

УДК 305-055.2

Gender Differences in Age Perception by Women Aged 40-60 in Russia and Australia

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Received 08.02.2013, received in revised form 15.02.2013, accepted 22.02.2013

This is a research on adaptation of woman of 40-60 years old according to gender characteristics. Women were tested by BSRI and author's topic-guide. The research was conducted among Australian and Russian women (406 people). We studied how women feel their age, how they comprehend the changes they have, aging, climacteric etc. In the report we tried to show gender and cultural differences of women who are in a big social and physiological crisis.

Keywords: women aged 40-60, gender, masculine, feminine, androgen women, climacteric, old age, and adaptation.

Society requires from women to be more masculine when they are 40-60 years old whereas at the young age they should be more feminine. Now women must be strong and resolute, so they have to reorganize their attitude and behavior. Women must adapt to new society wishes and this adaption is not always successful. In the report we give an analysis of adaptation of women according to their gender. Because we are sure that gender influences the effectiveness of this process.

Studies of women in the USA (Reinke, Ellicott, etc. 1985) showed that there are two important things in lives of the women at the age of 40-60: adult children leaving their home and parents' death. But we also should say that at that age women's hormone system is also changing.

S. Bem is convinced that difference between people goes beyond biological sex. We have different social standards which influence our behavior. (Берн, 2001). We are sure that this social influence defines gender.

In S. Bem's opinion there are four genders: masculine, feminine, androgen and non-differential one. (Bem 1979). But we think that at the age of 40-60 the latter one doesn't exist.

The research was conducted among Russian and Australian women. There were 406 women at the age of 40-60 who have never migrated from their countries. There were 278 Russian women (68,6 %), who live in different regions of the country (Ulyanovsk region, Moscow region, Nizhny Novgorod region, Khantomansiysky region, Khabarovsk region). Australian women were from state Victoria (Barnstable, Swan Hill,

Melbourne), and there were 128 of them (31,4 %). There were 106 (25,6 %) homosexual women and 88,7 % having long relationship with other women (67,2 % Australian women and 5,8 % Russian).

We divided women in gender groups by The Bam Sex-Role Inventory. We've got three genders: feminine, masculine and androgen ones (Table 1)

After that women were asked by our author's topic-guide.

The answers to the question "What happens with women at the age of 40-60" are in the Table 2. We can see cultural differences. Russian women suppose that women become older (16 times more choices than in Australia) and less pay attention to physiological aging (4 times less than in Australia).

Gender preferences of women show (Fig. 1) that feminine women worry more about their age (twice more). Androgen women suppose four

Table 1. Gender groups of women

Gender N=406	Percentage of distribution	
	Total	Russian women
Feminine	21.2 %	53.5 %
Masculine	24.1 %	49 %
Androgen	54.7 %	88.3 %

Table 2. Opinion about the processes women undergo at the age of 40-60

Processes N=406	% of choices	% of all Russian women	% of all Australian women
Climacteric	69.0	55.6	96.1
Aging	26.1	37.1	2.3
Nothing	4.9	6.9	1.6

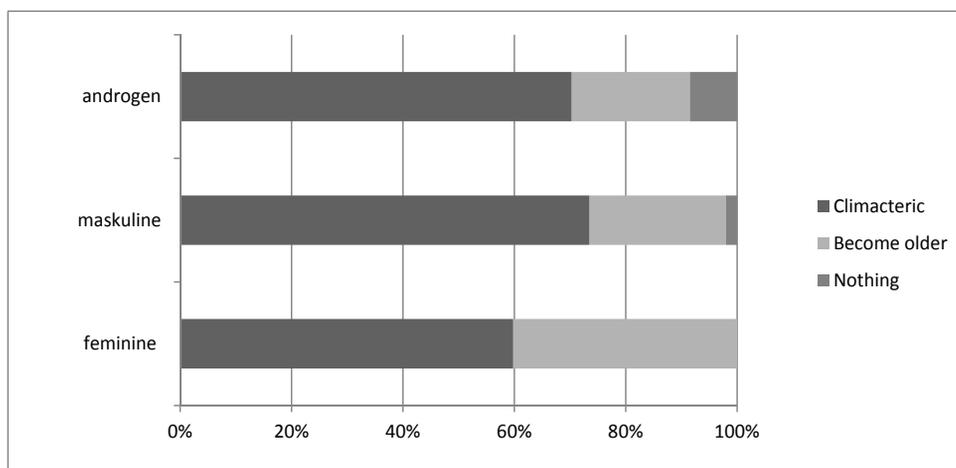


Fig. 1. Difference of opinion about the processes women undergo at that age according to gender

times more than masculine women that aging changes nothing.

Sixty nine percent of women answer positively on the following question “Has anything changed with you since you reached 40?”

Analysis of gender shows that feminine choices spread evenly, as for masculine and androgen women see changes twice more (Fig. 2). We didn’t see any cultural differences in answers.

Women were asked about particular changes if any (Table 3). Masculine women don’t feel they are older but feminine ones have maximum percentage in that opinion. They often feel their passport age. But as we can see they see no changes in their career, this could be because of such women are not interested in building a

career in general. They worry about health and aging.

Maximum changes of androgen women were in “career” and in “wise” sections. Masculine women were sure that they have more opportunities. It could be because their children came of age and women can think about themselves more than before. All three groups have minimum changes in their family sphere. Women spoke more often about positive changes such as wedding, grandchildren and other things (55,9 %) then about negative aspects (divorce, death of a family member, leaving work etc.).

Women were asked about their opinion of social environment in accordance with their changes (Table 4). As we can see those feminine women did not become quieter and

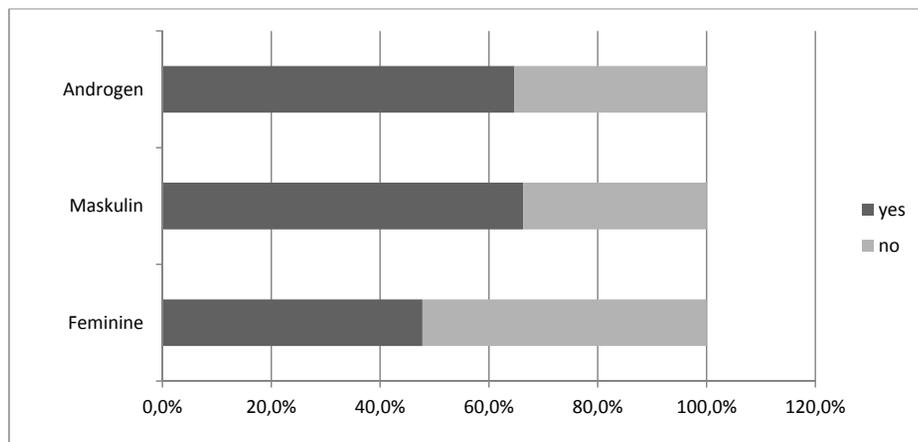


Fig. 2. Opinion of women about changes after 40 years old

Table 3. Gender choices of changing processes (Women had more than one option to choose)

Answers N=280	Feminine (%)	Masculine (%)	Androgen (%)
Aging	36.7	0	63.3
Health worsening	17.6	26.3	56.1
Becoming wiser	8.8	18.8	72.4
Opportunities	0	55.2	44.8
Career development	0	25.7	72.3
Changes in family	33.7	22.1	44.2

Table 4. Opinion about social environment in accordance with changing

Answers N=406	Feminine (%)	Masculine (%)	Androgen (%)
Character worsening	66.7	9.8	23.5
Aging	25.0	4.2	70.8
Professional development	1.4	28.5	70.1
Becoming quieter	0	40.3	59.9

Table 5. Gender distribution of definition “pleasure”

Answers N=406	Feminine (%)	Masculine (%)	Androgen (%)
Family	55.3	9.6	33.3
Work	15.2	51.8	41.2
Social life	6.3	28.6	19.0
Love life	18.4	4.4	4.8
Self-expression	4.8	5.6	1.7

their character becomes worse more often than characters of other genders. Less changing of the character towards worsening was in masculine group. This kind of women became quieter and more professionally developed.

Androgen women aged the most according to the opinion of people around them. But we must note that it could be not the opinion of the majority but the opinion that these women remember most.

An interesting fact is that there were 77,7 % answers about Australian women where people spoke about their professional development and there were only 13,8 % saying that women became older. It could be because Russians like to tell “the naked truth” whereas Australians are more polite and prefer saying more positive things to women.

In our research we asked women to divide 100 % of women’s pleasure on sections which we assigned (family, work, and social life) and one sector was free for women to fill in.

The last section was later divided into “love life” (love, sex) and “self-expression” (hobby, creativity, self-realization in any sphere). So we have six sections (Table 5) where we can see that no gender worry about self-expression. Feminine women value family and personal life as social life is least important.

Masculine women put work on the first place followed by social life, and personal life is not interesting for them. Androgen women also prefer work but family is important part of their life too. Low ratings of love life could be because of 30,8 % of women having no sexual partner. We also should add that there were no cultural differences in these answers.

Women were asked about feeling their own age (Fig. 3) and we can see that feminine women feel their own age most of all.

Masculine women least of all genders feel their age. And for androgen gender we can see even spreading of answers. There were no cultural differences too.

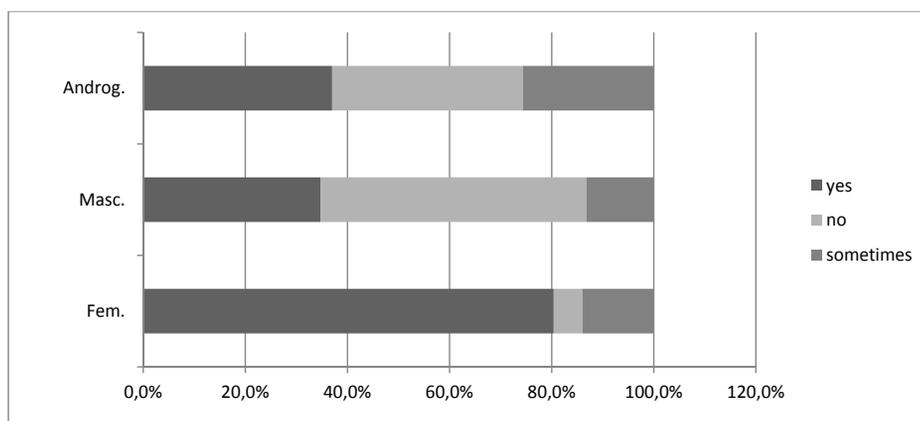


Fig. 3. Feeling of age by different gender

Table 6. Age problem in different gender

Answers N=406	Feminine (%)	Masculine (%)	Androgen (%)	Total (%)
Climacteric	26.4	3.5	70.1	76.6
Bad memory	47.3	17.8	34.9	36.0
poor attention	44.6	22.3	33.1	29.2
Illnesses	30.0	4.6	65.4	69.2
Change in social status	26.7	21.2	52.1	75.2
Losing sexuality	28.9	13.5	57.6	12.1

Most of the women name climacteric (76,7 %), illness (69,2 %) as the markers of aging and less of them about bad memory (36 %) and attention (29,2 %).

As we can see, feminine women worry a lot, but most of all they worry about bad memory and poor attention. Masculine women have no big age problems. Androgen women said about climacteric and illnesses, they also worry about losing sexuality and change in social status more than other genders.

In question about dreams for the next 20 years (Table 6) we can see cultural specifics. Russians want rest (88,5 %) but only 46,6 % of Australian women dream about the same (less twice). Most Russian women dream about grandchildren (86,5 %) and in contrast with them

only 15,7 % of Australians. 38,7 % of Australian women and only 27,3 % of Russians think about. 85,9 % of Australian women and only 13,3 % Russians want to see the world, which is five times less. We also can note that 34,5 % Russian women and 46,9 % Australians wish for better work. We can say that the tendency to rest in Russian group could be explained by them being tired from their hard life so they feel themselves as old women of 40-60 years old. Australian women feel themselves younger and they are more socially active and still want to see the world and travel.

Gender analysis shows us that feminine women dream about rest and grandchildren, they do not want to look for any job and they dream of retiring as quickly as possible.

Table 7. Obstacles

Answers N=406	Feminine (%)	Masculine (%)	Androgen (%)	Total (%)
Age	25.8	7.5	66.7	72.7
Health	33.3	10.4	56.3	45.1
Money	19.4	20.5	61.1	90.1
Family	61.5	0	38.5	12.8
Work	71.1	26.3	2.6	18.7

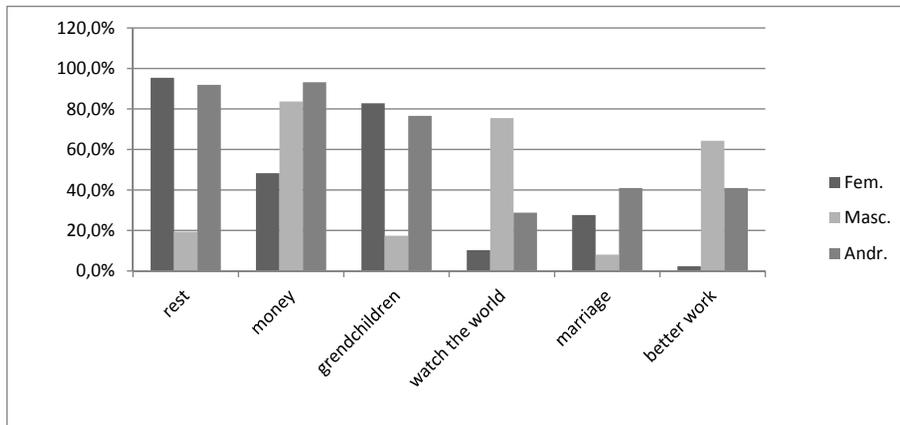


Fig. 4. Dreams of 40-60 years old women according to their gender.

Masculine women dream about money, seeing the world and better work. The minority dreams about marriage and family. Androgen women dream about money, rest, grandchildren and the least important is moving to another place. Cultural specifics can be seen in answers about the obstacles to getting what they want. Russian women are sure that their age is the main problem (68,1 %) and twice less Australians think the same way (31,8 %). Health is a problem for 65,7 % of Russian women and for 34,4 % (twice less) of Australian women. Only Russian women say that family could be an obstacle to getting what they want. None of Australian woman thought that family is a problem.

Analysis of gender (Table 7) can help us to see that most problems in groups are “money”, “age” and “work”.

Androgen women worry a lot. They see age, money, health and family as obstacles. Family is not a problem for masculine women but they worry about work. Minority of them see all these things as problems. Feminine women see work, family, and health as obstacles but they do not consider money being a problem.

We are sure that self-awareness and future orientation could be the reason for the different answers. So we asked women to choose the most suitable verb for them: “I can”, “I will be”, “I will have” (Fig. 7).

We can see gender specifics of women’s orientation. Feminine women prefer “I can” and they focus on realizing their own possibilities. They do not choose “I will be” and do not want to try and reach a goal. It shows that they are passive and they find what they want or like what they already have

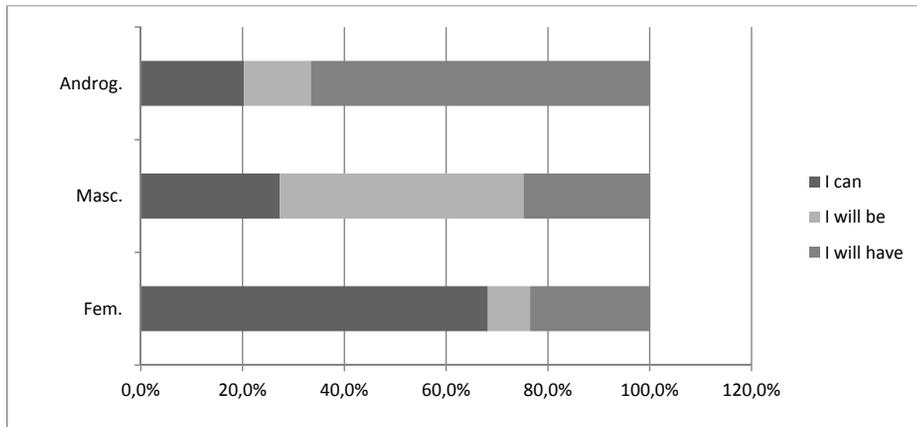


Fig. 5. Orientation of gender

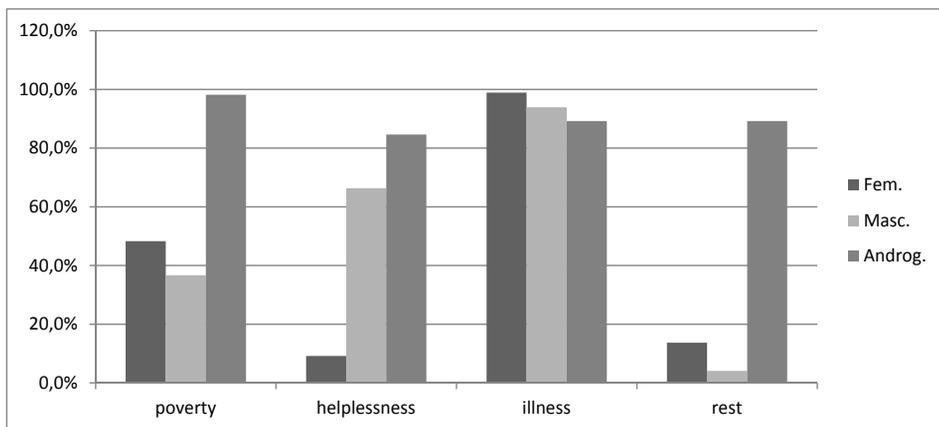


Fig. 6. Associating of old age by different genders (more than one option to choose)

and do not want any changes. Androgen women have maximum orientation on “I will have” and they focus on having what they want. They choose less “I will be” also and do not want to make any changes by themselves. Masculine women have maximum orientation on “I will be” and evenly on “I will have” and “I can”. They are focused on reaching their goal on their own and they are more precise and independent in their strategies and rely on themselves. So we can say about differences in motivation to achieving anything.

The age of 40-60 is the time to become an old woman, so we asked women about their attitude to that time (Fig. 8).

Russian women who are afraid of “poverty” form the biggest group of 62,8 % comparing with only 37,2 % of Australian women (it is twice less). Other groups have no national dominance.

Old age means illnesses for feminine women and they don’t associate this period with helplessness. For masculine women it is also illness and this gender doesn’t associate this time with rest. Androgen women associate this time with poverty, rest and illness.

Actual age that considers as “old” is different for all gender, but every second woman is sure that this time begins after climacteric (most women were at that age during the research). Therefore,

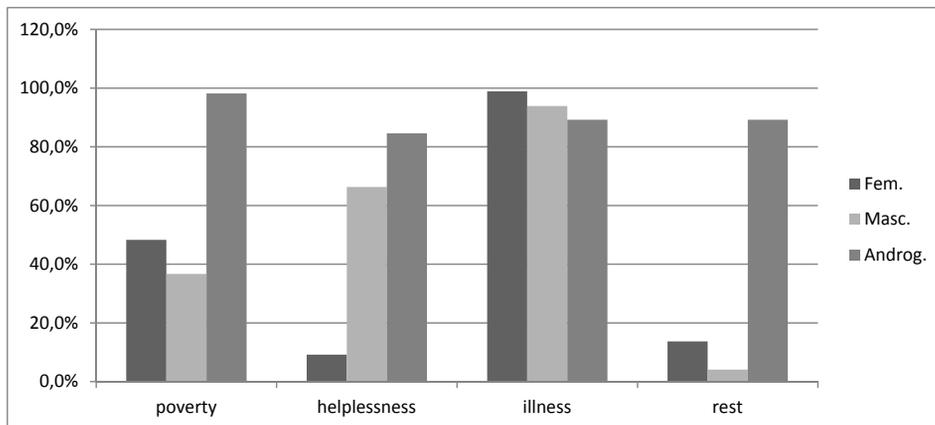


Fig. 7. Defining “old age” by different genders

we can see that these women are in transitional period which is difficult for them and influences them negatively, so it is stressful time for women of our age group.

Analyzing the answers about when does the old age start (Fig. 9) we can see that feminine women mention only two borders of that period. “After climacteric” is the leader in choices in more than three times.

Every second masculine woman thinks that old age begins after pension and they do not become pensioners, they have active position and try to use all opportunities in their life. Minority of them think that old age begins after climacteric. Androgen women same as feminine women think that this time begins after climacteric too and minority of them think that old age never comes.

Climacteric associations also have some cultural aspects. Most Australian women (95,3 %) are convinced that it is an illness and only 43,2 % of Russian women think the same way (twice less). Russian women dislike to going to the doctor with that problem may be the reason for that.

To 59,4 % of women climacteric is the old age. So, on the one hand, half of women are sure that the old age will start after climacteric. But,

on the other hand, they associate climacteric with the old age. Moreover, women who think that old age is climacteric constitute the majority of 70,3 %. Therefore most women aged 40-60 feel themselves old being actually adult. So we can observe big frustration women experience in our age group. We can see also that bigger part of women perceive these physiological changes as inevitability.

Analyzing these answer we can see (Fig. 10) that masculine women think that climacteric is illness and inevitability and minority thinks it is women’s problems. Androgen women don’t think that it is women’s problems but it is also associated with inevitability for that gender. Feminine women think that climacteric is women’s problems not to be talked about and inevitability. In our interview we saw that 36,2 % of women consider that an insult and 55,7 % of these women are feminine ones. There were 51,7 % of women who feel disappointed and 73,3 % of them are androgen women.

Appraising their condition in that physiological period women have different answers, from negative to positive (she can enjoy her life without getting pregnant) (Table 9).

In our research we can see that every second woman has psychological, social and

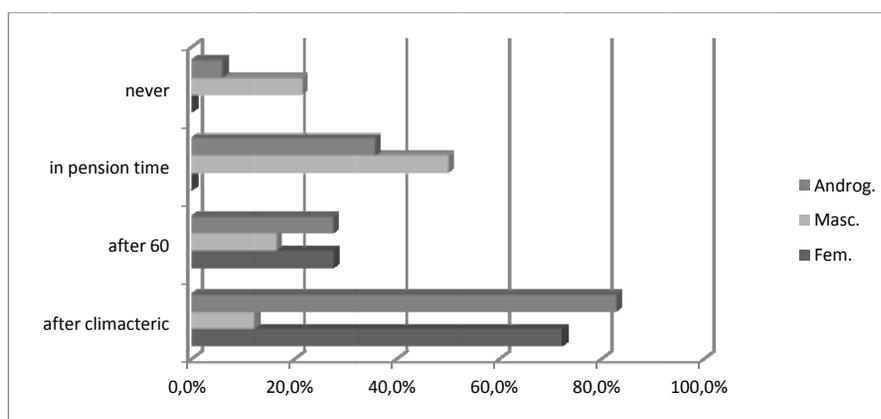


Fig. 8. Gender associations of climacteric

Table 8. Appraising their condition according to gender

Answers N=406	Feminine (%)	Masculine (%)	Androgen (%)	Total (%)
Shame	7.3	18.9	73.8	40.4
Health problems	39.6	11.5	48.9	44.8
Psychological problems	32.7	8.7	58.6	50.2
Social and interpersonal problems	27.2	20.9	51.9	50.7
Freedom	0	80.0	20.0	8.6

interpersonal problems during that time. Most masculine women feel a sense of freedom but none of feminine woman feels the same way. Androgen women also feel a sense of shame.

Taking into account that 79,3 % of our women were in climacteric time we could see that 63,3 % of women neurotically deny this problem, 40,1 % of women aren't ready for age changes and 25,9 % of women consider age changing inevitable (Fig. 11). Moreover, 87,4 % of Russian women and only 12,6 % Australian women choose "it will never be with me".

We can also see that answers "yes" and "no" have even spreading in androgen gender. Masculine women aren't ready for this period.

We asked women about what kind of crises they face after 40 (Table 10). Answers show

cultural differences. Australian women think that it is physiological and social crises, as Russian women have financial, moral and psychological crisis. And twice more Russian women think that women have no crises at all.

It could be psychological illiteracy or the result of soviet propaganda (all Russian women was born and grew up in USSR) or it could be the result of chronic stress of Russian women, who are in bad financial situation.

Among feminine gender answers more popular are financial crisis and moral crisis and less important are social crisis or no crisis at all. Among androgen gender answers most popular were psychological and physiological crises. Masculine women face social crisis or no crisis at all.

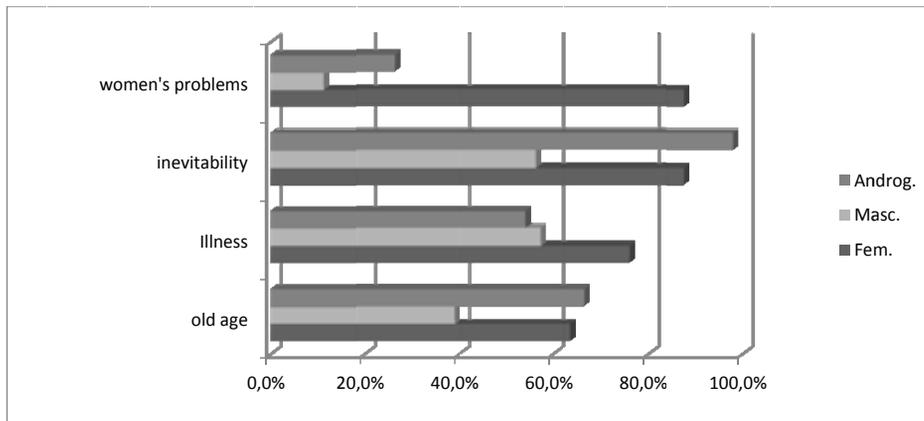


Fig. 9. Gender attitudes toward climacteric.

Table 9. Crisis of different nationality and gender

Answers N=406	Weight of crisis (%)			Feminine (%)	Masculine (%)	Androgen (%)
	Total	Russian women	Australian women			
Financial crisis	11.1	73.3	26.7	33.3	4.4	62.3
Moral crisis	25.9	85.7	14.3	31.4	0.5	68.1
Social crisis	8.4	35.3	64.7	5.9	35.3	58.9
Psychological crisis	58.1	51.3	8.7	5.5	8.9	85.8
Physiological crisis	71.2	36.0	64.0	20.4	6.2	73.4
Nothing	25.4	67.0	33.0	2.0	35.0	63.0

The last question was about people and things that can help women in their situation (Table 11). All women agree that there are psychologists (same opinion among Russian and Australian women). Less popular answers are “hobby” and “priest”, but it is interesting that Australian women prefer “hobby”, whereas Russian women choose “priest”.

We can see that Russian women prefer priests, relatives and work (where they have friendly relationships), but Australian women prefer dealing with doctors, hobbies and physical activity. We can say that they are more pragmatic.

Analyzing gender we can see that feminine women choose neither “work” nor “physical

activity” and masculine women don’t choose “priests”. Androgen women use all categories and they usually make more than one choice while feminine women usually don’t do that.

Summarizing our research we would like to note that the big part of the feminine women prefer keeping their habits, attitudes and values (they were ready to change and accept only their new status), their habitual behavior which is hard to change. As a result they face dissatisfaction, apathy, tiredness, depression, cynicism etc. 87.4 % of feminine women deny themselves personal and professional development (they’ve got no desire to look for a partner during a long period of time) and prefer safety and habitualness of known things, they consciously limit their

Table 10. Answers about people and things that can help women

Answers N=406	Weight of crisis (%)			Feminine (%)	Masculine (%)	Androgen (%)
	Total	Russian women	Australian women			
Psychologists	68.5	56.8	43.2	16.5	17.3	66.2
Doctors	29.3	18.5	81.5	39.5	10.1	50.4
Relatives	18.7	71.0	29.0	22.4	14.3	63.3
Priests	8.4	91.2	8.8	8.8	0	91.2
Work	17.49	71.8	28.2	0	16.9	83.1
Hobby	1.6	23.2	76.8	1.6	22.2	76.2
Physical activity	24.1	36.7	63.3	0	34.7	65.3

motivation structure and narrow personal space. They are in a place of a victim which “goes with the stream”. This kind of women prefer the role of “housewife” which worries about family, helps all her life to her children, grandchildren and other people surrounding her and it is the meaning of her life.

Masculine women prefer to see the meaning of their life in work, achievements in career. They need a new goal and direction to go for. Most women from this gender agree that “work is the biggest part of my life” (85,7 %). These women do not care about family and children. They do not love housework and spend minimum time at home.

The biggest part of androgen women agree that they “need maximum of self-realization and reaching all you can” (83,7%). They try to combine both genders and try to be good housewives and make a career at the same time (90,1 %). They experience mood frustrations and the change their authorities very often. These women are sure that they are bad mothers because they feel they can't establish as mothers. They try to compensate this attention to their grandchildren which they could not give to their own children.

We could see that children of women aged 40-60 are the big part of their life. Women try to apply maximum moral and physical efforts to raise their children and consider children a part of themselves. At this age women wait for support and understanding. And if women have any wishes which haven't come true, they try to compensate them by their children. This could be via:

1. Achievement of children which are possible because of their own talents and abilities (20,5 % feminine women, 56,4 % masculine ones and 78,6 % androgen women).

2. Directing and motivating them to fulfill her own wishes or continue a “family tradition”, (79,5 % feminine women, 6,0 % masculine ones and 43 % androgen women).

So we can see that masculine and androgen women trust their children more whereas feminine women try to direct children to fulfill women's dreams.

To sum up, we could say that different genders have their own life strategies and we can say the same about all women of our age group. We have to take into account their gender and culture.

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Гендерные различия женщин 40-60 лет в России и Австралии

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В статье проводится анализ гендерных различий у женщин 40-60 лет, проживающих в России и Австралии. Женщины были протестированы при помощи полоролевого опросника С. Бем (406 человек) и проинтервьюированы по авторскому топик-гайду. Мы обнаружили разное восприятие у женщин своего возраста, статуса и др. особенности.

Ключевые слова: женщины, климакс, адаптация, гендер, феминные, маскулинные и андрогенные.
