

“Childfree” as a created image of a successful woman in context of her gender role in the modern world (based on modern TV-series)

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the analysis of the formation of the image of a successful woman by modern cinema, foreign and domestic TV series. Based on the study of the latter in conditions through sociological methods, the change in the gender role of women in the conditions of modern nonlinear transformations is considered, one of the manifestations of which is "childfree" - a rationally conscious, rather than sensually emotional rejection of the birth and upbringing of children. This choice is often determined by a woman's desire to independently achieve certain professional heights, quality of life at the level of modern standards, to be beautiful and youthful. Such an image is gradually formed by modern Western, and, often, Russian cinema and advertising. These values also determine the reproductive strategies of modern youth, who, as the study showed, perceive children as an obstacle to self-realization. The "ideal woman" - strong, independent, beautiful - in the view of modern Russian girls pushes into the background a woman-mother, a woman-mistress. According to the author of the study, the emotional perception of such an image of a successful woman, imposed by TV series, leads to a rational choice of a strategy of "non-parenthood" in real life.

1 Introduction

The relevance of the problem under study is due to the steady pace of conscious choice of childlessness in modern society. According to the results of a sociological study by the Michigan State University (MSU), about 27% of respondents in the United States adopt the strategy of conscious childlessness (childfree) [19]. Results of a survey conducted in 2020 The analytical center of NAFI showed that in Russia 46% of Russians at reproductive age do not want to have and raise children [12]. Representatives of the Supervisory Board of the non-profit organization "Institute of Demography, Migration and Regional Development" note that "the number of Russians wishing to remain childless has doubled over the past 10 years" [14]. The trend of the popularity of "childfree" as a strategy of non-parenthood in this context becomes an urgent research task, involving the identification of the relationship

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between the steady number of followers of "childfree" among Russian citizens and the image of a successful woman formed by various means, including media resources.

The study of the phenomenon of "childfree" in the aspect of the formed image of a successful woman is actualized in the analysis of demographic processes taking place in Russian society, demographic indicators over the past 5 years. Since 2016, there has been a negative natural population increase and a decrease in the number of children born, which is aggravated by excess mortality during the COVID-19 pandemic and can lead to a "demographic pitfall" [13], and also threatens the implementation of the "Concept of State Family Policy in the Russian Federation for the period up to 2025" [1] and the "Concept of the state demographic policy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2025" [2]. In addition, from a socio-cultural point of view, it is possible to fix the formation of two oppositely directed trends in Russia, on the basis of the spread of which the stratification of civil society may arise and intensify on the basis of adherence to various cultural values and strategies of demographic and family behavior.

The study of the phenomenon of "childfree" in the aspect under consideration, namely: in connection with the image of a modern successful woman as "free from children" formed by various information methods and genres, with the popularization of this image, has not yet been reflected in empirical and theoretical-sociological studies. One of the important "layers" of empirical material are TV series, a significant proportion of which is addressed specifically to women as a socio-demographic group, including its structural component, which is at the stage of fertile age.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the content of TV shows in which the image of a successful modern woman is derived, and on the basis of the analysis carried out, to identify the importance of watching TV shows for the formation of the image of a successful woman in the context of changing her gender role, its popularization, the peculiarities of perception of this image by both women themselves and representatives of other socio-demographic groups. The research task is to systematize the criteria of female success, and to determine the place among them of such a sign as "childfree".

2 Materials and methods

The article uses theoretical methods:

- a method of theoretical analysis of the phenomenon under study, the research material is scientific works in the field of gender sociology, social psychology of the family, social psychology of the masses, manipulation of public consciousness.

When conducting an empirical study in order to obtain primary data on the perception of the image of women formed in modern TV series, socio-psychological research methods were used:

- plot analysis of TV series, the material for research is modern domestic and foreign TV series and the images of women in them;

- a survey conducted among community members in social networks and profile communities (Vkontakte. Kinopoisk), viewing and then discussing modern TV series, the material for research is data on the peculiarities of perception of the image of a modern woman presented in the series;

- the survey "Anti-reproductive motives" was used to identify, systematize and study the severity of anti-reproductive motives in society in the opinions of the women interviewed (A.T. Kutsubei and I.V. Ponomareva [10]).

3 Results and discussion

Currently, representatives of social knowledge pay close attention to the study of reproductive behavior, the choice of family and marriage strategies, the analysis and typology of factors influencing these processes. One of the aspects of this research area is such a social phenomenon as "childfree", which is in the field of scientific vision of sociologists, social psychologists, demographers, who note its popularization by a steady number of adherents, sometimes determining the reproductive strategies of young people.

In particular, J.W. Neal and Z.P. Neal believe that "childfree" is one of the strategies of non-parenthood [19], the manifestations of which are the following options:

- the passage of a certain stage of a person's development (child planning, not-yet-parents), when they have not yet made a decision about the birth of children and are preparing for its adoption;

- forced childlessness, when a person, for reasons related, as a rule, to health (actually infertility, childless), or certain life circumstances, cannot have children;

- childfree (conscious childlessness, childfree), when the unwillingness to have children in the indefinite future is a conscious choice of a person.

From the selection of the listed variants of childlessness, it follows that already at the theoretical level of research it is necessary to distinguish between "childfree", "childless" and "childhate". In our understanding, "childfree" is a strategy of conscious choice of a childless lifestyle; "childless" is a strategy of forced childlessness due to the influence of external factors; "childhate" is a strategy of abandoning children due to the fact that children generate negative emotions and feelings, on the basis of which negative attitudes regarding the birth and upbringing of children are formed.

The researchers note that the popularity of "childfree" as a value-rational choice strategy among Russian citizens has a certain circle of adherents, and at the same time they record a high potential for the impact of TV series on such a choice among individuals [6] and groups [7; 9; 11]. In particular, media channels are currently replacing TV channels that provide viewers with access to any content at any time for a fairly small amount of money (Netflix, Amediateka, Kinopoisk, Ökko, etc.), which caused a wave of popularity of the series. The film series gained additional popularity during the pandemic, when people were forced to organize their leisure time without leaving home.

Series are varieties of various television projects that consist of separately filmed episodes in a specific sequence. According to its structure, the series consists of seasons, which, in turn, consist of individual series (episodes). The phenomenon of multi-serialization is a reflection of the very essence of media resources, and the demand for the series is currently due to its organic entry into the specifics of modern media content, the tendency of representatives of not only modern youth, but also middle-aged people, to "clip way of thinking", when a full-fledged film is no longer able to hold the viewer's attention, and the viewer turns into a consumer of content.

At the same time, the series is a plot content, and the plots and characters of the series, as a rule, relate to the phenomena and problems of modern society. In particular, in modern TV series, one can see numerous images of women in the context of changing gender roles and erasing gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. The image of a woman is a representation of an ideal woman, which is inevitably modeled and simplified to a certain extent. Its structure includes ideas about appearance, character, value system (attitude to work and profession, to children, family, etc.), behavioral stereotypes of a modern woman. Researchers consider indisputable and obvious "changes in the image of a woman that are observed in today's public consciousness and manifest themselves at all levels of social structure" [5]. The features of the image of successful women with "childfree" traits in popular foreign and domestic TV series are systematized in Table 1.

Table 1. Features of the image of successful women with "childfree" traits in popular TV series.

| TV series | Character | "Childfree" motives |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| How I met your mother | Robin Scherbatsky, born in 1980, demonstrates masculine features (likes to drink scotch and smoke cigars, is fond of firearms); creative personality (former Canadian pop star, and later a journalist, at one time was the host of the morning show) | children – a hindrance to creative self-realization children – restriction of social activity |
| House of Cards | Claire Underwood, 52 years old, the wife of a politician, is engaged in charity, demonstrates a penchant for power, uncompromising | children – restriction of social activity children – a hindrance to a career children – the cause of physical and psychological inconveniences |
| Scenes from a marriage | Mira, 40 years old, a careerist, a product manager in a large company, supports a family and already has a 4-year-old child, after whose birth she hardly returned to the professional sphere and decided not to have children anymore | children – a hindrance to a career children – a hindrance to family life |
| Grey's anatomy | Cristina Yang, 35 years old, researcher, Chief Medical Officer and director of the Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery, experienced psychological trauma in childhood | childhood trauma children – a hindrance to a career children – a hindrance to realization in the profession |
| Dexter | Debra Morgan, 30 years old, works in the police, is passionate about the career of a detective, experienced a traumatic experience as a child, shows bright features of masculinity (rigidity, manner of conversation) | childhood trauma children – the cause of physical and psychological inconveniences children – a hindrance to a career |
| Suits | Sheila Sazs, 45 years old, works in the university administration, loves her professional environment, strict and principled | children – restriction of social activity children – a hindrance to professional self-realization |
| Such a job | Alexandra Boyko, 25 years old, law enforcement officer with pronounced masculinity traits | children – a hindrance to a career |
| Kamenskaya | Anastasia Kamenskaya, born in 1966, an operative/analyst from Petrovka, does not like to pretend to be beautiful, wears simple clothes, does not emphasize her femininity, but also does not have pronounced masculine features | children – a hindrance to realization in the profession children – the cause of physical and psychological inconveniences |
| The Master and Margarita | Margarita, the beloved of the Master, a witch, is ready for anything for the sake of love and a lover, the ideal image of a genius's wife | children – a hindrance to happiness with a lover children – a hindrance to creative realization |
| You all piss me off | Sofia Bagretsova, a restaurant critic by profession and a convinced misanthrope by nature. | children – the cause of physical and psychological inconveniences |

Source: compiled by the author based on the materials of these series and analytical reviews [17; 20; 21]

Based on this table, it can be concluded that the key factors determining the choice of conscious rejection of children are value-rational. In the value system of the heroines of the series, either professional development, career, or creative self-realization are located above the value of parenthood. The attitude towards non-parenthood is also formed by such social motives as the assessment of children as hindrances to social activity, and even motives related to love and marital relations (children as a hindrance to marital relations). A number of these characters are characterized by experiencing traumatic circumstances in childhood, as a result of which they protect their psyche from potentially traumatic situations associated with the appearance of children in their lives. The structure of the motives of non-parenthood in the characters of the series is diverse and quite deeply drawn.

The conducted plot analysis of the series shows that in foreign TV series, along with hyperbolized images of feminist women and "childfree", having some caricature features (Brienne of Tarth and Arya Stark from "Game of Thrones", Miriam Maisel from "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel", Miss Marple from Agatha Christie's detective series, characters from the Marvel and DC film universes), widely there are quite organic female characters who are "childfree". In the domestic series "childfree"-ideology can be found only in hyperbolized characters with a very rough and superficial "drawing" of the character. Moreover, characteristically, in Russian TV series such characters, as a rule, are forced (by the last series) to change their position or admit their wrongness. But it is necessary to note significant differences in the frequency of appearance of female characters, which can be attributed to "childfree", in foreign and domestic TV series. If in foreign TV series almost every popular TV series has at least one such character, then in the Russian content "childfree"-characters among women are rather rare.

The data obtained by us are consistent with the materials and results of other studies. For example, O.N. Voroshilova, studying the image of a modern woman on the materials of domestic magazines, comes to the conclusion that magazines form a traditional image with the key components "mother woman" and "spouse woman", as well as the image of a "new domestic woman" with the actualized components "woman-sexual partner", "a beautiful woman" [5]. I.A. Balalueva comes to the conclusion about the transformation of the image of a woman and its incompleteness, ambivalence, weak drawing on the materials of the Russian press [3].

In order to assess the impact of TV series on the perception of gender roles of modern women, on the attitude to the phenomenon of "childfree", the authors conducted an empirical sociological study. The following techniques were used:

- a survey to study the peculiarities of perception of images of women in TV series was conducted among members of communities in social networks and profile communities (Vkontakte, Kinopoisk), viewing and discussing modern TV series;
- the survey "Anti-reproductive motives" (A.T. Kutsubei and I.V. Ponomareva [10]) was used to identify, systematize and study the severity of anti-reproductive motives in the attitudes of the interviewed women.

The interviewees are members of communities in social networks and profile communities (Vkontakte, Kinopoisk), whose communication is devoted to watching and discussing modern TV series. To obtain the data, the author's survey and a questionnaire were used to study the severity of anti-reproductive motives in society (A.T. Kutsubei and I.V. Ponomareva [10]). The study involved 410 women aged 18 to 49 years.

Based on the results obtained through the questionnaire, a sociological portrait of a woman who pays great attention to watching foreign and domestic TV series was formed. This is a woman aged 30 to 35 years (48%), mostly employed and working full-time (38%) or working remotely/freelancing (33%). The marital status of women is different: married women (27%) and women who have a permanent partner with whom they live together (so-called de facto marriage) (30%). Single women make up 20% of the sample, having a partner,

but not living together with him – 23%. In the sample, only 38% of women have children, of which 18% have one child, 20% have two or more children.

Modern women watch TV series mainly in online cinemas by subscription (35%), online on the Internet (12%) or download from the Internet (31%), only 22% of women watch TV series on TV. The advantage in choosing is given to current series that have been released in the last 1-3 years (43%), foreign series over domestic ones (74% to 26%, respectively). Every third woman (33%) watches TV series on average 1 time a week, 30% of women watch TV series 1-2 times a month, 18% of women watch TV series almost daily (several days a week), 19% of women watch TV series irregularly. The motives for watching TV shows by women are: the desire to relax and distract (40%), interesting and fascinating content (25%), fascinating images and characters (24%), informative content (11%).

A more detailed analysis of the perception of female images presented in the series showed that 56% of female viewers noted that interesting and memorable female images are presented in modern series. 40% of women were able to name at least three memorable female images, among which the images from "Game of Thrones" (Daenerys Targaryen, Arya Stark, Sansa Stark), "Grey's anatomy" (Meredith Gray, Cristina Yang), "Doctor House" (Lisa Cuddy), "Bones" (Temperance Brennan), "House of Cards" (Claire Underwood). Then the respondents were asked to note from 1 to 3 key characteristics of the image of the "ideal" woman from the popular TV series viewed over the past year. The most frequently mentioned characteristics of the image of the "ideal" woman in the modern TV series are shown in Fig. 1.

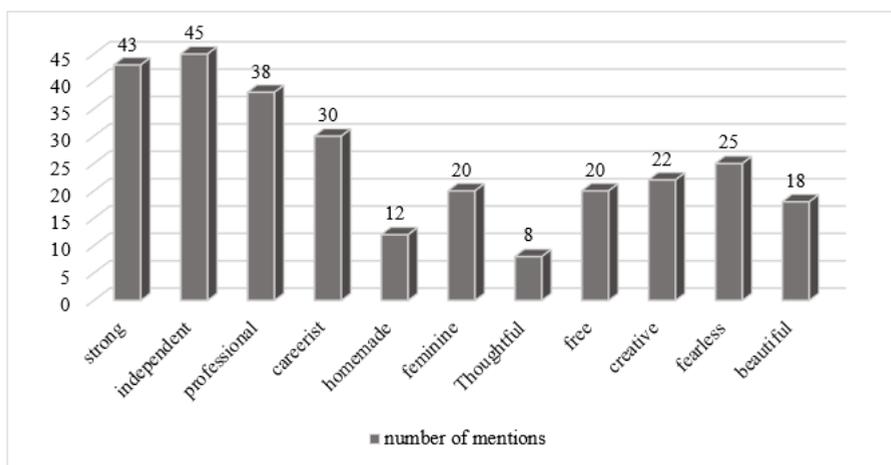


Fig. 1. Characteristics of the image of the "ideal" woman, formed under the influence of modern TV series.

Source: compiled by the author based on the materials of the survey (N=110).

The image of the "ideal" woman, formed and popularized by the series, is perceived by Russian women in the interrelation of two aspects: professional development (professional woman, career woman), the development of independence (strong woman, independent woman). The traits characteristic of the feminine gender role (caring, domestic, feminine and even beautiful) fade into the background.

The dominant anti-reproductive motives in society, according to women, were studied by us by using the questionnaire of A.T. Kutsubei and I.V. Ponomareva [10]. The women who took part in the study answered the question "What motives, in your opinion, stop modern women of childbearing age, physiologically able to give birth and raise a child, from having children?".

The data of the primary mathematical and statistical processing of the scales of the methodology are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Structure of anti-reproductive motives (N=110).

| Scale | M1 lack of material conditions | M2 lack of stability with a partner | M3 problems in marriage/relationships | M4 children are an obstacle to self-realization | M5 possible health problems | M6 possible consequences for appearance | M7 uncertainty about the future | M8 lack of housing | M9 restriction of social contacts | M10 stressful physical and mental load |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| average value | 3.58 | 1.40 | 1.96 | 3.86 | 1.94 | 2.12 | 3.10 | 3.04 | 3.66 | 1.42 |
| median | 3.00 | 1.00 | 2.00 | 3.00 | 2.00 | 2.00 | 2.50 | 2.50 | 3.00 | 1.50 |
| standard deviation | 1.32 | 1.40 | 1.11 | 1.21 | 1.09 | 1.32 | 0.95 | 1.42 | 0.86 | 1.23 |
| coefficient of variation | 36.87 | 100.00 | 56.63 | 31.35 | 56.19 | 62.26 | 30.64 | 46.71 | 23.50 | 86.62 |

Source: compiled by the author.

Based on the data obtained, it seems possible to conclude that the dominant motives for abandoning parenthood or doubts about choosing a parenting strategy, according to modern women who actively watch TV series, are: the motive "children are an obstacle to self-realization" (3.86 points), the motive "restriction of social contacts" (3.66 points), the motive "lack of material conditions" (3.58 points). The structure of the motives of non-parenthood in real women, in general, is largely similar to the structure of the anti-reproductive motives of women-"childfree" - the heroines of TV series: both those and others are dominated by the motives of abandoning children in favor of self-realization (in profession, career, creativity) and in favor of maintaining a high level of social activity. For real women, the picture of the motives for refusing parenthood is complemented by material motives that are not relevant or not drawn for the characters of the series. At the same time, the physical and mental inconveniences associated with the birth of a child are less disturbing to real women: they are not afraid of loads and stress.

4 Conclusions

Thus, the strategy of modern women's choice of forms of family and demographic behavior is the result of the influence of various factors, among which the role of such as viewing and discussing TV series in social networks, the heroines of which are business, professionally successful, creative, attractive women who choose not to give birth and raise children, is also revealed. At the same time, it was revealed that Russian TV series still do not actively draw an altered image of a woman with "childfree" characteristics, compared with foreign TV series. In a significant proportion of domestic TV series, a woman is either a mother and devotes herself to the family, or struggles to combine a professional career, personal self-determination with caring for children and fulfilling family responsibilities (although not always the heroines succeed). "Childfree"-female characters in Russian TV series at this

stage still have caricatured, hypertrophied features. In foreign TV series, the images of successful women have numerous features of "childfree" and at the same time are drawn quite organically. The main motives for refusing to give birth and raise children (anti-reproductive motives) of viewers of the series that are "childfree", in general, coincide with the anti-reproductive motives of the characters of the watched series, which, together with the high recognition of the characters, is evidence of the active impact of foreign series on the mass consciousness of the female audience.

As a result, on the one hand, the modern TV series seeks to reflect the realities of life in its scenes, to create an image of a real woman, close to reality, in order to captivate the audience with its help, to increase ratings. On the other hand, the series to a certain extent "plants" the created image to the audience, forms a motive for imitation. As a result, the series and its content affects the consciousness of representatives of both sexes, dictates to them a certain perception of the world and themselves in this world, a certain attitude towards themselves and their partner with an orientation towards the ideal woman depicted in the series. And since a successful modern woman from the series chooses a strategy of non-parenthood, the female audience, first at the level of emotional perception, and then at the level of value-rational choice, reproduces a similar strategy in real life.

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