

**“There Are No Ugly Women, Only Lazy Ones” – The Duty of Beauty Labour in
Contemporary Russian Women’s Magazines**

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Since the fall of communism, many Western-founded women’s fashion and lifestyle magazine titles have found considerable success in the Russian market. Whether in Russia or in the West, the magazines tend to present norms of beauty which are extremely narrow or difficult to achieve, something discussed in many significant feminist cultural analyses (see work by Angela McRobbie, Naomi Wolf or Janice Winship, for example). The quotation above that there are ‘no ugly women’, popularly attributed to beauty industry magnate Helena Rubinstein, is representative of a central message articulated in many of the magazines. It demonstrates the belief that, because beauty is supposedly achievable by any woman, each woman has a duty to meet certain norms of femininity through carrying out ‘beauty labour’ on themselves. Popular women’s magazines not only present desirable images of femininity, but focus on the products, methods and technologies that women should consume in order to achieve these ideals. This creates what Dworkin and Wachs have referred to as a “culture of lack” (Body Panic: Gender, Health, and the Selling of Fitness, 2009: 10) and normalises the expenditure of a considerable amount of labour, time and money in the pursuit of beauty.

This paper draws upon a discourse analysis of the three popular contemporary Russian women’s magazines *Elle*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Liza* to discuss the language and imagery used to contribute to a culture of intense self-scrutiny and a womanly duty to use beauty labour in the continual fight against ‘non-feminine’ bodily manifestations (e.g. body hair, undesirable body shapes, signs of ageing). Using recent interviews with Russian readers of the magazines, the paper also examines readers’ views on their bodies, beauty routines, and what it is to be ‘feminine’.