FEMININITY AND THE DOUBLE BURDEN: DIALOGUES ON THE SOCIALIZATION OF RUSSIAN DAUGHTERS INTO WOMANHOOD

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Introduction

In the last two decades there has been a mini-boom of publications on Russian women’s issues (Hurych & Goldstein, 1995; Ruthchild, 1993). There may be several explanations as to why the ‘women question’ in Russia has received so much attention recently. On the one hand, the lives of Russian women have been of great interest to western feminist scholars, as Soviet Russia was the first country in the world to officially proclaim the full liberation of women, legally protecting their equal political and civil rights (Tolkunova, 1985). Another source of attention to Russian women’s issues was the public debate about women in the USSR, launched by Soviet officials in the middle of the 1960s in an attempt to solve the demographic crisis (Attwood, 1990; Buckley, 1986; Lapidus, 1983). The official discussions about the position of women in Soviet society continued well into the 1980s, challenging the country’s sociologists, economists, demographers, and lawyers to solve the problems of falling birth rates and the declining economic productivity of working women (Buckley, 1986).

The third large body of studies on Russian women’s issues has been done by Russian feminists, whose writings emerged separately from their Western counterparts and had been ‘underground’ prior to perestroika (Mamonova, 1994, 1989). In addition, a number of ‘anti-feminist’ articles appeared in Western and Russian press as a reaction to the feminist treatment of Russian women’s issues (Tolstaya, 1995, 1990). Thus, there have been at least four different “sides” articulated with respect to the condition of Russian women.

Regardless of the side taken on the debate on the women question in Russia, one tenet remains well accepted. It is mothers who have the primary responsibility for the socialization of their daughters into womanhood. This chapter will first overview the two preeminent voices impacting the context within which women socialize their daughters to womanhood in the mid-1990s, the official historical perspective and the Russian feminist perspective. These views will then be compared with women’s own perceptions, emerging from interviews conducted by the first author in the city of Kazan, Tatarstan, Russia in the summer of 1997.

The Official View

The Soviet state had prided itself on having resolved the women question by the early 1930s, having granted women the right to full-time employment outside the home (Boss & Gurko, 1994; Silverman & Yanowitch, 1997). To allow for the full liberation of Soviet women from the drudgery of domestic duties, described by Lenin as “barbaric, unproductive, petty, enervating, stupefying, and depressing,” Bolsheviks had planned to transform household maintenance and childrearing into communal responsibilities (Hannsen & Lidén, 1983; Morvant, 1995).
The plans were never fully realized due to ‘more urgent problems’ the fledgling Soviet state had to solve at the time, such as World Wars I and II, civil war, famine, industrialization, collectivization, and the purges (Lapidus, 1983). The Soviet government was ‘forced’ for a time to give up on the broad measures it had planned for public support of families. The shortage of men, killed by wars and purges, left the country sorely needing women as workers in the expanding Soviet economy (Buckley, 1986). Thus, Soviet women were pressured to enter the work force, while at the same time unable to abandon their responsibilities for the home and family (Lapidus, 1983). Such was the origin of the “double burden” of Russian women, which, as most commentators agree, Russian women still carry today (Boss & Gurko, 1994; Koval, 1995; Morvant, 1995; Ries, 1994; Silverman & Yanowitch, 1997).

During the 1950s and 1960s, when the initial calamities of the new Soviet state were overcome, the Soviet government committed itself to implementing its initial plans for the socialization of housework, and started the vast development of crèches, kindergartens, and extended-day groups at schools, as well as expanding the network of public service centers. A number of official documents were passed between the 1960s and the mid-1980s to legally and ideologically ensure these commitments. In 1962, for example, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and the USSR Council of Ministers passed “the Decision on Further Improving the Communal Services for the Population,” which mapped out an extensive program of measures aimed at improving the conditions of daily life by increasing the range of services and the number of communal service establishments (Party and Government Decisions on Economic Issues, 1968).

In 1977, the new Soviet Constitution assured its citizens that the government was doing everything possible so that the family could ‘enjoy the protection of the state’ through an organized system of communal services (Soviet Constitution, 1977, article 53; Cf. Zuikova, 1985). In 1981, the 26th CPSU congress again stressed the necessity to give women better opportunities to combine public and family life by improving labor conditions and communal services and cultural facilities (Documents and Resolutions. The 26th Congress of the CPSU, 1981, Cf. Zuikova, 1985).

Despite the constant reassurance that the State was doing everything it could to improve the life of working women in the USSR, Soviet officials did admit that women were still burdened with housework, which accounted for their somewhat inferior position in the workplace (Zuikova, 1985). Moreover, Soviet officials recognized that the double burden of women had negative consequences not only for women themselves, but also for the running of the economy, population size, and the moral health of the family (Buckley, 1986). Thus, pressured to take measures toward solving the economic and demographic problems stemming from the double burden, Soviet officials turned to social scientists looking for ‘expert’ solutions.

The most common solutions for the demographic crisis, proposed by Soviet social scientists, were the introduction of part-time labor and the extension of maternity leave for women. “A woman endures a double burden, and so it would be good for her to have fewer hours in the workforce in order to ease this load. Women’s contribution to socialism is to work at home. She receives a financial benefit for this and later will get a pension. A four-day work week would be a help to her, rather than a five-day week” (Buckley, 1986, p. 16).
Part-time labor for women as the solution to the demographic crisis and ‘the declining moral health of families’ was based on a firm belief by Soviet social scientists in the unique role of women as mothers, reinforced by the traditional Russian cult of motherhood (Lipovskaya, 1994). The majority of Soviet economists, sociologists, and demographers speculated that giving a woman more time to ‘fulfill her natural role’ would strengthen family ties, allowing for a healthier family climate (Attwood, 1990). “Women’s main role lies in the reproduction of the species. Her economic role is important, but it is not the main role” (Buckley, 1986, p. 42). “The unique role of women rests in the family because politics and economics can exist without her, but the family can not. Her role in the family is therefore her main role because it is unique” (Buckley, 1986, p. 33).

Soviet psychologists provided a strong ‘scientific’ foundation for the idea of part-time labor for women, advancing the idea of biological determination of sex-roles (Attwood, 1990; Boss & Gurko, 1994). Further, official psychologists held a firm belief that differences between the sexes are ‘natural, essential, and inevitable’, which is why they need to be cultivated (Attwood, 1990; Boss & Gurko, 1994). It was also argued that during the last several decades, Soviet women were forced to accept male models of behavior due to their full participation in the work force. This accounted for the inevitable ‘masculinization’ of Soviet women, which had its negative effects on women’s personalities. “When cultivating in the woman the characteristics so useful in the sphere of business, such as firmness, steadfastness, intolerance, and rationality, we must be clearly aware that we are certainly reconstructing her emotional balance and contracting her purely maternal qualities” (Belskaya, 1977; Cf. Attwood, 1990, p. 167). As a result, masculinization of women had caused feminization of men, wounding the men’s self-esteem, causing them to become “idle and demoralized” (Afanasieva, 1977; Cf. Attwood, 1990, p. 167). Needless to say, such reversal of natural roles produced an ‘unhealthy imbalance' in the family, resulting in a high level of divorce, poor parenting, and an alarmingly low birthrate (Attwood, 1990; Buckley, 1986).

Armed with professional advice to reestablish the natural balance of the sexes, the Soviet State once again committed itself to taking the necessary measures in this direction. Re-socializing women and men into their ‘natural’ roles was attempted during the Brezhnev era, particularly through the introduction of a school course ‘The Ethics and Psychology of Family Life’ in 1984. The course outline was designed by members of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences and approved by the Soviet Ministry of Education (Attwood, 1990). The course was intended to provide “more thorough domestic training, and awareness of the kind of relationship which should exist between marriage partners, with correct understanding of sex-roles, masculinity and femininity, and family morality” (Yufereva, 1985; Cf. Attwood, 1990, p. 184). Students were taught that equality between the sexes was misinterpreted in the past as implying that the sexes are identical; this lead to the demise of essential male and female qualities in individuals (Attwood, 1990). Now as girls and boys “become aware of themselves and their special male and female roles,” they will be able to build stronger and healthier families (Snegireva, 1984; Cf. Attwood, 1990, p. 185). Thus, the government believed, the school course would solve the demographic crisis by providing an atmosphere with “fewer divorces, more babies, and a stable environment in which to rear them” (Attwood, 1990, p. 190).
Another attempt by the Soviet government to solve demographic problems resulted in the creation of family consultation centers throughout the country. Just as the secondary school course was meant to promote new sex-role socialization among teenagers, family consultation centers attempted to do the same among the adult population (Attwood, 1990). According to Bednyi (1984), the most important achievement of family consultation centers has been the establishment of a new psychological climate, “directed at the strengthening of the conjugal bonds and the creation of a full-blooded, healthy family with two or three children” (Cf. Attwood, 1990, p. 192).

The centers provided counseling sessions for many families in crisis resulting from men and women’s inability to understand one another (Sheinov, 1997). Cheslovas Grizitskas, a Soviet family consultant whose work has been widely reported in the popular press, describes the different mentalities of men and women as follows:

We talk a lot these days about the equality of men and women. They are equal in work, in study, in social life, and in marriage. But one ineradicable inequality exists – the bio-psychological. Each sex has its psychological peculiarities. The man is physically stronger, but the woman endures pain more stoically… The woman loves flowers, and cannot understand why her educated husband lounges in front of the television watching hockey (Grizitskas, 1977; Cf. Attwood, 1990, p. 194).

With the emergence of glasnost and perestroika, the official Soviet commitment to protecting the family did not wither. The famous 27th CPSU Congress of 1986 decided on further provisions for pre-school child care institutions and the extension of maternity leave to two years (Attwood, 1990). Mikhail Gorbachev, in his vision of perestroika in 1987, reinforced the reformed Soviet Union’s position on the women’s question:

During the years of our difficult and heroic history, we failed to pay attention to women’s specific rights and needs arising from their role as mother and home-maker, and their indispensable educational function as regards children. Engaged in scientific research, working on construction sites, in industry and the service sector… women no longer have enough time to perform their everyday duties at home – housework, raising children and the creation of a good family atmosphere. We have discovered that many of our problems – in children’s and young people’s behavior, in our morals, culture and even industry – are partially caused by the weakening of family ties and a slack attitude toward family responsibilities. This is a paradoxical result of our sincere and politically justified desire to make women equal with men in everything. Now, in the course of perestroika, we have begun to overcome this shortcoming. That is why we are now holding heated debates in the press, in public organizations, at work and at home, about the question of what we should do to make it possible for women to return to their purely womanly mission. (Gorbachev, 1987, p. 117)

Thus, as Silverman and Yanowitch (1997) note, “Gorbachev rejected the classical socialist assumption that ‘without the full and equal participation of women in social production, their genuine equality is inconceivable’, and accepted a reduced role for women in the workplace” (p. 59). As Voronina (1994) concludes, this position laid the foundation for the state policy toward women during the perestroika period. The hallmark of this policy was a large State program for “Improving the Position of Women and Protection of the Family, Motherhood and Childhood” with its main emphasis on the
protection of mothers, which extended the maternity leave to three years, of which 150
days would still be paid (Labor Code of the Russian Federation, 1995).

The political and economic upheaval of the post-perestroika period successfully
eliminated the remainder of the Soviet commitment to protecting wage-earning mothers.
As post-Soviet Russia fell into the economic crisis of 1992, the state abandoned almost
all of its former long considered obligations, including child-care allowances, quality
medical care, and adequate financial support for the elderly (Silverman and Yanowitch,
1997). The new Russian government, overburdened with ‘more serious’ problems of
emerging capitalism, found itself in a position similar to the Bolsheviks’ in 1917. In
times of turmoil, both governments were ‘forced’ to give up on social support measures
for their citizens. As a result of these changes, Russian women today are once again
caught in unresolved contradictions between work and family, being forced into another
cycle of the double burden.

The Feminist View

Although the history of Russian feminism dates back to the 1860s, it was not until
the late 1980s that Russian feminists emerged as an academic and political movement
(Mamonova, 1994). The first feminist publication in the USSR, the almanac Woman and
Russia, was banned by the Soviet censure. Tatiana Mamonova, the editor-in-chief of the
almanac, was arrested and soon exiled abroad (Mamonova, 1994; 1989). It was only after
perestroika that Russian feminists acquired a free voice. Currently, the Moscow Center
for Gender Studies is the leading academic institution of Russian feminism. The Center
aims to develop into a full fledged Institute of the Academy of Sciences to “undertake
much-needed research into a wider range of women’s issues” (Posadskaya, 1994, p. xiii).

From the very beginning, Russian feminists expressed strong criticism of the
official Soviet policy regarding women. According to Voronina (1994), the Soviet
experiment in solving the women question turned out to be “one of the most refined
social mystifications” (p. 37). “High-flown phrases about equal rights have been used to
hide the reality of women’s oppression” (Mamonova, 1994, p. 143). For many years,
Soviet women “have been subject to the harshest exploitation… [They were] the ‘internal
slaves’ of socialism: for many years economy was dependent on their cheap labor”
(Voronina, 1994, p. 41). “Equality between Soviet men and women [has been] observed
primarily on paper and the assertion that women [had] the same opportunities as men for
any type of work was pure nonsense” (Alexandrova, 1984, p. 32).

As Russian feminist scholars unanimously conclude, the Soviet power was
extremely patriarchal, with women occupying a subordinate place in both the social and
familial hierarchy. “For years, Soviet society has been run almost exclusively by elderly
and middle aged men” (Mamonova, 1994, p. 141). “Professional discrimination and
segregation of women has been widespread” (Voronina, 1994, p. 39). As Voronina
concludes, Soviet women have been excluded from decision-making in practically all
areas of professional activity. According to Silverman and Yanowitch (1997), by the end
of the 1980s “almost one-half (48 percent) of men with higher or secondary specialized
education held some form of managerial position. The comparable figure for women
with similar levels of education was only 7 percent” (p. 62).

As Voronina (1994) argues, workplace discrimination against women is expressed
through the creation of so-called ‘women’s professions’, or ‘women’s jobs’ inside
‘men’s’ professions. This is not surprising, she notes, as ‘women’s professions’ in Russia
have always been low in prestige and poorly paid (Voronina, 1994). Many Russian feminists point toward other, more overt forms of discrimination against women in the workplace, which increased with the transition of Russia to a market economy. For example, women have been paid on average 30 percent less than men (Silverman and Yanowitch, 1997; Voronina, 1994). They also became the first victims of cuts in managerial staff (Voronina, 1994). Most recently, they have often been declined job opportunities because of their sex (Mamonova, 1994; Silverman and Yanowitch, 1997). The less obvious form of workplace inequality, as Voronina (1994) describes it, is a very widespread practice of hidden discrimination against girls, whom schools gradually orient toward ‘women’s’ jobs, scaring them away from a number of ‘men’s’ positions with “the threat that they might lose their femininity” (p. 39).

Russian feminists point out that such debasement of women’s intellectual abilities leads to cultural misogyny toward educated women. “The talented woman is suppressed, her education is not acknowledged. She might be a Solomon in a skirt, and still she will be pushed aside. The maleocracy is noticeably fearful of brilliance, talent, and independence in women, which irritates the ‘lords of creation’ so much that they seem to surround such women with a field of ill-will. They prefer to give recognition to a mediocre woman who knows how to please them and how to push independent women off the path of advancement” (Mamonova, 1994, p. 143).

Russian feminist scholars argue that workplace discrimination against women is a clear indicator of the deep sexism engrained in Soviet culture. The world of politics, economics, and business is thought of as not a matter for women (Voronina, 1994). Posadskaya (1994) and others at the Moscow Gender Center cite examples of the overt sexism they have experienced in the Soviet Union. One, a journalist, states that “the men who control these [newspapers] have a consistent attitude. They tell [a woman journalist], ‘What are you talking about, my dear? Why does a pretty young person like you want to be politically active, to do professional work? Aren’t you tired of all that? Look at our Soviet women; they do not look like women any more. You can’t want them only to work. Please, do something else” (p. 193). Another example is cited by Voronina (1994): “In answer to a question about why there were no women on the political television programme “9th Studio”, the presenter, Leonid Zorin, gave the ‘witty’ reply that since this was a program for intelligent people talking about intelligent things, there was simply nothing for charming women to do” (p. 141).

As Mamonova (1994) concludes, sexist remarks like that indicate the success of the late Soviet campaign “Women go home!”, launched by Soviet officials in attempts to protect and strengthen the Soviet family. Lipovskaya (1994) demonstrates how Soviet propaganda internalized this campaign slogan and affected people’s attitudes as well. Soviet men lament the lost womanliness of modern women, “reproaching them for their lack of femininity” (p. 129). “Our culture is now creating a conventional image of compliant, sexualized femininity so dear to men’s hearts – submissive and tender… Together with the image of a good wife and mother, this model is now being promoted as the real, feminine woman so dear to Russian male culture” (p. 126+).

The ‘good mother’ part of the positive image of women, argues Lipovskaya (1994), does not require further establishing in Russian culture because of the cult of motherhood that has always existed in Russia. A childless or infertile woman is still viewed as less of a woman – an ‘empty flower’, as someone who has not fulfilled her
most important mission. With the start of the “Women go home!” campaign, Lipovskaya (1994) felt that motherhood had become even more accentuated in the mass media, films, literature and theater. She cites examples of how it has become popular to publish pictures of actresses, women writers, and professional women with their children, as if reminding them and the media audience of their paramount role in life. Lipovskaya (1994) concludes that “wholesale domestication of the once supposedly emancipated Soviet woman proceeds apace. Her social and professional functions recede into the background and to the fore come qualities befitting the traditional Russian model of ‘womanliness’” (p. 129).

Unlike virtuous motherhood, the ‘submissive and tender’ component of the revived femininity required specific promotion. Voronina (1994) provides abundant examples how this image of compliant femininity is being successfully inculcated into mass consciousness. She cites many official psychologists offering advice on the ‘secrets of feminine wisdom’: “Male psychology is such that the man has to feel that he is the head of the family, whatever the conditions. Even if it is the woman who shoulders all the problems, the husband should not be made aware of this!” (p. 137). Mamonova (1994) comments on the same phenomenon: “Russian psychologists (mostly men) have showered women with recommendations and warnings: don’t argue, don’t get angry – agree. Be patient – you’ll get by” (p. 163+).

Lipovskaya (1994) demonstrates how the idea of compliant femininity permeates the new image of female sexuality introduced to Soviet audiences. She cites a book on sex education by a well-known St. Petersburg sexologist Lev Shcheglov, Sex is a Normal Thing (1991), in which the author carefully restricts women’s sexuality to men’s sexual arousal, maintaining, for example, that “if a woman takes the initiative in sex, this will cause sexual disorders in the male because of her aggressive and too active attitudes” (Lipovskaya, 1994, p. 128). Thus, Lipovskaya concludes, the value of ‘new’ female sexuality is determined by how compliant and sensitive a woman appears regarding men’s sexual needs (p. 128).

Russian feminists develop their argument further, asserting that there is only one step from compliant female sexuality to nullified personality and the objectification of women. Lipovskaya (1994) comments on the sexual policy among some established Soviet media: “the newspaper Moskovski Komsomolets organized two contests called ‘Miss Bust’ and ‘Miss Legs’... Similar trends occur in contemporary commercial advertisement, as various parts of the female body are dismembered in order to sell anything” (p.127). Socially and ideologically, Lipovskaya concludes, “the image of women... is utterly deprived of all individuality and reduced to nothing” (p. 132).

The unfavorable views of the country’s social and moral policies, articulated by Russian feminists, have clearly contributed to the mythology of anti-feminism rising slowly but surely in modern Russia (Lipovskaya, 1994). Soviet and Russian media have been creating an invariably negative or at best ironic image of this movement (Mamonova, 1994, 1989; Posadskaya, 1994). In mass consciousness, feminism is perceived as an ‘f-word’, associated with men-hatred, singlehood, lesbianism, and the low self-esteem of women. “Many...have not grasped that the feminist movement is directed not against men, but against the violation of the person in any manner for any purpose,” writes Tatiana Mamonova (1984, p. xiv). Yet, Russian feminists believe that
the first step has been taken, and hope that it is only a matter of time for feminist thinking to gradually filter into Russian culture (Lipovskaya, 1994, p. 133).

Women's Own View

Whether the views of feminists have yet permeated the socialization of daughters into womanhood or whether the official/historical view is still widely accepted is a question best addressed to mothers engaged in the socialization of daughters and the daughters themselves.

As already mentioned, this part of the chapter is based on interviews conducted in the city of Kazan, Tatarstan, Russia in the summer of 1997. Kazan is the capital of Tatarstan, an independent republic within the Russian Federation, situated in the eastern part of the East European plain, where the Kama River flows into the Volga River (Khusnutdinov, 1996). Tatarstan enjoys significant political and economic freedom; its status is similar to that of an American State (Chamber of Commerce, 1996). Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan, is located 500 miles east of Moscow. It is home to over 1.3 million people, and the largest port on the Volga River (Chamber of Commerce, 1996). For centuries, Kazan has been a trade and transportation center between the Middle East and European Russia and Scandinavia. Traditionally, Tatarstan has also been both an industrial and an agricultural center. Despite the recent economic and cultural influences from the West, however, Kazan remains a provincial city less affected by Western ideology than, for instance, Moscow or St. Petersburg.

The first author interviewed nine women, six of whom comprised mother-daughter pairs. The daughters were in their late teens and early twenties, the mothers ranged in age from 39 to 66. The mothers interviewed for the study are highly educated; most are working professionals. However, they do work in predominantly ‘women’s areas’ (secondary school teachers and university professors of humanities and foreign languages). Their daughters who are pursuing their higher education, are also studying or have graduated from disciplines traditionally considered predominantly female (foreign languages and literature).

The interviews were focused on how mothers socialize their daughters into womanhood and how the daughters experienced these socialization efforts. Mothers were asked how they instructed their daughters in becoming ‘real women’, what qualities they wanted their daughters to develop, and what messages about femininity they wished to convey to their daughters. The daughters were asked about their goals in life, what they have learned or wanted to learn from their mothers, and about their own perceptions of femininity.

One of the major challenges the researchers faced in this study was the non-translatability into the Russian language of certain Western concepts, fundamental to the study of gender. Crucially important is that Russian does not distinguish between sex and gender: both the biological reality and its psychological components are referred to as pol, which literally means 'sex'. Given such non-differentiation, there is only one word in Russian – zhenstvennost' - for both "femininity" and "femaleness". Further, the words zhenstvennyi 'feminine', zhenskii 'female', and zhenshchina 'woman' stem from the same old Slavic root, zhena which means both 'wife' and 'woman'. Moreover, the concept of womanhood, that is, the experience of being a woman, is not translatable into Russian. The traditional question of Western gender studies, "What is it like to be a woman?" (Disch, 1997), evoked confusion and puzzlement when posed to Russian audiences.
(Roudakova, 1998). Since gender roles are generally believed to be natural and pre-determined, they have not traditionally been subject to contemplation or discussion. Thus, the question "What is it like to be a woman?" is similar to "What does it feel like to have blue eyes?" in English. You can answer the question if you think about it, but the response is not on the tip of your tongue.

Faced with such linguistic and cultural challenges, the authors attempted to formulate interview questions in a very general fashion, allowing women to slowly construct their own perceptions of womanhood. The most important finding of the study was that despite the interviewees' intellectual and professional backgrounds, they still defined their experiences of womanhood through the realms of home, family, and interpersonal relationships. Without being specifically asked, the women focused their narration around highly traditional themes such as femininity, female attractiveness and desirability; gentility and non-aggressiveness in communicating with others; the womanly mission of motherhood; the woman's care and self-sacrifice for her children and other family members; her responsibility for maintaining the family and 'home fire'; and her skill at housekeeping. The second largely surprising finding of the study was that the much discussed double burden is widely reinforced in mother-daughter communication. The women interviewed reported teaching their daughters how to be strong, enduring, self-reliant, and at the same time carry the burden with dignity, without questioning or complaining, rather accepting this role as natural.

The first component of womanhood easily identified by the women in this study was the imperative for feminine appearance – the need to expend effort to be attractive and desirable. "If you look at the stream of people hurrying to work in the morning," says Ludmila Petrovna*, 43, "you can notice that women, despite the incredible conditions of our chaotic life, look nicer, cleaner, and more dressed up than men. You can see the effort they make to look better, although, of course, you know that it does not come easy to them."

Interviewees revealed that the ultimate importance of being well-kept and well-groomed is introduced to daughters in practically every family. Daughters in the sample recalled their mothers specifically telling them that a girl should be 'neat', 'tidy', 'well-kept', and 'well-groomed'. “I remember my mother saying to me that there are no unattractive women”, says Zulfiya, 22. Farida Bakievna, her mother, 53, recalls telling both of her daughters: “A woman should always feel equal among equals. Beautiful among the beautiful. If God did not make a woman gorgeous, she must at least be attractive.” “My mother taught me how to style my hair, put on make-up, combine colors and fabrics in clothing,” says Olga, 18. “She has always advised me on what clothes to buy. In fact, I rarely shop without her even nowadays.”

Indeed, the idea that a woman needs to make special efforts to become attractive and desirable (note a Russian saying, "Beauty requires sacrifice") appears so deeply engrained in the women's self-images that trying to look good becomes a habit rather than a conscious effort. "What once used to be a moral imperative," says Zulfiya, "now turned into a need or a habit. When I am stressed or depressed, I sit down and put make up on, and then take it off. The procedure itself makes me feel much better.” "When I wake up in the morning," says Irina Vasilyevna, 39, "the first thing I do is put makeup on. I don't know why I do it. I just do. I feel uncomfortable without it."
Mothers indicated that they not only speak explicitly to their daughters about the importance of looking good – they also show them through their own behavior. Anna, 22, shares a story which happened to her a few years ago. Early one morning she stopped by the house of her music teacher, who was on maternity leave a few weeks after her daughter was born. The teacher was dressed nicely, wearing jewelry and makeup, her hair was well styled as well. Anna remembers being very surprised to see her teacher looking so ‘put together’ early in the morning. The teacher answered, "my daughter needs to see her mother beautiful every day. Then, when she grows up, she will have a habit of taking care of her looks, too."

Aside from overt verbal instruction and implicit behavioral messages, a Russian mother encourages her daughter's habit of looking good by buying her expensive clothing, jewelry and various beauty products. “I did not get to wear expensive clothes in my teens and twenties, so at least I let my girl be beautiful,” says Irina Vasilyevna. In her attempts to inculcate the 'good feminine habits' in her daughter, a mother often deprives herself of new clothes or beauty products for the sake of her daughter. “You can see this phenomenon on our streets,” says Raisa Iskhakovna, 50. “A daughter is all dressed and made up, wearing gold jewelry and fashionable shoes, while her mother is dressed very plainly, having sacrificed everything for her daughter.”

An important component to being desirable and attractive identified in the interviews is the woman's 'mysteriousness'. Looking good is not enough to keep a man beside a woman; there has to be something else to constantly draw a man's interest to her. Several women referred to a popular Russian saying, "there should be an enigma in every woman." One of the daughters recalled her mother explicitly telling her, "don't reveal everything about yourself to your boyfriend. When he knows all about you, he has nothing to be surprised at. Eventually, he will get bored and will start looking at other women."

When asked about the inner qualities they wished to inculcate in their daughters, mothers reported teaching their daughters how to supportively maintain relationships and to be oriented toward others rather than themselves. Again, traditionally feminine qualities such as ‘caring’, ‘kind’, ‘soft’, ‘attentive’, and ‘compassionate’ were mentioned most often. Several women in the sample referred to such characteristics as woman's ‘inner beauty’. Again, mothers teach this aspect of femininity through both explicit messages and personal examples. “My daughter Katya has this idea that a girl should be all beautiful and tidy,” says Raisa Iskhakovna. “But I tell her, that it’s not what is most important. What is important, is that she should be beautiful ‘inside’, to be soft, gentle, and caring. Unfortunately, she is not like that. There is still a lot of teenage pretentiousness in her behavior, and she can be snappy and even rude to people. I realize Katya took after me in character and developed my strictness and excessive adherence to principle. However, I am trying to be as soft as I can with her, though my own mother is reprimanding me for it. But I think I would stop being a true woman if I were strict with my daughter.”

“I know my daughter has a kind heart, but sometimes she pushes around her younger brother and even hurts his feelings,” says Irina Vasilyevna. “We tell her not to bully him, to be gentle with him, to feed him when he comes home from school, and to share games and movies with him. We also give her examples from other families we know, where there are warm and caring relationships among siblings. Finally, we tell our daughter, that even though her brother is little and defenseless, he will become her first helper when we won’t be there any more.”
Interviews also show that mothers’ messages about care, attention, and compassion go hand in hand with another traditional component of femininity - women's non-aggressiveness, yielding, forgiveness, and self-sacrifice. Women in the study, however, did not define this component as passivity but rather as 'female wisdom'. "When in conflict, a wise woman will yield," says Anna Ivanovna, 66. "And that is showing her strength, not weakness. In fact, it is not really yielding but wise recognition of your sacrifice."

The quintessence of the ‘female wisdom’ principle is crystallized in two Russian sayings, "a woman's strength is in her weakness" and "a man is the head, a woman is the neck." “I manage home and family,” says Olga Yurievna, 45, “but I present to everyone that my husband is the head of our family. I try to make him feel that way, and I think he does.” “I learned from my mother that a woman should stay in the second position,” says Raisa Iskhakovna, “and in my relationships with men I never resented being reminded of my role.” “My tentative observations allow me to conclude that some of the wisest wives stay in the shadow of their husbands,” she continues, “because to be weaker and cleverer for a woman is always more useful; to claim and fight for one’s rights is stupid and needless.”

Both mothers and daughters unanimously excluded such characteristics as being straightforward, aggressive, rigid, or rude from their definitions of femininity. “Rude and rigid women are counter-natural,” says Ludmila Petrovna, “scandalous women, boorish women are just a nightmare.” Her daughter Olga adds: “I am still learning from my mother how to control my emotions. Sometimes I really want to say something strong, but then I think about my mother and restrain myself.” “My mom is a perfect example of a real lady for me,” she continues. “She is always self-controlled, well-bred. When in conflict, she never raises her voice or uses strong words.”

Interviews also reflect that motherhood, along with the striving for femininity, is another important aspect of women's experience in Russia. Perhaps, it is even the most important aspect, as women in the sample reported that “being a woman and being a mother is the same thing” for them (Farida Bakiyevna); and “living without children is not living at all” (Irina Vasilyevna). The predominant opinion expressed by the mothers in the study was that a woman can realize herself fully as a woman only if she has given birth to a child. "Every woman, of course, needs to experience motherhood," says Anna Ivanovna. "It is given by nature, and we are not the ones to change it." "I respect women who decide to have children without a husband," Anna Ivanovna continues, "because a woman may not meet the right person on time, but the years go by and soon it may be too late to have a child." "If a woman in our culture is pursuing a career instead of having a family, that is theoretically a good thing, but in people's minds there is generally still a bias toward her: a woman without a husband is bad, a woman without children – even worse,” says Raisa Iskhakovna.

Motherhood and the resulting never-ending responsibility for her children, even more so than striving for femininity illuminates the Russian woman's ultimate priority of family and children over everything else. "When I was younger," continues Raisa Iskhakovna, "I was much more career-oriented, wrote a lot and conducted more research. I would leave my small son with my parents and spend months at a time in Moscow writing my dissertation. Now I sincerely regret it. I think I deprived my son of a lot of care and attention. I should have been spending more time with my family instead of
working on the dissertation. In other words, I feel that my professional qualities harmed the upbringing of my son. Today I spend much more time with my daughter, and this is why she is much softer."

The overwhelming care and self-sacrifice with which mothers surround their children are other indicators of Russian women's familial priorities in life. Most outside commentators agree that the value attached to children in Russia is enormous (Lapidus, 1983). "Having given birth to children, a mother becomes their slave, as my mother used to put it," says Farida Bakiyevna. "If I had to sacrifice something in my life for my children's happiness," says Raisa Iskhakovna, "by all means I would give away anything I have – house, career, money, health, anything." "I believe if a woman has children, she remains their mother till her last day," says Olga Yurievna.

As a woman's children grow up and her own parents grow older, her responsibilities as a daughter for taking care of her own parents add to the number of those a Russian woman already has to care for. In Russia generally even if a daughter leaves her parents to start her own family, she moves back with them when they need special care. Retirement homes, though they exist, apparently are not an option for Russian daughters. "My mother now is at such an age that she is helpless," says Anna Ivanovna, "so it is my responsibility to take care of her. Sometimes I scold myself for not being attentive enough to her, for being angry with her. I say to myself, 'she is my mother after all, how can I do that?'" "I stopped being a daughter for my parents – I am their mother now," says Raisa Iskhakovna. "I forgive a lot of things to them, their grumping, their elderly quirks and whims. I just view them as children, so I don't get mad at them, I forgive them everything." "I can not picture myself deferring from my parents in any way," says Olga. "It's a shame when children forget their parents, when they do not take routine care of them. Our parents have given us practically everything; they used their last energy to give us a good education and upbringing. They have put their life into turning us into decent people – and we forget them? What will my children think about me, when they watch my attitude toward their grandparents? What kind of message will they get? I believe that children remain indebted to their parents till their last day."

Still another aspect of womanhood associated with home and family on which mothers focused while socializing their daughters – the ability to run the home, to be a 'keeper of the home fire', providing the 'comfortable family atmosphere' – is the aspect which women felt Soviet culture deprived them of. "A good khozyaika (roughly, a 'homemaker') is exactly what men are looking for when choosing a wife," concludes Irina Vasilyevna. "They are looking for a woman who holds the house together, warming it intellectually and emotionally, creating a soothing atmosphere and providing the comfort of home. A khozyaika also has a kind and generous soul, her house is always open to relatives and friends." Taking into account the wide range of responsibilities the role of khozyaika includes, some women reported teaching their daughters how to cook, clean, sew, knit, and embroider. Others, however, believe that no specific lessons need to be taught; once a daughter starts her own family, she will actualize the skills of maintaining a household she unconsciously picked up by observing her mother's lifestyle.

So far we have discussed the first finding of the study -- the fact that despite their high intellectual and professional standing, the mothers interviewed for this study focused their socialization efforts on instilling traditional feminine qualities into their daughters,
and for the most part their daughters accepted these qualities as natural. Now we turn to the other, not less surprising finding of the study – the reinforcement through mother-daughter communication of the much-discussed double burden of Russian women. Both mothers and daughters in the sample, when asked to identify what distinguishes their lives as women in Russia, pointed to the low standard and difficult conditions of life, the incredible number of tasks and responsibilities they have daily, and the lack of leisure time and money which they can spend on themselves.

Indeed, the authors' own experiences in Russia testify that women’s chores around the house are still extremely laborious: a week’s grocery shopping takes many hours; most meals are made from scratch; washing, cleaning, and mending clothes is often still done by hand. In addition, women are generally the ones managing the family budget, which for many women means figuring out how to make ends meet while trying to look gorgeous at the same time. “Being a woman in Russia means being a very strong person, who is able to carry a double or triple load, to remain a whole and yet have many faces,” says Ludmila Petrovna.

It was none the less surprising to find out that women accept this load without question, do not complain, pull themselves together, and simply carry on. It was in this area that mothers provided the most role modeling for their daughters. “Of course there are times when I am ready to crash because hauling three full loads - my job, my house, and children - is too much,” Farida Bakiyevna says. “But I can’t let myself do it. If my daughters want to live in our society, they need to grow strong and enduring, being ready to take everything on themselves. And I must be an example for them. If I don’t show them, who else will?” “I learned how to be strong from my mother,” recalls Ludmila Petrovna. “She did not complain about life but just carried on, always facing her problems with dignity. The older I become, the more I realize my mother’s inconspicuous strength, which is probably what endurance really is. I try not to show my exhaustion in front of my daughter no matter how hard it may be. One must always keep in mind her responsibilities toward others.”

Thus women in today's Russia carry their multiple responsibilities in the household, family, and the workplace on their ‘frail women's shoulders’ relying on no one but themselves. The reinforcement of the double burden was seen especially clearly when women reported that, of course, it would be nice if their husbands helped them with the chores, but they rarely insist on their husband's help.

In addition, women still believe that the work men do outside the home is more stressful, more demanding, and more strenuous because men exert physical strength and energy. Thus, men need to be supported and protected. “One of the things I learned from my mother about family was that there had to be some kind of hierarchy,” says Ludmila Petrovna. “If a husband or an elder son works hard, there needs to be respect for him. A wife should give him the best piece of meat from the family pot of soup, should not get on his nerves and take some work off his shoulders whenever she can to make his life a bit easier.” “My mother believed such status was natural,” Ludmila Petrovna continues, “and it always seemed reasonable to me.”

Zulfiya and Raisa Iskhakovna provided still other reasons why men in Russia need to be supported and taken care of. “Russia's men have always been a vulnerable social group because of wars and serfdom,” says Zulfiya. “So men were valuable and needed to be protected. They were like a ‘roof’ to a household, their wives being its
‘foundation’. The ‘roof’ had to be supported by the ‘foundation’; if the latter was gone, the ‘roof’ would fall.” “A man without a woman is hopeless,” says Raisa Iskhakovna. “He is not enjoying life, he can’t keep himself clean, fed, well-dressed. He loses his ‘axis’, his will power. Though he doesn’t notice it, any woman does. Any woman can tell this man is lonely.”

In the midst of all of the domestic responsibilities to which women assign themselves, they seem not to forget about their intellectual endeavors and professional pursuits but the reasons are again highly traditional. “I am glad my daughter Olga is showing ambitious interest in her studies like I once did,” says Ludmila Petrovna. “There is nothing worse than a woman becoming a financial burden for her husband. I hope my daughter makes a career and starts a happy family. Then, if she has normal family relationships, her career will be looking up as well.” "I always tried to instill love for hard intellectual work into my children," says Anna Ivanovna. "I never made homework for them but rather tried to make them understand for themselves how important it is to study hard." "My daughter watched me prepare for my morning lectures," recalls Farida Bakiyevna, "so we would study in the same room, my desk three meters away from hers. She would stay up late reading, too, and would not go to bed before I did."

By the end of the interviews, when mothers and daughters had built up their own construction of womanhood and reflected back on all that is expected of women in Russia, they came up with a ‘solution’ which once again reinforced the double burden. “When my mother drives herself to exhaustion pressed by numerous problems of our life, I realize that a woman under no circumstances must become a ‘hanger’,” noted Anna. "No matter how hard it may be to remain a woman nowadays, we must," said Zulfiya. "Otherwise we will completely lose our femininity, and will turn into exhausted horses, not women.”

**Conclusion**

The portrait of Russian women depicted here is far from simple. They appear gentle and strong, weak and enduring, nurturing and controlling. They live in a society in which it is taken for granted that a woman should be educated and have a profession, but, at the same time she “can never be equal to men because she has to take care of her family” (Hurych and Goldstein, 1995, p. 45). They also live in a culture where for years ideology was not questioned, as individual action was not believed to have the power to change anything.

Despite the variety of roles into which these Russian mothers socialize their daughters, the overwhelming majority of those roles are still largely traditional and belong to the private rather than public sphere of life, revolving around the concepts of home, family, and personal relationships. The attention to the private/familial sphere of life causes women to depend heavily on maintaining relationships with others instead of developing personal autonomy. Thus, these women feel incomplete without a husband. In order to keep him beside her, a woman needs to be feminine – attractive, desirable, mysterious, gentle, non-aggressive, supportive, and caring. This concern with staying in a relationship at all cost ("a bad husband is better than no husband") illustrates how the private sphere of her life precedes her performance in the public/social sphere.

Mandatory motherhood (a childless woman being defined derogatorily as a ‘sterile flower’) and the concept of mothers as slaves to their children, again, support the conclusion that the appropriate focus for a woman is on her family especially during the
childrearing years. Her concern with the family does not end even after her children grow up, as she now becomes responsible for her elderly parents. The desire and the skill of ‘providing the comfort of home’ puts the final touch on the construction of the Russian woman, her family being its center and everything else remaining in the periphery.

Raisa Iskhakovna best expresses this idea of womanhood as a category of a familial/private sphere of life as follows: "A woman can not live without a family. In our country she usually lives with a family anyway – she lives with her parents, if not with her husband and children. I believe that a woman without a family is no longer a woman. Because only in the family she can show tenderness and care. At work, she can’t be a woman – she is a worker, she loses her sex. In our culture a woman without a family is viewed as less of a woman, as if she is somehow defective or flawed. This forms an inferiority complex in her; she is ashamed to admit that she is a woman without a family. To be a woman for me now is to live for my children and for my relatives. If I didn’t have any relatives, I think there wouldn’t be a reason for me to live. Family is the most important thing in my life."

The full participation of women in the workforce, practiced during the Soviet years, resulted in Russian women being torn between work and home, feeling that they never had enough time to spend on their families and that Soviet culture took away their femininity. Not surprisingly, then, after seventy years of carrying a double burden, many Russian women are content with having just one responsibility, the management of the home and the care of their families (Ballard-Reisch, Weigel, and Zaguidoulline, 1998; Morvant, 1995). The late Soviet slogan "women go home" was to a large extent embraced by the women in this study. Interviews indicate that these women are, in fact, operationalizing what "women go home" means to them – being beautiful, supporting their husbands, taking care of the children, managing their homes etc.

When the subject of feminism is generally brought up with Russian women, they answer that it is not feminism that is needed in Russia but rather a general improvement in economic conditions (Ries, 1994). Low wages, the near absence of affordable goods and services, poor transportation and medical care, financial instability – all of these factors contribute to Russian women’s dissatisfaction with their lives. In the midst of such insecurity, women’s families, of which they are the ‘sole mistresses’ (Tolstaya, 1995), often become their only consolation and comfort. Women escape into families from the uncertainty and chaos of the outside world. Managing the family becomes the meaning of their lives. When seen in this light, perhaps it is possible to understand why in this provincial urban city in Russia, even among professional women, the ideas of western feminism have not yet received widespread appreciation.

Yet some feminist thinking is slowly filtering into Russian women's culture. For instance, interviews show that attitudes toward the traditional Russian concept of 'love/marriage as sacrifice' are changing toward more self-sufficiency on the part of women. Raisa Iskhakovna, for example, recalls, "I can honestly say that the first couple of years after I divorced my husband I was ashamed of it. People were telling me that nobody divorces a husband at 40 just because he is an indecent person. I remember some months after the divorce, I went on a vacation alone, and put on a wedding ring, lying to people that I was married. I did not regret divorcing my husband, though. Rather, I was glad I had enough courage to make that important step in the first place. My daughter and I did not discuss much of what had happened, but I know she was big enough to
understand what was going on. Some years later she told me, ‘mother, I know you were brave to divorce dad. But I hope I never have to go through that myself.’"

"I do not want my daughter to date anyone who will become a burden for her," says Olga Yurievna. "I often told her that self-sacrifice is too much of a price to pay for having a partner." Unfortunately, everything else mothers teach their daughters does reinforce this concept of 'self-sacrifice'. Thus, mothers are left with nothing but hoping their daughters will escape their fate. "I tell my daughter that her boyfriend does not deserve her love," says Raisa Iskhakovna. "But she says she'll make him better. She'll educate him, she'll bring him up, she'll make of him whatever she needs. The most important thing for her is that he is affectionate. And there is nothing I can do about it, because it's our cultural phenomenon – combining love and feeling sorry for a man." "Of course, I would like my daughter to marry a nice person who would take care of her, make her feel loved, comforted, and protected," says Farida Bakiyeva. "But now Zulfiya is dating someone who needs her spiritual support and care himself. I don't think that is normal, but after all, I must respect her choice. Hopefully, she will change her mind."

One can conjecture that the cited examples are only the ‘sprouts’ of feminist thinking, tightly interwoven with the traditional perceptions of gender. Thus, it appears, there is a very long way to go before the feminist hope in provincial Russia becomes a reality. This process, of course, is aggravated by the breakdown in communication between Russian women and Western feminist thinkers due to the earlier mentioned negative portrayal of feminism in Soviet mass media. In fact, many women in Russia with rather progressive views on the role of women in society would not admit to being feminist (Hurych and Goldstein, 1995).

The growth of the feminist movement in Russia started with the capitals – Moscow and St. Petersburg, which have had the most Western influence so far. The spread of feminism to the Russian provinces will be gradual as those regions open toward the West. Until then, however, many Russian women will continue to live in a ‘schizophrenic split’ (Hannsen and Lidén, 1983), caught in the twixt of the double burden, unaware that a way out of it, in fact, depends to a large extent on the women themselves.

Notes:
Mothers in this study are referred to by first name and patronymic; daughters by first name only.

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