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**FAMILY IDENTITY PECULIARITIES OF WOMEN WHO HAVE MADE  
THE DECISION TO TERMINATE PREGNANCY AND ARE IN A STATE  
OF LEGAL OR CIVIL MARRIAGE**

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In this article we reflect on the relevance of the family identity research of the women who have made the decision to terminate their pregnancy. Family identity is defined as a specific form of personal and group identity that includes three aspects of family and self -perception as a family member: structural, emotional-evaluative and cognitional. Evaluation research of the women in a state of legal and civil marriage is given. General and specific peculiarities of their family identity are emphasized. General peculiarities are interpersonal relationships perception in the family as distanced and family image rigidity. Various active-passive positions inside a married couple, common for women in legal or civil marriages, are attributed to specific peculiarities.

**Keywords:** decision to terminate pregnancy, legal marriage, civil marriage, family identity, structural, emotional-evaluative and cognitional aspects of family identity.

## **ОСОБЕННОСТИ СЕМЕЙНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ ПРИНЯВШИХ РЕШЕНИЕ О ПРЕРЫВАНИИ БЕРЕМЕННОСТИ ЖЕНЩИН, СОСТОЯЩИХ В ОФИЦИАЛЬНОМ И ГРАЖДАНСКОМ БРАКЕ**

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В статье отражена актуальность исследования семейной идентичности принявших решение о прерывании беременности женщин. Дается определение семейной идентичности как особой формы личностно-групповой идентичности, включающей три аспекта восприятия семьи и себя, как члена семьи: структурный, эмоционально-оценочный и когнитивный. Приводятся данные сравнительного исследования женщин, состоящих в официальном и неофициальном браке. Выделяются общие и специфические особенности их семейной идентичности. Общими особенностями являются восприятие межличностных отношений в семье как дистанцированных и ригидность образа семьи. К специфическим особенностям относятся разные позиции в распределении активности-пассивности в супружеской паре, характерные для женщин, состоящих в официальном и гражданском браке.

**Ключевые слова:** решение о прерывании беременности, официальный брак, гражданский брак, семейная идентичность, структурный, эмоционально-оценочный и когнитивный аспекты семейной идентичности.

### **Introduction**

Nowadays birth control issues are in the center of state and public attention. Unfortunately, they include not only the wide range of financial support, childbearing stimulation and mother-baby health support issues. Birth control is the necessary condition for the individual freedom in the way of life in the modern society. For decades birth control issues were resolved with the help of wide

availability of artificial pregnancy termination and limited contraceptive methods in Russia. The analytics say, in our country, the national model of family planning has been formed mainly based on artificial pregnancy termination as the birth control method [5].

The understanding of the woman's right to pregnancy termination has become one-sided. However, the realization of this right is associated not with the feeling of freedom, but with the various trauma risks: physical, psychological, spiritual. This trauma often becomes an irreversible loss. Thus, medical institutions engage psychology practitioners to help women who are ready to terminate their pregnancy. The research in psychological consequences of pregnancy termination and its factors has been intensified [1], [9], [15], [16]. Such research investigates, for example, what financial and social circumstances affect the decision, the role of the outside pressure, the likelihood of the psycho-emotional state appearing after the abortion. Meanwhile, the pregnancy termination issue is not a local, isolated episode in a woman's life. However, it is a part of her feminine self-realization which is included in her family life and gradually becoming a part of the woman's self-consciousness and her family history with the numerous after-effects. Thus, the issue of pregnancy termination in psychological context has to be resolved through the woman's family identity [3], [7].

It is said that childbearing issues are directly connected with the family living arrangements. Thus, we should count the fact that these family arrangements are not limited by legal marriage. The research shows that in Russia the number of unmarried men and women is on the increase. The birthrate is decreasing and the number of divorces is increasing, sexual contacts outside marriage are widespread. It is registered that the number of families where the parents are not officially married is on the increase to [2]. Moreover, the statistics show that the majority of first pregnancies occurs outside marriage [12], [13].

According to aforesaid, a pilot research into family identity of the officially unmarried women, who have decided to terminate their pregnancies, was conducted.

Family identity is understood as a specific form of personal-group identity [10], [11], [14] which is a means of assimilation and integration of social experience in the important sphere of a person's life. Family identity is a subjective image of belonging to a family group, reflecting group characteristics and its function in it in structural, emotional-evaluative and cognitional aspects. This family identity provides regulation mechanisms of positioning and self-manifestation of the individuals as family members [3].

### **Selection and research methods**

Women, undergoing medical examinations by gynecologists and who decided to terminate their pregnancies, took part in our survey: 10 legally married women and 10 women in civil marriages. All participants already had one or more children, the respondent's age was between 25 and 40 years.

Following methods were used:

1) Structural aspect of family identity: projective drawing methods "Family sociogram" described by E.G. Eidemiller and I.M. Nikolskiy [8] for the detection of subjective family image peculiarities in real and ideal variants;

2) Emotional-evaluative aspect of family identity: "CTR" – "Colour test for relations" by A.M. Etkind [4] for the detection of the emotional dependency level of the family objects and for the detection of the emotional sense of the attitude towards these objects (list of evaluation objects: myself, my spouse, my family, my daughter, my son, my father, my mother, husband's father, husband's mother, past, present and future);

3) Cognitive aspect of family identity: "Set of grates" by John Kelly[6] for the detection of the content of the meaning used by the respondents to characterize their families and themselves as a family member.

### **Results and discussion**

#### *Structural aspect of family identity*

Almost all the respondents defined the structure of a real family as nuclear, that is consisting of 2 generations, including spouses and children. Only 2 respondents,

one officially married, the other in a civil partnership, defined the structure of a family as extensive, including there a number of relatives. The common feature of all the respondents of both groups is that the interpersonal distance of the family members is characterized as remote in their perception. The other common characteristic for both groups is a rather high social value of the family and its members.

The drawings of the women who decided to terminate their pregnancy have a distinct peculiarity, specific just for this group of women which has never occurred before in other family identity researches. This peculiarity is a near-absence of family borders. There are two versions: either family members are drawn outside the circle edge or this circle means a child and the spouses are drawn near it separately, removed from each other. In all the sociograms of the women in civil partnerships a child is the most important family member and its integrator.

An ideal family image of the married women is nearly identical to the reality. It means that the respondents do not think their living arrangements can change and are focused on the stability of their family situation bordering on rigidity.

An ideal family image of the women in civil partnerships does not differ from the real one neither by the structure nor by the distance in relations between family members. Also women who define a child as a central figure of all family relations practically did not change the structural configuration of a family. Those who put the members of the family beyond the circle borders in a real image included them inside the family borders in an ideal version.

#### *Emotional-evaluative aspect of family identity*

We conducted a procedure to identify reliable differences with the help of an U-criterion by Mann – Whitney between the analyzed respondent groups using emotional importance indexes of family objects and time categories in the CTR methods. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

**Direction and reliability of the differences of the emotional importance between  
the groups of married women and women in civil partnerships**

evaluation object	compared groups
	official marriage – civil partnership
myself	
spouse	< ; 95%
my family	
son	> ; 95%
daughter	
my father	> ; 99%
my mother	< ; 95%
spouse's father	
spouse's mother	
past	
present	
future	> ; 95%

The data in this table should be viewed taking into account the fact that in the CTR method the lesser figure is referred to the greater emotional importance. Accordingly, we can state that for the married respondents their spouses and mothers carry a greater emotional value than for the respondents in civil partnerships. However, the importance of their sons and fathers is less than that of those in civil partnerships. Also, the temporal category of the future carries a lesser emotional value.

The CTR method lets us define the sphere of emotional importance of the evaluation object (desired, relevant, irrelevant and rejected). In Tables 2 and 3 there is the allocation data according to the spheres of assessed objects importance by the research participants.

Table 2

**Spheres of importance percentage ratio for the assessed objects in the CTR  
 method of the married women**

Spheres of emotional importance	Assessment objects											
	myself	spouse	family	son	daughter	my father	my mother	Spouse's father	Spouse's mother	past	present	future
desired	80	50	60	10	50	50	50	20	10	20	50	30
relevant	10	20	20	40	30	20	40	40	30	40	30	50
irrelevant	10	20	10	30	10	30	10	20	30	30	10	20
rejected		10	10	10	10			20	20	10	10	

Table 3

**Spheres of importance percentage ratio for the assessed objects in the CTR  
 method of women in civil partnerships**

Spheres of emotional importance	Assessment objects											
	myself	spouse	family	son	daughter	My father	My mother	Spouse's father	Spouse's mother	past	present	future
desired	80	10	40	60	50	10	20	40	30	30	40	90
relevant	10	20	10	10	40	30	20		30	20	20	
irrelevant	10	50	30	20		30	30	30	10	20	40	
rejected		20	20	10	10	30	30	30	30	30		10

As can be seen from Tables 2 and 3, own emotional importance is highly evaluated in both groups of respondents which corresponds with the majority of cases in the “desired” sphere. However, the representatives of both groups differ in the assessment of their spouses and family. The spouse assessments of the majority of the married women lie in the favourable spheres of “desired” and “relevant”. However, there is an opposite situation in the group of respondents in civil partnerships. Here most of the assessments lie in the unfavourable spheres of “irrelevant” and “rejected”. The absolute majority of family assessments are localized in the favourable spheres in the first group. Meanwhile, in the second group the ratio of favourable and unfavourable assessments is 50:50.

Colour meaning of family object assessments of the research participants is reflected in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4

**Percentage ratio of colour associations for the family objects and temporal categories of the married women**

Colour association	Assessment objects											
	myself	spouse	family	son	daughter	My father	My mother	Spouse's father	Spouse's mother	past	present	future
grey		30			10	10	10	10	30			
blue		10	30	20	20	10			10		10	30
green	40	20	20	20	10	30	30			30	30	
red	20		10	30	30	20	20	30	20	40	30	10
yellow	20		10	10	10		20	50	10	10	10	10
purple	10	20	20		20	20	10	10	10	10	20	40
brown	10	10	10	10		10	10		20			10
black		10		10						10		

Analyzing colour associations which can be viewed as a projection of the emotional meaning of the attitude towards certain objects the following can be noted. The married women associate themselves to a greater degree with active, energetically rich colours - green, red and yellow. As opposed to this they characterize their spouses with energetically subdued colours. Curiously, the spouse's father in this group is often associated with active and optimistic colours (red and yellow). The rest of the assessment objects were associated with the wide colour range without pronounced tendencies.

Table 5

**Percentage ratio of colour associations for the family objects and temporal categories of the women in civil relationships**

Colour association	Assessment objects											
	myself	spouse	family	son	daughter	My father	My mother	Spouse's father	Spouse's mother	past	present	future
grey	10	10	10	10	10	10		20	10		20	20
blue	20	10	10		30	20	10	30			20	10
green	10	30	10	40	20		20	0		30	10	20
red	30	30	20	20	10		10	20	20	20	30	10
yellow		10	40	20	20	10	10	0		20	20	10
purple	30				10	10	10	10	20	20		20
brown		10		10		30	30	10	30			
black			10			20	10	10	20	10		

The situation of the women in civil relationships has following peculiarities. The respondents of this group more often associate themselves with the energy-saving colours. Purple holds significant place in their choices. It contains some lack of realism and introversion. The spouse's parents are associated in the majority of cases with passive colours. The spouse is mostly associated with active and energetic colours. The similar tendency can be noted with regard to the son.

*Cognitive aspect of family identity*

As can be seen, the married women more often characterize their families from the point of view of closeness. The following characteristics are important for them: love and family social position. The women in civil partnerships use closeness to characterize their families three times less often. They often characterize a family from the point of views of social normativity. In their turn, the respondents from the first group make the social position of their family more important, assessing it as higher than average. Meanwhile, the respondents of the second group wish to "save" the social face, attributing to it an average status. The women in civil partnerships use "love" to characterize family relations three times less often than the married

women. Both of these groups characterize their families from the point of view of positive emotionality and communicative openness.

Table 6

**Frequency of various types of construct usage for the family and oneself as a member of the family assessment (%)**

Construct categories	Constructs	Frequency of construct usage respondents in different types of marriage			
		Official marriage		Civil partnership	
		Family assessment	Self assessment	Family assessment	Self assessment
Family structural characteristics	family belonging	3	9	4	14
	completeness and functional family structure	6	9	6	5
	family hierarchy	2	1	1	6
Relationship characteristics	cognitive (mutual understanding)	5	2	2	1
	emotional (love)	14	11	5	13
	behavioral (care)	2	14	5	8
	communicative (openness)	8	12	9	8
	closeness	33	-	11	-
Emotional state characteristics	positivism	12	4	8	8
	steadfastness	0	4	1	0
Social characteristics (social position)	social superiority	8	8	2	3
	social normativity	4	3	22	12
Instrumental characteristics (effectiveness in different types of activity)	instrumental superiority	1	5	2	0
	instrumental normativity	1	6	7	7
	will	0	1	1	3
Moral and ethical characteristics	responsibility	0	6	0	8
	spirituality	0	0	0	0
	kindness	1	9	4	4

While characterizing themselves as members of families, the women of both groups rather often use the fact of their belonging to a family, but the married women highlight their family position as a wife and a mother. Also, important characteristics

for them are care, communicative openness, love and kindness. And they attribute care and kindness to themselves more often than to their family on the whole. Social characteristic (superiority) is used to characterize themselves as often as to characterize their family. To characterize themselves responsibility construct is used as often.

The women in civil relationships characterize themselves more often from the point of view of expressing of love and social normativity. If the latter is in accord with the way they characterize their family, then love is not even considered to characterize the family on the whole. Also they attribute to themselves emotional positivity and embeddedness into dominance – subordination family system.

The women of both groups characterize themselves from the point of view of responsibility and do not use this construct to characterize their families.

The married women use instrumental characteristics to characterize themselves highlighting their different abilities. Meanwhile, the family is not characterized from the position of effectiveness of the activities.

## **Conclusion**

The results of the research show that the family identity of the women who have taken the decision to terminate pregnancy has common and specific peculiarities in comparison with the married women and those in civil partnerships.

Rigidity of the family image and the absence of the idea that these family relations can change are common for all the groups. Although these interpersonal family relations are perceived as distanced.

The women in civil relationships do not perceive their family as a whole with strict borders. A child is an integrator of such a family.

Emotional importance of a spouse is assessed by the married women sooner as high, and by the women in civil relationships as low. The married women attribute to themselves the characteristics of activity which are realized in caring and responsibilities. The spouse is attributed the characteristics of passivity. The women

in civil relationships attribute energetic and active characteristics to their spouses, and passive characteristics to themselves, realized in embeddedness into dominance – subordination family hierarchy system.

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