

Remembering Soviet Everyday Life - burdens, happiness and advantages of maternity in Soviet Russia in 1950-1960s

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My presentation is dedicated to women's memories about everyday life in Soviet Russia and is based on my dissertation research - "Soviet people with female bodies: performing beauty and maternity in Soviet Russia in the mid 1930-1960s" that I plan to defend in Stockholm. For my dissertation I analyzed discourses of women's magazines and advice publications as well as used oral history approach. I was interested in everyday practices of maternity and beauty and interviewed women from three cities of Russian Federation – Moscow, Saratov and Ufa.

In the first part of my presentation I would shortly discuss a context of my interviews as well as benefits and problems connected with use of oral history for studies of Soviet femininity.

The second part of my presentation is centered around four interviews with women who gave birth to their children in 1950-1960s. I am going to show that femininities created through memories about maternity practices in the 40s and 50s were connected with complicated normativities (cross-section of social status, geographic locality, stage of life-circle, education and cultural belonging). The stories I have studied demonstrate that during this period of time the state's support for mothers of small children was considerably lower than what one could have expected on the base of the robust discourse on "care for mothers". In order to guarantee the physical survival of the child, to manage breastfeeding and childcare and to be able to practice "real" maternal love, the women were developing special skills and mobilizing all possible resources. Stories show that "mothers" were frequently subverting the dominant discourses on maternity by readjusting or misusing them. Maternity practices are presented in the stories as very important for the performance of femininity and absorbing elements of contradictory norms, including practices of religious rituals and abortion.