



## **The Specifics of an Estimate Discourse of Gender Stereotypes in Small Forms of Folklore in a Network Discourse of Electronic and Information Society at the Beginning of the 21st Century**

**Zaineta R. Khachmafova<sup>1\*</sup>, Irina S. Karabulatova<sup>2</sup>, Svetlana V. Serebriakova<sup>3</sup>, Anastasiya V. Zinkovskaya<sup>4</sup> and Elena N. Ermakova<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Department of German Philology, Adygea State University, 385000, Maykop, Krasnodar region, Southern Federal District, Russia*

<sup>2</sup>*The Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, 117198, Moscow, Central Federal District, Russia*

<sup>3</sup>*Department of Translation Theory and Practice, North-Caucasus Federal University, 355009, Stavropol, Stavropol region, North Caucasian Federal District, Russia*

<sup>4</sup>*Department of English Philology, Kuban State University, 350040, Krasnodar, Krasnodar region, Southern Federal District, Russia*

<sup>5</sup>*Department of Philological Education, Tyumen State University, 626152, Tobolsk, Tyumen region, Ural Federal District, Russia*

### **ABSTRACT**

Philosophers and historians considered society as the expanded family in the middle of the 19th century. The current state of the institution of the family is characterised by various parameters. The electronisation of the modern information society makes it possible for folklore to be easily shared among Internet users. Many of the crisis processes that are observed now in the family are the continuation of tendencies formed in those years when the family was the unique intermediary between the individual and society. Research testifies to this. Social, political and economic change in Russia in the past and at present make the study of the family especially interesting. Folklore available on the Internet, because of its small forms is convenient for sociological analysis. It provides anthropologists, culturologists and sociologists with additional data as other sources provide only fragments of statistics.

*Keywords:* Electronic and information society, folklore, gender stereotypes, norm transformation, folklore

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*E-mail addresses:*

zaineta@nextmail.ru (Zaineta R. Khachmafova),  
radogost2000@mail.ru (Irina S. Karabulatova),  
kafedra.tipp@mail.ru (Svetlana V. Serebriakova),  
nastassiat@rambler.ru (Anastasiya V. Zinkovskaya),  
ermakova25@yandex.ru (Elena N. Ermakova)

\* Corresponding author

### **INTRODUCTION**

National culture or folklore is an informal collection of different types and forms of art that have entered the collective

tradition of a people. Folklore very precisely reflects reality, being part of culture and depending less on ideology, official views and norms. This genre is almost not subject to censorship and shows events as presented by their creators, and not according to the taste or requirement of a ruling regime (Lebed, 2003; Logins, 1988; Toporkov). One of the main differences between folklore information (as a part of culture) and data from official texts is that it is not forced to adapt to the purposes and problems of the state system. National culture seeks "to give magnificent young growth in those parts of the globe where there are totalitarian modes and strict censorship... Communication between these phenomena, apparently, is inversely proportional" (Dandes, 2003, p. 189).

Works of folklore as material for social research have advantages not seen in other sources of information as they are created "not by request" as "It is the peculiar store of popular wisdom crystallizing within centuries and reflecting various aspects of ordinary life of many generations" (Dandes, 2003, p. 189). Folklore is created, transferred from person to the person and lives in time, and all this has been apparent long before researchers appeared. In this regard the objectivity of folklore sources is rather high. "Folklore represents [a] socially authorized 'outlet' allowing society and its separate subgroups to express, overcome and transform the fears, the inhibited desires, irresolvable conflicts, imperious and destructive aspirations, etc." (Dandes, 2003, p. 189). Works of national culture

are characterised by the wide range of problems concerning society. "Folklore can be considered as the most exact barometer of public opinion on different questions" (Dandes, 2003, p. 189). National culture usually quickly and adequately reacts to legal innovations and changes in sociocultural norms and reflects and estimates important processes in public life. "Folklore," as one of the founders of phenomenological sociology, Schütz, put it, "is one of the types of standardization and an institutionalization of behavior models."

In recent years researchers have begun to study the erotic elements that are observable in folklore. The most prominent scientists understand the historical and esthetic value of forbidden, 'treasured' layers of Russian folklore well enough. Their names are worth mentioning: Uspensky, Shane, Zhelvis, Plutser-Sarno, Toporkov, Loginov, Borisov, Trykova, Shcherbina's (Harchev, 1979; Karabulatova, Khachmafova, Bricheva, Nescheretova, & Bersirova, 2015; Sheyn, 1903; Uspensky, 1994). Emergence of the works of these writers is probably connected with the keen interest society has shown in recent years in the subject of intimate relationships (Ryazantsev, Pismennaya, Karabulatova, & Akramov, 2014; Verkhovin, 1997; Zhelvis, 2001). 'Dirty language' in Russia was always subject to moral sanctions; however, it is impossible to extend these estimates to folklore texts and to interfere with their analysis. As fairly noted by Plutser-Sarno, "if we forbid studying the obscene, then it is all the same as though within fight against

drugs forbade experts to study a problem of drug addiction....” Many specialists in folklore and philologists have argued about the need for attentive studying of ‘naughty’, ‘obscene’ *chastushkas*, and their historical roots, for example, in the publications of Kulagina, “Sensuality in Russian *chastushka*” and “O, folklorable!” and Toporkov’s “Sensuality in Russian folklore” (Toporkov, 1995).

The object of this research was change in sociocultural norms and values governing the relationships in a family and between a family and society as recorded in small forms of oral folklore. Social research into folklore, especially small forms of folk art (*chastushka*, anecdote, proverb), reveal their close connection with certain periods of history, efficiency of response to the topic of the day and their possible use as an information source that does not depend on the researcher or official views and norms.

The sociological analysis of small forms of folklore shows that in the first third of the 21st century the priority of private life in relation to family life has begun to weaken in mass consciousness. Today such benefits as family responsibility, the value of children as deposits for a safe old age and the authority of parents are gradually becoming less pronounced as other values such as individualism, independence and personal achievement are celebrated.

## METHODS

The family in crisis is the theme of the works of local and foreign sociologists such as Antonov, Arkhangelsky, Borisov,

Medkov, Sinelnikov, Sorokin, Le-Ple and Zimmerman. It is also seen in the classics of philosophy, philology, history and sociological science written by authors such as Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant, Herbert Spencer, Henri Bergson, Sigmund Freud, Lunacharsky and Propp. Modern local and foreign sociologists, philologists, philosophers, specialists in folklore and ethnographers such as Akhiyezer, Zhelvis, Kasareva, Dmitriyev, Lisovsky, Vdovina, Martynova, Kulagina, Khachmafovoy, Karabulatova, Plutser-Sarno, Toporkov, Uspensky and Dandes also explored it. Noted works that used folklore as analysis material include Dmitriyev’s “Humour Sociology” and “Sociology of Political Humour”, Verkhovina’s “Models of Economic Behavior and Their Verbalization in Russian Folklore” and “Experience of Interpretation of Monetary Stereotypes in Russian Folklore” (Verkhovin, 1997).

However, the listed works provide a fragmentary perspective of the family. The actual reasons for the breakdown of family and marriage are not exactly clear. Detailed analysis of the institution of the family is lacking. Works that come the closest to it are those by Lebed, “What is *chastushka*?” and “A Sociological Portrait of a Modern Family” (Lebed, 2003; Lebed, 2000). Researchers Karabulatova and Hachmafova (Karabulatova et al., 2015) also devoted time to studying the problems of the family institution and the relationships within a family on the basis of processing gender prose. However, there is very little work on studying the family and family relationships

using folklore.

This research used the integrated approach, making use of interdisciplinary, comparative-historical, structurally functional and institutional approaches. The novelty of this work lies in the complex application of various methods of research (quantitative, qualitative, comparative-historical) for studying ordinary interpretations of family norms and values of the past and the present as seen in folklore. Research traditions of such wide-ranging disciplines as philology, history, cultural science, anthropology and psychology are employed in this research.

## RESULTS

The family in a *chastushka* acts as a social institution functioning in interaction with

other public institutions in certain historical contexts. At the same time, the *chastushka* is considered a sub-category of the song as an art form together with the categories of family biography and history. (TABLE 1)

The analysis of *chastushkas* in this research demonstrated that in choice of marriage partner, people look for characteristics similar to their own, as seen in the following example:

*People say that I'm unpretty  
I don't try catch fancy  
And all pretty handsome boys  
Not so interest me  
I go through a mountain  
I go through sublimity  
I'm a poor girl-orphan  
Orphan-boy walks out with me.*

Table 1  
*Theme hierarchy in small forms of folklore about the family*

N	Theme	In % of all 'family' <i>chastushkas</i>
1.	Courting, advances, courtship, marriage selection criteria, disagreement and quarrelling between partners	53.51%
2.	Intra-family relationships	16.91%
3.	Deviations from norms (adultery, illegitimate birth, multiple sexual partners*)	10.99%
4.	Sexual relationship	9.77%
5.	Homosexuality, zoophilia, prostitution	3.25%
6.	Divorce, alimony	1.61%
7.	Wedding, marriage	1.21%
8.	Voluntary renunciation of marriage and childbearing	1.15%
9.	Contraception	0.50%
10.	Abortion	0.28%
11.	Other	0.87%
	Total	100.05%**

\*Multiple partners refers to having more than one sexual partner at a time

\*\*The amount exceeds 100% because of rounding to the 100th share

Winch agreed with Weininger that in relationships, people are attracted to traits that are opposite to their own. In our research we did not find confirmation of this theory. The following *chastushkas*, for instance, shows that in selecting a marriage partner, young people, as a rule, look for similarity of temperament.

*Silver water, silver stream,  
Silver gentle river.  
Need to find a guy for me:  
Battle and forever.*

Senter, in refining the theory of complementary needs, offered the tool concept. In his opinion, people choose spouses whose characteristics provide the maximum satisfaction of their requirements at minimum cost to themselves. Senter recognised that some requirements were crucial for men, such as leadership in the family, while others were crucial for women, such as privacy, care and concern. It is necessary for a successful marriage that men and women's requirements are matched and fulfilled, as revealed by our analysis of *chastushkas*. This idea extends to how youth ought to be treated, as shown below:

*It is necessary to mow the grass,  
Leave of which winds.  
We must love those guys,  
Affectionately for us.*

Homans offered another perspective of choice of marriage partner. He stated, "... social behavior represents an exchange of values, both material and non-material... the person "exchanges" some qualities for qualities and properties of other people... What is given by the person can be for him

cost... and what he receives – remuneration." Potential partners, according to Homans, are guided by an assessment of qualities both social and personal when choosing a candidate for marriage. If the potential spouse possesses characteristics that are mutually valued, the 'price' is determined and agreed on and the exchange can take place. Otherwise, there is conflict. Our research confirmed Homans' theory. At least, judging by *chastushkas*, future spouses are guided by similar criteria.

*Spruce is growing on a mount,  
It is growing on the summit,  
Give me younger, dear God  
To my beauty that I've got.*

Despite confirmation of these theories, there is no sufficient basis for predicting the success of a marriage. Family stability and compatibility between spouses is not defined only by their personal and specific and psychological features. Many other circumstances influence the success or disintegration of a marriage. One major psychological factor that can affect the outcome of family life is producing children.

The prospect of "remaining unmarried for too long (for women)" or "remaining single (for men)" because of the need to carefully select a spouse does not frighten young people today. Careful selection of one's future spouse can drag on for years, resulting in several marriages or trial marriages. Table 2 shows the popular criteria Russians expect in a spouse today. Figure 1 shows that physical appearance and background are important criteria in a future spouse.

Table 2  
*Criteria of marriage selection*

	Criteria of marriage selection	Percentage
1.	External data	22.62
2.	Social status	13.86
3.	Potentiality/Sexuality	7.84
4.	Financial position	7.67
5.	Influence of parents	6.62
6.	Character	6.53
7.	Age	5.31
8.	Absence of addictions	3.85
9.	Marital status of the partner	3.02
10.	Territorial closeness	2.65
11.	Creative abilities	2.41
12.	Education	2.37
13.	Nationality/nationality	2.36
14.	Heroism	2.12
15.	Family origins	2.05
16.	Gravity of intentions	2.02
17.	Morality/morals/chastity	1.65
18.	Diligence	1.47
19.	Though what, but that was	0.44
20.	Pity	0.07
21.	Religiousness	0.02
22.	Other	3.04
	Total	99.99*

\*The total does not add up to 100% because of rounding to the 100th share.

Diligence and skill are also important criteria that a spouse should have. This is shown in certain *chastushkas* and folklore. It is illustrated by the following proverbs and sayings: “Good for good, and hard-working for our brother,” “From a face of water not to drink, was able to bake pies” and “Beauty will get accustomed, and Russian cabbage soup does not sip.” However the importance of these criteria have declined over time. The *chastushkas* show that during the time of the revolution and civil war diligence was an important attribute in a future spouse but it is less so in modern times.

*The example below highlights the important criteria:  
Will you marry me, dear girl,  
I can work the best of all:  
Reap and mowing, milking cows,  
Flailing in the both my arms.  
And all our little girls  
They don't know how sew the shirts.  
Stitching set they in advance  
They don't have the chance to get  
married.*

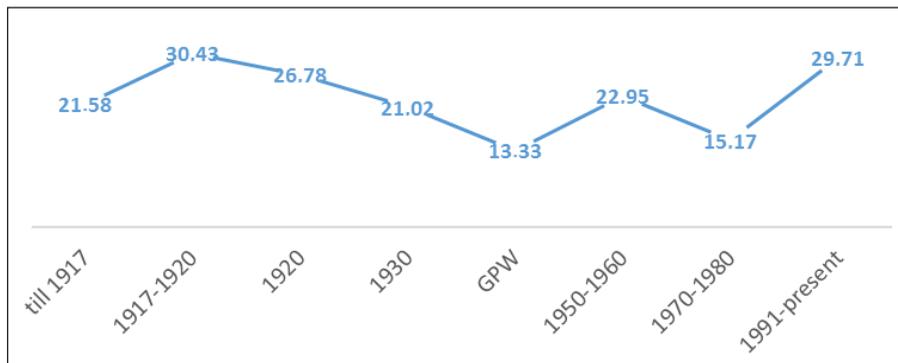


Figure 1. The significance of background as a selection criterion of marriage (as a percentage of the total number of *chastushkas* on marriage)

During the time of revolution and civil war, the *chastushkas* reveal that marriages were made with an economic motive behind them. In later years, what was more important was standard of living in the country, followed by the aspiration of youth to improve their financial position. In modern times wealth is a prominent theme (21.72%) and young people look to gain financial security by marrying a rich spouse. This tendency is clear in the songs of the early 1990s, which did not seem to be concerned with the source of the future spouse's wealth as long as he or she had a sizeable amount of it.

The third important criterion seems to be the ability of the partner to sexually satisfy his or her mate. This criterion gained importance at the end of the last century and continued into the present one. Up to the time of the Great Patriotic War it did not seem important but it gained prominence in the 1970s and the 1980s. This criterion was not important in traditional society as women were not expected to have sexual experience before marriage. Claims of sexual dissatisfaction in most cases were put forward by women turned off by impotence. Proposals were rejected for this reason, as seen in the following *chastushkas*:

*I've caught a noble eagle.  
I've wooed and got the mitten  
It's because my dick is tiny.  
Proposal is not so funny.  
You should marry without crank.  
Cock must be with quality mark.*

Such themes became possible because of the drop in the age of puberty, the

weakening of traditional morals and the increase in premarital sexual activity. The increase in sexual themes was also seen in comic folklore, as shown below:

*Funny times  
For all us started  
Fashion girls  
So early is matured.  
Little daughter in the play school  
Her virgin was broken by somebody  
fool.  
There was a time when I was so  
daring,  
I was sleeping with guys  
When I was thirteen  
And was so despairing.*

However, it should also be noted in all fairness that the criteria of morality and chastity also grew at the same time.

Our research showed that the youth tend to ignore the counsel of their elders on marriage. One of the most significant criteria of marriage selection in Russia traditionally used to be personal character that revealed the attributes of the future spouse. This is the sixth important criterion seen in the *chastushkas*. The important personal attributes were kindness, masculinity or femininity, a cheerful disposition and honesty. These were deemed important for building a strong family. Where these qualities were lacking, the couple would break off the relationship:

*I'm walking, dear's plowing  
Plowing on a tractor sod  
We've walked and we've broken  
Pity, but we don't forge a bond.*

Krasovsky has pointed out that women, especially those who were more mature, value good character very highly (53%). While men of all ages also value good character, they do not seem to value it as highly as women do (40%) (Krasovsky, 1994).

Age seemed to have a special bearing on marriage selection. This was connected with traditional views of the suitable age for men and women to marry and the age difference that should be between them. In the first post-revolutionary years, there was a sharp decline in marriage at a young age, probably because young people were no longer inclined to consider their parents' wishes regarding who or when they married. This rebellion is captured in some *chastushkas*:

*Mother settled me whitebeard,  
I'll pull out him his beard.  
Please don't woo me, gramp  
We cannot to build a camp.  
I'm so young, and you're old  
I'm not going marry grandpop.*

In the 1930s when the older generation

were becoming reconciled to the fact that children wanted to make their own selection of marriage partner, the importance of this criterion dropped sharply. However, this changed again during times of war when a disparity in the number of available marriage partners arose (Figure 2).

The high importance of age at marriage is confirmed by numerous studies and the statistical data they have collected. Women who married much older men seemed to do so for their high social status whereas men seemed to prefer very young girls because of their attractive appearance.

Another important criterion was lack of addictions, which is eighth in importance as a criterion of marriage selection. However, its influence has varied at different stages of Russia's history. During the pre-revolutionary period, the 20th century and the Great Patriotic War, the percentage of *chastushkas* in which harmful addictions of the partner are mentioned as being a hindrance to marriage is approximately identical: 2.28%, 2.23% and 2.08%, respectively. In the 1950s and

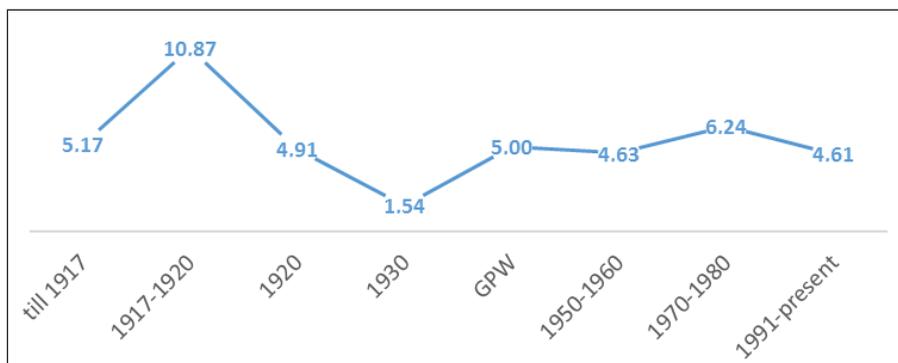


Figure 2. The criterion of age in marriage selection (as a percentage of the total number of *chastushkas* on marriage)

1960s the figure was 4.45%, and in the 1970s and 1980s, it grew to 17.88%. Today, it has fallen to 1.92% again. Apparently, these changes are connected with the dynamics of channelling addiction among youth and the attitude towards addiction in society. Today, it is impossible to find a partner who does not have addictions: “you will not find not smoking women now,” is how one *chastushkas* puts it. Another attests that young people are forced “to cave in under the changeable world” and to be content with things the way they are. Addiction was previously attributed to men but in these post-war years, judging by the *chastushkas*, it is attributed more frequently to women as women today are drinking, smoking and using drugs on an equal frequency with men. More and more young women of reproductive age are now smoking. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), Russia is among the countries with the highest percentage of smokers, and nearly 50% of Russian women who work smoke. This cannot but be reflected in the health of the newborn. This is referred to in some *chastushkas*:

*No more smoking! - I've requested  
But she's gave birth me smoked girl  
Many times it was suggested.  
Smoking mother is crud at all  
Such "equality" not really it is pleasant  
to men:  
Seagull eating apples  
Only with a dearth  
Don't try look brides  
Among smoking girls  
And think that all stop smoking -*

*It's really funny joking.  
But, dears smoking girls,  
Do you want to look heinous?*

Drug addiction is a huge problem for modern Russia. A closely related problem is the diseases that accompany it such as AIDS, hepatitis, tuberculosis and venereal diseases. In recent years the number of people using HIV drugs has increased; among them are infected expectant mothers and women who work. “Mother does not get forces to finish drugs and to carry out pregnancy prevention. Most often after the child's birth (sometimes healthy) the mother refuses it... .” Even when the mother keeps her child, the child's future is bleak because of disease and social stigmatisation. Komi Clinic reported that 198 children are being raised in families where the parents use drugs. The *chastushkas* touches on this issue, referring to the situation without condemning the parents:

*Hey, Ivan, don't mess around  
I'm going through cold turkey  
Calm the baby, I'm so downed  
And iron diapers.*

Communication with the married person increases eventually. According to our data the importance of marital status gradually declined over the years. It was important in the 1930s, and the *chastushkas* (10.77%) demands that prospective partners had to be single. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, this demand dropped (4.16%). In modern Russia monogamy is widely practised, while the percentage of remarriages is 26-28%, and 80% are divorced (Medkov, 2003;

Ostrovskaya, Karabulatova, Khachmafova, Lyaucheva, & Osipov, 2015; Ryazantsev et al., 2014). “Each person, at least, theoretically, is always a potential spouse for all persons of the opposite sex. In this case the fact that the state in marriage does not limit the person at all in the sense that he continues to remain the possible spouse in the latest marriages is important.”

Territorial proximity (neighbourhood) is an important factor in marriage selection. This concept includes not only geographical distance, but also collaboration (in the village housekeeping). One *chastushkas* noted: “Do not give far in marriage,” “you do not love the maid distant,” “because of distant paths left a lover.” Influence of this criterion on the choice of the marriage partner has gradually decreased, and among modern *chastushkas* we did not manage to find any songs that demanded territorial proximity.

The *chastushkas* also refers to creative ability as a criterion (2.41%). This quality is most often shown by girls. In this case it is not about special talents, but rather the ability to entertain the partner by, for instance, clowning around, dancing, singing or playing a musical instrument. Once again, we see here an orientation to short-term relationships based on superficial interest.

The 12th criterion considered important in a marriage partner is education level. The importance of this criterion has grown with the strengthening of the country’s economy and social structures. During times of social crisis such as repressions and war, this criterion was not as important, however.

## DISCUSSION

The interest in the problem of changes happening in the institution of the family arose in the social sciences in the second half of the 19th century. Significant contributions to this study were made by the Swiss historian Johann Jakob Bachofen, the Scottish lawyer John Ferguson McLennan and the American ethnographer Lewis-Henri Morgan. Their efforts lay the foundation for a more evolutionary approach, and new ideas regarding marriage and family were introduced (Antonov & Sorokin, 2000). Friedrich Engels (Engels, 1982) and Pierre Guillaume Frédéric Le-Ple then introduced a sociological perspective to this study. Friedrich Engels was one of the first to investigate the transforming influence of the economic development of society on the family, while Le-Ple paid attention to how family dynamics could influence social and economic processes. Locally, Kowalewski led research into changes in the family institution as a result of changes in social structure, while Sorokin introduced the idea of “crisis of family” (Sorokin, 1994). During the Soviet period Harchev (Harchev, 1979) made huge contributions to this area of study through his complex analysis of marriage and the family in Soviet society of the second half of the 20th century. He proposed the use of the structural functional approach to analyse matrimonial relations.

Scientists today do not always agree on the reasons and consequences of the present condition of the family institution. In local sociological studies, two main concepts have become prominent, that of

'crisis' and 'progressivist'. Supporters of the crisis approach, Antonov, Borisov, Medkov and Sinelnikov, among others (Antonov & Borisov, 2006; Medkov, 2003; Sinelnikov, 1989), considered that the deep decline of the family was a result of industrialisation, which in the long run, led to unforeseen negative influences that resulted in the destabilisation and destruction of the family institution. Another reason for the breakdown of the family institution was the anti-family policy of the state, the researchers contended.

The opposite point of view was argued by Vishnevsky, Volkov, Hunger, Darsky etc. (Golod, 2008; Vishnevsky, 1992; Krasovsky, 1994), who considered the changes as being the positive processes connected with modernisation and democratisation of social structures. In addition, adherents of feminist theory in their aspiration as much as possible that women should be emancipated, sharply criticised traditional family values, including marriage and motherhood, as being serious hindrances to self-realisation of the woman as an individual (Ayvazova, 1994).

The differing views presented in the literature and the lack of objective data in this area make folklore an important source of information for social research into this important subject. Studying folk art gives us the chance to better understand how people at one time perceived family and marriage. The majority of folklore is universal in theme, tone and conclusions and folklore is indeed a genre that appeals to all strata of society as it contains life situations that

resonate with children, youth, adults and the elderly. A special category of folklore is the humorous or comic genre such as *chastuskas*, anecdotes, taunts, nicknames, nursery rhymes and arcanas. Humour and comedy are vital aspects of culture and will always have appeal and legitimate function in social relationships.

## CONCLUSION

We can conclude that in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century, the family as an institution and marriage are no longer as important as they once were. New social norms are being fixed now, and these include having fewer children. The family is no longer the centre of education of young children as families are incomplete, with single parents, especially single mothers left to raise children.

The evidence presented by forms of small folklore is that the family structure has undergone serious change in every decade (Antonov & Sorokin, 2000; Ostrovskaya et al., 2015; Ryazantsev et al., 2014; Sinelnikov, 1989). Marriage and the family have become devalued (Karabulatova et al., 2015; Voronina, 2004; Zdravomyslova, 2003), while single life is widely accepted. Marriage is no longer considered for life and short-term relationships are common (Volkov, 1986; Voronina, 2004; Zhelvis, 2001). Research seems to show that the opponents of a complete family are generally women (Antonov, 1986), who seem to think that the participation of men is necessary only to conceive children and nothing else. With no new social norms and incentives for

marriage or its strengthening and for having a complete family, familicentrism seems to have given way to egocentrism as the new norm of Russian society.

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