

ЛЮБОВЬ

# The Man Question

LOVES AND LIVES IN LATE 20TH CENTURY RUSSIA

ANNA ROTKIRCH

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LOVES AND LIVES IN LATE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY RUSSIA

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Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to the women and men of St. Petersburg who wanted to share their life and love stories with me – and now with you.

*Pakila, Helsinki, February 2000*

*Again your presentation started by stating what we did not have: there was no sexual revolution, there was no public discourse on sex, I'm sorry but it already makes me sick.*

Sociologist Elena Zdravomyslova.<sup>1</sup>

*Sex... what's that? What we were always doing or something new?*

Comedian Mikhail Zhvanetskii,  
quoted in Engelstein (1992b, 786).

## Introduction

The velvet revolutions in Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s are said to be the first in history that were not guided by any utopian visions of a better, more equal future. On the rhetorical level, postsocialist Russia wanted to live 'normally', 'like everybody else' (in the West). Certainly, the neo-liberal theories formally guiding the Eastern European transitional economies were part of a particular ideology, including an ideology of human beings, human freedom and family relations. But these ideologies tend to be propagated as the absence of ideologies or state interference. Similarly, the return to intrinsically 'Russian' traditions eclectically favoured by communist and national-chauvinist groups in the 1990s was mainly defined in opposition to the too emancipated Soviet or too liberated Western woman. Questions of women's and sexual liberation had been on the top agenda of the Russian intelligentsia from the early 19th century until the 1920s. Now, they were assigned a subordinated role in the state project of post-Soviet Russia.

The absence of overarching, declared emancipatory projects has not prevented, but served and facilitated, re-arrangements of gender relations in Russian society. It has concealed, but not prevented perceptions of gender and sexuality from being at the core of numerous political, professional and personal conflicts. This time the most drastic changes have concerned men and masculinities. As the 'woman question' defined the end of the 19th century, what could be called the 'man question' was a driving force in the social and cultural dynamics of late 20th century Russia.

This book is about sexual and family life in Soviet and postsocialist Russia. It ranges from postwar Soviet society through the so-called era of stagnation in the 1970s (which will emerge as just the opposite in sexual behaviour) and the era of the public sexual revolution in the 1980s-1990s. It is a contribution to the social history of the vanishing world of real socialism and an inquiry into the dynamics of gender and family relations in Russia today. I will not trace the debates about Russian masculinity discursively, neither can I predict how the 'man question' will be answered. Instead, I want to detect the everyday practices and gendered constellations from which it has arisen.

The time is gone when revealing the injustices and complications of Soviet everyday life had an informational and shock value of its own. I do not want to write about what the Russians 'lacked' (although, as the above quoted frustration from a close Russian colleague shows, the risk is constantly present). Through the life stories and insights of autobiographies written by so-called ordinary people, I want to discuss what there was. The sphere of everyday sexual practices is taken as a case for analyzing the patterns of social development in late Soviet and new Russian society. It is also a case for extending our theoretical understanding of the relationships between human bodies, practices, and discourses. The Soviet experience offers us one of the best arguments for not reducing everything to linguistic practices. Were that the case, the Russians would indeed have been doing "something new", as Mikhail Zhvanetskii puts it in the quote above, and very exotic, in bed.

### *Framing questions: gender traditionalism and the semi-public sphere*

From the mid-1930s, the Soviet regime banned most kinds of discourses on sexuality – whether educational, entertaining, pornographic or philosophical. No-

tably, the Soviet Union had no ‘sexual revolution’ in the 1960s similar to that in the West. In the 1960s and 1970s, there were only minor changes in the sexual policy and ideology of the communist regime. This constellation served as my point of departure: *What happens in everyday life when a certain sphere of life – sexuality – is practically banned from public discourse?*

I have dealt with this initial framing question in two ways: by asking how *sexual behaviour and morality* changed compared with official ideological norms and how the *structure of sexual cultures* was affected by the prohibition of public debate and thus any negotiated, general consensus.

Related as they are, these questions led me in diverging directions. The question about behaviour and morality led me straight into the ‘emotional economy’ (Näre 1995) of the Soviet Russian families and everyday settings. It guided me to the relations between two sexes and three generations, and between declared ideals and a more pragmatic morality. I started with the common assumption that despite the seemingly egalitarian rhetoric of the Soviet state, everyday gender relations were more traditional (read: pre-modern) in Soviet Russia than in contemporary Western societies. This thesis of gender traditionalism of course included sexual relations as well. As I became more and more immersed in the autobiographies, which constitute my primary material, the claim of traditionalism seemed increasingly puzzling. Certainly, the Russians sometimes followed the changes in the sexual behaviour of the Finns with a neat 15-20 years of time lag. But in some respects the Soviet experience led to more radical (in the sense of anti-traditional) behaviour. For instance, a grandmother could advise her daughter to get a divorce and become a single mother.

This radical side of Soviet family life evidently had to do with the broader context of social and economic policies. Relationships between men and women were built on an economically different basis in state socialism than in capitalism. Social hardships – from wars and famine to the notorious lack of living space – put additional pressures on marriages. As a consequence, the Soviet heterosexual couple was in several ways more fragile than in prosperous and capitalist economies. Although in line with Friedrich Engels’s original prediction about families under socialism, this development was an unintended and much belated consequence of Soviet state policies. Everyday sexuality thus had to be understood against the background of the Soviet family with its weak or absent male breadwinner, and its basic structure of what I call extended mothering. I have named the social and mental consequences arising from this situation the ‘man question’.

The expression was first coined by Arja Rosenholm (1999), who shows how the Russian woman question in the 1860s was formulated by men and in many ways articulated male, not female, self reflection. Obviously, I talk about the man question in a different historical context. The man question at the end of the 20th century is often put by Russian women, but also explicitly by the men themselves. Just as the Russian woman question was not only discussed in Russia, the man question is not limited to the socialist or postsocialist space. In many ways, the Soviet experiences of the 1960s and 1970s resembled the uncertainties and parental anxieties, connected with women's economic independence and full-time employment, that the Western countries have fully faced since the 1990s. Systematic comparisons between the gender questions of the 19th and the 20th century, or between their formulation in Russia and outside it, lie, however, outside the scope of this work.

By talking about the man question I also wanted to pay explicit attention to the group that, even if representing the 'first sex', has been ascribed the role of the 'second gender'. That men should be explicitly included in gender research is a realization that has turned into practice only during the 1990s in international academic research.

The same paradox posed itself when I looked at what the authors from Leningrad/St. Petersburg included in their accounts of sexuality, or, how the domains of the sexual and of love were drawn. Not only did family and sexual culture seem to be formed by the explicit sexual and reproductive policies of the Soviet regime – the living conditions, the censorship and puritanism, the lack of adequate means of birth control, and the authoritarian and pro-natalist approach to parenthood in general and motherhood in particular. The emotional economy of everyday Russian life also denied sexuality a privileged and unique position. As Svetlana Boym (1993, 157) mentions, neither in tsarist nor Soviet Russia was sexuality thought of as a separate life sphere, "conceived separately from moral, emotional, cultural, and historical elements". In much of the autobiographical material used in this study, especially in that written by women, other forms of love – between parents and children, or between friends – were described as equally, if differently, important. Again, I was forced to look at my own culture and its exclusive focus on the sexual Couple from the outside. But were the Russian conceptions of love and intimacy more 'traditional' than those of my culture – or less?

My second framing question, the one about the structure of sexual cultures, did not concern gender as much as generational and class dynamics. Several

scholars have argued that the late 1970s and early 1980s were a watershed time in Soviet private, family and intimate life. This has been connected with a predominantly theoretical discussion about the ‘second society’ during state socialism (Hankiss 1988) or what has been referred to as the semi-public sphere (Zdravomyslova 1997). I wanted to test that concept with regard to sexuality and on a solid empirical base. Sexual cultures seemed a promising way of approaching semi-public lifestyles and discussing their relationship with generations and the dominant culture. I was also interested in what this could tell us about the relationship between discourse, or articulating sexual issues publicly, and practices.

I found that, yes, the biggest changes in sexual behaviour occurred in the late 1970s. During that period, conventionally labelled one of stagnation, various and sharply contrasting sexual ways of life established themselves in Soviet society. With the advent of perestroika in the mid-1980s, and especially after the economic reforms of 1991, the already existing subcultures provided the basis for the dominant culture of masculinity, as well as for more marginal cultures challenging them. But this process did not appear as neat as I had expected it to be. The Soviet semi-public sphere did not simply turn into the new public sphere of contemporary Russia. In many respects, the characteristics of the Soviet ‘semi-public’ domain, with its blurred distinctions between private and public, remained. They were especially dominating the lives of young Russians.

### *Disciplinary affinities*

This study belongs to the fields of sociology, social history and social policy, inquiring as it does into the intended and unintended consequences of Soviet reproductive and family policy. It also situates itself in the fields of feminist and gender studies and – to a lesser degree – sexual research. Needless to say, it belongs to Soviet and Russian studies, as well as autobiographical studies. However, the 1990s have witnessed an increasing malaise with the conventional disciplinary and thematical borders of social sciences. Anthony Giddens’ claim that history, sociology and geography are actually aspects of the same megadiscipline is true for many European sociologists of the younger generation, including myself. I would therefore as well place my work in the field – or metafield – of *comparative social theory*. In the spirit of reflexive social science and the extended case method, my interest is in documenting what is unique and local in order to improve our knowledge of the general.

In the West, 20th century culture has put intense – and ceaselessly intensify-

ing, it would seem – emphasis on sexuality. Partly this stems from such ideological currents as psychoanalysis and feminism, partly from the commercialization and mediatization of Western societies. Soviet Russia, by contrast, was a non-Freudian, non-feminist as well as anti-commercial culture. Psychoanalysis was repressed and access to any kind of sexually explicit material forbidden or strictly limited. Instead, Russian and Soviet culture has known several intellectual traditions, where sexuality or desire is not seen as the defining and decisive feature of human life.

Today, some Western scholars turn to the Russian experiences for alternative views of being human, of sexuality, the body, and subjectivity. Social scientists have looked for possible solutions to the Western (especially US) impasse arising from rigid identity politics (Tuller 1996; Rivkin-Fish 1997; Essig 1999a). In the social sciences, the works of major Soviet-era scholars are gradually being translated and integrated into our intellectual heritage.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, Western notions of personhood and sexuality were being rapidly exported to Russia. The Western, bourgeois capitalist view of sexuality as a separate, and privileged, life sphere is now spreading in the Russian middle and upper classes. One genre in my material are stories of identity quests – the search for a fitting sexual and/or psychological identity. Part of them – although a minority – were written in the emancipatory rhetoric familiar from Western women's and gay movements. This is similar to the way in which Russian research on gender and sexuality, when it was revived in the 1980s and 1990s, appropriated the latest Western academic concepts – beginning with the introduction of the new Russian word *gender*. As gender studies became institutionalized in the major Russian cities during the 1990s, the anthologies that appeared were almost always devoted to a presentation and rendering of international feminist theory (only during 1998 I counted almost ten such small *sborniki*).<sup>3</sup>

This fascinating, on-going and two-way exchange of ideas would certainly deserve a separate study. In this research, the history of ideas has a subordinated status and is only present in two aspects. On the one hand, it is an ingredient in analyzing the autobiographical materials: I pay attention to the categories through which ordinary people in St Petersburg wrote about sexuality in 1996. On the other hand, and more importantly, the Russian views of human development have shaped my theoretical quests. Since the late 1980s, I have followed and benefited from the discussions in the fields of philosophical and psychological Russian activity theory (Rotkirch 1996a and 1996b). In this work, I will refer to the theories of Soviet developmental psychology and activity theory, mainly the

schools of psychologist Lev Vygotsky and activity theorist Piotr Shchedrovitsky. My dream and ambition is for a real theoretical dialogue between the best of the Soviet/Russian traditions and the Western-dominated academic world.

Gender and sexuality have been the focus of scholarly attention in the fields of mass media, political rhetoric and popular culture (Gessen 1995; Kon 1995; Barker 1999). Still, Russian sexuality has rarely been analyzed as part of the everyday and family life. Svetlana Boym occasionally touches the subject in her “Common Places” (1994). Laurie Essig (1999a) partly documents the everyday of those who in Russia are called “unordinary” and for whom Essig uses the word “queer”. I will, by contrast, concern myself with “ordinary” love stories. We still lack any comprehensive sociological work about everyday family and love life during late socialism. Scholars have generally paid attention to changes in the public sphere, and have focused almost exclusively on Russian women.<sup>4</sup> This work looks at the loves and lives of both men and women.

The Soviet 1970s, usually called the “era of stagnation”, actually was a time of intense fermentation. This has been the focus of an increasing number of publications, mainly by Russian sociologists (e.g. Shlapentokh 1989; Ionin 1997). In my earlier work, I have discussed this dynamics from the point of view of case studies of Soviet psychology and philosophy (Roos & Rotkirch 1999). This claim has not, to my knowledge, been made on the basis of a large empirical material. And still, one of the annoying truisms of Soviet reality remains its homogenization, the image of identical homo sovietici forming grey masses in grey cities. For instance, Claus Offe (1996) refers to the “forcibly homogenized societies of state socialism”. While this was true for the structure of the public sphere, it does not apply to the whole of socialist society.

I align myself with the sociological and historical schools that have described the rich fibres of the semi-official and private spheres in Soviet society.<sup>5</sup> If nothing else, the political vicissitudes during Boris Yeltsin’s last year of presidency should convince everyone that in order to understand the problematic structures of public and political life in contemporary Russia, it is important to understand what happens in the circles of family and friends.

## *Outline of the book*

The first two chapters present the method and material guiding this work. *Chapter 1* discusses the extended case method in relation to Russia and defines the subjects of research as everyday sexuality and family life. *Chapter 2* presents



the autobiographies from St Petersburg about love and sexuality that constitute my primary material. It then introduces the three modes of experience that together form the triad of experience, an analytical tool that I use in my readings of the autobiographies.

*Part I* consists of chapters 3-5 and gives a *general* overview of the course of love in the Soviet Russian family. *Chapter 3* describes the conventions and practices of romantic courtship and dating. *Chapter 4* continues with marriage, childbearing, divorces and second chances. *Chapter 5* focuses on the role of women in the Russian family by drawing comparisons with Western theories about motherhood and women's discontent in the family. The dominant Russian family pattern emerging from this analysis is called extended mothering. The chapter then uses this pattern to revise and extend the thesis of Soviet gender traditionalism.

*Part II* is an inventory of milieu and gender differences. In *chapter 6*, I analyze the transmissions of sexual knowledge in three generations. I argue that the 'sexual revolution' in Russia happened in two distinct stages. The by now well-known revolution in the public sphere of the 1980s and 1990s was preceded by the behavioural revolution of late Soviet society in the 1970s. A second special feature of Soviet sexual culture was how it, from the 1960s and onwards, became tied to subcultures rather than generations. *Chapter 7* and *8* give examples of such subcultures: how the Soviet middle class dealt with double morality, and how promiscuity and social mobility interacted in the lives of male workers. *Chapter 9* summarizes the practical and theoretical consequences of the behavioural sexual revolution, here based on the example of same-sex loves.

*Part III* describes the lives in the Wild East of the 1990s. *Chapter 10* argues that the monetarization of family life has affected men at least as drastically as women. As the typical Soviet life course fell apart, the borders of the private and the public became increasingly blurred. The New Russian emerged from what I call the process of anxious masculinization. *Chapter 11* describes how naturalization of sexuality served two strategies, that of sexual enlightenment and that of anxious masculinization. It also shows how the emergence of sex as a separate life sphere was resisted in a critique of commercialized and compartmentalized human relations.

The list of the autobiographies collected in St. Petersburg in 1996 with their numbers, the pseudonyms used, and the main characteristics of the writers, is at the end of the book. I have also translated the announcement text used in the competition of autobiographies.

## *Ethical questions*

When a Western – in this case, a Finnish – researcher studies Soviet/Russian people's lives, the perspective is of course that of an outsider. It is also the view of a privileged outsider. The border between Finland and Russian Karelia presented one of the biggest gaps in living standards on the planet, exceeding, for instance, the differences between Mexico and the United States. Finnish and other Western researchers live in a comparably stable social situation, with much better salaries and academic facilities than the scholars of the former Eastern bloc. The Soviet experience and postsocialist experiments have led to shattered lives, pain and humiliation for many Russians, whereas they represent an intellectual adventure for interested Westerners, containing both the nostalgically familiar and the radically new, both their 1950s and 2010s.

The economic power dimension is accompanied by the power relations proper to the academic field itself. Russian sociologists, whose general intellectual level is certainly not lower than that of scholars in the West, had to enter the international academic discourse on terms established by others.<sup>6</sup>

However much I wish to make Russian theoretical achievements 'speak back', my own academic training and the basic concepts of research belong to a basically Anglo- and francophone academic discourse. And I write in English, the one and only international academic language at the moment – not Swedish, which is my mother tongue, or Finnish, the majority language of my country, or Russian, the language of my informants and also of some of my most important intellectual insights.

The power to decide which research questions are relevant has been an acute – if often acknowledged – problem in the field of Russian gender studies. In 1997, I checked a research data bank with presentations of mainly Northern American scholars doing Russian studies. The section of history and social sciences had over 300 names, and I was amazed to realize that almost one fifth of them listed Russian or Eastern European women's issues and women's movements as their topic. If we added Western European research, we can be quite sure to end up with more Western scholars interested in Russian women's issues than there are feminist scholars and feminist activists in today's Russia. As most of the research is written in English, the people of the former Soviet Union usually cannot read or afford to purchase it. During the 1990s, Russians were the objects of academic colonization: they represented a new and still quite unexplored topic in the business of academic writing and publishing. At present, even this ambivalent status

is in question, as 'Eastern Europe' was not perceived of as selling enough, once the perestroika boom was over.<sup>7</sup>

I myself belong to this strange group of Western academics. I am not always sure of being able to justify my research theme: often, when travelling to a conference, I think that the money would have served better in the hands of a small Russian NGO. But at least I do think I understand why so many Western scholars ended up with this research subject, often long before it became fashionable. This path, which is also mine, has evidently (and often explicitly) influenced the way in which we try to conceptualize the country's gender landscape, which is why I will try to summarize it here.

It is the story of a more or less leftist person, usually a woman, who first looked to the Soviet Union as an example of living socialism, or an interesting attempt of women's emancipation. When that illusion dissolved, the scholar had learned to like and love the country and the Russian people. After the Gorbachev reforms began, she was eagerly waiting for a 'real' feminism to develop. When the new Russian women's movement did get organized at the end of the 1980s, she often developed close personal and organizational ties (including fund raising) to Russian feminists. Still, Western women were disappointed that feminism remained a marginal political movement that was rejected by most Russian women.<sup>8</sup>

Feminism became one of the many unfulfilled expectations the West nurtured about postsocialist societies (Watson 1997, 23). The *prevalence of anti-feminist values and practices* was understood as the question needing explanation. In the 1980s and 1990s, it became the main field of inquiry together with the *negative changes in the situation of women* during the social and economic reforms of the so-called transition period. Much less attention was given to the 'good news' that many Russian scholars themselves have tried to emphasise: that Russia had several new prominent and even pro-feminist women politicians (Temkina 1996); that the Russian independent women's movement was the most active and well organized of all postsocialist countries and that women's organizations are a vital part of the developing third sector in Russia (Liborakina 1996); or that women in Russia have (literally) survived the transition process much better than the men, whose drastic fall in life expectancy has still not been explained by social scientists. Obviously, the initial expectations of many Western feminists caused their academic attentions to be focused too narrowly.

How are these economic and academic inequalities present in this research? My work has been part of two research projects, based and financed in Finland and employing Russian scholars for shorter time periods. While mainly financing

Finnish scholars, the projects have also provided work as well as educational and publishing opportunities for Russian researchers (Rotkirch & Haavio-Mannila 1996). The interview material and the collection of sexual autobiographies are now archived in St. Petersburg and available to Russian scholars. For research based on these materials, see e.g. Baraulina (1996), Temkina (forthcoming) and Zdravomyslova (forthcoming).

There is also the ethical question of the interaction and possible exploitation that takes place between researchers and respondents. Autobiographies fortunately represent a form where the latter choose to participate. About one fourth of the participants in the autobiographical competition in St. Petersburg have received some monetary rewards for their contribution, either as prizes in the competition, or as author's fees in the newspaper publications of excerpts from the autobiographies that were organized by Elizaveta Lagunova. Most importantly, many authors stated that they enjoyed and benefited from the process of writing itself. As usual in autobiographical competitions, the writers often thank the organizers for the incentive to write (Vilkkko 1997). Some wrote in deep despair, "*I do not need your prizes, I have to write this (...) I am crying as I write*" (No. 15). Another woman who was searching for love wondered rhetorically if she was not "*perhaps this moment dreaming about being loved by the one who will read these lines...*" (No. 23). Yet another, a talented woman with higher education who was nowadays a wealthy housewife (No. 22), wrote in order to "*serve our science at least with this modest opus. (So it would not be in vain that I once raised so many expectations...)*" We also had the authors' explicit permission for quoting their texts in scientific literature. I have thus not had the feeling of exploiting the respondents 'behind their backs'. Quite on the contrary, their comments repeatedly provided me with inspiration and encouragement to write.

In sum, my research is certainly part of the existing economically, socially and academically unequal structures between East and West, but has in my understanding at least not aggravated them.

### *Intellectual defaults*

As always, this research process has been about externalising and distancing one's own prejudices and preconceptions. Often it occurred to me that it is contemporary Finnish family and sexual culture that needs to be explained as a historical anomaly. The sexual behaviour of Finnish men and women has become increasingly similar since the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Today, Finns are even more

sexually active and often express more permissive views than Swedes or Norwegians do (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila 1995a). Although I write about Russia, occasional direct comparisons to similar Finnish material will be made. Otherwise, the comparison takes place on the theoretical and conceptual level. As my research material consists of people's intimate autobiographies, I have thought it appropriate to finish the Introduction with at least a little of my personal background, in order to present my personal reading glasses and highlight my initial intellectual defaults.

I was born in the middle of the 1960s and raised by educated and liberal parents who believed in (and practised) permissive child rearing, gender equality and sex education. I was the eldest of four children, both of my parents were employed and my father always did at least half of the housework and childcare (while he also held a higher and more time-consuming professional position). We children perceived our father as the more forgiving and nurturing one, while mother was the demanding figure who would never give in and did not like to be woken up at night or disturbed when she had some time of her own. I was raised to think that discrimination of women was a deplorable thing of the past and that there were no crucial differences between men and women.

After the feminist readings in my teens I also believed that marriage was a hopelessly dated and discriminating institution. At that time, I thought the question of whether to have children of my own would be decided in one way or another, some time in the distant future: I have no memory of any kind of motherhood propaganda or even motherhood talks during my childhood and youth.<sup>9</sup> The exceptions were provided during my trips to Russia. My family lived in Moscow in 1977-78 and after our return to Finland I regularly went back during my childhood years and early teens to visit my friends from my former Russian school. In the Soviet Union, adults advised me not spread my knees apart while sitting, since I was a girl, and not to sit on cold places, since I should think about my future ability to have children. I was extremely irritated by these comments.

I was brought up on progressive Scandinavian youth novels about relationships and sex, and until my early twenties I took several things for granted: that there was nothing shameful about being naked or about sexuality (although I explicitly discussed sex only with my best girl- and boyfriends); that people, including myself, may freely choose whether or not to marry and to become parents; that some people are homosexual (although when I had a very intensive relationship with a girlfriend in my late teens and my parents commented that it almost looked like a love affair, I found their remark disturbing and irrelevant); that con-

trapection was the duty and responsibility of both partners (although I actually always found the topic extremely embarrassing or simply impossible to raise in intimate settings); that women should have access to cheap and safe abortions (which I did not perceive as a moral issue at all).

Mine was not a typical childhood even in Finland, but such an attitude to sexual and gender issues had become possible in Scandinavia in the 1960s and 1970s, while remaining impossible in our Eastern neighbour. I have later come to revise or at least problematize most of these then unreflected beliefs. Only now do I also understand how exceptional they were, in a global context.

The Russian autobiographies I have become acquainted with challenged and shifted most of my initial frames of understanding. One person who read a manuscript version of this book thought I should take care so that the readers would not read only the quotations. But that is one of the possible readings I have wanted to provide and it has my full endorsement. As it often happens when dealing with autobiographies, the researcher did fall in love with practically all the life stories rendered in these pages.

1. Personal conversation at the 3rd congress of the European Sociological Association, University of Essex, August 1997.
2. For instance, Lev Vygotsky's work was not adequately translated into French and English until the 1990s. Soviet philosophy began to attract Western attention just as the Soviet Union collapsed (Bakhurst 1991). In autobiography studies, the relationship of the Leningrad critic Lydia Ginzburg to Western autobiographical theories is now discussed by Harris (1990) and Savkina (forthcoming). But the philosophical aspects of the works of Russian 20th century authors, from Marina Tsvetaeva to Joseph Brodsky, remain largely unassimilated by European intellectual discourse, including their possible contributions to gender and feminist theory.
3. The revival of Russian psychoanalytical theory has at least tried to present an exception to the general import of Western theories into Russian scholarship. From the beginning, the new Russian psychoanalytical community nourished an explicit intention to develop specifically Russian psychoanalytical terminology and theories (Etkind 1994).
4. Gail W. Lapidus' (1978) "Women in Soviet Society" is the classic work in this field. The 1990s witnessed several new publications about Russian women under socialism and postsocialism, notably Liljeström (1995) and the anthologies edited by Buckley (1992), Liljeström, Mäntysaari & Rosenholm (1993), Funk (1993), Koval (1995), Posadskaya (1994), Pilkington (1996), Goscilo & Holmgren (1996), Rotkirch & Haavio-Mannila (1996), and many more. See Rutchild (1993) for a bibliography. Publications dealing explicitly with Russian men are much rarer, but see Kon (1995), Essig (1999a), Zdravomyslova & Chikadze (1998) and Temkina & Zdravomyslova (1999).
5. In addition to the works already mentioned in the Introduction, recent research published in English has focussed on Soviet and Russian popular culture (Barker 1999), social movements and gender identity (Temkina 1996 and 1997), popular taste and the concept of *kul'turnost'* (Gronow 1996; Volkov 1999), collective practices (Kharkhordin 1999), gender culture (Goscilo & Holmgren 1996), café milieus (Zdravomyslova 1997), networks of exchange (Ledeneva 1998) and net-

works in professional communities (Lonkila 1999).

6. As the St. Petersburg sociologists Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova express it: "Russian scholars entered the international fora at a moment when their structures, institutions and finance methods had already been formed. The Russians had to adapt and approve of the rules of the game. We also have to accept and rejoice over any proposal of financial support, as Russian science has not yet solved its institutional crisis. This asymmetry is part of all international projects Russians engage in. It is a necessary school of international co-operation, but the students have different experiences, competence and aims. If articulated and reflected upon, these differences are an opportunity of development." (Temkina & Zdravomyslova 1998, 46, translation by AR.)
7. Among the morbid ironies is the fact that the leadership of Vladimir Putin and Russia's war against Chechnya in 1999 and 2000, which was still raging as this book went to print, is probably increasing Western interest in this scary part of the world once again.
8. This point is well put in Beth Holmgren's (1995) essay on the problems of "translating feminism into Russian". However, after having criticized the preconceived ideas of Western feminists, Holmgren goes on to quote two of them, Lynn Attwood and Helen Goscilo, about the state of women's affairs in Russia, without asking to what degree their work is tainted by those preconceptions. See also Funk (1993) and Lindquist (1994) for interesting self-reflections of Western feminists doing Russian studies.
9. A few years ago, I saw a Finnish advertisement for mint candies glorifying motherhood. The poster contrasted the taste of the mint shell with the taste of the soft chocolate inside: the first picture showed a kissing couple, the second a mother with her child. The text read: "Just when you thought you knew about passion...". I still cannot believe that heterosexual adult love was in that way made equal, or even secondary, to motherly love in a Finnish advertisement. I certainly have no similar memories of motherhood being elevated in other images or advertisements.

# 1 Extending the Case to Russia

This chapter presents the methodology and subjects of research used in this study. It discusses what kind of comparative research the extended case method represents, and limits the field of study to everyday sexuality. It then provides a basic overview of the main features of Soviet sexual and gender policy. Finally, the autobiographies that constitute my primary material are classified into three generations.

## 1.1. RESEARCH METHOD

### *The cognitive wall*

The wall dividing the 'first' and the 'second', the Western and the Eastern European worlds, was no less mental than political and economical. The cognitive divisions remain rooted especially in the routine thinking on the Occidental side (the Eastern has no choice but to transform or perish). As late as in 1997 and 1999 European sociologists, people who by professional identification should be the most attentive to the reintegration of Europe, held conferences where the Western plenary speakers calmly talked about a 'Europe' that excluded the former Eastern block. Or, to take another example, in an ambitious overview of the global situation Manuel Castells claimed that in every single country in Europe "there is a pervasive presence of feminism" and went on to state one page later



that “ex-statist societies present a peculiar situation” (Castells 1997, 185-186).

The problem is not only one of carelessly sustained linguistic conventions. Social theory is still made as if the socialist experience did not exist. During the 1990s, the field of Soviet and Russian studies has increasingly made use of current social and cultural theory.<sup>1</sup> It is, however, still rare for the empiry to strike back: to use the evidence of real socialism to correct and develop general social theory.

One of my strongest motivations for writing this book was reading Western academic social theory and always wanting to add, “yes, but under state socialism...” The Soviet experience is an excellent test of the accuracy and generalizability of practically all key terms of contemporary sociology – modernization, traditionalism, globalization and individualization; the public/private divide, patriarchal power and women’s liberation; identities, subjectivities, sexual revolutions, and so on. Real socialism knew all these phenomena without having a market economy. It had the same processes, but within another basic framework. This calls attention to the economic underpinnings of social and cultural processes – a view that tends to get lost in the current dearth of ideologically serious challenges to global capitalism.

For instance, the already mentioned work by Manuel Castells presents the “end of patriarchy” as imminent because of four interrelated and converging trends which have undermined the patriarchal family: women’s wage work, contraceptive and other reproductive technologies, the feminist movement, and globalized information exchange. He sees the process of ending patriarchy as emerging since the 1960s in “the most developed countries” (Castells 1998, 135-136). However, the Soviet Union has known the first two trends since the 1930s (women’s paid work and reproductive control), but never the two latter (feminism and global information). Although Castells of course knows this (he has himself been living in Moscow), it does not prevent him from assuming that the mere fact that both spouses work, for about equal wages, for about equal hours per day provokes feminism by making women question men’s low participation in housework. Wage work gave rise to feminism in Castells’s causal reconstruction. In fact, the Soviet experience shows how the patriarchal family was undermined *without* provoking feminist consciousness, and even less a Western-type feminist movement.

When Castells does explicitly pay attention to Eastern Europe, he thinks that the educated and wage working Soviet women have become so strong that “it is easy to predict a major development of the women’s movement in Eastern Eu-

rope”. Here he may be more perceptive than most Western (feminist) sociologists. I actually tend to agree with this forecast, although I do not think it is very easy to predict what kind of developments in what type of movement we will witness. What Castells’s confident statement completely disregards is that the basic social context has changed. One consequence of the economic reforms was that the structure of the public/private spheres was radically altered, which in turn led to a revival of the ideology and practices of the patriarchal family in post-socialist countries. Moreover, this often happened with the explicit support of women.<sup>2</sup>

Omissions of the socio-political context are found not only in general social theory, but in major works in Russian/Soviet studies. For instance, the first anthology about sexuality in Russian and Soviet culture does not even mention economic policy and its influences on gender dynamics and sexual identities (Costlow et al. 1993). Stressing the continuity between pre-Revolutionary, Soviet and even post-Soviet sexual culture, the reader would not know from this source that 1917 and 1990s brought two major economic transformations. Igor Kon’s book about the sexual revolution in Russia also fails to integrate economic conditions into its analysis.

These examples present the challenge of East-West comparative studies. Adequate comparisons, whether implicit or explicit, move on three levels: the level of concrete events, the level of the basic framework (or basic social field) that structures and validates these events, and the level of theory organizing the researcher’s own thinking. Most existing comparative research is situated on the first level of direct quantitative comparisons, where existing academic categories are simply applied to empirical material from Eastern Europe. Comparisons on the first and third level – research discussing isolated phenomena but with corresponding conceptual appropriation and development – have been made in recent cultural studies.<sup>3</sup> Works that move on the second level, addressing the differences and similarities on the level of the social system, remain scarce. Among such examples that have inspired my own work are Bertaux (1994), Essig (1999a), Watson (1993 and 1997), Ledeneva (1998) and the Finnish-Russian comparisons of social networks and professional fields made by Markku Lonkila (1997, 1998 and 1999) and Anna-Maija Castrén (1999).

### *The extended case method*

The comparative approach I use is not one of symmetrical comparison between

two countries. Peggy Watson (1999, 21) has suggested that we should think about East and West in a framework of *relative discontinuity*.<sup>4</sup> She emphasizes that such phenomena as the sexual division of labour and women's subordination are essentially continuous, while the ways in which they are understood and politicized can vary enormously. The cognitive wall is best overcome precisely by establishing such continuities and fissures between West and East – capitalist and (post)socialist – social practices and their interpretations. In order to highlight such continuities or cleavages, I will sometimes refer to sexual behaviour and gender relations in Western countries, mostly in Finland. Finland is discussed as an example of Northern European or Western societies and in connection with conceptual comparisons and developments. The references to Western experiences are also made in order to clarify my own point of departure to the reader. Being a Finn, my mental schemes and physical experiences have been formed in a Western, wealthy, post-industrial country.

The basic methodology generating and organizing the comparative aims of my work is best expressed in Michael Burawoy's (1998a; 1998b) elaboration of the *extended case method*. However, most research guided by the extended case method has been done inside ethnographic research and does not pay special attention to life stories or autobiographies (see, e.g., Burawoy ed. 1996; Verdéry & Burawoy 1999). As a guideline of reflexive sociological thinking in relation specifically to biographical material, I have used Daniel Bertaux' handbook *Récits de vie* (1997). Its approach fits into the extended case method and provides additional useful distinctions.

The extended case method belongs to what Burawoy calls the reflexive science model.<sup>5</sup> It aims at enriching and verifying general social theory by adding and extending particular cases and local applications. It opposes cultural relativism in support of 'embedded objectivity'. The subjective point of view of every research should not make it impossible to aspire towards general validity, just more interesting.

Burawoy enumerates four aims of reflexive social science:

1. *intersubjectivity* or sensitivity to the interaction between scholar and respondent during the research process,
2. *processuality* or attention to social processes rather than compartmentalized facts,
3. *structuration* or attention to the interplay between local vs. extralocal processes and to the underlying systemic, social and economic factors, and
4. *theoretical reconstruction*, including elaboration and modification of both aca-

demic theory and general common sense or “folk” beliefs (Burawoy 1998a, 14).

In autobiographical research (as well as in other so-called qualitative techniques), attention to the question of intersubjectivity is today commonplace and practically unavoidable. The research itself is understood as a ‘meeting place’ between the scholar/reader and the authors, where different ‘greetings’ from the part of the scholar lead to different interpretations and results (Vilkko 1997). Taken to the extreme, the fact of the researcher’s subjective involvement in creating and analyzing the material entices the scholar to reject the usual scientific claims for generalization.

A more moderate stand acknowledges the intersubjectivity of the research process, but nevertheless retains two levels of generalization: (i) the claim that the conclusions depict an objectively assessable truth about the object of the research, and (ii) the claim that the theoretical elaboration of the research material has general validity. Riitta Granfelt (1998) presents the apt metaphor of life stories providing a seat reservation for the researcher’s ferry trip. Depending on where you sit, you get a different view of the trip, but the researcher still tries to describe the same tour the other passengers have experienced. Daniel Bertaux (1997) talks about painting a landscape, where the painter’s skills and tastes obviously influence the resulting work of art, but where other people may assess how they think it relates to the actual landscape at hand, as well as to other paintings of the same view.

The extended case method is thus not relativistic in the sense of limitless, or even many equally true, interpretations. On the contrary, it sees general theory as enriched and additionally verified by more cases and local applications, and supports “embedded objectivity” (Burawoy 1998, 14). This should not be understood as a claim for the final interpretation or a universal truth. Rather, it is an invitation to discuss the connections between the particular truths that arise from every situation.

In this research, the thrust of my work has been not in dwelling on the intersubjective nature of the material, but in arriving at historical periodizations and conceptual generalizations through a discussion of the “unique situations” of the autobiographical authors, myself as a researcher, and the texts and thoughts of other scholars present in this work. Or as Burawoy (1998a, 13) expresses the same thing, “context [is taken] as point of departure but not point of conclusion”.

Burawoy’s second criteria of processuality is also quite unproblematically present while analyzing autobiographical material. Bertaux (1997) has distinguished between two main types of sociological objects of inquiry on the basis of bio-

graphical material. According to him, life stories can provide information about a certain *social world* or a 'field' in Pierre Bourdieu's sense (e.g. middle class lifestyles, the profession of bakers, the field of art). The analysis can also focus on a *category of situation* that the informants share, without in this case belonging to the same social world (e.g. the situation of divorce). The first part of this work analyzes categories of situation, such as dating, divorcing, and travelling. The second part is more preoccupied with peering into various social worlds in the sense of different Soviet classes and social milieus. In any case, whether we focus on social worlds or on categories of situations, we "enter /the actors'/ life worlds, their time and space, studying their situations as part of a social *process*" (Burawoy 1998a, 14).

The two latter criteria of the extended case method – structuration and theoretical reconstruction – have been more challenging for this particular work. The importance of structuration in Russian studies was already emphasized above when I called attention to the economic conditions and basic framework, or the 'rules of the game', conditioning Soviet gender culture and sexual and love life. From the 1980s, (Soviet) Russia was increasingly integrated in global economic and cultural processes. In most autobiographies, this structural change is reflected in changing professional, economical, familial or ideological identities. I have also tried to especially pay attention to the economic conditions by discussing class and social mobility.

Additionally, the process of structuration is especially important because of the subject matter. In every culture, sexual practices are especially easily perceived by general mentality as something innate, individual, and ahistorical. This attitude was present in the biological determinism characterizing large parts of the official Soviet ideology (albeit contradicting that ideology's simultaneous claims of dialectic materialism) (Clements 1985; Liljeström 1995). Naturalization is also among the dominating views of sexuality in today's Russia. Most of the autobiographers in our material think about their love lives as a tension between their natural, innate wishes and tendencies versus what was or is socially possible. This poses a delicate dilemma for sociological structuring. On the one hand, I want to present and respect the autobiographer's own view. On the other hand, the task of sociological research is to avoid the "biographical fallacy" (Bourdieu 1986) and show the social conditions underlying individual statements. My solution has been to structure the experiences related in the autobiographies according to the experiential triad (see below).

## *The flower and the ant – a comparison with grounded theory*

The fourth characteristic of the extended case method is theoretical reconstruction. In this respect it should be noted that Burawoy's reflexive model of science differs from *grounded theory*, the most frequently adopted method of doing qualitative studies in the social sciences today (Glaser & Strauss 1997, Strauss & Corbin 1990).<sup>6</sup> The logic of grounded theory strongly favours ground over theory, which it prefers to call "technical literature" (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 48-50). As Bertaux (1997, 101) points out, grounded theory pretends (for the sake of simplicity, but nevertheless) that earlier sociological theories do not exist. The direction of the research process is grassroots and upwards, resting on the so far as I know ungrounded hypothesis that thorough previous reading hampers creativity: "We do not want to be so steeped in the literature as to be constrained and even stifled in terms of creative efforts." (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 50). The extended case method, on the contrary, asserts that "because we *begin with theory* a single case is quite sufficient for a progressive reconstruction" (Burawoy 1998, 14, emphasis added).

Notwithstanding its grounded, qualitative techniques, the method of grounded theory is actually closer to the positive model of science than to reflexive science.<sup>7</sup> The main difference compared to Burawoy's definition of positive science is of course that grounded theory does not require the third "R" of positive science, representativity. But the criteria of reliability and replicability are not strangers to this model of reasoning and actually come close to its requirements of "fit", "generality" and "control" (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 23). Most importantly, theoretical generalization is presented as a handicraft, not a question of different scientific models and modes of research.

In grounded theory, I would compare the theoretical conclusion to a *flower*, cultivated and eventually picked by the researcher after interaction with the ground of empirical material. In the extended case method, theory – which now is, in the broadest sense, all the concepts that form our perception – is the ground, while empiry consists of the grass and its flowers. The researcher is more like *an ant*, or an earthworm, consuming and digesting the soil, collecting straws, and producing observations on how its habitat is shaped.<sup>8</sup>

Burawoy does not see the models of reflexive and positive science as antagonistic, but ideally as "Siamese twins", complementing and provoking each other, turning each other's strengths into weaknesses and vice versa.

The extended case method reinterprets the findings of survey research by revealing the links between structural constraints and their subjective apprehension. In the same way, the extended case method relies on survey research to explore the forces impinging on social processes. (Burawoy 1998, 18)

Survey results can well be used in an extended case, or autobiographies can be used in a positive logic (e.g. Kontula & Haavio-Mannila 1995b, 1997). In practice, direct combination of the two models of science is still rare, due to technical specialization on both sides but most of all to the switching of thought such a combination demands. My own education and thinking is on the reflexive side, but in co-operation with Elina Haavio-Mannila I have combined the use of survey and autobiographical material in a series of articles (Haavio-Mannila and Rotkirch 1998; 1999). Our interaction was inspiring, especially through the new questions it provided for each kind of material. This work will refer to the results of this combination of methods, but will basically follow a reflexive model of science.

What are the greatest limitations of the extended case method? Burawoy enumerates four challenges corresponding to the four criteria of intersubjectivity, processuality, structuration and theoretical reconstruction. First, the researcher unavoidably becomes involved in *networks of social and ideological domination*. In this research case, I have experienced this especially acutely along the axis of Western-Eastern inequality and the academic colonialization of Russia discussed in the Introduction. Second, some actors and experiences are always silenced by the nature of the gathered material and the researcher's choices (this question is discussed in chapter 2). Third and fourth, the generalizing and conceptualising work done by the researcher tends to objectify social processes as quasi-natural laws, and risks *normalising* the empirical world, making it seem more harmonious and without alternative paths of development than it is (as reality is always richer than any one social study of it). Finally, excessive generalizing is an unavoidable drawback of this work, which uses the experience from one particular city as a basis for discussing 'Soviet Russia'.

This book covers four decades of very diverse social change and the experiences of different social genders and classes. As a way of preserving the richness, and incompleteness, of the research material, I have avoided adopting one single theoretical framework or basic social process to guide my analysis. Departing from the thesis of 'gender traditionalism' in socialist societies I will discuss current Western academic concepts of motherhood, parenting and gender identity.

Second, I will use the thesis of the Soviet ‘semi-public sphere’ by employing the concepts of generations, milieus and subcultures.

## 1.2. SUBJECTS OF RESEARCH: EVERYDAY SEXUALITY AND FAMILY LIFE

### *The neglected everyday*

My field of study is limited to *sexuality, approached mainly as part of everyday life*. By everyday life I here understand our first, constitutive “province of meaning”, or “archetype of experience” (Schutze, quoted in Heiskala 1997, 251). It is a domain of activities and expectations different from travelling, working life or systematic reflection. In this sense the everyday is anticatastrophical and – especially in Russian history of thought – usually verges on the banal (Boym 1994). Any change to other life spheres is perceived cognitively, like a clear disjunction or even a slight shock: merely travelling to another town for a day may make a huge change in one’s perception of everyday life – and that changed perspective is unavoidably and quickly lost once one returns home.

Thus the everyday is tautologically defined as that which feels like everyday. Working life can be everyday life, but exceptionally demanding work can also be strictly separated from the everyday. Naturally, the contents of everyday life change with time and person. Still most people can easily answer the question “describe your everyday life” or, in the case of a personal or social crisis, “describe the everyday life you are not able to lead at the moment”.

Everyday life upholds the processes of social reproduction. As defined by Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner (1989, 382), the concept of social reproduction covers “the activities and attitudes, behaviours and emotions, responsibilities and relationships directly involved in the maintenance of life on a daily basis, and intergenerationally”. Women and men have different positions in social reproduction and, furthermore, social reproduction is one of the building blocks of the hierarchical division of labour that exists between the sexes. In Scandinavian and Finnish feminist research, these gendered practices have similarly been named the sphere of “caring” and of “reproductive work”.<sup>9</sup> Social reproduction covers the most ordinary corporeal and emotional contacts in everyday life – child rearing, caring for elderly, preparing food, having sex, being frustrated or infatuated. It is



close to the idea of families having a certain *emotional economy*, which is the focus of part I (Näre 1995).

The province of the everyday is also the domain where *tacit, practical knowledge* and *pre-reflective levels of articulation* are rooted (Giddens 1984, 336-337; Heiskala 1997). It favours the tactile and habitual modes of experiences, as they have been outlined above. Tacit knowledge is not necessarily symbolically articulated – people know how to do certain things without being able to tell about them or teach them to an outsider.<sup>10</sup>

My emphasis on the practical knowledge of everyday life does not mean stressing (only) that which is primitive, seemingly obvious, or banal, but rather acknowledging tacit knowledge as the precondition for other mental and physical activities. I will be especially interested in *everyday morality* as a form of implicit moral knowledge (see below).

Although everyday practices are increasingly the object of Russian studies, they are not yet part of mainstream Russian studies. A good deal has been written about Soviet gender ideology, but little about how it was *actually negotiated and experienced in concrete social situations*. Somewhat paradoxically, this neglect of everyday life has in my view hampered some of the most authoritative Western feminist research on Russian women. As mentioned in the Introduction, some Western feminist research on Russian women has been prone to overemphasise negative trends. This is probably due to various factors, among them the personal ideology and personal history of the researchers involved. The difference may also be a question of research methods and materials and of the theoretical tools applied. Focusing exclusively on official documents (journals, legislation, school curricula) and on the public sphere (media, politics) has proven to be a limitation. Social and political forces may originate in tensions in the private sphere, which should not be excluded from analyses. When we turn to the personal sphere and women's accounts of their everyday lives, the picture of an almost total denigration of women in post-socialist Russia is quite dramatically altered.<sup>11</sup>

Nor is much ideological value placed on everyday life by many Russians themselves. As Svetlana Boym (1994) explains in her study of Soviet everyday life, a disinterested or even overtly hostile attitude to everyday life has been and remains one of Russia's cultural specific traits. Historically, *byt* was looked down upon by such differing institutions as the Orthodox church, the Bolshevik regime and the radical Russian intelligentsia in the 19th and 20th centuries. A preoccupation with everyday comfort was seen as materialistic, Western, and petty bourgeois. In early Bolshevik discourse, *byt* was often juxtaposed to the revolution. These enti-

ties were also gendered: the backward *byt* was perceived of as the feminine antipode to the active, rational and male revolution. Destroying *byt* was not only part of a sincere socialist and egalitarian project of making life better. It was also evidence of the misogyny inherent in Russian culture. Transforming everyday life and the feminine sphere of social reproduction can be seen as a project of masculine self-reflection, directed against the maternal (Matich 1991, Rosenholm 1999). As Eric Naiman (1993, 270) has noted, “throughout the 1920s the unspoken equation beneath society’s hostility towards this ontological category was ‘*byt* = woman”.

One simple factor explaining the consequent failures of Soviet social policy was this intellectual heritage of disregarding domesticity, hygiene and small practical arrangements. In the Russian historical context of a continuing, ideological and practical devaluation of the everyday, the energies devoted by especially many women to achieving better material and also psychological living standards may be interpreted as a crucial amelioration of *byt*. In part III I will argue that this small-scale amelioration may in the long term even have political consequences and should therefore not be overlooked and devalued.

The hostility towards *byt* survived during late socialism, although family values and domestic comfort increasingly preoccupied people’s minds from the 1960s onwards (Shlapentokh 1989). Especially the highly romanticized and idealized conceptions of human love had a hard time surviving everyday life. One autobiography in my material alluded to Mayakovsky’s typical characterization of how “the love boat crashed against the shores of the everyday” (*liubovnaia lodka razbilas ob byt*).

Soviet ideology has never been able to deal coherently with the paradoxes it created in people’s everyday life. This is true whether we think about the gap between theory and everyday practices in gender roles, or between the ideals of socialist altruism versus the desire to consume. Neither has the new, Russian capitalism of the 1990s yet showed any greater concern for the beauty of the small and comfortable. The new masculine ideal of the rich businessman of the early 1990s is portrayed in exotic and extraordinary situations rather than in calm everyday settings – while a secluded private sphere is in fashion in these circles, it has not merged with any idealization of everyday life (Boym 1994). A New Year’s greeting I received from a Moscow scholar while writing this book wished me a “happy, not-everyday life” – an expression quite unthinkable in the West, where a happy everyday life is the unquestioned goal of all political visions.

## *Everyday morality*

Everyday morality is a phenomenon in the gray zone between tacit and explicit knowledge, between our daily habits and our reflections on them. It stands for the possible, acceptable and typical (although not always the desired, the ideal) developments of love and family life.<sup>12</sup> I understand everyday morality as differing from stated *values*, whether they stem from official ideology or personally endorsed opinions. Everyday morality also differs from actual, institutionalized *practices*. It represents the standard framework within which experiences are measured in life stories.

Any research on family life and sexuality has to deal with the contradiction between what is said, what is felt and what was done. This contradiction was especially acute in Soviet society, with its lack of articulation about sexuality and intimate issues in the public sphere. Thus everyday morality is influenced by, but does not necessarily coincide with dominant social ideology. Instead, ideology often adjusts itself to everyday morality, the ways people think things actually should and can be. Especially in the Soviet society of late socialism, everyday morality was in many ways rather detached from or indifferent to official Communist ideology.

Everyday morality is also often opposed to the gender ideals that are nowadays expressed by many Russians. Today, one often hears statements about how gender-neutral Soviet life supposedly was and that Russians should return to 'natural' patriarchal sex roles. However, these statements do not necessarily tell us anything about the actual behaviour or choices, the social practices of the respondents. In my reading of the autobiographies, there are often especially glaring gaps between reported actual experience and the way they are interpreted and commented upon. When talking about broader issues (not just sex roles and proper womanhood), the autobiographers come up with quite different views of what interaction between the sexes is like. *Everyday morality provides the context the personal values have to be put in* in order to be adequately analyzed and in order to grasp the ways in which gender traditionalism did or did not prevail during late socialism.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, everyday morality does not coincide with the whole spectrum of practices. Marrying for money happens, but is *not* viewed as acceptable in any autobiography of the Soviet period. But everyday morality does contain certain things you do see examples of, but which the society or milieu in question has not (yet) become reflectively aware of.<sup>14</sup>

A good example of everyday morality is serial monogamy. Both in Russia and Finland, about every other marriage ends in divorce and more than every fourth person has had several marriages or cohabitations. Young people may get married thinking this will not be their last marital relationship. Still, this existing practice is not generally acknowledged and approved of. It is not acceptable to state that 'I want to get married many times and have several important love relationships in my life' (Jallinoja 1997). Nor is it appropriate to remember the spouse's previous marriages at a wedding.

### *Sexuality and the semi-public sphere*

Only a handful of academic studies of sexuality in Russia and the Soviet Union have appeared, and a few more treatments of the topic in memoirs, travel accounts, and journalism.<sup>15</sup> The by far most authoritative and comprehensive monograph, "The sexual revolution in Russia", was written by Russia's leading sexologist, Igor Kon (1995). It describes general trends in Soviet sexual policy and behaviour, and offers brilliant insights and commentaries from a more subjective point of view. Kon's work uses primarily survey material and follows developments in the public sphere (research on sexuality, public debates, censorship etc.) Other academic research on Russian sexuality is growing, but is usually centred on either Tsarist Russia or the 1920s.<sup>16</sup>

This study approaches sexuality during the post World War II-era and from the perspective of everyday life and social reproduction in the family. This definition of the subject is not unproblematic, as it comes dangerously close to a stereotypical way of relegating sexuality, women, children, caring, biology, food, etc. to the 'private' sphere. Such dualisms then place men, work, politics and culture in the public sphere, while the private sphere is conceptualized as more natural, ahistorical and apolitical. I nevertheless hope to escape that kind of simplification. As defined above, the everyday sphere emerges as a special *province of meaning* and *certain social activities*. They may include working or institutional life, and they certainly are not apolitical. Nor did Soviet social life fit the (simplified) notion of a Western public versus private sphere: much of everyday Soviet life belonged to the category of the semi-public sphere.

This approach has the benefit of avoiding postulating a separately existing field of 'sexuality'. Sexologists have more than often participated in creating the thing they study. One of the most influential sexologists of this century, Alfred

Kinsey, regarded sexuality as “a rational economy for producing orgasms”, without even mentioning the connection between sexual intercourse, pregnancy and childbirth (!), while Masters & Johnson concentrated on designing the life and joys of the egalitarian heterosexual couple (Bozon 1999, 12-13). In a similar vein, some Western sexologists and feminists have refused to discuss the connections between maternal love and sexuality (related in Costlow et al. 1993, 287). However, sexuality is not perceived as a separate sphere by most lay people anywhere, and especially not in Russia, where the 20th century sexological and therapeutical approach became more widely known only in the 1980s.

Historically, Russian perceptions of sexuality appear to have always been different from the prevailing Western views. Until westernization under Peter the Great at the end of the 18th century, the idea of romantic love was not rooted in Russian society. As a consequence, love and sexuality were often perceived as totally separate things. As Eve Levin has shown, “Modern Western society has accepted as axiomatic the proposition that sexuality is innate. The medieval Orthodox Slavs rejected this view. They believed that the desire for sex came from outside the human being, and was not part of God’s original creation. They saw sexuality as an evil inclination originating with Satan, dangerous to the individual and to society, best kept within strict bounds if it could not be eliminated altogether.” (Levin 1989, 13).

The perception of ‘sexuality in itself’ as a devilish, non-human thing continued well into this century. In the 19th century literary tradition and especially in the early 20th century discourses about the Russian eros, Svetlana Boym discards “a certain fear – not so much a fear of sex as a practice, but fear of sexuality as an autonomous sphere, independent from social, religious or metaphysical occupations and connected to the ‘West.’” She therefore suggests that sexuality “as a nineteenth-century individualist construct developed in Russia somewhat differently” from the West (Boym 1993, 157-158). Only in the 1990s, and only for some parts of the population, did sexuality emerge as a separate sphere of life, as will be discussed in part III.

Accordingly, this study has excluded sexual relations in exceptional situations, such as in Soviet labour camps or in organized prostitution (although they of course were or are the “everyday” for hundreds of thousands of people). Nor will I focus on representations of gender and sexuality in literature, films and party ideology.<sup>17</sup> This work does not deal with sexuality in criminal or marginal areas, nor does it focus on love and sex as they were officially supposed to be in Communist ideology.

Instead, sexuality is discussed as it is remembered in ordinary, everyday settings. It is approached as one of many gendered practices.<sup>18</sup> My study of sexuality includes boring and routine sex, while excluding many less ordinary dimensions of erotic life. It also includes ideals of masculinity and femininity, norms of behaviour, everyday morality, and cultural configurations.<sup>19</sup> But I am not primarily offering a literary or discursive analysis of Soviet and Russian everyday life. I will instead focus on the practical effects of economic and social policy (which in the planned economy of the Soviet Union were merged) from the perspective of gender relations, family life and the semi-public sphere.

True, the autobiographies also describe sexuality as something *opposite* everyday life. It can be “a realm in which the laws and identities governing everyday life [can] be suspended and the self be organized in ways that include aspects and qualities otherwise exiled” (Simon & Gagnon 1984). While I will discuss such transgressive functions of sexuality in chapter 6, my emphasis is not on Russian eroticism *per se*, but on the socio-economic conditions creating or dissolving certain life course patterns, family arrangements, and sexual cultures.

Yet another view understands sexuality not as one separate social practice, but as one of the many threads constituting everyday life. In the phenomenological approach to the body, sexuality is a *constantly* present aspect of an individual’s (or a family’s) way of being, moving and talking. Sexuality is “not a separate sphere of life nor a separate order of significances but integrated in all behaviour. It is present in every act like a shade or a nuance” (Heinämaa 1996, 160-161). This beautiful description may be intuitively true, at least in some cultures,<sup>20</sup> but it is too encompassing to be sociologically useful. It is also in opposition to lay people’s experience of a distinguishable – if not absolute, nor fixed – divide between sexual and other human relations, or between sexually intense periods of life and other life stages.

Therefore I do not embrace the phenomenological, widest possible notion of sexuality. But neither do I start with any clear limitations to the phenomenon: instead, I look at what people included when describing the central events of their love lives, and through that at the main tensions and definitions creating that constitute sexuality in Soviet Russian everyday life. In retrospect, I can agree with Eve Sedgwick’s definition that sexuality is “the array of acts, expectations, narrative, pleasures, identity formations and knowledge in both men and women, that tends to cluster most densely around certain genital sensations but is not adequately defined by them” (quoted in Costlow et al. 1993, 1).

As an area practically excluded from public discourse, Soviet sexuality was es-

entially delegated to the private and semi-public spheres of life. I was originally interested in Soviet sexuality precisely as *an example of social life 'outside' or 'against' official discourse.*

The concepts of gender traditionalism and of the Soviet semi-public domain, as explicated in the Introduction, are of central importance here. The notion of the *semi-public* sphere is especially crucial for understanding the two phases of the Russian sexual revolution, the behavioural revolution and the revolution of articulation in the public sphere that are discussed in part II.

Even a short overview of recent research on the semi-public sphere reveals a handful of different names for this cherished child (Temkina & Zdravomyslova 1999).<sup>21</sup> The argument remains the same, namely, that the civil society of late socialism had a positive content: special niches, environments and spheres of activity that were less ideologically regulated from above, and where alternative ideologies and ways of being were nurtured. Among them were shadow economy structures, komsomol cells and dissident groups, musical and ecological movements, café and holiday cultures, poetry and literature, not to forget love, family and friendships.<sup>22</sup> The semi-public sphere was guided by what Viktor Voronkov calls a 'common law', which I here refer to as everyday morality. Soviet sexual cultures that were banned from the 'official' public sphere will be approached precisely as examples of a semi-public sphere – one with street culture, workplace habits, youth behaviour, etc. Gender traditionalism, which I will call *gender conventionalism*, will be discussed in parts I and III.

### 1.3 SOVIET FAMILY AND SEXUAL POLICY (HISTORICAL BACKGROUND)

#### *Wage-working mothers*

The Soviet gender system built on the wage-working mother (Temkina & Rotkirch 1997). Socialist work ethics expected all citizens to earn wages, while Soviet biological determinism stressed the 'natural' obligations of women: caring, nurturing and giving birth. On the symbolic level, the Soviet wage-earning mother was a paradoxical and fragile synthesis of the Marxist emancipated woman and the traditional nuclear family introduced by Stalin's family policies (Liljeström 1995).

Almost the same term, wage-working maternity, has also been used to describe the post-war gender contract of Nordic welfare states such as Finland (Rantalaiho 1994).<sup>23</sup> In both cases – Soviet state socialism and Nordic social democracy – measures such as paid maternity leave and affordable child care were introduced to facilitate the participation of most women in the labour force. Nevertheless, this similar term hides two significant differences. In the Soviet Union, wage-working mothers became the norm in the 1930s, several decades *earlier* than in other industrialized countries. In Finland, which was in this respect ahead of most European countries and the US, the majority of women with young children have been working since the 1950s. The nature of the process was also drastically different. In social democratic welfare states, the process of women entering the labour market can be described as a “social contract” between women and the state. This contract was worked out by political parties, professionals, individual women and women’s organizations (Nätkin 1997). Soviet women entered the labour force amidst chaotic migration, famine, forced industrialization and censored public discussion. It is obviously much harder to call the Soviet version any kind of social agreement or contract – women’s double and triple burdens were an unavoidable and in many ways unplanned consequence (Lapidus 1978). For this reason, I will here rather talk about the working mother in Soviet Russia as a ‘pattern’ and ‘family form’.

Second, the advent of ‘wage-earning maternity’ in Finland characterized the transition from a male breadwinner family to a dual earner family. With regard to Soviet Russia, the terms “breadwinner” or even “dual earner” do not make much sense. The Soviet family was built on the dual earner model, to be sure, but the social trajectory of the family was determined more by social and political than by economic factors. The socialist family model was one of dual state employees. To be an employee entailed more than receiving a salary for supporting your family. The work book, *trudovaiia knizhka*, that every Soviet citizen should have was similar to an internal passport to full citizenship. It linked the holder to the system of social services, adult education, retirements, travel opportunities, etc. The state often assigned the work places, and the work place usually provided apartments, childcare, shopping opportunities and vacations. The salary was only one among many forms of social compensation for work. Even if Russian men had higher salaries and social positions than women, the man’s salary was only in some specific milieus – such as those of military personnel or high-level physics – solely responsible for the family’s material and social status.



## *Love in the socialist family*

Soviet family policies followed a historical curve similar to that of society at large. The liberal policies of the early 1920s were reversed in the 1930s with the establishment of the ideal of the Soviet socialist family under the Stalin regime. In the post-war period, the attitudes again grew more permissive and allowed more scope for individual choices. Nevertheless, Soviet gender ideology and family policy remained within the framework set up by Stalinism (Liljeström 1995).

The official Soviet ideology of family life, sex roles and proper sexual behaviour was an eclectic combination of Marxism, agrarian patriarchal thought, biological determinism and puritanism. The ideal of the socialist family was articulated in the 1930s and remained basically unchanged until the process of perestroika in the 1980s. Whereas the Communist doctrines of the 1920s had projected a withering away of the state and the nuclear family – entailing the nationalization and collectivization of all aspects of social reproduction – Stalinism introduced the principles of socialism in one country and socialist love inside marriage. Soviet ideology from the 1930s (and onwards) propagated only the monogamous, heterosexual nuclear family and increasingly soft and domesticized ideals of femininity (Liljeström 1995).

On the one hand, the ideal of the socialist family reflected the patriarchal agrarian values held by the majority of the population. On the other, the propagation of the ideal of the socialist family coincided with the attempts of the state to 'civilize' city culture and create a well-behaving urban middle class.

In the 1930s and in the period immediately after World War II, the purpose of the socialist family ideal was to stabilise the situation after years of wars, famine, forced industrialization and rapid, uncontrollable urbanization. Soviet life of the early 1930s has been described as a quicksand society. The chaos and instability did not exclude family life. The collectivization process had led to agrarian ways of life being uprooted and pushed millions of peasant men and women to migrate to the cities, doubling the percentage of city dwellers in the country from 18 to 33 % during 1926-1939 (Lewin 1985, 221-219). Women entered the labour force in bigger numbers than the first five-year plan of 1928 had expected, while apartment conditions in the cities were appalling and housing and child-care provisions lagged behind. In the big cities of the Soviet mid-thirties, divorce rates were over 40% and the growth rate of the population was negative (Kerblay 1983, 123; Lewin 1985, 220). This accelerated the demographic concern of the Stalin regime, a main driving force behind its repressive family legislation.

Stalin's family policies reintroduced the ideal of a hierarchical family. In the socialist family the husband was supposed to be the head of the family, just as the General Secretary was the father of the country. Women 'naturally' had the main responsibility for child rearing and household tasks. According to popular Soviet pedagogue Anatoly Makarenko, the ideal number of children was seven (! – in this respect the ideology really reflected the values of an agrarian rather than an industrial society) and Soviet pedagogy warned against the inevitably spoilt and selfish only child. At the same time, both spouses were expected to get an education, participate in wage work and be politically active citizens (Liljeström 1995). Soviet children were expected to enter institutions for collective upbringing at an early age. As part of the Stalinist emphasis on the differences between the sexes from 1943 to 1955 boys and girls went to separate schools.

As for social institutions, the activities of social reproduction that already had been nationalized remained so: housing policies, childcare, work place and school lunches, the clothing industry, etc. Others – making food, cleaning, and the basic responsibility for child rearing – were declared to be family responsibilities. The original socialist project of emancipating women from housework – sharing it with the men had never been on the agenda – was thus abandoned as the practice of working mothers rooted itself in Soviet society. During the same period, it became increasingly impossible to discuss or do research on a range of political and social problems, including the "the woman question" (which had been officially solved with the constitution of 1936) and sexuality, although the abortion ban was adopted only after a heated public debate. (Liljeström 1995; Lapidus 1978, 113-114.)

Abortions were banned in 1936 in a situation with virtually no contraception. The family law valid from 1944 to 1968 made previously free divorces subject to court proceedings and reintroduced the former, pre-revolutionary distinction between children born in and out of wedlock. The 1944 legislation also made it difficult for single women to prove that a married man was the father of her child. (Lapidus 1978, 116-119.)

Theoretically, love in the socialist family was also part of love for the collective and the fatherland, a sober married love as opposed to (basically asocial) sexual passion.<sup>24</sup> As in premodern Europe, sexual passion was not given any articulated place even in private life, but became part of secret life. However, complementary to these directly authoritarian policies, Stalinism aimed at creating a cultivated middle class. The socialist family life was attached to general cultural values – denoted by a new term, *kul'turnost'*, which encompassed the ideal of a civilized citi-

zen, with a good knowledge of Russian literature and classical music, and who behaved and dressed properly (Volkov 1999). The policies of *kul'turnost'* embraced notions similar to the Western, bourgeois ideology of 'separate spheres': having the heterosexual couple as the basis of the family and expecting marriage to be based on mutual love and free choice, seeing the man as the authority of the household and understanding childrearing, morality and housekeeping to be the wife's main tasks.

Thus Stalinism was not only repressive; it also encouraged some kind of privacy and comfort in family life. Of course, the values of the nuclear family were not propagated as strongly as in, say, the United States of the 1950s.<sup>25</sup> Neither was Soviet-style home-keeping moulded by consumerism to the extent it was in the U.S., as life standards were lower and the service sector remained underdeveloped throughout the Soviet era.

The Brezhnev years saw a general rise of living standards and policies aimed at increasing the steadily dwindling birth rates. Abortions were again legalized in 1955. The family law of 1968 simplified divorce procedures and did not stigmatize illegitimate births.<sup>26</sup>As a whole, the new legislation "struck a more reasonable balance between the interest of the state in family stability and the need for greater freedom and equality in personal relationships" (Lapidus 1978, 239). However, as already mentioned, the main family ideals remained unchanged. Only now the regime tried to use its influence less intrusively, mainly through sex role education in schools and increased incentives to rear young children at home. Towards the end of the socialist period family benefits from the state included universal child benefits, four months of paid maternity leave, the possibility to take unpaid leave for a period of up to three years, and the right for women to have reduced working hours (Lapidus 1978, 305 and 126).

When the policies of transparency or *glasnost* were announced by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985, some of the failures of Soviet family policy immediately came under attack. The complaints first voiced by women during the *perestroika* targeted the general failures of social and housing policies, such as the quality of child and health care and the poor conditions of abortions and childbirth clinics. Within a few years, though, the Soviet social policies emerged as one of the biggest assets in helping the population adjust to the economic transformations.

During the 1990s, the biggest problem of most families became how to make ends meet. Impoverishment especially threatened poor single mothers and families with young or sick children. Most of the old Soviet system of social provisions for families was still formally functioning during the 1990s. Many people con-

tinued to go to their job in the state sector although the wages were very small and paid after several months of delay. The reason was that well into the 1990s, many workplaces still provided such social benefits as child care, apartments, or vacation trips. Federal and municipal social aid still provided significant financial support. But Russian social policy has not been able to effectively target social aid to the most vulnerable groups of the population. (Pirainen 1997; Liborakina & Rotkirch 1999.)

### *Four periods of sexual policy*

The Soviet regime did not adopt any explicit 'sexual policy'. Nevertheless, one can discern the major trends in the social and cultural approaches to sexuality officially propagated by the Communist Party. Igor Kon (1995) has distinguished four periods of sexual policy in the Soviet Union.<sup>27</sup> The first was a short, "daring and progressive" period right after the October Revolution with radical legislation, pluralistic discussion and social experimentation. The oldest autobiography in our material was written by a woman born in 1923. The impact of the early progressive policy of the 1920s is thus only indirectly present and remains outside the scope of this discussion. Suffice it to say that the famous discussions of 'free love' were limited to the intellectual elite and young people. The majority remained untouched by or suspicious towards them (Lapidus 1978, Clements 1985). The heritage of such Bolshevik theorists of sexuality as Alexandra Kollontay is still little known in Russia and was not once mentioned in any of our autobiographies. The progressive period of Soviet sexual policy did influence the lives of ordinary people, especially women, mainly through the right to free abortion (which the Soviet Union was the first European country to provide, in 1920) and in acknowledging de facto marriages and the right to divorce (Farnsworth 1985). Notwithstanding the Stalinist parenthesis, when abortions were once more illegal and divorces were more difficult to obtain, these basic changes had, as we shall see, a radical affect on the dynamics of Soviet family life.

Stalinism silenced or severely limited sexual discourse during the period Kon calls brutal repression. From the early 1930s, the regime tightened the legislation. After 1936 male homosexuality was penalized by up to five years of imprisonment, and female homosexuality was considered a mental disorder that could lead to forced psychiatric confinement. Sexuality became practically unmentionable in the public sphere, and love was ideologically confined to the married,

monogamous, heterosexual couple. Psychoanalysis had been banned in the late 1920s and Sigmund Freud was classified as a bourgeois scientist whose works were available only to professional experts with special permission. With Freud, other discussions of e.g. childhood sexuality disappeared, although the Marxist psychologist Pavel Blonskij published one article on the subject as late as 1934 (Etkind 1994).

After Stalin's death in 1953, there were only minor changes in the sexual policy of the communist regime. Kon describes the third period, the late socialism of Khrushchev and Brezhnev, as the domestication or "awkward taming" of sexuality: research on sexuality was again partially allowed, and some kind of information and advice featured in medical journals. At the same time, the actual sexual behaviour of Soviet people in some ways followed the developmental trends of other industrialized countries, including earlier onset of sexual life (Kon 1995, Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch 1998). But due to Soviet censorship on practically all matters of what was referred to as "intimate life" (*intimnaia zhizn*), the growing gap between the sexual experiences and values of the older and the younger generations was impossible to debate publicly. The norms of Communist ideology and those of the older generations coincided in supporting silence on sexual issues, abstinence from premarital sex, and a more permissive moral standard for men.

The haunting question of *why* the Soviet regime silenced or censored sexuality so heavily has probably no single answer. The general explanation is that totalitarian regimes want to control all life spheres, including private and sexual life. This attitude is certainly reflected in the family legislation until the law of 1968, or in the logic which condemned male homosexuality as a crime against society (Essig 1999a). During the thaw in the 1960s and later, under the Brezhnev years, the ban on sexuality in the public sphere was probably also a question of conformism and cultural inertia. For instance, having abortions as the main 'contraceptive method' was of course counterproductive for a regime that wanted as many women as possible to be in good reproductive health. But at the time, it was almost impossible to debate any social problems. The ruling elite almost exclusively consisted of elder men who were not very sensitive to the experiences of young women or even young men. Neither were there any commercial incentives or any social pressure (such as that from the feminist and gay movements) that would have favoured anything like the sexual revolution in the West.

With Gorbachev's politics of glasnost came a liberalization of the printed word and a Russian "sexual revolution", starting in Kon's periodization in the late

1980's. Only then did sexuality gradually appear as a possible public topic. Contraceptive methods, such as condoms and the pill, became widely available and the newspaper market was inundated with various 'erotic' magazines. The famous statement made in 1986 by a woman during a Russian-US television programme: "We have no sex in this country", was immediately perceived by Russians with laughter and irony, and countless interpretations and reformulations (Engelstein 1992b; Kon 1995; Gessen 1995). The expression was alluded to in the headline for the autobiography competition announcement in Petersburg ("Is there sex in Russia?") and in the announcement itself. It also served as the reference point in several autobiographies.

During the 1990s, *seks* in Russia went increasingly public, but remained a highly contested field. Libertine approaches coexisted with scandalising or moralising voices. More neutral or basically enlightening discourses were spreading, but still weak (Gessen 1995). Sexual education in the state school system was a hotly debated issue, and no comprehensive program had been adopted with the end of the 20th century. A wish to introduce censorship of pornography was usually high on the list of reactionary old-Communist political programmes (e.g. during the failed 1991 coup d'état).

We can date the four main *periods of Soviet sexual policy* described by Kon (1995) approximately as follows:

- (1) Progressive sexual policy (1917– mid-30s)
- (2) Repression (or silencing) (ca. mid-1930s – early 1960s)
- (3) Domestication (early 1960s – 1988)
- (4) Liberalization (or the sexual revolution in the public sphere) (1987–)

### *Three sexual generations*

If we take the formative years as a potential generational criterion, on the basis of socio-political changes we would expect to find generational differences for people born (1) ca 1900-20 (2) 1920-45, (3) 1945-72 and (4) after 1972. In the autobiographies, we have life stories of people in the three last age cohorts. The youngest generation will be dated a little earlier, *beginning in 1965*, as the behavioural changes during late socialism diverged more and more from the official social policy of the Soviet regime. The periods of Soviet sexual policy are discussed further in part I and the Soviet behavioural sexual revolution of the 1970s is presented in part II.

Throughout this work, the autobiographies will be divided into three main generational cohorts:

- the old generation, which I call *the silenced generation*, consisting of people born between ca 1920 and 1945 and with their formative years ca. 1935-1960;
- the middle generation, *the generation of personalization*, people born between 1945 and 1965 and with their formative years ca. 1960-1980;
- the youngest generation, *the generation of articulation*, born after 1965 and with their formative years from 1980 and onwards.

Of the autobiographies, eight women and ten men (Nos. 1-8 and 26-35) have been reckoned to belong to the oldest generation, eleven women and eight men (Nos. 9-20 and 36-43) to the middle generation, and five women and four men (Nos. 21-25 and 44-47) to the youngest generation.

This classification centres around two decisive periods in the development of the Soviet gender system and sexual policy: the period of Stalinism (late 1930s-early 1950s) and the times of late socialism (1970s-early 1980s). My periodization does not do real justice to the differences between the pre- and post-war times. The war experiences hastened and enforced already existing trends, such as women's participation in the work force. But still, the Soviet gender system is remarkable for its continuity from the 1930s until the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991.

In comparison, the development in many Western countries, among them Finland, has only *one* great turning point – the 1960s, when the generation of “baby boomers” was young. This has made it possible to talk about three distinct sexual generations in Finland, with the *generation of sexual revolution*, encompassing those born between 1937 and 1956, as the main reference point. Before this is the *generation of restraint*, and after – people born 1957-74 – the *generation of equality*, in which the behaviour of men and women became more similar) (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila 1995b). Soviet Russian generational change and its implications for the structure of sexual cultures and ‘revolutions’ are further discussed in part II.

1. Good examples of Russian scholars who have introduced and adapted Western social theory include Zdravomyslova (1996a) and Temkina (1997) concerning the study of social movements, Ionin (1997) for an application of Schutze's theory of life spheres to late Soviet society, Semyonova et al. (1996) for analyses of social mobility and Bourdieu's theory of social capital in Soviet Russia, Kharkhordin (1999) for an analysis of Foucauldian techniques of the self in the Soviet Union, and many others.
2. In a national survey from 1998 (N=1600), three of four Russians agreed completely or to some

- extent with the statement “*It is better for society when men work and women take care of the home and the children*”. Only 7% totally disagreed, and 14% disagreed to some extent. The results of the poll were reported in the weekly *Itogi*, 15 September 1998, page 5.
3. I am especially thinking of the works of Boym (1994) and Rivkin-Fish (1997), which analyze Soviet and Russian conceptions of everyday life and female patient’s relational selves, respectively.
  4. Watson advocates “a comparative framework in which East and West can be seen as both relatively discontinuous (at least until 1989) and essentially indivisible (i.e., mutually constitutive and often materially similar) social formations” (Watson 1997, 21).
  5. Michael Burawoy (1998a; 1998b) distinguishes between two basic *models* of doing social sciences: the positive and the reflexive model. Positive science is associated with survey research, while the reflexive model is associated with extended case methods (such as participant observation, life story interviews or, we could add, autobiographies). Burawoy underscores that the *techniques* of data collection, such as in-depth interviews or survey interviews, do not by themselves decide which methods are used in the research. In his terminology, the actual *methods* derive from the dominant model of thought and are close to what is often called methodology. Positive social science aims to be procedurally objective and is valued according to the “4 Rs” of *reliability, replicability, representativeness* and avoidance of *reactivity* (Katz 1983, quoted in Burawoy 1998a, 13). Reflexive science sees, on the contrary, subjective involvement as its point of departure.
  6. For recent US sociological bestsellers adopting grounded theory, see Coltrane (1996) and Hochschild (1997).
  7. Barbara Laslett originally pointed this out to me.
  8. The metaphor is not intended to suggest that the material world (‘empirical facts’ as grass) grows out of semiotic constructs (‘theory’ as soil). It rather aims to overturn the common spatial metaphor of ‘theory’ being above us. It also underscores that the material (‘grass’) and the semiotic/symbolic (‘ground’) nourish and transform each other, for instance with the help of researcher earthworms. This and the following chapter follow the same logic: beginning with my focus and work as a researcher (objects of research and research method), then discussing the material and the method of analyzing it.
  9. Beginning with the book “Men’s work, women’s doings” (Rantalaiho 1986), women’s caring work in the context of the welfare state has been in the centre of Finnish women’s studies. However, this has not included specific studies of sexuality in the context of social reproduction. For an overview of feminist and sociological discourses in Finland, see Anttonen (1997).
  10. Anthony Giddens (1984, 336) contrasts practical knowledge or “tacit consciousness” with two other modes: theoretical and reflective knowledge. The risk implicit in this categorization is to understand it as denoting different, hierarchical levels of knowledge. “Tacit” or “practical” then appear as banal and commonplace, while “reflective” appears by definition as the most valuable and adequate kind of knowledge. An analogous juxtaposition was made much earlier by Lev S. Vygotsky (1983), who distinguished between “lower” and “higher” mental functions (although the categories describe different things: Giddens speaks of knowledge and Vygotsky of mental techniques). I think both classifications can be adapted as first and foremost *logical* divisions, without normative judgements. I have already stressed Schutze’s view of certain types of knowledge and mental techniques as belonging to separate worlds, or different provinces of meaning. Moving from one province to the other requires certain cognitive skills (such as reflection, detachment, generalization, comparison, etc.). Different provinces have different functional use for the types of knowledge they produce. The unifying trait in Giddens’ and Vygotsky’s classifications is that tacit knowledge or lower psychological functions logically precede reflective knowledge and higher psychological functions: they are sequentially dependent on each other. Pyotr Shchedrovitsky originally made this point clear to me.
  11. Among the most influential scholars prone to find negative tendencies in the situation of Russ-



- ian women are the sociologist Lynn Attwood and the literary scholar Helen Goscilo (1996). Interestingly, using interactive methods (structured group discussions with students), Attwood (1996b) noticed more encouraging trends among her respondents, such as an openness to change, notwithstanding the usual strong gender stereotypes. The younger generation of feminist Russian scholars using more interactive methods of research also seems to detect a more colourful and complex gender culture – I am thinking about Hilary Pilkington's (1994) study of Moscow youth subculture and Michele Rivkin-Fish's (1997) work on the interaction between women and medical doctors in St. Petersburg.
12. Michel Foucault (1984, 32-33) describes the same phenomena as "souci éthique", "préoccupation" or "problematization morale": "Mais par 'morale', on entend aussi le comportement réel des individus, dans son rapport aux règles et valeurs qui leur sont proposées (...) Appelons ce niveau de phénomène la 'moralité des comportements'."
  13. Anthropologist Henrietta Moore (1994, 25) makes an analogous point when she emphasizes that the views on sexual difference in a culture vary according to the context in which they are expressed and acted out: "Where discourses exist that focus on the absolute and irreducible nature of sexual difference, there is no particular reason to privilege them over other discourses or to accord them some kind of foundational status." Some situations, e.g. marriage rituals, activate more polarized views on sexual difference than others.
  14. A good Western example of everyday morality is found in the changes in the normative sexual life course. In the 1980s, couples in Finland started having children before getting formally married. The preceding norm had prescribed first marriage and only then children; or first cohabitation, then marriage, then children; or cohabitation with children but without marriage. In the 1990s, those scripts of the family life course were supplemented by a new behaviour: first cohabitation, then children, then marriage. However, to start with, nobody declared that 'we want to have children first', or 'of course we'll get married once we have children'. The new pattern was something that emerged due to several economic and cultural reasons, but was not immediately articulated culturally. On the other hand, there were so many examples of this way of doing things that people would agree it was 'okay', and the new pattern did not appear as something shameful or shocking, either, even to the oldest generation.
  15. Non-academic monographs on sexuality in the Soviet Union after WWII include Stern (1979) and Popovsky (1985), both reviewed in Kon (1995, 279). Academic works include Kon & Riordan (eds) (1993), Gessen (1995), Kon (1995) and Golod (1996). Pilkington (1994) partly discusses Soviet youth and sexual morals. For separate articles, see e.g. the anthologies edited by Pilkington (1996) and Barker (1999).
  16. See especially Levin (1989; 1993), Engelstein (1992a) and Naiman (1993).
  17. For research on sexuality and gender roles in these spheres, see Attwood (1990); Costlow et al. (1993), Liljeström (1995), Goscilo & Holmgren (1996) and Barker (1999).
  18. My understanding of gender is heavily indebted to Teresa Lauretis. She sees gender as "the representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation which pre-exists the individual and is predicated on the *conceptual* and rigid (structural) opposition of two biological sexes" (de Lauretis 1987, 5). Scandinavian and Finnish feminist research has also made much use of the concept of a gender system as elaborated by the historian Yvonne Hirdman (1988). This concept underlines how social institutions and practices follow a hierarchical and asymmetrical division between the sexes. Marianne Liljeström (1995) reviews the use of the concept and applies it to the gender discourses of the Soviet Union. See also chapter 3.
  19. Veijola & Jokinen (1997) speak of cultural configurations as "a local relationship of time, space and power, which can affect or encompass concrete social subjects".
  20. It is probably no coincidence that the notion that sexuality is excluded from everyday life is presented by Anglo-American authors (with a reference to the Puritan tradition, which is nevertheless

- automatically elevated to the status of a “fundamental part of the modern Western tradition”, Simon and Gagnon 1999, 32), while the perception of sexuality as present in all human behaviour is embraced by French authors.
21. Among them are “prerequisites of civil society” (Shlapentokh), “engendering environments” (Yanitsky) and “spaces of freedom” (Ionin). Viktor Voronkov has distinguished between sets of governing rules in the private and those in the semi-public spheres: according to him, the “official public” was governed by written law and the “private-public” or “semi-public” by common law (Temkina & Zdravomyslova 1999). We can add the “second society” of Hankiss (1988) or the view of “social subjects” or “subjects of innovation” used in Russian activity theory (Shchedrovitskii 1991; Rotkirch 1996b) or, taken into relation with Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical apparatus, “shadow fields” (Roos & Rotkirch 1999).
  22. Oleg Yanitskii found engendering environments in four settings: (1) universities and major high schools; (2) research institutes and academic campuses, (3) Soviet professional organizations (the Writers’ Union, the Composers’ Union, etc.), (4) mass media. Leonid Ionin denotes “spheres of freedom” in more everyday activities, such as fishing, travelling or reading. (Temkina & Zdravomyslova 1999; Ionin 1997.)
  23. “Gender contracts” are one feature of the gender system elaborated by Yvonne Hirdman (1988). Liljeström (1995) rejects the notion of contract in her analysis of the ideology of the Soviet gender system. Her main objection is that the relationship between contract and system is not theoretically motivated in Hirdman’s theory. I would claim that ‘contract’ is a good word for describing the gender consensus and balance dominating certain societies at certain historical points, such as Finland in the 1950s or Russia in the 1990s (cf. Temkina & Rotkirch 1997). Contract is also suitable for describing the Soviet gender practices that Anna Temkina and I have earlier called shadow gender contracts (ibid.), and that I have here referred to with the phrase everyday gender morality.
  24. In principle, love for the fatherland should surpass family ties, as in the now infamous Soviet myth about Pavlik Morozov, who denounced his father for stealing state property and was brutally murdered in revenge. Ironically, it now turns out that communist loyalty did not break up this family, Pavlik’s father had left his wife and four small children much earlier.
  25. For instance, the word “intimacy” that had been banned as an esthetic notion during the 1920s was only tentatively reintroduced in the 1940s as a description of pretty housing (Boym 1994).
  26. The 1968 legislation protected the interests of registered marriages and of men rather than those of women, e.g. so that acknowledgment of paternity was voluntary on the man’s part if the couple was not married (Juviler 1984).
  27. Sergei Golod (1996) advanced a different periodization, distinguishing between three major transitions in sexuality in connection with the social upheavals of in the 1900s, 1920s and 1980s. The last period, the 1980s, is characterized only in a general way. Golod relies on several Soviet surveys from the beginning of the century and then from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. He does not discuss sexual behaviour but attitudes towards sexuality, especially towards the suitable timing of the first intercourse and the question of pre- or extramarital sex. His periodization could be justified with the claim that attitudes were mostly affected during the revolutionary times he mentions. However, I regret Golod’s complete disregard for the 1960s and 1970s, when attitudes were beginning to change, as several of his own interview excerpts indicate.

## 2 Analyzing Autobiographies

This chapter presents the material of the research, autobiographies about love and sexuality written by so-called ordinary people in St. Petersburg. The social profile and representativity of the autobiographical writers is discussed, and the texts are characterized by their genre and leitmotifs. The so-called “triad of experience” is then presented as a tool for reading autobiographical material and discussed in relation to some current debates in the field of social research on sexuality.

### 2.1 AUTOBIOGRAPHIES ABOUT LOVE AND SEXUALITY

The primary corpus of material consists of 47 autobiographies about love and sexuality written by people in St. Petersburg and collected in 1996.

The autobiographical material has been compared with the results from a representative survey from St. Petersburg in 1996 (N=2081) (Gronow, Haavio-Mannila, Kivinen, Lonkila & Rotkirch 1997). I also refer to some of the cross-country differences found in comparison with sexual autobiographies collected in Finland in 1992 and with the Finnish sex surveys made in 1971 and 1992 (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila 1995; 1997). The results of these Finnish-Russian comparisons have partly been reported elsewhere (Haavio-Mannila and Rotkirch 1998 and 1999; Haavio-Mannila, Roos & Kontula 1996).

Additionally, I occasionally use autobiographical accounts that have been published in Russia in the 1990s. I also refer to works of Russian fiction: especially

the first part of this work could be entitled ‘Notes on Lyudmila Petrushevskaya’, a writer whose merciless yet emphatic insights into Russian everyday family life have been unmatched during the last two decades. Viktor Pelevin and Viktor Erofeev write wonderfully about their struggles with the man question. Joseph Brodsky and Marina Tsvetaeva would certainly hate this kind of academic dissection of personal truths, but they remain the most sensitive recorders of reality I know of, including Soviet reality. The fictional sources are of course indicated in connection with the quotations.

The fact that my primary material is from Leningrad/St. Petersburg naturally limits the scope of experiences I have had access to. It goes without saying that St. Petersburg is a special city, one of the most beautiful places on earth, a country in itself, with a special history and a specific professional and demographic structure. The Nazi siege of Leningrad was still a vivid memory in the autobiographies. Deaths of family members by bombs or starvation, or the less dramatic facts of evacuations and interrupted studies clearly influenced the lives of the authors. A consequence of World War II was that Leningrad had a disproportionately high female population. Leningrad also experienced a huge influx of industrial workers in the 1950s and 1960s, which created a significant social distinction between those who had lived in the city for many generations and the migrants. Especially the ‘established Leningraders’ underscore this social distinction in their autobiographies. In the 1990s, the St. Petersburg population also had more elderly people, more women, a lower birth rate, a higher level of education, and more people employed in the military and related industries than in Russian cities in general.

In the text, the city is called Leningrad before 1992 and St. Petersburg afterwards. Some quotations refer to the city with its nickname *Piter*. It would, however, even for linguistic reasons be impossible to speak about Leningrad or St. Petersburg characteristics all the time. I will thus often generalize and talk about “Russian” and “Soviet” experiences. I also believe that the general processes in family life and sexual cultures that will be described were common for most of urbanized Soviet Russia.

When quoting autobiographies, I give the author’s sex, year of birth and an identifying number. I often also use the pseudonyms I have given to many of the autobiographical protagonists.<sup>1</sup> In close readings I have included both a first name and a surname in the pseudonym. In such instances, the surname refers to the author of the autobiography, the person remembering, and the first name to the protagonist of the stories, or the person remembered.

The autobiographers, with their identifying numbers, basic characteristics and the pseudonyms used in this work, are listed at the end of this book. The integral text of the competition announcement is also rendered there.

### *The use of autobiographies in social research*

As part of the renewed interest in qualitative material, personal narratives and everyday life in the social sciences, European sociologists have been gathering autobiographies through special competitions. Originating in Poland, this method of encouraging so-called "ordinary people" (as opposed to celebrities and writers) to write became popular in Finland in the 1980s and has also been used for instance in Norway, Italy and Great Britain (Roos 1987, Gullestad 1996). The aim of an autobiographical competition is to ask, usually through newspaper advertisements, either people in general or a specially targeted group to write about their lives. The guidelines usually encourage the writers to start with their childhood and their family background and then proceed to write their life stories.

There has been an increasing interest in collecting *thematical autobiographies and life stories*. They are helpful in focusing on specific areas, including the spheres of life that are perceived as either too banal, too interwoven with everyday life, or too intimate to be described in usual autobiographies. Thematical autobiographies can, following the distinction made by Bertaux (1997), be divided into two main types. Either they are united in describing a certain professional or social field. Autobiographical competitions for certain professions have, for instance, been common in Finland since the 1970s. Or, the thematical autobiographies are focussed on a certain category of situation. During the 1990s Finnish sociologists have collected autobiographies focussing on such diverse subjects as relationship to art and back illnesses. Love and sexuality have been increasingly popular themes. After the first Finnish competition for sexual autobiographies similar ones were organized in Russia, Estonia, Lithuania and Great Britain.

In 1993, the first collection of Soviet autobiographies was organized in Leningrad by Elizaveta Lagunova. During the 1990s, at least two other major collections of Russian life stories were also made.<sup>2</sup> In 1996, the Finnish research project "*Mosaic life. Upbringing, gender and sexuality in Finland, the Baltic countries and St. Petersburg*" organized an autobiographical competition about love and sexuality together with the Institute of Sociology in St. Petersburg. The research project was directed by J.P.Roos and partly continued the work with thematical

autobiographies about love and sexuality collected in Finland in 1992 by Elina Haavio-Mannila and Osmo Kontula (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila 1995b and 1997). Alexandr Klyotzin and Elizaveta Lagunova from the Institute of Sociology in St. Petersburg conducted the competition. People were invited to write about their love and sexual life through an advertisement in the newspapers *Vechernii Peterburg* and *Chas Pik*. Additionally, dozens of leaflets were distributed at academic institutions and women's organizations in the area.

The autobiographies were transcribed into computer files. A Russian-Finnish jury eventually selected six prize-winning autobiographies, the authors of which received a diploma and a monetary award (from 50 USD to 500 USD). Elizaveta Lagunova edited ten of these autobiographies for publication in *Chas Pik* in 1997-1998. As the publications elicited great interest on the part of the Petersburg readers, there are plans to publish a selection of the autobiographies as a book. The results of the research have also been presented to the general public through the Russian and Finnish media.

The competition in St. Petersburg yielded 54 entries. Of these, one consisted of several diaries, and six others (one by a man, five by a woman) were too short or incomplete to be considered autobiographical material. Thus I included 47 texts in my primary corpus of material. Twenty-five of these texts were written by women and twenty-two by men, born between 1923 and 1973. The length of the transcribed autobiographies varies from two pages to about seventy pages. At the end of the book, the autobiographies are numbered according to sex and age, beginning with the oldest woman and ending with the youngest man.

The translations in this book have all been made by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

### *Social profile of the authors*

Questions of the *representativity* of the people that participate in autobiographical competitions are standard in autobiographical research. Comparisons made in Finland between autobiographical and survey material indicate that the writers are close to the population at large, with minor although telling differences: women write more often than men, elderly (e.g. retired) people more often than younger ones, and not surprisingly the authors are a more introvert and inclined to writing than the population in general (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila 1995).

The sexual autobiographies from St. Petersburg were compared with the re-

sults from a representative survey with questions about love and sexual life conducted in St. Petersburg in the same year (Gronow et al. 1997). This showed that the persons who wrote autobiographies had a higher education, were less often married, and were slightly older than the population on average.<sup>3</sup> In both groups, two thirds were employed and one sixth pensioners, and the rest were students, housewives, or unemployed.

One of the most telling differences was that, especially compared with the Finnish sexual autobiographies, relatively few young St. Petersburg women contributed. By contrast, in the Finnish material young single women in their 30s were one significant subgroup of authors. This reflects the fact that an analogous female lifestyle is not as wide-spread in St. Petersburg (Haavio-Mannila and Rotkirch 1998). One of the two Russian autobiographies by women in their early twenties was written by a female “New Russian”,<sup>4</sup> a successful physician who worked partly in the United States and led a sexually autonomous and diverse life without any intentions of getting married.

The sexual practices described in the autobiographies were also compared with average sexual behaviour of the whole city population. The autobiographers in St. Petersburg had started to date regularly and to engage in intercourse at the same age as the whole population, and they equally often mentioned parallel sexual relationships.<sup>5</sup> But they had had more sexual partners: the median number of partners was twelve for men and five for women, whereas it is five and three, respectively, in the whole Petersburg population. At present, the Russian autobiographers had sexual intercourse less frequently and they defined their couple relationships as less happy than people in St. Petersburg did on the average. Clearly, people that were sexually more experienced, but at present lonely and unsatisfied, had had an incentive to write. Experiences of abortion, homosexuality and prostitution were also more commonly mentioned in the autobiographies than in the survey.

Of course, it is hard to say to what extent these differences reflect differences in actual social practices, or rather in the research methods. While completing a questionnaire, there is a tendency to favour more positive general evaluations and to omit or simply forget extraordinary sexual events. While writing one's autobiography, there is on the contrary a tendency to dwell on the most dramatic or problematic aspects, and there is more space for deep and time-demanding reflection. Russians have also been found to prefer the use of a rhetoric of lamentation when interacting with foreign researchers, a “barrier of unhappiness” (Bäckman 1997, 19-21).

The occupational, educational or class background of the authors was not always clear from the texts. When possible, I have classified them according to class (working class or middle class) and type of education (professional or higher education; technical, economical and humanistic).<sup>6</sup> The professional and class classification refers to the main occupation and the class status acquired towards the end of one's working life. Thus a woman from a poor family, who first became a saleswoman and then the director in a supermarket, but who is now retired and does not have a very high income, is noted in the list as being in the upper middle class. In the text I will talk about *lower working class*, *educated middle class* and *upper middle class*. A fourth, loosely defined group consists of the *bohemian and semi-criminal milieus* depicted in life stories of the middle and younger generations. In St. Petersburg, the fact of being born in the city or arriving there as a student or migrant worker was also a (if not the) crucial ingredient in social status and access to material resources, especially apartments. The question of classes in Soviet society is further discussed in chapter 8.

The autobiographies include about ten examples of lower working class. Eight life stories tell about upward social mobility: classic Soviet class journeys starting as factory workers or salespersons and ending up as mid-management directors. Two of the women were housewives, while the other women authors included a kindergarten teacher, an artist, a physician, a librarian, engineers and secretaries. The first prize went to a woman born in 1925, and many of the longest and most interesting texts were written by the oldest generation of women.

St. Petersburg men participated to a greater extent than men usually do in autobiographical competitions. Partly, this seems to have been a response to a perceived request of writing sexual memoirs, as for example in the "letters to the editor" in pornographic magazines. But several men also seemed to write out of a genuine need for classical autobiographical self-reflection. When I first read the entries, I wondered why so few young women wrote (Rotkirch 1997). In the course of the work I also learnt to put the question the other way around: why did so many Russian men write, in comparison both with women and with men from other countries?

Of the men, several presented quite atypical professions and personalities. More clearly than the women, the men represented both ends of the social spectrum, from a professor to an unemployed librarian. In the older generation, three authors had had high professional positions (the director of an enterprise and army officers), but had experienced social devaluation after perestroika. The two younger generations provide many examples of horizontal and blurred social mo-



bility, such as the trajectory of one man who was a sailor, then a geologist, then an artist. Four men mentioned psychiatric problems involving some kind of medical treatment or sojourn in mental hospitals, while none of the women mentioned mental problems that were this serious.

Lastly, surprisingly many of the contributors had used personal advertisements and contact agencies. This may be due to the fact that one of the newspapers where the competition advertisement appeared, *Chas Pik*, has provided that kind of service and has also written extensively about issues of sexuality and gender.

## 2.2 GENRES AND LEITMOTIFS

The autobiographical format in itself activates or develops a reflective and agency-oriented view of the self, what Pierre Bourdieu (1986) has called the “biographical illusion”. One feels more compelled to write one’s biography at certain moments in life, often in connection with a turning point, and using rhetorical modes (e.g. individual decision-making) that are not necessarily the dominant behavioural models in real life (Peltonen 1998; Vilkkö 1998). In this respect, participating (as well as organizing) an autobiographical competition about love and sexuality is of course part of the process of making sex public and creating sexual and gender identities.

Of all themes and practices, writing about sexuality is especially paradoxical. Sex is something we usually know only through our own practice or as mediated by language (including visual language). In most cultures, sexuality is not displayed for other family members or for strangers. If the sexual act is shown, as in pornographic movies, it immediately becomes a special and detached subfield of sexuality. (Bozon 1999, 5.)

Obviously, an autobiographical competition about sexuality attracts men and women who agree to reveal their sexuality, even in the intimate and distant setting of writing. “*Not seeing you makes it much easier*”, as one woman (No. 15) points out in the beginning of her text.

The competition also appealed to those who considered sexuality a *legitimate subject* of discussion and research. The opposite is common in Russia. One of the entries that did not qualify as an autobiography was sent by an anonymous woman who in a few lines objected to the subject of the study, saying that intimate questions do not benefit from public comparisons. We do not have the life experiences of her kind in this material. But the reluctance to tell about sex was not as great as many warned our research project it would be. For instance, the

section concerning sexuality in the questionnaire of the St. Petersburg survey had a fully acceptable response rate of 60%. This is lower than the response rate in Finnish sex surveys, which has ranged from 76% to an astonishing 91%, but close to response rates in some other surveys, e.g. one in Sweden conducted in the same year, 1996, as the Petersburg survey (Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch 1998, 136).

It has also often been claimed that Russian autobiographical writings are not as oriented towards the personal and the confessional as in the West. For instance, in the collection of Russian women's autobiographies from 1917 to the Second World War, Sheila Fitzpatrick (2000) found several peculiar traits for Russian women's autobiographies.<sup>7</sup> Testimony of the turbulent times was the primary genre, in contrast to the wide-spread opinion that women's autobiographies tend to be more confessional, relational and oriented towards the private sphere. "Russian women (like Russian men) write about their lives in the context of the times because they perceive their times as remarkable, overshadowing private concerns, impossible to ignore." (Fitzpatrick 2000). Russian women are not, she claims, oriented towards self-understanding in the conventional Western autobiographical sense. The men and women of the interwar period were all engaged in self-construction, in building new Soviet (or, in the case of émigrés and dissidents, anti-Soviet) conceptions of themselves. "Under [revolutionary] circumstances, the object of the autobiographical quest is not self-discovery in the normal sense, but rather the discovery of a usable self." (Fitzpatrick 2000).

Fitzpatrick's analysis sounds convincing, but only for the beginning of the 20th century. The 1980s and 1990s were also revolutionary and remarkable times, but in the thematical autobiographies about sex and love references to political events are glaringly absent. The difficulties of obtaining an abortion or a divorce are about the only references to Stalinism, the sudden access to literature about sexuality and to contraceptives the usual indications of perestroika, and the financial difficulties the main problem of today. The 1990s autobiographies seem to have been written *against* the canons of testimonies, with the permission and encouragement to think only about oneself. Half of those who participated were engaged in what I call identity quests, which means they were remoulding their personal self-perception. This new Russian trait is not such a tautological result as one might imagine (ask people to write about their private lives and they will not write about their public lives). In the Finnish sexual autobiographies, there were more references to "my generation" and the general social context than in the Russian post-socialist ones.

## *Intimate confessions and sexual memoirs*

The material clearly follows two main genres: *intimate confessions*, which resemble the classical autobiographical account, and *memoirs*.<sup>8</sup> The memoirs focus either on the relational or the sexual component of romantic encounters.

*Intimate confessions*. The intimate confessions are chronological autobiographies that include all central events in life in addition to the sexual ones. Their scope and richness of detail make them into what is in autobiographical research called 'thick' texts. This genre was suggested in the competition announcement, which was written by the Russian researchers on the basis of similar announcements in Finland. The announcement encouraged people to write "not only about facts, but also about feelings", to describe everyday life and to include seemingly less significant events; to "write as you would talk to your best friend". Many authors pointed out that they had no friends they could talk to as openly as they did in the texts. Most of the women and about half of the men wrote their sexual autobiographies in the genre of intimate confessions.

*Memoirs*. Those who wrote memoirs focussed on their love and/or sexual life, while leaving out crucial parts of the rest of their lives, such as their parents, social background, profession, etc. Quite often all references to professional life are excluded, perhaps in order to avoid identification. The memoirists were either writing in the *language of love relationships* or in the language of *sexual affairs*. This division depends on both generation and gender. Basically, the oldest generation and women tended to write memoirs of their love relationships, while the younger generations and men tended to describe their successive sexual affairs.

*Memoirs of love relationships* were written in a romantic style, with mostly everyday terminology and little or nothing about the sexual act itself. Less than a quarter of the men and the women (about a handful of each) wrote such memoirs, which are found in the autobiographies of both women and men from the oldest generation, and many women from the middle generation.

The genre of *sexual memoirs*, by contrast, resembles the "letters from the reader" found in pornographic magazines and was used by those who adopted a sexually explicit style of writing.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, this genre was not encouraged by the competition announcement, which did not suggest writing about sexual techniques or positions. Sexual memoirs was clearly the genre of six male autobiographies, and it was typical for all the biographies from the youngest generation of Russian men. Among the few (three) women that can be counted here, two belonged to the middle and one to the youngest generation. Two of the women combined ex-

PLICIT sexual accounts with descriptions of their relationships and reflections. A similar combination was not found in the memoirs written by men.

Compared with the Russian autobiographies, the Finns wrote fewer memoirs of their love relationships, preferring either full autobiographical confessions or sexual memoirs. One might argue that this difference merely reflects the fact that the instructions for the Finnish competition requested the contributors to write about sex, while the Russian announcement was more careful to talk about both “love and sexual experiences”. I would rather say that both the insistence of the Russian organizers to include love in the text of the announcement and the recurring pattern of many Russian autobiographies to combine or juxtapose love and sex stem from the same cultural specificity. In Soviet Russia sexuality is generally not conceived of as a separate and autonomous sphere of life. The gender differences in this regard also remain larger in Russia than in the West: Russian women more rarely wrote explicit sexual memoirs.

It does seem that the persons who participated in the competition *actively* (if not necessarily consciously) *chose* which kind of genre they would write in. Those writing intimate confessions fulfilled the demand of the announcement that asked for honest and thick descriptions of one’s love life. The authors writing in the language of romantic relationships followed the values of the Soviet educated middle class of the 1950s and 1960s, where love was seen as opposed to and better than mere sex. Those writing sexual memoirs placed themselves in the genre that dominated publications about sexuality in the Russian media in the 1990s – in pornographic journals as well as in regular newspapers such as the one in question, *Chas Pik*.

Finally, especially the female authors extended the domain of ‘love’ in comparison to the way it was used in the original announcements. In neither the Finnish nor the Russian announcement was there any direct allusion to love outside the romantic/sexual relation. But the Russian authors themselves point out that there are “*other kinds of love*” (No. 5), including parental and grandparental love, which often alternate with romantic love (see chapter 6). The way the respondents actively chose their genres and even redefined the subject matter (‘love’) suggests that the differences in the announcement texts were not responsible for the country differences between the Finnish and Russian autobiographies.

### *Love, laments and identity quests*

Three main leitmotifs could be distinguished in the autobiographies: *search for*

*pleasure and love, laments, and identity quests.* A fourth group combines the ‘thinner’ and merely *episodic* autobiographical accounts (a specific autobiography can combine two leitmotifs, but not more). These leitmotifs are characterized below in the order of their frequency in the autobiographies.

### 1. Search for pleasure and love

These were the tales of a gradual evolving of sexual and love life, of searching for and finding real passion. Some writers emphasized the supreme importance of Love with a capital letter, some spoke about fulfilment through learning the right sexual techniques. These autobiographies are united by the theme of searching, and they usually ended happily, or at least optimistically. In this group, the men often wrote about the tension between Love and Sex, while women wrote about finding a suitable partner. This group of autobiographies told about the obstacles to happy sex and love: taboos and censorship, lack of knowledge, lack of privacy in crowded apartments, fear of pregnancy. They were full of reflections (evaluations, justifications) and indications of life control (new projects and plans). This leitmotif was not encountered in the genre of relationship or sexual memoirs. The memoirs merely depicted events, without describing any accompanying search and fulfilment, and without tracing the evolution of the author’s conceptions and knowledge about sex – traits that both characterize this leitmotif.

### 2. Laments

Laments bemoaned about unhappy, estranged marriages, the absence of love, or of reciprocated love, and lives led in poverty, marital violence and illness. As many as one fourth of both the men and the women wrote mainly laments. Clearly, ‘pouring one’s heart out’ was one motivation to write. Stories which merely lack significant life events – e.g. that of an unmarried woman who had not had many relationships but did not complain – are not counted here. Here we find women with brutish and insensitive husbands, a young slightly disabled girl, stories of hopeless and unrequited love. Men’s laments dealt with acute material poverty. The stories in this genre made for sad reading and left the impression that the writer was in a state of apathy and pessimism. Still, the act of writing about one’s misery can perhaps be understood as an embryonic orientation towards change.

### 3. Identity quests

I have called identity quests the autobiographies with a formulated emancipatory

goal. In them, sexuality emerges in connection with different realms: there are stories of *psychological and spiritual* emancipation; *homosexual* emancipation, and *feminist* emancipation. Combining all of them is the question of finding a true self and/or at least finding out about sex. The emancipatory stories often resembled classical autobiographies, but were more *problem-centred* and had a red thread of explicit *self-reflexivity* and conscious use of terminology from expert discourses (psychology, astrology, psychoanalysis, feminism, gay liberation). The identity quests are further discussed in chapter 10.

#### 4. *Episodical stories*

Finally, some autobiographies merely depicted one crucial period of life or event. It was not possible to count these entries as proper autobiographies although they could be interesting in themselves. For instance, one episode was about a woman who fell in love with a Western man and about her reactions when he told her he that he was homosexual.

## 2.3 READING WITH THE EXPERIENTIAL TRIAD

When reading the autobiographies, I have distinguished between three modes of experience: *feelings, practices and interpretation*. Together, they form the so-called triad of experience. In order to justify this methodical choice, I will first compare my approach with the leading school in sexual research, the theory of sexual scripts, and then proceed to present the alternative provided by experiential semiotics.

### *Script theory – a critique*

The theory of sexual scripts was presented by William Simon and John H. Gagnon in their seminal article of 1984. Inspired by Irving Goffman and the school of symbolic interactionism, Simon and Gagnon used scripts (and scenarios) as a conceptual tool for grasping the cultural and social conditioning of sexual behaviour. Scripts were understood as the “operating syntax” of sexual behaviour, “much as language is a precondition for speech”. According to script theory, any sexual behaviour requires three levels of scripts: cultural scenarios, interper-

sonal scripts and intrapsychic scripts. Depending on the historical epoch, social situation and individual in question the three levels may be in congruence or conflict with each other.

The thrust of Simon's and Gagnon's argument was against ahistorical and biologising conceptions of sexuality. Scripting theory should "take us beyond inarticulate permanence of the body to the changing and diverse meanings and uses of the sexual. (...) [W]e see the sexual not in traditional terms of biological imperatives, but in terms of (...) our natural dependence upon social meanings". This quote is from the last sentence of the article, which is, symptomatically enough, the first and hence only time the word "body" occurs. The text avoids any mention of bodily parts or specific feelings; its most concrete examples of sexual practices are of a Playboy centrefold and of our habit of "putting out the lights before initiating sexual activity". This is of course defensible in a theoretical article. The problem is that the distancing from bodily perceptions is present not only in the chosen style of expression, but in script theory itself. There is "behaviour" and there are different kinds of "scripts". Behaviour should be analyzed and explained through scripts; and the scripts are enumerated beginning with the cultural, followed by the interpersonal, and lastly the intrapsychic (or individual) level. Interpersonal scripts are said to arise from the need to adopt cultural scenarios to concrete social situations; and the need of intrapsychic scripts arises from social interaction and the ambiguities possibly experienced by the individual at the cultural and social level.

This view is a conscious, and initially very radical, overturning of e.g. psychoanalytic or biological reasoning, where desires or instincts are the given point of departure. "Desire is not reducible to an appetite, a drive, an instinct; it does not create the self, rather it is part of the process of the creation of the self", write Simon & Gagnon (1984). However, the overturning runs the risk of assigning the "intrapsychic" a subordinated and derivative part in the "process of the creation of the self".

Simon and Gagnon neglect the bodily and the sensual, which seems to go hand in hand with an overemphasis on linguistic and social aspects. To take one admirer of Gagnon, Bozon (1999) first discusses how sexual practices are hidden and invisible in all known societies, and that they are peculiar precisely because we basically know about them from our own bodily experiences. Nevertheless, he later claims that "you [the scholar – AR] cannot 'know' (*connaître*) the physical practices of sexuality but through statements and language (...) nothing sexual happens that has not been first constructed as a *script*" – giving the scripts an on-

tological status similar to that of instincts of drives in other theories. ‘First there was the script...’

Robert Connell (1987) made one of the first explicit attacks on script theory when he claimed that “even if we do not see our bodies as pure sources of our selves, they remain the point of depart for biological processes, emotional sensations, physical perceptions and social interaction. The risk of biologism and essentialism may be best avoided by integrating the body into our view of the human being, instead of rejecting it”.

True, Simon & Gagnon (1984) distance themselves from claiming that sexuality is only or straightforwardly socially regulated: “We do not imply that the sexual is entirely organized directly by pressure of external requirements”. Neither is their definition of scripting exclusively linguistic. Cultural scenarios are, for instance, defined as “systems of signs and symbols through which the requirements *and practices* of specific roles are given”, while interpersonal scripts are making “appropriate identities” “congruent with desired *expectations*” (emphasis added). Scripts are basically normative and symbolic, but not clearly delineated from behaviour (“practices”) or feelings and values (“expectations”). The concrete example of switching off the lights before making love is, encouragingly, nonlinguistic.

Nevertheless, the rejection of the sensing body is further strengthened in Simon and Gagnon’s theory by its linguistic vocabulary. They talk about metaphors, scripts, roles and scenarios, which are to behaviour as “language is to speech”. This aspect has not been questioned by the critics who, like Connell above, miss the body in the theory of scripts. But when Simon and Gagnon say that scripts are to behaviour as language is to speech, one can ask just *how* language is to speech?

Lev Vygotsky’s notion of *inner speech* is useful in making the scheme of code-expression applied by script theory more complex. Vygotsky studied children’s play and the functional use of words in action (e.g. the child who says “take train” as he or she reaches out for a train). He noted how the child gradually learns how to do a certain thing without uttering that sentence – the words organizing activity have become internalized inner speech. However, the process is not only from outwards and then inwards, making previous speech inner speech. Vygotsky also discusses the disjunction that arises between having a vision or an idea and expressing it. Often the outcome of articulated speech seems inadequate, or poor, in relation to our inner speech. That leads to the thought that inner speech is less linguistically organized than social language and speech: inner speech is a kind of intermediate stage in the process of transforming *thought* into speech. What



emerges is an *axis, where thought, inner speech, speech, and language are in various relations to each other*. According to this conception, thoughts originate in the sensing, interacting body.

Thus we see how, together with the most *physical* aspects, an exclusive focus on the linguistic also neglects the most *abstract* realm. This may seem paradoxical, if we conventionally see the two realms of perception and conceptualization as separate or as mutually exclusive. However, we can also conceive of abstract thought as present in all human life, and modelled and moulded on the tactile and psycho-sensory experiences of the body. In such a view, babies also have abstract thinking before they know any words (Stern 1985; Sheets-Johnston 1993).

In sum, claiming that all thought and all semiotic activity was formed as linguistic signs led to two big “black holes” in academic thinking: neither the corporal nor extralinguistic cognitive processes could be grasped. Thus there was a constant reappearance of the ‘theoretical fork’ or academic ‘wall of Berlin’ (both metaphors are used by de Lauretis (1984)), where signs were relegated to the realm of culture, and bodies silenced and placed in the realm of the unspeakable, of nature, and the feminine.<sup>10</sup> The same divide is present in script theory, as long as it does not explicitly theorise and name the place of sensual perceptions and the feeling body.

Social interactionism, social constructionism and scripting theory have faced criticism from various directions, the sociology of the body (Connell 1987), phenomenological philosophy (Heinämaa 1996; 1999), and the experiential semiotics inspired by C. S. Peirce. I have adopted a Peircian framework as my own method of analysis.

### *The Peircian triad of experience*

The alternative to symbolic interactionism (script theory) and constructionism that I have chosen could be called experiential semiotics.<sup>11</sup> I will draw on the interpretations of Peirce’s thought made by Kirsti Määttänen (Määttänen & Simpura 1998) and Teresa de Lauretis (1984; 1987; 1993). In this view, experience denotes the process by which subjectivity emerges and changes – it is “a complex of meaning effects, habits, dispositions, associations, and perceptions resulting from the semiotic interaction of self and outer world” (de Lauretis 1987, 18).

Linguistic signs are part of experiential semiotics, but they do not constitute its foundations either logically or terminologically. Instead, experiential semiotics

makes a distinction between *three modes of being and experiencing*. Together, the three modes constitute the process of subject-formation. This triadic nature of experience can be traced to the works of Charles Sanders Peirce (1931; 1932). In Peirce's view, "there are three modes of being. (...) They are the being of positive qualitative possibility, the being of actual fact, and the being of law that will govern facts in the future" (1931, 1.23, 7).

Kirsti Määttänen has developed a scheme for analyzing experience which is called the *experiential triad* (Määttänen & Simpura 1998). In my readings of the autobiographies, the triadic scheme is first and foremost used as an *analytic tool*. We could also call it a *working ontology*: for this particular task, the triad provides me with an adequate conception of how things are and especially of how they may change.<sup>12</sup>

C.S. Peirce explained his three modes of being through the categories of firstness, secondness and thirdness (Peirce 1931, 1.23-1.26).<sup>13</sup> His categories are ideal types, but are also accessible through empirical self-observation. Definitions of these categories abound in his work, but may very generally be said to deal with pure *feeling* (firstness), *reaction and action* (secondness), and *interpretation* (thirdness). Firstness is a "positive qualitative possibility", such as a colour or a sound. Secondness refers, by contrast, to "the actuality of an event". It is specified by then and there and involves "all relations to other existents". Thirdness, finally, is a generalization or a rule. (Peirce 1931, 1.23-1.26, 7-8.)

As Määttänen puts it, "the first in the triad is feeling (or infinite series of feelings), which in relation to something else may amount to a sense of action and reaction, which then, in the flow of experience, may be interpreted in some general sense" (Määttänen & Simpura, 1998).

Any particular triad of experience belongs to an embodied subject in a *situation* of activity. For Peirce, the point of departure in every situation is feeling – the sensing body – although he emphasizes that the state of pure feeling is never found in actual social life. Feeling is present in all semiotic activity.<sup>14</sup> Still, the parts of the triad do not create hierarchical levels, but *mutually encompassing* corners.<sup>15</sup> We can talk about different *modes* of experiencing and choose from which angle we approach the semiotic process. For instance, interpretation can be compared with feelings, or with actions.

The experiential subject is not an individual subject in the psychological or psychoanalytical sense. Määttänen and Simpura underscore that a subject is "any collection of individual members united by communality of experience (...), moulded in and by (more or less organized) joint activities and mediated by a

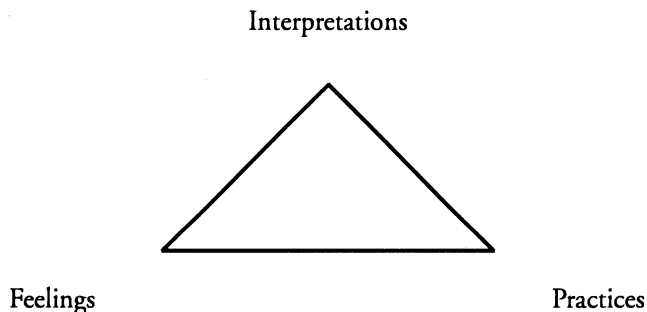
(more or less) shared interpretation and understanding”.<sup>16</sup>

How does the Peircian triad relate to the distinctions between tacit and reflective knowledge discussed in chapter 1? In comparison with the classifications by Giddens (1984, 336), Heiskala (1997)<sup>17</sup> or Simon and Gagnon, the idea of the experiential subject has several advantages. It retains their distinction of three main classes and their respective objects – i.e., Giddens’s distinction between practical and reflective knowledge, Heiskala’s prereflective and reflective levels of articulation, and Simon and Gagnon’s scripts. But the experiential triad understands these levels as co-dependent and integrated in each other.<sup>18</sup>

When we read autobiographies, we have no access to pure feelings but instead to already articulated, mediated experiences. Consequently, it would be more accurate to talk about a second (third, fourth...) degree of feelings and their descriptions. All three modes coexist in actual experiences or memories of sexual encounters. The idea of the distinction is to find developmental dynamics and contradictions, especially in their gendered aspects.<sup>19</sup> For as feminist research has emphasized, women and men participate in the social and semiotic systems in unequal and hierarchical positions. Experience “shifts and is reformed continually, for each subject, with his or her engagement in social reality, a reality that includes – and for women centrally – the social relations of gender” (de Lauretis 1987, 18).

For the purpose of analyzing autobiographies, I will use a simplified application of Peirce’s ideas. I will modify Peirce’s original terminology and talk about *feelings*, *practices* and *interpretations* (see figure 1).

**Figure 1.** The triad of experience in autobiographical analysis  
(modified from Määttänen & Simpura 1998)



### Feelings

The first mode, “*feelings*”, cannot be equated with emotions in the traditional sense. As I will use it, “*feelings*” denote all primary bodily perceptions of a tactile, kinesthetic, visual, or sensual nature.<sup>20</sup> The concept includes part of what is conventionally counted as emotions – fear, shame, joy, curiosity – but also so-called “*vitality affects*”: feelings of movement, touches, and rhythm (Stern 1985). Feelings are a broader concept than emotions – every lived situation has a particular feeling, although one does not necessarily experience any particular emotion. Vitality affects are tactile in the broadest sense of the word, they are the feelings of moving and being moved, looking and being looked at, as experienced with the whole body, like infants do. Such primary feelings are not relegated only to infancy and seen as pathological for adults, as is often the case in psychoanalytically inspired theory.<sup>21</sup>

Määttänen’s example is the feeling of drawing a circle compared to the feeling of drawing a triangle (Määttänen & Simpura 1998). The primacy of feelings is claimed both ontogenetically, in the development of human personality, and for each particular experience.

Feelings are part of social interaction and reflective interpretation, but not necessarily the other way around. Bodily experiences can also be the condition for entering a certain culture, for becoming initiated to certain symbolic contexts. Tatiana Shchepanskaia (1996, 278) has put this well in regard to (Russian) maternity: “The bodily code of maternal culture is completely inaccessible to the uninitiated. Without the corresponding bodily experience, they neither see the signs nor want to see them (...) [The] emotional barrier inhibiting the understanding of the bodily language of maternal culture (...) can be overcome only by personal bodily experience of motherhood (or coming into very close contact with it).”

My emphasis on corporeally grounded experiences is partially a reaction against social constructionism, where all kinds of emotions, gender differences and tastes are seen as ‘constructed’, with ensuing implicit models of causality and metaphors of building, constructing, etc.<sup>22</sup> In experiential semiotics, actions and reflections originate in the feelings that appear in certain biological bodies, certain clothes, certain physical and social settings. The mode of feelings comes close to strictly individual experience and what Rosi Braidotti (1993, 33) calls “the subject’s affirmation of its own existence”. It is the idea of the sensing, suffering body, imagined *without* the perspective provided by social interaction or semiotically organized reflection. In an analogous example, Michel de Certeau (1990, 174) opposes our everyday social habits to seeing the city from a skyscraper, with

a *perspective* on the everyday.

Russian history of ideas has also often emphasized the role of feelings or felt qualities in discourse. For instance, one can think about the *feeling of reading* an autobiography, and knowing that these events really happened, as opposed to reading a novel.<sup>23</sup>

### Practices

The right angle of the triangle denotes *habitual social practices*. It is the level of social action and interaction, of everyday routines and their institutional frameworks. In this work, practices include both the *effects of Soviet social policy* (shared communal apartments, lack of contraceptives) and the *tactics of different social groups* in adopting and modifying given social conditions (fictive marriages, illegal abortions).

The difference in the ways we experience a general law or social practices is well put by C. S. Peirce himself: "A court may issue *injunctions* and *judgments* against me and I not care a snap of my finger for them. I may think them idle vapor. But when I feel the sheriff's hand on my shoulder, I shall begin to have a sense of actuality. Actuality is something *brute*" (Peirce 1931, 1.24, p. 7).

Together, the modes of feelings and social practices correspond to what has been called the "pre-reflective" (Heiskala) or "tacit" (Giddens) features of the everyday. Also in Susan Bordo's (1993) definition, normative institutionalization encompasses both the bottom angles – feelings and social practices – of the experiential triad. I prefer to put feelings separately from practices because individuals function in different ways even though engaged in the same institutionalized practices. Neither is sexuality conditioned only by social practices, but also by biological and physiological processes, which are here encompassed by the notion of firstness and feelings.

### Interpretations

*Interpretation* is the mode of experience in which general, culturally established meanings become significant for the subject. Embodied actions become symbolized and immersed in meaning. In various situations of activity, human beings react to and adopt various interpretations from the spectrum which is available in their culture. If the whole triad stands for subjectivity, interpretations stands for articulated identities.<sup>24</sup>

Thus interpretation is the place for social *identities*. For instance, the same sexual practices may be interpreted in radically different ways depending on the cul-

ture and time in question. One characteristic of sexuality is precisely that similar practices may be subjected to a vast array of interpretations. With other social phenomena, such as eating, it may be the other way around – practices differ drastically, but interpretations are quite similar (Bozon 1999).<sup>25</sup> This interaction between the first and third (feeling and interpretation) modes of experience leads to the questions of discursive consent and consent in action discussed in chapter 10.

The mode of interpretations also includes the *norms* and *normative expectations* that regulate practices. These should not be equated with official Soviet ideology. When I describe “the norm of early marriage” in chapter 4, it is not so much a question of an explicit norm of Soviet ideology, but rather of a behavioural pattern acquiring its strength from social constraints and routines as well as from official and lay gender ideology. The type of everyday morality described in the previous chapter – practices that are generally approved of if not openly supported – takes place in the interaction between social practices and interpretations, on the right side of the triad.

When Peirce discussed the processing of knowledge, he stressed that all three modes of experience must be present: “In all action governed by reason genuine triplicity will be found” (1931, 2.86, 49). A full sign builds on feeling, reaction, and interpretation. For instance, the leitmotifs in sexual autobiographies described above could be further divided according to which mode of experience was presented. A “lamenting” text can emphasise the mode of feelings and describe loneliness, humiliation, physical pain and crying. But it can also emphasise the mode of interpretations by noting the reasons and consequences for the miserable situation. The stories about search for love and pleasure varied in a similar way between various modes of experience, while the leitmotif of identity quests always featured strong interpretations.

In de Lauretis’s reading of Peirce, the three modes may also interact to produce a *habit-change*. The chain of experiencing and signification may come to a (temporary) halt: this happens when a so-called final interpretant affects perceptions and behaviour. In that case, experiences have moved one ‘round’ on the triad (feelings-practices-interpretation) and the subject starts acting differently, transforming both itself and its situation. In this way interpretation may alter practices and eventually even feelings. Such an overall change is referred to as a *habit change* (cf. de Lauretis 1984; 1994). For instance, writing one’s autobiography may change the way one evaluates the events in life, and this change in interpretations may eventually even change one’s feelings.

## *An example – Viktoria's two introductions*

My use of the experiential subject can be clarified in a short example.

Viktoria (No. 5) was born in 1937 and spent the war years in Siberia, where her father worked as an engineer and her mother took care of their – for those times exceptionally large – family of seven children. Viktoria's autobiography has two parts: the first resembles an official *curriculum vitae*, the second is her sexual autobiography proper. The first part consists of two pages where she describes the general outlines of her life with corresponding years and titles: where they lived in her childhood; how she chose her professional field after a visit to a factory and how she stuck to her choice against the advice of her relatives; how she eventually succeeded in achieving high professional positions without succumbing to the sexual advances from her male colleagues and supervisors; how she had three daughters with two men, both of whom she eventually divorced. The second, longer and main part of Viktoria's autobiography is her sexual biography and as she expresses it, the explanation for the failure of her "family career".

In the very first paragraph of Viktoria's first ('official') part there is, however, one single intensely physical memory, an experience referring to the tactile mode of feelings.

*My father was working in the forest and our family basically lived in the forest. In childhood I had to do with nature and animals. I knew the Siberian taiga very well, and I was never afraid to walk far away together with the cow that I was taking care of every summer. (Viktoria)*

By contrast, the second ('private') part of Viktoria's autobiography begins with another physical memory from about the same time, perhaps a little earlier.

*I was six years old when I first felt sexually aroused. I have remembered that night for my whole life. It was in 1942, while my family was living in Siberia. I can still not understand why I was sleeping that night in my parents' bedroom. At night I was awakened from something incomprehensible happening to me, the lower stomach was literally boiling, but it was a very pleasant feeling, and suddenly I heard the faster breathing of my parents and the sound of movements. I understood that was what had awakened me, it felt so pleasant and scary (*tak mne priiatno i strashno*). (...) I grew up and was extremely scared of it all [overhearing the parents making love – AR], I tried to avoid such things and when I turned sixteen I left home never to return again. (Viktoria)*

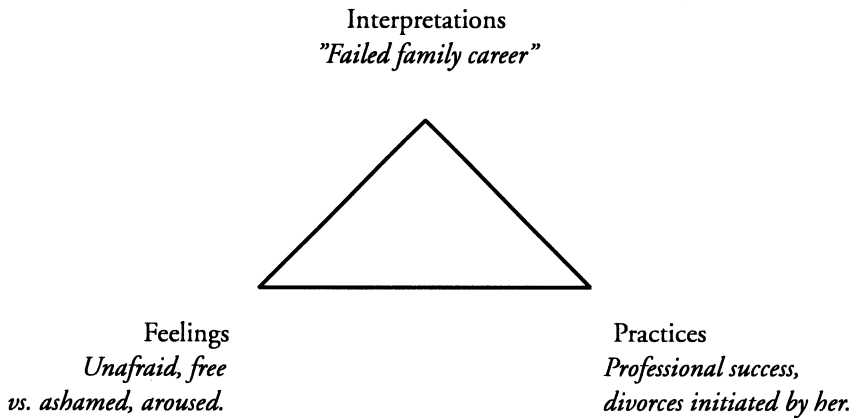
We get two different pictures: one of the girl on the *taiga*, at ease and “never afraid”, the other of the girl in the crowded bedroom, aroused but ashamed – with the shame dominating her sexual life for many years to come. It is between these two pictures of her self that Viktoria writes her autobiography. On the one hand the independent, competent Soviet career woman, on the other hand the lonely, insecure woman who suffered from overhearing her parents making love and does everything to avoid repeating that experience with her own daughters.

I will deal more with Viktoria’s story in chapter 4. For now, we can take the two basic images as examples of feelings (see figure 2). At least a Nordic reader can easily add what Viktoria did not tell about the *taiga* – we imagine wind, smell of pines, unending skies, her following the cow. The sexual feelings of the bedroom are also presented as rich, enigmatic, and surprising, something she tried to make sense of for decades to come. These were overwhelming, surprising sensory experiences that were not part of her reflective self at the time.

Interpreting feelings is harder because of the institutionalized practices surrounding Viktoria. Once, when she was an adult divorcée, her mother commented about how she “*cannot seem to be able to arrange her family life*”. That made Viktoria confront her mother for the first time, angrily answering that “*you shouldn’t have made me listen to the two of you in bed!*”. According to Viktoria, the mother reacted with complete silence. Discussing sex was a taboo, at the same time as making love near other family members was, by necessity, a frequent Soviet practice. Contrary to many other autobiographies, Viktoria does not articulate any solution to her problems or provide the reader with a final interpretation or a new identity. Throughout her autobiography, she remains ambivalent about her amorous and sexual experiences. For instance, she claims one should avoid divorce at all costs, after earlier having described how wonderful she felt each time she had walked out from an unsatisfactory relationship. The autobiography reads like a mostly unresolved collision between feelings, possible practices and reflective interpretation. It is an example of how statements that are often labelled ‘traditional’ (divorce is a failure, children should not be told about sex) appear totally different when seen through the chronological and many-layered perspective of an autobiography.



*Figure 2. Adapting the triad of experience – the case of Viktoria*



Of course, several differing triads could be drawn on the basis of Viktoria's account. The aim of the schematization is not to tell the "inner truth" about her autobiography, much less about the author herself. Instead, the autobiographical quotations are used as a basis for formulating and exemplifying tensions and issues I found important. It was often the case that a triadic division of the experiences rendered in the text provided me with the clue by pointing to a discrepancy or a missing link that helped me make sense of what I was reading. Especially the search for descriptions of feelings helped me localise key moments in the autobiographies. Such descriptions of sensory perception, taste, intense emotion, movements, etc., did not occur often in any one text, and were totally absent from some texts.

In what follows, I will either simply refer to the relations between various modes of experience with words, or, occasionally, draw triadic schemes in order to condense my argumentation and show the reader how I have analyzed the excerpts from the autobiographies. Also, different parts of the work emphasise different parts of the triad of experience: for instance, part I mostly deals with everyday morality in the tension between practices and interpretations, chapter 6 with explicit sexual knowledge and thus the mode of reflective interpretation, while chapter 9 discusses the tensions between feelings and interpretations.

1. For the convenience of Western readers I have not used patronyms in the pseudonyms. I hope this does not suggest lack of respect for the members of the older generation.
2. They include the corpus of Russian family histories collected in the project led by Daniel Bertaux from Centre Nationale de Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Paris in collaboration with the Institute of Sociology in Moscow (Semyonova et al. 1996) and a collection of Russian women's oral histories (Engel & Posadskaya-Vanderbeck 1998).
3. In comparison with the whole population of St. Petersburg aged 18-74 years, the persons who chose to participate in the autobiographical competition were on average five years older (47 vs. 42 years), more educated (57 vs. 40 percent had finished college or high school) and less likely to be married (39 vs. 57 per cent) (Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch 1999).
4. The term "New Russians", *novye russkie*, is used for those who made fortunes during the transition to capitalism in the 1980s and 1990s. The word is also connected to a fashionable lifestyle and a neo-liberal ideology. Thus the part of the old Soviet nomenklatura that also became wealthy during the privatization process, e.g. former Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, does not really count as New Russians. The image of the New Russian is generally, if not exclusively, male. See chapter 10.
5. "Parallel sexual relations" is the term for having one or several other sexual relationships while in a steady relationship. Sometimes I will also refer to such relations as extramarital relationships.
6. In order to protect the anonymity of the authors, I have avoided giving the exact occupations in the List of autobiographies. In the text, the occupations sometimes figure ('engineer', 'kindergarten teacher'), sometimes not.
7. Most of the autobiographies Fitzpatrick refers to were unsolicited published memoirs and diaries, but some of them were gathered as oral histories.
8. Other, obvious classifications concern literary language vs. less formal writing that is closer to speech in vocabulary and structure. Most of the autobiographies from Petersburg are well and coherently written. Many had attached or incorporated poems (much more than in Finland, where poetry is not a national passion in the way it is in Russia). The *rhetorical devices and language* used in the autobiographies in reference to sexuality would deserve a separate linguistic study. I am not able to provide that, although the wording and style will occasionally be taken into account in the analyses presented in the following chapters.
9. In European cultures, sexuality is usually described in non-specific terms – everyday verbs and nouns which may be used with a sexual connotation (such as 'take', 'make' or 'stick') (Bozon 1999, 5). The use of the special terminology that is typical of sexual memoirs is thus an exception.
10. Teresa de Lauretis (1984) was an early critic of this tendency in the semiotics of Umberto Eco and Julia Kristeva. In the 1990s Kristeva herself criticized her earlier neglect of (non-linguistic) experience (Kristeva 1996).
11. Experiential semiotics draws on several intellectual traditions, such as the pragmatism of the American philosopher C. S. Peirce, the developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky and the Russian school of activity theory inspired by him, and (to a lesser degree) the philosophical phenomenology of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1900-1964). I am not able here to make a proper conceptual comparison of these traditions. Their crucial unifying trait is that they all provide alternatives to a narrowly linguistic view of human activity and sexual behaviour.
12. Working ontology is my translation of the concept *rabochaiia ontologiia* used in Russian activity theory (P. Shchedrovitskii 1991).
13. The experiential triad developed by Kirsti Määttä bears some resemblance to Lev Vygotsky's scheme of the mediated organization of human activity, as it was developed in the 1920s and has been used in Soviet and Western activity theory (P. Shchedrovitskii 1987; Vartiainen 1996). Vygotsky's triangle is usually presented as consisting of subject, object and symbolical tool. It has been interpreted as emphasising the structuring role of mental tools (languages, mnemonic de-

- vices, basic conceptual schemes, strategic visions) in human activity. Some Russian activity theorists, among them G.P. and P.G. Shchedrovitsky, have stressed that the subject of activity is not merely one corner of the triangle, but the whole triangle 'subject-tool-object'.
14. As Kirsti Määttänen has stressed, firstness is omitted from most interpretations of Peirce's work. See also de Lauretis (1984) for a critique of how Umberto Eco discards firstness and the bodily from the field of semiotics.
  15. "Mutually encompassing" is my translation of the word *vzaimopoglashaiushchii*, a term used in Russian activity theory.
  16. Määttänen and Simpura further explain that a "certain degree of communality of experience provides a basis for a certain degree of mutual understanding, which may become explicit in discourse and remains implicit in the rule-governed nature of everyday activities (...). The very basis of this mutual understanding is grounded on such self-evident and omnipresent qualities of feeling as, for example, the feeling accompanying the experience of drawing a circle, as distinct from that of drawing a rectangle" (Määttänen & Simpura 1998, 20).
  17. Neo-structuralist theory as elaborated by Risto Heiskala (1997) describes *pre-reflective levels of articulation*, which are also seen as grounding the reflective and constitutive levels of articulation. I object to Heiskala's use of the term "pre-reflective", which puts reflective knowledge as the point of reference. Especially when discussing sexual experiences it seems out of place to call intense and confusing bodily sensations "pre-reflective", as if they were only waiting to be semiotically reflected upon.
  18. The earlier mentioned relationship between speech, inner speech and language may for example be understood as a Peircian-Vygotskian triad. There abstract thought would take the place of firstness, speech would replace secondness, or action and reaction, and language would represent thirdness, i.e. the established and culturally transmitted level of the process. Note that the definitions of 'speech' and 'language' here do not exclude the languages of gestures, mathematics, etc.
  19. In a similar spirit, Susan Bordo (1993) talks about "normative institutionalization of practices" and stresses that such practices – the ways in which time, space and bodily movements influence people's everyday lives – precede thought and "ideology".
  20. While Peirce grounds his theory of knowledge formation in "feelings", little has been said about Vygotsky's attitude to primary perceptions and corporeality. A child of his modernist times, Vygotsky certainly concentrated on the higher mental functions and saw children and primates as in this sense deficient creatures. On the other hand, Vygotsky's cognitivism does not a priori exclude bodily sensations or emotions. A typical approach by Vygotsky is provided in his famous lecture about the role of play in child development (1933/1966). First, he discards the approach that would see play as basically a pleasure-oriented activity. There are no references, but the Freudian view of child behaviour is certainly not far away. But Vygotsky refuses to do away with feelings altogether. "Still it seems to me, that to discard the approach to the question of play from the point of view of how the child's need are realized, how he is incited to act, and his affective aspirations – would mean a terrible intellectualization of play. The problem of a whole range of theories is some kind of intellectualization of this problem" (Vygotskii 1966, 62). After this he further adds that this is the problem of many developmental theories. Vygotsky's work has also inspired many studies on creativity and spontaneity. I have nevertheless chosen to base my analytical tool on C.S. Peirce's thought because of the explicit and important place he gives to feeling.
  21. For instance, Julia Kristeva's notion of the semiotic as the presymbolic, maternal, pulsating realm is close to Daniel Stern's notion (1985) of "vitality affects". But Kristeva sees culture as per definition excluding and suppressing the semiotic, while Stern rather understands it as an integrated, even if a little neglected, side of everyday activity.
  22. This criticism of the metaphoric language of constructionism is made in Heinämaa (1996).

23. The Soviet literary critic Lydia Ginzburg stressed that what she called documentary literature, which included autobiographical writings, always provokes “a dual cognitive response and a dual emotional experience because a feeling for the authenticity of the events of actual life is provided that no form of art can reproduce” (Ginzburg, quoted in Harris 1990, 22). Needless to say, fictional works also produce feelings, but autobiographies are accompanied (both when writing and reading them) by a feeling of their own. This “dual cognitive response and emotional experience” is felt in the stomach when one watches a movie and wonders if it *really* was based on actual events, or if one reads an autobiography and suddenly for some reason begins to wonder if it might be ‘made up’. In both cases, the answer to this question will crucially influence one’s overall perception of the work in question. Ginzburg’s thesis is sustained by the feeling for the “authenticity of events” that is often reported to be the criteria of judges of autobiographical competitions – criteria that cannot be written down or detailed but which are nevertheless referred to when discussing the contributions. Of course, different readers feel different texts as ‘authentic’, but authenticity – together with a coherent but not too ‘literary’ style – is generally understood and accepted as a legitimate value.
24. Suvi Ronkainen has made this distinction between identities and subjectivities. As she puts it, identity offers experiences of “the embodied subject of being abandoned, affirmed, rejected or lured by the identities she or he has been offered and which she has striven for” (Ronkainen 1999, 65). Laurie Essig (1999a; 199b) similarly found “queer subjectivities”, but not “homosexual identities” in Russia (see chapter 9).
25. In Russia, for instance, a woman living with a woman she loves may identify herself as a “*natural’ka*”, or a heterosexual woman, her female partner as a “normal man”, and both of them may detest “lesbians” (Essig 1999a, 78).



# Part I



*Ne strast', a bol'*  
*opredeleyaet pol*  
(Not desire, but pain  
defines sex)  
Joseph Brodsky

## The Life Course of the Soviet Family

"The Soviet family remains a particular enigma", Gail W. Lapidus pointed out in her seminal work on women in Soviet society (1978, 235), suggesting that "the social history of the Soviet family in all its social and cultural diversity" should be the subject of future research.

To the extent that we can talk about one general Soviet pattern of family life, transcending class, it is characterized by the socio-economic pattern of *wage-working mothers* and the socio-cultural pattern of *extended mothering*. Part I explores these *common denominators* of Soviet family life in order to provide a basis for discussing the social differences in family and sexual cultures that will be the subject of part II.

Part I depicts Soviet everyday morality: the typical and acceptable, although not always desired, paths of the Soviet love and family life course. As the quote by Brodsky suggests, it is a picture with much pain and disappointment. It also points to a view of sexual difference not based on desire, but on (the pains of) motherhood. Chapter 3 describes the love relationships in youth and early adulthood. Chapter 4 continues with the paradoxical frailty of the Soviet marriage institution. Chapter 5 analyses the cross-generational ties that create the pattern of extended mothering. It then summarizes the gendered aspects of Soviet everyday morality through the notion of gender conventionalism.



## 3 Growing Up with the Norm

*My biography contains both sex and love. I'm an ordinary woman – a 'variation of the norm'. I have sinned, repented, loved and given birth. (Ja obychnaia zhen-shchina – 'variant normy'. Greshila, kaialas', liubila, rozhala.) (Nina, b. 1958, No. 17)*

This is how a young woman we shall call Nina ended her autobiography, the title of which is also “A variation of the norm” (*Variant normy*). Viktoria, the retired chief engineer presented in the previous chapter, wrote in the introduction of her autobiography:

*My family career has failed. (...) I am very happy – I have wonderful children and grandchildren – and I am very lonely. (Viktoria, b. 1936, No. 5)*

In what respects did the lives of these women vary from the Soviet “norm”, the “family career”? This chapter will begin a discussion of what the autobiographers meant by being an “ordinary” Soviet woman or man and having normal or successful love affairs. It looks at the differences between the normative Soviet family ideals and everyday morality: how the average, urban Soviet life course was actually lived out and evaluated in the autobiographies at hand, beginning with initial platonic admiration and dating.

### 3.1 ROMANTIC COURTSHIP

One of the constant tensions in the autobiographical accounts in my material is that between non-sexual love and sexual desire. These two magnetic poles of So-

viet love life were, not surprisingly, especially felt in the descriptions of the first great love. Attitudes towards young people's dating were quite similar both in official Soviet ideology and in everyday morality. They were stricter in Soviet Russia than in most Western European countries. The average Soviet life course also provided with a comparatively short time for such premarital dating.<sup>1</sup>

Most autobiographers presented their first teenager love as a platonic, "pure", young love.<sup>2</sup> This ideal is summarized by the notion of *romantic courtship*. Romantic courtship was propagated in Soviet education and popular films and widely embraced in Soviet society: it was described in the courtship of young people in the villages in the 1930s, in autobiographies from poor working milieus of the 1950s as well as from intellectual circles of the 1960s; and the very same chivalrous manners were, for instance, taught in elementary schools as late as in the 1980s (Chistiakova 1998, 38; Attwood 1990). The rituals of *ukhazhyvaniia* or romantic courtship included the man bringing flowers, being polite, buying chocolate or (for young adults) cigarettes, carrying bags, taking the girl for a walk or to an ice-cream bar or to the movies, after which he was obliged to accompany her home, etc.<sup>3</sup>

The specifically Soviet Russian flavour of these practices was in my opinion tied to two factors: their celebrated *asexuality* or anti-'sensuality' and their indebtedness to the Soviet behavioural code of *kul'turnost'*. First, the descriptions of ideal young love emphasise their purity and lack of sensuality. It is love before or above sex, a comradesly love that can easily be accommodated in the collective. The Soviet norm for both sexes, but especially for women, was to avoid premarital sex or at least marry the partner of the first sexual intercourse. Over half of the autobiographies by persons who did marry had followed this pattern (ten of nineteen women and nine of sixteen men). Even in one of the most marginal and promiscuous life stories, that of a taxi driver from a very poor working background, his future wife preserved her virginity until the wedding night.<sup>4</sup>

Viktoria described her "pure relationship" with her first boyfriend:

*I had little to do with the boys of my age, I got a friend when I was 14, he was three years older. We had a pure relationship, this suited me well. (Viktoria, b. 1936, No. 5)*

This purity, and thus the relationship, was destroyed after their first kiss:

*Once he tried to kiss me, I did not feel anything, and suddenly he started to caress my legs above the knees. I was so insulted by this that we parted forever, although he loved me very much and, as later became clear, still loves me. I have remembered him my whole life. (Viktoria)*

Later Viktoria accepted significantly worse assaults on her physical integrity. The nostalgia for her first romance is probably retrospectively accentuated by her problematic first marriage. Nevertheless, the quote accurately reflects the dominant ideal of suitable relations for young people. The word Viktoria used for “dating” was the common expression “being friends”, *druzhit’*.<sup>5</sup> The second frequent expression is to court somebody, *uchazhivat’ za kogo-to*, where the agent is conventionally male. Viktoria could of course also have talked about “love” or “loving” (*lyubov’* and *lyubit’*). But instead, she emphasized the purity of her relation in what can be seen as a typical description of a spiritual friendship.<sup>6</sup>

Second, the signs of male respect and attention in a romantic courtship were part of the behavioural codes of any Soviet *kul’turnyi chelovek* or civilized and educated person. The term and standards of *kul’turnost’* were elaborated and disseminated in the 1930s as part of the programme of teaching Soviet citizens an urban – and what we would now call middle-class – lifestyle (Dunham 1976; cf. chapter 1). In the post-war period it had become part of general and basically unquestioned social rules. The romanticism and luxury connected with *kul’turnost’* was often built on pre-Revolutionary Russian high culture. It included, for instance, some specific goods produced and democratically distributed all over the country, such as champagne and chocolate (Gronow 1997). It also included ice cream bars, carnations and the mimosa flowers for Women’s Day (March 8th). Another ingredient was mastering a certain selection of cultural classics in music, literature and the arts, basically from canonized versions of 19th century Russian or Western European artists. Yet another ingredient was male polite behaviour. For instance, curse words or the language of *mat* were especially kept from the ears of middle-class women or foreigners.<sup>7</sup>

### *The first love of ‘Softhands’*

One of the most touching descriptions of young love was written by a man, who wished to be referred to by the pseudonym “Softhands” (*Miagkholapov*). The story of Softhands’ first love at the age of thirteen takes up the major part of his autobiography. I will look at it in detail, as it reveals the tension between practices, feeling and interpretations that is created by the ideal of elevated love.

*Her name was Lyuda S. In our love – the love of a sixth-grader and a sixth-grader – everything matched our age: nothing sensual (*chuvstvennogo*) or “indecent” (*poshloe*), as it was then called. This love was as pure, as we were pure and inno-*

*cent ourselves. It was love at first sight. Once during class, as I accidentally looked at Lyuda and noticed how she suddenly blushed, lowered her gaze and turned away. I understood that I am in love and that I am loved. And that besides that, I need absolutely nothing, that nobody else is existing for me. In a word, I fell head over heels in love.* ('Softhands', skilled male worker, b. 1944, No. 35)

The first real love was presented as “matching their age” and “as pure and innocent as ourselves”. Interestingly, the author introduced this central part of his autobiography by telling us about how he, at the age of 13, experienced two important events that influenced his consciousness (*samosoznanie*) of being a man. The second event was falling in love with Lyuda. But it had chronologically been preceded by his first nightly wet dream. He took his biological maturation “relatively calmly” and felt that it made him “a normal guy, not worse than the others”. But Softhands emphasized that he did not, at the time, have any “sensual’ or adult” interest in the female sex. In his view of sexuality, there was a clear divide between the asexual child and the “sensual”, sexual adult.

Softhands further emphasized that his love was not based on physical attraction:

*It is hard to say what I specifically saw in Lyuda, and it seems to me both unnecessary and impossible to explain. She looked ordinary (to everybody except, of course, to me). She was quite short, fair, with thick braids. She had such severe eyes that when she was looking at me I always felt that I was guilty of something before her. That gaze reproached me. Other maidenly delights were not familiar to me at that time, I was not interested in them, and I always immediately quit the conversation if somebody of the boys started to discuss the physical assets of the girls in our class. On the contrary, precisely in the moments when I could have studied Lyuda's figure, had I wished to do so – during the gym lessons (like some of the other boys did) – I tried not to look in her direction. I could not overcome that confusion of mine. She, it seemed to me, was also shy of looking at me, exposed as I was in only sport shorts and a T-shirt.<sup>8</sup> ('Softhands')*

On the other hand, “sensual” relations were not only a question of wanting, but also of daring:

*During the whole, almost two year long story of our love, I only dared about three times to take her hand for a short moment, and afterwards I was crazy with joy for a week. Otherwise we were content with what usually is a testimony of love in that age – looks, sighs, small notes, exchanging various insignificant things such as pens, rulers and such nonsense. True, I also had the almost generally acknowledged privilege of carrying the school bag of my beloved. ('Softhands')*

Carrying the schoolbag was, we are explained, “*a certain sign that the heart of the woman was conquered*”. It was accepted courtship, while direct touching was remembered as something as exceptional, as overwhelming. After telling this, the author again underscored that Lyuda and he were content with silent and distant signs of love. What, then, made the touching so daring? Softhands’ story gave two clear indications of how the young lovers, however innocent they were, actually provoked the social control of his family and at school.

Once, one of Lyuda’s girlfriends helped the shy couple to arrange a date. The three of them met a Sunday at noon and walked along the Neva river. The boy was thinking that this event signified that they would later marry. He was very nervous, and very happy. But passing under the window of his own apartment, the boy thought he noticed his mother in the window and became anxious and embarrassed. He had not told the mother anything about the date, and her standard warning used to be: “If the kids are playing love, you better skip it!” As a result, although the other girl had finally left Lyuda and the boy on their own, he ended their walk and hurriedly, without any explanation, accompanied Lyuda to her home door.

→ The second time the social norms were challenged constituted the highlight of this romance. The boy participated in a pioneer meeting on the occasion of Lenin’s birthday in April. A seventh-grader now, his task was to welcome the new pioneer members from the third class by tying the red pioneer scarf around their neck. But because of a school scandal the last year, when Lyuda was caught for having stolen the teacher’s diary with grades, Lyuda had been excluded from the pioneer organization.<sup>9</sup> In the spring, she had behaved well enough to be accepted again. Thus she was, to Softhands’ immense surprise, present at the occasion.

*That was when I saw my Lyuda among those who were being admitted! It seems they had decided to take her back as a pioneer, and now she got her scarf tied together with the third-graders. She was quite short and did not stand out from the small ones. When, after the Solemn Vow,<sup>10</sup> our line moved towards the line of entering pioneers, I realized I was just opposite Lyuda. I will never know whether it was a coincidence or if the comrades had tried to arrange it, knowing about our love (that we did not try to hide). I took the scarf from Lyuda’s hands and went behind her. Then I had to gather all my willpower, because in order to tie the scarf around her neck I had to (horrible thought!) raise the small collar of her semitransparent white pullover. I had never touched her so directly, I had never been so close to her. I bent towards Lyuda and felt the scent of her hair. Never have I experienced such a divine feeling, not before nor afterwards, not even as an already grown-up, experienced and family man. While I was tying the scarf on Lyuda, I could feel she was all trembling, that she was shaking, and she*

*became pale. And when I had finished and went in front of her again to adjust the knot, I noticed that her eyes were full of tears. It happens that way when you accidentally pour too much in a glass of water, but not excessively – the water comes over the brim but is not yet flowing over. That was how it was here. I adjusted the knot as tenderly as I could and our eyes met. I felt that I could not simply walk away and leave this girl who was standing before me, trembling, and whose eyes had just flown over with tears that were streaming along her cheeks. Her enormous blue eyes had lost all their usual severity, they were looking only at me. In that moment nothing else, except Lyuda, existed for me. ('Softhands')*

Looking around, Softhands noticed how one of the girls from his class, having adjusted the scarf of a small girl, gave her a loud kiss on the cheek. The kissing looked like a “normal and even logical” end of the ritual.

*Then I knew what I would do. The Rubicon was instantly crossed, I could not and would not retreat. I put my hands on Lyuda's shoulders, which was fully acceptable due to our difference in height, and it was as if I would have embraced her (*ia kak budio ee obnyal*). Then I bent over the girl and let my lips touch the corner of her mouth. I thought I would kiss her on the cheek, but in the last second she must have understood everything and helped me. Her lips were not answering me, they were simply very soft, tender and compliant. They submitted to my lips completely, like they would have surrendered to me. Lyuda stood dead still. Of course the kiss lasted just a moment, but it was the first! Although everybody in the hall saw what had happened, and those who did not see it for themselves were told afterwards, but after that day nobody ever reminded me of that kiss. Not the teacher, not the pioneer leader, not my class comrades, not Lyuda herself. Were its sensations not so strong and overwhelming, I could think I had dreamt it. ('Softhands')*

The following year, the love story faded out as the boy went to a vocational school while Lyuda continued in 8th grade. Two years later, he was told that she had died the summer before her tenth and final year at school. He never learned the details of her death, nor where she was buried. Softhands wrote that for 25 years, he avoided Lyuda's house, like if through some mystical notion of wanting to leave her memory in peace. But for the last ten years, he had brought flowers to Lyuda's former front door each year on her birthday.

*Of course, after so many years, when I have already known enough of all kinds of love situations – both mutual love and unanswered love for me, as well as family happiness, – one could calmly discuss how the first love is no love but a 'holy devotion', and that generally it is just nonsense and pampering. But I cannot forget that 'nonsense' (*erunda*) and that really holy devotion. It was in that moment I experienced the purest and brightest feeling of my life. Perhaps that feeling keeps pushing me every year to the familiar front door? ('Softhands')*

## *Playing love*

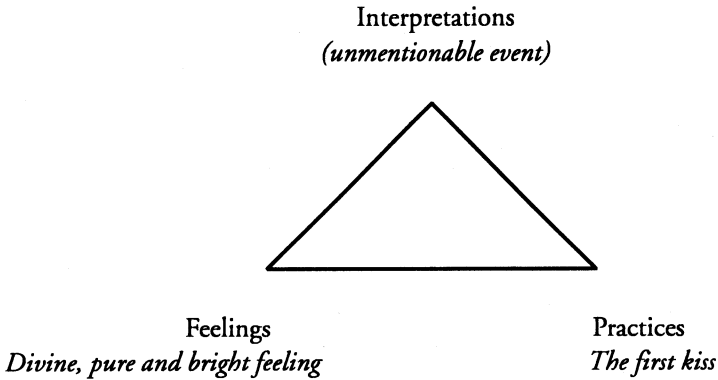
Softhands' autobiography stresses the purity, holiness and properness of his first love. His account apparently corresponds to the ideal of young love as a platonic friendship that is not hid from but approved by the collective (here represented by the class and the school's pioneer organization). The boy was not interested in the girl's body, not even in her appearance, but emphasized that she probably looked beautiful and special only in his eyes. He had the most serious intentions and understood the relationship as one of lasting, devoted love that would lead to marriage. His stated norms and the Soviet social conventions appeared to be very close, if not overlapping ideals. Love mainly manifested itself in some of the rare 'privatized' areas of school life – such as the boy's privilege of always carrying the girl's school bag. The boy was cautious so as not to be caught "playing love" with girls after school.

However, a closer reading shows a clear opposition between the boy's (and the girl's) sensations and the surrounding social practices.

Once, when the boy was admiring a girl named Ira, he once almost accidentally managed to grab her by the legs as she was fooling around by hanging between two desks during the break. Their eyes met. He thought the girl teased and tested him, to see what he would do and where he would stop: *"But I was raised to respect girls and would have felt ashamed of myself; had I not let go of Ira's feet, which I also immediately did."* The moment was lost, but it had made him aware of his manhood: *"My unanswered love for Ira helped me to feel for the first time as a representative for the male part of mankind, clearly delimited from the other, female half."*

After these and other occasions of physical hesitation, the tying of Lyuda's pioneer scarf became the key event, the "crossing of the Rubicon". The boy dared to kiss his beloved, and this happened during the most important of all pioneer rituals. The account is not about being afraid what the girl would say – on the contrary, she instinctively understood and helped him – but about making the first kiss a seemingly "normal and logical" accomplishment of the school ritual. It *looked* like he would have (comradely) embraced her, and the embrace was conceivable only because they were not of equal height. The boy aimed at her cheek, but touched the corner of her mouth.

*Figure 3. Playing love – the tensions of romantic courtship in Softhands' case*



Softhands' memory crystallises the tensions of romantic courtship (see figure 3). What the two young lovers did was what the boy's mother had literally forbidden him to do: *playing* love. In Lev Vygotsky's (1933/1966) view, playing (*igra*) involves a tension between the concrete, visible situation and the meanings attached to it. Playing begins when the concrete situation is separated from the meanings assigned to it. The player is not directed by the concrete situation, but starts acting independently of what he sees. In that way, play is a 'negative' image of reality, overturning the usual relationship between social reality and meanings. For the young boy, crossing the Rubicon was not so much about daring to make the first kiss as it was about redefining the concrete, social situation they were participating in. The social and the personal situations overlapped, and the task was to follow the rules of the social game but achieve personal aims. The youngsters succeeded in their double play: although the boy was sure everybody at school had heard about the kiss, he could not be reproached for it. On the contrary, the whole event was never mentioned openly, not even between the lovers themselves.

The intensity of this particular memoir, the tying of the scarf, seems to stem from two circumstances. First, as Vygotsky (1966) also notes, the function of the rules of a game is to intensify pleasure by postponing it. The player learns to substitute immediate emotional satisfaction for the even stronger emotional satisfaction of winning in a game. The kissing of the two pioneers is an obvious example of sexuality made possible and intensified by formal procedures and prohibitions. Softhands thought no adult experiences of allowed relations would equal his first,



public, kiss. It was a divine, bright and pure feeling.

Second, the incident transgressed social norms in the sense that it remains unarticulated – it could not be criticized or openly referred to. What Softhands did had no place in the conceptions of young Soviet love, whether voiced by official ideology or by his own, stated values. ‘Playing love’ by pioneer rules provided a dizzying feeling of freedom. The shy and obedient boy was free to act, he was able to “define his actions originating from his I” and not the usually surrounding social conventions (Vygotskii 1966, 76). Lyuda was also transformed – her severe gaze, which during usual school days made him feel guilty before her (but guilty of what? daring too little, or longing too much?), melted into a pair of enormous, tearful, silently waiting eyes. We are told how she was seeing only him, he existed only for her, and how her soft lips surrendered completely to his. In the midst of a pioneer ritual – the very moment of creating, sustaining and reproducing the political collective – two teenagers became closer to and more exclusively possessive of each other than ever before, or after.

But the freedom in play is partly illusionary (Vygotskii 1966, 74). The player’s actions are still defined and directed by a certain – if redefined, and overturned – meaning. In Softhand’s case, he became free to *give* the kiss, transcending habitual *practice*. He managed, in one unforgettable moment, to create his own game, master the social rules, and thus to be free to act differently. But neither the boy nor the adult narrator took the freedom to redefine the meaning or *interpretation* of the kiss. In playing young love, Softhands did not skip or explicitly challenge the rules. In Softhands’ view, his and Lyuda’s love was never “sensual”. In my own and, I suspect, many other people’s readings, this love story was on the contrary sensual in a palpable, beautiful and literal way.

### 3.2 DATING AND SINNING – THE AMBIVALENCE OF SEXUAL NORMS

#### *The moral grey zone*

If it was hard to reflect about your first kiss, as in Softhands’ story, the problems did not diminish as the sexual explorations expanded. The general trend in Russia was, just like in other industrialized countries, towards earlier sex and more pre-marital relations (Jones & Grupp 1987; Kon 1995). As in other countries, the

youth of big cities had more permissive attitudes than those from smaller provincial towns or the countryside (Golod 1996, 45-57). But this social development remained in direct contrast to prevailing social norms, creating what I will depict as a *moral grey zone* of dating and sinning.

The question of premarital sex is described in a typical manner in the autobiography of a man, born in 1932. He was working in a small town and dated his first wife for a year. Eventually, this couple entered a short and unhappy marriage, as the author explained it because of spare living space and his “*heightened sexuality*”:

*I went walking with her, visited her, but we did not have sex as there had not yet been any wedding. Before that we kissed and practised petting. By ‘we practised’ I mean one side – mine. She was too shy for that, raised in the ‘best traditions’ of Russian provincial petty bourgeoisie.*<sup>11</sup> (Man, higher education, b. 1932, No. 29)

Viktorina (No. 5) similarly referred to her upbringing as the reason she wanted to avoid premarital sex: “*I read very much, basically the classics, and I was raised on classical literature. In my understanding only my husband could touch me.*” Neither did she in any way enjoy her boyfriend’s sexual advances. The situation is brought to a critical stage when the boyfriend cruelly deceived her:

*The first time I received a real kiss was from my future husband when I was 17 years old, and he was 25.*

*I was terribly scared by that kiss, but not the least aroused. He was a very experienced man who kissed and caressed me often, he became aroused, but I did not let him come close before the wedding. Once he resorted to a trick – got me drunk (I did not drink at all) and took me in an unconscious state, I came to my senses from my own terrible screams.*

*I understood what had happened, it was a tragedy, he tried to calm me as much as he could and did not touch me any more before the wedding.* (Viktorina, b. 1936, No. 5)

In the oldest generation the exceptions to the norm – premarital sex long before marriage – are evaluated very differently in male and female autobiographies. Early sex was tied to occasional but happy encounters in the men’s stories, but with violence and betrayal in the accounts by women.

One notable exception was the description of love affairs at a labour camp. Ri-

ta, a woman from the oldest generation, described the love affairs she had had during her time as a convict. The first serious affair began when once, as she was tending cows, she met a gorgeous man in the woods. They first sat silently and then, suddenly, he kissed her passionately.

*...I was all one with him. Then I became clear in my head. Started to think directly during the kiss. What to do? Chase him away, scream at him, make him feel ashamed: see, I'm not such a woman. (Rita, b. 1925, No. 2)*

She asked to know at least his name, he told her and started undressing her.

*I felt ashamed. I always wanted to show my dignity, but the atmosphere was such, that if you don't make up your mind, you will continue to walk around with your dignity, that is of no use to anyone. On the contrary, everybody is envious if you have a nice guy. (...) I threw away my dignity and my shame and let him come near to me. I was so happy, my soul was singing so strongly of joy, that for the first time in my life I hugged and kissed him. (Rita)*

Nevertheless, Rita had never told anyone about these relationships. Her son did not even know she was once a convict.

*I have never read about love in the camps in the literature, therefore I want to inform you even a little. There was also life, even if very gloomy, not like normal life. But love is love everywhere, however savage that seems. What I will write to you only you are going to know, I haven't told or let anybody take part. (Rita)*

The other autobiographies by women workers also suggest that they may have experienced fewer problems of reconciling ideas about sex and love. Still, the norm of virginity was present also in Rita's story, justified by her on account of the exceptional setting.

Viktoria used the word tragedy to describe the rape by her fiancée. She did not tell us about her possible hesitations to marry this obviously unchivalrous man although she, for instance, later provided the reader with many reasons for divorcing him. The second time Viktoria talked about "tragedy" was when describing her wedding night. Again, her husband behaved aggressively. But Viktoria mainly accused herself for "not having known" in advance and being fooled by the values of classical literature (and, we may add, the surrounding ideology of the 1950s):

*Our first wedding night was terrible. I felt absolutely nothing, he was angry and said ugly things, that all women had been crazy about him, why am I this way. And I understood that one should have known before marriage, and then, perhaps, there would have been no tragedy. I started to pretend. (Viktoria, b. 1936, No. 5)*

With respect to preserved virginity there was a break in the middle of the second generation. From the late 1960s onwards many Soviet women wanted, and even felt an obligation to be sexually experienced before marrying.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the official standards approving only marital sex were preserved in the ideologies of main social institutions, such as schools, the mass media and the official arts. Unlike the case with the codes of romantic courtship and dating, with respect to the sexual debut there emerged a clear *discrepancy* between official values and the practices and morals of different social milieus. This led to great ambivalence and confusion among young people.

In the life story of Nina, the young woman who called herself a “variation of the norm”, the norm of proper early marriage was voiced by the socially suitable man she at one stage planned to marry. The times were the end of the 1980s.

*I hinted that perhaps we should test our physiological compatibility [before getting married – AR], but he answered solemnly: ‘I’m convinced that everything with us will be just fine, I have never met such a wonderful girl as you, and I generally respect you too much to sleep with you before marriage’. (Nina, b. 1958, No. 17)*

*Nina had started taking lovers much earlier, after having felt “weighed down by my virginity” at the age of 19. Her first sexual relations were described as unproblematic, pleasant and friendly. But she also mentioned in passing having had several shorter affairs including sexual intercourse, the memories of which made her feel “awkward and ashamed”.*

### ‘Purification through sin’

In Nina’s autobiography, the most paradoxical type of sexual encounter occurred after the death of her mother in the early 1980s. Nina was depressed and disoriented and tells us she looked for (sexual) pain and denigration.<sup>13</sup> *“I was walking around as if anaesthetized, and nobody was there to wake me up by pinching me on the cheeks. The remaining solution was to hurt myself, in order to wake up.”* She then described how she let herself be picked up by a man, a ‘Soviet playboy’, on the street.

*Suddenly a man stood before me and for a minute scrutinized me like a statue. A daring, undressing gaze, enormous dark rings around the eyes, a sensuous mouth,*

*a wonderful figure and no signs of intellect. (...) I didn't care, I even wanted him to degrade me, hit me, even rape me. (...) But the 'Soviet playboy' turned out to be significantly better than I had expected. He offered me an aromatic foam bath, a tasteful dinner and he was very tender in his bed with mirrors in the ceiling above. Just like in the movies!* (Nina, b. 1958, No. 17)

Luckily for Nina, the man that picked her up followed all the most polite codes of romantic courtship possible in that situation. But she was nevertheless angry with herself for ever having ever dreamt of really romantic and spiritual relationships with men. She described how she continued to seek denigration through obeying the man's every wish, cleaning his sheets that were dirty from his meetings with other women, and serving him food. *"Thus I probably took a revenge on myself for the previous stupid fantasies, the affairs with flowers and love, which had left only an emptiness in my soul. And, believe it or not, I felt better!"* The 'playboy', quite bewildered, asked Nina if she was trying to make him marry her. *"No, I'm just such an idiot"*, she replied. Later in the autobiography she wrote that she grew *"tired of all kinds of games"* and wanted to live more responsibly.

How should we interpret Nina's self-punishment? In the related episodes, she seemed to condemn her naiveté (expecting flowers) more than her earlier sexual exploits *per se*. The death of her mother and her bad conscience for not having helped her enough loomed large in the background. Anonymous, potentially dangerous sex became the means of physical punishment – for failing as a daughter, including failing to live up to the moral standards her mother would have expected from her.

Another autobiographer, Julia (b. 1965, No. 21), described an almost exactly similar situation of elevation through denigration. In the beginning of the 1980s, when Julia was twenty years old, she had a period of strong religiosity. She was looking for a man to marry, while simultaneously having several sexual affairs with unknown men. She described these encounters as *"purification through sin"*. Although Julia's behaviour of course was everything but part of Orthodox religious codes of behaviour, the female religious symbolism of sacrifice is present in both Nina's and Julia's way of justifying themselves.<sup>14</sup> Their experience resonates with overtones from stories from Catholic countries – from the medieval female saints punishing their bodies by starvation to Pauline Réage's 'The Story of O' young women sacrifice their bodies in order to transgress the gendered boundaries of their society (Bell 1985). The women's own sexual enjoyment (or lack of enjoyment) was not mentioned at all: it is the act, transgressing the norms, that in Nina's words, made them "feel better".

## Confusion and violence

The religious interpretations recorded by Nina and Julia can also be seen as expressions of the difficulty of justifying autonomous female sexuality. The texts have an ambivalent attitude in relation to both what actually happened and how it should be expressed and evaluated from today's perspective. Thus men described their bewilderment at dating women who kept seeing them but refused all advances, or let them engage in heavy petting or simulations of intercourse without penetration. Women remembered how they in their youth were "*foolish enough*" to follow some guys to an empty apartment and to submit to the ensuing rapes or attempted rape. For instance, one woman described the last meeting with a man she had adored throughout her teenager years. Many years later, a common friend told him that she was still interested in him, and he visited her with serious intentions and a bottle of cognac. "*When he did not get the expected reaction, he tried to use force. I had to show him the door. It was funny and sad.*" (Woman, professional education, b. 1946, No. 12.)

A few women recalled their husband's disappointment and questions when it turned out they were not virgins. One man whom I call Georgii (b. 1949, No. 37), cynically remembered how "*she naturally pretended to be a virgin, screaming that it hurt, I believed her then*", although we are not given any reasons for why he should have doubted her behaviour. Other women told about their first lover refusing to believe this had indeed been the woman's first intercourse. Men's autobiographies correspondingly mention the surprise and anxiety after discovering, once in bed, that the woman was still a virgin.

I interpret these memories as showing both a lack of stable norms, especially with regard to women's sexuality, and a lack of an adequate language or tone. Many of the situations led or could easily have led to sexual violence, partly due to misunderstandings between the sexes, as often seemed to happen with Georgii (see figure 4):

*That year [when he was 16 years old – AR] when I was living in the countryside I used to walk in the neighbouring woods looking for a girl or a young woman, with whom I could try and test myself as a man. (...) That summer I was attracted to teenager girls, whom I went "hunting" in the neighbouring woods. Once I had luck, I tracked down two girls in the raspberry bush, her friend ran away at once, but the other one was confused. (Georgii, b. 1949, No. 37)*

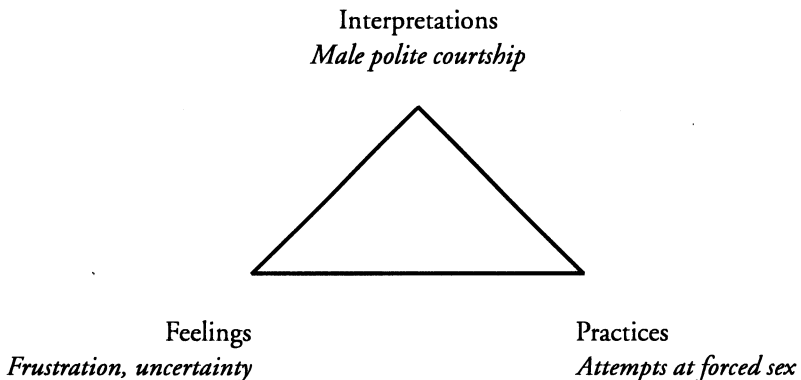
In Georgii's account, one of the girls agreed to stay with him, but after a failed attempt at intercourse he "*lost interest in her, buttoned up and let her scared run away*

and find her girlfriend” – a wording that implies the girl was threatened into staying. Another time he again tried forced sex as a result of not knowing how to approach women:

*I had again fallen in love like a schoolboy, but this time platonic love did not satisfy me. (...) We started meeting at my place, I was like in a fever not knowing how to please her, I put on an LP, or offered her a book and scared of the suggestive darkness she sat clutched in the armchair, trying not to turn her back on me, thus denying me any possibility to improvise... (...) My relationship with Valya was in a dead-end. She continued to visit me, listening to my tirades with the same cold attention, and then I made an extreme decision and decided to take her by force, I had, so to say, had enough of her. After some gallant courting which already made me sick, without much thinking, I chose a suitable situation and dragged her on the bed. She fought me off the best she could with her legs, which only triggered my desire, then she used a ruse and feigned that her heart ached, and I believed her and stopped. But it was just a lie, she lay stark naked in the armchair, consciously continuing to tempt me with her gorgeous hips, lay like that for a minute, and then as if nothing at all had happened she went to drink tea. (Georgii, b. 1949, No. 37)*

Georgii went on to describe how he continued to meet with the same young woman. During a second attempt he drank alcohol to get more courage and did not listen to her complaints. She agreed to undress “like a wooden doll”, but when he lay down on her she hit him, and with this tragic situation his attempts to have sex and also his infatuation with her disappeared.

**Figure 4.** Ambivalence of sexual norms (based on Georgii’s case)



The difficulty of finding interpretations may explain the irony, tragedy and evasiveness of both Georgii's and Nina's reflections. The moral grey zone was also structured according to double moral standards for men and women. One woman described her first intercourse at the age of twenty-one, with a man she was very much in love with:

*Except for great pain and heavy bleeding (2 days), I don't remember anything. No, there was also a feeling of happiness because I had given my beloved something very precious. We parted in the classical way: he condemned me for being willing and left me. (Maria, b. 1946, No. 10)*

Yet another consequence of the moral grey zone concerned contraception, which was a non-issue in the autobiographical descriptions of first sex. Not one account of premarital sex in youth mentioned the methods used, or not used. Instead, the reflections implicated that this was something one avoided thinking about: *"I am still amazed over how I did not get pregnant or infected from him with some disgusting crap."* (Lyuba, b. 1954, No. 16) Only one older woman, who had premarital intercourse for the first time in her late 30s, mentioned how her partners wanted *"to avoid unpleasant consequences"* (in order, she thought, to make her possible future marriage *"happy and untroubled"*). Her first long-term relationship avoided intercourse altogether. She then became attracted to a colleague at work and decided to *"be close with him"*. When they got the opportunity, she disapproved of his concern for a possible pregnancy.

*My sensuous feelings had overwhelmed me to the point that I did not want to think about the consequences. But he, notwithstanding all the passion, became anxious in case there were consequences. I felt that he was more afraid for his own sake than for mine. Perhaps I was wrong, but from that moment on I became indifferent to him. (Woman, b. 1946, No. 11)*

Similarly, a journalist remembered dating her boyfriend during three years in her late teens, without having intercourse.

*What stopped me at the final line? I was afraid to be condemned, and of my mother. I was afraid to lose him forever. But what is really surprising – I did not think of pregnancy at all! How bad that we were not told anything and were not given anything to read.<sup>15</sup> (Woman, b. 1945, No. 9)*

When Nina later ridiculed herself for not having any "orientation towards motherhood", it was rather a comment on her attitude towards men, not her first



two abortions. When the autobiographies mention contraceptive methods, their success or failure, and the fear of pregnancy, it is generally after marriage and after the first child. This may partly be due to a lack of available expressions – a remnant of the Soviet taboo on all public discussions of these issues. But this cannot be the only reason since other Soviet taboos, such as masturbation or oral sex, were now discussed especially by the young authors (see chapter 6). A similar silence about contraception has been noted in the context of European worker's autobiographies from the beginning of the 20th century (Maynes 1995). Perhaps, then, the explicit attention paid to contraceptives in contemporary Western (e.g. Finnish) autobiographies is a historically new phenomenon: The ideal of young people's sexuality involving personal, concrete responsibility for contraceptives may be so tied to the Western sexual revolution that it is not found in the normative expectations of other cultures.

Autobiographical descriptions of the period of dating were linked to the question of honour and respectability, both in the social and sexual sense. The risk of pregnancy and ensuing marriage intensified parental control over socially suitable candidates. In one account, this link was made explicit. In 1970, Lyuba (b. 1954, No. 16) was dating her first boyfriend. They did not go further than kissing, but her father eventually had a serious talk with the young man, who was some years older and from a lower social background. As a result, the boy ended his relationship with what Lyuba accepted as an honest admission: "*I would like to go further, but that would be bad for your studies.*" In this case, going further would have entailed the intertwined risks of having an early child and marrying a man of socially lower status, both actions that would have hurt the woman's professional career. But usually, neither Soviet society nor everyday morality posed any bigger obstacles to marrying in one's early 20s, and for love. Those early marriages will be the subject of the following chapter.

## Summary

The beginning of the actual Soviet life course tended to follow the ideal prescriptions of Soviet ideology and family policy. Among the practices that were embraced by both Soviet ideology and everyday morality, we find first and foremost the notion of *romantic courtship*. Young love was given central importance by many autobiographers, partly because of its perceived pure and elevated, non-sexual, nature. The autobiography by 'Softhands' illustrated the unmentionable

nature of physical desire in the ideal of romantic courtship, as well as the space for freedom and intensified pleasure that the social prohibitions also created.

With regard to romantic courtship, there was no discrepancy between Soviet ideology and the everyday conduct of the majority – both valued men's correct politeness, combined with coy and careful feminine behaviour. The man should appear as able and protecting and the woman as in need of help. The *code of chivalry* built on the ideal of unattainability, just as if the feudal ideal of love, a late-comer in pre-Revolutionary Russian culture, would have finally rooted itself in the Soviet period, complete with singing bards and enigmatic females. In a Westerner's eyes, it also had an inherently nostalgic component, but that may be because ritualised courting disappeared from our mainstream cultures after the 1950s.

As later chapters will show, the code of chivalry was consciously constructed against the type of the uncultivated and brute Russian *muzhik*. *Muzhik* does not here refer to its agrarian connotations of a traditional elderly patriarch, but to a symbol of physical and sexual male power. In popular and poor working class milieus, the masculine code of a physically impressive, masculine man, good at drinking, fighting, and having his way with women, remained an ideal. In the autobiography of Ivanov, a taxi driver born in 1935, this ideal is represented by the rude friend Oleg (see chapter 8). But also in lower class milieus, the romantic ideals of *kul'turnost'* became the generally imposed, and generally acknowledged, norm. Even Soviet subcultures, such as the dissident circles or the *rokery* of the 1980s, did not oppose, but emphasized and exaggerated the norms of romantic courtship. Educated bohemian men could kiss ladies on the hand in an 'aristocratic' fashion; young rock fans dressed in suits and always helped their girls out of the buses (Pilkington 1994). The code of romantic courtship clearly differs from the view of teenage and youth sexuality that would spread in the West through the young rebels of the 1960s, a view in which teenage boys were seen as especially rude and sexual creatures.

Although the code of romantic courtship was strongest in autobiographies from the oldest generation, it was present in all generations. The endurance of this code has been fascinatingly shown in a sexual life story collected in 1996 and analyzed by Tatiana Baraulina (1997). Baraulina chose the story of Igor, a 27 year old 'new Russian' of the 1990s, as an example of post-socialist hegemonic masculinity. Igor led a promiscuous and wild, semi-criminal life-style. His sexual conquests are presented in two forms: on the one hand, he was the insensitive, hypersexual *muzhik*. But on the other hand, he created an image of the "romantic hero

lover” who transformed the life of his beloved into a beautiful adventure (Baraulina 1997, 29-30). Thus Igor’s self-perception contains many ingredients of the Soviet code of romantic courtship, now continuing as part of the New Russian male ideal:

In the morning I took her to school, before that, in the evening, I had absolutely bought flowers, so I drove up to her front door, gave her the flowers, you see, opened the door for her... I invited her to dinner at my place. I prepared dinner, put some nice-looking candles, long and beautiful, and flowers, I mean the flowers were not even for her, for her I had separate flowers, but just so they would be there looking beautiful, and the winter, and everything... (Igor, b. 1971, quoted in Baraulina 1997, 29)

The situation was different with respect to the first sexual relations, where there was a stronger discrepancy between interpretations and practices. Communist ideology was either silent about or condemned premarital sex. Soviet everyday morality had not developed any coherent approach to it. There existed a moral grey zone, labelled by adventurous discoveries but also by fear, ignorance and male violence. This led to great ambivalence and confusion among young people. The dating partners misunderstood each other, sometimes with violent assaults as a result, or they were themselves ambivalent about how to evaluate their experiences, as in some women’s way of justifying promiscuity as a purification through sin.

1. Compared with Finland, the people of St. Petersburg started active sexual life later, but entered into marriage or cohabitation at the same age. The average time of dating and possible premarital sexual relations was thus about one to two years shorter in Soviet Russia than in Finland (Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch 1998).
2. The autobiographies also featured accounts of earlier childhood experiences – mostly doctor games. However, those memories of sexual games were usually not connected with love or erotic feelings, at least not before the negative response from adults or in retrospective evaluation. Early sexual games are therefore rendered in chapter 6 in connection with receiving sexual knowledge.
3. One man was refused by a woman he was in love with and describes her rejection according to the criteria of Soviet courtship (No. 37, b. 1949): “...I thought everything was in order. Then she confessed being dissatisfied with a lot of things, I did not give her flowers. I did not help her with her coat, my avarice, my habits...”
4. Compared with Finland, the norm of marrying as a virgin was preserved about fifteen years longer in Leningrad (Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch 1998). Sexual abstinence was, of course, not only due not to ideological, but also to practical constraints. The poet Joseph Brodsky (1986) describes growing up in the Leningrad of the 1950s and 1960s as endless walking around with girlfriends, as there was nowhere to go: “There was no supply, only demand.”
5. Russian lacks a precise equivalent for “dating”. The words *drug* or *podruga* can, depending on

the context, mean both 'friend' and 'my boy/girlfriend' (a distinction the French solve by adding "small" and talking about *ami(e)* or *petit(e) ami(e)*). As Marina Tsvetaeva noted in a diary note from 1919, "Beloved – sounds too theatrical, lover – too frank, friend – too indefinite... What an unloving country!". The diary excerpt is quoted in Boym (1993, 157).

6. True, there was an important distinction between spiritual friendship between members of the same sex and the love and adoration (even if pure) supposed to arise for the opposite sex. In their analysis of Soviet male drinking, Zdravomyslova and Chikadze (1998) note how drinking celebrated male friendship while automatically excluding girlfriends and wives.
7. After one year and several shorter visits in Moscow in the late 1970s, neither my mother nor I as her teenage daughter had learned any indecent words. In the beginning of our first stay, my parents used to play a family game on the street, where the child is thrown into the air while everybody counts to three and shouts 'khuuujj!', the Finnish for 'wheew!'. This led to hysterical laughter in my 12-year old classmates, since the expression equals the English 'dick', but this we were never told. Finally my mother asked one of her closest Moscow woman friends to tell her what words were used. The friend wrote them down on a piece of paper, which she then immediately tore up. Compare this with Finland in the 1970s, where 'cunt' was a strong expletive but also the most-used adjective in teenager discourse, much like the English use of 'fuck', and every school door and lift was decorated with graffiti dicks.
8. Soviet schools were co-educational, with the exception for the Stalinist parenthesis of separated education from 1943 to 1955 (Liljeström 1995, 273). Some subjects, such as housework and woodwork, remained differentiated according to sex. But gym lessons were co-taught (in contrast to e.g. Finnish and Scandinavian school practice, which had coeducation except for separate gym lessons). The fusion of boy's and girl's schools in 1955 was of course a big event, especially for the pupils of the elder grades. "I will never forget the morning when twenty six-graders entered our class (...) The walls of the monastery crumbled – the boys were seated at the desks beside the girls," Natalia Tolstaia (1998) recalled. Her memoirs describe the teasing and embarrassment connected with the shared "hated gym lessons".
9. The absolute majority of Soviet school children were enrolled in the pioneer organization between the ages of seven and fourteen. The red pioneer scarf was daily worn with the school uniform (dark blue suits for boys, brown dresses with black or white aprons or the girls). For disciplinary reasons, pioneer membership could be temporarily suspended or even permanently revoked. Not applying for or not being accepted into the pioneer organization was a social stigma.
10. In the Solemn Vow, the future pioneer vowed to serve the Party and the fatherland.
11. When blaming his wife's "bourgeois" background for sexual prudery, this man was writing in the best traditions of the Soviet sexual revolution in the 1920s, when women were accused of being bourgeois *meshchanki* either for not acquiescing to sex or, on the contrary, for being too occupied by sexual matters (Liljeström 1995, 225-226).
12. In Finland, the same attitude of 'having to get rid of my virginity' is noted about fifteen years earlier; a classical example of the impact of the sexual revolution in the West (Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch 1998).
13. At this point in Nina's autobiography, it is hard to distinguish between what Nina thought then and her views now. She writes as if these were her thoughts at the time, "Let him do with me what he wants to, the worse the better, I thought."
14. I have found no similar accounts of purification through sin in Finnish autobiographies.
15. The woman's complaints that he had ignored the question of a possible pregnancy are a little surprising, as she also mentions how her girlfriend got pregnant and had an abortion at the age of 19 – probably before the narrator's first intercourse. It may reflect an elevated belief in the importance of formal, educationally and text-oriented sex education ("we were not told anything and were not given anything to read").

## 4 The Frailty of the Heterosexual Relation

This chapter continues to trace the typical life course of the Soviet family by presenting a picture of adult life: marrying, having one child, frequently divorcing, and sometimes remarrying. It pays special attention to women's transition to motherhood in the life course of the Soviet family. It will also focus on the frailty of Soviet heterosexual relationships and especially first marriages. The term 'frailty' does not mean all marriages were short-lived or unhappy: 'frailty' rather denotes their fragile status and the vulnerability of life-long heterosexual ties as compared with the expectations and hopes connected with such ties.

### 4.1 THE OBLIGATION OF MARRYING

During the post-war period, when most of the autobiographers in my material were growing up (42 of 47 authors were born after 1929), Soviet youth was expected to marry relatively early, during the last years of professional or high school education. Both Soviet ideology and everyday morality saw this as desirable. Throughout the post-war period of late socialism, the social expectations and personal aspirations of most Soviet people included marriage. As late as in 1988, four out of five urban adults between the ages of 20 and 40 said they would prefer being married (Stevenson Sanjian 1991, 632). The biggest and most

approved reason for marrying was, not surprisingly, romantic love. Almost as important was the social pressure: especially for women, marrying in the early 20s was the *sine qua non* of successful femininity. Additionally, as we shall see below, there were few social conditions that supported postponing marriage.

Marriage was a simple formality from a legal point of view — the future spouses applied for a marriage license, were given a date, and registered their union. Since the Stalin era, Soviet urban marriages followed specific secular rituals including rings, vows and brides in white. The main difference compared to Western weddings was that only the state had the right to register marriages. The state weddings took place in specific marriage palaces.<sup>1</sup> After the ceremony, the couple visited certain important sites in the city, such as the eternal fire commemorating the heroes of the Second World War.

Both Russian and Western scholars like to speculate that the more educated women are, the less attractive the marriage institution is (*ibid.*, 633). While women's educational level certainly influences the stability of marriages, I have, however, not found any evidence in my data of Soviet educated women who consciously rejected the notion of marrying in the first place. The men correspondingly tell about being persuaded by their girlfriends to marry:

*She did not let me undress her. Then I changed tactics and tried to kiss her 'there', in the space between her legs, she liked that. 'Let's get married' she whispers and sighs of exaltation. It seems I gave her an orgasm that way. After some months we got married in the spring. (Georgii, b. 1949, No. 37)*

Parents could, as everywhere, oppose their children's marriage plans. But besides them there were few other social obstacles in Soviet society. Being professionally and economically independent was not a big issue, nor was the ability to found a household of one's own. For instance, the man just quoted above was married for four years, but they continued to live separately: he with his and his wife with her parents. On the contrary, marrying meant improving the chances of receiving an apartment of one's own.

Marriage implied children. For most Soviet citizens having one child within a few years time after marriage was an unquestioned, almost automatic expectation. Postponing it for social or professional reasons was unusual and considered selfish; infertility was seen as a tragedy and often a social taboo. Both women and men mentioned this norm of child bearing in their autobiographies. A geologist, now married for the second time, complained that his wife

*was not able to make the decision to have a child, again referring to her age [33 years – AR]. When I started to insist, she reminded me about the son I already have. So, to my regret, this issue was soon closed forever. And you can't talk about a family being complete if there are no children. (Vasilii, male industrial worker, b. 1945, No. 36)<sup>2</sup>*

The norm of early childbearing was especially clearly articulated in the few exceptions when having a child directly after marriage was postponed. In a few autobiographies, the mother-in-law advised the young couple to wait a few years, probably also thinking about her own responsibility for bringing up the child. Other reasons mentioned were that the young woman was still studying, or that the material conditions were too bad. On the other hand, several women mentioned finishing their studies and having their first child the same year.

Among the most influential factors favouring marriage we can detect *getting away* and *pregnancy and/or the desire for children*. Besides a wish to follow social conventions, these were the two most specific reasons given in the autobiographies for actually taking the step of transforming love and lust into marriage.

### *Reasons for marrying: Getting away*

Marrying appeared as a means of escaping three main types of situations: difficult relatives, too small apartments, and undesired or unsuitable social milieus.

“For never was a story of more woe...” is the epigraph – from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* – to one of the, indeed, most woeful autobiographies in my material. The author blamed her mother, her husband and in the last instance herself for destroying her life. It is the tale of a short and tragic marriage, caused by the narrator’s need to get away from her “despotic mother”. The father was described as “clever and good-looking”, but without any actual impact on everyday family life.

*My inner life never interested anybody at home, and from my mother I only heard prohibitions: ‘don’t go there’, ‘shut up’, ‘nobody asked for your opinion’, ‘I don’t give you permission to go there’, ‘it’s too early for you to be seeing anybody, nothing good’s come out of that’, ‘I forbid you’, and so on. (...) It seems to me that she even detested me. But why? She was constantly picking at me, degrading me, calling me names and hurting me, she seemed to enjoy that. She had time for this as she was not working.*

*Gradually I came to think that I could get rid of her only by getting married, but married life was not attractive to me either. I saw too few happy people around [among my married friends – AR]. (‘Story of woes’, b.1935, No. 4)*

While not actually wanting to marry, the narrator, who at that moment was 30 years old, also mentioned “the pressure of years” as a reason for marrying. To the reader it seems obvious that this social convention, paired with the need of escaping her mother, were the main reasons behind her eventually short and tragic marriage.

Elena (b. 1946, No. 12) also described problematic parental relations. The leading part in her autobiography is played by her apartment. It is a story of self-earned, hard-won, social success. The quest for separate, private space destroyed her first marriage, but eventually she ended up as an independent career woman, even the owner of two apartments. In between, she had at various stages of life known “*marriage without sex, sex in marriage without love and sex with love but without marriage*”.

Elena first married at the age of 22. The young couple had no place of their own, and moving in with the parents were problematic as both sides had vehemently opposed the marriage. To be able to buy an apartment, the husband went working as a sailor for two years. Meanwhile, Elena was working as a saleswoman and living with her parents. In two years time, the husband had earned enough money to buy a so-called co-operative apartment in 1970. When he was at home, their new apartment was invaded by their friends, as they were among the first in their circle of acquaintances to have a space of their own.

The couple spent little time together and the husband was gradually losing his interest in Elena. Although Elena was still fond of her husband, she applied for divorce immediately after having discovered that he had an affair with a woman working on his ship. The couple nevertheless continued to live together, as her husband was not satisfied with the available options for changing apartments. The next time he returned from the sea he brought a new mistress with him. Elena was in the classic, embarrassing and cruel Soviet situation of sharing the same flat with her ex-spouse and his possible new partners.<sup>3</sup>

*In order to faster remove him from my sight (out of sight, out of mind) (s glaz doloj – iz serdisa von), I decided on a marriage of convenience.*

*I had known my future mother-in-law a longer time than my future husband. I did not hide my intentions from her. My ex-husband asked for the full price of the apartment and received it from my second mother-in-law. V., my next husband, came to me with joy, he wanted to escape his mother's care. He had already been married but while he was in the army, he had been summoned at an unusual age, something had been destroyed [in that first marriage]. At twenty eight years he, of course, did not want to live with his mother. (Elena, b. 1946, No. 12)*



Elena got rid of her first husband by buying him out of the apartment he had earned at sea. The money was provided by her new mother-in-law, who – as it later turned out – was not only helping her son to get an independent life, but was also more than happy to get rid of him, as he was drinking too much.

Although calculated, Elena's second marriage was at first not fictitious. Before her first wedding and at the end of her first marriage she had experienced "love without sex". Now, she ironically described experiencing sex without love – "...and it is hard to say, which one is better. As he [the second husband – AR] was in his own opinion a straightforward person, and in my eyes simply a brute, there was no mention of kisses or caresses." But, she noted, at least she now had the opportunity to compare the two men, and in some moments "new sensations made themselves felt, and I started to understand what I wanted [in bed]." This husband was also "convenient" in everyday life as he, quite exceptionally, "took the responsibility for all kitchen work" and prepared food for her.

Eventually, Elena's second marriage grew more and more formal. The husband took many business trips and Elena continued her studies while working full time. Their marital relationship basically ended when after some years Elena gave birth to their child. The father refused to change anything in his life-style or participate in the upbringing of the child. Elena received a higher, demanding work assignment at the store and was occupied day and night. They divorced. Later, the husband remarried and had another child. He nevertheless continued to live most of the time in his ex-wife's apartment. Again, it was through the social constraints of the 'apartment question'<sup>4</sup> that Elena interpreted and classified her relationship: "To put it briefly: from a husband he turned into a neighbour."

Elena's apartmental situation was not resolved until the 1980s. People emigrated to the West and apartments were for sale in Elena's house. She gathered enough money – this time her own – to buy a second apartment. Her second ex-husband then exchanged apartments with her mother: he moved to the mother's single room apartment and the mother was registered in Elena's new apartment. Thus Elena, her mother and her child had two flats at their disposal.

A third reason for marrying was to leave an undesirable social milieu. The best-known form was marrying for the *propiska*, or the right to live in a certain place, preferably an apartment in the big cities. There were established prices on the black market for a completely fictitious marriage. More widespread were the arrangements with more or less explicitly stated primarily pragmatic motives, but which included cohabitation, close relations and common children – as with Elena's second marriage just described.<sup>5</sup>

The autobiographies also have examples of leaving an undesirable social class or a dangerous social milieu. A man from a very poor social background remembered understanding his own social position in his late teens. For him, there was a direct link between better material standards and respectable women :

*After having visited my friends, who lived in the city even if in communal apartments (and some – in separate apartments), I understood in what kind of place I was living. My friends did not have to think about getting wood, fetching water and emptying buckets with waste water, or running out on the street to the toilet. And I also saw other kinds of family relations, I learned to know many good girls who were shy to change clothes in front of me, were shy to show their precious parts, and who blushed if something awkward happened. Those girls did not offer their kisses and did not let themselves be kissed too daringly – they either pushed you away, or ran away, and avoided being alone with you after that. This made me feel both more light-hearted, and more gloomy. I did not want to go home at all, and I tried to stay overnight at my friends' place. (Man, b. 1935, No. 30)*

This man could escape his home and his traumatic relationship with his mother when called to do his army service. Afterwards, he soon found a “decent girl” whom he married. (For a longer discussion of this autobiography, see chapter 8.)

A second example is a younger woman who in the late 1970s, when she was in her mid-twenties, had become involved with bohemian circles and drugs, black-marketing and a volatile lifestyle. She was “forced to marry” in order to get her life in order.

*My life was overfilled with everything you can imagine. In the end I was so buried in it all that I was disgusted with myself. Drugs, sex, fartsovka (...) It seems that some destiny protected me from becoming a criminal, from the places that were not so far away from me. At work they were suspicious of my narcotic state and I was also selling [black market] stuff there and once I got caught in an unpleasant situation... (Woman, b. 1955, No. 15)*

When her working colleague fell in love with this woman and proposed to marry her, she agreed, to the surprise of everybody else. This woman had and still has her real love affairs with other women, and was sleeping with both men and women. Interestingly, the marriage was unequivocally described as a way of being saved from her destructive life-style – not, for instance, as a way of gaining social respectability as a married woman and avoiding being stigmatized because of her sexual orientation.

## Pregnancy

If social expectations, relatives and the original social milieus did not push people into marriage, actual or desired pregnancies did. During the last Soviet decades, the percentage of children conceived prior to marriage in Moscow rose from one fourth in the late 1960s to almost 40% in the late 1970s, approximating half of the children in the 1980s (Stevenson Sanjian 1991, 642). As one young man described one of his numerous girlfriends: *“After New Year Vika told me that she was pregnant and was going to keep the child. I agreed. We celebrated the wedding in a restaurant.”* (No. 40, b. 1960). The autobiography mentions nothing else about the child, and the couple divorced after two years. This standard formula was repeated across generations. One of the oldest autobiographers, Rita (No. 2) had begun a relationship with a man who was living with another woman and constantly had other affairs.

*Most interestingly it turned out I was pregnant. Now I had blown it: in those conditions, I had no home and nothing. (...) I was told he already had another dame. (...) He was standing on the street with that lady and said something to me, I don't remember what. I did not like it and was so hurt I hit him. He hit me back. (...) I cried and here I confessed to him that I was pregnant. Then he immediately said: 'Let's go home', hugged me, and we went home. (Rita, b. 1925, No. 2)*

The previous chapter already quoted Maria (b. 1946, No. 16), who in her youth was judged and left by her boyfriend after having agreed to have intercourse with him. Soon afterwards she married a man who loved her, but whom she did not love. Behind her decision was probably the previous, failed love affair, but also social conventions – 22 years was, she thought, already high time. And, most importantly, Maria wanted children: *“I wanted to have a family, a home, I very much wanted a daughter, a small blonde little daughter.”*

The “story of woes” quoted above continued with the woman eventually falling in love. She agreed to have intercourse with her boyfriend, who turned out not to be interested in much else. He proposed to marry her, but she suggested they would marry only if she became pregnant. The man was very jealous and they soon started having huge fights. *“I became bored with him and lost my interest”,* the narrator told, while her husband *“as they say, only wanted to ‘fuck.’”* (b. 1935, No. 4) When the woman became pregnant the man asked “Is it mine?” – an insult which made the woman end the relationship, instead of marrying at once, as they had agreed. But she wanted to keep the child.

*It was a huge scandal. My mother screamed, stamped her feet on the floor, told me I ought to be ashamed, and demanded that I have an abortion. My father was somehow indifferent. I felt very sad for my child who, even before he was born, was not needed by anyone.* (Woman, b. 1935, No. 4)

During the pregnancy, the couple became reconciled and married. Not surprisingly, the marriage barely lasted until the child was born. The obligation was to get married, not to stay in the first marriage.

In the autobiographies, the pragmatic reasons for marrying are described matter-of-factly, without moral condemnation or regrets. One exception was purely material gain, which was usually mentioned only when the author eventually declined the marriage. Nina (No. 17) underscored how she refused to marry a man who had both a *dacha* and an apartment; another man mentioned a girl “*with a Zhiguli [car – AR] and an apartment*” whom he nevertheless refused to marry (No. 40, b. 1960).

The common morality accompanying reasons for marrying thus was close to that seen in *blat* relations, the specific Soviet way of exchanging favours that lies somewhere between friendship and commercial transaction (Ledeneva 1998). The constraints posed by the Soviet system and the ways of overcoming them through mutual help were part of accepted, everyday knowledge. Exchanging favours – a *propiska* for freedom from one’s ex-husband – was a normal part of Soviet social networks. But direct corruption, or the analogue, marrying only for better (and not acutely needed) material gains, was disapproved of, even if it occurred.

## 4.2 VARIATIONS ON THE NORM

### *Nina’s story*

In Nina’s (No. 17) autobiography, the reason why she would be a “variation” of the norm is not explained immediately. She merely stresses how she had “*for a long time longed to tell about this side of my life to an interested and understanding listener*”. She did not seem to be talking about her intimate life with anybody at the time of writing, but the terminology used in text indicates she had read medical and psychological literature about sexuality. Nina’s text is highly self-reflec-

tive, with observations of recurrent patterns and possible explanations for her behaviour. In the introductory remarks to the jury organizing the competition, she speculated that one may want to refer her to a “*sexopathologist, or a publisher (joke)*”. Although she was educated in a medical profession, Nina’s hidden literary ambitions had obviously continued ever since her great interest in literature in her youth.<sup>6</sup>

Nina’s autobiography has subtitles which capture the essential phases in the development of her love-life: *My first memories, Dolls, Kolya, Books, Drawings, Fantasies, Touch-me-not, The first experience, Dangerous games, An affair with consequences, Without mother and without love, I meet my prince, Birth of my son, I change*, and finally *What next?* Nina illustrated her autobiography with excerpts from her own poems and with drawings of princesses and devils she had made in her youth.

Nina’s parents were “first-generation Soviet intelligentsia”. They came from agrarian and working-class backgrounds and both received a higher education in the 1940s. As a girl, Nina was close to her mother but distant from her father. The parental marriage was increasingly unhappy and the father was having a parallel relationship for several years. We get a glimpse of the tensions this created when Nina tells us how her mother, when she became fatally ill, blamed her disease on an evil spell cast by the other woman.

Nina described herself as a shy, talented and sensitive girl during childhood. In her late teens she moved away from her provincial home-town to study in Leningrad, where she also worked to support herself and developed an active social and sexual life. She wrote that she always fell for handsome, elderly, “hooligan”-type men, who all had the same first name: Kolya. With one of the early Kolyas she got pregnant twice and underwent abortions.

At the age of 25, Nina went back to her hometown to care for her incurably sick mother. She described this as the most difficult period in her life, the event which was still hardest to write about. After her mother died, Nina returned to Leningrad and lost all contact with her father, who started living with his mistress.

A few years later Nina met the love of her life, Kolya. He eventually became “everything” to her, “*friend, lover, father, child and even slightly a mother*”, in a love where “*two halves were joined*”. The man in question was married and had a teenaged daughter. He had no intention of leaving his first family. After three years Nina and Kolya decided to have a child together (according to Nina, it was his suggestion). Some time after the birth of her son she took her aunt, who was

ill, to live at her place during what was to be the elderly woman's last year.

At the time of writing in 1996, Nina and her son shared one room of a communal apartment. Kolya spent 3-4 days and some nights weekly with this family, the rest of the time with his official wife, who knew about Nina and her child without having ever met them. Nina was not happy with the situation but did not "regret anything". She still loved Kolya, although he visited her less often and was less tender to her. The couple's sex life had almost ceased since her pregnancy and she suspected Kolya to have a new mistress. After having stayed at home with her child for several years, Nina had recently found a new job through the employment office. She complained about material hardships but did not specify how she was managing economically – we may assume the child's father contributed to some extent.

### *Reasons for not marrying*

Nina described herself at age 17 as a "dreamer and touch-me-not-girl", who "never thought about marriage or children, who could not imagine herself as a mother and wife". In her early twenties she was dating men without wanting to marry them. This is how she described meeting one of her lovers:

*I was not disturbed that he was married, as I was not aspiring to get married, the motherhood instinct had not yet awakened in me, I was interested in him as a personality. (Nina, b. 1958, No. 17)*

Nina's relationships with men "as personalities" included sex, although without much physical enjoyment on Nina's part, shared cultural interests, and an intellectual friendship that often survived the love affairs. However, when Nina "met her prince" and fell deeply in love, she did want marriage. Clearly, her failure to get married was the point where Nina's life deviated from the norm.<sup>7</sup> Personally, she would have wished her life to have turned out otherwise:

*The words 'my wife' were pronounced in the third month of our acquaintance and the third day of close relationship. I simply began to cry. Not because I already had claims on him, I just did not want to be the mistress of a married man with all the entailing consequences. (Nina)*

Nor was this relationship approved of by her relatives and friends. Nina also noted that many other women would have pressured more, but that was not "her

style". She justified her own choice by presenting herself as the very epitome of the undemanding, loving and self-sacrificing Russian woman:

*Of course I suffered that my child was born out of wedlock, I often wept, but I did not want to blackmail Kolya with my pregnancy or later with the child, I did not want that, I never gave him an ultimatum. First, that is not my style, second, I was always afraid on account of his heart problems, and third, I just counted on destiny. (Nina)*

Nina did have the possibility to get married. In one of her efforts to finish the affair with Kolya she found a suitable man, with "a car, an apartment and a dacha". She was introduced to his parents and the date of the registration of their marriage was set. She consciously wanted this marriage for reasons of social convention: "I was really planning to find myself a husband and live like everybody else."

Except for Nina being passionately in love with Kolya, with whom she was in contact also during this other engagement, another minor, but decisive event occurred with her potential husband.

*The day before we were supposed to register our marriage I and my 'fiancé' spent a quiet evening at his place (...) It was time to have dinner, and we went to the kitchen to make an omelette. I quickly cracked the eggs in my usual way, and suddenly... he took the egg shell and started cleaning out the rests of the white, while telling me that every good housekeeper like his mother knows how to do this, and I should also get used to it. That was it! (Vsel) (...) I immediately imagined what kind of life awaited me, and realized that I could never agree to that. (Nina)*

Nina emphasized that she was not ready to submit to a man in marriage, not wanting to confirm to traditional expectations of a housewife. From ignoring the question of marriage to almost marrying out of convenience and then ultimately sacrificing formal marriage for the sake of fatal love, Nina's story covers a good part of the moral scope of the Soviet marriage institution.

Of the other autobiographies of unmarried women, all but one presented good reasons for their single lifestyle. A woman born in 1946 (No. 11), with some longer relationships but no marriages or children, had been living with her mother and had kept a close circle of woman friends, most of whom were also unmarried. On the one hand this woman reflected over her failure to marry. She recalled how in her childhood, she became deeply shocked after seeing the pictures in a gynaecological book. Later her first love tried to rape her, and she was repeatedly harassed by men in the public transport (neither of these words, rape or harass-

ment, were used by herself). In these early experiences she now saw indications of her “fear of” and “reluctance” regarding men. The reader may think she just met quite hopeless men, but she was intent on blaming herself for failing to catch one of them for good: *“Like every normal woman I also wanted to have a family, children, my own house, but in the beginning there should be love. No other possibility was acceptable to me.”* But at one point in her life, her long-time married lover got thrown out by his wife. Although they did not discuss it openly, it was clear that he considered the possibility of moving in with her.

*He was in an incredibly difficult situation: without a place to live, separated from his children which he loved very much, without a good work place giving a sufficient salary in order to somehow build up his life again, and with a serious illness that demanded a calm moderate life and good nutrition. On top of it all he was a person not used to and not liking being alone.* (Woman, b. 1946, No. 11)

But at this point, the woman did not take any decisive initiative. She was no longer passionately in love with the man in question, and neither was she enjoying their sexual relationship as much as earlier. *“First, because our spiritual contact had been lost due to our rare and occasional meetings, and second, because I had entered the difficult period in a woman’s life, which made me experience unpleasant and painful feelings.”* The major reason for rejecting a husband was, however, her habitual independent lifestyle:

*Having lived my whole life free and rather independent, it was already difficult for me to change my way of living. And the thought of our age difference, although I look younger than my years, would have poisoned our life. I doubt we would have been happy.* (Woman, b. 1946, No. 11)

After a short period of time, the man found himself a new woman whom he soon married. *“Generally speaking I am not afraid of loneliness, that seems to be my destiny”,* the author concluded.

Another woman was almost forty years when writing her autobiography. *“I have no husband and no children. My parents have died. Why did it turn out this way?”* she started her short text, which is furthermore titled ‘From the margins of lovelessness’. But then she continued:

*No, I am not especially traumatised (kompleksuiu). Dad used to worry that I am alone, but my mother said: ‘She would only suffer from some drunkard’ (popadetsia kakoi-nibud pianitsa – namuchaetsia). I was 18 when a drunken boy my age tried to rape me. That destroyed any interest in men for a long time.* (b. 1958, No. 18)



Thus, in despite of the references made to conventional expectations, most of the unmarried women stressed that their life situation was actively chosen and preferred by themselves.

### *Divorces: The rocks of everyday life*

Bearing in mind some of the reasons for marrying, the ensuing disappointment in married life is not surprising. Soviet divorce rates, and especially the amount of divorces in big cities such as Leningrad, have been among the highest in the world since the 1930s. The difference was partly due to the liberal Soviet divorce legislation. Even during the time of the strict Stalinist family law 1944-1968, divorce was easier to get in the Soviet Union than in most Western European countries. After the re-liberalization of divorce in 1968, the country had ten times as many divorces per year as in the immediate post-war period. The huge social transformations and catastrophes of the 1930s and 1940s – from the famine in the early 1930s to the Second World War – additionally undermined the durability of marriages. Killing more men than women, they contributed to the shortage of men to marry. All in all, by the 1970s, almost one in two Soviet marriages ended in divorce (Kerblay 1983, 124; Stevenson Sanjian 1991, 632). Leningrad citizens both married and divorced more than in many Western European countries.<sup>9</sup>

Many marriage problems arose from everyday shortages, especially the lack of private space. In the many communal flats of Leningrad, the shame and frustration created by the constant lack of private space was, not surprisingly, a leitmotif in the autobiographies.

*Then the wedding – we had many guests: students, his friends and mine, in our one room in the communal apartment. We spent our wedding night in different beds, the place was full of drunken guests who stayed over night. The next night my mother left for her sister's place (it was her sister's idea) and we were on our own. (...) Later everything happened in one room, with my mother and grandmother sleeping beside us on the little sofa. We waited for them to fall asleep in order to, as they call it now, make love. (...) Practically all our private life took place before the eyes of our relatives. (Woman, b. 1937, No. 6)*

Also for couples with their own, but tiny apartments, the proximity of parents or children was problematic. As a divorced, middle-aged woman described one very satisfying relationship:

*We met in order to have sex, which literally helped both him and me to live happily. I started to think about why this was happening, why we felt so good together, and I came to the conclusion that we could relax completely, nothing and nobody prevented us from making love. He had two small children at home, a young wife and a small uncomfortable apartment. (Woman, b. 1936, No. 5)*

In addition to the housing shortage, the main, still more serious reasons for Soviet divorces were (male) alcoholism, and (women's) frustration over the unequal division of housework. The Soviet gender system gave women the main responsibility for housework and child care. Within the framework of this basic expectation, the pattern of wage working mothers nevertheless created constant tensions: women wanted men to do more at home, and vice versa.

Maria (No. 10) married her second husband out of great love. The husband adopted her daughter from her first marriage and the couple then had a child together. By hard work, they managed to obtain a three-room apartment in a building co-operative. Still, to the stupefaction of the husband, Maria divorced him when she felt she did not love her husband anymore – and that he was of too little use in everyday housework:

*We parted because I stopped loving him. (...) my days were filled worrying about him and the children, we had no money, we started quarrelling and blaming each other. I thought I deserved better treatment. I felt like a chased horse. I obtained a divorce, although he was absolutely against it. He could not understand why. He was terribly unhappy. But nothing else. He did not try to say anything. To say simply: 'I love you!'*

*Because I am telling quickly, without details, I may seem a femme fatale who walks on corpses. But that is not true. I fought for my husband's love for a long time, the whole house was only on my shoulders, the children were only on my shoulders. He had grown up in a family where the mother was not working and he was of the opinion that the women should do everything. That we managed to make ends meet was also my achievement. (Maria, b. 1946, No. 10)*

Maria blamed her husband for not sharing any housework tasks. The couple had discussed the question directly, and the man evidently defended his view that this was the woman's responsibility. Maria did not want to do "everything", but neither did she tell us what her ideal division of labour would have been. She also, as most analogous accounts by women, saw her husband's emotional indifference or inadequacy as the final, decisive reason to divorce him. Where women stressed emotional abandonment, many of the male autobiographies did not shy away from giving completely pragmatic reasons for divorce. Thus the man who was

quoted earlier for seeing marriage as incomplete without children (No. 36), had ended his first marriage with the explicit motivation that his wife did not take proper care of the household. His wife was also working, as a draftsman, but that fact did not change his domestic demands. That the couple was also expecting a child is told almost in passing.

*Our family nest did not seem to hold together. I come home from work late and exhausted, but the place is a mess, the kitchen sink full of dirty dishes and the bathtub of soaked laundry. What's the matter? 'I'm tired, I didn't have the time, I'll wash it in a minute...' (...) For about one year I continued these spiritual conversations with my better half. She found a way out and started to leave the household tasks for work trips, which she herself arranged on her work place. I got fed up with all that. A banal case: 'the boat of love ran aground on the rocks of everyday family life'.<sup>10</sup> I waited until her pregnancy ended with the birth of a son, but after one year divorce could not be avoided. (Man, b. 1945, No. 36)*

In this man's short-lived marriage, it was "her pregnancy" after which "a son" (not 'my' or 'our son') was born. The divorce is described in the passive voice as something that "could not be avoided". The narrator was probably consciously painting an unsympathetic picture of himself. Earlier he had described himself as "emotionally poor" with regard to women and everyday events, and he related his second wife's critique of his behaviour towards his son. Nevertheless, he failed to mention that his "waiting" until the son was one year old was stipulated by law – husbands could not obtain an official divorce as long as the wife was pregnant or the couple had a child under one year of age (Lapidus 1978, 240).

The account of a somewhat older man, Valerii, a skilled worker born in 1939, is unusual for its explicit reflections on his responsibility and role in child rearing after a divorce. While some men give the responsibility towards their children as a reason for not divorcing, their relationships to these children are not elaborated on. This man discussed fatherhood at length, both with regard to his own biological children and to the other children of his wives and mistresses.<sup>11</sup>

Like the previous man, Valerii also initiated the divorce after one year of his first marriage, "leaving her with a baby daughter in her hands". He stressed that he paid his ex-wife good alimony – as an industrial worker, he received a good salary. He had fallen in love with another woman and would have liked to leave the marriage earlier, but thought about what people would say about deserting a pregnant wife. But after a while,

*I was not even stopped by the general opinion in that question: "How can you leave your child, a new-born baby!" If you think like that the result is that you*

*can never get a divorce. When the child grows up, when he gets used to you, when you get used to him, is it easier to leave then?! And furthermore, the longer you stay, the more the tragedy of two turned into a tragedy of three. That's why I decided to make that step – get a divorce. (Valerii, b. 1939, No. 32)*

Later in life Valerii again started a relationship with his first ex-wife. Their daughter was eleven years old by then, but it was “*not in my plans to learn to know her*”. The lovers therefore rented a separate apartment for their meetings, although the woman had a separate apartment with two bedrooms. In this man's logic, a possible relationship with his daughter was entirely dependent on how “*things work out with her mother*”. The mother was of another opinion:

*So far I had not had any contact with my daughter (I only inquired through the mother, and she was not against my meeting my daughter, that I would put my own bricks – as she put it – in her upbringing). The grandmother was against our meetings, and I agreed with her opinion on this question. I thought: love if you love, chop if you chop! (Valerii)*

Eventually, Valerii agreed to meet his daughter and moved in with his ex-wife. But things did not work out. “*One month of living together was enough to disappoint me, and for the daughter it turned out to be a tragedy.*” An identical pattern was repeated with his third wife: he became disappointed after one month of married life, but did not want to leave until the summer when the children were away.

The same autobiography also describes a rare case of male competition in housekeeping.

*The neighbour's husband was a rather positive man: non-drinking, non-smoking, very compliant. For some time I had a silent competition with him: which one is a better husband to his wife! He washed the apartment, I also tried (I did not use to do that earlier) and so on. Then I look and see him ironing in the kitchen (the kitchen had two windows and 16 square meters) when I was there, in an ostentatious way, and she is standing by the window in a similar ostentatious way and folding her arms over her breasts she is commenting on how which places should be ironed: like, this small place in your underwear should be bettered ironed. I was confused by this ostentatiously shameless attitude towards her own husband. I explained my attitude towards this fact to her in a correct, but convincing way and continued this theme from time to time until she retreated, admitting her fault. (Valerii)*

The author of this autobiography presented himself as a difficult and dogmatic person. He nevertheless embodies quite a typical norm of Soviet men in his stress on love, sex, and everyday comfort (housework) as the conditions for functioning marital life. Before the monetarization of family life in the 1990s, there was no mention of economic ties or barriers in this man's many and complicated relationships with women and children (cf. chapter 10).

For women with children, there was one crucial factor when getting a divorce: having somewhere to live, or at least to stay. The economic situation also worsened. As Andrea Stevenson Sanjian (1991, 638) has underlined, since "most welfare benefits are awarded on the basis of family size or are simply available to all families with children regardless of income, they did not constitute a real 'safety net' for the divorced mother". However, the autobiographical accounts mentioned the apartment question, but not money in itself, as a factor in deciding whether to separate. For instance, Maya, a factory engineer born in 1936 (No. 5), left two marriages – with two children in 1965, and with third small one in 1985. Both times she moved away from the husband and had to "start from zero". The first time she returned to her parents, the second time she moved to another city but was in a position to get an apartment through her work place. The family of a woman from the younger generation (No. 14) received an apartment of their own when, in the early 1980s, their fourth child was born. The woman, who was still only in her twenties, almost immediately divorced her husband. After various "scandals" she even started receiving alimony from her husband. She had not remarried since, longed for love but stated she was very satisfied with having divorced. Today, only fifteen years later, a young housewife with four children could hardly afford divorcing a husband as long as he is employed.

Likewise, Maria (No. 10) was quoted above complaining of material hardships already before her divorce – and there was no mention that they were significantly aggravated afterwards. She automatically kept both the children and the apartment. We are not told anything about the ex-husband's possible presence as a father after the divorce, or of where he went to live. Under Soviet state socialism, where new apartments were socially and economically among the hardest things to obtain, it was rather the men who were at risk of losing status in a divorce. A divorced man usually returned to live with his parents or found a new wife. In the autobiographies, only very poor or psychologically inhibited men had problems finding women in Leningrad, with its shortage of men. (The shortage was especially felt in Leningrad as most of the victims of the Nazi blockade were men.) The divorced mothers kept the previous apartments, and/or moved in with their parents.

## *Emotional abandonment*

Another main reason for divorce was the woman's growing irritation and physical discomfort. In the "story of woes", the narrator married relatively late for a Leningrad woman, after turning thirty, and much in order to escape her "despotic mother". She was at first romantically in love with her fiancé. But at an early stage she discovered that it was "boring and uninteresting" with him:

*At the time I admitted to myself that had I been younger, I would probably not have become involved with him or left him in time. But the years were pressing. I had to settle for somebody. I still hoped for a 'bright future' together with him.* (b. 1935, No. 4)

When she got pregnant, neither her future husband nor her mother supported her. She was again deeply disappointed in both of them. The couple "somehow reconciled" during her pregnancy and got married. The narrator wrote about her feelings that the marriage would not last. She already knew she was not really interested in this man's "personality", which she saw as excessively simple and sex-centred. The pregnancy – neither unplanned nor a surprise – seemed to be destroying both of them:

*I was sorry for him, for having destroyed his life as well, but he had not been able to leave me earlier, and once he could not do it then, then we had to bite the sour apple together. And he was so far content with me. He had a good dinner and a woman at night. He did not need anything else.* (b. 1935, No. 4)

This woman's reasons for marrying were mysterious attraction – "some kind of invisible threads were tying us to each other", as she described her relationship just before she got pregnant. But most importantly she felt that she had no social alternatives, as her parents were not supporting her decision to keep the child whether she got married or not.<sup>12</sup> "How embarrassing, how wounding, how much would I not have wished for the support of my parents, had they supported me I would never have married him..." Her hope of having someone with whom to bring up the child was an additional reason for opting to "bite the sour apple together".

The birth was hard and with medical complications, and the woman had to be hospitalized for several months. According to her, her husband accused her of staying in the hospital on purpose in order to avoid coming home and doing housework. When she finally came home with the baby, her husband at once insisted on having intercourse. Earlier, she had "felt nothing during physical closeness

and agreed to it only because he liked it and he enjoyed it". Now, intercourse had become painful.

*I fell immediately ill, I had high fever, and he was always after me, but I was disgusted by him, I am explaining to him that I need time to recover, that I am very tired since he is not helping me [with household work – AR], he does not want to listen but is always after me. Gradually, I begin to detest him, since I do not feel anything but pain. (b. 1935, No. 4)*

As the narrative switches from past to present tense, we approach the hardest moments in her marriage. Things turned nightmarish as she soon became pregnant again. Beside herself with anger and grief, she started detesting her husband and tried to force him to leave her and the baby. She achieved her aim after the second pregnancy had been ended through an abortion:

*After that terrible operation I hated him even more, and when I returned home I calmly told him that if he did not leave me, I would poison him. That scared him and he went home to his mother. (b. 1935, No. 4)*

The divorce was complicated as the husband tried to disavow the child (and his duty to pay alimony) by claiming his wife had been unfaithful. The court judged in her favour. She was greatly relieved, feeling free and invincible, but "*hating all men on earth*".

This particular autobiography is a model of laments from a psychologizing perspective. Expressions such as "despotic mother", the attention given to the prohibitions of her childhood (cf. chapter 3) and the author's way of blaming herself for lack of decisiveness and ambitions – together, these formulations give the impression that the author was familiar with popular psychological readings. Little is said about any concrete social settings and practices. Contraceptives were, once again, a non-issue. The autobiography does not even mention the crucial apartment situation: the woman evidently managed to move out of her parental home by getting married, but nothing is said about how the apartment was obtained. It was implicitly clear that she wanted to keep the couple's living space for herself and the child, while her ex-husband had to return to living with his mother. Only in reflecting on her mistaken marriage did she use more self-critical and social interpretations: she reflected over having married because of age pressure, her harmful belief in romantic love against all realistic odds, in order to get away from her mother, and, lastly, in order to have somebody beside her while raising the child.

An almost word-for-word similar description of estrangement and divorce around the birth of the first child was given by Maria, although her style and general attitude is one of self-irony and optimism rather than lamentation:

*Finally (after 4 months) I got pregnant and that was the beginning of the end of our family life. I had a tough pregnancy and a difficult delivery, from which I could not recover for about 8 months. At first, there could be no question of intimacy, and then I was paralysed for many years by the thought of a possible pregnancy. My husband did not understand me and blamed me for not being able to do anything, I could not even give birth like everybody else. We were further and further estranged. The small blonde child swallowed me entirely. We divorced.* (Maria, b. 1946, No. 10)

Maria's version was not as dramatic, but also she claimed emotional abandonment as one decisive factor: the husband was unsupportive and complaining. The "story of woes" (No. 4) is in its very core structured by such *feelings* of pain and abandonment: the woman's life-long psychological pain due to emotional neglect gradually transformed into overwhelming physical pain, crystallized around forced intercourse with her husband. However one may evaluate the narrator's own behaviour or depiction of other people, the reality of suffering itself is conveyed to the reader in an unquestionable way.

Alcohol, violence and emotional neglect were the usual reasons for Soviet divorces, but also the cement of many relations of mutual dependence and denigration. In the women's accounts, experiences of emotional abandonment are condensed in *sexuality as pain, or as leading to pain* – abortions or childbirth. References to periods spent in hospital and various more or less severe diseases are legion. The typical framework is built around how the woman took care of others, but the care was not reciprocal, even if she had physical problems. Such female lamentations represent a basic rhetorical category in Russian culture.<sup>13</sup> In the women's writings, concrete physical pain – of recovering from a pregnancy or an abortion – was mirrored in and intensified by the husband's indifference. They were focused on the experiential mode of *feelings* in a way that was unparalleled in men's autobiographies. Pain is on the one hand something intensely individual, something which overshadows other experiences and is hard to share with other people. On the other hand, pain can be a transcending experience, and telling about pain a way of connecting to other people. Through the autobiographical text, for instance, it becomes possible for the reader to imagine what a certain kind of suffering is like (Ehn 1998).<sup>14</sup>

In addition, it was common for Russian women to elaborate on their bad



health because of stress and burdens, or as one autobiographer puts it: “*On the nervous soil of all these difficult years all kinds of illnesses bloomed: heart arrhythmia, the kidneys, the nerves – “a fool let free” (psikh na vole), as my now grown-up son said*”. One typical incident took place when this woman took care of her lover for weeks after he had had a first heart attack. Immediately after he had recovered, she caught him in bed with a young woman. “*On my feet the veins around my ankles all burst (the cost of the “calm discussion” with him and her, while she was sitting naked on the bed) – and they have still not recovered*” (Irina, secretary, b. 1941, No. 8). This was the only reflection of the event in the autobiography, and I am not sure there was much irony in it.

### *Illegal abortions*

The stories of abortions often reflected extreme experiences of both emotional abandonment and physical pain. From 1936 to 1955, performing illegal abortions or persuading the woman to have one was punished by imprisonment for up to two years. The woman herself could only be sentenced to fines (Lapidus 1978, 113). This put the relatives and friends in an uneasy position. Rita, a woman from the oldest generation, decided to end her first pregnancy in 1954. “*Neither of us wanted the child, and we were not married*”, she explained, but at the time she and her husband realized this she was already in her fifth month of pregnancy. Rita’s boyfriend approached a surgeon he knew, but the doctor refused to break the law, saying she would need to be hospitalized. Rita then found a woman who did illegal abortions.

*She ordered me to prepare boiled washing soap. I prepared everything. She came, poured the soap and said: ‘Some air went there, you’ll have the shivers.’ That’s how it was: Sasha came home and understood at once that I was done. I had the shivers, a temperature of 40 degrees, the fruit<sup>15</sup> was not coming out, and not on the next day either. We called an ambulance, Sasha ran away – there were very heavy penalties for abortion. In the hospital I said I had done the abortion myself, they paid no attention to me, only during the rounds, they were asking, has she delivered? No? Well, let her do it. That was all. I had been lying for three days already, forty degrees of temperature, I was already decomposing. There was a stench from me, in the ward they began complaining – they could not eat. The ward was stinking, and nobody did nothing. You did it yourself, so pull it through on your own. I asked the nurse to be moved to the corridor. It was winter and cold, but at least I would not disturb anybody. The nurses moved me to the corridor. Winter, thin covers. They put a mattress on me so I would not*

*freeze. I had been lying like that already three days, all of me was decomposing. Nobody came to look at me. The fruit had not been moving for a long time, I understood that this was the end. In the morning a nurse came to me – a long, red-haired and beautiful woman, a nice one. I explained her everything, that I had been lying for a long time without any kind of help. I begged her to help me, as I was dying. And she had pity for me, she gave me two injections in my feet and I started to choke, turned around, took hold of the back of the bed and gave birth. Afterwards I asked her who it had been, she said a piece of meat, nothing could be seen. So my suffering kind of ended. But it only seemed so, I had two more cleanings and I left the hospital, as they say, thin as a leaf. I came home, Sasha was very worried, looked at the little that was left of me. (Rita, No. 2)*

The published life story of Alexandra Chistiakova (1998) is also built around her sacrifices for an unthankful and aggressive husband. She stayed for decades in a marriage which was violent and abusive from the very beginning. As in the autobiography called “the story of woes”, emotional abandonment was suffered first because of the parents, then the husband. Coming from a poor agrarian milieu, Chistiakova’s problems were on another level. During the famine of the early 1930s, her mother left for another town and the ten-year-old Alexandra and her younger sister survived by begging on the streets and working as servants, in return for a piece of bread. Once, she was on the verge of freezing to death. As an adult she continued with hard physical work, first in the Siberian winter woods and later also in her family tillages.

No surprise, therefore, that pain, illness and hunger constitute the red thread of Chistiakova’s life story. But in her strange dependency on her heavily drinking husband, pain and its remedies acquire a metaphysical aspect. While she did not say anything explicit about her married sexual life, she described in detail her first illegal abortion and the absence – or, at the verge of death, saving presence – of tender caresses from her husband.

*I had to think seriously about my future, because I was pregnant once again. I went looking for a person who would know how to terminate pregnancies. I found a woman who did what she could and promised me: everything will be fine. (Chistiakova 1998, 43)*

Instead of becoming well, the night passed in pains that she concealed from the rest of the family:<sup>16</sup>

*no-one in the family knew about my suffering. I bit my teeth together but did not utter one sound. Even my husband, who was sleeping beside me, did not know what was happening with me. In the morning, overcoming terrible pains, I got up, fed my husband and followed him [as he left for work – AR]. Of course, had*

*he been more attentive he would have understood at once that I am not well. He was only thinking about himself and knew that everything should be ready for him, but how it became ready and in what conditions he did not know nor did he want to. (Chistiakova 1998, 43)*

Chistiakova passed the next day losing blood and thinking she would die. Her husband did not notice her condition, and her mother-in-law screamed at her to get up and dress her young son. When Chistiakova answered that she could not stand up, the mother-in-law “evidently understood”.

*At midday mother[-in-law] looked at me from under the curtain and was obviously scared. (...) Put on this clean shirt, she told me, and wash yourself, I will go and get a doctor. (Chistiakova 1998)*

The mother-in-law ran around “*all doctors, but nobody was at home*” – or nobody wanted to take the risk of helping her? – and it was impossible to go the hospital. A neighbour came to look at Chistiakova, but when she lost consciousness the neighbour got scared and left. Finally, her mother-in-law alerted her husband at work, warning him that ‘It is not sure you will get to see her alive again’:

*He rushed to the canteen and bought sugar and butter on cards (...) [When he came home] he took milk, put sugar in it, mixed it and brought it to me with the words ‘You have to eat’. He lifted up my head, I drank the milk. Immediately I felt stronger.*

*He touched my hands, and they were like a corpse’s. He poured hot water in bottles and put them beside my hands and feet. Mother fried bread with butter, he brought it to me and I ate two pieces. The blood stopped flowing: I lay without knowing what will happen to me next. But I felt in myself that now I can continue fighting and will not give in to death. Yes, and I did not die. (Chistiakova 1998, 43)*

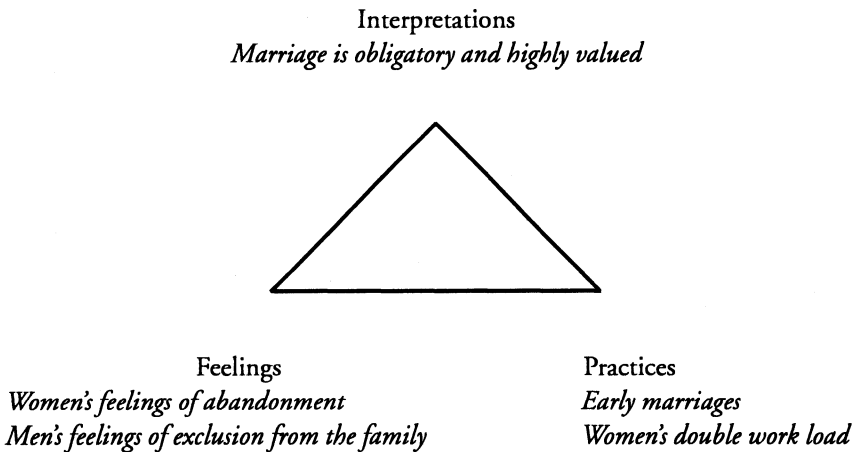
The account is about food – in the post-war years basic items were still being rationed and Alexandra did not eat enough, “*only potatoes*”, giving her son and husband most of the bread and other food. But clearly the life-giving force was her husband’s caring. Lifting his wife’s head, bringing warm milk, touching her hands, warming her cold feet – in an almost biblical description her life forces suddenly returned. “Milk and tears are the privileged signs of the *Mater Dolorosa*”, writes Julia Kristeva (1983, 312).

The dissymmetry and silent suffering between men and women is crystallized around love-making and its consequences. The epigraph to part I, the two lines by Joseph Brodsky, “*not desire, but pain / define sex*”<sup>7</sup> has been interpreted precise-

ly that way by the several Russian men and women I have asked. In the case of “the story of woes”, it was a question of revulsion for intercourse and later for “all men”, something the author clearly deplored. But in other constellations, such as Chistiakova’s marriage, the woman liked and longed for all kinds of physical caresses from the man. The common denominators were the women’s complaints of indifference, brutality, lack of empathy and emotional abandonment.

Women’s usual complaint in Soviet Russia (and not only there) was of the husband as a ‘second child’. The analogue is as wrong as the common claim of people’s bestiality, although animals rarely are consciously cruel the way human beings are. For Russian women, children were often felt as a much more stable and rewarding source of joy, tenderness and love than their husbands. By contrast, the relationship to men was easier experienced as a misfit between ideals and expectations and actual everyday practices. Figure 5 summarizes this experienced frailty of the heterosexual relationship.

*Figure 5. The perceived frailty of heterosexual relationships*



The perceived frailty of the heterosexual relationship could be attributed to a variety of things. Here, the aim is to emphasise that this experience enhanced the value of marriage and put it as something worthy of protection, not of ideological and practical deconstruction.

## Second chances

The reader should remember that divorces and unhappy people were over-represented in the autobiographical material. Once again, as Tolstoy knew, the story of happy families and lasting marriages were not deemed interesting enough to write about. Needless to say, there were also happy endings in Soviet society. Especially later, second marriages had better than average chances of lasting.

The autobiographies feature a few descriptions of the “good-enough” spouse – one to settle with, one who is far from the worst possible, even if he or she has difficult traits. Interestingly, such descriptions were mostly found in working class women’s autobiographies. This is, for instance, how Rita remembered her first husband:

*Once I was hanging wallpaper, standing on the table, he came, took me down from the table and laid me on the floor. And of course I am laughing, “Let me at least wash my hands!”, and he is also laughing: “You can wash them later, I can’t wait.”*

*That is how we lived. We bought furniture, and music, an expensive radio “Minsk 55”. We had earned big money in the north. The most important thing, which I understood later, was that Sasha was not drinking or smoking. And neither was I. I learned to love him not even knowing this. I was inexperienced and did not pay much attention, I thought – I am in love, I don’t need anything else. My neighbours even used to ask me: “Why is your Sasha never drunk?” (...)*

*He was a very musical man, he worked as a chauffeur, played jokes, had a mandolin and loved to play. (...) It was impossible with Sasha, the girls were always clinging on to him, especially when he was playing music. (...) I guessed that he was unfaithful, but I did not make a big fuss about it, you can spoil everything in one short moment. I didn’t want that. He was dear to me. He took good care, I had everything – his caresses, and that playfulness of his, I liked it all, and I had to reconcile [to his shortcomings - AR]. Nothing hurt me. (Rita, worker, b. 1925, No. 2)*

Rita’s description of hanging wallpaper resonates with a Soviet-time anecdote:

An American couple has boring marital sex. When this is over, the wife is thinking, I will ask for those new curtains. A French couple has boring marital sex. When this is over, the wife is thinking, I will ask him to buy me new jewellery. A Russian couple has boring marital sex. When this is over, the wife is thinking, I will start painting those walls.<sup>18</sup>

The joke is obviously on the working load of the Russian woman, and the absence of practical or luxury compensation for her marital duties. Rita was also painting the walls, which in many Western cultures is reckoned as a man's work at home. But Rita was content, as her husband behaved and cared. She gave a standard of a good-enough husband: one who does not drink, earns sufficiently and does not spend his money on drinks or cigarettes, who is handy and of use at home, and who is not brutish in bed. As in Rita's case, extramarital affairs were both relatively common and relatively tolerated in urban Soviet culture (see chapter 7). They probably both caused and prevented divorces.

While Rita's joyful kind of compromise was possible, many Leningrad women had significantly higher expectations (Lagunova 1995). These marital expectations themselves were often later ironized and ridiculed; but they were seldom if ever questioned as admirable ideals. Notwithstanding all marital deceptions or pleasant experiences of autonomous living, life as a single was not part of everyday morality and aspirations, neither for men nor women.

Maya, an engineer born in 1936 (No. 5), twice left marriages when her husband either treated her badly or drank too much, and raised three children basically on her own. Although her life generally appeared to be happy, she concluded that her "family career was unsuccessful": "*Since my childhood I dreamt about having a good husband and many children whom I with great pleasure would have cared for and loved until the end of my life.*" In the accounts of her divorces, however, Maya described quite different feelings – of happiness, freedom and autonomy. She was clearly proud of having managed to create a life "from zero".

Like Maya, the woman with the "story of woes" initiated a divorce she did not in any way regret. The regrets were reserved for the failed ideal.

*Then I got the divorce. After the divorce I was for a long time beside myself with joy over having got rid of him. I was free! Nobody is treating me badly, nobody is creeping to me, I am not afraid of anything. After him I stopped even looking at men for a long time, I did not even notice that they exist. I did not want them, I was drunk with my solitude. My daughter and I, that was everything I needed.*

*But in the depths of my soul I admitted, that had I had a normal husband, I would have had it easier and more interesting in all respects. I was very sad that my daughter grew up without a father, she never saw him, she never asked about him, she must have understood how painful that is for me. She never reproached me. And I could have married again. I was good-looking for a very long time, but when I remembered my married life, I started to shake, I was afraid that everything would repeat itself, I would just not survive a second divorce.*  
(Woman, b. 1935, No. 4)

Regardless of the liberating experience of divorce, both these women felt the lack of a (proper) husband. Or at least they thought they should feel this lack. One woman even reproached herself for not envying married women and feeling lonely (!).

*I can still not understand why everything in my life went so awry. When and why did I make a mistake? Why did I never envy my married woman friends? Why did I never suffer from solitude?* (Woman, b. 1935, No. 4)

### 4.3 LOVE OF CHILDREN

In addition to describing sexual love, the autobiographers often wrote about love of children. Indeed, one striking difference between the Finnish and Russian autobiographies was that the Finns did not include relationships to their children when writing memoirs of love and sexuality. If the Finnish texts mentioned children, it was in a general manner, or in relation to the obstacles they posed to the parents' love-making. In the Russian texts, love for children is a theme in its own right. Or, more precisely, the mother's love for her children, which both men and women described.

#### *"Becoming my own mother"*

Having children was an unquestioned goal for the absolute majority of Soviet women. Even such perceptive Soviet demographers as Valentina Belova (1975, 7) simply state that the phenomenon needing scientific explanation starts with the second and third child. The first child is born anyway, according to Belova, who claims that demographers "acknowledge the enormous value of the first child" saying that "'practically no-one refuses the first child', 'no factors whatsoever can influence the birth of the first'".

Belova's assertion is of course at odds with any serious explanation of child bearing. "Accounts of mothering need to recognise not-mothering, and recognising it, would have to deal in economic circumstances and the social understanding that arises out of such circumstances" (Steedman 1994, 88). But interestingly enough, the crucial question for a Western author such as Steedman is whether women want to have children at all. She stresses the need to understand "the social specificity of wanting and not wanting children in the first place" (ibid., 90).

This focus was central for many Western women of Steedman's generation who had social and cultural opportunities in the 1970s to live without a husband and/or without children.<sup>19</sup> More or less voluntary childlessness was *not* on the agenda of Russian women of the same post-war generation. Belova's assumption is true in the sense that it represented a cornerstone of Soviet everyday morality: a woman should have at least one child.

This cultural assumption did not change in Soviet Russia, as it did in Western Europe, due to the economic conditions and dynamics of Soviet family policy. Historically, Soviet women of the post-war period had exceptionally good possibilities to combine studies with motherhood. Soviet society even witnessed a unique development with regard to the age of women for having their first child. In most societies, the age of the woman at the birth of the first child has tended to increase with education. In the Soviet Union of the 1970s, living standards and educational levels were increasing, but women's average age for having the first child dropped (Stevenson Sanjian 1991, 634). As already noted, the family policies of the Brezhnev era gave over three months of paid maternity leave and the possibility of leaving work to take care of children for up to three years (Lapidus 1978, 305). Women could be almost totally sure of not losing their job or facing unemployment because of having a child. The interruption caused by a child certainly harmed very ambitious career plans, but the brightest career prospects were in any case not open to most Soviet women. Women's considerations of the impact of children on working prospects were not, as in today's Western world, tied with the timing of a possible first child. On the other hand, due to the same economic and social conditions, Soviet women were less motivated to have second and third children than Western women. Among the reasons for this we find divorces and the increased social stress experienced by wage-earning single mothers.

The transition to marital life and motherhood marked a distinct shift in Soviet women's life course. It was apparent also in the physical transformation of Soviet women, whose habitus changed to that of the adult female. A 'mother's' appearance meant dressing like a middle-aged woman, becoming more corpulent and using less make-up. The change was more clear-cut and visible in Soviet Russia than for urban Western women in the 1960s and 1970s, where the ideal for many women was to look like a student in her twenties even after becoming a mother.

For Russian men, marriage and fatherhood entailed a less definitive social and physical adjustment. For instance, both married and unmarried men were habitués of the bohemian circles of Leningrad, while married women and especially married mothers could or would not lead the same kind of reckless and un-



predictable lifestyle (Zdravomyslova 1997). When men described utmost physical tiredness and huge responsibility, it was not in connection with having small children, but in later phases of the life course, such as poverty and unemployment, or when taking care of sick and elderly parents.

Let us first return to the life story of Nina, who presented her life as a “variation of the norm”. Nina’s life story has three thematic cornerstones: the sexual adventures of her youth, her great love Kolya and the question of marriage, and her relationship to her mother as well as towards her own motherhood. Her autobiography gives no clear indications of what she meant by the sins in her conclusion (“*I have sinned, repented, loved and given birth*”). Even less is there any sign of having “repented”, only a brief mentions of religious interest. I have interpreted the sins to refer above all to Nina’s bad conscience towards her mother, as well as towards some of the sexual adventures of her youth (see chapter 3). The circle drawn in her autobiography goes Mother – sex – love – motherhood.

Nina claimed she was originally “not oriented towards motherhood” and that the initiative to have a child with her lover, Kolya, originated from him. But the actual advent of the child soon transformed Nina’s orientation towards both sex and love. She described how her body was changing – not so much because of pregnancy as because of everyday motherhood:

*I tried the best I could to keep myself in shape but my forced confinement to the home, material hardships and limited tasks (washing clothes – preparing food – emptying pots – going for walks – taking medicines) left their inevitable traces. I stopped seeing myself as an object and subject of desire, I became merely a mother. And not merely a mother, but my own mother. (Nina, b. 1958, No. 17)*

Looking in the mirror at her “*tired, rounded face, marked by motherly worries*”, Nina began to see her own mother. The feeling was ambivalent (“I tried to keep myself in shape (...) I became merely a mother”) but in no way entirely negative. Nina depicted a return to her own childhood. “*I take up my son and have the physical sensation that my mother also used to take me like that. This is why I am myself, my mother and my child in one person.*”

Nina wrote how she gradually stopped being interested in having sex with Kolya. Reflecting on this change, she noted that “*in my understanding, mother and child are outside sex, which is why this became something forbidden to me.*” With the exception for a few short references to religious interest, the reader is not told where this understanding of motherhood and sexuality stemmed from. One should also bear in mind that in this particular case, Nina’s father had left her

mother for another woman. Nina had suffered from a bad conscience after having left her unhappy and sick mother in order to go to Leningrad and study. She “became her own mother” also in the sense of repeating her mother’s situation of being committed to a man who could not decide between two women, and whom the women spare from making any choices with references to his heart problems (although Nina had the role of mistress and not that of wife).

Finally, the intergenerational triad mother – narrator – child was elevated to a religious dimension:

*[T]his new sensation of a trinity helped me better grasp the trinity of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, which I used to understand only rationally.*  
(Nina, b. 1958, No. 17)

The same emotional pattern was repeated in other, completely non-religious accounts of the transition to motherhood:

*Little Igor was born – Volodya was carrying him home on feet stiff by joy and... did not approach the child anymore – he was afraid to break something in him. I judged it otherwise – as a lack of desire to be with the child. It made me angry. And Volodya was angry that I only fussed around the child and had forgotten about him – he had been waiting that I would be even more temperamental after the birth: “I should have punched the guy who told me that”. I definitively cooled towards my husband when I saw his total indifference towards the child.*  
(Irina, secretary, b. 1941, No. 8)

Elena told a similar story. She unexpectedly realized she was already four months pregnant by her second husband, whom she had married for pragmatic reasons connected to the apartment. As abortion was still an option, Elena counted her reasons to keep the child:

- *I was thirty years old, it was high time to have a child*
- *my living conditions allow for it*
- *perhaps it would strengthen the family*
- *after having a child, I would never be alone* (Elena, b. 1946, No. 12)

Elena did not mention having discussed the decision to keep the child with her husband. It appeared to have been her decision and her child, even though she would have hoped for “family ties” to strengthen. That Elena was not actually very convinced about the child’s positive role in family cohesion was underscored by her saying that she wished it would be a girl, as “*a son needs his father more in case of a divorce*”.

Soviet surveys support the impression that women's decision about whether to keep a child or not was crucial in the European part of the Soviet Union. When asked about the number of expected children in the family, Soviet women from those regions answered by discussing their own decisions, not that of both spouses or of the man alone.

If the husband's wish significantly diverged from their intentions, the women often related to him as to an irresponsible person who does not take into account the difficulties that would arise if the child was born. This attitude becomes quite clear from the following kind of commentaries [written in the margins of the questionnaires]: 'What does he care! He'd take eleven children!' 'He does not care about how many', and so on. (Belova 1975, 117)

In our 1996 survey, one third of the women reported having made the decision about their last born child on their own (the other alternatives were in consensus with their partner, or pressured by somebody). One fourth of the men reported having decided alone.

### *Longing for a second child*

The intense love for the first-born was probably even more acute, as many Soviet women would have liked to but did not have a second child. In the lives of Soviet women, the crucial question was often *whether to have a second child* or not. The increased state support in the form of child and family benefit programmes of the late Brezhnev era did not succeed in making Leningrad women have more children (Stevenson Sanjian 1991, 635). This was confirmed by statistical studies made in the 1970s. At that time, over 90% of married women in Leningrad expected to have one or two children. This was the lowest rate in Soviet Russia, the bottom of a steadily declining trend in the number of children in the family.

Interestingly, one child was seen as the "ideal" number of children by very few – only two percent – of Leningrad women. The answers concerned what was generally perceived as the ideal number of children, not the ideal number for oneself or one's family. Such general evaluations are usually at variance with one's individual preferences and actual behaviour of the respondents. For urban educated women, the discrepancy between stated "ideal" number of children and the number they expected to have themselves was largest. In working class milieus, the ideal was also higher, but the discrepancy to the actual amount of children small-

er. Soviet men, by contrast, would have liked to have slightly more children than the women. (Belova 1975, 116.)

In any case, the discrepancy between one child as an ideal and reality was especially high, since almost half (46,5 %) of Leningrad women actually had only one child while practically nobody saw it as an ideal situation (Belova 1975, 109-141). One of many similar laments is found in the story of Valya.

*My maidenly dreams of giving birth to three sons and one girl (so that my only daughter would be three times as adored and caressed) were destroyed by my own inability and by the overwhelming instability of my personal life. (...) I'm in my thirties and my child is already the only one....* (Valya, b. 1966, No. 23)

By contrast, the question of a third child was not as problematic. According to research done in the early 1970s in Moscow, 40% of the interviewed women workers would not have wanted to have as many as three children under any circumstances. Other research shows that Soviet women with three children were often unhappy with their situation and regretted their actual number of children more often than the women with two children did. (Belova 1975, 23-32.)

As to the reasons for not planning to have more children, the answers obtained in Soviet surveys included apartmental space, money, day care and health. Although the child as an obstacle to studies or to working life was on the list of alternatives, it was not often chosen as a significant reason. Marital relations – or their absence – were excluded from the list of obstacles. One influencing reason may have been that the Leningrad survey Belova refers to studied only married women (Belova 1975, 160).

### *Which basic instinct?*

The exclusiveness of the mother-child bond continued well into the youngest generation (as chapter 10 documents). When Valentina was writing her autobiographical lament she was only in her early thirties. She began by urging herself to leave her passionate love, the man she had sacrificed many years for:

*If [my son] takes his genes from the man I am living with, that thoroughbred stallion, it is sheer luck, I've been thinking. But to have him as a man is sheer sorrow. The conclusion is evident.* (Valya, b. 1966, No. 23)<sup>20</sup>

None of the men described a similar shift of the object of love in himself. Un-

doubtedly, there have been men who were more attached to their children than to their wives or lovers, but those emotional bonds were not articulated in these autobiographies. This was instead a usual male positioning:

*It is necessary for me that a woman loves me and is by my side (I don't support being alone very well). During my bachelor life I noticed even with some kind of surprise that I myself have a no lesser need of loving somebody, to have an object of love. First and foremost it is a woman, then a child. (No. 29, b. 1932)*

In the 1970s, Soviet men also remarried much more often than women did (Stevenson Sanjian 1991, 635). The formula for marital mobility during late socialism for women followed the transition marriage-motherhood, and for men the transitions went from one marriage to the next.

The women's shifting interest embodies a new contradiction, since both women and men saw – and see – the heterosexual tie as too weak. After having her first girl child, Maria described a loss of sexual interest. Neither had she originally been very much in love with her first husband. But even in her second marriage, to a man with whom she was very much in love, love for the child quickly became more central than her love for her husband. She explicitly presented her relationship to her second child, her son, as a compensation for heterosexual love.

*A blonde, adored boy was born. Probably I poured all my unexpressed love for a man as such on this boy. I am not saying I love my daughter less, but she is understandable to me, she is the same as I myself; but my son – he is like from another planet. It is still the same way. I worship him. Thank god, or me, that he still is a normal person, notwithstanding such enormous maternal love. (Maria, b. 1946, No. 10)*

Similarly, the anthropologist Tatiana Shchepanskaia (1996, 275) has noted a special *maternal erotica* in contemporary Russian urban culture that excludes and banishes “external” erotica. She describes the women's development as one from the binary myth of heterosexual love to a “concentric myth”.<sup>21</sup> In her autobiography, Maria claimed this shift was wrong: her enormous love for her son was the love she *should* have given to the generic creature named “man as such”. This opinion was widespread in late Soviet society, where childcare experts decried the feminization of child raising and the ensuing spoiled and insufficiently masculine men (Attwood 1990). The view was further enforced during perestroika, when especially mothers were blamed for the problems of Soviet youth (Pilkington 1994).

As one man described the changes in his girlfriend after the birth of their

child: “*the motherhood instinct proved stronger than the basic instinct*” (b. 1949, No. 36). This unintentionally comic expression poses the question in all its paradoxality: if motherhood is stronger than the “basic” – (hetero)sexual – instinct, which one is then actually basic? How did it happen that from lovers and husbands men turned into presences of secondary importance? The next chapter will sketch this dynamics with the help of the concept of extended mothering.

## Summary

Adult Soviet life was characterized by the obligation of marrying and the norm of having a child, preferably when the woman was in her early twenties. This was supported by Soviet social policy as well as enshrined by everyday morality. Although many Soviet marriages were lasting and happy, a relatively high proportion was not. The number of failed marriages, or failed intentions of marrying, appears especially high when we consider the high social value attached to the married condition. I have here described this tension as the frailty of the heterosexual relationship.

The frailty of men’s presence and position in the family has been a constant ingredient in the everyday knowledge of Soviet people. It has in a lucid, if sinister, way been depicted in the fiction of writers like Lyudmila Petrusheskaya. Whether a marriage ended in divorce or not, heterosexual relationships were often experienced and interpreted as unbearably frail. Once marital status was achieved, the women’s initial concern to get married transformed into concerns for the husband’s drinking, prolonged absences, his other women and perhaps other children, or his generally feeble or unreliable presence in the household.

Here, the ‘man question’ emerges in the sense of women’s anxiety over heterosexual relations. This was heightened by the fact that the *single person* was not a cultural or practical alternative in Soviet life. Unmarried or divorced men and women tended to live with their parents. The *unmarried* and *childless woman* was especially pitied and stigmatized as an old maid. As a consequence, women were usually more eager to marry than men. In the big cities, pregnancy was one of the common reasons for marrying and women could often decide about whether to use it in order to pressure or, on the contrary, avoid registering the marriage. But once marital status and motherhood had been achieved, the necessity of the married condition was not as great. In contrast to the single woman, the *divorced single mother* was a possible role in Soviet everyday morality. This was in stark

contrast with the officially articulated values of the Soviet man as the head of the household.

Concerning divorces and single motherhood, Soviet everyday morality was much more tolerant than the official ideology would have it. Being guided by one's romantic feelings was widely accepted, even when it meant having children outside marriage or getting a divorce. Correspondingly, there was a generally shared disapproval of marrying for pragmatic, material reasons. The existence of such marriages was acknowledged, but they cannot be counted as part of everyday Soviet morality (in contrast to post-socialist everyday morality, cf. chapter 11). Marriages of convenience were rarely mentioned, unless the narrator was heroically refusing the opportunity. By contrast, parallel relationships were both widely practiced and accepted, especially for men.

From the viewpoint of social policy, there were two major reasons for the usual Soviet family dynamic of marrying, having a child, and divorcing, and all when the spouses were in their early twenties. The first reason was *socio-economic*: the fact of women's equal rights, high educational level and economic independence. The pattern of wage-working mothers eased the economic and social obstacles to ending an unsatisfying relationship, often reducing them to the infamous apartment question. In this respect, the absence of larger amounts of private property was of crucial importance. As Zdravomyslova and Chikadze (1998) put it: "The rights and duties of fatherhood and marriage liaisons were weak as well. Divorce was easy (...) because it was not hindered by common property. Most Soviet divorces were initiated by the wife, but as we shall see, the approximate economic equality was also making it easier for the husbands to initiate a divorce."<sup>22</sup>

The second reason was the *matrifocality of Soviet social reproduction*: everyday family life relied heavily on cross-generational help and caregiving relations, taking place mostly between women. This further lessened the functional necessity of the husband and also helped to estrange him as a parent. We have read about how love for the child was perceived as substituting or threatening love for the partner, to the point of one man claiming maternal love to be more basic than the "basic" sexual instinct. The Soviet pattern of mothering will be more closely dealt with in the final chapter of part I.

1. In addition to the state registration, marriages could also be celebrated in church, but that did not affect its juridical status. Church weddings were celebrated only by a small minority during the Soviet era. In the 1990s, it has become more popular to marry in church, either in connection with the civil marriage, or as a "second", church marital ritual later in life, celebrating the durability or spiritual depth of the union.
2. This man's first marriage had ended within a year after the birth of his first child. He did not mention keeping any contact with the child. Evidently, his second wife was using the discrepancy

- between his norms (children complete the family) and his actual behaviour (ignoring the existing child) to defend her relatively unusual decision to remain childless.
3. One of the best-known forced triad households was experienced by Anna Akhmatova, who had no choice but to live with her ex-lover and his new wife. There is an abundance of grim and inhumane stories of the sufferings this caused. A doctor I interviewed in St. Petersburg in 1995 told about his family's situation in Leningrad during the siege, when the father gave his food coupons to his new family, but not to his ex-wife and his child by her, and the mother eventually starved to death. Emma Gershtein recalls in her memoirs the death of a family friend. He had divorced his wife and they built a wall dividing their single room in a communal apartment. One night he had a sudden infarct and died. "My sister told me how he was lying, completely red, on the table, while his ex-wife and son with the help of faithful friends were tearing down the partition, so they would not be assigned an strange inhabitant in the now vacant room." (Gershtein 1998, 272)
  4. As the famous expression by Satan in Mikhail Bulgakov's "The Master and Marguerite" goes, the people of Russia have not basically changed, only the apartment question (*kvartirnyi vopros*) has spoiled them.
  5. In contemporary Russia, another new form of marriage of convenience has emerged: marrying in order to receive a visa to the United States, which refuses single women more easily. Needless to say, the newly-wed woman in the real-life story I heard in Moscow left alone, and with no intentions of returning.
  6. One Russian reader felt Nina's highly structured story, full of literary allusions and paraphrases, was less authentic than the other autobiographies in my material, to the point of questioning whether she really described actual events. From my point of view, her articulated reflections around "the norm" makes her story a perfect reference. None of the described events are in any way improbable, but on the contrary statistically commonplace.
  7. Interestingly, Nina did not explicitly reflect on the fact that she had thus partially replicated the situation of her own childhood, with herself in the role of the second woman her father neglected his family for. Kolya was described as equally incapable of making a decision as her father, in fact they never discussed directly the possibility of him getting a divorce; both men also had heart problems.
  8. "*la sobiralas vydat' sebja zamuzh i zhit', kak vse.*" Nina used the more old-fashioned expression "to marry off somebody", here she was herself performing the function traditionally assumed by parents. This is a clear parallel to Carol Steedman's (1994, 82) observation of English working-class marriages: "neither taken nor given in marriage, [the woman] was to some extent both the subject and object of her own exchange".
  9. The Soviet Union had higher divorce rates than many other socialist countries. In 1987, the USSR had 3.36 divorces per 1000 inhabitants, while the UK had 2.88, Hungary 2.8, Sweden 2.19 and the United States 4.75 (Stevenson Sanjian 1991, 634).
  10. *Liubovnaia lodka razbilas' ob byt* – the quote is from a poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky.
  11. It should be noted that this particular autobiography (No. 31) was evidently written by a psychologically unstable person. The author reported that he was twice in a mental hospital, although the causes and results of his treatment remained unclear. His strict views of child rearing were evidently looked upon with suspicion and disapproval. The text indicates that that other people were shocked by his pedagogical methods, which the author presents as harsh and honest. The autobiography ends in a quite bizarre speculation about starting a relationship with his step-daughter, in the name of sexual emancipation.
  12. Abortions had been legalized once again in 1955, or a decade before this woman's two pregnancies and the different decisions made with regard to them.
  13. In the classic Russian folk tales, the identity of the wife (as opposed to the often active role of the maiden) is basically expressed through lamentations of pain and abandonment: in the tale of Alionushka and her brother Ivanushka, the witch ties a stone to the newly wed queen Alionush-



- ka's neck and throws her in the sea. From there, she laments: "Oh, my little brother Ivanushka! The heavy stone weighs me down to the ground, the silky grass has entangled my legs, the cruel serpent has sucked out my heart!" (*Russkie narodnye skazki* 1994). The happy end comes only when the husband finally hears her cry and sets her free.
14. Nadia Seremetakis has stressed that the notion of pain as a separating and individualising experience belongs to the contemporary Western understanding of emotions. She finds pain in Greek women's culture as a collective and ritualized experience – "a transpersonal and allegorical paradigm of pain" (Seremetakis 1998, 116). Similarly, Russian women's late 19th century literature has been characterized by pain, with illnesses occupying a central place (Rosenholm 1999). It may well be that feminine suffering is especially present in the Orthodox Christian tradition, or that other social and cultural similarities can explain why pain and suffering play such a central role in both Greek and Russian women's cultural repertoires.
  15. Rita used the Russian word for fruit, *plod*, corresponding to fetus.
  16. Although I do not have any exact figures, it does not seem to have been unusual for Soviet women not to tell their husbands about having abortions. I have heard stories claiming that in the elite circles of the housewives of military men, it was even a question of honour to arrange the abortions while the man was away, so he never had to notice anything.
  17. In the quote by Brodsky, 'sex' (*pol*) does not refer to sexuality but to gender. The Russian word 'pol' usually translates as (biological) sex, although sometimes also as 'gender' or 'sexual' (*polovye roli* – gender roles; *polovoi svyaz'* – a sexual relation). Like many other European languages, Russian does not follow the distinction between sex and gender present in the English language and Anglo-American feminist thought.
  18. This anecdote was told to me by sociologist Elena Zdravomyslova in August, 1997.
  19. In another autobiographical text by a Western working-class woman from the same postwar generation as Steedman's, Nuala O'Faolain (1996) reflects on her own childlessness, how it represented a break with the Irish culture of her youth, and its personal costs.
  20. However, Valentina's autobiography ends on quite a different note, as she concluded with stating how she would happily serve her husband (see chapter 10). The beginning is at any rate a good example of a certain attitude and rhetoric about marriages/relationships.
  21. Heldt (1993, 244) also found conceptions of love that were not limited to the sexual couple in Russian women's writings. She uses Ann Ferguson's term "sex-affective energy" to describe "affectionate attachments that do not necessarily refer to particular objects of bodily functions, although they may do so. This theory enables feelings of parenthood and other forms of bonding to be related to the sexual as part of a more general category." Heldt's example is the Soviet poet Maria Shkapskaya, who "uses the theme of motherhood to evoke sympathy, love, communality, nationhood, distress – in fact, a full range of human emotions involving the self, the other, and all other, but especially other women." Shkapskaya "addresses not a community of sisterhood based on self-sufficiency, but rather a communality of understanding among women whose lives are diverse (mothers and nonmothers) but mutually sympathetic. This sympathy excludes men from the sister-mother-child-configuration" (Heldt 1993, 249).
  22. Interestingly, this evident economic base – emphasized by Marxist theory – goes unmentioned in most evaluations of the state of gender relations in late and post-socialist Russia. Jones and Grupp (1987) or Stevenson Sanjian (1991) do not even mention the abolition of private property as a factor contributing to the instability of Soviet marriages. Igor Kon (1995, 150-156) discusses what he calls the "demasculation" of Russian men extensively, but without any reference to their diminished economic advantages in relation to women. Men's wealth is mentioned only from the seemingly innocent angle of the popular survey theme, where the question is whether men's salaries should allow women to choose between wage work and housewifery – not as the basic socio-cultural structure defining gender, and sexual, relations.

## 5 Extended Mothering

This chapter summarizes what in the autobiographies appeared as the main dynamics of the Soviet family. What I call *extended mothering* denotes the combination of women's responsibility, caring and control which characterized Soviet everyday life. It seems to me that this family pattern explains some of the biggest differences in the family experiences of Russians and Westerners. I argue here that many Western interpretations about Russian gender culture are mistaken at precisely this point. They equate Western and Soviet Russian women's critique of men, although these criticisms are launched from diametrically opposite directions.

Extended mothering was sustained by the women-centred, cross-generational ties of the Soviet family. The chapter analyses the tensions and dependencies this created from men's and women's point of view. As the men wrote less about children and family relations in their sexual autobiographies, their familial roles will be less fully treated. Also in this respect, the 'man question' remains problematically open. The chapters present two cultural configurations that the male autobiographers adopted: those of 'the passive hero' and 'the seeker'. Finally, I critically review the thesis of gender traditionalism: the ideology and morality accompanying the frailty of marriages and the pattern of extended mothering is, I argue, better described as gendered conventionalism.

## 5.1 INTENSIVE AND EXTENDED MOTHERING: A COMPARISON

Russia has always been famous for its strong mothers, which are too often represented in a glossy, one-dimensional way. In contemporary Russian studies, the image of the all-powerful and benevolent Russian mother is present in such differing works as Hubbs' (1988) presentation of the maternal myth in Russian culture and Barbara Engel's historical analysis of mothers and daughters in the pre-revolutionary Russian intelligentsia (1983). On the other hand, historians have shown how, for instance, terrifying child neglect was common for Russian mothers (not to speak of the fathers) (Ransel 1988; 1991). Several feminist scholars have explicitly demythologized the image of the Russian mother. Thus the editors of the first Western anthology on Russian sexuality stressed how "alongside the veneration of the mother (...) there exists a feeling of revulsion around the maternal body" and how "tightly sexual desire has been trapped in the myth of the maternal" (Costlow et al. 1993, 21). During the conference on sexuality and the body that the book was based on, some participants even objected to discussing maternity at all. The question of motherhood was seen as "acts of avoiding the sexual", while others "simply disagreed with the terms with which motherhood was being described, finding them at once essentializing of the maternal and glorifying of it" (ibid., 287). I agree with the latter precaution, but I have seen it as a reason for discussing the entanglements of the maternal and the sexual, not avoiding them.<sup>1</sup>

In order to grasp the subject of Russian motherhood in a limited, but more sociological and concrete way, I will compare some defining traits of the current practices of mothering in the United States and Russia.

The parenting pattern dominating the USA in the 1990s has been named *intensive mothering* (Hays 1996). The ideology of intensive mothering claims, first and foremost, that women are the best caretakers for their children. Hays notes that also wage-working US mothers motivated their forms of childcare by saying it was the best thing for the child. Alternative explanations could have claimed that it was the best solution for the mother, or discussed the presence or absence of the father in the child's daily life. In addition to this, intensive mothering stipulates that child rearing should be "child centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive and financially expensive" (Hays 1996).

If we compare this description of Northern American maternal ideology with

that of Soviet Russia, we notice both similarities and differences. The main similarity is the value of motherly care. In Northern Europe, for instance, the ideology dominating late 20th century general opinion was that fathers should participate in childcare, to the benefit of both the children and the adults in the family.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the Russian view of parenting still centres on the women's role. Therefore I will talk about a pattern of *mothering*, not of fathering or parenting. I will also talk about a 'pattern' rather than an ideology, just as Hays does, because this is a dominating *practice* I have discerned in the autobiographies. As such, it does not always coincide with the patriarchal ideology propagated by Soviet or post-socialist experts, where motherhood is alternatively elevated or blamed for all social ills.

Regarding Hays' four characteristics of US mothering, Soviet Russia differs on every point. The emerging pattern can thus suitably be named extended mothering, in contrast to intensive mothering. Russian extended mothering is *authoritarian, family-guided, socially integrated*, and takes pride in *unique* and hard-to-obtain items.

## 1. Child-centred vs. authoritarian attitudes towards children

In Soviet Russia, child-centred pedagogy was never dominating. The idea of "letting the child decide", "putting the child in the first place", began to spread in certain intellectual circles only with perestroika. Benjamin Spock was not diffused in Russia until the beginning of the 1980s, half a century later than in US, and is still not as widely read. Similarly, the Russian educational system has always stressed the importance of collective, not individual needs, and of conformity, not free expression.<sup>3</sup> Both in late Soviet and early new Russian society, teaching children obedience and compliance is a crucial value. A typical example of this is how one educated St. Petersburg woman, interviewed by me in 1994, described teaching her toddler daughter proper behaviour:

I taught her that some things are forbidden (*nel'zia*), that some things will disturb other people. For example I get very disturbed when some parents take off their children's pants in public places and let their children relieve themselves just like that in the middle of a park. (...) Even when she had her overall on and we were going somewhere, I remember saying to her that you have to stand it (*nado terpet'*), you're a woman, so you'll have to stand it, just be patient, now we go, and we will stand it, don't complain but let's go, let's think about something else. (...) She was then less than one year and a

half. She was a very easy child. (Interview with St. Petersburg business-woman, born in 1942)

In contemporary Western ears, such a description of proper upbringing sounds authoritarian and even cruel.

Neither is Russian extended mothering exclusively directed towards biological children – grandchildren, children of relatives and friends, husband, elderly parents and parents-in law are all included in maternal caring. As discussed in the previous chapter, maternal feelings were perhaps intensified and bestowed on so many various objects because many Soviet women had fewer children than they would have desired.

## 2. Expert-guided vs. family-guided mothering

Just as in other modernising European countries, many areas of Soviet family life were subjected to medical and expert-guided control during the 20th century. For instance, late socialist society had, just like its Western counterparts, high esteem for medical advice from doctors, popular medical and pedagogical journals (*Zdorov'e* and *Sem'ia i shkola*), a common system for pre-natal and child care, and the (in)famous strict four-hour schedule for breast-feeding. What seems peculiar to Russia, though, is its strongly preserved mix of folklore and medical discourse, plus a strong reliance on the advice of relatives and neighbours.

Especially the pedagogical expert discourse was less developed and extensive in Soviet Russia than in Western countries (recall the later arrival of Spock's method of child rearing). The proximity of elderly female relatives discussed above also contributed to the preservation of traditions. As Hoikkala (1997; 1998) shows in his comparative research of the mid-1990s, the idea of the family as a unit, with the children as a self-evident part, was stronger in St. Petersburg. The Finnish families were more individualistic and the relations between adults and children more guided by well-meaning theories. "The late modern scene of intimate relations in Finland may look like this: family ties are loosening and social control is becoming sparer, but the family as a value and point of orientation in life is prized very highly (...) family ties are tighter in St. Petersburg. (...) In Russian culture children are to a greater extent and in a stronger mode part of their families than in Helsinki." (Hoikkala 1997, 14)

### *3. Emotionally absorbing and labour-intensive vs. socially integrated mothering*

Russian motherhood is strong, but rarely exclusive in the way that Hays depicts US mothering to be. The Russian scene presents a type of “independent motherhood” (Nätkin 1997, 251) that is exclusive vis-à-vis the father. But the role of grandparents is also crucial. In Russia, as opposed to contemporary Western states, it is usual and completely acceptable to let even very young children spend weeks or months away from both of their biological parents, for instance during summer vacations. Similarly, it was not unusual to have small children in kindergartens during the whole working week, to be taken home only during weekends. Another option was to let the child live permanently with the grandmother. The same behaviour could of course take place in Finland, but then it would absolutely have to be accompanied by lots of justifications. Russian extended mothering is “socially integrated” in the sense that other parts of society than the biological mother (or both the parents) can assume the major responsibility for childrearing. Even if that is not the case, being a good mother is not tied to spending much time in creating an exclusive, emotionally exquisite contact with the child.

### *4. Expensive vs. unique and hard-to-obtain items*

It is a commonplace but serious problem in Western societies that children have too many (manufactured and expensive) toys. The same is not the case in Russia. True, the habit of buying clothes, toys and whole birthday parties for one’s child is part of the consumerist lifestyle among the very rich in Russia. But for the majority, the ideal of mothering does not follow the logic of capitalist markets. On the contrary, it often opposes the commercial logic by valuing friendship networks and unique gifts. The most admirable thing in St. Petersburg is to make nice and special children’s clothes and toys oneself, or to have many friends who help you by giving presents to the child. Russian mothers with young children form their own “queues” by handing down clothes to each other as the children grow out of them. This arrangement is both of material and symbolic importance:

Buying baby things in a shop, therefore, is treated almost as a lack of respect for the custom. Since this belief means effectively that one has to rely on presents and help from other women, it serves the purpose of guiding a preg-

nant woman towards expecting support from the female community and not fussing with preparations herself. (Shchepanskaia 1996, 266, emphasis added)

With strict abstract logic, the belief that one should not buy baby clothes does not by itself mean one could not rely on help from men. Seeing the female networks as self-evident, Shchepanskaia's astute observation provides us with an example not only of extended mothering, but also of the deeply rooted women-centredness of Soviet family life.

## 5.2 CROSS-GENERATIONAL HELP

Contemporary Western households represent increasingly smaller units of consumption. Non-monetary, self-sustaining household production and cross-generational households are increasingly rare (Offe 1996, 122). Modernization in the Soviet Union also entailed a shrinking of the average household size. But the deficiencies of the Soviet service sector paired with Russian family dynamics helped to preserve various forms of cross-generational help. Belonging mostly to women's responsibilities, they sustained the *matrifocality* of the Soviet family. This women-centredness meant that the predominantly female, cross-generational social, emotional and economic relations were the structuring features of family life. It was the precondition for the practices of extended mothering. Vertical or cross-generational relations existed between the wife/mother and her mother, mother-in-law, other elderly female relatives, and sometimes also their respective men. Horizontal female networks included relations to siblings, cousins and relatives of the same age and to the closest circle of friends.<sup>4</sup>

The women-centred family structures put women in a position of greater agency, whether they wanted it or not. Research on fatherhood in the US suggests that without a strong ideological change, the only socio-political factors making men participate more in child care are (a) poorly developed institutional child care and (b) a weak support network of other relatives. Some findings indicate that in the 1980s American fathers quite suddenly began to share childcare (if not other house work tasks) with their wives (Coltrane 1996). Exactly the lack of available and affordable day care and the diminishing amounts of help from other relatives may have played a crucial role in this change in parenting patterns. Perhaps it is not only egalitarian thinking that makes American fathers want to take

care of their children – are they not also structurally pushed to do so? The Soviet pattern of social reproduction confirms this hypothesis: with its cheap and extensive system of day care facilities, strong social support networks, and the absence of any ideological discussion of men's household duties, there are few challenges to women's core roles in the family. The resulting structure legitimated men's low degree of participation in housework and childcare and discouraged the men who wanted to be more present in their families.

In the upper classes, the horizontal relations of female assistance traditionally included servants and a nanny. Until the 1950s, it was fairly common for educated Leningrad families to have a special *nyanya*. These nannies were young girls or elderly relatives from the countryside who stayed with the family for several years. With rising living standards and easier possibilities for young women to get independent work in the cities, the number of nannies decreased. But the importance of *grandmothers* continued throughout socialism. Their influence on child rearing led Russian sociologist Leonid Gordon to talk about "cross-generational upbringing".

The amount of cross-generational help a family received or gave was tied to distinct stages in the family life course. The first stage occurred at the birth of the child. Couples with small children were often living with the parents of either spouse because of the lack of apartments and/or the need for help with household tasks and child rearing. If the parents were living separately, it was common to have a grandmother or mother-in-law looking after or living together permanently during the first weeks after the birth of a child. Later, grandparents also participated in child rearing during the pre-school and school years. As the children grew up, they passed afternoons, week-ends and entire school vacations in their grandparents' care. As mentioned above, in one-parent families it often happened that the child lived with the grandparents for large parts of his or her childhood. Finally, as the grandparents became old and sick, it was customary to take care of dependent elderly relatives.

In Nina's story (No. 17), the relationship with the mother was very close, as well as marked by Nina's remorse for having left her mother when moving away from home. It went without saying that she returned to take care of her mother for one year while she was dying. When she gave birth to her own child as a single mother, her mother could no longer help. Nina's woman friends and her aunt helped take care of the child. Some years later the old aunt fell sick. Nina then took the elderly woman to her single room in Leningrad and cared for her for several years until she died.



Another woman, a teacher and journalist (b. 1945, No. 9) married in a Siberian town during her student years in the mid-1960s. A daughter was born within one year after the wedding. As the child was weak and sickly, the couple moved to the paternal grandparents in a southern republic so the grandmother could help with childcare. (This did not mean the emotional relations between the narrator and her husband's parents were close or unproblematic: her parents-in-law had decisively opposed the marriage and the woman wrote that she never really got along with her mother-in-law, who thought her not beautiful enough for her only son...) At the end of the 1960s, the narrator's own mother became sick. She then returned to her home town in Siberia to take care of her mother until her death, three years later. There is no mention about whether the child stayed with its mother or with the paternal grandmother.

A third autobiography (No. 8), tells about longer periods caring for three elderly female relatives. The author, Irina, was brought up by her paternal grandparents and felt very close to her grandmother. When Irina was 21 years old and newly wed, she made her grandmother move from another town to live with her and her husband in their single, 12 square meter room in a communal apartment in Leningrad, *"because she was not living well at my father's place, and I loved her very much"*. The grandmother lived with the family for fifteen years, helped much with child care, and received much care herself during her last years.

As for Irina's biological mother, their relationship had been distant or hostile for most of their lives. The mother opposed all of Irina's cohabitations or marriages, forced her to have an abortion, did not help her economically and continuously criticized her daughter. *"We generally just do not get along together. She is a Leo. We are antipodes. Additionally, our biopodes are totally incompatible,"* the daughter states with references to astrological personality analyses. *"But she is ill and in August 1994 I came (when she telegraphed) to take care of her. I am still here."* Thus Irina had left her recent husband, her son and her grandchildren in Leningrad in order to care for her mother for an indefinite period of time. This, again, is not to say that the motives were totally unselfish: Irina's mother had now registered her daughter in her Leningrad apartment, the rights to which she would thus inherit. Finally, Irina took care of her ex-husband's mother during her last years, although their previous relations had also been quite hostile. *"I was kind to her: I travelled to wash her (she was 86 years old) and helped her with food and money."* (b. 1941, No. 8)

The pragmatic everyday arrangements sometimes led to huge geographical leaps and prolonged absences from the spouse or the children. The rudimentary

and inflexible apartment system posed restrictions on moving with the whole nuclear family. State institutions for old people were (and still are) in very bad repute and not considered an acceptable option. This norm of caring for the elderly is a good example of Soviet everyday morality: it was not articulated in official ideology, yet so self-evident that it is rarely part of personal value statements either.<sup>5</sup> For instance, one of the women just quoted (No. 9) mentioned the three years she spent taking care of her mother in her distant home town only in passing at the end of the autobiography, and not at all in the general and 'official' life course provided in the beginning of the text.

Although done mainly by women, the everyday caring also involved Soviet Russian men, especially when taking care of elderly parents. They shared the work with their wives, or, especially in case the wives or daughters could not do the caring work, men shouldered the major responsibility. The most desperate description of such a family situation is provided by a male worker, in whose family the mothers of both spouses needed help at the same time, but could not be cared for together:

*...those were very hard times for me. My sister had already died. And my father did not live much longer after that. And my mother did not get well, her condition became worse all the time. So for twelve years I nursed my sick mother, tearing myself between her, my family (as the birth of a daughter had made my presence absolutely necessary) and some kind of work, which was quite free and at least gave minimal support, together with my wife's income, for our daily existence. The problem was that my wife also had a very sick mother and our mothers were totally incompatible, they could never have moved together into the same house. That would have been such a pain for them! It was so difficult for me that there were times when I was walking on the street and, looking down at my feet, I felt a strong desire to die and remain there on the asphalt. So I would not have to take any more steps. Because I felt how, with every step, I was leaving behind the missions nature had prepared for me, providing me with talents and wasting all that energy on me. Life was leaving me like a bitter smoke, but my conscience does not allow me to take the other road, does not allow me to die, leaving my mother alone, helpless and with such a terrible loss. (Male low-skilled worker, b. 1936, No. 31)*

Later in life the man felt the same kind of heavy responsibility towards his daughter. He wrote that he did not divorce his wife *"feeling the feelings of my daughter in the case that I would leave. She is clever – no way you could fool her by gradually leaving, even when she was three or even only two years old"* (No. 31). The responsibilities of the sons increased as Russian mothers often expected especially their

sons and daughters-in-law to take care of them during old age.<sup>6</sup>

The cross-generational ties of the Soviet family created emotional strain and conflict. Before turning to the problematic sides of the women-controlled power functions, the positive results of these family dynamics should also be emphasized. As in many industrialized countries, Russian women live longer than men and there is a significant number of single elderly women. Having divorced or buried their husband(s), children and grandchildren often remained the main emotional content of their life. Elderly women often described being close to grandchildren as the greatest satisfaction. It is *“another kind of love”*, but intensely gratifying. Maya (b. 1936, No. 5) ended her autobiography longing for a new sexual relationship and feeling “very lonely”. What also made her “very happy” was the presence of “wonderful children and grandchildren”. Rita, although cruelly deceived in her last relationship with a man, saw her granddaughter as one major reason for nevertheless being happy with life:

*Since that [relationship] I have not had any dates anymore. After that, my granddaughter Natashka has coloured my life. She has compensated everything for me. (...) I have a granddaughter who kisses me and hugs me. And that can also be something to envy, that there is also another love in life, a totally different love that will compensate you for all other kinds of love that you had earlier. And I am content – caring and loving, I am ending my life on earth. Everything is wonderful, everything in life changes, like the seasons. Everything is fine. I am not alone. I am happy it turned out this way. (Rita, b. 1925, No. 2)*

While middle-aged men and women often presented maternal love as a threat to the wife’s love for her husband, elderly women did not describe similar conflicts. In Maya’s case, ironically, one reason she had difficulties starting a new love affair was that she had given up her own apartment in favour of her daughter and grandchildren and thus had no suitable place to receive a lover.

### 5.3 POWER AND PERSUASION

The patterns of extended mothering contributed to the *estrangement of the father* from childcare and family life in general. This seems to have been especially true in the first phase of cross-generational help, when the family was still a young unit and the grandparents took part in caring for the new-born child. For instance, one man first lived for six years together with his wife in a rented room. But once she became pregnant and their child was born in 1965, they “had to”

move in together with the mother-in-law:

*We had to move together (prishlos' s'ehatsia). My mother-in-law simply detested me. My wife was put before an ultimatum: (not by me, but by life itself): I or her mother. She chose her mother, applied for a divorce, and I was a bachelor again. (Man, b. 1932, No. 29)*

This man did not write anything more about his child, which presumably grew up with the mother and grandmother. Such experiences of male powerlessness constitute one red thread in men's autobiographies.

### *Deciding about abortions*

One special area of women's mutual help, but also of family struggle dealt with abortions. Many women described pressure brought to bear by other women, generally their mothers or mother-in-law. No-one in these autobiographies wrote it was the husband or partner who pressured her (except through indifference or simply leaving the woman).<sup>7</sup> In one case, a young woman was living with her father, brother and paternal grandmother, all of whom pressured her to have an abortion when she had become pregnant at a young age.

*Granny demanded that I have an abortion at any time during the pregnancy and at any cost, my father shut up, ad my brother stopped talking to me. Thus I irreversibly lost my father and my brother, having crossed the border that separated me from the world of "decent" people and having chosen my destiny. (Julia, b. 1966, No. 21)*

Notwithstanding this enormous pressure, the young woman decided to keep the child and do as she wanted. Her mother (who had earlier divorced her husband) came to her help, to the extent of taking over the main responsibility for child care a few years later.

Another example of the decision-making process was described by a man, whose mother-in-law taught the couple to resort to home-made abortions:

*It had been over one year since we married and now we totally stopped protecting ourselves. And if we used condoms, it was only to make my organ thicker and continue intercourse longer – that was what my little wife liked. She was no longer afraid of pregnancy – well, if her mother helped her once, she'd help her another time. That also happened: her mother steamed her and the periods start-*

*ed again. True, sometimes clots, coagulated blood, flowed from her vagina.*  
(Man, b. 1935, No. 30)

Some years later, after the birth of their first child, the wife became pregnant again. “*First we decided that she would keep the child, but, presumably after talking to her mother or for some other reason, she decided to have an abortion, against my opinion.*”<sup>78</sup> (No. 30) Women related similarly frustrated and complex stories about their mothers and mothers-in-law. Just before the end of the Second World War, a twenty-year-old woman, Olga, became pregnant from her husband. The couple was living in a provincial Siberian town, where the woman’s mother and sister joined them. Very soon, the enlarged family constellation forced the husband to move out:

*[My first husband] very much wanted a child, but I did not become pregnant. (...) Then I got pregnant – he was happy. But after a month – a miscarriage. Perhaps as a result of the siege [of Leningrad – AR]. Soon I became pregnant again, however, we were not meant to live together. As a result of long correspondences I found my mother and my sister, who had been evacuated [from Leningrad] later than I had. They came to us.*

*My mother immediately disliked P. and declared war on him. She said that he was not suitable for me, and when we wanted to register our marriage, she put an axe on the doorstep and said to me: ‘Don’t you dare!’ When I argued that he was the father of my child, she said: ‘The father is not the one who conceives, but the one who brings the child up.’ I was crying. P. moved out.*

*I was an obedient daughter and returned to Leningrad, where one day after the arrival the xx. of September 1944 I gave birth to my daughter Nina. That is how I became a single mother.* (Olga, b. 1923, No. 1)

The author told about disagreeing, but eventually complying with her mother’s will (“I argued” – “I was crying” – “I was an obedient daughter”). She blamed her mother for making her a single mother (*mater-odinochka*). The end of Olga’s first marriage is also described in the passive voice, as unavoidable destiny: “we were not meant to live together”.

Another woman, Irina, a secretary from a working background born in 1941 (No. 8), described in detail her problematic relationships with her mother and various mother-in-laws. Her mother had left her and her father when she was less than one year old, and her early childhood was spent with her paternal grandparents in the countryside. At the age of fourteen, Irina moved to Leningrad to live with her mother and step-father. In her late teens, she dated several boys and

moved for a short while to live in a civil marriage with a boy of her own age, a union vehemently opposed by both mothers. She then met a slightly older, exceptionally good-looking student from another town. After they had been dating for six months he had to return to his home-town, and proposed to take Irina with him. Her mother knew the young man had not yet officially divorced his first wife and refused to let her daughter leave with him. Then Irina found out she was pregnant. She had not told the future father:

*I was pregnant. For the first time. How happy I was! I had dreamt about having a child already in school – I had played, in a literal sense, with dolls even in the tenth grade. (...) I was dreaming about getting married and giving birth to a “football team with reserve players”. But alas! (...) I was left [by the boyfriend – AR] to be torn to pieces by my mother and her friend, our neighbour, Vera Petrovna. They pressed, pressed and pressed me to have an abortion. How can I describe the tears, the pains of the soul – to kill a child! A child, that I wanted so much from my beloved V... But my mother was not listening. She threatened to throw me out in the street and with other punishments. Meanwhile Vera Petrovna made a deal with the head doctor of the hospital S. and literally dragged me there. I have forgotten all other abortions,<sup>9</sup> but this one I still remember today. Even today my heart is aching that my little son was not born, and I am crying for him. (Irina, secretary, b. 1941, No. 8)*

Irina also blamed her mother-in-law for destroying her husband’s relationship to their common (and her only) child by suggesting that the boy was not actually his child.

Olga later provided a touching description of her ex-husband’s longing for his first child, whom he never met. She added a transcription of the letter her sister wrote to her after having met her ex-husband in Siberia, and showed him the first pictures of the new-born daughter in Leningrad.

*I had only entered the room when he said ‘So, tell me at once, how is Olya and how is the child?’ (...) He asked: ‘Do you have a photograph of her?’ I gave a photo of you and the child. Dear Olya, if you only had seen how he was looking at the photos the whole evening and would not let go of them. Then he said, ‘Give them to me, so I can at least look at them’, so I gave him the photo. (...) Olya, I never thought he would suffer so much. If you had seen how sad he became and how he looked at the picture, and said to [the child – AR], ‘my sweetie, where are you?’ (Letter from Olga’s sister, 2.7.47, quoted in No. 1, b. 1923)*

The man also wrote a letter to his ex-wife, discussing an eventual reconciliation but not about the child. He had by then already remarried and had a child with

his new wife. It is therefore hard to evaluate how much the sister's description was tainted by what she wanted to convey to Olga. The fact remains that one of the rare lengthy descriptions of an estranged Soviet father's pain is found in this letter, written by a woman. In order to grasp the men's position in the pattern of extended mothering, I will sketch the two main types of family men (husbands and fathers) as they were described by the male authors.

### *The passive hero and the seeker*

In referring to female decision making in the family, the male autobiographers presented themselves in two types of cultural configurations. One drew the picture of "*the passive hero*". The type is well-known from Russian fairy tales where it is exemplified in the lazy and slow youngest son, Ivan. In male autobiographies of this kind, events happen to the narrator, but his own intentions are not given much space. This type was directly embodied in one autobiography, written by a geologist born in 1956.

In his early thirties, this man had one marriage behind him and was living together with his mother. He suddenly met the big passion of his life: "*From that minute, from that precise instant my life started to be directed by forces unknown to me and following special rules of existence.*" After two weeks of heavenly sex during secret meetings the woman decided to end the relationship: she was married and thus torn between her lover and her family, and the lover was evidently also drinking much more than she liked. For instance, he mentioned how she forbade him to drink alcohol when they were supposed to meet and how he willingly obeyed. Here, the man described a scheme of reaction that is identical to the male romantic heroism in *Thousand and one nights*. What was in that epos called being lovesick, would now be diagnosed as acute depression: the hero simply lay down in bed and refused to get up or eat anything. He was brought back to life by the care given him by two wise old women:

*On legs crooked by sorrow I managed to reach the bed and that was all. I drew the blanket over my head, bit my teeth together in order not to cry, and was quietly dying. I lay that way for many days and nights. (...) On the evening of the second day there was a knock on the door, and a retired neighbour, the war veteran Gamina Petrovna, entered. She offered me some galantine with garlic and I... ate it. And then I ate with good appetite a plate with borsch soup, that was kindly offered by our second neighbour Lyuba, a housewife in life – she has six children – and a chef by calling. (Man, b. 1956, No. 39)*

The passive hero was also exemplified in the case of Georgii. First, he described getting married because his girlfriend insisted on it while they were having oral sex (quoted in the previous chapter). Then he agreed to a divorce because of his wife's reluctance to leave Leningrad when he got a work assignment in the south, and because his own mother insisted that he get a divorce:

*[Our marriage] continued four years, exactly the time I was studying. Then I got work at N. on the Black Sea. She did not want to go there with me and lose her propiska. So we got divorced, the decisive role was played by my mother, I would not have taken that step (we had no children). (Georgii, b. 1949, No. 36)*

The second male configuration recalls that of the “seeker”. Seekers are “not committed and are therefore constantly on the move, searching for happiness (without finding it)” (Ojakangas 1994). Seekers are men who present themselves as being in control of their life, but whose stories give the reader a more ambivalent impression. In such autobiographies, questions of decision making and everyday responsibilities are avoided or rendered as frustrating and problematic. The men were rather individualistic and emphasise themselves as sexual heroes. Valerii, an industrial worker born in 1939, may exemplify this second strategy. Emphasising his own principles and activity, his autobiography nevertheless draws a picture of great dependency on the surrounding women, especially his mother. When he married for the second time at the end of the 1960s, he soon became “disappointed” in his wife. He nevertheless felt it was his duty not to divorce her. The couple was sharing two small rooms with Valerii's parents.

*So I accepted the entire responsibility for preserving the family, and I did not want to divorce a second time. My mother somehow did not like [her daughter-in-law – AR] and she once declared that I would not be staying with her for long. So I wanted to prove the exact opposite. I had complicated relationships with both of them. And my mother thought I had problems with her because of my wife's influence. But my wife was, on the contrary, of the opinion that I like to seek pretexts from my mother. Whereas I have always been putting a sense of justice above all. (Valerii, b. 1939, No. 32)*

Valerii's mother was cast in the role of controlling witch in every aspect, from her small habits – like demanding to keep the door to the young couple's bedroom open by night, as a closed door would give her a headache – to major events, as when she tried to manoeuvre her son out of the apartment altogether. (At a later stage, the son had no contact whatsoever with his mother for many years.) Not having a say in the decision about giving birth or not was, again, a major frustra-



tion for the potential father. When Valerii's second wife became pregnant, his mother persuaded her daughter-in-law to have an abortion. After the operation the wife was unable to get pregnant again. Eventually, the absence of biological children in this marriage was one of Valerii's reasons to divorce this wife: "*In addition we did not have children of our own – on my mother's insistence she aborted my [sic] child (later she regretted that) and could not become pregnant after this*".

For a longer period, Valerii was torn between his first and second wife, partly living with both of them at the same time. He presented himself as the restless, moving, but desired target of both women. The second wife pretended she was pregnant, had him arrested by the police, threatened him with suicide if he left her, etc. His indecisiveness made him entangled by these complicated relationships and with little practical space for independent action. When he applied for a divorce from his second wife, she surprised him in court by describing him as a wonderful husband. The judge gave them three months to think about their application for divorce, and they continued to live together for many years.

## 5.4 GENDER CONVENTIONALISM

How does the evidence of extended mothering relate to the thesis of 'gender traditionalism' in Soviet families? This popular thesis has been most succinctly condensed by sociologist Peggy Watson (1993), who claimed that state socialism unintentionally preserved cultural and especially gender "traditionalism". This was, firstly, a result of the *informal personal networking*. In a situation of continued scarcity of commodities "the importance of traditional gender identity was also heightened as a cultural resource for both survival and resistance. (...) State socialism, in fact, acts as a life support system for traditionally based identity" (Watson 1993, 472 and 482). From buying furniture to choosing a doctor, Soviet citizens were dependent on the advice and support from relatives, friends and friends of friends. Ties to older generations and neighbours were essential in everyday coping and prevented any bigger breaks with tradition. Watson claims that these networks 'pushed' towards a preservation of traditional (patriarchal, pre-modern) gender roles. She does not define the word traditional, but seems to refer to the values of previous generations, possibly even pre-revolutionary agrarian or aristocratic customs.

Second, the *Soviet public sphere lacked institutions and expert systems* that would encourage reflection on gender and sexual identities. From the 1930's and on-

wards Soviet ideology propagated only the monogamous, heterosexual nuclear family and increasingly soft and domesticized ideals of femininity (Liljeström 1995). There were no social movements, commercial mechanisms, or widespread psychotherapeutic practices that would have built on and furthered people's interest in changing their sexual and gender identities. On the contrary, pre-revolutionary gender markers, such as 'aristocratic manners', were adopted in some milieus as a means of criticizing socialist ideology. Watson concludes that gender identities under state socialism were formed *reactively*, rather than reflectively.

Furthermore, the values of Soviet people were often more traditional than what the actual organization of labour, living and loving in society permitted. A *normative pressure* existed in gender and other identity issues:

There were limits, for example, to the extent to which women could devote themselves to domestic activities since they were practically all employed full-time, while the opportunities for exercising masculine power and initiative in a state-controlled public domain were very largely lacking. (Watson 1993, 472)

This pressure would then have been released during the rebuilding of the post-socialist European societies in the 1980s and early 1990s (Watson 1993, 472).<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the 'traditional' and patriarchal trait of Soviet family policies is not generally acknowledged or questioned. The initial, 1920s view of the family is still seen as the one the Soviet regime actually adopted: erasing sex roles, destroying the family as an institution, taking child rearing away from the family, etc. For instance, when directly asked about sex roles, many Russians of late socialism think the women should be more feminine than under socialism. Few acknowledge that this was exactly what Brezhnev's school programmes of so-called family education told women to be (Attwood 1990).

But is 'tradition' the proper word for this attitude towards gender roles, as it is both hard to pin down (which and whose traditions?) and easily gives the wrong associations (traditional as opposed to modern, for instance)? In my view, Soviet family relations had a *double impact*: sustaining some traditions, but effectively breaking others. On the one hand, as Watson and other scholars have argued, some of the traditions and values of the older generation were preserved in the family settings and transmitted to Soviet girls and boys during late socialism. The central value of maternity – that every woman should have at least one child – is one example of such values that came to be problematized during the moderniza-

tion process of many other countries, but not in Russia. As Watson says, the practical dependency on help from the grandparents also made it harder for the nuclear family to develop alternative life-styles or alternative child rearing practices. We have seen in this chapter how Soviet men and women complained about their mothers and mothers-in-law either because of their disturbing presence or because they did not help enough.

On the other hand, according to these autobiographical excerpts, the mother's persuasive powers were clearly used for "non-traditional" solutions: to postpone marriage or have a divorce, to abort pregnancies and belittle the importance of fatherhood. Mothers of the older generation sometimes opposed having grandchildren because they knew it would affect their personal free time and strength.<sup>11</sup> Grandmothers could also support divorces due to their own personal reasons, such as disliking their in-laws or just being very tied to their children.<sup>12</sup> The picture is thus more complicated than one of merely increased gender traditionalism.

However, it is plausible to argue that the pattern of extended mothering is one that goes back to the pre-revolutionary Russian agrarian tradition. In pre-industrial Russia, as in other Northern European countries, the households had an asymmetrical division of labour. Women could, if necessary, do men's work, while men could not do women's work (Ransel 1991; Liljeström 1995). As a result of this, women were ultimately responsible for the family household (Apo 1993). The same tradition continued in the Soviet socialist family. Women could do men's work in the public sphere, as they received access to education and wage-work, but men 'could not' (would not) do women's work at home.

Thus it is the tradition of *asymmetrical division of labour* and women's family responsibilities, often and wrongly blamed only on state socialism, that represents *tradition* in the Russian family, if we understood tradition in the sense of ingrained, historically founded common practices and customs. Under late socialism this tradition created the rhetorical praise of the (non-existing) bourgeois family, with a clear separation of women and men into two separate spheres. It seems misleading to call this rhetorical reaction "preserved traditionalism". Instead, it is a good case of how traditions are invented. One could, then, take an easy way out and say that this is traditionalism because all traditions are invented traditions (Giddens 1999, 40). I would instead propose a separate word for the *longing for certain invented traditions* that we find in late and post-socialist Russia. I suggest we could talk about *gender conventionalism*.

By conventionalism, I mean two things: a support for the gender roles that are perceived as natural, normal, 'traditional', irrespective of their actual historical

roots in Russian society; and a general aversion against revising or reflecting on these gender roles. In a society with a changing gender landscape, with increasing uneasiness over gender relations, gender conventionalism stood for a search after unquestioned, solid ground. What in a Westerner's eyes appears as stereotyped and politically incorrect, or in any case annoying, expressions of true masculinity and femininity (men shaking men's hands but kissing a woman's) may be examples of *conscious* stereotype: a way of saying 'let's wish this was a natural, unchangeable thing, let's not discuss this further'.

Conventionalism is distinct from 'traditionalism' in the organic sense of following certain ingrained cultural habits (such as going to the sauna in Russian and Finnish cultures). It is also distinct from 'tradition work' in the reflective, playing sense of the Western 1990s (such as the return of intricate rituals surrounding weddings). Conventionalism is wishing there was a fixed tradition, such as the longing for true masculinity or femininity that Watson accurately describes. I will illustrate the difference between traditionalism and conventionalism with an example of women's criticism of men.

### *Why complain?*

A typical example of the clash between patriarchal ideals and reality comes from the autobiography of a young woman, Evgenya. First, she absolutely wanted to find a husband and marry as a virgin. She describes herself as an "*individualist*", who always liked being alone and was used to having a room of her own. She was nevertheless worried over having been so "*late to develop. I started wearing make-up at the age of 23 and married late*". After many efforts, she married at the age of 28 and quickly transformed herself into a self-assertive and confident wife. Bored with "enslavement in marriage" and as her husband started drinking, she divorced him after three years of marriage:

*After the divorce I started thinking about the reasons for inequality, women's enslavement in marriage. How can you preserve femininity, sensitivity and softness if our women are with few exceptions working, carrying the family on their shoulders, bringing up the children and on the top of this completely serving the husband at home? I see that with my own parents and in many families I know. This kind of situation provokes a protest in me. But the men are satisfied with this kind of situation. (...) Maybe we have those kind of [Asian] traditions and habits but that does not mean that they should remain the law and rule for everybody. This female slave habit of ours will leave its traces for a long time to come. (Evgenya, b. 1964, No. 20)*

This quote can be read in two quite opposite ways. Paying attention to the “reasons for inequality” and “the enslavement of women in marriage” sounds like grains of a proto-feminist consciousness, the first articulations of a feminist identity. But it can be understood the other way around: the enslavement is wrong because women work too much – they should be working less, preserving their “femininity, sensitivity and softness”. The quote can be interpreted as an example of radical questioning of gender roles, or quite on the contrary, as an example of resorting to conventionalism, wishing that would settle the matter. Other parts of Evgenya’s autobiography indicate that she herself saw it both ways, or that her reflections were still without a clear direction.

Unfortunately, some Western feminist readings choose only the more familiar interpretation, that of (proto)feminism. Especially Helena Goscilo has been tenaciously engaged in an effort to prove that Russian women’s contemporary fiction exposes “the prevailing cultural sign system as a mastodontic outgrowth of self-serving masculinist ideology” (Goscilo 1996, 60). One of her main examples is a short story by Nina Sadur, “Worm-eaten sonny” (*Chervivyi synok*), written in the 1980s. Goscilo find the text an “undermining of conventional gender roles” creating a

vividly repulsive counterimage of Man (...) Sardonicly switching the gender roles in the drama of the Fall, Sadur attributes the consequent tragedy of human suffering and mortality not to the wily Eve but, instead, to the fatally flawed Adam. (...) Man here gets demoted from his authoritative role of world bearer (Logos legislator) to that of worm carrier (source of psychic and bodily decay), his fabled authority travestied as ruinous petty tyranny. (Goscilo 1996, 61-62)

Without here assessing Sadur’s original text, I want to emphasise that already Goscilo’s own short rendering of the short story can be interpreted in an opposite way. The “fatally flawed” (Russian) Man and his inability to function as world bearer is a characterization many Russian men and women would agree with. But more than an ironic play with cultural stereotypes, it is a question of a deep source of anxiety. Given the choice, the women would perhaps prefer Adam without worms.

The 1970s experience and visionary project of many Western women was condensed in the slogan “Woman, wake up – there is no prince”, or “A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle”, or – still more drastic – “I need you like a hook in an eye. A fisherman’s hook. A fish’s eye.” In Russian women’s autobiographies, their own conclusions rather suggest they would wish for the prince to

wake up. The vehement denigration of Russian men, whether it took place at the kitchen table or in women's fiction, was not done to question the system of heterosexual relations and patriarchal culture. It was articulated in order to criticise men, in the more or less clung-to hope of making them change. This does of course not exclude feminist "subversive" readings of these complaints, or that these initial laments may develop into feminism (see chapter 11 for a discussion of feminist identity quests).

The second wave of feminism in the West was in many ways characterized by a questioning of the heterosexual relation, especially the institution of marriage. Men's social and personal domination over women, ranging from macroeconomic inequality to sexual domination, was the main challenge. The original point of departure and object of this critique was the patriarchal bourgeois family and its forms of masculinity and femininity. Later, working class women or women of colour objected to this defining framework, claiming other points of departure. As Carolyn Steedman has noted, "analyses of patriarchal systems suppose propertyless women" – and, we may add, men with property. For a child of the Western working class, the father's authority took quite different forms than in classic feminist (or psychoanalytic) analyses. A working class girl

knew her mother as the manager of a household, and as the ultimate financial supporter of her children. My own father was, as much as the rest of us, living outside the law; its rules were not of his making, and when he transmitted them to us, he was an agent of some distant ruling, not its representative. The economic system of our household, and the relationship it dictated between mother and child, meant that he could not represent for us the economic face of a wider social system. (Steedman 1994, 82)

The same difference in basic family dynamics characterizes the Soviet experience compared to the predominant Western models. Only, under state socialism the family of dual employees was not confined to a certain class, but characteristic of most social classes (with the exception of the political and professional elite). The wage-working mother was the "manager of the household", and the father was rarely perceived as the main agent and representative of the "wider social system".

Additionally, in most Western cultures *motherhood and women's professional and intellectual autonomy have been seen as mutually exclusive*. The pioneering Western 'New Women' of the turn of the last century implemented a new social lifestyle elaborated by women of the intellectual elite: basic everyday relations were not structured around one heterosexual relationship, and many of these women did not have children. To my knowledge, there is no research on similar

women's households in Russia. As a hypothesis, we may speculate that they were less common, for the same reasons that the bourgeoisie as a whole was smaller and less culturally dominant (Engel 1983, Engelstein 1992a). If such a speculation has any value, it would further explain the nowadays prevalent pattern in Russia, where socially autonomous womanhood does not exclude marriage or motherhood. Not only the weak cultural imprint of the housewife, but also the weak imprint of the autonomous, man- and childless woman, defines the historical configuration of motherhood in Russia. Russian women were never 'only' mothers, but neither could they be non-mothers.

This would explain why questioning or rejecting heterosexual marriage was, and is still, unfashionable in Russia. As Laurie Essig (1999a) points out, politically active Russian lesbians can well be officially married to men, without it causing any problems in their circles of friends. Sometimes these marriages are forced by social conventions and pragmatic aims, but may well include a significant and true (if not necessarily sexual) relationship. Another example is provided by the feminist writer and playwright Maria Arbatova (1997), who through a TV-show has become the best-known feminist in Russia. Arbatova's autobiographical short stories describe her difficult project of social and sexual self-realization in the 1970s. Her aims were to "become a personality" – to fulfil herself as a creative, independent woman unfettered by social gender stereotypes. There are no indications that this project was in any way perceived as contradictory to marrying.

In Soviet Russia, heterosexual relations and marriage were felt to be frail enough as they already were. They were not viewed as the main object of critical demolition, but as in need of strengthening and support. As the above-quoted Evgenya (No. 20) wrote concerning her failed first marriage, her husband's problem was that he "*submitted to me in everything. (...) I took care of him, he was proper, ironed, well-fed (as he ate what he was given) and I knew everything about his work place.*" Evgenya also took her husband to doctors and psychotherapists because of his excessive drinking. When he still did not stop drinking, she applied for a divorce, to which he also agreed "*as he was used to submitting to me*". While Evgenya's parents understood and approved of her divorce, she was more self-critical herself. She should not have been "the man" in the family:

*I saw my mistakes. We had a typical Russian "love-pity" relationship with my husband, when the woman feels sorry for a "poor guy" and accepts all of the everyday problems and carries them like a workhorse, while the husband contents himself with giving her his whole salary and is not responsible for anything. I was the man in our family. He stayed the boy he was. (Evgenya, b. 1964, No. 20)*

At the same time, Evgenya proudly rejected a new boyfriend and potential husband who was far from burdening himself down with housework and whose mother seemed intent to “enslave” her in the household. Evgenya’s search for a new balance in family dynamics was evidently not over (for a further discussion of this case, see chapter 10).

### *Summary: ‘The ideal Soviet mother’*

This and the previous two chapters have discussed how the generally acknowledged practices and everyday morality of Soviet urban life diverged from the patriarchal or ‘traditional’ ideas so frequently stated by official ideology and individuals alike. The life course of the Soviet family included the practices of early and often short-lived first marriages, the norm and social habit of women’s in industrial societies relatively early childbearing, a lower average birth rate, a comparatively high number of divorces and extramarital affairs, the traditions of women’s cross-generational influence and help, high geographical mobility, and the ideology of motherhood as a woman’s natural vocation and of the man as the head of the household. These practices converge in the pattern of extended mothering.

Often, the expectations, conditions and dynamics of extended mothering were stronger than the institutions of heterosexual love. Extended mothering caused motherhood in a broad sense to remain as the main structure of the family. This is hauntingly expressed in Joseph Brodsky’s observation that sex is based not on desire, but on pain, alluding to women’s greater part in the process of reproduction. Another example from Russian literary history is Marina Tsvetaeva’s (1998/1932) passionate reflection on love affairs between women. Her only objection to them is that two women could not (at the time, we may add) have biological children. Love between women, just like love between a man and a woman, is always doomed to vanish. For Tsvetaeva, the only future of a love relationship lies in the future of the child: “You cannot live of love alone. The only thing that survives love is the love of the child.”

Compared with women of Western bourgeois cultures, Soviet Russian women may have had fewer barriers to envisaging a combination of motherhood and life as a (professionally, intellectually, emotionally) active woman. This chapter has tried to contextualise this combination by describing the practices of extended mothering. However, these practices were paired with gender conventionalism



and pressures to follow the stipulated life course, marry and have children. Thus normative expectations of marriage and childbirth co-existed with the view of single and/or professionally active mothers as acceptable social constellations. As the feminist scholar Marina Liborakina once put it to me: “After the institutionalized Soviet marriage came the institutionalized Soviet divorce – but then the woman had got her child legitimately.” Or, remember how Nina (No. 17) retrospectively explained her lack of ambitions to get married in her youth: her “motherhood instinct had not yet awakened” (and not, for instance, that she had not experienced her great love or did not know about sexual passion). The same attitude is reflected in Soviet survey results from the 1970s, when 70% of recently divorced women stated they had no intentions of remarrying, although half of them eventually did so (Kerblay 1983, 124).

In the men’s autobiographies, fatherhood was more rarely seen as a subject for autobiographies about love and sex. Fatherhood became a topic in those situations where the man did live with his children, not as an everyday habit and experience. Basically, both in practice and ideology, the mother-child dyad evolved without men. A male professor (born in 1941, No. 33) described his first wife as saying: “*I am the ideal Soviet mother – I gave birth to a son, went out with him, brought him up, gave him a good education and took him out from the country*”. (*la – ideal’naia sovetskaia mat’ – ia radila syna, vychodila, vyrastila, dala prekrasnoe obrazovanie i vyvozila*). That the two last phases – education and emigrating – took place after she and her husband had divorced does not in any way diminish her achievements, just as their having been married was not mentioned in the list of her achievements.

1. Arja Rosenholm (1999) on the contrary criticizes the silencing and marginalising of the maternal, as she shows how the image of the Russian new woman of the 1860s rejected maternal features. Khvoshchinskaya’s heroine in the novel “Pansionerka” “denies everything that could be given in terms of maternal, and, consequently, chooses action, willpower, reason and the action against feminized emotion, nurturing, love and motherhood”. Where the aristocratic woman was seen as guided by her heart, the new woman was guided by her head. And the new woman was “eager to strike out the feminine, especially the maternal symbolic from her being”.
2. In Finland, fathers should participate in the birth of the child (and most of them do), take some parental leave, try not to be absent when the child is small, etc. For instance, one of the candidates for the presidential elections in 2000 stressed family values in his campaign. His wife was a housewife and the couple had three young children. However, the candidate was widely criticized for not participating in the daily care of his children.
3. The distinction between child- and community-centred views of child rearing is seen when comparing the giants of developmental psychology in Russia and the West, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Piaget thought a child was born a separate personality that was socialized and learned to follow norms during its upbringing. Vygotsky saw the newborn child as an already socialized creature who could learn to master social rules and thus achieve freedom of action.

4. The horizontal ties of mutual assistance between women are shortly discussed in Ledeneva (1998). They were interestingly enough predicted by the August Bebel, who optimistically stated how women under socialism did not need to worry about child care: “Nurses, teachers, female friends, the rising female generations [will] help mother when she needs” (quoted in Holden & Levy 1993, 302). (NB that help from an older female generation is completely dismissed!)
5. Lyudmila Petrushevskaya’s (1998) short story “Night Time” (*Vremya noch’*) describes a poor middle-aged woman’s desperation and bad conscience as a result of moving her old and demented mother to a state mental hospital.
6. Eve Levin (1993) gives an interesting suggestion for the social basis of this pattern. She underscores how, in the Russian peasant family, the closest and longest emotional bond was likely to develop between a mother and her son. Other social relations, including those with the husband, were socially arranged, and the daughters were married away earlier. As late as in 1993, I interviewed a woman psychologist with two teenage children, one son and one daughter. Her plans were to grow old in her son’s house, after he had become a successful businessman. That her son, or she herself, might not want such an arrangement in forty years time was not one of her considerations.
7. In our St. Petersburg survey, over 60% of the women reported having decided on their own about their last abortion. Ten percent said their partner pressured them, while pressure from the woman’s parents or ‘others’ (in-laws?) amounted to almost as much (8%).
8. The domestic abortions this man describes are mentioned in chapter 6 as an example of orally transmitted sexual knowledge. This whole life story is presented in detail in chapter 8.
9. This woman tells about having seven abortions altogether.
10. The traditional gender roles have also been described as a separate ‘shadow’ gender contract, coexisting with the official Soviet norm of the wage-earning mother. For women, the ‘shadow’ ideals valued a feminine appearance – dresses, make-up – and the ability to manipulate social networks (Temkina & Rotkirch 1997). In the informal semi-public milieus of the 1970s and 1980s, gender relations often appeared even more, not less, unequal than those in official working life: “Ideal masculinities tried to establish themselves in the domains of shadow economy, dissident movement, counter-cultural and elite milieus. (...) in these spheres men occupied dominant positions, and both men and women shared the view that these arrangements correspond to the ideal gender order. (...) In the counter-cultural and bohemian milieu women were muses and lovers as well as devoted self-sacrificing wives of un-recognized mischievous geniuses. In the shadow economy and elite circles the women were mainly passive submissive housewives; in the dissident movement women were typists, disseminators and managers of open houses” (Temkina & Zdravomyslova, 1999).
11. A vivid depiction of this dilemma is presented in the diary of Galina Vladimirovna Shtange from 1936. Shtange, then 51 years old and belonging to the Soviet nomenklatura, was eager to become socially and politically active. “May 14, morning. Last night, caught up in the enthusiasm of the people around me, I boldly joined the women’s movement.” Then her son got a child. “August 27. So much for my community work! (...) Circumstances will not let me be distracted, even for a moment, from what’s going on at home. Borya had a son on August 15 and neither of us has a maid, in fact they don’t even have an adequate place to live. (...) I feel awfully sorry for them, the poor things, and I have to come to their aid at this difficult time. So I decided to give up the work that I love so much, and take up cooking, dishwashing, and diapers again.” (Garros et al. 1995, 167-215).
12. Alexandra Chistiakova’s autobiography relates how she encouraged her son to divorce his wife and return to “his home”: “All is not well in your family life. You are not telling me anything, but I understand everything. I beg you, take care of yourself, come what may. You can take the children and come to your home. There is enough space here and I can bring them up as well as she does.” (Chistiakova 1998, 80).



# Part II



*But tell me, at the time of those sweet sighs, how was love announced?  
What sign brought you to the first stirring of dubious desire?*  
Dante, *The Divine Comedy* (Canto V in *The Inferno*)

## Soviet Sexual Cultures

The quotation in the beginning of this part is from Dante's polite yet compassionate request to hear Francesca di Rimini's life story. It may here symbolise the ideal attitude of the scholar asking for sexual life stories. Love and "dubious desire" are announced under, and modelled by, certain "signs". In di Rimini's case, the lovers found each other while reading about the tragic knight Lancelot. This part will approach some of the signs, types and arenas of sexuality in Soviet society.

I start from the generational dynamics with regard to sexual knowledge and everyday morality, and then look more closely at various examples of sexual cultures in post-war Soviet society. The 1960-70s appear as a period of the revolution in sexual behaviour, evident in family life and semi-public social settings, although without a simultaneous revolution in the articulation of sexuality. As the semi-public sphere grew in importance, it came to feature distinct sexual subcultures. Part II finishes with a sketch of a conceptual chain between milieus, subcultures and the emerging public cultures in post-socialist Russia.

## 6 Transmissions of Sexual Knowledge

This chapter focuses on the ways of *obtaining sexual knowledge* during different periods of Soviet history. The term “sexual knowledge” can be understood in a narrow or in a broader sense. The first refers to sexual knowledge in the sense of education and enlightenment – as *information* about intercourse and reproduction (menstruation, pregnancy, contraceptives, personal hygiene, etc.). This type of sexual knowledge can be greatly enhanced by schools, health care centres and other social institutions. It has been shown to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and abortions, and to have a positive impact on people’s health and sexual satisfaction (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila 1995a). In the Soviet Union, the first modest amounts of sexual education in schools were not introduced until 1981. It is still not systematically and efficiently taught in Russian schools. Only with the advent of perestroika did this kind of sexual knowledge become widely, if randomly, available through the mass media, popular science books and books for children and adolescents.

In a broader sense, sexual knowledge also includes reflective assessment of questions of *sexual mastery, identity and self fulfilment*, especially in reference to what one from today’s perspective thinks one should have known earlier in life. These psychological and identity building aspects are being increasingly integrated into contemporary sexual education in schools. They are also enhanced by expert systems such as women’s and men’s magazines, medical and psychological discourses, social movements, etc.

It goes without saying that the two levels of sexual knowledge, information and self identity, are not clearly separable in autobiographical accounts. The

author's opinions in the moment of writing shape the selection of memories and their rendering and evaluation, including the accounts of what did *not* happen – for instance, the common complaints about the absence of physical touching in childhood, or about the lack of sexual information provided by parents. These retrospective evaluations are discussed in part III as part of the process of establishing a public sexual discourse. Here, I will focus on the level of sexual information, or what the autobiographies presented in terms of 'how I learned about it'. Although the evaluations written today show traces of the nowadays dominant naturalization of sexuality – what is 'normal', natural, basic, instinctual, etc. – I have no doubt that many of the complaints were felt, if not necessarily voiced, long before perestroika. To clarify this claim, I will relate one particularly tragicomic episode.

This event is related by Konstantin, an engineer born in 1932 (No. 29). Raised in an intellectual family, he became an engineer with a rising career in research institutes. In the mid 1960s Konstantin was in his early 30s and living through a severe personal crisis, during which he was drawn to the verge of suicide. The crisis broke out some time after his second divorce. He had several affairs, the last of which was with a married woman with whom he fell seriously in love. They could only meet for short times at awkward places, and during intercourse he had problems with early ejaculation for the first time in his life. According to Konstantin, the woman openly despised him, called him impotent and ended their relation. He became desperate and followed her everywhere until she threatened to report to the police. Deeply depressed, he decided to take his life. Not only did he not want to live without that particular woman: the author stresses that a life without love and sex was unthinkable to him, as "*that meant almost everything to me*". He also stresses his masculine pride in deciding about the way of making suicide:

*I explicitly wanted to shoot myself, as any other form of suicide (except perhaps immediate poisoning with cyanide) seems to me to be shameful, denigrating and unworthy of a man. It was impossible to get hold of cyanide then, or of a revolver. I decided to use a hunting rifle. (Konstantin, engineer, b. 1932, No. 29)*

But in order to buy a gun and cartridges, he had to enter a hunting society:

*I became a member of the [hunting] society, got my ticket, bought a cartridge with a bullet and chose a suitable single-barrelled hunting rifle. But while I was gathering money to buy the rifle, there were no single-barrelled ones left in the*



*shop (a lucky incident!), and the double-barrelled rifles were much more expensive. By that time (another lucky coincidence) I had started talking with a female colleague at our institute. (...) My outlook and the way I was talking must have made her worried. She was persistent and curious and gradually made me 'open up'. (Konstantin)*

The woman friend succeeded in getting him to talk about his problems and advised him to take a prolonged vacation. *"After one month I returned as another person and without any clear indications of impotence. I am grateful to this wise woman."*

Konstantin's autobiography is written as a paradigmatic example of a quest for sexual knowledge, and the author repeatedly blames the Soviet system for not providing it. Much could of course be said about the picture or identity, male self-esteem and sexuality – how a deep life crisis is attributed to sexual failure and sexual failure is attributed to the Soviet system, or how suicide and proper masculinity are linked. But concerning the level of sexual information, this episode also provides clear evidence: for instance about how the lovers both wrongly concluded that he suffered from impotence, and how neither of them had access to expert systems – books, doctors or journals – from where to seek help for that supposed problem. It also shows how social networks – the man's woman colleague – in the end provided him with support and effective advice. (The story also gives equally direct evidence in favour of restrictive weapons legislation.) I do not think there is any need to doubt that, whatever this person's current ideological emphasis is, he suffered at the time the crisis unfolded. True, the importance of printed and 'objective' information may be overstated in the autobiographies.

How and where, then, did Soviet children and youth get information about sexual matters?

## 6.1 SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE SILENCED GENERATION (AGE COHORT OF 1920-1945)

*I am a product of my time, of the period in our country about which it is said and written: "There is no sex in the Soviet Union". For the biggest part of my life, talk about sex and erotica were considered forbidden and shameful themes. Nevertheless love, sex, and erotica are an inseparable part of the life of every person, and play an enormous role, wherever he lives. In my life they played a dominating role. (Woman, b. 1937, No. 5)*

The oldest generation I shall discuss here consists of people born between the 1920s and 1945, who had their formative years in the late 1930s to late 1950s. In the ways of acquiring sexual knowledge they are quite similar to each other, giving the reader a taste of a specific generational experience. These autobiographies also resemble Finnish (and Estonian) sexual biographies of the same age cohort (Rotkirch 1997). Behaviourally, there are country differences already in this first generation. For instance, in the 1940s Finns on average started dating when they were nineteen, while the average age in Leningrad was above twenty. At the time of their first sexual intercourse Finnish men were on average nineteen and Finnish women twenty, while Russian men were twenty-one and Russian women twenty-two. Throughout this century, Finnish women and Russian men have thus followed the same statistical levels of sexual behaviour, while Finnish men are less and Russian women more restricted. But the general trend is the same in both Finland and Leningrad – one of gradual lowering of the age of the ‘first times’. And the general problems and events of sexual life described in the autobiographies by Finnish and Soviet people are much the same.

In Finland, this pre-war generation has been called the generation of sexual repression. But in the Russian case, I suggest talking about the *silenced generation*. The term is motivated by two reasons. First, “*silenced*” is comparatively more adequate than the word “repressed”. In contrast to Western Europe, this Russian generation was preceded by the unique postrevolutionary period in the 1920s, when Soviet policy in sexual and family matters was at its most liberal, and social instability and transformation was rapid. In the big cities, free relationships were discussed and practised, cohabitation was usual and abortions and divorces legal and easy to obtain. From the early 1930s, the Stalin regime tightened the legislation. Igor Kon (1995) has called the period between 1930 and 1956 that of *sexophobia, denial and repression*. While it is true in describing the closing down of sexual research and aesthetics, it is exaggerated to call Stalin’s family policies “brutally repressive”. Even with the new restrictions they remained more liberal than in most other countries at the time.

Concerning actual lifestyles, the 1930s may have been more radical and permissive than the immediate post-war period. Igor Kon (1995) hints at this when he notes that the availability and use of condoms may have been wider spread before the war than after it. For instance, the literary critic Emma Gershtein reflects in her memoirs on the rich sexual relations in the circle around Osip and Nadezhda (Nadya) Mandelstam in the 1930s. She gives the following characterization:

Nadya was assuring me that against the background of complete sexual liberation, the incredible novelty of the times and the danger that was floating in the air, there emerged a favourable soil for the blossoming of great love. She used to talk about her wish to write a book about the love of the modern (read, Soviet) human being. But even without those high-strung words I had a living example of such a love before my eyes – the two of them, Osip and Nadya Mandelstam. (...)

Nadya called her union with Osip Emilevich a ‘physiological success’. At the time all her discussions and doings were saturated with talks about eroticism. How did I relate to that? The moral and aesthetic side of such themes was not worrying me the least. We lived in the epoch of sexual revolution, were free–thinkers, and young, that is with a natural and healthy sensibility, but already the elaborated manner of real snobs of never being surprised by anything. The only resting criteria of behaviour in intimate life was for us individual taste – who happened to like what. (Gershtein 1998, 424–425)

According to Gershtein, Nadezhda Mandelstam was interested in same-sex experiences and various *ménages-à-trois*. But in Nadezhda Mandelstam’s memoirs, written in the 1960s, she kept silent about those issues and denied the importance of her and her husband’s other love affairs. There were of course many and complex reasons for this change in sexual openness, but among them we must count the prudent Soviet 1960s. The young woman who dreamt of writing a book about the emancipated and passionate love of the new Soviet man and woman, became the widow who, when opposing the regime that killed her husband, wrote about quite another kind of love: marital, pure, elevated and exclusive. This latter kind of love suited the official Soviet norms of intimate and family life, although Nadezhda Mandelstam’s of course opposed the Soviet regime in other respects. Mandelstam’s transformation can be seen as evidence of how, even in the most liberated and bohemian circles of artists and writers, sexuality (among many other things) was *silenced*.<sup>1</sup>

Igor Kon also generalizes a little too hastily about the influence of Stalin’s repressive sexual policies on people’s lifestyles. He writes that “[a]ll knowledge and civilized notions about that sphere of life [sexuality – AR] was eradicated in the USSR root and branch. Generations of Soviet people were brought up in an atmosphere of sexual ignorance and the anxieties and fears that usually accompany such ignorance” (Kon 1995, 85). Although Kon’s periodization concerns public consciousness and official doctrines, generalizations such as this one imply the actual knowledge and lifestyle of people. But as we shall see, far from “all

knowledge” was destroyed.

The second reason for talking about a generation of silence stems from the autobiographies themselves. They show no lack of sexual events – in fact, many of the richest sexual biographies come from this generation. The oldest woman (born 1923, No. 1, here called Olga) had several marriages and lovers in a life story that we will presently follow more thoroughly. The second oldest woman, Raisa (born 1925, No. 2), a woman of the working class and experiences of labour camps, also gives among the most sensual and joyous descriptions of physical passion in the whole material. However, she writes that she never told even her children about her time in the labour camp, and neither had she mentioned the love relationships of that period to anyone. They were thus doubly shameful and silenced. Of the men who participated in the autobiographical competition, the ones from this generation were exceptionally sexually active – they have a median of over 10 sexual partners, which was typical for only one third of the whole age cohort in Leningrad.<sup>2</sup> But notwithstanding rich sexual experiences, for the absolute majority of this generation sexual matters were something to be *silent about*. For instance, practically every respondent in the survey born between 1922 and 41 said that sexual matters were kept in secret in the family and 96 percent that they had had no sex education in school, and less than 30 percent reported that sex was something they discussed with same-sex friends. Also between spouses and lovers, sexuality was often something unmentionable. Of this generation, about 40 percent thought it was very or rather difficult to talk about sex with their partner. (Half as many, or one fifth of the whole age cohort, thought it had become easier to talk about it during the 1990s!) For comparison, in the second and third generations the figures for those who found it difficult to talk about sex were less than 30 percent and less than 15 percent, respectively.

### *The event of finding out*

Valerii Golofast (1997) has suggested a distinction between three levels of biographical narratives: (1) the routine, (2) the level of events, and (3) the secretive and the hidden. For the generation of silence, sexuality definitely belonged in the realm of secrets. Therefore acquiring knowledge was an Event that left clear memories. For both women and men, there was a distinct turning point at which one learned the basics. Writing about these kind of secrets – breaking the silence – was also an event for the persons of this generation, who often note that this

was the first time they described their sexual life to anybody.

In this generation, all women with professional or higher education mention how they 'found out' as an event. By contrast, two of the four women workers with lower qualifications do not explicitly mention obtaining sexual information, except that one of them complains nobody had informed her about menstruation. The class difference may be interpreted as a greater restriction on which topics are suitable to mention, even in an autobiography about sex and love. None of the working class women in my material use specific sexual terminology: for instance, while they may describe intense physical pleasure, they do not discuss the presence or absence of their own orgasms. It seems that the emphasis on exact, scientific knowledge and terminology is in itself a demand typical of middle class women's culture. An alternative and in my view even more probable explanation is that the working class women got enough practical information not to see their ignorance as the main problem in their first relationships. A woman worker described her early basic knowledge in the following way:

*I grew up in a suburb and spent much time on the streets since early childhood, playing with children of various ages and from different types of families. Because of the bad living conditions and the quite low material and cultural level of these families, the children were early informed about sexual relations and, to the best of their understanding, shared their knowledge with the younger children.*  
(Woman, professional education, b. 1946, No. 11)

Nevertheless, the same woman later in the text stated that she was "totally uninformed in sexual matters" during her first longer relationship, probably referring to her lack of more detailed knowledge about women's orgasm and satisfaction.

By contrast, 'finding out' was depicted as an Event for all, both more and less educated, male autobiographers. For the men, acquiring knowledge was usually described not in connection with abstract knowledge (e.g. how children are made), but with the first sexual experience and the pressure to succeed.

As a typical case from the silenced generation, we will look at the oldest autobiographical narrator, Olga (No. 1). Her story is an exemplary illustration of Soviet upward social mobility and, as a part of it, of a desire to learn, professionally as well as privately.

Olga's parents were born in the middle of the 1880's. Both had four years in school and became factory workers. Olga finished school and started her studies in a technical field at the end of the 1930s. With the outbreak of the war, her studies were interrupted and she was evacuated to a small town where she met her

first husband, who was working at the same military factory. She was pregnant with his child when her mother persuaded her to return to Petersburg, where she gave birth to her daughter in 1944 (as discussed in chapter 4). She first lived as a single mother for more than ten years and then had two marriages. In 1996 Olga was living with her fourth husband, who had a relatively prominent position. She had a successful career, having a degree of higher education and rising from factory worker to a researcher in a project institute. At the time of writing she was retired and in need of extra income, as she mentioned she was working as a cloak-room attendant.

Olga's life story is unusually rich in family life events, it is otherwise in several respects typical of the autobiographies of the silenced generation. For instance, there was usually no mention of sexuality at home. In the case of Olga, the silence is enhanced by her religious upbringing. Notwithstanding the new atheist Soviet regime, her mother continued to provide the children with a traditional Christian education. There was also little physical contact in the family:

*Mother was the head of the family – a Petersburg family, kind but strict and demanding. (...) My father somehow went unnoticed in our family, he was a man of few words, who hardly took part in our education, but loved us. I was his favourite, he often patted me on the head and called me not by name, but “my girl” (*dochenka*). (...) Mother was religious and tried to raise us in accordance with the Christian commandments. Mother was restrained in caresses, she patted and kissed us only on the head. We did not dare to: lie, steal, be lazy, misbehave towards elderly people, go to stranger's apartments or go playing in the yard without permission. In the room there was a picture with the face of Jesus, and mother said: “He sees everything.” I looked at the little god from different corners of the room, and everywhere he looked directly at me. (Olga, b. 1923, No. 1)*

Olga and her sisters had to sleep with their hands on the blanket and were not allowed to stay in bed while awake. She emphasized that she did not see naked men in her childhood, except for small boys in the sauna. “*But in the banya they did not make any impression on me, although I probably remembered their well-proportioned bodies.*” Her knowledge and experience of the other sex came from children's games. “*When I was five I saw a small boy without trousers, perhaps that was the reason [that I once asked my mother to transform me into a boy]. The sight made a strong impression on me, I felt shame and some inexplicable feeling.*”

## *Peer groups and curiosity*

Olga's autobiography describes several situations characterized by such strange feelings of "shame, and something else". A similar inexplicable feeling occurred at eight years, when she felt another child's hand between her legs during play of hide-and-seek, or when she saw animals copulate.

Typical for the silenced generation in Russia, as well as for the corresponding generations in Finland and several other European countries, was that children obtained their first knowledge about sex children from *peer groups*. In Leningrad, the other children that provided information could be neighbours in the shared *kommunalka* apartments, playmates in the yard, relatives in the countryside or comrades in the summer pioneer camps. The stories of childhood sex games are often staged in the countryside, where the children spent the summer at their grandparents' place, or in small provincial towns where Leningrad children were evacuated for several years during the siege of the city. A typical memory is given by the woman (b. 1937, No. 6) who recalls how the village girls on the dacha "played 'marriage' in the banya so that the 'husband' commanded: lie down, you whore!" (*lozhis', bliad!*). Evidently, she did not hear such expressions in her home milieu in the city.<sup>3</sup>

Another, more detailed memory vividly illustrates the silencing of sex. One man recalled playing "doctor" with his friend at the countryside. Sometimes the games involved taking off the small trousers that were the only thing they were wearing because of the hot weather. When the friend's parents found out about their games, they became extremely upset and punished the seven-year-old boy in quite painful ways:

*After some time Yurik told his parents how we had been playing "doctor", and his mother beat him up with a belt, and then in addition put nettles in his trousers. I do not know whether our parents discussed the event between them, but I was not punished in any way and they did not talk about this with me. Yurik continued to come to my place, but instead of trousers they had dressed him up in some very tight pants with a bib and straps like on a swimming suit, with a complicated buttoning in back, and they had severely-severely forbidden him to take them off or let them down. You could pee through a slit in front, that was usual in those times. All in all we were not especially disappointed by this – we had other games to play. (Man, b. 1944, No. 35)*

This man stressed the innocent nature of his childhood games, with the exception for one time when he, undressed by his friend but without direct touching

taking place, suddenly experienced intense pleasure in his loins. Only later did he interpret this feeling as having something to do with sexuality. The same author also had vague but persuasive memories of having an operation on his penis at the age of four or five. The incision made a long, dwindling scar that never bothered him, but remained for his whole life. He recalled being too shy to ask his parents about the reasons for the operation. Only as an adult man did he once approach his mother. To his surprise, she denied the whole event, saying that “no such operations had been made” and “maybe that’s the way it should look?” At the moment of writing, the author was still ignorant about why he was operated.

The second main way of gathering information was simply by attention and curiosity. While some authors claim total ignorance about “everything” until their late teens, others picked up pieces of knowledge and various expressions from an early age. Of course this type of “information” could be misleading. Once, the young Olga overheard two men talking. “*One of them says ‘Vse liudy kak liudy, a ia kak kh... na bliude’*” (“All people are like people, but I’m like a pr... on a dish.”) The expression means being exposed and naive and has no direct sexual connotation except for the wording. Understanding the expression literally, Olga tried for a long time to picture this.<sup>4</sup>

In the silenced generation, the ways and forms of childhood sexual knowledge in Russia resemble other societies, such as in Finland of the same time period. The biggest difference between the Soviet Union and Finland is that the period of no or very diffuse knowledge continued later in life. This was the case especially for women, and most of all for women from the educated middle class. In some cases (Nos. 4, 5 and 9) the Leningrad women were over 18 years old when ‘finding out’, whereas the Finns tell about being 14 or 15 when learning about child making and birth. In only one Finnish autobiography the girl, born in 1936, was as old as 18 (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila 1995a, 163).

*In my time neither the parents nor school gave us any kind of information in questions of love, sex and even hygiene. (...) My naiveté in these questions was ridiculous and actually stupid. Now it is probably hard to believe that before 20 I did not know where children came from – I thought it was from behind. (Woman, higher education, b. 1937, No. 6)*

*I learned how children are born when I was 18, from a girlfriend. I was horrified, I did not believe her. I understood that they are not found in cabbageheads,<sup>5</sup> I had seen pregnant women, but I had never thought about how she came to have the baby there. After that I could not look at my parents without disgust, especially on my father, when I imagined what they are doing. And you can imag-*



*ine (!) how they were doing it in a room 16 square meters large and with two adult daughters.* (Woman, intendent in a nursery school, b. 1946, No. 10)

Soviet urban life provided few other channels except for the already mentioned ways of acquiring sexual knowledge – peer groups and curiosity. In his account of how sexual information was obtained in Victorian England, Peter Gay (1984) describes the very same principal sources of knowledge. In addition, Victorian society also provided younger males with access to an urban culture of “erotic education”: prostitutes, fashion, artistic and bohemian milieus (Gay 1984, 334-5). In postwar Soviet Russia, public spaces had much less of similar visible signs. I have been told by people growing up in Moscow and Leningrad of the 1950s and 1960s that also children knew certain streets or houses were of “such” kind, although of course not openly advertised or displayed. As for the artistic and bohemian milieus, they seem to have been more sexually experimental during the first three decades of the century. At least in the quotation by Emma Gershtein above, the Soviet intelligentsia is characterized as more sexually daring in the pre-war than in the postwar period. In any case, although there are a few mentions of brothels, none of the autobiographies of the silenced generation consider them, prostitution, or bohemian milieus, as a crucial source of children’s gossip or sexual information. Instead, the central sources which crucially formed Soviet people’s perceptions about love and sexuality were art and literature.

### *The joys of art: Maupassant and Michelangelo*

The silenced generation was the first to grow up in the educational framework of *kulturnost’* developed by Stalinism. Selected readings, manners and a certain general education were systematically taught to all Soviet citizens, especially the first generation of urban dwellers. The result was that for both sexes from the educated classes, and for women from the working class, crucial impressions and information were obtained from fiction.

*(...) the little I knew I either read in books (and I loved to read and I read a lot), or from my observations of adults or animals.* (Woman, b. 1937, No. 6)

The Russian classics, notably Pushkin, and French novels from the last century fed Soviet girl culture with information and ideals about love.

*Secretly, during the interval, we read Maupassant (...) and Kuprin – they haunted us and attracted us with something unknown and enigmatic.* (Woman, professional education, b. 1937, No. 7)

*My first acquaintance with love happened in childhood, when every day I listened to my parents calling each other tender names, how they hugged and kissed cheek to cheek (in the presence of the child).<sup>6</sup> (...) In later years I learned about love mainly from books. An especially strong impression was left on my unconscious by the books of Guy de Maupassant. (Woman, higher education, b. 1926, No. 3)*

*When I was 18, I did not have the slightest idea of how children are born and what spouses do in bed. Somehow all that went by me, I was not at all interested in it. (...) How children are born I learned at the age of 19 from literature. In one novel by [Theodore] Dreiser it was depicted in detail. And I was very surprised, I thought it happened in a totally different way, that's how stupid I was! (Woman, working class, b. 1935, No. 4)*

Again, a comparison with Victorian England does not seem too far-fetched: Soviet youth in the 1950s actually read the very same French novels that English youth had read in the 1880s. Maupassant's passage about the onset of menstruation seems to have come as a similar shock to the female readers of both historical epochs.

Only two of the autobiographies of the silenced generation in my material mention reading (popularized) scientific books about sexuality. One man described the war times, when he spent the years between 18 and 22 working up to 12 hours a day in a military factory in Leningrad:

*No time for girls, although there were many of them working there. (...) My "sexual development" was limited to listening to stories of the experienced guys about their successes and failures in love, learning foul language (in which master Vedov even gave production orders), and the book "Man and woman" (by the way really vulgar), which I saw at a neighbour's house. (Man, b. 1924, No. 26)*

Similarly, a Leningrad woman born in 1922, excerpts of whose autobiography are published in Creuziger (1996) remembered reading her father's medical books at the age of 12. "I had learned the big secret from my friend Tanya, and moreover, Kashtanka held a canine wedding near the house twice a year. Everything was clear after that and I became especially interested in the chapter on extra-uterine pregnancy." When this woman told her parents about her readings, she provoked a characteristical reaction as her mother "locked the book on gynaecology in the suitcase and added a few more books to that. I managed to obtain them nonetheless..." (Creuziger 1996, 23)

In addition to information from fiction, some men (but no women) also told about looking at and distributing art pictures. Again, these came from the legiti-

*ashamed to learn from my woman that I went for the wrong hole. (...) I would simply have needed serious knowledge about sex, but that was nowhere to be found. Once I got hold of some semi-underground photocopy of a translation of an English author. But he did not allow himself to leave the academic world (uchenost) for reality.* (Man, unqualified worker, b. 1936, No. 31)

We can take another example of a traumatic first sexual experience by returning to the life story of Olga. As a teenager, she described herself as an active, outgoing girl, who did well in school and was socially active. At the same time, she had “*sharp experiences of the feeling of shame*” concerning everything that had to do with romance, beginning with kissing. Much as in the life story of Viktoria (No. 5), the young Olga saw herself divided into an assertive, public self and a hidden, private self defined by shame and strong bodily sensations.

In the beginning of the war, she attended a military training camp in Leningrad. The camp leader was her sports teacher from school. One night, he arranged to be able to sleep in the same room as she did and came into her bed.

*I did not like it, but I did not suspect anything bad (as he was my teacher!). Then he started to kiss me and say some tender words, but I was burning with shame, my heart was beating fast. I did not like him and even found him repulsive because of his thick lips. Some kind of faintness overwhelmed me. He took my pants down and asked me to part my legs, but I did not resist as I did not understand what he was doing with me. I was repulsed by his panting, but I endured it. He said “I won’t hurt you.” It really did not hurt.* (Olga, b. 1923, No. 1)

This event is hard to label. Olga did not call it rape, while by contemporary Western standards it would be at least forced sex. In an almost identical description by a Finnish woman, the event is categorized as rape, and the author is now regretting she did not report the man to the police (Rotkirch 1997). In Olga’s rendering, her first intercourse serves as yet another example of the ambivalence of Soviet young people’s sexual codes and behaviour – the sports teacher may well have been thinking she was not against his undertaking. She described her bodily sensations in detail: how she was “burning with shame”, her “heart beating fast”, how she “did not like him”, was “repulsed” and again “ashamed”. But two things kept her from transforming this inner resistance into action: “some kind of faintness” overwhelmed her (she expresses herself in the the passive voice), and she “did not understand what he was doing”. The faintness and the lack of understanding may be seen as two faces of the same thing: the absence of concrete knowledge and, reinforced by that uncertainty, the lack of possible modes of behaviour except “enduring” and being ashamed (see Figure 6).

mate high culture of the Stalin period.

*My feminine ideal was built on the classical ideals. Looking through an album with works by Michelangelo, I was impressed by the sculpture "Night" on his grave. Several times I copied her during some school lesson or another, and even on demand; I had great success. I still remember the expression of voluptuous exhaustion on her face. Then came the time of romantic love, I wandered around in the halls of the Hermitage, once during the winter holidays I fell in love with a portrait of a lady with very strange eyes, they seemed to look at me persistently and tenderly, and as the portrait was quite small and hung in a hallway, this created an intimate atmosphere. I was for a long time infatuated with this look. (Man, b. 1949, No. 37)*

One man tells an exceptional story of how he got hold of erotic pictures. During the war, he was staying with his grandparents in a small village that was eventually occupied by the Germans. They threw out heaps of books from libraries, pedagogical institutes and schools on the streets and yards:

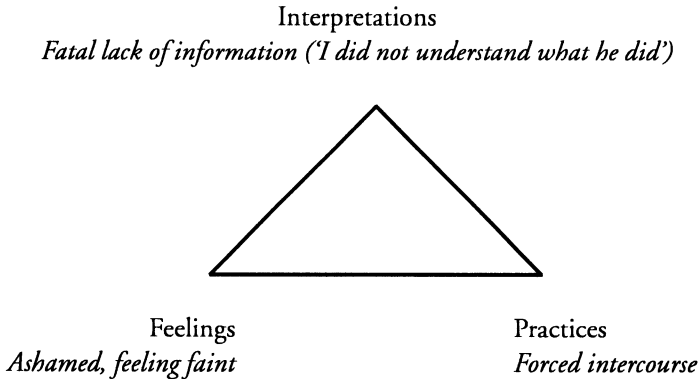
*That way I got free access (in 1941) to literature of all genres and directions. True, the Bolshevik regime had restricted the scope of themes and writers a Soviet person could get hold of, but I still managed to read a lot that would have been out of reach if not for the war – from Maupassant and Boccaccio to a leaflet by Professor Shchukin called "Man and woman in sexual life". (Man, b. 1932, No. 29)*

## Learning by doing

To some extent, the experiences of the silenced generation do validate the sensationalist argument that Soviet Russia during Stalin belonged to one of the cultures in world history knowing least about sexuality. The oral culture of agrarian culture had largely disappeared together with the erotic culture of the upper classes, and the evolving new Soviet middle class was deliberately kept in sexual ignorance. Painful experiences of dating and family life have already been described in part I, but in the following examples they are directly related to sexual information:

*I was sexually close to a woman only after the army.. She was twelve or fifteen years older than me, somehow dogged by bad luck, unhappy and alone and I pitied her. (...) We undressed, I was even more ashamed than she (...) How would I know what should be done and how to behave when I had evaded even in the army all talks about amorous escapades during leave. They were bragging and cynical. That hurt me. When I had finished my first try unsuccessfully, I was*

*Figure 6. Experiencing sexual violence (the case of Olga)*



*In the morning I had not slept for a minute and could not look at him, I was so ashamed. (...) In the diary I kept at the time I wrote, "I am no longer a virgin" (*devushka*). My sister had noticed some change in me and read it. She did not say anything to mother, but to me she said: "You have destroyed your life". (Olga)*

Although Olga retrospectively understood what had happened – “I am no longer a virgin” – she repeatedly returned in her autobiography to her little understanding of what “virginity” represented physiologically. First, she could not explain her earlier sexual experiences to her first husband.

*During the very first intercourse P. understood that I was not a virgin. I racked my brains over how he guessed that, because I did not have the slightest idea about the virginal hymen. He asked me, "Have you loved anybody?". "No", I answered honestly. Because I had really not loved F.V. On the question: "How did that then happen to you" I answered: "I don't know". We never talked about that again. (Olga)*

Later in the text, she raised the same issue when discussing the necessity and limitations of sexual education.

*In school age I think it is necessary to breed a sense of shame in children, especially in girls. That feeling will guard them from many sorrows. At the same time they should be given knowledge about sexual things, corresponding to their age. If I had known about the virginal hymen, I would have behaved otherwise. (Olga)*

This time, her lack of resistance is blamed solely on the absence of information. It contradicts her own earlier description, where the sudden “faintness” and burning feelings of shame did not guard her from many sorrows, but quite the contrary, prevented her from acting.

Thus it is true that in Soviet society, people – and especially middle class women – indeed had received unusually little concrete information about sexuality. But the silenced generation also had more sexually informed and permissive milieus, where knowledge was not transmitted through the written word.

### *Oral culture and the question of milieus*

With the hindsight of today, many writers clearly value “printed”, scientific knowledge over informal, unspecified and local sexual knowledge. Thus one author complains how in the early 1960s, “*of all contraceptives we only had condoms and no literature about this issue: it was dark as in the forest*” (taxi driver, No. 30). However, the same man described earlier how his mother used a special glass bottle for washing herself with soap as a contraceptive device. That kind of homemade reproductive and sexual knowledge is not counted as proper sexual information, although it remained rich in many Soviet milieus. It was transmitted among members of the same sex and included, for instance, the transmission of sexual vocabulary, techniques, or ways of having illegal abortions.

*And after yet some time Raia started to change positions while we were fucking, she asked – let’s do like this, or like that, we had already tried out many ways, but once again we did everything ourselves: she learned a little elsewhere, from what her mother advised her, or her girlfriends. We had no literature, everything was forbidden, we had to find out everything ourselves.* (Man, taxi driver, b. 1935, No. 30)

The same man recalled how, when his wife’s periods disappeared half a year after their wedding, his mother-in-law showed them what to do.

*We had to heat the sauna. We did not have a sauna, so my mother-in-law made arrangements about the sauna with our neighbour, as they were friends. And so, having heated the sauna so that it would be hot, she asked Raia to sit in a tub and started to add hot water into it, so that it would be as hot as one could stand, then she poured dry mustard there and covered it with a thick rag that looked like a carpet. I saw her ass when she got out of the tub – it was all red. Mother-in-law told her to put on warm trousers and took her home. That night her periods started and they came regularly.* (Man, taxi driver, b. 1935, No. 30)

The middle class autobiographies contain less evidence of such orally and informally transmitted hints and devices than those from the working class. This does not necessarily mean that they were in reality much more limited in scope: in the in-depth interviews about sexuality collected in St. Petersburg, where the respondents were directly asked about what kind of contraceptive methods they had used, many mentioned pills from abroad acquired through contacts, or special lotions and soap used as spermicide. But probably the lower and more popular Soviet milieus retained more autonomous – in the sense of non-medicalized – tacit and practical knowledge, as well as greater distance vis-à-vis dominant Soviet ideological conventions.

In addition, the working class autobiographies tend to contain many of the most sensual and directly sexual experiences, as if the dichotomies between pure love and sex, or between one's own knowledge and "proper", medical sexual information, operated less rigidly there. Thus one working class woman described her husband as being

*...very good to me, took care of the house and to sleep with him was pure pleasure. He was all joking, playing in bed, finding his way to all your pleasant feelings inside. He knew how to do everything, he knew all corners of a woman, knew where you should go. Not everybody knows that. They think you stick it here and there – and everything is fine. That's a bluff, you should know how to do it, know all the pleasant corners (ugolki priyatnosti). (Woman, b. 1925, No.2)*

Without more data it is impossible to conclude about the extent and contents of orally transmitted sexual knowledge. In the silenced generation oral information seems to have been transmitted randomly, moving on a family level. After the great social catastrophes and transformations, traditional channels of such cultural transmission were often lost. The majority were increasingly influenced by the Soviet pedagogical and medical professionals and the public norms of Soviet morals. In some families the old – agrarian, bohemian, working class – traditions were preserved, while in others they were replaced by other forms of behaviour that also deviated from the dominant ideology. These diverse enclaves formed various *milieus*.

## 6.2 GENERATION OF PERSONALIZATION (AGE COHORT OF 1945-1965)

On the basis of both the political shifts in the Soviet regime and its sexual policies and these autobiographies, the generation of silence expanded until the end of WWII. A change arrives with the cohorts born in the mid-1940s, whose formative years were around 1960s-1980s, with the late 1970s as the defining period. Soviet citizens of this generation grew up in the liberalized climate after Stalin's death in 1953. But although abortions were again legalized in 1955, a more liberal family law had to wait for over a decade, until 1968 (Lapidus 1978, 239). One of the reasons is supposed to be that Nikita Khrushchev himself had participated in drafting the repressive family legislation of 1944. Post-Stalin sexual policy was therefore more a gradual opening up than any complete break. This led to one of the biggest contemporary cultural divisions between the West and Eastern Europe: their different '60's'. But gradually, the second wave of migration to the cities and the increase in material standards contributed to dramatic changes in sexual life and youth culture.

### *'Living by passion': The different 1960s*

The Soviet people of the sixties, *shestidesyatniki*, constituted a distinct political generation, representing the (eventually failed) attempt of socialism with a human face. But they are not remembered for any wider public discussion of youth, sex, and gender like that taking place during and after the Western sixties. It has been argued that the Western sexual revolution started from a re-evaluation of young people's position in society. The demands for general sexual liberation, and a little later for women's liberation, grew out of the new generation's rejection of the previous double moral standards, an issue that was first discussed in relationship to *youth*.<sup>7</sup> In that respect, Soviet ideology showed no similar changes. The view of youth as an object of proper communist upbringing persisted well into the 1980s (Pilkington 1994). Second, the sexual liberation in the West was focused on *women's sexuality*. Both lay people and sexologists started emphasizing women's sexual pleasure and initiative (Heidenry 1997; Bozon 1999). This perspective, of course, also remained far outside the scope of Soviet public debates. Even the hesitant and moralising post-Stalin discussion of sexuality regularly pro-



voked counterattacks and calls for censorship.

Instead, the Soviet 'sexual sixties' meant some limited debates in the mass media in the early 1960s, the renaissance of sex research (in the form of questionnaires), the development of the field of so-called sexopathological research,<sup>8</sup> of a limited amount of sexual therapy, and of pedagogical advice on the proper upbringing of boys and girls.

According to the privatization thesis (Shlapentokh 1989), the 1960s was the time when the *gap between the official ideology and private behaviour widened*. A more accurate term for that process would in my view be *personalization*. Personal values such as family life and leisure became increasingly important for Soviet citizens. The informal exchange networks expanded into full bloom, and it seems that the frontiers between home and workplace became relatively more permeable during this time (Ledeneva 1998; Lonkila 1999). As we shall see, the intimate life sphere also received increasing attention (although Shlapentokh, quite typically for a Soviet *shestidesyatnik*, mentions this only in passing).

The change in the everyday preoccupation of Soviet people is fascinatingly rendered by one man who remembered seeing one film of the thaw period called "Your contemporary" (*Tvoi sovremennik*), which featured the role of a nice professor:

*Then professor Nitochkin, played by [Nikolai] Plotnikov, discusses the guiding principles of life with a colleague, and exclaims: 'One should live by passions, my dear friend! By passions!' The whole movie theatre exploded with applause, which rarely happened. We had probably not heard such discoveries from a movie screen earlier – until then we had been taught to live by Leninist ideas. And it was no dubious, unreliable personality who advised the people to let go, but a very positive and sympathetic Soviet professor.*

*My immediate reaction to the words about passion continued long after the movie was over. I involuntarily compared them with my own character and behaviour, until I was finally convinced of my own emotional poverty – in what concerns both various everyday events and women. Why indeed did I have to conceal my feelings, filter them through sensible judgement and all kinds of norms invented earlier by somebody else, and thus to seem, instead of existing (*kazat'sia, a ne byt*). (Man, born ca. 1945, No. 35)*

'To exist instead of seeming to exist' described a *zeitgeist* where the Western and Russian sixties do coincide; with French existentialism paralleled by the original work of Merab Mamardashvili, in whose thinking the idea of a second birth into real spiritual and cultural existence is crucial. The difference between Russia and

the West was, once again, that such philosophies could not be published for broader audiences before the late 1980s, and remained the oral and local knowledge of small academic circles (Roos & Rotkirch 1999). And when the moviegoer, after having taken the movie character's words to heart, organized a student evening devoted to dancing the twist, he had already done something forbidden, as twist (as well as jazz) was forbidden music.

During the period of "living by passions", the word sex itself was taken into use. True, the newspaper articles of the period continued to prefer "intimate relations", *intimnye otnosheniia* (Kon 1995).<sup>9</sup> But nevertheless *seks* came to be used alongside the traditional Russian popular expressions for intercourse.<sup>10</sup> This is also pointed out in one biography:

*In a certain way I agree with the opinion that "we had no sex", as there was no such word as "sex". All Russia managed with other, simple, everyday-life words. And I still do not quite understand why it is totally decent to say "I have sex", "I have intercourse" or "I engaged in sexual intercourse" (...) while the same meaning (this action as a verb or a noun) expressed in Russian, beginning with "ie" or "io", is seen as indecent. (Man, b. 1936, No. 31)*

Somewhat paradoxically, then, "sex" was actually introduced, even if reluctantly, into Russian society in the late Soviet prime time, the Brezhnevian 1960's.<sup>11</sup> The term carried with it a Western connotation, an implicit reference to the sexual emancipation in the West. But in public Soviet "expert advice" on sex, the main emphasis was to warn about the harm of masturbation and the risk of getting venereal diseases (Kon 1995, 85-106). Neither did the Soviet experts represent the kind of structures and wide *expert systems* that would promote active reflection on sexual identities outside the realm of the personal relations themselves (cf. Watson 1993). In the West, psychotherapy, marriage counselling and various forms of self-help groups started expanding precisely during the early 1970s. In Russia, these functions remained weaker and were the sole responsibility of intimate conversation among friends and lovers.

I have relied on autobiographies by eleven women and eight men as belonging to the second generation, born 1945-65. The main channels of acquiring sexual knowledge continue in this generation: peer groups, learning by doing, and reading classical literature.

*[R]eal expressions of human feelings were to be searched for in the novels by Emile Zola, Stendhal, Jorge Amado and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Françoise Sagan and other Western authors. (Man, b. 1945, No. 36)*

One woman worker described how her later conception of love was formed by the Russian classics.<sup>12</sup> After reading Pushkin, Maupassant appeared as a harshly realistic, down-to-earth alternative, which she nevertheless refused to be influenced by:

*It goes without saying that my parents were teaching me (vnushit') notions about modesty, respectability and a strict behaviour with boys. Of course also the teachers talked about that. But it seems to me that classical literature, especially Pushkin, had a greater influence on me. I read from the age of 6 and without interruption during the school years. And I early started to long for elevated, romantic love. Not even Maupassant, whom I read at the age of 12, could any longer make my wishes return to the ground. (Woman, professional education, b. 1946, No. 11)*

The impact of the classics fits well into the romanticized, literary ethos of the Soviet 1960s. It also continued until the very end of the Soviet era. One of my woman friends, born in the early 1960s, said she still remembered the impression of reading Pushkin's *Ruslan and Liudmila* and wondering what on earth it was that Ruslan did *not* do to Lyudmila. A Finnish-Russian comparison of women's memories also found the literary references of the Russians to be one of the greatest differences (Simonen & Liborakina 1996). And one man from the third generation, born in 1968 (No. 43), recalls secretly watching slides from the Hermitage with the neighbour's girls. Another man, born the same year (No. 44), told us he learned about the world mainly through the library of his friend, where he found the familiar list: Balzac, Zola, Stendhal, Maupassant, and later Walter Scott and Dumas.<sup>13</sup>

### *The behavioural revolution*

Against this background of continuity, the personalized generation was distinguished from the oldest generation in two crucial respects: it experienced a revolutionary change in sexual behaviour, while at the same time change hit so differently on different milieus that it becomes almost impossible to call this an actual sexual generation.

Crucial changes occurred in Soviet sexual behaviour in the 1970s. Just as in the first generation, there was a gradual lowering of the age of first dating (from about nineteen years to eighteen years, for both sexes) and the age of first sexual intercourse, which for men went down to eighteen, and for women to nineteen. But now, the types of sexual behaviour and practices became much more varied.

An increased number of sexual partners and of extramarital affairs, a greater variety of sexual practices and techniques – these standard components of what is referred to as the sexual revolution – increased significantly under the 1970s. In this generation, the number of Leningrad men who have had parallel relationships jumped to well over fifty per cent, and the number of women's infidelities doubled compared with that of the previous generation, from fifteen to almost thirty per cent. Sexual techniques, such as oral sex and other than man-on-top positions, were reported to have been used by over half of this generation. (Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch 1998, 153.)

According to our survey findings, the time difference for changes in sexual behaviour between Finland and Leningrad was between ten and twenty years. For instance, the reported number of sexual partners increased for Finnish women born in 1946-50s, and for Leningrad women born between 1956 – 60s, giving a time 'lag' of only ten years. Reporting masturbation has a country difference of 15 years, as do practices of oral sex. (Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch 1998; 1999.)

For the generation of the behavioural sexual revolution, obtaining sexual knowledge was no Event anymore. For this generation, family sex education had become slightly more common. According to our survey, the percentages who had *not* received any sexual information in their childhood home declined from almost 90 in the previous generation to less than 80 in this one, although information had still been given "sufficiently" to less than 5 % in both generations. Here a decisive change occurred only for the next generation, where 'only' about half had not received any sex information in the family, and already about 15 percent said they had known enough. A few popularized books about sexuality had also become available. The few mentions of first sexual knowledge as an Event are connected to this kind of publication – three women, born in 1946 (No. 11), 1958 (No. 17) and 1964 (No. 19), all mention a handbook on gynaecology as the main source of their knowledge of sex.

For the young Petersburg women in the first post-war generation, the main problem was not learning about sex, which was gradually becoming more of a self-evident routine. Instead, the question was *whether to get married as a virgin*. What had been obvious behaviour for the older generation now became of a matter of negotiation. In our survey, almost half of the men and almost 60% of the women from the silenced generation thought sexual intercourse should happen "when the couple was planning to get married or was already married". In the next generation, the numbers fall to less than 30% for the men and 40% for the women. We note that the gender gap in the second generation is relatively bigger

(although smaller in absolute numbers), probably increasing the misunderstandings and conflicts between dating young men and women. Chapters 4 already featured Nina's experiences with one man who kept her as a mistress and led parallel family lives, and a suitor who could not imagine testing sexual compatibility before marriage. Another woman Nina's age described similar reactions from a more conservative man:

*After about one week [of flirtations – AR] I understood that coquetry is not my style, I cannot and will not hide my activity under a veil of passivity, as all women do.*

*Once, when V. was sleeping over at our place, I sneaked into his room, woke him up and declared that I wanted to give myself to him. I was straightforward and shameless (...) -Am I your first?, asked V. -Yes, I admitted. -But why did you want this? You know that I have a fiancée. I explained to him, the best I could, that I wanted to part with my virginity, that once I have got that into my head I will achieve what I want anyway, if not with him then with somebody else, but as I like him and desire him he should not play a fool but take advantage of the situation. V. was shocked. Virginity seemed to him such a treasure that he could not possibly understand why I wanted to give it to the first one that comes along. I had a hard time to convince him that I was not trying to trap him and did not intend to make him marry me. (Woman, upper middle class, b. 1960, No. 19)*

A third topic that was not raised until this generational cohort is *homosexuality*. In the previous generation of autobiographers it was mentioned briefly by two men, in this generation the subject is raised by five women and three men, and actively practised by two women and one man. Of course, as the quote by Emma Gershtein pointed out, same-sex experiences were even quite common among Russian intelligentsia at the beginning of the 20th century. But after the severe criminalization of male homosexuality under Stalin and the pathologization of lesbian relations, mentions of homosexuality disappeared from Soviet publications of the Stalin era and from the autobiographies of the silenced generation as well. In the generation of personalization, one homosexual man complained vehemently about misinformation, social hostility and lack of anything that could have helped him, but a female homosexual wrote a life story where society was not the problem (see chapter 9). These mentions are also reserved, taking distance but not judging. One woman typically first criticized the Petersburg and Moscow Centres for Women's Studies for their "open lesbianism", but then approvingly quoted the following story, where her artist friend approached an Orthodox priest:

*Father, I worked on a restoration of the church and do you know what? There are so many gays there! Do you at least know about this? -I do. But I also know that every one will have to answer for himself, and not for everybody.* (Woman, b. 1945, No. 9).

## The generation that was not one

The final and main distinction of the personalized generation is its *lack of a common generational experience*. Their autobiographies are more disparate and could often belong either in the previous generation or in the following one. Some are written in the style and with the flavour of “sexual emancipation”, humorously relating different sexual adventures. Others are grim, cynical stories about dark lust and loneliness or betrayal. Yet others complain of complete ignorance. Olga’s complaints from the oldest generation are repeated almost verbatim:

*The atmosphere in our family was always quite puritanical, no “bodily tenderness” between my parents or with us, the children, no suggestive talk when the children were listening nor too explicit books and reproductions. Neither did my mother have any “enlightening” talks with me (the result was that when my periods began at age 11 I did not know what it was, and where children come from I learned even later, and I am still almost ashamed to kiss my own brother or my father).* (Woman, nurse, b. 1958, No. 18)

*My mother said she could not give any advice, because for her and grandma it was all dirt and sin. They did not find any pleasure in sex. Even if grandma had seven children and a womanising man.* (Woman, librarian, b. 1964, No. 20)

True, similar stories are also found in the autobiographies of Finnish women of the generation of baby-boomers, called the generation of the “sexual revolution”. Still, the very same level of ignorance does seem to me quite unimaginable in a Western European country in the 1980s (when this woman was in her late teens):

*I had [when I was 21 years old] an idée fixe to get married as a virgin, I was afraid of pregnancy as of fire, of children born outside of marriage and such things. I had only vague ideas about the methods of birth control.*

*It is typical that I did not have any idea of the actual physical side of love, and neither had I anywhere to learn this from. As I had a sharp feeling of the “sinfulness” of my hobby [drawing erotic pictures – AR], I hid it carefully. I promised myself to stop all this, but (...) I started again, and so it continued until I got*

*married, and I got married when I was 26 years old. As for masturbation, I did not understand I could have gone into my panties, but caressed my breasts (...) Later I read in one of the many "Sexual encyclopaedias" that there is nothing wrong about that. But I thought otherwise, and all my actions in that direction were accompanied by an enormous feeling of shame. (Woman, b. 1964, No. 19)*

Thus in this cohort, the forms of acquiring sexual knowledge become more varied, but also more stratified, and "randomly" distributed. There were big gaps between various town districts and social classes, as the next two chapters will show. Even inside the middle class, there were substantial variations. You could or could not find the handbook in gynaecology at your friend's house, and that created a significant difference in your understanding about sex. You could have access to Western or *samizdat* publications or not, etc.

Due to the censored public discussion, Soviet people also had very little information about social milieus that were not within immediate reach. During late socialism, there existed bohemian milieus where same-sex love was not unusual or condemned. But for somebody outside those small circles there was no way to get to know them. Thus one man who had been looking for a man to love or the last fifteen years knew only about the places for anonymous sexual encounters. Disapproving of them, he had (and still did not have) access to any other options:

*The first way to get to know somebody would be somewhere on a fitting "rusovke", that is in places where "gays" (golubye) so to say accumulate. Such places probably exist, but really unofficially, almost underground. In any case I have not found official information anywhere in the newspapers, in contrast to, for instance, Helsinki, or some other European cities, where the travel guides mention the cafés or restaurants where gays meet. (Man, higher education, b. 1960, No. 40)*

By contrast, a man born in 1945 (No. 36), had no problems knowing what homosexuality was and described receiving homosexual advances in the army.<sup>14</sup>

Far from presenting one stereotyped homogenous Soviet experience, the autobiographies of the personalized era show evidence of different sexual scripts and behaviour that existed simultaneously, inside the same generation. For instance, one woman recalls more sensuous doctor games that the girls knew were disapproved of by adults. But then she emphasizes how her meeting with a girl from a higher social milieu made her stop thinking about such pleasures "for ever":

*I was also occupied by the question of the origin of children. At the age of seven, returning home from the holidays at my grandmother's place, I told my girl-*

*friends that I had given birth to a child there, and it had been taken out from my stomach.*

*At about the same time the older girls taught me how to play “doctor”, and also to get my first sexual pleasure while touching my genitals. Of course, we felt that it was not a very nice game and played it in secret.*

*When I was 10, I tried to teach this to a younger girl who had come to visit me. The girl did not like the game, perhaps because she was from a culturally educated family. Her reaction convinced me that this was an unworthy (*nedostoinoe*) thing to do, and since then I never had any similar thoughts or wishes. (Woman, professional education, b. 1946, No. 11)*

These differences sometimes reached the point of non-communication between different classes and sexual lifestyles. A woman with a middle class background from a provincial town described encounters with other kinds of sexual milieus while studying at a technical high school in 1980:

*In the technikum I stumbled over things previously unknown and incomprehensible to me. In the group there were 4 girlfriends, who “collected” (*kopili*) boys and competed among themselves about their amount. All their relations were for more than one time and quite serious. They were not ashamed and talked about whom they were sleeping with and how. Nobody reprimanded them. Everybody found it interesting to talk with them. (Woman, b. 1966, No. 23)*

*Now, like never before, I understand that I was formed not at home, but at the counter – on both sides of it. (...) At seventeen I eagerly began working [as a saleswoman – AR].<sup>15</sup> After having got into a work collective with girls and women who were, so to speak, not married for the first time, I understood that in other families the relations between men and women were not as rapid. (Woman, b. 1946, No. 13)*

This second generation can therefore not be called a sexual generation in the strict sense, with shared crucial experiences (Rotkirch 1997). It was a ‘split’ generation, where tradition disappeared, and with it a common understanding – albeit seldom articulated and differing by class and gender.

Personalization meant that non-public life, including sexual life, became relatively more important in life, and that many public and semi-public arenas were defined by personal contacts and networks. As a consequence, this age cohort cannot be said to present a coherent sexual generation in any meaningful sense. It does not constitute an experiential generation, and even less a “mobilized generation” with a political program. The only common trait is the increased role of



“passions” (*strasti*) in life. And this was the period when the various milieus of sexual culture began to evolve into *distinct subcultures* of private lifestyles. This development from milieus to subcultures is more closely analyzed in chapter 9.

### 6.3 THE GENERATION OF ARTICULATION (AGE COHORT 1965–)

Judging solely by the periods of official Soviet sexual policy, a generational break in sexual cultures could be expected with the advent of glasnost, or for those born after 1972. The formative years of this generation were the mid-1980s, when the debates about sexual issues and family policy began and when sexuality became increasingly liberalized and commercialized in the Russian public sphere. This is usually referred to as the “sexual revolution” in Russia, also by Igor Kon (1995). More precisely, it was the revolution of articulation and of commercialization, of sexuality entering the public sphere.

A stylistic and experiential difference was clearly experienced already in the autobiographies written by Soviet people born after 1965. Five women (Nos. 21-25) and four men (Nos. 44-47) belong to this third generation. Socially, their life stories often represent open-ended, ambivalent or unstable situations. Especially the men’s autobiographies are examples of horizontal mobility – clear change of professional and life orientation – or blurred mobility, or attempts at social ascent while the patterns of social mobility were breaking down (see chapters 9 and 10). With regard to sexuality, both the men and the women are direct and outspoken. The general tone is ironic, often rather detached. When the previous generations described feelings of shame and curiosity, the youngest generation now spoke about “*my libido*” (No. 45 and No. 46).

In contrast to the previous generation-that-was-not-one, the young St. Petersburg people showed traces of shared generational experiences. Sexual behaviour continued to change in this generation. The average age of first steady dating, which used to be eighteen, dropped to younger than seventeen years. The average age for the first sexual intercourse also dropped, becoming about seventeen years for young men, and above eighteen years for women. In this generation, already about three of four persons of both sexes reported having used varying sexual techniques, such as various positions and oral sex (Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch 1998, 140-147). More significantly, sexual knowledge now became articulated as

*separate* sexual knowledge, with the terms of popularized sexology or psychology. Sexual knowledge was not ‘learning about It’ or (for the women) whether to preserve sexual virginity. Instead of a traumatic ‘finding out’, one woman (No. 22, born 1966) remembers how she as a six-year-old looked for the main four-letter word in the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia and was surprised not to find it. Later, her school teacher told the class about sex, which she became happily curious about.

In this generation, the focus is on reflecting on one’s own sexual tastes and personal aspirations. Separate attention is given to e.g. masturbation, one-night stands, contraceptives, prostitution and homosexuality. I have therefore called this the *generation of articulation*.

If we contrast Russian and Finnish youth, their behaviour and attitudes are converging. One crucial exception is the gender gap: in Finland, men and women born in the late 1960s had practically identical sexual behaviour, while in Leningrad/ St. Petersburg the gender gap remained, although it was diminishing. There are also big country differences in the experiences of commercial sex and sexual *blat*, which were sharply increasing in Russia. Two of the four male Russian autobiographies mention meetings with prostitutes, while Finnish youth had had *less* experience with prostitutes as compared to older generations in Finland. This was, of course, the generation of the *commercialization* of sex – with commercialization and the project of sexual enlightenment being the two driving forces behind the articulation of sexuality (see chapter 11).

## Opposing shame

In their autobiographies, the men and women representing this generation approached sexuality solely in the frameworks of “communication” or “pleasure” (Temkina, forthcoming). For both sexes, marriage or children are only exceptionally part of sexuality. Approaching sexuality as a field of pleasure-serving, separate issues, much of the stories are about transcending the shame traditionally attributed to premarital loss of virginity, masturbation and homosexuality.

The women of the generation of articulation suggest a different relationship to sex. Instead of wanting to get married as virgins, the women now describe wanting to get rid of their virginity:

*After finishing school I applied to an institute [of higher education]. I remember that I was terribly weighed down by my virginity, which I had not yet had the*

*opportunity to get rid of. Significantly, I gave the absolutely opposite impression (perhaps I tried to do so very hard) – that of a fallen woman who had tried everything. (...) Then one beautiful day, and more precisely the 1st of May, I returned from the demonstration (oh, these obligatory demonstrations!), and when I left the escalator at the metro station I was stopped by a playboy with a moustache, aged 35. He was to become my first man. (...) I very much wanted to get rid of my virginity. Why? Well, first of all, as self confirmation, and then, of course, to finally be able to sleep with V. [whom she was in love with – AR]. I wanted so badly to appear experienced in his eyes! For that I needed somebody like that [the playboy's] type.(...) I do not have any special memories. It was practically painless, and there was only a little blood, he turned out to be quite tender and caressing, in one word – no ecstasy, of course, but quite nice. (A. Sobolevskaya, b. 1966, No. 22)*

Compared with the intense, shameful and/or devoted descriptions of women from the older generation, A. Sobolevskaya was very matter-of-fact about the whole event. She did not mention the use of contraceptives in her first sexual intercourse, but some of the women of her generation (No. 20 and 24) and one man (No. 45) already did, in strong contrast to the previous generation who take up the issue only much later in their life course, after having children and abortions. Neither did Sobolevskaya want any deeper relations with the man she had chosen to be her first:

*Our relationship had no future. And I understood it perfectly. But he for some reason saw it differently. The difficulty of getting rid of a man you are fed up with – that's a whole different story, and I learnt that lesson at the very beginning of my way as a woman. (A. Sobolevskaya, b. 1966, No. 22)*

The same attitude was adopted by another young woman (No. 24), who consciously chose a man with extensive sexual experience for her first intercourse. It is also clear she had acquired basic sexual and physiological knowledge well in advance:

*He was stubborn, with an incredibly big ego. His nose and his member were also incredibly big. (...) his sexual experience was also very big, and I never regretted that I chose him to be my first man. Having almost finished his medical studies, eight years older than me, experienced, beautiful, clever, sharp – that was what my first should be like. And I never wanted my first to be my one and only. (Woman, b. 1972, No. 24)*

This autobiography provided the only light-hearted sexual memoir written by a woman in this collection, identifying her lovers by their astrological signs and

praising equal, explorative sexual relationships without plans of further commitment. Another woman (No. 21) also had a bunch of lovers, albeit justifying this with a complex idea of “purification by sin” (discussed in chapter 3). There are less signs of women’s ambivalence to sexuality in these autobiographies. But still, very few young women wrote at all, as compared with both the other generations and the entries of the Finnish competition. And the liberated, individualized lifestyle quoted above is presented in a provocative tone, as if building on the assumption that a man-like, sexually completely emancipated woman is different from most traditional women who follow the usual codes of everyday morality and accompanying shame (Temkina 1999).

This generation was the first to write in detail about masturbation. For instance, A. Sobolevskaya depicted it as a joyful experience without any need of being ashamed:

*I do not remember at which age I started to masturbate. Perhaps in the seventh or eight grade. It gave me lots of pleasure. I took some volume of “Thousand and one nights” from the shelf, found an erotic scene and, reading it several times and pressing my legs together, had an orgasm. (...) I told the girls at school that I was masturbating without any shame whatsoever. Now I would without doubt not share such private secrets to my women friends. But I think that rich experience of masturbation helped me not to have practically any problems reaching orgasm in my relations with my husband. (A. Sobolevskaya, b. 1966, No. 22)*

This approving attitude was not without opposition even in the 1990s. Thus one of the leading Soviet sexologists, Sergei Golod (1996, 130), described masturbation as psychologically harmful for men (women’s masturbation was not mentioned). But Golod belongs to the older generations: the young men stress, by contrast, either that masturbation is “nothing to be ashamed of”, or something they have now learned not to be ashamed of:

*Once in the bathroom I got to know the helpful friend of all men – masturbation. -There is nothing shameful in that, because only a sick person or somebody without any genital functions does not masturbate. (...) It was an undescrivable pleasure. (Man, b. 1968, No. 45)*

*I would be lying if my story did not include such a phenomena of teenage life as masturbation. When did it happen with me? It is hard for me to answer that question, I only remember that I was over ten years old. The sensation of something forbidden, those were the first feelings that overwhelmed me. But even if I cannot remember the day, where it was, or even the time of the year, I clearly remember how it happened. I was already familiar with my erection, but what to*

*do next? From my experience and the explanations of my (female – AR) cousin I approximately knew the algorithm of action. That's why during the first attempt I did not experience anything except for a sweet pain. Enough for today, I decided for myself. Next morning in school was like being torture. By the general opinion (obshchestvennoe mnenie). Could it really all be written on my face, are my hands, which suddenly started sweating, really telling about what I did at night. (...)*

*I had not discussed this with my father and mother. Therefore I started to think through and analyze street jokes and stories and naturally I came to some kind of conclusions. Strange as it may seem, it was "The Wall" by Pink Floyd which helped me realize the importance of my new knowledge, it was precisely because of that film that I suddenly stopped seeing what I had been doing in such a degrading and disgusting light. (...).*

*My parents guessed, but did not take any steps to reveal my secret, just limited the quantity of porn journals, which used to be lying around in the hallway. (Man, b. 1973, No. 46)*

Similarly, homosexuality is not only mentioned, but personally related to by heterosexual male autobiographies only in the youngest generation. One of the young men explicitly denied having had any homosexual relationships during his army service: *"My service passed driving trucks, but without any women. I did not notice any homosexual aspirations on my part. I still cannot understand: how could you do it with a man, in the ass? Of course everybody has his own peculiarities (zamorochki)." Another man told a quite remarkable story of a Soviet school class protesting against a teacher who displayed homophobic attitudes:*

*Although our class was divided into groups according to living area, we were all friends with each other and had sympathy for another's sorrow. Thus, when the history teacher called one classmate something much worse than 'gay' (goluboi), notwithstanding the shattered relations, everybody stood up and left the room. Of course, from today's perspective provided by a university education, one could attribute any kind of motivation for the event, but at the time it was great. (Man, b. 1973, No. 46)*

This account is not very clear (does "another's sorrow" allude to the boy being gay? What is the "other kind of motivations" a university education provides, are they psychoanalytical explanations?), but its main message is clearly permissive. The same man mentioned attending gay meeting places, *geiiouskie tusovki*, together with his girlfriend.

This is of course not to say that male homosexuality had ceased being a social taboo or that it was easy to adopt a homosexual lifestyle (see chapter 9 and 11). Even in the generation of articulation we find heartbreaking accounts of ignorance, like that of one young man, who did not even understand what he was being teased for:

*I did not know anything about homosexuality. (...) I read about it in the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia: 'a sexual perversion' and so on. I did not understand the colloquial "goluboi" [the word stands for gay – AR]. When they were teasing me for being "goluboi" in the army I did not get offended, because I thought that "goluboi" was just a synonym for "not like everybody" (drugoi). (Man, b. 1968, No. 44)*

## Two phases of the sexual revolution

That the sexual revolution in Russia began already under late socialism is confirmed by several accounts of the Soviet Union during late socialism. The physician Mikhail Stern mentioned a "sexual revolution" happening precisely in the late 1970s: "The current Soviet 'sexual revolution' is not the result of forced urbanization but rather the manifestation of a search for natural and normal forms of sexual expression. So far these preliminary attempts have usually been characterized by cynicism and sexual license" (Stern 1979, 282).

Igor Kon indirectly says the same thing. Generally, many behavioural changes occurred in the 1960s and 1970s with the second wave of urbanization and the increased living standards. But he does not let it influence his – by his own admission crude and preliminary – chronology of sexual periods.

Additionally, the survey findings also show the biggest differences in attitudes and behaviour between the last generation and the two previous ones. The generation of articulation that will be discussed in the next chapter refers to those growing up in the 1980s and 1990s, within a drastically different public sexual display and ideology. Thus *the Russian sexual revolution can be said to have taken place in two phases*: the first as a behavioural change, and the second, public revolution, taking place about ten years later, at the same time as the development of *glasnost* in the public sphere.<sup>16</sup>

A comparison with Finland shows the different structure of the sexual revolution. In Finland the 1960s gave rise to a public discussion, which led to state and school programs of sexual education that consciously changed traditional attitudes regarding sexuality. Generalizing, we can say that *public ideology changed be-*

*fore sexual practice.* In Soviet Russia, the sexual revolution happened the other way around: in the late 1970s, many people were already living as if the sexual revolution had already taken place. But the articulation – publicly, but also privately, between sexual partners (Gerasimova 1997) – started one decade later. *Sexual practices changed much before public ideology*, which is only now in the making.

1. One indicator of how the Bolshevik sexual revolution failed was that the so-called “missionary position” became referred to as the “worker-peasant way” (*rabocho-krestianskii sposob*) (e.g. in No. 32, born in 1939). The emblem of the Soviet state, the (male) worker and the (female) peasant, was used for denoting the most conventional and least ‘liberated’ sexual position.
2. The age cohorts employed in our survey (Gronow et al. 1997) coincide quite well with my periodization of generations. The statistics I will be quoting refer to people born 1922-41, 1942-61 and 1962-78 and I have divided the autobiographical generations at 1945 and 1965. As the years of generational change are not meant to be exact, I do not give the decimals of the statistical percentages.
3. The oral culture in the Soviet countryside, where sexual issues seem to have been more directly approached, was outside the scope of this research. However, there is some evidence that the agrarian population was not very “silenced” or prudent. For instance, one of the icons of Stalin’s Soviet Union was the photograph by Robert Capa published in the Ladies Home Journal (February 1948), showing a kolkhoz woman with strong brown hands, white traditional headcloth, black skirt, and a peering look into the camera. She was standing in the fields as the embodiment of the post-war, strong Soviet woman. What the reporters did not at the time mention was that the woman had waved a cucumber at Capa, joking that “Men should be as impressive as cucumbers!” (Morris 1998). The remark no doubt was too outspoken to be printed either in the United States or the USSR at that time.
4. Similar accounts are found in autobiographies of Finnish and Estonian woman of the same generation as Olga (who were not living in the Soviet Union). An Estonian woman tells how she also interpreted literally what she heard men saying about them “making children”. She was astonished and wondered how these huge male hands could produce intricate small baby ears and fingers. She then told her mother she also wanted to learn how to make children. The mother slapped her in the face (Estonian woman, born 1926).
5. Cabbageheads are the Russian equivalent of the European myth of the stork or of the gooseberry bush that produces children.
6. The author underlines that this kind of open sensuality displayed between the parents was something unusual for those times.
7. At least the role of youth in the very origins of the ‘1960s’ has been demonstrated on the case of Sweden by Lennerhed (1994).
8. The decline and revival of Soviet sexopathology is well illustrated by the quantity of books published: 52 from 1917 to 36, only 5 from 1937 to 1960, followed by 15 in the 1960s, and 61 in the 1970s. (Before 1917, 126 Russian books on sexual research were published (Masevich and Shcheglov, quoted in Kon 1995, 91).
9. Earlier, during the egalitarian and collectivist ideology of the 1920s, *intimnost’* had been a provocative word, considered to be degenerate and bourgeois. It was taken into use during Stalinism (Papernyj 1985).
10. An earlier version of this paragraph contained the popular expressions for intercourse spelled out. I was told by representatives of the Russian intelligentsia from this generation that such a

thing could simply not be done. As the form of those expressions has no influence whatsoever for my overall argument, let them remain at least in this work part of a shielded, provocative oral culture. (Of course contemporary Russian literature has no problems with spelling them out on paper; the curious reader should consult the great novels of Vladimir Sorokin or Viktor Pelevin).

11. This seems to coincide with the spread of the word 'sex' in Finland (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila 1995b, 63 and 68).

12. The woman was, of course, referring to the Soviet canonized selection of Russian classics. Pushkin, whom she got to know as the emblematic example of elevated and romantic love, also wrote openly erotic and anecdotally pornographic verses (*Literaturnoe Obozrenie* 1991, 26-35).

13. The popularity of 19th century art is also described in the following anecdote of the 1970s, quoted in Stern (1979, 81):

A police patrol comes upon two lovers kissing in a Moscow street. One of the officers confronts the couple:

'Who taught you to carry on like that?'

'Maupassant'.

'Sergeant! Run a check on this Maupassant fellow and bring him down to the station!'

14. Again, the complaint about total lack of knowledge is not to be taken literally. One current Soviet anecdote, for instance, was about a scientific institute that had announced a lecture on the topic of love and sexuality. "An immense crowd gathers, much larger than for any of the lectures organized by the Party. The lecturer appears and begins: Dear comrades, there are three kinds of sex. The first kind is that between a man and a woman. This you know all about so I won't be talking about this here. The second is between a man and a man or a woman and a woman. This exists only in bourgeois societies where labourers are exploited, so I won't be talking about it here either. The third kind is the love that exists between the workers and the party, and that is the subject of today's lecture" (quoted in Gessen 1995). Lack of knowledge about homosexuality probably refers to a lack of scientific explanations, psychological support, technical advice, etc.

15. The narrator started working in a supermarket as a saleswoman, and eventually became manager of a department. The position was very prestigious especially in Soviet times, as it implied access to the channels of distribution of scarce goods.

16. I thank Daniel Bertaux for helping me formulate this conclusion.



*The loves of the 1960s tend to be extra-marital. They take place outdoors, the romantic affair between a geologist and a stewardess exemplifying the travelling eros of the time. (...) A new breed of nomads celebrates hiking and camping trips and resists the daily grind, domesticity, and conformist stability.* (Boym 1994, 116)

## 7 Journeys as Sexual Transgression

The generation of personalization was characterized by a growing variety of subcultures and the behavioural sexual revolution. But even as everyday family life began diverging dramatically from the traditional pattern, there was little space for young people in which to elaborate new standards of behaviour or evaluate them morally. Everyday Soviet life was circumscribed by social conventions as much as by the crowded living spaces. Among the less regulated spaces, there were the pioneer camps for school children, the student's yearly practice of leaving to work at collective farms during the summer, or the new industrial cities with a predominantly young population. Additionally, there were the opportunities provided by journeys. With the growing living standards of the 1960s and 1970s domestic journeys – business trips and leisure travel – increased. In Svetlana Boym's words quoted above, those were the times of "the travelling eros", symbolically connected particularly to extra-marital affairs.

This chapter will look at sexual experiences as part of Soviet domestic tourism, a certain kind of temporary lifestyle and milieu.<sup>1</sup> The two most frequently mentioned types of journey in the autobiographies were *vacations to the South* and *komandirovki* or Soviet business trips. While both sexes made both kinds of trips, the vacations figure in my material as an ambivalent symbol of women's sexual autonomy and dangerous (mis)adventures, while work-related travels emerge as a predominantly male way of arranging a lifestyle with parallel relationships. Two cultural configurations typical for late Soviet society emerge: "*the travelling maiden*" and "*the man with parallel lives*".

## 7.1 THE TRAVELLING MAIDEN

### *Escaping the everyday*

Travelling is, of course, one of the paradigmatic forms for mental and physical transgression. ‘Getting away’ in order to acquire more *psychological space* is probably a basic mechanism in most cultures.<sup>2</sup> In Soviet Russia journeys seem to have been an especially important possibility of escaping conventional sexual morals and the surveillance of parents, spouses or children. Additionally, travels provided private *physical space*, whether in the form of camping tents, train wagons, or hotel rooms.

Elena Hellberg-Hirn (1998) has sketched the dynamics of Russian space as arising from the opposition between the inwards, immobile centre/home and a limitless, rapid move or escape away from the centre. The secure and controllable home is in the Russian history of ideas especially preoccupied with borders and fences, the *zabory*. The centrifugal flight is of course connected with the vast steppes, and the vastness of the whole national space – *prostor*. This basic spatial axis would also appear to have structured the ways of remembering and writing about transgressive experiences in my material.

Soviet social practices further encouraged a division between *domestic* (silenced, controlled, routine) sexuality and *foreign* (outdoor, dangerous, unpredictable) sex. The ‘domestic’ sphere here includes both life at home and in official Soviet public places (schools, working places). The ‘foreign’ alludes to less regulated, semi-public places, such as certain cafés, transport vehicles, or the usually official places at unusual hours. Under the puritanistic surface of Soviet urban life, even short trips on public transport and taxis were loaded with the possibility of anonymous and potentially dangerous sex, or sex in exchange for material favours.

Both in travelling practices and the metaphors of travellers, tourism is gendered. Or, as Soile Veijola and Eeva Jokinen (1997) express it, “the tourist, the flâneur, the stranger and the adventurer (...) are always embodied [relations] and, accordingly, sexed”. Women and men tell about vacation trips and *komandirovki* with different emphasis and varying frequency. This difference in remembering and writing about journeys probably reflects direct gender differences in the amount of travelling. Soviet men were more likely to leave for longer working trips, as they had higher work positions and less caring obligations in family life.

The women were more often tied to the home by the responsibilities of caring for dependent small children or elderly relatives. But also women could take one or two weeks of vacation, alone or with women friends.

### *Trips to the South*

Characteristically, 'going south' was a good way to find a new partner. "Yalta is probably the sexiest resort in Europe", writes Viktor Erofeev (1997, 51-52) about the most famous vacation goal in the Soviet Union, "It is not made for vacation, but for a constant being on the spree, frenzily unrolling affairs, sleepless nights, dangerous liaisons. The air smells of perfume, sin and boxwood."

*"Once more I found myself in the South with the aim of getting to know a nice woman. (...) I fell in love with her, as I needed that. (...) Soon I revealed to her that I was ready to take her as my wife with all her children, regardless of how many she had"*, wrote a man born in 1939 (No. 32). The same pragmatically expected romance was described in Lyudmila Petrushevskaya's short story "Clarissa's story". Clarissa, the heroine, is a young divorced woman who first fights to get custody of her child, then leaves the child and travels to a sea resort. For this single mother

it was a pure feast when she after one year got a vacation, which she for the first time in her life spent completely alone in the South after having left the boy at a kindergarten in the countryside. Having arrived to the South Clarissa first felt the overwhelming concern for her boy typical for mothers, she felt guilty thinking about the sea, the tan and the fruits and remembered her child, who had been left in the pouring rain of the North. (...) But the sea, the tan and the fruits of the South, which Clarissa bought because they were so cheap, had their effect and Clarissa's outlook changed once again (...) At this point a local pilot fell in love with her.... (Petrushevskaja 1989, 135, translation – AR)

But especially for young women the South had a more complex and mystical allure. It was the realm of first, and often dangerous, adventures. The vacations to the South often represented sexual initiation, in the sense of first intercourse or of an initiation to rich and exotic sex.

The journeys South are one of the key events in the autobiographies of both middle class 'Lyuba' (b. 1954, No. 16) and working class 'Valya' (b. 1966, No. 23). For girls the everyday at home meant pressure to behave strictly, even though

values had already significantly loosened in the youngest generation.

Lyuba's upbringing, including sexual education, was typical for a girl from the educated Soviet milieu. Her knowledge about sexuality was accompanied with ignorance and misinformation: in her childhood, her father had told her she had been bought from a shop; and although she later learned where she had come from, she wrote how she in her late teens had no concrete idea of how human sexual organs look or function.

At 18, she decided to quit her studies for a while and got the chance to work during four summer months at the Black Sea in 1970. This possibility and permission to travel alone was something exceptional for girls from her class:

*There I was finally without parents, I was 18 years old, and I did not waste any time anymore. It is amazing [that nothing bad happened], I must have been protected by God! There I finally experienced my first intercourse with a man. (Lyuba)*

Ten years later, in the 1980s, it was Valya's turn to travel to the Black Sea. Valya went together with a girlfriend. She had been there on vacations earlier together with her mother. But now she had started her vocational studies and moved away from home. And as Valya was living alone renting a room, nobody could prevent her from what she calls a "summer of freedom".

*I was so much in love with the South, that all my complexes, all my insecurity, all my timidity disappeared there. I'm now very often trying to recall that first night [of vacation], in order to experience those feelings again. The music was roaring below. And we descended towards it from the house on the hill. We walked as if everybody immediately should look on these two snow-white young bodies, that attracted attention because of the lack of sunburn. I felt as if even the music fell silent. I really felt sensations like the ones in my frequent dreams about flying (...) I was overwhelmed by joy. (Valya)*

For Lyuba, this was the summer of unashamed and loose behaviour. She recalled thinking she loved the local guy who soon became her boyfriend, but when he suggested they should marry she was "not at all interested". On the contrary, she reflected on her own feeling of social (and geographical) superiority vis à vis her friend: "We were a few people from Leningrad there, like one group. We were supposed to be proud about being from Leningrad and feel a little above the local people. My lover was one of the locals."

While dating one of the boys, Lyuba also flirted widely. She recalled how somebody asked: "Is this your girl?" My friend answered, not without irony, 'yes, this

is OUR girl'. I have to say that I was not actually hurt by that remark, but rather flattered. He could not downgrade me. Dirt did not cling to me."

During that summer vacation, Lyuba fully enjoyed reading, nature, and writing poetry. "I was afraid of nothing then, I was strong and free. Imagine! I was happy then."

At the moment of writing, Lyuba was amazed that "nothing bad happened". But for Valya the adventure ended violently. Already during the first magic evening described above, two local boys started clinging to her and her girlfriend "with an iron grip":

*Our young small heads could not even think about how this could end. That night they did not insist on their invitations to go to a café and accompanied us home. (...) the [next] evening we went to the dances again. Now we had to be only with them. This time we went with them to a café. That was the first stupid thing to do. The second was that we separated into couples, when they accompanied us home. In the Caucasian darkness... Almost without any sudden movements and almost without using any force, the one who accompanied me pushed me at some suitable moment into some small building on the beach. Before I knew where I was I was thrown down (it turned out to be the watch tower at the row-boat station). Later it seemed to me, that I simply did not resist all the way, that I didn't fight as much as I could... But it was an instinct of self-preservation, on the one hand, and the superiority of male force over female, on the other. And my curiosity. (...) Then he helped me to get dressed and accompanied me home. My friend arrived just after me. The same thing had happened to her, but on the bare sand. We had nothing left to do but to laugh through half of the night over all the details of these events and our own foolishness. (Valya)*

Valya did not herself use the word "rape" about the event, which in contemporary Western terminology would be classified as either rape or forced sex.

### *Threats to the travelling maiden*

Janet Holland et al. (1996) have analyzed the gendered differences in experiencing and telling about 'the first time'. In their analysis, men and the norms of masculinity dominate the experience, leaving women with little space for feelings of autonomy and resistance:

The two worlds of adolescent masculinity and femininity come together at the moment of 'first sex' in a way that powerfully confirms respective positions of agency and object, of doing sex and being done to. These meaning-

and positions are difficult to escape, despite the self-awareness and resistance expressed by many of our respondents. (...) the only potential positions of female power appear to be negative and disembodied: either by saying 'no' or by ridiculing her partner's performance. (Holland et al. 1996)

In my reading, both Lyuba's and Valya's stories present a less simple picture. Certainly, we detect both contradictory and ambivalent relationships between the three levels of analysis I use: feelings, social events, and (retrospective) interpretations and justifications. But it seems to me the Soviet stories both present strong evidence of at least partly successful female sexual autonomy.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the desirability of such feminine independence was perhaps harder to justify in the Soviet Russian context than in Great Britain.

The Black Sea travel descriptions begin with colourfully described feelings of freedom and adventure. They obviously stem both from the lack of social surveillance and the exotic sensuality of the landscape, the food and the people. The strength of the feelings themselves remains important at the moment of writing. The summer is said to be one of Lyuba's happiest times, and Valya remembered that "*nevertheless, the summer left memories of warmth and light. As for my unconscious fear of men – how was I to know, that it would stem from precisely that summer.*"

The initial happy feelings are then contrasted with the actual social interaction between young people. The first obstacle facing the *self-sufficient travelling maiden* was the threat of irresponsible or violent men. The men's behaviour is on the one hand relativized and belittled – "*we had nothing left to do but laugh*", Valya wrote after what happened to her and her girlfriend. On the other hand, it is elevated to a continuous threat to ignorant young women, with (in Valya's case) unpredictable imprints e.g. on the unconscious.

This actual social threat is enforced by ethnic cultural stereotypes. Southern – Armenian, Georgian, Caucasian, Azerbaidzhan, etc. – ethnicity is in several female (but no male) autobiographies mentioned as a fascinating but unsuitable trait in itself.<sup>4</sup> For instance, one woman who longed to get married rejected an Uzbek suitor whom she fell in love with only because of being afraid of living with an 'Eastern man' (*vostochnyi chelovek*); a young disabled girl's mother forbade her daughter to marry one of her few boyfriends, who was from Tadzhikistan. Accounts of harassment and rapes by southern men also appear mostly in connection with exotic trips and 'foolish mistakes', although there is no reason to believe they were actually less usual in domestic everyday settings. The accounts featured the attractive but deceitful figure of the "locals", who are represented by

local men, never any women (Zdravomyslova, forthcoming).

At the level of presenting interpretations and evaluations of their experiences, both Lyuba and Valya partly defended their right to, and enjoyment of, sexual adventures. Valya mentioned her own curiosity about sex as one reason for not fighting more when she was forced to have intercourse. But the women also continuously moralize and condemn their own behaviour. Valya described her and her girlfriend's innocence and "young small heads", thus casting herself both as a powerless victim and as a girl who should have known better. Valya also blamed herself for not fighting more to protect her virginity – "later it seemed to me that I did not resist all the way". Zdravomyslova (1999) similarly found the feelings of becoming paralysed, and later the regret of not having fought back, an important context in Russian women's memories of sexual violence.

Valya also interpreted her first violent sexual experience as being the root of her present "fear of men". Her situation in 1996 was certainly problematic, as she had started a long, complicated and unhappy relationship with an elder, married, sick and alcoholic man. Lyuba was, quite to the contrary, at the moment of writing living through a very experimental and exciting period of her sexual life. Nevertheless, she also judged her adventurous young self:

*[My boyfriend] also liked to drink, and I was so unused to it I started drinking in big dosages. I am still amazed over how I did not get pregnant or infected from him with some disgusting crap.... Now I remember myself with horror, wondering how that could have been me? I was very depraved: drank myself drunk, smoked, behaved extremely loosely, fucked with my boyfriend wherever we could.*  
(Lyuba)

It seems that in Lyuba's retrospective evaluation, fitting into conventions – 'how could that be me?' – is almost as big a problem as the concrete social risks of pregnancy, venereal disease or sexual violence. Lyuba also continuously raised the theme of unjustly received, unearned happiness, of behaving in a too egotistic way.

*[My lover] arranged fantastic adventures for me. He took me to the mountains, let me ride on a yacht and a steam boat took me on excursions. (...) I did not think that my trip [on a yacht] was made possible by somebody's hands. I had not crossed one single finger [to help]. I got it for free. Why? I did not think that I had to pay for this in any way. I was irresponsible and carefree. I don't know who had to pay for that happiness of mine, or how.* (Lyuba)

In the British study, Holland et al. (1996) claimed the impossibility of fully autonomous female sexuality. The successful stories of women's resistance were, ac-

ording to them, basically connected with denying pleasure – thus women act as agents mainly by refusing to have sex, ending the relationship, and so on. The implicit assumption of the British researchers is that women would like to be (and be seen as) autonomous beings, and suffer from their passive role: “The range of young women’s responses reflects different approaches to the problems of managing their lack of agency. His achievement of manhood is her loss of autonomy.”

As already said, I have fewer problems detecting clear and sensual representations of women’s autonomous sexuality from the Soviet autobiographies. In Valya’s case, the autonomy was connected with the gorgeous surroundings and her anticipation of sexual adventures, while actual intercourse proved a dramatic and traumatic event. The young Lyuba fully realized herself as a self-centred sexual subject. However, she could not approve of this behaviour in retrospect. Her problems did not lie with initiating the sexual exploration, or telling her story, but with justifying it to herself and her readers. Even when psychological and physical space was found for young women’s independent sexuality, no cultural space was available for expressing herself in positive terms.

Thus the second obstacle facing the travelling maiden is that too self-centred a lifestyle is in itself culpable, not fitting into the prevalent Russian configuration of the a *self-sacrificing, altruistic woman*.<sup>5</sup> Also Valya was at the moment of writing justifying her continuing current unhappy and worsening relationship by way of the man’s heart problems and his need for her help and her sacrifice.

In Soviet Russia, the self-approving, young and sexually active woman was a rare phenomenon. One of the social types dominating the corresponding Finnish autobiographical material – the single, childless, active woman in search of adventures and different partners – is all but lacking from the St. Petersburg material, both when we look at the authors themselves and the people they describe (cf. chapter 2). But however rare, this type of woman was sometimes encountered. One man with a previous broad sexual experience describes his astonishment at meeting such a woman, Vika, during a tourist trip abroad. She was the one making sexual advances, and she was openly enjoying sex:

*Vika thought sex was a very important and central thing for a woman. Perhaps, as she did not have children, for her this substituted for children, and a regular husband. She dressed very well, but, the main thing I have remembered about her (and which was pointed out by the ladies in our group), was that she did not wear a bra. In those times (1975) it was against customs and conventions.*  
(Man, b. 1930, No. 28)

Only one of the youngest women in our autobiographies (No. 24, a physician



born in 1972), described a travelling lifestyle, where the declared goal is self-fulfilment and pleasure, not responsibilities, marriage and children. Her sexual memoir is told in a detached and funny tone, with the amorous adventures in the United States clearly separated from domestic everyday life back at home.

By contrast, somewhat older, middle-aged women gave more examples of rich but unproblematic sex lives. Women of the middle generation wrote accounts of Southern trips and exotic lovers where the threat of violence and the need for self-judgement and moralising is absent. They gave examples of Southern trips as initiation to sexual adventures precisely without blame and outside social conventions. Thus a woman born in 1946, holding the especially prestigious (in Soviet times) position as the head of a supermarket department, describes her most recent love story as a beautiful romance at the Black Sea. The man was 16 years younger than she was, quiet, delicate, and very romantic. She took the initiative to have sex with him. The first problems arose only as she, when they parted, gave him her card encouraging him to contact her in Petersburg, and he froze when he understood her social position...

Another woman also experienced her last romantic encounter during a work-related trip to the South. *“Either I retain an unused reserve of romanticism, or either it is a characteristic of my soul which I will never get rid of. In the middle of the summer there was a komandirovka to the shores of a warm sea. ...”* (Woman, b. 1946, No. 11) In order to modify in advance the generalization I will soon make below, it should be noted that the boss that was the male object of this romanticism avoided any physical closeness between them in order to guard his and her reputation.

## 7.2 MEN WITH PARALLEL LIVES

Soviet sexual practices during late socialism followed a double moral standard in two senses: the declared ideological and social values were far from the actual sexual behaviour, and the behaviour and morals of men differed from those of women.

This double standard is exemplified in the autobiography of ‘Vera’ (No 6, b. 1937), a woman whose story also has the most detailed descriptions of advances made during train journeys. (Night trains were famous for presenting good opportunities, as men and women shared the compartments on Soviet trains.)

*During one komandirovka to Moscow I travelled with the head engineer of the*

*project in a first class SV wagon, in a coupé for two. After champagne, chocolate candy and mandarins, while a romance in Shalyapin's performance was playing, he, like a serpent-seducer, made me forget about everything. He was a 40 year old Armenian, a married man, who, in his own way, was deeply attached to his wife, and their daughters, but at the same time nothing could prevent the gossip of his new passion from spreading around the institute. I saw him for about one year. (Vera)*

At that time Vera was herself married, and had already had some extramarital relationships. However, she wanted to stress that she consciously had a 'taboo' against workplace affairs: several men were chasing her, while she maintained that "in order to escape gossip, jealousy and misunderstandings you should never have relationships at work". Although the one-year affair described above is first depicted as romantically and sexually very satisfying, she now saw it as a "stupid error" (*glupost*).

*As we were both married, we basically met during working trips, which there were quite a lot of. When there were no trips we met at my place a few times, but that was not enough for him and he started to follow me at work, begging for a new meeting and insisting we should rent an apartment for our meetings. I refused his offer, because I was tired of his harassment and fed up with hiding, lying, and feeling ashamed, especially as he was a terrible coward in this respect (that nothing would come out, that nobody would see or think anything). (Vera)*

The relationship ended brutally one Sunday when they both had happened to come to work. The man locked Vera in a room, threatened her and raped her. She was hurt and shocked, "I felt like I had been thrown away as garbage. As they say, there is one step from love to hate." After that, Vera escaped every kind of contact with the man, who eventually began an affair with another woman at the workplace.

Vera's autobiography then continues with telling about how she successfully rejected another advance made on a train. Again, the man had arranged for a first-class wagon for only two persons, and arrived slightly drunk to what he had planned as an amorous night. Vera found him disgusting and unattractive:

*When we met in the coupé I told him to be ashamed [for planning to sleep with her]. Then he started to make advances, and I said rude things to him and asked him to go outside. I quickly undressed and lay down on the upper bed, which surprised him when he entered the coupé, but he accepted my decision. However, in the middle of the night he woke me up, climbing to my bed and begging me to give myself to him. I was sleepy and at first did not understand what was happening. When I finally awoke, I was filled with such disgust at his spitty kisses,*

*that I suffocated with anger. I pushed him away with all my strength and it was a wonder he did not hurt himself on the small table when he fell down from the bed. The next morning he excused himself. I told him to approach me only on work-related matters (...)* (Vera)

### **Komandirovki and double morality**

Thus the only female autobiography in our material with detailed descriptions of affairs during komandirovki is very ambivalent: Vera did not approve of workplace relations in principle, unwelcome advances gave her long lasting memories of disgust, and a longer relationship ended in violence and mutual anger. She told us she complained about the lying and hiding connected with her affair, while her lover on the contrary wanted to intensify the affair – and even to aggravate the lies by arranging a special apartment to meet in. Although Vera's personal feelings and her interpretations of adultery were not presented as very contradictory, she was explicitly criticising the (male) social norms of organizing and conducting extramarital affairs for being morally unacceptable.

For Vera's married male colleagues, by contrast, workplace affairs and *komandirovki* seem more like an *acceptable* way to arrange love affairs, a constant way of leading parallel lives. This impression is supported both by statistical comparisons and comparative analysis of autobiographies: while European men generally have more parallel affairs than women, St. Petersburg men more often demonstrate infidelity as a way of life, compared to Finnish and Estonian men (Haavio-Mannila et al. 1998).

Infidelity in the form of consciously sought and sustained parallel lives is clear from this man's words of advice:

*It is evident that love affairs should not be conducted with single women, if you are married and cannot have a divorce. Single women always have the hope that you will be with her all the time, and it is not possible in most cases. You begin to feel guilty, and the meetings turn into family quarrels. Even the sexual meetings start to become monotonous. And, evidently, the affairs cannot last too long. It is better when they finish soon – you are left with the memories but no aftertaste of hurting each other.* (Man, b. 1930, No. 28)

The prototype of a Russian Don Juan is found in autobiographies from the youngest generation. A man born in 1960 (No. 41; see chapter 8) was unfaithful to his wife before, during and after their wedding, and the biggest part of the autobiography consists of hundreds of short encounters in hotel rooms and massage

parlours.

But of course, not all Soviet men were young seductive Don Juans or married men in high status professions. For instance, Georgii (No. 36) presented himself as a shy and socially awkward man. He was ruthlessly used by a woman, who left him once the trip was over. For him, *komandirovki* were among the few possibilities of meeting a new woman after he divorced his first wife in his early 30s. He participated in geological trips with the explicit (if failed) aim of arranging his sexual life.

*When I parted with [my first wife], I thought that changing woman would not be a problem and everything would go smoothly. There were no 'personal' advertisements at the time and my only source of contacts was the expedition in the summer (...) In the expeditions there were usually very short-lasting love affairs, they ended with the end of the expedition. But you don't think of that in the beginning, and the atmosphere of living together in field conditions facilitated the proximity of bodies and souls. The important thing is not to lose time when people are forming into groups. (...) When the time came, [my girlfriend] parted and left only memories. After returning home from the expedition, I tried to continue our games, but she made it clear that she was not the least interested. I suffered for some time, but catching sight of a distant star in the sky one autumn evening, I understood how far we were from each other. (Georgii b. 1949, No. 36)*

Georgii's account of this *komandirovka* was just the opposite of the summer journey to the South told by Lyuba earlier in this chapter. Lyuba deplored her lack of love for the local guy she had an affair with and moralized over her sexual exploits. Georgii, by contrast, presented sex as the main (and completely acceptable) reason for starting an affair. Nevertheless, his suffering after being left – looking at the stars to console himself – unexpectedly reveals to the reader quite different feelings. In the next paragraph, however, Georgii again used pure sex as his only motive for starting to date. He told us how after the sad end of his geological expedition, he finally managed to find a sexually available woman whom he said he used to call “*piece of meat*” even in her presence.

## Summary

Sexuality in everyday life has in Soviet culture been understood as something embarrassingly banal (Boym 1994). Journeys, by contrast, seem to have provided both physical, psychological and cultural space for non-trivial sexual adventures.

This chapter has looked at two typical forms of Soviet domestic tourism, vacations in the South and business trips. Such journeys emerge as one case of special, secret sexual milieus or subcultures during late socialism. *Komandirovki* were typical for the middle-class professions, while the travels to the South were often acquired through the workplace and often distributed also at blue-collar workplaces (cf., for instance, the rail worker Chistiakova's (1998) many trips to health resorts and the South).

The ultimate goal of travelling – transgression – was approached differently in the male and female autobiographies presented here. What the women found, and cherished, was autonomy, freedom, and the possibility of taking sexual initiatives that were lacking and/or condemned in everyday domestic life. In the journeys to the Black Sea retold here, it was the allure of the foreign, of the rapid and risky ‘letting go’, that characterized the stories, which often verged on culturally culpable carelessness and physical risk-taking. In Soviet Russia, travelling young women faced two main obstacles: threats of violence, and the cultural difficulty of justifying a sexually self-sufficient and independent lifestyle. Even when there was, exceptionally, social space for women's sexual adventures, it could not be accommodated in the prevalent cultural configuration of the self-sacrificing Russian woman.

In the descriptions of *komandirovki* related here, the Petersburg men often stressed the instrumental and pragmatic aim of their social and sexual relations. The configuration of the ‘man with parallel lives’ contained an active, seductive man who seemed not to bother with more complex psychological and moral issues. This configuration was certainly enforced by the perceived lack of control and autonomy, or manhood, in other spheres of Soviet life. Leading parallel love lives and ceaselessly making conquests would then appear as analogous to the obstinate refusal of Russian men to wear seat belts – power is exercised wherever possible.

Thus the men were, on the one hand, fulfilling the ideals of autonomy, initiative and freedom by dividing their lives into married domestic life and foreign travelling affairs. The configuration of the ‘man with parallel lives’ fits well into famous absence of Soviet Russian men from everyday family life. On the other hand, one male autobiographer who started from the assumption of macho exploits, ended up telling about his longing for emotional closeness and deeper relationships with women. Here, the quest for space and foreign experiences was a getting away in order to come ‘home’ – escaping the everyday in order to look for a new centre.

1. An earlier version of this chapter has been published in a book edited by Jeremy Smith, whom I thank for valuable comments (see Rotkirch 1999b).
2. Already in early Christian asceticism, geographical movement away from home and its securities was seen as “essential for the creation of a new self” (Veijola & Jokinen 1997, 39).
3. The difference between the conclusions of Holland et al. (1996) and my own interpretations may reflect the ideology of the researchers, real cultural differences, and/or differences in the type of research material. Holland et al. made interviews with strong interaction between the teenager and the adult researcher, while the autobiographies I am using present fuller, more complex stories that are structured by another interaction – that between the adolescent and the reminiscing adult. I suspect all three causes to be at work (cf. the discussion in the Introduction).
4. It is a great linguistic irony that “*kavkazkii chelovek*”, literally “Caucasian man”, in Russian is a strongly negative stereotype of a passionate, violent and often criminal person, while contemporary English uses the same word to describe a white, Western man.
5. A comparison of Finnish and Soviet women’s ways of coping with sexism and harassment showed the *rhetorics of sacrifice* to be a way of coping that was not mentioned in similar Finnish material. The other major difference was that Finnish women more often used public and legal means, whereas Russian women took to personal revenge (Verkkoniemi 1998).

## 8 Working Poor: Social Marginality and Sexual Promiscuity

This chapter will examine two descriptions of poor and socially marginal milieus from different generations. 'Mikhail Ivanov' (born in 1935) deals with incest and sexual blat relations in the 1950s and 'Aleksei Lukashin' (born ca 1960) describes Leningrad suburban gang and rock cultures in the 1970s. These autobiographies clearly differed from the rest of the material and were for me among the most unexpected and shocking to read. It is hard to judge whether they are representative, although some attempts are made in the discussions of generations, milieus and subcultures in the next chapter. Here, the cases are presented as examples of the plurality of and the differences between social environments during late socialism.

### 8.1 DISCUSSING THE MARGINS

#### *Workers, lumpens, and the rest*

Poverty and social marginality have received little attention in Soviet studies. A silenced phenomenon in official Soviet discourse, the illegal migrants, beggars, working poor and their culture became primary 'others' in the eyes of educated Soviet citizens. In the rhetoric of perestroika, they were often disdainfully referred to as the *lyumpeny* and the supposedly lacking, or at least vanishing, civilization

and education in Russia was referred to as *lyumpenizatsiia* of the country.

As in many other cases, the ‘otherness’ of poorly qualified workers is hence characterized by two traits – demonization and trivialization. On the one hand, they are referred to as *nekul’turnye lyudi*, or as “families with many children” (*mnogodetnye sem’i*): uncivilized, drinking, violent, animal-like, amoral and sexually promiscuous. Many autobiographies of children from educated families “implicitly [contrast] their own behaviour with that which they believed to be characteristic of the popular milieu surrounding them” (Maynes 1995, 148). For instance, one woman (born in 1946, No. 11) described learning early about sexual matters from other kids on the street and playing advanced and consciously daring doctor games. She stopped when a girl from a ‘cultural’ family disapproved of her behaviour.

On the other hand, the way of life of these popular milieu is judged to be so embarrassingly simple as to be uninteresting. When Alexandra Chistiakova’s life story was published and then nominated for the Russian Booker prize in 1998, the majority of the Russian mass media questioned the relevance of her testimony. Although comprehensive life stories about Russian peasant and working women had scarcely been published in Russia before, Chistiakova’s narrative of famine, social struggle, illegal abortions, alcoholism, and family violence was discarded as something that “everybody knows” and that would “interest only Western feminists”.<sup>1</sup>

Neither have Russian or Western scholars had much interest in, or adequate access to, the poor and marginal groups of the population. It is still utterly unclear who belonged to such groups and how extensive they were.

The difficulty of any discussion of marginalized and lower social groups is connected to the class problem of Soviet society. The Stalinist “2 and 1/2” formula, which divided socialist society into workers, peasants and the intelligentsia, remains influential in both non-academic and academic thinking about Soviet Russia, with the addition of the Soviet elite classes or *nomenklatura* as a fourth stratum. These categories are not so much classes in a socio-economic sense as peculiar forms of quasi or proto estates, adherence to which was decided by the Soviet state (Fitzpatrick 1993; Radaev & Shkaratan 1994, 58). Furthermore, they superficially united professionally, politically and economically distinct and in some cases even potentially antagonistic social groups. Thus Fitzpatrick (ibid., 766) underlines how the category of the Soviet ‘intelligentsia’ merged “the old ‘employees’ category with both the intelligentsia and the Communist administrative elite to form a single white-collar conglomerate”.



The same problem overshadows any discussion of Soviet “workers”, especially the working poor. Detailed research has been done to classify the working classes on the basis of their professional status and access to power (reviewed in Radaev & Shkaratan 1994, 239-255). In most categorizations, the working poor belong to the groups of workers with low or no professional skills. But such professional groups actually included very different ways of life: from semi-agrarian communities, migrant limichiki workers and ex-convicts to factory workers of the second or third generation with a basically middle-class lifestyle.<sup>2</sup> Conceptual vagueness concerning ‘the masses’ persists in today’s Russia. While sociologists of the 1990s struggled to determine the scope and criteria of the new middle class, the categorization of the ‘rest’ – the classes under them – was at least just as problematic. In a model by Tatyana Zaslavskaya (1998), one of Russia’s leading sociologists, over half of the population belongs to the “basic stratum”, with one tenth as the “underclass” and the “social bottom” – presumably the homeless, the criminals, and so on. In Timo Piirainen’s (1997) classification, this category is called the “proletariat” and amounts to forty per cent. Radaev & Shkaratan (1994, 272) refer to this group as the “pariah”.

In escribing the ways of life of the economically and culturally poor, I will here refer to “lower social classes”. In the two cases below, much needed information, e.g. about the education and occupation of parents or partners, is absent. As I have myself no direct experience of similar milieus and as these life stories are different from the other autobiographies of my material, I am relying more on the single texts themselves than is the case in the other chapters. These testimonies belong to what Mary Jo Maynes has described as the seemingly patternless stories that defy and question categorization. She stresses the importance of including such texts, as they “hint at the many lives that never culminated in autobiography” (Maynes 1995, 150). In the case of Soviet Russia, we may still add a ‘yet’.

## 8.2 POST-WAR PROMISCUITY

### *Ivanov, the taxi driver*

‘Mikhail Ivanov’s’ autobiography is lengthy – almost 80 double-spaced pages – and covers his whole life. Born in 1935, he lost his father in the war in 1942 and grew up with his widowed mother and elder sister. After the seventh grade he started studying at the age of 16 at a vocational training school. His sister finished

ten grades and then studied at an agricultural institute. Their mother advised her daughter to content herself with a lower education at the *technikum* level, but Mikhail's sister refused to even consider that option, showing clear signs of social ambition. The sister left the family and later moved, together with her husband, away from Leningrad. Mikhail served in the army in 1954-1957, after which he started working as a chauffeur for a larger enterprise. In 1959, he married Raya, his first wife, with whom he had two children in the early 1960s. His mother died of cancer of the uterus in 1961.

In the second half of the 1960s, Mikhail divorced Raya and married Ksenya, with whom he was still living when he wrote his autobiography in 1996. He also adopted Ksenya's daughter from a previous marriage. Towards the end of his first marriage he changed his profession and became a taxi driver. Although he probably had continued doing this – in both Soviet and post-Soviet circumstances – quite lucrative work, he complained of a lack of financial resources.

Ivanov's first two homes – that of his childhood and of his first marriage – constitute the main locations of his narrative. Both families lived in material and cultural poverty, which the young Mikhail repeatedly tried to escape. His relatives and friends worked as doormen, factory workers, saleswomen and porters. In one family, which is enviously described, the wife works as *dvornik* "because of the apartment space" while her husband was a doorman in the famous restaurant *Metropol*. They lived well by buying "crystal, gold, silver, everything from drunkards". These were lower working class people, often migrants and the first generation of Leningrad residents. They were culturally marginalized, albeit not necessarily any longer materially poor during the last decades of the Soviet regime.

Ivanov gives 'thick' descriptions of various everyday situations, for instance the customary heavy drinking (although he proudly notes refusing alcohol if he had to drive afterwards, "if I had to work the next day, I was always in form, and almost always sober"). He also described his working career, but mostly through his sexual relationships at work. They are, in turn, merely a subtheme of the main, overshadowing subject of this autobiography: the lack of control over his life – which is equated with lack of control over his sexuality – and the opposite aspirations for better living conditions and a 'normal' family life.

### *Problems of reliability*

Throughout his life, Ivanov tells about having been seduced, exploited or practically raped by family members, female neighbours, his wife's girlfriends, and fe-

male colleagues. From the age of seventeen, Mikhail had various sexual experiences with girls, but his first fulfilled sexual intercourse was with his mother. Their incestuous relationship continued until after he finished his army service and moved away from home. When he married his first wife, it was largely due to the activities of his mother-in-law, who is said to have repeatedly tried to seduce him, and with whom he eventually had a sexual relationship towards the end of his first marriage.

This autobiography caused the only disagreement between me and the Russian scholars involved in the research project. The three Russians who originally read the text found it an exceptionally rich, interesting and totally believable story.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, I was originally inclined to suspect the authenticity of the related events. But the Russian readers pointed out that the living milieus, described characters, street addresses, and work relations were most convincingly described. We agreed to award this autobiography one of the jury's special prizes. After our discussions and after having repeatedly read the text, I have come to specify and limit my objections into three points, all of them related specifically to the depictions of female sexuality.

First, this autobiography has an unusually large amount of dialogue in the form of direct quotations. This is not a common nor advisable device for autobiographical writing, as one seldom remembers the exact wordings of sentences uttered twenty or thirty years ago (Roos 1999). But it is especially problematic as many of the quotes in Ivanov's autobiography are put in the mouths of women, all of whom are sexually uninhibited and actively desiring personalities (only his second wife, Ksenya, modifies the overall picture by being attributed with an indifferent attitude to sex later in their marriage). The dialogue is also written in the vocabulary of pornographic stories, as in this excerpt of the mother talking to the teenaged Mikhail: *"You, my son, have really got a big one, not all men have such a big one, you'll even reach the girls in the womb, and well, I wouldn't say no to that myself..."*

Second, some sexual events repeat themselves suspiciously often. One is the theme of mother-son (or mother-daughter) incest.<sup>4</sup> Mikhail's best boyfriend during his teenage years is said to have told him how he *"fucked his mother as well, and she is very content with that, and I don't forget my sister either"*; later one woman friend at work told him how she had *"made a man"* out of her son. Another key scene tells how Mikhail sees a woman he loves and desires making love to another man. Such voyeuristic scenes take place with his mother, his school teacher, his first girlfriend Galya, and with his first wife Raya. While the repeti-

tions are psychologically understandable, they are difficult to relate to as sociological evidence.

Third, female sexuality is depicted according to physiological stereotypes common in pornographic literature. In addition to explicitly explaining what they want and how, and commenting aloud on the intercourse while it's taking place, practically all Mikhail's partners regularly have multiple orgasms during which they "let out juices". These formulations can be interpreted as pure exaggeration or as merely an attachment to a certain sexual vocabulary. But similar behaviour has not been confirmed in empirical research on women's sexuality (e.g. Hite 1978). I have not included or discussed the sexual techniques or orgasmic sensations depicted in the other autobiographies. Therefore this objection mostly served to strengthen my suspicions in the first two instances.

On each of these three points, the author's way of describing events can be interpreted as more or less phantasmagoric. Even if the events actually took place, which is not impossible, they have been retold according to a (subconscious?) pattern of repetition and in a specific pornographic vocabulary, which make any generalizations about Soviet social sexual practices problematic.

My solution has been to relate the social interactions and their environments – the realm of the habitual – depicted by the narrator, assuming they are basically adequately rendered. For example, I render the descriptions of contraceptive devices and domestic abortions described in the autobiography. They do not follow an established pornographic rhetoric and sound believable. But I have avoided quoting and relating to the dialogic "excerpts" of what the women surrounding Ivanov supposedly said about sex and desire. I do not want to exclude the possibility that Soviet women in some milieus may have expressed themselves and behaved like that, but I think it highly improbable. In any case, I prefer to wait until we have at least some kind of similar evidence from women themselves. Only one recurrent theme in Mikhail's sex talk with women, that of breast milk, will be discussed in connection with his views on masculinity – that is, inside the realm of interpretations, to which they undeniably do belong.

### *Fallen women and social ascent*

Ivanov's social mobility follows a path from a suburb to the centre of Leningrad, through successive apartment changes and gradually improving housing conditions. The autobiography opens with a description of the family's deplorable ma-

terial situation during the war years.

*[I]t is better not to think about how we managed – like everybody else. (...) ...we were moved to a small one-storey house, after they had moved the Finns out.<sup>5</sup> The little house was divided into two parts, and we got one room as earlier, although this one was smaller, and a kitchen, and two storage rooms, we did not have much furniture – a table, some chairs, two stools, and two single beds which we seldom used. A couple of big and wide barrack-beds were patched together in the room, and we slept on them all three of us under one big blanket, it was warmer that way. We did not have enough firewood for the winter, somehow we managed to heat, we probably burnt everything that could be burnt.*

Mikhail married inside this poor milieu. With his first wife, they shared a wooden house without any facilities with her sister, brother and mother. Raya and her mother worked at the Metalloprodukt factory making agricultural machinery. In 1960, a commission checked their living conditions and the family received a room of ten square meters from the new dwelling houses of the factory in which the women were working. “*This was a real blessing*”, he noted: now they had an indoor toilet, although the heating was still done with wood. Mikhail, Raya and their children moved to this apartment, but they continued to be in geographical and social proximity to Raya’s mother. Ivanov described the mother-in-law as the central and supporting force, especially in the beginning of his marriage. All family members gave her their salary. When a new woodshed proved too small, it was she who arranged a tractor-load of old boards, out of which they built a new shed. She was the one who provided the household with firewood, or the young couple with condoms; and when her daughter soon after the wedding became pregnant for the first time, she told her how to induce a miscarriage.

After the second move, the family’s material situation was already somehow satisfying. For instance, Mikhail was not pressuring his (in his view, lazy) wife to return to her wage work, as “*we still had enough money*”. A few years later, the family received an apartment in the centre of Leningrad. They got two rooms and kitchen, central heating, hot water, a bathroom and a separate WC. “*My god, what a miracle – you don’t need to prepare wood, carry water and carry the wastewater out.*” Mikhail’s mother-in-law and her other two children also received a two-bedroom apartment.

After divorcing his first wife, Mikhail left their apartment to her and their children and moved in with his second wife, her daughter and mother in a three-room apartment, also situated in the city centre. We are not told the occupation of his second wife, but it is clear the second marriage continued and stabilized his

improving social status. It is through Ksenya that Mikhail finally escaped both the material and moral stigma of his first two families, although the past returned as a dividing issue between the spouses later in their marriage.

The story of escaping material poverty runs parallel to the description of escaping moral stigma and sexual promiscuity portrayed in the figures of Mikhail's mother and his first wife.

In the late 1940s, Mikhail's mother started to work in a military unit that occupied his family's previous house. The neighbour woman they shared their new dwelling with also worked there, and both women received soldiers who "*gave them food products*" and were their lovers.

At the age of fourteen, after Mikhail got drunk for the first time, the son's relationship with his mother became explicitly sexual, involving kisses, petting and her giving abundant advice about how to do things with girls in the right way. The boy was highly ambivalent about his whole life situation. On the one hand, he tells us he trusted and admired his mother. This is, for instance, how he describes his feelings after one of their first sexual encounters: "*In the morning everything was fine. After that I did not taste wine for a long time and started to relate tenderly to my mother – how wise and good wasn't she, after all.*" Also their first intercourse, when Mikhail is about seventeen years old, is described as a happy event.

*So my mother got up, took off her night gown, put in a [contraceptive – AR] stick and lay naked in the bed. I pressed myself against her breasts and started to suck the nipples, squeezing her tits, my mother was swooning. (...) She was content with me, and I was in high spirits. That is how I was my mother's man for the first time, and neither was it the last. (...) In the morning I woke up in a good mood. After breakfast both of us went about our own business. I did not tell anybody about this event, not even Oleg, and now, for the first time in many years, I am telling this story.*

But both before and after the first seduction Mikhail describes how he was "unwilling" and "disgusted" to go to sleep in the same bed with his mother, or even to go near her. He was often depressed and desperate, "*it was all so difficult and disgusting, I became mad at everybody. It is hard for me to describe all my worries.*" From the age of seventeen, Mikhail started to detach himself from his mother. He notes that he had then become older and "*perhaps got more sense in the head*". His studies provided a way out of the intimacy and the drinking his mother enticed him into:

*I started to develop a different attitude towards sexual life, and to life in general, I started to be irritated by the persistent girls and the men that came to our house.*

*As a rule, they all brought vodka with them. My mother was drinking with them, and they offered me to drink. I got drunk a few times. But when I woke up a saw the house was a mess (*bardak*). My mother sank morally, and I did not even want to talk with her anymore, not only not to go to sleep in her bed. But when there were no men next to her she asked me to lie with her again, she said that she cannot do without men, that she wants all the time, and she was crying. I felt sorry for her, and the drinking made me feel sick, especially the next morning. I was afraid of the hangovers because I had to study, to work, and I started to run away in order not to take part in the drinking. I dived head first into my studies.*

Mikhail graduated from his vocational school and started to work in a factory. Through his new acquaintances, he further re-evaluated (*pereosoznat'*) his views about families and morality. He avoided going home and welcomed the army service as a way of escape.

*At the factory we had a wonderful sport collective with our own sport centre, where you could do sports in winter and in summer and occasionally stay overnight. Looking at such families I understood that my mother and I had completely abnormal relations, she was both a mother to me and not a mother, but a mere woman, female and drunkard, and that started to torment me. Now I only waited for the day when I would go to the army, everything else went to a secondary plan.*

Mikhail obtained a chauffeur's license while preparing for his army service, which he started in 1953. He was satisfied with his experiences and says the army occupied him totally: "*The most important thing was that there were no women.*" Also his social ambitions were supported. He entered the sergeant school, and was looked up to: "*I was the only one with a seven-year education and I counted as being from Leningrad.*"<sup>6</sup>

But in the second year in the army his mother came to visit him. "*So mother came, like snow on the head in the middle of summer.*" With her, "women" and sexuality entered his army life, literally ending it. Ivanov describes his mother having intercourse with two of his superiors on the way to the hotel where mother and son were going to spend his leave together. When he reproached her, she explained that she did it only because it was in his interests. Indeed, only two months after her visit he was prematurely demobilized in 1956, which he thinks was due to his mother's contacts. After that, however, he ended the sexual relationship with his mother.

*I was appalled to look at my mother, my own mother. She started to drink, smoke and lead a whore's life. Soon after my demobilization [from the army] she*

*gave birth, but the child died in the hospital. I do not know why, nor was I interested, I had my life and she had hers.*

Towards the end of the 1950s Ivanov's mother inclined increasingly towards prostitution and alcoholism: "...*she had stopped hiding that different men came to her, brought something to drink, and she paid them with her body*". Mikhail knew he had to put his life in order. First he started working, and then he soon met his future wife, Raya, in a dancing place in the suburb where he lived. He became infatuated with her and first perceived of her as a suitably nice and decent woman. Raya had an older brother and younger sister who, "...*characteristically, were all born from different fathers. I learned that a little later, but at the moment I was not thinking about that, and I did not know.*" Raya was not drinking vodka at that time, but her mother liked drinking. She got cross when Raya refused alcohol and objected that it was always all right to take a little at dinner – "*This also made me unhappy, but it became clear only after quite a while.*"

The couple dated following the norms of Soviet romantic courtship. For a long time Mikhail was not allowed to kiss Raya. "*I was not insisting, but in the end she kissed me herself, I had brought her flowers, and then we started kissing all the time, but things did not go further than that.*" The couple started disagreeing, but Mikhail remained infatuated: "*We started to quarrel about anything and nothing, but I was still drawn to her like a magnet.*"

During this period of 'pure' dating, Mikhail had sex with Raya's friend. While he later moralized over his mother's and his wife's behaviour, he was here describing his own premarital sexual relations in a neutral and non-judgmental way. Raya's friend told him Raya was more experienced than she had led him to understand, but he refused to believe such rumours. Mikhail also visited his mother's acquaintance, who worked as a porter in a *obshchezhitie* and could arrange for some girl to come and spend time with him. "*The girl knew why she was brought there, and without words or preludes she either undressed or merely took her trousers off.*" We are not told whether Mikhail paid these girls, and the woman arranging the meetings is said to have asked him only for sexual favours "*in exchange*", which he refused. Probably, the woman got some kind of material rewards for her services.

If Mikhail first thought well of Raya, Raya's mother is from the start described as an intriguing and driving force. Ivanov admired her ability to arrange things, but was also repelled by her sexual advances and her determination to get him as an in-law; he would later accuse her of literally using spells in order to bewitch him. One evening during their dating period, she is said to have made Mikhail



and Raya drink and put them to sleep together in the woodshed. Ivanov says that Raya's mother thus directly encouraged him to take her daughter's virginity, after which he would be obliged to marry her. Another time, he noticed that the cellar was full of wine, vodka and moonshine. Raya's mother explained that it was for the wedding. *"I had not even started to think about marriage, but I was already being married."*

Mikhail eventually married Raya in 1959 and moved in with his wife's family. After the birth of their second child the marriage started falling apart. Like his mother, Raya started smoking, drinking, and talking openly about her affairs on the side. *"She knew I did not like that women smoked or drank wine, but later [her friend] Valya taught Raya to smoke too, and they started to smoke and drink the two of them, and that was the beginning of the end of our family life (I talk and write ahead now)."* Mikhail felt trapped:

*I openly blamed my mother-in-law. There was nothing I could do. I could not leave the children and break up the family, so I had patience for the time being. I said, "it was you who married me to your daughter, why did you bewitch me, why?" And there was nothing she could say in reply. (...) I was fed up with everything: my work, my family, but you have to preserve the family because of the children (*no semiu nado khranit' radi detej*). But you can change your work place. So, weighed down by my work (...) I quit and started working as a taxi driver.*

Once again, a change in Mikhail's public life gave him some sense of life control. Earlier this sense came through his studies and army service, now it was through a new job. But in the private sphere, his helplessness grew. It culminated when Raya started expecting a third child, the paternity of which he was uncertain about.

*I did not know anything about this pregnancy, neither did my mother-in-law. We learnt about it when her stomach was visibly big. Everything happened in silence, once again nobody knew what to do. We started to wait for the third child, and I did not know whose it was.*

It was too late for an official abortion and this time Raya failed in her usual attempts to *"get rid of it herself"*. But the child was still-born and evidently had malformations – Mikhail never learned the details. He was interrogated by the doctor, who eventually refrained from raising charges, *"although it was obviously a crime. It seems Raya had also confessed to that."* While Raya was still in the hospital after the tragic birth, Mikhail was seduced by her mother, and then he engaged in

other sexual relationships.

Soon afterwards, Mikhail fell in love with his future second wife (a friend of Raya's sister), moved in with her and eventually applied for divorce. In this third family setting he finally managed to escape from "loose living" (*besputnaia zhizn'*) – the expression he uses e.g. when seeking reasons for his mother's premature death from cancer of the uterus. In his thirties, living in the centre of Petersburg in a family with "normal" relations and taking pride in handling his work tasks well, Ivanov had established himself as proper member of the Soviet middle class.

### *Sexual blat and prostitution*

Ivanov's autobiography is full of descriptions or mentions of sexuality as a means of exchange. It appears in two forms: prostitution and sexual *blat*. A specifically Soviet phenomena, *blat* relations were a middle form between gift and exchange, corruption and friendship (Ledeneva 1998). Thus prostitution here denotes an exchange of sexual favours for money in a somehow organized setting, including pimps, certain places, contact persons, etc. (Of course, in many cases the line between sexual *blat* and prostitution is blurred.) *Blat* existed as horizontal ties within circles of friends, and vertical ties between different social classes or hierarchical positions in, notably, the workplace. For instance, Ivanov describes these relations among taxi drivers: "*I never suspected that money decides everything in the taxi, you have to pay everybody and for everything with money. The result is that you become dependent on everybody.*" In this quote, "money" does not mean overt bribes. This is clear from the ensuing example, where Mikhail after the work day went to the central in order thank one of the telefonistka women, who had provided him with many advantageous orders during the day. "*I had bought a cake (tort) and a box of chocolate and (...) was almost knocked over by laughter. Later I understood that I should have brought something to drink and cigarettes, at least Bulgarian ones [if not Western – AR].*"

Ivanov was not involved in outright prostitution and describes it only as indirect knowledge.<sup>7</sup> For instance, he tells about an elderly woman who was his neighbour when they first moved to the factory dwelling house in 1960. She was somehow involved in court proceedings against an underground brothel. "*Then it became clear to me that there were many brothels in town. I heard a lot about them especially while working as a taxi driver. But that happened after a long time, ten years later.*"

Working as a taxi driver, Mikhail met women passengers offering themselves as payment (which he declined), or men asking him to provide them with alcohol and women.

*When I told them I did not know where to get that, they would not believe I did not have any vodka or wine and did not frequent prostitutes. But that's how it was. It took me a long time before I learned to know (*pronikat'*) the work of a taxi driver."*

An outsider to prostitution in the Soviet times,<sup>8</sup> Mikhail was often part of or direct witness to sexual *blat* relations. The visiting soldiers of his childhood and his mother's way of getting him prematurely released from the army are the first examples in the text. Later, after returning from the army and shortly before meeting his first wife, he worked as a chauffeur in a research institute. Once he drove food to one *stolovaia* or workplace restaurant and met the director of the place. They agreed to meet after work and eventually spent the night together. After this, Mikhail was soon called to her office:

*There I was unequivocally told [by the director] that if I would at least sometimes pay Nina V. attention in a sexual way, I would get a good position in society and at my workplace. Instead of answering her I embraced her shoulders, pressing her against my chest, and our mouths were united in a single passionate kiss.*

While Ivanov is not prone to moralising over his own pre- or extramarital affairs, the *blat* relations are condemned and described in negative ways. This is not related to the relations *per se* – he openly acknowledges the benefits he got from them and did not seem to mind them in the beginning. Rather, he judges the psychological discomfort and social stigma eventually created by such affairs, “it turned out I was a prostitute”:

*She was content, and I was also, to a certain extent – I always had enough to eat and did not have to think about my daily bread, and I got a new car, and a better wage, and the director even appointed me as a stand-in in the buffet. So sex had such a good influence on my career and my life. But of course, that could not continue for a long time: I had to put my private life in order. ...*

*I was content with my work, I had to pay attention to the director, but that was without any future prospects – I will not marry her, she is much older than I am, her daughter is already grown-up. Well, so far she is keeping herself in shape, but for how long can it continue later on, it is not such a pleasure with an old lady, but sexually I continued to satisfy her, and she did not stay indebted to me, so it turns out that I was a prostitute.*

The relationship ended when the director got caught for dubious financial transactions and lost her position (*“lucky me, and unlucky her”*). Mikhail lost his opportunities for extra work and additional income in the workplace restaurant, but he got to do more financially rewarding long distance driving. Later a female colleague proposed an affair, to which he at first objected on the grounds that *“there was no love between us”*. She let him know that *“if I want good trips and good moonlighting, I have to show her attention once in a while”* and they eventually had a two-year long relationship.

Ivanov also described a failed blat arrangement. His sister-in-law was supposed to marry a close friend of her boyfriend, a released convict, in order to help him get a *propiska* in Leningrad. After they had made an application for a registration of marriage, the boyfriend demanded that she should have sex with his friend. Thus the two men deliberately confounded gender *blat* (marrying the friend of a friend in order to help him) with sexual *blat* (having intercourse with him). She refused, but her boyfriend left the apartment and let her be raped by her ‘fiancé’. In revenge, Dasha *“of course did not go anywhere”* – i.e., did not report to the police – but withdrew her application for marriage. This was something the two men had evidently not expected, and to manage with this she needed the support of her brother, who warned the two men from attempting any kind of repercussions on their part.

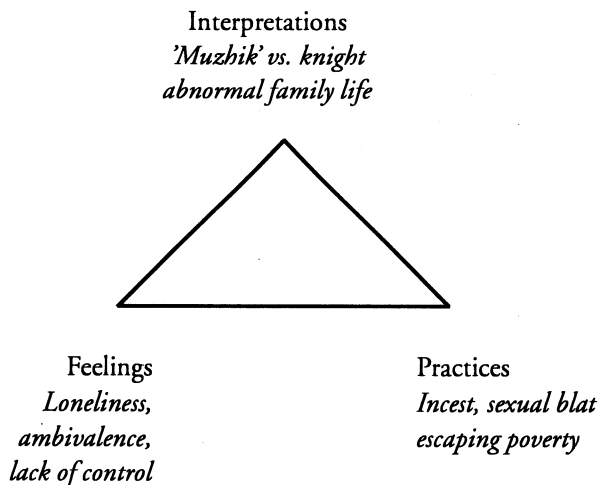
As I have previously stressed, we have no way of knowing whether the women involved in these instances of *blat* really expressed themselves as explicitly in reality as in the autobiography. But the relations themselves were not improbable. Nor is it surprising that, although some autobiographies written by women in my material tell about sexual *blat* relations with men (see the previous chapter), there are no other mentions of *blat* where women occupy the higher position and demand sex in exchange for material favours. Ivanov’s affair with the director is a clear example of vertical relations of blat, close to (but not identical with) prostitution. This gender constellation was certainly much rarer than the opposite one, if only for the reason that there were more men in middle and upper managerial positions in the Soviet Union. The secrecy and stigma attached to *blat* relations in general, and to sexual *blat* in particular, would also be highest in the case of a harassing woman. As a man, Ivanov justified his relations by appealing to valued masculine features such as his great capacities as a lover and the attractiveness of the women who desired him. For a Soviet woman, it would be harder to present (ab)use of power and sexual initiative as part of accepted femininity.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, Ivanov also conveyed his moral ambivalence and feeling of a lack of life

control as the *blat* relationships continued.

The other workplace affair and the related story about his sister-in-law's failed fictive marriage are examples of *horizontal blat* relations between work colleagues or friends. In Ivanov's two experiences of sexual *blat* on the workplace, the biggest problem was not the rewards themselves, but the absence of feelings between the partners. Belonging to the silenced generation born in the immediate pre- and post-war years, Ivanov is typical for emphasising that sex without love is objectionable. After meeting his second wife, he refused all relationships on the side, emphasising love and fidelity. And when yet one work colleague tried to seduce him, he notes how "*I could no longer trade my consciousness, I had fallen in love with K. and could not be unfaithful to her, even with those whom I depended upon, I could no longer have sex without love. It was prostitutes who had sex and got money and presents instead of love.*" In 1996, he noted that his occasional passionate meetings with younger women are so rewarding, because they give him "*the feeling that you are still needed, which provided an indescribable satisfaction and pride.*"

Ivanov's need for moral justification is also felt in the stories of refusing prostitution or other types of casual sex on the road. On long-distance drives, he earned an additional and informal income from hitchhikers. He notes that many women offered themselves to him, but he mostly refused as he was afraid of venereal diseases and "*sex on the road did not tempt me very much.*"

Figure 7. From muzhik to knight (the case of Ivanov)



In Ivanov's case, social mobility was connected with rejecting loose living and developing "normal" family relations. The cultural clashes between impoverished working-class and middle-class milieus, public Soviet institutions and private complicated chaos resulted in feelings of loneliness, ambivalence and lack of life control.

Maynes' (1995) study of 19th century workers found a pattern of men's self presentation in which sexual restraint was equated with self control and social mobility. Ivanov's life story follows the same logic. It also features more detailed evidence of the tension between two conceptions of masculinity, the crude *muzhik* and the courteous man. This dilemma is crystallized in the notions of female breasts and milk.

### *Muzhik or knight?*

Two almost exclusive notions of masculinity are present in Ivanov's story – the local brute, or *muzhik*, and the courteous knight.

The *muzhik* is from the local milieu Mikhail was brought up within. It is symbolized by his best childhood friend, Oleg. Ivanov was a lonely child who was tormented by jealousy and several times remarks that "*nobody loved me when I was a boy*". During the difficult times of his youth, Oleg became the one who "*helped me with everything*". Clearly idealized by Mikhail, Oleg first taught Mikhail how to handle girls and the main sexual vocabulary. Oleg has also had the same incestuous experience with his mother (and even his sister) as Mikhail, but talks about it without any shame. He is made to represent the harsh, commanding and highly sexual male, the *muzhik* who says "*I never let anybody pass whom I could fuck*." This type of man also appears in the already mentioned story of how Mikhail's sister-in-law was raped. "*She was against it, but as he was a man (on vse-taki muzhik), he added: 'If you won't undress, I'll fuck you nevertheless and that'd just be worse for you.'* (...) he tormented her, and only when V. returned to the apartment did he let her go."

The second, contrasting masculine ideal of the responsible man belongs to Soviet notions of proper courtship and family life. These ideals were elaborated in the 1930s and 1940s and represented the lifestyle of the emerging Soviet bourgeoisie (Dunham 1976). They are condensed in a statement put forward towards the end of Ivanov's autobiography: "*The preservation of the family is one the big problems of our days*." Quite unexpected and unintentionally comical in this con-

text, the declaration sounds like a direct quotation of a psychological or pedagogical ‘expert’ or like a headline of the 1970s or 1980s. Earlier, when Mikhail’s first marriage was falling apart, he offered similar arguments for not getting a divorce (“you have to preserve the family because of the children”, *‘no semiu nado khranit’ radi detei’*”).

Interestingly, Ivanov does not at any point openly condemn the *muzhik* ideal taught to him by Oleg. At one point, Oleg destroyed Mikhail’s relations to his first girlfriend by forcing her to perform oral sex with him, an event which Ivanov witnessed and made him want to hang himself. Already in those years, Mikhail longed to distance himself from such crude manners, and the text stresses the importance of love and reciprocity in sexual relations. This contradiction leaps into the eye of the reader, but is not at all commented on or elaborated by Ivanov. Oleg evidently figures first and foremost as his best friend.<sup>10</sup> Mikhail actually behaved like a *muzhik* only on rare occasions. Mostly, as we have seen, he perceived of himself as the passive, insecure man being seduced. Once towards the end of his first marriage, he saw a naked young woman at a party, and *“one thought overwhelmed me: how to fuck her.”* But even here his behaviour is justified by a quote from the same girl, who commented on the infidelity with the words *“they don’t have a normal family anyway now, everybody is on his own”*. And at a similar wild party, he remarks *“I did not fall in love with anybody and just like that, without love, I did not want to get closer to anybody, I did not even feel aroused by these naked girls without their panties on.”*

A similar contradiction appears in Ivanov’s condemnation of pornographic journals. First, he disapproved of his first wife’s, Raya’s, loose morals. When she brought imported condoms and Western pornographic journals home, Mikhail said supposedly *“take them away, I don’t want to look at naked women, and even if I want to look, I don’t want pictures”*. But later in life, he tells about hiding pornographic journals from their daughter as an example of his efforts to provide a strict moral upbringing.

The ideal of the responsible man as a ‘knight’ seems closer to Mikhail’s perception of himself than the *muzhik*. Such Soviet middle-class culture is in the beginning represented by his student milieu and later by his second, lasting marriage. In this family, his wife was quite embarrassed by any discussions about sex, and Mikhail was the one who had to explain things to their curious daughter. The parents took care while making love and avoided showing themselves naked in front of their child, they carefully hid their erotic literature and journals, and Mikhail explained to her that only husband and wife may wash each other naked

in the bathroom. Later, they found erotic books, “*some kind of boulevard sex*” and condoms in their student daughter’s bag. The parents asked her about this but did not reproach her. At 18 she started bringing boyfriends home, “*we decided it was her fiancée, but we were deeply wrong, because she had quite a number of such fiancées*” – in sum, a for many Western readers fully recognisable, tolerant approach to teenager sexuality, with minimal control, if quite a bit of worrying on the part of the parents.

The *muzhik* and the knight are distinct from each other to the point of resembling the classical female dichotomy between whore and madonna. Nevertheless, the contrasting ideals have one thing in common: they control the situation. In this particular life story, the ideals provide different reactions to the perceived threat of feminine immorality and material poverty. The knight ideal is the culturally approved of, proper way out, much like the self-restraint advocated by Mayne’s working class autobiographers. The *muzhik* is characterized by the immediate, brutal response of the man who does not rise socially, but who is in control. The big difference between the young Mikhail and his friend Oleg was that the latter was not ashamed of his incestuous relationship and even bragged about it.

Ivanov’s perception of himself remained divided. When young, he used to suck his mother’s breasts both with tenderness and passion. Later, his wife suggested he should drink her breast milk (she was breast-feeding their second child for almost two years) since it was healthy and would strengthen his potency. Mikhail retorted: “*I am not such an idiot as to drink women’s milk, that’s the last thing I need.*” Once again, these kind of contradictions do not seem to be perceived by Ivanov. Still, he was able to articulate and reflect on his experiences. Towards the end of the text he described a quarrel with his wife: she complained about his looking at young girls on the beach, he complained about her refusing to have sex and pointed out that (again with clear allusions to pedagogical popular literature) “*sexual relations are formed in the family, they depend on how you are growing up, and being brought up, what and how you are seeing in your milieu (sreda)*”. She retorted that one could, indeed, see from his behaviour where he had been growing up and told him that his former sister-in-law had told about his previous relationships, including those with his mother and mother-in-law.

This revelation was followed by the credo of Ivanov’s autobiography, summarizing his pain and *impuissance*:

*Saying that, she did not understand that I grew up in a milieu among women and girls who were unashamed of me, were naked, and washed themselves with*



*me, or rather I with them, in the sauna, and that I was sleeping with my mother who was young and did not shun men. It was not my fault that she made me lie on her and made me a man, and later, my mother could not and would not refuse herself sexual pleasure, and she did not pay attention to who was beside her at that moment, so I said to her: 'Be content that you had your mother, a grandmother for your daughter, and that she got used to sleeping in her own bed since childhood. It is not certain what would have happened if Olya would have slept with you, what she would have been drawn to, perhaps she would also have become a lesbian, and would have been drawn to others like her. And about that mother-in-law (...) you know how she got me married, and you know the rest. So you should not blame me now. And later, in what followed, all my life went in some kind of sexual dependency and notwithstanding everything I have seldom chased women, the women have chased me, and so what, if they succeeded?'*

Here, finally, the contrasting male ideals merge in order to support Mikhail's explanation. Sexuality is, as in *muzhik* behaviour, a wild, raw, and potentially destructive and immoral force. Then, enter the cultured knight: With proper education and upbringing this force can be civilized and the development of perverse habits (incest, lesbianism) can be reversed. Nothing was Mikhail's own fault, because what happened is how things inevitably evolve in such situations. In his view, the naturalization of sex moves on two levels: it first excuses male *muzhik* behaviour and then blames education for failing to regulate it. Women are only partly embraced by these justifications. Loose women are morally condemned, unlike the *muzhik*, and women are additionally blamed for not providing the social regulation (here symbolized by a separate bed for the children), by which both sexes become civilized.

### 8.3 SUBURBAN GANG CULTURE

#### *In the cellar*

Aleksei Lukashin, a medical student who had worked in a rock band and was later a doctor, a masseur and finally went into show business, was born the youngest of three boys in 1960. Like Ivanov, he was raised by a single mother in a clearly poor district of the city. The eldest brother moved out when Aleksei was still a toddler, but he spent much time with his middle brother. Aleksei's school teachers are said to have lost all hope at an early stage: the only one who really minded

him not attending classes was the sports teacher, who is described as chasing him with a basketball around the building, his eyes stained with blood after Aleksei had made a stone hid in a briefcase fall on his head. This anecdote says much about the social setting, as the Soviet schools of the 1970s generally had severe discipline.

The young Aleksei and his friends played some sports (especially ice hockey, and also did some cross-country skiing) but mostly hung out together. In this autobiography, there is never any hesitation about which ideal of masculinity to follow: there is much fighting with fists, knives and occasionally even with guns, and much laughing, drinking and dragging. *“My brothers were known in the whole region. They fought very well. I tried not to be worse than they were. (...) When it became necessary, I took part in the battles, and when I could, I went out with them in the company of girls.”* These girls – later in the text usually called ‘beauties’ (*krasavitsy*) – only figure as sexual objects who circulate between the guys. It is a *muzhik* world, where the word love is mentioned only in quotation marks and there are no attempts at knighthood discourse except in order to ridicule or oppose it.

Out of straightforwardness or provocation, the text opens with a close-up of a “meeting” many others would call a gang rape:

*It happened a long time ago. It is over 20 years since. I was about 15 years old. I was a clever, quick little guy. I was physically strong, above my age. I was friends with my classmates, but also with guys who were 3-5 years older than me.*

*My first close meeting with a woman took place in a cellar. My elder brother had brought some girl. Together with his friends we got drunk and then everybody fucked her. Around the tenth turn was mine. I was very nervous, standing in line. The older friends calmed and encouraged me. You won't even have to do anything, they said. Just take off your pants... When I went in, she was lying on the floor, smoking a cigarette. To hide my anxiety, I behaved rudely (like a big boy), and took off my pants without a word. I firmly followed the instructions. I lay down on her. I felt her body and some kind of smell that was new to me. Sensing this all so close to me lifted my worries to a qualitatively new level. My legs started shaking. But like a bulldozer, without noticing anything around, I went into action. It was very wet in there (...) After that I quickly left and went home. At home I washed myself and went to bed. I was all trembling of excitement. I lay just a short while. Then I jumped up, dressed and ran to the cellar, but, alas, there was already nobody there.*

This is the first episode in Lukashin's sexual memoirs. Of the hundreds of other sexual encounters, none is described in this much detail. The first time is recalled

with a strong component of vitality affects, in Daniel Stern's (1985) terminology, and feelings – smells, tactile sensations, trembling. Later he merely describes the appearance of his female partners (often with grades), the positions used and his general impressions of the conquest in question. But in many respects the style of the cellar scene is typical for the whole text. On the one hand, the author makes a strong effort to remember, but on the other hand, he adopts a joking, anecdotal tone that often serves to belittle the events and distances the reader from the events. The frequent mentions of laughing – with the guys, or while first flirting with a girl – are among the most personal and sympathetic features. Otherwise, Lukashin clearly expects the reader to want a story of his sexual escapades, much in the genre “Letters to the reader” in pornographic or erotic journals. The directives provided in the autobiographical announcement (to begin with early childhood, to write about both sex and love, to talk “like to a close friend”, and to reflect on various phenomena, e.g. homosexuality or prostitution, etc.) do not seem to have left any trace. Lukashin clearly enjoys recalling some very successful or unusual affairs but discards others, *“I have left much out on purpose, and I think there is also much I simply do not remember.”* Some experiences, such as his family relations or his religious views, are deemed irrelevant in this context, *“that is another story”*. Towards the end of the text, he complains of being tired of writing and having too little time left as his wife (or companion) will soon return, and he does not want her to read the text.

The girl in the cellar is not described as having resisted the boys in any way. At the same time, it is hard to imagine that any teenager girl would of her free will participate in such a scene. She may have been threatened in some way, just as Ivanov's sister-in-law was forced to agree with the argument that it would just be much worse if she did not co-operate (see above). At the very least, the girl in the cellar had for some reasons reached a point where she did not or could not care about her own integrity. This is the most striking example of the moral grey zone and ambivalence about sexual norms that, as I have argued earlier, loomed especially large during late socialism. The Soviet statistics already indicate that sexual violence was frequently committed by young males and that specifically group rapes by youth gangs were more frequent than in other countries: every second registered rape in the early 1990s was a gang rape (Kon 1995, 212). Yet we may suppose that the events reported to the police must have been among those perceived by all participants as more or less unequivocal violence. In addition, there were probably many more situations akin to Lukashin's sexual initiation in which neither the offenders nor the victim seem to have had clear notions about how to

name, react to, or later think about what happened. His version is the other side of what the women autobiographers describe as foolishness, fatal innocence, becoming paralysed or fearing to scream (see chapter 7).

These practices created intense and contradictory feelings which evidently found no adequate or stable interpretational frameworks. This is obvious when Lukashin tells about how he later was recognised by the girl in the cellar. His first reaction was – “naturally” – guilt:

*That was my first close meeting with a woman. By the way, she remembered me (although it had been quite dark in the cellar). A month or two later we met each other on the street one evening. I didn't recognise her, two girls just asked for a cigarette and we started to talk. Then one of them went away, and the other suggested we go smoke in another place – which turned out to be an attic, and even a comfortable one, it had a sofa. We sat down, smoked, and that was when she reminded me of the story with the cellar. I, naturally, denied it at first, but she calmed me, saying that she did not blame me, that it was her own fault and so on, well, and that she had liked me. I looked at her, she was about ten years older.*

This time, they had more varying and longer sex. But then this *later* sexual encounter is in retrospect – jokingly, but nevertheless – called a rape (of himself!).

*After I had been raped (as I now understand) by my brother's girl in the attic, my life took on different colours. I somehow changed sharply. Something in my head awoke that drove me crazy.*

Aleksei invited one girl home and forced her to undress before him by bending her fingers so it hurt. The girl agreed, but on the condition they would not have intercourse. After this they often met for mutual petting and without any mentions of further persuasion by force. When Aleksei insisted on intercourse, she promised to provide another girl for him. Indeed, after some time a new girl appeared in their circle of friends. *“I do not remember what I told her, but relatively easily I took her to a hut on a construction site”,* where the new girl *“calmly lay down”*. Aleksei got nervous when he discovered she was a virgin, as he did not know how to manage without any help from his partner. Furthermore, the other guys had already formed a line outside the hut. *“It all ended so that we just got dressed and I followed her home, which happened and still happens to me extremely seldom.”*

Aleksei obviously rescued his partner from another gang rape like the one in

the cellar. His noble behaviour is presented in the rhetoric of “praising by downgrading”, stressing that he practically never followed the golden rule No. 1 of Soviet romantic courtship: that the man should follow the woman home (cf. chapter 3). He also provides us with a cynical ending of this relationship. The couple met again and managed to have intercourse, he was confronted with her boyfriend and beat him up, after which they had sex “*a couple of times more, and then she went from hand to hand*”.

The list of women, types and places of sex during the next fifteen years continued, until Lukashin on the last page a little surprisingly declared that he was actually tired of all this, “*sex has long ago lost its actuality for me*”. In his mid-thirties, he had not settled into his family life nor into professional circles. He was at the writing moment cohabiting, but dreaming about finding a completely “perfect woman”, *garmonichnaia zhenshchina*. He was employed in show business but finishing his studies on the side, hoping that “the best is yet to come” in his life. This life phase of personal and professional unrest may have created the need for self-reflection, or at least the urge to remember prompted Lukashin to write.

Although Lukashin’s social status was far from settled, his social trajectory represents a very different pattern from that of the previous generation. This is evident in the perceived relation between sexual restraint and social success, as well as in his attitude towards women.

### *Attempts at social ascent*

Initially, Aleksei Lukashin’s path followed a similar logic as Mikhail Ivanov’s: to get away from his childhood milieu by putting order into his life and studying. In the end of the 1970s, Aleksei spent two years in the army, where he used all his spare time “*maximally, in order to develop my intellectual and physical qualities. This produced results. When I returned after the army service everybody found me different. I did not drink or smoke and I talked about important goals in life.*” However, the dramatic separation and opposition of spheres (home milieu vs. student milieu, chaotic family life vs. responsible working life) characteristic of Ivanov’s social trajectory is not paralleled in Lukashin’s case. For instance, the army improved Aleksei’s intellectual ambitions, but he also notes how “*in the army my muscles of stone started to dry up, and indifference and apathy entered my soul*”. Public life and Soviet institutions do not appear in the role of stabilising and saving structures (as was also the case, for instance, with Alexandra Chistiakova’s story,

discussed in chapter 4).

While Ivanov's lifestyle 'relapsed' into promiscuity and a loss of control over his life due to his first marriage, Lukashin interrupted his plans of higher education in order to work for some years with a touring rock band. Aleksei had fewer problems with women than with his drinking, but the general logic of women and alcohol versus social improvement and life control, is dominant in the beginning. Work appears as a means to escape his lifestyle at home:

*At that time, I needed to somehow detach myself from women and I actively looked for some interesting work. An administrator I knew well suggested I could call the organization of one regional centre and give his recommendations. I did so and was offered to work for a rock group that was more or less famous at the time.*

Touring life proved even more full of sexual encounters, and Aleksei started to drink and smoke again – blaming the meeting with his older brother in one Siberian town, a celebration which evidently was not conceivable without excessive alcohol. He was also baptized "*the specialist on bitches*" (spetsialist po babam) in the group, as he had so many affairs and also "*seriously helped everybody else to get women*". But life on the road was exhausting. "*I left a part of my health on the tours and I had a serious need to regain my former strength. I skipped drinking and smoking and started to go to a body-building gym.*" He left the rock band after a couple of years and began his studies. The balanced and healthy lifestyle was not at odds with several sexual affairs or black market transactions (fartsovka) to gain extra money. Aleksei also married one of his girlfriends, who had become pregnant and who also had immense patience with him, including his infidelity during the wedding celebrations.

But then, times started changing. Lukashin does not once refer to any social or political factors, but it is hardly a coincidence that he quit his education after the mid-1980s. He left the medical institute and the straightforward track into a feminized profession that was poorly paid in Soviet times and one of the relatively worst off professions in the 1990s. Instead, he acquired the less demanding qualifications of a masseur. At his first work place, the succession of affairs started again. "*I had to fuck in the ispolkom, at the registration office before somebody's marriage, and so on.*" At the same time, he divorced his wife whom he found too lethargic. Following the classical script of short first Soviet marriages, she automatically kept the child (if it was ever born – there is no mention of it at all in the text) and the apartment, and he moved to one room in a communal apartment,

which was close to his work but far away from his mother and ex-wife.

Through an acquaintance, Aleksei received a temporary doctor's post. Once more, he tried to straighten up. Lukashin proudly noted being able to save a woman's life, and how he "*did not drink, did not smoke and was in good form (...)* For about half a year I recovered morally. No sex, no nothing. I was all in my work." True, the next paragraph describes how "*the most interesting women received complete satisfaction*" and only the locals were refused "*special treatment*", although they tried hard to seduce him.

The same winter, he leafed through his telephone notebook and called an acquaintance, who arranged for him to work as a masseur in a newly established, private sauna.

Here the old logic – social ascent equals adoption of proper middle class morals (the normal family life, in Ivanov's terms) – is broken. True, Lukashin emphasized how good he was at his new work, getting clients from his already established colleagues. But he also noted that it "*was a psychologically hard transition from the image of the doctor to the image of nearly a banshchik. But I had to live and support myself somehow. I couldn't expect help from anywhere.*" Soon he worked a lot, and this included sex. "*I had to fuck sometimes several times a day. Naturally with different women. Everything started to spin and swirl (zavertelos, zakruzhibilos)... , I started to drink and to smoke. The bacchanal continued for about three years. I actually tried to regulate the process somehow.*"

But, clearly, the regulation of the "process" did not succeed. The nature of the sexual relations in the sauna are not clear – Lukashin says most of his female clients were prostitutes, although some were married rich women, but who paid whom and what kind of exchange of sympathies or favours took place remains unclear. Neither does he mention any relations with the male customers that he also received in the beginning. He alludes at propositions also from their part – "*I was surrounded by all kind of strange kinds – gay, dyke and so on*" (*vsiaikaia vsiachina – golubaia, rozovaia i t.d.*).<sup>11</sup>

At this point, Aleksei's professional and personal life had become completely intertwined. Far from helping him to avoid the behaviour he himself perceived as problematic, the job in one of the new postsocialist commercial structures exploited and reinforced it. By trying to improve his life – moving from a medical position in state-owned medical clinics to professionally lower but economically better position in the private sector – his working life and his sexual life became more entangled than before. On the road with the rock group, or as a doctor in a tourist base, he had numerous affairs, but of his own choice and as an addition, a

non-obligatory complement, to his working profile. The fact that his own body was being cynically exploited by his employees and their clientele may perhaps explain Aleksei's pronounced cynicism about women.

### *Misogyny and male bonding*

Lukashin presented himself as an uncaring man whose only aim is to fuck women. Only in a couple of exceptions he noted, for instance, that he “*by the way, also held a seriously deep feeling towards her*”. Or that he was disappointed when one meeting “*satisfied only the lust, but without any like a more human thing, with rasstanovka i razmacha*”. Statements like “*I am one of those who think that the best moment with a woman is closing the door after she has left*”, or “[*the intercourse*] could be graded as satisfying. That is for me – I let off steam, and her opinion did not interest me” are among the lightest. In themselves, they are quite possible to explain by his bachelor lifestyle and resistance to stable love relationships, coupled with a longing to find the perfect woman.

But there are also a few descriptions, which indicate a deeper hatred of women. Sexual violence is practised without any regrets, as already discussed above. The women's hesitations or opposition to have sex are always treated with overt contempt. For instance, one woman picked up after a rock concert was made completely drunk by Aleksei and his friends, who both have sex with her. That she never completely agreed to this is made clear from the summarising statement: “*In the morning we parted with her not as friends, but not as enemies either.*” Another time, he and his friend had picked up a woman in a hotel bar and invited her to their hotel room. When she “pretended to leave”, Aleksei asked her to stay:

*She began something stupid about her being an honest girl and so on. But I understood that she had simply not had enough to drink (...) Morally I was already tired but the lust-devil in me surfaced. Finally she started to talk less and react more to my caresses. (...) It was like a wind had blown away from the girl all the education, upbringing, and the manners that she first displayed like a model of upbringing.*

*It seems, really, to be so, that when the natural, the core (estestvo, nutro) of a human being is speaking, which is, according to one theory, animal, then all the artificially adopted disappears without a trace.*



This woman is told to have enjoyed the night with Aleksei and his friend to the extent of inviting her girlfriend for a foursome the following evening. But notwithstanding the woman's feelings, there is in Aleksei's comment much contempt for her way of negotiating<sup>12</sup> and especially for her education and good manners. Sexuality, and especially wild and daring sex (like group sex with strangers), is the natural drive that surfaces in both sexes when the surface is a little melted with alcohol. The educated women's opposition is merely artificial and dishonest behaviour. This logic is of course familiar from many pornographic and erotic texts, notably Henry Miller's works. It presents a naturalized view of sexuality ("the natural", "the inner", "animal") where especially women who, through education and ambition, socially compete with men, are denigrated.

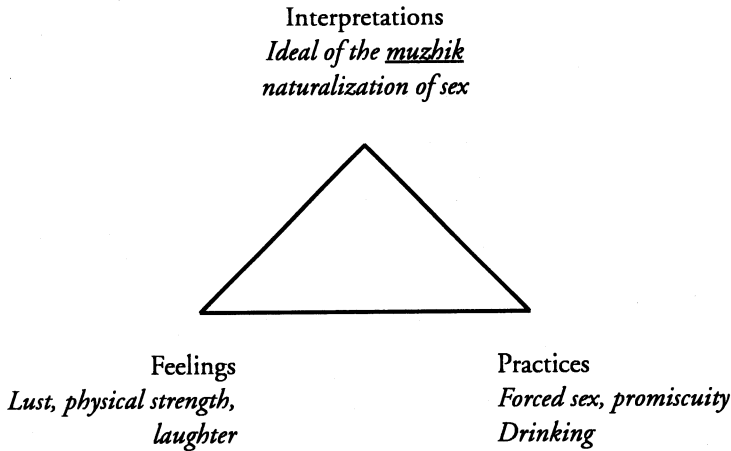
Lukashin's misogyny was matched by strong homosocial ties. Men were the self-evident frame of reference, and Lukashin often noted how he had been respected and feared due to his physical force, courage, and success with women. In his youth, it was indeed, a question of interpersonal violence as a pattern of communication (Zdravomyslova & Chikadze 1998, 19). A bit later, alcohol in itself suffices. Lukashin described a funny incident of male bonding, when he was consoling his boss, who found him in bed with the woman the boss had been courting:

*[The boss] started to scream, wave his arms and spit around him about what kind of trash we were. He was a proper, intelligent man, taking her, it appeared, to dinner to restaurants, following her to her [hotel] room, almost reading her a fairy tale before she would fall asleep, but instead she had, and so on. I stood calmly, contemplating it all in silence. To fight with him was simply not of any interest to me, and well, the guy had to speak out. When he stopped I immediately offered him a drink, although he was not drinking anything at all. But now he accepted. We drank. Our talk gradually entered the subject of the hardships in his life. In sum, I became almost as dear to him as his own brother after that night.*

His male friends are pitied and ridiculed if they suffer from unhappy love, like the ones among his friends of youth who opened their veins or attempted to jump from a roof because of women.

Lukashin's experiences may be described as a triad in the following way:

Figure 8. Masculine subcultures of the 1970s (the case of Lukashin)



In his autobiography, Lukashin presented himself as a straightforward guy. There were seemingly few conflicts between feeling, social practices and their interpretations. He appeared a physical, active man who always enjoyed sex and more or less successfully fought his drinking. He had the most complete realization of a macho, Don Juan *muzhik* ideal. In his few reflections on sexuality, he advocated a naturalized view of sexuality – sex is an inner core which only artificial education or too well-behaved women deny. This aggressive, naturalized sexual ideology also seemed to compensate for professional and personal instability and failed attempts at social ascent. At the very end of the autobiography, more serious aspirations surface:

*I do not look at the world with wide open eyes, but I think that the best is yet ahead. Sex has long ago lost its actuality for me, I mean that to fuck somebody is no problem. The problem lies elsewhere. To meet the perfect woman (physically, psychologically and intellectually) is very hard. To keep her, after having met her, is still harder. Usually they have far too much self-esteem, demands and so on. In my opinion, one should trust the will of the divine, and if something should happen, it does, and the other way around. But that is the theme of another essay.*

Here again, the reader is reminded that Lukashin consciously follows the genre of erotic memoirs, and hides e.g. his religious or more serious social views. He admits to longing for a stable relationship, although his expectations seem high

enough, especially if the perfect woman should not have high self esteem or “demands”. Interestingly, Lukashin’s final credo absolves himself – just like in Ivanov’s final justification – from any responsibility or active agency. Where Ivanov blamed his upbringing, in line with the dominant pedagogical ideas of his adult years, Lukashin gives a semi-religious, fatalistic solution characteristic of the Soviet 1970s and 1980s – “if something should happen, it does”.

## 8.4 FROM ACCULTURATION TO BLURRED MOBILITY

Mikhail Stern, a Soviet émigré doctor, has made the following characterization of the sexual mores of the Soviet lower social groups: “[A]lthough sex may be a taboo subject among ‘respectable’ people in the Soviet Union, those people who live on the fringes of society, who think of themselves as belonging to ‘the lower depths’, talk about sex very openly and naturally.” (Stern 1979, 199). The ‘loose behaviour’ of the lower working class is a prevalent social stereotype, in Russia just as in the rest of Europe. But as Mary Jo Maynes has pointed out, even if workers may have a less strict attitude to some types of sexual behaviour (e.g. virginity) than the middle class, that does not imply their cultures were more “natural”, without their own specific codes of shame and respectability. Against the kind of simplification of working class sexuality that Mikhail Stern presents in the quote above, Maynes argues that the “links between sex and social identity were not generally the same for workers as they were for their class superiors, but they were equally problematic” (Maynes 1995, 131; see also Steedman 1991).

This chapter has examined only male examples of such links in poor working cultures. The few texts I have by Soviet women workers place a very different emphasis. None of the working class men could make the consoling claim of Raisa (No. 2, quoted in chapter 3): “There was also life, even if very gloomy, not like normal life. But love is love everywhere, however savage that seems.” For Ivanov, love was not the same everywhere, and for Lukashin there was no love. The links between sexual and social identity seem especially problematic for these two male cases from marginal milieus: the men have a more dramatic gap between local and dominant ideas about sexuality and family life, and they have a harder time reconciling them with each other.

Ivanov’s life draws a quite classical picture of the class journey from poor, marginalized worker to a well-to-do member of the upper working class. Just as in the worker’s autobiographies from one century earlier, male self-control was seen as

part of a rising social position (Maynes 1995, 135). Although he depicts a seemingly amoral world, the fact remains that Ivanov himself was deeply morally affected by it. The parallels between middle class morality and social ascent are explicitly drawn by Ivanov himself throughout the text. He willingly followed the path of *okulturyvanie*, adopting stricter sexual norms after starting out from a situation that was rather *akulturnyi* than *nekulturnyi*.

Lukashin, by contrast, had to let go of his initial (albeit diffuse) dreams of becoming a doctor. Like Ivanov, Lukashin described sexual *blat* relations, for instance how one of his lovers, who worked as an administrator in a hotel, always provided him with de luxe rooms. Affairs like those may have added to his status in the working collective, but they were not integral to them. But in the private sauna, Aleksei's affairs moved to the centre of the picture, and promiscuity appeared as a central feature of the establishment itself. He also related how he worked for a short time in a sport and health institution, where the administration wanted to arrange a "commercial line". Aleksei helped them organize the new sauna department, and described the criminal and rich clients, billiards played with naked prostitutes, etc. The sexual component of the sauna institutions had moved from occasional meetings between two people in closed rooms to a display in front of the whole clientele in the main room.

Russian women are more often objects of such intertwining of sex and work. But the evolution from Ivanov's *blat* relations to Lukashin's semi-open prostitution reflects economic and structural dynamics. The traditional Russian and Soviet way of social ascent through education was stopped. In a parallel fashion, behaviour that was semi-official entered professional life. These developments affected men, which is not to say that they were gender symmetrical. On the contrary, Lukashin's deliberate misogyny is a good example of the attitude that also entered the public sphere together with the generation of the 1970s.

As will be explored in part III, the view of sexuality of postsocialist Russia is dominated by the naturalization of sex. Aleksei used this argument also with women: "*I mumbled something about the elevated and beautiful, about how good sex is for your health, about the beautiful music that was playing and how it is better to listen to it lying down and relaxing, with your eyes closed and so on.*" In this seduction talk, some shattering of romanticism remains ("the elevated and the beautiful"). But it is used purely for strategic reasons and paired with the totally different view of healthy sex. This is in glaring contrast to Ivanov and his generation, who sincerely searched for the elevated and beautiful, and perceived it in painful tension to lust and the sexual. Ivanov emphasized the role of education in pro-

hibiting sexual excess and perversions, while Lukashin understood sex as a less problematic, healthy activity. Lukashin followed what has been called the “hydraulic model” of male sexuality, seeing it as a natural and uncontrollable force in men’s lives (Weeks 1985). But in both cases, the naturalization of sex served to enhance the men’s feeling of control over women, over their own life, without blaming themselves for anything in their past experiences.

Finally, Ivanov’s life story evolved away from an acultural setting to that of established Soviet middle-class life, while Lukashin’s biography was horizontal: his social status remained undefined, and his excessive sexuality moved into the centre of his professional life.

An almost identical sexual life story to that of Lukashin has been analyzed by Tatyana Baraulina. According to her, restless promiscuity is one of the paradigmatic forms for late Soviet and post-Soviet masculinity:

*As [the interviewee] continues to look for reasons for his polygamy, he runs out of explanations. (...) ‘I don’t know, why I do it, I can’t explain it, I mean... I don’t know, why do you, say, smoke – well it’s like that and, well...’ (...) The experience of one-night stands is the fundament on which the identity of the narrator is built. It is what he cannot explain, it is ‘like smoking’, it is what he is doing because he is – a Man. (Baraulina 1997, 41-42)*

I finish the second part with a discussion of what these different movements indicate about the relations between sexual generations, milieus and subcultures.

1. The negative reactions to Chistiakova’s life story were confirmed to me by Irina Savkina in a personal communication in February 1998 on the basis of her close monitoring of the Russian media. It is interesting to note that at the same time, a woman’s autobiography about childhood poverty, social struggle, illegal abortions and family violence became a best-seller in Ireland., although it must be stated that Nuala O’Faolain’s (1996) autobiography is much better written than Alexandra Chistiakova’s life story.
2. Soviet social policy defined several vulnerable social groups eligible for monetary assistance and other benefits, such as housing and special discounts in shops. These categories of social aid were not tied to a conception of poverty or the working poor. Instead, they included single mothers, invalids, war veterans, families with three or more children, etc., regardless of social status or level of income (Liborakina & Rotkirch 1999).
3. In addition to Alexandr Klyotzin and Elizaveta Lagunova, the organizers of the competition in St. Petersburg, Anna Temkina also read and commented on this autobiography. I am grateful to all three for their shared insights.
4. Love (1992, 142) has found mother-son incest to be related to settings similar to that of Ivanov’s childhood: when a teenage boy gets to sleep in his mother’s bed and the mother has just divorced, become a widow, or does not get attention from her husband. Love claims that actual intercourse between mother and son is very rare.
5. This suburban town was situated on the old border between Finland and Russia. After 1944, it

- became Soviet, and the Finns and related ethnic groups were moved out and sometimes deported.
6. Actually, Ivanov lived only in a suburb of Leningrad and was probably a migrant of the second or even the first generation – we are not told where his parents were born, or whether the family had moved to the Leningrad suburb before Mikhail and his sister were born.
  7. The existence of underground brothels is an excellent example of the how sexual knowledge varied with class and place. The boy from a poor promiscuous suburb did not have what several Leningrad women of the same generation, but from the educated middle class living closer to the centre, have assured me was general, if silent knowledge.
  8. Today, Ivanov writes that he cannot use the services of prostitutes because of a lack of money, implying he would not be against buying sex. But I suspect this comment to be rather an expression of *muzhik* rhetoric than a deeply felt possible solution to his present difficulties of finding women to have intercourse with. Also towards the end of his autobiography, Ivanov emphasised the importance of receiving tenderness and the feeling that he is needed from his partner.
  9. In contemporary literature, Maria Arbatova has described the challenge facing a sexually autonomous Moscow woman in the 1970s in her autobiographical short story “My teachers” (1997).
  10. As Temkina & Zdravomyslova (1999) summarise the importance of male friendship, “the ideology and practices of true manhood, declared by the Soviet liberals and dissent, contrasted from that promoted by state and family solidarity. As an alternative, the relations of male friendship were seen as the ground of men’s collective identity and solidarity. Male friendship in different milieus became a substitute of civil virtues, such as Soviet fatherhood, wedlock, state service.” Vail and Genis (1998, 70) have also underlined how “friendship, the emotion which had occupied the 1960s, gave rise to independent general opinion”.
  11. *Goluboi* (light blue) and *rozovaia* (pink) are insider expressions for homosexuals and lesbians (Essig 1999a, x).
  12. What from a man’s perspective may be seen as feigned innocence and dishonest coquetry, may also be explained as a woman’s way of negotiating and flirting, no less authentic than the man’s supposed straightforwardness. This point is well argued in Toril Moi’s close reading of Sartre (Moi 1994).

## 9 The Behavioural Revolution of the 1970's

Chapter 6 looked at the ways of receiving sexual information in what I called the generation of personalization. It showed how during the late 1960s and the 1970s, sexual behaviour grew increasingly varied in two senses: general sexual practices became more pluralistic, and distinct sexual subcultures emerged. I have called the period of late socialism the time of behavioural sexual revolution and analyzed it as the first phase of the sexual revolution in Russia. The behavioural revolution in the semi-public sphere took place about twenty years before the revolution of articulation in the public sphere in the late 1990s.

This peculiar, two-phased structure of the Russian sexual revolution poses interesting questions about the role of explicit discourse in the formation of behaviour and sexual identity. In order to discuss this, this chapter presents contrasting examples of the impact of the Soviet repressive censorship in sexual matters. Not surprisingly, many Soviet people did have less, and also worse, sex because of inadequate or no sexual education or actual misinformation. That phenomenon will here be called learned ignorance. But others had more, and perhaps also freer and less self-conscious intimate lives because they were less influenced by the discursive policies of naming. I will first present laments of ignorance and then look at different depictions of women's same-sex sexual relations.

To summarise this chapter and part II, I propose a view of the evolution of sexual cultures in Soviet society, from milieus to subcultures, and, in the 1990s, to new dominant cultures.

## *Learned ignorance*

Post-war Soviet society was subject to what Igor Kon calls the policy of “domestication”, when sexuality was allowed to enter some, albeit specialized and controlled, public arenas. It could also be described as the policy of *learned ignorance*. The phrase is employed by the historian Peter Gay (1984, 278-327) to distinguish sexual misinformation from sheer lack of knowledge. Mere innocence is, he stresses, an easier curable condition, “for that may always be alleviated by pertinent new information” (ibid., 309). This was the case for many Soviet people of the oldest and the middle generations.

*My desires appeared and developed naturally, as I was completely uninformed in questions of sex, as it is now called. I did not discuss that theme with my woman friends – it was not customary for us. Neither did I read such books. (Woman, b. 1946, No. 11)*

This woman noticed her lack of knowledge, but eventually got to know her desires and wishes “naturally”. Learned ignorance may reject and counter such spontaneous learning and have more severe consequences. Gay’s main example for Victorian England is masturbation, which was seen as seriously harmful, causing people great anxieties and stress. In the Soviet Union, similar myths existed about masturbation. Other examples include abortions and women’s sexual frigidity, and homosexuality. I will present three of these myths briefly, and then discuss homosexuality more extensively.

This was how one man from the youngest generation reacted to a discussion of masturbation in an old issue of the magazine *Sem’ia i shkola (School and family)*:

*One article was about teenage masturbation; only then did I learn the name of the thing I was doing. I understood and became scared, because the article said that masturbation has negative effects on the body. They suggested teenagers should go in for sports more, or collect something – in short, to distract oneself from the harmful deed. (Man, b. 1968, No. 44)*

Similar misinformation abounded regarding reproduction. Soviet doctors told young women that the risks of terminating their first pregnancy by an abortion were greater than with later pregnancies. Some young women decided not to interrupt their first pregnancy because of this advice, which could be found in brochures at the gynaecologist and in abortion clinics.<sup>1</sup> The underlying logic was that once the woman had conceived one child, possible infertility resulting from



an abortion would not exclude motherhood altogether. Although that is a factually accurate claim, the advice ignored the social and psychological context of young women's decisions. In other respects, the health risks connected to induced abortions as they were performed in the USSR were generally understated, and folk beliefs flourished – for instance, the still current belief that abortions can be good for the woman's body, providing a kind of “cleaning”, or that abortions are less harmful than eating contraceptive pills (Murcott & Feltham 1996).

A third example is the idea that the woman's “frigidity”, or lack of orgasm, and the absence of regular intercourse, makes the woman sterile. A woman from the oldest generation was married to a man whom she loved but who was merely feeling friendship towards her. She inferred that

*The inseparable part of love – constant hugs, tender kisses and a wish for more frequent closeness – was absent. In sex my husband functioned by the biological law – the maturing of seed. And I, almost trying to imitate him, made myself frigid. That was how we lived. This was probably why we had no children.*  
(Woman, b. 1926, No. 3)

More probable explanations, such as the woman's age during this marriage – over 40 – were not mentioned. A woman who was twenty years younger repeated the same logic. She also entered a long, stable relationship at the age of 40.

*I was not afraid of any consequences of our intimacy. Either because of my previous lack of a normal sexual life, or because of other reasons, it turned out that I could not have children. Of course, the absence of the necessity to use contraceptives made our closeness (*blizost'*) freer and daring.* (Woman, b. 1946, No. 11)

Learned ignorance was a combination of folk beliefs, medical advice and random bits of expert advice. Academic accounts of such beliefs or folk myths have claimed similarities and continuities with very different social settings. Thus Shchepanskaia (1996) traces a direct transmission of pre-industrial, agrarian myths into contemporary Russian urban maternal culture, while Murcott and Feltham (1996) in the same book argue that Russian women's beliefs about reproductive health are actually quite similar to those in Western countries. But the articles have in common that neither of them takes issue with the factual accuracy of the beliefs, as the term ‘learned ignorance’ by definition does. Nor do they address the question of class differences. I would side with Shchepanskaia and see a strong influence of Russian agrarian traditions in urban culture. But I think learned ignorance, arising from a mixture of sources (from folk to medical), was

especially characteristic of Soviet Russian educated women. They were shielded from much of the oral street knowledge, and they were also the main readership of Soviet professional medical and pedagogical journals, either in their role as parents or as professionals. The cultural desire to name and causally explain seems to be characteristic for women of the educated middle class, as we shall see below, while Lukashin's autobiography was of course far from this kind of "learned ignorance".<sup>2</sup>

As the Western sexual liberation first and foremost revolutionized perceptions of middle and upper class women's sexuality, the policy of learned ignorance aimed at and affected women from the Soviet middle class and intelligentsia. An atmosphere of more honest information and communication about sex would no doubt have reduced the dissatisfaction of women of the second generation. At least, that is what many of them believe – rather than, for instance, blaming their partners, the women complain about excessive ignorance, innocence and romanticism. We can return to the woman from the oldest generation mentioned above (No. 3). Her first serious relationship lasted ten years, during which the couple spent nights together but did not have intercourse. The author explained that the probable reason for this was her partner's complicated relationships to his ex-wives, lovers and several children (the man had two more children with other women while this couple was meeting each other). *"As I understood, everything in his life was decided by women"*, is the author's dry commentary. She also said they both knew they would not *"have a future"* together. Notwithstanding the unfavourable conditions, her lack of sexual satisfaction was not blamed on the man, but on herself:

*How many new and unknown feelings did I not experience during that and the following night. But because of the limitation to our closeness, I felt some lack of satisfaction. I did not know fully the completeness of feeling.* (Woman, b. 1946, No. 11)

In addition, women suffered more from the ambivalence of sexual norms and from entrenched double standards of morality.

### *Same-sex love – consent in action and discursive consent*

Attitudes to homosexuality under late socialism were a varying mixture of crude discrimination, conventional stereotypes and moral permissiveness. Soviet sexual

policy was extremely negative to homosexuality. Convicted men could be sentenced to as much as five years in prison for homosexual relations (*muzhelovstvo*) as a form of anti-social behaviour.<sup>3</sup> Female homosexual relations were, by contrast, considered a disease. Women who loved women were considered medically ill and could be sent to psychiatric treatment, ranging from psychotherapy to an official change of sex (not necessarily including a sex-change operation). (Essig 1999a.)

Laurie Essig (1999a, 61) underscores the symbolic threat that silenced many women: "The possibility of being diagnosed as sexually/mentally ill and the resulting forcible internment in a Soviet psychiatric institution worked primarily at a symbolic level. [It] circulated as a threat. (...) If a woman stepped too far out of line, the threat of the Cure could force her to return to the family of man. Many women told me of threats from the internal security apparatus as well as the KGB: if the women did not 'cooperate' they would be 'outed' to their families, at their place of employment, to their neighbours. Places of employment would fire them, neighbours would blackmail them, families would shun them, or worse, commit them to a psychiatric institution." (Essig 1999a, 61-62)

However, same-sex relations do not always need discursive, symbolic consent which belongs to the mode of interpretations. As Teresa de Lauretis stresses, there is another type of consent for sexual activities, namely consent in action, which belongs to the mode of practices. "In other words, the consent to homosexual activity and gratification may be provided by a discourse that permits them, as well as by participation in the activity itself" (de Lauretis 1994, 74). The autobiographies give examples of both kinds of consent.

Tatyana, born in the mid-50s (No. 15) and Nadya, born in 1960 (No. 19) came from socially and professionally very different milieus. In the late 1960s, Tatyana moved from a southern Soviet republic to Leningrad to study, probably in a professional institute (VUZ). She acquired a technical specialisation and, through relations of sexual *blat* (with the aid of her female lover's male lover, who had a high social position), a decent work place in the city. That job was jeopardized during Tatyana's period of drug usage and petty crime (*fartsovka*) at the end of the 1970s. Her life straightened up after she married, divorced and gave birth to a daughter. In 1996 she was living in a communal apartment with her child, working hard – shifts every fourth night. She seemed generally content with her life, except for her love relations. Tatyana's autobiography begins and ends in acute suffering, "I am in pain right now, and I don't need your prizes, I need to write this." The immediate reason was that one woman, whom she had recently found

through a personal advertisement, had ended a beginning relationship. A deeper, enduring pain stemmed from her biggest passion, the affair with her class teacher during the first half of the 1970s, when she was in her late teens.

Nadya, by contrast, was raised in an educated Leningrad family and acquired a high, and, especially for a woman, rare position in the field of arts. Her autobiography is lighter in tone, as she painted herself as an active, spontaneous tomboy. Like Tatyana, Nadya wrote very little about her professional life, but concentrated on her successive love affairs. Nadya had sexual relationships with many women and some men, and was in 1996 involved with a married woman. She stressed that sex had never been a determining ingredient in her life. She was at the moment of writing more interested in philosophy and social and political questions, including feminism, to the point of naming her autobiography “Confessions of a radical feminist”.

Tatyana wrote that she always knew what she wanted. On the first page, she states that “*I have been and still am of the opinion that all love relations are normal*”, including her own “*non-ordinary*” (*neordinarnie*) tastes. When she fell in love with her teacher it was her first important affair, but something already fully “mature” in her inner self.

*My father helped me get settled and returned home after two weeks. No control! Freedom!!! Super!!! It seems to me, that inside my unfinished essence a desire to pay attention to what I paid attention to had matured already long ago. It was as if the general repetition in my brain had transformed into real life. (Tatyana)*

By contrast, Nadya's sexual tastes did not develop as immediately. As a young girl, Nadya fell in love with different guys and was infatuated with the famous pop singer Alla Pugacheva. At seventeen, she dated an extremely attractive, somewhat older guy, whom she calls unique: “*He was the incarnation of gallant masculinity, but at the same time he did not have a trace of sexual harassment (seksual'noe domogatel'stvo) in his behaviour with me, it was a purely spiritual friendship, a union of reason and soul*”. The two of them talked half-jokingly about getting married, which Nadya thought she actually wanted at the time, in order to “feel myself a woman” – supposedly a feminine and heterosexual woman. But she wrote about how, the first time they undressed and he touched her, she – completely unexpectedly for herself – suddenly pushed him away in an intense feeling of disgust and horror.

*It was a purely impulsive, unconscious movement, with my reason I understood the tactlessness and crudity of my attack, but my body protested against that attempt to get close. (Nadya)*

This sudden revulsion is something Nadya wrote she still could not understand, and one which was not repeated “*Later on I never had such a reaction, I found some men agreeable and others disagreeable*”. She was confused by her reaction to her boyfriend, guessing with daisies about her own feelings: ‘I love him, I love him not...’ Then, when she was in her late twenties, Nadya became close friends with a fellow student and discovered her preference for women. It was not something she was immediately ready to approve of:

*Don't you think that our relation is a little pathological? she suddenly asked me one day. I shrugged my shoulders and answered that I had not noticed any pathology with myself. But the seeds of suspicions were sown. And then one time, when A. once again touched my hand, desire sparked inside me. I was a mature woman and knew the value of all my sensations. There could be no mistake. It was that very same “pathology” (Nadya).*

What Tatyana knew early in life, Nadya got to know as an adult. In both cases, bodily desire (and revulsion) was said to be the guiding force. But Nadya spoke of “pathology”, the official Soviet attitude towards female homosexuality, and clearly was at first suspicious and guarded about love between women. In her case, the symbolic threat was clearly present in the form of, at least, a social stigma. On the other hand, once she felt bodily desire, the label of “pathology” did not pose any obstacle.

In Tatyana's story, there are no similar references to social taboos and threats. As mentioned above, she talks about “non-ordinary love”, a neutral word probably picked up from the advertisement to the autobiographical competition. Tatyana made only two short references to the social obstacles facing same-sex love, and they have a formal, almost obligatory ring to them: “*Love relations with non-ordinary sexual orientations are obstructed by problems that have to do with society.*” And a little later Tatyana specified how, during her long-lasting affair with her teacher, there were “*problems having to do with society: the husband [of her lover – AR], my mother, the relatives*”. But such social problems would surely have haunted also a heterosexual teenager, had she or he fallen madly in love with an older, married teacher.

In the beginning of Tatyana's autobiography it is stated that “*you will understand the reason of my enforced marriage*”, but the reader who thinks Tatyana married in order to conform to heterosexual standards is mistaken. According to Tatyana, her husband and she both understood that she married him in order to leave her circle of criminals and drug addicts. And although she considered her marriage an “*imposed, blatant mistake in my life*”, she enumerated many of the

most usual reasons for divorce – namely, her husband's drinking, jealousy, and insensitivity in bed – without giving her sexual preferences a leading role in the drama.

In Tatyana's experiences, feelings and sexual practices, how she felt and what they did, were the most important. Nadya, by contrast, provided us with a classical example of identity construction that heavily involves the mode of interpretations. She wrote extensively about how she renamed and reinterpreted her own self after her deep friendship had evolved into her first sexual relation with a woman.

*The happiness I experienced with her cannot be compared to anything else. Never had sex been so joyful and tender and the affinity of souls so deep. That love made me look anew on my whole previous life, to re-evaluate and understand many things. I remembered that, as it turned out, I had fallen in love with women my whole life, without paying any notice to it – in female teachers and doctors, and in Alla Pugacheva, and those feelings had a clear erotic quality.*  
(Nadya)

The previously inexplicable revulsion towards her previous boyfriend can also be interpreted from her new perspective: "It was the first male touching of me, and I rejected it with my whole being." Nadya noted how her feminism, after her sexual experience with a woman,

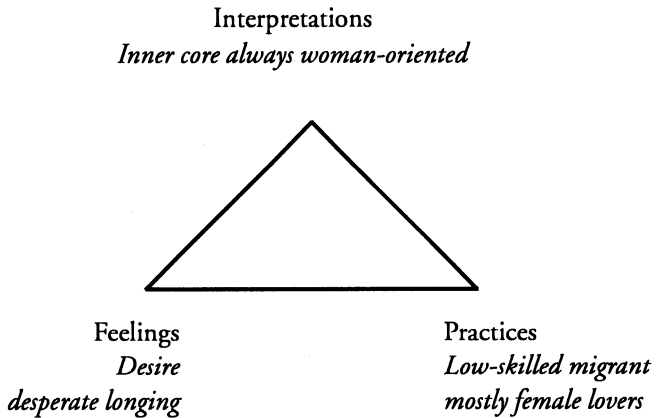
*acquired an impeccable theoretical clarity, the missing link had finally been found. Until then my heterosexual intentions were at dissonance with my convictions and my whole style of living and behaving. In relations with men there is always the duplicity and subservience that belong to the female gender. I do not want to say that those characteristics are immanent for us – no, they have been forced upon us by men, but we have adopted them!* (Nadya)

If women have adopted characteristics given by men, Nadya had, for her part, adopted the view that all real feminists are lesbians, and the other way around.

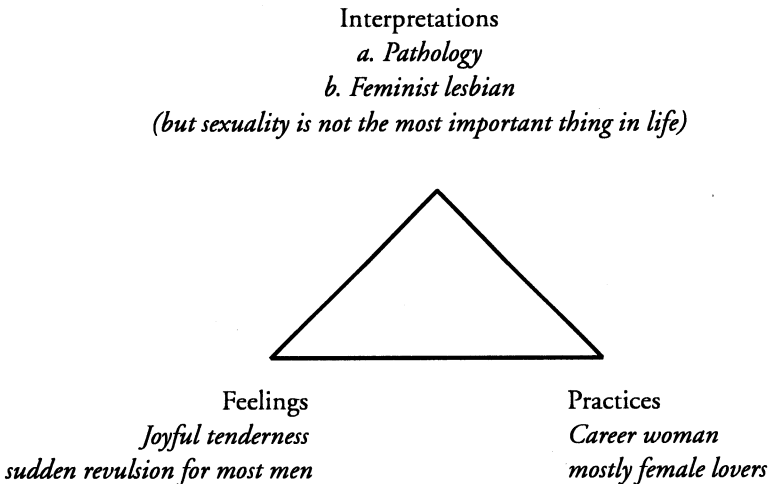
Tatyana's life story had no similar identity revelation or prescriptions. Instead of Nadya's impeccable theoretical clarity, she related, clearly amused, how one of her lovers was surprised by her rich repertoire of sexual techniques. The lover, in her turn, surprised Nadya with "having read much Western literature, about what to do and when". Habits Tatyana had developed herself turned out to be recommended in Western books, but there are no mentions of the reverse process – that theoretical knowledge could have significantly influenced her behaviour. True, Tatyana described intercourse in detail and with current popularized sexological terminology (such as masturbation, orgasm, heterosexual orientation). Her auto-

biography is among the most sexually detailed of those written by women in my material. But these terms, she stressed, were learnt later in life and do not seem to have altered her profound sense of herself as a woman and sexual being. (See figures 9 a and b.)

*Figure 9a. Example of consent in action (Tatyana's case)*



*Figure 9b. Example of discursive consent (Nadya's case)*



In case 9a, exemplified by Tatyana's autobiography, the emphasis is on feelings and practices. Her life had had severe social problems, but they were not directly related to her sexuality. Her feelings of loneliness could be related to the difficulty of finding suitable female partners on a social level, but Tatyana perceived of this as a purely personal problem. Nor did she talk about the availability of newspaper advertisements – a contact forum absent in the Soviet times and a clear improvement for persons seeking same-sex experiences – as a social improvement, she simply makes use of it.

In Nadya's case (9b), her social practices and her personal feelings are both presented as a reason for, and consequence of, her identity construction. Escaping misinformation and a vague disapproval of "pathology", she evolved into a conscious radical feminist.

Tatyana's experiences were characterized by bodily sensations of desire and pain, while Nadya consciously described her bodily experiences in terms of Western feminist discourses about lesbian love. Although similar in their sexual practices (mostly with women, but some men), the two women interpreted them very differently. Take, for instance, their current relations to men. Nadya had rejected all her heterosexual relations – with the exception of one short and stormy affair (*"I cried on his chest... I really loved him in at that moment"*). They would not be on line with her political and sexual identity. But Tatyana still occasionally had sex with men, without wanting to justify it to the reader (*"I told him that I do not need any bed relations (...) and that I am not interested in men. (...) But this country guy, shapely built and enduring in sex, struck me, and was struck by me."*)

The differences between consent in action and discursive consent was clearest in the summarising self-evaluations towards the end of autobiographies. In Tatyana's case, there was none – she ended up being lonely and unhappy, but no longer wondered why she loved women more. Nadya, on the contrary, went to pains to explain that lesbianism is "purely social":

*Whatever they write about the hormonal or chromosomal nature of homosexuality, I am firmly convinced that the reasons for this phenomenon are purely social. People with deep and refined sensations (and all homosexuals are like that) cannot accept duplicity and the alienation it creates, which are at the fundament of the relations between men and women. (...) women's lesbianism, if it is sufficiently firm, is nothing else but a form of protest against the discrimination of women and the lack of trust and latent animosity between the sexes that it leads to.*

*In my case it is a conscious protest, more often it is unconscious, but in any case it is a natural and logical manifestation of feminism. (Nadya)*



In my reading, Nadya's emphasis on the social origins of her homosexuality seems to contradict her description of the initial, bodily rejection of her boyfriend. In any case, the word "social" in her vocabulary has to be a broad concept, encompassing such things as personal aesthetic and unconscious motives, in order to fit into her logic of reasoning. As already noted, Tatyana instead disregards most social interpretations, centering her self presentation on personal and interpersonal characteristics.

Somewhere in between Tatyana and Nadya, there is the autobiography of Darya, a woman born in 1972 (No. 24). Darya was mainly man-oriented, but had a sexual relationship with one of her good female friends. A few times, she also tried to meet female partners through putting personal advertisements in newspapers. For her, it was an important if secondary part of her love life:

*Women are very often present in my erotic fantasies – in my thoughts I am making love with one, two three and very many women. And I have no doubts that I will sometime do it in reality. At the same time I do not think of myself as a lesbian – it is just another sexual experience. (Darya, b. 1972, No. 24)*

Why did Tatyana and Nadya differ so much in their models of subjectivity? The two main explaining factors are class and generation.<sup>4</sup> Tatyana had a provincial and lower class background, and her formative years were during the prime time of late socialism, in the early 1970s, when public discussions of intimate issues were extremely limited. Nadya belonged to the Leningrad/St. Petersburg upper intelligentsia, and her formative years were during the mid-1980s, when sexual issues were being increasingly articulated. The influence of generation is fairly obvious – even if Tatyana was only five years older than Nadya, the latter had access to many more publications, expert advice and newspaper accounts of lesbianism during her formative years (Gessen 1995). But that access was even more due to her class and sexual subculture.

For instance, Nadya related a discussion at a small party of friends in 1985, at the beginning of Gorbachev's perestroika. The friends played 'do-or-tell' and she got the question "*How would you react if a homosexual (gomoseksualist) or a lesbian (lesbianka) fell in love with you?*" At that time, Nadya responded negatively. "*I took the question very seriously, thought about it for a long time and finally I answered that if it would be a primitive person, I would simply ask her to beat it*". Her friends then asked what she would do if it was not a 'primitive person', to which she more hesitantly answered that she would still tell her just the same, to beat it. Some of the others present at the party did not disapprove of homosexual relations. The whole

event is a good illustration of how sexuality, and homosexuality, became an acceptable – if daring – topic during the 1980s and acquired words that had not earlier been in use in Russia, such as *lesbianka*. Nadya clearly belonged to the Russian generation that articulated sexuality. Nevertheless, the same kind of discussion was present in more limited spheres even earlier: it would also have been possible in certain middle-class, student milieus already in the 1960s or 1970s.

Indeed, Nadya's emphasis on self-reflection and naming seems to be typical, if not defining, for the first generations of the European middle class in the end of the 19th century – for the men and women who had mostly acquired their social position by rising social mobility and increasing education. In addition, in this autobiographical corpus middle-class authors use literary metaphors and allusions (although people from all classes write poems!). The agrarian and/or working-class women referred more often to bodily sensations, especially physical pain (cf. the discussion of pain in chapter 4).

Tatyana's story is partly an example of writing as a way of embodying experiences of pain. Her text begins and ends with her being in tears; the sentences are fragmentary and often end with ellipsis. But she also wrote directly about touching, talking, and experiencing sexual pleasure. That is more rarely found in the women's autobiographies of my material, although, among the few exceptions is another poor woman worker from the oldest generation. Tatyana's very direct style and abundance of intimate details may be a trace of the bohemian and semi-criminal subcultures she used to belong to in the 1970s. Her experiences were formed both by her provincial (agrarian/working class) background and her participation in a metropolitan subculture.

Nadya again, as most other middle-class women writers, rarely described pleasure by itself. Notwithstanding her radical political views, her descriptions of love and sex are typical for her class and in the middle of the Russian mainstream. In her view, sex was better in connection with love, or submerged by love and respect. As Nadya put it, ideal relationships are "a unit of soul and reason".

## 9.2 MILIEUS, SUBCULTURES, HEGEMONY...?

As argued in chapter 2, sexuality has a discursive component, but is even more regulated by bodily feelings and social practices. The behavioural sexual revolution in Soviet Russia proves this: despite its drastically different public sexual culture, Russians behaved much the same as Western Europeans. The average time

lag of ten to fifteen years behind Finland is comparatively small and can well be explained by the lower material standards in Soviet Russia.

This part has focused on differences between Soviet sexual cultures that co-existed during late socialism in the 1960s-1980s. Our evidence of the sexual behavioural revolution challenges the still dominant stereotypical view of the Soviet 1970s as a grey, homogenous epoch. Stagnation in the public sphere was compensated for by intense developments in the private and semi-public spheres. As noted by Russian poets and sociologists, the era of stagnation provided a paradoxical freedom from the public sphere and an existence seemingly untouched by political or economic concerns. The ideal of such a highly personalized (if not private) world is condensed in Joseph Brodsky's (1990) line from 1976, "*freedom is when you forget the name of the tyrant*".

Such freedom led to many hobbies and creative beginnings that would later surface in the social activism and movements of perestroika. It also created additional space for family and other love relations. The personalized focus of energies is excellently conveyed in an interview quoted in Zdravomyslova & Chikadze (1998, 15), where 'Oleg', a dissident bohemian born in 1951, recalled the whole 1970s only by his sexual relations, as a time without conventional dates: "It is difficult for him to recollect the year and the date of the event he retells. He tries to remember the date using the calendar of his love affairs. He confesses, 'For me it was absolutely the same whether it was Andropov's or Chernenkos' or Brezhnev's time'." Other men interviewed for the same research project also remembered how money was no problem, it "came from the air" or they "did not need money" (for drinking) – a view that was not necessarily shared by their wives (ibid., 16).

Viktor Erofeev explicitly dates the Russian sexual revolution to the same period. In his recollection, this was when Russian women learned to be demanding:

In the beginning of the 1980s (well before any political changes) a process of female sexual emancipation began, which eventually put many of our men in a quite embarrassing situation. The longstanding role of a conqueror was gradually taken away from the man. (...) If in the 70s the word "to fuck" became the sign of dawning changes, then the MORE that fell from female lips and was heard with increasing frequency in the silence of the night, proved to be a demand not really of the times, but rather of the women. They started to want additional pleasures that had not been envisaged in the Russian male price-list. (Erofeev 1997, 33)

Erofeev's observation is matched by statistical data from Petersburg. The women of the personalized generation (to which Erofeev belongs) were both dissatisfied

with their sex lives and wanted to have more intercourse - which indicates that they wanted their sex lives to improve (Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch 1998).

I have so far claimed to describe the semi-public "milieus", or "ways of life", without specifying what that refers to, or how extensive such ways of life may have been. What, indeed, can be said about the spread of the sexual cultures and male attitudes described by the life stories of Ivanov and Lukashin, or by Tatyana and Nadya? Were they stable and reproducing ways of life and how far did they extend?

A "way of life" has been conceptualized as a specific combination of generation, culture and class expressed through a particular *habitus* (Roos 1988).<sup>5</sup> Although this definition does not deal with the *temporal* dimension, it approaches ways of life as something long-lasting. However, we can use the examples given above to introduce an additional distinction. Both represent specific ways of life, but the first one (the stories of Ivanov and Tatyana) was more limited and short-lived than the second (exemplified by Lukashin and Nadya). I propose to talk about the ways of life of a *milieu* in the first case, and of a *subculture* in the second.

The main distinction is that a milieu is smaller and is not culturally transmitted and reproduced. A subculture is, by contrast, transmitted symbolically and through habits. A subculture has the potential of becoming a dominating and hegemonic culture if it continues to spread. A milieu would thus be more random, connected with exceptional social and ecological circumstances, while a subculture is a milieu that has become rooted in society. In order of size and cultural visibility, we could imagine the following axis: *circles of friends - milieu - subculture - class culture - dominant culture*.

What in these autobiographies supports such a distinction? Let us return to the autobiographies of Ivanov and Lukashin where I found useful hints on two levels: how the author describes *meeting other social milieus*, and what kind of *language* is used.

In Ivanov's text, entering different social milieus is described as a recognition of differences. As a student and in the army, he began to think that his family milieu was abnormal and unusual. By contrast, Lukashin behaved in a similar way with everybody he met on his journeys in various parts of the country. He noticed that middle-class women were "too innocent" to be approached too harshly, but not once did he describe feeling that he was an outsider whose norms did not fit in with the present surroundings. I propose that Ivanov's milieu may be seen as a temporary, literally anomalous milieu that was created by the social upheavals

and armed conflicts in the preceding decades. Lukashin encountered similar morality and behaviour whether he was in his home milieu, rock groups, or in a tourist resort. It was no longer a question of a possibly unique milieu, but of a rooted and extended, if not dominant, way of life.

My second, linguistic, criterion is on more shaky ground, as we cannot know whether the language employed was used in the youth of the narrator or more recently. Still, Ivanov's text was marked by his own, local expressions. Lukashin, by contrast, used special terms (like "defloration") as if they were a part of his vocabulary even in the 1970s. This could indicate that the sexual subculture was large enough to include access to various popularized scientific and pornographic vocabularies.

If this analysis is correct, we may see how a certain attitude to sexuality and masculinity gradually established itself in post-war Soviet history. For instance, while Ivanov was highly ambivalent about a naturalized view of sexuality, Lukashin embraced it totally. Lukashin's misogyny also illustrates how a trait of a Soviet subculture of the 1970s achieved a dominating status in the Russian public sphere of the 1990s. Similarly, the same-sex experiences of the middle generation, such as Tatyana's story, would be examples of milieus that could arise and exist several years, but also disappear suddenly. The story of Nadya, by contrast, reflected the emergence of distinct gay and lesbian (sub)cultures of the 1980s and 1990s. It was thus a part of the process of articulation of sexuality that is the subject of part III.

1. The autobiographies from Leningrad do not mention the advice not to terminate the first pregnancy as a reason for giving birth, but in similar sexual autobiographies from Soviet Estonia two women tell about this. That this was a widespread argument has also been confirmed to me by several Russian women friends and by Murcott and Feltham (1996).
2. In Finland, by contrast, children from academic and educated families seem to have had more sexual enlightenment than children from worker's families and, especially, agrarian families, where sexuality was never mentioned (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila 1995a). However, this generalization may be insensitive to the experience of women only – as in Soviet Russia, Finnish girls from the upper classes were sometimes kept in the deepest ignorance.
3. In the 1960s male homosexuals were imprisoned (probably over five hundred convictions in Soviet Russia annually) and they belonged to the most despised caste in the prison system (Essig 1999, 8). Others 'merely' faced discrimination and lack of support and information.
4. My analysis of two male autobiographies describing same-sex relations (but not rendered here) confirms the conclusion that the emphasis on interpretation and identity construction are related to higher education and a middle-class lifestyle.
5. The relationship and interaction between class and generational experiences remains undertheorized. However, it seems unquestionable that the dominating or middle classes are in a position to influence what becomes generational through their presence in schools, mass media, the arts, etc. Even when classes and groups that are peripheral to the dominating discourse may identify themselves with their 'generation', they are often parallelly aware of their own specificity with regard to the 'common experiences' of 'our times'.



# Part III





*I am not a man, I am a geological shift*  
Viktor Erofeev (1997)

## The Man Question

The concluding part argues that the post-socialist transformation in the Russian gender system, including sexual relations, has centred on the Russian man. The 'man question' posed itself as the Soviet man transformed into the new Russian, and even more when he failed to do so.

In the late 1980s, the Soviet public space gradually collapsed. What had matured in the semi-public sphere of late socialism emerged as the ingredients of a new public sphere. Simultaneously, the basic rules of the games changed with the shift to capitalism and the integration into global cultural and economic processes.

The first of the two final chapters looks at how the process of monetarization affected family life and disrupted the typical Soviet life course. The second chapter describes the articulation of sexuality. It claims that the naturalization of sexuality served two strategies, that of sexual enlightenment and that of anxious masculinization. It also shows how the emergence of sex as a separate life sphere was resisted in a critique of commercialized and compartmentalized human relations.

# 10 Monetarization of Family Life

## 10.1 FROM DUAL EMPLOYEES TO FAMILY ENTREPRENEURSHIP

After the political disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the first governments of the new Russian state undertook economic reforms in order to introduce capitalist relations of production. The prices of consumer goods were liberated from state control and major enterprises were privatized. By the end of the century, the economic transition was basically complete (Sutela 1998). Russia did not look as any of the reformers had intended it to, but had instead become a blend of market and feudal relations, robbery capitalism and neocommunist politics. The hybrid had many names, among them “nomenclature capitalism”, “postmodern feudalism” and “illiberal democracy” (Temkina 1997). The last invective could as well be reversed to “liberal authoritarianism”: *anything goes* was at first the excited, later the exasperated feeling of the people who were subjected to the reforms. But while anything went, surprisingly little resulted in projected improvements on the macro-scale, as the economic and political power became concentrated in the hands of a few men and their closest relatives.<sup>1</sup>

The main processes changing everyday and family life in the 1990s can be summarized in one word: monetarization. Suddenly money mattered, in the direct sense of the enrichment of a few and the impoverishment of many, in the structural sense of rebuilding social relations and in the cultural sense of in-

fluencing new ideals and counterideals. I will here discuss the latter two aspects.

Monetarization influenced social relations in two main ways. First, the emerging class positions in post-socialist Russia were determined by *access to various types of economy*. As ideal types, we can talk about the market economy, the 'Soviet-type' economy, and the informal economy, all co-existing in post-Soviet economic space. On the basis of these different economies, Timo Piirainen (1997) distinguishes between four main family types: the entrepreneurial middle class with a strong market-oriented strategy; wage earners that aspire to a middle-class position and are mostly market-oriented; low-income wage earners employed in the Soviet economic sector who get supplementary income from the informal sector; and the working poor, who have scarce assets in all types of economies (Piirainen 1997, 71). Towards the end of the 1990s, the trend was for an even stronger correlation between the new class division and sector stratification. As more people moved into the market sector, the different types of economies also grew more distant from each other, making it harder to switch from one to the other (Liborakina & Rotkirch 1999). The marketization of certain spheres was accompanied by an opposite trend, where informal relations and non-monetary transactions dominated the means of coping to a much greater extent than under state socialism. Just as in the 19th century, some Russian families now led the lives of the European upper class, while others moved close to a pre-industrial barter economy.

Second, monetarization put increased stress on the family as an economic unit. Where the Soviet family had been a family of dual employees, the new Russian family was one of *family entrepreneurship*. Entrepreneurship is here understood in the largest possible sense – practically all family types had to manage their assets in a combined effort. The huge social transformations demanded economic, psychological and ideological adaptation and people resorted to various strategies for everyday coping. Instead of living in a highly predictable institutional environment, people found themselves in a situation of continuous and substantial risks. Schools, work places and political organizations were no longer reliable; the family remained. Family entrepreneurship could take the form of spousal partnership or of small businesses in which various members of the family were employed, such as that of the daughter working in her uncle's firm, or the man making career and the woman making the home, or the woman acting without support from a husband but with aid from her sister and mother.

Thus Konstantin, a man in a good social position who was then in his sixties, wrote that one of the reasons for staying with his current wife was that she would

have nobody to support her if he left:

*For instance, I left my first wife when we were young. I almost wept for compassion for her when I went away. But I had somewhere to go, and I knew that I was leaving her capable of earning herself a living, on the hands of her (that is my) relatives with all kinds of support from their part, and as a young woman, that is with a chance of remarrying. But now I would not make the decision to leave my wife, as she receives the minimal wage, has two children, and the child care allowances are only one hundred to one hundred and fifty roubles, and she has troubles with her health. The question of how she was managing would not leave me in peace. (Konstantin, b. 1932, No. 29)*

Similarly, Valerii (No. 32), who used to switch from woman to woman, now felt obliged to take financial care of his second wife's family. He wrote about having had to "adopt a family of invalids" consisting of his second ex-wife, who was chronically ill, her daughter and her grandmother.<sup>2</sup>

Valentina, a woman in her early thirties, complained throughout her autobiography about her sick, alcoholic husband. It is both puzzling and quite painful to read her repeated assurances that she would end the relationship and get her life in order. She began her text with allusions to a coming divorce – "*To have him as a husband is pure grief. The conclusion is clear.*" When she at a turning point in their relationship decided stay with him, it is described as "*taking yet one more step into the abyss*". But at the very end of the autobiography she stroke an entirely different note:

*The most important conclusion is that I have understood that I can leave my husband. But I cannot abandon him. If anything bad happens, I always run to rescue him. (...)*

*Of course, we do not make love as we used to. But the important thing is that the issue does not create tensions in our relationship anymore. The important thing is that I try to make food for him and look after him, in order to facilitate the life of the breadwinner in his family. The important thing is that we quarrel and tell each other we are sorry. The important thing is that when he comes home from work, he shares all his problems and worries with me, just like before. The important thing is that our daughter says that we are the best and the sweetest.*

*The important thing – until he starts drinking again. (Valentina, b. 1966, No. 23)*

This bittersweet ending builds on the rhetorics of female sacrifice Valentina employed throughout the text. But Valentina's decision to stay and not, as she some-

times planned, to “*leave it all and go without anything and nowhere with the child in my arms*” had in the 1990s a new, pragmatic underpinning. She had quit her studies during the passionate beginning of the love affair and the couple had a small child. As a migrant in Leningrad, she had no family of her own to help her on a daily basis. Returning to a life as a full-time student or worker was much more complicated in the mid-1990s than in the mid-1980s. Valentina needed her husband as her major source of income more acutely than had her mother’s generation.

Of course, such patterns of economic support and dependence were not unusual under the Soviet system. Staying with alcoholic and abusive husbands as a hopeless sacrifice was not uncommon in the Soviet period either (nor in other countries) – we need only to remember the life story of Alexandra Chistiakova (1998). But Chistiakova could receive the education she wanted; she was able to return to work after staying at home with her children for some years in the 1950s; she was financially independent and managed to build a house although her husband spent most of his salary on vodka ( cf. chapter 4). The postsocialist monetarization of family life meant that money moved to the forefront in family relations. While Nina (b. 1958, No. 17), a woman from the middle generation, desired a marriage certificate with the father of her child, the young Valentina’s dream was not ‘only’ to marry, but to get a well-behaving, tender breadwinner who would support her and pbediently come home to a prepared dinner and share his worries at work with her.

### *The figure of the male breadwinner*

The *limits* of the family unit were recast in the process of monetarization. The families doing well – the classical example was, of course, the husband transforming into a successful businessman – drew their borders sharply, moving to separate apartments, complaining how lack of time and psychological difficulties made it hard to preserve old friendships and more distant family relations. The poorest families – characterized by single mothers with many or sick children, refugee families, or lonely elderly relatives – were often acutely deprived precisely because of a lack of supporting social ties outside the immediate family circle. But the majority of the people, the upper and lower middle classes, continued to live in a family unit enlarged on demand. One extreme example was an extended household where two sisters, their men (who were physicians), their four chil-

dren of various ages, and their ageing parents, all contributed to their general welfare by combining wages, barter, social benefits, and institutional access. One person had access to hard currency, another to vegetables, yet another to a computer at her workplace (Liborakina & Rotkirch 1999).

It is hard to estimate how transitory the increased importance of the family as an economic unit will turn out to be. In the mid-1990s, there were signs of the diminishing impact of family entrepreneurship, as business and personal relations started to separate into different spheres. One dared to employ people on professional grounds solely, not only because they could more easily be trusted than relatives or friends of friends. But under the unstable economic and political conditions at the end of the 1990s this trend was not self-evident. Recent research about the social networks of teachers has suggested that the level of family involvement in professional life remained both qualitatively and quantitatively higher in St. Petersburg than in Helsinki (Lonkila 1999).

To this situation of continuing risk monitoring and cooperation in the family, Russian family policy provided some but not sufficient relief. The percentage of public cash social transfers to household budgets decreased and inflation diminished their value. Russian social policy began a transition from the Soviet system of state social provision to a more diverse system, combining elements of social insurance and social assistance. Compared to the 1980s, public housing became subsidized to a significantly smaller extent.<sup>3</sup> Soviet workplace benefits, such as apartments, advantageous shopping possibilities, holiday trips and child care, persisted throughout the 1990s, but were gradually transformed into communal care, or stopped. Russians continued to enjoy free (or very inexpensive) public education, pre-school childcare and other public services. Medical care also remained covered by universal public health insurance. Social aid that did not require means-testing included housing allowances, maternity and child allowances. But the exceptionally good legal and social conditions that had encouraged Soviet women to have a child at an early age and did not pose major obstacles to divorce evaporated into thin air.

Social support constituted an important part of the budget for the majority of Russian families, but it was not something to be counted on, if only for the notorious delays in the payments of pensions and unemployment benefits in the state sector. Enterprises in the new market sector paid better salaries but they did not adhere to the employee's rights to sick leave, maternity and parental leave that were stipulated by law.

As a result, the birth rate in St. Petersburg fell throughout the 1990s. Although

young Russian girls continued to talk confidently about having both children and a full-time profession, that combination was less and less self-evident in working life (Attwood 1996b). The age of the first marriage or cohabitation was lower than in earlier generations, but young couples began postponing the birth of the first child. Second and third children were even harder to plan. ‘These are not times to have babies in’, was the usual sad constatation by Petersburg inhabitants. ‘*Children? I do not want them. The destitute should not breed destitutes*’, wrote a man in his mid-thirties (No. 42). Families with small children were in general less well off than retired people – for political reasons, the government often paid the pensions on time while other social benefits were delayed. To become a single mother was especially difficult without the material and professional rights formerly provided by the state. Evgenya wrote about her dilemma when, shortly after her divorce in the mid-1990s, she thought she had become pregnant with a man she had dated for a brief time:

*I ran to the gynecologist, who did not find [any signs of pregnancy]. When I thought I would have to have an abortion I felt sad for the future child and wanted to keep it and love it. But I have no possibilities to raise a child outside marriage: everybody knows what kind of salary a librarian has. My parents feed me and well, with the rest I try to manage the best I can. (Evgenya, b. 1964, No. 20)*

The practice of extended mothering largely facilitated the coping strategies of families. Again, monetarization worked in two senses: for those acquiring money, the grandmothers were crucial in the start. For instance, if the woman of the family began working in the new market sector as a career woman or a businesswoman, there was usually a grandmother figure taking care of the children and the household (e.g. Temkina 1996). This generational division of labour was not dependent on whether the woman had a husband and how successful he was professionally. Later, the role of grandmothers could be replaced by the paid care of a nanny, a governess, or boarding schools in the West. For those with less money, help from older generations became even more crucial than before. Neither was it unusual, especially for young, single, middle-class mothers, to have the child raised by its grandparents (cf. the case of Julia below).

The ideology supporting extended mothering also remained unchallenged. True, on the level of official ideology and everyday morality, the sexual couple gained increased prestige as opposed to the glorification of motherhood. Monetarization also forcefully imposed another ideal, that of the *male breadwinner*. The image of the successful New Russian capitalist, *novyi russkii*, was male per defini-



tion. Among the strategic resources for families, gender – being a man, or having a man in the family – was a factor as crucial as the level of education and the total amount of manpower in the family. A new pattern of gender segregation emerged as men tended to be employed in the new market sector while women more often retained their job in the ‘Soviet-type’ economy (Piirainen 1997; *Women in transition* 1999, ix).

Accompanying the male breadwinner, two types of gender relations that had been unusual during Soviet times imposed themselves: the *housewife* and the *sponsored woman*. The housewife was characterized by the American home-maker ideal, while the sponsored woman was a kept and economically dependent partner, whether in a dating, married or extra-marital relationship (Temkina & Rotkirch 1997; Pilkington 1996, 199). Darya (No. 24) actually called one of her lovers “the Sponsor”, as he financed the trip of a group of students abroad. In her case, she was not personally supported by her sponsor, but her use of the term indicates its frequency in everyday talk.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1990s the roles of the housewife and the sponsored woman were dominant in Russian ideology. Gradually, an egalitarian ideology favouring shared household responsibilities also took hold, although its influence was limited. In practice, however, the wage-working mother remained the prevalent type, although the emphasis increasingly shifted to her working half (Temkina & Rotkirch 1997). She appeared in two main forms in the postsocialist urban family: as the familiar Soviet-type, *wage-working mother* with a triple household burden, or as a newer type of *career woman*. The interaction between these family arrangements and the male breadwinner will be discussed towards the end of the chapter. In order to grasp them, we should first look more closely at the breakdown of the typical Soviet family life course.

## 10.2 FISSURES IN THE SOVIET LIFE COURSE

The autobiographies from the generation born after 1965 are quite few in number and in several respects not typical for their age cohort. None one of the four men had ‘settled down’ in the sense of leading a stable family or professional life, and two of the five women had unusual life stories that included several years of drug abuse (No. 21) or serious disability (No. 25).<sup>5</sup> But once again, we can claim that atypical stories may best highlight the social transformations that affect everyone (cf. chapter 9). The life course of everybody born in the Soviet 1960s and 1970s began inside the framework of late socialism, while the transition to

adulthood coincided with the profound transition of the social system that quickly evolved into situations involving “all-encompassing risk” (Yanitsky 1999). This generation was the one which articulated sexuality, but from a socioeconomic point of view, it was the generation of uncertainty.

### *Housewives and singles*

Of the autobiographies by young people, the life of the pseudonym A. Sobolevskaya (No. 22) comes closest to what used to be the typical Soviet family life course. Born into an educated Leningrad family, she married at the age of twenty and had a child the next year. She wrote that their marital sexual life was wonderful, but otherwise the spouses had little in common. Sobolevskaya still dreamed about her great teenage love and had occasional affairs on the side. But she harboured no plans of divorce, especially because of their child.

That this marriage took place in the 1980s and 1990s, and not in the previous decades, is evident in two respects. Sobolevskaya’s autobiography is the very first to mention *marrying for money* and not out of love as something quite neutral, and not condemnable. She wrote that she found the man she chose to be her husband to be pleasant, thinking that “*he suited me in everything: he was three years older, from a similar family, and he worked in a very profitable field*”. In earlier generations, marriage was presented as based either on love, or as purely pragmatic (like the marriages entered into in order to get access to city residence or apartments). Sobolevskaya also stressed that she married “*very early*”<sup>8</sup> and that the child was planned, as if distancing herself from the unplanned pregnancies or the quasi-automatic practice of ‘having children once you are married’ that had been so characteristic of previous generations.

Second, the couple married in the very beginning of perestroika, and evidently Sobolevskaya’s husband soon succeeded in the market economy. A major break with Soviet life patterns became evident when Sobolevskaya became a *full-time housewife*. Her housewifery differed from that of the minority of Soviet women who did not do wage work: Sobolevskaya stayed home at that stage in life when Soviet women usually returned to working life, as the child was beginning school. She also perceived of herself as the new type of bourgeois housewife:

*At the present time I am not working, soon it will have already been three years, representing the model housewife with all ‘housewifery’ attributes, like: watching TV serials, making tasty dinners, raising our son and a bull-terrier dog. (A. Sobolevskaya)*

Still, the autobiography ends with its writer longing to do something else in life, something “*that lasts*”. Elena Zdravomyslova (1996b) has showed how the post-war generation of Soviet women found housewifery psychologically hard to adjust to, as they had been raised to think of themselves as professionally active. Even though Sobolevskaya was quite young, and in the very beginning of her marriage when the social changes started, she still could not reconcile being a housewife with her “*image of herself as a thinking person*”, as she puts it. Expecting rewards in both private and public life, she clearly did not want to be confined to the first.

Valentina’s (No. 23) fate to some extent parallels Sobolevskaya’s, as she was also a housewife, but she lived in a much poorer milieu. I have stressed above how the fact that Valentina quit her studies and gave birth to a child put her in a situation of high dependency on her alcoholic husband, and she had few prospects of any easy start of a professional career. Valentina ended her autobiography dreaming of Sobolevskaya’s type of husband, quite unexpectedly switching from the rhetoric of fatal love and sacrifice to that of the need of a protective breadwinner.

In contrast to these two housewives, two of the young women were leading the singles’ lifestyle that has become emblematic of urban youth in Western societies – a professionally ambitious lifestyle with many love relations and sexual experiments, and harbouring the idea of sometimes finding the ‘right’ person to live with (Kontula & Haavio-Mannila 1995b; 1997). One of the singles had a well-paid position in an international organization, while the other had an education in the humanities and could not have been materially very well off. The first, Darya, appealed mainly to her experience of living in the United States in advocating her lifestyle:

*America has generally had a big influence on my views on the family. I am much impressed by late marriages. Why hurry? (...) And an even greater advantage of the American family, in its best version, is of course ‘two persons – two careers’. Each has already achieved something before marriage and will continue to develop, with the support of the spouse. And nobody is making a sacrifice. Both make compromises! And there are no martyrs, whose sacrifices are not fully appreciated. And it is not the woman’s duty to make food! Oh, how I love equality!* (Darya, b. 1974, No. 24)

But the second single, Julia (No.21) had not found any usable social rhetoric to explain her way of life.

*I will not be able to describe here all the wonderful people that I have shared love affairs with during my short life. I will in these notes hardly be able to enumerate*

*all the men I have been close to and all the women that I have loved, there will not be enough space. From the point of view of society (obshchestva) my personal life has not worked out, but I am happy it was the way it was, even if it was not totally normal from the point of view of society. (Julia, b. 1965, No. 21)*

Julia defended her choices in life merely by appealing to her right to an individualized lifestyle and by stressing that she did not regret the choices she had made. True, her single life had involved more problematic decisions than Darya's. Pregnant by mistake in her late teens, Julia gave birth to a child against the advice and pressures from her parental home. In the late 1980s, her mother took the child, as Julia could no longer manage as a single mother:

*Three years after my child was born (I have left out graduating from the university and receiving my diploma holding the child in my arms, and the dean said "I give this diploma not to you, but to him", working as a teacher, nursing and all the child illnesses in the kindergarten, changing apartments and confronting the horrible life in a communal apartment, the constant lack of money – this is the story of my loves and not a recitation of my sufferings, which there have been enough of, as in every woman's life) my mother took him, in what then appeared as a kind of experiment, to live with her during the week, so that I could do my work. (Julia)*

Giving away the child to be raised by its grandmother is a paradigmatic example of the continued importance of extended mothering in postsocialist Russia. In the West, white, middle-class women would rarely do the same, and it would be totally against the ideology of intense mothering which values the exclusivity of the mother-child relation. In the new context this arrangement is, however, precisely what allowed Julia both to have her cake and eat it, too: to combine the Soviet script of having a child relatively early, with a more Westernized script of the young independent single. Julia herself stressed how the "freedom" of taking care of her child only on weekends allowed her to have love affairs. In fact, she was one of the few mothers who explicitly put love for the child outside the theme of this autobiography:

*My relations with my son – that is an entirely different story, which I will leave outside the frame of this narrative. He is the most precious thing I have, but he could still not replace a close adult person, whom I longed to talk to and to love. (Julia)*

Julia's relationships included one longer and problematic affair with an "Antihero"

who was possessively jealous and abused narcotics. Julia, who had already been part of the Leningrad bohemian youth culture, now drifted further into the more asocial and drug-abusing circles that were spreading in the late 1980s. However, she was at the moment of writing very confidently waiting for a new and happier love, "*I know that HE will come*", and her professional life seemed to be in order.

The second single, Darya (No. 24), would, at the first glance, seem to have closely followed a Westernized way of life. Hers is the only heterosexual autobiography with a sexually very active and absolutely self-confident woman as the autobiographical 'I'. She emphasized her taste for earthly pleasures, saying how "*tactile and taste sensations have always played a big role in my life.*" Darya hated to cook but loved food, and provided wonderful erotic memories of what she ate: "*In the numerous cafés we had ice cream with nuts and chocolate cream. And with lingonberry jam. I remember that mix of tastes – it creates the same sensation as when fingertips are drawn along your tummy – from the navel and down.*" At the same time, Darya stressed her ability to stay in control of her enjoyment of pleasures. Interestingly, she did not attribute her independent mind and high degree of autonomy only to the influence of her time spent in the US. As the first important influence, she mentions her grandmother. "*I do not care what you think about me! It is more important what I think about me myself! My grandmother had an enormously important role in nurturing such an attitude.*"

Both cases should, once again, caution against easy attributions of "traditionalism" to the presence of the older generation in Soviet families. Julia's traditional resorting to her mother for help in child care facilitated a non-traditional single's lifestyle; Darya's modern individualistic values were first transmitted by her grandmother, and only much later reinforced by her contacts with Western societies.

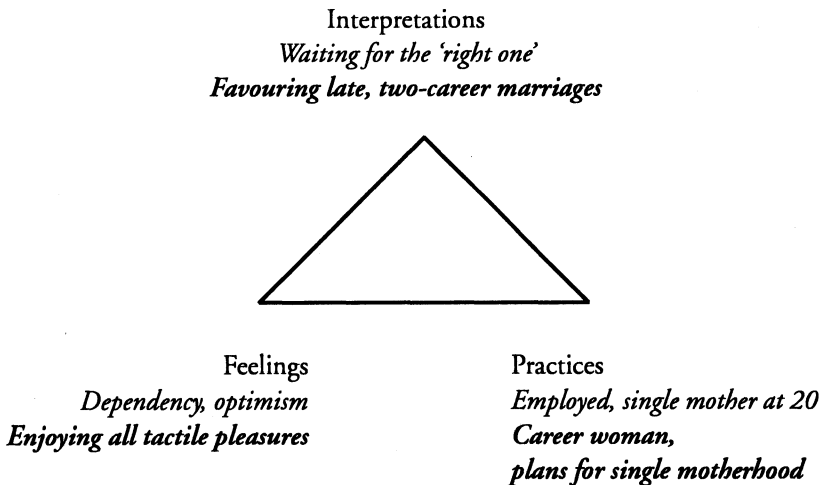
Notwithstanding Darya's clear orientation towards a professional and autonomous life, and notwithstanding her admiration of late marriages, she was intent on having a child soon. She did not appeal to "the point of view of society", as Julia did, but to medical discourse: "*You have to found a family, and I feel that. 'Play, hormones!'*" Darya was 24 when she wrote her autobiography. At that age, few Western career women feel they should – or could afford to – have a child.<sup>7</sup> But Darya did not write a single word about worrying over the problems of combining her career with a child. Instead, she was acutely aware of the problems of combining her career with a (Russian) *husband*. Darya's ideal was not, in the end, the DINK lifestyle ("Double Income No Kids") or even late children. She preferred a good income, a child, and no husband. "*On the whole I shiver when I*

*think about marrying. (...) There is no way a husband could fit into my professional career plans for the next five years!*" Thus Darya contemplated having a child on her own:

*Should I have a child with my dear one [one of her current lovers – AR]? Lately I have often been thinking about having a child without a husband. (...) The main argument against this is that the child needs a father. (...) And some while ago I also had a new little idea – to marry a man with a child. (Darya)*

Darya saw becoming a single mother as a potential problem for the child, but not for herself or her social status. Such an open refutation of Soviet/Russian morality emerges only in this generation, and remains marginal. For instance, although the number of cohabitations has grown in Russia during the 1990s, there are indications that for most such couples, cohabitation does not constitute a freely chosen alternative to conventional marriage, but a form made necessary by economic problems or social obstacles, such as one partner being still married (Mikheyeva 1999). Darya's explicit questioning of marriage is even more unusual than cohabitation, especially for a woman. Nevertheless, it is as if Darya's provocation had articulated the view of acceptable single motherhood that was silently present in Soviet everyday morality.

**Figure 10. Experiences of two single women**  
(*Julia*, No. 21 and *Darya*, No. 24)



The schematization of Julia's and Darya's examples shows two very different versions of the same social practice – living as a young single woman (see figure 10). Julia justified her lifestyle mainly by writing how she enjoyed it; although she clearly had a bad conscience for not living with her son constantly: *“I started to live that double life that is so painful to me: on the weekends I am a mother, but during the week I am a free woman.”* In her main social relations – to her parents, her child, and her lovers – Julia seemed torn between high (“pathological”, as she often puts it herself) dependency and difficult attempts to detach herself and be a “free woman”. By contrast, Darya presented herself as in total control of her life, both professional and private. Of course, Darya could more easily contemplate the advantages of single motherhood, being economically well-off and without the actual experience of child raising that Julia had.

Significantly, the need to have children was proclaimed by both women, notwithstanding all their differences. Where the generation of Western women born in the 1960s and 1970s looked for a stable partner as something self-evident, while children were something to be decided upon, the Russian women took having children as the self-evident part, while having husbands – especially in Darya's case – was the open question.

In the life course of young St. Petersburg women outlined above, we have seen the usual Soviet chain of events mingle with what I have called Western patterns.<sup>8</sup> The bourgeois housewife ideal was imposing itself, while women's professional achievements remained socially and psychologically influential. The lifestyle as a single unmarried woman spread, but mixed with historically older attitudes, especially the high value of motherhood. The corresponding autobiographies by young men, however, initially seemed harder to analyze. The blurred social mobility already described in the case of Lukashin fit practically all of the autobiographies by the men of this generation.

## The taxi driver, the DJ and the new age therapist

The three youngest men (Nos. 45-47) are easiest to characterize by the jobs they did in 1996 – a taxi driver (and ex-businessman), a new-age therapist, and a disc jockey who was also a student and a political activist. Just as Aleksei Lukashin (No.41) had switched to massage, these young men looked for their living in the expanding and, by the 1990s, thoroughly commercialized spheres of services and entertainment. Of the taxi driver, the DJ and the therapist, two of them had al-

ready almost ‘made it’, or made it temporarily, while the third was only in the beginning of such a zig-zagging biography, and doing his best to keep it stable.

The man who used the pseudonym Yuri Sergeev (b. 1968, No. 45) was working as a taxi driver, just like Mikhail Ivanov (cf. chapter 8). But where professional life for Ivanov always was a way ‘out and up’, helping him away from a poor and suffocating family life, Yuri’s taxi *was*, essentially, his family life. The car is mentioned as a person of the male sex (*’on*), not a thing.<sup>9</sup> The car was

*my profession and my way of life. (...) I love driving the car. I enjoy the feeling of merging into him (slianie); his unconditional obedience, his joy over the smallest things. I often get the feeling that he is alive; that he gets disappointed and is depressed together with me. (...) I have a unique feeling for him, I love the car almost like a woman. (Yuri Sergeev)*

The car is, together with the love affairs taking place in it, the core of Sergeev’s autobiography. Still, Sergeev’s life course originally set out on a most typical Soviet path. A shy and creative boy from the Leningrad middle class (unfortunately we are not told the professions of his parents), he was raised at home until going to school, had read “all of Balzac” as well as Stendhal, Maupassant, Scott and Dumas by the age of thirteen, and enjoyed solitude, nature and photography. His memories from his youth feature the standard complaint about having no place to go on his date. He first had intercourse with his first big love when they were both 18. The couple had access to an empty apartment and thus experienced all the joys of mutual sexual discovery. “*Nobody taught us about sex, but we were happy*”, Sergeev emphasized – belonging to the first generation who did have access to printed information, he was among the first to belittle its importance. This first important love affair eventually ended, and some years later the young woman was killed in an accident. Echoing the sweet, sacred memory of the first love that was so brilliantly depicted in Softhand’s autobiography (No. 35), Sergeev was also still cherishing the memory of the young woman: “*Only in my daydreams and my dreams does she come to me. She does not come that often, but just like earlier we indulge in that sweet love which is only our love...*”

After Yuri’s army service in the mid-1980s he entered an institute for higher education and met his future wife. The social network which he and his wife belonged to is throughout the story presented as the most important one: it consisted of Yuri’s friends from the dacha, the summer cottage.

*I did not go to pioneer camps, nor to the kindergarten; instead we had a dacha on the Karelian peninsula. Relations at the dacha are generally very different*



*from those at school. It was at the dacha that I made my first and truest friends, friends who have remained so to this very day. And what is important – time and money have no power over this friendship. (Yuri Sergeev)*

Time and money did, however, have increasing power over a young man's social and professional prospects in Russia. In 1991, Yuri quit his studies and evidently dived head first into the new commercial (and basically illegal markets) that were opening up.

*Business (biznes) began to prosper at this time, mostly in the black import. I had luck. I had the opportunity to take to town what had never been available earlier. I got money, a car, then another car, a better one. The business grew, had a bigger and bigger turnover, the transportation vehicles changed, and finally I got 'Volchka'. I will not tell what mark he is, but I now I have no need for a better car. (Yuri Sergeev)*

Sergeev is as secretive about the way he lost his fortune as about how he originally acquired it. We only learn that he and his wife, "as a consequence of some perturbations lost all our fortune – the house, the car and the money". Evidently the friends for which having or not having money counted also disappeared. "Having lost everything, except for my optimism, some old friends and my joy of living", Yuri's short life as a New Russian was over and he started to work as a taxi driver.

While the ways of earning fast and easy money were too questionable to be described, Sergeev depicted with pride his hard work in taking care of the more or less abominable cars he was given as a taxi driver. Before that, however, he had to let go of his beloved 'Volchka' car. Firmly determined not to let him get a new and bad owner (and perhaps because of insurance money?), Yuri deliberately set fire to his beloved in the most heartbreaking scene of this autobiography:

*When the time came to lose Volchka my heart froze somewhere under my ribs. And he understood me. No, I did not sell him. That would on my part have been a really low thing to do towards him. We travelled with him far enough to find a place that was not only spectacularly beautiful, but also completely uninhabited. I emptied a bottle of vodka, and had some fresh onions as zakuski. Then I poured two cans of gasoline on the backseat, and cried, for the second time in my life (that I can remember). The first time I cried was when Lenchka [his first girlfriend – AR] died.*

*I moved away and threw my lighter into Volchka. (Yuri Sergeev)*

Professionally, we find Yuri Sergeev approaching his thirties without having fin-

ished higher education, employed in a sphere which provided him with a good income but was far from his (probably) stable and educated Leningrad family background, as well as from his original dreams of becoming rich. His family life similarly departed from the conventional Soviet script. He was still married, but the couple did not live together: the wife had moved in with her parents, presumably after the loss of the couple's house. They had no children, and that subject was not mentioned with one word. Sergeev described his affairs on the side, including several meetings with prostitutes. On the theoretical level, he did not appear to deny his wife a similar freedom: *"It is a great sorrow when love becomes an iron chain which unites the two hearts. A heart in shackles – that is terrible."* Sergeev also emphasized how much he still loved his wife.

*Can one be in love with two women at the same time? Why not? (...) Nobody understands me and my wife. (...) In sexual matters we always had a quite complicated situation. First we are through, then it is a crazy passion, until exhaustion. (...) Sometimes my relief brings her to me and we have a stormy night. During my turn, while she is still sleeping, early-early in the morning, I bring her flowers, put them in a glass bottle right under her nose. Silently I caress her chestnut hair.* (Yuri Sergeev)

Sergeev was not only avoiding the conventional forms of founding a family, but also the typical forms of first failed marriages, with the spouses growing apart and eventually divorcing. The marriage could be classified as LAT ("Living Apart Together"), an arrangement increasingly common in the West – but it is hard to do make this classification without having his wife's version of the situation. Neither did Sergeev in any way discuss their future plans or his own aspirations. Indeed, he was like the majority of Russians in the 1990s, rarely planning anything more than one year at a time.

The two youngest men, Pavel, the DJ (b. 1973, No. 46), and Sergei, the therapist (b. 1974, No. 47), were only in their early twenties when writing their autobiographies. Even if it was too early to draw conclusions about their coming careers, it was striking how clearly their point of departure had changed, as compared with that of the older men. Where Yuri Sergeev was among the earliest members of his generation, Pavel and Sergei were born right in the middle of it. About the only trait common with most of the older autobiographies was that both young men mentioned being brought up only by women.

Pavel came from an upper-middle-class artistic family, went to special language schools and described teenage years spent with the upper-class youth called the "golden youth", *zolotoi molodezh'*. He studied at the university in the early

1990s but was more occupied with girls, alcohol and light drugs. He began working as a DJ in a restaurant, but had also tried business and even politics.

Sergei, on the contrary, came from modest conditions. He was raised by a divorced mother with several children and went to work in a factory producing military equipment directly after school. Sergei had so far not had any serious sexual relationship. He had tried to find a girlfriend through personal ads, but failed, and stressed that love and sex were not preoccupying him at the moment.

Pavel's story is an example of the heightened reflexivity and irony that is often connected with postmodern life, while Sergei refused such reflective play in order to find and develop his 'true self' through various types of meditation and therapeutic massage of "bioenergies". Pavel's autobiography is full of ironic references to about everything, including contemporary debates about gender and sexuality. Thus his first childhood love helped him "*overcome the exploitative attitude (potrebitel'skoe otnoshenie) towards women taught to me by my classmates*"; and at the graduation party he was "*raped*" by two charming female classmates, although "*the thought about the impossibility of rape still exists in my mind, as do other thoughts from my childhood*". By contrast, Sergei's style is deeply sincere, immersed as it is in New Age rhetoric: the text finishes with wishes of "*Peace, Warmth, Kindness, Love and Light*". But Sergei was also very incoherent, writing with glaring grammatical faults and direct contradictions.

In spite of their different social and educational backgrounds and with almost opposite personalities, Pavel and Sergei were moving in relatively close circles. To start with Sergei, he was obliged to – reluctantly – quit his job in the state military factory in 1996, as he was not paid wages anymore. Instead, he developed his hobby of Eastern psychophysical teachings, such as tai chi and rei ki, into his new profession. In a fast horizontal move he changed from a Soviet (military) engineer, which there were too many of in St. Petersburg, to a therapist in the market sector. Sergei was also a member of St. Petersburg's nudist association, and describes the liberating feeling, devoid of sexual overtones, of being naked together with other people of both sexes.

Pavel had, as a DJ, continued in his father's artistic footsteps. Chapter 8 described Aleksei's Lukashins travels and the gang and rock subcultures of the 1970s. Now, twenty years later, we see how that subculture had become part of normal youth culture. Pavel repeatedly emphasized the change of cultures himself – how the way he was living differed from the values of earlier generations. Even if he adhered to Soviet codes for male behaviour, he did so with irony: "*I am travelling in the tram and by an idiotic, old habit that was spanked into me in my*

early childhood I give my place to an old woman.” Now, he underlined, the knowledge of the classics of socialism had been replaced by knowledge of drugs:

*At one party that was held in the dormitory I was sitting on the sixteenth floor, slowly and peacefully smoking hash. That was when a young lady came, sat down beside me and said: “What’s that?” In those years it was very hard to surprise me. If somebody would walk up to me and say that he knew the whole works of Karl Marx and Vladimir Illich Lenin by heart, or if a person would start walking on air directly in front of me, that would have had no effect. But the question “What’s that!” caught my attention for eighteen months. Some days later we were lying in bed and I was wondering how I could have missed such a beautiful girl earlier. (Pavel, b. 1973, No. 46)*

Pavel also related his mother’s anger when she found out about his careless relations with girls.

*Once at home my mother became hysterical when I, after having been away for two or three days, took off my jeans before her eyes and my underpants turned out to be all bloody. I explained that everything was fine with me, only my underpants are dirty with blood. I got a whole lecture about when and where you should take a girl’s virginity. After that I lost any desire to practice that activity for the rest of my life. (Pavel)*

The autobiography by Aleksei Lukashin featured a similar scene, where late one night his mother caught him with a girl in the staircase to their apartment. In the youngest generation, the practice of short and early sexual relationships had spread well into the middle class, evidently upsetting Pavel’s mother more than Lukashin’s. Pavel related this event as if it had influenced him into adopting an explicit double standard. After that reprimand, his “moral codex” made it difficult to seduce a girl he was in love with: “To go to a discotheque, pick up a goodlooking lady and fuck her at somebody’s place was much easier than to say to the girl you love: ‘My parents will not be at home today, and let’s forget about the neighbours.’”

Exactly as the autobiography of A. Sobolevskaya, Pavel mentioned dating for pragmatic reasons without shame (although, once again, his irony serves as an underlying comparison with the previous culture):

*It is hard to imagine, but when you are on the very first day after having met being told “I want to get married!”, you lift your hands to your head and wonder whether to run to the right or to the left, but you are taken by the hand. The next sentence “My dad is xxx” turns you into a big smile, makes you look once more and think: “She’s not that bad! Those who get to know each other, get to love each other” (*Sterpit’sia, shubit’sia*) With that attitude I started courting Natasha. (Pavel, No. 46)*

After all, Pavel did not marry the woman with the suitable father. He also refused the prospect of marrying because another of his girlfriends had become pregnant. But unlike the men of previous generations, he expressed his sorrow and regrets over the unwanted pregnancy, and the decision to terminate it:

*This is a very sad story, because as a result of it I failed to become a father. For the first time a woman was pregnant by me. And it was a woman who had problems with her rhesus factor. She should have become a mother. Three times we went to apply for registration, but three times we did not make it to the registration office. (...) Later she came to me and said: "I need your and your friends' car." I knew why she needed the car... (Pavel)*

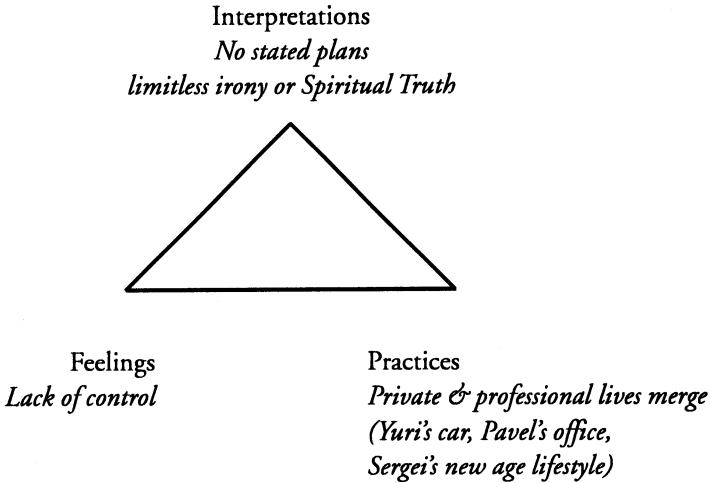
Pavel was, just like Darya, determinedly leading a single life. For him, the idea of a spouse was not as frightening as the thought of having children. Still, the biggest difference between the two of them was his general lack of life control and his constant mingling of personal, sexual and professional relations. Here are parts of his experiences from the last months, when he was involved in a business project:

*...Natasha is taking more and more of my time. She comes to my office. I hide. What kind of behaviour is that? My moral codex is worrying me again. She has again some kind of boss. My morals already combine economics, finances, sociology and politics. I see how Natasha is falling in love with my boss (...) While my secretary, my former girlfriend Lena, is making me blow up because she is stealing from me in the office. Worst of all, she doesn't do any work. (Pavel).*

With his high reflectivity, Pavel was himself acutely aware of his chaotic life. He had twice been in "in need of psychiatric treatment" (it is unclear how literally that should be interpreted, but at least it was a deep personal crisis). He had had "too much" for his age: life "constantly hits you":

*Now it may appear as if much of what I have written is made up. Unfortunately that is not the case. I would myself prefer to forget many of the events of this biography. It is too much for twenty years, said one girl who helped me check this manuscript. No, life simply keeps on beating, hitting you right on the head. (Pavel)*

The similarities between the social situations of the three youngest male autobiographies are summarized in the triad below (for their views on sexuality, see chapter 11).

*Figure 11. Young men of the 1990s*

In comparison with Yuri Sergeev and Pavel, Sergei had an opposite reaction to their changing times: he maintained his calm, isolated concentration. But in all three cases, the former Soviet semi-public sphere entered the men's professional lives, and their private and professional lives were interwoven. No longer serving as a vehicle for a class journey, as in Ivanov's (No. 30) story, the car had for Yuri Sergeev become the symbol of a cruising life without any clear direction. Pavel complained how his sexual morals combined "economics, finances, sociology and politics". Sergei had turned his hobby – Eastern spiritual beliefs, which existed informally in the Soviet 1970s – into his profession, and it is a profession which is also a world view and religion. The attraction of New Age professions and social networks compensates for an objective lack of possibilities of social ascent; in Sergei's case, they substituted for his first profession as an engineer.

All three men represented the majority of young Russian men who belong neither to the clear winners nor to the losers, but who are facing huge social expectations and uncertainties. It is as if their reluctance to speculate about the future, even to state any general grandiose plans, would not merely reflect their current life phase, but caution against unfounded dreams.

### 10.3 MEN – A GEOLOGICAL SHIFT?

We have seen how the life courses of young women combined parts of the Soviet lifestyle and parts of current Western lifestyles, while the men's paths were more difficult to classify. Just as in the Soviet family of late socialism, the man has remained a question mark in the first decade of Russian capitalism. Men had become a question for women: to have or not to have? And they were a question to themselves. Professional life appeared more exclusively demanding for men, children did not function as an orientation mark in their life, indeed, there were not many signs that men were able to plan or control their life course at all. With the imposition of the bourgeois male breadwinner, the Russian man had to start changing in all the many meanings of the word. As writer Viktor Erofeev ingeniously puts it in his book "Men" (*Muzhchiny*):

We change five fingers for a comb, tanks for perfume, foul language for English (...) party membership cards for rings, literature for TV, steel foundries for jeeps, rotten socks for new ones, kolchoz for business, no money for money.

We change money.

I am writing a text the colour of iron. I myself am – a geological shift. (Erofeev 1997, 3-4)

#### *Men's stress*

Of the new 'curtains' that replaced the iron curtain in Europe after the 1980s, the health curtain became one of the most dramatic. In mortality figures, Russian men were one of the hardest hit groups in the Eastern European transitional societies. In the period 1989-1994, life expectancy dropped most in Russia – 6.6 years for men and 'only' 3.2 years for women. The drop in life expectancy was mostly due to violence and heart or circulatory diseases. After the mid-1990s, Russia's life expectancy started rising again while the worst numbers for the post-socialist countries came from some of the other CIS countries (Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine). The gender differences in health issues are usually explained by the larger number of male alcoholics and criminals. These social problems in turn depend on other social factors, many of them connected to the family situation. For instance, male mortality correlated more strongly with divorce rates than with declines in GDP. The MONEE report stressed that in addition to economic indicators, psychosocial factors – life skills, emotional support from family

and kin and social networks – played a central role in health questions (Women in transition, 12-13).

Recent research would thus seem to validate the common, vernacular knowledge in Russia: that women manage better because of their central role in the family and their closer ties to the children. As Erofeev expresses it:

The Russian woman was statistically telling far fewer lies at work, and drinking far less at home. She had a better grasp on things and was rooted in today. She washed, ironed and used lipstick even at the height of the cult of personality, she gave birth to children and breast-fed them. She took care so that her children would not have runny noses. She was dreaming of buying furniture. But, most importantly, love was more important for her than communism. (Erofeev 1997, 7)

Erofeev is right in that Russian men drink significantly more alcohol: statistics from Moscow show that the difference between Russian men's and women's alcohol consumption is larger than in any other industrialized country (Simpura et al. 1997, 100). Also in other respects, men faced bigger social problems and stress. Stress can be separated into two separate phenomena: the stress caused by constantly having to perform at top-level and that caused by a low sense of life control (Karasek & Theorell 1998). Thus this inflational term does seem to grasp the essence of the dilemma of Russian men, as it extends in two directions and covers both those at the top and at the bottom of society. In different stages of life, different types of stress may prevail, as was evident in the zigzagging life course of Pavel or Yuri Sergeev. Bluntly, the Russian men who manage to live up to the ideal of the breadwinner face the first kind of stress, while those who do not face the second.

At one extreme, stress affected the successful businessmen, or the Soviet-style corporate oligarchs, who had to manage in a public sector characterized by continuous economic, social and physical risk-taking. This male anxiety is perfectly captured in the young Russian writer Victor Pelevin's (1999) novel *"Generation P"*. It is staged in an all-male world, where everybody is part of larger, threatening games – from criminal business dealings to world-wide political conspirations – on which one's social and physical life depends. In a significant scene at the beginning of the novel, the protagonist faces his first important opportunity as an advertising designer. His rich client gives no clues about what kind of advertisement would please him. Then the protagonist suddenly looks at the client's hands:

They were clasped into each other, and he was quickly twiddling his



thumbs, as if they were gathering an invisible thread. This was the moment of truth.

-Aren't you afraid, that it may all come to an end?

The client wrinkled his eyes and looked upward, not comprehending. (...) His thumbs stopped twiddling.

-Yes I am, he said, lifting his eyes. -Who wouldn't be afraid. What strange questions you have. (Pelevin 1999, 27)

The novel's protagonist is criticized for his daring question, but he has understood what the client needs: an assurance of stability.<sup>10</sup> In the atmosphere of general risk and insecurity described by Pelevin, it was no coincidence that many New Russians literally adopted the bourgeois idea 'my home is my castle', building the brick palaces for caged housewives that became their emblem in the press and in the popular consciousness. This exaggerated pride in having a home of one's (his) own should be understood not only in the context of the preceding Soviet housing shortage, but also in that of the previous practice of allowing the wife and the children to stay in the apartment after a divorce. A guarded suburban palace appears as an exaggerated expression of a male need for life control and a strictly separated private life, both of which were key problems in the autobiographies written by young Russian men.

On the other end of the social spectrum, stress afflicted the lonely or 'useless', lazy and drinking men. This was, for instance, how an industrial worker born in 1936, a shy and withdrawn man, described the importance of work in the Soviet times:

*I worked there over thirty years until I retired (at 50). I still work there (...) I worked a lot. (...) I supported everything – I hardened and trained myself – and am still in rather good physical shape. I dived into hard physical work – gave myself entirely to it – and found satisfaction in it. I got satisfaction not so much from the big earnings, as I got psychological satisfaction. So you envy my money, well go and earn them yourself! My attitude towards myself was something like: if I cannot endure this, it means I am not worth anything.* (Mañ, b. 1936, No. 32)

A female industrial worker could of course feel a similar pride in her work – in Alexandra Chistiakova's life story, managing with hard industrial work and earning social appreciation was the only thing that was always described as a source of self-esteem and support. But none of the female autobiographies stated that failure at work meant that the author was worthless.

Similarly, another man wrote that the loss of his workplace meant the loss of a

wonderful sex life:

*Now you can hear people saying that we have had a sexual revolution in Russia. And that program, with the sentence “We have no sex in Russia”, I was looking at TV then. It was very funny. My whole life used to be saturated with sex. The working day began with talks about who had spent his night how. In the factory department there was no married woman without lovers, and the men were playing around whenever they could. (...) Therefore I have come to the conclusion that in fact there was sex exactly in the Soviet Union, while nowadays people who are poor and do not have a normal apartment do not have any sex. (...) For me personally there is no more sex in Russia. (Man, unemployed, b. 1954, No. 38)*

A similar strong link between social success and male self-esteem has, of course, been well-documented in other countries as well. But we can wonder whether this link would have been so important, had Russia had the traditional and patriarchal society it is often presented as having had. Is it not that loss of one's job and ideology hurts more, if there are no other forms of authority that can compensate for them? Statistics from the former Asian Soviet republics do not have as disastrous health figures for men, even if they are economically worse off than Russia. This is true for e.g. Georgia, Tadjhikistan, and Armenia. According to the MONEE report, “this suggests that non-economic factors, such as social cohesion created by strong family ties and ethnic pride, may have had a mitigating effect.” (Women in transition 1999, 12).

In addition to their economic and social problems, Russian men had ambivalent cultural and ideological support. The image of the New Russian was built on the pitiful rejection and hatred of the image of the Soviet Man. The courting knight was too weak, the *muzhik* too lazy. Erofeev begins his book by claiming that the Russian is only today even beginning to become a man: “What there was – is over now. The Russian man stands up after crawling on all fours. It is time for him to turn into a man. What a mug!” (Viktor Erofeev 1997, 3) This ideological ambivalence deserves additional scrutiny.

### ***Anxious masculinization***

Uneasiness about masculinity was at the heart of the long-standing Soviet debate about the “demasculinization” of Soviet men. This is how Igor Kon has summarized this claim:

[Although] it may seem paradoxical, the overall historical trend in Soviet so-

ciety has been toward the demasculinization of men. Despite many ethnic, religious and historical variations, the traditional male lifestyle and archetypal male always and everywhere emphasize such qualities as energy, initiative, independence, and self-direction. (...) At every moment in his life, from the cradle to the grave, the Soviet boy, adolescent and adult was likely to feel socially and sexually dependent and frustrated. (Kon 1995, 150-151)

In their analyses of this ideological configuration Temkina & Zdravomyslova (1999, 23) describe it as follows: “The Russian man was not a successful one, he never benefitted from true masculinity, however it had been defined, so he wanted to do his best to compensate for this failure. The Soviet system was blamed for the disempowerment of man as Agent, Owner, Actor.”

These references to “demasculinization” and “disempowerment” suggest that the ideal, assertive Russian man would indeed have existed at some historical point. In fact, Russian cultural history is full of similar complaints about the failure of men as “agents, owners and actors”. To take only one example, in a modern edition of a favourite folk tale, Emelya is a stupid, lazy, youngest son, totally devoid of any initiative. Emelya can wish for anything he wants as a reward for saving the magic pike’s life. Astonishingly, he only wished for what other women wanted him to wish. First, his brother’s sisters ask him to do domestic chores, then his wife, the Tsarevna, asks him to save them from peril, build them a house, and eventually transform himself into a handsome and clever man (!). Emelya himself can never see why one should bother wishing such things – only after having become handsome and clever does he agree to his wife’s wish, without first opposing it by asking if things weren’t good as they were. The only wish Emelya the Fool makes on his own initiative is when he wants the Tsarevna to fall in love with him (*Po shchuch’emu veleniiu*, 1997).<sup>11</sup>

The concern for demasculinization during the Soviet period appeared exaggerated to most outside observers. However, in the light of the current stress of Russian men, it deserves credit for focussing attention in the right direction. In addition to its lack of historic specificity, the problem with the thesis of demasculinization is that it simplified the image of real, true and desirable masculinity (and, by negation, femininity). The claim of demasculinization stereotyped traditional gender roles, just as the official Soviet gender ideology of egalitarianism exaggerated and stereotyped equality. Relations on the Soviet workplace were not as equal as Russian general opinion thought they were (as it disregarded wage differences, career opportunities, etc.), but neither were relations in the family and the semipublic sphere – where many people sought to readjust the balance in favour

of real masculinity and true femininity – as traditional as people liked to present them as being.

The thesis of demasculinization is also closely connected to the rejection of the socialist project of emancipating women. It is a well-known fact that gender equality was not perceived as belonging to the *per se* great ideas that had simply been deformed by state socialism. Nor did women's emancipation belong to the old Soviet values the Russian people increasingly began to miss, as capitalist reality grew harsher and harsher towards the end of the century. Instead, gender equality was largely seen as having actually taken place – to the detriment of Russian men. To take one of countless examples, in 1994 I asked a psychologist in St. Petersburg how to bring up boys and girls. She answered:

A similar upbringing [of boys and girls] does not lead to any good. You get a generation with levelled views: neither masculine nor feminine. (...) so the women become more like men and think about how to feed the family and how to survive. Often the men let the women do this. (...) All in all, probably the role of the the man is to protect, to provide for his family, to take responsibility. When this is absent there are many problems. And a woman's role is in maintaining the family hearth, in providing the emotional spice of life, love, and support. (Woman psychologist)

At the time of the interview, this woman was 34 years old. However, it will come as no surprise to those acquainted with Russian women that this particular respondent began by studying astrophysics, a faculty she chose because she noticed it did not usually admit any women. During the Soviet period, she and her husband had both contributed equally to the household, and during the 1990s the woman had been the stronger provider while her husband had periodically been unemployed.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, although the official image of the Soviet emancipated woman was discarded and many social problems blamed on its existence, few Russian women spoke as if they had identified themselves completely with that image. In comparison, the postsocialist hatred of Soviet men had no clear ideological image to crush, but was rather directed against men as they were. For instance, in Erofeev's mythical account of the fall of the communist regime, men are given the role of utopian revolutionaries, or dishonest drunkards, while women are the sensible, matter-of-fact saviours:

But the Russian woman did not let the utopia happen, she stopped the horse's flight. Not the dissidents, nor the liberal writers, but the Russian

women saved our men from Communism. (...) She stopped him at a gallop and said: let us live for today. Let us, she said, live so that we might have everything that real people have (*kak u lyudei*). (Erofeev 1997, 7)

This rendering has of course nothing to do with the actual onset of perestroika, where women as a pressure group were glaringly absent. Erofeev is working on the level of archetypes – and always with a substantial amount of irony. What is it, then, that the Russian man lacks? In Erofeev's account, it is style, bodily awareness, sexuality and sensuality.

The man (*muzhik*) did of course not understand what she [the Russian woman] had in mind. At work he was lying around a lot, and at home he was drinking a lot, and therefore it took him a long time to get it. He knew from old songs that there was such a thing as love, but he had always had Lenin standing before his eyes, and not something else, and for that other, half forgotten thing, he seldom found a worthy use. Only sometimes in the *banya*, when he looked at himself from upside down while washing, he discovered strange wishes, but the journal "Playboy" was not sold at that time, and he did not know what to do with himself in those cases. (Erofeev 1997,7)

And the New Russian men are, consequently, discovering sex and self-identity in a simultaneous move:

We pay attention to our body. There it is, my body. Looking in the mirror, we start thinking about sex. (Erofeev 1997, 4)

This post-perestroika development has been described by Lynn Attwood as "aggressive remasculinization", which she defines as "an attempt to reassert male dominance in post-Soviet Russia after decades of concern that women were challenging male supremacy" (Attwood 1996a, 264). If we emphasize the *attempt* to assert male dominance and take into account the costs of this attempt, regardless of whether it proves to be successful or not, we could rather talk about *anxious masculinization*. This is not to deny its aggressive component: as the *muzhik* type of male behaviour spread, violence increased – male violence against other men, as in the violent entrepreneurship characterizing New Russian business – or male violence against women. According to one estimate, the "number of recorded criminal acts involving women who were victims of jealousy or family conflict" doubled from 1994 to 1996 (from 40,000 to 79,000; Women in transition 1999, 82). But it does seem that aggression and violence is increasing precisely because

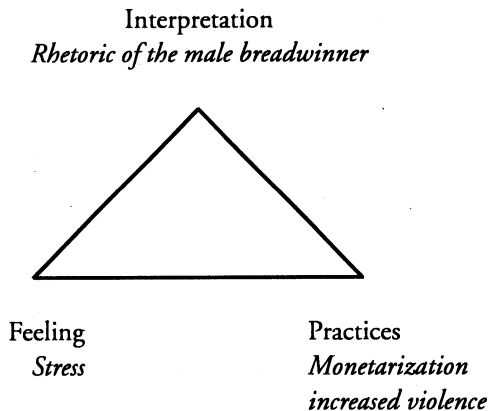
it is outside stable traditional and patriarchal structures (not to mention stable egalitarian structures). Of course, misogyny and wife-beating have been a part of Russian tradition, but the recent escalation cannot be explained by that alone.

Stanislav (No. 44) gave a fascinating picture of his generation of Russian men, a depiction that corresponds to the notion of anxious masculinization:

*I had to do with a very interesting guy – a Russian superman (supermen), Clint Eastwood in the role of Pechorin<sup>13</sup> or the other way around. In the 80s and 90s writers and directors were interested in such types (recall Viktor Tsoi in “Iglu”<sup>14</sup>), at that time it seemed that there was another “lost generation” growing. But the majority of people belonging to this generation found themselves in business or trade (private entrepreneurship is a gamble). True, they are sometimes overcome by universal suffering and then they get themselves a pedigree dog or pure-bred Egyptian cat. They love to exert power and love to (as a compensation) submit themselves. Behind their faked cruelty and supermanhood is confusion and a painful loneliness, with which they pay for their fear to lose their freedom and independence. Homosexuality lends to the Pechorins of today slightly more vulnerability. (...) Otherwise it is just the same. (Stanislav, b. 1968, No. 44)*

Figure 12 presents the main characteristics of this new Russian superman:

*Figure 12. Anxious masculinization*



The anxious masculinization characteristic of the New Russian thus has many affinities with the ideal of the *muzhik* – the physically strong, sexual, aggressive, autonomous and hedonistic male image – as we have found it in autobiographical accounts of working milieus in the 1970s and 1980s. Its roots are in the subculture of gangs and gansters, rather than in the knighthood ideals celebrated by the official Soviet ideology and the intelligentsia. But the New Russian is also supposed to be rich, and is characterized by cultural aspirations unknown to the *muzhik* (exchanging, in Erofeev's words, steel foundries for jeeps and tanks for perfume).

In Erofeev's account, money and sex are the two axes forming the system of coordinates of the New Russian man. He does not propose that Russian men should acquire any of the virtues he ascribes to women – rootedness in the everyday, an appreciation of love, or the habits of parenting. He does not discuss male violence (in contrast to Pelevin, who builds both his Soviet and post-Soviet fictional universes on violence between men). The accounts of the New Russian man, including the autobiographies of Pavel and Yuri Sergeev, fit the image of the 'Brother' in Juliet Flower McCannell's (1991) terminology – a young man without responsibilities, only the duty of enjoyment.

1. For instance, the listings of the one hundred most influential persons in the Russian media in 1998 used to include only one woman, president Boris Yeltsin's daughter Tatyana Dachenko.
2. The term, *sem'ia invalidov*, denotes one of the categories of Soviet (and Russian) social assistance (Liborakina & Rotkirch 1999).
3. Additionally, Soviet social policy still maintained a complicated system of category-based privileges in the form of rent subsidies or reduced services' payments. The "categories", a remnant from the Soviet system, covered socially vulnerable groups such as disabled persons, large families and single mothers, but also different professions (judges, prosecutors, rural teachers and others) and honourees (including veterans of the Second World War and the war in Afghanistan). The problem was that the rigid and complicated categories did not reach many of the working poor that were in acute need of social assistance (Liborakina & Rotkirch 1999).
4. Marina Liborakina has told about her visit to a private luxury gym in Moscow in 1994. In the saunas, the other women politely asked "And who is your sponsor?" Liborakina was almost about to answer "The Ford Foundation", who at the time sponsored her women's group, when she understood they were asking whether she had a rich boyfriend.
5. The youngest woman (No. 25) did not want her autobiography to be quoted.
6. The average age of marriage for St. Petersburg women of Sobolevskaya's age cohort was indeed almost one year later, at the age of 21, and women from upper middle-class families tended to marry later than the average (Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch 1998, 143).
7. For instance, among educated women in Finland the average age for having the first child reached 30 years in the late 1990s.
8. A "Western life course" here denotes an individualized way of life, in which the thresholds be-

- tween youth and adulthood are less clear, as an independent and 'carefree' life may continue well into middle-age (Hoikkala 1993).
9. In Russian, 'it' referring to a car (*mashina*) would in this case have corresponded to the feminine 'ona'.
  10. In the novel, the patisserie directed by the rich client was proposed the slogan "Mediis tempus-tatibus placidus" (Calm among storms) for its advertisement. The client was killed the next week (Pelevin 1999).
  11. The tale about Emelya and the magic pike also gives an interesting allegory of social ascent. Emelya gains everything, although in the end he renounces the Tsar's position, claiming he is happy where he is (to the Tsar's great relief) (*Po shchuch'emu veleniiu*, 1997). In another folktale widely known in Russia and Northern Europe, the wishes of the magic fish end by returning the protagonist to his original situation of a life in poverty and the moral is not to attempt to take the easy road to social ascent. By contrast, the moral of Emelya and the magic pike can be interpreted in two ways: you can get rich easily, or those who get rich easily are undeserving fools (Hans Ruin pointed out this comparative aspect to me).
  12. Even when lay people adopt the rhetoric of gender emancipation, it often seems to be with the same aim in mind: to improve the Russian man. I noted in chapter 5 how Evgenya, by criticizing her husband's "despotism", expressed her desire for a more active and responsible man.
  13. Pechorin is a famous hero from Mikhail Lermontov's work.
  14. Viktor Tsoi was the worshipped rock legend of the 1980s and an astonishing parallel to James Dean – a young man of equal talents and gorgeous looks who died young and tragically in a car accident. In the film "Igl'a" ("The Needle") Tsoi played a kind of alter ego, a lonely mysterious person dressed in black.



## 11 Articulation of Sexuality

The second phase of the Russian sexual revolution was the *articulation* of sexuality. With the liberalization of the press in the late 1980s, sexual topics entered the media. As *seks* went public, it was partly transformed. The processes of articulation and commercialization changed and attenuated practices that had existed in more intimate settings. Existing sociocultural resources were mobilized in the creation of new political and personal identities. On the one hand, nothing ‘new’ appeared that had not been prepared under the illusory stagnation of late socialism. On the other hand, ‘old’ lifestyles and morality established themselves in a new basic context.

As Peggy Watson (1997) has stressed, a public sphere that follows the logic of democratic liberalism needs a certain type of political subjects. It especially needs to mobilize *differences* between political subjects. Differences that had been rather ignored in the socialist public space were now emphasized. National, gender and sexual differences became political resources in a new way. At the same time, their importance in private life increased: “discourse becoming possible and the personal becoming political are two sides of the same process of transition” (Watson 1999, 27). This concerned not only gay people’s or the women’s movements, but heterosexual men’s identity as well – although less explicitly. In this view, the post-socialist “traditionalism” in questions of ethnicity, gender, or the nation-state, is not something that had been dormant and now emerges into the open. The post-socialist practices grew from already existing practices, but their framing and interpretation were first and foremost nurtured by the new risk-filled and economically harsh environment.

The two biggest changes in the sphere of sexuality were articulation and com-

mercialization. The autobiographies did not contain much material about the latter, although the longest episode involving prostitution is discussed at the very end of this chapter. The chapter otherwise concentrates on the various *effects of the process of articulation* – the fight for a public consensus, sexual enlightenment, and the elaboration of sexuality-based identities.

## 11.1 GOING PUBLIC

### *In search of consensus*

From having the world's most advanced sexual and reproductive policy in the 1920s, the Soviet Union had the world's perhaps most hypocritical and prudish regime in the 1970s. When sexual issues were first publicly debated under perestroika, they consequently always smacked of scandal. For instance, the teachers in a small Siberian town went on strike for the first time in the spring of 1997. The reason was not that their wages had not been paid during the last months – indeed, it had no direct connection to Russia's economic or social problems. The teachers were participating in the nationwide protests against the first programme of school sex education. As this controversy showed, Russia *lacks a cultural consensus* in questions of sexuality.

The articulation of sexuality developed in a context of globalization and integration into the international cultural mainstream. The Russian gender system, which had remained relatively unchanged since the 1930s, now faced an avalanche of Western advertisements with their commercialized sexual images, Latin American and Western soap operas,<sup>1</sup> Music Television, Hollywood movies, Tampax ads, etc. After the end of Communist censorship of sexual and erotic topics in 1988, pornography appeared in the metro stations of the cities, but young people living in the same cities could still be totally ignorant of such basic physiological processes as menstruation (Gessen 1995; Rotkirch 1996b). During the failed 1991 putsch directed against the reform program of Mikhail Gorbachev, one of the measures of the short-lived new regime was to introduce censorship of erotic publications. The availability and use of modern contraceptives (the pill and IUD) was spreading, but abortion remained one of the main ways of birth regulation. Russia did not have coherent legislation concerning family planning and reproductive rights (Lakhova 1997). In this transitional situation, it was

possible for the Ministry of Education to develop and adopt the programme of sex education that provoked the strikes – a programme which, despite its good intentions, was insensitive to the context of implementation and which eventually remained of limited significance.

As Kirill Razlogov (1991) has put it, there was “no other society on earth which simultaneously was living through the periods of late medieval society, early capitalism, the collapse of the colonial system, postmodernism, and an integration into the global culture and economy”. Diverse attitudes and experiences had been co-existing already under late socialism – now, they began to discover each other. The autobiographies had several anecdotes about such clashes of cultures. One man remembered how in the 1970s through his profession he came in contact with “*coarse, low-cultured male collectives*” who told him that there “*were women, especially artistic women, who ‘suck you’. I remember how struck I was by this. Not by the fact that there generally were women who ‘suck’, but by the fact that we had them in our country*” (Konstantin, b. 1932, No. 29). Another man recalled how he, after finally having accepted his homosexuality, decided to shave off his beard. “*Funny how that gesture became almost like an initiation ritual. Another thing was also funny: my neighbours interpreted the shaving of my beard as a return to the norm (with beard and long hair, I had appeared to them as a dangerous and unreliable bohemian)*” (Stanislav, b. 1968, No. 44).

Another vivid illustration of the clashes of cultures can be taken from reactions to the research project this work is based on. In Finland, the press conferences usually yielded annoyingly similar accounts in the media. Not so in Petersburg, where a similar press conference, held in early 1999, led to completely opposite reports. “According to the Finns, the sexual revolution has fully and irreversibly triumphed in Petersburg” was the headline in *Vesti* (13 February 1999, No. 16, p. 7) “Petersburg sex is in a deep crisis. Perhaps this is a reason for the ‘migration’ of our city’s female inhabitants abroad.”, wrote *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* (30 January 1999, p. 12), although during the press conference the Finnish research team had said nothing about the possible reasons for ‘migration’. “Petersburg inhabitants and the Finns as victims of the same revolution. The sexual revolution”, wrote *Delovoi Peterburg* (3 February 1999, No. 11), quite accurately conveying the message we as researchers tried to give at the press conference: both countries had experienced the same sexual development but according to a somewhat different timetable and in a different order. But “Sociologists compared sexual lives of Finns and Petersburg inhabitants – Failed, once again” (*Opiat’ dvoika*) summarized *Neuskoe Vremya* (6 February 1999), giving the impression that St. Petersburg sex

life had been graded as “failed” in comparison to that of the Finns.

The situation was not one of an ideological or moral ‘vacuum’ or ‘desert’, as Western media liked to depict it, but rather one of an ideological ‘jungle’ (Kääriäinen 1998). It is also misleading to generalize about Russian public opinion (e.g. ‘the Russians are homophobic’) before public consensus can be said to exist in any meaningful way.

## Sexual enlightenment

*I first became conscious of my orgasm when I was about 37 years old. Before that I did not know anything about it and did not notice it. I read about it in books and became surprised and frustrated because I did not have it. (...) I asked the man I was close to then: ‘Yura, am I an ordinary woman?’ ‘No, you’re a fantastic woman!’ After some difficult considerations I asked again: ‘Why don’t I have, at the end, what you have?’ And he showed me in slow motion that I did.* (Maria, b. 1946, No. 10)

This was how a middle-aged teacher, Maria, described her discovery of the female orgasm in the early 1980s. She stressed that this event did not suffice to make her enjoy sex, which happened only when she some years later met the big passion of her life. But her story shows how access to printed material – at the time, before perestroika, probably one of the erotic novels, pornographic journals or books about sexual techniques that were circulated in the unofficial *samizdat* or bought abroad – made her raise the new subject with her lover.

On the most evident level, this story tells about the impact of sexual information and its benign effects. They should not be underestimated. Learned ignorance caused much suffering and misunderstanding. Information about, for instance, the female orgasm, had earlier been only randomly accessible in some limited circles, such as among Maria’s intellectual friends. Ten years later such information was being openly sold in bookstores in the big cities. The majority of the writers mentioned reading explicit printed sexual information for the first time only in the late 1980s or the 1990s.

*During the last years a lot of information has appeared on sexual matters and that is good. If I had had that information during my youth, many problems would have disappeared by themselves. At least the problem with condoms – how much did I not struggle with them, and it turns out I just put them on the wrong way. Once I by mistake put it on slightly differently and, to my surprise, every-*

*thing changed: sex with a condom became totally acceptable. Life would have been far more interesting and attractive if you would have not had to discover such details all on your own. (...) Information on sexual questions has helped me in many ways. I have overcome my extreme timidity, to the degree that I even allowed myself to write an essay on this topic. (Man, b. 1939, No. 32)*

For Sergei (No. 44), it was reading a novel by James Baldwin that, one memorable spring day in 1995, led him to a re-evaluation of his previous love life and his coming out as a homosexual. Pavel (No. 46) mentioned Pink's Floyd film "The Wall" as a crucial influence in lifting sexual taboos. (In questions of sexuality, as in Russian culture at large, the literary centredness of the Soviet era turned into knowledge increasingly formed by visual images.)

However, Maria's quotation about discovering orgasm also points to another, more ambivalent, content of sexual enlightenment – the duty of pleasure. She described how the female orgasm (or rather its absence) became a matter of concern, just as it had become in the West about two decades earlier. It created new requirements of sexual satisfaction and additional ways of being "not like ordinary women".

Konstantin gave typical evidence of the attitude of educated men, who blamed the Soviet system for causing suffering:

*All these sexual worries of my youth (...) did not destroy my life very much. But they would have been minimized or not appeared at all had the Soviet public (rather, party-state) morality, pedagogy and teenage medicine not been so outdated, coarse and ideologized. (...)*

*Soviet power talked about strengthening the family, but they prevented sexual enlightenment and only god knows how many families fell apart because of that. I am sure that if my wives and I would have been sexually enlightened, I would have had half as many wives. (...)*

*Judge yourself, how could I be guilty for not knowing what it means to prepare a woman for the sexual act, for not having any understanding not only about erogenous zones and the clitoris, but about women's orgasm. (...) The blame for my (and not only my) illiteracy lies on the damned Soviet system. (Konstantin, b. 1932, No. 29)*

While male writers often blamed the system for their failures, the women blamed their partners, themselves and 'the times' equally much. Konstantin did speculate about his own responsibility, and was even unusually eloquent about the suffering he retrospectively understood that he must have caused his wives:

*The first two marriages now seem to me totally vapid. There was love, but some kind of Soviet love – terribly correct and boring: we went to the movies, walked in the park, gave birth to children. It is sad and distressing to remember that family sex. Now I clearly see that only I received some kind of satisfaction from intercourse, while my wives were only fulfilling their “marital duty”. I am sure they never experienced orgasm, the poor women! I acted (precisely acted, and did not practise sex) like the mediocre ‘sovok’<sup>2</sup> I actually was. Some movements with the hands on my wife’s body, 20-50 frictions and ejaculation. Then sleep. Neither did I receive from that kind of sex even the slightest part of the satisfaction I could (I suspected) get in other circumstances. Even if, as I now understand, the women were suffering much more, my part of the guilt for our miserable sexual life was quite small. (Konstantin, b. 1932, No. 29)*

But then, with his third wife, Konstantin used his new enlightenment not only in order to make things better for his partner, but also to put increasing demands on her:

*Through erotic and sexual literature and videos (...) I got the sexual education I had lacked and learned about the stimulation of erogenous zones, about the ‘G’-point, about how to prepare a woman for intercourse and about orgasm. (...) I introduced [my wife] to cunnilingus almost at the first contact. Later she told me that she was almost upset about it and shocked (‘what is this – a perversion’), but as she loved me and had a compliant character she did not object to it. Very soon she started to like it (how could she not) and when I with the ‘documents’, that is the books in my hand showed her that these kind of things are not only widely spread in civilized countries but were practised already in antique times, she completely stopped worrying and just started to enjoy sex and my caresses. I bring home erotic literature and journals, sometimes she reads it or we look at erotic films. Therefore it was easier for her to move to the next level – oral sex. She also started to enjoy that. (Konstantin, b. 1932, No. 29)*

As Konstantin shows, sexual enlightenment can also figure as part of a male-centred way of naturalizing sex and make any reluctance seem old-fashioned and uniformed (see below). Nevertheless, most autobiographies gave evidence about the unequivocally positive effects of sexual enlightenment, especially in what concerns family planning .

## *Family planning*

One of the biggest changes made possible by the Russian public sexual revolution was the access to modern contraceptives, notably the pill. The autobiographies

written by younger women show the impact of being able to plan their family life from the very beginning. Evgenya (No. 20) described herself as being very ignorant on sexual matters in her childhood and youth. She married at the age of twenty-seven without previous experience of intercourse. On her wedding night she “*had taken a contraceptive pill in advance and was not afraid of becoming pregnant.*” Evgenya could thus enjoy marital sex from the very beginning. She then continued to consciously avoid the usual life course of Soviet women, who got their first child early in their marriages:

*I had three years left to study and there was no way a child would have fit in. And then I had a plan: to live with the person at least one year (...) and only after that think about children.* (Evgenya, b. 1964, No. 20)

After first trying contraceptive pills, Evgenya then wanted a IUD and turned to one of the new medical structures, a “medical cooperative”, that had established themselves by the 1990s. At that time, the couple was staying with the husband’s parents in a small provincial town. But the parents-in-law, who expected grandchildren, were furious when they were told that Evgenya used contraception. As a result of the conflict the young couple had to move out – in a vivid illustration of gender conventionalism as exercised by the oldest generation. We should also remember that this woman did not belong to the rich housewives or career women – raised in a family of workers, Evgenya was first trained as a mechanic and her husband was an alcoholic and ex-convict. Evgenya’s salary from a state enterprise was among the lowest, and she did not mention additional earnings.

The availability of contraceptives did not prevent the reproductive situation in St. Petersburg from worsening in many other respects. The number of abortions decreased, but abortions were still used as one of the main ‘contraceptives’, and teenage abortions increased. In our survey, only a small percentage of St. Petersburg women said they did not use contraceptives because they were too expensive or because it was awkward to go to the doctor. The decisive factor in promoting family planning was access to knowledge and the social skills Evgenya mastered so well.

Finally, family planning in a broader sense of the word became facilitated by the spread of contact agencies and ‘personal’ pages in newspapers, both of which also emerged during the late 1980s. Unusually many of the autobiographers had used this way of finding a partner or a spouse. St. Petersburg had a proportional shortage of men, whereas people from the provinces were eager to move to the big cities, so the contact bureaus often provide addresses from other towns. Evgenya

used these bureaus several times in her search for a suitable husband, and Lyuba (No. 16) was still using them to seek love and erotic adventure. Valerii happily recalled receiving 330 answers to his advertisement, and praised this opportunity:

*To get to know women used to be an insurmountable problem for me. Now I solve that with the help of contact ads in newspapers. (b. 1939, No. 32)*

## Resisting sexual violence

Sexual violence was yet another issue that became publicly articulated only during perestroika. Lyuba (No. 16) was educated as a worker in a technical field and had three children in her marriage. One subplot in her rich autobiography is about dealing with stalking. Lyuba was repeatedly, during many years, followed from the bus and attacked by the same man. The first time she was terrified, as well as humiliated when her boyfriend saw it as her fault. Some of the times she was attacked she managed to escape. But the last time she spotted her stalker on the bus and had the courage to confront him publicly.

*From the victim I had turned into the hunter. That happened just a short time ago. After twenty-two years of confrontation. Now I am not afraid for myself, but for my daughters. (...) I really want my experiences to be quoted in scientific literature so that it could help to change people's awareness and attitudes towards men's violence toward women. (Lyuba, b. 1954, No. 16)*

There is also an encouraging story of a young girl determinedly escaping the kind of situation so many of the women of the previous generations got caught in: ending up alone in an apartment with one or two men and little physical means or psychological courage to say no, although they did not want to have sex. This woman rendered in ironical tones how she had followed a man to his hotel room and, as his friend joined them, was prevented from leaving.

*He was not prone to violent acts but had unfortunately taken too much liquor and passed out. His friend came, and now there were really concrete attacks on my maidenly honour! (...) There was a fight in the hotel (...) I threatened that disgusting type with a kitchen knife which he, fortunately, took away from me or anything could have happened, then I persuaded him to leave the hotel and go to his place. (Woman, b. 1972, No. 24)*

She was finally saved when miraculously seeing her mother in a car on the street.

*I was put on house arrest, but I learned several useful lessons, and most impor-*



*tantly, I became convinced that you should not lose your head in an awkward situation, and that I will have sexual intercourse only if I have the desire to do so. The friend-attacker then called me several times, declared his love for me, wanted to marry me, but eventually gave up. (Woman, b. 1972, No. 24)*

This rendering was also unique for its lack of self-accusations. The men were clearly put in the roles of those who misunderstood the situation and behaved naively – not the author herself. The author mentioned only one direct source for her self-esteem and ability to say ‘no’ – her beloved grandmother, who taught her to think that *“I am able to make my decisions myself and not behave like everybody else does, and I do not care what you think about me! It is more important what I think myself!”*. However, she was clearly also well read in matters of sexuality and psychology.

## 11.2 HYPHENATED INTIMACY

The main leitmotifs of the autobiographies have been classified as laments, search for pleasure and love, and identity quests. Not all texts had such guiding themes. The ones that did took part in the process of separating sexuality into a life sphere with relative autonomy. The intimate domain was becoming articulated and categorized, or ‘hyphenated’.

Few of the autobiographies provided examples of sexuality and gender relations as an explicit ground for social and political identity, for example feminist or homosexual identity. The two most significant approaches to sexuality were instead the naturalization of sex, and sexuality as part of psychological emancipation. While both approaches have their counterparts in the West, the logic of their development and significance was determined by the post-Soviet context.

### *Naturalization of sexuality*

Of all quests for sexual identity, the most significant saw sexuality as something natural, innate, inevitable and uncontrollable. Six women and six men clearly endorsed such a naturalized view of sexuality. The majority of them were from the oldest generation and three from the youngest. It was also echoed less prominently in many other autobiographies.

The naturalization of sexuality appears in two different, sometimes even op-

posing, forms. The first is naturalization as part of the strategy of increasing tolerance in sexual matters, e.g. making sexual education or homosexuality acceptable. The other is naturalization within the context of anxious masculinization.

The first form is thus naturalization as an attempt to create a depoliticized, scientifically informed, liberal attitude toward sexuality. Soviet ideology had claimed that all parts of intimate life could (and should) be subject to state control. Characteristically, the Soviet regime criminalized male homosexuality as a crime against society, not as a psychological deviance as in many other countries (Essig 1999a). Naturalization opposes these experiences of étatist social constructionism. Liberal circles understood sexual ignorance to be one of the many repressive faces of the Soviet regime. Both scholars and lay people accused ‘Soviet power’ of sabotaging family life, as in the excerpts from Konstantin’s autobiography above. Although women blamed Soviet power less, they did express relief when they found out that their sex lives were ‘normal’:

*The first time I took a book about sex in my hands I was 40 years old. This was a good book, written by some German doctor and writer. I did not read it all (...) But I understood one thing – everything in our sexual life had been normal, inside the framework of a normal sexual life. (Woman, b. 1945, No. 9)*

In this emancipatory way of naturalizing, sexuality is described as something “natural”, “beautiful” and “genetically programmed”. The aim is to secularize sexuality and turn it into something that regards only the individual and cannot be directed by religious or political powers (Heiskala 1999).

But naturalization also fits well into the attempts of anxious masculinization. The previous chapter described the emergence of the New Russian man as a shift to *muzhik* (and bourgeois) brotherhood. Such male bonding has been called the ‘regime of narcissism’, in which sexuality is given high importance and represents an end in itself, but which is otherwise characterized by a lack of social responsibility (MacCannell 1991). In the rhetoric associated with the strategy of naturalization, sexuality is often compared to the animal world (preferably lions; cf. Baraulina 1998). “*From the point of view of nature it is totally normal that a man may be attracted by several women one after the other, and sometimes even several at a time*”, as Konstantin (No. 29) justified his extramarital affairs.

Such naturalization of sexuality was discussed in previous chapters in the cases of Aleksei Lukashin and Pavel. The most problematic “natural” attitude was exemplified by Valerii’s autobiography (b. 1939, No. 32). He described his current life situation when writing as one where he contemplated starting a sexual rela-

tionship with his much younger, teenaged step-daughter. Both his wife and the daughter had already been acquainted with this idea. *"I have the feeling that it would not be hard to persuade her (the young woman). It is more difficult with her mother."* Valerii's plan was justified by his current, ultra-liberal morality: *"I think my strategic mistake in life has been to feel more pity for other people than for myself. (...) The main principle should be: if it's good for you, it should not be bad for the others!"* In a (consciously?) distorted credo, Valerii presented himself as totally emancipated, so that being rid of shame was equivalent to becoming shameless: *"In this essay you can see how an exaggeratedly ashamed boy is transformed to a shameless man who is sexually set free and liberated."*

Valerii's example is certainly extreme. Still, it exemplifies the 'hydraulic' model of sexuality that sees male sexuality as something natural and uncontrollable. This model was at least partly present in all of the male autobiographies from the youngest generation. This kind of male sexuality was also at the core of the view of the New Russian man, as we have seen in extracts from Viktor Erofeev's work. Paradoxically, the reconstruction of the Soviet man builds on his naturalization. The irritation over gender emancipation and feminist discourse is to a large extent due to the fact that it per definition challenges such an unproblematizing naturalization of both sexuality and masculinity.

Erofeev summarizes the transformation of Russian men with the words "I am no man, I am a geological shift". It is a strong and beautiful metaphor. But is it a coincidence that the process is understood to be directed by nature? Is this not a symptomatic way of naturalizing masculinity?

The most famous poem in my own, Finnish-Swedish, culture was written in the beginning of the 20th century by Edith Södergran. It begins with the line: "I am not a woman, I am a neuter." Södergran's aim was to denaturalize womanhood by strange and unconventional associations. That bold refusal of essentialist femininity formed the main contents of the feminist cause during that century. At the end of the century, Erofeev echoed these words in his own metaphor. In a reverse move, he naturalizes masculinity: comparing the drastic socio-economic changes in the lives of Russian men to a natural, albeit unpredictable, transformation.

### *Psychological quests*

The pluralization of Russian society created new possibilities of 'trying out' ide-

ologies and identities. A great number of them were psychological, psychoanalytical, spiritual or religious. Many of these directions had existed in the semipublic sphere or underground during late socialism (e.g. psychoanalysis, new age movements and of course the Greek Orthodox church). Others, mainly a number of applied psychological techniques of self-development imported from the United States, flooded the book market. Anyone who visited the book stores in Moscow and Petersburg during the 1990s noticed how what used to be the section for philosophy and social sciences had been transformed into a section for religious literature, astrology and self-help books.

After naturalization, the second biggest group of sexual identities in the autobiographies was guided by such psychological ideas. This was the leitmotif in the autobiographies by four women and one man. Here, the goal was not to discover or liberate sex, but to discover one's true self by the means of sexuality.

Olga, the oldest woman in this collection (b. 1923, No. 1), is a clear example of the change psychological self-discovery introduced into her sexual life. Olga was in 1996 a happy retired woman, financially well off and happily married to her fourth husband. During the 1990s, she had been reading psychoanalytical literature (she mentioned Freud and Jung). As did many others from her generation, Olga regretted her complete lack of knowledge and sex education. *"I read my first information on sex between newlyweds in a gynaecologist's waiting room, 60 years old. During my whole life I had read only one special leaflet, 'Women's hygiene'."* With respect to her first experience of forced intercourse at the age of seventeen, she even wrote that *"If I would have known about a girl's virginity, I would have behaved otherwise."*

But while Olga would probably have agreed that sex is a 'natural force', she interpreted it in the framework of psychoanalysis. Sexuality was for her a natural drive, but also a force that could be moulded by relations in early childhood. For instance, Olga established a potential causal relation between the way she remembered looking at a little boy's genitals and her own early desire to be a boy. The influence of psychoanalysis was perhaps also the reason why her biography had the most detailed accounts of childhood sexuality of all the women of her generation.

Another woman (b. 1926, No. 3) of Olga's generation wrote a much sadder autobiography. She described herself as a "grey mouse" for whom the first half of life "flew by unnoticed". She married late and not very happily and became a widow in the late 1980s. During the last years, her main occupation had evidently been to study psychology. *"I live in absolute isolation from the outer world, studying questions related to psychology which have interested me during my whole life."*

The author also described herself according to temperament, character, type of body, and general personality – according to a book on “socio-nics” (*sotsionika*) she had been reading, her personality type was a “*logico-inductive introvert*”.

A woman from the next generation, Lyuba, called her autobiography: “*Love – my way of learning*”. She wrote how the year the Soviet Union dissolved, 1991, was a year of “*overwhelming personal changes*”. She changed her professional interests from the technical to the humanistic field, she fell in love with a man, was sexually interested in women, was baptized in church, and tried out different spiritual movements and psychotherapy:

*1991 was the year of my second birth. After that life sort of started to repeat itself very quickly. Keeping to my previous body, I spiritually went through the stages of childhood, adolescence, youth, and gradually I again approached maturity. (...) That was the time of my intensive professional reeducation. (...) I started to learn how to allow myself to create, independently and fearlessly, how to live and make decisions without the approval of the people surrounding me. I got to know new people who were different from the people I used to know, women for whom I felt respect and interest, and even love – that was the first time – in -91 – that I felt sexual desire for a woman (although in the background, once again only in the background, of my love for a man). It was not realized in action, but it has always been more important to me to experience with the soul rather than the body. That was, by the way, the time when I learnt how to use contraceptives the right way and became more liberated sexually. (Lyuba, b. 1954, No. 16)*

Lyuba’s autobiography is, indeed, one of the most impressive and optimistic ones. I have often used it when lecturing to Western people who think postsocialist Russian sex is only about white slave trade and female submission. Lyuba, who had earlier learnt to deal with her sexual harasser, described her current situation as one of continuous exploration, of learning through loving:

*Two years ago, during one of my deep depressions, I came to the conclusion that I should seek erotic experiences and relations with actual men (and perhaps also women, that is still and open question) as regularly, assiduously and obstinately as I take care of the children and of our daily bread and health. (...)*

*First it was terrifying. It was terrifying to buy a contact journal, hide it from the family, and read it. (...) But then my experience grew. At times it was painful. (...) But it is an experience of life and of patience, of love, anticipation, knowledge and of just an inner sensitivity to my own discoveries. I am becoming less and less romantic and more and more sober. I make my life myself. I choose and discard. (...) I study myself and the world. (Lyuba)*

Lyuba’s story was also a paradigmatic example of increased reflexivity. In contem-

porary Russia, even so-called traditional identities are built on the grounds of a reflective choice. It would be absurd to label Lyuba's Christian baptism 'traditional' and her desire for women 'modern' or 'postmodern' – both are part of an overall process of the same process of reflexivization that is also characteristic of Western societies.

In psychological quests, sexuality is liberated and 'naturalized' but not as an end in itself. Sexual behaviour is also, contrary to the strategy of *muzhik* naturalization, subject to improvement and change.

### *Feminist and homosexual identities*

A few autobiographies followed the emancipatory logic familiar to those acquainted with social movements in the West. We have already seen how same-sex practices did not necessarily – indeed, did not usually – translate into identity building. The same is true of feminist identities.

True, some autobiographies did feature what could from the outside be labelled proto-feminist consciousness. Thus the rich housewife, A. Sobolevskaya, had one of the most serious motivations for writing her autobiography. After having ironically described her daily occupations – making food, watching soap operas, walking the dog – she told about her writing habits and the urge to do "something that would last", so that her talents would "not have been in vain":

*Perhaps I do not have a very rich sexual biography, although I personally find it amusing. I perceive of myself as a thinking person, and it was useful for me to analyze this all, sitting before the computer. At the present time I am not working, it has soon been already three years, representing the model housewife with all the attributes of a housewife, like: watching television serials, making tasty dinners, raising our son and a bull-terrier dog.*

*I often wonder what I will leave behind me?*

*May at least this modest opus serve our science. (So it would not be in vain that I once raised so many expectations...)* (A. Sobolevskaya, No. 22, b. 1966)

While Sobolevskaya's circumstances remind one of the birth of the second wave of feminism among frustrated American housewives in the 1960s, her autobiography cannot be labelled consciously feminist. Earlier, I described the case of Nadya (No. 19), whose autobiography gave a typical example of developing a

feminist and lesbian identity (see chapter 9). Another young woman (No. 21) openly identified herself as a feminist, but discussed feminism only when mentioning how the women's movement had helped her understand that she had actually been raped by her boyfriend several years earlier.

With the exception of the above-mentioned cases, one woman – Galina – wrote about the influence of feminism on her marriage, and one man – Stanislav – provided a classical and touching account of coming out as a gay man.

Galina, a middle-class woman who was in her fifties when writing, had recently become involved in charity organizations and the women's movement. In 1996, she had participated in an international feminist seminar in Moscow. Galina quoted the speech she gave and told about the heartily laughs her sarcastic marriage memoir provoked:

*I was always a good student, and I wanted to become a mathematician, and a jurist, and a philologist, and a journalist. (...) I would probably have continued with science had I not met my future husband. From the age of 21 my whole life and all my energy was directed at one single goal: that he would not leave me. I am such a persistent person! This lasted for about twenty years. (...) The main part of our life we lived in X, where I, without any thought about any science, did everything possible and impossible so that my husband would have it as good as he could. He was not earning much (like all of our men, although they are not otherwise that bad), but I was absolutely not worrying about that. ...*

*When we moved here, I became involved in women's issues. But he had become used to something quite different! Once he asked me: "What's happening? Why are you being like this to me?" And I answered him honestly: "After we had our church wedding on the day of our silver anniversary, I understood that you have finally begun to love me, and I calmed down!"<sup>3</sup> He was very surprised and said: "But I have always loved you!" I answered: "If you had told me that before, I would have become involved in the women's movement earlier!" (Galina, b. 1945, No. 9)*

Behind Galina's anecdote lies quite a significant statement. One of the biggest feminist challenges in Russian culture was not to criticize men – the most vehement critique of men can often be interpreted as a dream of strong breadwinners.<sup>4</sup> The challenge in today's Russia is instead to manage without a man – openly. Soviet everyday morality demanded that the man was seen as necessary, although he was in practice often absent or useless. In 1993, the sociologist Anna Temkina (1993) published a review article in the St. Petersburg weekly newspaper *Chas Pik*. Its heading was "Who am I without a man?" This was probably one

of the first times this question was publicly raised in post-Soviet Russia. Even if Russian women were not economically and socially dependent on men, they were emotionally and ideologically not used to thinking of themselves as having a perfectly satisfactory life without a man. Galina's growing emotional independence from her husband was a tribute precisely to this new kind of self-esteem. Similarly, the single life of Darya (No. 24) appeared especially radical in the Russian context, as she toyed with the thought of never marrying.

Stanislav's autobiography was an example not only of homosexual 'coming out', but also of psychological identity building. He wrote about his "ideal and real self", "self projection" and "narcissism". Here, the terms had clearly been integrated into the author's own, profound thoughts, and his psychology readings had served as a concrete tool of self therapy. In the early 1980s, when Stanislav was in his mid-twenties, he faced a big depression and life crisis. He returned to Petersburg after a job assignment in another town, where he had been involved with a woman. Confused and unhappy, he started reading "Freud and the neo-freudians"<sup>5</sup> and tried to interpret his dreams:

*It is not important whether I interpreted my dream images right or wrong (...) the important thing was that I seriously started to think about myself. I tried to think honestly about everything, including sex. I had to admit that I was bisexual. But I did not dare to go further (...) I had the feeling of plunging into dirt. I stopped making interpretations, did not worry about my painful memory, and soon I tore out the notes and destroyed them. (Stanislav, b. 1968, No. 44)*

After ceasing to reflect on his sexuality, Stanislav entered a better period, dated a woman and worked productively. But a few years later he faced a new crisis. This time, he had been talking to a friend "who did some therapy" and had been able to confess to him that he was "not a 100% man". Soon afterwards came the crucial life event, the thing it was "most difficult to write about". If anything, this event is evidence of the revolutionary impact that can be provided by discursive consent (cf. chapter 9). Stanislav went with a friend to the open air book market and bought himself "Giovanni's Room" by James Baldwin.<sup>6</sup>

*I had seen the book earlier on the counters, but after having read on the back that it was a novel about homosexuals I had not bought it. But now I did it. That is, two times I passed the stand before I had gathered enough courage. Usually we went around by ourselves, and then met on the street and showed each other all we had bought. I did not show Baldwin's book to my friend.*

*I came home and sat down to read. It is not a long novel and I read it during that day, almost without interruption. What happened then? An explosion, an*



*avalanche – I do not know how to define it properly, I do not know how to write about this. Everything that had accumulated during years instantaneously burst forth. An enormous, immense sexual desire demanded immediate outlet.*  
(Stanislav)

After this crucial insight Stanislav told his closest friends and his mother about his sexual orientation. He had one longer relationship with a man and several shorter ones. Stanislav traced his path to a homosexual identity, but that identity was not seen as any exclusive or sufficient goal. For him, being able to accept and live out his sexual desires was part of his overall development as a human being:

*I am convinced that there is no specific gay culture (gei-kul'tura), just as there are generally no sub- or countercultures. It is only in the interests of scientific analyses to distinguish between them. We live in one culture – it is changing, many-faceted, contradictory, but it is a totality. There are no rigid walls dividing a gay person from a straight one (gomik ot naturala). We love in the same way. Yes, love is always personal, but precisely for that reason it is the same whether it is a man and a woman that love each other or a woman and a woman, or a man and a man.* (Stanislav)

With this credo, Stanislav reminds us of the parts of Russian perceptions about love that still remain, despite all the changes in economical, social and gender relations.

### 11.3 IS THERE LOVE IN RUSSIA?

If naturalization was the dominant trend in the articulation of sexuality, it also provoked a counterreaction. As sexuality was on its way to be perceived as a separate and autonomous life sphere in Russia, many preferred, like Stanislav, to see sex as part of something greater. Sexuality in itself was too banal, or too dangerous, or too irrelevant to be focused upon. Love, on the contrary, united the best things in a human being. Both contexts of naturalization talk – naturalization as sexual enlightenment, or as anxious masculinization – were rejected with the same argument: love. In contrast to love, sex was irritating, materialistic and Western. Laments about the fast disappearance of love served, as always, to prove the contrary.

The realm of the intimate, unregulated, unarticulated and apolitical was, for better or for worse, increasingly an object of romanticising nostalgia for the Soviet times. In the beginning of perestroika the key question was about the existence

of sex in the Soviet Union. At the end of the 1990s it had turned the other way around: was there still love in Russia?

## *Prostitution*

The materialization of love relations was symbolized by the rapid spread of prostitution. Prostitution had been the symbol of perestroika – of how Russia sold itself to the West (Waters 1989). The image of the prostitute combined attractiveness and fast money with moral condemnation. The very popular perestroika novel and film “Interdevochka” portrayed a young woman who prostituted herself, abandoning her mother and her country.

In real life, prostitution and other forms of sex for material favours did indeed spread in St. Petersburg much more widely than during previous generations. In St. Petersburg, the men of the youngest generation, born after 1965, had had most experiences of sex in exchange for material rewards.<sup>8</sup> Almost every other woman of the young generation in St. Petersburg, reported having been “persuaded into sexual intercourse by offers of money or similar economic advantage”. Compared with previous generations, the proportion of women who had been offered money for sexual favours had more than doubled.<sup>7</sup> Young Russian women had been offered economic rewards for sex twice as often as Finnish women of the same age. Six per cent of the young Russian women reported having accepted the offers. Of young men in St. Petersburg, one in ten had been offered sex for money, and two per cent had agreed (Haavio-Mannila & Rotkirch 1999).

The rapid spread of prostitution, in combination with the general monetarization of family life (and other human relations), created uneasy tensions. As a rule, the naturalization of sex according to male views included liberal attitudes in which prostitution was seen as something normal or at least unavoidable. On the other hand, several men hinted that they had used prostitutes, but none of them included a fully believable account of these meetings in their autobiographies. While relations of sexual *blat* were described by both women and men, direct experiences of prostitution did not feature, with the exception of the case presented below. When the men wrote about their personal attitude towards prostitution (as opposed to their general opinions), it was without exception in favour of ‘real love’. In the same way, the meeting with a prostitute described by Yuri Sergeev told more about love than about prostitution.

## The fairytale castle

Let us return to the young man in his car, the autobiography of Yuri Sergeev (No. 45, b. 1968). He rejected the view of sexuality he saw as the prevalent one in the older generation, that of sex as reproduction. He also rejected the view he understood as characterising his own generation, that of sex as recreation. Thus he recalled how he and his first girlfriend were happy without any sexual education: *"nobody taught us about sex, but we were happy. For us sex was not a reproductive function of two organisms, or an athletic interest. (...) And we had no need for different positions. We used the most banal positions."* Sergeev had in the beginning of his memoirs recalled his first love, a girl who died at a young age. His current marriage was tenderly described, but was evidently in a quite confused state. Then, in the middle of the text, the narrative is for a moment suspended in favour of a fairytale.

The fairytale begins with Yuri driving his beloved car, driving on a road with countless holes and fissures, thinking how he *"likes to spend his time with the prostitutes on the road"*. He picks up a young woman, Lena, with a *"sympathetic, almost childish face"*. Her childlike character is emphasized throughout the tale. Lena asks for a low price in exchange for oral sex. He gives her significantly bigger sum, *"which would actually suffice for a couple of hours with a professional"*. He thinks she is extraordinarily shy, and suggests they go swimming first. *"—Lenochka, why do you need that money? You seem to have well-to-do parents, and you are quite well dressed, and you must be studying at school."* Lena answers that she is finishing school and simply needs the money, and that Yuri is her first client. Later it turns out that her sister owed somebody four hundred dollars and she was (quite improbably) helping her out this way.

Yuri takes Lena to a restaurant. *"I felt how I bloated of pride and a most stupid satisfaction with myself. Here am I, such a strong man, with money, in a great car, saving a child..."* The two of them then leave the restaurant and go out into the open air, where it has just started to rain. In her kiss there is *"the wind of spring, a violet nectar and something else that I still have not found out. (...) Soft, fantastic lips, totally inexperienced. I learnt to love them in that kiss."* The girl declares her love for him, he picks flowers for her, they drive in the car. *"Lenochka is sleeping, putting her head on my knees, spreading her blond hair out. It is so good and calm. And I would like to take her far, far away. And build a castle there, and make her live in a fairytale. And be the creator of that fairytale, almost a god."* Before they, eventually, have sex, he is afraid that would *"destroy the fairytale for me"*. And afterwards,

when she is crying for joy, and before they part and he gives her all the money she needed, he thinks: *“Without love sex is somehow not complete.”*

In sum, Yuri Sergeev told the not unusual story about a man meeting a prostitute who wants to have sex because of love, not money. Still, it wonderfully illustrates Sergeev’s precarious balancing between love and commercial sex. The same balancing is seen in his different languages: in the text, Sergeev uses popular and sexological, detailed expressions, but in the many poems he has included he uses only romantic language, without any physiological details.

Darya, the career woman (No. 24), had no dreams of a prince who would enter her life and solve its problems; on the contrary, she was afraid he would spoil it. Yuri Sergeev, with little control over or perspective for his own private life, dreamt about becoming the creator, literally a god, for a young woman-child.

Compared with the oldest generation, the situation has turned upside down. We remember Softhands’ bright memory of tying the pioneer scarf around his beloved’s neck. He went to great lengths, opposing the whole surrounding environment, in order to have have what he called his most sensual experience. Yuri Sergeev, on the contrary, exemplifies an even more improbable reversal, moving into the realms of romantic fiction in order to create love out of a meeting that was supposed to be about sex only.

In part, the counterreaction against sexuality entering the Russia public sphere was similar to the conservative and moralistic criticism that surfaced in many other countries, particularly the United States. However, the quotations provided in this chapter by Stanislav and Yuri Sergeev point to a politically different counterreaction. We can almost speak of a conscious critique of an excessively harsh commercialization of human relations – a critique formulated by two young men. The women, by contrast, did not write explicitly of their reactions against e.g. erotic and pornographic images on the streets of their city. While Sergeev escaped into a fairytale of total masculine – paternal? – control, Stanislav formulated a vision of everyday, if precarious, human freedom. He expressed thanks for the incentive to write his autobiography – it had been *“perhaps yet one small step towards the freedom I yearn for, or rather, towards a balance between fear and freedom.”* And he thanked even those of his partners who had deceived him:

*I am grateful to everybody I have been with. They taught me and teach me freedom and wholeness, as sex ceases to be the forbidden fruit, some kind of dirt far from the heights of spiritual life. Creativity, sex, and love – it all merges and unites in our whole body. (Stanislav)*

1. Of the soap operas one should especially mention "Santa Barbara", which introduced Western discussions of sexual and gender problems such as rape, incest and harassment to the Russian audience.
2. *Sovok* is a pejorative expression for "Soviet person" (*sovetskii chelovek*), 'homo sovieticus'.
3. In the 1990s it became increasingly popular to add a church ceremony to the usual civil registration of marriage. In Galina's case, the church ceremony was also motivated by her religious sentiments.
4. For instance, in a discussion on local television in Vladivostok in 1998, a group of feminist women participated in a discussion with a group of so-called traditional women. The arguments did not develop as the discussion leader had imagined. When approaching the subject of men, the feminists said they felt sorry for Russian men, who were so oppressed by patriarchy. The 'traditional' women, on the contrary, launched a full-scale attack against the useless, lazy and drinking men. Marina Liborakina related the contents of this television discussion to me in personal communication in April 1999.
5. In the late 1980s and 1990s psychoanalytic literature was again published in Russia after more than sixty years. First literature that had been published in the beginning of the century was republished, then new translations followed.
6. According to Laurie Essig, "Giovanni's Room" belongs to the Western novels that have a particular appeal in Russia: "This [concept of queer male] sexuality is neither bounded nor fixed. It is not an identity but a practice. The characters are not either gay or straight but both, or neither. They are men who are sexual with both men and with women, not because they identify as bisexual but because their lives are bifurcated. The split between the underworlds and overworlds, the hidden queerness and public normalcy, is most pronounced in 'Giovanni's Room'" (Essig 1999b, 291).
7. In Finland, men's experiences with prostitutes have on the contrary decreased during the post-World War II period. The cohort of Finnish men born before the war was the one that most often reported having offered money for sex. fifteen per cent of older Finnish men did so. A similar proportion of the young Russian men reported having offered money for sex, but of course the young Russians had a much shorter life span behind them.
8. In Finland, on average every tenth man and every fifth woman had been offered money for sex. Of young Finnish women, every fourth had received such offers. In St. Petersburg, the women of the two older generations have similar rates as the Finnish women. (Gronow et al. 1997, 304-305; Kontula et al. 1994, 205-203.)

## Conclusion

**A**fter finishing this book, I travelled to Moscow with my daughter, who was then six months old. Together with a good Moscow friend we went to the Central Exhibition Hall. I was carrying Stella in a baby carrier facing backwards. One of the old museum attendants shouted at me from a considerable distance: "You can't do that, the baby will suffocate! Is it a boy? Well, thank god it's not, boys can't be held like that, it squeezes the wrong parts." Then she went on to mutter about modern women who are too lazy to carry their children with their own hands. Embarrassed by this outbreak, and as my back had grown tired, I turned Stella so she faced me. Immediately, a female visitor gently reproached me: "You shouldn't carry the baby that way, she can't see the pictures!"

These maternal threads of care and control, familiar to anybody who has ever been to Russia, make up the fabric I have called *extended mothering*. I have depicted extended mothering as a basic structuring pattern that is authoritarian, family-guided, socially integrated and based on informal networks. Extended mothering is not as linked to biological motherhood as are the kinds of mothering prevailing in Western countries. It embraces strongly expressed love for children, but also sorrow and frustration over not having had the possibility to raise as many children as one would have wished to, or on the contrary, over having to take care of children or elderly dependent relatives in a life situation where this was not one's first priority.

When I started this research, I had no intention of describing motherhood. Indeed, as I now realize, previous research on Russian sexuality has as a rule excluded family life, while, on the other hand, Russian family life has been analyzed with-

out describing sexuality (for an exception, see Heldt (1993)). In the autobiographies, however, these subjects were intertwined in the most obvious way: while the Finnish autobiographers I had read earlier obediently wrote about sexuality when asked to write about sexuality, the Russians wrote about sexuality in relation to various kinds of love, especially maternal love for children.

The *wider conception of love and sexuality* in Russian autobiographies not only testifies to the way sexuality has been separated into a sphere of its own in the West. The pattern of extended mothering also represents one of the continuity between Soviet times and contemporary Russia. Its presence and persistence raised questions about discontinuities and absences, about fathers and husbands – questions that were forcefully articulated by Russian women themselves. This constitutes one side of what I have called the Russian ‘man question’.

Compared to the emotional and functional strength of the intergenerational ties, heterosexual relationships appeared to be threatened and frail. Soviet family policy had both *sustained and undermined the institution of marriage*. On the one hand, it favoured early marriages and child bearing. On the other, the norm of wage-working mothers assigned the double work load to women only, creating irreconcilable tensions. In the Soviet debate of the 1960s and 1970s, this problem was formulated as the problem of demasculinization of Russian men (Kon 1995; Temkina & Zdravomyslova 1999). In the West, it was interpreted as a sign of gender traditionalism (Watson 1993).

In my earlier research, I had been increasingly puzzled by this supposed traditionalism (Rotkirch 1997). It denoted one of the greatest differences in the post-1960s gender cultures in Eastern and Western Europe. In the West, women questioned the norms of marrying and having children, while many of them remained economically dependent on men. In comparison, Soviet Russian women were economically (and often socially) relatively independent, but both marriage and children retained their cultural attractiveness. I have tackled this question by studying *everyday morality*. Autobiographies provide excellent access to this intermediate mode of experience, situated between practices and interpretations. Everyday morality emerged through the ways the authors chose to render their life stories, how they justified their mistakes, how they compared themselves to the ‘norms’. It defines what is considered possible and acceptable, although not always desired, behaviour. In Soviet urban everyday morality, to be unmarried was condemnable although to divorce was acceptable, and being single was much more suspicious than being a divorced single mother. There were also zones without any generally established and shared morality, notably that of adolescent

dating and sexual relations. In such grey zones, there was often a clash between contrasting attitudes towards e.g. the importance of women's virginity, and such clashes resulted in confusion, conflicts, and violence.

When seen through the lens of everyday morality, the claim of Russian gender traditionalism appeared erroneous and misleading. In its place I have suggested the term *gender conventionalism*. It denotes a general aversion against reflecting on or revising the adopted gender roles. Conventionalism means support for the gender roles that are perceived as natural, normal or 'traditional', irrespective of their actual historical roots in Russian society. We can recall the museum attendant who regarded baby carriers as an invention for the lazy modern woman – a view that, needless to say, has nothing to do with the history of childcare. In an analogous way many Russians support what has traditionally been a bourgeois division of labour between the sexes. But this bourgeois conception, which sees the sexes as separated into two spheres – with women in the domestic sphere and men in public life – has, as we know, never actually been dominant in Russia (e.g. Engelstein 1992a). Nevertheless, it is that very same bourgeois model that lurks behind the remedies for the Soviet 'demasculinized' man, as well as behind the Western view of what constitutes 'traditional' gender roles. It is from within that model that a Western researcher may ask whether Russian women experience a "return to domesticity and dependence" (Attwood 1996a, emphasis added) - as if domesticity and dependence were their point of departure.

The other side of the 'man question', the one formulated by men, was harder to grasp. Initially, I had expected the semi-public Soviet subcultures to have simply and mechanistically split into two halves – the private and the public. I thought that the male 'New Russian' would go hand in hand with the establishment of a distinct private sphere in the bourgeois sense. With this model in mind, however, the autobiographies written by young Russian men made absolutely no sense at all. In the mid-1990s, the distinctions between public, semi-public and private that had characterized late Soviet society had become more, not less, blurred. The scope and importance of informal networks of exchange had not diminished. The lost opportunities of gradual but stable upward social mobility, the rise in especially male mortality, the increased cultural expectations and social stress, the risk of success – the young men were caught in experiences of *anxious masculinization*.

In comparison, the Russian women did not face a similar cultural change. The wage-working mother continues as the main socio-economic family form; the pattern of extended mothering is somewhat tattered, but is alive and well. Where



Western women of my generation hesitate to have children, one Russian career woman was worried about how to fit in a husband with her career plans – to have a child was still a self-evident goal, even if it is unattainable for many women due to economical reasons.

The process of anxious masculinization goes hand in hand with the *naturalization of sexuality*. This contrasts with Soviet everyday morality, in which love was seen as something pure and opposite to ‘the sensual’ and ‘the intimate’. Autobiographies of the older generation often understood sexuality to be moulded by upbringing and education. At the same time, some subcultures used sexuality as one of the rare spheres of life where the ideal of the brute, strong *muzhik* could be lived out. In contemporary Russia, many men celebrated *seks* as such a natural, brutish and instinctual force.

At the same time, there is still a strong tendency in Russia to refuse to compartmentalize sex, or love in general. If I dare to generalize about what still appears to me to be specifically ‘Russian’ in perceptions of love and sex, it seems to be the persistent ingredients of utterly romantic courtship, paired with a rejection of ‘only’ sex. The Russians retain a taste for the elegant and the romantic. Just like in music the melodic Beatles were always more popular than the rocky Rolling Stones, getting satisfaction still appears to be less important than remembering that money can’t buy you love.

The notion of everyday morality is one way of avoiding the exclusive emphasis on discourse that has characterized much of theoretically ambitious cultural and sociological research in the 1980s and 1990s. Everyday morality is not a discourse, but a form of practical knowledge that is conditioned by social practices and economic constraints. For instance, the attitude towards marriages of convenience has become more permissive in capitalist families than it was during late socialism.

I have also tried to develop a way of analyzing autobiographies that would not exclude bodily sensations and emotions. This was at the outset only a theoretical stance: my familiarity with the Russian schools of activity theory and, later, with some feminist adaptations of C. S. Peirce’s work had taught me to conceive of the realm of meanings and significations as part of an acting and embodied subject. Thus I was at first theoretically attracted by the triad of experience developed by Finnish psychologist Kirsti Määttänen. During the multiple readings of the autobiographies, I was repeatedly surprised by the way this triad actually worked. By separating the mode of ‘feelings’ from that of practices and interpretations, I was

forced to pay more than lip service to the role of memories of tactile and physical sensations. Precisely when trying to name the ‘feelings’ present in each particular triad of experience, I usually got a clue to what it was all about. For instance, only after having paid attention to the descriptions of anxiety and lack of control in the male autobiographies was I able to formulate the notion of anxious masculinization.

One benefit of drawing the triads has been, I hope, to make my own interpretational links explicit. In each case, another reader could have focused on other aspects, or named them differently. This is one level on which people can explicitly disagree, and challenge my conclusions. As for the drawbacks, it seems to me that the greatest risk in my use of the triad is that of psychologizing the cases. I am convinced that in autobiographical research, the *basic unit of research* (in Vygotsky’s terms) is one life story. The importance of retaining the whole life story, also when inserting only a short quotation is, I think, essential. But it creates the appearance that the researcher is analyzing another human being – which is, of course, not the case.

Assessments of Soviet sexual policy run the risk of both demonizing and trivializing their findings. For instance, Kon (1995, 109 and 86) talks about the lack of erotic culture, about the “primitiveness” and “ugliness” (even the “nakedness”) of Soviet sex. We are presented a picture of totalitarian sex: primitive, repressed, impoverished and violent. At the same time, Kon often stresses how Soviet everyday sexual behaviour was similar to Western sex. This ambivalence may partly stem from the quantitative methods used in earlier studies. Repression is the outcome if you analyze the Soviet public sphere; on the other hand, Western-like developmental trends are the outcome if you rely on surveys and look at average behaviour. In comparison, the unique advantage of autobiographies is that they open windows into the changes of social practices over time.

In the spirit of the extended case method, I understand Russian sexuality as a phenomenon of relative discontinuity with Western experiences. For instance, any assessment of Stalin’s sexual and family policies needs to be tempered by remembering that in most respects, the same kind of repressive sexual policy prevailed also in other European countries of the time. The special characteristic of the Soviet regime in this respect was not so much repression, as is generally claimed, but the gradual *silencing* of public discourse, along with censorship in arts, literature and science.

How, then, did the lack of public discourse on sexuality affect Russian people?

The Russian evidence presents one of the most unequivocal supports for sexual education. It proves, as many other studies have done, that lack of sexual education does not mean that people have less sex, they just have worse sex. In Soviet Russia, the lack of public debate, adequate information and modern contraceptives helped to preserve double moral standards, providing men with greater sexual license. It nurtured the phenomenon of *learned ignorance*, which also affected especially women's sexual health and satisfaction in a negative way.

However, the Russian experience also illustrates the difference between *discursive consent* and *consent in action* (de Lauretis 1994). The discursive prohibition on homosexuality, masturbation, premarital relations, and so on, was not activated in all kinds of situations. The absence of a name does not imply a lack of conception, or of imagination. Personal freedom, including sexual freedom, can be achieved without words and labels. Part of the current nostalgia for Soviet times stems from memories of such local, if limited, freedom in the semi-public sphere, when people had enough time and money to love.

It may sometimes seem as if the Soviet kind of inner freedom even led to deeper and less self-conscious intimate lives (Ionin 1997). The emphasis the intelligentsia put on *style* and ways of being as opposed to, for example, rigidly defined gender and sexual identities, resonates with the newest trends in gender and queer studies. But one should remember that the ethos of personal freedom in the Soviet 1970s was a profoundly anti-political and -sociological way of thinking, a world-view based on personality, aesthetics, metaphysics and destiny. Without naming, it is also much harder to transmit the experiences of one milieu or one generation to the other. In sexual matters, the generation of personalization was a deeply split generation.

This work has shown the peculiar structure of the development of sexuality in Russia. I have distinguished two phases of the sexual revolution in Russia: the first – behavioural and silent – in the 1970s, and the second – articulated and public – in the 1990s. This challenges the ways in which scholars have automatically focussed only on changes in public articulation of sexuality. For instance, Goldschmidt (1999, 321) automatically posits that the first sexual revolution in Russia was in the 1920s and the second began “around 1987”. My findings also challenge the view that aggressive male subcultures would have emerged only with the marketization of society (the prevalence of such a view in Russia is shown in Pilkington 1996, 212).

The generational experiences depicted in the autobiographies – which I have named the silenced generation, the personalized generation, and the generation

of articulation – were formed not only by the sexual knowledge available in their formative years, but first and foremost by the two-step structural dynamics between practices and their articulation. Russian sexual behaviour changed long before public articulation did. The Western countries have experienced the reverse: first, in the 1960s, came a dramatic change in the way sexuality was publicly depicted, while the behavioural changes came afterwards.

Finally, 'extending' the case of the sexual revolution made me question my understanding of the Western experience. What I initially took for a relatively evident "Western sexual revolution" proved to be quite differently understood in various contexts. Some accounts pay attention to the changes in behaviour, others to the cultural transformation, yet others to radical political mobilization (e.g. Stopes 1992; Lennerhed 1994; Heidenry 1997; Connell 1997). In this way the Russian experience may help us detach separate but, in the West, simultaneous processes from each other. The socialist experience already taught us that women may enter wage work without the emergence of feminism. This study has shown how sexual behaviour may become more pluralistic without being accompanied – or preceded – by commercial interests or social movements.

*List of autobiographies about love and sexuality  
collected in St. Petersburg in 1996*

WOMEN

| No. | Year of birth | Pseudonym <sup>1</sup> | Education or class                | Genre <sup>2</sup> | Leitmotif <sup>3</sup> | Other mentions             |
|-----|---------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1.  | 1923          | Olga                   | higher technical ed.              | IC                 | Search, Psych. id.     |                            |
| 2.  | 1925          | Rita                   | lower working class               | IC                 | Search                 | III prize                  |
| 3.  | 1926          |                        | higher economic ed.               | RM                 | Laments, Psych. id.    |                            |
| 4.  | 1935          | 'a story of woe'       | professional ed.                  | IC                 | Laments                |                            |
| 5.  | 1936          | Viktoria               | higher technical ed.,<br>director | IC                 | Search                 |                            |
| 6.  | 1937          | Vera                   | higher ed.,<br>clerical worker    | IC                 | Search                 | I prize                    |
| 7.  | 1937          |                        | professional ed.                  | IC                 | Laments                |                            |
| 8.  | 1941          | Irina                  | professional ed.,<br>secretary    | RM                 |                        |                            |
| 9.  | 1945          | Galina                 | higher humanistic ed.             | IC                 | Fem. id.               |                            |
| 10. | 1946          | Maria                  | ed. middle class                  | IC                 | Search                 |                            |
| 11. | 1946          |                        | professional ed.                  | IC                 |                        | no marriage<br>or cohabit. |
| 12. | 1946          |                        |                                   | RM                 | Laments                |                            |
| 13. | 1946          | Elena                  | upper middle class                | IC                 | Search                 |                            |
| 14. | 1955          |                        | middle class (?)                  | RM                 | Laments                | migrant                    |
| 15. | 1955          | Tatyana                | professional ed.,<br>bohemian     | SM                 |                        | migrant                    |
| 16. | 1954          | Lyuba                  | higher ed.                        | IC                 | Psych. + fem. id.      |                            |
| 17. | 1958          | Nina                   | ed. middle class                  | IC                 | Search                 | migrant                    |
| 18. | 1958          |                        |                                   | RM                 | Laments                |                            |
| 19. | 1960          | Nadya                  | higher humanistic ed.             | IC                 | Fem. + homos. id.      |                            |
| 20. | 1964          | Evgenya                | worker + human.ed.                | IC                 | Psych. id.             |                            |
| 21. | 1965          | Julia                  | humanistic ed.,<br>bohemian       | IC                 | Fem. id., search       |                            |
| 22. | 1966          | 'A. Sobolevskaya'      | higher techn. ed.,<br>housewife   | IC                 |                        |                            |
| 23. | 1966          | Valentina              | unfinished higher ed.             | IC                 | Laments                | migrant;<br>special prize  |
| 24. | 1972          |                        | higher ed.                        | SM                 |                        |                            |
| 25. | 1974          | Darya                  | student                           | RM                 | Laments                | disabled                   |

## MEN

| No. | Year of birth | Pseudonym <sup>1</sup> | Education or class          | Genre <sup>2</sup> | Leitmotif <sup>3</sup>   | Other mentions            |
|-----|---------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 26. | 1924          |                        | higher scientific ed.       | IC                 | Search                   |                           |
| 27. | 1927          | Oleg                   | higher military ed.         | IC                 | Search                   | migrant                   |
| 28. | 1930          |                        | professional ed.,<br>worker | SM                 | Search                   |                           |
| 29. | 1932          | Konstantin             | higher techn. ed.           | IC                 | Search                   | II prize                  |
| 30. | 1935          | Mikhail Ivanov         | professional ed.            | IC                 | Search                   | special prize             |
| 31. | 1936          |                        | retired worker              | IC                 | Laments                  |                           |
| 32. | 1939          | Valerii                | professional ed.            | IC                 |                          |                           |
| 33. | 1941          | 'Digest'               | high scientific pos.        | SM                 |                          | free love, many partners  |
| 34. | 1941          |                        | sportsman                   | SM                 |                          | hundreds of partners      |
| 35. | 1944          | 'Softhands'            | higher education            | RM                 | Search                   |                           |
| 36. | ca. 1945      | Vasilii                | professional education      | RM                 |                          |                           |
| 37. | 1949          | Georgii                | ed. middle class            | IC                 | Laments                  |                           |
| 38. | 1954          |                        | professional ed.,<br>worker | RM                 | Laments                  |                           |
| 39. | 1956          |                        | professional ed.            | RM                 | Episod                   |                           |
| 40. | 1960          | Alexandr               | ed. middle class            | RM                 | Laments,<br>Homos. id.   |                           |
| 41. | ca. 1960      | Aleksei Lukashin       | bohemian                    | SM                 |                          | hundreds of partners      |
| 42. | 1961          |                        | professional human.ed.      | RM                 | Laments                  | no marriage or cohab.     |
| 43. | 1963          |                        | professional techn. ed.     |                    | Laments                  | very incoherent autobiog. |
| 44. | 1968          | Stanislav              | higher humanistic ed.       |                    | Homos. id.<br>Psych. id. | special prize             |
| 45. | 1968          | 'Yuri Sergeev'         | New Russian, worker         | SM                 |                          |                           |
| 46. | 1973          | Pavel                  | businessman                 | IC                 |                          |                           |
| 47. | 1974          | 'Sergei'               | lower medical ed.           | IC                 |                          |                           |

1 The pseudonyms in single quotation marks were used by the authors of the autobiographies. The other names have been given by AR.

2 IC = Intimate confession, SM = Sexual memoir, RM = Relational memoir. See chapter 2.

3 SP = Search for sexual pleasure and/or for love, Laments = Laments about unhappy and unfulfilled love lives,

IQ = Identity Quests, presenting sexuality as part of psychological (psych.), homosexual (homos.) or feminist (fem.) emancipation.

See chapter 2.

Integral text of the advertisement for the St. Petersburg competition for autobiographies about love and sexuality, Spring 1996.

## Is there Sex in Russia?

*In Finland, a country very close to us by its climate, geographical location and, supposedly, character, there is every eight years a large sociological survey concerning the sexual orientation, experience and discoveries of men and women in the land of Suomi. For us, this sphere was until recently outside the scope of glasnost, as the formula "There is no sex in the Soviet Union" was functioning by inertia. Judging by the mass of publications that today deal with sex and eroticism we have already understood that "there is even quite a lot of sex". Now scholars from the St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences together with colleagues from the University in Helsinki have decided, as it is customary there, to believe in the algebra of harmony. For this purpose they have organized a competition for biographical essays on the theme: "Sex, love and sexuality in your life" ("Pol. liubov' i seksual'nost' v vashei zhizni"). The results of the competition will be decided at the end of July and will reward the winner with 1500 Finnish marks. The second and third prizes will receive 1000 marks and 500 marks, respectively. Special prizes will be awarded to other outstanding contributions.*

*The aim of the competition is to gather information about the place of love and sexuality, of love and sexual experiences, in a person's life.*

*The competition is open for everybody, regardless of sex, age, family situation, education and sexual orientation.*

*The spelling and the handwriting do not play a crucial role – the most important is an authenticity and sincerity in describing one's personal love and sexual experiences. Write the text as you would tell it to a close friend. Do not try to make it appear beautiful or decent. Remember that real life and real feelings are often more interesting than literary, film and other wide-spread images.*

*The organizers would like you, when you take part in the competition, to write not only about the turning points in your sexual and love biography, but also about events that may seem insignificant. Please, describe not only facts, but also your feelings, worries, and hopes...*

*When writing about your life you can use words and assessments familiar to you, do not search for special terms or expressions. When referring to your relations with other people, you may call them by other names than their own, the important thing is that you talk about real persons and events.*

*Try to cover all the periods of your life in your story: childhood love, 'playing doctor', the love and sexual problems of teenagers in the process of growing up: the first love and the first sexual experience (dates, hugs, kisses); when writing about adult life you may describe your first marriage, love relations and sexual adventures, sexual satisfaction, happy and sad events, your experience of contraception, problems of loneliness and the search of a partner, and changes in love and sexual relationships having to do with ageing.*

*Depending on the period of life in question various problems having to do with love and sexuality will appear on the forefront: for example, how to deal with infidelity (one's own or that of a close person), what to do about unrequited love, what kind of compromises one should make in order to preserve the family, how to handle sex without love and love without sex, how to combine love and a professional career... Do not forget to write also about them!*

*Finally, although love and sexuality are to a large extent everybody's private (lichnoe) thing (or something between two people), there are nevertheless problems having to do with society: traditions, customs and prejudices, the problems for people with non-ordinary sexual orientations (neordinarnye seksual'nye orientatsii), everyday and material discomfort that make love and sexual relations more difficult; prostitution, sexual discrimination and inequality, harassment and sexual violence and so on. The organizers of the competition ask you to tell what precisely has influenced your love and sexual biography and to what extent.*

*Describe how your sexual life is unfolding today and what are your present joys and sorrows.*

*The organizers also ask you to present, on a most general level, the main events of your life: studies, changes of residence, professional changes, getting married, when your children were born, etc.*

*If you have decided to participate in the competition:*

*– your text should not be longer than 50 pages of typed text or 100 pages in handwriting (with margins);*



– your essay should be sent to the address (...), marked 'Biographical competition'.

Your biographies will be read by a qualified jury consisting of sociologists from the institutes who are organizing the competition. The materials you have sent us will be used only for scientific purposes. Any kind of quotation of a biography (which will always preserve the anonymity of the author!) is possible only with your written consent, therefore do not forget to write whether you give the right to quote your biography in scientific literature.

The organizers of the competition guarantee the authors of the essays that the received information will be strictly confidential; nobody except for the members of the jury and the researchers will have access to it. You may write under your own name or using a pseudonym or a motto, and you may contact the organizational committee directly or through somebody you trust.

For additional information, on Tuesdays or Thursdays between 12 and 3 pm you may call the telephone number (...).

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