CHAPTER 27

'A Woman Isn't a Woman When She's not Concerned About the Way She Looks': Beauty Labour and Femininity in Post-Soviet Russia

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The quotation in the title highlights this chapter's key argument: that work on achieving a beautiful body (henceforth: 'beauty labour') is, and has long been, one of the most important elements of a discourse of normative femininity in Russian culture and society.[1] As the participant, Katya, says, a woman is simply not considered a woman if she does not worry about her appearance.[2]

This chapter demonstrates how women in contemporary Russia understand the achievement of a beautiful body as a central aspect of being a woman. It draws on feminist and gendered theoretical perspectives to explore beauty and femininity as social constructs in post-Soviet Russia. Rather than dwelling in too much detail upon elements of change in gender or gender-related discourses, I argue that post-Soviet trends related to beauty (for example, glamour and conspicuous consumption) have in some ways been facilitated by continuities in how women are viewed in Russian society.[3]

The 'concern' also mentioned in the title is an important aspect of how I conceptualise beauty and femininity discourses: displaying worries about one's body, and performing beauty labour in order to address these worries, essentially represents a striving to meet socio-cultural gender norms that stress beauty as a signifier of femininity. In this sense, I argue that a feminist theoretical perspective is at least as significant as a post-socialist perspective in exploring how beauty is understood in patriarchal Russian society.

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After a brief discussion of methods and feminist theory on beauty, I begin with a discussion of women's understandings of beauty labour as a form of bodily disciplinarity.[4] It is also a means of 'doing' or performing normative femininity.[5] In the empirical sections, I show how women understood beauty labour as a process which highlights gender differences. Women are seen to lose out from a pressure to be beautiful, as masculinity was not seen to draw on the same ideals and practices. The chapter draws links not only between beauty and normative femininity, but also between beauty and perceived professionalism. Beauty labour is seen as a means of lending women the confidence to succeed in the post-Soviet world of work, where the onus is on the individual rather than the collective. Finally, the chapter explores links between beauty, femininity and Russian national identity, picking up on previous work on the Soviet-Russian context and showing how women use these topics to frame their discussions of post-Soviet social change.[6]

Although the interviews I conducted were carried out with readers of women's magazines, the questions and discussion were not entirely focused on this topic. They also encompassed attitudes towards gender roles, beauty and conspicuous consumption. The examples used in this chapter demonstrate that this group of participants discussed beauty as a social category relevant to the majority of women. Given the content of these media, it may be posited that readers are more likely than the general female population to take an interest in beauty labour. Although I acknowledge that there may be certain social groups where women's bodily appearance is less critical to their perceived achievement of normative femininity, it is not always straightforward to predict which groups this may encompass.

Beauty and Femininity from the Soviet Era to the Present Day

A number of recent publications have discussed the importance of beauty and femininity to women during the Soviet era. Djurdja Bartlett's work challenges the Cold War stereotype of the dour, utilitarian Soviet fashion landscape and emphasises Soviet women's interest in looking beautiful.[7] Melanie Ilic's work on late Soviet beauty contests shows the social value of a beautiful appearance, even as this perspective clashed with some official Soviet norms.[8] Olga Vainshtein explores the significance of homemade cosmetics and style advice in Soviet-era women's magazines.[9] Yulia Gradskova draws on oral history interviews to examine how Soviet women understood beauty and femininity as performative, a perspective I will show is still very much in evidence today.[10]

Moving to aspects of change relating to gender and beauty in the post-Soviet era, the deregulation of the socio-cultural sphere led to some noticeable differences. For example, early post-Soviet advertisements for secretaries who were beautiful, slim or even willing to perform sexual favours have been well documented[11]; and the mass availability of pornography and the growing popularity of beauty contests,[12] even in prison,[13] point in the direction of a 'clear trend towards the commercialisation and objectification of women's bodies'

beginning in the Gorbachev period. Other trends, such as a culture of glamour[14] and conspicuous consumption,[15] have certainly brought about a changing cultural landscape in Russia, where feminine beauty has (at the very least, visually) been brought more to the forefront. However, I would argue that these changes have reframed rather than reformulated the links between beauty and femininity. From the Soviet era to the present day, femininity has been inextricably linked to a discourse of beauty and beauty labour. Below, I discuss how a feminist approach can help to deconstruct this discourse.

Theoretical Approaches to Gendered Beauty

Beauty has always been a central tenet of feminist thought. One significant feminist critique of how women's bodies are understood in Western society and culture is based on the assumption that, 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. Women, arguably to a greater extent than men, are judged on their ability to achieve a normative body, and it is assumed that bodily appearance is a direct result of their own lifestyle.[16] Naomi Wolf's 1991 book *The Beauty Myth* is a key text from this perspective, and puts forward a strong argument that a culture of beauty is limiting to women and contributes to gender inequality. Sheila Jeffreys' work expands on this idea with regard to the new millennium, exploring new consumer opportunities and technologies as increasing pressure on women to 'look good'.[17] Anderson et al. discuss how women's bodies and appearances are perceived to be the key resource they can draw upon in order to negotiate their position within social hierarchies, discussing how 'traits of beauty […] are perceived as assets capable of yielding privilege, opportunity and wealth'.[18] Kwan and Trautner empirically demonstrate the disadvantages women face for being seen as *less* beautiful, exploring education, work, and even the law.[19] Although some authors have argued that patriarchal structures mean women should take advantage of their 'ability' to exploit beauty as a form of social capital,[20] I would disagree. The pressures faced by women can be seen to result in the proliferation of women 'doing gender' via beauty labour, which points to an understanding of gender as a social construct which is understood performatively (that is, as negotiated and renegotiated on an ongoing basis), rather than being a stable facet of a subject's 'identity'. The first empirical section of the chapter below discusses this in more detail.

Beauty Labour as Disciplinarity

Some feminist scholarship has utilised Michel Foucault's work on bodily discipline and surveillance to critique social norms which encourage women to put their bodies under ongoing surveillance and to 'discipline' them via beauty labour (which encompasses a wide range of activities from dieting, to wearing make-up, to having cosmetic surgery).[21] Practices of bodily discipline 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.[22] 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.[23]

Participants' discussions reflected a view of the female body as in need of discipline and surveillance. This view was not always demonstrated in a straightforward dislike of their bodies, but rather in a tendency to view them in segmented parts. It is the parts that are in need of 'improvement':

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

> 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)

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 [*pause*] I wouldn't say that I'm terribly thin, but I'd like to put on a little weight. 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 and Oksana, both 22)

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 would they not? This suggests that the pressure for women to 'improve' their bodies according to an ideal of the feminine body is relevant to wider Russian culture.

Furthermore, despite the usual stress 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. Femininity is partly constructed 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' that has been a consistent discourse from the Brezhnev period to the present day.[24]

Participants often held a dichotomous understanding of femininity, which was constructed as both inherent (natural) and achieved.[25] 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. 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 when in fact it is performatively constructed via beauty labour, as I discuss further below.

Beauty Labour as Gender Performativity

Many participants spoke about beauty labour as specifically feminine work: as an inherent part of being a woman. For example, women 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)

Although women 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. Perceptions of appearance as significant to selfhood to others may be said to reflect a wider trend towards post-feminist notions of individualism linked to the body in certain types of literature and media.[26] This approach tends to highlight the capacity of the individual for self-improvement whilst neglecting genetics, personal circumstances, health or social structures, for example, all of which contribute to bodily appearance. In relation to contemporary Russia, this reflects patriarchal notions of women's role in society.

Furthermore, Diana's observations highlight the social penalties that failing to achieve an acceptable level of beauty may entail, implying a consciousness of the amount of beauty labour performed; she does not wish to look 'over the top'. This reflects continuities with the Soviet discourse of *kulturnost'*, which emphasised 'appropriateness' in dress rather than an overly individualistic or sexualised look for women.[27] Although individualism is more acceptable as a social value compared to the Soviet era, there is still a social pressure not to be *too* individual and to achieve the correct balance.

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)

Putting time, money and effort into performing femininity was perceived by Masha as directly linked to a woman's success in various spheres of life. This is a pragmatic response to patriarchal social norms: several studies have pointed to the benefits of achieving an appearance considered beautiful–and the penalties of failing to carry out beauty labour—for women outside of Russia.[28] 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 heterosexual romantic relationships and male attention. This is seen not as a product of mutual interests or compatibility, but a result of the woman's beauty labour and gender performance. 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, especially given the greater 'opportunities' for the consumption of beauty products and procedures in the post-Soviet era.

Women also talked about the extent to which creating a desirable body was in itself gendered—a task that women are socially expected to perform to a much greater extent than are men. As such, beauty labour was viewed not as confined exclusively to women, but certainly as a *feminised* activity. 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)

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 a perceived double standard which allows men lapses in personal grooming unthinkable for women, as they risk the loss of a valuable male partner.[29] 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, and 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)

Yulia's comments emphasise the high levels of personal grooming that women are expected to carry out, much more than is expected of men. The benefits that women perceive they will gain from beauty labour could also be linked to economic stability, given the stress on the man as breadwinner (*kormilets*) in Russian society.[30] This could be due to a belief that women may perceive their beauty as a form of aesthetic capital which they can turn into economic capital in the form of financial support from a male partner.[31]

Furthermore, men's efforts to work on their body are described as 'within limits' and linked to the active *participation* in sport, as opposed to purely physical appearance and being *passively* objectified by others. Research carried out in the early 1990s suggests that this is by no means a new phenomenon: one participant interviewed by Bridger, Kay and Pinnick noted the double standard for men and women's appearances in very similar language to Yulia and Zinaida: 'the men look such a mess and the woman have obviously taken such care and dressed really thoughtfully'.[32] Beauty labour is thus highly linked to an essentialised version of femininity:

> I think a woman isn't a woman when she isn't 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 [sic] 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)

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 make-up when she had not 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. Worries about how one's body appears to others are taken for granted as simply part of being a woman. This suggests that beauty labour can be seen as an essential part of gender performativity in contemporary Russia, and it creates pressures for women to which men are not subject in the same way. I would also highlight the personal failure women perceived, which reflects an understanding of the body as a signifier of a woman's individual worth.

Beauty Labour at Work

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

> For women it's important to be beautiful because a woman's success depends on a lot of things, including beauty. A person is judged by their clothes. If a man doesn't look good: oh well, perhaps he's brainy. But a woman? [*pause*] I don't remember who said this [*pause*] generally an intelligent woman can't look unattractive – she has to be good looking *as well* [as intelligent]. She can't go into a big company looking untidy, ungroomed, dressed badly, and ask for work. No one would take her on. (Marta, 23)

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 coming into contact with people, so you have to look 'one hundred per cent'. (Lyubov, 22)

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.

Marta highlights the additional, *gendered* pressure women face in achieving career success, whereby skills and achievements must also be accompanied by an acceptable level of beauty labour. This shows how beauty labour can be seen as a specifically feminine duty linked to one's professional life. For many women in this study, looking professional was associated with wearing makeup to hide undesirable (that is, unfeminine) features and highlight desirable ones.

As previously noted, scholars have discussed the phenomenon of women's job advertisements in the early post-Soviet period containing stipulations for women to possess certain normative feminine traits linked to their face or figure. Although this overt sexism may be less noticeable in post-millennial employment practices, Susanne Cohen's recent work looking at notions of professionalism and image in the 2000s suggests that a feminine appearance is still perceived as very important to Russian women's success in the workplace.[33] Cohen's work suggests that a new 'gendered morality' linked to the development of capitalism may act to frame work on one's image in different ways in post-Soviet Russia. However, this may also represent continuity with Soviet values of femininity which also stressed beauty and a 'cultured' appearance via forms of beauty labour. Thus, although women may now face less obvious pressure to look a certain way for their jobs than was reflected in 1990s advertisements, pressures linked to ideas around 'professionalism' are still apparent—and in some ways are also fundamentally linked to women's performances of beauty labour.

Beauty and National Identity

In this final empirical section, I discuss different ways beauty and femininity can be discursively linked to the idea of 'Russianness', an aspect that has been discussed in existing literature on both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras.[34] 'Russianness' could also be defined in temporal terms in relation to Soviet beauty ideals, or in relation to perceptions of how women of other nationalities performed beauty labour.

To begin, participants often mentioned the idea of 'Russianness' as inherently linked to a beautiful or feminine appearance. This was sometimes seen as somehow 'natural', or could be perceived as a result of Russian women putting more emphasis on beauty and beauty labour than women of other nationalities:

> Ever since I was a child I heard that Russian women were the most beautiful. […] Despite the fact that in Russia salaries are lower than in Western countries, women here manage to figure it out so their appearance is A + [*vygladet' na pyat' ballov*]. […] The question of femininity is very important. […] In Europe, you value comfort more than we do here. I would even say that if you go to our rural areas, you'll still see girls in stilettos. She'll be walking through potholes in such [high] stilettos, that it's clear that the question of femininity is of primary importance – she'd walk through a field in high heels! (Sveta, 23)

HP: In your opinion, how important is it for women in Russia to look beautiful?

Lyubov: To me it seems important to the majority of women. Here, it's not like Europe. Here, every girl strives to look good. (Lyubov, 22)

Although some participants discussed Russian beauty as somehow inherent or natural, Sveta and Lyubov's understanding of it highlights beauty as socially constructed, as a product of greater beauty labour or disregard for the discomforts of trying to emphasise one's bodily femininity.

In terms of specific post-Soviet developments, some participants perceived the fall of the Soviet Union 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 make-up, 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)

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, implied by the braid and uniform of the typical Soviet working woman, and the post-Soviet era in which the accoutrements of a culture obsessed with bodily appearance are visible at 'every step'. It is interesting that this participant links 'choice' to the Soviet past, which contradicts prominent discourses of choice more often linked to the neoliberal, capitalist global order. Once more, this may be seen to be linked to newer trends such as individualism, and particularly to a culture of conspicuous consumption, both of which have seen women's bodies classified as commodities. Yulia's view of these social changes is quite pessimistic. Other participants, however, 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)

Despite the fact that, as previously noted, there was a clear stress on beauty for women in the late Soviet period and the 1990s, Valentina perceives a growing focus on maintaining a beautiful body in the Putin era 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 from Soviet political norms or post-Soviet economic troubles is also present here, with consumer opportunities being framed in a language of choice for women who previously would have been largely excluded from consumer-linked beauty activity. Although from some feminist perspectives previously discussed the framing of beauty practices as liberating is problematic, and I would agree that such change is less of an advance than an entrenchment of patriarchal gender norms, the example above does point to one element of change that has been perceived in contrast to Soviet gender norms.

Some participants took a long-term view of beauty norms that was more ambivalent:

> 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 fashion adverts 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)

Although Yevgenia did link harmful diseases such as anorexia to a new female archetype which emphasised a slim body, she also saw it in historical context, possibly as a phase that would pass with time. Others took a similar view:

HP: In Russia right now, how important is it for women to look beautiful?
Tamara: It's not only in Russia, it's everywhere—women in all countries want to look good. […]
Nina: Appearance is very important here.
Tamara: Now in the twenty-first century, it's important. If you look at the past, at the beginning of the twentieth century/end of the nineteenth century, then they had noblewomen with big dresses and hairstyles. It's just the style has changed. Women have always wanted to look good all the time in any era.
Oksana They sacrificed even more.

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

Tamara contrasts the different body ideals of 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. 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. Although Tamara uses a different archetype of feminine beauty – the curvy, sexualised Pamela Anderson figure as opposed to the presumably more androgynous model figure – the emphasis on beauty as a key feminine attribute nevertheless goes unquestioned.

Conclusion

A feminist critique of post-Soviet gender and beauty norms demonstrates how Russian women share anxieties about achieving a beautiful body that have also been explored in Western feminist literature. Many women internalise normative discourses on the necessity of achieving beauty, and their reactions to the inevitable failures of their own bodies to meet feminine ideals (for example, self-criticism, performing beauty labour) are in line with concepts of the feminine body as in need of discipline. Although some literature has argued that women should use beauty labour to enhance their prospects in life, I would argue that a stress on women's bodily appearance is a sign of ongoing gender inequality and is inherently limited, where women suffer feelings of injustice at the extent to which men are excluded from beauty labour. I would also point to the temporal (that is, due to ageing), class (that is, due to lack of money to spend on beauty products or procedures) or other limits inherent in forms of capital linked to gendered bodies.

Discourses of national identity in Russia are shown to intersect with normative gender discourses, and this chapter has also shown how contemporary discussions draw upon more deeply rooted understandings of femininity also present in the Soviet era. Some women saw an excess of beauty labour as linked to post-Soviet change, whereas others framed beauty labour and its results as a particular virtue of Russian women. Furthermore, some participants perceived an increased emphasis on beauty labour as negative, and perhaps linked to a concurrent perceived rise in individualistic or man-pleasing values. Others welcomed such trends as progressive. Clearly, though opinions are mixed, the perceived beauty of women's bodies is (and will likely remain) not only discursively linked to normative femininity in Russia, but a visual and discursive signifier of a variety of other social norms and developments from professionalism to national identity.

NOTES

1. My use of the term 'beauty labour' may be understood as a means of 'doing gender' (see Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, 'Doing Gender', *Gender and Society*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1987, pp. 125–151) aimed at achieving normative femininity: from wearing make-up, to attempting to change their body shape via weight loss, to cosmetic surgery. 'Beauty labour' represents the drawing together of a range of feminist approaches to beauty practices as problematic: see, for example, Sheila Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny: Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*, London: Routledge, 2005; Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, London: Vintage, 1991; Samantha Kwan and Mary Nell Trautner, 'Beauty Work: Individual and Institutional Rewards, the Reproduction of Gender, and Questions of Agency', *Sociology Compass*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2009, pp. 49–71.
2. For further theoretical background and discussion about how beauty labour is central to an understanding of femininity in women's magazines, see Holly Porteous, '"There Are No Ugly Women, Only Lazy Ones": the Duty of Beauty Labour in Contemporary Russian Women's Magazines', in Helle Ehlers, Gabriele Linke, Nadja Milewski, Beate Rudlof and Heike Trappe (eds), *Körper – Geschlecht – Wahrnehmung. Geistes- Und Sozialwissenschaftliche Beiträge Zur Genderforschung*, Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2013, pp. 133–56.
3. This analysis of gender discourses is based on a view of gender as socially constructed; that is, notions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' are not linked to biological truths. See Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society*, London: Temple Smith, 1972. According to this view, gender may be seen both as discursively constructed via language (see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge, 2006) and also as 'a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction' (see West and Zimmerman, 'Doing Gender', p. 125).
4. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, London: Penguin, 1979; and, from a gendered perspective, Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. I use the term 'beauty labour' as a reflection of the value association of 'labour' as work on the body which is associated with the production of gendered aesthetic and cultural capital. 'Labour' is semantically faithful to the everyday striving of many women to achieve and sustain an attractive and feminine appearance, reflecting social pressures they face to carry out such work.
5. Butler, *Gender Trouble*; West and Zimmerman, 'Doing Gender'.
6. This chapter is based on my Ph.D. research, which looked at femininity, beauty and consumption in Russian women's magazines and according to reader perceptions. In-depth interviews were conducted in St Petersburg and Nizhniy Novgorod with 39 Russian women aged 18–35 who were (or had previously been) regular readers of women's magazines. The interviews were analysed from a feminist perspective in tandem with a discourse analysis of the magazines.
7. Djurdja Bartlett, *FashionEast: the Spectre that Haunted Socialism*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.
8. Melanie Ilic, 'Women and Competition in State Socialist Societies: Soviet Beauty Contests', in Katalin Miklóssy and Melanie Ilic (eds), *Competition in Socialist Society*, London: Routledge, 2014, pp. 159–75.

9. Olga Vainshtein, 'Female Fashion, Soviet Style: Bodies of Ideology', in Helena Goscilo and Beth Holmgren (eds), *Russia–Women–Culture*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996.
10. Yulia Gradskova, *Soviet People with Female Bodies: Performing Beauty and Maternity in Soviet Russia in the mid 1930–1960s*, Stockholm: Södertörn University, 2007.
11. See Barbara Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700–2000*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 250, and Valerie Sperling, 'The "New" Sexism: Images of Russian Women during the Transition', in Mark Field and Judyth Twigg (eds), *Russia's Torn Safety Nets: Health and Social Welfare during the Transition*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000, p. 180.
12. See, for example, Ilic, 'Women and Competition'; Sue Bridger, Rebecca Kay and Katherine Pinnick, *No More Heroines? Russia, Women, and the Market*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 29; and Rebecca Kay, 'Images of an Ideal Woman: Perceptions of Russian Womanhood through the Media, Education and Women's Own Eyes', in Mary Buckley (ed.), *Post-Soviet Women: from the Baltic to Central Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 82.
13. See Dominique Moran, Judith Pallot and Laura Piacentini. 'Lipstick, Lace, and Longing: Constructions of Femininity inside a Russian Prison', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2009, pp. 700–20.
14. See, for example, Helena Goscilo and Vlad Strukov, *Glamour and Celebrity in Contemporary Russia: Shocking Chic*, London: Taylor and Francis, 2011; M. Litovskaia and O. Shaburova, 'Russian Glamour and its Representations in Post-Soviet Mass Media', in A. Rosenholm, K. Nordenstreng and E. Trubina (eds), *Russian Mass Media and Changing Values*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 193–208; Larissa Rudova, 'Uniting Russia in Glamour', *Kultura*, no. 6, 2008, pp. 2–3; Birgit Menzel, 'Russian Discourse on Glamour', *Kultura*, no. 6, 2008, pp. 4–8; and Katharina Klingseis, 'The Power of Dress in Contemporary Russian Society: on Glamour Discourse and the Everyday Practice of Getting Dressed in Russian Cities', *Laboratorium: Journal of Social Research*, no. 1, 2011, p. 84.
15. Olga Gurova, '"We are not Rich Enough to Buy Cheap Things": Clothing Consumption of the St Petersburg Middle Class', in Suvi Salmenniemi (ed.), *Rethinking Class in Russia*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, pp. 149–66.
16. C.J. Heyes, *Self Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
17. Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny*.
18. T.L. Anderson, C. Grunert, A. Katz and S. Lovascio, 'Aesthetic Capital: a Research Review on Beauty Perks and Penalties', *Sociology Compass*, vol. 4, no. 8, 2010, pp. 565–6.
19. Samantha Kwan and Mary Nell Trautner, 'Beauty Work: Individual and Institutional Rewards, the Reproduction of Gender, and Questions of Agency', *Sociology Compass*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2009, pp. 52–4.
20. See, for example, Catherine Hakim, 'Erotic Capital', *European Sociological Review*, vol. 26, no. 5, 2010, pp. 499–518.
21. See, for example, Heyes, *Self Transformations*; Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*; Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny*; Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, London: Routledge, 1991; and Monique Deveaux, 'Feminism and Empowerment: a Critical Reading of Foucault', *Feminist Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1994, pp. 223–47.

22. It has been argued that men are ever more subject to similar discourses on creating masculinity through body work. See, for example, Chris Haywood and Máirtín Mac an Ghaill, *Men and Masculinities: Theory, Research and Social Practice*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2003. Wacquant, 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: Loïc Wacquant, *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, and Loïc Wacquant, 'Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour among Professional Boxers', *Body & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1995, pp. 65–93.
23. Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*.
24. See Mary Buckley, *Perestroika and Soviet Women*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 3; Bridger, Kay and Pinnick, *No More Heroines*, pp. 22–4; Michele Rivkin-Fish, 'Pronatalism, Gender Politics, and the Renewal of Family Support in Russia: Toward a Feminist Anthropology of "Maternity Capital"', *Slavic Review*, vol. 69, no. 3, 2010, pp. 701–24.
25. For a more in-depth discussion of this phenomenon in women's magazines, see Porteous, 'There Are No Ugly Women'.
26. See, for example, Suvi Salmenniemi and Maria Adamson, 'New Heroines of Labour: Domesticating Post-Feminism and Neoliberal Capitalism in Russia', *Sociology*, vol. 49, no. 1, 2015, pp. 38–55; Anna Gough-Yates, *Understanding Women's Magazines: Publishing, Markets and Readerships in Late-Twentieth Century Britain*, London: Routledge, 2003.
27. Gradskova, *Soviet People*, p. 271.
28. See, for example, Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*; Jeffreys, *Beauty and Misogyny*; Kwan and Trautner, *Beauty Work*; Anderson et al., *Aesthetic Capital*.
29. I discuss a perceived scarcity of eligible men in Russian society, and its implications for gender roles, in greater depth in Holly Porteous (2017), 'From Barbie to the Oligarch's Wife: Reading Fantasy Femininity and Globalisation in Post-Soviet Russian Women's Magazines', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 180–98.
30. Sarah Ashwin and Tatyana Lytkina, 'Men in Crisis in Russia: the Role of Domestic Marginalization', *Gender and Society*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2004, pp. 189–206.
31. There is not scope fully to discuss aesthetic capital in this chapter, but for a more in-depth discussion, which draws on Pierre Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural capital, see Anderson et al., *Aesthetic Capital*.
32. Bridger, Kay and Pinnick, *No More Heroines*, pp. 187–8.
33. Susanne Cohen, 'Image of a Secretary: a Metapragmatic Morality for Post-Soviet Capitalism', *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 86, no. 3, 2013, pp. 725–58.
34. Gradskova, *Soviet People*; Bridger, Kay and Pinnick, *No More Heroines*; Djurdja Bartlett, 'Let Them Wear Beige: the Petit-Bourgeois World of Official Socialist Dress', *Fashion Theory: the Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2004, pp. 127–64. Note that in the Soviet Union the notion of 'Russianness' could be interchangeable with the idea of 'Sovietness'.

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Holly Porteous completed a Ph.D. in Russian gender studies at the University of Glasgow, UK, in 2014. Her doctoral research centred on gendered bodies, popular media and conspicuous consumption in Russian society and culture. She is currently working on a joint project between Swansea University and the University of Glasgow focused on the experiences of Central Eastern European migrants to the UK. Her most recent publication is 'From Barbie to the Oligarch's Wife: Reading Fantasy Femininity and Globalisation in Post-Soviet Russian Women's Magazines', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (2017).