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## **The Social Construction of Motherhood and Daughterhood in Contemporary Poland—a Trans-Generational Perspective**

*Abstract:* The mother-daughter relationship has received increasing attention over the last few decades, both at the conceptual level and in empirical research. Unfortunately, however, this domain has not yet been sufficiently explored in the Polish context. Equally infrequent are empirical projects which strive to combine analysis of individual experiences with the examination of public discourse and social change within particular historical and cultural contexts. The present text analyzes the process of defining motherhood and daughterhood in Poland, focusing specifically on the trans-generational aspect of female identity construction. It is based on qualitative research carried out in the Warsaw area in 2005–2008. Arguably, such an analysis should help us to map the complicated intersections of gender, generation and positionality in times of social change and contribute to the development of a new perspective on the process of identity construction.

*Keywords:* motherhood; daughterhood; mother-daughter relations; identity construction; trans-generational perspective.

Researchers nowadays feel that Adrienne Rich's (1976) famous observation that the mother-daughter relation is a great story yet to be written is no longer relevant (Lawler 2000; Miller-Day 2004). From the 1970s on, relatively many works have been written on mother-daughter relations and many results of studies of this topic by sociologists, psychologists and literary critics have been published. The subject is also more visible in the arts and the media (Boyd 1989; Hirsch 1981; Walters 1992). Unfortunately, the vast majority of these texts were written in Western Europe and the United States and have not been translated into Polish. Also, many of them are really about mother-child relations, not relations between mothers and their adult daughters. In Poland, the mother is the main focus of analysis (Budrowska 2000; Janion 2004; Ostrowska 2004; Walczewska 1999) whereas the daughter's role and her relations with her mother are seldom the object of investigation or a source of inspiration for Polish researchers (Budrowska 2000; Ostrouch 2004).

The marginalization of histories of mothers and daughters may be interpreted as a consequence of living in a culture where the "masculine" is automatically more valued than the "feminine" (Walters 1992; cf. Irigaray 1995) but the consequences of such marginalization need to be studied further. The Dutch researcher Janneke van Mens-Verhulst (1993) believes that acceptance of the perspective within which the only significant relations are relations with men has several consequences: focus on

heterosexuality, highlighting the role of the father in the formation of female identity or finally “an almost unconditional belief in the necessity of autonomy as a state of adulthood” (1993: xiv). Hence the role of mother and the importance of mother-daughter relations in the shaping of identity are underestimated and the consequences of lesbianism are ignored (Rich 1980).

Meanwhile, relations between mothers and their adult daughters constitute a significant part of many women’s everyday experience. According to van Mens-Verhulst, a better understanding of their dynamics would help us to get a better grasp of relations between women who differ in their level of power, not only in the family but also in other contexts, e.g. education, therapy or management, because they can be viewed “as an archetype of real and symbolic generation differences between women” (1993: xiii) at both the individual level and the mezzo and macro levels of social relations. It is therefore very important that we uncover and describe them anew so that we can fill the gap in the social sciences and popular understanding.

The present text is a contribution to the critical analysis of mother-daughter relations. It is based on the findings of a research project in which I conducted in-depth one-to-one interviews with mothers and their adult daughters within a select sample of families. I conducted the interviews in 2005–2008 and twenty women living in the Warsaw region participated. Most of them had secondary or higher education and were currently working outside the home or had done so earlier. All in all, I analyzed sixteen interviews.<sup>1</sup> The interviewees’ economic and social status was rather good or good (with the exception of two women whose material status was bad). It is important to note, however, that the ratings of material status are rather subjective because “the concept of prosperity or affluence is arbitrary and if it is used in the social sciences at all it is used mainly in studies of lay perception of social structure” (Palska 2000: 30). I therefore chose to operationalize the concept and adopted the “unrestricted consumption and beneficial location in the labour market criterion” (ibid: 12). Partly due to my own social status and partly due to the fact that I adopted the snowball method to recruit successive interviewees, most of the young women in the present study represented the “knowledge professions” (ibid: 30).

The interviewees’ family situation was more heterogeneous. I interviewed women in relationships (formal or informal), single, divorced and widowed; women with an only daughter or other children as well. Family status was very important in the daughters’ case because most researchers analyzing relations between mothers and their adult daughters point out that daughters having children greatly affects the quality of the mother-daughter relation. This is why I interviewed young women, some of whom had children (daughters) and some of whom had not. Others declared at the time of the study that they would or would not like to have children in the

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<sup>1</sup> The sampling method proved to be a decisive factor in this particular study, as I had assumed it would be in the preliminary stage. Although I tried to make sure that the sample was as heterogeneous as possible in terms of background, material status, life and family situation, so as to get as rich a picture of mother-daughter relations as possible, I was not fully successful. The reason was largely practical. I recruited consecutive interviewees snowball-wise and limited the area of my investigations to Warsaw and the Warsaw area. Hence the final sample was rather homogeneous as far as social status is concerned.

future. The age of the daughters ranged from 26 to 37 and the age of the mothers ranged from 50 to 65.

Not all interviewees wanted to disclose their personal data and so instead of real names I decided to use codes: the first letter of the fictitious name of the respondent plus the first letter of the fictitious name of her daughter/mother. This way, the reader would be able to identify the quotes for each pair.

It is worth noting at this point that I usually contacted the mothers via their daughters and that the participants were on relatively good terms with each other, not conflicted. Of course, problematic issues emerged as well, and sometimes mothers and daughters interpreted the same situations differently. It means, however, that many of the problems reported in the literature or known to me from private conversations with women: abuse, emotional rejection, possessiveness or jealousy, did not emerge in my interviews or if they did, they usually referred to the maternal grandmother or other female family members. Hence the present analysis focuses on selected aspects of mother-daughter relations and by no means covers the whole area.

As a researcher, but also daughter, I am aware that the interview may have been a difficult situation for many of my interviewees. They had to trust a stranger and disclose their emotions to her. This makes me all the more grateful to them for sharing their experiences and feelings with me. I greatly admire their courage and generosity.

### **Feminist Definitions of Daughterhood and Motherhood**

When we examine the theories of mother-daughter relations and the research which has been done on this subject, we become aware of a paradox. On the one hand, the institution and experience of motherhood have been analyzed much more frequently, and hence scientifically seem to be much better understood, than the institution and experience of daughterhood, also within feminist theory and research (Budrowska 2004; Snitow 1995; Miller-Day 2004). A review of the most important texts on this subject would exceed the confines of this article (cf. Gajewska 2004) but the existence of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement, a separate academic association which publishes its own journal and organizes numerous conferences, attests to the frequency with which this problem area is approached by the scientific community. Meanwhile, the daughter role goes relatively unnoticed (Ostrouch 2000). Even the Polish language reflects this neglect. The word “motherhood” can be found repeatedly, in all its case forms, particularly in the Polish context, whereas there is no widely used linguistic equivalent for daughters, either in Polish or in other languages (e.g. French or Swedish). We only have the adjective *synowski* (filial) in Polish. The *Popular Dictionary of the Polish Language* (2000) gives the following definition of the term: “characteristic of the son, belonging to the son, referring to the son.” There is no equivalent for daughters.

Meanwhile, according to Steph Lawler (2000), the daughter perspective predominates in analyses of the mother-daughter relation. The daughter is often viewed “as

possessing a privileged insight into the relationship, and her account is seen as giving a 'true' representation of the mother." (2000: 15) This privileged position is caused by specific socio-cultural factors, and particularly by the fact that the women who introduced this subject to academic discourse in the 1960s and 1970s often did so in opposition to their mothers' generation (Rich 1976; Chesler 2003; Araszkiwicz 2001). Although this opposition was much less culturally salient than the opposition of sons to their fathers, it left its mark on most of the classic texts on the subject. Most of these works are written from the daughter's perspective and this largely determines the point of view and the range of discussed issues in both the scientific texts (Arcana 1981; Irigaray 2000a, 2000b) and the popular literature (Friday 1977).

The very definition of daughterhood is problematic. According to Maggie Humm's *Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, daughterhood is simply "women's relationship with their parents" (1993: 37) whereas in feminist theories a daughter's relationship with her mother is the more important (Ostrouch 2004). This concise definition hardly does justice to the entirety of the emotional, intellectual and physical effort which the daughter's role involves. We must also remember that, like the role of mother, it is fluid, flexible, culturally and historically diverse. According to Adrienne Rich (1976), there is empirical evidence that these relations were much closer and much more stable in the reality of nineteenth-century America than they are today. Rich quotes Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's conclusions that in those days the intimate relation between mother and daughter was the axis around which the young woman's world revolved (Rich 1976: 192). This age allegedly came to an end in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century together with increasing modernization which brought with it new models of femininity and new opportunities for women (paid employment, professional careers, birth control) and propagation of psychoanalytic thought.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult not to notice a note of nostalgia in Rich's tone when she writes about women's 'lost paradise'. Perhaps nineteenth-century America was a paradise but it is worth bearing in mind that the relations which Smith-Rosenberg quotes and analyzes and which Rich refers to took place among privileged upper-class women who could afford to nurture a separate women's world and to describe it in their letters and diaries. But what about the relations of lower-class women who had to struggle for survival and left very little evidence of this struggle?

Much more space in feminist theories is devoted to the mother's role although many researchers admit that the definition of motherhood continues to raise doubts and is a source of controversy. Ann Snitow (1995) argues that opinions on this subject have evolved from the radical texts of the 1960s and 70s when some writers, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone or Betty Friedan came to the conclusion that it was advisable or even imperative that women challenge motherhood in its existing form as a major cause of women's enslavement, through the now classic writings of Adrienne Rich, Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein, who argued

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<sup>2</sup> Linda W. Rosenzweig (1991) disagrees with this picture in her book *The Anchor of My Life: Middle-Class American Mothers and Daughters, 1980–1920*. She points out that already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century these relations were a mixture of tension and closeness rather than based on complete identification and conflict-free codependence.

that “motherhood is a social construct, and its forms are evolving together with social and cultural changes” (Humm 1993: 121) to the validation of motherhood in the texts of Sarah Ruddick (1980) and Carol Gilligan (1982). Ruddick suggested that we broaden our thinking about motherhood to include practices and attitudes, or even a specific style of thinking, characterising not only biological mothers but caring relations in general. Maternal thinking was to lead to transformation of social reality and initiate social change of practices and values. It is noteworthy that this view mainly applies to the Western European and American context and therefore is in no way the only possible one (cf. Hill & Collins 1997; Hryciuk 2008).<sup>3</sup> Also, Agnieszka Gajewska (2004) points out that it would be difficult to find similar changes in definitions of motherhood in the Polish context, where contemporary texts were read in synchrony with works from the early nineteenth and twentieth century.

### **The Social Construction of Daughterhood and Motherhood in the Polish Context**

Analysis of the data from the interviews with mothers and daughters in Poland supported the observation that the mother role is more clearly defined than the daughter role. The motherhood was mentioned repeatedly in the interviews, even when other issues, for example female identity, were being discussed. On the other hand, daughterhood was rarely mentioned spontaneously and the interviewees hardly ever mentioned this subject in the context of defining femininity. As in Joanna Ostrouch’s research (2004), my interviewees were evidently uncertain as to what attitudes, behaviours and feelings define daughterhood. Utterances on this subject were generally shorter than utterances on motherhood and the interviewees frequently expressed their ambiguity (verbally and nonverbally) when discussing this topic. They declared that daughterhood is something one takes for granted but when it came to defining it, they had some problems, partly due to the fact that they did not analyze this sphere of life on a daily basis. All this supports the conclusion that while the ideal of motherhood is more general and abstract, the definition of daughterhood is constructed in the context of specific interactions (Gergen 2000).

Concepts such as “responsibility” and “duty” often appeared in the interviewees’ utterances in the context of daughterhood. Daughterhood appears to be a debt to one’s parents which one should pay back eventually.

My mother took care of me and still does so naturally it is my duty to take care of my parents when they need help. Perhaps sons are different but for me, this is indisputable... (daughter MR)

What this means in practice is that daughters often accept and adjust to parental expectations and make sure parents feel secure and confident that feelings and resources invested in their children will not be wasted.

Now this is really difficult, being a daughter. Well, of course, you have to show your mother that you trust her, that you love her above all and, well, no matter what she’s like, that you accept her somehow, and

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed account of theories and research on motherhood in Polish see the books by Bogusława Budrowska (2000) and Joanna Ostrouch (2004).

you certainly shouldn't tell your mother that you've done this or that to me, you have to treat her with understanding, even if she made mistakes. (mother WL)

Some women admitted outright that daughterhood was a very demanding role—they sometimes had trouble being “good daughters” even though they loved their mothers and felt they were important figures in their lives. Respect for the relationship framework delineated by the older generation means that one has to relinquish some of one's own needs and expectations. Mothers, not daughters, are the ones who define the situation and the emotional distance although they are not always aware of their supremacy.

Daughters seldom try to renegotiate their role for fear of hurting their mothers or appearing unloving or disloyal:

To be a daughter means to respect your mother and her boundaries. As far as I'm concerned, the trouble is that you automatically become schematic, because I have many of my mother's traits which I don't like. On the other hand, she is the one who sets the boundaries, I always felt obligated to certain things, because she's dear to me—hence the inner struggle. (daughter BW)

The interviewees—both younger and older—were equally unlikely to define daughterhood in terms of receiving care and experiencing unconditional love, which is often identified with the child role. Very few experienced their relation with the mother in such a way:

To be daughter means to feel loved, intimate and safe, it means to be so lucky to belong and have someone who is close to you. (daughter SM)

When asked what is unique about the daughter-mother relation some women declared that it is the feeling that mothers always wish their daughters the very best whereas other people, even close ones, can sometimes be jealous or “not quite sincere:”

Mummy once told me that best friends listen and go their own ways, whereas always to listen is what mothers are for. And that has stuck in my head to this day. (daughter MR)

This means that inter-generational bonds are constructed as something unique compared with extra-familial relations: with close friends or acquaintances who may not pass the test of time or provide a comparable sense of security. It is worth noting that this vision is largely based on the interpretation of motherhood as unconditional, self-less and permanent love of one's child whereas the daughter remains the object of her feelings rather than an active participant in the relationship.

Daughters often feel a discrepancy between their definition of motherhood on the one hand and their self-perception as the object of maternal love on the other hand. This discrepancy may be caused by the fact that the maternal role is largely defined via relations with the young child (Budrowska 2000) rather than the adult but it may also be the effect of changes in the definition of the cultural ideal of motherhood. Moreover, daughterhood is relational: it is one thing to be a daughter vis-à-vis one's own mother, it is another thing to consider the position of one's own daughter (van

Mens-Verhulst 1993). At the same time, both daughterhood and motherhood involve giving more than one receives. This implies that throughout their lives women are supposed to give unconditional love and understanding, not expecting much in return.

According to Budrowska (2000), motherhood is a complex construct. It includes many (often internally inconsistent) norms and places enormous demands on women. It is therefore a source of intense emotions, both positive and negative. Most of the interviewed women's statements confirmed this vision. Importantly, both generations expressed the opinion that motherhood is a task which has to be learned, but while the daughters felt that one can learn to be a mother from the media and professional publications the mothers tended to believe that the mothering role is refined in practice, based on the maternal instinct which all women allegedly have.

Several levels of understanding of the concept of motherhood can be identified taking under consideration that the interviewees adopted different perspectives on motherhood depending on who they were describing—their mothers or themselves as mothers. This generational gap confirms also that the definition of good mothering has changed significantly within the last few decades (Urbańska 2009; Hryciuk & Korolczuk forthcoming).

The older women talked of motherhood mainly in terms of the practical aspects of childcare—making sure that the child has everything it requires, that its basic needs, especially material ones, are satisfied. The major elements of the motherhood discourse which can be called “traditional” can be found in their utterances. Most were of the opinion that motherhood should be a woman's vocation. This vocation is rooted in the universal maternal instinct and involves performing one's daily responsibilities toward not only one's children but also the whole family (Budrowska 2000; Urbańska 2009).

Home was always the most important thing for me, to be a mother is to focus on one's children, one's home, that is what one should care for more than anything else. (mother TK)

The older generation does not always idealize this role the way it is idealized in popular culture, however. The image of children as a source of only joy and fulfilment (Budrowska 2000: 213; Łaciak 2003) gives way to the image of motherhood as work which requires sacrifice and sometimes has a negative effect on other spheres of life. Some interviewees representing the older generation were quite explicit about the costs of motherhood such as the need to relinquish their own educational or career opportunities or the need to give in to their husbands so as to maintain the family:

Motherhood is encoded in women and that is why we forgive, care and allow people to treat us as doormats. (mother CD)

Women are responsible for their families and so they need to have some responsibility. Men should be responsible too but that's not always the case. I [...] tried to be responsible. And that is why I was basically left with nothing. (mother BA)

It is worth noting that although the interviewees were aware of the costs of motherhood, this does not mean that they denied the value of motherhood as such. I shall return to this later.

The younger interviewees paid more attention to the emotional sphere stressing that ideally, children should feel secure, loved and happy:

To be a mother is to love unconditionally, to make your child happy, to be a responsible person. (daughter SM)

When questioned about the costs of motherhood they often mention emotional costs and guilt due to inability to satisfy all their child's potential needs. Their statements clearly demonstrate that they are well aware of the dominant discourses defining what "a good mother" should feel and do (Urbańska forthcoming). An important element of such an ideal is to control one's emotions: the mother must not be overcome by negative emotions, she must keep calm and composed whatever happens. According to present childrearing standards anger, distance and anxiety are not good for healthy development and so women try not to show their "bad" feelings. But because they are unable to get rid of them, they are constantly struggling with guilt and the sense of imperfection.

I would like to be such a mother [...] to be able to contain my emotions if necessary, emotions which are bad from the educational point of view, inadvisable. (daughter AA)

What it really means to be a mother is to have never-ending dilemmas, not knowing whether one is giving one's daughter enough, spending enough time with her, because there are moments of limitless happiness, joy, intimacy [...] but there are also moments when you get terribly angry and you really want to shout at her, tell her "to stop yelling and shut up" or to shake her really hard so that she stops and then I have a guilty conscience because I shouldn't feel that way. (daughter IA)

It is worth noting that there are several reasons for the differences between the two generations. First, their time perspective is different (e.g. young women are not yet able to say how a child is going to affect their career in the long run). Second, their life choices are different due to differences in the social context. For the older generation, motherhood usually meant a long break in education or career with the possibility of returning to the interrupted activity. Such choices were reinforced at the individual level and in most cases were feasible in the reality of a socialist economy. The young women, on the other hand, went back to work soon after their babies were born, often for economic or practical reasons (e.g. because they could not find anyone to replace them). They felt overworked due to the need to juggle different roles in a world which value effectiveness. Furthermore, as far as inter-generational relations are concerned, the adult daughters tended to position themselves as "well-informed" mothers, mothers who cannot escape responsibility for the way they carry out their role. They are quite different in this respect from their mothers who sometimes excused the mistakes by saying that they lacked sufficient knowledge. Such perspective allows a woman to cope with changing patterns of motherhood but it also widens the inter-generational gap because the mother is not viewed as a partner, a source of expertise.

The effect of cultural change on the construction of the maternal role and children's needs is also demonstrated in the motif of lack of physical intimacy between daughter and mother, especially in the narratives of the younger women. Some interviewees said that they missed and sometimes still miss maternal hugging, touching and caressing.

I rarely recall gestures of physical closeness or cuddling when I was little. It's not that mum was ice-cold but I remember that once we were cuddling so much that daddy was taken aback. Dad was the one who cuddled [...] and grandma. Not mum. (daughter IA)

Although in most cases someone in the family compensated for the scarcity of maternal affection (grandmother, sometimes father), many daughters felt that such physical distance was painful and hard to understand, all the more so that they generally rate their relations with their mothers positively. Some interviewees were surprised to find that they could not remember any signs of motherly affection:

Well I'm sorry but I can't remember any pleasant scenes of that sort. I'm surprised, really. It seems that mum simply didn't know how to ... (mother WL)

It is important to point out that neither group of women blamed their mothers for this state of affairs. Lack of affection, coldness, excessive control were mentioned very rarely and my interviewees often tried to say something positive about their mothers in the same breath or at least to excuse them somehow:

My mother didn't show me much affection. [...] But she was also tolerant toward everybody. I think she was a traditional person, and that the war changed her outlook. (mother RM)

Older interviewees in particular made it clear that their mothers belonged to a generation in which other patterns of behaviour were obligatory. In most cases they portray not only their mothers but also their fathers as honest, hardworking people who did their best to make sure that their children had everything that they needed materially but had little time to spare. Also, these were times when one did not show one's feelings or dare to talk about them. It just wasn't acceptable. Parents showed the children they loved them by providing them with the best possible conditions of living and family relations were rigidly hierarchical. Also the younger group of interviewees used similar argument when talking about negative aspects of relations with their mothers. The daughters pointed out to a specific childrearing code in the sixties and seventies, when the emphasis was on environmental sterility and physical health, not on satisfaction of children's emotional needs.

Such vision converges with an analysis of childrearing practices and advice conducted by the sociologist, Sylwia Urbańska (2009). Urbańska reviewed self-help books and magazines addressed to mothers in the 1970s and today. She compared the contents of a magazine for parents, "Twoje Dziecko" (Your child) in 1975 and 2003 and found that the ideal of the "good mother" and the dominant discourse changed radically within just one generation. In 1975 the mother was to make sure, with the help of her family and other people, that her children were healthy and socially well-adjusted. The ideal mother of the year 2003 was to be an effective and well-organized manager of family life, fully responsible for her child's present and future happiness and success. As she facilitated his/her development, she was to have state-of-the-art expertise, unlimited financial resources and lots of free time. Urbańska (2009) also points out that contemporary publications depreciate the knowledge and experience of the older generations and largely focus on "experts" as sources of information. Contemporary

mothers must have considerable cultural competence. This is a middle-class ideal to which all women are to aspire.

Let us return once again to the costs of parenthood. Both age groups were clearly frustrated. The older women complained of their unfavourable professional and financial situation—in most cases their career had suffered because of their homemaking responsibilities. The younger women complained how difficult it is to reconcile their different roles. However, all women, both old and young, declared that they do not grudge their children the time and effort devoted to them. This attitude is consistent with the outcomes of Anna Titkow's research on family care perception. She found that "both men and women feel that caring for others and woman's contribution are what family life is all about" (2007: 238) and women view caring for others not only as their source of "meaning in life" but also as a "synonym of the emotional dimension of family relations" (Titkow 2007: 240). In this context, the interviewees' declarations are not surprising. If taking care of others is how love and caring are expressed, refusal to deliver the care is equivalent to the denial of a woman's maternal identity. Only one woman in the mother group openly admitted that the time she spent taking care of her little baby was extremely burdensome and a part of a never-ending process of caring for others. She therefore greatly feared the moment when her daughter would have children, and expect her help as a grandmother. Thus, though she wished her daughter to have children, she did not want to give up the freedom she regained only recently:

I'm scared now too because I wouldn't like her to need my help. Because I'm tired of life. My father was paralyzed and I took care of him for 12 years, then my mother. Grandma lived till she was 105. According to my calculations, I've spent more than 25 years of my life looking after my family, literally wiping their bottoms. It was so hard, it was a nightmare, and it is only recently that I regained my freedom. But I can't tell her that because that might hold her back. (mother RM)

This internalized sacrifice imperative is a great emotional burden. But to refuse helping the family members or at least attempting to renegotiate one's role as principal and often sole carer is unconceivable. It would mean challenging the very foundation of female identity.

The sacrifice imperative is embedded in the Polish Mother figure which can be traced back to the XIX century romanticism (Janion 2004). It is present in the narratives produced by both older and younger women, testifying to the view that sacrifice is still an element of the cultural feminine ideal in Poland (Walczewska 1999; Budrowska 2000). This theme is also present in public discourse, as illustrated by the retirement reform debate initiated in 2009. The media often suggest that Polish women *want* to retire earlier so that they can take care of their grandchildren. For example, Piotr Pacewicz wrote in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on the 7 December 2007: "Women in Poland are still dreaming of retiring as quickly as possible so that they can take care of their homes and grandchildren. They do not feel discriminated against." In the CBOS opinion poll which he quotes, one of the questions was: "Why should women retire 5 years earlier than men?" and it is true that the most frequently endorsed response option was: "To take care of the home and the grandchildren." However, nothing in this option suggests that women do this of their own free will or because that is what

they dream of doing. The journalist failed to notice that unpaid women's housework is often a necessity caused by the shortage of such institutional solutions as day care and nursery schools (Titkow 2004). He also expressed the opinion that women do not feel gender discrimination although the opinion poll contained no questions referring to this issue. In press publications such as this women's caring for the children and grandchildren is taken for granted and is believed to be a basic element of feminine identity, while the systemic factors and cultural norms are ignored (cf. Charkiewicz & Zaborowska-Mazurkiewicz 2010).

### **“Good Mother” vs. “Good Daughter”—Ideal and Reality**

When we analyze the mother-daughter relation from the daughter's perspective, we see that sacrificing oneself for one's children can be interpreted in various ways, and sometimes is viewed negatively by the children. Therefore, a “good mother” is a mother who is able to make her children feel secure and loved, to facilitate their development and give them the sense of family traditions. This is how motherhood is viewed in families where relations between the parents were harmonious. In such cases the daughters often talked of “good parents,” not just “good mothers.” The “good mother” figure has also a different face, however. She is described as loving, generous and sacrificing herself for her children but also unfulfilled and frustrated, struggling alone with burdens which are too much for her. From the daughter's point of view, this approach stimulated very ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, she identifies with her mother, wants to support and protect her, compensate her for her efforts. But on the other hand, she rejects the idea of sacrificing herself and, consciously or not, she is angry with the mother. One elder woman portrayed her mother as giving people more than they deserved and unable to prevent people from taking advantage of her:

We all thought that mum gave grandmother more than she should. Because if someone does not understand that she herself is giving nothing, just taking, there comes a time when you have to make them know. Mum was unable to do this, either in her relations with grandma, or her two husbands. When I got married I said to myself that I was definitely not going to let anybody treat me that way. (mother AI)

In this case, the mother's complete sacrifice and resignation from needs and strivings of her own had a negative effect on the mother-daughter relationship. Unable to accept that her mother was humiliated by other family members, this interviewee wanted to leave home as quickly as possible and live a completely different life. From the perspective of the next generation, the grandmother's unconditional goodness was also rather negatively received as it hindered genuine mutual understanding and partnership:

I could see that mum loved grandma but I sometimes had enough. Because grandma was far too good. (daughter IA)

One of the reasons for this ambivalence could be that the mother is the person who upholds patriarchal relations most successfully. The daughter has to carry the burden of her humiliation and sacrifice and cannot get rid of it. According to Adrienne Rich:

Thousands of daughters see their mothers as having taught a compromise and self-hatred they are struggling to win free of, the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of the female existence were performed transmitted (1976: 193).

One face of the “good mother” is a face of a slave, who passes on her suffering and submission to her daughter instead of self-esteem and self-confidence. As a result, the daughter may feel guilty that she has succeeded in life at her mother’s cost. The mother, in turn, may feel used and depleted (Budrowska 2000; cf. Klein in: Ostrouch 2004). In other words, mother-daughter relations are determined not only by the way the mother fulfils her maternal role but first and foremost by the dynamics and quality of family attachments or—more generally—women’s social status.

### **Mother–Daughter Relations and Positioning in the Social Structure**

The quality of mother–daughter relations is determined by a number of factors—historical, cultural and social, such as the class position. Steph Lawler (2000) discusses this problem arguing that women who have advanced socially thanks to their education, a good job or good marriage, are especially prone to matrophobia defined as the fear of becoming one’s own mother (Rich 1976: 193). Lawler found that women, at least in Britain, who have advanced socially focus on differences between themselves and their mothers—in tastes, lifestyles, knowledge of the world or even interior decorating.

The British sociologist points out that compared with other women, these daughters are struggling with the problem of identification with their mothers because they see their social advancement as a way of realising their “true self,” a self which is totally different from their mothers’. They are afraid that this “true self” may be smothered by their mothers’ identity and that they “may become their own mothers.” This, says Lawler, is a form of fear of the prospect of returning to their mothers’ position in the class structure (2000: 102). According to this interpretation, matrophobia is not just the effect of women’s subordinate social position as Rich argued, but it is the effect of class mobility.

Importantly, Lawler’s British respondents negate their mothers’ way of upbringing because the dominant model is the middle class model based on the ideology of “intensive mothering” that requires knowledge, time and considerable financial input (Hays 1996). Lawler points out that the mothering styles of lower-class women are often labelled socially incorrect and the mothers themselves are said to be insensitive to their children’s needs, uninvolved, “either unfeminine or sexually hyper-aroused” (2000: 104). This social group’s mothering is often accused of fostering such contemporary pathologies as alcoholism, drug addiction and crime.

As a result, women who managed to climb the social ladder feel that they know how to be a mother. They also know that their own working-class mothers do not fit the “good mother” definition (Lawler 2000: 102). Of course, the British context, with its rigid and clearly defined class structure (Okely 2007) differs from the Polish one where class structure is a problematic concept, even at the definitional level

(Domański 2002). But the processes of inter-generational class mobility should be taken under consideration.

In the interviews with mothers and daughters living in the Warsaw area the class aspect was present only marginally. However, the group was homogeneous with respect to this variable and although the daughters were generally more educated and better off financially than their mothers, the differences were not striking. To determine the role of class advancement we would have to study families in which this factor was salient. We would also have to look at several different aspects such as education, place of residence, material assets and lifestyle.

It could also be that class position means different things in the Polish and British contexts. Whereas Lawler's participants reported that their poorly educated mothers seem to envy them their superior position and tried to hold them back especially with regard to education (2000: 112), the daughters in the study spontaneously stressed that their mothers had supported them in their efforts to do well, especially educationally. Mothers who often did not have the chance to continue their own education and have an interesting career, or did not take advantage of the opportunity if they did have it, brought their daughters up in the belief that they should take a different road.

They tried to encourage their daughters to get a good education, stable career and financial independence. Evidence can be found in their accounts:

I'd like her to finish university because if you don't have higher education you won't get ahead in life, women can't rely on men. Not even if they have lots of money. (mother RM)

This approach was especially visible in the case of women who were forced to struggle with financial hardships and couldn't count on their husbands or extended families. Not only did they explain to their daughters how important education and a career were, they also sometimes assumed most of the household duties so that their children could concentrate on their studies, thus supporting the conclusion that people who have advanced socially despite lack of financial and cultural capital had so called 'hidden capital' (Palska 2000). This is evident in the way parents attached a lot of importance to their children's education and supported them on a daily basis by, for example, reading to them, buying them intellectually stimulating gifts or generally boosting their self-esteem (Palska *ibid*: 85–86, 92).

### **Cultural Narratives vs Individual Experiences**

Interestingly, all of the daughters taking part in the research project evaluated their relations with their mothers positively and their mothers were likewise satisfied with their relations with their daughters. The older interviewees (mothers) rated their relations with their own mothers (not interviewed) differently. Some of them said their relations with their mothers were complicated, difficult or deeply ambivalent. What is more, most women were more willing to mention problems and their unsatisfied needs when reporting about mother–daughter relations in other families or in response to indirect prompts. Perhaps this was because the women I talked to were in good

enough relations to agree to be interviewed. But it is also possible that they found it hard to express those aspects of the mother–daughter relationship which did not match the idealized images of the dominant discourses (Korolczuk 2008, 2009). As Kenneth J. Gergen reminds us, we are all being saturated with culturally dominant narratives and are trying to fit our own narratives into the dominant ones, in terms of both form and content (Gergen 2000: 163). Respondent narratives concerning so-called turning points in their mother–daughter relations, such as the daughter leaving home or giving birth to a child, lend support to this interpretation (Fischer 1981). Time and again, women’s accounts contain elements of cultural narratives which establish the framework of mother–daughter relations (Walters 1992). At the same time, however, some accounts reveal conflicts and contradictions between cultural norms and experience.

This discrepancy is evident when we compare the narratives of the mothers and the daughters when their accounts of the same situation differ significantly. The daughter’s leaving home is one example. According to the dominant discourse, every young woman wants to break free from her mother who, on the contrary, wants to keep her daughter at home for as long as possible, which is a frequent source of conflict (Korolczuk 2006 and 2009; Walters 1992). The interviews did not confirm this picture as some of my older interviewees were relieved to hear that their daughters were going to leave home. Interestingly, they tried not to show their feelings for fear that they would hurt the daughters, while the daughters were convinced that they had “won” their independence at the price of hurting their mothers. Some mothers simply enjoyed the fact that they no longer had to quarrel with their adult children about housework or money. They felt more free and independent, as the one of the mothers explained:

M: And how did you take your daughter’s leaving home?

I: Well, I hate to admit it but I think I was relieved. Let me say that I think I was ready to let go of my child. Before, I had to do her laundry, buy her food and cook it, didn’t I? [...] Sounds rather ruthless but we’re being frank, aren’t we? I just feel that I was putting in more work than my daughter in this. (mother WK)

This mother was feeling the burden of having to do all the housework which her adult daughters were reluctant to take responsibility for, and of having to mediate between them and her husband who was very strict about such things as dirty dishes or a messy house. And although she clearly felt guilty because of the relief she experienced when her daughter left home, she was also obviously glad to be free again.

Her daughter, meanwhile, mainly paid attention to the emotional aspect of new situation, obviously projecting some of her own feelings onto her mother. Her narrative communicates fear that that her mother will interpret her decision to buy a flat of her own as a threat to the stability of their relation:

I knew mum would ask me whether I didn’t like living with them. And I could see the tears in her eyes and I’m sure that she wept because she was angry or ... sad that I wanted to leave home. (daughter KW)

The daughter’s account clearly fits into the well-known narrative schema which says that mothers should be unhappy when their daughters leave home. The older

interviewee's conclusion also suggests that this is a normative model: to admit that one feels relieved arouses guilt and is inconsistent with the good mother image.

In another family not only housework (cleaning, cooking) was a problem. So were financial issues. The daughter reported bitterly that as soon as she got a job her parents forced her to contribute to the costs of bills. She therefore came to the conclusion that it would be better to be completely independent and she moved out. Interestingly, in spite of frequent quarrels and parental suggestions, particularly her father's, that she leave home, the daughter claimed that her parents did not really want her to move out and that she only managed to do so smoothly thanks to a coincidence:

My father kept asking me when on earth I was going to move out [...] because he wanted to let my room, but I'm not sure if he just wanted to know, because that was what he really wanted, or if he didn't really want me to go. And it took me just one day to do it. ... There were no scenes. My parents were taking their afternoon nap so it just happened quickly and naturally, with no problems. (daughter MR)

Meanwhile, this young woman's mother's narrative conveys a sense of relief that her daughter was finally independent. Due to financial hardships and marital problems, the mother felt really burdened with the responsibility for her daughter's everyday life. Now that she no longer had to worry about money or be home by a certain time in order to tidy up and cook the family's meal she felt freer and more secure:

The most important thing for a mother is for her child to be able to earn its own living. Then she can, well no die but at least relax [...] All my life, I hurried home from work, I was tied in. Now I don't have to any more. I've got peace and quiet, no children tugging at me. (mother RM)

Significantly, this was one of the few moments in the interview when she so blatantly verbalized the burden of motherhood because in the section of the interview actually dealing with motherhood she largely focused on positive experiences and feelings.

The daughters' unsatisfied needs—mainly in the sphere of communication—often surface when they become mothers:

I'd like my relations with my daughter to be on a more equal basis, not the mother–daughter kind, more friendly. I'm an open person and there's nothing I can't talk about. (daughter DC)

Such utterances can be interpreted as indirect evaluations of their relations with mothers. Younger women clearly miss the opportunity to express their opinions and feelings freely without having to stay within strict limits of the relation and respect specific taboos. Daughters obviously feel uncomfortable with this lack of freedom to say what they think and submit to the hierarchy (where not everyone is free to talk about everything).

The younger interviewees also often said that their mother's well-being and quality of life had a significant effect on the quality of their mutual relations. Thus, they wished the mothers would rather enjoy life than sacrificing themselves for the children. One younger interviewee was quite explicit about this:

I just wish my mother were happier because I'm worried about her, I feel the weight of her sadness, her problems, her bitterness. (daughter BW)

This example confirms Adrienne Rich's opinion that the best legacy we can leave to future generations of women is the mothers' sense of fulfilment. She claims that:

As daughters we need mothers who want their own freedom and ours. We need not to be the vessels of another woman's self-denial and frustration. The quality of mother's life—however embattled and unprotected—is her primary bequest to her daughter [...] (1976: 204).

But if mothers are to feel free and fulfilled, the social context and the division of labour must change, not only at the individual level but also at the level of society as women find it more and more difficult to reconcile their private and professional lives. Otherwise the possibility to achieve individual fulfilment may turn into the demand to keep up the appearances of happiness no matter what happens. The fact that the young mothers believe they are supposed to control their emotions and should not express any "bad" feelings such as anger or frustration, suggests that the ideal of a happy, self-assured mother may be yet another source of enormous pressure on women.

### Conclusions

According to the British sociologist Steph Lawler (2000), although many women perform the two roles at the same time, as all mothers are daughters and many daughters become mothers, the mother relation to her daughter is different from the one of the daughter to her mother (cf. Budrowska 2000: 134). The daughters tend to attribute the source of problems in their mothers' attitudes whereas the latter experience greater agency and responsibility when relating to their daughters, being less likely to blame them for conflicts (Arcana 1981). This is largely because traditionally mothers are believed to be the active agents, responsible for their daughters' upbringing, whereas the latter are thought to be passive and receptive (Hirsch 1981; Lawler 2000; van Mens-Verhulst 1993).

These relations develop somewhat differently in the Polish context because—located at the micro-social level—they are also enmeshed in macro-level processes and determined by socio-historical changes. The transformation which has been taking place in Poland over the last decades has had a major effect on mother–daughter relations. Women who entered adulthood in the 1960s and 1970s are situated between the clear hierarchy on which parent–children relations were based in their own homes and rationalized educational discourse of post-war communist Poland (Urbańska 2009) on the one hand, and the contemporary mothering ideal based on expert knowledge and emotional involvement on the other hand (Budrowska 2000). Most of them were aware that the patterns of parent–child relations as well as conditions of living, particularly in the case of women, have evolved over the last few decades and so they tried to justify their parents attitudes and child-rearing practices as well as prepare their daughters for new challenges. Their attitudes and views on mothering and daughtering are constructed as a patchwork of "new" and "old" beliefs and ideals (Korolczuk 2009). The younger generation of women feeling more comfortable

with the model of relations based on openness and frankness rather than on cross-generational hierarchy did their best to understand the cultural determinants and not to blame their mothers for potential problems. Some of the daughters actually felt responsible for their mothers who had to cut out a new place for themselves in the new reality. Hence the daughters declared considerable more responsibility for the relation with mothers as compared to the models described in existing research (Arcana 1981). They were also willing to renegotiate the shape of the parent-child relationship regarding both their mothers and children.

All this leads to the following conclusion. The quality and form of mother-daughter relations depends not only on individual factors, as suggested by dominant cultural narratives (Korolczuk 2006 and 2009), but also on evolving cultural discourses and conditions of living. These affect not only the way mother-daughter relations are presented in the culture but also the way women themselves experience these relations. As far as future research is concerned, this means that we need to look not only at the micro level, where interpretations are largely made in psychosocial terms, but also at the macro level. It also means that we must consider several other factors, such as demographic change, family restructuring or changing gender contracts (Titkow 2007).

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