

Rationalizing essentialism: Adapting to a stalled revolution

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Despite women's increased participation in the labor force across the industrialized world, the gender division of domestic labor remains stubbornly unequal (Bianchi *et al.* 2012; Dex 2010; Fuwa 2004; Ridgeway 2011; Thébaud, 2010). There is no country where men perform equal amounts of domestic and caring labor as women, though there is considerable cross-national variation in the level of inequality in domestic labor (Dex 2010; Fuwa 2004; Thébaud, 2010). Russia is an extreme case, combining historically and comparatively high female labor participation with a starkly unequal gender division of domestic labor. The Soviet state promoted women's employment so that by 1970 89% of working-age Soviet women were engaged in work or full-time study (Shapiro 1992: 15). Yet this did little to encourage equal sharing of the domestic load (Lapidus 1988; Author 2000). Today, as in the Soviet era, Russia's gender gap in labour participation is one of smallest in the world (Atencio and Posadas 2015), yet women perform the lion's share of domestic labor (Author *et al.* 2004; Utrata 2015), and men's contribution is low by international standards (Fuwa 2004). Even more surprisingly for a society where full-time, continuous employment of women is a well-established norm, current scholarship suggests that a gender-unequal division of domestic labor matches the preferences of a majority of Russian women (Author 2006a; Teplova, 2007; Motiejunaite and Kravchenko, 2008). Cecilia Ridgeway, summarizing the US research on the gender division of domestic labor, argues that "women's employment and earnings ... have equalizing effects on the household division of labor," but that these effects are "blunted to some extent" by the power of gendered cultural schemas (2011: 142). In the Russian case, cultural schemas seem to have all but eliminated the effects of women's employment and earnings on their share of domestic labor. We engage with this puzzle at a micro level, using longitudinal qualitative data to examine the evolution of young

women's work-family preferences between 1999 and 2010, analyzing how gender-unequal preferences are sustained and under what conditions they change.

Recent contributions to gender scholarship have examined how young women's preferences regarding work and family are formed (Bass 2015; Damaske 2011; Gerson 2010a, 2010b; Pedulla & Thébaud 2015). We aim to extend this research by examining how women adjust or sustain their work-family aspirations as they attempt to translate them into action. We identify a process through which gender unequal preferences are sustained – what we call *rationalizing essentialism* – and two conditions which sustain or promote the formation of egalitarian preferences – support from male partners, or lack of desire for marriage or children on the part of the women concerned.

Our research setting of Russia has particular characteristics which make it a revealing context for this research. As mentioned above, labor participation of women is high by international standards, and full-time work is the norm for women as well as men. But feminism, along with all other independent social movements, was suppressed during the Soviet era (Browning 1987) and has gained little ground in post-Soviet Russia. In the early transition era, feminism was unable to expand its influence beyond a small base of dedicated activists (Sperling 1999), and since the Pussy Riot action in 2012 the situation has deteriorated, with the state and church openly vilifying feminists as pro-Western opponents of Russian values (Sharafutdinova 2014; Yablokov 2014). Russian women's preferences have thus been formed in the absence of the sensitizing cultural frame of feminism. The lack of feminist influence in Russian society is likely to be an important factor in the explaining the traditionalism of the prevailing gender division of domestic labor, though this is not the focus of our study. Rather, we aim to explain how gender-unequal preferences are sustained (or otherwise) in the face of the practical and emotional challenges women face in dealing with the highly

unbalanced gender division of labor they encounter in the household. If Russian women, who are largely insulated from feminism, need to develop strategies to reconcile themselves to domestic inequity, it is likely that such strategies are also required by women whose domestic arrangements are exposed to greater cultural challenge. We therefore think that the mechanisms we identify are likely to have wider salience.

Literature review

Our aim is to exploit our longitudinal qualitative data to examine the processes through which women's work-family preferences are sustained or modified over time. As noted above, recent literature has examined preference formation, but there is a dearth of studies investigating how work-family preferences evolve over time. Below we briefly examine recent scholarship on preference formation before setting out the gender theory that has informed our data analysis, and how it applies to the area of preferences regarding the gender division of domestic labor.

A vibrant stream of recent studies has highlighted interactional and institutional influences on the formation of gendered preferences in the US. With regard to the former, recent studies have focused on issues such as the gendered impact of future plans for children on career aspirations (Bass 2015), and the way in which cultural norms regarding women's work differ by class and race (Damaske 2011). At an institutional level, Gerson (2010a, 2010b) has stressed the role of US institutional arrangements in shaping men and women's work and family aspirations. Pedulla & Thébaud (2015) tested Gerson's idea using a survey-experimental design on a nationally-representative US sample. Their findings supported Gerson's idea that, when the institutional constraints are removed, the majority of men and women (regardless of educational level) prefer an egalitarian model of earning and caregiving. But while the presence of supportive policies increased the odds of women selecting an egalitarian relationship by more than five times as compared to when no supportive

policies were primed, supportive policies did not significantly alter men's preferences. This led the authors to conclude that the desire of a significant minority of men to fulfil a neotraditional role "is strong and largely impervious to policy context," a finding which highlights the resilience of the male breadwinner norm (p.133). Together these contributions suggest that both institutional and interactional level factors are important influences on the formation of the work-family preferences of young men and women. Institutional arrangements set the limits within which aspirations are formed, but interactional factors shape the way in which different groups of men and women negotiate these constraints.

As Cecilia Ridgeway has argued, explaining gender inequality is difficult because many of its "obdurate" elements are "overdetermined" - that is, they are maintained by "multiple complementary processes acting simultaneously at different levels of analysis" (2011: 17-18). In her "gender as structure" framework, Barbara Risman integrates different levels of analysis, proposing reciprocal relationships between individual, interactional and institutional levels of analysis (2004; 2011). She sees individual gender beliefs and behaviors as shaped by what she calls the interactional and institutional levels of analysis, while in turn individual behavior influences interaction and institutions (2011: 20). The interactional level comprises gender relations, including the accountability to sex category envisaged in West and Zimmerman's "doing gender" (1987), as well as the cultural norms which inform these accountabilities such as the "schemas of devotion" to work and home described by Blair-Loy (2003). Cultural expectations are not necessarily uniform, however, and can include the influence of the feminist movement alongside more traditional ideas (Risman 2004: 440). The institutional level includes the "distribution of material advantage" (Risman 2011: 20), while we would also explicitly include labor market and welfare institutions which structure the ways in which men and women are enabled (or not) to combine work, family and other commitments.

As a qualitative study tracing individual women, our argument necessarily focuses on the individual and interactional levels, though we lay out the changing institutional context in the next section. Our understanding of this is informed by the “doing gender” framework. In this seminal contribution, West and Zimmerman argued that men and women “do” gender in order to assert membership of the appropriate sex category. Their behavior is at constant risk of “gender assessment” by others who hold them “accountable” (p.136). Doing gender is therefore “unavoidable” (p. 137); achieving “competence” as a member of society is “hostage to its production” (p.126). By asserting that gendered behavior will be produced moment-to-moment at the risk of judgment by others, West and Zimmerman dispense with the need for an account of gendered socialization, but nonetheless provide a compelling explanation for gendered behavior.

Turning to the domestic division of labor, the literature suggests that women’s working hours and absolute and relative income do have a significant influence on the amount of domestic and caring labor they perform in heterosexual partnerships, but the domestic sphere remains stubbornly gendered (Ridgeway 2011). The idea that high earning women do more housework when they are the main breadwinner to “neutralize” their “gender deviance” remains contested (for recent reviews see Hook 2017; Schneider 2012; Gupta 2007). But what is clear that, as recently shown by Jennifer Hook, even high earning women in the United States continue to “do gender” through housework, with their weekends (when time constraints are diminished) looking “pretty similar” to those of lower earning women in terms of time spent on housework (2017: 197). The “doing gender” perspective thus remains central to sociologists’ understanding of the gender division of domestic labor.

The “doing gender” framework provides a compelling explanation of the tenacity of a gender unequal division of domestic labor. The domestic arena is a prime site for the demonstration of gender competence. But

still questions remain. How do individual women reconcile themselves to the inequality implied by a traditional division of domestic labor? As Nancy Folbre asserts, “Norms of fairness and reciprocity are surprisingly robust” (2001, 30). Even if women have not been exposed to feminism or have grown up in a context hostile to it, the violation of norms of fairness presents a challenge to traditional gender preferences. Our contribution focuses on explaining how women navigate the injustice implied by a traditional gender division of labor. That is, we explain how women rationalize essentialism.

Setting

Studying interaction and institutional level influences on women’s aspirations requires an understanding of local context. The Soviet state promoted and institutionalized a distinctive gender order, which still influences contemporary gender relations in Russia (Author 2000). Below the key features of the (post-)Soviet gender order are noted in order to contextualize the interactional and institutional influences on our respondents.

The model Soviet woman felicitously combined full-time work with motherhood and domestic management. Although marriage was considered desirable, it was not an essential component of successful womanhood; single motherhood was normalized by a state hungry for citizens and short of men after the devastation of the Second World War (Utrata 2015). Work and motherhood were seen as women’s twin duties to the state (Issoupova 2000). The Bolsheviks initially aimed to facilitate women’s work through the socialization of domestic services. But this aim was never realized, except to some degree in the realm of childcare. And since the association of domestic labor with women was never questioned, the traditional division of domestic labor remained intact (Author 2000). Thus, women were expected to combine full-time work with caring and household management – their notorious “double burden”

(Lapidus, 1978: 232-84). Working motherhood was facilitated by nurseries, kindergartens, clubs for “pioneers” and school children, as well as pioneer camps in the summer (Zdravomyslova, 2009: 97). Nevertheless, organising childcare was a mother’s responsibility.

These arrangements were complemented by a taken-for-granted official assumption that men would be primary breadwinners. Soviet wage scales and pensions assumed a dual-earner family (Lapidus 1988: 92-3). Yet at the same time policy makers assumed that women would be secondary earners. Gail Lapidus makes the striking observation that the presumption that the women’s income in the family should amount to two-thirds of men’s primary income was “so widespread in Soviet economic writings as to be virtually axiomatic” (Lapidus, 1978: 194). Although the causality is complex (Katz 2001), the Soviet gender wage gap neatly matched official assumptions regarding primary and secondary breadwinners, with women earning 60 – 70% of men’s wages (Lapidus 1988).

The male breadwinner norm was a crucial prop in the Soviet gender order. The gender wage gap, and the ideology of male breadwinning associated with it, was the central justification for a strikingly unequal division of domestic labor (Author 2000). Indeed, a Soviet man’s income was often the only contribution he made to the household (Author et al. 2004)

In the 1990s, the Russian state did not repudiate the Soviet gender order, but its institutional buttresses were weakened by economic liberalization. First, the end of full-employment and the crisis of male-dominated military-industrial complex undermined the ability of men to perform as primary breadwinners (Kiblitckaya 2000b; Author 2006). Second, although there was no direct policy challenge to women’s high labor participation, state capacity to enforce Soviet-era discrimination legislation was dramatically weakened (Kozina and Zhidkova 2006; Vinogradova *et al.* 2015). Third, support for working motherhood was eroded. Provision of childcare reduced sharply. The mass privatization program of the 1990s

entailed the transfer of enterprise social facilities to local authorities which often lacked the resources to sustain them. This resulted in a decline in the availability of childcare places and an increase in cost to parents, sometimes combined with a reduction in the quality of care (Teplova, 2007: 292). Meanwhile, although generous maternity leaves and strong protection of the employment rights of pregnant women of the Soviet era were not repealed, they were increasingly ignored by small private employers (Kozina and Zhidkova 2006; Vinogradova *et al.* 2015). From 1992 eligibility for childcare leave (available on a paid basis for eighteen months and unpaid for three years) was extended to fathers and other relatives, who could take the leave with the written permission of the mother (Teplova, 2007: 298). But measures that have been used elsewhere to encourage fathers to use parental leave – such as a non-transferrable “daddy quota” – were not employed. Indeed, the government does not even publish statistics regarding the proportion of fathers taking leave. Moreover, it has returned to the Soviet focus on motherhood with the launch of the policy of “maternity capital” – entailing specific financial rewards to women who had a second child – in 2006.

The behavior of women has changed little, however, with full-time work remaining the norm. As noted above, women’s labour participation has remained high (77% for working age women in 2015 as compared with 84% for men). But the gender wage gap has remained fairly constant at around 30% during the last 20 years despite huge changes in the economic structure (Atencio and Posadas 2015). Finally, there has been little progress in challenging inequality in the division of labor, with men’s contribution remaining minimal.

In line with this, the gender norms of the Soviet era have been largely reproduced. Soviet-era interviews (Hansson and Liden 1987), diaries (Fitzpatrick and Slezkine 2000), and retrospective interviews conducted in the post-Soviet era (e.g. Kiblitckaya 2000a; 2000b; Kukhterin 2000) suggest that official gender norms commanded widespread support. Meanwhile, interviews and surveys in Post-Soviet Russia provide evidence

of strong support for the key components of the Soviet gender order (Author 2006a; Teplova, 2007). During the 2000s, there was evidence of a shift towards more gender-egalitarian beliefs among young, unmarried, university-educated, non-religious people, but in other groups gender traditionalism remained strong (Motiejunaite and Kravchenko, 2008).

The experience of the last century therefore appears like a “stalled revolution” *par excellence*. The Bolshevik revolutionaries supported women’s movement into the labor force, but did not disrupt their role in the domestic arena, except in the area of childcare where public nursery provision was the new norm. The gender hierarchy was thus preserved at work and at home, with women’s primary role in the household undermining their role as workers and reinforcing their status as secondary earners. This neatly self-reproducing system remains in place today as evidenced by the remarkable stability of the gender wage gap.

Data and methods

This paper is based on data from a longitudinal qualitative project examining the adaptation of men and women to Russia’s transformed labor market. The sample was drawn from four groups facing distinct labor market transitions at the beginning of the research in 1999. These were: employees of economically struggling organizations (in Moscow); new graduates from a university and technical training institutes (in Ul’yanovsk); the registered unemployed (in Samara), and state social assistance recipients (in Syktyvkar). The original sample comprised 120 men and 120 women. (For more details regarding the sample see Author, 2006b). We conducted four in-depth interviews with each respondent at six monthly intervals between 1999-2001, focused on the aspirations and labor market behavior of respondents, as well as their domestic circumstances. The research was resumed in 2010, when 126 of the original sample were found and interviewed (59 men and 67 women).¹

For the purposes of this article we focus on a sub-sample of our female respondents who were under 25 at the time of the first interview and were still in the sample at T5 – 17 individuals. Their ages ranged from 17-24 at

T1. We focus on younger respondents in order to exploit our longitudinal data to examine the development of their work-family preferences. Of the respondents in the sub-sample, 11 came from our youngest sample of graduates from Ul'yanovsk, and two each from Moscow, Samara and Syktyvkar. Thirteen of the respondents had higher education (in several cases gained during the research period), three had vocational qualifications, and one a school-level education. The educational and occupational profiles of our respondents are presented in Table 1.

The Russian team who conducted the interviews had either been involved in the project since 1999, or fully briefed by the team member who they assisted with interviews. Respondents were usually interviewed by someone they knew well (except in a minority of cases where this was impossible due to scheduling problems). Attrition occurred for a variety of reasons from death to change of address. Interviews are referred to using a three-number code: the first indicates the respondent's city (1=Moscow, 2=Ul'yanovsk, 3=Samara, 4=Syktyvkar), the second is the respondent's number, and the third indicates the wave of research. Pseudonyms are used when respondents are named in case histories.

The analysis for this article was based on multi-stage coding focused on respondents' employment experiences, and aspirations regarding work and family. Work and family aspirations were discussed in every interview, and at T2 and T5 respondents were asked the formalized questions "Who should take primary responsibility for breadwinning?" and "Who should take primary responsibility for running the household?" Our findings are summarized in two tables. We also focus on particular cases in order to reveal micro-processes in action.

RESULTS

In this section we report our respondents' preferences regarding work and family as reported at T2, and now these had changed by T5. We also report how this compares with the arrangements they reported having achieved by T5. This overview provides the background to the more

detailed discussion of how our respondents sustained their preferences, and what circumstances sustained or promoted a change towards more egalitarian preferences.

Our young respondents' accounts of their preferences bear the clear imprint of the Soviet gender order. These women had been born between the years of 1975-1982, so their socialization took place during the late Soviet era. In line with Soviet policy, the vast majority of them assume that a woman should work, have children and run the household. Their aspirations are also structured by class, ethnicity, family history and other factors, but their gendered assumptions are remarkable for their similarity.

We divide our respondents into two groups in terms of their gendered preferences: "Soviet traditionalists" and "egalitarians." Another group, neotraditionalists, was a possible constellation, but we did not find any respondents in this category. We reserve the term "neotraditional" for those who believe that mothers or women in general should withdraw from the labor market.² We defined Soviet traditionalists as those who adhered to the Soviet era idea that women should combine work and motherhood, while men should take primary responsibility for breadwinning and women for domestic labor. We feel the term "neotraditional" is inappropriate for this group, because of the Soviet emphasis on the importance of women's labor participation. As can be seen in Table 2 over three quarters of our respondents (13 out of 17) fell into the category of Soviet traditionalists at T2. We defined egalitarians as those who wanted to work, and believed that breadwinning and domestic labor should be shared. We included both those who aspired to be mothers and those who did not in this category. At T2 four respondents voiced support for an egalitarian domestic division of labor.

Women in the group of Soviet traditionalists expected to work full-time at the beginning of our study, but held essentialist assumptions regarding the gender division of labor in the home. Vera, who at the time of the

second interview was studying for a postgraduate (candidate's) degree in Ecology, stated her aspirations in terms which reproduce perfectly the Soviet vision of successful womanhood:

Work, family – they are both as important as each other, because if you just focus on the family you become somehow dissatisfied with yourself. If [you focus] only on work – that's also impossible. Career and work – they are one and the same; if you work it means you're making a career.

[...] A woman must do something, both to work and earn money insofar as she's able, but she shouldn't be the primary [breadwinner], because a woman already has a very big load: the children and the house all rest on her. (2-59-2)

Zita (1-30), a biology and chemistry graduate employed at a research institute in Moscow, likewise fully endorsed the Soviet gender order. She enjoyed her work, declaring her love for researching things “that nobody else knows” (1-30-1). She said that she would work even if she was financially independent. Nevertheless, she naturalized an unequal gender division of domestic labor, as the following exchange reveals:

Zita: A man should perform masculine tasks, and a woman – feminine tasks.

Interviewer: *And what does it mean – masculine, feminine?*

Zita: Well, a man should carry out heavy physical work, and provide for the family. And a woman [should] all the same work in the home – cook, clean. (1-30-1)

As can be seen, an essentialist strain runs through the traditional Soviet approach to gender. Vera makes clear that work has to be combined with women's “very big load,” meaning that only men can be primary breadwinners. And, despite her strong attachment to her career, Zita likewise fully endorses a traditional division of domestic labor.

Our egalitarian respondents were more diverse. Two (Anna 1-13 and Elena 2-48) had egalitarian views regarding breadwinning and housework, but were not particularly motivated by the idea of marriage or children. Meanwhile, Irina 2-47, although married at the time of the first interview, did not express any desire to have children. Thus, only one of the egalitarians at T2, Nadezhda 2-03, expressed a strong desire to become a mother. In line with Gerson's account of the "underdetermining" nature of early experiences (1985: 65), these respondents had diverse early experiences. For example, Elena grew up with relatively egalitarian parents, while Nadezhda presented her egalitarianism as a reaction to the injustice of her parents' marriage: "He sits and reads the paper and that's it.... She runs around, does everything" (2-3-1).

It should also be noted that even these "egalitarian" respondents would occasionally take male privilege for granted. This can be seen most clearly in relation to shared breadwinning, about which, despite their declared support, respondents seemed ambivalent. For example, Nadezhda qualified her support for shared breadwinning with an acknowledgement of men's need for primacy:

I would like everything to be equal. Of course, it would be desirable for my husband to earn more. Because then they feel proud and everything [to hear]: "yes, you earn more." It seems to me that they somehow feel uncomfortable [when they don't]. (2-3-1)

Turning to our respondents' views at T5, we see remarkable stability. Only two respondents - Anastasia and Ksenia - changed their position, in both cases shifting from a Soviet traditional perspective to an egalitarian outlook. In terms of their ability to realize their aspirations, as can be seen in Table 2, six of the eleven respondents who retained a Soviet traditional perspective were "living the Soviet dream," while three were living a modified version of it as single working mothers, which, as noted above, was always a legitimate alternative within Soviet society. Valentina

deviated from the soviet ideal by withdrawing from the labor market after becoming a mother, and Aleksandra had neither married nor had children by 2010. Aged 30, she claimed to regret this, despite her professional accomplishments as a chef. Perhaps unsurprisingly, none of the women classified as Soviet traditionals in terms of preferences secured a gender-egalitarian marriage or partnership.

Meanwhile, two of the four egalitarian respondents – Irina and Nadezhda – managed to secure what they reported to be gender egalitarian relations in marriage, in Nadezhda’s case in the presence of children. Anna and Elena, who had not expressed a strong interest in creating a family at T1, had not married. Meanwhile, one of the two respondents who moved towards an egalitarian position, Anastasia, claimed to be in a relationship which matched her aspirations of sharing the domestic load.

In the following sections we analyze how the Soviet traditionals sustained their gender unequal preferences in the face of the practical challenges of living up the Soviet superwoman ideal, and the conditions which supported the maintenance of or move towards an egalitarian outlook.

Rationalizing essentialism

Women classified as Soviet traditionals constructed narratives which emphasized the fairness of their domestic arrangements. Although a taken-for-granted essentialism often lay at the root of their acceptance of the traditional Soviet gender division of labor, they nevertheless felt the need to emphasize that their husbands had earned their domestic privileges. “Earned” is the operative word, since men’s role as primary breadwinners was what justified their limited contribution to domestic labor in our respondents’ eyes.

This is well illustrated by the cases of Vera and Zita, whose aspirations to conform to the Soviet superwoman ideal were cited above. By T5 both of them had realized their aspirations. Vera was married with two daughters,

and was working in the state environmental protection service. Zita was married to an academic historian with whom she had one child, and was working as an academic scientist. Despite working full-time, both respondents identified their husbands as breadwinners. (Zita disclosed her husband's income, revealing that she received 60% of his wage, while Vera declined to do so). Both these respondents took primary responsibility for running their households, and caring for their children. They declared themselves fully satisfied with the unequal distribution of domestic labor, citing their husband's superior earnings as the justification for this. As will be seen below, both acknowledged that motherhood had left them with less time for work. But neither complained about the injustice of their domestic burden.

Summing up her life at T5, Vera provided a ringing endorsement of the Soviet gender order:

Of course I'm satisfied – a family, children, work, I've got it all; I'm satisfied. [...] The husband should earn money, the wife bring up the children and do the housework. That's how it is with us – it suits us, everything's good with us.

Zita likewise explained her responsibility for the domestic labor in terms of her husband's earnings.

Interviewer: *I remember that you adhered to a traditional scheme in which a woman is the housekeeper...*

Zita: And that's how it's remained. It all comes from me probably. My husband is from the sort of the family where there's also a traditional view of family life.... He's the breadwinner. He gets [paid] more. And therefore the house rests on me (1-30-5).

The simple statement 'He gets paid more. And therefore the house rests on me' in most cases does not stand much scrutiny either from a time availability or a relative earning / resource bargaining perspective. Men's often slight earning advantage secures a disproportionate advantage in terms of leisure time. Nevertheless, it appears to be a vital cover story that allows women to perceive their situation as fair.

The importance of this narrative in sustaining women's support for the traditional Soviet division of labor can be seen in the lengths to which our respondents go to uphold it, and the consequences which regularly occur when it cannot be sustained.

This can be seen in the case of Alena, an enthusiastic adherent of the Soviet gender order. Her parents' marriage had been slightly unconventional in that her mother had the higher formal salary, but this had been remedied by energetic endeavor on the part of her father:

Overall, I was brought up [to believe] that the breadwinner should be daddy.... [M]y daddy was a long-distance driver, and mummy was always a headteacher, and my daddy always earned more than her. That is, it was such a paradox, because at that time a headteacher earned the highest wage rate. She had the highest wage rate at that time, and daddy was a driver, [but] all the same he sort of considered that he should earn more. As well as that he had a big domestic farm, that is, in order to earn extra income. He bred oxen and pigs just in order to be the breadwinner.

Alena had learned this lesson well, and looked to replicate it within her own marriage. At T5, Alena was working as the director of a real estate company with 14 employees, and was married with a daughter. Her husband, Stanislav, was working as an independent craftsman - a restorer of wooden ornaments - whose main client was the church. His income was far less stable than hers and she acknowledged that her earning potential

was higher; Stanislav was not the main breadwinner. Alena believed he should be, however, declaring, “it’s right and it’s holy” for the man to be chief breadwinner. Whereas her father’s gender work in his marriage had entailed arduous supplementary earning, in her own marriage Alena made strenuous efforts to construct her husband as a breadwinner, endeavoring to align her norms with reality:

Perhaps that’s why I didn’t try to change my job, so as not to be a higher earner than my husband, so that I didn’t humiliate him with that. And kind of knowing his income, you try not to overtake him. Sometimes it even happens that when I’ve got additional work, I fail to mention it to him. Specifically in order [to say] “yes it’s your money, you earned it.” And act as if I’ve got nothing. Look, that is, I consider that the man, he should be the breadwinner. He’s the provider, it’s in their blood. ... I never aspire as it were to the leading role. And sort of, any authority that there is in the family, my husband can have it. I think that any wise wife must behave like that. (2-58-5)

The self-contradiction in this passage is evident. Alena naturalizes her normative essentialism – men should be breadwinners “it’s in their blood” – but it is only her deception of her husband that upholds the norm in her household. Nevertheless, the fiction has real consequences. Alena has opted to stick by her husband, has declined to seek a better paid job, and has also decided not to have more children as they cannot afford it. She reconciles herself to her situation, though it is clear this requires some mental effort:

Probably in different circumstances, I don’t know, if I’d have had a different husband perhaps I’d have had three children, I’d have a different job, perhaps I’d have moved to a different city. But clearly it’s how it’s supposed to be. Because everything happened naturally, according to plan, probably. [...] And probably, if I’d have married a different person, I’d probably have had a different life. Better in some ways, worse

in others. And I don't complain of anything; look, for these ten years [since the last interview] I don't complain of anything. Even about the fact that all the time I've been in the same job [laughs]. But I don't complain. (2-58-5)

Alena keeps her marriage intact through her pretence that her husband is the breadwinner. That she preserves this fiction at the cost of some of her own aspirations shows its importance as the cornerstone of 'soviet traditional' marriage.

Men do not always manage to earn more than their partners, however. Indeed, during the 1990s it became increasingly hard for men to secure well-paid, stable work. Even in the more prosperous Putin era a significant minority of men earn less than their wives.

Given what has been argued above, it is perhaps not surprising that once the central prop of the Soviet gender order is undermined, the marital edifice is liable to collapse. Or, put another way, if men's sole contribution to the household is financial, once this ceases they are liable to redundancy (Author et al. 2004). In our wider data set, a majority of the divorced men (eleven out of twenty) considered their failure to fulfill their perceived duties as primary breadwinner to be a major factor in the breakup of their marriages. There were cases of this in all regional groups, and across the social spectrum. But even in our small sub-sample this tendency is visible. Rita, a somewhat disenchanted Soviet traditional, explained her decision to leave her husband Dima in following way:

Well if a person doesn't work he can't support [you]. Everything came from me and when the money ran out – everything finished immediately... It worked out that I had no money, a child and an empty fridge; I was unemployed – it was the last straw, probably. I should have done it [divorced her husband] in 1999 already (3-6-5).

Although Rita was unemployed at the time of her divorce, she saw it as Dima's duty to resolve their financial difficulties, laying responsibility for the "empty fridge" squarely on his shoulders.

The fact that the "last straw" was Dima's failure to provide is highly significant, since she had been at odds with him since the first interview in 1999. She reported that Dima was highly controlling, adopting an extreme neo-traditional perspective with which she did not concur:

I don't know where it comes from with him: a woman should stay at home and not go anywhere. And wear a burqa. His parents are nothing like that. His mum wears what she wants, goes where she wants.... She can go to see her girlfriends. But here it's not allowed. [To wear a top] with a décolleté is impossible, this is impossible, to go somewhere is impossible. "Why have you been so long at the shop?" A short skirt is impossible, a summer dress with spaghetti straps - impossible. I should wear a burqa and wait for him at home with open arms and cook. I am like his property, like a bird in a cage, and he covers or removes the shawl [over the cage] as he wants.
(3-06-1)

Rita resisted these injunctions as best she could - the interviewer's reports noted that she appeared self-possessed and determined. Nonetheless, despite her complaints and resistance, it was only Dima's categorical failure as a breadwinner nearly ten years after the first interview that finally pushed Rita to leave him. Dima's failure to live up to the one family role expected of him provided a justification for divorce which had unquestionable social legitimacy in her milieu. Once again, this case reveals the centrality of the male breadwinner norm to the legitimacy of Soviet gender order, and traditional divisions of domestic labor more generally.

This section has highlighted the centrality of male primary breadwinning to the (post-) Soviet gender order. Although most women work full-time like their husbands, the higher incomes that men generally receive justify their domestic privileges. This provides even highly educated women with a cover story for “doing gender” in the household and goes some way to mitigate marital tensions. Once this fig leaf is removed, it is more difficult for women to justify domestic inequality. At this point, divorce or at least dissent is a likely option. Thus, the notion of the male breadwinner is crucial in allowing women to rationalize essentialism.

Egalitarianism in a cold climate

How are egalitarian preferences sustained or promoted in a hostile climate? Our first finding is that lack of a desire for (heterosexual) marriage or children helps. This allows women to sidestep the thorny problem of how to put egalitarian preferences into practice. Our second finding is that finding a supportive man can help sustain or even engender more egalitarian preferences. The implication is that women who are highly motivated to create a heterosexual family unit will find it harder to sustain egalitarian preferences. Indeed, the prospect of male resistance may help explain why so few aspire to what may be seen as a utopian dream in the Russian context.

It is notable that half of our egalitarian respondents were childless at T5, and that two of the six were unmarried by choice. For example, marriage appeared as an irrelevance to Anna who led an adventurous life full of exploration. Anna began her career as a junior scientific researcher, but later retrained as a vet. She then had a spell working as an office manager, before finding the freedom she craved as a freelance translator of scientific texts at T5. Her hobby was cycling round Europe. She didn't want a regular job “I want to be free,” and this desire for freedom extended to her personal life: “Probably I'm not created for family life. I like living in such a way that if I feel like it I can break loose and travel

somewhere” (1-13-5). Thus, Anna’s love of independence enabled her to avoid engagement with the messy compromises of traditional family life.

Likewise, a willingness to postpone or forgo having children enabled Irina to maintain her egalitarian preferences and an equal partnership with her husband. As Ridgeway notes, “the salience and relevance of family-based gender schemas really sky-rocket ... with the birth of a child” (2011: 137). Postponing motherhood allowed her to sidestep a potential obstacle to her preferred work-family balance. On the one hand her work, to which she was devoted, allowed her little free time. At the same time, she could not envisage her husband taking the leading role in fatherhood due to a self-confessed suspicion of househusbands. Remaining child-free was therefore allowed her to sustain her egalitarian vision.

The second facilitating condition of egalitarian preferences was marriage to men who were prepared to share the domestic load. For example, at the beginning of our research Anastasia expressed a traditional conception of the division of domestic labor. But it was clear from her comments that this rested on an assessment of the compromises she was likely going to be forced to make in order to have a family. Asked who should be responsible for running the household at T1 she responded:

Well, probably me more.

Why? Because your mum is quite domestic, or you are?

Well, I don’t know. It’s rare when that kind of husband comes along. Ready. Well, simply, I like the kind who don’t do domestic work.

But Anastasia did prove able to find a man “ready” to share the domestic load. Her comments indicate that she is the lead parent (for example, it is her that takes time off if their daughter is ill), but nonetheless, she experiences the domestic load as being shared, reporting that they do everything “together.” Likewise, Nadezhda was able to sustain her

egalitarian preferences after finding a husband ready to share everything. They ran a small business together, and she seemed delighted with her marriage, which she portrayed as infused with spirit of mutuality:

We always do everything together. We try to do everything together everywhere. We rest together, we work together, we travel everywhere together. Well, I don't know, I like it, together and together (2-3-5).

Perhaps because of this cooperative ethos, Nadezhda reported that having a child had only had a positive impact on her work and her life.

Taken together, the biographies of our egalitarian respondents suggest that the difficulty of finding what Anastasia refers to as “ready” men, men prepared for sharing, constitutes a major barrier to women even dreaming of a creating an egalitarian family unit. It is easier for women who are not strongly motivated by the prospect of marriage or children to contemplate such an arrangement. It seems that those who do want marriage and children may compromise in advance, holding out only for a breadwinner who will fulfil his side of the bargain.

Conclusion

The Soviet gender order was contradictory. Women's work was celebrated and facilitated through state child care, but at the same time a deeply traditional gender division of labour was legitimized by the communist regime, which preferred men to devote themselves to work. Soviet Russian women tended to endorse the “Soviet superwoman” model implied by this arrangement, and this model still commands widespread support today. Men's chief role in the household was that of main breadwinner, which justified their lack of domestic engagement.

We have shown that the status of men as chief breadwinners is a crucial prop in this gender system. It allows women to perceive their domestic

arrangements as fair, even when their contributions exceed those of their husbands. The idea of the male breadwinner allows them to rationalize essentialism. It is thus highly destabilizing when men do fail to perform as primary breadwinners. In most cases, however, the gender wage gap ensures that the system remains intact, while the unequal division of domestic labor helps to sustain the wage gap. For this reason, the disruptions to the system are limited. When these disruptions do occur, they are explained away as the failing of the individual man, and are not seen as a problem of the gender unequal model that women endorse.

Movement away from this gender model is facilitated when women are not highly motivated by marriage or motherhood. It is also facilitated by encounters with egalitarian men. Once again, however, these conditions are not widely experienced, thus limiting change. Women who do want to marry, and are not fortunate enough to encounter an egalitarian man, have to content themselves with rationalizing essentialism.

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Table 1

Respondent	Education	Jobs held
Anna (1-13, b. 1976)	Higher education (T1)	Gardener, laboratory assistant (T1); junior researcher (T2); veterinarian (T3); office manager (T4-5); freelance translator (T4-5, T5)
Zita (1.30, b. 1978)	Higher education (T1)	Junior researcher (T1-4); research fellow (T5)
Nadezhda (2-03, b. 1980)	Technical education (T1)	Unemployed (T1), tram conductor (T2-T4); sales person; goods manager; director of supermarket; small business owner (beauty salon) (T4-5); Partner in family brokerage business (T5).
Lilia (2-09, b.1976)	Higher education (T1)	police officer (T1); personal assistant of police dept chief (личный ассистент начальника отдела полиции)(T2, T3); police officer (personnel) (T4); senior expert at the State Department of social work (T4-5, T5)
Anastasia	Higher education (T1)	Unemployed (T1), Factory

(2-14, b. 1977)		patent engineer (T2); lawyer at state dept of land use(T4-5, T5)
Zoya (2-16, b.1982)	Technical education (T1); higher education (T4-5)	Unemployed, at home with child (T1-T4); factory computer operator, trade union secretary in factory workshop (T4-T5); secretary of shop chief (T5).
Aleksandra (2-20 b. 1979)	Technical education (T1)	T1-T5 A cook in same café; T5 informally chief cook.
Valentina (2-26, b. 1980)	Technical education (T1) higher education, (T4-5)	Sewing teacher at children's summer camp, T1; accountant in small business (T2-T3); senior accountant in small business(T4); full-time mother (T4-5, T5)
Lyuba (2-31, b.1979)	Technical education (T1)higher education (T4-5).	T1-T4, English teacher at secondary school, T4-5; T5 - senior specialist in insurance direct sales.
Irina (2-47, b.1976)	Higher education (T1)	T1 -T4 web designer; T 4-5 art director; T5 - e-commerce project director
Elena (2-48, b.1976)	Higher education (T1)	T1-4 - Librarian specializing in physics and maths; T4-5, T5 - department head at the same library.
Alena (2-58, b.1977)	Higher education (T1)	T1 - Computer programmer; T2-T3;

		manager real estate company; T4-5, T5 - director at the same company.
Vera (2-59 b.1977)	Higher education (T1)	T1 seamstress, T2 - full-time post-grad student; T3-T4 - freelance ecological expert at state organisation; T5 - the same, as a permanent staff member.
Rita, (3-06 b. 1977)	Technical education (T1) ; T5 - higher education	T1, T2 - housekeeper, T3-T4 - Accountant freelance; bank operationist
Marina (3-14, b. 1980)	Technical education (T1)	T1 - unemployed; T2- factory seamstress; T3 - seamstress in a shop belonging to a private person; T4 - seamstress in a fashion design shop; T4-5 - sales person; T5 - secretary.
Maria (4-03, b. 1975)	Technical education (T1)	T1- Dishwasher; ice-cream salesperson (T2); salesperson in kiosk T3, Dishwasher T4, salesperson in a hypermarket (T4-5); worker at paper producing plant (T5).
Ksenia (4-28, b. 1975)	Technical education (T1); higher education T2-T3.	T1 - Salesperson in private sales company; entrepreneur in Ukraine; T2-T3 - salesperson T4,T4-5, T5 - small business

	owner, selling bags
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Table 2

Gender ideology T1- T5 compared with status and behaviour, T5.

Gender ideology	Married employed mother, primary carer and domestic manager	Married mother not employed, primary carer and domestic manager	Married mother, employed, shared domestic labor	Married, no children, shared domestic labor	Single employed, no children	Lone mother, employed	Total
Consistent support for Soviet gender ideology (T1 - T5)	6	1	0	0	1	3 (2 divorced, 1 never-married)	11
Consistent support for egalitarian gender model (T1 - T5)	0	0	1	1	2	0	4
Shift towards endorsing egalitarian	1	0	1	0	0	0	2

n gender model							
Total	7	1	2	1	3	3	17

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2 Even with this meaning, the term “neotraditional” is problematic in this context, because the vast majority of Russian women have always worked. On the eve of the Russian revolution 80 per cent of the Russian population were peasants, and peasant women worked within the context of the peasant household (Glickman, 1992). Moreover, on the eve of the revolution the participation of women in industry was quite high: in 1913 women constituted a third of the industrial labour force, rising to half during WW1 (Lapidus, 1978: 164-5). Male heads of household were considered to have the right to control women, but most men in Tsarist Russia could not afford to keep a non-working wife.