Chapter 5. Self-Reliance as Best (and Only) Option: Women Navigating Institutional (Dis)trust in Reproductive and Pediatric Health Care in Tyumen

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter draws on women's stories of navigating reproductive, obstetric, and pediatric health care services in Tyumen. It considers the extent to which the "new" pro-natalism and "medicalization of motherhood"[222] discussed in Chapter 2 impact the women I spoke with, and how these women's perceptions of medical care effect their own decision making and navigational strategies related to seeking reproductive and pediatric medical information and care.

I find it important to note that in my initial interview questions, I had not chosen to focus on women's experiences medical care. The topic proved, however, to be of great significance to many women I interviewed when speaking about motherhood, and emerged organically in a number of conversations. In the first section of this chapter, I reflect on why this may have been so. The questions that guide my analysis in this section are how do women in this region in the contemporary period relate to the Russian state and institutions, broadly? Given the "new" pro-natalist welfare policies in Russia, what governmental support for women and mothers did the women in Tyumen discuss, and what were their views on this support? How does institutional distrust play out in these women's lives, and why might this be important when reflecting on their experiences with the medical sector? (5.2) Following from this discussion, I move into an exploration of women's views on their medical care options. I ask how institutional distrust factors into these women's use of the medical sector for reproductive and pediatric care in Tyumen. How do their medical experiences shift or reinforce this distrust? (5.3) Drawing on de Certeau, what strategies and tactics did women I interviewed discuss utilizing for establishing (precarious) trust, and seeking physical, psychological, and emotional support and care from medical professionals? (5.4) Finally, returning to questions of medical care and pro-natalism, I ask in what ways negative encounters with medical professionals impacted women's perceptions of their options and limitations related to motherhood? How do pressures and dynamics within these encounters influence their thinking and decision making? What circumstantial factors present in individual women's stories play into their experience with care, and how does this effect their strategies and plans for their reproductive futures? (5.5 and 5.6) I conclude with a reflection on my findings, highlighting how the contours of power

[222] Temkina, "The Gynaecologist's Gaze," 1528.

in the medical system are experienced in this context and how these dynamics orient women's strategies of negotiation with healthcare, ultimate leading them to become their own, highly resilient, "experts," seeking alternative methods of receiving support, advice, and information.

5.2 Pro-natalism, Institutional Disengagement and Medical Care: The View from Women in Tyumen

In my interviews with women in Tyumen, government support for mothers and families was most frequently discussed in terms of its limitations. Women I spoke with described the financial support offered by the state in meager terms and frequently brought up the issue of the one-and-a-half-year gap between the end of paid maternity leave and the beginning of state-funded preschool for young children. The maternity capital program, described in Chapter 2, was something that most of my interviewees raised in conversation (although none of them had firsthand experience using it). As Tatiana noted "Of course now, for the second child, now there's the maternity capital, and that's a big plus, support for families, that's just great. But, so far even that hasn't moved me to have a second child. [laughing]"[223] I asked Tatiana whether she thought the maternity capital served to offset some of the issues of the one-and-a-half-year gap for families with two children, but she explained that it does not. "No, because you can't even use that money until after the child turns three. And then you can only use it to improve your housing, put it towards the mother's pension, or towards higher education of any child (that one or the older one). […] You can remodel your apartment, but you have to eat every day, so that's a slippery moment."[224]

As Tatiana's account suggests, most women I spoke to regarded the limited state support available to them as one of many factors to consider when negotiating choices around motherhood and parenting, but not much more. My impressions of women's attitude toward state welfare support largely mirrored broader trends in attitudes towards the state and institutions that I had seen while living in Tyumen in 2013-2014. The widespread cultural distrust of institutions which I discussed in Chapter 2 is compounded by disengagement from official systems and politics. Many women I spoke with echoed a refrain that is commonly heard in Tyumen: *I'm a patriot, I love my country and respect the laws. But I don't own a TV, I don't read the news, and I'm not political.*

Because of these trends, to a large extent it would seem that the pro-natalist policy change and rhetoric happening at a state level since 2006 would touch women in Tyumen very

[223] Tatiana Nikolaevna, age 36.
[224] Tatiana Nikolaevna, age 36.

little, and thus have little effect on their daily lives and choices. The exception to this, as it became clear during my interviews, is within the realm of encounters with medical professionals.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Anna Temkina describes the medical industry as the primary biopolitical means of pushing the Russian pronatalist agenda because of what she describes as the "medicalization of motherhood."[225] Health care for women is characterized by "biopolitical disciplining techniques of doctors" which are biologically essentialist and geared toward reproduction. Scholarship on medical seeking behavior in Russia has illustrated that, as in other arenas of life, social capital may function as an important "tactic" and supplement to official channels. Anna-Marie Salmi's 2003 article about health seeking behavior in Saint Petersburg discusses what she describes as the strength of "informal medical exchange practices" in health care seeking behavior in post-Soviet Russia.[226] Citing economic constraints on Russian incomes, she demonstrates a tendency to "bypass the formal [medical] market mechanisms" as well as "official procedures," instead using personal connections and social connections to access cheaper medicine and free or cheap health care services.[227] Salmi argues that "Networking both implies and strengthens the idea that the responsibility for achieving good health care belongs to the individual, not to the state. On the other hand, informal practices are often more a necessity than a choice."[228] Other authors have noted that strategies of seeking reliable reproductive health care, at least within urban centers of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, mirror these larger trends.[229]

In their 2016 article "Using maternity capital: Citizen Distrust of Russian Family Policy,"[230] Borozdina et al. argue that rather than "producing disciplined citizens" who comply with the reproductive norm of having two children, pro-natalist policy in Russia may in fact be serving to "foster demanding and critically oriented individuals who are ready to fight or cheat the system in order to protect their family's interests."[231] The findings of both Salmi and Borozdina et al. correspond to some extent with the narratives highlighted within my interviews

[225] Temkina, "The Gynaecologist's Gaze," 1528.
[226] Anna-Maria Salmi, "Health in Exchange: Teachers, Doctors, and the Strength of Informal Practices in Russia," Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry 27, no. 2 (June 2003): 109, https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024241123139.
[227] Salmi, 109.
[228] Salmi, 124.
[229] Michele Rivkin-Fish, "Bribes, Gifts and Unofficial Payments: Rethinking Corruption in Post-Soviet Russian Health Care," in Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives, ed. Dieter Haller and Cris Shore, Anthropology, Culture, and Society (London ; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto, 2005), 47–64.
[230] Borozdina et al., "Using Maternity Capital."
[231] Borozdina et al., 73.

as well as with my general impressions of everyday life navigational strategies in Tyumen. While expressing distrust and frustrations with gaps in government policy and support for mothers and families, women I interviewed demonstrated that these feelings served as an impetus to rely more heavily on themselves and their social networks, and disengage further from institutions. Indeed, as this chapter demonstrates, the women I spoke with demonstrate that a key strategy for "making do" in the context of institutional distrust is to cultivate and share what I will refer to as "navigational capital"[232] within social networks.

American sociologist Tara Yosso,[233] refers to "navigational capital" as a form of cultural and community wealth. The conception refers to the "array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts" that are used as strategies by individuals and communities to navigate institutions whose aims, goals, and structures may not be designed in a way that serves their interests or needs. Yosso's conception of navigational capital entails an emphasis on resilience, "a set of inner resources, social competencies and cultural strategies that permit individuals to not only survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning.'"[234] In the sections that follow, I explore Tyumen women's narratives about their experiences with the medical system and, drawing on Yosso's concept, demonstrate these women's pragmatism and resilience in navigating a medical system they do not trust or feel supported by.

5.3 "Even if it's not my child being diagnosed, I'd still ask two other doctors their opinion"[235]

> "I don't go to the clinic assigned to the neighborhood because they only give 12 minutes per child. You're sitting in this long line with a lot of people around coughing and sneezing. You can only come with an appointment, and if you come with an appointment usually, you're not that sick, […] but if you come with one ailment, you'll leave with three others in addition."[236]

Oksana Igorovna, the 31-year-old mother and advocate for "natural" parenting who appeared in Chapter 4, described to me her preference for private over free health clinics. Her friend Kristina Valerovna nodded in agreement and chimed in that in addition to having longer lines and wait times than private clinics, the doctors at public clinics are not very attentive. She

[232] Yosso, "Whose Culture Has Capital?"
[233] Yosso, 69.
[234] Yosso, 80.
[235] Kristina Valerievna, age 31.
[236] Oksana Igorevna, age 31.

argued that they often miss things and are more focused on the mountains of paperwork they have to do than on the patients.

> "If you go to a clinic they have a lot of paperwork, they leave very little time to actually look at the child, they run, run, run, they rush to check because they have piles of papers to fill. I've often seen that, even when I was pregnant, they would write things that I didn't say, I saw on the paper things that I don't have. And the question that stands is the competence and adequacy of these doctors."[237]

The current Russian medical system is two tiered. Since 1993, when universal, mandatory health coverage was established during the post-socialist transition, all patients have access to government run, public clinic services free of cost.[238] Public 'women's clinics,'[239] like the ones Oksana and Kristina describe, are assigned by neighborhood of residence, and provide a variety of services to women, including gynecological and obstetric care. Official standards require health care practitioners in women's clinics to see five patients per hour, or eight patients per hour in the case of preventative care.[240] A number of women echoed that these time constraints (coupled with tremendous bureaucratic workloads) can "make the doctor's work conveyer-like."[241]

Private clinics, meanwhile, are paid for out of pocket by patients, with the cost of services varying greatly depending on market demand and competition. These private medical care clinics were characterized in my interviews as having shorter wait lines, friendlier staff, and (to a certain extent) offering a superior quality of care. Elizaveta Borisovna, a 34-year-old mother of a preteen and a six-year-old, explained that she typically visits public clinics for general care but goes to private clinics with more important issues. Yet, despite the perception that medical care might be better, the women I interviewed perceived private clinics as coming with their own risks. In the words of one woman,

> "If you go to the paid clinic, they find everything, even problems you don't have, any possible analysis, everything, everything, everything, so that they get more money. And sure, I mean, you go there yourself, freely, so you agree. So, they do a full investigation. And that's what you agree to."[242]

[237] Kristina Valerievna, age 31.
[238] Meri Maaria Larivaara, "Reproductive Medicine in St Petersburg : A Study of Reproductive Health Services and Gynaecologists' Professional Power and Knowledge" (University of Helsinki and National Institute for Health and Welfare, Finland, 2012), 17.
[239] Zhenskaya Konsul'tatsiya, outpatient clinics for gynecological and obstetric care. I use "women's clinic" to refer to these centers, following the lead of Temkina, "The Gynaecologist's Gaze," n. 1.
[240] Temkina, "The Gynaecologist's Gaze," n. 12.
[241] Temkina, n. 12.
[242] Nadezhda Mikhalkova, age 35.

While the perception of private clinic was that they may charge for things a patient didn't need or want done, some women told me that when they chose to pay for services, they felt more comfortable speaking their mind and asking all their questions. When asked about the cost of private clinics, most said that they were financially accessible to someone with a "sredni" [average] income, but that since private clinics have a tendency to order more analyses and tests than public clinics, it's important to pay close attention and to get a second opinion.

A description of the official institutional structure of the public and private healthcare market does little to describe the practical mechanisms of their use in Tyumen. While there was a consensus among my interviewees regarding the quality of care received at public versus private clinics, most women described visiting a combination of public and private facilities to meet their needs, in combination with informal meetings with healthcare providers outside of official office hours.[243] As the narrative examples in the sections that follow will demonstrate, such strategies require women to develop an expert level knowledge of both the medical system and medical treatment options.

5.4 "Nobody Cancelled Medicine Yet": Strategies of Making Do

> "Sometimes there are moments when you do have to refer to doctors, nobody cancelled medicine yet [rye laugh] this you have to understand. I'm not a fanatic in that sense, but I recommend finding a specialist who you trust. I go to my [public] clinic when I need an analysis, they recommend a particular analysis, the clinic is free so I go and get it. Then I send the results to a private doctor to look and to comment on it."[244]

Oksana recalled going to the clinic after the birth of her first child and deciding after a few months that she could do the same check-ups at home without the wasted time and paperwork. When her second child didn't seem to be moving as much as she should by three and a half months, Oksana described going to a variety of doctors, but didn't feel her concerns were taken seriously. Frustrated, Oksana decided to take matters into her own hands. She did research online and went back to her pediatrician to discuss options she had read about, including body massage and aquatic physical therapy. The pediatrician sanctioned Oksana's suggested remedies but instructed her to complete them at home as the hospital didn't have the resources. In the end, Oksana recalled, the baby's mobility improved as a result of her efforts. Oksana's

[243] Many of the same doctors work in both public and private clinics, and additionally often take patients informally on the side for a fee. This trend of Russian medical professionals working outside of business hours and in informal meetings with patients was also noted amongst Saint Petersburg doctors by Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova, "Patients in Contemporary Russian Reproductive Health Care Institutions: Strategies of Establishing Trust," Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization 16, no. 3 (July 1, 2008): 285, https://doi.org/10.3200/DEMO.16.3.277-293.
[244] Oksana Igorevna, age 31.

overall attitude from the experience was one of resignation. "Now I only go [to the clinic] when I need to confirm or double check my actions." Oksana explained that based on her experiences with doctors, she doesn't trust the use of medicine and advocates for turning to "traditional" and herbal means of treatment and home remedies.

Kristina, on the other hand, came from a family of medical professionals. Her grandmother worked for fifty years as a doctor which instilled in Kristina a respect for the profession. But while she explained that she doesn't usually use home remedies, she also doesn't go running to the doctor for "every sneeze." Instead, she says, she reads a lot and does a lot of her own research.

> "Sometimes when you call the clinic, they send really young doctors, inexperienced, and there have been instances when they gave us dosages of medicine that were not for children and had I not known I could have seriously harmed the child- and who is going to take responsibility for that? So, we have a very tense relationship with the doctors, I start asking questions that they aren't prepared to answer, and they ask 'do you have a medical education?' No, I'm just a mom of three kids, who get sick."[245]

In Kristina's question "who is going to take responsibility" there is an implicit declaration: the burden of responsibility for care of a child, and (as further narratives below will demonstrate) for the woman herself ultimately rests with the woman and mother, not with the medical "expert." Despite their differing views on medical care, Kristina and Oksana share the understanding that as mothers, they are their children's first line of defense, know more about their children than anyone and, given their experiences with medical care, they aren't willing to take any chances. Thus, for them, doing their own research and sharing medical knowledge, solutions, and support with one another are essential tactics for meeting the needs of their children. In addition to self-reliance and mobilizing social networks to establish contact with doctors that they trust, many of the women place their faith in the advice and support of other women, such as friends to their own mothers. Oksana often turns to Kristina with her medical questions, while Kristina expressed that Oksana had been a huge help in learning about alternative remedies and preventive care.[246]

Meanwhile, while Oksana's preferred strategy for navigating the medical system is to avoid it as much as possible, she concedes that this is not always an option. Oksana stressed

[245] Oksana Igorevna, age 31.

[246] Similar findings were present in a 2008 article on the specific strategies that female patients use in seeking reproductive care, Temkina and Zdravomyslova note "mobilizing social networks" as the primary tactic they noticed in across interviews with women in the cities of Saint Petersburg, Samara and Chelyabinsk. Temkina and Zdravomyslova, "Patients in Contemporary Russian Reproductive Health Care Institutions," 289.

the importance of finding a medical "specialist" that you trust. She explained to me that these days she's connected to a pediatrician who works in a sports center but sees patients on the side. Oksana articulated her trust in this doctor as coming from the fact that the doctor is unique and "belongs to the category of specialists who do what they do out of love for their work." As opposed to the apathetic, rushing, or patronizing doctors she had experienced before, this doctor takes time to carefully examine Oksana's kids. Oksana's recommended course of action is to go to the public clinic to get analyses, but to return to a "trusted specialist" in order to review the results and get a second opinion. Once again, the "navigational capital" necessary for mothers to achieve the strategies described here appears significant. Oksana and Kristina each emphasized that mothers must be their own experts and must have institutional competency that allows them to perceive the ins and outs of using a distrusted system to the best of their ability. Such expertise and competency were lauded throughout these and other interviews as valuable and necessary skills for women and mothers to develop and possess.

Vika has never been pregnant but shared with me some of the skepticism towards the medical field that Oksana and Kristina expressed. She recounted several anecdotes of experiences her friends and older sister had had, when doctors made mistakes that placed the mother or the child in jeopardy. Although she has no plans to have children yet, these medical stories have made her wary for the future. Vika emphasized that when she gives birth, she either wants a friend in the room with her who has a detailed knowledge of what should be happening in order to monitor the situation. "It's scary to give birth with our doctors, even if you pay."[247] Vika's mother, Svetlana Valeirovna, echoed similar sentiments in a separate conversation. "You're going to be afraid, as a mother, no matter what. Everything depends on you… and if there aren't any good doctors, if they're no good, if they aren't smart?! And even if they are, they won't know your child like you do."[248]

The women's narratives highlighted above demonstrate that medical distrust is reinforced by negative experiences with reproductive and pediatric care.[249] By cultivating and sharing navigational capital, women are able to bypass difficulties and overcome setbacks in

[247] Victoria [Vika] Igorevna, age 27.
[248] Svetlana Valerievna, age 52.
[249] Temkina and Zdravomyslova, "Patients in Contemporary Russian Reproductive Health Care Institutions"; Michele R. Rivkin-Fish, Women's Health in Post-Soviet Russia: The Politics of Intervention (Indiana University Press, 2005).

attaining satisfactory medical care.[250] In addition to this navigational expertise, strategies and tactics of "making do" in the context of medical distrust include a number of informal practices of bypassing difficulties based on personal relationships.[251] The narratives highlight a shared belief that self-reliance and dependence on friends and family are essential. These strategies become particularly important when it comes to the emotional well-being of women, as Vika and Svetlana's discussion of fear indicates.

5.5 Women as Latent Mothers: Pressure of Reproduction

While Oksana, Kristina, and Vika were concerned primarily with physical health and safety, several of the women I spoke with described significant psychological and emotional impacts that medical experiences had left on them. Nadya Mihaelovna spoke to me about one particularly gendered element of this impact: the pressure placed on her by medical professionals for being a woman over thirty without kids. As mentioned in the previous section, Nadya wants to become a mother someday but cannot say when. She expressed resentment that "every doctor I go to see" urges her to make giving birth her first priority.

> "And I usually say to them, well... what do you have here? Who do you have, show me, do you have someone here who'd like to become a father? Let's see him. […] I really don't like this, the idea itself that it's necessary to impose that before a certain age you must absolutely give birth to a child."[252]

While Nadya expressed thinking that she thought the pressure put on women to give birth by thirty was mainly about the physical health of a woman (and the pervasive understanding that medically, childbirth becomes more difficult with age), she explained that not all her experiences being asked about her intentions for motherhood had felt like innocuous, medically motivated advice. For example, when meeting a new gynecologist and revealing that she had never been pregnant, the doctor accused her of neglecting her duty as a woman.[253]

Nadya explained that the gynecologist in question had been the head doctor[254] at a public clinic but, like many doctors, received patients privately (for compensation) on the side.

[250] It is important to note that the availability of some of these women's "tactics" would likely be contextually specific to a well-developed, urban environment such as Tyumen. A poorer city or village with fewer clinic options would limit women's ability to seek second or third opinions. Likewise, while women assured me that someone with a "sredni" income could afford to see a private medical professional for care, lower income families or single mothers would likely have less resources (both in terms of money and time) to seek care.
[251] Salmi, "Health in Exchange," 109.
[252] Nadezhda Mikhalkova, age 35.
[253] "Ne vypolnila svoj zhenskij dolg."
[254] Zavedushhaja

She characterized the women as a "very professional person" who was known for "solving everyone's problems" and who had come highly recommended by Nadya's sister.

> "So, I went to her […] and she said how old are you... have you given birth? No. Did you have any miscarriages? No. [pause] I'm writing. 'Has not fulfilled her duty as a woman.' Yes. And this was just...I understand that this was some kind of, well, psychological pressure. And I looked at her, and she looked at me again and repeated, "I wrote, she hasn't fulfilled her duty as a woman." And I couldn't say anything to her. Because, well, fine, go ahead and write that, tell me what's next. And she told me what to do, well I had questions, she answered all my questions, and I said it's that everything? She said, sure, we'll do this...and then, you need to get pregnant right away. And that phrase, this 'hasn't fulfilled her duty as a woman,' I just.. I don't know how to describe it, it was like a shock to me. Very unpleasant. First of all, I don't owe anyone anything. And secondly, why are *you* telling me this, who are you to me?"[255]

The gynecologist's attitude mirrors much of the neo-traditionalist, conservative brand of politics that accompanies pro-natalist rhetoric and policies in contemporary Russia discussed in Chapter 2, which define motherhood as a women's natural calling and place pressure on women to prioritize the private sphere and the family.[256] Nadya's story also sheds light on how medical care can be an obstacle rather than a support for women who don't have children by the prescribed "normal" age. Still, this obstacle neither causes Nadya to question herself, nor to change her opinion about when and how becoming a mother will be right for her.

Nadya went on to underline that the gynecologist she spoke with had come with the highest recommendation from many people she knew. Additionally, she explained, this gynecologist had a reputation for helping people save money: she would diagnose and order analyses in informal meetings but insist that her patients return to public clinics to carry out any procedures rather than accepting money. Nadya seemed to underline these points in order to emphasize to me that this was a doctor that could, for all intents and purposes, be trusted.

The power dynamics in Nadya's story are striking. After the shock and humiliation of being insulted by a female, head doctor, Nadya explained that she had difficulty knowing who to turn to. In Nadya's case, one can see how psychologically and emotionally intense the multi-faceted pressure to have children can be, coming from both this doctor and her family. She explained that she had not mentioned the negative experience to her sister or her mother, and that she didn't necessarily have a strategy to avoid such experiences in the future, aside from avoiding this particular doctor. "I personally have already changed doctors four times," she said

[255] Nadya Mikailovna, 35, no children.
[256] See Sorainen et al., 2017, panel on strategies of families in neo-traditionalist Russia.

resignedly. "I can't seem to find myself a normal doctor, who I like, who understands what to do and understands me, and all of that together... and who doesn't say I haven't fulfilled by obligation as a woman."[257]

5.6 The Conditional Nature of Care

Aleksandra Dmitrieva has been pregnant twice but both pregnancies had, in her words, "unpleasant endings."[258] At thirty-one, Aleksandra, like Nadya, is over the age perceived as normal for women to have children in Russia. The first time she got pregnant, at 24, Aleksandra had an abortion after what she described as a "medical mistake." Her doctor had prescribed a course of antibiotics to treat a cyst, and while Aleksandra received an ultrasound before beginning treatment, she was too early in her pregnancy for the pregnancy to be detected in the examination. A few weeks later, when the pregnancy was discovered, the doctors warned her that the future child would likely suffer harm from the antibiotics and have problems with its nervous system, brain function, and spine. Aleksandra agreed to a medically induced abortion and went to consult with a specialist.

> "I wasn't handling it entirely well, you have to understand, in that state… I had elevated hormone levels, I was crying all the time, I just wanted to keep everything [keep the pregnancy] but I understood that that wasn't going to happen, and it was difficult. And I came across not only misunderstanding but even some kind of unwillingness on the part of medical professionals to meet with me. To the point where it was so difficult that I went to the women's clinic and went up to the receptionist, saying I need to see the doctor, this is what's happening, and I need to have a medical abortion. The receptionist… I mean, maybe she didn't understand me. She started to say that I needed to come in a week, the doctor doesn't have time, and that first I need to go and see a psychologist. Evidently, she thought I wanted to just get rid of the child, and probably if a woman wants to get rid of her child, she needs to first see a psychologist, and as I far as I understand the psychologist will try to convince the woman to keep the child. But it was strange that, a woman in a situation like mine, when I couldn't decide anything, it wasn't my decision, the way everything was playing out… then you don't suggest psychological help. Because apparently, they don't consider [an abortion] to be that scary, that important, a woman can just live through it on her own. It's just really strange that if I want to end the pregnancy, you're going to try to convince me, and

[257] Nadezhda Mikhalkova, age 35.

[258] Aleksandra reached out to me over social media, suggesting that it might be useful for my research to hear about "this aspect" of motherhood. I entered the interview slightly apprehensive, not sure how I would navigate a conversation about loss of pregnancy when my interviews to that point had centered around expectations or experiences of motherhood. Aleksandra, however, spoke openly about what she had been through, and remained highly engaged throughout the conversation about her experiences. Aleksandra Dmitrieva, age 31.

> work with me but if I'm destined to go through with ending the pregnancy, I'm completely by myself and alone."[259]

Aleksandra's description of the abortion process highlights several important elements of her experience. First and foremost, her narrative underlines an expression of feeling that she had very little recourse medically, due to the behavior and attitudes of the staff, and could only rely on herself. She critiqued the fact that psychological support seems to be aimed not at caring for women so much as aimed at carrying out the priorities of the hospital or medical staff to keep women from terminating pregnancies. Likewise, she expresses criticism that psychological support would be offered to a woman who had more of a choice about whether or not to undertake the abortion. Aleksandra's experiences demonstrate the conditional nature of her experiences with medical care and support: provided not, perhaps, for the individual woman's well-being but instead for the purpose of "convincing" her to keep the child.

Aleksandra's second pregnancy ended in a miscarriage just two months before our interview. After a difficult start of fatigue and morning sickness, her symptoms began to clear up in a manner that didn't feel normal to her, and she suspected something was wrong. She explained that she had very little support at the time, but that her mother had been with her when the miscarriage started and had called an ambulance.

> "It took me to a hospital, where they left me to wait for a very longtime, even though I told them that I was badly bleeding, I was in pain, that I suspected I was having a miscarriage…and it's really strange, because if it had still been possible to save the child, by the time I waited that long in the line there wouldn't have been anything to be done."

Both before the miscarriage started and when she was at the hospital, Aleksandra had a strong suspicion about what was going on, but said that she was not taken seriously by the doctors. She recounted that she returned to get an ultrasound at the same hospital about a week later. In the week interim, she had been carefully monitoring herself and taking medication to avoid inflammation and complications from the miscarriage and wanted to make sure that the pain and bleeding she was experiencing were normal. She described once again waiting three and a half hours, in a great deal of pain, before the attending doctor came out to speak to her.

> "The doctor who was working was frank, she said 'I don't want to be here, I don't like working here--you all come here, you're all angry, and you all just come here to get this ultrasound for free.' This was Friday, you have to understand, probably at about eight in the evening. Imagine, there are six women waiting in line. And all of them are hurting somewhere. One's come in

[259] Aleksandra Dmitrieva, age 31.

> an ambulance, someone else has come on their own. There's a woman who's bleeding, a woman with an early term pregnancy, and we all came so that we could just get a free ultrasound, seriously? I mean, I would have been better off at home on a Friday evening, we ended up leaving there at quarter to 12!"

In Aleksandra's narrative, the doctor emphasizes that the women waiting in line must all want "free" ultrasounds, denoting an accusation of entitlement. As my discussion in Chapter 4 concluded, explicit accusations of entitlement, such as the case of #yazhemat', seem to emerge as a means of policing mothers whose behavior is deemed socially inappropriate for demanding too much. The implicit accusation of entitlement in the case of this doctor is interesting. Officially, the women waiting in line in the clinic are quite literally entitled to free medical care: they are in a free clinic which is available to all citizens. Aleksandra explaind that this encounter served to reinforce her understanding that care is conditional, that facilitating motherhood is priority for these doctors, and that women (especially those not fulfilling this role) should navigate the system with care. Continuing her story, Aleksandra recounted:

> "And this women [the doctor] is saying, 'I would have been better off at the perinatal center[260]—and she says she likes it better there, because women come there to give birth, they come with in a different mood, they're already happy when they arrive, and you all come so ill-tempered to us, in such a mess. And I'm thinking, well yes, of course, we're ill-tempered, but we're sitting here in this line, we're all in pain, and you aren't taking care of us."[261]

The dynamics Aleksandra faced in seeking medical treatment for loss of pregnancy underlined to her that a woman who has failed to realize the potential for motherhood is less valued and poorly treated, regardless (as Aleksandra emphasized) of whether that woman wishes to become a mother or has a choice in the outcome of her pregnancies. Aleksandra mentioned multiple points when her physical and psychological pain were disregarded or even prolonged. In recounting her stories, she expressed frustration and pain at various experiences she had with medical care, how poorly the medical staff treated women in "her situation," and how little support was available to her. Ultimately, despite her wishes, she found herself forced to rely on herself rather than on the doctors. Like Kristina and Oksana, Aleksandra became her own expert, doing a great deal of research after her miscarriage and relying primarily on herself rather than on experts. Importantly, Aleksandra's experiences with these doctors did not, within the narrative, lead her to question herself. Indeed, the poor experiences strengthened her self-

[260] Childbirth center [Rodil'nyi dom]
[261] Aleksandra Dmitrieva, age 31.

reliance while simultaneously reinforcing her institutional distrust. When Aleksandra spoke about what she would do differently if she were to go back, her response was to speak to other women, because "[women] who have been through these things, […] likely know even more than the doctors. And also, because doctors aren't always that talkative or forthcoming and women are just the opposite, they speak about every detail." Aleksandra also said that if she could do it all again, she would trust herself more.

> "I wouldn't keep everything to myself, I would demand attention. Pay more attention to yourself, and trust the doctors but also actively have some kind of contact you really trust […] So pay closer attention to yourself and keep everything more under control."[262]

The experiences Aleksandra had in the public health clinics, while more extreme than the stories told by women like Oksana, Kristina, Vika, or Nadya echo the shared understanding of distrust and the need for self-reliance as a result of scarce resources and, perhaps more impactful, biased behavior on the part of doctors. I asked Aleksandra if she had had better experiences with doctors since the time of her miscarriage. She explained that she had and that she had established a relationship with an acquaintance who is gynecologist at a private, paid clinic. Aleksandra said this new doctor seems to really care, listens well, and tries to help, in a way that she has never experienced with doctors in the government clinics.

What is both striking and ironic in both Aleksandra and Nadya's stories is that their personal goals do, in a sense, align with the goals of the doctors (and, by extension, the Russian state): both women do want to become mothers, someday. Their stories highlight how challenging and isolating it can be for women in this context, as they struggle to find adequate physical care, navigate the attitudes of medical professionals, and overcome the emotional and psychological hurdles associated. In these cases, medical experiences more often manifest in disciplinary and negative forms of power whereas, at least in perception, in positive reinforcement for mothers who are having children (whether or not they have any choice.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how, the women I interviewed in Tyumen look at and deal with medical institutions. It became clear that the women regard these institutions as a series of problematic but unavoidable obstacles, to be navigated with care and sharp wit. As all the narratives above demonstrate, inconsistent and dissatisfactory experiences of reproductive and pediatric health services (and, perhaps, of the medical system more broadly) engender further

[262] Aleksandra Dmitrieva, age 31.

dissatisfaction and distrust of the system among women. Rather than serving as resources for information or support to women as they navigate issues of reproductive decision making, pregnancy, and motherhood, medical encounters in these narratives are characterized by medical mistakes, bias on the part of physicians, neglect and scarcity of time and attention. Oksana and Kristina attributed these issues above all to inexperience and scare resources, while Aleksandra was vehement that the doctors she had seen were perfectly normal and qualified and that their behavior came instead from apathy or bias.

The chapter has also illustrated how the pro-natalist agenda and "medicalization of motherhood"[263] impacts women I spoke with in Tyumen. The individual experiences of Aleksandra in seeking pre- and post- loss of pregnancy care and Nadya being pressured to "fulfill her duty as a woman" offer insight into some of the ways that broader pro-natalist trends can manifest to police and discipline women who are not having children according to the prescribed timeline.

The effects the experiences that all the women in these interviews described had on their decision making were relatively similar. The women emphasized the necessity and, in many cases, inevitability of being self-reliant and independent when it comes to issues related to motherhood. In each of the narratives, the mistrust and difficulties faced in navigating the medical system boiled down to a cohesive set of tactics and strategies: do your own research, have someone you know and trust in the medical field, trust yourself, get multiple opinions, and speak to other women. The navigational capital and expertise the women I interviewed possessed allowed them to be resilient in the face of institutional adversity, and to maintain their own interests and goals even after negative experiences.

[263] Temkina, "The Gynaecologist's Gaze," 1528.

Chapter 6. Reflections and Conclusions

For the women I spoke with in Tyumen, the question of motherhood was a crucial organizing feature around which their lives and gendered identities were centered. Whether they were mothers or grandmothers themselves, or did not yet have children, women's narratives revealed that their "potential relationship to their powers of reproduction and to children,"[264] served as a source of meaning, of fulfillment and, often, of scrutiny. My analysis has demonstrated that these women experienced multi-layered pressures to reproduce and actively employed dynamic (and highly individual) tactics and strategies to negotiate with these pressures, as well as to improve their material and familial circumstances, and to meet their own interests and goals.

The historicization of the institution of motherhood in Russia that I provided at the outset of this project showed that these multi-layered pressures to become mothers must, in part, be tied to the extensive history of nearly fifty years of pro-natalist policies and ideologies. My exploration of women's accounts of negotiations with medical care corresponded with existing literature on the subject, demonstrating that for women in Tyumen, medical care is a primary source of pro-natalist pressure. In the context of institutional distrust and disengagement, women's dissatisfactory medical experiences often led them to rely primarily on themselves and on their social networks, cultivating an expertise and navigational savvy which allowed them to circumvent issues they perceive with medical care. Throughout the narratives, particularly those of women whose timelines for becoming mothers deviated from societal norms, it was clear that rather than encouraging women to have more children or helping them to meet their reproductive aims, medical encounters more often served as an obstacle to circumvent in order for women to get their healthcare needs met.

Likewise, in the broader social, how much and under which conditions women were able to lay claim to the achievement of motherhood as a source of social support emerged as a terrain of precarity, context despite the high value placed on becoming a mother, Accusations of entitlement surfaced both in institutional settings, such as Aleksandra's experience with the doctor in the public medical clinic, and between and among women, as in the examples of aggressive mothers and the #yazhemat' hashtag. This mechanism of policing behavior and expectations serves to underline the extent to which the pressure and onus of motherhood is taken for granted as the responsibility of a woman alone and perhaps even her "duty as a woman" as

[264] Rich, Of Woman Born, 3.

the doctor in Nadya's case underlined, such that asking for anything in return may be seen as inappropriate.

In my conversations with women, I was most deeply struck by the emotional elements of their stories. From the external pressure and precarity that mediated their thinking and decision making around their own reproductive capacity, to their expressions of exhaustion (as well as stories of their mothers' overwork and exhaustion) to the shock, frustration, isolation, and fear they felt when relating to the medical system, these women spent a tremendous amount of emotional energy navigating systems and expectations in order to experience motherhood on their own terms. While deeply moving, however, the stories by no means left me with an impression that these women were without recourse or agency. On the contrary, women's strategies in navigating institutions and their tactics for negotiating for improved gender dynamics within their families demonstrated tremendous pragmatism and tenacity. For many women, the tactics of perseverance they adopted in their experiences of gendered identity and motherhood were medicated by their relationships with their own mothers, demonstrating how not only some of the challenges (such as the double burden of work and childcare) but also some of the solutions and strategies women adopt to "make do" have transgenerational continuity.

On August 16, 2018, less than two months after I completed my fieldwork in Tyumen, thousands of people took to the streets in Moscow in what was called the "Mother's March," to express outrage over the imprisonment of a group of teenagers. In the weeks that followed, an interview was published with prominent Russian sociologist Zhanna Chernova, which was meaningfully entitled "YaZheMat' [IAmAMother]: Are Parents Becoming a Political Force in Russia?"[265] The culture of political and institutional disengagement, particularly in less metropolitan areas such as Tyumen, makes a forecast of parents directing their energy towards politics or public resistance seem unlikely. Yet the stories told by women in these interviews serve to underline some of the ways in which women and mothers in Russia already are (and have been) a strong force of a different kind. My project ultimately highlights some of the ways in which high levels of expertise, navigational capital, and mutual support allowed women to be resilient in the face of institutional adversity and to take active part in negotiating gendered roles and dynamics within their families and social networks. Finally, it illustrates the transgenerational nature of this resilience, enduring and adapting to – or even in spite of – changes within the broader society.

[265] Chernova, Yazhemat': stanut li roditeli politicheskoy siloy? [IAmAMother: Are Parents Becoming a Political Force?].

Appendix 1: Demographic and Socio-Economic Information[266]

Name	Age	Year of Birth	Education	Occupation/ Employment Status	Children	Marital Status / Husband's Occupation[267]
Vera Ivanova	**55**	**1963**	**Higher, two degrees in engineering and finance**	**Now retired. Worked as a "machine builder" then at an oil company.**	**One**	**Divorced**
Svetlana Valerievna	**52**	**1966**	**Higher**	**Officially retired, working as a receptionist**	**Three**	**Widowed**
Natalia Vladimirovna	**40**	**1978**	**Higher, degree in accounting/economics**	**Entrepreneur, on maternity leave**	**Two**	**Married, entrepreneur/ business owner**
Olga Davidovna	**39**	**1979**	**Higher, two degrees in library science and history/Latin teacher**	**Management**	**Two**	**Married, engineer**
Tatiana Nikolaevna	**36**	**1982**	**Higher, two degrees in mathematics and law**	**Real Estate Agent**	**One**	**Married**
Nadezhda (Nadya) Mikhalkova	**35**	**1983**	**Higher, degree in English teaching**	**University English teacher and owner of private English school**	**None**	**Lives with partner, unmarried. Lawyer/ IT specialist.**
Irina Mikhailovna	**34**	**1984**	**Higher, oil and gas university**	**Real estate development**	**One**	**Married**
Elizaveta Borisovna	**34**	**1984**	**Higher, degree in construction and architecture**	**Maternity leave but works from home part time**	**Two**	**Married**
Alexandra Dmitrieva	**31**	**1987**	**Higher, degree in cultural studies**	**Accountant/ bookkeeper**	**None**	**Married**
Oksana Igorevna	**31**	**1987**	**Higher, degree from the department of library sciences in the institute of art and culture**	**Maternity leave**	**Two**	**Married, programmer for oil and gas company**
Kristina Valerievna	**31**	**1987**	**Higher, degree from the department of library sciences in the institute of art and culture**	**Maternity leave**	**Three**	**Married, head engineer in a building company**

[266] Interviewees are listed chronologically by year of birth.
[267] Husband's occupation included if discussed in the interview.

Ekaterina Aleksandrovna	**26**	**1991**	**Higher, degree in railroad management**	**Hairdresser**	**Two (and eight months pregnant at time of interview)**	**Divorced**
Yulia Dimitrova	**27**	**1991**	**Higher, degree in primary school English teaching followed by beauty school**	**Hairdresser**	**None**	**Engaged**
Viktoria (Vika) Igorevna	**27**	**1991**	**Higher, degree in English interpretation and translation**	**Job Seeking**	**None**	**Single**
Galina Petrova	**27**	**1991**	**Higher, degree in engineering (roads and bridges)**	**Engineer, oil and gas sphere**	**One**	**Married**
Yana Arturovna	**26**	**1992**	**Higher, degree in cultural services and tourism**	**Maternity leave**	**Two**	**Married**
Diana Olegovna	**23**	**1995**	**Higher, degree in psychology**	**Early Childhood Educator**	**None**	**Married, oil and gas industry**
Sofia Yuryevna	**22**	**1996**	**Higher, Business Informatics**	**Master's student**	**None**	**Married, husband did not finish higher education now working in a construction firm**
Karina Vadimova	**22**	**1996**	**Higher**	**Maternity leave, studying nights to become an Early Childhood Educator**	**One**	**Married, entrepreneur**
Daria Sergeevna	**20**	**1999**	**Higher, studying management**	**Hairdresser's assistant**	**None**	**Single**
Anastasiia (Nastya) Alekseevna	**18**	**2000**	**Finishing secondary school, plans to attend university**	**Student**	**None**	**Single**

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