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# **Reading Femininity, Beauty and Consumption in Russian Women's Magazines**

**Holly Porteous MA (Hons), PgDip Russian Language, MRes**

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy**

**School of Social and Political Sciences  
College of Social Sciences  
University of Glasgow**

**October 2014**

## Abstract

Western-origin women's lifestyle magazines have enjoyed great success in post-Soviet Russia, and represent part of the globalisation of the post-Soviet media landscape. Existing studies of post-Soviet Russian women's magazines have tended to focus on either magazine content or reader interpretations, their role in the media marketplace, or representations of themes such as glamour culture or conspicuous consumption. Based on a discourse analysis of the three Russian women's lifestyle magazines *Elle*, *Liza* and *Cosmopolitan*, and interviews with 39 Russian women, the thesis interrogates femininity norms in contemporary Russia. This thesis addresses a gap in the literature in foregrounding a feminist approach to a combined analysis of both the content of the magazines, and how readers decode the magazines.

Portrayals of embodied femininity in women's magazines are a chief focus, in addition to reader decodings of these portrayals. The thesis shows how certain forms of aesthetic and cultural capital are linked to femininity, and how women's magazines discursively construct normative femininity via portraying these forms of cultural capital as necessary for women. It also relates particular ways of performing femininity, such as conspicuous consumption and beauty labour, to wider patriarchal discourses in Russian society. Furthermore, the thesis engages with pertinent debates around cultural globalisation in relation to post-Soviet media and culture, and addresses both change and continuity in post-Soviet gender norms; not only from the Soviet era into the present, but across an oft-perceived East/West axis via the horizontalization and glocalisation of culture.

The thesis discusses two main aspects of change: 1) the role now played by conspicuous consumption in social constructions of normative femininity; and 2) the expectation of ever increasing resources women are now expected to devote to beauty labour as part of performing normative femininity. However, I also argue that it is appropriate from a gender studies perspective to highlight Russian society as *patriarchal* as well as *post-socialist*. As such, I highlight the cross-cultural experiences women in contemporary Russia share with women in other parts of the world. Accordingly, the research suggests that women's lifestyle magazines in the post-Soviet era have drawn on more established gender discourses in Soviet-Russian society as a means of facilitating the introduction of relatively new norms and practices, particularly linked to a culture of conspicuous consumption.

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## Acknowledgments

I have been lucky to receive the kind help and support of many people since I began this thesis. First and foremost, I owe a great debt to the women in St Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod who gave up their time to be interviewed for this research, and very much appreciate their openness, thoughtfulness and willingness to discuss their experiences with me.

A big thank you must also go to my supervisors at the University of Glasgow, Professor Rebecca Kay and Dr Francesca Stella, who were enthusiastic, engaged and perceptive sources of advice during the writing of this thesis. Both of them have made many invaluable suggestions, and have also encouraged me to take new opportunities and develop as a researcher.

I'm especially grateful to friends and colleagues in the Department of Central & East European Studies, where I have made my home as an undergrad, postgrad and tutor over the past decade. Many people there have contributed to this thesis in terms of feedback and advice, and I am particularly grateful for the four years of GTA funding I received which enabled me to carry out this piece of research. I have received further support for language training, fieldwork and conference attendance from CRCEES, the Fran Trust in Scotland, and BASEES.

The help of numerous people was instrumental in enabling me to carry out fieldwork in Russia. In Ul'yanovsk: thanks to Irina Lyakhova for providing valuable early advice on women's magazines; to Elena Aristova for her hospitality (and Artyom for introducing me to *durak* and Sisters of Mercy!). In St Petersburg: thank you to Anna Temkina and Nadya Nartova for their advice on finding participants; to Albina Gasimova for her advice and help with visas and transcription; and to Nastya Gritskova for very kindly finding me missing copies of *Elle* magazine. Dasha Egorova, Maria Zhigalova and Ekaterina Tkachuk were all very generous with their time; and thanks also to Irin Breining for helping when my laptop gave up, and putting up with a successive number of Glasgow flatmates! In

Nizhny Novgorod: many thanks to Oksana Lopatina, whose help was integral to the second part of my fieldwork. Thanks also to Alexander Soldatkin and Nina Ivashinenko for their help with visas, contacts and other practicalities; and to Natasha Sidorova, for her assistance and friendship.

Thanks to Katja Lehtisaari for her help in organising my time as a visiting scholar at the Aleksanteri Institute in Helsinki, and to Jukka Pietiläinen, Olga Gurova and Saara Ratilainen for their valuable perspectives on aspects of this thesis during my stay. I am also grateful for comments received on my work in workshops I attended in 2013: both *Russian and East European media: Perspectives on Consumption and Social Change* at Aleksanteri, and *Gender and Post-Soviet Discourses* at Södertörn University.

There are many friends and family who have helped with this research, both directly and indirectly. The biggest thank you goes to Michael for providing no end of love, advice, practical help, morale boosts and packed lunches – and especially for never complaining when I disappeared abroad every summer. I also can't imagine getting through the past five years without the various CEES office pals who've come and gone, without whom this experience would have been a lot less fun. Thanks to Liam O'Shea and Neil Martin for sharing travels and flats in Russia; and to Lena Podolian, for early Russian conversation practice. Claire and Axel Welsh have throughout the thesis provided welcome distractions in the form of Harris and Molly!

Acknowledgements must also go to Gwen and Michael Porteous, for sparking my fascination with Russia many years ago. Jane and Shaun Comerford often went beyond the call of duty to get me to and from airports, and have been incredibly kind in other ways. On a related note, thanks also to Emma and James for taking me to Heathrow so early in the morning! I am grateful to Dad and Alison, who have been a great source of support and advice. Neil Robson and Lucy and Bill Newbegin have also given me a great deal of support (and cake!) over the years, and my wonderful, now not-so-little sisters Olivia and Georgia are a constant source of inspiration. Finally, thanks to my mum, Rosie Robson, for everything – but especially for her strength, and for her feminism.

## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name \_\_\_\_\_

## List of Tables

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 General Introduction

Women's lifestyle magazines have a substantial presence in recent studies of post-Soviet society and culture. Aside from research into the magazines as a phenomenon in themselves (Kalacheva, 2002; Stephenson, 2007; Gudova & Rakipova, 2010), they have featured to a greater or lesser extent in debates around conspicuous consumption (Patiko, 2008; Ratilainen, 2013); gender relations (Kay, 1997); mass media (Omel'chenko & Bliudina, 2002; Mironenko, 2007; Pietiläinen, 2008); and glamour culture (Menzel, 2008; Rudova, 2008; Goscilo & Strukov, 2011) in Russian society. This is partly attributable to their long-term historical significance: from one perspective, they were widely read and culturally significant throughout the Soviet period. This is reflected in their presence in scholarship on Soviet history (McAndrew, 1985; Dotlibova & Nemec Ignashev, 1989; Azhgikhina & Goscilo, 1996; Vainshtein, 1996; Attwood, 1999; Gradszkova, 2007b). However, they have also been subject to considerable changes in form, style and content since the debut international women's magazines began to emerge during the Gorbachev period. Not only have Soviet-era women's magazines such as *Krest'ianka* been forced to adapt to a more Westernised formula to survive (Ratilainen, 2013), but a considerable number of other Western-origin magazines have arrived on the market in the past twenty years (Pietiläinen, 2008); for example, *Elle*, *Liza*, *Marie Claire*, *Burda Moden*, to name a small selection. In contrast to their Soviet counterparts, magazines now embody values that were anathema to official Soviet state ideology, such as individualism, glamour, and conspicuous consumption. However, there are also parallels that may be drawn with Soviet

portrayals of femininity. As such, women's magazines are an interesting measure of how gender discourses are, and have been, mediated in Russian popular culture.

Furthermore, given that gender equality and feminism are often perceived in Russian public discourse as counterintuitive and even threatening to mainstream ideas about Russian national identity (Temkina & Zdravomyslova, 2014), the present decade is a pertinent time to revisit the potential significance of women's magazines as constructing and reflecting gender norms in contemporary Russian society. As a result of the failure of the Soviet leadership to address 'the women question', an emphasis on gender *differences* in official state discourse was understood by many as progressive rather than a step backwards for post-Soviet women (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996). In contrast, many Western countries had by the 1990s witnessed the rise of 'post-feminist' discourses (McRobbie, 2004; Gill, 2007b), which position feminism as no longer necessary. Building on the gains of the second wave feminist movement, these discourses also neglect ongoing gender inequalities. Given the continuity of magazine brands in these two contexts despite their different histories, a study of the magazines and of Russian women's interpretations of their dominant gender discourses brings a different perspective to studies of the Russian context. This is especially so given that existing studies of Russian women's magazines tend to focus on either content (Ratilainen, 2013), wider cultural resonance (Gudova & Rakipova, 2010) or audience reception (Kalacheva, 2002). Those that feature both tend to be fairly limited in scope and discussion (Stephenson, 2007).

The wider political, economic and socio-cultural context also supports the case for an up to date feminist analysis of Western-origin media and its positioning in the post-socialist world. Ongoing globalisation of the economic and cultural spheres in Russia over the past

two decades now seems to be increasingly accompanied by a rejection of ‘Western’ norms; an analysis of binaries of ‘East’/‘West’ and ‘global’/‘local’ from a socio-cultural perspective helps to illuminate the ways these discourses are used on an everyday basis (see Pilkington et al, 2002). Whereas some former socialist countries have been absorbed into the European Union and have been expected to undergo a ‘transformation’ towards Western liberal democratic values, others such as the Russian Federation are in many ways resisting the idea of a ‘transition’ to these values. Debates around the meaning of such simultaneously monolithic and vague terms as ‘East’ and ‘West’ now exist in an ever more technologically sophisticated twenty-first century context, in which currents of globalisation sit alongside the neo-traditionalist policies of the Putin government (Rivkin-Fish, 2010), the socio-cultural legacy of the Cold War, and the efforts of international organisations such as the United Nations to promote “global standards and norms” around gender equality (‘About UN Women’, [unwomen.org](http://unwomen.org); accessed 01/05/14). Events in Ukraine and Crimea in early 2014 are symbolic of ongoing international tensions based around notions of East and West which many hoped had been dampened by the end of the Cold War. Thus, examining whether such tensions are also reflected in socio-cultural spheres of Russian life represents a pertinent question for scholars of the region.

## **1.2 Women's Magazines as an Object of Study**

Women’s magazines present an important source of information about socio-cultural norms of femininity for two main reasons. Firstly, they are a type of media aimed at women solely because of their gender. For feminist scholars from the 1970s, they have prompted the question of why gender should be one of the main lines along which magazines are sold; indeed, McRobbie (1997c: 191) notes that they have become "part of

the history of the development of feminism in the academy". Studying portrayals of gender in such an overtly gendered media format offers a rich opportunity to examine what mainstream media represents as significant for women's interests.

Secondly, women's magazines are one of the most popular forms of media in the Russian Federation (Pietiläinen, 2008). They seek to appeal to a wide enough audience to sell as many copies of each issue as possible, and enough advertising space to make the titles profitable. As such, women's magazines essentially form part of the regular cultural scenery of readers' lives, representing a significant source of gender socialisation (Gudova & Rakipova, 2010: 6). Insofar as they have been viewed as "a kind of barometer of how womanhood and girlhood are currently represented in the popular media" (McRobbie, 1997c: 191), they arguably represent mainstream femininity norms, and offer a rich source of data for those wishing to analyse gender norms in twenty-first century Russia.

### **1.3 Gender Studies Background**

The approach I take to an analysis of dominant gender discourses in Russian society and culture is based on a view of gender as socially constructed; i.e. notions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' are not linked to biological truths (Oakley, 1972). According to this view, gender may be seen as discursively constructed via language (Butler, 1990/2006: 12) and as "a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction" (West & Zimmerman, 1987: 125). The topic of gender is approached from the viewpoint that portrayals of gender in popular culture, and the way the audience decode and relate to these portrayals, is vital to an understanding of the socio-cultural norms that form understandings of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' in any given society. The thesis is predicated on the notion that socio-



cultural gender norms act upon – and are acted upon by – gender norms in political, legal, economic and other spheres.

In using this approach, the thesis addresses specific themes in feminist and gender studies. Firstly, the thesis draws upon feminist analyses of the female body in society and culture. This is inspired by feminist explorations of bodily surveillance and disciplinarity, drawing on feminist interpretations of the theories of Michel Foucault (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1993/2003; Heyes, 2007), and also of the female body as a means of “doing” gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and gaining ‘aesthetic capital’ (Anderson et al, 2010). Secondly, the thesis engages with feminist debates around agency and the decoding of culture and media aimed at women. Key studies in this field include Radway (1983), Ang (1985), Frazer (1987) and Hermes (1995). Recent feminist debates indicate the contentiousness of this issue; for example discussions between Gill (2007a) and Duits & van Zoonen (2007). This thesis addresses a gap in the literature by looking at these issues in the Russian context, on which little work comparing media content with audience reception has been done from a gender perspective.

## **1.4 Gender and Women's Magazines in the Russian Context**

To very briefly contextualise popular women’s magazines in Russia, in the USSR the flowering of literacy in the first years after the October Revolution was mirrored in the growth of every kind of periodical, including those aimed at women, who were seen to play an important role in educating newly literate workers and shoring up support for the new regime. *Rabotnitsa*, aimed at women workers, first appeared before the revolution on 8th March 1914, aiming to radicalise readers into supporting communism. *Krest’ianka*, a

magazine for peasant women, followed as Bolshevik power was crystallising in June 1922 (Gudova & Rakipova, 2010: 12). Several other titles for women were published on a local or regional basis (Attwood, 1999: 26), and women also acquired Western magazines such as *Burda Moden* on the black market and eventually as part of *Rabotnitsa* magazine in the 1970s (Bartlett, 2010: 251). Party publications aimed at women had a clear educational and propagandising role throughout the Soviet period; however, Western media became more widely available with the onset of Gorbachev's *glasnost* in the late 1980s. After the fall of state socialism, the 1990s saw a boom in Russian versions of international women's magazines. Most Soviet women's magazines gradually disappeared, with the exception of *Krest'ianka*, which adapted to the style and content of its newer rivals, and *Rabotnitsa*, whose style remains more old-fashioned.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas the topic of women's magazines has been explored with reference to the Soviet era (McAndrew, 1985; Attwood, 1999; Gradsanova, 2007b) and to post-Soviet Russia (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996; Kay, 1997; Kelly, 1998; Goscilo, 2000; Kalacheva, 2002; Stephenson, 2007; Ratilainen, 2013), there has been little work on audience reception of women's magazines in Russia, and none which takes an overtly feminist approach to gender portrayals and how they are understood by magazine readers. For example, existing studies have looked at interpretations of media in the Russian context (Omel'chenko & Bliudina, 2002), at magazines as part of Russian reading culture and part of consumer culture (Ratilainen, 2013), or have included data on the growing sales figures of foreign-origin women's magazine genre in the Russian marketplace (Pietiläinen, 2008). Women's magazines have also been mentioned or analysed as part of more general social currents

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<sup>1</sup> See 'Rabotnitsa. Zhurnal dlya zhenshchin i sem'irabotnitsa-magazine.ru' (consulted 07/05/14). As of 2007, *Rabotnitsa* held a 0.3% share of the market, and *Krest'ianka* held 0.8% (Pietiläinen, 2008: 376).

such as the rise of *glamur* (glamour) culture in Russia (Ratilainen, 2012; Goscilo & Strukov, 2011; Klingseis, 2011; Litovskaia & Shaburova, 2010; Gusarova, 2008; Rudova, 2008; 2011; Menzel, 2008). In terms of the themes of beauty and femininity, Gradszkova (2007a; 2007b; 2008) and Gurova (2009) have covered similar thematic and methodological ground to this research from a historical point of view, and thus the thesis provides an updated view on issues that have already been shown to be culturally significant, bringing in a perspective from the 2010s. Although some of this work has addressed gender as an aspect, this thesis addresses a gap in the literature by foregrounding a feminist perspective on women's magazines in the Putin era.

Furthermore, the thesis takes a gender perspective on debates around how Westernisation and globalisation are portrayed and understood in the Russian socio-cultural landscape, a theme which has been prominent in areas of research on Russia relating to my central topics (see Gurova, 2012; Gudova & Rakipova, 2010; Menzel; 2008; Patino, 2005; 2008; Caldwell, 2004, 2002; Kalacheva, 2002; Pilkington et al, 2002; Goscilo, 2000; Barker, 1999; Omel'chenko & Aristarkhova, 1999; Zelensky, 1999; Kay, 1997; Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996).

## **1.5 Thesis Aims**

This thesis carries out a discourse analysis of the three different Russian women's lifestyle magazines – *Elle*, *Liza* and *Cosmopolitan*. It also draws on interviews with 39 Russian women who were, or had previously been, readers of women's lifestyle magazines. The main aims of this thesis are as follows:

1. To critically interrogate popular contemporary Russian women's lifestyle magazines as texts, with a view to determining dominant or significant gender discourses in the media and amongst magazine readers in relation to the themes of femininity, beauty and conspicuous consumption;
2. To examine Russian women's views of femininity, beauty, conspicuous consumption, and women's magazines, with the aim of exploring interactions between gender discourses encoded in women's magazines, and as decoded by their audience;
3. To explore continuities and changes in terms of gender discourses over the post-Soviet period in Russia, especially in the light of debates around the globalisation and/or Westernisation of Russian media and society.

## **1.6 Thesis Structure**

Chapter 2, a review of relevant literature, contextualises the thesis within relevant theoretical debates, and critically examines previous empirical work relating to gender in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. To begin, section 2.2 of the chapter discusses gendered bodies and women's magazines from a feminist perspective, drawing on feminist theoretical perspectives taken from the work of Michel Foucault (1979/1991), Judith Butler (1988; 1990/2006) and West & Zimmerman (1987), amongst others. Then, section 2.3 sets out the approach taken by the thesis in relation to gendered forms of non-economic capital – particularly cultural capital and aesthetic capital. I also discuss my use of the term beauty labour to describe work associated with building gendered forms of cultural capital. In

section 2.4, I examine beauty and femininity in the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian context, exploring change and continuity over these eras. Section 2.5 examines the existing feminist and gender studies literature on women's magazines and wider gendered culture, particularly in relation to different ways they are decoded. In section 2.6 and 2.7, the chapter once more focuses on the literature on Russian studies; firstly, by exploring debates around globalisation and Westernisation, and secondly by analysing literature on conspicuous consumption in Russia and how this may be viewed from a feminist perspective.

Chapter 3 details not only how fieldwork and analysis were conducted, but explains the design of the research project and decisions made in its implementation. It also discusses the ethical considerations encountered during the research process and beyond, and the subjective positioning of myself as a researcher, and setting out my feminist and reflexive approach to my methodology.

In Chapter 4, the first empirical chapter, I analyse how women's bodies are portrayed in contemporary Russian women's magazines, arguing that the female body is depicted as a central reflection of a woman's worth. This chapter also looks at discursive constructions of beauty labour as a key way that gender is performatively (Butler, 1990/2006) constructed in women's magazines. The chapter largely draws parallels with existing feminist literature on the body, and with portrayals of femininity in Soviet society. It considers gender binaries, discussing how women's bodies are often represented by metonymic parts which are classified in binary terms as feminine/unfeminine. Women's bodies are also understood according to the assumption that they must be in need of surveillance; feminist work using Michel Foucault's notion of bodily disciplinarity, by

scholars such as Sandra Bartky (1988), Susan Bordo (1993/2003) and Cressida Heyes (2007), is central to developing the chapter's theoretical perspective. In addition, the chapter introduces Pierre Bourdieu's (1984/2010) theory of cultural capital to the empirical analysis, arguing that beauty labour, as a means of performing femininity (West & Zimmerman, 1987), is understood as a key way of creating cultural and aesthetic capital for women.

Chapter 5, which is based on interview analysis, shows how beauty labour is also understood by Russian women as a form of gender performance (West & Zimmerman, 1987). I discuss how discursive constructions of femininity in women's magazines may often be related not only to the ways women perform beauty labour, but to how women decode and are affected by magazine discourses. The chapter shows how magazines can act as gender socialisation in post-Soviet Russia, taking on a similar role to that of Soviet and Western women's magazines. Beauty and femininity are discussed in relation to Russian national identity, as a way of marking out 'Russianness' against Western versions of femininity. The chapter also engages with theoretical debates around agency in relation to media discourses, mainly via analysing reader understandings of beauty labour as a duty or a pleasure.

In Chapter 6, I show how the women's lifestyle magazines analysed contain an almost constant imperative for the reader to consume new products and services. From a feminist perspective, magazines are shown to portray conspicuous consumption, in tandem with beauty labour, as a key part of performing and achieving normative femininity. Section 6.2 critically analyses and compares sample issues of *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle* and *Liza* from February 2011. Section 6.3 goes on to discuss wider tactics used by all three magazines to

persuade the reader to consume regularly, linking these tactics into femininity discourses discussed in the previous chapter. I argue that conspicuous consumption is one aspect of women's magazines that characterises their post-Soviet incarnation as a particularly 'glocalised' form of media that has led to changes in how normative femininity is socially constructed and understood. Women's magazines can be seen as purveyors of escapism and pleasure, especially in relation to the wider literature on glamour in post-Soviet society.

Chapter 7 addresses the question of how women negotiate the linking of femininity in women's magazines to an often unrealistic level of conspicuous consumption, as discussed in Chapter 6. It also looks at the different ways women's lifestyle magazines are decoded, and how the ways that women categorise them as high or low culture affect this decoding process. The analysis is contextualised within the wider literature on glamour, beauty and fashion in Soviet and post-Soviet society, and explores continuity and change in Russian society over the past two decades. Although I examine the opportunities readers perceive they main gain by reading magazines, I argue that it is important to position this with regard to the gendered nature of this capital which reflects wider gender inequality in society.

Chapter 8 in many ways brings together themes from the previous four chapters, drawing on both interview and magazine analysis. I discuss fantasy femininity discourses in women's magazines, arguing that specific archetypes of femininity serve to highlight themes already discussed in the previous chapters. I also argue that fantasy figures, from princesses and fairies to celebrities and oligarchs' wives, are used to represent normative femininity in contemporary Russia (whether they are idealised portrayals or negative

characterisations of womanhood). The chapter also highlights how fantasy forms part of the debates around glamour culture, and the globalisation or Westernisation of various aspects of Russian culture in the post-Soviet era.

The final chapter brings together the above discussions and draws conclusions around the main areas explored in the thesis, particularly regarding elements of continuity and change in gender norms since the collapse of state socialism. Section 9.1 discusses these conclusions in more depth, drawing conclusions from the thesis in relation to issues of globalisation and Westernisation, femininity norms, and conspicuous consumption. Following on from this, section 9.2 considers the contribution the thesis seeks to make to existing debates within both gender studies and Russian studies. Moving on, section 9.3 explores the limitations of the research, both in terms of topics it has been possible to pay sufficient attention to, and in possibilities for future research highlighted by this research project. Finally, section 9.4 offers some brief concluding remarks reflecting on the thesis as a whole.



## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter positions the thesis within wider theoretical and empirical debates around gender, gendered media and culture, conspicuous consumption, and the post-Soviet context. It also introduces themes and concepts which will be put to use in later empirical chapters, and gives an overview of sociological and cultural theory that has contributed to my analysis of gender in contemporary Russian society. As the main themes are very much overlapping and intertwining in the thesis, this review of the main literature is structured into themes that may themselves overlap.

Section 2.2 is concerned with socio-cultural understandings of the gendered body. It looks specifically at the female body as a signifier of gender on a socio-cultural level, employing feminist theory readings of Michel Foucault (1979/1991) to discuss how the female body can be understood as in need for surveillance and discipline. The work of Judith Butler (1988; 1990/2006; 1993) and West & Zimmerman (1987) frames my analysis of femininity as a social construction linked to bodily norms and gendered discourses. Furthermore, it looks at how feminists have positioned women's magazines as reflective of dominant discourses around the female body.

Section 2.3 looks at the themes of beauty and non-economic capital. Bringing in theoretical perspectives from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984/2010), it examines the role played by

the female body in acquiring aesthetic capital (Anderson et al, 2010).

Section 2.4 gives some empirical background to socio-cultural norms of beauty from Soviet to post-Soviet Russia, examining the continuities and changes prompted by political and socio-economic policy. It gives a historical background to the thesis, drawing on key work on gender and beauty from a historical (e.g. Azhgikhina & Goscilo, 1996; Attwood, 2001; Gradsikova, 2007b; Bartlett, 2004; 2010) and sociological perspective (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996; Kay, 1997; Moran et al, 2009; Cohen, 2013).

Section 2.5 reviews different perspectives on women's media and culture, specifically focusing on key feminist debates around how media is decoded. After offering a perspective on how women's magazines have been studied (McRobbie, 1978, 1997c; Frazer, 1987), it explores how particular social constructions of women's culture and media as low in status (Ang, 1985; Hermes, 1995) may contribute to the ways they are perceived and decoded by readers. It also looks at different ways of decoding gendered cultural forms in relation to the pleasure women gain from them (Winship, 1987; Stevens, 2002), the escapism that reading can entail (Currie, 1999; Stevens, Maclaren & Brown, 2003), or the critical readings women have been shown to enact (Ballaster et al, 1991).

Section 2.6 examines the issue of globalisation as related to the contemporary Russian media. It considers socio-cultural developments in post-Soviet Russia in relation to understandings of East/West and Russian/non-Russian (see Gurova, 2012; Gudova & Rakipova, 2010; Menzel, 2008; Patico, 2005; 2008; Caldwell, 2004, 2002; Kalacheva, 2002; Pilkington et al, 2002; Goscilo, 2000; Barker, 1999; Omel'chenko, 1999; Zelensky, 1999; Kay, 1997; Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996), and explains why these are relevant in

looking at femininity and gendered media in the contemporary context.

Finally, section 2.7 focuses on conspicuous consumption, especially in relation to gendered media and related themes such as ‘glamour’ in the post-Soviet context (e.g. Stephenson, 2007; Patino, 2008; Gusarova 2008; Rudova, 2008; 2011; Menzel, 2008; Litovskaia & Shaburova, 2010; Klingseis, 2011; Goscilo & Strukov, 2011; Ratilainen, 2012). The section details how changing consumption habits have been used by some scholars as one means of analysing socio-cultural change since the collapse of communism (Gurova, 2012; Gudova & Rakipova, 2010; Shevchenko, 2002; Kalacheva, 2002; Oushakine, 2000), and explores their significance in relation to gender discourses in contemporary Russian women’s media.

## **2.2 Gendered Bodies and Women's Magazines**

This thesis aims to explore and critically interrogate bodily norms as key to understandings of femininity in Russian women’s lifestyle magazines, and in wider Russian society. This chapter thus begins by identifying feminist critiques around gender norms and the female body, assessing how the latter can be seen as a site upon which patriarchal gender norms are inscribed.

### 2.2.1 Feminist Approaches to the Body

Our body, in contrast to our organism, is not a naturally given thing, but a product of culture. Our body is not just a torso [*tulovishche*], not an anatomical map. It is a symbolic representation of cultural experience, identity and uniqueness. (Kosterina, 2008: 45)

Since the 1960s and second-wave feminism, the body has remained an important focus of

analysis amongst gender scholars. Feminist debates around issues such as abortion, sexual assault and rape within marriage, are centred on a woman's right to ownership over her body. In relation to how feminists have conceptualised the body, embodiment and subjectivity are two vital conceptual terms used in this thesis, which uses interviews to explore women's experiences of embodiment in relation to gender norms in Russian society.

Firstly, embodiment encompasses the notion that "our bodies are who we are and are inextricably linked to an understanding of the self" (Woodward, 2008: 84). Given that gender is often immediately assessed by others via the appearance of the body, and is one of the first things we notice about other people, embodiment is key to an understanding of gender as an aspect of individual experience, and as a wider social category. As such, feminists such as Susan Bordo (1993/2003) and Cressida Heyes (2007) have explored how self-expression via the body necessarily reflects social gender norms:

[T]he idea that our embodied deviances or conformities are or should be expressions of an inner self is, I argue, often deployed not as the gesture toward recognition it wants to be, but rather as a mechanism of docility we should resist. (Heyes, 2007: 17)

In addition to embodiment, this research builds upon the notion of subjectivity, which refers to an understanding of lived experience as constitutive of 'subjects' on the basis that bodies are "arenas for the complex production of gendered subjectivities" (Mac an Ghail & Heywood, 2007: 151). This is based on Michel Foucault's definition of "being as historically constituted as experience" (Skeggs, 1997: 27). Subjectivity is, in the Foucauldian sense, defined against notions of a fixed and coherent identity: the individual is a "discursive subject" (Strozier, 2002: 12), the product of social discourses and disciplines (on which more below). It is important to note that subjective bodily experience

is also linked to Foucault's theories on power: he conceptualises the body as an object moulded by the expert gaze and state power, and at how forms of power have moved through history from being explicitly used by the sovereign against individual bodies ('sovereign power') to becoming more diffuse and dependent on notions of surveillance and self-surveillance ('disciplinary power') (Heyes, 2007: 28). Foucault explains that modern societies have reached a form of power which, in contrast to earlier periods of human history which relied on the threat of death, "has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize [...] it effects distributions around the norm" (1978: 144).

As part of this, social norms operate via normative discourses, which relate to language and social practices. According to Fairclough et al (2011: 358), discourse is "socially *constitutive* as well as socially shaped: it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it". Foucauldian theory, as Heyes explains, positions the gendered body within a wider disciplinary understanding of how power operates via discourse in modern societies; it is no longer a top-down process but "an ubiquitous relation within which multiple local forms of domination, discipline, or denial of self-government can occur" (2007: 71).

Feminist scholars have utilised Foucault's work on bodily discipline and surveillance in critiques of discourses on women's bodies (for example, Bartky, 1988; Deveaux, 1994; Bordo, 1993/2003; Jeffreys, 2005; Heyes, 2007), suggesting that women's bodies are infused by patriarchal power in contemporary Western culture. A key aspect of this discipline has been the tendency to view women's bodies as somehow unruly or 'anarchic'

(Gatens, 1996). This positioning of the female body has a basis in binary notions of gendered bodies: women's bodies are habitually viewed in comparison with, and as opposite to, men's bodies; they are thus seen as somehow special, specific or 'Othered' next to the 'neutral' male body. Such a view relies on fundamentally androcentric social structures (as first discussed by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 1911/2011).

It is also possible to trace these ideas of the female body to notions of a mind/body dichotomy based in Enlightenment ideas (Laqueur, 1990). The body, rather than being part of the self, is seen as a separate entity from the mind, and often as a threat to the core Enlightenment virtue of logic and rationality. The body thus detracts from a more perfect notion of the self, something that can be traced back to the beginnings of philosophical thought (Bordo, 1993/2003: 144-145) as well as to mind/body and culture/nature dichotomies expounded by early feminists such as Shulamith Firestone and Simone de Beauvoir (Gatens, 1996: 278). This dichotomy was extrapolated onto gender relations: because of bodily functions such as menstruation and their childbearing capabilities, femininity has been linked to the (unruly) body, and masculinity to logic, rationality and intellect. Partly because their bodies were viewed as somehow inherently unreliable, but also due to men's desires to exert control over women's reproductive capacities, women have been (with a few notable exceptions) excluded from positions of political and economic power throughout history.

Foucault's idea of bodily disciplinarity has been subject to feminist critique for its failure to recognise certain gendered aspects of bodily disciplinarity (amongst other things) (Deveaux, 1994). However, feminists have *adapted* this theoretical approach to suggest that, as explicit forms of patriarchal power (e.g. political, economic) over women's bodies

have become more diffuse, women themselves have turned to greater surveillance of their bodies. (See Wolf, 1991; Faludi, 1991/2010; Bordo, 1993/2003; Heyes, 2007.) One way in which Foucauldian surveillance, self-surveillance and disciplinarity may be said to operate is via the ‘gaze’: an awareness of surveillance (whether one’s own or that of others) over one’s body. Foucault first spoke about the “medical gaze” in *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963/2012), and expands this notion in *Discipline and Punish* (1979/1991), where he discusses the significance of self-surveillance in modifying the behaviour of individuals. The idea that women experience their femininity as if under the constant watch of a specific *male* gaze was an idea first explored by Laura Mulvey (1975) in her work on cinema in the 1970s, and Teresa de Lauretis (1984) has widened the gender perspective of this theory. However, the idea has been used in other work, where individuals are understood to live as if under the constant scrutiny of others, leading to practices of bodily discipline (Rysst, 2010: 72). Some results of this have included the institution of internalised patriarchal norms regarding the female body, leading to understandings of femininity as entailing competition between women (e.g. to have the best body). Whereas Stuart & Donaghue (2012) discuss this competition (or desire to please other women) via becoming more beautiful as outside of the realm of patriarchal discourses due to the focus being taken away from male attention, I would argue that this is precisely an area in which patriarchal discourses on gendered bodies help to form social norms.

### 2.2.2 The Body, Gender Performativity and “Doing” Gender

Women’s bodies have also been argued to be primary signifiers of an individual woman’s ‘femininity’ – her ability to meet cultural norms around what it means to be a woman. In this section I introduce two linked, but nevertheless distinct theoretical perspectives which contribute to my empirical analysis of gender in contemporary Russia.

Firstly, Judith Butler (1988; 1990/2006; 1993) has led gender studies debates around ‘femininity’ and the female body since the publication of her seminal work *Gender Trouble* in 1990. Butler’s work on gender performativity highlights masculinity and femininity as social constructs that are discursively constructed via the repetition of norms through language (Brickell, 2003: 166), and yet which are also commonly understood as supposedly ‘natural’ attributes of biologically sexed (male/female) bodies. She bases her deconstruction of gender as a category around the assertion that a heterosexual matrix is vital to how gender is understood, and furthermore asserts that heteronormativity – the assumption of heterosexuality as the norm – contributes to the construction of gender as a binary category.

Butler bases the notion of gender performativity on the premise that identities are performative, and have no ontological reality (Salih, 2005). Butler writes that “identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (1990/2006: 25). As such, her work destabilises notions of gender, biological sex and sexuality, and explores how these discursive categories may affect the construction of gendered subjectivities. For Butler, gender is an aspect of subjectivity that is being constantly renegotiated via discourse. Butler works from the assumption that the body is in no way inherently or naturally gendered; however, she also accepts the necessity of employing gendered terms for political (i.e. feminist) purposes, even if she questions their ontological basis (1988: 529). In agreement with this, although I would accept the notion of gender performativity as contributing towards a socially constructed notion of ‘identity’ as Butler argues, from a feminist viewpoint I retain a notion of ‘woman’ as a politically important (albeit socially constructed) category for analysis in this thesis.



Butler's work is particularly significant in my analysis of 1) how gender is discursively constructed in Russian women's magazines; and 2) the language readers employ in discussing gender. However, this perspective is not in itself sufficient to enable me to analyse the everyday practices women engage in to perform and embody 'proper' femininity and accomplish 'gender'— whereas Butler addresses performativity, this is centred largely on gendered discourses rather than behaviours (Brickell, 2003).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, some critics have noted the problematic aspects of transferring Butler's performativity – a theory based largely on discourse analysis – into the sociological realm: Nelson (2012) notes that this approach leaves little room for exploration of how subjects negotiate practices associated with identity, or of the reflexivity and agency they may have in these processes.

Therefore, to facilitate my exploration of everyday *performances* of gender, I also draw upon Candace West & Don H. Zimmerman's discussion of "doing gender": that gender is "a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction" (1987: 125). In this, they draw upon performance as a dramaturgical metaphor, a sociological perspective which has in turn been based largely around debates emanating from Erving Goffman's (1959) influential work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. West & Zimmerman argue that individuals "organize their various and manifold activities to reflect or express gender, and [...] are disposed to perceive the behaviour of others in a similar light (1987: 127). Furthermore, they note that if "we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals [...] may be called to account (for our character, motives, and predispositions)" (Ibid: 146).

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<sup>2</sup> Brickell (2003) also discusses the various ways in which performativity and performance have been conflated, exploring common misinterpretations of Butler's work.

This thesis explores the gendered body as a site used to perform and (re)produce femininity, and the penalties associated with being perceived (or perceiving oneself) as failing to accomplish normative gender relations and appearances.<sup>3</sup>

Brickell notes that although there are differences between gender performance and gender performativity, they do have some shared aims: most notably for this thesis, both regard “naturalness” as a social construction (2003: 170-171). This will be shown to have implications for social constructions of femininity in the contemporary Russian context, in that gender is discursively portrayed as both natural and achieved; and that individuals take part in behaviours to accomplish normative femininity or masculinity, similarly suggesting that it is both natural and achieved. As a preliminary example of this, normative femininity is often *discursively linked* to smooth, hairless skin; yet, for the vast majority of women, to achieve this look demands *performing* gender in the form of hair removal. The following sections will discuss additional and related theoretical positions on the subject of gendered bodies.

### 2.2.3 The Female Body and Social Worth

One significant motivation for a feminist critique of the social construction of femininity as inseparably linked to bodily appearance is based around the idea that a woman’s worth is primarily reflected in her body. Whatever a woman may do or say in everyday life, whatever status she may hold in economic or social terms, to a large extent her body is seen to represent her worth as an individual. Heyes’ (2007) work on women’s bodies,

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<sup>3</sup>Based on Brickell’s (2003) observations about the background behind the literature discussing ‘performances’ of gender (as opposed to performativity), the terms “doing” gender/femininity and “performing” gender/femininity are used interchangeably in this thesis with reference to West & Zimmerman’s (1987) approach.

utilising Foucault's framework of disciplinarity, is one critique of this patriarchal discourse. Although she focuses specifically on three core topics of dieting for weight loss, cosmetic surgery and gender reassignment surgery, I argue along similar lines in this thesis that an idea of the female body as unruly can also be seen in other forms of bodily discipline. Heyes argues that Western societies "are being drawn increasingly into a model of subjectivity in which the concepts of the authentic inner and often deceptive outer are incorporated into the structure of the self and become the implicit justification for technologies aimed at transforming the body. [...]Through working on the body, the inner truth of the self can be displayed, and painful moments of false recognition can be avoided" (2007: 22-23). This argument highlights the morality often associated with the body's appearance: individuals (and particularly women) are judged on their ability to present a normative body, and it is assumed that this body is a direct result of their own lifestyle or actions.

Heyes gives the example of the dieter, who wishes to be seen as "a moderate, well-disciplined, and hardworking person, whose moral character deserves to be read from her slender form". Contemporary debates around 'fat-shaming' are another way bodies have become linked to notions of individual morality and even good citizenship (Farrell, 2011). Similarly, "the recipient of cosmetic surgery is "beautiful inside" and wants to be received by others as an attractive and desirable individual" (Heyes, 2007: 23). Heyes shows how, through institutions such as Weight Watchers, women are continually confronted with the message that their inner, supposedly more perfect self can be manifested via the corporeal self. Such discourses essentially revive the mind/body dichotomy discussed earlier in this chapter (Laqueur, 1990), and stress its gendered aspects. However, they also add a further, gendered binary of feminine/non-feminine, in

that women's appearances are judged via a set of normatively<sup>4</sup> feminine criteria.<sup>5</sup>

The idea of the body as an outward manifestation of morality (Hesse-Biber, 1996; Tyler & Abbot, 1998) can also be seen as contributing to contemporary social norms: dominant discourses in society and culture imply that one's own body, however imperfect, should be made closer to the norm as a matter of personal responsibility to the self and to society.<sup>6</sup> What is more, practices of bodily discipline are highly normative, and reflect social pressure on women to spend a considerable amount of time, money and energy on them – arguably much more pressure than men face to take part in the same activities.<sup>7</sup> It is thus not just disciplinarity itself that is problematic from a feminist perspective, but the “continual” aspect: work on the body is more of a constant and never-ending struggle for many women, and has been argued to contribute towards psychological and physiological disorders such as anorexia (Bordo, 1993/2003).

Feminists, however, are not united on this front: some have sought to explore the pleasure women may experience as part of beauty labour. For example, Amy J. Cahill (2003) explores the pleasure she and women from her family experienced in taking part in communal beauty labour before a wedding. She seeks to distinguish the pleasure of

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<sup>4</sup>In my use of the term 'normative' I draw upon a view that societies have social 'norms', or appropriate ways of behaving, which are accompanied by 'sanctions' which "promote conformity and protect against non-conformity" (Giddens, 1997: 174). This fits into a Foucauldian approach to power: norms are created and maintained through discourses in society, which themselves imply a form of sanction or "discipline" (Foucault, 1979/1991) against those who fail to adhere to them.

<sup>5</sup>This is more fully explored in subchapter 2.3.

<sup>6</sup>In Chapters 4 and 5 I discuss particularly Soviet-Russian aspects of this social responsibility (see Gradskova, 2007b).

<sup>7</sup>It has been argued that men are ever more subject to similar discourses around the masculine body, suggesting this gender imbalance may be changing - see Mac an Ghaill & Heywood (2003) on creating masculinity through body work. Work by Wacquant (1995; 2004) however shows the differing nature of men's body work as compared to women's: a normatively masculine body is linked more to its ability to *do* things rather than its desirability as an object.

actually *doing* beauty labour from the implications of the result (e.g. women making themselves into objects of the male gaze, or fitting femininity norms more closely). Cahill argues that beauty labour processes “must be understood and experienced as existing *for the pleasure and delight of the beautifying woman*” (2003: 59; author’s emphasis) in order not to be classified as social coercion. She acknowledges the difficulty of actually achieving this separation, and thus the paper presents a generally unconvincing case given that it is almost impossible to ignore the context in which beauty labour usually takes place (i.e. in patriarchal societies). On a similar note, Budgeon & Currie (1995: 184-185) explore feminist subtexts in young women’s magazines, but conclude that this is more of a post-feminist dialogue which “draws upon feminist discourse in a way which helps to create the commonsense that gender equality has been achieved”. They thus conclude that pleasure is not a firm indicator of women’s empowerment in reading women’s magazines. That women may gain pleasure in performing beauty labour is not in dispute; the argument is that it is more difficult to situate this pleasure outside of a patriarchal discourse on women’s bodies.

#### 2.2.4 Gendered Bodies and Women’s Magazines

Women’s magazines have been cited as key actors in encouraging contemporary anxieties around the female body and its appearance. For example, Naomi Wolf cites their embracing of a neoliberal attitude towards women’s supposed personal empowerment:

In providing a dream language of meritocracy (“get the body you deserve”; “a gorgeous figure doesn’t come without effort”), entrepreneurial spirit (“make the most of your natural assets”), absolute personal liability for body size and ageing (“you can totally reshape your body”; “your facial lines are now within your control”) and even open admissions (“at last you too can know the secret beautiful women have kept for years”), [women’s magazines] keep women consuming their advertisers’ products in pursuit of the total personal transformation in status that the consumer society offers to men in the form of money. (1991: 29)

Wolf's work demonstrates how women's magazines encourage bodily surveillance and disciplinarity; the quote above also reflects their preoccupation with conspicuous consumption. Anne M. Cronin (2000: 275) has argued that women's magazines associate consumption with continual scrutiny of the body in the search for "authentic self-knowledge". Dworkin and Wachs (2009: 63) describe magazines more generally as creating a constant striving for perfection on the level of the individual, where failure is inevitable (despite the feelings of achievement that may be gained through smaller acts of bodily disciplinarity). As such, women's magazines have been argued by Hesse-Biber to "hold up an especially devious mirror. They offer 'help' to women, while presenting a standard nearly impossible to attain" (1996: 32). That is, they tend to contain mixed messages: on one hand there is a discourse of self-improvement (or 'help') based on the notion that individuals have control over the way their bodies look. On the other hand, there is also encouragement for women to keep their bodies under constant surveillance due to their perceived unreliability in relation to an inner identity. Whereas a perfect body in accordance with the norms of popular media is, in reality, achievable by only a minority of individuals, striving for an ideal body is normalised in women's magazines.

On a related note, studies by Angela McRobbie (2004) and Budgeon & Currie (1995) frame women's magazines as part of a post-feminist backlash against the gains of Western feminism, as described above. This is associated with a discourse of supposed empowerment; contemporary popular media texts are argued to normalise "post-feminist gender anxieties so as to re-regulate young women by means of the language of personal choice" (McRobbie, 2004: 262). The framing of women's bodies within discourses of choice and autonomy in women's magazines seemingly erases the social structures (and, indeed, genetic and biological variables) that affect how far individual women are able to

change their bodies. Because popular women's lifestyle magazines tend to stress a fairly narrow range of normative bodily traits, and give readers instructions on how to achieve them, they arguably contribute to a dearth of representations of non-normative bodies for women in popular culture.

However, it is also important to note that women's magazines represent an important focus of feminist work around the influence of popular women's media and culture, and the role of the audience in interpreting the powerful gender norms they often portray. This point is addressed from a theoretical perspective in section 2.5, and from a methodological perspective in Chapter 3.2.1.

## **2.3 Gender and Forms of Capital**

In this section, I explore the different types of resources women are perceived to gain from gendered forms of embodiment and behaviour. It thus provides a background for discussions of how notions of 'beauty' and 'femininity' may be seen as socially constructed. Cultural capital, as discussed by Pierre Bourdieu (1984/2010), and a related concept, aesthetic capital, as discussed by Anderson et al (2010), are pillars for this discussion.<sup>8</sup> Taking into account both of these perspectives, this section of the chapter also looks at the notion of beauty labour for women as a means of gaining aesthetic and cultural capital.

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<sup>8</sup>Bourdieu's theory of practice is based around interlocking concepts of field, habitus and capital (1984; 2010). Given my stress on a feminist theoretical approach, in this thesis I focus on cultural capital (and by extension aesthetic capital, as a form of this) and its gendered aspects, although I acknowledge that women's magazines may also be positioned in relation to field and habitus.

### 2.3.1 Cultural Capital

The means by which power is gained and distributed in society has been a key question for sociologists. For example, Marxist analyses have focused on economic capital as creating hierarchies according to social class. However, during the twentieth century economic analyses of class extended to include often less clear-cut ideas about how power works in different social contexts. A key theorist in this field has been Pierre Bourdieu, whose work discusses both economic and other forms of capital which may nonetheless – like economic capital – be used by individuals to their own benefit. Bourdieu (1986) initially introduced only three forms of capital: economic, social and cultural; though he later added the category of symbolic capital, which represents forms of cultural capital which have become legitimated (Salmenniemi, 2014: 51). Although other subsets of his main three categories of capital have been discussed in existing literature,<sup>9</sup> this thesis focuses mainly on two kinds – cultural capital, and aesthetic capital – and on the ways in which the accrual of these kinds of capital can be seen as particularly gendered.

Cultural capital may be essentially defined as a form which is gained via the use of language, knowledge or behaviours which have been socially constructed as ‘legitimate’, and which are described by Bourdieu (1986) as often seeming particularly natural rather than acquired (though he notes that they are in fact acquired, often via early socialisation). Bourdieu argues that once forms of cultural capital have become perceived as legitimate, they play a role in forming hierarchical social structures and may be capitalised upon in the form of power (Skeggs, 1997: 8). Bourdieu illustrates how the accumulation of cultural

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<sup>9</sup>For example, bodily capital, as explored by Loïc Wacquant; or educational capital, as discussed at length by Bourdieu (1984/2010) himself. Social capital is one form which has been particularly important in Russian studies literature; for example in the form of *blat* (Salmenniemi, 2012: 5), the informal Soviet economy of exchange.



capital “can only be acquired by means of a sort of withdrawal from economic necessity”, which entails a concentration “solely upon the mode of representation, the style, perceived and appreciated by comparison with other styles [...] a life-style [sic]” (1984/2010: 41). As part of this process, ‘hierarchies of distinction’ form around particular forms of culture which are understood as ‘legitimate’. This means that they are able to be utilised as symbolic capital, and have achieved cultural *distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984/2010).

The concept of *taste* is also used by Bourdieu (1984/2010) to refer to an individual or class’s ability to possess the right kind of knowledge about legitimated forms of culture. Particular types of knowledge are required to engage with (if not always fully live) culturally legitimated lifestyles. Non-legitimated or semi-legitimated forms are designated ‘popular culture’ or ‘middlebrow’ in taste, and accordingly are associated with lower levels of social distinction. Taste is also a vital part of Bourdieu’s discussion of *Distinction* (1984/2010), in that it contributes towards the operation of social hierarchies.

Cultural capital has been used to describe social structures and hierarchies beyond Bourdieu’s own analytical focus on class. Most importantly for this thesis, the notion of cultural capital has been used in gender studies to highlight how patriarchal social structures are enacted in society (e.g. McCall, 1992; Skeggs, 1997; 2005; McRobbie, 2005a). McCall (1992) describes Bourdieu’s emphasis on embodied forms of capital as particularly easily changed into symbolic, or legitimated, capital, and highlights his positioning of gender as a key way in which cultural capital is mediated. Skeggs (1997) emphasises the classed *and* gendered nature of cultural capital in her discussion of working class British women. As a further example, McRobbie (2005a) provides a description of how legitimated knowledge functions in early 2000s Britain via popular television

makeover shows. In makeover shows, the subjects of the makeovers are often derided or mocked for a failure to have grasped the ‘correct’ (i.e. legitimated) taste in fashion. In this thesis, women’s magazines are explored in their propensity to portray particularly gendered types of knowledge (e.g. about fashion or beauty products) as a route to greater cultural capital.

The notion of cultural capital has also been used in Russian studies: for example as a significant theoretical perspective in an edited volume on class (Salmenniemi (ed.), 2012). Suvi Salmenniemi (2014) also explores forms of capital and the extent to which these are mediated by gender norms in different social contexts. Bourdieusian taste, which is linked to the appropriation of cultural capital, is discussed by Gurova (2012) to classed aspects of clothing consumption in contemporary Russian society. In this thesis, I refer to ‘gendered cultural capital’ as a means of exploring how the gaining of cultural capital is mediated by gender norms in society. This term is also used largely in relation to ways of “doing” femininity (West & Zimmerman, 1987) which are linked to beauty labour and conspicuous consumption.

### 2.3.2 Aesthetic Capital

On the other side, I use the term aesthetic capital in discussing how women’s bodies and appearances are perceived to be a resource they can draw upon in order to negotiate their position within social hierarchies. Aesthetic capital is a term put forward by Anderson et al (2010), to describe these aesthetic resources, and one which I argue is particularly useful in critically interrogating women’s magazines and the role they play in upholding gender norms. Aesthetic capital is defined as “traits of beauty that are perceived as assets capable of yielding privilege, opportunity and wealth”, and relies on the intrinsic worth of beauty

in society to form hierarchies of distinction (Anderson et al. 2010: 565-566). As such, it may be considered a subset of cultural capital. Anderson et al (Ibid) detail how appearance is construed as important for the success not only of actors, for example, whose occupations are more overtly linked to how they look, but for almost everybody else. In accordance with a Bourdieusian perspective, they discuss the benefits<sup>10</sup> of aesthetic capital for those that are considered attractive: from psychological traits such as greater self-esteem, to better health, to the possession of greater economic and political capital. On the other side, Kwan & Trautner (2009: 52-54) discuss the disadvantages posed by being seen as less attractive and empirically demonstrate that perceived levels of beauty affect many social fields including education, work, and even the law.<sup>11</sup>

On a related matter, gendered notions of beauty as a positive trait have deep cultural roots both in Russia and in the rest of Europe. For example, popular folklore and fairy tales (which I discuss in Chapter 8) consistently draw upon a discourse of feminine beauty linked to positive traits (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). Vainshtein (1996) and Gradskova (2007b) have highlighted the moral significance of certain bodily traits and ways of presenting the body through clothing in the Soviet era, in that it was related to the notion of *kulturnost*'. To take a more modern view, in consumer societies beauty can even be discursively associated with "moral goodness" (Featherstone, 2010: 195). Dworkin & Wachs (2009) demonstrate how this is visible, for example, in the portrayal of exercise as an inherently virtuous activity which leads to a beautiful body; overweight individuals are often held personally accountable for their failure to achieve a slim physique, and the

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<sup>10</sup>Or the propensity to convert these types of capital into other forms of capital – although Bourdieu (1986) notes that all other forms of capital are subjugated to economic capital in some form, and thus are in one way a means of disguising how economic capital affects social relations.

<sup>11</sup>For example, those considered more beautiful have been argued to have an advantage when it comes to finding work or even when defending themselves in court.

myriad other factors which may affect one's weight such as class, education or illness are brushed aside.

It is important to note that, although gendered aspects of non-economic capital are not fully explored by Bourdieu himself,<sup>12</sup> he did mention how gender mediates access to embodied cultural capital; for instance, he describes

the establishment of a legitimate market in physical properties. The fact that certain women derive occupational profit from their charm(s), and that beauty thus acquires a value on the labour market, has doubtless helped to produce not only a number of changes in the norms of clothing and cosmetics, but also a whole set of changes in ethics and a redefinition of the legitimate image of femininity. (Bourdieu, 1984 in McCall, 1992: 844)

Here, it is not difficult to see the links between aesthetic capital and gender norms which encourage women to discipline (Foucault, 1979/1991) and modify their bodies, particularly via the consumption of beauty and fashion products. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that feminists have critically drawn upon cultural capital as a useful tool in interrogating gender inequality. For example, Beverley Skeggs (1997) looks at gender in combination with a class analysis of women's ability to make use of femininity as cultural capital, concluding that class plays a significant role in limiting women's use of femininity in this way. Bridget Fowler (2005) makes a similar point when she notes that gender can act as cultural capital when it is symbolically legitimated (e.g. via class). These points aid in a critique of some work which has discussed the ways that women may gain from normative feminine beauty. For example, both cultural and aesthetic capital play a role in Catherine Hakim's (2010) conceptualisation of 'erotic capital'. Women's bodies are a vital resource according to Hakim's deconstruction of traits contributing to social success: namely beauty, sexual

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<sup>12</sup>Although an attempt was made in his work *Masculine Domination* (2001), McLeod (2005: 19) notes that this offers few novel observations, as it draws largely on gender observations already made by second wave feminists.

attractiveness, social skills, liveliness, social presentation or style, sexuality, and (potentially, she argues) fertility. Hakim makes the point that, for women, performances of femininity and specifically female beauty are “highly valorised” (2010: 504), and thus does highlight the gendered nature of aesthetic capital. However, she also describes her central concept of erotic capital as democratic, in the sense that anyone can – and by implication probably should – draw upon this form of capital. Hakim’s arguments are, from a feminist point of view, problematic in that they seem to accept the gendered nature of hierarchies based on beauty as somehow ‘natural’ or acceptable. Asserting that women should buy into these hierarchies, rather than resist them, obscures the links between such hierarchies and other forms of social inequality. Similar conclusions are made by Salmenniemi (2014) in her exploration of feminine capital in the civic field in Russia: although the types of gendered capital women have typically had access to in the post-Soviet period have enhanced their status in that field, this type of capital was not necessarily transferable to other fields such as politics.

Thus despite Hakim’s (2010) desire to recast the potential for women to gain from aesthetic capital as a boon, or the efforts of others to highlight the pleasure women may get from beauty labour (Cahill, 2003), it not is difficult to argue that, in most areas of the world, women are expected to work on their appearance as a default activity to a greater extent than men are. The extent to which aesthetic capital gained from achieving a normatively feminine appearance is transferable into other, arguably more useful types of capital (e.g. economic or political) is however not the central question. Indeed, the notion that women have the potential to benefit from ‘improving’ their bodies (or being born with a body considered naturally more attractive) is not a notion that is widely questioned in existing gender studies literature. However, drawing on gendered forms of aesthetic capital

may also have its own penalties, as McCall (1992: 845) notes with regard to a ‘brains versus beauty’ dichotomy that is often related to women. Furthermore, although they do not draw explicitly on the term capital, Adkins & Lury (1999) discuss how aesthetic capital is more taken for granted for women; in contrast, when men achieve it, it is more highly rewarded. In this thesis, then, I dwell on the potential for a stress on aesthetic capital as important for women as a symptom of wider gender inequality.

The notion of aesthetic capital as a basis for Bourdieu’s “hierarchies of distinction” (1984/2010) is relatively under-explored (Anderson et al, 2010). This thesis attempts to address this issue via examining the perceived value of aesthetic capital in Russian society, both in discursive terms, via media analysis, and in social terms, via how women perform femininity (West & Zimmerman, 1987). It is also significant for this thesis that the encouragement for women to accrue aesthetic capital is often, in practice, intertwined with an encouragement for them to gain cultural capital. This is because gendered forms of cultural capital (e.g. knowledge about fashion and beauty practices) are related to gaining aesthetic capital (through these practices). As such, both aesthetic and cultural capital may be regarded as both interlinked and particularly gendered forms of capital. A key aspect of this is the perceived significance of ‘beauty labour’ for women in achieving aesthetic capital, *and* as a feminine practice which may be seen to entail gaining cultural capital.

### 2.3.3 Defining Beauty Labour

This thesis argues that ‘beauty labour’ is a vital component of femininity in contemporary Russia, as it is in Western countries. The term beauty labour is used in this thesis to refer to a means of achieving a higher level of aesthetic capital and femininity, but also as an everyday means of ‘doing’ or performing femininity (West & Zimmerman, 1987). It is not

explained here as a novel concept, but in terms of the literature contributing to the concept as it has been used in existing work, albeit in different vocabulary and sometimes with slightly different meanings. Because of this, in this subchapter I take the opportunity to explain my understanding of the term prior to its use in the thesis.

On its most basic level, ‘beauty labour’ is used to describe work on the body in the pursuit of a higher level of normative, feminine beauty. The processes that make up beauty labour are variable, and chiefly concern the decoration, modification or maintenance of the body. For example, any of the following activities may be said to fit with the aims of beauty labour as described above:

- using ‘beautifying’ products such as moisturiser or serum
- applying cosmetics to enhance or conceal features
- applying self-tanning products to change skin colour
- choosing clothes with the aim of enhancing or concealing features, or to more closely meet norms of femininity or of fashion
- physical exercise with the aim of weight loss or body sculpting
- cosmetic surgery such as liposuction, breast enlargement or a face lift
- treatments such as laser skin resurfacing or Botox injections.

Because these activities encompass a range of different activities, it is important to note that this research, unlike the work of other scholars such as Jeffreys (2005), does not attempt to equate them or grade them according to a continuum; for various reasons, surgery under anaesthetic is seen to be a more drastic action related to beauty labour than

using make up on a daily basis. What the thesis aims to highlight is the *aim* of these activities, which is to produce a more normatively feminine or beautiful body. Indeed, the activities women do in relation to their bodies is often with the aim of strengthening markers of femininity (Kosterina, 2008: 47).

A perceived need for women to ‘fix’ their bodies implies that a woman’s ‘natural body’ must be inherently unsatisfactory (Brush, 1998: 29). Women’s bodies have come to be seen as raw material (Cronin, 2000: 277) to be modified with the aim of either reflecting or concealing information about the woman herself. Culturally, the female body stands as an eternal ‘work in progress’ with no rational end point. My use of the specific term ‘beauty labour’ is predicated on this point, in addition to the lack of clarity around other terms which have been used in the literature around beauty. For example, a similar term drawing on the idea of aesthetic capital – ‘aesthetic labour’ – has most often been used with specific reference to workplace or employment practices linked to both appearance and physical behaviour aimed specifically at pleasing customers (Warhurst et al. 2000: 4). It has also referred to the greater emphasis given to aesthetic capital in certain types of work such as acting (see Dean, 2005). Although this research mentions the centrality of beauty labour to social outcomes in arenas such as in the workplace, I wished to use a term centred more on the gendered aspect of achieving beauty for most women.

Loïc Wacquant’s ‘body work’ or ‘bodily labour’ also have some theoretical resonance, in that he uses the terms with explicit reference to the achievement of bodily capital; they are, he argues, interdependent (1995: 67; 2004). Beauty labour and aesthetic capital are



similarly linked.<sup>13</sup> Although some studies (e.g. Ratilainen, 2012) have used Wacquant's notion of "bodily capital" to refer to women's beauty practices, I prefer the term aesthetic capital (Anderson et al, 2010). This is because Wacquant's use of the term bodily capital not only refers to the production of a specifically *masculine* body, but his exploration of this masculine body is focused on the male subject's agency and action with reference to his body. In contrast, this thesis dwells on portrayals of the female body as passive and as an object in popular culture, arguably making aesthetic capital a more appropriate term.

Other work using similar terms is problematic in terms of the areas it addresses. For example, Kang (2003) uses the term 'body labour' with reference to working on the bodies of others, rather than on one's own body. As such, it is more closely linked to Hochschild's (1983) concept of emotional labour in its focus on a workplace setting, in that individuals are modifying their appearance and/or behaviours for the benefit of others. Again, Mears & Finlay (2005) also draw on both 'body capital' and 'emotional labour' as closely linked to employment and work practices.

The most comparable term to 'beauty labour' from the literature – 'beauty work' – is mentioned by Kwan and Trautner (2009) in reference to practices similar to those I mention above. However, they also make a distinction between 'beauty work' and 'beauty labour', associating the latter with labour performed on others (Ibid: 50), presumably due to the associations of 'labour' with gaining economic capital. Because of the lack of precedence of this particular usage,<sup>14</sup> I prefer to use the term 'beauty labour' as a more

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<sup>13</sup>This has some theoretical and semantic links to Marx's (1887/2008) work on labour, surplus value and the production of capital – beauty labour is a means of accruing aesthetic capital. However, there is not space to explore these links in more depth in this thesis.

<sup>14</sup>Kwan and Trautner reference an unpublished working paper by Louise Roth which, upon contacting the author, I found was unavailable in the public domain.

faithful reflection of the value association of ‘labour’ as work on the body which is *also* associated with the production of a certain form of capital (in this case, aesthetic and cultural capital). I feel it is also more semantically faithful to the everyday striving of many women to achieve and sustain an attractive and feminine body –their ‘labour’ in the field of beauty.

Although she does not use the term ‘beauty labour’, Yulia Gradszkova (2007b) explores very similar ideas in her thesis on femininity in the USSR, also referring to women’s magazines, beauty and fashion. In a post-Soviet context, Ratilainen (2012; 2013) also discusses the extent to which social capital in Bourdieusian terms may be linked to beauty labour in contemporary Russian culture, explicitly drawing links between such labour and maintaining certain class positions.<sup>15</sup> Salmenniemi & Adamson (2014) use the term “the labour of femininity” to refer to similar practices in relation to contemporary self-help books in Russia, further highlighting the ways in which appearance is understood as a key reflection of normative femininity in the contemporary Russian context.

To summarise this theoretical perspective, ‘beauty labour’ encompasses work on the body to more closely resemble an idealised understanding of femininity and to thus achieve greater aesthetic capital; it is a term that is intended to broadly encompass many activities without equating or comparing them along any particular scale; and it is intended to reflect the ongoing nature of the activity from a feminist point of view.

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<sup>15</sup>In terms of its use in Russian women’s magazines, beauty labour may encompass the term *ukhod za soboi* (lit. ‘care for the self’), the verb *krasit'sia* (to put makeup on), amongst many other terms – this reflects the nuance of behaviours considered under the aegis of this term.

### 2.3.4 Feminist Critiques of Beauty Labour

There has been a significant volume of criticism of beauty labour activities amongst feminist scholars. Whereas it has been argued that men are becoming ever more susceptible to pressure to perform this kind of work and embody particular normative masculinities, this labour has been seen as more the preserve of women in society, and the body has been seen as more central to the creation of a feminine subjectivity than to a masculine one. As Bartky comments, "[s]oap and water, a shave, and routine attention to hygiene may be enough for him; for her they are not" (1988: 100). Other work points to the sheer extent of the beauty labour expected of women as a main factor in its reflection of wider gender inequalities. For example, Hesse-Biber in her work on the cult of thinness in popular culture argues that "[b]eauty is depicted not only as a job, but as a lifetime career that requires time, energy, and, above all, the proper tools" (1996: 12). Women, more than men, are socialised into believing that it is important for them to devote resources to these practices. If they follow these norms, they necessarily have less time to devote to personal, career, intellectual or leisure pursuits than men do. Sheila Jeffreys (2005) argues that beauty practices form part of patriarchal social structures, constructing them as part of a continuum of gender inequality, whereby more violent practices such as female genital mutilation lie at the other end. Along similar lines to radical feminists of the second wave era such as Andrea Dworkin (1974), Jeffreys sees simple oppression in most forms of beauty labour and argues that women are under a great deal of pressure to perform them:

Beauty practices show that women are obedient, willing to do their service, and to put effort into that service. They show, I suggest, that women are not simply 'different' but, most importantly, 'deferential'. (2005: 24)

Thus women are more under pressure to be aware of how others view them, and to 'defer' to these views. Picking up on the Bourdieusian framework of this thesis, the pressure to

perform regular beauty labour can be seen as a form of ‘symbolic violence’ against women in contemporary societies, as McRobbie (2005a) also argues. In Bourdieu’s work, symbolic violence is a result of the ‘misrecognition’ which sees arbitrary forms of capital legitimised, a process which he argues helps to sustain social inequality (Moore, 2008: 104). According to this logic, in certain fields normative understandings of beauty are accorded value in the form of aesthetic capital. The gendered nature of this form of capital means that it is often seen as contributing to gender norms based around patriarchal discourses.

## **2.4 Beauty and Femininity in Russia and the USSR**

### 2.4.1 The Early Soviet Period

This chapter now turns to examine beauty and femininity as social constructs in the Russian context. This section uses existing literature to demonstrate that, despite the undeniable changes that came about in terms of gender norms from the Gorbachev period onwards, concerns about beauty labour as linked to femininity were also present in earlier periods of everyday Soviet life. As such, it sets the scene for my discussion of the changes and continuities that have taken place in the post-Soviet period.

Before the ‘Great Retreat’ (Timasheff, 1946) of the Stalinist era, the Soviet regime negatively associated beauty labour with bourgeois sensibility. Consumerism, which had started to play a significant part in how middle- and upper-class women carried out beauty labour in the pre-revolutionary era, was fundamentally against the communal spirit of Bolshevik socialism. Lynne Attwood (2001: 166) writes of a 1927 article in *Rabotnitsa* which “insisted that fashion, jewellery and cosmetics were bourgeois preoccupations

which had no place in Soviet society”, being variously categorised as a representation of personal wealth, a way for women to attract men, or a method of disguising illness (not necessary in a society where workers and peasants presumably display a natural healthy glow at all times). The constructivist culture of the early Soviet period saw attempts to radically change existing styles of dress (Bartlett, 2004: 127), using clothes as a strong visual symbol of breaking with the old and ushering in the new. Clothing for women was supposed to become more androgynous and practical, freeing women from the constraints of corsetry and making them into better workers. The economic challenges of the 1920s made some of these transformations appropriate: most people had little access to fashionable clothing on a regular basis, and functionality tended to come before style amongst women revolutionaries (Gradsikova, 2007a: 23). However, the extent to which women actually adopted new forms of clothing was debatable (Azhgikhina & Goscilo, 1996). From the beginning, gender equality suffered in relation to the goal of destroying the prevailing class system.

As a result, Stalin’s leadership marked a return to traditional gender norms. The prevailing visual norms of socialist realism emphasised strength, a healthy body and a simple style of dress that rejected the artifice and glamour associated with capitalist consumerism. However, the 1930s ushered in different attitudes towards beauty and the body, particularly amongst the new cultural elite and wives of Party functionaries (Gradsikova, 2007a: 23). The 1930s also brought more access to beauty and fashion as public services, although the regime found it necessary to frame such frivolities in the official rhetoric all the same (with an emphasis on hygiene, health and naturalness as opposed to beauty or cosmetic improvement) (Gradsikova, 2007a: 24). Although women were firmly ensconced in their new roles as workers and builders of socialism, having by then entered the workforce in

large numbers, an extra role was added to the ideal Soviet woman in the form of work on the body and clothing, leading Attwood (2001) to describe normative femininity at the time as a combination of “the rational and the romantic”. As she was expected to take on the ‘double burden’ (Corrin, 1992) of paid employment in addition to domestic and motherhood duties, the Soviet woman also combined traditional and socialist values, something which was reflected in the popular magazines of the time. Readers of *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest'ianka* were now given a regular supply of dress patterns and knitting tips; there were advertisements for scent and cosmetics; and articles called for the production of more fashionable dresses, hats and shoes (Attwood, 2001: 166). The Party’s media organs were by no means averse to choosing pictures of the most physically attractive young Stakhanovite women, and “the new feminine ideal had become softer and more feminine than that of the twenties” (Engel, 2004: 181). Women of high Party status were encouraged by the state to pay attention to personal style, and sometimes opened up ‘fashion ateliers’ or dressmaking shops in new factory towns to provide clothing for the community (Fitzpatrick, 1999: 158).

#### 2.4.2 The Post-War Period

The Great Patriotic War had seen more women than ever before needed by the state to maintain industrial and agricultural infrastructure and take part in military action. Perhaps as a result of the social turmoil of these years, a pattern of ever growing emphasis on a feminine appearance took hold, and the first Soviet fashion periodical, *Zhurnal mod*, began to be published in 1945 (Gradska, 2007a: 24). Despite the often debilitating hardship of the immediate post-war years, women’s magazines continued to offer advice on what were seen as perennial women’s interests, which included domestic concerns, feeding a family well, and – crucially for this research – looking after one’s appearance (Engel, 2004: 225).

Barbara Engel writes that Soviet culture actually became “preoccupied with femininity” after the horrors of the Great Patriotic War: although “fashionable dress and cosmetics remained inaccessible to all but the most privileged Soviet women, media encouraged women to dress well and make themselves attractive” (2004: 240). Thus, the upholding of an ideal unattainable for many is not just a post-Soviet phenomenon. The extent to which the idea of fashion was present in Soviet women’s magazines changed most notably during the Khrushchev ‘Thaw’. As previously noted, clothes that had to be changed every season and an emphasis on looks could be viewed as a core ideological clash with communism. However, the growing acceptance of more traditional ideas of femininity within the Party and society in the 1950s meant that women’s magazines began to engage with fashion, and a fashion and beauty industry began to develop in the Soviet bloc (Bartlett, 2010).

However, official socialist ideas about fashion differed significantly from those held amongst the average Soviet population, as with many other areas of life. Gradsanova (2007a: 38) argues that “‘doing femininity’ in post-war Soviet Russia required knowledge of multiple norms, codes and techniques of beauty and cannot be classified according to any one set of norms and values.” Clearly, there was a discrepancy not only between the official images and the reality of Soviet life, but also within the official imagery itself:

Just as in Stalinist times, official socialist dress from the late 1950s on had little to do with everyday reality [...] Official socialist dress was an ideological construct, a discourse channelled through the state-owned media [...] women used a whole range of unofficial channels, from self-made clothes to the black market, private fashion salons and networks of connections to obtain desired clothes in their everyday life. (Bartlett, 2004: 129)

Bartlett (2004; 2010) portrays fashion in the post-war Soviet bloc countries as little more than another way for the regime to control the masses and to portray socialist life as more utopian than it actually was. Women outside the *nomenklatura* classes may have been

aware of what was fashionable, but whether they were able to gain access to this world was entirely another matter. However, such cultural currents still formed part of a growing emphasis on fashion in Soviet society and culture, accompanied by a renewed stress on normative femininity as linked to a beautiful body. Increasingly, acquiring a fashionable look meant spending time and often money on changing one's body as well as one's clothing (Gradskova, 2007a: 28). For example, magazines such as *Rabotnitsa* offered readers advice on how to care for their skin, recipes for homemade beauty products, and other – albeit more basic – versions of the kind of advice still offered by women's magazines in Russia today (Vainshtein, 1996). If *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest'ianka* were supposed to mould women's lives in the USSR according to official ideology, then the editors' decision to include beauty advice would have implied that women should be interested in trying to appear more beautiful. If they were supposed to reflect women's lives in the USSR – something which is very much more debatable – then we may assume that upholding a beauty regime was something that interested many Soviet women.

Another important means by which appearances mattered in Soviet society can be seen in some aspects of *kulturnost'* (Gradskova, 2007a: 24) or 'good taste' – demonstrating that one was part of a cultured and intelligent sector of society via behaviour, appearance and cultural tastes. *Kulturnost'* may be seen as a form of Bourdieusian cultural capital in Soviet society. Similarly to Bourdieu's classification of taste discussed in section 2.3.1, the Soviet version of 'good taste' was also based on legitimating the tastes of the most powerful section of society – the intelligentsia – and encouraging other classes to emulate this in various ways (Salmenniemi, 2012: 6). Most significantly for the topic of gender addressed in this thesis, women's bodies were significant to this ideal as part of "connections between the aesthetic ideal, naturality [sic] and decency" (Gradskova, 2007b: 271).



Although the regime promoted this cultural ideal as a value for Soviet men and women, it was important for women, more than men, to have a neat appearance and not to provoke too much attention.

The idea of *kulturnost* gained most traction in the ‘developed socialism’ of the Brezhnev era, when new opportunities to consume materialised, alongside the regime’s growing ability to ‘turn a blind eye’ to the possession of ‘Western’ cultural goods that had previously been frowned upon (Yurchak, 2006). A renewed emphasis on more traditional modes of femininity linked to motherhood and feminine attributes, including beauty, were also features of the Brezhnev period to the early 1980s (Bridger, 2007: 112-113), and can be linked to fears of a demographic crisis and the reopening of ‘the woman question’ (Buckley, 1992: 3; Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996: 22-24).

#### 2.4.3 Gorbachev to the Post-Soviet Era

With the openness of *glasnost* arrived new freedoms, including the ability for high-profile Soviet women to now complain about the standards of appearance that were expected of them in public life (Heldt, 1992: 161). However, there was also renewed stress on women’s domestic roles and on motherhood as aspects of femininity that had supposedly been neglected under previous leaders. Women were perceived as having been ‘masculinised’, and their emancipation began to be linked in popular discourse with a return to the home (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996: 24-25) and a stress on women’s moral role in bringing up children and providing citizens for the state (Bridger, 2007: 114-115). Official attempts to promote certain norms of femininity became contested in the Soviet media as Gorbachev allowed greater press freedom by the late 1980s, and media debates criticised some oft-used Soviet measures to promote women’s roles as mothers (Ibid).

However, on a more general level Gorbachev's stress on differences between the genders – as begun under Brezhnev – was popular (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996: 27), as it was perceived as a liberation from the 'double burden' that women had faced (even if Gorbachev's gender reforms were, as under previous leaders, often more rhetorical than practical). Attempts to introduce feminism were often viewed as "an encroachment on what little area of 'comfort' Russian women finally [had] begun enjoying in the last few years" (Azhgikhina & Goscilo, 1996). The "comfort" referred to by Azhgikhina & Goscilo includes beauty labour and new opportunities for conspicuous consumption. Undoubtedly, the increasing marketisation of the Soviet economy led to more opportunities for some women to access beauty and fashion commodities.<sup>16</sup> Other late Soviet and early post-Soviet developments such as the mass availability of pornography and the growing popularity of beauty contests (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996: 29; Kay, 1997: 82), even in prisons (Moran et al, 2009), are connected by Sperling (2000: 174) to a "clear trend towards the commercialisation and objectification of women's bodies" beginning in the Gorbachev period. On a similar note, the early post-Soviet advertisements asking for secretaries who are beautiful, of a certain size, or even willing to perform sexual favours have been well documented in the literature on gender (Engel, 2004: 250; Sperling, 2000: 180).

Women's ability to find work in the post-Soviet period has also been predicated on a *feminine* appearance, as well as a sexualised one. Rebecca Kay's (1997) work on the 'Moscow Image Centre' of the early 1990s, and Susanne Cohen's (2013) work on *imidzh* in relation to secretarial training, discuss the ways women have been forced to deal with

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<sup>16</sup>More on this in section 2.6.

new classifications of ‘professionalism’ via projecting the correct image to others. Cohen positions this as part of encouraging a neoliberal moral order in post-Soviet Russia. She describes how secretaries were told to embody the values of ‘elegance’ and ‘femininity’ in their working lives.

Kosterina (2008) presents a more theoretical discussion of how bodies act symbolically in Russian culture, discussing notions of the body as simultaneously part of and removed from the self. She emphasises the presence of beautiful depictions of both men and women’s bodies in post-Soviet popular culture, media and street advertising, linking it to individuals’ dissatisfaction with how their bodies look. Lerner & Zbenovich (2013) document how television makeover shows position appearance as a somewhat unreliable construct in Russian culture, and yet still stress the importance of beauty as a reflection of happiness and overall life satisfaction. Salmenniemi & Adamson (2014) also discuss how normative femininity in aesthetic terms is construed as a significant value in contemporary self-help literature in Russia, discussing it as part of a particularly post-feminist discourse in post-Soviet culture. However, they note that in the contemporary context, “where social protection is inadequate, educational credentials are rapidly being devalued and labour markets are volatile, femininity presents itself as one feasible resource to be cultivated in the scarcity or absence of other resources” (Ibid:15). Despite this, they also note that femininity is not a particularly enduring form of capital. This arguably provides a further example of how, despite women having access to certain gendered forms of capital that men do not necessarily possess (Hakim, 2010) these do not compensate for wider gender inequalities in society.

This section has shown that many of the norms of femininity and beauty presented in

contemporary media represent part of a continuum in terms of femininity norms. Kay (1997) stressed the growing emphasis on working on one's beauty for women in the 1990s, and noted that such practices were linked to a specific rejection of official Soviet discourse on femininity. This is despite the fact that achieving a feminine appearance was also a feature of everyday Soviet norms of femininity, as discussed above. Due to this apparent dissonance in gender norms, and (as will be discussed) its links to the rise of consumer culture, this thesis seeks to explore notions of beauty and femininity on the axis of Soviet and post-Soviet, as well as along the axis of Western/Eastern and global/local.

## **2.5 Decoding Women's Culture and Media**

The very fact that magazines aimed at a specifically gendered audience exist at all represents a point of interest for feminists. Why are women assumed to share enough characteristics as a social group to merit this kind of media being produced, and what are these characteristics perceived to be by the media itself? Taking these questions as a starting point, this section of the literature review looks at the extent to which women's magazines may play a role in gender socialisation.

Viewing women's magazines through the prism of socialisation into gender relations can be seen as part of the magazines' normalisation of beauty labour and normative femininity. They position themselves as a source of advice for women, with problem pages, advice columns, and special sections dealing with relationships, beauty, fashion and many other topics. Women are often brought up on magazines: they encounter them in the hairdresser or waiting room, or read their mothers' copies at home. In addition, many magazines now produce 'teen' versions of their titles, intending to bring in an audience at an even younger

age to the magazine brand. Research from other contexts also shows a high percentage of women below the target age read magazines on a regular basis (Kim & Ward, 2004: 49).

Their promotion of essentialist gender relations is an aspect of women's magazines that has received much attention from feminist critics, as discussed in section 2.2. However, the role of the audience – the reader – in interpreting gender discourses found in women's magazines has also received much attention in recent feminist work, and it is this aspect that the thesis now turns to in order to position itself within this wider debate within feminist studies.

The globalised nature of mass media in the twenty-first century makes for some undeniably complex models of inter- and intra-cultural communication. Horkheimer & Adorno's (1944/1997) damning criticism of mass media as commodifying culture for the masses to consume largely uncritically seems out of date when one considers the diversity and pluralism of media in the internet age. Likewise, it is now almost impossible to construct media effects theories based on the traditional mid-twentieth century stimulus-response model of 'message —> receiver —> effect' (McQuail & Windahl 1993: 58-59). Relationships between the individual and the media they consume have been found to be more varied and effects more difficult to measure. People have more control than ever over the type of media they consume, and there is simply more out there to choose from – from television channels and blogs, to internet video and news sites. Questions of how media texts are 'encoded' or 'decoded', to paraphrase Stuart Hall (1980) are pivotal in understanding the relevance and influence of media content. Hall explains how media is encoded and decoded with reference to knowledge frameworks, relations of production, and technical infrastructure; the product being encoded and decoded has then reached a

level of “‘meaningful’ discourse” (Ibid: 130). This research aims to analyse the discourses encoded in women’s magazines as popular media, but also processes of decoding, aiming to contribute in some way to the body of literature around popular media and its role in society.

Initial studies of women’s magazines by feminist academics tended to focus on either the *content* of the magazines (via content analysis or discourse analysis), or on the *reception* of women’s magazines (via communication studies, psychology or ethnography). A seminal debate in gender and media research contributing to the growth of studies which combine audience and media studies was based around Elizabeth Frazer’s (1987) *Teenage Girls Reading Jackie*. This questioned the centrality of ‘ideology’ in determining how media texts affect their audience. McRobbie’s earlier work on the same magazine had been important in analysing the codes of femininity that lay behind popular magazines for teenage girls in 1960s and 1970s Britain. McRobbie (1978) argued for an analysis of magazines for teen girls as containing an ‘ideology’ around gender that it sought to communicate to its readers via ‘framing’ the world through a particular viewpoint. However, Frazer’s work highlighted the significance of looking at *how* teenage readers read the magazine. She argued that magazines were read “lazily” (1987: 414), which impacted on their overall effect on readers. Frazer encouraged a move away from studying ideology (in this case patriarchal ideology) and towards the study of discourses and registers, a move she argued would better reflect human experience and everyday life, and which indicated a general turn towards this type of study in social sciences.<sup>17</sup> Other studies have gone on to reflect the primacy of debates around how media is decoded in feminist approaches to women’s culture and media. For example, Janice Radway’s (1983; 1984)

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<sup>17</sup>McRobbie (1997c) herself later acknowledged these criticisms of her own work.

work on women reading romance novels emphasised the different ways socially conservative texts may be read against the grain by women who do not necessarily subscribe to normative gender discourses. Ballaster et al (1991) also mention the often critical reading stance taken by women in relation to women's magazines. Tania Modleski's work questions the notion that women consumers of media are "cultural dupes" (1991: 45).

A related perspective on women's culture explores its cultural status, which I will show is significant to a wider analysis of gender in relation to the magazines. Although I agree that the perspective she offers is an important one, Hermes' (1995) study of women's magazines arguably puts too strong an emphasis on how the magazines are read, somewhat side-lining the importance of discourse analysis.<sup>18</sup> However, Ien Ang's work offers a more useful perspective: her study of the television soap *Dallas* saw a critique of how "the ideology of mass culture sees the audience as unwitting and pathetic victims of the commercial culture industry" (1985: 119). Her work highlights, in common with Ballaster et al (1991) and Hermes (1995), the critical approach that readers may have. However, significantly she also explores the low status that forms of culture consumed chiefly by women are perceived to have. This is arguably linked to patriarchal discourses which position women's popular culture as inferior to men's, and arguably as intrinsically less likely to lend the consumer cultural distinction (Bourdieu, 1984/2010). Ratilainen (2013) also discusses the status of women's magazines as significant in her analysis of consumer culture and print media. In her work, magazines are considered in the light of Soviet and post-Soviet reading culture, in which post-Soviet women's magazines have often been understood as a low status form of popular culture.

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<sup>18</sup> However, I do draw on her methods as an influence, which I discuss in Chapter 3.

Magazines as popular culture can also be perceived more positively: some feminist literature views women's magazines with reference to the pleasure that readers may gain from consuming them. Janice Winship's (1987) work in particular, whilst taking an overall feminist approach, stresses the visual pleasures that women's magazines can offer. Lorna Stevens (2002) positions them as offering women both escapism and a source of information, a tendency I also address in Chapter 7. Furthermore, Stevens, Maclaren & Brown (2003) explore how pleasure is portrayed by certain women's magazine brands as a key part of their appeal. This may also be related to understandings of the magazines as an arena of escapism from everyday life (Winship, 1987; Currie, 1999; Stephenson, 2007). Although the pleasurable aspects of reading magazines are significant in this thesis, like Ballaster et al (1991) I also seek to relate the pleasure women gain from reading them in relation to (gendered) social hierarchies; in accordance, I essentially concur with their point that the pleasure women take in reading women's magazines need not preclude their propensity to represent particular forms of (patriarchal) power.

Anna Gough-Yates' (2003) extensive study of the women's magazine market positions them in relation to their business model, which relies on selling consumer culture to the reader in various ways. Using a more critical perspective on this aspect of the magazines, Ellen McCracken (1993) argues that women's magazines represent a particular 'ideology' based around consumerism and the capitalist marketplace. Whereas she acknowledges arguments that readers can interpret media in varying ways, her account puts the main stress on the negative associations she interprets in magazine content, on the women's magazine industry as a whole and on editorial decisions, particularly related to advertising. Budgeon & Currie's (1995) research yields similar conclusions. Although I do not employ



the term ideology in this thesis, from a feminist perspective I do discuss the idea of patriarchy and how it infuses social life and gender relations. For these purposes, I note that I draw on Sylvia Walby's definition of patriarchy as essentially "a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (1989: 214). Essentially these social structures perpetuate gender inequality; however, with reference to my previous discussion of Foucault, this power is often enacted via discourses of self-surveillance and discipline (on which more in 3.2.2).

To summarise this section and set out my own perspective on women's magazines, in this thesis I will explore the patriarchal discourses they contain with a view to contextualising them within wider patriarchal social hierarchy in Russian society. I draw on both discourse analysis, and on an analysis of how magazines are decoded by readers, positioning each of these perspectives as important to an analysis of gender in relation to contemporary Russian media. Furthermore, as in some previous analyses of women's culture, I draw on notions of women's magazines as inherently 'low' or popular culture, although I also consider ways that they may be considered as purveyors of 'high' or legitimate culture. The pleasure and escapism that readers perceive they gain from reading women's magazines is also something I explore in this research, though I take the perspective that this should be in relation to the wider social context and existing gender norms.

## **2.6 Globalisation and Understandings of East and West in Post-Soviet Russia**

Researching women's magazines in Russia entails an engagement with certain specific contextual debates. This thesis looks on one level at the globalisation of the media in present day Russia via an analysis of Western-origin women's magazines – *Liza*,

*Cosmopolitan* and *Elle* – which were founded in Germany, the United States and France respectively. The magazine content, initially translated from foreign editions, is now produced by Russian staff, a trend in media transformation which had taken place largely by the end of the 1990s in Russia (Omel’chenko & Bliudina, 2002: 41). Because of this, here I examine existing literature around the themes of gendered media and globalisation in post-Soviet Russia.

As this thesis takes a largely cultural, area studies perspective on analysing globalisation, it is important to focus in on the literature around socio-cultural change in post-Soviet Russia rather than to go more deeply into globalisation as a concept. Accordingly, in this subchapter I merely offer a brief overview.

For many, globalisation has indeed become “the elusive catchword for defining and critiquing the new world order” (Artz, 2003: 4). Although globalisation as a concept takes in political and economic aspects as well, it is in the interests of this to dwell upon the cultural aspects of the process, as well as its social effects. As such, I draw upon John Tomlinson’s definition of cultural globalisation as “the particular effects which [...] general social processes of time-space compression and distancing have on that realm of practices and experience in which people symbolically construct meaning” (1996: 23). Wider debates around globalisation reflect particular controversies around its status as economic or multinational, what it actually entails and even whether it really exists, recent versus long-term trends that affect it, its manageability, and whether it may be essentially defined as neoliberal capitalism or something more nuanced (Pieterse, 2009).

From a socio-cultural studies perspective on contemporary Russia, it is most important to

consider the values and effects associated with globalisation as a phenomenon. For example, some scholars overtly celebrate the spread of internationally recognisable forms of culture: for example, James Lull (2000: 230) speaks of "hybrid forms", arguing that although "symbolic representations of culture arrive from distant locations powered by mass and micro media technologies, they are mediated critically and appropriated socially and culturally in the contexts they enter." In the Russian context, Omel'chenko & Bliudina (2002) also refer to the hybridisation of culture. Hybridisation as a concept may also be said to be similar to 'glocalisation' (Robertson, 1995), a term which emphasises the changes forms of culture often go through to become accepted or even indigenised in new contexts.

Globalisation is also linked to changing values in societies experiencing it. Some scholars critique a loss of geographically identifiable variability in cultures, and the transmission of certain cultural values as universal; for example 'McDonaldization' (Ritzer, 1983) is one term which may seem especially relevant in the late Soviet to early post-Soviet period. That era saw long queues at the opening of a McDonald's restaurant in Moscow, but also featured the use of the same fast food branches as a basis for anti-American protests in 1998 (Caldwell, 2004: 6).<sup>19</sup> Tomlinson (1996) refers to dystopian views of cultural globalisation which stress cultural uniformity, at the expense of existing cultural variation. Furthermore, he notes that more negative views of cultural globalisation have also equated globalisation with Westernisation – a view which emphasises the "cultural imperialism" of tides of globalisation (Ibid: 26).

However, recent trends in globalisation theory have been less focused on Westernisation

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<sup>19</sup>See also Constantin Boym's (2001) memoir piece for an interesting discussion of McDonalds in Russia.

and more focused on different currents of global culture: for example, how migration brings cultural practices from the hitherto ‘periphery’ into Western countries. There have also been critiques of those who use Westernisation to describe what are in fact very complex processes of globalisation. As Tomlinson (1996: 26) puts it, “some cultural goods have a broader appeal than others, some values and attitudes are easily adopted while others are actively resisted or found simply odd or irrelevant”.

Perspectives on globalisation have also been influenced by the economic growth of nations in the ‘global south’ and of the so-called BRIC countries (Pieterse, 2009: 22), of which Russia is one. A diversification of media sources has undoubtedly taken place in Russia as part of post-Soviet globalisation, from the Soviet norm of officially state-sanctioned media to the appearance of many popular media franchises from outside Russia, such as television programmes and magazines (Omel’chenko & Bliudina, 2002). Additionally, a recent boom in internet usage and the popularity of websites such as LiveJournal (Kuzmina, 2011) and YouTube in Russia means that the broadened media landscape now allows Russian citizens to have distinct cultural experiences that are shared by many more people, more instantaneously than ever before in human history. Arjun Appadurai (in During, 1999: 223) has described such developments as providing “large and complex repertoires of images, narratives and ‘ethnoscapes’ to viewers throughout the world”.

The impact of such developments in the first decade after the collapse of state socialism has been discussed in a co-authored monograph by Hilary Pilkington et al (2002) which tackles notions of globalisation, Westernisation and Russian cultural values in relation to Russian youth culture, and which (taken as a volume) demonstrates the contested and non-linear nature of the process. Melissa Caldwell (2002; 2004) also discusses this in relation

to food and consumption in the post-Soviet context. Omel'chenko & Bliudina assert that a "horizontalization" of relations between Russian and global cultures has taken place in the post-Soviet era, suggesting a certain amount of 'give and take' in cultural terms and "a more mosaic-like character of contemporary youth tastes and cultures" (2002: 41). However, the idea of Russia as "catching up" with the West in various terms is also prominent discourse in the Russian context (Pilkington et al, 2002: xiv). Indeed, in a discussion of media globalisation, it is important to note the existence of particular post-Cold War cultural discourses, and the suggestion of power relations which may lay behind these. For example, the influence of so-called 'Western' ideas in Russian society has long provoked debate in post-Soviet Russia: largely as a result of Cold War fears of cross-cultural contamination, globalisation as a concept can prompt specific negative associations in the Russian context. Pilkington et al provide an apt explanation of some of this cultural tension:

Whereas in the West *cultural* globalisation has been studied as a set of empirical cultural *flows* and social *processes* moving outward from "core" to "periphery", in Russia globalisation has been interpreted as a political, or "ideological", project led by the West. The "global community" has been considered to be a *Western* idea, world culture equated with the Americanisation of "peripheral" national cultures and economic and political globalisation interpreted as a means of subordinating Russia (and the East) to the interests of the West, above all the United States. (2002: xiv)

Cultural developments are to some extent linked to the long-term development of political discourse on Russia's place in the world: for example, in Putin's 2013 Presidential Address, the desire to retain a particularly Russian global outlook and internal culture was very evident (Putin, 2013). Manifestations of nationalist feeling in post-Soviet Russia have included the conscious consumption of products which are considered Russian (or *nashi*) (Caldwell, 2002). This concept has also been used historically to discourage the black market consumption of non-Soviet beauty products (Gradsikova, 2007b), demonstrating

how it links in to the themes of this thesis. Furthermore, an emphasis on national identity is now more evident than ever regarding recent events in Ukraine: both Russian and ‘Western’ (i.e. European Union, NATO or American) rhetoric consistently invokes a struggle between two perceived opponents to maintain their own cultural values in this former Soviet country. This has led to renewed stress on the idea of Russia as a special case, in which particularly ‘Western’ liberal democratic ideas have either failed, or will never be appropriate.

To summarise my own perspective on the topics discussed in this subchapter, in the thesis I try to avoid presenting globalisation, glocalisation or cultural hybridisation in a particularly negative or positive light. Rather, I seek to explore how they are helpful in an analysis of gender in contemporary Russian society and culture.

## **2.7 Gendered Media and Consumption in Post-Soviet Russia**

### **2.7.1 Conspicuous Consumption and Women’s Magazines**

The final section of the literature review continues the theme of globalisation, focusing in on the aspects of conspicuous consumption that form a principal theme of this thesis. The idea of conspicuous consumption was first explored in a Western context by Thorsten Veblen in 1899 (Trigg, 2001: 99), who noted that consumer practices operated along the lines of social hierarchy – people were buying goods to reflect their own identities and to convey information about themselves to others. Other scholars (Cronin, 2000; Fowler, 1997) have also noted that consumption has been constructed as a feminine (and thus largely denigrated) activity, building on Veblen’s discussion of conspicuous

consumption.<sup>20</sup> In different ways, under Communist Party rule, conspicuous consumption was not ideologically frowned upon, and mass consumption was not a feature of the Soviet planned economy. It was also fairly difficult to practice due to the failures of a planned economy to provide consumer goods.<sup>21</sup> Because of this, the growth of conspicuous consumption in Russia in the past two decades presents particular questions around globalisation and Westernisation for scholars of Russian society and culture. Consumption in most forms carried associations of (capitalist-style) individualism in the Soviet era; empirical research has shown that some of these values have persisted into at least the first decade of the post-Soviet era (Omel'chenko & Flynn, 2002: 83-84).

Activity and cultural norms associated with conspicuous consumption in Russia have been transformed in the past two decades. Suvi Salmenniemi's (2012: 3) characterisation of the rapid change from a "Soviet logic of social differentiation to the logic of global neoliberal consumer capitalism" in Russia highlights a further reason as to why it presents a particularly pertinent case for a study of consumption in the 2010s. Russians with memories of the Soviet period have seen a transformation of consumption opportunities: from the fairly homogeneous Soviet shopping experience which offered little chance for self-expression through material goods (Caldwell, 2002: 299); to a market in which the purchase of material goods has often become symbolic of an individual's identity or status; to the rise of 'conspicuous consumption'.

However, it is important to also note the differences between common consumption practices in Russia and in Western European countries. For example, whereas fast and

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<sup>20</sup>See de Grazia & Furlough (1996) for an in depth historical analysis of gendered forms of consumption.

<sup>21</sup> However, Yurchak (2006) discusses the possibilities that did exist for conspicuous consumption in the late Soviet era, especially 'unofficial' forms.

incredibly cheap clothing has become the norm in Britain in the form of retailers such as Primark – who sell three t-shirts for less than the price of the minimum hourly wage<sup>22</sup> – Russian consumers do not have access to such cheap goods on an everyday basis. Gurova (2012: 161) notes that Russians she spoke to tended to “refresh” rather than replace their clothing on a seasonal basis and that consumer services in St Petersburg tended to be regarded as inferior to those in other European countries. However, the fact that many of her interviewees nevertheless identified with European levels of consumption hints at the often ambiguous positioning of contemporary Russian consumer culture and habits, and the tendency for these to be compared against ‘Western’ culture.

As such, women’s lifestyle magazines constitute a particularly pertinent example from which to evaluate these ambiguous understandings of East/West and Russian/non-Russian, as they represent a type of media which was perceived as foreign when it was first introduced in the early 1990s, but has become more indigenised. This is not in terms of format, as clearly women’s magazines existed throughout the Soviet period, but in terms of content – mainly in that they contained a new emphasis on conspicuous consumption as a feminine activity. Newer, Western-origin women’s magazines (alongside the concurrent adaptation of Soviet magazines such as *Krest’ianka*) thus form part of post-Soviet media transformation.<sup>23</sup> However, women’s magazines are also interesting from the point of view of conspicuous consumption in that historically they were brought into the Russian market with very few adaptations (beyond language) to Russian society. Because of this, one can assume that publishers had confidence that certain global themes of femininity would also (eventually, if not immediately) hold resonance for post-Soviet women. Indeed, as the

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<sup>22</sup> £6.31 per hour as of 2013/14 ([hmrc.gov.uk](http://hmrc.gov.uk); consulted on 18/06/2014).

<sup>23</sup> For an overview of post-Soviet media transformation, see Pietiläinen (2008) or for an in-depth analysis, see the edited volume by Rosenholm, Nordstreng & Trubina (eds.) (2010).



magazine publisher below predicted, the “shop window” with all its associations of aspirational consumption is now a visible feature of many Russian streets:

"I knew *Cosmopolitan* could work here. You looked at Russian women, and you saw... how they wanted to improve themselves. I knew if there was one magazine that shows you how your life can be, a shop window you can look in... it was Cosmo"

(publisher of Russian *Cosmopolitan* magazine, quoted in Gallagher, 1995: 3).

As such, although women's magazines may have initially been seen to represent the transplant of particular cultural norms around conspicuous consumption into a context in which these norms seemed (and continue to seem) somewhat problematic, as shown earlier in this chapter the stress on beauty labour for Soviet women perhaps provided a hook on which a newer *culture* of conspicuous consumption could be hung.

Notwithstanding this point, in the early to mid-1990s, when many Western-style magazines were beginning to appear in the Russian market, consumer culture was still in its infancy and most Russians did not have the disposable income necessary to take part in any but a very limited amount of consumption (Bartlett, 2006: 176). Accordingly, many of the newer popular magazines of the 1990s represented an unrealistic level of consumption for the vast majority of those that bought them, with one scholar describing *Cosmopolitan* during the first decade of market reform as "an extremely highly priced glossy aimed at a readership who can afford \$200 for a pair of shoes" (Kelly, 1998: 230) (although this is a description that could arguably be applied to many Western readers of women's magazines). Factors such as location also affected whether people had access to these goods: Flynn & Starkova (2002: 56) note that, by the mid-1990s, a majority of advertising in *Cosmopolitan* was for Western goods only available in fashion centres such as Moscow. In some ways, then, the conspicuous consumption of Western women's magazines, which are dependent on the advertising revenue they bring in (Nelson, 2012: 55-56), may be seen

as having been ‘imported’ into a Russian context in which the content was not always relevant to the majority of potential readers, who did not necessarily fit an “ideal consumer” addressed by many women’s magazines (Gough-Yates, 2003; Ratilainen, 2013).

However, it is also vital to note that many poorer women in the Western countries where the magazines were first published are also often unable to buy many of the products magazines encourage readers to purchase. Because of this, the initially foreign nature of the newer women’s lifestyle magazines could be said to lie more in the new cultural norms around conspicuous consumption they contained, rather than in their lack of relevance in economic terms (even if this did seem to present a more significant issue in post-Soviet Russia than in the UK, for example). This is even more so given that a high level of conspicuous consumption remains largely confined to a small economic elite in the Putin/Medvedev era, despite the growing stability of the Russian economy. By the time the global financial crisis emerged in the late 2000s, only 22 per cent of people could be described as middle class by Western standards (Sergeev in Rudova, 2011: 1106), particularly from the point of view of disposable income (and thus potential access to consumption).<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, a focus on consumer goods seems to have helped rather than hindered the success of many women’s magazines; as Pietiläinen (2008: 377) notes, the magazine market has grown considerably in the past decade or so amongst women who are now “more interested in personal pleasure” – according to women’s magazines, pleasure may be found via conspicuous consumption, or even via window shopping, both of which have become a significant leisure activity in contemporary Russia. Gurova (2012: 164)

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<sup>24</sup> However, it should be noted that definitions of ‘middle class’ are highly contentious, and thus opinions differ on the true extent of a middle class in Russia (Salmenniemi, 2012: 36-37).

describes middle-class consumers in St Petersburg as "omnivorous consumers, open to various kinds of retailing, and reflexive consumers, contemplating many of their consumption practices", demonstrating that conspicuous consumption as a practice has a clear foothold amongst certain social groups. However, it may be said that a *culture* of consumption (if not necessarily always the ability to indulge in significant amounts of conspicuous consumption – an issue I discuss in Chapter 7) is apparent in contemporary Russia.

In accordance with this, post-Soviet women's magazines portray consumption, often in the form of shopping, as a leisure activity. The constant array of new products (*novinki*) featured in their pages leaves the reader in little doubt as to the links between consumption – particularly linked to beauty and fashion – as a normative means of 'doing' femininity (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Indeed, a focus on conspicuous consumption has been one of the most noticeable changes brought into women's magazines since the collapse of state socialism. Whereas Soviet women's magazines held a clear, ideologically-defined role in readers' lives, their contemporary counterparts now "play the role of a guide in the world of consumption" (Kalacheva, 2002: 4). To take an example of February 2011 issues of the Russian women's magazines used in this research, *Cosmopolitan* was 33 per cent pure advertising, *Liza* 36 per cent and *Elle* 37 per cent<sup>25</sup>, proportions which are certainly comparable to many Western women's magazines.

### 2.7.2 Femininity and Conspicuous Consumption in Russia

From a feminist perspective the new 'opportunities' Russian women now have as

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<sup>25</sup>By 'pure', I mean pages, half pages and quarter pages of advertising, not counting product placements or advertorials, which would increase the percentage.

consumers can be seen as problematic. The question is whether they offer real opportunities – whether they have increased freedom of choice for women – or whether they merely symbolise a newer form of gendered constraint based around claims to individualism and choice, rather than the more overt constraints of Soviet collectivism. Certainly the discourse of “selfism”, or liberation through individualistic rather than collective practices, has been questioned by some feminist scholars (Stevens et al, 2007: 237). Naomi Wolf’s arguments situate women as victims of the world of conspicuous consumption found in women’s magazines, citing them as part of a neoliberal attitude towards women’s supposed personal empowerment and arguing that they “keep women consuming their advertisers’ products in pursuit of the total personal transformation in status that the consumer society offers to men in the form of money.” (Wolf, 1991: 29) Similarly, Russian women are confronted with an ever-increasing array of consumer ‘choices’ linked to beauty labour, and women’s magazines tend to present access to these supposed choices as egalitarian (which I discuss further in Chapter 6).

It is also important to consider the historical specifics of the Russian context alongside the growth in more individualist socio-cultural values in Russia. For example, Sian Stephenson’s work on Russian women’s magazines discusses how the sudden centrality of ‘selfhood’ after the fall of communism could be appealing to women who had previously lived in a society which encouraged the subsuming of the individual to the collective, arguing that “[women] were being asked to think about themselves in a completely new way and to recognise “their own self”. Their “*old self*” could be abandoned along with the reality of their lives” (2007: 615). Thus, often Russian women had to learn to negotiate new rules which positioned femininity as more highly linked to conspicuous consumption than it had been in the past: they had to get used to popular culture which constantly

offered them images of “\$200 shoes”, to paraphrase Kelly (1998). Discourses of ongoing reinvention espoused by the new women’s magazines offered escapism from reality – which remained harsh for many women – but also a chance for women to acclimatise to the emerging economic and social values of the post-Soviet era.

With rapid social change came changing gender norms. The figure of the ideal Soviet woman, even if it did not reflect reality for many Soviet women, became somewhat of an anachronism. Eventually the female *sovok* – a woman with a Soviet mentality – was a caricature often portrayed satirically in the mass media as a backward and negative version of womanhood (Lipovskaya, 1994: 124). The rejection of some official socialist femininity norms also led to a type of backlash after the fall of communism. With the advent of Gorbachev’s reforms, many Soviet women were keen to both take part in the ‘Western’ rituals of beauty that were now depicted in the press, and to stress that they were part of a global culture through their grooming and fashion choices (Kay, 1997: 82), choices for which the new consumer marketplace was beginning to cater. Thus, debates around the liberating or restrictive nature of a culture of conspicuous consumption should be contextualised around the historical legacy of communist consumer goods shortages and the perception that to be able to consume represented a new kind of freedom for late Soviet women and men alike.

However, a post-Soviet emphasis on conspicuous consumption and femininity runs alongside a renewed emphasis on the body as a major reflection of a woman’s worth, in the process contributing to a greater polarisation of gender discourses in post-Soviet Russia that has somewhat paradoxically occurred alongside a greater plurality of choices for women in everyday life. Although Soviet women took part in beauty practices, as I have

previously discussed, and consumption certainly existed as a practice from the Stalinist era onwards (Gurova, 2012: 151-153), in this thesis I explore the ways that attitudes towards consumption have changed specifically in relation to *gender*. Namely, I argue that change has come about in the extent to which women's appearances became linked to conspicuous consumption. I will argue that this has entailed a greater emphasis on maintaining a desirable body, linked to the fantasy lifestyles of celebrities and brands they are seen to consume in the media.

Indeed, recent studies of glamour culture have captured how post-Soviet forms of femininity are often highly linked to appearance and conspicuous consumption (see Gusarova 2008; Rudova, 2008; 2011; Menzel, 2008; Ratilainen, 2012; Goscilo & Strukov (eds), 2011). Kseniya Gusarova (2008) portrays *glamur* as a rather elusive quality which contains elements of both fantasy and reality; it can be present in material goods, but it can also be inherently out of reach in that these material goods are only accessible to a relatively small elite in Russia. She captures the appeal of this to the post-Soviet consumer, arguing that "the boundless allure of 'glamour' lies in its partial attainability: it is possible to acquire piecemeal the trappings of the elite, such as accessories and cosmetics, but not the whole lifestyle" (Ibid: 15). Many women's magazines fit into this description in that they normalise high levels of consumption despite the apparently small size of the consumer base that can afford to buy them. In this sense *glamur* is a paradox: it is both a minority pursuit and a part of contemporary mass culture, and is also highly aspirational.

Litovskaia & Shaburova (2010) offer several interlinked definitions of glamour, most of which are linked in some way to consumption in the new Russia. They also portray glamour as linked to self-improvement, Westernisation, luxury and aspirational lifestyles.

In similar terms, Birgit Menzel stresses the foreignness of a glamour discourse to the Russian context, describing glamour as the “cultural equivalent of unchallenged global capitalism” (2008: 4). Indeed, glamour discourses have provoked concern on a moral level, particularly from the older generations for many of whom glamour culture goes against the anti-capitalist and anti-individualist values of the past (Rudova, 2011: 1103). However, some gendered aspects of glamour culture may represent continuity, as opposed to a completely new cultural phenomenon; several historians have highlighted the significance of appearances to women’s worth in Soviet society (Gradsikova, 2007b; Vainshtein, 1996; Azhgikhina & Goscilo, 1996), for example, pointing out the ambiguity of past values (and the difference between official and individual values and behaviours).

Moral concerns about glamour culture also echo feminist criticism of consumption norms in Western societies as linked to binary gender norms (consumption has often been linked to women, femininity and pleasure, and in opposition to a supposedly more logical masculinity linked to production and rationality) (Cronin, 2000: 274). The post-Soviet female consumer is seen to represent a new era in Russian history, where she is a new “creature [...] in direct opposition to the patriotic mother and industrious worker of the Soviet Union” (Stephenson, 2007: 615). The post-Soviet woman, with her office job and leisure habits focused around shopping and beauty labour, is perceived to produce very little aside from femininity. Thus as in the West, consumption can be seen as something feminised and thus frivolous, perhaps symbolic of a new era lacking the concrete and communal social goals of the Soviet era. This moral attitude towards consumption for its own sake is also reflected, for example, in some aspects of Gurova’s (2012) research on clothing and consumption in contemporary St Petersburg.

However, existing literature has also highlighted the continuities in consumption which can be found in comparison to certain elements of the Soviet past. Vera Dunham's (1976/1990) work on Stalin's era shows how material goods became more important in building an intelligentsia and nomenklatura class loyal to the Soviet system. Furthermore, Yurchak (2006: 168-169) notes that in some forms consumption was accepted in the post-Stalin Soviet period, as long as consumer items were admired for the 'right' reasons. Klingseis (2011) also recognises some continuities from Soviet discourses on the body and ethics related to appearance, tracing elements of glamour in interviews with those who chose to dress 'flamboyantly' in the Soviet era. She notes that the desire for some elements of glamour may have existed in the Soviet era, although the dominant morality made it more difficult to achieve.

In addition, Soviet women's magazines such as *Rabotnitsa* contained a message that looking good was important for women, for example via advice on clothing and beauty care, but also reflected the culture of homemade clothes and cosmetics that existed in the USSR (Vainshtein, 1996; Gradszkova, 2007b). Despite the fact that the late 1980s saw an explosion of consumerism, goods were scarce. Although he argues that women – in their gendered role as the chief participants in the queuing that was necessary to buy everyday goods – were identified with consumption more than men during Soviet times, Oushakine's (2000) arguments suggests that it took time for consumption to be strongly relinked to womanhood, as it was in the West (Cronin, 2000). Interestingly, he also sees this role as having been somewhat reversed in the 1990s, with a new stress on a largely male cohort of 'New Russian' consumers. This was also a product of the concentration of capital, and the capacity to earn money through business activities (or otherwise), into the hands of men. A woman's "commodification" as wife or girlfriend of the nouveau riche



‘businessman’ “precedes her entry into the domain of consumption” (Oushakine, 2000: 102). In a way, consumption was still a feminised activity, though it was mediated due to women’s relative lack of economic power.

Recent work however suggests that conspicuous consumption is now firmly associated with mainstream gender norms relating to womanhood, in which the mass media – including women’s magazines – has played a significant part. Aspirational consumption plays a vital role in women’s magazines (Stephenson, 2007), and this has implications for gender norms. Saara Ratilainen has argued that “[T]he commodification of an elite lifestyle [...] has transformed the Russian social order. The mass media have participated in this process by actively de-coding and re-coding the central features of a Russian feminine identity. (2012: 57). Although I would agree this is true to a certain extent, the re-coding has not necessarily brought about as much change in gender norms as may have been anticipated – which I will discuss in later chapters. Furthermore, although much of the conspicuous consumption in magazines is aspirational, it would be spurious to ignore the fact that the availability and range of consumer items on the Russian market has vastly increased in the past two decades, with the growth of malls notable not just in larger cities such as St Petersburg and Moscow, but in provincial cities such as Ulyanovsk and Nizhny Novgorod, for example. Middle-class consumers with the means to travel sometimes prefer to shop abroad (Gurova, 2012: 160), although class indeed plays a significant role – as in other areas of the world – on the types of consumption available to individuals. However, in relation to attitudes and consumer behaviour, consumption arguably now plays a much greater role than it did in the Soviet and early post-Soviet eras.

To summarise this section, it is clearly important to take into account not only changing

material conditions over the past two decades in Russia, but the specific moral and cultural values associated with conspicuous consumption and individualism that have developed alongside this. Although in some ways change is very apparent, in other ways continuities in gender norms have actually helped to facilitate these changes. For example, the stress on beauty for women which existed during the Soviet period has arguably facilitated changes in the amount of consumption *linked to femininity* that Russian society has witnessed in recent years.

## 2.8 Conclusion

Taking the gendered body as a point of departure, this chapter has sought to present key gender studies debates with the aim of providing a theoretical basis for an analysis of femininity norms in contemporary Russian media and society. I have shown how, in existing literature, the body has been conceptualised as not only the subject of surveillance, self-surveillance and disciplinarity via beauty labour, but a means of gaining aesthetic capital, which I have positioned as a particularly gendered form of Bourdieusian capital. Feminist critiques of portrayals of the female body in women's magazines and culture provide a background to my own discussions of the body in Russian society. As I have also discussed how literature on both Western and Soviet women's magazines has highlighted the body as a particular focus of the genre, in the thesis I aim to explore how notions such as feminist uses of discipline and surveillance may be useful in analysing discursive portrayals of women's bodies in Russian women's magazines. These theoretical approaches will also be used to examine readers' attitudes towards their bodies and the beauty labour that they carry out; however, feminist debates around agency and decoding media will also be significant in exploring how Russian women decode magazines and

how they negotiate gender norms.

Discursive constructions of conspicuous consumption as linked to normative femininity are another aspect of the thesis which has been discussed in this chapter. The role of state socialism in twentieth century Russian history means that consumption (both as a culture and as an activity) has a symbolic resonance different to that of consumption in Western, capitalist countries. This research explores what significance this issue, which has been addressed in recent Russian studies literature, has in relation to contemporary gender norms. This is especially relevant given that a culture of consumption is a topic at the forefront of women's magazine content.

Discursive constructions of Russia itself, especially in relation to constructions of the West, has also been introduced here as an aspect addressed in my analysis of gender in Russian media and society. The most significant thing to highlight in relation to the perspective taken in the thesis is that existing literature has emphasised that these values should not be divided *a priori* into binaries of West/East or Russian/non-Russian, but that cultural dialogue between Russia and other nations in the post-Soviet era has been neither unidirectional nor uncontested (Pilkington et al, 2002; Lerner & Zbenovich, 2013). As such, the thesis looks at which values Russian women bring up in relation to Russia and the West. The thesis thus explores continuity and change in gender discourse, rather than seeking to categorise discourses into categories of Russian, Western or global.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to detail not only how fieldwork and analysis were conducted, but the decisions made in designing the research project. As such, both methods (i.e. how data was collected) and methodology (the epistemological, ethical and philosophical stance taken in this thesis) are discussed.

The first section on research design explains how the decisions taken in planning this research project were taken. Section 3.2.1 discusses the centrality of a feminist approach to research methods and the empirical studies that have influenced the research design. Section 3.2.2 and 3.2.4 discuss how, in approaching the theme of gender in contemporary Russian media and society, a qualitative methodological approach combining a study of media and a study of media consumers was seen as most appropriate. In section 3.2.3 I explain other issues such as the choice of magazine titles.

The second section on methods – how data collection and data analysis were carried out – includes discussion of different issues encountered in the field, as well as the approach taken to data analysis and arranging interviews. The two methods employed in exploring gender and women's magazines in a contemporary Russian context were discourse analysis and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The final section looks at research ethics and positioning of the researcher in the field, in line with the notion of knowledge as situated and with a feminist approach to research methodology.

## 3.2 Research Design

### 3.2.1 Choosing Methods based on Feminist and Media Studies Paradigms

As part of the research design, choosing appropriate methods is necessarily based on a consideration of the key themes the research project will cover, and the broader questions it will address. As discussed in the previous chapter, a main aim of this research is to explore how normative portrayals of femininity in women's magazines compare with women's understandings of femininity in the Russian context. As such, it was appropriate to use a 'triangulation' approach. Although triangulation can imply verification or 'fact checking' (Gomm, 2004: 188; Bryman, 2008: 379), it is broadly defined as "using more than one source of data in the study of social phenomena" (Bryman, 2008: 379).<sup>26</sup> In this case in reference to qualitative methods I use a definition of triangulation not as verification or a means of finding some kind of ontological 'truth' about the social world, but more as "a mode of enquiry", as defined by Huberman & Miles (1998: 199). This is because the approach taken to the research is both abductive and iterative.

An abductive strategy is defined as "exploring through everyday language the knowledge that social actors use in the production, reproduction and interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation" (Blaikie, 2000: 100). The triangulation of methods allows the use of different data sources (in this case, from the media and from interviews) to investigate a social issue. An abductive approach also implies a rejection of positivism and a relativist ontological view of any representation of social reality. (Ibid: 116) This rejection of positivism also fits with the feminist methodology that informs the research: feminist methodology has tended to critique the idea that any piece of research may objectively

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<sup>26</sup> N.B. The three points of the 'triangle' refer to one issue of study in addition to the two approaches being used.

reflect social reality (or should aim to), and the idea that the role of the researcher in producing the research is unimportant (Ramazanoglu & Holland 2002: 45-46).

An iterative style involves allowing knowledge to emerge as the research process progresses, in acknowledgement that initial observations may change and new ones may emerge (Huberman & Miles, 1998: 186-187). The dual methodological approach taken in this research relied on the simultaneous use of both methods, with a more general pattern of analysis centred around the themes of femininity and the body at the beginning, which gradually focused in on significant sub-themes and issues.

Triangulating methods also enabled an exploration of the research aims mentioned in the Introduction, which I revisit below:

1. To critically interrogate popular contemporary Russian women's lifestyle magazines as texts, with a view to determining dominant or significant gender discourses in the media and amongst magazine readers in relation to the themes of femininity, beauty and conspicuous consumption;
2. To examine Russian women's views of femininity, beauty, conspicuous consumption, and women's magazines, with the aim of exploring interactions between gender discourses encoded in women's magazines, and as decoded by their audience;
3. To explore continuities and changes in terms of gender discourses over the post-Soviet period in Russia, especially in the light of debates around the globalisation and/or Westernisation of Russian media and society.

As such, I wished to approach the collective of women's magazine readers as Gudova & Rakipova (2010: 9) describe them, as an audience that "not only passively experiences magazine material, but [which] also forms demand and takes part in the social readership of illustrated magazines, and from the other side of things, constitutes a subject who

rebuilds their daily reality according to the rules, and in the style, of the glossy magazine." The approach of combining discourse analysis with audience studies was also influenced by several prominent feminist studies of media and audience reception of popular culture texts aimed at a female audience. These include Ien Ang's (1985) study of the soap opera *Dallas*; Elizabeth Frazer's (1987) critique of an ideological rather than a discourse-based approach to *Jackie* magazine; Janice Radway's (1991) work on popular romance novels; Dawn Currie's (1999) work on adolescent magazines; Joke Hermes' (1995) work on 'repertoires', or ways of reading women's magazines; and Beatrix Ytre-Arne's (2011a; 2011b; 2012) work on magazine discourses and reader experiences. In addition, Currie's (1999) work argues that a synthesis of what have traditionally been two different academic approaches – cultural and sociological studies – are particularly useful in research on women's magazines; sociological analysis enables us to move beyond "the text as thing" and towards exploring "women's everyday encounters" with the texts (Currie, 1999: 290). Although I do not necessarily agree with the outcomes of each of these pieces of research, as discussed in the previous chapter, I was influenced in my research design by their approach.

The above approaches converge in two main ways. Firstly, in their feminist perspective, acknowledging the importance of media as an agent of gender socialisation; and secondly, in their willingness to look at reader experiences (whether in reading practices or in attitudes to gender discourses found in the texts). Some combine audience study with discourse analysis, and some dwell more on audience reception with minor references to content. They also show that a triangulation of methods can be valuable in providing different perspectives on the same topic within one piece of research. For example, Radway's (1983; 1984) work uses content analysis in combination with interviews and

some observation, based on the assumption that readers construct the meaning of a text with reference to their own experiences and context (Reinharz, 1992: 210).

As a further example, Joke Hermes' popular text 'Reading Women's Magazines' (1995) has provided an example of the insights it is possible to gain from a reader-focused approach to popular culture. Indeed, this thesis partly utilises Hermes' method of analysing how texts are read (or 'interpretive repertoires'). However, unlike Hermes, I do not see combining analysis of media with reception analysis as inherently problematic. Although I appreciate her argument that reader perspectives are in themselves fascinating and worthy of study (1995: 10-11), I find it difficult to agree with her perspective that reader accounts will be "drowned out" by the authorial voice involved in a media analysis. If anything, reader voices in research are the sections that often seem to jump out, to enrich discourse analysis rather than play a secondary role if they are well contextualised. Brita Ytre-Arne's recent study of women's magazines in Norway also holds particular resonance for this thesis. She argues that "there is something about the phenomenon [of women's magazines]" that makes a combination of these two methods appropriate (2011: 214). The thesis clearly agrees with this hypothesis in its approach, but seeks to foreground interviews with reference to the specific themes of beauty and femininity. It thus differs slightly from Ytre-Arne's approach, which allowed women to bring out a wider range of themes.

Another aspect in which this body of work was significant to the research design was in the extent to which it sought to question a prevailing feminist critique which (intentionally or unintentionally) painted women as victims of gender discourses in popular media, or "cultural dupes" (Modleski, 1991: 45). For example, Ang's (1985) work pays particular



attention to the ways in which women consumed media, for example as a ‘guilty pleasure’. This is especially relevant in relation to this thesis’ focus on the former Soviet sphere, an area of the globe which has been represented as less progressive in terms of gender norms, neglecting the differing ways in which feminist ideas developed in socialist societies<sup>27</sup> (which were not necessarily ‘behind’ Western movements for women’s emancipation).

Essentially, combining discourse analysis with audience reception analysis is done with the aim of engaging with one critique of past studies of women’s media which, although they represented a valuable and necessary point of analysis in the history of feminist thought which McRobbie (1997c: 196) refers to as “angry repudiation”, failed to engage sufficiently with how women decoded media. In this study I aim to explore norms and discourses which reflect patriarchal power, whilst also exploring how these discourses are mediated in the light of the ways they are read.

In taking a feminist perspective, this research aims to explore women’s experiences of reading magazines as an additional means of analysing their significance. Through using two methods, this research aims to engage with both a feminist critique of magazines as texts, but balance this critique with additional research into how these texts are read, decoded and contextualised in Russian society. This chapter now moves onto examine the two methods used in more depth.

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<sup>27</sup>For example, Cerwonka (2008) highlights the growth of feminist ideas in early twentieth century central Europe, and notes that this progress was somewhat lost under state socialism. Similarly, although gender equality was never achieved in Russia, it is important to refer to the early Bolshevik period and the influence of women such as Aleksandra Kollontai in advancing feminist arguments.

### 3.2.2 Discourse Analysis

A discourse analysis of contemporary Russian women's magazines was the primary building block of the thesis, intended to meet the following aims: bringing out some of the main themes of the research; highlighting the specificities of the Russian context; and enabling data analysis to begin at an early stage of the research (interviews were necessarily confined to a later period of fieldwork, when I was based in Russia). This section will cover two main aspects of this choice of methods: firstly, why discourse analysis was suitable for this research; and secondly, the reasons behind the sources which were chosen for analysis.

A discourse may be defined as a certain feature of 'symbolic interaction and communication' (Bloor & Bloor, 2007: 6) present in the text. This research draws upon a definition of discourse as associated with a Foucauldian approach which positions gender norms and subjectivities as "constituted within" discourses (Bacchi, 2005: 200): we acquire meaning via discursive activity and understandings. According to Foucault, these discourses are related to regimes of power, as they help to form social norms which encourage individuals towards behaviour such as self-surveillance and the disciplining of their bodies, for example. Discourse is not only significant, but the very means by which power is enacted in society (Foucault, 1971). In relation to this research, notions of 'dominant' or 'hegemonic' discourses have been widely used in feminist studies (Bacchi, 2006: 201) and gender studies (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) in highlighting gendered notions of power in society.

Discourse analysis as a method is associated with an implicit acknowledgement that texts are composed not only of a surface meaning, but potentially also implicit meanings linked

to the culture and society in which they are produced. This is also to say that the texts assume some level of cultural understanding on the part of the reader: they take for granted that the reader is familiar with any number of things, from overt references to popular culture, to stylistic devices, to ways of formatting content in a magazine. Thus discourse analysis is one means of exploring hidden and overt discourses that help to create meaning within texts.

However, discourse analysis is also based on the various levels of understanding that a text can carry; it takes into account that texts may be interpreted in different ways by different readers. Although this poststructuralist approach to assessing texts has attracted criticism (e.g. that it concentrates on meaning at the expense of affecting material change in society), in reply I would quote Bertrand and Hughes: “the fact that ‘truth’ is an impossible goal does not prevent us from seeking it” (2005: 209). Any discourse analysis is necessarily subjective and the product of a certain temporal, geographical and cultural context, but a reflexive approach to research and a solid theoretical grounding means that it is still possible to produce valuable findings from a discourse analysis of empirical data.

### 3.2.3 Choice of Magazine Titles

This research uses three titles from the contemporary Russian women’s magazine market. All of the titles were originally Western titles which have been ‘imported’ since 1991, but which are – aside from a small minority of articles, such as interviews with international celebrities – produced in the Russian Federation by Russian-speaking staff. *Cosmopolitan* was first published in Russia in 1994, *Liza* in 1995, and *Elle* in 1996. Although Soviet-era

women's magazines such as *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest'ianka* still exist,<sup>28</sup> with the latter recently having undergone a makeover, a focus on foreign-origin titles in comparison with Russian interviews was planned to provide a further perspective on aspects of gender that may have been subject to cultural globalisation after the fall of state socialism. The magazines chosen are aimed at younger women aged from 18 to 35 years old, and although readership information reflects this, it also shows that they may be read by women of all ages (albeit at lower rates) (*Cosmopolitan Media Kit*, 2013). Most women interviewed for this study, for example, read their mother or sister's women's magazines from early adolescence. However, there were other considerations in choosing the magazines.

Market share was one factor, in that it gives a good indication of the popularity of each magazine in the Russian context. By readership share *Liza* was the most popular print magazine in Russia as of 2007; *Cosmopolitan* holds third place with a readership share of 2.7% (Pietiläinen, 2008: 376). That these magazines should retain such prominence in the magazine market as a whole suggests that women's magazines are a significant sector of the contemporary Russian print media. Amongst glossy magazines (which excludes *Liza*), *Cosmopolitan* is in first place and *Elle* in fifth. (*Cosmopolitan Media Kit*, 2013).

The second factor was to use a fairly diverse range of sources within this genre. In this sense, the choice of *Elle*<sup>29</sup> (rather than, for example, the more popular *Glamour* magazine) resulted from a desire to represent a different sector of the market aimed at women. Although its readership share was only 0.1% as of 2007 (Pietiläinen, 2008: 376), representing more of a niche area of the market, based on informal discussions with

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<sup>28</sup>As of 2007, their market share was 0.3% and 0.8%, respectively (Pietiläinen, 2008).

<sup>29</sup>As an aside, *Elle* was originally started in 1945 by Hélène Gordon-Lazareff, a Russian who had emigrated during the Bolshevik revolution who was based in France (Grandpierre, inaglobal.fr, 07/02/2013).

different Russian women prior to beginning the research it seemed to be ‘up and coming’ in Russia,<sup>30</sup> and I thought it would add a valuable insight given its greater focus on high fashion than either *Cosmopolitan* or *Liza*.<sup>31</sup> *Elle* features longer articles and what may be termed a slightly more ‘high-brow’ register than the other two magazines, which perhaps reflects its more luxury or upmarket style in the brands it features, as well as its generally more serious approach to the world of fashion. Bartlett (2010) discusses the efforts of women’s magazines to find resonance with more ‘serious’ sectors of the literary intelligentsia in Russia, who would have traditionally regarded glossy magazines as somewhat culturally corrupt. *Elle* magazine’s use of a more complex vocabulary and register than *Cosmopolitan* or *Liza* indeed made it more difficult to translate, but also may hint at an attempt to position itself within a more legitimated (Bourdieu, 1984/2010) cultural sphere.

The choice of *Liza* magazine was also motivated by diversity: although it is popular, unlike the other two magazines it is not considered a ‘glossy’ or *gleanets*, and it is published on a weekly basis.<sup>32</sup> Although focusing on glossy magazines would also have provided an interesting range of texts, *Liza*’s different style of layout and content – articles tend to be relatively short, and language more straightforward – and its market popularity suggested that it would provide an interesting contrast to mainstream glossies. Its greater focus on

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<sup>30</sup>During the writing of this thesis its circulation increased from 200,000 to 1.109m copies (*Elle Media Kit*, 2013), suggesting that the past five years have been a time of significant growth for this brand and confirming my initial expectations.

<sup>31</sup>Gough-Yates (2003: 101) notes that *Elle* is aimed at a more wealthy sector of the market in France and the UK.

<sup>32</sup>Some work (e.g. Ratilainen, 2013) refers to *Liza* as part of wider glamour/glossy culture; this research also essentially relates it to similar discourses in relation to gender. However, my own informal discussions with Russian women, in addition to comments by Russian researchers at conferences suggested that it is not generally viewed as a ‘glossy’ magazine in Russia. This seemed to be as much because of its content as it was related to the magazine being printed on non-glossy paper. However, as this thesis dwells on gender rather than categorising women’s magazines as glamour/glossy culture, I merely note the existence of ambiguous attitudes towards this particular magazine.

family life and child-rearing as well as fashion, beauty and career advice, and the more straightforward, less ironic register that it used to speak to its readers were also motivating factors for this choice.

The final consideration in choosing magazines was initial, informal research carried out on previous trips to Russia. These three magazines seemed to represent the interests of a fairly wide group of women in terms of income and interests, and yet could also be grouped together as popular women's lifestyle magazines. The magazines were procured from an online subscription service in two rounds, the first running from November 2009 to April 2010, and the second from November 2010 to April 2011. The reason for this was to allow time for analysis and to allow for the budgetary constraints of my research funding. Although all issues of *Elle* and *Cosmopolitan* from these discrete periods were selected for analysis, given that there were four times as many copies of *Liza*, one per month was selected for analysis. In the interests of diversity of material, I chose the first of each month from 2009-2010, and the last of each month from 2010-2011. This gave a total of 12 of each magazine (36 magazines overall) for analysis (see Bibliography for a list of magazine issues used in this research).

To give further relevant information about each magazine, *Elle* targets readers aged 25-35. Looking at issues relevant to this research, according to its 2013 media kit,<sup>33</sup> 51% “can afford to buy expensive clothes and all they want”, and “self-fulfilment” is important to 88% of readers. These are clearly rather vague statements, but they do demonstrate the centrality of one theme of this thesis – consumption – in producing this kind of magazine.

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<sup>33</sup>Media kits or packs are generally compiled for marketing purposes, and are especially aimed at selling advertising space. They contain a letter from the editor and information about content, issues, market and advertisement pricing.

They offer “special advertising projects”, including product placements within the beauty and fashion pages (*Elle* Media Kit 2013). *Cosmopolitan* gives a readership age structure rather than a specific target consumer, but the majority (57.9%) of its readers are aged 20-34. Its media kit argues that it “is the closest of all to what an ideal magazine should be – it has the largest audience that has the highest income level possible” (*Cosmopolitan* Media Kit, 2013). This arguably positions it between the intended readerships of *Elle* and *Liza*: *Elle* has a relatively small circulation with relatively high spending power, and *Liza* has the opposite, but *Cosmopolitan* encompasses (it implies) a wide readership which includes higher income levels. Again, this is also a rather vague statement, but it does highlight the significance of selling products to the magazine’s production ethos.

*Liza* magazine claims to be aimed at women aged 25-35 (*Liza* Media Pack, 2013). However, in their information they also cite the main age of their readers at 25-44, further stressing the fact that readership can be wider than their intended audience. Appropriately for a non-glossy magazine, it likes to differentiate itself from other popular women’s titles: the reader of *Liza*, according to their own material, likes to “make her own life in her own way”. The editor writes that “a woman is not just a shopaholic, but a mother, a colleague, a daughter and a friend” (*Liza* Media Kit, 2013). Clearly, less of a stress is given to conspicuous consumption in the magazine’s brand identity, although selling advertisement space is still a priority. In terms of reader social class, they prefer to cite what percentage of their readership can “afford expensive purchases” – 33%. This is contrasted with the *Elle* and *Cosmopolitan* media kits, the latter of which states that the magazine contains “everything real shopaholics need to know” (*Cosmopolitan* Media Kit, 2013).

### 3.2.4 Interviews

The choice of semi-structured interviews was based on the chief research aim of comparing media discourses with how these discourses were perceived and decoded by women. In using interviews, I build upon other work done on gender in the post-Soviet era. (See for example Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996; Kay, 1997, 2000; Omel'chenko & Aristarkhova, 1999; Ashwin (ed.), 2000; Kalacheva, 2002; Pilkington et al, 2002; Patico, 2008.) Speaking to participants is a means of delving deeper into the daily experiences that help to form understandings of gender on an individual and a societal level. Furthermore, interviewing was chosen as it constitutes a “co-operative activity” (Gomm, 2004: 169) in which information is produced via a conversational process between the interviewer and the interviewee. Of course, information is always mediated during the processes of research and analysis (Ribbens & Edwards, 1997), and the very application of academic theory to women’s voices may be seen as ambiguous, either increasing the extent to which they are heard or, conversely, shaping or silencing them (Parr, 1997).

However, semi-structured interviews (as opposed to surveys, for example) are a method more conducive to the feminist methodological aim of allowing women’s voices – which have been historically marginalised – to be heard. Allowing participants to “speak for themselves and (in part at least) set the research agenda is likely to produce work which can be used by women to challenge stereotypes, oppression and exploitation” (Letherby, 2003: 85). Fully structured interviews would leave less scope for discussing general topics around beauty, femininity, conspicuous consumption and women’s magazines that participants may find important, so semi-structured interviews meet a further feminist approach of involving participants actively in the processes of knowledge creation (Reinharz, 1992: 20). In addition, they allow for informal, ad hoc discussion. They also



reflect the feminist approach taken in this thesis: feminist approaches to social sciences methods have striven to acknowledge the power relationships between the researcher and the researched (Naples, 2003: 3), something which I will touch upon again in section 3.3. Finally, it was important that the majority of interviews took place in Russian as opposed to English. This not only allowed participants to use their own everyday language, but meant that I could compare this with the language used in women's magazines to refer to gender and beauty themes.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.2.5 Fieldwork Locations

As part of fieldwork for the research, I conducted interviews in St Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod over a period of two summers. In June-July of 2010 a pilot trip to St Petersburg was undertaken in order to refine my interview questions and meet participants. The second visit was for a longer period from April to August 2011, including three months in St Petersburg and a further month in Nizhny Novgorod.<sup>35</sup> Although location was not something I focused on as an aspect of my data analysis, it does feature in some interviews as a factor influencing, for example, access to consumer goods, or attention to appearance. As such, I give a brief introduction to provide context on the locations of the research below.

St Petersburg is Western Russia's second largest city after Moscow, chosen because it is considered one of Russia's two 'capitals', with a population of around 4.8 million people (*Vserossiyskaya perepis' naseleniya*, 2010). It is a cosmopolitan city, a centre for culture,

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<sup>34</sup> I conducted interviews in English only when participants requested to make use of the opportunity to practice with a native speaker.

<sup>35</sup> Although more time spent in the field would have been desirable, to a large extent it was constrained by teaching commitments as part of my research funding that meant I could only travel outside of the teaching year.

commerce and tourism. From a logistical perspective, unlike Moscow I had spent time in the city previously and had existing academic and personal contacts. This made living arrangements more straightforward, but also gave me a chance to draw upon existing research networks at the Centre for Independent Sociological Research (TsNSI) and the European University of St Petersburg, where I was able to attend research seminars and meet other researchers, as well as use desk space and the library at TsNSI.

St Petersburg is also an interesting location from the point of view of research that looks in any way at globalisation and Western influences on Russia since the fall of communism: it is close to Europe and has traditionally been called Russia's "window on the West" (Geraci, 2001: 5). Many inhabitants travel to nearby Finland, particularly to buy consumer goods, a trip which became more straightforward with the opening of the faster, direct 'Allegro' train service in late 2010 ('Allegro Launch Cuts Helsinki - St Petersburg Journey Times', [railwaygazette.com](http://railwaygazette.com); 25/09/13). Due to such links, living standards are higher than other regions of Russia: only Moscow and St Petersburg feature in the top 200 ranked world cities in terms of living standards ('Asia Pacific cities rank high on 2012 QOL index', [Mercer.com](http://Mercer.com); consulted 07/10/13). The city has a greater concentration of shopping facilities and Western brands than Nizhny Novgorod, mainly located along the main shopping areas centred on and around Nevsky Prospekt. These features make St Petersburg a specific case in relation to cities in other regions (except Moscow), in that inhabitants have greater access to global brands, to world culture in general. Given the city's status as a global commercial and touristic hub, they have a greater chance of contact with non-Russians on a day to day basis. I found that participants in St Petersburg were more likely to speak or to be learning English than those in Nizhny Novgorod. They were also more likely to be employed by companies that required them to travel abroad for work, whether

this was to China or to the U.S.A, as with two participants from St Petersburg.

Due to these specificities, Nizhny Novgorod was chosen as a contrast to St Petersburg in that it is in many respects representative of a typical Russian provincial city (albeit a large one). Choosing a city outside of the two ‘capitals’ was important in terms of providing a diversity of reader experiences (see Stella, 2008: 51). An *oblast’* capital which is an overnight train ride away from Moscow, the city (renamed ‘Gorky’, and closed to foreigners during the Soviet period) is Russia’s fifth largest city and a hub of industry particularly for information technology and engineering. It currently has a population of around 1.25 million people (*Vserossiyskaya perepis' naseleniya*, 2010) spread over several districts, over two sides of the Oka river. One side features the main railway station and is more focused on industry, whereas the other features the old town centre and more residential areas. The city shows signs of continual expansion, with new detached housing being built on greenfield sites just past the city boundaries. At the time of research, modernisation of many areas was taking place, and many of the tsarist-era wooden houses which had fallen into disrepair were being taken down. The city has one main shopping street filled with shops, banks, a cinema, cafes and restaurants, not far from a centuries-old kremlin fortress. There are also several shopping malls in central areas of the city, giving citizens access to many opportunities for conspicuous consumption. The choice of Nizhny Novgorod was also partly influenced by the availability of contacts in the region, who were able to assist with the practicalities of living in a new city and also with finding participants. During the research, I was officially based at Nizhny Novgorod State University.

### 3.3 Methods

#### 3.3.1 Discourse Analysis

This section discusses processes of data gathering and analysis. As a first step, the magazines were read as entire texts with the aim of gathering relevant information. Although magazines are by nature a multi-modal (Bloor & Bloor, 2007: 6) media format, in that they contain pictures and photographs as well as words, I decided to focus on language in the texts so that this could be covered thoroughly in the relatively small scope of this thesis. For similar reasons, there was a focus on editorial as opposed to overt advertising<sup>36</sup> content.<sup>37</sup> Further criteria were based on the research's central themes of beauty and femininity, which included all or most of the fashion and beauty sections of the magazines, in addition to material from outside these sections which featured these themes. Due to the large amount of data used in this research, it was decided that the software package NVivo would be useful in analysing data. Often used in qualitative research, NVivo provides a range of tools for handling rich data records, coding, annotating and accessing it quickly (Richards, 1999). The program allows material not only to be stored in an easily accessible manner all in one place, but aids the researcher in systematically organising material into themed 'nodes', which is especially useful in abductive research as it allows analysis of the most prominent themes. When data is entered into the NVivo system, nodes can be created and linked to each other, clearly highlighting the location of potentially relevant source material for referencing and cross-analysis. Bazeley (2007: 8)

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<sup>36</sup>This includes 'advertoiral' features, defined as "promotional material [...] that the publisher develops in accordance with the concept of the magazine". (*Liza Media Pack*, 2013) These are usually clearly labelled as such, whereas product placements and advertisements are not.

<sup>37</sup>This is to say, advertising which is clearly positioned as such. Product placements are a key part of editorial material. There is little research on this topic, which Anna Gough-Yates attributes to the reluctance of magazine producers to come under the close scrutiny of researchers. However, it is suggested that these placements are unpaid or paid with 'favours' (i.e. free beauty products) for magazine staff ('The Lipstick Years: Confessions of an Ex-Beauty Journalist', *The Vagenda*; consulted 16/06/12).

argues that using NVivo can be helpful in moving between general and specific examination of research materials, and thus potentially contributes to a more sophisticated analysis overall. Indeed, NVivo allowed for both specific analysis of the material already coded, but enabled me to easily move to a wider view of the emerging themes.

Accordingly, the next step was to carry out a pre-analysis: highlighting relevant pages for extracts to be typed into NVivo, where notes on and quotations from single articles were transformed into individual documents relating to particular articles, magazine headings or pages.<sup>38</sup> In terms of translation from Russian into English, rough translations of content from pre-analysis were fed into the NVivo project, and more accurate translation was carried out at a later stage when sources were selected for inclusion into empirically-based writing. Given that I am not a native Russian speaker but have some years of language training, I used online sources<sup>39</sup> alongside traditional dictionaries to help more accurately translate some of the language, which at times could be very specialist in that it related to various kinds of beauty products and terms for clothing. The process of data collection, coding and discourse analysis was ongoing in that it continued into my fieldwork period in Russia and beyond, and sources were regularly revisited to allow coding and analysis to evolve during the research project. This allowed for an organic development of what turned out to be the more significant themes of the research – indeed, these were not always the themes that had seemed most important in the beginning, and some themes became more or less important when viewed alongside the interview material.

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<sup>38</sup>The multi-modal nature of magazines means that content is not always easily classifiable as titled articles, so page numbers were used to ensure accuracy.

<sup>39</sup>Mainly multitrans.ru, which is useful for giving contextual examples of words and phrases.

### 3.3.2 Interviews

In this section, the interview-based parts of the fieldwork are discussed, covering the issues of selecting participants, interview structure and questions, and data analysis. The thesis contains results from some pilot interviews carried out in 2010, prior to the main fieldwork period in 2011. It is important to note that there were fewer pre-prepared questions, and as research themes were at an earlier stage of development, there was more of a focus on magazines and femininity as a concept as opposed to beauty labour and conspicuous consumption. In keeping with this, the prompt survey<sup>40</sup> was not given to these five interviewees.<sup>41</sup>

Interviews were carried out with 39 women, divided as follows: 5 pilot interviews in 2010 in St Petersburg; 18 interviews in 2011 in St Petersburg; and 16 interviews in 2011 in Nizhny Novgorod. Location was not a significant factor in interview questions or analysis, and transcripts were analysed as a group without distinguishing their locations.

### 3.3.3 Access to Research Participants

Demographically participants were chosen from the age group that the magazines are aimed at, which was younger adult women up to the age of 35. Of course, this is not to say that the magazines are only read by women of this age group – many participants mentioned that they read magazines from their early- or mid-teens, and there is plenty of material in the magazines for them to be interesting to women of any age. However, much of the content – including advertising – is aimed at 18-35 year olds, and so I decided to

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<sup>40</sup> See 3.3.4 and Appendix II.

<sup>41</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout in the interests of anonymity. The pseudonyms of respondents from pilot interviews are Yevgenia, Sofia, Zinaida, Zoya and Yulia, and the question sheet from these interviews may be found in Appendix IV.

focus on this to narrow down the potential pool of interviewees. Although I advertised for this age group, the interviewees I found ranged in age from 21 to 33.

Aside from age, the other main criterion for choosing participants was that they were familiar with this genre of magazines. I did not stipulate that they needed to be subscribers as some similar studies did (see, for example, Ytre-Arne, 2011) or even that they read one of the magazines used in this study, but only that they were familiar with the genre or self-defined as regular readers of women's magazines. Although I had initially decided to only interview women who described themselves as regular readers, I came across some who seemingly had strong feelings about magazines and spoke about having purposefully stopped buying (if not always reading) women's magazines in the recent past. This kind of opinion I felt offered an important viewpoint on the significance of women's magazines in socialisation and on the overt rejection of some magazine discourses by women, as particularly discussed in Chapters 5 and 7.<sup>42</sup>

Although this thesis to some extent explores class distinctions as related to consumption opportunities, social class was not part of the selection criteria. With hindsight on some of the issues that emerged during analysis, it would be interesting in future research on women's magazines to provide some rough measurement of social class (preferably by taking into account both income and other factors such as social capital). Despite this, some limited general observations on class were made in addition to the research focus on gender. For example, some women were unemployed and spoke about not being able to afford the consumer items recommended by the magazines, and others had well-paid jobs in large cities that enabled them to travel and consume luxury items. All but three of the

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<sup>42</sup> For simplicity, in the thesis all participants are referred to as readers.

women interviewed had completed higher education or were in higher education at the time.<sup>43</sup>

The approach taken to finding participants was threefold. Firstly, online magazine forums (for *Elle* and *Cosmopolitan*, as *Liza* did not have a significant online presence at the time) were used to advertise the research and request contact from potential participants. Secondly, a ‘snowballing’ (Bryman, 2008: 184-185) technique was employed to build on contacts I had already made through existing interviewees, colleagues and friends in St Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod. Finally, academic and civil service contacts in Nizhny Novgorod were also extremely helpful in finding me participants who had an interest in the research topic. Appendix V gives participants’ demographic details under pseudonyms.

### 3.3.4 Interview Structure

Although interviews were conducted based on some pre-prepared questions (see Appendix D), the use of semi-structured interviews was intended, as discussed, to leave space for research participants to give their own thoughts on the research themes. In terms of general structure, the first part of the interview was dedicated to putting participants at their ease with some general questions. We then moved on to discuss their experiences of beauty labour, beginning with the ‘survey’. The third section included more discussion of the magazines in their lives, and the fourth was left open-ended, when participants were asked if there were any topics they would like to discuss further.

In relation to language, due to my natural limitations as a non-native Russian speaker, interviews conducted in English tended to be less structured by pre-prepared questions as I

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<sup>43</sup>Further demographic data on age, education and occupation can be found in Appendix V.



was more easily able to steer the conversation in different directions. However, after an initial period this was also the case with interviews in Russian, as I became more confident in spoken Russian. Although this issue would have been difficult to avoid given the practicalities of conducting fieldwork in a non-native language, I also paid attention to body language and non-verbal communication as a means of contextualising what I was hearing, a technique mentioned in some of the literature on conducting research as a non-native speaker (Winchitz, 2010).

A small survey (see Appendix II) was given to participants after the second stage of the interview with the aim of familiarising them with the kinds of issues the research was considering. Giving participants some examples of the kinds of processes I wanted them to talk about was an attempt to avoid misunderstandings and keep the interviews on track in a less formal way. The survey sheet consisted of some basic demographic information (age, job, education) and a table containing examples of ‘beauty labour’ activity, with additional blank boxes for participants to fill if they wished to add further examples. Participants were asked to provide a tick or a cross to indicate which activities they took part in, and many also wrote information about how often they carried out the activities. This ‘survey’ was never intended to be used quantitatively, but rather as a prompt or device to aid the interview process. It was also used at an early stage during the interview to allow a more gradual familiarisation with the interview process, as it would be their first opportunity to take a moment to think, tick off the activities on the form which met with their own beauty practices, and not feel as pressured to speak for the whole duration of the interview. The tapes show that while some participants indeed used the survey this way, others used it to talk more about their beauty labour regimes, and thus it had further benefits as a prompt for discussion.

### 3.3.5 The Research Process

A spreadsheet with brief information about each research participant was useful in keeping track of time spent in the field. It was also vital in maintaining anonymous data as participants were given pseudonyms in any written material from an early stage (i.e. straight after the interview). This was an important issue to consider in sending out audio files to be transcribed in Russia, as numbers were used rather than names in sending out files for transcription.

A research diary was kept during fieldwork in Russia which kept track of my research activities. It was also useful for developing ideas during the fieldwork period. In the diary I was able to reflect on the different themes which were present (or, indeed, absent) from both my interviews and my media sources. The diary was very loosely structured and – given the often sporadic nature of finding research participants – kept on an ‘as needed’ basis rather than according to any particular schedule. A research diary was also useful in the writing up stage of the research, aiding my recall of interview situations and thus enriching interview data. For example, I noted that in one interview the participant checked and reapplied her makeup in a small hand mirror at least every five minutes, something which may have had possible implications for her views on beauty labour. In another situation, I was able to jot down some observations from a cosmetologist I was in contact with who explained some issues around the beauty industry in Russia. It was also useful to look back on some of the feelings I had in terms of the research themes (i.e. beauty labour, femininity) when it came to fitting into certain situations or being able to relate to participants on certain issues.

Interviews were carried out without any outside assistance, and in varied settings: most

were conducted in cafes, a few in my own accommodation, and in some cases at the workplaces of the participants. Although a quiet location was preferable, it was more important to meet at a location most convenient to the participants (and thus could also include the park, for example, which was more comfortable during hot weather). The majority of the interviews were carried out in Russian. However, some participants wished to use the occasion to practice their English language skills, and so six women were interviewed in English. To avoid misunderstandings I made sure that the women were aware that they could switch to Russian if they wished to clarify a word they were unsure of. Most of the interviews were one-on-one; although five were group interviews with two-three participants (see Appendix V). Again, this depended on whether participants were more at ease discussing issues in a group with work colleagues or friends, which was not deemed a problem for the interview process and is an approach that has been used by other researchers in the Russian context (see Stella, 2008; Pilkington et al, 2002). In fact, participants were often prompted by their co-interviewees to remember specific issues that they may otherwise have forgotten, and the group interviews yielded on the whole very rich data.

The interviews were recorded using a small, digital recorder, meaning that records of the discussion were available to draw on in analysis. Consent for recording was obtained from each participant. Minimal notes were made during interviews as I felt this could distract my attention from the process of interviewing; instead, quick observational and analytical notes were made following the interview session. These formed part of the aforementioned research diary. The majority of the interviews were transcribed in Russian by two transcribers, both of whom had experience of working with academic transcription. One individual was from a St Petersburg research centre, and the other was recommended by a

colleague also carrying out research in the same city. The English interviews I transcribed myself on returning to the UK.

Having worked as an audio transcriber in different contexts, I am aware that there is always a margin for error in audio transcription: some transcribers ‘tidy up’ the text more than others, and some alterations may be inevitable if interviews are to result in readable text (unless, of course, the research is based on in-depth speech analysis). Because of this, during the analysis stage I checked transcriptions alongside the original recordings. Although I found some places where the exact words had been changed, overall there were few significant errors and the transcriptions were reliable. Of course, tapes and transcriptions can never provide a ‘neutral’ view of events – they are only one representation of events and feelings during fieldwork. The fieldwork diary was one way in which I attempted to reflect this issue, and recording where interviews took place and other details were helpful during analysis. For example, listening to interviews in conjunction with the fieldwork diary allowed me to place interviews in context during analysis, and remember other details about the setting which may have affected what was present on transcriptions.

### 3.3.6 Analysis and Interpretation

As previously mentioned, interpretation and analysis are processes that can be present throughout the research process (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002: 159). Given the iterative and triangulated approach to this research, to a certain extent ‘coding’ the interview data interacted with existing and developing coding of the magazine data I had already done. However, there were also themes emerging during interview analysis which were not already present in the magazine data, as will become evident in my empirical chapters.

Coding data using NVivo was most useful with magazine data given the volume of the source material. However, I chose not to use NVivo to analyse interviews due mainly to circumstances: firstly, I was able to take notes and code away from a computer more easily during certain periods of travel and being away from my office computer. Secondly, I began interview analysis during my time in Russia, when unfortunately my laptop (which had the only available copy of the NVivo software) broke down. Having to borrow a laptop from a friend for the remainder of my time in the field meant that there were several months during which NVivo would be inaccessible, so analysis had to begin using other means. On my return to Glasgow, re-coding using the software would have been a lengthy process that I felt would not have enriched the analysis at that stage, and so I continued to use the same method. This involved reading, re-reading and combining several layers of analysis: printouts of transcripts were highlighted for potential themes, and then digital copies of which extracts were copied and pasted into word processor documents organised by theme. On gathering the most prominent themes from the data, with reference to theoretical considerations, they were organised into provisional chapter headings. The writing process saw reorganisation and refashioning of these headings to suit the emerging themes.

### **3.4 Positioning in the Field**

The research process involves many choices at every stage of the work, and a reflexive approach can be helpful in shedding light on processes of knowledge production. Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2000: 5) talk about reflexivity (or being “reflective”, which they use as a synonym) as having two main implications for research: firstly, that all references to

empirical data are the results of interpretation; and secondly, the side of reflexive research which turns attention “inwards” towards the researcher themselves and towards their community, society, intellectual and cultural traditions (i.e. examining the researcher’s subject position). This section will address these issues with the aim of situating both this thesis and myself as a producer of knowledge, with an emphasis on the view that reflexivity entails an awareness of how one’s subject position impacts on the research process; that the “personal is not only political; it is intellectual, theoretical, and part of the research process” (Deutsch, 2004: 887).

In the past few decades, a reflexive approach to (in particular, qualitative) research has been recognised as helpful in encouraging openness around the processes of knowledge production. As Kim England (1994: 244) argues, “reflexivity is critical to the conduct of fieldwork; it induces self-discovery and can lead to insights and new hypotheses about the research questions. A more reflexive and flexible approach to fieldwork allows the researcher to be more open to any challenges to their theoretical position that fieldwork inevitably raises”.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, many others have argued for the inclusion of the researcher in the finished piece of research, albeit to varying extents. There is a growing line of reason that researchers should admit and explore the choices they make in their research, as they are involved in value judgements as well as description in the course of the work and the many choices they make in how to approach it (Gewirtz & Cribb, 2006: 142). Additionally, reflexivity “adds validity and rigour... by providing information about the contexts in which data are located” (Etherington, 2004: 37). In other words, academic writing is not produced in a vacuum: more traditionalist and positivist approaches that try

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<sup>44</sup>For example, I began the research with a view more sympathetic to agency in the face of dominant gender norms, but data gathered in interviews led me towards a more sceptical approach.

to convey objectivity have the potential to mask social inequality by hiding the context and processes behind knowledge production in academia. A reflexive approach also entails not positioning the researcher as an invisible and unquestioned voice of authority in the field and in the research produced. However, it should be noted that there is a balance to be struck between reflexivity and taking a wholly relative attitude towards fieldwork (Ribbens & Edwards, 1997: 4). As Burawoy (1991: 3) argues, the researcher must find a middle ground between two kinds of reductivism: firstly, in terms of trying to position oneself as the neutral, detached observer; and secondly, in terms of blurring the lines between researcher and researched so much that in-depth analysis on the researcher's part becomes difficult.

Given that this thesis has been carried out from a feminist epistemic standpoint, it is important to acknowledge that feminist approaches to research have often included some discussion of researcher reflexivity. Feminist empirical work often focuses on approaches to methods and questions the 'objectivity' of positivist methods, seeking to make knowledge that is 'better' due to it having been derived from marginal perspectives (Letherby, 2003: 44). Another perspective, 'feminist standpoint epistemology', argues for a rejection of traditional academic norms and values such as objectivity, which are claimed to hide the researcher's values and assumptions in the processes of knowledge production. By acknowledging standpoint and researching women's issues from a woman's point of view, this standpoint implies we may get closer to the truth, drawing on reflexivity as a resource to achieve a stronger objectivity (Ibid: 44-46). Finally, a postmodernist approach to feminist research rejects the notions of objectivity (Ibid: 51), seeking rather to explore particular subjectivities at particular times and contexts and from the perspectives of different individuals or groups. Although criticisms of all of these theories would demand

more space than is possible in this thesis, the most important thing to signpost from a reflexive perspective is the positioning of my research within all three of these feminist approaches to research. Despite some criticism of positioning the self in research, I agree with Letherby (Ibid: 143) that some balanced reflection on the part of the researcher can be beneficial to situating the researcher within the research and acknowledging the privileges and perspectives that come with a particular research perspective. As such, I attempt some reflexive thought on the research process below, and in the following section on ethics in fieldwork.

Potential tensions between the lived experience of fieldwork – especially in area studies – and the process of representing it in academic writing has been discussed by Kay & Oldfield (2011) and in an edited volume by De Soto & Dudwick (2000). For Western researchers, it is particularly necessary to be aware of potentially constructing Russia as an ‘Other’: particularly because in the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and Russia have been symbolically ‘Othered’ by politicians, the media and culture for a long time, even after the end of the Cold War (from Winston Churchill’s “enigma” comments, to the present day relishing of espionage narratives by some British newspapers, who are often still keen to buy into a James Bond-style story). Given the events of early 2014 in Ukraine, it is difficult to imagine that these discourses will become less prominent in the near future. However, such discourse often neglect the fact that, despite historical contingencies and the Cold War legacy of an East/West dichotomy, modern day Russia has been subject to many of the same currents of media globalisation as other countries. Additionally taking into account the rise of the internet, Russian citizens are clearly part of the global community and the globalisation of culture. It is thus beneficial to be aware of assumptions about the so-called ‘transition’ era in Russia, whereby the prevailing view was based on



neoliberal ideas that the former USSR countries would pass relatively smoothly into a democratic and capitalist system along the lines of Western nations (see, for example, Fukuyama, 1993). Theoretical boundaries are also something to consider (Cerwonka, 2008; Temkina & Zdravomyslova, 2014); Ribbens & Edwards also discuss further difficulties of carrying out research as a Western researcher in non-Western contexts:

However hard the researcher tries to position herself within the marginalised culture, she faces a dilemma. As long as she is seeking to be heard by a public academic audience, she cannot evade the necessity to interpret the world and understandings of the Other into a discourse or knowledge form that can be understood and accepted within the dominant Western frameworks of knowledge and culture. Such Third World or Other voices cannot be heard by a public Western audience without the researcher as 'interpreter'. (1997: 3)

It is difficult to avoid employing Western theoretical frameworks, especially relating to Russia, where there was little history of gender studies as a field under state socialism. In a way, reading Temkina & Zdravomyslova's (2003; 2014) two works on gender studies in Russia, a decade apart, suggests that there is now less of a problematisation of Western-origin theory in the Russian context than there had been in the 1990s – though their 2014 article certainly highlights the political difficulties of researching gender in contemporary Russia. However, some effort can be made by the Western researcher to address the issue of discrepancy, even if it is difficult to evade it completely. Firstly, the feminist approach of my fieldwork aims to centre participant voices through representing the discourses employed by women themselves in discussing their own lives and society. Secondly, using scholarship of Russian origin is also vital, and I have also attempted to incorporate as much as I could within the scheme of the research and bibliography (without designating it as somehow 'Othered' or different from research originating in the West).

The selection of methods is another aspect affected by researcher positionality. I had used both discourse analysis and interviews previously, and I had resources available to carry

out fieldwork in Russia as part of my PhD funding. I was also influenced by particular studies – both prior to this project and during it – and saw some value in their approaches, as discussed earlier in this chapter. My thematic field and university department also had some influence: fieldwork abroad is for obvious reasons prominent in post-Soviet area studies work, and I was able to draw upon the experience of research done in the earlier post-Soviet period in formulating my own approach. This is particularly true for gender studies of the region, which has used various methodologies – including media analysis and interviews – in exploring the rapid changes seen in the post-Soviet context. (See for example Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996; Kay, 1997; Omel'chenko & Aristarkhova, 1999; Ashwin (ed.), 2000; Kalacheva, 2002; Pilkington et al, 2002; Patico, 2008; Stella, 2008.)

On a more personal level, positioning oneself as a researcher is sometimes discussed in terms of being an ‘insider’ or an ‘outsider’, requiring some reflexivity on the part of the researcher as to the positives and negatives of either status. Although ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ may seem like binary terms, in reality the researcher is positioned through various prisms of perception. Being an insider is not simply a matter of nationality or language. For example, Bahira Sherif (2001: 438) encountered both acceptance and alienation in Egyptian society due to her insider and outsider knowledge and behaviours as an Egyptian-American. The “shifting and ambiguous identities” of researchers, she argues, blur boundaries and challenge binary conceptions of the researcher’s role. In some ways, I was an insider: women’s magazines had played a role in my own gender socialisation and in that of many women I knew, and I was a similar age to many of my research participants. In addition, I was keen not to stress the positioning of researcher/researched during interviews, but rather to encourage a less formal conversation between myself and the participants. Some approaches to this included being open about my own experiences

with women's magazines and beauty labour, both during interviews and in less formal interaction, so that the dialogue was not limited to a question-and-answer format, an approach that Harrison et al (2001) argue contributes to richer data. Some participants wished to ask about women's magazines in the UK, and used a national perspective to draw comparisons between Russian women and women in other European countries, for example, and two-sided dialogue demonstrating how in some ways I was an 'insider' was possibly helpful in putting some participants at ease.<sup>45</sup>

However, as Francesca Stella (2008: 57) argues, on the part of the researcher "[a] pretence of sameness is ultimately delusional if not deceitful, and can be exploitative by masking issues of power intrinsic in the relationship between researcher and researched group." My simultaneous position as an 'outsider', with no connections to Russia outside of my academic specialism, inevitably drew some lines between myself as a researcher and participants of the research, and also meant that an awareness of power relations in the research relationship was important to maintain (see the following section). I was a 'Westerner' and had, prior to fieldwork, only lived in Russia for a few weeks at a time. This, in addition to my non-native level of Russian, put me in a different position from an insider carrying out interviews. This is not necessarily a negative point, however: being removed from a culture in some ways may offer insights into socio-cultural practices that could differ from those of a 'native' researcher. Incorporating both Russian and Western empirical literature should thus provide a richer perspective on these practices.

As with reflexivity, reciprocity has been a concern of much feminist research (Harrison et

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<sup>45</sup>However, I did find that upon transcription one transcriber tended to skip the relatively rare moments of dialogue spoken by me as an interviewer outside of the usual questions. They perhaps had the intention of presenting the speech as somehow 'tidier' or less informal, but this possibly points to general perceptions of what a sociological interview should or should not consist of.

al, 2001). Feminist research inherently seeks to analyse and point out social inequalities, with the aim of lessening distinctions between researcher and researched. As one of Hermione De Soto's (2000: 89) participants discusses in her study of East German women during the collapse of state socialism, acting in a reciprocal manner as a researcher can be one way of tackling power inequalities or lessening the gap between researcher and researched. As described above, if I felt it would add to the interview as conversation, I sometimes spoke about my own experiences (whether in the British context or with magazines, beauty labour, etc.) during the interviews. Other means of increasing reciprocity included being available for English language practice during fieldwork or, later, online; carrying out interviews in English if the participant wanted to practice their foreign language skills; or offering advice on topics I had experience of.<sup>46</sup>

In addition, although the fact that I was in many ways an outsider possibly made some women feel less at ease – in which case interviews tended to be shorter or even, in one pilot interview, unusable – it could also work in my favour, as some participants wanted to practice their English or were interested in showing their city to a foreigner in the spirit of reciprocal friendship. There has been much discussion on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of researcher-participant friendships, especially in qualitative research which often requires one to become integrated with groups of people. Caroline Knowles (2006: 394) talks about familiarity and intimacy in fieldwork as “a fundamental part of a process capturing depth and meaning in others' lives.” As such, I saw such relationships in the field as beneficial. Interviews were often fitted in around social time, other activities and meetings with groups of people. I was not only able to make some observations around

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<sup>46</sup>For example, one participant wanted to know about studying in the UK and how to apply for funding, and I was able to offer some information about funding processes.

the interviews, but also to form social relationships and be of help to some participants in the spirit of reciprocal research.

### **3.5 Ethical Issues in Fieldwork**

Research involving human participants necessarily demands ethical foresight and planning, as well as an awareness of what ethical issues may arise during and after the research process. Ethical principles in social research can be broken down into four main areas, which involve whether there is harm to participants, whether there is a lack of informed consent by participants, whether there is an invasion of privacy, and whether deception is involved (Diener & Crandall, 1978, cited in Bryman, 2008: 118). The following sections discuss how I sought to engage with ethical dilemmas before, during and after fieldwork.

#### **3.5.1 Planning Ethical Research**

As a primary note on ethical considerations, prior to my interview fieldwork, I was required by my university's ethics committee to consider potential ethical issues in advance, in order to "reassure the committee that we are competent and experienced researchers who can be trusted" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004: 263). Guillemin & Gillam point out the tension between the 'official' version and the actual, living process of fieldwork, highlighting how researchers have to present different 'selves' to ensure their research is a success: first to secure approval, then to fit in with participants and get useful data. I certainly noticed a difference between the 'official' version of fieldwork as imagined by my undergraduate self, based on much of the Russia-based research I had read, and the actual, nuanced experience of spending time in the field.<sup>47</sup> Thus, it may be

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<sup>47</sup>See Porteous (2013b) for an informal discussion of this.

argued that institutionalised ethics procedures play only a small role in research ethics, as ethical decisions are often encountered on an ad hoc basis in the field and beyond (Kay & Oldfield, 2011) and, as such, are ongoing in research and sometimes difficult to plan for or anticipate.

### 3.5.2 Ethical Considerations During Fieldwork

Gaining informed consent from participants, which may be defined as being as “open and honest” as possible with human subjects (Rossman & Rallis, 1998: 50), is also vital to an ethical research approach. This entails an explanation to participants that taking part in your research is a process which is subject to re-negotiation over time (British Sociological Association in Gomm, 2003: 307), and that they may withdraw consent at any point without giving a reason. During fieldwork, the steps taken to ensure informed consent involved an information sheet, which was given to all participants (see Appendix III). To ensure sufficient informed consent, prior to interviews it was explained to participants what sort of topics would be covered, and that the research sought to gain their personal opinions. It was also important to use clear, jargon-free language so as not to intimidate participants.

Formal, signed consent forms may be alienating to participants in postsocialist countries due to a historical suspicion towards bureaucratic procedures: due to Russia’s recent history of repression of its citizens, paperwork can have more intimidating overtones than it might do in Western Europe. The Association of Social Anthropologists’ new code of ethics is helpful in understanding why it can be more appropriate to use verbal and negotiated consent:

Many of the communities studied by anthropologists are highly suspicious of formal bureaucratic procedures and often of their state or local state. Under these circumstances, even if they are literate (and many are not) they are very likely to be suspicious of signing forms and would thus be unwilling to give written consent. It is possible, however, to obtain verbal consent and explain about the research. (Association of Social Anthropologists)

Arguably signed consent forms also increase pressure on the individual to think about the interviews as an overly formal process, or to articulate their views in a more reserved manner. As I wanted interviewees to be at ease and talk openly about their experiences, verbal consent was deemed to be a better alternative: this was given on tape at the beginning of the interview. The information sheet they were given included my email address and details. In positioning consent as ongoing, I asked participants to contact me if they had any further questions, wished to withdraw consent at any point (including after the interviews), or wanted to be informed about the research at a later date. Only one participant requested that I send on details of the research in the future; I remain in contact with her and have sent material on as it is published. I also made clear how the research data would be used, and that our discussions would be on an anonymous basis.

A further ethical issue lies in trying to be aware of emotions occurring during interviews. Although my research topic is not particularly 'sensitive' for most participants, and so did not provoke strongly emotional responses which might have demanded closing an interview, it was vital to be aware of whether the interviewee felt comfortable in the situation and to pay attention to their body language as well as their dialogue. For example, one participant who was referred to me by somebody else was giving very short answers, in addition to appearing quite reticent. I did not wish to cut off the interview abruptly and perhaps cause offence, so despite her agreement to take part in the research, I felt that it was appropriate to allow the interview to tail off at an earlier point than was usual.

Sometimes circumstances beyond my own control also led to an extremely short interview. I had just finished one interview in a park, when the participant invited me to meet some of her friends who were waiting nearby. She then asked them directly if they would also take part. One woman decided to take part, and I was told by the group to carry out the interview on the spot. I did not think that proper informed consent was obtained in these circumstances – a point further emphasised by the participant's one-word answers – and so asked a few questions out of politeness before ending the interview, which was not used in this research. Both of these situations demonstrate how ethical issues are constantly renegotiated during fieldwork.

### 3.5.3 Post-Fieldwork Ethical Considerations

Finally, ethical considerations were not confined to fieldwork itself, and thus did not end as I left Russia in August 2011. They also demanded a consideration of the effects of the research as a whole on participants. The issue of anonymity demands consideration in any project dealing with potentially sensitive issues. Interviews involved discussion of some sensitive areas around the issues of the body and appearance, and participants were asked to divulge potentially personal information. Although individuals had different approaches as to whether they considered the information they gave to be highly personal, from the beginning it was decided that all data would be given on the basis of anonymity to protect the participants from any potential disclosure risks. Participants were assured of their anonymity on the interview information sheet (see Appendix III). On beginning to analyse the interview data I immediately assigned pseudonyms to participants to ensure anonymity throughout transcription, analysis and storage of data. All data was kept on my personal computers, to which only I had password access. The interviews were stored electronically under pseudonyms, as were other field notes, which were all kept in electronic rather than



paper format. In addition to anonymity, as I have already mentioned, I was keen to avoid one-way relationships during fieldwork, whereby the researcher gets what they need and then disappears, despite (for however short a period) becoming part of the participants' social world (Rossman & Rallis, 1998: 51). Although the archetype of the 'objective researcher' is often still perceived as an ideal, I did not seek to achieve it and was in contact with a few participants socially during my time in St Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod, and beyond via social networks and Skype calls. However, maintaining friendships with participants outside of the field involved drawing clear lines between information given with consent, and other potentially interesting information (from a sociological viewpoint) that may have been given to me in confidence in a social context such as Skype or as a Facebook 'friend'. As such, it is important to make it clear that the scope of the research was strictly limited to information given to me under informed consent during fieldwork in 2011 despite further contact with participants on a social basis.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the research design of this thesis and the means by which fieldwork was carried out, highlighting the influence of existing feminist research in both of these processes. It has also examined the analysis and writing up of the research, considering ethical issues and positioning of the researcher in the field, with the aim of acknowledging the subjectivity of my own position in the data and conclusions produced. With the background theory and methodology set in place, I now move on to discuss some of the findings of the thesis based on empirical material collected during discourse analysis and interviews.

## 4. Beauty Labour in Russian Women's Magazines

### 4.1 Introduction

Beginning the empirical section of the thesis, this chapter discusses portrayals of femininity – and more specifically, of beauty labour and the female body – in contemporary Russian women's magazines. Drawing on the theoretical background discussed in Chapter 2, it discusses how magazines portray the female body as a reflection of a woman's worth. It also shows how women's magazines operate under the implied assumption that all women need to take part in beauty labour in order to satisfactorily 'do' their gender. Furthermore, this chapter builds upon recent work on beauty, glamour and media in Russia (Gusarova 2008; Rudova, 2008; 2011; Menzel, 2008; Ratilainen, 2012; 2013) in that it addresses portrayals of femininity in Russian popular culture.

I begin with a discussion of how magazine portrayals of the female body are based on binary understandings of feminine/non-feminine, in keeping with a social construction of normative femininity as significantly dependent on women's abilities to achieve certain beauty norms. Beauty labour is understood as a means of 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987) aimed at achieving normative femininity. Moving on to a related topic, I examine portrayals of the female body as inherently problematic, particularly in relation to feminist and Foucauldian (1979/1991) discourses of the body as in a state of surveillance and self-discipline, and also as the subject of disciplinarity via beauty labour. Next, I use feminist theory in a discussion of portrayals of women's bodies which use a

warlike or military rhetoric. Here, magazines conform to feminist understandings of the female body as potentially separate from a 'true self'; the body is represented as an enemy (or, indeed, an ally) for a woman on her assumed quest to achieve a normatively feminine appearance. Finally, I discuss how magazine gender discourses portray beauty labour as an essential tool in embodying feminine beauty and sexuality and encouraging competition for not only the sexualised 'gaze' (Mulvey, 1975) of men, but the envious gaze of other women.

## **4.2 Beauty Binaries and the Body Problematic**

Much feminist scholarship has stressed the role of women's bodies as an outward indicator of social success, and noted the significance of regimes of Foucauldian bodily disciplinarity as particularly significant for women (Bartky, 1988; Deveaux, 1994; Bordo, 1993/2003; Jeffreys, 2005; Heyes, 2007). A stress on women's bodies has also been a feature of the literature on Soviet media (Attwood, 2001; Gradskova, 2007a; 2007b) and post-Soviet Russian media (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996; Kay, 1997). If the "new image promoted for the woman of the 1990s [was] one of beauty, fragility and fashion" (Kay, 1997: 81), the women's lifestyle magazines which first emerged in that era still seem to rely on this limited understanding of femininity.

In *Cosmopolitan*, *Liza* and *Elle*, the problematic or unruly (Gatens, 1996) nature of women's bodies is present as a particularly strong assumption underlying the magazines' discursive construction of normatively feminine bodies. For example, specific language is used to describe desirable and non-desirable bodily traits that readers are presumed to be trying to achieve. An analysis of what magazines categorised as feminine and non-

feminine traits revealed a binary structure of categorising women's bodies or body parts: for every desirable aspect of femininity there must be an antithesis, an undesirable opposite. The table below<sup>48</sup> represents some of the more consistently used 'feminine' traits and their antitheses.

FEMININE	ANTI-FEMININE
Smooth	Rough/ Hairy/ Frizzy
Soft	Hard
Refined	Coarse
Even	Uneven
Sexy/Seductive/Sensual	Undesirable
Beautiful	Unattractive
Attention-grabbing	Unnoticed
Shining/Radiant/Sparkling	Dull/Tired
Volumised	Flat
Calm	Irritated

Table 1: Femininity and Anti-Femininity

Although there is some crossover with normative masculine traits in the second column, the binary pairs are not necessarily female/male – the type discussed at length by Judith Butler (1990/2006) – but rather feminine/anti-feminine. The categorisation of the female body in terms of gendered binaries is achieved chiefly through its portrayal as defective, unreliable or somehow lacking: hair is rarely just hair but frizzy/smooth, volumised/limp or dry/greasy; likewise, hips are rarely just hips but something to minimise or emphasise

<sup>48</sup>Originally employed in Porteous (2013a).

with suitable clothing depending on their ability to meet physical norms of beauty. I also note continuities of this aspect of analysis with portrayals of femininity in Soviet women's magazines, which especially focused on 'plumpness' (as opposed to slimness) as symptomatic of the unruly female body (Vainshtein, 1996).

By concentrating on specific positive and negative categorisations of the female body, and representing it via disembodied parts of a transgressive whole, women's magazines encourage an alienation from the body; as discussed earlier in the thesis, this mind/body dichotomy has been a key feature of some feminist sociological analysis (Gatens, 1996: 278), suggesting parallels in Russian and Western cultures. In Butler's questioning of the links between man-masculinity and woman-femininity, she argues that if we are to separate sex from gender, this "suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constituted genders" (1990/2006: 9). However, in women's magazines it seems to be the opposite: they rarely actively encourage deviation from traditional notions of gender identity as linked to the appearance of the body. It is somewhat ironic, then, that by constructing these binaries of the feminine/anti-feminine, women's magazines draw a question mark above any supposedly 'natural' link between 'woman' and 'feminine'. Paradoxically, the magazines construct a female reader with an inherently unfeminine body: the reader is failing to achieve a normative femininity which women (it is implied) should naturally possess. Yet, through a stream of advice on how to 'improve' femininity, the magazines seem to also imply that no woman escapes this activity. In women's magazines, beauty labour is taken for granted as a means of tipping the balance from the negative side of the binary table to the positive; it is a tool for dealing with an unruly body in need of surveillance (Foucault, 1979/1991).

To build further on the notion of binaries, beauty labour is constructed as a feminine duty through the recommendations that magazines make to readers on getting the latest look:

It may seem that to make your skin whiter during a Russian winter is easy peasy, but no – we are not talking about pallid skin here, but about lustrous, shining and healthy skin. For the most part our skin has a characteristic dull, sallow-grey tone until the middle of January, along with dryness, flakiness, redness and other problems. (*Elle*, January 2011: 163)

Even in the cold and wind your skin can be as soft as a baby's and you can protect your hair's volume and tremendous shine! (*Liza*, 20 November 2010: 35)

In the first example it is evident that, even if she already has fashionable white skin, the reader must still perform beauty labour if she wishes to meet the exact standards recommended in the article. To paraphrase an earlier point, in the magazines skin is rarely just skin; here it may indeed be the desired white, but it is also dry or reddened. The second example shows how readers are expected to maintain beauty labour against the elements. The magazines often contain this notion of the ‘body problematic’: segmented body parts are dealt with in turn, their ‘problems’ to be corrected via a mix of beauty labour and the consumption of appropriate products (on which more is said in Chapter 6). The use of “our skin” in the example above seems to draw a peculiarly Russian picture of the problematic body, whereby both the reader and the journalist can find some community in sharing their experience of skin ‘problems’ resulting from the dark Russian winters. To give a further example, an article from *Cosmopolitan* demonstrates how readers are encouraged to see their bodies as inherently problematic:

[This fabric] softens athletic shoulders [...]. Give yourself height by wearing a miniskirt and heels [...]. Tallness can be balanced out with a wide dress with a strong bright print. Your proportions will look more normal. (*Cosmopolitan*, April 2010: 216)

The bodily proportions which might represent normative femininity are shown here to be extremely specific, and yet still vague enough for the average reader to consider herself in

need of at least some physical transformation. Clearly a woman should be (somewhat in the vein of Goldilocks and the Three Bears) not too tall, not too short, but ‘just right’. “Athletic shoulders”, rather than representing strength or sportiness, have associations with a male physique and should be – again, referring back to binary understandings of femininity – “softened” (i.e. feminised). Another example from *Liza* gave advice on nail shapes in manicures:

A 'spade' shape does not suit chubby, short fingers: they seem even chubbier and shorter! Long, pointed nails look really great on elegant, small hands, but the fingers shouldn't be too slim: you don't want to provoke associations with sharp, birdlike talons, do you? The oval shape is universal, but especially suitable for flat nails. Oval shaped nails shouldn't be unnaturally long. (*Liza*, 22 March 2010: 22)

The minute detail of advice on bodily modification for readers demonstrates the high level of bodily scrutiny that is normalised in women’s magazines. Once more, it is possible to draw continuities with Soviet depictions of normative femininity: indeed, Gradsanova draws on Butler’s theories of gender performativity, arguing that “the Soviet gender map” relied on a “border between ‘natural’ and ‘social’” which was never clearly defined; “instead, it was assumed that a woman, unlike a man, had specific qualities and interests, like care, tidiness and beauty as well as ‘natural’ (pre-defined by her anatomy) reasons for being upset or angry, for example [...] lacking beauty stuff and services” (2007b: 264). Readers are encouraged to classify separate parts of their bodies according to value-laden binary attributes of feminine/anti-feminine; they are told to monitor them and change them if they fail to meet the required standards of normative femininity. Although these practices present disembodied parts which are unruly and from which women might feel alienated, the female body is also understood to be representative of, and yet separate from, a ‘true’ self: the body still requires work to enable the reader to project the best image of themselves that they can possibly achieve.

### 4.3 The Female Body As an Enemy or an Ally

Some metaphors used by the magazines to describe beauty labour demonstrate its status as a tool for taming the problematic female body and making it conform to certain gendered norms of appearance. Both implicitly and explicitly, beauty labour is portrayed as a means to control the female body as an enemy in the implied quest towards ‘improving’ one’s appearance. This quest may be viewed in light of the rise of glamour culture in Russia, which puts an emphasis on the visual, with the corollary that individuals are expected to take responsibility for the way their bodies appear to others. As *glamur* has been noted to be particularly popular amongst women (Menzel, 2008: 5), perhaps it is not surprising that the pressure to conform to a dominant aesthetic norm provokes strong metaphors in women’s magazines, one of the key manifestations of glamour culture in Russian society (Ibid).

In magazines, warlike metaphors reinforce the notion of the body as separate from an idealised inner self, as an enemy that the reader has to battle and reconstruct. For example, *Liza* advises the reader on how to prepare for a meeting with a lover, telling them “you will be calmer if you are 'fully armed' [having paid attention to your appearance]” (*Liza*, 20 November 2010: 68). Further examples are below:

Every girl that respects her body knows that she must *fight a continual battle* for even, smooth skin. We asked some specialists what was new on the *anti-cellulite front* and they told us that progress is happening – but as usual no one is promising it will be easy. (*Cosmopolitan*, April 2010: 383; my emphasis)

To be able to boldly wear a short skirt in the summer and go to the beach without feeling shy, *start the war* with 'orange peel' skin! (*Liza*, 16 April 2011: 94)

Have you decided to go on a diet? Our advice helps you to carry on until *victory* without suffering from hunger pangs [...]. To get slim together with a friend is a little more fun [...] *in the war* against that extra weight. (*Liza*, 20 November 2010: 52-53; my emphasis.)



In this sense the magazines portray the body as an alien entity which is in conflict with some idealised notion of a woman's true self-expression. Bordo (1993/2003: 146) links these beauty discourses into a Christian ethic of anti-sexuality in which the body gets in the way of the mind's higher ethical goals. Waging war on the seemingly unpredictable behaviour of the body is a way of experiencing a sense of control over at least one part of life, especially in a world where other things (e.g. work, interpersonal relationships) may feel less controllable. A mind/body dichotomy and a sense of alienation from the body are often found in women's magazines. As such, beauty labour in one way constitutes part of a modern, consumer society's drive towards self-improvement, to be the best you can be, as demonstrated in an article about beauty magnate Estée Lauder:

The biggest luxury is love for yourself, but it can and should be possible for everyone. This idea, now espoused by every glossy publication, then seemed revolutionary. 'For that money [the cost of a luxury beauty product] I would be better to go off on a holiday to Hawaii with my husband!' exclaimed a shopper one day in a meeting with Estée Lauder. Another client replied, 'of course, go away on holiday! When you get back you'll look ten years older from being in the sun. Isn't it better to spend this money wisely and look ten years younger?' (*Elle*, November 2010: 368)

However, considering the literature on Soviet women's magazines, it is difficult to represent this drive to achieve beauty exclusively as an influence of Western-origin consumer-driven magazines on Russian society; both Vainshtein (1996) and Gradskova (2007b) detail the advice given to Soviet women on 'improving' their appearance as part of the drive towards being a better *Soviet* citizen. This suggests a certain amount of continuity in gender discourses into the post-Soviet period.

On one level, the idea that the body can be modified to represent a more perfect version of the self – bodily "plasticity" (Brush, 1998) – reinforces the self/body dichotomy. However, the self and the body can also be portrayed as more symbiotic: the body could be a weapon

for women. One article from *Elle* magazine tells the reader that “[k]nowledge of how to move on skis and a well-considered *beauty arsenal* lets you feel self-confident on the snowy slopes.” (January 2011: 158; my emphasis). A ‘beauty arsenal’ suggests shoring up your body with consumer products and beauty labour before presenting it to a presumably hostile world: this time, the enemy is outside the gates rather than within. The following month’s issue uses the same phrase: “[b]lack lace and crimson satin are a suitable addition to the *arsenal* of any seductress”. (*Elle*, February 2011: 256). In an article from *Cosmopolitan*, similar language is used: “[a] seductive cleavage and a tight waist – these are your *weapons*” (April 2010: 219; my emphasis). In this last example, the idea is taken even further: it is perceived feminine bodily attributes themselves that can be used as ‘weapons’ in attracting a male partner.

The paradoxical nature of discourses on women’s bodies contained in the magazines is clear: the body can be an ally in its status as a sexual object, or it can be unreliable, a hindrance. In both cases, however, beauty labour and conspicuous consumption may be seen as part of an encouragement towards bodily surveillance and disciplinarity.

#### **4.4 Social Pressure and the Male (and Female) Gaze**

Research on Soviet and post-Soviet Russia has discussed (explicitly or implicitly) the significance of the ‘gaze’ in contributing to femininity norms. Ratilainen (2013) discusses the gaze as significant in her reading of consumer culture in *Krest’ianka* magazine in the 2000s. Vainshtein (1996) uses a Foucauldian framework of surveillance and power in her discussion of Soviet women’s magazines, citing a 1960s *Rabotnitsa* article entitled ‘Please watch yourselves!’ as one example of the judgemental gaze that Soviet women were

subjected to if they failed to meet Soviet fashion norms of simplicity and modesty. Additionally, Azhgikhina & Goscilo (1996) document the Soviet tendency towards public commentary on the appearance of other women, and the penalties for breaching social guidelines on makeup or hair for school students, for example.<sup>49</sup> However, since perestroika, a more sexualised form of femininity has arguably become prominent in normative conceptions of how women are expected to present themselves to the world. Gradskova (2007b: 149-151) asserts that Soviet women were advised to hold back on too sexualised an appearance in the 1930s-1960s, and discusses how her older participants described the post-Soviet generation as sexually immoral. Kay's (1997: 86) work, which has cited male attention as an important sign of having achieved normative femininity in the early post-Soviet period, suggests that the addition of a more sexualised femininity may be one means in which normative gender discourses have changed since the Gorbachev period.

The display of one's desirability as a bodily object of the (real or imagined) gazes of others, a perspective with theoretical underpinnings which may be traced back to Mulvey's (1975) work, is also a prominent aspect of the beauty labour theme. This concept was employed by existing feminist literature on women's magazines: for example, Mari Rysst comments that women's magazines in Norway "encompass disciplining looks, or gazes"; and argues that in part through magazines, women "come to experience their bodies as if someone were looking at them" (2010: 72), which stresses the globalisation of the feminine ideal as promoted by women's lifestyle magazines. The gaze may be seen as part of a Foucauldian disciplinary stimulus to enhance one's femininity, and may be seen as a

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<sup>49</sup>Although it should be noted that stories of girls being taken out of class and made to wash their makeup off are also a familiar story told by women who grew up in twentieth century Britain!

form of reward for beauty labour. In *Liza*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle*, displaying this femininity was presented as one of the goals of beauty labour:

Used to wearing jeans and trainers, our reader was overwhelmed that she could look so seductive [...]. In front of our eyes, this enthusiastic young girl turned into an elegant and feminine young lady. (*Liza*, 20 November 2010: 106-107)

Magazine content often focused on a sexualised feminine image, which was presumably (given the heteronormative focus of the magazines) something to strive for in order to attract men. In support of this, *Cosmopolitan* ran a regular column entitled 'His View'; other examples also demonstrate the importance of the male perspective:

Out of 100 of our male participants, 65 per cent are bothered by stubble on their girlfriend's legs. For 35 per cent it's all the same if there is hair on your legs or not. The conclusion? You must shave your legs regularly. If you've had enough of shaving, wax them. (*Cosmopolitan*, December 2009: 394)

If we are going to turn men's heads, let's do it in a grown up fashion! – This is what Tatiana Sycheva decided as she set off to master pole dancing (*Elle*, December 2010: 248)

It's been proven that the majority of men like it when women smell like some kind of sweet dessert, especially vanilla. (*Elle*, December 2009: 444)

According to the opinion of the stronger sex, clothes should accentuate your figure [...]. [If] a woman has wide hips and a pert bosom, it demonstrates that she can bear and feed a child. This may or may not be true but all the same, why not fully indulge [men's] innocent desires? (*Liza*, 22 January 2011: 30-31)

In the example from *Cosmopolitan*, statistics are used to emphasise the need to remove women's natural body hair, demonstrating how beauty labour is a means of bodily disciplinarity linked to the patriarchal male gaze. This may be also seen in the context of an increase in the amount of beauty labour expected of women in post-Soviet society: although I gather bodily hair removal was not unheard of, Goscilo (1996: 102) writes that Soviet women did not tend to shave their legs or underarms. In *Elle*, pole dancing – an activity with overtly sexual overtones – is used both as a method of bodily discipline (in

terms of exercise to sculpt the body) and as a means of attracting men's attention. The final example from *Liza* portrays men as weak, needing to be indulged by the reader in her display of femininity, echoing the previous discussion of the body as a weapon. However, in the same article women are also advised to be careful not to go too far in using their sexuality in this way for fear of intimidating romantic partners:

[...] you shouldn't show everything all at once! Otherwise we'll scare off our loved ones; they won't know where to look. (*Liza*, 22 January 2011: 30-31)

Thus sexuality is portrayed as a form of capital for women to draw upon, a point of view in which the magazines seem to agree with Hakim's (2010) notion of erotic capital as a resource for women. In contrast to this perspective, I would argue that female sexuality is more of an *extension of*, than a threat to, existing patriarchal discourses. The article advises readers *not* to threaten men – to temper their supposed erotic power and perform a less threatening version of femininity. Femininity is (obviously with a hint of humour) portrayed as a dangerously powerful resource, a threat to patriarchal norms which see women discursively constructed as *objects* of the male gaze. This discourse is echoed in Soviet women's magazines, which cautioned women to present their body according to Soviet norms of feminine appearance (Vainshtein, 1996). Gradskova (2007b: 145-153) also discusses the significance of the male gaze in Soviet society, and the multiple views of feminine sexuality and beauty that existed which saw them (often simultaneously) classified as normative and threatening. After sexuality became a more openly discussed topic after perestroika, understandings of normative femininity as *non-threatening* to men are discussed in Kay's (1997: 82-83) work; she notes that potentially more sexually threatening versions of femininity were linked to the perceived Soviet 'over-emancipation' of women. Overall, then, normative understandings of an acceptable feminine body, the awareness women are expected to have of the male gaze, are nothing new in the Russian

context, even if sexualised femininity is more of a feature of post-Soviet women's magazines.

Women's magazines also use the theme of competition between women for men's attention in discussing beauty and fashion choices:

[Seamed stockings are h]yper-feminine, revealing and cheeky. Wear them on days off with a dress or a mini skirt, and every man will only have eyes for you. (*Cosmopolitan*, March 2010: 78)

The idea of the ever-present 'male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975) is still very much in evidence here, as the magazine prompts the reader to imagine themselves getting dressed with the specific aim of pleasing a male eye, highlighting feminine traits, and presenting themselves as sexually desirable objects. To expand this route of analysis, in a study of cinema Teresa De Lauretis (1984) widens Mulvey's perspective to include a female gaze. Ratilainen (2013) also relates the imagined "feminine gaze", via her analysis of *Krest'ianka*, to an idealised reader, especially linked to consumption norms. However, from a feminist perspective it is also important to stress the embodied aspects of this gaze, whereby the gaze of other women is conceived of as a motivation to 'improve' the body:

In order to reach your goal, it's important not to miss training, not to be lazy and to monitor your nutrition. [...] "When people start to give me jealous glances, I'll look back on that uneaten piece of cake with a smile." (*Cosmopolitan*, November 2010: 140)

This example shows how readers are advised to provoke envy and admiration in their peers by surpassing the efforts of others to discipline their bodies; beauty is portrayed as a zero-sum game in which women must compete with each other for attention.

In sum, this section has discussed how male *and* female gazes form a key part of beauty

labour: they encompass ideas about the appropriate use of feminine sexuality, the desire to please men, and competition amongst women for male attention. In the post-Soviet context, ostensibly this could also be linked to a perceived demographic gender imbalance in Soviet and Russian culture (Buckley, 1992: 3; Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996: 22-24; Rivkin-Fish, 2010), which supposedly leaves women competing with each other for male partners.<sup>50</sup> The wider implication of the gaze is that women do not only need to be aware of and cultivate a normatively feminine body, but that this should be one of their chief goals *as women*, whether they are at work, socialising, at home with their partner, or exercising. Women's magazines imply that a significant amount of energy should be diverted away from other activities towards beauty labour.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This analysis of portrayals of beauty labour in Russian women's magazines draws some continuities with existing feminist analyses of women's magazines in non-Russian contexts (Wolf, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Cronin, 2000; McRobbie, 2004). I have also argued that wider theoretical approaches to portrayals of the body have relevance in the Russian context. For example, magazines encourage an awareness of the gaze of others (Mulvey, 1975), which arguably leads to a perception that the problematic female body is in need of ongoing surveillance and discipline (Foucault, 1979/1991; Bordo, 1993/2003; Heyes, 2007).

In addition, the chapter has shown how language describing beauty labour in *Elle*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Liza* demonstrates an understanding of it as a necessity for women in

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<sup>50</sup>This will be discussed further in Chapters 5 and 8.

their presumed desire to ‘improve’ their bodies. Contemporary Russian women’s magazines not only take part in the social construction of gender via discursively constructing the normative female body; they also advocate ongoing beauty labour as an important means of “doing” femininity (West & Zimmerman, 1987). However, the end goal of this beauty labour – a perfect body – is impossible to achieve for the vast majority of readers. Paradoxically, and echoing Butler’s (1990/2006) discussions of gender, the magazines portray femininity as both something inherent that all women should naturally possess, but also as something inherently lacking that must be constantly renegotiated.

Although achieving a normatively feminine bodily appearance was certainly one focus of Soviet women’s magazines (Vainshtein, 1996; Gradszkova, 2007b), since the 1990s research has reflected a growing emphasis on beauty and beauty labour in Russian society (Patino, 2008: 164; Kay, 1997); arguably contemporary women’s magazines now make beauty labour a more central focus. ‘Looking good’ has arguably become more important as part of performing both femininity *and* masculinity in post-Soviet Russia, perhaps the result of a change from a largely verbal to a predominantly visual culture (Goscilo, 2000: 20). However, it is vital to note that normative femininity still tends to entail a higher emphasis on beauty labour than normative masculinity does. Thus, although some scholarship on contemporary Russia positions women as having gained in some ways from an emphasis on attractive femininity in society (Goscilo & Strukov, 2011: 13), in response I would highlight a feminist critique which highlights how beauty is understood as more significant for women than it is for men.

In terms of changing gender norms, one point to take from the observations made in this chapter is that whereas Soviet women were subject to collective norms around how they



presented their bodies, and could be subject to public censure for this (Vainshtein, 1996: 78), women's bodies are now seen to reflect a more individualist morality. Perhaps in contrast to Soviet norms, a woman whose body appears overweight is now judged to have let *herself* down, rather than visibly contradicting collective values of a strong, fit and healthy body by being "plump" (Vainshtein, 1996). Moreover, the motivation behind women taking part in beauty labour may have changed over the post-Soviet period. A sexualised femininity seems to have become more acceptable, although I have also noted that women are still expected to regulate this aspect for fear of going 'over the top', as they did under Soviet norms of *kulturnost*' (Gradszkova, 2007b).

Finally, via highlighting magazine recommendations on fashion and beauty purchases necessary to perform a lot of the beauty labour they recommend, this chapter has broached the topic of conspicuous consumption as a source of changing understandings of beauty labour and the body in post-Soviet Russia. Perhaps because beauty products and advice are more widely available than they were during the Soviet period, beauty labour has changed from being just one (albeit significant) way of "doing" femininity, to being an activity that is more expected of women. This topic is addressed more fully in Chapter 7. The next chapter retains a focus on beauty labour and the body, widening the perspective to take in the opinions of Russian women on these topics.

## 5. Reader Perceptions of Beauty Labour & Women's Magazines

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the observations of the previous chapter, moving the focus from media portrayals of beauty labour to reader *interpretations* of these portrayals and their wider understandings of beauty labour as a performance, or a means of “doing” gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Although some themes will represent continuity from the analysis in Chapter 4, new themes will also be shown to have arisen as a result of this part of the analysis. This chapter also draws primarily on feminist interpretations (Bordo, 1993/2003; Heyes, 2007) of Michel Foucault’s (1979/1991) notions of surveillance, self-surveillance and disciplinarity, and relates these to an emphasis on aesthetic capital (Anderson et al, 2010) as important for women.

I begin by discussing women’s understandings of beauty labour as both a form of bodily disciplinarity and as a means of doing normative femininity. Part of this entails a discussion of how women’s magazines may be perceived as contributing to pressure on women to discipline their bodies via performing beauty labour, as argued in existing feminist research (Wolf, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 1996; McRobbie, 2004). I then move on to look at women’s views of the magazines as representative of a form of ongoing gender socialisation, in that they position particular topics as inherently feminine. They also play a role in introducing readers to an ever-expanding roster of potential beauty treatments, thus

feeding into understandings of the female body as inherently problematic, and highlighting the promotion of particular forms of consumption as feminine.

Section 5.4 shows how the topics of beauty, femininity and women's magazines form one means of assessing how binary discourses of East/West and global/local are currently used in Russian society. This argument draws on previous work on the Soviet-Russian context (Gradsikova, 2007b; Stephenson, 2007; Kay, 1997) to explore continuity and change in gender norms. The chapter also examines how participants use these topics to frame their discussions of post-Soviet social change.

Finally, I address individual women's experiences of beauty labour, and their categorisations of it as a duty or a pleasure, as previously addressed in both gender studies (Cahill, 2003) and Russian studies (Gradsikova, 2007b) literature. As such, this chapter of the thesis begins to address feminist debates around agency in relation to popular media norms, and the different ways that women decode women's magazines.

## **5.2 Bodies, Beauty Labour and Gender Performativity**

### **5.2.1 Surveillance and Discipline of the Feminine Body**

I begin this chapter by discussing how Russian women perceived their bodies more generally, highlighting the point that understandings of the body and femininity are often complex. For example, one of the questions asked in each interview was how the women felt about their bodies. Although many women drew upon the discourse of beauty labour as a normatively feminine activity, quite often they simultaneously claimed to have a positive body image. Women could both like their bodies, and yet feel that they also needed

improvement on an ongoing basis.

Overall, I like my body. But I should do more sport, use a hula hoop – I want a slim waist. (Vika, 22, NN)

I don't like my teeth. I have two little 'fangs' that stick out, I don't like them. I also don't like my breasts, but most of all it's my teeth. But everything else is fine. Everything's fine with me, just my teeth and then the rest is good. (Margarita, 21, NN)

Vika's comment that, despite liking her body, she wanted to have a smaller waist, and Margarita's comments about her teeth and breasts, echo portrayals of femininity in women's magazines. As discussed in the previous chapter, women's bodies are often portrayed in terms of their problematic or unproblematic constituent parts. Both Vika and Margarita spoke about their bodies as a general whole, but also in terms of constituent parts that were in need of discipline. Indeed, there were very few participants who did not name some change they would like to make, even if they claimed to be happy with their bodies overall:

HP: What do you like best about your body, and is there anything you don't like?  
Nina: I don't like... I wouldn't say that I'm terribly thin, but I'd like to put a little weight on. That is, gain some curves, and then it would be fine. Well, and my bust of course.

Oksana: Probably everyone wants a better bust. I also want to get rid of my tummy.  
Nina: I want to go to the gym.

(Nina & Oksana, both 22, NN)

Here, both women are immediately able to pinpoint certain parts of their bodies that they would like to improve. Oksana's comments suggest that she sees this view as particularly normative: "everybody" (or, more accurately, every woman) must want a "better bust": why wouldn't they? This suggests that the pressure for women to 'improve' their bodies according to an ideal of the feminine body is significant in wider Russian culture, as well as in magazines. Furthermore, despite the stress that women's magazines put on weight

loss as a means to enhance femininity, Nina feels that she should put on weight in order to feel better about her figure, a point that may seem anomalous at first glance. However, when considering idealised portrayals of women in popular culture as very slim with large breasts, a figure that few women naturally possess, Nina's comments make a lot of sense. Part of how normative femininity is constructed is via highlighting the curves of an idealised female body so as to distinguish it from the angles and muscles of an idealised male body. Curves and slimness are thus two sides of the same coin in terms of essentialising a 'feminine' body. Feminine curves may also be linked to women's reproductive role, especially as a means of addressing the 'demographic crisis' which has been a consistent discourse from the Brezhnev period (Buckley, 1992: 3; Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996: 22-24) to the present day (Rivkin-Fish, 2010).<sup>51</sup>

Participants often held a dichotomous understanding of femininity in their discussion of beauty labour and women's magazines; in common with portrayals of femininity in Russian women's magazines, their answers represented an understanding of femininity as both inherent (natural) and achieved. For many participants, beauty labour seems to be a way of making up for the femininity that their body (supposedly) lacks: a form of bodily disciplinarity (Foucault, 1979/1991; Bordo 1993/2003). However, this 'lack' is also perceived as a sign of failure on the part of the individual woman, as femininity is supposed to be 'naturally' present. This points to gender as performatively constructed (Butler, 1990/2006) in wider Russian society, as well as in women's magazines.

### 5.2.2 Beauty Labour as a Means of Doing Gender

Reflecting portrayals of beauty and femininity in magazines, many research participants

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<sup>51</sup>I address the significance of this more fully in Chapter 8.

spoke about beauty labour as specifically feminine work: having an interest in beauty and carrying out beauty labour was often presented as an inherent part of being a woman in contemporary Russia. According to some strands of feminist thought, whatever a woman may do or say in everyday life, whatever status she may hold in economic or social terms, to a large extent her body is seen to represent her worth as a person (Bordo, 1993/2003; Heyes, 2007) and her ability to achieve gender norms (Butler, 1988). For example, participants spoke about a well-kept body as both a sign of, and a reason for, confidence in social situations:

HP: In your opinion, how important is it for a woman to look beautiful?

Diana: It's hard to say what beautiful is. Maybe well groomed – that's important. Beautiful – when it's over the top glamour, it's too much. But beautiful is important.

HP: And how does it affect work, personal life and relationships with men?

Diana: I think it improves your self-worth; a person is more confident if they can easily communicate with everyone. When people believe in themselves, I think it's better. (Diana, 24, SP)

Although in interviews participants often talked about the significance of personality, intelligence or other initially invisible qualities, many noted the value of the body in presenting a positive image to the world. Such perceptions of bodily appearance as significant to portrayals of the self to others may be said to reflect a wider trend towards the adoption of Western pop psychology, a common feature of women's magazines in the British context (Gough-Yates, 2003: 127, and a discourse which resonates with wider post-feminist notions of individualism linked to the body in certain types of literature (Salmenniemi & Adamson, 2014). This approach tends to highlight the capacity of the individual for self-improvement, whether through a change in appearance or in personal outlook; for example, this might be seen in the notion that you have to love yourself (e.g. before anyone else will love you), in reference to achieving success in relationships.

Heyes' (2007) observations on the more limiting aspects of practices of corporeal 'self-improvement' reflect a Foucauldian understanding of the body as subject to disciplinarity, and stress the gendered aspects of this. I also refer to West & Zimmerman's (1987) discussion of doing gender as part of this: processes of beauty labour are a result of a perceived need to 'correct' the body, but also as a performance of normative femininity. Furthermore, Diana's observations highlight the social penalties that failing to achieve an acceptable level of aesthetic capital may entail. Her comments also reflect a consciousness of a need for balance in the amount of beauty labour performed; she does not wish to look "over the top". This clearly echoes the previous chapter's example of advice from *Liza* magazine (22 January 2011: 30-31) on being conscious of the effects of your appearance (as a woman) on others (particularly men). It also reflects continuities with a Soviet discourse of *kulturnost* which emphasised 'appropriateness' in dress (Gradszkova, 2007b: 271), rather than an overly individualistic or sexualised look for women. A desire to be perceived correctly by others, and the perception that it affected a woman's success in life, was also present in other interviews:

HP: How important is it for women to look beautiful?

Masha: I think it's very important. When I'm in social situations, I notice that not everyone thinks so. They simply don't have the desire, because when you have the desire, you can find the time and money. I think that it's important and it's an expression of our inner condition. Because when a girl or a woman is well groomed, people see her completely differently.

HP: And how does that affect her career, personal life, relationships?

Masha: It has a direct effect. The people around us value us only as much as we value ourselves. For example, as far as I've seen, in personal relationships when a woman is well groomed people want to give her presents, flowers, look after her. [...] If she values herself highly, men are attracted to that and value her more. The same goes for work – at work it's very important. (Masha, 22, SP)

Putting time, money and effort into doing femininity this way was perceived by Masha to

be directly linked to a woman's success in various spheres of life. To a certain extent, this is a pragmatic response to patriarchal social norms: several studies have pointed to the transferability of the aesthetic capital gained from beauty labour – and the penalties of failing to carry it out – for women outside of Russia (Bartky, 1988; Jeffreys, 2005; Kwan & Trautner, 2009; Anderson et al, 2010). Masha clearly describes the perceived benefits of beauty labour, and implies that she has internalised these standards in judging other women ("I notice that not everyone thinks so"). It is also significant that Masha's answer puts a stress on romantic relationships with men, and attention received from them, which is seen not as a product of mutual interests or the compatibility of their personalities, but a result of the beauty labour carried out by women. As I argued in Chapter 4, although there is continuity in some aspects of this from the Soviet period, the amount of beauty labour now expected from Russian women may have increased, and become more overtly sexualised, since the Gorbachev era.

### 5.2.3 Beauty Labour and Work

Masha mentions work as another area of life where women can benefit from beauty labour (or, indeed, lose out from a lack of it) (Adkins, 1995), a view also held by other participants:

HP: Do you use make up every day?

Lyubov: At work, every day, but rarely on weekends. At the weekend I try not to wear makeup if I'm not going anywhere.

HP: Do you like using make up?

Lyubov: It's more of a necessity, because for example my facial skin tone is uneven and too pale. At work I'm in contact with people, so you have to look 'one hundred per cent'. (Lyubov, 22, SP)

Lyubov worked in a business setting and again took a fairly instrumental approach to



beauty labour, but for different reasons to Masha: it was necessary to look “one hundred per cent” at work, but in her everyday life she preferred not to wear cosmetics. It is evident that, corresponding with magazine portrayals of femininity, beauty labour could be seen as a specifically feminine duty: it was seen as necessary to embody normative femininity in one’s professional life, and looking professional is associated with wearing makeup. Scholars have discussed the phenomenon of women’s job advertisements in the early post-Soviet period as often being linked to certain gendered appearances (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996). Although this overt sexism may be less noticeable in post-millennial employment practices, Susanne Cohen’s (2013) recent work looking at notions of professionalism and *imidzh* (‘image’) in the 2000s suggests that appearance is still very important to Russian women in the workplace. Cohen’s work suggests that a new “gendered morality” (2013: 725) linked to the development of capitalism may act to frame work on one’s image in different ways in post-Soviet Russia. Thus, although women may now face less obvious pressure to look a certain way for their jobs than was reflected in 1990s advertisements, where women’s appearances were often overtly mentioned as a necessary quality for the job (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996: 80), pressures linked to ideas around ‘professionalism’ are still apparent – and in some ways are also fundamentally linked to how women look and dress.

#### 5.2.4 Beauty Labour as a Feminine Activity

To return to Masha’s framing of beauty labour within a process of meeting men’s expectations, other participants spoke about the extent to which creating a desirable body in itself was gendered – a task that women were socially expected to perform to a much greater extent than men were. As such, beauty labour was viewed not exactly as an activity confined exclusively to women, but certainly as an activity that was feminised.

Demonstrating concern about one's body and the way it is seen by others could be seen as just a taken for granted part of womanhood; a pressure that men were not perceived to face in such a strong way:

[When young men take part in physical activity] it's for themselves – not for women, not for their appearance. [...] Men have more confidence, they think that if a girl's with you then they'll love you whether you have a beer belly or not. For some reason they have a slipshod approach to their appearance. But if a girl gets a little fatter or stops wearing makeup and looking after herself, men start to look at other girls. You see it all the time – a really pretty girl, well groomed, going around with a man who's practically bald; it's not even important that he's not the same age and has a beer belly and dirty boots. If a woman appeared in front of him looking like that, he wouldn't stand for it. I don't know why that is. Perhaps it's because there are more women than men, and they know that if they don't catch one, there are plenty more fish in the sea. (Zinaida, 23, SP)

Zinaida's comment that men do not face the same pressures as women highlights pressure on women to 'improve' their bodies, to enact their femininity via wearing makeup and "looking after [themselves]". She also links it to romantic relationships and the double standard she argues exists within this sphere, where it is acceptable for men to lapse in their personal grooming but unthinkable for women, as women risk the loss of a valuable male partner.<sup>52</sup> Another participant brought out similar observations:

Yulia: [Men] do look after their appearance, but within limits. In the first instance it's sport, fitness, when men maintain their figures, that's one thing – to keep their bodies looking good. But of course they don't use lip gloss or mascara. For women it's more pronounced.

HP: Is it more important for women?

Yulia: It seems that it's very important in the modern world. Men are also influenced by the mass media and advertising, but the mass media portrays an ideal woman – she has ideal legs, ideal breasts, an ideal figure, face. She's completely idealised, right down to the tips of her fingers. One way or another, we have to measure up to that benchmark, especially unmarried women who are looking [for a man]. (Yulia, 27, SP)

Yulia's comments bring out high levels of personal grooming that women are expected to

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<sup>52</sup>A perceived scarcity of men in Russian society is discussed in Chapter 8.

carry out, much more than is expected of men. Again, the theme of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) is present: women who have not yet found a male partner are seen to face more pressure to live up to the beauty norms that are expected of women in Russian society. The aesthetic capital that women are told they will gain from beauty labour could also be linked to economic capital given the stress on the man as *kormilets* ('breadwinner') in Russian society (Ashwin & Lytkina, 2004). Perhaps there is a belief that is possible for women to turn aesthetic capital into economic capital, in the form of financial support from a male partner.

Furthermore, men's efforts to work on their body are described as "within limits" and linked to sport, rather than purely physical appearance. Research carried out in the early 1990s suggests that this is by no means a new phenomenon: one participant cited by Bridger, Kay & Pinnick noted the double standard for men and women's appearances in very similar language to Yulia and Zinaida, discussing how she noticed that "the men look such a mess and the woman have obviously taken such care and dressed really thoughtfully" (1996: 187-188). Beauty labour is thus highly linked to an essentialised version of femininity:

I think a woman is not a woman when she is not concerned about the way she looks. She has to be – that's what her job is. Be concerned about how you look. I don't think it's the biggest sin to walk out without makeup on – you can do that, of course. In winter, I'm so lazy, I'm always oversleeping. So when I wake up I have ten minutes to go to work – I don't care, I would just be warm and go to work. But I feel uncomfortable – when I arrive at work and I didn't do my makeup, I would be like [to another woman] 'hey, do you have a mascara or something? Let me [use] that.' So I will do it. (Katya, 25, SP)

On one hand, Katya identified worrying about appearance very strongly with femininity, going as far to describe it as a woman's "job". Though she stressed certain aspects of everyday life – such as work responsibilities and the difficulties of a St Petersburg winter –

as obstacles to performing a minimum level of beauty labour, she felt a very clear pressure to apply makeup when she hadn't found the time to carry out her normal beauty routines in the morning. For Katya as for other women I interviewed, beauty labour was a vital reflection of their femininity to the outside world, and worries about how the body appears to others were taken for granted as simply part of being a woman. This suggests that beauty labour can be seen as part of gender essentialism in contemporary Russia, and again I would highlight the personal failure women perceived as mirroring magazine portrayals of the body as a signifier of women's individual morals and character.

### **5.3 Magazines as Gender Socialisation**

Olga Kalacheva (2002) argues that, in the first decade or so after the collapse of communism, new women's magazines played an educational role for Russian women. Because consumer society in Russia was relatively new, the magazines were seen to show women how and what to consume. Arguably, women's magazines played a similar educational role in the Soviet period in relation to socialising women into dominant norms of femininity; this is especially in terms of beauty labour and how to care for the body (Vainshtein, 1996; Gradskova, 2007b), topics that – as argued in the previous chapter – demonstrate more continuity into the women's magazines of the post-Soviet era. Gudova & Rakipova (2010: 6) have also positioned women's magazines as agents of socialisation for women in Russia.

Research into other contexts suggests that women begin to read women's lifestyle magazines at a younger age than the magazines' target audience often intends (Kim &

Ward, 2004: 49),<sup>53</sup> positioning them as agents of gender socialisation in other areas of the world. As such, this section explores the role of magazines in gender role socialisation in contemporary Russia, using interviews to look at how far women use women's magazines as a source of information about femininity, particularly in terms of beauty labour.

### 5.3.1 Magazines as a Source of Information about Femininity

A significant number of research participants spoke of information about beauty labour and beauty products as central reasons why they chose to read women's magazines in the first place. The magazines could be viewed as a source of information about how to "do" femininity, partly via beauty labour.

HP: Why do you like reading women's magazines?

Zoya: Because I'm a woman – I like fashion, pretty pictures, perfume, makeup. It's interesting to look at. It's also pleasurable, and a source of information. (Zoya, 23, SP)

Zoya clearly associates beauty practices and consumption with essentialist notions of femininity: to her, it seems obvious that women's magazines should reflect what women are supposed to be interested in – to reflect normative gender discourses and behaviours. The fact that some women saw women's magazines as a source of valuable information about gendered beauty practices also came across when participants were asked to name their favourite sections of women's magazines:

I like [to read] about fashion, about body care, about makeup, about creams. (Klara, 33, SP)

Generally fashion, body care, make up. (Lyubov, 22, SP)

Fashion, body care, beauty and horoscopes. (Margarita, 21, NN)

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<sup>53</sup> Indeed, as will be mentioned in Chapter 8.4.4, many participants in this research spoke of discovering the magazines as young teenagers or even as children at home, where they read their mothers' or sisters' copies.

These participants discussed beauty labour as an appealing aspect of women's magazines. Others saw magazines in a similar light, as a practical guide on how to perform different kinds of beauty labour:

A woman can't always go to a beauty salon, primarily because of the cost. It's an expensive industry [...] In magazines they have easy [to use] procedures: you can make your own hair mask, use different creams. I love to read about that. (Valentina, 24, NN)

Magazines on this level did not just function as a means of finding out which beauty products to buy, but could contain helpful advice on carrying out cheaper forms of beauty labour at home. In one sense this may be seen as a continuation of Soviet ways of doing gender, in that women were given advice on how to make their own beauty products in Soviet women's magazines (Gradskova, 2007b), even if, as Gradskova notes, it must also be said that making beauty products is costly in terms of time for women. Nevertheless, it also highlights that portrayals of beauty labour in magazines do not *always* entail conspicuous consumption (see Chapter 6).

### 5.3.2 Perceptions of Media Influence on Gendered Beauty Labour

In the quote above, Valentina also mentions magazines as a prompt for her to carry out new or different types of beauty labour to those she had been used to. This suggests that women's magazines may play a role in *increasing* the amount of beauty labour readers carry out, which supports a view of them as contributing to a rise in pressure on women to discipline and modify their bodies (Bartky, 1988; Wolf, 1991; Jeffreys, 2005) and suggesting that this may also be the case in the Russian context. For example, when asked whether they had ever tried out a new beauty procedure they'd seen in a magazine, these women answered:

Yes, epilation – I used to just shave, but after waxing and photo-epilation became popular [I did those]. It's very comfortable. And then all kinds of masks. I never used to use masks, then in *Cosmopolitan* I read a forum where girls were sharing beauty secrets. (Valentina, 24, NN)

I had a chemical peel done in a salon. [...] It removes the top layer of bad skin. It's a good enough procedure – that is, it's effective. (Inessa, 22, SP)

There was tooth whitening. I'd read about it in some magazine, and they had a special offer so I called them and signed up for it, did it, and I liked it. (Katya, 25, SP)

These three examples are interesting in that the women speak of being actively influenced in their beauty labour practices by magazine content, and sometimes by internet magazine forums. Clearly, women's magazines in Russia do not only encourage women to have an interest in 'improving' their looks on a constant basis, but actually expand the amount of beauty labour some readers carry out. An encouragement towards a greater amount or different kinds of beauty labour is evident, for example, in the regular *Elle* magazine column 'Elle beauty test' which every month details a new (usually salon) beauty procedure available to the reader. The articles use a fairly generic structure and rhetoric: the beauty journalist expresses scepticism or fear about a new beauty treatment; she then describes the procedure in detail; finally, she details her conversion to this 'miraculous' new treatment. The column can be read as both a promotion of new procedures on the beauty market, and a reassurance to readers due to the fact that the procedures are often relatively unknown. The mystery (and actual difficulty) often associated with achieving a beautiful appearance may also be seen in the description of "beauty secrets" by Valentina above. Other participants cited women's magazines as a source of this particularly feminine anxiety around the body and how it appears to others:

Nadezhda: I guess I ruined my mind because of such [women's] magazines and such stereotypes. Because sometimes I want to be nice, slim, and so on, and I think oh, I need to go on a diet, I need to lose weight, and just spend more money. I have more money [than I used to], and modern TV shows, modern stereotypes... you just need to follow [them].

HP: So there have been times when you've felt pressure from the media?

Nadezhda: Yeah. Sometimes I can't accept myself like I am. Yeah.

HP: Have either of you felt that way before?<sup>54</sup>

Larisa: Of course sometimes I think about this. I think of it like, I must lose weight, I must go on a diet. Spend more time and money on my appearance of course – with girls it is normal I think. (Nadezhda, 25; Larisa, 29, SP)

Nadezhda specifically mentions women's magazines as a contributing factor to negative feelings she has had about her body. Popular culture puts constant pressure on women to look a certain way. As she has more money from achieving promotion in her working life – something about which it would be normal to feel a sense of personal achievement – she conversely feels more pressure to spend more on achieving aesthetic capital, and finds it difficult to accept herself as she is. Nadezhda sees consumption and beauty labour as ways of allaying her worries about the way she looks, although it can be inferred that this satisfaction may only be temporary.

Larisa's comment is also interesting because she is almost trying to neutralise the worries that both women have felt about their bodies. Her comment that worrying about their bodies and performing beauty labour is "normal I think" suggests that she sees it as simply part of everyday performances of femininity. The messages sent by culture about how to see and care for your body as a woman are thus shown to be, in Larisa and Nadezhda's case, very much assimilated into their own way of thinking. The fact that Larisa wants to stress the normality of such thinking – that she is not different from other women – demonstrates that in her view, these discourses are prevalent in Russian society. I give one final example of this view:

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<sup>54</sup> A third participant, Kristina, was also present in this interview.



HP: How do you think these magazines affect our understandings of femininity?

Zoya: Of course, they formulate... people look at the pictures in the magazines and want to look like the girls there. But the girls there are beautiful, well dressed, have their hair styled. And everyone tries to be like the ideal shown in these magazines. Yes, they have a lot of influence. (Zoya, 23, SP)

Clearly, women actively read women's magazines to gain information about beauty labour, and the magazines help to promote new examples of beauty labour that arise in the consumer marketplace. Through their portrayals of femininity, they also frame beauty labour as necessary, as seen in Zoya's discussion above. As such, they can be seen as part of a discourse of beauty labour as an ongoing process: even if the reader carried out all of the available procedures to the letter, the chances are that the list of procedures would keep on increasing. In turn, this creates more pressure on women to micromanage their bodies, to perform femininity via beauty labour, and to strive to increase their aesthetic capital.

### 5.3.3 Positioning Magazines within a Wider Beauty Culture

Some participants saw a clear link between the pressures faced by women and the cultural discourses on femininity that exist in Russia. To a certain extent, some of these discourses may be positioned within the rise of glamour culture in Russia, although I would stress the gendered aspects of this culture more than some scholars (e.g. Goscilo & Strukov, 2011) do. Patriarchal society, I argue, puts pressure on women to aspire to certain images associated with glamour culture. For example, many women interviewed for this research discussed the gap they perceived between media portrayals of femininity and their own bodies.

HP: Are women influenced by magazines? Makeup, hair, body, etc.?

Yulia: Partly, yes. But it's not just magazines that do it. It's just that these images of femininity, beauty, perfection are everywhere. They're on billboards on public transport and on the streets... even when you watch a film, the actress is wearing

makeup when she's asleep in bed. She wakes up with a perfect face, a perfect hairdo. Her hair is perhaps a little dishevelled. How can that not be an idealisation? Magazines cultivate [this ideal], but they also tell you how to achieve it – use this face mask, wear this eyeshadow. All of that's present in large doses.

HP: Do these magazines affect your understanding of femininity?

Yulia: They affect mine. When I see beautiful women in magazines, really beautifully dressed, very stylish, well groomed, I want to look almost that good. I notice something I like in the clothes, hairdo, and I frequently go to the hairdresser and say, 'cut my hair like that'. Or I look for similar things in the shops. So, the images have an effect. (Yulia, 27, SP)

Yulia discusses the direct effect that normative images of femininity in women's magazines can have on women in everyday life, and particularly on the beauty labour women choose to carry out. However, there was also a sense that it was not only media that influenced women in the kinds of beauty labour they performed, but the views of others. This aspect partly reflects the post-Soviet milieu; as noted by Azhgikhina & Goscilo (1996), it was not unknown for others to comment on people they found lacking in Soviet society, and older Russian women in particular were often viewed as arbiters of taste, giving younger women and men advice on their appearance.<sup>55</sup> However, in the contemporary context this could be seen from the opposite generational perspective. For example, some participants noted that their mothers did not wear makeup; one spoke about how she encouraged her mother to carry out more beauty labour than she would usually do:

HP: Thinking about your female friends, family or work colleagues, is there anything here that you'd be surprised or shocked that they didn't do? Do you think there are basic things that all women should do?

Katya: I definitely think that a haircut is something you have to get all the time. Cream – some people need it, some people don't. I do think that it's time for my mom to get some products. My mom doesn't tan and I always tell her that she has

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<sup>55</sup>Indeed, I received this kind of advice from the mother of the family on the first day of a Russian homestay. This was explained to me as a generational prerogative (at 25 I was the same age as the woman's son). Katharina Klingseis (2008) offers some interesting observations on the positioning of the foreign researcher in Russian society in terms of appearance.

to do it because she's always pale. I like when ladies' fingers and nails look nice, so I do think that manicures [are] something that you would do. One of my close friends, she doesn't [have] pedicures, which is kind of weird to me. (Katya, 25, SP)

In Katya's discussion, it is possible to point again to the female gaze (De Lauretis, 1984): not only does she appear to assess her female friends and family in terms of a feminine appearance, she gives them advice when they appear to be falling short in terms of the beauty labour they perform. However, this is not necessarily in terms of competition, but (as is apparent above) it can arise from a desire to help those close to them, perhaps in a similar manner to the older women of the Soviet era discussed by Azhgikhina & Goscilo (1996). Media norms and social norms are thus mutually reinforcing in putting pressure on women to achieve a higher level of aesthetic capital.

## 5.4 Femininity and National Identity

In this section of this chapter, I discuss different ways that beauty labour can be discursively linked to the idea of 'Russianness', whether this was related to Russian national identity or to ideas about how *non-Russians* looked and performed beauty labour. This idea has been discussed in existing literature on Soviet and post-Soviet Russia (Gradskova, 2007a; 2007b; Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996; Bartlett, 2004). Amongst participants in this research, 'Russianness' was defined against other, non-Russian national identities, but it could also be defined in temporal terms in relation to the Soviet era. The linking of femininity to national identity can be seen as one means of defining appropriate behaviour for women in contemporary Russia.

To begin with, some participants perceived the fall of the USSR as a significant point at which gender norms around beauty and femininity began to change:

Previously [lots of personal grooming for women] wasn't cultivated so much. Before women had a choice... as far as I know, women could wear makeup, but it wasn't so important and not as popular, and women's natural beauty meant one large plait and wearing a uniform. Now it's fitness everywhere – every step you take – advertising, hair removal cream, plastic surgery. It's becoming more and more idealistic. Now there are lots of girls with fake nails, fake lashes, fake breasts, and men are thinking 'hurrah!' Of course there are men who don't want that, but most of them like it. (Yulia, 27, SP)

Yulia's perception that pressure on women to look a certain way has grown in recent memory seems to draw a line between the more natural feminine ideal of the Soviet era (Gradskova, 2007b), implied by the plait and uniform of the typical Soviet working woman, and the post-Soviet era in which the accoutrements of a consumer culture obsessed with bodily appearance are visible at "every step". It is interesting that this participant links the idea of choice to the Soviet past, which contradicts prominent discourses of choice more often linked to the neoliberal, capitalist global order. In other words, Yulia's view of these social changes is quite pessimistic; however, other participants were more enthusiastic about social change in the post-Soviet era:

I think that now – in Russia anyway, how the situation has developed – women have started to look after themselves more. [...] Here a large percentage of women go to beauty salons. I think that it's really great. In Russia young designers import things, bring in fashion shows. In the city we get all of these fashion shows by the fashionable designers, the industry. It's interesting, it's great – I think that we need to introduce young women [to this] so they can look after themselves. And it's not about whether they can afford it, but rather about a desire to look beautiful all the time. [...] I talk to my clients and our partners and those who have already spent a long time in the beauty business, and they tell me: you know, ten years ago we had no work, it was boring, no one went anywhere – well, rarely – and now it's the opposite. [Even] women on an average wage try to put some money aside for themselves, for their own beauty: to visit a beauty salon, to go to the gym. I think it's very cool. Demand creates supply – demand grows, and supply grows. (Valentina, 24, NN)

Despite the fact that, as I have previously argued, there was a clear stress on beauty for women in the late Soviet period and the 1990s, Valentina perceives a growth in the amount of beauty labour and focus on maintaining a beautiful body in the past decade alone.

Furthermore, she clearly links this rise in beauty labour to changes in the economic sphere – the supply and demand of capitalism and the growth of a consumer society in Russia. A discourse of beauty as liberation as discussed by Bridger, Kay & Pinnick (1996: 165) is also present here, with consumer opportunities being framed in a language of choice for women who had little access to them in the Soviet or earlier post-Soviet era. Changes could also be viewed as not particularly negative or positive, in a more pragmatic sense:

Understandings of femininity change with the fashions. Previously it was fashionable to be plump. If women used to wear long skirts and an open neckline, everything was on show, but today it's stylish to be slim, like models. [...] All of the models on the adverts for the clothes have that figure. [...] In our time it's fashionable to have your body on display – not just your bust like before, but your legs too. It seems to me that everything changes with the times. In the Soviet era it was fashionable to be athletic – defined muscles, they had gymnasts, all of that... biceps, triceps. It all changed. (Yevgenia, 25, SP)

Although Yevgenia did link harmful diseases such as anorexia to this new female archetype, she saw it in historical context, possibly as a phase that would pass with time.<sup>56</sup>

Others took a similar view:

HP: Right now in Russia how important is it for women to look beautiful?

Tamara: It's not only in Russia, it's in every state – in all countries all women want to look good.

Oksana: In Africa they don't want to – they don't need to.

Nina: Appearance is very important here.

Tamara: Now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it's important. If you look at the past, the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century/end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then they had noblewomen with big dresses and hairstyles. It's just the style has changed. Women have always wanted in any era to look good all the time.

Oksana: They sacrificed even more.

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<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, Yevgenia's opinion – that it was previously fashionable to be plump – is in contrast to some of the advice in Soviet women's magazines (Vainshtein, 1996), but it is also possible that she is referring to an earlier time (e.g. the early 1900s, when fashion tended to emphasise a woman's bust and hips).

Tamara: Now standards are different. Before the beauty standard was Marilyn Monroe, now it's Pamela Anderson. (Tamara, 21, Nina, 22, Oksana, 22, NN)

Tamara contrasts the different body types with different eras, though interestingly draws upon Western archetypes as opposed to Soviet ones: Marilyn Monroe is used as a cultural icon rather than any of the many Soviet film stars who would presumably be as well known in post-Soviet Russia. However, unlike Yevgenia, these women do not see 1991 as a changing point, but rather perceive continuity in gender terms with earlier periods of Russian history. Another point is the extent to which the discussion of these three women draws upon a culturally Othered idea of feminine appearance – that of the woman “in Africa”, who apparently doesn’t need to “look good”. This demonstrates the significance of ethnicity as a signifier of Otherness in Russian society (Roman, 2002). From another perspective, when I questioned participants on whether they had a perspective on the Russian context in particular, some drew upon a European or American as an arguably negative standard, against which they contrasted as a Russian approach to beauty and femininity:

HP: How important do you think it is for women to look beautiful in Russia?

Lyubov: It seems to me that it's important to most women. It's not the same here as in Europe. Here every girl tries to look nice. I have friends who meticulously plan their appearance, their clothes. They devote a lot of time to their looks. (Lyubov, 22, SP)

HP: How important is it for women in Russia to look beautiful?

Valentina: Here [in Nizhny Novgorod] it's not so visible. Moscow is the capital. When I go to Moscow I feel like I'm stepping onto a big podium. [...] Everyone is so beautiful, looks well groomed... I was in America and I couldn't judge how good or bad the girls were. There women fall into one of two categories: either those you wouldn't look at, just unnoticeable, or complete Barbie dolls.<sup>57</sup> We don't have the same divisions – here all girls look stylish. All of them. [...] It seems to be that

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<sup>57</sup>I will discuss the significance of the Barbie archetype of femininity further in Chapter 8.

Russia is one of those countries where women follow the latest fashions and want to look good. (Valentina, 24, NN)

There was, therefore, sometimes an idea of a specifically Russian femininity, which Valentina frames positively in contrast to Western femininity standards, and seems to take pride in. Russian women can be seen as representing a positive feature about a national ideal of 'Russia'. Clearly, despite the relatively new prominence of Western media and more global beauty norms, some women preferred to highlight what they saw as the special nature of Russian beauty, something Bridger, Kay & Pinnick (1996: 170) also highlight, especially in terms of Russian beauty being somehow 'deeper' than the Western ideal. The participants above also saw Russian women as achieving a more desirable standard of feminine beauty: neither the over the top Barbie doll, nor an "unnoticeable" appearance. However, this was not always the case; for example, one participant discussed negative attitudes to Russians that she had encountered during her travels abroad:

HP: How important do you think it is for women to look good in Russia?

Elvira: It's very important. Really, sometimes women prefer to sleep less but to spend more time getting ready to go somewhere. Sometimes it starts getting absurd, like strong make up in the early morning or something like that. Or wearing [miniskirts] with high heels in the first part of the day. I even read once an article on the internet which was about London and about Russian girls in London. It said that if you see a blonde with bright make up, wearing a mini and high heels at noon in a central London street, you can be sure that she's Russian. [laughs] Sometimes it makes us think that our national identity as Russians is not as well appreciated by other nations. (Elvira, 22, SP)

Elvira also described going on holiday and trying to look as 'non-Russian' as possible (i.e. not dressing glamorously) and trying to challenge stereotypes of Russianness abroad. Another participant, Katya (25, SP), worked regularly in the U.S., had an American boyfriend and spoke fluent American English. She thus seemed to be more Western-oriented than many other research participants. In some instances, Katya spoke about 'Russian' as a negative category representing a less sophisticated kind of culture than in

the West (see Pilkington et al, 2002). For example, she criticised Russian magazines for having too much coverage of Russian celebrities as opposed to international celebrities (possibly linked to the lure of icons such as Marilyn Monroe), and perceived their quality as inferior compared to foreign branded magazines. Understandings of the West as a desirable Other, something for Russians to aspire to in its supposedly advanced level of ‘civilisation’, have also been noted in the literature (Pilkington et al, 2002: 7; Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996: 172), and such discourses may also have an influence here.

However, at certain points Katya also highlighted Russia’s *lack* of difference from Western countries, which she chose to discuss in response to the question of whether she had any final comments for the interview. Katya said that magazines had become popular in the previous decade in Russia and that “[Russia is] not different from any other European country.” This desire to stress Russia’s relevance in a new era of globalisation may hint at the perceived Othering of Russia that is sometimes evident in Western culture – an attitude that Katya may have encountered during her time in the U.S. It may also reflect her wider attitude towards being interviewed as a Russian woman by a researcher from the West; towards the end of the interview, Katya did seem to become more defensive of Russia in her responses, rather than merely descriptive.

Clearly, participants’ conceptions of Westernness/Russianness could be complex and contested. In contemporary Russia, there exists a simultaneous pride in the national ideal as linked to certain standards of feminine beauty, but also a self-consciousness about how Russia is perceived internationally or a perception that the post-Soviet era has brought with it an undesirable emphasis on beauty. Even disregarding this ambiguity, the most important point to take from this section is perhaps the extent to which, beyond the Soviet period,



normative femininity continues to be entwined with the idea of the Russian nation.

### **5.5 Beauty Labour: a Duty or a Pleasure?**

In employing the term ‘beauty labour’, I chose to use the word labour to reflect the demands that these practices make on individual women in their pursuit of aesthetic capital, and as a facet of performing femininity. As such, the term itself is from a feminist viewpoint a critique of these practices, as the individuals carrying out beauty labour are, most often, women. Beauty labour as a performance of femininity (West & Zimmerman, 1987) reflects wider social gender inequalities, wherein normative femininity is more reliant on bodily appearance than normative masculinity.

However, in analysing different participants’ approaches to beauty labour, it is also important to address ongoing feminist debates around agency in women’s bodily practices (Radway, 1983; 1984; Frazer, 1987; Hermes, 1995; Modleski, 1991; McRobbie, 1997c; 2004; Gill; 2007b; Duits & van Zoonen, 2007).<sup>58</sup> This relates to the issue that some women view beauty labour as a pleasurable experience, rather than one that always reflects gendered inequalities in Russian society. Although I wish to present a critique of beauty labour as a form of women’s oppression, the fact that many women view it as having positive effects (e.g. increasing self-esteem) should not merely be dismissed. Indeed, some scholars have attempted an analysis of beauty labour as an empowering process for women (Cahill, 2003); in this section I address these debates. Furthermore, a discussion of beauty practices as either a duty or a pleasure also has a precedent in the historical literature on Soviet gender relations (Gradskova, 2007b: 242-251); Gradskova draws on extensive

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<sup>58</sup> I also discuss this issue in Chapter 7.

research with women who were young in the Soviet Union of the 1930s-1960s, conceding that individual experiences of beauty labour may have offered some capacity for women to resist dominant Soviet discourses.

### 5.1 Beauty Labour as a Duty

Beauty labour can be framed as part of an overall discourse of a need to constantly monitor and correct the female body. As Foucault's work on bodily discipline demonstrates, society and culture often create the desire to discipline one's own body in practices of social control (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1993/2003; Heyes, 2007). Through such portrayals, beauty labour can be framed as a duty for women. In interviews, participants explicitly voiced similar understandings of beauty labour:

HP: Do you like to spend time on beauty procedures?

Diana: I'm not sure... maybe yes. If you set aside some time specially, then perhaps, yes. If for example I go to the banya once a week – it's also a kind of procedure – that's enjoyable. If I do something every day, I sometimes think, *bozhe* ['my god'], I'm doing this *again*. From day to day, it's like a routine.

HP: Are there things you don't like doing?

Diana: Maybe removing body hair. Epilation is the most boring thing.

HP: Do you feel it's necessary?

Diana: Mostly, yes. I play sport so it's best to keep it all under control. (Diana, 24, SP)

Diana's participation in sport, something she enjoys, is accompanied by a measure of beauty labour – in this case, hair removal. In a sense this extract reflects the extent to which beauty labour is performed in order to achieve normative ideas of femininity: before women can *do*, can participate in society, they must *become* women via performing beauty labour. In Diana's case, this means removing the hair that grows on certain parts of her

body, a chore that she evidently finds tiresome. Her use of the word control also points to the processes of bodily disciplinarity inherent in this type of beauty labour.

A lack of time could also be a pertinent issue for women: dealing with the pressure to perform certain types of beauty labour meant that other things may have had to be sacrificed:

HP: Do you like to spend time on beauty procedures?

Natalia: Not always. Manicure, pedicure – [I don't like it] very much.

HP: Why, do you find it boring?

Natalia: It takes up a lot of time. Because I try as much as I can to grow my fingernails, then manicure them. Because it's so often, I just don't want to spend time on it.

HP: How often do you carry out these procedures?

Natalia: Mostly on the weekends, when I have free time, because if I start, then it takes ages: first the manicure, then the pedicure – it will be a long time. So it's better to specially set aside time for it. (Natalia, 22, NN)

Katya: There's a lady cosmetologist and she has the magic stick and she's popping all your... yes. That's horrible.

HP: So you'd rather not have that done, but you still go? Why is that?

Katya: Because, well there is a time to [do it] ... like right now for me! When you have blackheads. I can do it in my face mirror, but I can't really see them on the sides of my face, so sometimes I have to go there. I prefer to do it not more often than once a year, because I hate it. I prefer to just... as far as I can do it myself, I do it, and when I have to go, I go. It's like torture! [laughter] (Katya, 25, SP)

Natalia's attitude towards maintaining her finger and toe nails, a process that can take up quite a bit of time and demands regular upkeep, was unsurprisingly one of impatience: the feeling was that it had to be done – it was in some way a duty – but that it was an activity that she did not enjoy devoting time to. Katya demonstrated a similar attitude: there were some procedures that she clearly found very unpleasant, but nevertheless she felt they were

necessary to maintain a desirable appearance. An understanding of beauty labour as a duty was also reflected in some of the language used by women in describing their attitudes towards different procedures:

HP: Do you like to spend time on beauty procedures?

Valentina: Well, not always. Sometimes I don't want to sit down and do something, I'm so lazy. But sometimes I really want to get busy and after that, when you've done everything yourself – pedicure, manicure, hair colouring – you feel more confident. (Valentina, 24, NN)

Larisa: Yes, you don't always want to [work on your appearance] but you should do, and you always find excuses not to do it! [...] When you visit the gym or do some gymnastics, you see that you lose some weight and you have a better figure – but you need to find the time and not be lazy, because laziness is my problem! (Larisa, 29, SP)

As these examples show, there is a good amount of 'should' about performing beauty labour that helps to frame it as a duty for women. Valentina and Larisa somewhat guiltily describe what they feel they should be doing in terms of beauty labour, and its perceived benefits (i.e. confidence, a better figure). Both women use the word lazy to describe a failure to carry out beauty labour: in this sense, beauty is not only a duty but a virtue, and failure to carry it out has an air of moral transgression. Gradskova (2007b) discusses several ways in which appearances were linked to morality in the Soviet period, though as with other aspects of femininity this link was ambiguous; beauty could also signal immorality. In some other examples from my interviews, participants discussed beauty labour more positively, however:

I don't want to go to the gym, but I say to myself – you must do it! Then, for example, if I go for two months and when I see the results it's a big pleasure for me. (Nadezhda, 25)

I think if I go to the gym I will be very happy because it's my aim. I try to force myself to do it because it's very important – our health is very important because we spend all day at work, sitting, and I think if we spend more time on our figures, on our health, I think it will be great and I will be very happy. (Kristina, 25, SP)

Although there is clearly also a health element to Kristina's confession that she tries to "force [her]self" to go to the gym, the body is clearly represented in terms of appearance – "figures". The extent to which going to the gym is linked to a feeling of happiness lies mainly in its status as a form of beauty labour which produces visible results. Thus the pleasure associated with beauty labour is not necessarily in the labour itself, but in the results of the labour: a body that more closely fits a normative, feminine shape, and thus greater aesthetic capital. This is in agreement with Gradskova's (2007b) discussions of happiness as associated with possessing a healthy and attractive body. It also suggests that beauty labour is understood by women not as a pleasurable part of performing normative femininity in contemporary Russia, but as a duty which they are more obliged to carry out in order to discipline their bodies and make them more closely fit a feminine bodily ideal. Cahill's criteria that beauty labour "must be understood and experienced as existing *for the pleasure and delight of the beautifying woman*" in order not to be classified as social coercion (2003: 59; author's emphasis) could feasibly be applied in relation to the results of beauty labour (i.e. one's aesthetic capital is enhanced), but not, it appears, to the actual process of performing it.

## 5.2 Beauty Labour as a Pleasure

This section of analysis aims to situate women's discussion of beauty labour as a pleasurable experience within the wider feminist critique of beauty labour the thesis proposes. Whilst in this chapter I essentially present a critique of beauty labour as based around patriarchal gender norms, I also wish to critically interrogate some of the ways in which beauty labour is seen as a pleasurable activity.

In relation to Russian studies, Gradskova (2007b: 271) has also explored notions of

pleasure associated with beauty labour, showing that “the ability to look good, attractive and beautiful” was, for Soviet women, also associated with happiness. To begin this section, I look at how contemporary women described their enjoyment of beauty labour:

HP: How do you feel about these things that you do, that you spend time on to look after your appearance? Do you enjoy doing them?

Elvira: Oh yes, I do. *After* doing something for myself at home, I feel very proud of myself like I’ve done something very important. And *after* visiting beauty salons I also feel that I have been treated and my body will say thank you for this. No matter what procedure. (Elvira, 22, SP; my emphasis.)

HP: Do you like spending time on beauty care?

Lena: Yes, always.

HP: Why is that, how does it make you feel?

Lena: My skin feels cared for. Relaxed. It’s just a pleasure to know that *everything’s okay with your appearance*. (Lena, 33, SP; my emphasis.)

Women’s lifestyle magazines often highlight the relaxing nature of beauty labour: it is often portrayed as ‘me time’ – a kind of indulgence for women – rather than a process of work which often entails considerable temporal and financial means, and can even be painful (e.g. hair removal). This can be seen in the previous chapter’s discussion of Estée Lauder’s description of beauty labour as “love for yourself” (*Elle*, November 2010: 368). Indeed, upon analysing Lena and Elvira’s discussion a little more deeply, the notion that the pleasure of beauty labour lies in fulfilling a duty rather than in the actual processes themselves becomes apparent. Elvira has “done something very important” and she is “proud of [herself]”, both reactions that better fit a sense of achievement, rather than a sense of pleasure or indulgence for its own sake. She also associates pleasure with *after* the beauty labour has taken place (i.e. with its results). Likewise, Lena’s assertion that the pleasure comes from knowing “everything’s okay” speaks more to the previously discussed Foucauldian element of bodily surveillance, as opposed to ‘me time’.

In other words, although some women clearly feel that they should devote a significant amount of their resources to beauty labour, it is important to question both the motives behind this activity, and why it is that such processes of work on the body should be thought of as pleasurable. Arguably the motives are rooted in an idea of the body as a key reflection of women's value in society, and on beauty labour as a crucial way of performing femininity. Both of these points are based upon patriarchal understandings of beauty labour as necessary for women (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1993/2003; Jeffreys, 2005), and as a means of "doing" or performing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). It is also based on bodily self-surveillance (Foucault, 1979/1991) as a necessary step on an ongoing road towards beauty. Thus different ways of thinking about beauty labour as a performance do not necessarily entail a subversion of dominant discourses in contemporary Russia, as Gradskova (2007b: 251) argues took place in relation to Soviet beauty norms. It seems that beauty labour is now such a mainstream practice in Russian society that it is difficult to categorise it in any way as subversive.

My point is not that women do not experience pleasure from beauty labour. Rather, I seek to situate discussions of beauty labour as 'me time' within gender norms in Russian society, where women are subjected to so much pressure to perform beauty labour that it is more limiting than liberating. Beauty labour is portrayed in magazines, and understood by many women, to be a route towards aesthetic capital (Anderson et al, 2010).

However, some participants spoke about femininity as linked to aesthetic capital and beauty labour as a rather negative aspect of gender norms, and tried to resist some norms that they saw portrayed in women's magazines. For example, Zinaida's criticism of the

tendency for popular women's media to present a homogeneous view of femininity demonstrates an awareness of some of the limitations of portrayals of femininity they contain:

HP: How do you think magazines affect your own understanding of femininity?

Zinaida: Of course, there's a lot of advertising in magazines. Advertising influences our understanding, even if we don't want it to. In a magazine, what kind of girls do they show? Idealised ones. We want to become the cover girl – beautiful, with a lovely hairstyle, groomed hair, beautiful, perfect skin, beautiful clothes, a slim figure. That's what femininity is associated with as a rule. Long, slim legs, high heels, revealing dresses, all of that is [associated with] femininity. It's completely mad, I disagree with it – and it doesn't have an effect on me. (Zinaida, 23, SP)

To conclude, the above analysis reveals how much of the pleasure women experience from beauty labour, at a second glance, is often due to one of two factors. Firstly, their perception of a positive result having been gained from beauty labour rests on a notion that they had 'corrected' their bodies; clearly, this may be framed within performances of femininity via beauty labour. Secondly, it is important to note that a portrayal of beauty labour as 'me time' relies on an understanding of beauty labour as a particularly feminine pursuit, and often as a duty for women. Therefore, although reader discussions of beauty labour as a duty represent a clearer target for feminist criticism, discussions of it as a pleasure also represent wider patriarchal attitudes towards gender in contemporary Russian society.

## 5.6 Conclusion

With reference to the previous chapter, many of the discourses employed in magazine portrayals of normative femininity and the female body are reflected in the ways that Russian women talk about a feminine bodily appearance. Thus, to some extent women's lifestyle magazines both reflect, and contribute to, gender discourses in contemporary



Russian society.

An analysis of reader understandings of beauty labour, and the role women's magazines are perceived to play in contributing to norms around such activity, have contributed to several arguments used in this thesis. Firstly, it contributes to the argument that Foucault's bodily disciplinarity, as employed by feminist scholars such as Bartky (1988), Bordo (1993/2003) and Heyes (2007) in relation to the female body, is pertinent in an analysis of reader attitudes towards the body and its role as a signifier of femininity. Secondly, it also explored how surveillance and disciplinarity are perceived as means of increasing one's aesthetic capital, and contribute to its particularly gendered nature. Thirdly, the chapter contributes to my argument that beauty labour is also perceived as a way of performing femininity, meaning that West & Zimmerman's (1987) theoretical approach is equally useful in an analysis of this particular context.

As in Chapter 4, there is much to be questioned from a feminist point of view. Many women have internalised normative discourses on the necessity of gaining aesthetic capital via beauty labour, and their reactions to the inevitable failures of their own bodies to meet feminine ideals (e.g. self-criticism, performing beauty labour) are in line with magazine gender portrayals of the female body as problematic and in need of discipline. Furthermore, the extent to which aesthetic capital is transferable into other kinds of capital, such as economic and social capital, is debatable. On one hand, it has been shown to provide real life benefits (e.g. in work or the legal sphere) for women in other contexts, as discussed in Chapter 2 (and see Kwan & Trautner, 2009; Anderson et al, 2010). However, other studies have pointed to the time constraints inherent in forms of capital linked to women's appearances (Salmenniemi & Adamson, 2014). From a feminist perspective,

therefore, it is also important to consider the limits of aesthetic capital in relation to women's positioning in patriarchal Russian society, which affords men greater access to more diverse and transferable forms of capital than women may access.

Moreover, notions of national identity in Russia are shown to intersect with notions of normative gender discourses, although women addressed this issue in varying ways. Some saw an excess of beauty labour as linked to the influence of 'Western' values in post-Soviet Russia, and thus challenging previous gender norms. Others framed beauty labour and its results as a particular virtue of Russian women, whose beauty and beauty labour were compared against non-Russians.

In this chapter I also explored different ways that women challenge ideals of femininity as based on extensive and ongoing beauty labour. Correspondingly, the chapter represented the beginning of my attempt to address feminist debates around the agency women may have in how they decode media. The different attitudes that my participants had to the day to day work of beauty labour were revealing in terms of these debates, especially as many women view beauty labour as a pleasure linked to femininity, *as well as* a duty that they sometimes feel pressured into performing and which could thus have more negative connotations. Although it was also understood as a pleasure, the pleasure often depended on patriarchal discourses that construct beauty labour as a necessity for women. Therefore we may address agency in the face of media and socio-cultural norms as a relevant concept, but one which demands consideration in relation to wider gender norms which, I argue, are more limiting than liberating for women. This is even more salient given women's discussion of women's magazines: readers use them as a source of information not only about the beauty labour they already perform, but about further ways they can

‘enhance’ (i.e. discipline) their bodies.

Furthermore, reader attitudes towards these values were mixed: some research participants perceived a rise in the amount of beauty labour being performed by women, which could be linked to a concurrent perceived rise in Western values, whereas others welcomed such trends as symbolic of ‘progress’ in Russia. Furthermore, some women expressed a desire to retain some specifically Russian cultural values. This range of perspectives supports an analysis of post-Soviet Russian culture and society as “hybrid” (Lull, 2000; Pilkington et al, 2002), and as one that shows signs of ‘glocalisation’ (Robertson, 2005). Omel’chenko & Bliudina’s assertion that a “horizontalization” (2002: 41) of relations between Russian and global cultures has taken place in the post-Soviet era is also useful. Although those authors refer specifically to youth cultures, this chapter suggests that a similar conceptualisation may be suitable for women’s culture and, in addition, that this horizontalization has continued from the late 1990s into the Putin era. The following chapters expand some of the arguments only briefly touched upon in this chapter, such as the centrality of conspicuous consumption to constructions of femininity, the perceived demographic gender imbalance in Russian society, and perceptions of globalisation and Westernisation in Russian culture.

## 6. Consumer Culture in Russian Women's Magazines

### 6.1 Introduction

As mentioned in Chapters 4 and 5, in conjunction with beauty labour, conspicuous consumption is a significant way in which Russian women's magazines portray normative femininity. The magazines tend to portray a high level of conspicuous consumption that is unrealistic for much of their readership: for many women it would not be feasible to update their wardrobe with every season or buy a skin cream costing over \$100, for example; yet these are both consumer practices that are normalised in the magazines studied in this research. High quality images of expensive face creams and fashion shoots featuring clothes with the label 'price on request' from international fashion labels such as Calvin Klein or Versace are common. Cheaper brands are also featured, but often these are as alternatives to 'the real thing'.

Although the economic turmoil of the 1990s has made way for a new generation of Russians with a greater disposable income, Russian society has recently been described as having the highest level of wealth inequality in the world outside of the small Caribbean island tax havens typically inhabited by international billionaires (Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report 2013: 53). Furthermore, by the time the current global financial crisis emerged in the late 2000s only 22 per cent of Russians could be described as middle class by Western standards (Sergeev in Rudova, 2011: 1106). Meanwhile, the gulf between rich and poor continues to expand year on year (Balmforth, 2013). This is significant

considering that levels of conspicuous consumption seen in many magazines bypass even middle-class capabilities. Indeed, the culture shown is of a type of frequent conspicuous consumption fully accessible only to a minority.<sup>59</sup>

As a popular form of media, women's magazines act as significant purveyors of gender norms, but the growing significance of high-level conspicuous consumption of fashion and beauty products means that it is increasingly portrayed as a necessary part of performing femininity. According to Suvi Salmenniemi (2012: 12) "contemporary Russia has witnessed an increasing emphasis on commercialised self-realisation and self-pleasure", and consumption has also been argued to now play a significant role in the formation of individual subjectivities in Russia, especially for the evolving Russian middle classes (Gurova, 2012: 149). Shopping has changed from a necessary part of domestic labour under the Soviet period to a leisure activity in the post-Soviet period. Although location and disposable income have been shown to affect Russians' ability to consume in the past two decades, in larger cities those with enough income have been described by Gurova as omnivorous and reflexive consumers (2012: 149).

This chapter examines portrayals of consumption in women's magazines in the light of this context, in which some sectors of Russian society are becoming more Western in their consumer habits, but many others still do not have access to significant levels of conspicuous consumption. It aims to show that gendered portrayals of consumption in women's magazines neglect this social context as a result of their focus on portraying a culture of conspicuous consumption as linked to normative femininity. Women in post-

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<sup>59</sup> Strukov & Goscilo (2011) discuss this as part of the glamour phenomenon in contemporary Russia.

Soviet Russia undoubtedly have more opportunities to consume fashion and beauty products than under the Soviet regime; however, from a feminist perspective the assumed centrality of consumption to a feminine identity is problematic. The prominence of consumer products in women's magazines somehow implies that 'full' femininity cannot be achieved without the outer representations of gender epitomised by creams, cosmetics and fashionable clothes. Indeed, Jennifer Patino has expressed worries that contemporary Russian norms of femininity are excessively tied to the consumer marketplace (2008: 142), a feature that has also been commented upon in Western consumer societies (Cronin, 2000). Although it may be so that not everybody can take part in a high level of conspicuous consumption, the magazines help to frame a *culture* of conspicuous consumption as a particularly feminine interest. Not only that, but the kind of consumption that magazines portray is often linked to beauty labour: women are encouraged to keep up with the latest fashions, buy appropriate clothing for their body type, and consume new cosmetics. The magazines' stress on this type of gendered consumption thus contributes to social pressure on women to take part in this culture in order to meet norms of femininity based around performing beauty labour and achieving aesthetic capital (Anderson et al, 2010).

Accordingly, the chapter aims to contribute to wider discussions of social change in the post-Soviet era, especially given that – in contrast to beauty labour – the growth in conspicuous consumption since 1991 seems to represent a clearer break with late Soviet norms of femininity. However, the chapter also examines how processes of dealing with the Soviet past – via nostalgia or *stio*b (Yurchak, 1999), for example – are present in women's lifestyle magazines in Russia, seeking to situate a discourse of conspicuous consumption linked to femininity within wider cultural and cross-cultural currents of

globalisation.

The structure of this chapter differs slightly from the other empirical chapters in this thesis, in that I give an overview of conspicuous consumption discourses in the three magazines, presenting a ‘typical issue’ from each magazine from February 2011. Taking this approach allows for a more in-depth analysis of conspicuous consumption in the magazines, and also provides some context for Chapter 7 (the following chapter) by demonstrating the prominence of this theme in women’s magazines. Next, section 6.5 presents an in-depth analysis of the *overt* encouragement to consume, where articles or sections focus on recommending products, and the *covert* product positioning, where product recommendation is ‘hidden’ within articles which seemingly have a different focus.

## **6.2 An Overview of Consumption and Femininity in Women's Magazines**

### 6.2.1 *Cosmopolitan*, February 2011

As a measure of the prominence of consumerism to *Cosmopolitan*, exactly one third of the magazine’s pages are taken up by full-page advertising. Of the sections that focus on introducing new products (which include some of this advertising), the ‘fashion and beauty’ section and a section called ‘Cosmo shopping’ total 55 pages, or roughly 20 per cent of the magazine as a whole. The centrality of advertising is no doubt a result of editors’ needs for revenue: Nelson (2012) notes that magazines would be unable to flourish if they relied on cover price alone. The centrality of advertisers in providing revenue might provide one explanation for the amount of consumer-themed material in women’s magazines. Perhaps all the more since, according to an anonymous blog post on a well-known contemporary feminism blog, the material included as recommendations in

magazines is not necessarily paid advertising but usually works on a mutually beneficial arrangement:

The beauty industry is predicated on young, impressionable and (mainly) female journalists being lavished with free massages and creams and stuff by very personable PRs and companies keen to gain column inches... no one will give you freebies or advertise in the publication that employs you unless you pay them back – in words. This is the *quid pro quo* of the journalist-PR relationship. ('Amy', 'The Lipstick Years: Confessions of an Ex Beauty Journalist', *The Vagenda*, 19/06/2012)

Although 'Amy' writes about her experiences in the UK and Ireland, she describes how the beauty journalism circuit works and it can be assumed that at least some of the magazines from this study also work on this premise. Indeed, I would note that aside from a few comparison pieces, little to nothing is said in the magazines about products that are of below average quality: negative press is not a feature of the magazines analysed in this research. Women's magazines thus may be seen to function on the basis of persuading readers to buy into consumer culture on a regular basis, and to purchase the products advertised or featured in magazines.

I begin by giving an overview of the fashion and beauty sections of *Cosmopolitan*. The fashion section consists of a display of the current trends, with pictures of the catwalk (*Cosmopolitan*, February 2011: 226-231), which is followed by a display of non-designer (though certainly not cheap) brand examples of how to achieve the trend (Ibid: 232). After a fashion spread, *Cosmopolitan* moves on to an article about how to achieve "cared for skin and a good mood", whereby five different "rituals" are detailed – four of these involve a product that the reader has to buy (Ibid: 254-257). On the next page, a regular feature entitled 'Your face' (Ibid: 258), five products are recommended, at least three of which are high-end brands. The next regular page, 'Your makeup' (Ibid: 260), manages to recommend seven products, whereas 'Your hair' (Ibid: 262) has five. 'Your body' (Ibid:



264) has the same number, including an offer for a free ice-skating ticket when you buy a particular perfume.

In another monthly column, 'His view', *Cosmopolitan* presents both statistics on what men (supposedly) think about certain beauty topics – in this February issue, it is wearing hair in a bun – and suggestions for things to buy for or recommend to your significant other. In addition, one box offers advice on how to persuade men to consume for themselves. Presumably, given associations of consumption with femininity rather than masculinity, they are reluctant:

Is your man not keen to buy cosmetic products for himself? Take the situation into your own hands. If he washes with water... present him with a cleansing foam with glycolic acid, it will prevent hair growing back. If he doesn't want to use body lotion... put a moisturising shower gel with glycerine in his bathroom, for example Active 3 Sport by Nivea for Men. (*Cosmopolitan*, February 2011: 266)

Here, the magazine presents women with an opportunity to buy products outside of their usual beauty regime. The piece demonstrates an association of conspicuous consumption with femininity rather than masculinity (Patino, 2008) – it is women who need to prompt men to take part in this kind of activity. It also points to some continuity with the Soviet style of consumption described as feminine by Oushakine (2000) – women are encouraged to consume for men as well as for themselves. In the following section, 'Beauty news' (*Cosmopolitan*, February 2011: 268-270), another seven products are added to the list, with a photo of the model advertising one of the perfumes, and another which uses the symbolism of a classic 1950s fashion image to suggest timeless glamour and luxury.

Another section sees an 'expert' test various cosmetic products (Ibid: 272) – however, the idea of a test seems to merely be a device to show products in a different way, as the tester's comments are one hundred per cent positive on all of the products. Here, the

products fill up most of the page, giving the reader a clear view of what is being promoted. A ‘Beauty alphabet’ section (Ibid: 274), which in this issue gives instructions on how to deal with puffy eyes and dark circles, does not feature any specific products. However, it does mention the beauty salon from which the advice was procured and assumes the reader will employ several (unnamed) types of cosmetic products to accomplish results, which in itself implies prior or future consumption of a range of different products.

The penultimate feature is a guide by a Clinique makeup artist on how to apply makeup for a date or a party (Ibid: 276). All of the makeup recommended is accompanied by large pictures of Clinique products, although this article is not marked as an advertising feature. The section finishes with a ‘Master class’ (Ibid: 280), accompanied by celebrity photograph of Anna Kournikova and makeup products which are of equal size. The magazine recommends three products to slim down your face to “look like you’ve lost weight”, echoing a discourse of bodily disciplinarity (Foucault, 1979/1991; Bordo 1993/2003) discussed in the preceding chapters.

### 6.2.2 *Elle*, February 2011

With a full 21 pages of pure advertising content before a reader even reaches the contents page, *Elle* has no less of a focus on products than *Cosmopolitan*. Although the magazine is bigger there is also more full page advertising by percentage, at 37 per cent (139 out of 371 pages). 128 pages are dedicated solely to fashion and beauty as topics, although there are usually more product recommendations towards the beginning of the magazine (particularly for jewellery). Because of this, it would be a more complex task to come up with a true number for *Elle* which would include embedded, covert advertising. As the magazine has a main focus on fashion and thus is, for all intents and purposes, saturated

with references to it, a brief look at the beauty section should be sufficient to give some idea of the ways in which the magazine encourages conspicuous consumption.

*Elle* has a system of seven subtitles for its beauty section: ‘new products’ (*novinki*), ‘advice’, ‘care’ (*ukhod*), ‘makeup’, ‘fragrances’, ‘salons’ and ‘stars’. It features a ‘cover page’ with its own headlines, a mini equivalent of the main cover. In the February 2011 issue, these headings were ‘About this – lipstick as a sex fetish’ and ‘I need a bath – how to bathe properly and attractively’. Both of the main articles contain recommendations for lipstick and bath products, respectively.

Like *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle* also has a ‘master class’ (*Elle*, February 2011: 292) and guides on how to accomplish various beauty tasks, such as a certain hairstyle (Ibid, 294). Alongside these regular features sit others such as ‘10 beauty rules’ (Ibid, 298), a test of a salon procedure (Ibid, 308), a top ten of the month’s products by the beauty editor (Ibid, 316), and the ubiquitous beauty *novinki* (Ibid, 322-326). The vast majority of these include product recommendations, whether they be new mascaras or the salon procedure (as in *Cosmopolitan*, the tests usually result in positive reviews). *Elle* also features a section on cosmetic products and fragrances for men (Ibid, 324-325), echoing *Cosmopolitan*’s prompting of women to consume on behalf of men as well as themselves.

Perhaps because *Elle* has more space to fill, there are more original features (as opposed to regular features) which deal with specific topics: for example, in this issue there are items on scrubs, products containing special oils, and Valentine’s Day spa procedures for couples. Interestingly, *Elle* also publishes a regular feature, ‘Hit of the month’ (Ibid, 314), which explores the benefits of a specific ‘cult’ product, further stressing the fetishistic

attitude towards cosmetics as commodities. In general, *Elle*'s beauty section features a greater volume of products, and also gives more attention to certain individual products than *Cosmopolitan*, marking a higher degree of fetishisation of specific – usually luxury – consumer brands.

### 6.2.3 *Liza*, 19 February 2011

As a weekly magazine which is around a third of the size of *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle*, *Liza* has a slightly different approach to advertising, with fewer full page adverts – half, third or quarter page adverts are more usual. Because of this, *Liza*'s percentage of advertising represents a percentage of the pages that have prominent advertising as opposed to full pages. Here, the total came close to *Elle* at 36 per cent.

Fashion and beauty made up 19 pages, or 17 per cent of the magazine in total. Although product placement was a feature for much of the magazine, it was not as noticeable as it was in the other two. An exception to this was on the topic of health, which was a much more prominent feature of *Liza* – more product recommendations were given for medicines and health products than were given in the other two magazines. Another notable difference is that *Liza* includes prices beside most products it recommends, with costs sometimes being made a prominent part of the features to help readers choose the most suitable combination for them.

In *Liza*, beauty is also more often linked with natural ingredients, even if these are contained in branded products. There is a noticeable trend towards cosmetics that are flavoured with ingredients such as fruit or tea. Despite this, beauty concerns notably do not differ very much from those found in the other magazines. For example, one article tells

the reader:

Our favourite drinks [coffee and tea] help you to feel more toned and discover the secrets of a youthful appearance (*Liza*, 19 February 2011: 20-21)

As *Liza* has a more homely, traditional feel, it is perhaps fitting that the product recommendations are presented in such a way as to link to traditional remedies of the type that could have come from an older female family member, for example. However, it is interesting that the concerns and ‘problems’ of appearance are framed in a similar manner to those found in the other magazines, despite *Liza*’s lesser emphasis on an up-to-date, urban lifestyle. Certainly, though there are fewer beauty pages, this one article contains no less than eight product recommendations, demonstrating that it is a sister of the genre despite its more ‘folksy’ and less glossy branding.

*Liza* also features quite a bit of advice on how to save money, which reflects its possible focus on women with a slightly lower income than the other two magazines (see Chapter 3.2.3). Despite this, the advice given in this issue is on how to *continue* a consumer lifestyle rather than how to reduce consumption. An illustration of this can be seen in one article which depicts a woman struggling with a lot of shopping bags, with the sub-heading “excessive spending or economising doesn’t do anybody any good. Learn how to manage your money” (*Liza*, 19 February 2011: 42). Although the ethos of consumerism seems to be less pervasive in *Liza* at first glance than it is in the other two magazines, because of the way the advertising is formatted it actually intrudes onto reading space in a significant way. For example, *Elle* often features dozens of pages in a row which do not feature overt advertising (i.e. in sections showing subsequent fashion spreads), whereas *Liza* has smaller advertisements which are included at least once every other page. Nevertheless, *Liza* has a less *Cosmopolitan*, glossy feel and though it does encourage consumption, unlike in

*Cosmopolitan* or *Elle* there is little emphasis on luxury or aspirational goods.

Having discussed the levels of consumption visible on a surface level in the three magazines studied, I move onto a more in-depth discourse analysis of the ways in which these magazines contain a message to consume regularly, demonstrating how this is particularly linked to beauty labour.

### **6.3 Linking Conspicuous Consumption to Normative Femininity**

With these products and hairstyles [*ukladki*], no one will guess that you have fine hair! (*Liza*, 20 November 2010: 35)

The above example from *Liza* encapsulates many of the discourses inherent in the magazines' encouragement to consume, which are thematically linked to the previous chapters concerning beauty labour and the body. It not only encourages women's insecurities around their bodies based around the gazes of others (Mulvey, 1975; De Lauretis, 1984), but categorises a particular part of the body as problematic, a feature criticised by some feminists (see Bordo, 1993/2003; Jeffreys, 2005). Overall, it draws on fear of a loss of aesthetic capital (Anderson et al, 2010) based on failing to achieve a sufficiently feminine bodily attribute. Consumption, alongside beauty labour, is presented as the antidote to all of these problems. I will now move on to give examples of some tactics employed by magazines to convey the importance of conspicuous consumption to maintaining a normative feminine body.

#### **6.3.1 Product Recommendations and the Magazine as Expert**

To begin, articles are often built specifically around product recommendations. This infers

an assumption made by the magazines about why readers may choose to read them: to find out about new fashions and cosmetic products or to find the most suitable items for themselves. As is clear from the previous chapter, many readers do cite this as an important reason for reading women's magazines. The magazines position themselves as guardians of knowledge, and nowhere more so than in the spheres of beauty and fashion. To paraphrase Kalacheva (2002: 4), they act as guides to the consumer marketplace, educating readers in which procedures and products are necessary. As reflects the magazines' focus on consumption, the solutions to these questions are often portrayed as achievable via buying particular products. For example, the appearance of a new product on the market is presented as a news event:

ANNOUNCEMENT! – So many cosmetics for the skin around your eyes have already been developed, that it seems practically nothing else may surprise us. However, the Olay company think differently. Their new product is a pretender to the name superproduct, capable of dealing with dark circles, shadows and wrinkles very quickly. And it's not a cream. Interested? Don't miss the next issue of Cosmo. (*Cosmopolitan*, March 2010: 384)

Sections entitled *Novinki* (in this context, 'new products') are regular features of both *Elle* and *Cosmopolitan*, and are a means of introducing the reader to new consumer beauty products. In this sense, they reflect a femininity norm which emphasises beauty and fashion as inherently feminine topics of interest. Related to the idea that beauty labour is a feminine area of interest, the magazines also act as a guide to negotiating the consumer marketplace. They aim to educate women about beauty products – particularly new ones – and the best ways to use them. The following examples of product recommendations were found in the beauty sections of the magazines:

Your perfume and your body products (shower gel, lotion, deodorant, etc.) should all be from the same line of products. (*Liza*, 30 November 2009: 24-25)

Wind and rain won't be able to damage your hairstyle! The main thing is to choose the right product. (*Liza*, 22 February 2010: 22-23)

The magazine as ‘beauty bible’ here gives out dictates: on what to consume, why, and how. Brands are held up as good or bad (though overwhelmingly the former), and readers can choose the ones they need to combat the ‘problems’ they have with particular parts of their bodies, reflecting a stress on bodily disciplinarity as discussed in the previous two chapters. There is a sense of right and wrong: are you, as the reader, consuming the correct product? To consider this particular consumer discourse in the post-Soviet context, the popularity of women’s lifestyle magazines in the 1990s may have been partly attributable to their stress on ‘educating’ former Soviet women on what and how to consume, given that there were few opportunities to take part in consumption activity in the USSR (Kalacheva, 2002); Bartlett (2006: 176) has also argued this in relation to *Vogue* magazine. The tone used by magazines to give recommendations can be quite forthright, although arguably in a friendly and usually non-patronising manner:

HOT MESS<sup>60</sup> – Coloured smoky eyes are in fashion for a second season, and you still haven't decided to give them a go? This is especially for those who are scared of radical experiments... It's worth at least one try! (*Cosmopolitan*, November 2010: 252)

Whilst this extract maintains an air of fun, its intimate tone implying a sister or female friend, the idea of beauty labour as necessary is still present. There is, it is implied, a duty for women to try out new trends, to keep up to date. Brands – usually different ones each month, presumably depending on product endorsements – are fetishised:

It's nice when your favourite brand works for its clients, like Shiseido does. Now its products will always be at hand – you can buy them at the chain L'Etoile. (*Cosmopolitan*, January 2010: 246-248)

Presumably moving into a popular chain of Russian cosmetic stores is merely a shrewd business decision for Japanese company Shiseido, and yet it is presented as an almost

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<sup>60</sup>N.B. 'Hot mess' is a phrase from Western popular culture commonly used to refer to somebody (usually women) with a scruffy or inelegant, yet (it is implied) sexually attractive appearance.



altruistic action. The magazine managed to convey a reassuring air of exclusivity – the brand, it is implied, was not always easy to get hold of before, but somebody somewhere has decided to ‘treat’ the general consumer to better access to its products. On a visual level, the fetishisation of brands continues: often beauty ‘spreads’ (photographic examples of a model wearing the latest cosmetics running to several pages) are accompanied by a page or two of photographs of the products themselves. They are usually portrayed in such a way as to fit in with the rest of the spread with similar lighting, colours or tones. The size of the products on the page communicates the centrality of the brand with its tasteful bottle or powder compact, although quite often these are accompanied by photos of the product *outside* the bottle to add different textures and colours. These beauty spreads tend towards two main themes: tastefulness (conveyed by muted, neutral colours) or edginess (bright or very dark colours, a more aggressive or high fashion aspect to the model and brands).

The discourse of magazine as teacher goes beyond product recommendations: for example, one regular feature in *Elle* entitled ‘Lesson’ was a guide to creating particular makeup looks from the current season, and had an additional focus on promoting one brand that had featured the look (e.g. Dolce & Gabbana in February 2010, Clinique in April 2010). ‘How to’ guides are a common occurrence. This further stresses the ‘educational’ socialisation role of women’s magazines. This may be seen as a continuity from both Western women’s magazines – who routinely offer such advice – and Soviet women’s magazines, who also sought to socialise readers (Vainshtein, 1996; Gradsikova, 2007b).<sup>61</sup> It should also be noted that the socialisation is not merely gendered, but classed: via putting an emphasis on expensive beauty brands, the magazine valorise a femininity discourse

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<sup>61</sup> Chapter 7 explores further potential views of women’s magazines as somehow educational for post-Soviet women specifically, taking into account the less developed consumer market in Russia after state socialism.

grounded in a middle- to upper-class lifestyle.

### 6.3.2 Homemade and 'Natural' Beauty

As noted in Chapter 5.3, magazines sometimes seem to temper their overt encouragement to consume by including homemade remedies or natural products. *Liza* puts a particular stress on homemade remedies, but in *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle* these were more often used as a foil for consumer items. For example, an article entitled ‘Get rid of stress’ in *Cosmopolitan* (November 2009: 394-398) suggests several more holistic possibilities for body care such as swimming and massage, but this is alongside recommendations for concealer and other cosmetic products.

Certain recommended beauty labour practices – such as achieving a tanned appearance – are sometimes used to lead in to product recommendations, as in this example where the magazine explains why eye cream is necessary:

Outwit the ultra-violet – A tan makes dark circles even darker, so SPF cream in the area around the eyes is not a luxury, but a necessity. Why not use just face cream? Because the rays that get through it can irritate the delicate eye area. (*Cosmopolitan*, November 2009: 389-392)

A tan, which is often portrayed as a necessary part of normative femininity in magazines, was presented as provoking a need for *further* beauty labour and surveillance. Significantly, the suggestion is not to avoid the sun, but to consume further cosmetics. I note that this also supports discourse discussed in Chapter 4, which stressed the ongoing nature of beauty labour as portrayed in women’s magazines.

The expensive nature of some of the items recommended for consumption to readers was sometimes acknowledged by journalists, as illustrated by an article which sought to justify

spending a relatively large amount of money on cosmetics:

Are exorbitantly [*zaoblachniy*] priced cosmetics turning us into snobs, or are they a proper investment in your appearance? Maria Taranenko explains whether it's really worth paying for elite products. (*Elle*, November 2010: 361)

Unsurprisingly, Taranenko (beauty editor of the magazine) comes to the conclusion that it is worth paying for more expensive products, even in an economic downturn, as it is an investment in one's future. She thus clearly brings in associations of certain forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984/2010) via women's consumption of the 'right' products; as will be discussed further in Chapter 7, given that the field of fashion and beauty are culturally understood as feminine areas of interest, women's knowledge of the fashion and beauty world can be seen as a route towards possessing a higher level of cultural capital. Furthermore, these products are also portrayed as a route to aesthetic capital (Anderson et al, 2010) for the reader, as discussed in Chapter 4; an investment in one's future may be in the implication that certain consumer goods will arrest the ageing process or generally improve the appearance.

Finally, Taranenko explicitly refers to the recent (Soviet and/or post-Soviet) past in describing the allure of consumer goods for Russian women:

Simplicity is not in favour today. It is associated with poverty, something we've had enough of. A cosmetic product represents a dream, and a dream should be beautiful. (*Elle*, November 2010: 366)<sup>62</sup>

It is possible to read the quote above as an evocation of the Soviet or possibly earlier post-Soviet era. This suggests that poverty is no longer an issue for Taranenko's readers, something which is clearly not the case in contemporary Russia (see Salmenniemi (ed.),

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<sup>62</sup> 6.3.4 returns to 'dreams' related to beauty and consumer culture, and their significance to normative femininity in Russia.

2012). Her reference to simplicity in beauty products as being undesirable also brings to mind the phenomenon of glamour culture in post-Soviet Russia as a reaction to difficult economic conditions (Gusarova, 2008).

### 6.3.3 Nostalgia and Contemporary *Stiob*

Both *Elle* and *Liza* magazines occasionally included free gifts as a motivation for readers to buy certain issues. *Liza* included, for example, Valentine's Day themed stickers or larger samples of new consumer items.<sup>63</sup> Clearly, samples are intended to introduce the reader to new products and – the manufacturers presumably hope – to encourage them to buy them in the future. However, *Elle* magazine included some more subtle consumerist messages which reflected the significance of conspicuous consumption to the magazine as a brand. Firstly, a small desk calendar in a late 2009 issue featured slogans from its in house advertising campaign which stress the key women's magazine themes of beauty and fashion, as well as the *Elle* brand:

*ELLE* – for those who never go to bed without makeup

*ELLE* – for those with a serious take on handbags

Furthermore, during the period studied in this research, *Elle* featured an advertising campaign which drew upon Soviet symbolism and Communist Party slogans. The February 2010 issue contained two sheets of *Elle* stickers featuring the following slogans, backed by photos of crowds of models with loudspeakers and placards in colours which echoed Soviet culture; each is headed with '*ELLE* – the time has come'.

To the victims of fashion – shopping grants

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<sup>63</sup> Small samples (e.g. of shampoo or face cream) are often included inside all three of the magazines studied in this research.

A third clutch is not too much

My wardrobe is my fortress

Days off for the sales

Shopping is the best drug

The slogans are a play on Soviet-era Communist Party propaganda, and are the result of a competition for readers to make up their own phrases reflecting the *Elle* lifestyle brand. The fact that so many of the stickers are focused on women as consumers highlights the centrality of consumption to *Elle* and women's magazines in general. There is obviously an ironic twist to the stickers, given that conspicuous consumption was officially anathema to the communist regime. This draws upon the idea of *stiob* in Soviet culture, a form of absurd irony that Yurchak (1999: 91) describes as “the new post-Soviet public derision [...] of recently sacred symbolic material”. Although Yurchak's description sounds rather negative, in more recent years *stiob* might also be said to draw on an affection for this “symbolic material”. In the *Elle* campaign there is more than a touch of post-communist nostalgia,<sup>64</sup> particularly in terms of imagery: the stickers draw on a stereotyped version of the Soviet past that many readers would recognise, even if they were too young to actually remember the era.

The stickers are also a playful representation of changing ideas of femininity since the late 1980s, and to a certain extent the rejection of what are seen as Soviet gender values: the strident woman political activist with a placard; the woman peasant with her robust body and sickle in hand; women as actors in the public – economic and political – spheres. The play on words represents very different concerns to those portrayed in Soviet propaganda:

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<sup>64</sup>For more on this phenomenon in the former Soviet sphere, see Todorova & Gille (2010), Oushakine (2007), or Holak, Matveev & Havlevna (2007).

although women are shown as a collective, the stress is on the individual woman's appearance; the women carrying the placards are models with slim limbs wearing full makeup; overall, the focus is on the body, clothes and conspicuous consumption as primary interests for readers of *Elle*. A discourse of conspicuous consumption is embedded within Soviet symbolism to produce an ironic, knowing effect: contemporary Russian women are shown to possess different values to those of their Soviet grandmothers (even if, as discussed in Chapters 2.4 and 2.7, fashion, beauty labour and even conspicuous consumption were not foreign concepts for Soviet women). Oushakine (2007: 481-482) argues that the use of nostalgia in the post-Soviet present is "compensatory[...] signification" which demonstrates that "the radical multiplication of interpretative strategies that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union have not automatically erased the feeling of shared symbolic experience that had been cultivated by the Soviet culture industry". Certainly, nostalgic references have been widely used by advertisers as a means of achieving emotional resonance with consumers (Holak et al, 2007). Reverting to the symbolism of the past, it could be suggested, is thus as much expressive of Russians' comfort with such symbols as it is of a lack of postsocialist symbolism. However, the same *Elle* campaign used on a large outdoor billboard in Moscow provoked criticism from the Moscow Committee of War Veterans for its incorrect and inappropriate use of military medals on its models (Fedorova, *be-in.ru*, 29/10/2010; consulted 24/04/14). Clearly, some sectors of Russian society are more comfortable with an ironic use of Soviet symbolism and slogans than others.

There is also a point to be made about post-communist nostalgia as a form of 'glocalisation', as Moonyoung Lee (2011) describes it. Lee describes how "in the cultural sphere globalisation neutralises local or national peculiarities, but, at the same time, this

process paradoxically provokes an acute demand for those very peculiarities and increases sensitivity to cultural differences” (2011: 159). The fact that a Western-style mainstream women’s lifestyle magazine uses communist symbolism suggests that there may be a desire to highlight rather than erase values that may have been lost over the past two decades of marketisation in the Russian Federation. One excerpt from *Elle* captures what are perhaps changing attitudes towards the Soviet and early post-Soviet past. In a special issue which looked back to the 1990s the editor discusses initially uncertain attitudes towards Western culture:

To be honest, we [the magazine staff] began our 1990s project a little frightened; [I recalled] my awkward childhood and unfashionable youth, brightly and colourfully failing to fit with the Western ‘dream’. But then, meeting our heroes and remembering those spirited ‘circus’ songs, we tired of thinking about that, because the Western dream hasn’t changed since then and it’s very boring. We’ve been travelling on the winds of a time machine. Let’s just hope that it’s finally broken down. (*Elle*, December 2009: 50)

Now the editor of an international glossy magazine brand, the author is initially embarrassed by the ‘backwardness’ of her youth in 1990s Russia. However, looking back on the time with the confidence of somebody at ease with conspicuous consumption, she is less in awe of the “Western dream” and more philosophical about what was, for most Russians, a very difficult period. In a sense she is speaking about the indigenisation of many norms which were once seen as alien; nevertheless, she also refuses to accept this “dream” uncritically and seeks to emphasise the ongoing significance of Soviet-Russian culture.

#### 6.3.4 Dreams and Aspirations

Magazines are in the business of creating dreams and desires through consistently emphasising novelty in beauty and fashion. However, on a more material level they are

also ‘helping’ readers to fulfil these wishes through advice on how to use new products to combat ‘problems’, whether they concern parts of the female body or one’s personal style. The magazines essentially offer wish fulfilment to readers. This often means talking about the promise of fast or far-reaching results for consumers of certain products: the wish is that a single purchase can satisfy a deeply held desire to change one or more aspects of one’s body. A dream is something that could, in principle, become a reality, even if it is a distant one; in fact, ‘dream’ signifies the act of turning fantasy into reality:

Women dreamed of a return to their former feelings and intimate youthfulness. (*Cosmopolitan*, January 2010: 145)

This quotation is taken from an article on vaginoplasty: *Cosmopolitan* explores the new trend for women to use surgical methods to combat insecurities they may have about their bodies as a result of the ageing process, childbirth, or a general dissatisfaction with the shape or size of their genitalia. For women with these insecurities, this new type of cosmetic surgery is presented as the solution to a problem and enactment of a ‘dream’ they had – the magazine implies – potentially been harbouring. Writing about a form of beauty labour previously unheard of, and indeed potentially taboo, in a magazine, and providing advice on how to enact this ‘dream’, helps to normalise this new surgical procedure. More significantly, it also aims to provoke the reader’s awareness of a part of the body they probably rarely considered as in need of beauty labour. Below is another example of how the dream was used to portray wish fulfilment:

One day I saw the advert in a magazine, and right there and then I tore out the page and took it to a shop. This is the lipstick of my dreams! (*Elle*, January 2011: 174)

This quotation obviously bears the mark of hyperbole, but can still tell us something about the importance cosmetics can assume in readers’ lives: again, the assumption is that the woman seems to have been waiting – dreaming! – about her ideal lipstick, and was able to



enact this fantasy thanks to the help of a magazine. The sense of urgency conveyed by the piece – “right there and then” – lends extra emphasis to the sense of importance that the magazine wishes to convey about its own role in readers’ lives. As discussed in Chapter 4, it is in the magazine’s interest to portray its advice as not only useful, but necessary and potentially life-enhancing. Performing beauty labour and taking part in conspicuous consumption are reader activities that magazines arguably encourage as a result of their reliance on consumer values to sustain them as a business.

Russian women’s magazines often portray the ‘dream’ – in this sense, meaning the striving towards specific material or physical aspirations – as part of normative femininity. The ‘dream’ of success through having a perfect body is simultaneously a fantasy it is assumed that all women share, and yet (with enough work, it is suggested) within reach of any woman. She need only have the necessary resources, and a central role of the magazines (or so they portray themselves) is to help the reader to achieve this goal:

Braces: don’t hide your smile! [...] Do you dream of correcting your wonky teeth?  
Dentists can do this [for you]! (*Liza*, 18 December 2010: 32)

In addition, certain kinds of rhetoric help the magazines to portray their brand as a world that readers identify with, blending reality with unreality to promote certain ideas about femininity. Readers are continually addressed *as women* – as if they had a homogeneous view of their bodies and the world around them.

This [beauty product] brings up colour to freshen your face and illuminate darker areas. Doesn’t every girl dream of that on New Year’s Eve? (*Elle*, December 2010: 258)

What woman doesn’t dream of a finely moulded silhouette and seductive curves? (*Cosmopolitan*, April 2010: 360)

Who hasn’t dreamed that, on transforming your outer appearance, the rest of your life will be changed towards happiness too? (*Cosmopolitan*, January 2010: 232)

We all dream of having bright eyes and expressive lips. (*Cosmopolitan*, January 2010: 252)

With the rhetorical spin ‘who doesn’t/doesn’t everyone’, and the inclusivity of “we all”, magazines create and promote norms. The magazines are not just ‘making dreams come true’, but actually helping to create ever evolving bodily norms through the removal of the possibility of questioning particular feminine attributes. Women are encouraged to change their attitudes as well as their bodies. A similar rhetoric is noted in the television show *Modnyi prigovor* (‘Fashion verdict’) (Lerner & Zbenovich, 2013: 839) to stress the centrality of beauty labour to a normative feminine identity in contemporary Russia. These rhetorical tools are used to promote the idea of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983) amongst the media audience; a community that does not exist in the traditional terms of physical space, but is based on the group of people who choose to consume the media on a regular basis. Encouraging women to feel part of a community in this way can be assumed to encourage a sense of personal identification with the magazine brand, a task on which international magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* expend a considerable amount of effort (see Machin & Thornborrow, 2003); this is also clearly the case in the Russian context. The rhetoric seen in the above examples helps to portray media brands as a world that readers inhabit and feel part of on an everyday basis.<sup>65</sup>

### 6.3.5 Consumption as Indulgence

Another encouragement to consume lies in the magazines’ propensity to present the act of

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<sup>65</sup>This process of (imagined) community building (Anderson, 1983) may be enhanced by interaction with online forums run by some magazines, including both *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle*. For example, one participant, Anya (27, SP), commented that she used the forums regularly, had met one of her best friends via these forums, and had even communicated with editorial staff about contributing an article on her own experiences. Clearly, this element of interaction could not only strengthen a reader’s connection to a magazine brand, but extend the ‘imagined community’ into a real-life community of readers. The rise in internet communication has arguably bolstered this: now, women can not only identify with the ‘dreams’ promoted by magazines, but discuss them with real life friends and swap tips with others online.

consumption as an indulgence or a luxury. At first glance this seems in juxtaposition to the idea that women should be consuming regularly, but the point is that these treats should be regular: they are presented as a reward, rather than entailing a penalty in terms of time or money. As such, this discourse forms part of magazine portrayals of beauty labour and achieving greater aesthetic capital (Anderson et al, 2010) as normative behaviour for women. Certain language is also useful in exploring how ongoing consumption is central to the magazines: products are often presented as somehow necessary, as they are so effective:

Bronzing powder or cream gives the skin luminescence, **a must** this season. (*Cosmopolitan*, April 2010: 374-377)

Deep Comfort Hand and Cuticle Cream from Clinique is a **must-have** product for your dressing table, especially in winter. (*Cosmopolitan*, January 2010: 242)

The impetus is on the reader to recognise why they should consume the new products described in hyperbolic language, another tactic often seen on the magazines' beauty pages. In reality, obviously it would be unrealistic for every reader to go out and actually buy every 'must-have' that is featured in their magazine. Framing consumption in this way helps to emphasise its links to a normative feminine body, which in itself is discursively constructed as a "must-have" attribute for women.

#### 6.3.6 'Magic' and 'Miracles' of Consumption

'Magic' and 'miracle' were two significant terms associated with conspicuous consumption in the three magazines studied in this thesis. They can be positioned as part of discourses relating to beauty labour: the implication is that products featured in the magazines would be so effective as to seem somehow fantastic. They may also be discussed with reference to the 'glossy' rhetoric of glamour culture, both in the sense that

they represent the hyperbole of consumer culture and the sparkle and shine of the world it represents (Goscilo & Strukov, 2011; Mikhailova, 2011: 95-96). ‘Magic’ is in this context a superlative, adding an extra dimension of wonder to the process of consuming and using beauty products. For example, a piece entitled ‘Miracle Broth’ describes a new beauty product as “a magic elixir” (*Elle*, November 2010: 402), a phrase with fantasy associations: the elixir of life supposedly brings endless youth and the ability to defy the ageing process. In another piece, a skirt is described as being able to “work real miracles” (*Liza*, 22 February 2010: 6-7) and another piece entitled *Red hot* describes “the magic of red”: a scientific study finding that men are drawn to red clothing is used as advice for women in attracting sexual partners (*Cosmopolitan*, November 2010: 85). The suggestion is that beauty products and fashion items will work to emphasise or improve a woman’s body so well that the reader will find it difficult to believe: it is so effective that it could almost be magical or miraculous.

The use of fantasy vocabulary in relation to femininity and beauty has been observed by Azhgikhina & Goscilo (1996), who note the rather magical names of two women’s beauty and hair salons in 1990s Moscow: *Volshebnitsa* (‘Enchantress’) and *Charadeika* (‘Sorceress’), connoting either the ability of the cosmetologist or hairdresser to transform one’s appearance, or the ability of the ‘beautified’ woman to cast a spell on potential male suitors.<sup>66</sup> A similar discourse related to the transformation of a woman’s appearance has been observed in the aforementioned contemporary television show *Modnyi Prigovor* (‘Fashion verdict’), where the show’s hosts describe the makeover of the female subject as “a miracle” and “a fairytale” (Lerner & Zbenovich, 2013: 846).

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<sup>66</sup> An internet search revealed that both of these salons (or salons of the same name, at least) still exist in Moscow in 2014, suggesting a magical discourse in relation to beauty has had enduring relevance over the past two decades.

*Elle* magazine (December 2010) published a double New Year issue in which the themes were ‘magic’ and ‘dream’, stressing the transformative discourse of femininity in women’s magazines.<sup>67</sup> The same issue introduces a fashion spread in the following way:

You can’t have too serious a relationship with fashion. Even designers, for whom fashion is a business, understand this. So for us this holiday is also an excuse to enter into the world of magical transformations! (*Elle*, December 2010: 164-173)

The spread features a model dressed in fairly bright, voluminous outfits, positioned in various, clearly playful poses (cleaning a car, licking an ice-cream, being carried down the street by sailors). “Magical transformations” are portrayed playfully, but are associated with aspirational consumerism: all of the clothes are from high end labels such as Chanel. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, such high end labels can be real enough to relate to, but also somewhat unrealistic in that they are out of reach of most consumers. In this way, the magazines offer enough reality for the reader to relate to, but also represent a simulacrum of reality, a realm of “magical transformations” where normative femininity is only possible via the consumption of certain ‘miracle’ products. As another example, this cosmetics guide features references to the fantasy character ‘Zolushka’ (the Russian version of Cinderella):

These super-sexy looks easily take you from an office Zolushka to the heroine of a fantasy romantic fairytale. Choose one to suit you and follow the instructions of our makeup artists. (*Cosmopolitan*, November 2010: 240)

A discourse of transformation is present in this extract which implies that, like Zolushka, you can transform your body to become “super-sexy” – presumably to find your ‘prince’, and escape the everyday realities of working in an office. As in Chapter 4, a woman’s body

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<sup>67</sup> In the period studied, each issue of *Elle* had a theme emblazoned across its front cover in large, bright letters.

is portrayed as a means of gaining aesthetic capital and thus happiness and romantic success, showing that aesthetic capital is portrayed in the magazines as potentially transferable into other types of capital (e.g. economic, social).

In another example, a fantasy transformation was based on a description of a new vegetable-based beauty treatment under the heading *Turn into a pumpkin* (*Elle*, January 2011: 184-185), clearly echoing the Zolushka/Cinderella story. The procedure was described as “magic”, further emphasising a fantasy theme as part of wider discourses of beauty labour and conspicuous consumption as offering transformative possibilities based around notions of increasing one’s aesthetic capital.

The ‘Cinderella story’, although undoubtedly present in Western fairy tales (Warner, 1995: xv-xvi), may also be seen through a particularly post-Soviet lens. As will be discussed further in Chapter 8, the upwardly mobile woman is seen to benefit from certain feminised forms of aesthetic capital (Anderson et al, 2010) if she takes part in the lifestyle of conspicuous consumption and beauty labour as promoted in women’s magazines. As part of the social transformation of the late 1980s and 1990s, a discourse of appearance transformation can also be found in *glasnost*’-era books and films such as *Interdevochka*, which portrays the transformation of a woman’s life narrative as clearly linked to her attractive body. Azhgikhina & Goscilo (1996: 94-95) argue that this fairytale narrative reflects a preoccupation with the Cinderella narrative in Russian literary culture: “Russian readers always prefer to witness not the predicament of a beautiful woman who suffers for profound if ill-defined reasons, but the story of the ordinary Cinderella, who suddenly becomes beautiful and finds Prince Charming”. Furthermore, Kay (1997: 81) highlights the transformative potential offered by the new women’s magazines of the early 1990s, and the

ways in which they represented a departure from Soviet femininity norms.

Many other discourses which could be included under the heading ‘encouragement to consume’ will be or have already been discussed in more depth in this thesis and thus will be mentioned only briefly at this point: celebrity endorsement (Chapter 8); the exotic lure and cachet of foreign brands (Chapter 8), the compulsion to present an appropriately feminine body to both men and women (Chapter 4); and the tailoring of consumer product recommendations to particular body ‘problems’ (Chapter 4).

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

Conspicuous consumption has been shown to play a significant role in portrayals of femininity in contemporary Russian women’s magazines. It not only contributes to socio-cultural norms of femininity, but is vital to the very business model on which women’s magazines rely (see Nelson, 2012). The first section of this chapter emphasised how consumption is deeply embedded in the beauty and fashion sections of the magazines, showing how notions of consumption as a feminine activity are intertwined with aspects of beauty labour, and emphasising the discursive construction of the female body as in need of surveillance and discipline. Conspicuous consumption is highlighted as a means of gaining aesthetic capital in the magazines, but also as a means of performing femininity.

Women’s magazines, which were argued to play a role in teaching former Soviet women to be consumers in the earlier post-Soviet period (Kalacheva, 2002), arguably continue to play this role. This is despite the fact that conspicuous consumption is, in some ways, no longer as much of an alien concept as it was for many in the early 1990s. This role is perhaps now not just perceived in relation to consumption, but in relation to performing

normative femininity. The beauty market, in Russia as in other parts of the globe, relies on a constant updating of trends and technologies, and it is in the business interests of women's magazines to convey these trends; to 'educate' the reader via advertising and product placement.

As conspicuous consumption was a very minor feature of Soviet women's magazines, the influence of global consumption norms on this sphere of the media can be seen as a significant change contributing to gender norms in contemporary Russia. Nevertheless, this chapter has also shown that the Soviet past remains a powerful cultural touchstone in relation to consumption. Via the use of nostalgia and *stio*b in their encouragement for women to consume, women's lifestyle magazines now take part in an ongoing reframing of the Soviet past in contemporary Russian culture. Although some sectors of society remain critical of conspicuous consumption as a shallow part of glamour culture, and as in conflict with traditional Russian-Soviet values (Goscilo & Strukov, 2011: 19-21), the widespread popularity of this type of magazine suggests that these criticisms are not shared by all sectors of the population. As such, in the next chapter (Chapter 7) I discuss how women negotiate a discourse of femininity as linked to consumption in women's magazines. Chapter 8 also deals with the ambiguous positioning of conspicuous consumption in the post-Soviet era, and the values and norms it is seen to represent.



## **7. Reader Perceptions of Conspicuous Consumption Linked to Femininity**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Chapter 6 discussed the importance of conspicuous consumption, in conjunction with beauty labour, to how normative femininity is discursively constructed in women's magazines. In this chapter, I look at how Russian women negotiate these norms, particularly exploring why, when they portray aspirational consumer lifestyles that seem to bear little relevance to the everyday lives of most women, they nevertheless remain appealing to many readers. Given the gendered and classed nature of the culture of conspicuous consumption portrayed in women's magazines, this chapter argues that post-Soviet women's magazines to some extent draw on Soviet gender norms, and have thus contributed to the growing acceptability of consumerist and glamour discourses in post-Soviet society. The chapter draws upon Bourdieusian classifications of culture as legitimate or popular, linking women's magazines further into the argument that some forms of cultural capital are particularly gendered. In doing so, it examines both the perceived status of the magazines (as high or low culture) and the role of gender in lending certain forms of culture "a profit in legitimacy" (1984/2010: 255).

Firstly, the chapter engages with a growing literature on the culture of conspicuous consumption in post-Soviet Russia. For example, discussions of glamour culture in the 2000s (Stephenson, 2007; Patino, 2008; Gusarova 2008; Rudova, 2008; 2011; Menzel,

2008; Litovskaia & Shaburova, 2010; Goscilo & Strukov, 2011; Klingseis, 2011; Ratilainen, 2012; 2013) have often been linked to the portrayal in the media of the aesthetics and values of an unrealistically aspirational consumer lifestyle. To paraphrase Litovskaia & Shaburova, “[Russian] society [has become] accustomed to seeing wealth as stylish beauty” (2010: 198). Furthermore, changing consumption habits have been used by scholars as a means of analysing socio-cultural change since the collapse of communism (Gurova, 2012; Gudova & Rakipova, 2010; Shevchenko, 2002; Kalacheva, 2002; Oushakine, 2000). Significantly, this chapter emphasises the relevance of conspicuous consumption to a *feminist* analysis of changing gender discourses in post-Soviet Russia. Critically approaching women’s attitudes to portrayals of gender in women’s magazines, as discussed in Chapter 5, means engaging with a body of feminist literature on how women’s media and culture are decoded (Radway, 1983; 1984; Ang, 1985; Frazer, 1987; Hermes, 1994; McRobbie, 1997; Gill, 2007b; Duits & van Zoonen, 2007). Drawing on this literature, the chapter aims to contribute to debates around how women may negotiate patriarchal discourses on an everyday basis.

Bourdieu’s description of women’s magazines as “semi-legitimate legitimising agencies” (1984/2010: 70) hints at the positioning of women’s magazines as both – or somewhere between – high and low culture. This chapter looks at women’s magazines in representing – and *recommending* – particular forms of taste<sup>68</sup> to women. This is firstly in terms of content: the consumer items they encourage readers to buy can represent ‘high’ culture to some readers via their connection to the world of fashion as art. In this sense, they act as arbiters of taste, recommending legitimate forms of culture (in this case, the taste of

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<sup>68</sup> In the Bourdieusian sense: taste works as part of Bourdieu’s (1985/2010) theory of practice, which he uses to explain how class hierarchies are perpetuated. Taste is a means of displaying one’s cultural capital.

particular wealthy social groups) to their readers. Secondly, in terms of the status of women's lifestyle magazines as media, their time-sensitive, widely available, relatively cheap price and throw-away nature may position them in the opposite manner, leading some readers to regard their content as unimportant 'low' culture. Based on these two differing perspectives, this chapter explores the liminal status of women's lifestyle magazines in Russian society, which is shown to be particularly related to their status as gendered media.

The positioning of women's magazines has also been addressed in Russian studies. For example, Ratilainen (2013: 90-91) discusses consumer or glossy magazines (including women's magazines) from a literary studies perspective, in the light of Soviet and post-Soviet reading culture. She argues that in the Russian context particular attention must be paid to criticisms of the perceived role of 'glossy' media in the downfall of popular Soviet literary culture, which could be categorised as more 'highbrow' than contemporary popular culture might be. Because of this, she argues that this type of magazine is difficult to position as either high or low culture. In this section of the chapter, I engage with this question on women's magazines as a genre in Russia, bringing in a specifically gender studies approach which takes into account reader perspectives.

In the first two sections of the chapter I examine how women's magazines may be perceived as 'legitimate' culture, in that they can be perceived by readers as a source of cultural capital or creative inspiration. Both of these perspectives are shown to be highly linked to normative femininity: they relate to the sphere of fashion and beauty as a normatively feminine interest.

The second two sections of the chapter examine women's magazines in a more familiar guise, as essentially popular or 'low' culture. I show how Russian women read the magazines critically, 'cherry picking' the content to suit their own perceptions of femininity and/or conspicuous consumption; or viewing them as sources of escapism from everyday life. These classifications are also linked to wider discussions on the value of women's culture as discussed by Ang (1985) and Hermes (1995), and to the status of women's magazines as a form of escapism, both in Russia (Stephenson, 2007) and elsewhere (Stevens & Maclaran, 2005).

## **7.2 Magazines as Legitimate Culture**

### 7.2.1 Magazines as a Source of Cultural Capital

Although some magazines acknowledge the economic circumstances of most of their readership by providing women with more affordable examples of consumer products, as discussed in Chapter 6 they also regularly portray an aspirational consumer lifestyle, with multi-page spreads of high fashion clothing and designer beauty brands. Because conspicuous consumption is portrayed as highly linked to performing normative femininity in magazines they are, from a feminist perspective, representative of patriarchal discourses. In addition, despite the focus on gender in this thesis, it is also important to acknowledge the classed aspects of these discourses in that they can represent an aspiration to take part in the lifestyles of more wealthy social groups.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> A good example of this is Michelle Rivkin-Fish's (2009) discussion of class and aspirational consumption, and its links to changing ideals of *kulturnost* in the post-Soviet era.

Below, I position the acquisition of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984/2010), or the non-economic benefits associated with particular kinds of knowledge, taste and behaviour, as a means by which readers of women's magazines position themselves in relation to Russian society and wider global culture. Drawing on the cultural capital associated with particular ways of performing femininity (i.e. beauty labour, conspicuous consumption), some readers perceive women's magazines as a means of improving their relative positioning within social structures of gender and class.

The cultural capital women perceive as achieving from reading women's magazines is dependent on perceptions of high fashion as legitimate culture (Bourdieu, 1984/2010); as a form of art. In the example below, it is possible to see how this form of legitimised cultural capital is perceived to operate:

I don't see the point, for example, when you're reading magazines... why would I look at the new Mango<sup>70</sup> collection when Mango doesn't dictate the new trends? If something good turns up there, then it's not that it's a rip off, but it is referencing the more famous fashion houses. (Marta, 23, NN)

Marta describes how she actively chooses not to peruse more affordable consumer products and, in fact, rejects the idea of affordable fashion as a focus of women's magazines. This is because she is keen to find inspiration from what she saw as the authentic source. In reading women's magazines, she aims to gain knowledge about who she perceives as the real 'movers and shakers' of the fashion world. If a magazine recommends a more accessible brand (such as Mango), this is viewed as a dilution of authenticity – like looking at a reproduction rather than the original artwork. A reproduction was fine for everyday life – and indeed it was what Marta sought out in reality – but magazines themselves hold a clear role for her of connecting her with fashion

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<sup>70</sup>A mid-range multinational clothing chain.

as *legitimate* culture. Given that knowledge about fashion has associations with normative femininity, as discussed in Chapter 6, this form of cultural capital may be seen as having strongly gendered aspects. Having knowledge about high-level consumer goods is associated with being ‘in the know’, connected to the *makers* of legitimate culture and a world often beyond the typical reader’s geographic, temporal or financial boundaries; some readers perceive women’s magazines as a means of this type of gendered cultural capital:

HP: What is the main reason why you read women’s magazines?

Vera: To keep up with what’s current.

Sasha: Maybe for self-development. To see something there for myself.

Zhanna: To see the new fashions, what’s going on outside these four walls.

Sasha: Yes, because we have a lot of work to do, so it’s very important to widen our perspectives – that sort of thing. (Sasha, 29, Vera, 25, Zhanna, 22, NN)

Although they were highly educated and working in a well-respected field of employment, Sasha and Zhanna’s salaries were low, and they commented during the interview that they were not able to afford to buy many of the things they read about in magazines. These participants viewed women’s magazines as enlightening, a type of reading that expanded their usual horizons and kept them up to date with what was going on not only in other sectors of society, but in other parts of the world. Having access to knowledge about the international fashion industry makes some Russian women feel part of an imagined global community, something that was obviously important for Sasha, Vera and Zhanna, who described it in contrast to the many hours they spent working each week.

A recent study of Russian women’s magazines by Gudova & Rakipova (2010) has also used this idea – originally put forward by Benedict Anderson (1983) – to stress the gendered aspects of women’s media, describing the magazines and their readers as “a

communality, inside which gender socialisation is accomplished and gender identity is built” (2010: 7). Feeling connected to developments in the world of fashion and beauty, something clearly positioned by the magazines as feminised areas of interest, contributes to gender role socialisation. McCracken (1993: 299) also refers to a “combined master narrative” present in women’s magazines, which address women as part of a collective. Part of this could certainly be seen in magazines’ coverage of the latest fashion and beauty products: they address women not just as women, but as consumers.

To perceive women’s magazines as a source of cultural capital is in some ways a contrast to Soviet era cultural distinction, which relied heavily on locally legitimated forms of culture, was largely based on the tastes of the Soviet intelligentsia, and categorised many (though not all) Western forms of culture as ideologically suspicious. However, it should also be noted that this was the official Soviet view, which fluctuated over several decades of Communist Party rule. Work by scholars such as Yurchak (2006) and Vainshtein (1996) suggests that knowledge about Western or international fashion trends could bring its own kind of cultural cachet; as such, there is some continuity in this perspective.

This view of women’s magazines as a source of knowledge about gendered cultural trends was also apparent in my discussion with a beauty industry manager, who perceived women’s magazines as a kind of cultural catalogue:

When they show Bulgari’s<sup>71</sup> new jewellery collection in the magazines, it’s very cool, it’s beautiful. I understand that my current pay means I can’t buy a ring for 200,000 [rubles] from Bulgari, but it’s beautiful and if you want you could find yourself something similar. I think they show it in magazines not so you would go and buy it, but so you know this kind of thing exists, that they’ve made such a beautiful thing. Perhaps no one will ever buy it, [or just] rich people. It’s simply an

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<sup>71</sup> A expensive luxury brand.

example of what's going on at the moment. Every year, every season everything changes. I think it's a display of what there is. (Valentina, 24, NN)

Valentina recognises that the magazines do not represent her own consumption abilities, but as with Marta this point was superseded because the magazines made her feel connected to the globalised, legitimated culture represented by luxury fashion and beauty brands. Valentina's opinion of the magazines also points to their emphasis on an aspirational consumer culture. Magazines encourage readers to hold aspirations linked to an aspirational lifestyle – in terms of knowledge, if not necessarily in terms of being able to actually buy the products.

Some participants described the cultural capital gained from magazines in artistic terms. One interviewee, an artist herself, put forward the following view: "I'm interested in looking at high fashion; it's art. It can be referred to as art." (Tatyana, 21, NN) Although she was not interested in following fashion as such, Tatyana enjoyed looking at the fashion spreads created by the magazines, which she saw as a form of legitimate culture – as did Valentina and Anya:

HP: Do you like to look at designer things?

Valentina: Yes, I find it interesting because, as a rule, designer clothing... the clothes aren't suitable for real life. It's a kind of art, like paintings and everything else. (Valentina, 24, NN)

Fashion as art should be viewed as a definite trend, like [the fashion designer Alexander] McQueen. Specific things can be seen as art. (Anya, 27, SP)

Some women clearly enjoy reading material that leans towards an aspirational lifestyle: although the lifestyle itself is not necessarily realistic, women's magazines can represent a form of legitimate culture through which cultural capital can be gained. These women do not necessarily interpret women's magazines as putting pressure on them to perform their



femininity via conspicuous consumption: consumption itself is not always necessary in subscribing to femininity norms. However, *knowledge* about contemporary trends in conspicuous consumption (i.e. fashion and beauty brands) is seen as valuable for women, and is portrayed as valuable in women's magazines (see Chapter 6).

### 7.2.3 Magazines as a Source of Creative Inspiration

The next category also concerns participants who tended to view women's magazines content as a means of accessing cultural capital *and* aesthetic capital (Anderson et al, 2010). This group used magazines in more practical ways: as advice on what to consume (even if they were unable to buy the actual brands recommended in women's magazines), or inspiration for making their own clothes. The practice of using magazines as a source of 'creative inspiration' allows the reader to approximate the aesthetics of legitimate culture even if she does not have access to the same material items. Ordinary Russian women can access capital in aesthetic terms through buying or making similar clothing.

For example, one participant mentioned in the previous section, Marta, enjoyed reading a lot of high fashion magazines (e.g. *Elle*, *Elle Fashion*, *Harper's Bazaar*) and recognised that many had a focus on high-end designer labels that, in her words, "only people with a high salary can afford". However, from an early stage in the interview she explained that they were a source of information about what was in fashion and inspiration for her own style:

I think that in coming up with an idea it's better to show high fashion and luxury brands because that's how fashion is made. You need some ideas, in my opinion: not so you can go and buy the exact skirt you see on the page, but it just gives you an image, a route that you can follow and be more beautiful. (Marta, 23)

Creative inspiration was a feature of several interviews, and was used by women to explain

the appeal of magazines. In this sense, it is especially relevant to understanding their appeal for women who were not otherwise able to take part in the lifestyles they promoted. The “exact skirt you see on the page”, Marta says, is not really the point: a cheaper or homemade version of the skirt is also one form of buying into legitimised consumer culture. Reading (certain) women’s magazines thus represents a means of acquiring, in Bourdieusian terms, the correct (i.e. culturally legitimated) taste. So, even if – as with Bourdieu’s (1984/2010) class of schoolteachers – one does not have the necessary economic capital to achieve a certain culturally legitimated lifestyle, one may still acquire some of its distinction via displaying one’s cultural capital.

There is some continuity in this perspective from the ways that women used Soviet-era women’s magazines as inspiration to gain cultural and aesthetic capital: Soviet women also used *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest’ianka* for dress patterns and tips on how to knit and sew (Attwood, 2001: 166) and as a source of information about style (Vainshtein, 1996). Furthermore, one of the first popular Western magazines to spring up in the USSR (in 1987) was *Burda Moden* (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996: 28), which included dressmaking patterns as standard. However, the ways participants in contemporary Russia discussed such activity in relation to consumer culture (i.e. fashion brands) suggest that ways of using women’s magazines may also have changed during the post-Soviet era.

However, another continuity is the extent to which such practices reflect the gendered aspects of aesthetic and cultural capital linked to fashion. Marta’s observation that such behaviour is a means of “becom[ing] more beautiful” shows that she uses the magazines as a means of achieving normative femininity. In further support of this point, she mentioned that, due to being outside the standard size range sold in Russian shops, she was sometimes

unable to buy fashionable clothing in her own size. Sewing her own clothes was thus also a way of negotiating bodily norms. Marta's problem of not being able to find fashionable clothing in shops may also have been a problem for women outside the standard sizes in Soviet times, who were subjected to rather patronising advice in Soviet women's magazines on how to dress to hide their fuller figures (Vainshtein, 1996: 78-79). However, for the majority of Soviet women, many fashions shown in magazines would not always have been available in shops due to continual shortages as a result of the planned economy. Although ready-to-wear fashion became more available from the late 1950s (Gradszkova, 2007b: 144), any woman who wanted a variety of fashionable clothing tended to acquire the necessary skills to make her own (Gradszkova, 2007b; Vainshtein, 1996). In contrast, market developments and the rise of glamour culture in the last two decades in Russia have meant that there is more of an aspiration to purchase clothes *prêt à porter*, a greater variety of shops in many cities from which to choose clothes, and a greater pressure on women to have awareness of designer trends from high fashion.<sup>72</sup> Using magazines as creative inspiration thus enables readers without the means of actually buying into the aspirational lifestyle associated with glamour culture, as seen in many women's magazines (Menzel, 2008; Rudova, 2008; Goscilo & Strukov, 2011), to negotiate newer social expectations for women in post-Soviet society:

Olya: People who can't buy themselves clothes, they can use the advice and find something suitable out of their own wardrobes. In any case if you have even an idea about what's in fashion, it's useful... Basically, all magazines are ruled by advertising, so I don't think that someone looks at a magazine and saves up the money for a skirt from Max Mara.<sup>73</sup> You can even find a similar thing for ten times cheaper.

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<sup>72</sup> Although, as discussed in Chapter 2, shopping facilities in most Russian cities are not comparable in brand or price ranges to Western European retailing, where there is often more choice and access to cheaper clothing.

<sup>73</sup> A designer brand.

HP: It's just interesting for you to see what's in fashion, despite the price of the items? Just the images?

Olya: Yes, simply the images. Just the ideas. (Olya, 22)

Olya intended to adapt certain ideas to her own circumstances, demonstrating that readers took an interest in a culture of conspicuous consumption as part of subscribing to femininity norms. However, it should also be noted that other participants appreciated the efforts made by some magazines to recommend consumer items of various values, enabling them to have easier access to aesthetic capital:

They have expensive things, French things, and they have pictures of equivalents that we can buy. It's interesting to see what you could buy. (Polina, 21)

Polina was unemployed and valued useful information about how to consume according to her own limited financial capabilities. For this participant, it was important that she was able to link the world portrayed by the magazines to her own world in practical terms. This was in one way a means of taking part in an international culture of fashion, which is perceived as a feminine sphere of interest.

Sections 7.2.2 and 7.2.3 of this chapter have thus shown the importance of considering how women decode popular media, as some of the perspectives they take can be fairly nuanced. The aim of using magazines as creative inspiration is not only associated with gaining aesthetic capital; in the 2010s, displaying one's knowledge about consumer culture (e.g. fashion) has become an aspect of normative femininity. This is tied into its positioning in women's magazines, and also to a wider rise in glamour culture (Gusarova 2008; Rudova, 2008; 2011; Menzel, 2008; Litovskaia & Shaburova, 2010; Goscilo & Strukov, 2011; Ratilainen, 2012). Classed as well as gendered aspirations are a clear part of this: glamour culture is associated with a wealthy lifestyle which allows for the

consumption of certain products.

In sum, although a growth in a culture of conspicuous consumption is arguably demonstrative of post-Soviet social change, this change has nevertheless been facilitated by some continuity in gender norms, mainly linked to fashion as a normatively feminine area of interest.

### **7.3 Magazines as Popular Culture**

#### 7.3.1 Magazines as Escapism and Pleasure

In this section, I move on to look more at the status of women's magazines in Russian culture, discussing them as popular culture. I also continue to explore women's decoding of media as a means of explaining the appeal of women's magazines, which often portray an unrealistic level of consumption as part of normative femininity.

To begin with, I discuss women's magazines as a source of escapism and pleasure. Essentially, portrayals of conspicuous consumption as linked to normative femininity were, as noted in the previous section, acknowledged by some women as unrealistic. However, this section shows how an element of unrealistic, conspicuous consumption can be a way of imagining a different world and escaping the banalities of daily life for a brief period of time. The status of women's magazines as popular culture arguably facilitates this perspective.

In many ways, women's magazines as purveyors of escapism and pleasure has formed the basis of the study of women's culture in the past forty years in the West. Janice Radway

(1984) emphasises this approach in her analysis of another female-oriented medium, romance novels. Janice Winship discusses the “pleasure of colour pages” (1987: 54) and the “airy routes to dreamland” (1987: 55) offered by women’s magazines, demonstrating their usefulness to women as a way to escape and enjoy visual pleasure. They have also positioned themselves as giving women licence for “me time”, as argued by Stevens, Maclaren & Brown (2003). In addition, women’s magazines as a specific form of reading different from, say, books or newspapers, was discussed by Hermes in her study of reading practices. Hermes discusses women’s magazines as “putdownable”, “the ultimate ‘in-between’ activity” (1995: 32) and a source of relaxation (1995: 36). Stevens & Maclaren have described women’s magazines as a “shopping imaginary” situated somewhere between fantasy and reality, and even as a desirable commodity in themselves:

[Women’s magazines] offer imaginary worlds that are rich with consumer products. Women’s magazines contain all the excitement of consumption, both in terms of the actual magazine as a desirable commodity, and in terms of the anticipatory, imaginary and experiential consumption they invite. (2005: 283)<sup>74</sup>

Hence, existing feminist literature has emphasised women’s magazines’ *distance* from reality as part of their appeal. However, there is also a precedent for such a view of an engagement with (if not necessarily taking part in practices of) consumer culture in literature on the post-Soviet era. Sian Stephenson (2007) stresses the lack of reality in the world of consumption presented by Russian women’s magazines. Furthermore, Sergei Oushakine (2000: 104) describes a similar “imaginary consumption” which took place in the first decade after the collapse of communism, noting that it should not merely be categorised as a form of “proto-consumption”. As seen in section 7.2.3, the ways that women decode women’s magazines can certainly be categorised as a form of ‘proto-

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<sup>74</sup>That magazines could be “a desirable commodity in themselves” in the Russian context is further demonstrated in section 7.3.2 by the example of Alisa (30, SP), who collected out of date issues of women’s magazines.

consumption' in contemporary Russia. However, it is also possible to see reading practices as a foray into an imaginary space. According to this view of women's magazines, magazines represent a form of consumption whose *lack* of relevance to real life is a boon, rather than a hindrance, to reader enjoyment of the magazines.

HP: What is the main reason you like to read women's magazines overall?

Larisa: The main reason is to relax your brain! In your daily life, to see and to feel and to dream, or to get some new ideas. (Larisa, 29, SP)

Clearly Larisa uses the magazines for practical means, but she also values their potential to prompt her to "dream", to let go of reality. A magazine as an aid to a daydream was also mentioned by another participant, when asked if she preferred to read about fantasy or reality in women's magazines:

I probably like reading about some kind of dreams more [than reality], because if you need something realistic, [there are] other magazines, something serious. But for me women's magazines are more for relaxation. (Lyubov, 22, SP)

Another participant also picked up on Lyubov and Larisa's categorisation of the magazines as relaxation material:

HP: What is the main reason you read women's magazines?

Inessa: That's a tricky question. Sometimes it's just nice to get home after a hard working day, pick up a magazine, lie in front of the TV and relax, not think about anything. Flick through it, look at the beautiful people, at the beautiful pictures. It's nice. (Inessa, 22, SP)

Usually I read it on the Metro or after a hard day at work. I want to see colourful pages and not think about anything. (Nadezhda, 25, SP)

The "beautiful pictures" and "colourful pages" – many of which are centred around fashion and beauty items, as discussed in Chapter 6 – are categorised not always as potential items to consume, but as simply an undemanding format to relax with. Sometimes an element of fantasy could be particularly valuable as part of a magazine:

HP: Do you think magazine content should be more realistic, or do you prefer to read about a fantasy world?

Masha: I like both. Without fantasy there would be no reality. I think that in the more realistic parts of the magazines, you can allow some sort of fantasy element. Especially as dreams do come true. You need fantasy as well [as reality]. (Masha, 22, SP)

The above examples show how notions of relaxation, visual pleasure and escapism are combined in women's magazines to form a specific form of popular media that encourages women to find pleasure in an unrealistic world – a world often based around narratives of an expensive consumer lifestyle.

Because there is little historical research that has interrogated women's motivations for reading magazines in Soviet times, it is difficult to hypothesise whether there is continuity in this view of women's magazines into the post-Soviet period. However, it is possible to draw continuities with perceptions of women's culture in Western contexts. This categorisation of women's magazines as leisure reading is another example of Ang's (1985) 'guilty pleasure' theories on popular culture, where magazines are perceived as lacking cultural significance. The patriarchal discourses that lead forms of women's culture such as women's magazines to be perceived as inherently popular, non-legitimate culture affect women's willingness to identify with them on a serious level. This suggests that a lack of realistic lifestyle portrayals may not be a problem for many readers: as Lyubov (22, SP) notes, "if you need something realistic, [there are] other magazines". As such, the decoding of women's magazines via a categorisation of them as inherently 'low' culture, although entailing pleasurable, also points to an understanding of them as less culturally valuable.



### 7.3.2 'Cherry Picking': Dealing with Negative Feelings towards Consumption Norms

This section discusses the ambivalent attitudes that readers often had towards women's magazines; 'cherry picking' describes how women viewed some aspects of magazines as harmful or distasteful, whilst still enjoying other aspects. Arguably this is also based on a categorisation of women's magazines as popular or low culture.

An informed and critical attitude to mass media in the Russian context has been discussed by Omel'chenko & Bliudina (2002), who argue that such an approach had become a cultural standard in Russia by the late 1990s. They document the increased sophistication of the media by that time, but also the increased sophistication of media producers and audiences who had lived through a decade of the newly heterogeneous post-Soviet media landscape. A decade on from this work, the ability of women to cherry pick from media norms suggests the ways women decode women's magazines can be fairly critical and sophisticated, as has been suggested of women in other contexts (Ballaster et al, 1991). Indeed, this section demonstrates the ability of readers to challenge some aspects of a femininity discourse linked to conspicuous consumption, whilst not rejecting gender norms more widely.

Although none of my research participants had a lifestyle that enabled them to buy designer items or expensive beauty products on a regular basis, some had more access to expensive brands than others. For example, Alisa had a relatively well paid job as a manager, giving her disposable income to spend on beauty treatments such as Botox. She also demonstrated an interest in different high-end beauty brands. Magazines were a hobby for Alisa: she described travelling to specialised street markets around the city to buy slightly out of date copies of her favourite titles in bulk, and she collected them at home,

rather than giving or throwing them away once she had read them. Despite this obvious enthusiasm for women's magazines, Alisa took a semi-critical approach to the aspects of the magazines involving conspicuous consumption:

They encourage us to consume as often as we can. That is, every month you get a new magazine, and on every page it's saying 'buy, buy, buy!' Really. It's like an instrument of manipulation for a woman. If you don't find out for yourself exactly how to bypass it, then you'll lose yourself in it and run to the shops after every magazine, thinking 'I want a bikini like that, I want that bracelet, I want that...' And each magazine gives way to the next. (Alisa, 30, SP)

Alisa speaks of the need to "bypass" a good deal of the conspicuous consumption encouraged by the women's magazines in order to fully enjoy reading them. Reading magazines was rewarding in terms of gaining knowledge about fashion and beauty (i.e. gendered cultural capital), but also demanded the ability to 'cherry pick' from the material, deliberately weeding out advice she found questionable.

Alyona named "a source of [information about] fashion, how to dress" as a central reason for reading the magazines, but also employed cherry picking as a means of negotiating discourses on femininity and consumption that she found dubious:

I don't like that [magazines] preach about glamour now – that you have to dress this way, or this way, or this way. They encourage girls to have more insecurities. If you don't have this brand of clothes, then you won't be successful; you'll be less popular socially. But in Russia people are very susceptible to that. The magazines start to change them. (Alyona, 23, SP)

Alyona provides an interesting perspective on the influence of glamour culture in women's magazines, linking it to pressure on women to perform femininity via conspicuous consumption. A stress in magazines on particular brands was identified as potentially harmful, putting pressure on women to fit socially acceptable norms of femininity and highlighting the tension between magazine portrayals of an aspirational or glamorous

lifestyle, and the ability of readers to take part in such a lifestyle. In addition, there is a discourse of the country as somehow more culturally naive or ‘backward’ in comparison to the West, with its greater experience of consumer culture. This has also been a feature of other research into post-Soviet Russia (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996; Kay, 1997; Pilkington et al, 2002; Cohen, 2013). Alyona’s discussion suggests that Russia may be perceived as having been subject to cultural changes at almost too fast a pace, with the implication that discourses of conspicuous consumption may be somehow harmful and slightly out of context in the post-Soviet environment. Alyona also said that although she bought women’s magazines less often than she used to, she did continue to read them *despite* feeling alienated by some of the content. As such, cherry picking from popular media was a means for readers of discarding themes which produced a sense of personal or cultural dissonance, whilst often continuing to consume them as media:

HP: Do you identify with the women shown in women’s magazines?

Raisa: Probably in general I can’t do that at all. I can’t compare myself to them.

Polina: Yes, it’s difficult.

Raisa: It’s difficult because you have your own wishes, your [own] dreams, your own view of the world. Even if you look at magazines, it’s not that you’ll take on that kind of fate for yourself. That’s not right. (Raisa, 23 & Polina, 21, NN)

So the ‘dreams’ shown in women’s magazines did not necessarily match the kind of personal hopes and dreams readers themselves harboured in real life, but women often continued to read them despite this issue.

Another mode of ‘cherry picking’ encompassed references to women’s magazines in humorous or ironic terms. Although these women were in fact regular readers and liked the magazines, they did not always choose to identify with them. One participant mentioned this attitude twice in her interview.

HP: Do you take tips about makeup [from the magazines]?

Katya: I usually make fun of what they write, but I like noticing them. (Katya, 25, SP)

I feel sarcastic about [women's magazines]. I like reading them and I don't take them as the truth or something. I just read them and it makes me laugh – oh, she's a psychologist and that's what she says? Seriously? Lady, what are you talking about?! (Katya, 25, SP)<sup>75</sup>

So reading the magazines could be a fun activity precisely *because* of some of the disagreeable content, which served as entertaining rather than putting her off women's lifestyle magazines altogether. Two other participants also took an ironic view of the magazines.

Lara: For me, personally, more often than not [the advice is] funny. You read it and understand that it's not suitable for [real] life. That is, it's something so made-up, and you know very well that's it's not really like that in practice...

Irina: The reason why the advice isn't suitable is because – it seems to me – that they repeat it from year to year. It's as if they don't evolve.

Lara: It's written on a very primitive level. (Lara, 30 and Irina, 27, SP)

This kind of irreverent, critical or ironic attitude towards women's magazines fits into a wider practice of cherry picking from magazines as popular media. Even when readers were critical of the magazines, the negative aspects they perceived could be a pleasure in themselves. Indeed, a tendency in readers to approach women's magazines critically has been noted in several Western studies of women's magazines, including going back to Elizabeth Frazer's work on *Jackie* magazine (1987), Ballaster et al (1991), and Joke Hermes' (1995) work on repertoires.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> N.B. Katya had a very good level of English as a result of working in the USA, so the use of idiom is her own rather than a translation.

<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, Hermes found that it was more often a male than a female perspective on women's magazines.

Cherry picking may be firmly positioned as a process relating to magazines as popular culture: they are seen to offer little intellectual stimulation, but are a good source of amusement and light entertainment. Although this certainly points to ways that women can question femininity norms, in other ways it also stresses the patriarchal nature of Russian society. This is because as a medium aimed at women, a categorisation of women's magazines as culturally insignificant can be situated within a wider disdain for women's culture in Russian society. This phenomenon has certainly been noted by feminists in other contexts.<sup>77</sup> For example, Ien Ang (1985) argues that an ironic attitude towards certain genres is a way for women to legitimise their own enjoyment of cultural forms that society widely regards as bearing little actual cultural value; in Bourdieusian terms, forms that are lacking recognition as legitimate culture. This distances the subject (here, the reader) from the baggage associated with forms of popular culture they may well enjoy for its own sake; as Ang argues, "real love involves identification, whereas irony creates distance" (1985: 109). Clearly, a critical attitude towards women's magazines does not always entail a critique of the wider gender norms they represent.

## 7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed reader perceptions of women's magazines in relation to both legitimate culture and popular culture (Bourdieu, 1984/2010), showing how they negotiate the norms of conspicuous consumption that they portray as inherently linked to normative femininity, and the ambiguous ways that they decode magazine content. Women's magazines were not necessarily viewed as a guide to actual consumption; in other words,

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<sup>77</sup>As noted by Ratilainen (2013: 62), Huyssen (1986) also refers to a similar phenomenon of mass culture associated with femininity.

most readers are not the “ideal audience” of wealthy consumers envisioned by some women’s magazines as they began to publish Russian editions (Ratilainen, 2013: 38). However, the interest of some participants in the lifestyles portrayed in many women’s magazines was linked to gaining a particularly feminine form of cultural capital via gaining knowledge of, and inspiration from, this lifestyle. From a feminist perspective, this suggests that many women in Russia identify with a discourse of normative femininity as linked to conspicuous consumption, even if they do not (or are not able to) fully take part in this lifestyle. Although consumption could be part of performing femininity during the Soviet era, in her work on the 1930s-1960s Gradska (2007b) positions culture and education as equally important to beauty labour, suggesting that today’s magazines reflect a much more pervasive culture of consumption in the post-Soviet era. This way of decoding women’s magazines also suggests that the aims of some magazines to position themselves as a form of legitimate culture in the post-Soviet market by including more ‘literary’ reading material and focusing on attracting the attention of the wealthy elite (Bartlett, 2006) have been relatively successful.

However, perceiving women’s magazines as popular culture provides an alternative means of negotiating portrayals of conspicuous consumption linked to normative femininity. Although this can imply a critical approach to certain aspects of this genre, as seen in sections 7.3.1 and 7.3.2, it also highlights the status of women’s magazines in wider culture as a means for women of glossing over the unrealistic, aspirational consumer lifestyles they often portray.

The ways that women’s magazines are decoded by readers thus operate in relation to wider gender norms in Russian society, albeit with the caveat that understandings of femininity

lie along a fairly wide scale: from acceptance of femininity linked to consumer culture and conspicuous consumption, towards a more critical approach towards this idea. Nevertheless, it is perhaps most significant that readers tended *not* to depart on a significant level from normative socio-cultural understandings of femininity as discursively linked to conspicuous consumption. This suggests that gender norms play an important role in how women's magazines are read and viewed by women. Accordingly, despite historical differences in both actual consumption levels and in the cultural status of consumption, I can draw parallels in the Russian context with feminist research which has critiqued the ubiquity of consumer culture in women's magazines in Western, capitalist societies (Wolf, 1991; McCracken, 1993).

## 8. Fantasy Femininity Discourses

### 8.1 Introduction

The appearance of fantasy as a theme of women's magazines has been addressed in existing literature, whether in the fairytale form of the Cinderella narrative (Stevens, 2002) or the idealisation of real-life royalty such as Princess Diana (Winship, 1987: 57-59; 82). In Russian socio-cultural studies, fantasy is no less a prominent theme, arising in analyses of media and popular culture in reference to beauty, femininity or media in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia in work by Azhgikhina & Goscilo (1996), Goscilo (2000), Omel'chenko & Bliudina (2002), Engel (2004), Stephenson (2007), and Gudova & Rakipova (2010). Fantasy also plays a role in debates around glamour and celebrity in post-Soviet Russia (Gusarova 2008; Rudova, 2008; 2011; Menzel, 2008; Klingseis, 2011; Goscilo & Strukov (eds.), 2011; Ratilainen, 2012).

Correspondingly, the following two chapters demonstrate that fantasy discourses in contemporary Russian women's magazines represent a potentially symbolic source of ideas about normative femininity. This chapter examines ways in which fantasy figures such as queens, princesses, Barbie dolls and fairies contribute to wider gendered discourses already discussed in this thesis, particularly in terms of beauty labour and aesthetic capital (Anderson et al, 2010). Furthermore, fantasy adds to the classed aspects of gender norms as mentioned in the previous chapter: an discourse which presents certain (wealthy) lifestyles as desirable for women is also present in celebrity and makeover discourses, for



example (see McRobbie, 2005). However, the chapter also examines figures which are employed in a similar way in terms of fantasy, but which are taken from real life, such as celebrities and oligarch's wives; these figures play a part in constructing an arguably fantasy aspirational lifestyle for readers. The role of fantasy in combining the real world and an unreal world thus continues the previous chapter's discussion of women's magazines as a source of escapism.

This chapter also aims to contribute to debates around the globalisation or Westernisation of various aspects of Russian culture in the post-Soviet era. (See Gurova, 2012; Menzel; 2008; Patico, 2008; Caldwell, 2004, 2002; Temkina & Zdravomyslova, 2003; Kalacheva, 2002; Pilkington et al, 2002; Goscilo, 2000; Barker, 1999; Zelensky, 1999.) It explores the extent to which fantasy discourses are linked by readers to gender norms that are linked to post-Soviet cultural globalisation, or whether they are perceived as having more indigenous cultural roots. The chapter shows how ideas of East/West or global/local are often highly ambiguous, but nevertheless play a role in cultural constructions of normative femininity based around fantasy.

The first two subchapters feature an analysis of fairytale gender relations in women's magazines, including ways in which the magazines might be seen to challenge fairytale gender relations. I then move on to a discussion of celebrities as modern day fantasy figures who are seen to embody a similar type of idealised feminine body and lifestyle to the princess figure. The next part of the chapter deals with the doll and Barbie doll archetype of femininity, discussing how the Barbie doll in particular has moved from a symbol of Western culture during the late Soviet and early post-Soviet eras, to being a symbol of hyper-femininity in the present day. This hyper-femininity can additionally be

identified with the public figure of the wealthy “oligarch’s wife” in Russian society. Although this chapter employs mainly magazine data, comments from interviews are also used to demonstrate the often critical stance women take towards normative portrayals of femininity such as the Barbie doll archetype.

## **8.2 Royalty and Gender Relations**

Fairytale figures present an interesting framework from which to analyse how normative gender relations are presented in contemporary Russian magazines, where fairytale attributes morph into qualities presented as applicable to women who might otherwise have long outgrown children’s stories. This is because fairy tales, as myths about society, tell us something about how we have chosen to portray gender and are related to the social and material conditions of the past (Warner, 1995: xviii). They also blur the line between fantasy and reality: queens, princesses and fairies, it will be shown, are present not only in fairy tales, but on the world stage as celebrities. Here I examine how fairytale gender norms contribute towards a fantasy femininity discourse, particularly (in line with this thesis) from the perspective of aesthetic capital.

In Russia, as in other European countries, a certain cultural heritage portrays royal fairytale archetypes as desirable role models. Female fairytale characters can be seen to possess various desirable feminine qualities such as kindness, patience and beauty. Although personality traits such as resourcefulness and moral fortitude feature in Russian fairy tales as well as in those from Northern Europe (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, 2003: 719), in both traditions there is often a link between feminine beauty and other positive traits or

outcomes, just as unattractiveness is linked to negative ones.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, Walter (2010) has criticised the figure of the princess as encouraging young girls to be passive and fit traditional gender norms around femininity<sup>79</sup>.

### 8.2.1 Royalty and Beauty Ideals

Fantasy royalty figures were employed by magazine readers in relation to a normative feminine body and to beauty labour as a means of achieving this. One participant brought out the theme in discussing how difficult it was to maintain beauty ideals:

It's just that regularity and I are completely incompatible. But if I manage to cleanse my face regularly, morning and night, with some kind of product, use toner and then apply moisturiser, I feel just like a queen. I really love it. (Marta, 23, NN)

For Marta, feeling “just like a queen” is an experience that she clearly enjoys, but she also notes that it is a feeling she doesn't manage to achieve on a very regular basis: it is only evoked when she manages to do the things she feels she should do to take care of her body. Marta also evoked royalty's symbolic associations of luxury and exclusivity in describing some of the things she had encountered in the magazines:

I really like Chanel's next collection – gold, brocade, royal kinds of clothes. I really like the jewellery collection, which has Byzantine influences. It's really nice. I've even thought about wearing something similar myself. (Marta, 23, NN)

Here it is the fashion industry's use of visual references to royalty that appeals to the reader. Royalty can thus reflect not only normative gender discourses, but the perceived role of conspicuous consumption in achieving this. This was also the case in the magazines

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<sup>78</sup>See Balina et al (2005) for examples of this; particularly “the beautiful princess Elena” in the *Tale of Prince Ivan, the Firebird, and the Gray Wolf*, and the main female protagonist in *Baba Yaga*.

<sup>79</sup> It is also interesting to note the obsession with 'Disney princesses' in contemporary Anglo-American internet pop culture (e.g. memes, articles and quizzes on popular sites such as Buzzfeed.com) where it seems to reflect a nostalgic view of childhood films.

analysed. For example, becoming princess-like could represent an escape from daily realities and from a woman's negative feelings about her body:

On New Year's Eve size doesn't matter! Every one of us will look like a princess if they know how with the help of the right clothes to give you the ideal figure. (*Cosmopolitan*, December 2009: 364)

Here, to look like a princess represents the highest of ideals in terms of a feminine body: this is a once a year event, where it is assumed a woman will make the most effort to perform beauty labour and achieve aesthetic capital. Through its message to the reader that "size doesn't matter", the extract reveals that for women size usually does matter; that it must be a significant occasion for this usual 'problem' to be made invisible. Additionally, by suggesting that the "ideal figure" can be achieved, the magazine is 'helping' the reader to become princess-like, to escape her everyday existence; but this ideal can only be realised by devoting time and possibly money to the pursuit of a perfect body. Other examples of a royalty theme related to performing femininity also appeared:

Every time Laima [Vaikule, a Russian celebrity] goes into public, it's a show. The singer's original elegant manners compliment her queenly style. (*Liza*, 18 December 2010: 135)

This cold and extremely stylish colour reigns supreme in the wardrobes of Princess Leia and many queens of the screen and society columns. Not bad company... (*Cosmopolitan*, December 2010: 88)

Here, celebrities and pop culture figures are invoked to emphasise the cultural legitimacy of certain ways of performing or embodying femininity through clothing the body. The mention of "society columns" also points to the relevance of upper class modes of femininity as desirable for women. Finally, the "elegant manners" in the first example also bring to mind Soviet-era *kulturnost'* as involving particular types of cultural knowledge and behaviour related to specific social classes.

### 8.2.2 Royalty and Normative Gender Relations

Although the figure of the queen has thus far shown to be prominent, another example is the princess, who (like the queen) is not merely a character employed to tell a story, but an embodiment of desirable femininity: via her behaviour and appearance, she acts as a signifier of essentialised gender qualities that are portrayed as desirable for modern day women.

Not long ago I read this revealing discussion on one of the women's forums. The theme was, 'should men open the car door for women?' One woman ingenuously wrote, 'yes, they should. It's nice to feel like a princess again.' The aggressive and many-voiced reaction to this innocent reply resembled a party meeting. (*Cosmopolitan*, November 2010: 129)

With a simple act of opening the car door, the man is slotted into the role of the prince, making a woman feel special by showing her a level of respect and attention she considers suitable for a princess. In her reference to feeling "like a princess", it is uncertain which period in her life the contributor is referring to: it could be the beginning of a relationship that has since lost its spark, or a kind of idealised imaginary scenario that never really existed in reality. Either way, the word 'princess' is used to represent the positive associations of having attention bestowed on oneself as a woman, by men. However, the writer also evokes the Soviet era, juxtaposing the very contemporary activity of commenting on an internet forum with behaviour associated with Communist Party gatherings. The reader is left in no doubt of the journalist's stance on this kind of behaviour: the "ingenuous" woman employing the fantasy language in an "innocent" contribution to the conversation is drowned out by a flurry of responses from the opposite camp. Here, the Soviet era signifies a time in opposition to the one signified by the princess, though both are considerably stylised.

The figures of the masculinised working woman and the feminised man, deprived of his rightful role at the head of the family, were tropes of the Gorbachev era when emancipation for women changed from being linked to economic and political work to being linked to a return to the home (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996: 24-25) and their “purely womanly mission” (Mikhail Gorbachev, quoted in Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996: 25). This reference to the Soviet period acts as a contrast to the previous discussion of Soviet nostalgia (see Chapter 6.3.3). Russian attitudes towards feminism and gender equality carry associations of the inequalities suffered by Soviet women, as the state failed to provide legislation that would have enabled them to play an equal role in the workforce, leading to a ‘double burden’. Due to this, traditionalist attitudes to gender based around binary gender relations, which may have seemed regressive in Western nations without a history of state socialism, took on a more progressive air under Gorbachev and in the 1990s. For example, Rebecca Kay (2006: 41) has argued that whereas chivalrous behaviour may be seen as “old-fashioned” in other European countries, actions such as opening the car door for a woman can be viewed as “simply a model of good male behaviour” in the Russian context, and has demonstrated that attributes traditionally perceived as male (e.g. gallantry, courageousness) were indeed appealing to women in the early post-Soviet period (1997: 85). That such portrayals of gender relations can also be found in contemporary media aimed at women suggests that a neotraditionalist attitude towards gender relations has carried on into the 2010s.

Additionally, the role of the strong male figure in royalty discourse could appeal to contemporary readers for other reasons. Men fitting the ideal of the handsome prince, coming to rescue his ‘princess’, could understandably have held some appeal for women in the first decades after communism, when a decent salary was hard to find. This was even

more because many job advertisements in the early 1990s carried ‘men only’ specifications (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996: 80). More recent research has also highlighted the appeal of traditionalist gender relations in other kinds of Russian culture (Salmenniemi & Adamson, 2014). Contemporary magazines play on this notion of the prince as an idealised masculine archetype, which also exists in Western culture. One article which was highly focused on beauty labour, entitled *Take a look at yourself*, tells the reader that “whatever you say, a girl’s attractiveness has close links to her love life”, with advice for readers on which beauty labour to carry out whilst “awaiting your prince” (*Cosmopolitan*, December 2010: 420-421).

These portrayals of royalty and gender play on a perennial perception that there is a deficit of “real men” in the Russian Federation. This is an idea that has been discussed in the literature (Kay, 2006: 156-158) relating to the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Television shows such as *Davai pozhenimsya* [‘Let’s get married’], which categorise women by age, also play on notions of men having the greater choice when it comes to relationships. A perceived lack of men in Russian society, perhaps based on enduring perceptions from the real demographic imbalance which persisted amongst the World War Two generation,<sup>80</sup> was also discussed by interviewees. For example, Valentina (24, NN) explained the growth of the beauty industry as “possibly linked with the fact that we don’t have many men, and so young women have very serious competition – it’s a fight for a place in the sun.” Another participant spoke of a similar issue:

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<sup>80</sup>Despite common perceptions in the mass media that men outnumber women (e.g. Mironov, 2009), the 2010 census shows that this has little effect on those of childbearing age: at age 48, the proportion of women hits 53%, and then begins to rise more steadily, reaching a ratio of 6:4 women to men at age 60 and 7:1 at age 77 ([http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol2/pub-02-01.pdf](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol2/pub-02-01.pdf), consulted 23/06/14).

HP: I've seen a lot of articles in women's magazines which say that young women can't find a man. Do you think this is a problem in Russia, or is it just portrayed that way in magazines?

Sofia: Yes, there is that problem.

HP: Is it a significant problem?

Sofia: Yes, there aren't enough men in Russia, especially in St Petersburg. The number of women overrides the number of men a few times. It's obvious. And the quality of the young women we have in Russia – in St Petersburg – of childbearing age, with good figures, who dress well and are well educated... The amount of men to match up with them is very much lower or practically none. Either they drink, or they're gay, or something else. It's true. (Sofia, 26, St Petersburg)

Sofia speaks not only of problems with the quantity but also the *quality* of men; women are thus left in the position of competing for a few (desirable) partners, a point which helps to explain the magazines' portrayal of women as in competition with one another (as noted in Chapter 4). The narrative of the handsome prince riding in on his white horse could be seen to be returning things to more conventional gendered love narratives, where women are pursued by men rather than the other way around. The comments of another participant suggested the potentially undesirable effects of gender role reversals in Russian culture, in connection with a perceived lack of men:

It's really very important for women in Russia to look good, maybe that also has an explanation concerning the demographic situation in the country. Because there are a lot more women than men, and a lot more single women. [...] Every time an average Russian girl who is single goes out of home, every time she acts like she's really on the hunt! Sometimes you go to a café with a friend who also has a boyfriend – we just decide to go and have a girl chat – and we come to some café. If it's popular and fashionable, and it's the weekend, we can see girls in small [and] big [groups] – they're all dressy, they're all trendy and they're searching for someone with their eyes. And it just really feels disgusting! (Elvira, 22, SP)

For Elvira, it is almost as if women are forced into behaving somehow unnaturally: they are the ones "on the hunt" for men, rather than the more normative romantic ideal of men "hunting" for women. Such discourses can also be seen to represent idealised gender relations whereby women rely on men to be the ones to take on the role of the romantic



pursuer. This feeds into a wider discourse of the nuclear family where men take on the role as the stronger partner, who is a reliable breadwinner and head of household. Women are then ‘free’ to focus on being a wife and mother. Indeed, contemporary narratives of an idealised nuclear family as seen in ‘happy ever after’ endings have also been a feature of Putin-era discourse related to the family and women’s role in society (Rivkin-Fish, 2010).

A royalty discourse is also used to signify idealised femininity from a very young age, as in one article which gave examples of how to dress the whole family well for the New Year celebrations. Whereas readers are told that a son can wear just his favourite pullover and jeans, for a daughter (under the heading ‘*Like a little princess*’) readers are told that “[i]t’s essential that a little girl is dressed in a long skirt or a dress, even if they’re made of jersey or cotton. A real little princess!” (*Liza*, 28 December 2009: 8-9) Another recommends a particular brand of children’s shampoo with the instruction-like statement: “[y]ou really want your favourite princess, your darling daughter, to be a beautiful girl!” (*Liza*, 2 November 2009: 61).

### 8.2.3 Linking Royalty to Creating an Object of the Male and Female Gaze

On another level, magazines also use the royalty discourse to evoke a sense of admiration: that is, to demonstrate that a woman has achieved the recognition of others for her efforts in creating a desirable body:

Becoming the queen of the party isn’t as difficult as it might seem. (*Cosmopolitan*, December 2009: 69)

Such articles dress special occasions, such as parties, in the garb of competition. For women, a party is portrayed as more than just a chance to enjoy socialising with others; competing with other women for the attention of men seems to be a given in this case. The

reader must be prepared to carry out the right amount of beauty labour and/or conspicuous consumption to become the “queen of the party”: in this article this entails owning the right handbag, but in other articles it could be choosing a fashionable outfit or coming up with an original makeup look. The link between this competitive aspect and the previous discourse on a lack of men in Russian society is not difficult to make: achieving aesthetic capital and female sexuality are portrayed as vital to finding a heterosexual partner.

A second dimension of this extract links into another trait that is sometimes portrayed as normative for women: female competitiveness. In this context, the royalty discourse signifies social success: it represents the ability to command positive attention from others by virtue of your body and fashion choices. Wolf writes that women’s magazines encourage “women’s wariness of one another on the basis of their appearance” (1990: 75); indeed, there can only be one “queen”, and the women attending this imaginary New Year’s party are in competition with each other to wear the crown. This has some cultural precedence in fairy tales: a study of the Grimm fairy tales demonstrated that 17 per cent of the stories linked beauty to jealousy (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003: 719), as may be seen in the story of Snow White, for example, where the queen herself is obsessed with the beauty of her young stepdaughter. In magazines, royalty discourses are telling readers that, despite the fact that they may have other things to offer as human beings, their body and the way they present it is a (if not *the*) pivotal part of social success linked to their gender.

#### 8.2.4 Royalty as Past and Present

To conclude this section of the chapter, there are several possible reasons for why an imagined past and patriarchal gender relations are romanticised in women’s magazines, and also feature in everyday discussions of femininity. Firstly, the fairytale princess always

finds her prince, and the queen has her king. Royalty can be linked to an idealised nuclear family, and certainly one of the main roles (if not the main role) of the *tsaritsa* in Russian history was her ability to produce an heir (Thyrêt, 1994). Woman as mother and wife is a role that has been increasingly stressed as desirable by successive Soviet and post-Soviet governments: in 1990, for example, *Rabotnitsa* magazine described motherhood as a woman's "fundamental function and her chief predestination" (Goscilo, 1996: 36); and social advertising promoting a (white, heteronormative, two-parent) family is a regular feature on Russian streets in the early 2010s, alongside the 'maternity capital' scheme instituted by the government to boost fertility rates ('Government Wants to Extend Maternity Pay Program Until 2025', *Moscow Times*, 04/12/13). Results of a 2002 survey about women's attitudes to gender relations (White, 2005: 431) suggest that many readers might identify with this nuclear family as a life goal in itself, especially given the continued stress on motherhood (through the Soviet period and beyond) as a woman's true destiny or calling in life (Rivkin-Fish, 2006). In this sense, the aesthetic capital that women are told they can achieve in women's magazines has an implied value in the form of adhering to certain gender relations in one's personal life.

Secondly, the role of the strong male figure in royalty discourse could be attractive to contemporary readers. A strong male figure, corresponding with that of the prince, could understandably have held some appeal for women in the first decades after communism when a decent salary was hard to find (see Kay, 1997: 86) and when women were often first to lose their jobs. The perception that there is a "man deficit" in the Russian Federation, an idea which has little basis in statistics outside of older generations,<sup>81</sup> could strengthen the perception that women are in competition for male attention. The narrative

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<sup>81</sup>See footnote 73.

of the prince riding in on his white horse to save the damsel in distress could thus be seen as a conventional gendered love narrative whereby the woman is pursued by her male suitor. As such, a royalty discourse may be appealing in terms of representing ‘the way things are supposed to be’. Once more, this fits in with the implicit ‘reward’ for women of taking part in beauty labour and conspicuous consumption – they will meet a romantic partner.

Thirdly, the idea of a sudden change in social status that is a part of fairy tales such as *Zolushka* fits into a narrative of transformation found often in women’s magazines – in the West as much as in Russia (see also Chapter 6.3.6). Warner (1995: xv-xvi) writes that transformation (‘shape shifting’) and the happy ending are primary aspects of the fairytale. The modern princess experience can be easily traced through some of the clichés of women’s magazine journalism (e.g. ‘get a bikini body in time for summer!’; ‘catch your dream man!’). McRobbie (2005) has discussed the classed *and* gendered elements of makeover culture in the British context: the above examples show how this is also the case in the Russian context. On one level, the royalty narrative promises escapism in the sense that it represents an idealised world of luxury and ease of living, but it also relates to real life scenarios which are held up as gendered and classed aspirational ideals.

### **8.3 Challenges to the Passive Princess?**

Despite the fact that language and imagery related to fantasy, fairy tales and celebrities plays a prominent part in the magazines, there have been some attempts by journalists to address these topics in a less straightforward way. For example, the ‘Letter to the Editor’ column in *Elle* runs each month and features comments by a different well-known

personality each time. In the December 2010 issue, Dior jewellery designer Victoria de Castellane acknowledges the power of the fantasy discourse in childhood, but adds that she rejected it both as a child and as an adult:

It's no secret that every little girl dreams of becoming a princess, but personally I didn't like the idea. I prefer to be the heroine of my own life and thus I stopped reading fairy tales. When I work on our jewellery, I prefer to think up my own fairy tales inspired by the beauty of nature, butterfly wings, ballet, Hollywood and actresses. (*Elle*, December 2010: 44)

De Castellane rejects the fairytale discourse of the passive princess, distancing it from her own personal narrative as a successful businesswoman. However, it is interesting to note that the fantasy element is not at all neglected here: she may prefer not to take inspiration from princesses, but the things she cites as stimulating her creativity as a designer all, without exception, fit into traditional ideas of what women and girls should be interested in. Furthermore, some of them are identified with other classic female figures of fantasy: the ballerina and the famous actress. These fantasy discourses have special relevance to the Russian context, where the ballerina and the actress were glorified as female role models in Soviet times and exported as examples of Soviet cultural superiority to Western audiences in magazines such as *Soviet Life* (Rhodes, 2004: 21). Indeed, ballerinas still represent idealised femininity in *Liza* magazine (18 December 2010: 78-79), where three female members of the famous Bolshoi Ballet model “the most luxurious clothes for New Year”. Bartlett has also noted that the ballerina was used by *Vogue* magazine in the post-Soviet era to symbolise a particularly Russian form of culture and appeal to readers, suggesting that this may also be the case in more recent editions of women's magazines.

An article from *Elle* (December 2010: 132-137) approaches the subject of princesses from a different point of view, taking a tongue-in-cheek look at the subject of how realistic it would be for the average *Elle* reader to “meet a real prince and become his wife”.

Although the article clearly takes an ironic view of the subject, it does not seem to present the notion as entirely divorced from reality – the journalist mocks traditional ideas of femininity rather than the idea of marrying a royal. She examines the brides chosen by European princes since the 1960s, and evaluates their looks, lifestyle and priorities in the hope of determining which characteristics might be desirable to a prince nowadays. The article concludes that although “a pleasant appearance” is a useful string in a potential princess’s bow, “a hard-working nature and a lively mind” are more valuable. As such, it seems to challenge notions of passive beauty as central to desirable femininity.

However, based on the fact that this kind of material is prominent in Russian women’s magazines, I can conclude that some (if not all) of the values associated with femininity in fairy tales – for example, beauty, vulnerability and passivity – play a part in contemporary media portrayals of femininity. The beauty and exclusivity of the princess character are seen as something to strive for, and again the rags to riches story of *Zolushka* also fits rather neatly into the aims that magazines assume their readers have. Beauty, and the consumption of products and services to achieve beauty, evidently have the power to enchant journalists, who continually associate them with what are seen as core life achievements: developing heterosexual relationships (‘finding your prince’) and gaining aesthetic capital via achieving a normatively feminine body.

## 8.4 Celebrity

Celebrities also represent fantasy femininity, albeit a facet of this which has closer links to reality. The popularity of different celebrities, both Russian and non-Russian, also has implications for the topic of globalisation as addressed in this thesis. For example, a cult of

celebrity has been linked by some scholars to the encroachment of glamour narratives, potentially perceived as Western in origin, onto the Russian scene (Menzel, 2008: 4; Rudova, 2008: 2). However, it would be spurious to claim that celebrity worship – albeit often with slightly different emphases – did not exist in the Soviet era (see for example Norris, 2011). Although the official, politicised image of the Soviet worker or rural woman endured, there was also a desire for a more glamorous female image, something which Gradskova (2007b) argues was always present in some form in post-war Soviet society. Additionally, Anna Dotlibova and Diana Nemec Ignashev (1989), surveying the landscape of Soviet women's magazines in the years leading up to the collapse of the USSR, demonstrate that female celebrities were also an important fixture in the late Soviet period. Such celebrities were interviewed regularly, whether on the level of 'legitimate culture' about their artistic achievements, or on a more 'popular culture' level with a focus on their personalities and roles as wives and mothers. Furthermore, although they would have to be state-sanctioned to achieve widespread fame, Soviet celebrities certainly existed beyond the political realm: by 1991 the famous Russian singer Alla Pugacheva had even launched her own lifestyle magazine (Partan, 2007: 495). Celebrities may be seen to embody certain norms of femininity; for example, former spy Anna Chapman has recently launched her own fashion label, trading on her glamorous image and her status as a Russian patriot ('Anna Chapman: Russia's new fashion tsar', *The Guardian*, 23/01/2014): her collection includes handbags emblazoned with classic Russian works such as Chernyshevskii's 'What Is To Be Done?' ('Anna Chapman stala model'yerom', *Dozhd'*, 10/01/2014). In this section, I discuss how celebrities are used to represent idealised femininity in contemporary Russian women's magazines.

#### 8.4.1 The Celebrity as a Modern Day Fairytale

To begin, the celebrity plays a significant role as a figure of aspiration, an individual woman who is both a fantasy figure, and yet often one that readers are encouraged to relate to. The following quote highlights the ubiquity of this contemporary form of hero worship, demonstrating how a world of fantasy and the cult of celebrity merge with one another to create the ultimate figure of femininity:

Curvy feminine figures are not really a sin, but a virtue. Take for example Beyoncé, who arrived in Moscow as if in a fairy tale, appearing onstage in a Thierry Mugler costume. It would be difficult to call her an ethereal waif, but nonetheless she is completely enchanting! (*Cosmopolitan*, February 2010: 30)

Fantasy is prominent in this example: firstly, Beyoncé “arrives in Moscow as if in a fairytale”; secondly, she wears a costume by a French designer, linking her to the symbolic cultural capital associated with Paris and the world of fashion; finally, she has brought the fantasy glamour of the United States with her as well, and as a black woman she may be seen as instantly positioned as an exotic ‘Other’ in the Russian context. The positioning of Beyoncé in contrast to the culturally valued body of the “ethereal waif” is also interesting in that it highlights the value of celebrity: although her “curvy” body is a contrast to the body types usually portrayed as desirable for women, her celebrity, personality and fashion sense overrule this. In its positioning of the female body, the piece acknowledges *Cosmopolitan*’s usual emphasis on an essentially Othered (in terms of body shape and ethnicity) form of female beauty, perhaps implying that women who are not themselves “ethereal waifs” might relate to her.

An article from a Christmas edition of *Elle* about the Russian model, Natalia Vodianova, also exemplifies a kind of fantasy femininity that the reader (it is implied) is encouraged to emulate:



Delicate and light, Natalia Vodianova isn't only the happy mother of a big family, but also a kind fairy for a thousand children all over Russia. The model tells *Elle* about her good deeds, patience and strong will. (*Elle*, December 2010:128-129)

Although the article focuses on Vodianova's charity work – she is portrayed as the fantasy figure of the “kind fairy” granting the wishes of vulnerable children – her physical appearance used in photos, where she is dressed as a beautiful fairy, contributes to this image. Significantly, the model is a home-grown “kind fairy”: she is *nasha*.<sup>82</sup> Not only was she born in the Soviet Union, and thus embodies a particular kind of domestic femininity, but she is also a successful international model who symbolises the export of ‘Russianness’ abroad. She is the kind fairy queen, and so a fantasy figure, but as importantly she is a mother, both to her own “big family” and through her charity work with Russian children. As in the previous section, motherhood is portrayed as a desirable goal for readers to achieve.

Vodianova can also be framed as a figure of fantasy femininity in that she symbolises a modern day fairytale heroine in her very *distinctiveness*. Zolushka (or her equivalent)<sup>83</sup> may have become a ‘princess’ (celebrity), but in doing so she has left behind the dreary reality of normal life and become an aspirational role model for the rest of the female population. Her very appeal lies in the juxtaposition of the two: the average young woman's fantasy of becoming famous (‘that could happen to me’), and the inaccessibility of the fantasy lifestyle Vodianova is now perceived to inhabit.

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<sup>82</sup>This term refers to an acceptance of something as peculiarly Russian or Soviet in origin. See Melissa Caldwell (2004), ‘Domesticating the French Fry: McDonald's and Consumerism in Moscow’ for discussion of ‘nash’ and ‘nashification’.

<sup>83</sup>e.g. Vodianova, or other Soviet-born celebrities such as tennis star Anna Kournikova or Hollywood actor Mila Kunis.

#### 8.4.2 Celebrities and Conspicuous Consumption

The accessible side of the celebrity fantasy is also used by the magazines in the form of beauty tips and product endorsements, strongly linked to an aspirational lifestyle. For example, the opening of a Missoni spa-hotel in Edinburgh, Scotland, is accompanied by an assurance that the spa treatments it offers have been used by *Sex and the City* actor Sarah Jessica Parker and pop star Madonna (*Elle*, February 2011: 304). Although the level of bodily maintenance (e.g. personal trainers, cosmetic procedures) many celebrities carry out is beyond the means of most young Russian women, the magazines are keen to tell their readers that a part of this lifestyle actually can be achieved. Readers are given the chance to feel some of the ‘magic’ for themselves in identifying with celebrities, as magazines often inform readers of the beauty treatments they recommend. Furthermore, the above extract may be seen as aspirational in terms of its portrayal of a hotel in Edinburgh, presumably frequented by those with considerable economic capital able to travel abroad frequently, as a realistic recommendation for most readers.

One issue of *Elle* (March 2011: 226-228) states that “[a]ll year long, Russian and foreign celebrities have told *Elle* about their favourite beauty products. Here, we bring you the top ten passions of the stars.” Evidently, not only Western but Russian celebrities are used to represent fantasy lifestyles. One issue of *Cosmopolitan* (December 2009: 380) magazine featured “Anna Netrebko, opera diva” and her “diamonds of the opera collection”, while another devoted one of its “6 cool ideas for this week” to “think[ing] up a new, secret nickname for yourself, something along the lines of a royal title or the stage name of a movie star” (*Liza*, 22 March 2010: 5). The cultural significance of the ballet to Russian culture is used in another article which recommends particular methods of bodily discipline to achieve a “ballerina-like figure”, alongside a quotation from a famous ballerina (*Liza*, 16

April 2011: 92-93). Thus, not only popular celebrity culture but more traditionally legitimate (Bourdieu, 1984/2010) forms of culture are employed to sell particular modes of femininity to the reader.

#### 8.4.3 Celebrities and the Cult of Beauty

Celebrity culture is also used in magazines as symbolic of social change in the post-Soviet era. For example, the below example discusses the phenomenon of the idealised body, arguably a cultural norm in which magazines themselves play a significant role:

In Russia plastic surgery which comes with the promise of "how to look like a star" have become more popular more recently; since around fifteen years ago. Before that, plastic surgeons were only allowed to interfere minimally with a Soviet person's appearance. [...] The pages of glossy magazines, the cinema, TV screen, stage and podium started to foist upon us the cult of the idealised, beautiful face, legs, bust, etc. Under the yoke of copying celebrity beauty, it became difficult not to worry about one's own attractiveness. Almost imperceptibly, for many people the words 'beauty' and 'success' became synonyms. "In society we have three cults – of success, of beauty, and of youth," ascertains Beauty Plaza Clinic creative cosmetologist, Nata Topchiashvili. "They are connected and interdependent. Your appearance has an impact on success not only in your personal life but in your career." (*Elle*, April 2011: 369)

This example shows a perception of a clear delineation in cultural values that is seen to have emerged after the fall of state socialism, and clearly shows the linking of beauty and social distinction in contemporary Russian society, and – not least – links glossy magazines, presumably including *Elle* itself, to this rise. Of further interest, it is taken from an issue of *Elle* which has a few special features around cosmetic surgery, and also features the cover theme 'STAR'. This particular article considers both positive and negative points around the rise of cosmetic surgery in Russia, questioning why Russian women increasingly wish to have surgery in the pursuit of a particular celebrity look. The surprisingly balanced nature of the article is possibly undermined by another piece whereby the editor herself, Elena Sotnikova, undergoes cosmetic surgery – at the Beauty

Plaza Clinic mentioned in the previous article. Sotnikova goes on to reflect on her role and decisions as an editor:

But as the editor of a big women's magazine which is full to the hilt of advertisements for cosmetic surgery, I can't stand on the sidelines [of the debate]. (*Elle*, April 2011: 395)

The plastic surgeon from the Beauty Plaza Clinic also contributes a short piece extolling the positive points of Sotnikova's surgery (*Elle*, April 2011: 396), leading to the question of whether much of these rather intelligently-written pieces were more the result of a particular marketing agreement than of a genuine desire to explore the issues. The first article also features the results of a survey of 3,284 readers from the *Elle* website, where women were asked "have you ever wanted to change your appearance because of a celebrity?" The results were as follows: 23% have wanted to, but not with surgery; 7% said yes, if they'd had the money; 53% said no, I value my individuality; and 17% said that they had never thought about it before (*Elle*, April 2011: 369). The pre-set options provided by the magazine highlight magazine discourses of capitalist "individuality" and a particularly post-feminist rhetoric of choice and autonomy (McRobbie, 2004, Salmenniemi & Adamson, 2014).

#### 8.4.4 Readers and Celebrity

A significant number of participants in this research positioned celebrity news as a central reason for reading women's magazines. Clearly, keeping up with celebrity gossip and reading about the lives of the 'stars' plays a significant part in motivating women to read the magazines. Celebrities – as in other countries – epitomise a fantasy lifestyle or particular qualities, functioning as indicators of desirable, fashionable, or new consumer items.

HP: When you were younger, what did you find interesting [in the magazines]? Advice?

Polina: Yes, there was more interesting advice. It could possibly have been something about celebrities' lives – [magazines] talk about their imperfections, et cetera. (Polina, 21, NN)

Polina mentions the tendency, also found in British women's magazines, to highlight celebrities' "imperfections", a topic which is interesting when compared to the aspirational portrayal of celebrities which is also a significant feature of the magazines. On the one hand, female celebrities represent the ultimate in terms of beauty, the ability to live a 'successful' lifestyle entailing a good deal of conspicuous consumption. Beauty and fashion brands use celebrities to signify the effectiveness or reliability of their products, but they are also fantasy figures, living a lifestyle beyond the dreams of most people. On the other hand, (often in the same magazines) editors unceremoniously bring a celebrity down from their pedestal by showing the reader their physical 'faults' – cellulite, a double chin, spots – indicating that in fact they are mere mortals with similar problems to readers. This is not often openly abrasive; the problematisation of stars' bodies is more subtly achieved: one piece about celebrities photographed without makeup disingenuously notes that "[i]t's interesting to see how glamorous stars look in everyday life" (*Liza*, 18 December 2010: 134). This could be linked back to a point made in Chapter 4.4 about beauty labour and competition between women: it is almost as if the magazines are trying to reassure readers that even celebrities have to perform beauty labour to correct their imperfections. It also points to a wider discourse of surveillance, which female celebrities are also subjected to.

Although Polina spoke of how celebrities attracted her to magazines as a young teenager, an interest in celebrities was also a feature of interviewees' adult lives. One participant was

able to use her interest in famous people to benefit her working life:

I work in the health and beauty industry, [advertising] is interesting for me. I find it interesting when new ranges come out, new partners for our business... Especially Hollywood stars, I like to look at beautiful women. (Valentina, 24, NN)

The centrality of celebrity endorsements or associations in how companies market new products was something that Valentina was aware of as a manager in her field. Models – though sometimes they can also be famous in their own right – were also idealised by readers:

Many girls want to be models, because it seems like something better. Because you're pretty – all [they think] it means is that you wear a nice dress, walk down the catwalk and earn good money at the same time. Well, it's a kind of myth. (Lara, 30, SP)

Lara argues that the model lifestyle is one that is seen by many girls as a quick route to success and financial stability, a point made by Bridger, Kay & Pinnick (1996) about the early post-Soviet period:

beauty queens represented, however frivolously, a lifestyle where fighting for the basic necessities would be over [...] Beauty contests and glamour modelling, though providing money, travel and a genuine escape only for the few, served as symbols to the many of a different way of life. (1996: 30)

Although she views it as being a possibly damaging process for young women, Lara recognises the dissonance between ideals and reality for many readers. In fact, she seems to distance herself from this process, describing this view as a “myth”: a model's rise to stardom is the Cinderella story retold, but it is similarly unrealistic.<sup>84</sup> Fundamentally, models and celebrities are part of an aspirational portrayal of beauty and money as ways of changing one's everyday reality, accessing the semi-fantasy worlds that seem appealing to many readers.

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<sup>84</sup> Her quote also brings to mind Ratilainen's (2013: 91-96) analysis of the film *Glianiets*, further discussed in 8.5.1.

In the context of this chapter, the celebrity factor fits into the process of fantasy creation that the magazines take part in. As in Soviet times, celebrities can be seen to embody qualities of specialness, otherworldliness and ways of living that perhaps surpass the banality of everyday life for women, and as such the themes of this chapter may be linked to those of section 7.3.1 on magazines as a realm of escapism. However, the linking of celebrities to beauty labour and conspicuous consumption also frames them as part of magazines' encouragement for readers to take part in these gendered activities on an ongoing basis, as a means of achieving both aesthetic and cultural capital.

## **8.5 Barbie Dolls & Oligarchs' Wives**

### 8.5.1 The Doll as a Representation of Hyper-Femininity

The final section of this chapter explores how fantasy can represent ambiguous discourses around beauty, class and the 'Westernisation' of Russia, especially in the views of magazine readers. In both magazines and interviews, fantasy figures such as the doll are seen to embody a juxtaposition of childhood fantasy, as well as a contemporary form of hyper-femininity. The doll could be said to symbolise three different types of femininity: that of the Western woman and her supposed freedoms (in relation to the Soviet woman); that of infantilised female sexuality; and that of a 'Barbie doll', the glamorous woman of a post-Soviet Russian economic elite.

To theoretically contextualise this analysis, across three 'waves' of feminist thought from Germaine Greer (Wolf, 1991: 12) to Naomi Wolf (1991: 12) to Natasha Walter (2010: 2), it has been argued that the doll, traditionally associated with childhood toys, is in fact not

out of place in a more adult milieu. She is argued to be an important symbol of female beauty and sexuality, most notably in the infamous form of the Barbie doll, a toy with an adult woman's body that began to be widely available in Russia from the early 1990s (Zelensky, 1999: 153), and which was both fetishised and condemned for its Westernness (Goralik, 2005: 46; 48). It seems unlikely that adult woman readers of the magazines would actually have a great interest in dolls, and so on one level their prevalence suggests that women's magazines encourage an infantilised view of womanhood, something which has been critiqued as a desirable mode of femininity by some feminists. For example, Walter argues that young girls are now encouraged to see dolls as an aesthetic ideal to emulate, an image that follows them into adulthood:

Living a doll's life seems to have become an aspiration for many young women, as they leave childhood behind only to embark on a project of grooming, dieting and shopping that aims to achieve the bleached, waxed, tinted look of a Bratz or Barbie doll. (2011: 14)

Clearly, beauty labour plays a role in this form of femininity as discussed by Walter. Furthermore, as an item to be played with, a doll symbolises passivity. She can be either asexual like the rag doll, or sexualised like Barbie, but overall is used to symbolise different kinds of normative femininity. This has been the case in some recent British media coverage: one television show showed women how to recreate 'the doll look' with makeup (This Morning, ITV, 30/04/2012), and a Moldovan woman of Ukrainian descent has also provoked some interest as 'the real Barbie' (Daily Mail Online, 'Valeria Lukyanova pictures: 'Real-life Barbie' seeks to be world's most convincing doll', 24/04/12). This demonstrates that a doll-like appearance is associated with femininity in both the Western and the post-Soviet contexts, and also hints at redefining Russia via perceptions of post-Soviet women as having somehow *over*-adopted Western beauty and



glamour norms or otherwise having misunderstood them.<sup>85</sup>

However, on her most basic level, the doll also represents childhood; in post-socialist contexts, she has symbolised the coveted objects of a childhood lived under communist rule. For example, a Barbie doll features as an object of great desire for the young protagonist of *Marzi*, a graphic novel memoir of one woman's childhood in communist Poland. Marzi, the protagonist, represents her childhood self in a Barbie-style box in one of the first illustrations of the book and, in the final pages, she gives her long-awaited Barbie doll to her cousin as a comfort, describing it as "the most precious thing I own that I can give you" (Sowa, 2011: 230). Slavenca Drakulić (1993: 62-64) also discusses the significance of the Barbie as an exotic and rare commodity in her highly successful memoir of socialist womanhood, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed*. Thus Barbie became a symbol of 'the West' – enigmatic and often glamorous in cultural terms – for young women living under communist party rule.<sup>86</sup> Kathy Burrell (2010) has described this wider fetishisation of previously unavailable goods as "the enchantment of western things", a phrase that evokes the fantasy associations of material goods under state socialism.<sup>87</sup>

This juxtaposition of the doll as a symbol of both childhood and female sexuality is reflected in women's magazine articles relating to beauty and fashion. The symbolism of the doll as a nostalgic evocation of childhood can be seen in a column on pop star Gwen

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<sup>85</sup>The latter theme also emerged in interviews: for example, Elvira (22, SP) expressed similar worries in Chapter 5.4.

<sup>86</sup>For an in-depth discussion of Barbie's cultural significance, including perceptions of her in Russian society, see Goralik (2005).

<sup>87</sup>See Gurova (2007), Yurchak (2006), Oushakine (2000) and Pilkington (1996; 2002) for further discussion of consumption and its associations in the Soviet and early post-Soviet period.

Stefani's perfume, the bottles of which are shaped like dolls. *Cosmopolitan* magazine proclaims that "[i]n every one of us lives a little girl who loves to play with dolls!" (*Cosmopolitan*, March 2010: 384) Another article about beauty products states that "[e]ven grown-up girls have a soft spot for dolls." (*Cosmopolitan*, November 2010: 85). Sometimes this juxtaposition of childhood and adult sexuality is used in a less subtle way, as an example from an article about how to achieve a (to put it kindly) 'gamine' style entitled *How cute*, which states that "[r]eal Lolitas aren't afraid to go out in ankle socks, which this season they wear with sandals" (*Elle*, April 2011: 263). References to this kind of adolescent, immature female sexuality are thus not a rarity in the magazines studied. Although references to childhood may, like the other fantasy characters discussed in this chapter, act as a nostalgic reference to a possibly happier time when life was simpler, it can be argued that the magazines are encouraging an infantilised view of womanhood and female sexuality, as discussed above.

### 8.5.2 The Barbie Doll as Hyper-Femininity

In interviews the doll proved to be a rather divisive symbol of womanhood, with Russian women sometimes using Barbie as a signifier of a mode of femininity that they found worthy of (sometimes critical) comment:

HP: Are [cosmetic procedures] common in Russia?

Tamara: Recently there's been more demand for it. Barbie doll-like girls are very popular here – with the teeth, the hair extensions, really big busts.  
(Tamara, 21, NN)

[In Russia] We have a certain standard of beauty which is set by rich men. They want to have a Barbie doll beside them that they can show off to everyone else. It's a certain standard. A tall blonde with a big bust and pouty lips. (Lara, 30, SP)

The 'Barbie doll look' represents a very narrow version of femininity based on a high level

of beauty labour, and possibly on surgical enhancements of her body. She is characterised by Lara as a kind of trophy girlfriend for wealthy men. One participant characterised this image as a typical form of femininity found in her favourite women's magazines, and was more explicit in her condemnation of this particular type of femininity:

HP: What do you think about how women are represented in the magazines?

Lyubov: They're shown in a certain image – a girl who always looks after herself, who is obliged to look after her outer appearance, her clothes, to have an ideal personal life, to follow all the advice. Something like a Barbie doll type, an ideal woman who doesn't appeal to me. (Lyubov, 22, SP)

Lyubov implies that women's magazines place an emphasis on looks in creating their idealised version of femininity, with which she clearly chose not to identify. At the same time Barbie represents a kind of mass produced femininity "type" who rejects an individual look. Sometimes participants linked this image to Western influences on Russian society:

Raisa: There are young girls who generally dress very smartly. And they start to do it fairly early – that is, they start to wear makeup at an early age.

Polina: It's not femininity so much – it's not real.

Raisa: Like dolls.

Polina: Yes.

Raisa: Like some kind of doll. They're just doing it because of the Western influence, [from] looking at videos and magazines.

Polina: Yes, they want to look like celebrities. (Raisa, 23 & Polina, 21, NN)

Here, younger girls' attempts to copy what is viewed as a foreign culture provoke their disapproval. The perceived "Western" culture of wearing makeup and dressing a certain way is seen as encroaching onto the territory of childhood: the girls wearing the makeup are trying to emulate a certain type of femininity, but are instead compared to dolls. The

doll here becomes linked to the consumer culture which has sometimes been viewed as a Western-origin phenomenon, and which is visible in the media. Because of this, the doll can be seen for some participants to symbolise the encroachment of a new symbolic order in which children, rather than using dolls as toys, consume beauty products with the aim of resembling dolls. Furthermore, we can refer back to fears about the over-adoption of Western beauty norms by supposedly naive Russians, as discussed in Chapter 5 and previously in this section. The doll can thus be quite a complex figure of fantasy femininity: though she can be seen in a positive light in the media as a return to childhood, she is also linked by some participants to a kind of (possibly foreign-influenced) hyper-sexualised woman who focuses on looks to the detriment of developing her personality.

Interestingly, greater individualism – an idea previously linked to the incursion of ‘Western’ values into Soviet society – now becomes something to be valued, as can be seen in Lyubov’s condemnation of the Barbie “type”. Looking glamorous or sexy is seen as a shortcut to having a ‘nice’ life because it attracts male attention, a widespread view in the early post-Soviet period (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996: 30). This view of the glamorous, fantasy-doll, hyper-feminine look was similarly associated with class, money and power by participants, in that it enabled less wealthy women to gain access to a more consumer lifestyle:

In general, what glossy magazines are dictating – or so it seems to me – is that this girl is sexy, she is strong, with a big bust; she is tall and wears high heels all the time, and perhaps has a deep cleavage. Just that kind of sexy-sexy, everything. Unrealistically well groomed hair. Some kind of hairstyle, and always a chic manicure. With expensive perfume, a good car, and with the kind of guy that has lots of money. That kind of sexy, expensive, luxury woman. In the majority of magazines, it’s like that. (Dasha, 28, SP)

Irina: I think that some glamorous women’s magazines give plenty of advice for women with silicone lips. Be stupid, pretend you don’t know something, be

helpless, and so on. So sometimes you read it and you think ‘what stupidity!’ (Irina, 27, SP)

Fantasy femininity linked to a Barbie-like body (“silicone lips”) is thus linked to some other figures which hint at a fantasy world, at least in the popular Russian imagination: the rich (male) oligarch and his female companion. Azhgikhina (1997; originally cited in Partan, 2010) draws the links between hyper-feminine beauty and the ‘New Russian’ style businessman of the 1990s, in that winning beauty contests gave women in the early post-Soviet era the opportunity to date or even marry this type of man. However the conceptual link of ‘beauty = wealthy partner’ seen in the Barbie stereotype now comes full circle, becoming ‘wealthy partner = beauty’. In other words, using a desirable feminine body as a means to get into a relationship with a wealthy man is now relying on a wealthy man for one’s looks:

Of course, [magazines] talk about different categories of people. If you’re talking to us, neither Nina, Oksana or I can afford to spend this or that amount of money on a dress – two wages! But if girls are married to an oligarch, who doesn’t do anything, then he can help them buy a dress. There are such people; we have plenty of them in Russia. (Tamara, 22, NN)

So it’s difficult to conform to the glossy magazine ideal... If I were an oligarch’s wife and was in those surroundings, I would probably have to be like that. But here, at [work], it would be somewhat ‘unreal’. (Dasha, 28, SP)

The discussion above is in contrast to the valorisation of wealthier sectors of Russian society often seen in women’s magazines. Both Tamara and Dasha seem to at least partly reject an upper class version of femininity: either with a hint of cultural disapproval of the lifestyle (Tamara), or merely out of a lack of identification with that particular classed type of femininity.

The wider significance of a wealthy lifestyle as a cultural reference point for gender norms is evident in its appearance in recent popular culture aimed at women. Drawing upon

literary and television sources, Ratilainen (2012: 62) writes that in contemporary Russian culture “the nouveau riche wife is shown to have surpassed the conditions of Soviet standardised femininity”, partly via her body and the way it is presented socially. She also provides an apt analysis of the 2006 Russian feature film, *Glanets* (‘Gloss’), which she interprets as critiquing certain aspects of contemporary Russian culture linked to glossy magazines and ‘Westernisation’. The film follows a naive young girl from the provinces on a journey of Cinderella-like (though not necessarily positive) transformation, both in terms of her appearance and her lifestyle, in that she becomes the partner of a rich oligarch (Ratilainen, 2013: 92-96). There is clearly a sense of moral transgression to the discussion of oligarch’s wives and girlfriends above. This is possibly because, in the post-Soviet era, Russian society has also seen growing concern about such figures of femininity as representative of “conspicuous, frivolous consumption” (Patino, 2008: 141), where glamour culture is seen to represent a new era which is simultaneously exclusive (in terms of representing a Western, hedonistic lifestyle aimed at the *nouveau riche*) and democratic (in that consumer culture is – in theory – open to everybody) (Rudova, 2008: 2). Processes of achieving a certain normatively feminine look may be seen as part of this; certainly, the growth of glamour culture has been linked by other scholars to women’s magazines (Menzel, 2008; Rudova, 2008; Klingseis, 2011; Goscilo & Strukov, 2011; Ratilainen, 2012). If Soviet *kulturnost*’ idealised the norms of the intelligentsia class as a model for women to aspire to, it can be said that upper- and middle-class notions of femininity hold more relevance as a cultural reference point (whether positive or negative) in contemporary Russia.

In addition, a discourse of Westernisation as threatening can again be seen as linked to women’s magazines in post-Soviet Russia, particularly in that they are perceived to

contribute to a level of aspiration that is not necessarily realistic for most women. Trying to achieve the goal of a beautiful, glamorous appearance with the aim of achieving a certain lifestyle may be perceived as damaging:

Kristina: Media advice in our society is not so good – maybe because earlier in our country we didn't see expensive things and advertising.

Nadezhda: It was more equal.

Larisa: Yes, it was so equal and we aren't used to it. To my mind a big problem has appeared here, because people, girls, they started to dream about a better life, they want to live like other people, to have a lot of money and cars, and they don't live their [own] lives. That's why there is such a feeling that it's not *your* life. You are just sitting and watching but you are waiting for something. This is a problem, just not to live every moment but [to] wait for something better. And this something better, it may not appear.

HP: So do you think that magazines contribute to that because they're presenting... do they reflect reality?

Larisa: When you're dreaming about a better life, you always hope for some interesting events in your [own] life, for some travel, a lot of money. And you try to earn it, and you try to follow the life of... I don't know who, but not your [own] life!

HP: Do these ideas for you come from the media or do they come from yourself?

Larisa: I guess it's a stereotype and it's come from the media, from magazines, from everywhere in our lives. (Kristina, 25, Nadezhda, 25, & Larisa, 29, SP)

The aspirational lifestyles displayed in women's magazines as normal are described as having a negative effect on the aspirations of these interviewees, giving them somehow false expectations of life or encouraging them towards a certain homogeneous view of life. Discourses of doll-like femininity on some level echo moral worries about the future of Russian society. As is evident from the women's views above, they also represent a rather unrealistic and, indeed, undesirable look and lifestyle for some readers. On this level, then, fantasy femininity in magazines is often acknowledged by readers to be just that: a fantasy which does not reflect the lived reality of the average Russian woman. On that level, certain representations of femininity linked to wealthier sectors of Russian society may be

negatively perceived rather than seen as something to aspire to, as discussed earlier in the chapter. However, there is also an ongoing concern around the ‘naive’ Russian girls (as in the *Glianets* film) who would be vulnerable to the temptations of a glossy magazine lifestyle and thus buy into this culture of glamour and conspicuous consumption. As seen in the above example, the dream of achieving an aspirational lifestyle can represent a threat to perceived Russian values in the post-Soviet era.

## 8.6 Conclusion

The different types of fantasy femininity explored in this final empirical chapter have reinforced the main themes which run through the thesis. Different fantasy figures are used in magazines to stress the cultural significance of achieving normative femininity via beauty labour and conspicuous consumption, and provide idealised archetypes on which readers are encouraged to base their own ideas about femininity.

This chapter has also shown how different manifestations of fantasy femininity in women’s magazines represent a hybrid media culture displaying the influence of both Western and Soviet/Russian ideas about gender. The interweaving of references to Soviet society and references to Zolushka, princesses, celebrities, Barbie dolls and oligarchs’ wives exemplifies the amalgamation of different cultural influences at work in contemporary Russian society. Clearly, it has not been a case of the West having a direct and straightforward influence on Russian understandings of gender in the post-Soviet period, but rather that Western influences, as Pilkington & Bliudina (2002: 3) have argued, are “filtered through [...] the experiences, memories, imaginations, and fantasies that accumulate collectively and individually.” On one level, fantasy operates on the level of



emotional responses to the relatively stable and culturally familiar gender discourses found in fairy tales: the magazines use fantasy to tap into readers' desires for the security, beauty or lifestyle associated with becoming a princess (or a celebrity, or a rich man's wife). As such, I echo both Sian Stephenson's (2007: 615) argument that women's magazines in Russia can be seen to represent a "powerful fantasy", and Lorna Stevens' (2005: 283) description of the woman's magazine as a "dreamworld" able to "facilitate flights of fancy": although women's magazines build on everyday, real life situations faced by readers, they also portray a fantasy world where the reader's imagination can be indulged. As such, it can be linked to reader discussions of women's magazines as a source of escapism in Chapter 7.

However, reader references to fantasy figures also make a point about socio-economic stratification in Russia, meaning that they cannot be categorised as representative of a fantasy world alone but reflect wider values linked to class and gender. This seemed to more often hold negative associations for readers, who talked about fantasy femininity discourses such as the 'Barbie doll look' in terms of its distance from their own lifestyles or understandings of feminine norms. For example, the perceived passivity and dependence of an oligarch's wife was seen as a negative trait for a Russian woman to possess. This may be linked to the 1990s idea of the "new Russian" (Oushakine, 2000), suggesting disapproval of a mode of behaviour based around conspicuous consumption and a hyper-feminine appearance. Furthermore, references to "Western" influences suggests that perceptions of Western culture as inferior/superior (either way, as inherently *different*) to Russian culture, as observed by Pilkington & Omel'chenko (2002: 206) in the late 1990s, are still present in the 2010s. Although this research has found some differences between femininity norms in Russian culture and in Western culture, the many similarities

that it has found suggest that perceptions of the inherent *difference* of Russia's cultural landscape are to a certain extent a social construct.

To conclude, fantasy femininity discourses are representative of a twenty-first century context in which media discourses reflect collective memories of the communist era, as well as the contemporary global discourses around conspicuous consumption and normative femininity. Women's magazines may be seen as a 'hybrid form' of culture (Lull, 2000), and their popularity suggests that women are familiar with this mix of cultural influences (if not always uncritical of them). However, Pilkington's (2002: 226) observation that the hybridisation of culture can jar with the "Russian narrative of self" also has some resonance: criticisms of the perceived non-Russian nature of certain forms of femininity – such as the 'Barbie doll look' – may reflect a criticism of an overly consumption-led femininity which is perceived as particularly post-Soviet or Western in nature.

## 9. Conclusion

### 9.1 Thesis Conclusions

Centred on the themes of women's magazines, beauty, femininity and consumption, this thesis has sought to interrogate gender norms in contemporary Russia from a feminist perspective. In doing so, it has engaged with debates around gendered bodies, the encoding and decoding of women's media, and the globalisation of Russian culture. I have carried out a discourse analysis of women's lifestyle magazines, centred on a critique of this kind of media as a source of gender socialisation which help to shape femininity norms in Russian society and culture. In addition, I have analysed original interview material to examine the attitudes of Russian women to the key themes of the research, comparing and contrasting this material to these themes.

I have argued that women's magazines play a role in emphasising the ongoing surveillance, self-surveillance and discipline of women's bodies in contemporary Russian society. They have been shown to do this chiefly via an emphasis on beauty labour and conspicuous consumption as normatively feminine activities. However, they also draw upon discourses of transformation of the female body, and on wider cultural currents around celebrity and glamour culture. As in other patriarchal societies, in Russian culture the body is portrayed as a reflection of individual worth for women to a greater extent than it is for men. Similarly, beauty labour and conspicuous consumption associated with 'improving' one's appearance are considered feminine preoccupations more than they are

masculine ones, highlighting the significance of perceived gender differences and thus the ongoing gender inequalities present in contemporary Russian society.

Furthermore, I have sought to explore aspects of both change and continuity associated with the above research findings as part of wider observations on how gender discourses have evolved during the post-Soviet era. In relation to depictions of normative femininity, a stress on beauty labour for women is not a uniquely post-Soviet development. However, I have proposed that developments in Russian society since the Gorbachev era have changed some of the ways women are expected to *perform* beauty labour, as well as the temporal and economic resources they are expected to devote to it. Reader discussions largely coincided with magazine portrayals of beauty labour as an essential part of maintaining a normatively feminine appearance. Even when participants disapproved of the levels of beauty labour depicted in the magazines, or disliked performing it, they tended to react self-critically to the inevitable failure of their own body to meet feminine ideals. Thus women's magazines may be seen to draw on, and contribute to, patriarchal bodily norms in Russian society. Russian women are, in common with women in other areas of the world, subject to pressure to discipline and monitor their bodies as part of the powerful gender discourses present in the contemporary media, and wider society.

Changes may be observed in relation to women's bodies as a reflection of their worth as individuals. Although women's bodies held significant symbolic value under the Soviet regime, this research suggests that the values that they represent and the implications for individual women have shifted. During the Soviet era, women who failed to meet normative standards of appearance were judged against collective values centred around ideas of *kulturnost'*, which in turn can be linked to notions of class and cultural capital

(Bourdieu, 1984/2010). In contemporary Russian society, key understandings of embodied femininity have emerged which now exist within a much more consumer-oriented society; these are reflected in women's magazines which rely on a fetishisation of beauty products, fashion and consumer brands in order to sustain them as a business. To a certain extent this reflects a greater stress on the individual in post-Soviet Russia (Salmenniemi & Adamson, 2014): readers of women's magazines are addressed as individuals who are assumed to have access to all of the possibilities the consumer market offers people wishing to 'improve' their appearance. As a result, rather than offering more general advice about clothing, diet or skincare as Soviet women's magazines did, contemporary women's magazines focus in on a range of new areas of the body, presenting new scientific, surgical and technological 'opportunities' for Russian women to try. Nevertheless, these messages reflect social hierarchies of gender and class as much as *kulturnost* did in the Soviet era. As such, this array of advice represents not choice, but pressure on women to micromanage their bodies to fit ever more meticulous standards of femininity. A failure to meet these norms, the magazines imply, results in failure for individual women, with social penalties based around specific 'life goals' (career, love life, etc.) which are commonly portrayed as important in contemporary women's magazines. Although similar social penalties existed for women during the Soviet period, the wider values resulting in surveillance and judgement of women's bodies have changed in the move towards more individualistic socio-cultural norms.

Some of these changing norms are also based around a growing commodification of women's bodies which began in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet period (Bridger, Kay & Pinnick, 1996; Kay, 1997; Sperling, 2000). In present day Russia, this commodification is ever more present in the form of the aesthetic capital women are told they should

achieve via beauty labour and conspicuous consumption. This element reflects both change and continuity. In one sense, women's bodies have always played a role in how they are viewed in Russian society; from their ability to bear children, to the emphasis on the beautiful body as a signifier of normative femininity. However, the move to more visual forms of media in a more consumerist, post-Soviet society, this research suggests, has increased the overall significance of a woman's outer appearance to her individual worth. If, as Azhgikhina & Goscilo (1996: 96) argue, a woman's inner beauty has in Russian culture been as significant as her outer appearance, in this thesis I suggest that the achievement of aesthetic capital has become more important – both discursively and in typical ways of “doing” gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987) – for Russian women since the collapse of communism.

A further change in post-Soviet society that this thesis has explored has been the changing nature of gender norms in relation to social hierarchies over the past two decades. For example, some themes that have arisen in the thesis have shed light on ambiguous perceptions of a post-Soviet economic elite. The wealthy simultaneously represent an aspirational consumer lifestyle, and the moral ambiguity associated with the fading significance of certain Soviet gender norms. For example, some participants criticised stereotypes of wealthy women who were seen to embody a particularly post-Soviet (and potentially Western-style) form of ‘Barbie doll’ femininity. However, the lifestyle of conspicuous consumption they represent was idealised by other participants, who saw knowledge about luxury brands as a means of increasing their cultural capital in contemporary Russia. From one perspective, the lifestyle portrayed in magazines is accepted as part of normative femininity in contemporary Russia, and women seek to take part in it, sometimes with the aim of feeling part of a global cultural of femininity and

conspicuous consumption. However, in everyday discourse there are still traces of Soviet norms of *kulturnost*', which entailed a modest and understated feminine appearance, as well as a negative perception of conspicuous consumption which formed part of official Soviet discourse.

With minor exceptions, the women's magazines studied in this research tend to ignore the financial circumstances of the majority of their readers, framing conspicuous consumption as a relatively democratic form of gender performance that all women can choose to take part in. Because of this, it is perhaps not surprising that women have developed a range of strategies to negotiate consumption norms that are so highly linked to normative femininity. Although this thesis has explored the potential women have for agency in the face of dominant media norms, the results of my analysis point to a rather more pessimistic view of possibilities for social change. Although undoubtedly women have different interpretations of women's magazine content, and additionally different ways of viewing them as a specific type of media, interview data suggests that their understandings of normative femininity do not depart significantly from the arguably patriarchal gender norms found in the magazines. In terms of the ways that readers decode the magazines, this research suggests that the concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984/2010) is particularly useful in framing women's readings of women's magazines, particularly with reference to their portrayal of a lifestyle often quite removed from the reality of life for many Russian women. As in Western contexts, the popularity of the magazines thus seems to result from their employment of a mixture of fantasy femininity, consumer aspiration, and the exploitation of women's insecurities around their appearance, rather than their ability to directly mirror women's everyday experiences.

The methodological and thematic approach of this thesis has enabled a different perspective on changing values and morals in post-Soviet society, particularly in relation to how understandings of Russian national identity are also deeply gendered. This is particularly in relation to its exploration of East/West or global/local discourses, which have been previously explored by a diverse range of scholars in relation to post-Soviet society and culture (Kay, 1997; Omel'chenko & Aristarkhova, 1999; Barker, 1999; Pilkington et al, 2002; Flynn & Starkova, 2002; Omel'chenko & Bliudina, 2002; Shevchenko, 2002; Menzel, 2008; Rudova, 2008; Cohen, 2013). The research findings suggest that Omel'chenko & Bliudina's (2002: 41) argument on the "horizontalization" of Russian culture in an age of globalisation, originally made in relation to the late 1990s, may also be an appropriate framework for scholars in the 2010s. That contemporary Russian culture reflects a horizontalization or 'give and take' between formerly more separate global cultures is supported by the range and ambiguity of women's views as discussed in this thesis. For example, some research participants saw an excess of beauty labour as linked to the growing significance of 'Western' values into post-Soviet Russia, and thus challenging previous gender norms. Others framed beauty labour as a particular virtue of Russian women, whose appearances were compared against those of non-Russians. If participants' views did not necessarily adhere to one side of the East/West or global/local dichotomy, it is nonetheless significant to note that this terminology was present in their discussion.

Moreover, the thesis has highlighted the importance of recognising the real life cultural nuances and ambiguities which make understandings of contemporary Russian culture and society as 'Westernised' unhelpful. The influence of a range of fantasy femininity stereotypes and archetypes of Western, Russian or other origin in women's magazines



suggests that it is appropriate to refer to them as a kind of ‘hybrid’ (Lull, 2000) or ‘glocalised’ form of popular culture in the 2010s. This may represent a contrast to their initial greater significance in 1990s Russia: now that magazines from the Soviet era have also adapted to similar visual and content norms as Western origin magazines, it might be argued that they are perceived as more a globalised or glocal than Western phenomenon.

## **9.2 Thesis Contribution**

This thesis makes a contribution to the existing literature in two main ways. To begin with, it represents an addition to socio-cultural studies of post-Soviet Russia. Its discussion of issues relating to globalisation and Westernisation contributes to existing literature on globalisation, and brings a focus in to gender and consumption as interlinked in the late 2000s to early 2010s. In many ways I agree with the conclusions of Hilary Pilkington et al (2002) about media, culture and globalisation based on empirical research from the late 1990s. As I have argued in the previous section, there is a sense of ‘hybridization’ relating to women’s magazines and wider beauty culture in the Russian context, whereby East/West binaries, even if they are not redundant as argued by Omel’chenko & Pilkington (2002: 214), certainly do not reflect the complex Russian cultural milieu. The thesis also contributes to debates around the interplay of the global and the local under postsocialism (Pilkington et al, 2002), demonstrating the contested nature of supposed ‘Western’ discourses relating to gender and consumption, and pointing out some continuities in the form of gendered discourses which may be perceived as Western, but often have at least some grounding in the Soviet-Russian context.

The thesis builds thematically on work carried out on beauty and femininity in the Soviet

and post-Soviet era. In discussing the role of fashion in relation to the female body in Russian society, I have built upon work by Vainshtein (1996) and Bartlett (2004; 2006; 2010). I have concurred with several of Gradszkova's (2007b) perspectives on femininity norms of 1930s-1960s Soviet society and culture. This is particularly true in terms of her Foucauldian reading of the female body in Soviet discourse. Although I have covered similar themes to studies of Soviet culture based more on a literary studies analysis (Azhgikhina & Goscilo, 1996), I have also brought a more feminist perspective on these themes.

However, this thesis also reflects some changes in the past decade of the Putin era. Overall, in contrast to earlier work (Oushakine, 2000; Pilkington et al, 2002), and in agreement with some more recent studies (Gurova, 2012), the young women I spoke to *did* tend to identify with consumer culture. Although some experienced a disconnect from it on the level of income and affordability, and thus practice, most tended to identify with it on an aspirational level. Although this does not mean that the inhibition of consumer culture that some scholars have argued is a particularly post-Soviet attribute, resulting from the status of consumption under socialism (Pilkington et al, 2002: 219), has disappeared, by the 2010s it certainly appears to have weakened. Even if Russia is considered a cultural periphery, as seen in women's discussion of fashion, beauty and global brands, young Russian women often see themselves as taking part in a particularly globalised form of culture based primarily, I argue, around normative femininity. Thus in some aspects, it can be said that gender norms are stronger than norms of national identity which stress Russia's difference from the West. Accordingly, some enduring gender norms centred on gender have helped to facilitate the growth of newer social norms around consumption that have resulted from the greater globalisation of the Russian cultural sphere.

In its discussion of glamour culture, this thesis draws more explicitly on feminist thought than existing literature (Ratilainen, 2012; 2013; Goscilo & Strukov, 2011; Klingseis, 2011; Gusarova, 2008; Rudova, 2008; 2011; Menzel, 2008). It features a discourse analysis of two ‘glossy’ women’s magazines, which have been viewed in the literature as part of this phenomenon. However, I have shown how some of the values associated with the glamour of the glossies – e.g. celebrity culture, an emphasis on beauty for women – are also present in *Liza*, a more down-to-earth weekly magazine for women. As such, a glamour discourse can be said to hold a wider resonance in women’s media beyond the ‘glossies’, and may be seen as a more widespread phenomenon in its links to normative femininity. Furthermore, the inclusion of interviews in the thesis adds an approach which has thus far been lacking in the literature on glamour in contemporary Russia, which has largely focused on media and literary analysis. However, I have concurred with much of the existing literature on glamour on the issue of glamour culture as somewhat morally ambiguous in Russian culture. In relation to gender, as it is in relation to class, morals or politics (Goscilo & Strukov, 2011), glamour culture is sometimes embraced, and sometimes viewed more critically in contemporary Russian society.

Finally, the thesis also contributes to feminist scholarship. Firstly, in its discussion of beauty labour in the Russian context, the thesis supports feminist critiques of how the female body is discursively constructed in popular culture, and suggests certain ideas from gender studies are useful in an age of global media and culture. This is particularly with regard to feminist literature based around Foucault’s notions of surveillance and disciplinarity (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1993/2003; Jeffreys, 2005; Heyes, 2007). The use of Bourdieu’s (1984/2010) cultural capital and the relatively new category ‘aesthetic capital’

(Anderson et al, 2010), has been further ways that the thesis has contributed to scholarship on patriarchal discourses in media and culture, and how these contribute towards gender inequality. One aspect of this has been my emphasis on exploring how media is encoded and decoded, and as such this research has attempted to build upon some key studies in the field (Radway, 1983; 1984; Ang, 1985; Frazer, 1987; Hermes, 1995; Ytre Arne, 2008). Although in doing this I have emphasised the importance of exploring women's agency in the face of gender discourses, I would argue that the thesis does not overemphasise the possibilities for the widening of currently narrow gender norms in the Russian context.

### **9.3 Research Limitations and Implications for Further Research**

This research comes from a perspective from which certain limitations should be considered. Some of these limitations may arise from my subject position as a Western researcher working in a second language, and drawing largely on Western-origin theories, in the post-socialist region. There is the possibility that a researcher for whom Russian is a first language may have further insights into the data used in this study, for example, given an indigenous cultural knowledge. However, as discussed in the methodology chapter, there can also be benefits to an outsider perspective, and the various categories that make up a researcher's subject position (gender, class, experience) in addition to nationality means that language is merely one facet of this. From a theoretical perspective, it should be noted that the main theorists employed in this research have come from a Western viewpoint, something which might be considered inevitable given that much of the theoretical feminist literature privileges an English-speaking and Western perspective.<sup>88</sup> Whether feminist theory originating in Western contexts may be applicable in the post-

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<sup>88</sup>As Stella (2008: 227) similarly notes about the literature on sexualities.

Cold War 'East' is a topic that has been considered by Cerwonka (2008) and Temkina & Zdravomyslova (2003; 2014), and based on their discussions, I would argue that using Western-origin theory is somewhat unavoidable in the current academic context. This is especially given recent work published by Temkina & Zdravomyslova (2014) which discusses how they themselves have sought to bring Western gender theory into Russian universities: in comparison to their 2003 article, they seem to emphasise the political difficulties of gender research in Russia rather than the difficulties of employing Western-origin theory. However, it should be said that research into the Russian context benefits from a sensitivity to the specific historical and cultural context of the post-Soviet world (Flynn & Oldfield, 2006) and an attempt to use as much Russian-origin research as is relevant to the research topic. Although this is an important aspect of cross-cultural research, as Cerwonka (2008: 811) argues, "feminist thought always functions as a travelling discourse and yet is always articulated in very particular, localised ways". Therefore, I would argue that because social structures in Russia are, as in Western countries, based upon patriarchal gender discourses which continue to result in inequality between men and women both globally and locally, global feminist theoretical perspectives make a valuable contribution to studies of post-Soviet society.

Although this thesis has examined a relatively small section of the Russian socio-cultural milieu, its findings have opened up some potentially interesting avenues for future research, some of which I will now discuss. Firstly, the data collected in the course of this research presented some avenues for analysis that, regrettably, I was unable to incorporate into the relatively small scope of this PhD, given concerns of timescale and the overall size of the thesis. One of these is the role of magazines in the gender socialisation, especially of younger readers. This was one element which came out strongly in the interviews: women

frequently cited magazines as very influential in their youth, and then positioned their current selves as somehow immune to this influence due to greater maturity and understanding of what their own particular femininity encompassed. This could have interesting implications for feminist approaches to agency, but might also point to the utility of carrying out further research with teenage readers of women's magazines aimed at older women.

From the point of view of magazine content, there were certain themes which relate to notions of beauty labour which might also provide material for future consideration. Relating to the beauty industry and the employment by magazines of particular discourses around beauty products, I coded a significant amount of data on a semi-scientific or pseudoscientific discourse, as explored from the point of view of natural sciences by Moore (2002). Products are often sold on the basis of scientific promises involving ingredients such as retinol or hyaluronic acid, which the average member of the public would be unlikely to understand. This would provide an interesting contrast to other discourses I coded around beauty, such as the 'magical' nature of consumer beauty products, or the 'natural' discourse (e.g. products having natural ingredients or being based on vegetables, fruit, etc.).

To broaden perspectives for further research, given that gender is still overwhelmingly understood on a binary basis, any study of Russian femininities would benefit from a comparison via a similar study of Russian masculinities. Substantial work on Russian masculinities from a sociological perspective exists (Meshcherkina, 2000; Kukhterin, 2000; Ashwin & Lytkina, 2004; Kay, 2006), but aside from some work on the more pornographic side of the market (Borenstein, 2008), as an aspect of a wider socio-cultural

analysis (Goscilo, 2000; Goscilo & Strukov, 2011), and on their portrayal of health issues (Pietilä, 2010), men's magazines in Russia represent one gap in the literature. Although they have a smaller circulation in Russia than women's magazines (Pietiläinen, 2008), they have few Soviet-era predecessors and thus are a newer addition to the post-Soviet market than women's magazines, and so would provide potentially different angle on media globalisation.

My discussion of consumption in this thesis was necessarily focused on its particularly gender aspects. As a result, and as a result of a lack of focus on this topic during fieldwork interviews, class was not a significant focus of this research. However, there is undoubtedly space to build a class analysis of women's magazines in contemporary Russia, especially given the overlapping themes of this research with other work which has focused more on the classed aspects of consumption (e.g. Gurova, 2012). From the point of view of studying magazine audience reception, as I have done here, further research into the potentially classed nature of the women's magazine market (e.g. involving greater demographic information than was collected during my own fieldwork) would broaden the picture, especially in the interests of applying a more intersectional approach to audience reception of popular media. In a similar vein, researching non-Slavic ethnic groups about their understandings of beauty – discussed in Gradsanova's (2008a) historical work – might provide another perspective on femininity. Location is a further example of issues for further research to address. Although location was not a focus of this thesis, it did emerge from some interviews in relation to gender and consumption. Perennial discussions on the 'special' nature of Moscow, Russia's capital city, with research participants, Russian friends and other researchers suggests that studying similar issues there might provide a different insights into how location might affect gendered experiences, as may researching

less cosmopolitan cities in the far east or south of Russia, for example.

Discourses encouraging bodily discipline for women have been touched upon in this research, and clearly weight loss was a gendered issue present in women's magazines and in interviews, as well as having been pinpointed as an area of growth in Russian society by Bridger, Kay & Pinnick (1996) in the 1990s. However, at the time of writing there is a relative lack of national-level 'Weight Watchers'-style weight loss groups, such as those studied by Heyes (2007), in the Russian Federation, although magazines aimed at dieting women such as *Khudeyem Pravil'no* ('Lose weight properly') do exist. Taking into account arguments in this thesis around the female body as in need of surveillance; the recent rise in 'obesity studies' as a new sociological field; and signs that 'obesity' is a growing medical problem in Russia, as in many other parts of the world; research into the gendered, 'overweight' body as a sociological issue would be topical and pertinent. It would also be useful to build on existing analyses of the overweight body in Soviet women's magazines (Vainshtein, 1996) and to trace the evolution of discursive constructions of the overweight body in the post-Soviet period. Furthermore, it may be possible to assess how it fits into other post-socialist discourses on gendered bodies, as well as how gendered bodies may be studied from the point of view of state policy on health.

A final point for future research is based on the presence of women's magazine brands online: on websites, forums and on social media. As mentioned at an earlier point, I used online magazine forums as one way of finding research participants; analysis of forum participant interactions on the topics of beauty, fashion and femininity would represent a fertile area for future research. Some studies have begun to address this issue from the



point of view of glamour culture (Strukov, 2011). In the final year of this research, I have also been following social media feeds from Russian women's magazines, and the material suggests that this would also be an interesting area for research; for example, I have seen women use them to scrutinise celebrities' bodies, or question magazine content.

## 9.4 Concluding Remarks

The rapid growth of Western-style content and layout in the Russian women's magazine market in the post-Soviet era has formed a key basis for this thesis, which has presented an analysis of the resonance and dissonance between magazines portrayals of gender, and gender norms amongst readers of the magazines. I have shown how a feminist analysis of women's magazines, and of how they are decoded by readers, is significant in exploring continuity from the Soviet era, such as the stress on aesthetic capital as a fundamental goal for women; but also for exploring changing socio-cultural norms around gender linked to issues such as individualism, means of performing beauty labour, and conspicuous consumption. I have suggested that continuities in gender norms have facilitated some of the newer cultural discourses on consumption that have become a feature of post-Soviet media and society.

Women's magazines in Russia can be seen to represent a particular set of norms which do not necessarily reflect real everyday lived experiences of gender, or even actual attitudes towards gender norms. However, they have been shown to reflect these lived experiences and attitudes to a great enough extent to give them often powerful discursive resonance amongst Russian women, often despite ambiguous and contested readings of women's magazines by individuals. As such, the magazines can be viewed as a valuable cultural

reference point with reference to which wider social critiques can be made, particularly in relation to gender norms and discourses. The extent to which aesthetic capital is represented in culture as a key goal for women is, I suggest, an enduring indicator of gender inequality in Russia as much as it is in other contexts.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix I: 2011 Fieldwork Interview Questions**

#### **STAGE ONE – INTRODUCTION**

Can I confirm for the tape that you have a copy of the information sheet and are happy to give your consent to take part in this interview, and that you know you are able to stop the interview at any point or refuse to answer any question, without giving a reason?

#### **STAGE TWO – GENERAL BACKGROUND**

- Can I ask first what kind of magazines you like to read? [SHOW EXAMPLES]
- Which of these are your favourites? Why do you like them?
- Are there any which you don't like reading or find uninteresting?
- How often would you say you read these kinds of magazines – whether it be buying them for yourself, or reading them in a salon, or at a friend's house?
- How old were you when you became interested in these kinds of magazines?  
[follow up]
- What is your favourite part of the magazine? Is there anything you look at first?
- What would you say is the main reason that you read (or have read) these magazines?

### STAGE THREE – IMAGE & BEAUTY ROUTINES

- I'd like to talk to you about style, appearances and how you feel about that.
- How would you describe your own style? Is it important for you to be able to show your personality through the way you look?
- Do you follow fashion or read about it in the magazines or on the internet? What kind of sites do you visit?
- Do you enjoy shopping by yourself or with friends? How often do you like to go shopping for clothes or beauty products?
- How much time do you spend on thinking about or planning your own style and the way you look?
- What is your favourite thing about the way you look?
- Is there anything you don't like about your looks or that you would like to change?
- I'd like to talk about beauty products and the way you care for your face, hair and body now. Having a look at these examples, would you be happy to talk to me about which ones you think are an important part of your routine, which ones you might do only sometimes, and which you wouldn't consider necessary? [SHOW EXAMPLES]
- Thinking about your female friends, family and work colleagues, is there anything here that you would be surprised or shocked to find out that they didn't do? What would you say the average woman should do as a minimum to look acceptable?
- How do you feel about the things you do to look after your appearance? Do you enjoy taking that time? Are there things you don't enjoy doing?
- If you could choose one of these things and wave a magic wand to say you wouldn't have to do it ever again, which would you choose? Why is this?
- Do you visit beauty salons and hairdressers? How often? Is it usually by yourself, or

do you take friends and/or relatives?

- Do you look out for new brands and try them out, or do you tend to be loyal to your favourites?
- Can you tell me about your favourite beauty products – cosmetics, hair products, body creams, etc. Why do you like them?
- Do you talk with your close friends and female relations about beauty products or things you do to maintain your appearance? Do you ever share recommendations for beauty products with each other?
- How important would you say that the women's magazines you read are to the products you buy or the beauty procedures you carry out regularly? Is there anything you've been introduced to by a magazine that you didn't do before?
- [If they read them as a teenager] Has your attitude to the advice offered by the magazines about beauty changed since you first begun reading them? Do you still look at them the same way now as you did then?
- Have you ever decided to change your appearance to a great extent (i.e. a 'makeover')? If so, what did you do and what motivated you to do this? If you haven't, what is the biggest change you have made to your appearance, and what motivated you?
- What is your opinion on more serious beauty procedures such as laser resurfacing, Botox and fillers? Do you know somebody who has had these things done or would you ever consider them yourself?
- Similarly, what about plastic surgery? Tell me your thoughts on it.

#### **STAGE FOUR – WOMANHOOD & FEMININITY**

- How important do you think it is for women to look good? How significant is

looking after your outside appearance to a woman's life – her job, her personal life, etc.?

- Tell me what you think looking feminine means, and what feeling feminine means.
- What kinds of things do you consider unfeminine or unattractive for a woman?
- How important is it to you to look and feel feminine, or womanly?
- Magazines offer lots of advice on how to live, particularly around beauty and how to behave with men or boyfriends. What do you think about the advice they offer? Can you remember any specific times when you have ever followed any advice about how to look or behave?
- Can you remember reading anything in a magazine which contradicted your own outlook on life, or which you thought was wrong or didn't apply to you? Does this happen often?
- What do you think about the visual aspects or pictures of women in the magazines? How do they represent women?
- Do you identify with the pictures of women in the magazines?

## Appendix II: Survey, 2011 Fieldwork

Interview number:

Age:

Job:

Education:

Use special products for your skin type (e.g. dry, normal, oily, combination)	Eye cosmetics (mascara, eye shadow, eyeliner)	Anti-cellulite cream
Lipstick or lipgloss	Body hair removal (shaving, waxing, epilation,	Face masks
Facial hair removal (waxing, threading, bleaching)	Facial care routine (e.g. cleanse, tone, moisturise)	Anti-ageing products
Visiting the hairdresser	Use special products for your hair type (e.g. for volume, frizz, dryness, etc.)	Spa treatments
Foundation and concealer	Eye cream	Botox, mesotherapy, fillers
Exfoliator and scrub	Eyebrow shaping/tinting	False eyelashes
Tanning beds	Exercises to improve body shape	Self-tanning
Exercise to lose weight	Diets	Hair colouring
Hair straightening/curling		

## Appendix III: Information for Participants

My name is Holly Porteous. I am a graduate student from the University of Glasgow in Scotland and I am carrying out interviews as part of my sociological research.

This interview is part of project on the theme *Women's Magazines, attitudes to the self and to the body and means of caring for the self in contemporary Russian society*. The aim of this project is to gather anonymous data about the opinions of young women who read women's magazines on their bodies, care for the self and women's magazines in general.

The interview will last approximately one to one and a half hours, and – depending on your consent – will be recorded. We can talk in Russian or in English. The information you give is strictly anonymous, and any information used in research will be given under a pseudonym. You have the right to leave the interview at any time without giving a reason. Additionally, you have the right to refuse to answer any questions that you may be asked.

Thank you for the interview.

### **Who to contact about this research**

Key researcher: Holly Porteous, University of Glasgow, UK

Email: c.porteous.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Telephone contact in Russia (until September 2011): 7 981 870 3212

### **Further contacts for information or concerns**

Research supervisors, University of Glasgow, UK

Professor Rebecca Kay; email: rebecca.kay@glasgow.ac.uk

Dr Francesca Stella; email: francesca.stella@glasgow.ac.uk



## Appendix IV: 2010 Pilot Research Interview Questions

- Where do you get women's magazines? (e.g. buy from kiosks, from friends, etc.)
- How often do you read women's magazines?
- When and where do you usually read women's magazines?
- At what age did you begin reading women's magazines?
- Please give the names of magazines you read, and say whether you read them often or just occasionally.
- What is your favourite magazine? Why?
- Are there magazines you don't like? Why?
- Why do you find it interesting to read women's magazines?
- What are your favourite pages (*rybriku*)? Why?
- Are there pages you don't like? Why?
- What do you think about how women are shown in these magazines?
- Do you think women and men have more or less in common with each other? Why do you think this might be?
- Do you think men have a different role in life than women? If so, how is it different? What about priorities?
- What role should women have in life?
- Do you think there are typically feminine characteristics? If so, what are they?
- How do you understand the idea of 'femininity'?

- How do women display their femininity? Can you remember a period or moment when you felt particularly feminine?
- What kind of women read women's magazines? How does an 'ideal reader' look and act? Do you identify with the ideal reader?
- How do women's magazines show femininity?
- Do you think the magazines influence your own ideas about femininity?
- Do you identify with the images of women in women's magazines?
- Do you think the magazines have an influence on your opinions or change them?
- How do you feel when you read women's magazines?
- What kind of influence do you feel the magazines have on your life?

## Appendix V: Demographic Data

N.B. Occupations given are according to participants' own descriptions. Individual interviews are white; group interviews are indicated by shaded, linked columns.

### Pilot Fieldwork – St Petersburg, 2010

Participant Identifier	Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Date	Language
A	Yevgenia	25	Social work	05 July 2010	Russian
B	Sofia	26	Outdoor activity instructor	11 July 2010	Russian
C	Zinaida	23	Teacher of foreign languages	12 July 2010	Russian
D	Zoya	23	Assistant at women's magazine	12 July 2010	Russian
E	Yulia	27	Psychologist	14 July 2010	Russian

## Fieldwork – St Petersburg, 2011<sup>89</sup>

Identifier	Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Date	Language
1	Anya	27	Import executive	18 May 2011	English
2	Alisa	30	Manager	25 May 2011	Russian
3	Alyona	23	Transport logistics	25 May 2011	Russian
4	Dasha	28	Academic librarian	26 May 2011	Russian
5	Diana	24	Secretary	26 May 2011	Russian
6	Elvira	22	Retail manager	01 June 2011	English
7	Galya	23	Public relations	03 June 2011	Russian
8	Inessa	22	Technology writer	04 June 2011	Russian
9	Katya	25	Film secretary	05 June 2011	English
10	Klara	33	Manager	06 June 2011	Russian
11	Lara	30	Brand manager	21 June 2011	Russian
12	Irina	27	Wine company	21 June 2011	Russian
13	Masha	22	Manager	26 June 2011	Russian
14	Lyubov	22	Trader	26 June 2011	Russian
15	Larisa	29	Marketing manager	08 July 2011	English
16	Kristina	25	Junior legal expert	08 July 2011	English
17	Nadezhda	25	IT	08 July 2011	English
18	Lena	33	Manager	08 July 2011	Russian

<sup>89</sup> N.B. Shading indicates group interviews.

### Fieldwork – Nizhny Novgorod, 2011<sup>90</sup>

Identifier	Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Date	Language
19	Natalia	22	Unemployed	16 July 2011	Russian
20	Margarita	21	Secretary	21 July 2011	Russian
21	Tamara	21	Manager	27 July 2011	Russian
22	Nina	22	Unemployed	27 July 2011	Russian
23	Oksana	22	Unemployed	27 July 2011	Russian
24	Olya	22	Lawyer	28 July 2011	Russian
25	Polina	21	Unemployed	01 August 2011	Russian
26	Raisa	23	Unemployed	01 August 2011	Russian
27	Sasha	29	Academic faculty specialist	01 August 2011	Russian
28	Vera	25	Academic research (natural sciences)	01 August 2011	Russian
29	Zhanna	22	Academic research (natural sciences)	01 August 2011	Russian
30	Marta	23	Project coordinator, private company	02 August 2011	Russian
31	Tatiana	21	Unemployed, recent graduate	02 August 2011	Russian
32	Sveta	23	Interpreter	02 August 2011	Russian
33	Valentina	24	Manager	08 August 2011	Russian
34	Vika	22	Programmer	08 August 2011	Russian

<sup>90</sup> N.B. Shading indicates group interviews.

## Appendix VI: Magazine Issues Used in Research

<i>Cosmopolitan Magazine</i> Russian edition	<i>Elle Magazine</i> Russian edition	<i>Liza Magazine</i> Russian edition
November 2009	November 2009	2 November 2009
December 2009	December 2009	30 November 2009
January 2010	January 2010	28 December 2009
February 2010	February 2010	25 January 2010
March 2010	March 2010	22 February 2010
April 2010	April 2010	22 March 2010
November 2010	November 2010	20 November 2010
December 2010	December 2010	18 December 2010
January 2011	January 2011	22 January 2011
February 2011	February 2011	19 February 2011
March 2011	March 2011	19 March 2011
April 2011	April 2011	16 April 2011

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