

THE CONSTRUCTS OF MASCULINITY IN THE CULTURE OF RUSSIAN WORKING-CLASS YOUTH

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Abstract

Purpose: The study is aimed to research the means and patterns of masculinity constructing in the working-class culture of modern Russia. Both the practices of producing its multiple forms in daily interaction and the stable structures of social inequality, which consolidate gender order at the institutional level, have been considered. The article also provides an analytical review of current studies of the working-class masculinity regimes in post-industrial societies.

Methodology: The empirical base of the research is represented by the mass survey of 1534 respondents living in the Ural Federal District of Russia. The participants were working-class young people aged 16 to 29 years and occupied in the field of industry, technical maintenance, and customer service. The processing of research results was carried out using a statistical package IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20.

Main Findings: It was found that the remaining structural disproportion between sectors of the economy in the level of remuneration and the gender composition of workers determines translation and reproduction of the male breadwinner pattern that has power in the family on the basis of control over economic resources.

Applications of this study: The results of the study can be used in the teaching of sociology, gender studies, and cultural studies; it can also be applied by local policymakers while developing social policy programs targeted on the regarded social group.

Novelty/Originality of this study: In the current research we have examined a specific group at the intersection of three stratification features: social class (the working class representatives), gender (men's and women's view of the masculine construct) and age (the youth of three age cohorts). The attention was paid both to the cultural production of multiple forms of masculinity and to the continued dominance of social inequality and suppression' structures.

Keywords: Working-class, Working-class Youth, Masculinity, Gender, Gender Regime, Hegemonic Masculinity.

INTRODUCTION

Studies of masculinity as one of the research directions of gender sociology focus on the everyday life of the working class in the late 1970s. By that time the post-industrial transformation destroyed the traditional foundations of men dominance in this social environment. Gender regimes of the Russian working class rarely become study objects while Russian sociologists also point to the crisis of the traditional model of masculinity caused by the negative consequences of deindustrialization in the 1990s. It led to an increase in destructive physical practices of alcoholization, narcotization, and violence (Zdravomyslova, Temkina, 2002; Tartakovskaya, 2002; Vanke, 2014: 154). At the same time, the reductionist interpretations of the working class are criticized in the current discourse of gender studies; the focus is shifted to the postulation of its multiple forms and practices of embodiment in everyday life.

The discussion in this problem field unfolds within the framework of two conceptual directions: a discursive constructivist approach emphasizing the fluid, procedural nature of gender differences as derivatives of everyday practices in a specific local context, and an approach focusing on the importance of generally accepted categorizations, such as class, gender, and ethnicity, for the consolidation and reproduction of social inequality structures in modern capitalist societies (McDowell, 2004: 46). Based on the methodological aspects of our study, the second position seems to be more relevant.

In this article, we will focus on the forms of embodiment of the working class masculinity in modern Russia. The research objective is to study the means and patterns of masculinity constructing in the working-class culture within the social context of a provincial city. We will pay attention both to the cultural production of multiple forms of masculinity (variable, fragmented and often contradictory gender constructs embodied in everyday discourses and practices) and to the continued dominance of social inequality and suppression' structures (relatively stable gender orders reproduced at the institutional level).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Updating of the research of masculinity regimes in the last third of the twentieth century was due to a change in the social position of women in the post-industrial society, which problematized the male breadwinner dominant and normative pattern. In the late 1970s, the working class was observed as a carrier of conservative ideology in the conventional discourse on gender roles. However, at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, empirical studies showed that the men's gender attitudes in this social group had also undergone changes and fragmentation (Segal, 1990). At that time

arguments regarding the defining markers of the construct of the working-class masculinity concentrated around manual labor, the workplace, and wages (Connell, 1991: 142). The problem statement of the working class masculinity belongs to the British author A. Tolson (Tolson, 1977). Among the early studies of this problem works of M. Donaldson should be noted. Using the comparative analysis of four English-speaking countries, he came to the conclusion that masculinity in the culture of the working class was formed at the intersection of two decisive factors: everyday family-household practices and the workplace (Donaldson 1987). Some left-leaning studies have examined how the everyday masculine culture of industrial enterprises forms and reproduces class subordination (Willis, 1979), constructs and translates patriarchal order (Cockburn, 1983) and alienated sexuality (Lippert, 1977).

Neoliberal capitalism has changed the conditions, the organizational model, and the interaction's macro-policy in the workplace. Having lost hope of secure employment in the industrial sector, men were forced to move into the service sector. In addition, they lost the ability to reproduce the customary model of masculinity based on the value of physical labor, salaries and the subordinate position of women in the household. Retail and fast-food work required a "service with a smile" ignoring the customers' rude or neglect, tolerance of permanent control, obedience to bosses, and control over fleshlessness and sexuality, which contradicted the notions of masculinity prevailing in the work environment (Nixon, 2009). Trying to distance from routine service work requiring so-called "emotional labor" and servility, men refused this available type of unskilled labor or left such employment quickly (Lindsay, McQuaid, 2004; Roberts, 2013). On the other hand, employers preferred to hire women defining the behavioral signals and external attributes of working-class masculinity as a potential threat (McDowell, 2004: 51). Therefore, the post-industrial transformation in Western Europe and the United States put men from this social class in an even more disadvantageous position than women due to their external attributes, gender attitudes, and attitudes to power and submission. There was an increase in violence, xenophobia and alcohol abuse, which played a compensatory role in supporting the crumbling masculinity model. In turn, this led to moral panic and the demonization of "white working-class men" in the media and scientific discourse, which has persisted and worsened at the present time.

The need for sociological attention to these processes and the development of effective solutions for the social policy has caused an increased interest in masculinity and the emergence of new more subtle analytical models. A significant role in the formation of modern axiomatics of this research field was played by the works of R. Connell. Having problematized the stable concepts of "gender roles" and "identities", the author considers masculinity as a socially constructed and temporally changeable form of a life project that transforms the bodily differences of men and women into "gender" as a social process. The construction of multiple models of masculinity as gender varieties is realized and can be found in social practices at different levels: personal, physical, cultural or institutional. In Connell's works the differences between "hegemonic" masculinity (socially dominant but not necessarily the most common) and protest one subordinate to discredited or suppressed forms (homosexual masculinity) are identified and argued (Connell, 1991).

Despite recognition by the scientific community, the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" has been criticized for narrow-mindedness and reductionism (Whitehead, 2002). Researchers emphasize that the apparent internal unity of this model is actually a collection of conflicting elements (Demetriou, 2001: 349); in addition, in each individual historical period, there is more than one version of the dominant form of masculinity (Anderson, 2005). Taking into account the criticism, we believe that the Connell's theory retains its value as a research tool, as it includes both an analysis of the structural relations of power and the diverse everyday gender practices.

In the current discourse of gender studies, positive changes are noted in the adaptation of the dominant forms of working-class masculinity to the requirements of the service sphere. It is claimed that the nature of service labor no longer poses a threat to masculinity, "many working-class men find themselves in this kind of work," and successful communication with a client brings a sense of work satisfaction (Lupton, 2006: 117). At the same time, the long-established construct of masculinity is still in the working-class men's minds as a model sample. It can be evidenced by recent studies that point at the avoiding practice of "serving" to clients and the continued desire for physical work at retail enterprises (Roberts, 2013: 675).

METHODOLOGY

An analysis of relevant approaches to the study of gender and class issues intersection shows the applicability of using the methodology of "agency within the structure" proposed by R. Settersten and L. Gannon. It allows combining a holistic algorithmic approach (when the life course is considered as organized integrity within structurally defined characteristics) with the hermeneutical outlook in the study of biography as a set of specific events, ways of their legitimation and reflection by working-class youth (Settersten, Gannon, 2005). The combination of approaches provides an opportunity to carry out a deep sociological analysis of the relations between the macro-social and personal aspects of masculinity construction. It helps to look at the structural forming factors and a lot of affective flows generated by specific situations of social interaction.

A place of the new working class in the social structure of Russian society and western approaches to its conceptualization has been analyzed in our recent book (Gavrilyuk, 2019). It was revealed that in the Soviet and post-Soviet tradition it was customary to oppose the class and stratification approaches since the first one was associated with Marxism exclusively. This led to a substitution of notions in Russian sociology: the "middle class" was interpreted as a

stratum, and the “working class” was replaced by euphemisms (for example, the “base segment” in the works of T. I. Zaslavskaya ([Zaslavskaya, 1997](#)). In modern Russian sociology the question of the criteria and the main features of the working class, which make it possible to draw a clear distinction between it and other social groups, have not been raised.

Within the framework of the study, the working class is considered as a group of employees who are not involved in management and do not have property rights in the organization where they work; they are employed in all areas of material production and service; their work is routinized and divided into standardized algorithm-fueled segments and has quantitative standardization of results. There are the criteria for separating the working class from other classes and stratification groups: attitude to property, participation in management at a particular enterprise, and content of work. The internal differentiation of the modern working class is associated with the influence of factors such as the form of employment, which determines the degree of employment’s stability; the presence or absence of social guarantees (from permanent employment to illegal precarious work); employment sphere (employed workers in the real sector of the economy, including commodity production in the field of agriculture, and workers employed in the service); income level; the degree of routine labor (from clearly regulated, standardized to some degree of freedom in decision-making); lifestyle and cultural capital (from groups whose lifestyle and cultural practices are close to the middle class to marginalized and socially excluded groups).

Having analyzed a specific problem of this article we move away from the binary contrast between masculine and feminine and concentrate attention on the theoretical assumption of multiple gender models in modern culture included in the working environment. The specific social group was examined at the intersection of three stratification features: social class (the working class representatives), gender (men’s and women’s view of the masculine construct) and age (the youth of three age cohorts) ([Hancock, 2007](#); [Jackson, Berkowitz, 2005](#); [Lee, Waithaka, 2017](#)). At the empirical level, the most general structures of the gender order in the family sphere and in the workplace were analyzed: men’s normative social roles, stereotypes of everyday performance of men’s gender roles, and gender restrictions and privileges.

The empirical basis of the research is presented by the mass survey of young working-class representatives from different occupation spheres. The data collection was carried out from April until July 2018 in the Ural Federal District of Russia including three major cities (Ekaterinburg, Tyumen, Kurgan) and typical rural settlements of this area. Participants were 1534 emerging adults, a target multilevel sample type was implemented on four criteria – the age range from 16 to 29 divided into cohorts of 16-19 (33%), 20-24 (33.4%) and 25-29 (33.6%), according to the standard of official Russian statistics; gender - men (50.3%) and women (49.7%); place of living – city (76.2%) and countryside (23.8%) of the Ural Federal District; occupation sphere – commodity production, including agricultural sphere (45.2%) and in the service sector (54.8%). Participants in the study were selected randomly from the panel. Since we had taken only employed part of working-class youth as an object under study, the survey was conducted mostly at the workplaces by the prior arrangement with the management of companies. The younger cohort of the sample aged 16 – 19 was questioned at the places of study (vocational education institutions), but in so doing, only employed part of students was selected to take part in the research. Participants were informed about the purpose and length of the study, the content of the questions and the intended use of the data. None of them was paid or provided with other compensation in return for their participation.

The processing of the research results was carried out using a statistical package IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20. The main types of statistical analysis of quantitative research data (frequency analysis and contingency table analysis) were used to identify general trends. Frequency tables with ordinal and nominal scales have been described. To determine the presence of correlation in the contingency tables, the statistical criterion χ^2 (Pearson's chi-squared test) has been used,

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

Social Positions Based on Gender Differences

Empirical evidence indicates the presence of the following significant markers of the traditional gender order in the working-class culture of modern Russia such as a man’s ability to provide for his family, initiate romantic relationships and play the traditional role of romantic “courtship” to a girl. Other parameters related to constructing gender into everyday practices and institutional constraints were assessed less warranted by respondents (see Figure 1).

The continuing contradiction between the patriarchal society’s structure and women’s career intentions is evident in the analysis of the working-class youth’s attitude to two mutually exclusive statements. The vast majority of respondents (93.6% agree and 59.9% show strong agreement) believe that “a man should earn more than a woman to keep his family,” but with the fact that “men dominate in our society; women have little chance to make a career” only 27.3% agree, another 30.6% of respondents partially agree. It follows that young people are not fully grasping the connection between the patriarchal order which they support in the workplace (higher incomes for men imply fast promotion and better positions in the organizational hierarchy) and the problem of the “glass ceiling” in women's careers.

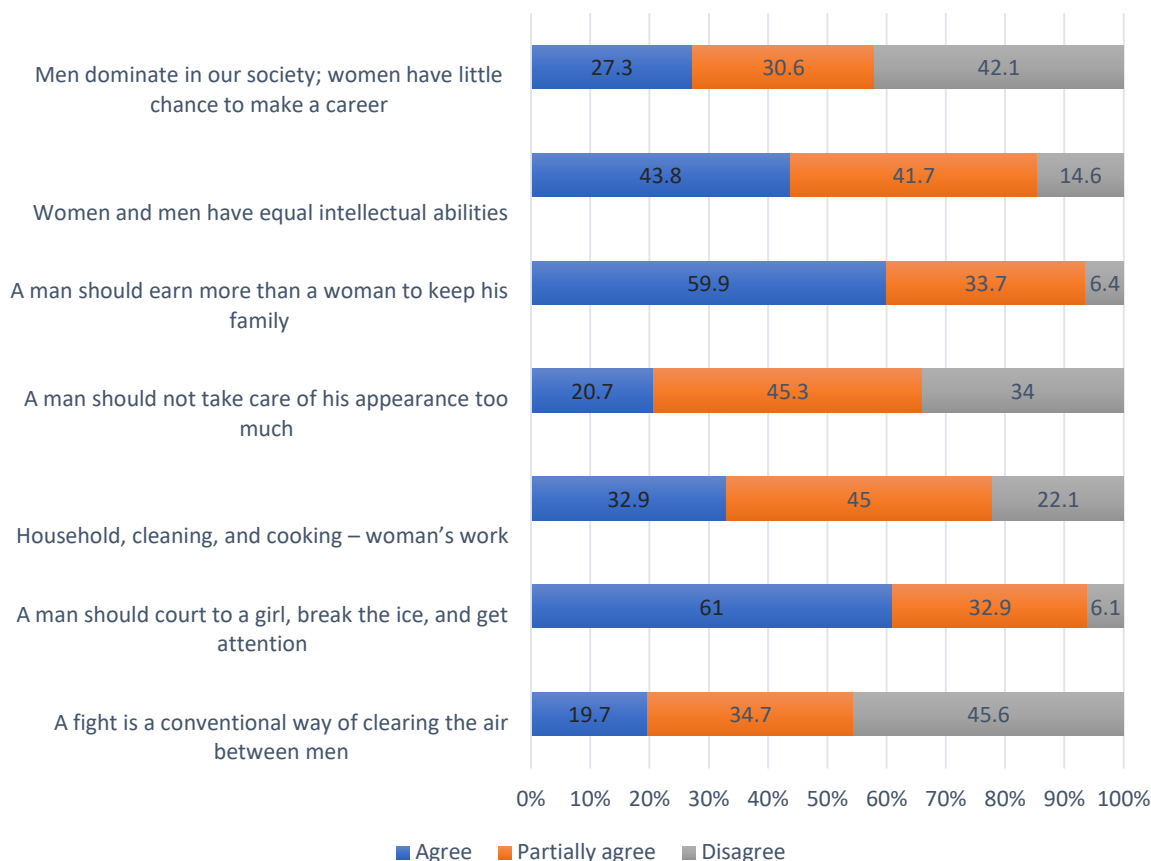


Figure 1: Distribution of answers to the question: “Do you agree with the following statements?” (% of the number of respondents)

No gender differences were found among respondents who disagree with the need for men's financial dominance. Moreover, the working-class young women are more confident in the need to maintain and reproduce this key foundation of patriarchy (63.3% of women and 56.5% of men fully agree with the statement about the role of men as “breadwinners”). That confidence strengthens with the increase of age: slightly less than 30% of respondents in the age cohorts of 15–19 and 20–24 fully agree with the statement; in the age cohorts of 25–29 confidence increases to 42.5%. The normative pattern of the breadwinner is the strongest among young people living in rural areas (95% of respondents support it; 66.1% of them fully share the attitude put in this statement, while 58% of urban working youth show absolute solidarity with it).

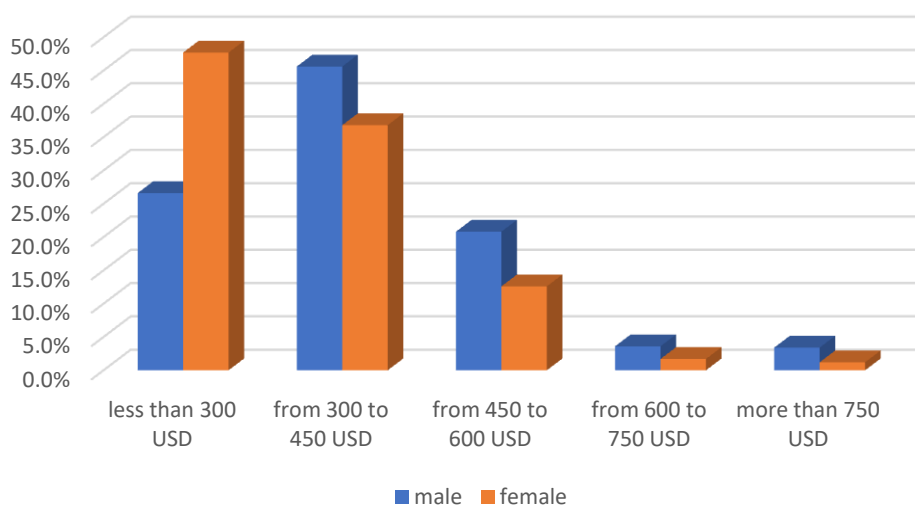


Figure 2: The real income level of the working-class youth (% of the gender group)

In assessing the statement of men's dominance in society and women's little chances of career progression there were no significant differences in gender, place of residence and employment. However, young people's confidence in the inevitability of a patriarchal order increases as they are growing-up (41.6% in the older age cohort fully agree with the statement, while in the younger group only 23.5% agree with that; in the middle age cohort of 20-24 (the period of professionalization and the beginning of a career) the level of agreement is reduced to 16.4%).

The indicated above respondent's positions have structural grounds, which are confirmed by data on their real income level. Figure 2 shows a significant gender pay gap in workforce positions (but not only the competitive and attractive managers' positions and highly qualified specialists, as it is commonly believed).

At the same time, the gender distribution of workers in the industrial sectors and services varies about 70/30 (see Figures 3 and 4).

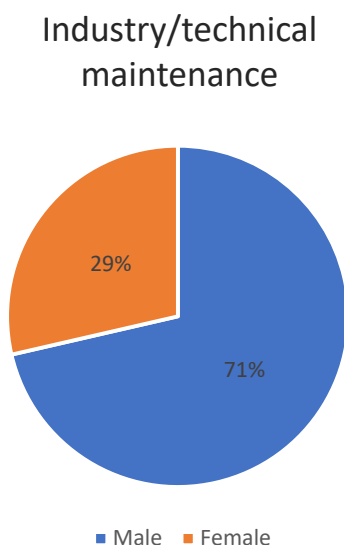


Figure 3: Gender distribution of young workers in the industry and technical maintenance (% of the number of respondents employed in this field)

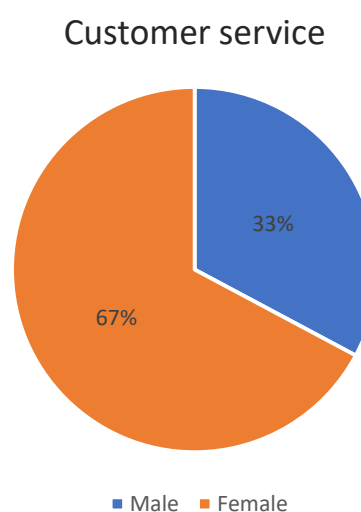


Figure 4: Gender distribution of young workers in the customer service (% of the number of respondents employed in this field)

The persisting structural imbalance between economic sectors in the rate of salary and gender composition of workers (46.2% employed in the service have salaries below 300 US dollars, and 37.8% employed – below 450 US dollars; mostly women) determines the translation of the normative attitude on the reproduction of the breadwinner pattern, who has power in the family on the basis of control over economic resources. Consequently, having the same class status, men and women, engaged in routine labor, still have non-equal financial opportunities. At the same time, only 14.6% of respondents have an essential belief in natural gender inequality based on the intellectual supremacy of men over women. Less than half (43.8%) believe that men and women have equal intellectual abilities and about the same number of respondents (41.7%) do not dare to make their attitude clear to this issue.

Gender Relations in a family

The analysis of youth attitudes to issues of everyday men's dominance in the family sphere focuses on assessing the compulsory component of the traditional patriarchal family – domestic woman's work. Studies by a number of Western authors indicate that a new form of masculinity is emerging as emotional sensitivity and involvement, respect for a woman, and an egalitarian position regarding family roles. A key parameter is man's participation in household and child care (Gill, 2003). Nevertheless, despite the rejection by most western countries of the patriarchal family model and almost universally equal participation of women in the labor market, studies show that women do most of the household chores (Thébaud, 2010). As a rule, women do routine work at a strictly defined time, excluding the possibility of moving it in time (for example, cooking) (Coltrane, Shih, 2010). Men, on the other hand, are responsible for those types of domestic work that are performed sporadically and can be delayed (for example, minor repairs). It gives them more time for leisure activities (Craig, 2006). Russian authors also note a greater gender imbalance in the male worker's attitudes regarding family responsibilities compared with the middle class (Meshcherkina, 2002; Lipasova, 2017). So, in the study of A. Lipasova, it is noted that beliefs about desirable gender roles in working families often do not correspond to the real situation. Men interviewed by the author declared the "protector" and "breadwinner" models as normative, but in reality, the heads of families did not always correspond to these ideal types showing irresponsibility, while their wives had to work in a "double-shift" (Lipasova, 2017).

Among the participants in our survey, a significant differentiation of views is manifested (Table 1). The results of the study show that young people are still interested in maintaining the patriarchal model for domestic work distribution. Representatives of the older age cohort who already have experience of marriage or cohabitation are also more inclined to agree with the statement about cleaning and cooking as “women's work”. There are no differences between rural and urban youth in assessing this issue.

Table 1: Distribution of answers to the question of agreement with the statement “Household, cleaning, and cooking – woman’s work” (% by respondents’ groups)

Youth groups	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree	Total
By gender groups				
Men	41.1	41.5	17.4	100.0
Women	24.4	48.5	27.1	100.0
By age cohorts				
Age of 15–19	27.3	48.1	24.6	100.0
Age of 20–24	28.5	46.9	24.6	100.0
Age of 25–29	42.5	40.0	17.5	100.0
Respondents’ groups by place of residence				
City	32.7	44.6	22.7	100.0
Village	33.3	46.1	20.6	100.0
Total by the respondents’ array	32.9	45.0	22.1	100.0

Masculinity Constructs in Everyday Interactions

Further, we pay attention to the masculinity constructs in the sphere of everyday interactions embodied in the attitudes of the new working-class youth.

Table 2: Distribution of answers to the question of agreement with the statement “A man should court to a girl, break the ice, and get attention” (% by respondents’ groups)

Youth groups	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree	Total
By gender groups				
Men	53.0	39.9	7.1	100.0
Women	69.1	25.8	5.1	100.0
By age cohorts				
Age of 15–19	58.5	33.7	7.8	100.0
Age of 20–24	57.4	37.2	5.4	100.0
Age of 25–29	67.0	27.9	5.1	100.0
Respondents’ groups by place of residence				
City	59.4	33.6	7.0	100.0
Village	66.2	30.7	3.1	100.0
Total by the respondents’ array	61.0	32.9	6.1	100.0

As Table 2 shows, the conflicting expectations of women are observed not only in the above analysis of the dilemmas of female professional self-fulfillment and adherence to the “breadwinner” model in the family but also in assessing the significance of everyday communication rituals. A much more pronounced desire for a conventional pattern of gender interaction of women compared with young men is manifested in the assessment of the statement “A man should court to a girl, break the ice, and get attention”: almost 70% of them expect conventional “courtship” and special attention from a man; among the young men about half are ready for these actions.

Gender standardization of everyday practices was also revealed by analyzing respondents' attitudes to a number of evaluative judgments corresponding to stereotypes about hegemonic masculinity in a given social environment:

everyday violence (a fight as a common and “normal” practice of resolving conflict situations between men) and fears about excessive care of appearance (A “man” should not give too much attention to his appearance, as this is an indirect marker of homosexuality). The survey results indicate that women generally are not inclined to normalize violence in the men’s environment: 60% of them do not agree with the statement “A fight is a conventional way of clearing the air between men” (a little more 30% of men do not support this statement). About a quarter of male respondents believe that men’s violence is inevitable and normal; more than 40% “partially agree” probably appealing to take into account the context of a particular conflict situation.

The respondents’ opinions regarding the men’s appearance are divided. About 20% of respondents of both sexes fully agree with the statement “A man should not make much effort in personal caring”, man more often choose the alternative answer “partially agree” (52%), women – “disagree” (39.9%) and “partially agree” (38.6%). In general, the pattern that is conventional for the Russian working class is preserved: women would like their partners to implement the increased focus on personal caring. However, young men are not sure whether increased attention to appearance is combined with the dominant masculinity construct in the work environment (exceptions are visiting gym, tattoo). Interestingly, this opinion is least supported by the most mobile age cohort of men aged 20-24 (only 13.3%), while among the group of young adults aged 25-29, more than 30% agree with the statement.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the analysis of quantitative data shows that conservatism and patriarchal family attitudes, which are attributed to the working class in mass culture, while remaining the dominant reference family model, nevertheless do not find unambiguous support of the vast majority of youth and have little to do with the real situation in working-class families. In view of the extremely low income, the classical patriarchal family model (a man is a breadwinner, a woman is a housewife) is rather an ideal-typical construction, accessible only to the middle class in Russia. Having the same class status, men and women of the working class, engaged in routine labor, still don’t have equal financial opportunities. It means that salaries in the service sector, where women are the majority, are still much lower than in industry, mining, and construction. Consequently, economic factors reinforce the conditions for the reproduction of structural men’s dominance practices in the family sphere, stipulating the preservation of a positive normative attitude towards maintaining the breadwinner pattern who has power in the family on the control over economic resources. Therefore, the statement of one of the first researchers of the working class masculinity A. Tolson, relating to the end of the 1970s, has not lost its relevance and is still reflected in the collective attitudes of working youth: “In our society, the main focus of masculinity is the wage” ([Tolson, 1977: 58](#)).

The implementation of the masculine model of behavior in everyday practice is assessed by respondents ambiguously. The survey identified the most common trends, but this problem requires a more in-depth analysis using qualitative methods. The desire of women for the conventional pattern of romantic “courtship” does not fully correspond to the model of masculinity that dominates among young men of the working class. Almost 40% of working-class women do not find the contradiction between masculinity and personal caring, but most young men still have doubts, considering increased attention to appearance as a threat to their masculinity. Also, most women are not inclined to normalize violence as part of the masculinity construct, while two-thirds of men consider fighting to be a normal way to resolve conflicts. In this regard, it is possible to speak about a tendency to the difference of the expectations of young men and women in the sphere of daily behavior and communication: the most part of young men still tends to hegemonic masculinity model for the working class (manual work, physical force, brutal appearance, demonstrative insubordination of the power, domination over the woman), while young women, accepting the patriarchal order and realizing the position of it in general, are ready to the execution of their gender role in the case of financial support and protection from their men; moreover, the abovementioned indirect features are not the indicators of masculinity from their point of view.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

The survey identified the most common trends, but this problem requires more in-depth analysis using qualitative methods to understand working-class gender regimes of everyday culture. In the next stage of our research, the explanations should be given how the masculine models of behavior have been produced, transmitted, and changed in everyday practices.

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