

Emilia Garncarek 
University of Lodz, Poland

“Living with Illegal Feelings”—Analysis of the Internet Discourse on Negative Emotions towards Children and Motherhood

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Abstract The aim of the article is to show the socio-cultural conditions influencing the ways of expressing emotions and feelings by mothers. It presents the results of the analysis of the Internet discourse on negative attitudes towards motherhood and/or a child/children. The text is built on the author’s research on the issue of “regretting motherhood” and is based on a qualitative analysis of the content—blog entries/posts: nieperfekcyjnie.pl [notperfect.pl], matkawygodna.pl [slackermom.pl], mamwatpliwosc.pl [ihaveadoubt.pl], and in the group—Internet forum—*Żałuję rodzicielstwa* [I regret parenthood]. The theoretical basis were the concepts included in the sociology of symbolic interactionism.

Keywords Motherhood; Emotions; Motherhood Regret; Internet Discourse

Emilia Garncarek is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology of Structures and Social Changes, Institute of Sociology, Faculty of Economics and Sociology, University of Lodz. She is a sociologist and her research interests include: gender studies, alternative forms of modern family, voluntary childlessness, transformations of motherhood in the contemporary world, regretting motherhood issues.

email address: emilia.garncarek@uni.lodz.pl

Motherhood can be seen both as a woman’s individual experience and as a social institution (Rich 1976). Research conducted in various socio-cultural contexts show the diversity of motherhood and the variability of maternal practices depending on the historical moment, as well as the social group (Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2012). Whether and how motherhood begins and how it is implemented does not depend only on a woman’s decision and does not constitute her individual ex-

perience, as it is determined by the socio-cultural context. Motherhood is also deeply politicized and linked to various ideologies and visions of society (Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2012:10). It constitutes a capacious category, especially nowadays, because as a result of socio-cultural transformations we are dealing with a diversification of maternal and parental practices, and thanks to the development of medicine and modern reproductive technologies, also the possibility of being free from motherhood (voluntary childlessness) or fragmentation of motherhood (e.g., surrogate mothers) (see, e.g., Badinter 1998; Budrowska 2000; Slany 2006; Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2012; Garncarek 2014; 2017; Kwak 2014). As Glenn (1994:2) points out, motherhood is now increasingly becoming a contested terrain where practices and gender discourses clash.

Despite the changes in this area, social researchers stress that women are still perceived through the prism of the maternal role, it is still an element of social expectations towards them (Budrowska 2000; Dzwonkowska-Godula 2015). That requirement is strengthened in the process of the socialization of individuals. What is also important is that social awareness and public discourse are dominated by narratives that especially show the positive aspects of motherhood. However, the experiences of contemporary women/mothers are to varying degrees consistent with the pattern of behavior expected by society. Their personal experiences are varied and show many faces of motherhood. It is perceived by women not only positively, but it is often associated with experiencing a number of negative emotions. More and more often we hear voices of women who admit that they do not like taking care of their

children or regret becoming mothers. The way the child is treated and the value attributed to it have also changed significantly (Garncarek 2014; 2019a). Those phenomena can be considered in the context of broader processes taking place in contemporary societies of Western culture, including Poland, for example, individualization, empowerment of individuals, personal and psycho-social conditions. As Giddens (2006) points out, modernity changes the most personal human experience, including the experience of emotions (Pawlik 2011:122). Society and culture influence not only what we do and what we think, but also, to some extent, what we experience and feel as actors of social life. The expression of our emotions has a social character. Culture and social norms make our emotions suppressed or we do internal work to arouse them within ourselves (e.g., in our maternal role). Sometimes, however, the power of emotions burst the corset of social orders, prohibitions, and expectations (Pawlik 2012).

Referring to the issues explored in this text, a discussion pertaining to emotions connected with motherhood (e.g., intensive motherhood, postnatal depression) has been noticeable in recent years. The issue of regretting motherhood, thus far not tackled by Polish sociologists, is a new and interesting field of research and scientific reflection (Garncarek 2019a; 2019b). The article will present the results of the analysis of the Internet discourse on negative attitudes towards motherhood and/or children. It was made on the basis of the author's research on the issue of regretting motherhood and, in the case of this text, is based on a qualitative analysis of the content—blog entries: nieperfekcyjnie.pl [notperfect.pl], matkawygodna.pl [slackermom.pl], [Qualitative Sociology Review • \[www.qualitativesociologyreview.org\]\(http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org\)](http://mamwatpli-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

wosc.pl [ihaveadoubt.pl], and in the group—Internet forum—*Żałuję rodzicielstwa* [I regret parenthood]. It will present socio-cultural contexts that influence the ways in which mothers who admit regretting their motherhood express their emotions and feelings. Concepts included in the sociology of symbolic interactionism, like Thomas Scheff's notion combining the ideas of the tradition of symbolic interactionism and psychoanalysis into a general theory of emotions, will provide the theoretical framework for the analysis.

“Old” and “New” Patterns of Femininity and Motherhood

For centuries family and motherhood had been the most important and, to a large extent, the only areas of action and activity for women, defining their relationships with other people and social groups, determining their social position. The perception of women as potential or actual mothers was associated with a specific socialization scheme and the consolidation of their tendency to sacrifice, care, engage in unpaid work at home, and a particular sensitivity and readiness to meet the needs of other people. At the same time, it determined the identity of women and was a criterion for their assessment (Budrowska 2003; Bourdieu 2004; Krzyżanowska 2014).

As a result of socio-cultural changes, including the activities of emancipatory movements, there have been slow changes in the sphere of family life, changes in the status and social roles of women and men, and gender relations. The changes taking place on a global scale also influenced the situation in Poland. They were primarily an effect of the broadly

understood modernization of societies, while the current acceleration—the post-modern phase of development—leads to their intensification. We are talking here about such processes as individualization, which exposes, among others, rationality, reflectiveness, and the aspiration of individuals to self-fulfillment (not only as an opportunity, but also as a structural constraint) (e.g., Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 2001; Giddens 2001; Beck 2004). The transformation of values should also be mentioned here. Above all, in highly developed societies, individuals are beginning to attach increasing importance to the issues of quality of life, autonomy, and free expression, questioning the tradition that can limit them. We are dealing with the liberalization of patterns of behavior, for example, concerning marital and family life and sexual behaviors (e.g., Giddens 2001; 2006; Inglehart and Norris 2009).

Significant among the issue discussed here are the transformations of femininity and masculinity patterns in Western culture, where the traditional gender model clashes with a new perception of women and men, based on equality and partnership. The clash between two opposing cultural gender models—traditional and modern—poses many challenges, not only at the individual, but also group and institutional level (Dzwonkowska-Godula 2015). In the new paradigm, marked by the third wave of feminism, motherhood as a social role and, at the same time, a component of a woman's identity is more often a choice than a constraint. However, it is a non-obvious choice (Krzyżanowska 2014). The decision on whether or not to give birth to a child, or how motherhood should be implemented, in a culture marked by risk (Beck 2004), consumerism, and

fluidity (Bauman 2006; 2007), is a challenge for contemporary women. More and more women are combining family and professional roles and treating both as equally important. At the same time, they point to various costs of motherhood—economic, social, psychological. Therefore, some of them turn away from children or postpone the decision to have a child (Garncarek 2014; 2017). Even so, it should be noted that today we are dealing with high standards and requirements for parents. Nowadays, not only the identity of an individual becomes a part of a reflexive project (Giddens 2001)—parenthood also becomes a project to be implemented. We are dealing with the professionalization of parenthood, which places, especially for mothers, many demands on them. Sharon Hays (1996) points to the emergence, especially in Western culture, of an “ideology of intense motherhood,” which includes the enormous amount of time, energy, and money needed for proper care and upbringing.

The change of contemporary patterns and norms leads to a transformation of the role of the mother, which makes it reasonable to define motherhood as a socially constructed activity (Forcey 1994:357). The dominant discourses of motherhood clearly indicate what qualities and attributes a “good mother¹” should have. Modern standards of good motherhood seem to rise and the demands on women are increasing (Medina and Magnuson 2009:90). It is very difficult to deny or reject the symbol of the

ideal mother, because motherhood is still perceived as crucial for social life. The social norms and social imperatives of the role, by introducing the dichotomy “good mother-bad mother,” reinforce the negative traits attributed to the construction of the bad mother. The behavior of mothers is socially evaluated and controlled in a way that men are not controlled. Mothers who have difficulty in meeting idealized standards are described as bad mothers. As Walls (2007) points out, there is a social mechanism of “mother-blaming,” which consists in attributing a special role to mothers who are responsible for the survival of humanity and blaming them for not doing well enough to accomplish key tasks for society. The image of a good mother is so strong that women who deviate from the ideal at hand expose themselves to strong emotional reactions from the rest of society, including social exclusion and even legal consequences (Kudlińska 2011:64). Women are expected to love their children, devote a lot of time to them, put them first, and be happy with it. There is no place for frustration or fatigue in this arrangement, because such symptoms lead to stigmatization of women and their perception as bad mothers (Badinter 2013). Women who perceive themselves as insufficiently good mothers may feel guilt and shame, and be frustrated and believe that they cannot cope with their femininity and/or motherhood. Taking into account contemporary changes and standards associated with education, labor market requirements, realization of professional career, contemporary motherhood becomes very demanding and difficult to realize.

It should be noted that both the new images of femininity and the new images of motherhood meet

¹ Those are: patience, unconditional love, goodness, kindness, establishing a strong bond with the child (“being with the child”), putting children’s needs before one’s own, sacrificing oneself for children, coping (in addition, joyfully and patiently) with the lack of sleep and time for oneself and one’s ambitions (Lupton and Fenwick 2001:1011).

criticism and rejection of some social environments, and the gender patterns manifested in stereotypes still dominate social life. Researchers point to manifestations of resistance against changes in the cultural model and gender pattern, as well as attempts to maintain or return to the traditional way of implementing femininity (and masculinity), especially on the part of neo-conservative environments. Also, modern models are not supported by the content promoted by the mass media (e.g., Arcimowicz 2010). According to Beck (2007), the recent changes in the definition of gender and gender relations in the countries of Euro-American culture have taken place more “in consciousness and on paper,” but not in the behavior and situation of men and women, especially when we analyze the division of household duties in families and the situation on the labor market.² The previously mentioned changes in cultural gender structures, including maternity patterns, are therefore more model than practical, as we still face difficulties in implementing new patterns in practice (Dzwonkowska-Godula 2015). As already mentioned, such difficulties may give rise to negative emotions in women in relation to their role as mothers.

Emotions as the Subject of Sociological Considerations

In ancient times, emotions were part of scientific dissertations (Szczepański 2011:25), but inscribed

² Referring to the research results, for example, in Poland, in most households, women are still solely responsible for the activities related to running the household. They deal with laundry (82%), ironing (81%), and preparing meals (65%). Cleaning and thorough cleaning also rests on women's shoulders (61% and 57% respectively) (CBOS 2018).

in modern sociological thought only around 1975, due to the first important publications in the research area (Anioł 2016:67). In recent years, in various areas of social sciences, including Polish sociology, there has been an increased interest in human emotionality. The turn towards the emotional sphere of human functioning is connected with the emergence of the so-called third sociology dealing with the phenomena of everyday life (Simlat-Żuk 2012:45-47) and the departure from Weber's sociology, which emphasizes the significance of rationalization and diminishes the role of emotions in the functioning of societies (Barbalet 2004:13). As Flam (1990) points out, at the root of this increased interest lies not only the exhaustion of other, classic areas of sociological inquiry, but also the observation that many social phenomena that occur in the surrounding reality simply cannot be explained by looking through the prism of a rational actor (Sawicka 2018). The perspective of explaining emotions through the prism of cultural phenomena has introduced a new quality, associated with a significant widening of the spectrum of causes for a number of phenomena occurring in the space of interpersonal relations.

Within the framework of the interpretative paradigm, emotions are understood as processes resulting from a specific relationship between the organism (the individual) and the environment (Lazarus 1991). In the paradigm at hand, the interaction between the individual and the environment, and their mutual influence, serves to create and maintain social relations (Pawłowska 2013:133). Moreover, there are several theoretical concepts concerning the understanding of emo-

tions.³ Feelings are referred to within that paradigm as the creation of an emerging experience, in which social factors play a role. Social conditions underpin the whole process of emergence of emotions—their arousal and extinction (Pawłowska 2013:134). In the sociology of emotions, the theories of symbolic interactionism describe social life through the perspective of an individual attempting to maintain a positive view about oneself. Identity and concept of the self become the regulators of human behavior. When individuals have a chance to maintain a positive image of themselves, they will experience positive emotions, and if they fail to do so, they will experience negative emotions (and there will be a mobilization to balance). An individual who draws information about oneself from self-knowledge and what the outside world seems to think about them (looking-glass self) refers to defensive mechanisms if there is no other possibility to confirm one’s positive self-image. Those strategies are used because unpleasant emotions cause pain that people try to avoid. All that influences behavior change, and consequently—emotions, which can serve as a tool of socialization (Turner and Stets 2009:174-176).

Thomas Scheff’s Concept of Pride and Shame

In the context of the issues discussed in the text, Thomas Scheff’s concept, which embeds emotions within their social origin, deserves special attention.

³ Dramaturgical approach (Goffman), cultural (Hochschild, Gordon, Thoits, Clark), constructivist (Averill), ritual (Goffman, Collins, Summers-Effler), symbolic interactionism (Mead, Cooley, Stryker, Burke, Heise, Scheff, Tangeney) (Pawłowska 2013:134).

As Turner and Stets write (2009:174), Thomas Scheff “combines ideas from the symbolic interactionism tradition and psychoanalysis into a general sociological theory of emotions.” The concept of shame, arising from embarrassment and awkwardness, and pride occupies a central place in his idea. Scheff analyzes the ways of dealing with the emotion of shame. At the same time, he suggests that shame is seen as a basic social emotion in the context of the social control system (Scheff 1987; 1988; 2000). According to the author, shame is an important social emotion for at least two reasons. Firstly, it signals a threat to social bond (Scheff 2000:97 as cited in Sawicka 2018:21) and, secondly, it is the most important mechanism of social control (Scheff 1988 as cited in Sawicka 2018:21). An important issue in Scheff’s concept is the self-observation of the individual, which, according to the author, is always aimed at evaluation. As a result of self-observation, shame or pride appears that anticipation is typical of an individual. Such a statement allowed him to propose a concept of a “subtle and widespread” system of social sanctions, operating precisely due to experiencing shame and pride (Scheff 1988 as cited in Sawicka 2018:21). In such systems of control, a pleasant feeling of pride or self-satisfaction is a reward for behavior in line with social expectations, while guilt and shame or humiliation—a punishment experienced by an individual for an offense against social norms, for example, those related to the role of a mother (need to care for children, sacrifice for children, particular sensitivity and readiness to meet the needs of other people, etc.). As individuals seek to feel positive emotions, such as pride, the result is social conformism and a high degree of social stability. Thus, pride and shame ensure social regu-

lation of behavior without the need for external supervision (Scheff 1990). Shame is the result of fear of exclusion from the group, fear of rejection, negative self-perception, low self-esteem, subordination, and assessment of one's actions as incompatible with how one sees reality expectations. Shame and guilt are secondary emotions, built on negative emotions such as anger, fear, and sadness (Turner 2009). Pride is a secondary emotion built on positive emotions, and is part of the family of emotions of satisfaction (Goleman 1997).

The emotions experienced by mothers are, in a way, important for the duration and functioning of society, as they uphold the existing system of norms related to the role of a mother. As Reewes (1982) points out, a woman's biological predisposition, duly justified by social institutions, has become a premise for the spread of the "maternity coercion," from which for every normal woman there is a duty to give birth, care, and ensure good upbringing. It should be added that in many societies, the number of children born by a woman is a measure of her social status, and it is a common perception that women who cannot comply with such socially determined scenario feel incomplete, regardless of other life achievements. As already mentioned, the social "coercion to motherhood" and the realization of the role of a good mother have been passed on to the younger generations for centuries as part of family socialization and through guidelines from numerous institutions, especially the Church. As Gawlińska (2003:34) claims, the stronger the pressure the more demographic processes of the modern world indicate birth rates declining. The problem of low fertility, recently observed and widely discussed in

Poland, intensifies that pressure. Thus, according to Scheff, maintaining social order requires the control of the individual through one's feeling of shame and its derivatives, for example, by using appropriate reinforcements in the form of specific messages (such as social programs and campaigns, statements of politicians, as well as ordinary people repeating common opinions such as: "woman = mother," "every mother loves her child," "a mother's heart will endure everything").

Research Methodology

The inspiration for research on the issue of regretting motherhood was, first of all, the recent observation of an increasing number of Polish blogs and Internet forums on maternal issues, including those focusing on the emotions associated with the role of a mother. Secondly, the publication of the Israeli sociologist, Orna Donath, who conducted interviews with Israeli women who regret becoming mothers. She coined the term "regretting motherhood" (Donath 2017), which I use in this article. It was decided to conduct similar analyses in Poland, but with the use of concepts of sociology of emotions as a theoretical background, and taking into account the specificity of Polish society and culture. The issue of regretting motherhood, thus far not addressed by Polish sociologists, has become an interesting field of research and scientific reflection (Garncarek 2019a; 2019b). The analyses focused on the socio-cultural context that can influence the ways in which mothers who admit to regretting their motherhood express their emotions and feelings; the emotional experiences accompanying women in their role as mothers; as well as how the fact of feeling and

expressing certain emotions influences the performance of the role. In the case of this article, selected issues raised during the analysis are presented—the focus is on the issue of guilt and shame in the context of regretting motherhood, including articulating negative emotions.

The results from the first stage of the research presented in the text are based on a qualitative analysis of the content of entries on blogs: *nieperfekcyjnie.pl* [notperfect.pl], *matkawygodna.pl* [slackermom.pl], *mamwatpliwosc.pl* [ihaveadoubt.pl], and the Internet forum *Żałuję rodzicielstwa* [I regret parenthood]. The analysis was based on search results for the phrase “I regret motherhood.”⁴ Next, a purposive selection of the mentioned blogs and groups was made. They contained numerous amounts of information and comments on the issues discussed here. After a preliminary analysis of the content, the author decided to follow the above-mentioned platforms—from June 2018 to January 2019. I observed:

- posts and discussions under the entry “Would you also turn back time?” on the blog *nieperfekcyjnie.pl* [nonperfect.pl];
- posts and discussions under the entry “Regretting motherhood—being nobody’s mom” on the blog *matkawygodna.pl* [slackermom.pl];
- posts and discussions under the entry “The birth of the sad mothers” on the blog *mamwatpliwosc.pl* [ihaveadoubt.pl];

- 30 posts on the Internet forum *Żałuję rodzicielstwa*⁵ [I regret parenthood].

The aim of the investigation was to identify what kinds of topics have been addressed, as well as how they have been framed. The basic unit of the analysis was a single text (utterance), and, next, a set of coherent texts that constituted a thematic, as well as meaningful, whole. Important in the research process was a general sense of the utterances and the socio-cultural context underpinning the stories shared by mothers, which was also their reference and interpretation. Following Szczepaniak (2012:110), my analytical steps included: 1) selection of empirical material—with particular emphasis on its possible formal uniformity allowing for comparing and juxtaposing the data (individual texts); 2) multiple analytical reading of the texts aimed at structuring the topics covered, as well as content presented; 3) creation of a categorization key resulting from reading the texts and constituting a structured set of thematic categories contained in the articles (categories of the key were the subsequent topics described in the analyzed texts or minor aspects of the main topics; the key was a kind of a list of issues covered in the research material and served to aggregate similar threads while attempting to capture maximum thematic diversity); 4) defining categories in the key to bring how they were created and understood by the researcher closer; 5) constructing tables with quotations that provide direct contact with the empirical material. The analysis included posts/statements that offered anonymous stories of women telling their own experience of motherhood. Unfortunately

⁴ Google Web Search.

⁵ See: <https://www.facebook.com/ZalujeRodzicielstwa/>. Retrieved January 06, 2020.

ly, the type of research material does not allow for presenting metric data.⁶ The presented research results are of an exploratory nature and their aim was to identify the problem and illustrate preliminary findings concerning the phenomenon of “regretting motherhood.”⁷

Living with “Illegal Feelings”

Women taking part in discussions on the aforementioned Internet forums focused on describing their own motherhood from the perspective of important events, sharing their experiences with other female speakers, attempting to understand experiences related to their motherhood. They were also looking for attention, mental support, sometimes a piece of advice. For some of them, as they noted themselves, the forum posts and discussions were a kind of mental cleansing.

The analysis of the collected material allowed for the initial identification of three main types of motherhood regrets. We can distinguish: 1) “regretting motherhood, but not children,” consisting in a negative attitude towards the social role of the mother, especially the role-related duties; 2) “regretting giving birth to / having children,” involving disliking them, disappointment and/or unloving, emotionally difficult relationships with the child/children;

⁶ Based on the collected data, it can be assumed that most of the speakers were young and middle-aged women, living in the city or in the countryside, and having one or two children (of different ages). Most of the speakers lived with the father of the child or another partner, while some of them raised their child/children on their own.

⁷ The author is in the process of carrying out in-depth research (IDI) and broader analyses on the issue of “regretting motherhood.”

3) pointing to both types of motherhood regrets. The main reasons behind regretting motherhood and the emergence of a number of negative emotions associated with the role of the mother were⁸:

- Excessive social expectations of mothers, including: feeling the pressure to be an ideal mother; fulfilling the role of a mother in line with social expectations, and experiencing related (growing) frustration;
- Fatigue of responsibilities related to the role of a mother;
- Lack of support from partners/husbands in childcare;
- Lack/limitation of self-determination / sense of objectification;
- Problems with combining maternal and employee roles;
- Longing for the “old life,” “former self—before being a mother”;
- Difficult relationship with the child/children (e.g., in the case of an over-excitable child, a child who does not meet previous fantasies, expectations, etc.).

Pointing out the regret of motherhood, most women referred to the main (basic) negative emotions. In the statements of the women, there was especially sadness, anger (aggression), disillusionment, and

⁸ A more detailed description of the reasons behind regretting motherhood can be found in Garncarek (2019b).

its derivative—shame. Those emotions appeared in the context of the role of the mother, as well as in the context of the relationship of mothers with their own child/children. Women mentioned sadness especially in connection with the loss of previous life and their sense of subjectivity:

When my older son was born, I felt as if someone had taken everything from me, my whole world, my identity, work, activity, enthusiasm, and even the chair where I read books. I, ambitious, educated, able to do everything, suddenly shrank to the role of a nanny / washerwoman / housekeeper...I valued my independence, and I have nothing left...if I could go back in time... I would never decide to motherhood. [Kolejna smutna (Another sad) / blog mamwatpliwosc.pl (ihaveadoubt.pl)]

My life is no longer mine, the baby took everything from me. He didn't do it on purpose, but does that change anything? [forum Żałuję rodzicielstwa (I regret parenthood)]

In several statements, the way they function is compared by the mothers to prison conditions. Feelings of sadness appeared in connection with the lack of freedom of action, control over their lives, and dependence on others. Above all, their existence was filled by suffering and a sense of loneliness. The mothers were unable to find themselves in a new role, they could not cope with the burden and fatigue, they were not ready for many changes, sacrifices, and relinquishments:

Sad mothers hide their saber in the closet. They apologize for the extra pounds, like if they were to fuck-

ing explain themselves. Because of a bad dinner, as if anybody they're making it for were able or would try to make a better one. They ask permission to leave the house, as if it was a prison pass—each time organizing it as if they were going into space, and seeing it as something extraordinary... After a year they simply say, “He took care of the children, so I rested, I washed the floors and windows,” “I'm going for a walk to Biedronka” [Polish grocery store]. [Radomska / blog mamwatpliwosc.pl (ihaveadoubt.pl)]

The emotion of sadness (characterized by affective negativity) appeared not only in the statements of the discussants, but also manifested in their nicknames: “Sad mother,” “Another sad mother,” which can be interpreted in terms of building one's identity, that of a mother, based on the emotion of sadness. For some women, that emotion shaped the image of motherhood, constituting the essence of one's identity of a mother regretting her motherhood.

I'm done. It was said that it will get better with time, easier, when the children grow up and go to school. Bullshit. I'm very tired. With all the planning and organization on my mind. [Kolejna smutna (Another sad) / blog mamwatpliwosc.pl (ihaveadoubt.pl)]

Some mothers mentioned disappointment with their child, dislike of the child/children, and there were also a few statements from mothers who wrote that they never really loved their child and would gladly leave them, as well as their present life. However, they are held back by social pressure and a deeply internalized sense of moral obligation to take care of the progeny. What follows, it can be assumed that there are mothers who live with “ille-

gal feelings,” because not liking or not loving their child is far from the accepted pattern of femininity and motherhood in our culture. One of the participants emphasized:

I'm simply DISAPPOINTED with motherhood. That's not how I imagined it... That's not how I imagined my child, who embodies everything that I hate about children... Screaming 24/7 from the day she was born... and she is already several years old. I love her, but... I'm simply disappointed in her. I'll probably be stoned here, but I don't care. That's how I feel. [Smutna Matka (Sad mother) / blog mamwatpliwosc.pl (ihaveadoubt.pl)]

I allow myself to long for those times, the old me and my more carefree life, greater freedom, I allow myself to be angry, to be disappointed, to be lacking in strength—because motherhood is not as great as others want us to believe. It can give joy, it can give a sense of fulfillment, but I understand that it can also disappoint, and even take away the desire to live. [blog matkawygodna.pl (slackermom.pl)]

Before having children I thought I would be a fantastic mother. Energetic and full of ideas. Today I'm sad, I haven't hidden my sword yet, but the closet door is already open. What disappointed me the most was my partner, with his lack of support, or rather my roommate, because the only thing we have in common today is probably a shared flat. [Agnieszka / blog mamwatpliwosc.pl (ihaveadoubt.pl)]

Fulfilling the role of a mother in accordance with social expectations was the reason behind growing frustration, feeling dissatisfaction, and in some cases—articulating anger and pointing to aggressive

behaviors. Anger and aggression appeared both in the context of fulfilling the role of a mother, as well as in the context of mothers' relationship with their own child/children:

I'm pissed off by the daily rituals, cooking lunches, bathing, reading, and taking care of the baby in general. I have the feeling that my time flies through my fingers, because when I do what I have to do, I could be doing something else that would fascinate me. [Kasia / blog mamwatpliwosc.pl (ihaveadoubt.pl)]

Sometimes I sit down and cry from this powerlessness, sometimes I jerk the little one or yell at him all the time, and when it's very bad, I am even able to tell him how much I regret that I gave birth to him and how good it was without him. I'm sick of this tiredness and mess all around. [forum Żałuję rodzicielstwa (I regret parenthood)]

Interesting in the context of previous reflections on guilt and shame as the most important mechanisms of social control were the statements of women who admitted to the difficulty of accepting their negative emotions towards their children and/or of fulfilling a maternal role. As Turner (2009) points out, shame and guilt are secondary emotions, built on negative emotions such as sadness, regret, anger, aggression, disappointment. For a sociologist, secondary emotions, also called social emotions, are more interesting, since they are more susceptible to social impact, that is, they are socially constructed (Lewis and Haviland-Jones 2005:72-86). With reference to the cultural patterns of motherhood, those negative emotions are not associated with motherhood. It is rather associated with positive emotions and experiences.

Especially the image of the so-called good mother, in which patience, unconditional love, goodness, kindness, establishing a strong bond with the child (“being with the child”), putting the children’s needs before one’s own, sacrificing oneself for the children, coping (in addition, in a patient way) with the lack of sleep and time for oneself and one’s ambitions are important (Lupton and Fenwick 2001:1011).

An important aspect discussed here is the socio-cultural context of the statements of mothers. It also provides a framework for the interpretation of their utterances. Given the widespread (and established in the process of socialization) social belief in “the natural vocation” of women to motherhood (and their tendency to sacrifice, care for, and like unpaid work at home), this is an important reason for the appearance of a sense of guilt caused by the awareness of exceeding previously internalized norms. According to them, a “true/good” mother should be ashamed if she fails to meet social demands. Talking about the negative emotions associated with the role of a mother, articulating grief, sadness, and disappointment has been a challenge for some women taking part in discussions. Some asked themselves whether it was normal to feel negative emotions towards their own child. They expressed them using the keyboard, but some of them, sometimes already in the same entry, punished themselves for it:

I’m sick of my baby. Every day I have more remorse that I’m not the kind of mother I imagined I would be. [forum *Żałuję rodzicielstwa* (I regret parenthood)]

At times I don’t want to live and I really want to give him away somewhere, even though he’s my son. I’m

ashamed of that feeling, but I don’t have any more strength. [forum *Żałuję rodzicielstwa* (I regret parenthood)]

...most women remain silent, silent because of fear of social condemnation, because of fear of contemptible gazes. Trapped somewhere between what they feel and what they are expected to feel, they become more and more unhappy. It is easier for them to throw a plate against the wall when they are alone and feel powerlessness and helplessness than to admit to their immediate surroundings that they are tired, powerless, or disappointed in being a mother. [blog *matkawygodna.pl* (*slackermom.pl*)]

Conclusions

The analysis of the Internet discourse on motherhood made it possible to identify the problem of regretting motherhood, which has thus far been poorly present in Polish public discourse, as well as in sociology. In the vast majority of the analyzed statements, women expressed negative emotions connected with their role. Motherhood was described in terms of constant hardship and struggle with one another, with one’s own emotions, such as regret, sadness, disappointment, and anger, which some of the participants found difficult to admit in the context of their role as mothers. They indicated not only a struggle with oneself, sometimes also with one’s own child and/or the father of the child who was “absent” in the process of upbringing. The women wrote about the problem of giving up on themselves and their previous lives. There was also a certain “suspension” of women between traditional and modern gender models. On the one

hand, there was a rebellion against the situation / struggle against the traditional understanding of the role of the mother, and, on the other hand, it was pacified by the sense of duty to be a good mother, internalized in the socialization process. They were held back by social pressure and a deeply internalized sense of moral obligation to care for one's child/children, a perpetual tendency to sacrifice oneself, to work unpaid at home, and a particular sensitivity and readiness to meet the needs, first of all—of other people, and then one's own.

In the common sense, regretting motherhood is still seen as impossible by definition, is stigmatized, and is considered a taboo. However, the statements made on the Internet forums and blogs show more and more voices of women who admit that they do not like taking care of their children or regret becoming mothers. The experiences of modern mothers are to varying degrees consistent with the pattern of be-

havior expected by society. Their personal experiences are varied and show many faces of motherhood. It is perceived by women not only positively, as it is often associated with the feeling of a number of negative emotions. Nowadays, especially thanks to the Internet—blogs and forums—they can articulate those emotions. With their voice, however, they contribute to violating the cultural taboo associated with the role of a mother.

This article does not exhaust all of the possibilities of analyzing the collected research material and does not present the whole interpretation of the problem, but it outlines the socio-cultural conditions of the ways of expressing emotions and feelings in the context of regretting motherhood. It points out the main emotions (and their sources) that occur in the case of regretting motherhood, and is an inducement to further in-depth analysis of the problem.

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