

Abstract dissertation thesis: Construction of motherhood and femininity in the three generations

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This dissertation aims to analyze the norms of "good" motherhood, discourses, and social practices related to these norms, and their connection and interrelationship with the issue of agency and women's/mothers' free choice under specific conditions over the course of three defined periods. In particular, in this study, I focused on the prevalent conditions (be it legislation, i.e. family and social policies, expert discourses in the field of psychology, demography, pediatrics, etc., but also societal expectations of women within family and employment) during the three defined periods. I analyzed how individual standards of "good" motherhood and "proper" child care are defined and conceived under these circumstances, in which the interviewed mothers carried out their motherhood projects. Furthermore, I focused on what choices mothers could make in these normative conditions, what choices they considered available to them and realistic in each one period, and whether some of the mothers' personal traits may have bolstered or diminished their ability to make informed choices concerning their motherhood project. In the three periods examined, the manifestations of biopower (Foucault 2004 and 2005) therefore gradually change in the context of "good" motherhood and "proper" childcare. In the first period, both biopower techniques were evident, the regulatory one (by way of political decisions, legislation—family and social policies, employment-related legislation) and the disciplinary one (by way of social institutions such as the family, marriage, also the practice of counseling for pregnant women and mothers; regular medical check-ups which the right to child allowance was conditional on, etc.). In the second period, the regulatory power and its manifestations were gradually waning and it was the disciplinary technique of power that gained strength. The narratives of the mothers in the second group show as well that social institutions play an important role in their mother projects. In contrast, as for the third period, which is marked by more room for choice in different areas of life, the analysis showed that in the context of childcare, choices are made in a comprehensive and broad normative framework of "intensive motherhood" that structures these "free" choices. The analysis of narratives and their rhetoric indicates that mothers do not reflect to such an extent on the regulatory mechanisms or disciplining through social or medical institutions, but the most striking in their narratives was the manifestation of self-regulation and self-discipline.