

Being Independent Together:
Urban Russian Businesswomen and New Forms of National Belonging

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing disintegration of a state-sponsored safety net (1985-) have proffered both massive unemployment among women and unprecedented opportunities for a minority of women to take leadership positions in business. During this time, Russians have also witnessed a proliferation of policies and media encouraging Russian women to focus their attentions on childbearing and homemaking. These discourses focus on below-replacement fertility rates (1991-) as the problem threatening the nation's future. This is despite many complex demographic processes that continue in Russia—including extraordinarily high death rates among working-age men. Such moralizing discourses have turned low fertility into a symbol of a whole range of political, economic, and social concerns (Goscilo 1996:117; Gal and Kligman 2000:16, 18-20, 46-47; True 2003:28-54; Rivkin-Fish 2005; Temkina 2008). For example, public concerns such as crime and drug abuse, among others, are often attributed to bad mothering or single motherhood. While research has been done on how concerns about gender and fertility shape public debates (e.g. Gal and Kligman 2000), ethnographers have yet to more deeply explore how women participate in these

discourses—in Russia, and in other post-socialist states where similar discursive strategies are used.ⁱ

Focusing mainly on highly educated, entrepreneurial women in their 20s and 30s, this dissertation examines how women's engagements with pro-natal messages have led to the formation of new subjectivities. Women engage in a variety of activities, including the consumption of translated self-help literature, corporate motivational seminars run by transnational companies, and psychotherapy, for example, through which they appropriate idioms of self-reliance (*samostoiatel'nost'*), independence (*samostoiatel'nost*), and self-development (*samorazvitie*). Women connect what, for Russia, are radical notions of self-sufficiency with their ability to make social contributions as businesswomen.

Russian entrepreneurial women are not resisting cultural essentialisms about women and what they should be like; rather, they are interpreting them in ways that sometimes make these ideas mean something altogether different. Through their ways of justifying their work lives to themselves, their spouses, and others, women suggest how participating in the business world—or doing so and being unmarried or childless—is more than just tolerable for women. Rather, women are ideally suited for these supposedly male (*muzhskiye*) ways of life: They are able to relate to and understand

ⁱ Important exceptions include Gail Kligman's work, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania* (2000) and the edited volume by Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova, *Zdorov'e i Doverie* (Health and Trust) (2009). These works include case studies of how women respond to pro-natal discourses through their interactions with reproductive healthcare practitioners. My work contributes to these discussions on subjectivity formation in pro-natal political contexts through its focus on the broader context of individuals' lives, rather than on institutional settings.

people in all kinds of settings, even when they have recently migrated to a new urban setting in Russia.

What deserves emphasis here is that some of the self-help media and programs with which women engage by definition require them to distinguish themselves radically from more widely held definitions of (gendered) personhood around them. In these respects, women have participated in—and not only been affected by—the development of a market economy in Russia. Some have ended up in positions of greater overall self-reliance than they might have enjoyed in other professions.

My aim is to reinsert local Russian entrepreneurs into literature on gender and post-socialism and more broadly, to complicate anthropological assumptions about the largely disenfranchising effects of neo-liberal discourses, particularly on local livelihoods (e.g. Postero 2007; Chernoff 2003). Enough about these transnationally-produced discursive strategies resonates with women's lives and Russian culture that women have been able to engage with these discourses to their own economic and social advantages.

I organize this introductory chapter into narratives about and by individual women rather than theoretical passages. My rationale is to allow subjects' voices as well as the many contingencies of their particular lives to emerge; details and issues lingering in the backgrounds of stories I have pieced together may be examined critically by the reader, should s(he) wish. I follow each story with my own more theoretical commentary. This approach is inspired by the article, "Repositioning without Capitulation," by Kay Warren (2005). Warren calls for ethnographic accounts that allow "the researcher herself to recapture and reconsider issues at the margins which, with the passage of time, become central to nearly emerging research agendas (219)"—a process

that can be especially productive, Warren argues, through conversations among social analysts.

Chapter breakdown

Aside from this Introduction, this dissertation has a total of six additional chapters.

In Chapter 2, Methodology, I detail my activities in Russia with a focus on fieldwork in 2007-2008. I discuss my approach to semi-structured interviews, contexts and methods for participant observation, participant recruitment, and the geographical settings of my research. In this chapter, I also elaborate on the class positioning of women in my research population and questions of generalizability.

Chapter 3 is entitled “Purpose as a Guidebook: Urban Russian Businesswomen Navigating Social Uncertainties.” In this chapter, I focus on metaphors of physical mobility employed by women as they discuss the diversity of self-development strategies in which they engage. I treat these metaphors as a window on much broader concerns in urban Russia about *anomie*, depression, and Russian preoccupations with self-determined goals. These concerns must be understood in the context of economic instability and social disorientation, in which Russians of various ages continue to struggle for alternatives to the ontological collective of the former Soviet Union. These issues drive a multitude of practices through which Russian businesswomen strive to cultivate self-reliance. Having individualized goals is especially important to women because sexism and social ostracism form yet another layer of social dislocation that they have to manage. Further, by virtue of these women’s positioning as caretakers for their families,

they are particularly attuned to how their own morale affects others. The fact that women are cultivating motivated, proactive selves is significant to attitudes about gender in Russia, as well; popular and political discourses have historically associated womanhood with suffering as a source of moral worth.

I title Chapter 4 “Gender and Work in Late 2000s Russia: An Historical Perspective.” The objective is to trace the contemporary situation for Russian entrepreneurial women back through a series of overlapping historical trends, some of them with influences in Soviet Russia. I emphasize the dissemination of individualizing discourses in the 2000s and their intersections with official and popular pro-natalism. My objective is to complicate the socialism-transition binary that serves as a trope in both scholarly and everyday Russian conversations: I demonstrate multiple ways in which women incorporate older cultural trends in their contemporary individualizing strategies.

Chapter 5 is entitled “Mutual Translatability and New Forms of Belonging.” Often during my fieldwork, I was struck by differences between women’s understandings of self-development and my own observations of what happened when they pursued it. To varying degrees, women frame self-development as enabling them to be entirely independent—emotionally and financially. Yet, the multiple ways in which they do this enable them to feel more as though they are a part of Russian society. Specifically, women are developing arguments for how work and family, which are widely constructed as separate and conflicting spheres in Russia, require the same sets of feminine traits. These discursive shifts have a number of effects. In a society where political discourses portray citizenship and personhood as highly gendered, through such discursive strategies, women start to see themselves as having roles to play in Russian

society. They become *people*, rather than conflicting social functions. Self-legitimization is especially apparent when women justify their work lives to unsupportive spouses and relatives, who see women's professional lives as undermining their womanhood. Furthermore, in the process of establishing mutual translatability of work and family among other women and sometimes, with men, women are establishing social relationships based on friendship, non-heteronormative romance, and the sharing of professional experience. Although such relationships can be fleeting, it is within and through them that novel understandings of gender become more widely legible in Russian society.

Chapter 5 constitutes a response to Leo Coleman's recent methodological commentary, "Being Alone Together." Drawing from ethnographic case studies of gay identities in New Delhi, Coleman asks anthropologists to consider ways in which "solitude can be studied ethnographically without reducing it to the negative underside of solidarities, politics, belonging, and—at its greatest extension—society. Can we speak of a social solitude and examine its potentials for collective life in great cities?" (2009:758) Women frequently invoke the idea that they are alone—that they cannot rely on the state, male partners, or relatives, for validation and support of the lives they have chosen. However, this entails more than their cognizance that there are many others in similar positions. In social settings, women negotiate the meanings of being alone and translate it into broadly defined forms of self-reliance. These meanings, and the relationships in which women articulate them, make real headway in expanding notions of gender and personhood in Russia. This is especially the case when women's self articulations find broader representation in alternative print and Internet media.

Chapter 6 is entitled, “Exchange, Not Charity: Self-Development and Social Networking during Periods of Economic Disenfranchisement.” At points in some women’s lives, they have especially few material resources to care for themselves and their dependents. Periods of unemployment, inter-city migration, economic instability, and divorce are some examples of problems that intersect in women’s lives. During these times, women’s convictions of self-reliance become especially urgent as a set of justifications for receiving forms of economic and social support from others. Reviewing three case studies in the domains of inter-city migration, an Internet romance with a Western man, and single motherhood, I show that women see themselves as having something *intellectually* valuable to offer others in return for forms of social and economic assistance. They can offer insights on self-development and its methods and social efficacy in the business world, especially—insights that they garnered from their engagements with neo-liberal self-help discourses and their survival of political and economic instabilities. Self-development enables women to enter relationships marked, in my view, by inequalities of wealth, gender, class, and nationality. Women teach themselves to ask for what they need in these relationships without sacrificing a sense of self-reliance and dignity.

Chapter 7, my conclusion, is entitled, “Neo-liberal Belief Systems and Their Limits.” Throughout this dissertation I am more concerned with unpacking self-development as a set of beliefs and practices from women’s perspectives, rather than critiquing it for its social consequences. In my concluding chapter, I consider what are sometimes the shortcomings of neo-liberal belief systems: I first return to a point that I raise in Chapter 3, which is that the motivational seminars and literature with which

women engage require, by definition, that they “think outside of the box”—that they come up with ways to distinguish themselves from widely recognizable notions of personhood and gender in Russia. Living an innovative life is pre-determined in these discourses. However, one of the reasons these ideologies of self-sufficiency have flourished in Russia since the late 1980s is that they explain poverty and poor health outcomes in terms of failed personal initiative, not structural inequalities. My research reveals important differences in generation, socioeconomic class, gender, and family history that influence the extent to which self-sufficiency is feasible for women in Russia. My concluding discussion serves as a lens onto some of these limitations.

Theoretical framework: Pierre Bourdieu

My discussion in this dissertation has been informed significantly by the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital (1973) is useful because it allows me to explain how people translate aspects of their cultural environment into credentials and skills that are valued by other entrepreneurs and especially, affluent and privileged ones. I am going to use this concept to explain how women have effectively become capitalists with little (financial and social) capital.

I first want to emphasize the symbolic significance of business in Russian society. In post-Soviet Russia, business has emerged as a field of social legitimization and a space for the production of new forms of symbolic capital. The Russian national and global publicity of oligarchs such as Roman Abramovich and Mikhail Khodorovsky underscore the rising prominence of this field in the Russian neo-liberal marketplace of ideas and power. From the beginning of the 1990s, however, the public face of Russian business

has been largely young (under 40) and male (Yurchak 2003), and this remained the case later into the 2000s (Salmenniemi 2009:2). Simultaneously, since the early 1990s, a growing number of women have aspired to own their own businesses (Gritsenko 2007) and occupy managerial positions in large corporations (Novosti 2008).

Female entrepreneurs in Russia have generally been concentrated in less profitable businesses. This gendering is a result of multiple factors, including unequal distributions of former socialist real estate, production equipment, and money into the hands of men, women's disproportionate domestic workloads, and gender stereotypes that translate into different career choices as well as formal and informal discrimination in the labor force. These discrepancies mean that Russia's growing minority of women who do strive towards positions of greater profit and prestige must rely more heavily on their own creativity to mobilize their experiences, skills, and symbolic resources in ways that are publicly recognized and valued; this is where Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital is particularly useful. In 1973, Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron framed cultural capital as the social worth accorded to certain credentials or cultural knowledge. In his later work *Distinction* (1987), Bourdieu argued that people with fewer financial resources and social connections are more dependent on cultural capital in order to achieve social mobility (5). This is especially the case in post-communist societies, where as Eyal et. al argue, "cultural capital is the main source of power, prestige, and privilege (1998:6)." In the case of women who wish to set up firms that reach beyond their homes, a source of cultural capital is to play on their perceived social distinctiveness as women, marketing their supposed skills and abilities as women as commodities of

value.ⁱⁱ Women have been able to capitalize on certain gender essentialismsⁱⁱⁱ in creating motivational services and positioning themselves as uniquely capable of teaching others to engage with the new realities of Russia's neo-liberal society.

My research suggests that women's growing ability in the 2000s to enter the business world is in part due to new discourses and measures of upper class status in Russia. Galina Lindquist (2002) has argued that among affluent urban Russians, "the consumption of objects has been replaced with the consumption of experiences (342)" as markers of status —experiences such as global travel, for example. The experiences that matter most among many highly educated, professional Russian women and men that I know include international travel, work, friendships, and romance with Westerners, and attendance at Western motivational seminars, or "trainings." Wealthier urbanites are willing to purchase these experiences.^{iv} Both women and men entrepreneurs transform these assets into commodities that can be taught to others. For example, some women market particular tips for Russian businessmen to communicate diplomatically with American businessmen, based on notions of how culture affects human behavior. They draw on their experiences traveling to the West and Internet friendships with Americans.^v Women, however, occupy a particular niche in that certain gender essentialisms allow

ⁱⁱ See Chapter 7 for my discussion of value, based on David Graeber's 2001 work.

ⁱⁱⁱ Throughout this dissertation when I use the term "gender essentialisms," I refer to notions of womanhood (and sometimes, manhood) that are structured by social and political institutions. For a further discussion of which institutions I mean, see Chapter 4.

^{iv} See Chapter 2, "Social class," for further discussion of how some women gain cultural capital in the form of certain experiences, without large financial means.

them to be perceived (and to perceive themselves) as uniquely capable of translating their own experiences into a set of skills to be taught to others. They therefore translate womanhood from a discursive and structural basis of exclusion in the business world, into a form of social distinction.^{vi} They thus bridge emerging ideas about consumption as a marker of class, their own self- and socially perceived abilities as communicators and nurturers, and new markets in Russia for motivational services. Womanhood is a form of (new) cultural capital that they own and use in order to acquire greater power in the new field of business.

Bourdieu's subjects internalize cultural models for behavior and are not aware of them (1987:468), but my research participants are at least partially self-conscious of prevalent expectations of women and how they might interpret them. My research participants are therefore more agentic than Bourdieu's subjects, who more fully internalize notions of difference and cultural patterns of behavior. I therefore emphasize women's maneuvering into entrepreneurial roles as windows on personal and wider social change. With varying degrees of intentionality, women translate cultural notions of themselves as intuitive, nurturing, and knowledgeable of national culture to render womanhood a category of professional distinction.

^v See the section in Chapter 4, entitled "Markets for gendered personhood." Briefly, I am referring to demands among professional Russians for new communication skills for Russian and international corporate settings, as well as a wider set of demands for strategies of emotional self-sufficiency. There is a broader market for the creation of assertive, self-reliant people with portable networking skills.

^{vi} By "distinction," I mean Bourdieu's concept of how actors distinguish themselves based on aesthetic tastes and classificatory categories (i.e. "working class" p481)—classifications that reflect and influence socioeconomic disparities.

As I conceptualize how people widen their social possibilities and influence attitudes without labeling themselves overtly as activists, I find useful Elisabeth Kirtsoglou's ethnography with a semi-secret community of urban Greek women (2004). Kirtsoglou's informants form romances and friendships with one another. Their relationships are partially visible to the wider public and within them, they discuss ideas about gender that have the potential to be more widely impactful. Yet, these women do not label themselves as "lesbians" or push for any kind of activist agenda. They also sustain more conventional kinship arrangements and heteronormative gender roles in wider society. The women in my research do not form a singular community, and while they protect some secrets among one another, the networks that they form are not hidden in any way. Nevertheless, they, similar to Kirtsoglou's informants, are aware of heteronormative gender essentialisms and accept and embrace them to varying extents. Women also view adherence to these gendered ideas as bases for their own continued activity within the social field of Russian business, which is broader than their own networks with one another. Furthermore, similar to the Greek women in Kirtsoglou's work, Russian women's engagements with more conformist notions of gender can be socially productive; intentionally and unintentionally, women accomplish more than the establishment of their own business ventures. Kirtsoglou argues that people can influence conventional gender stereotypes by forming alternative social arrangements and deliberating new ideas—all of which are more broadly socially visible. Russian entrepreneurial women similarly form alternative social spaces where the ranges of acceptable feminine behaviors and relationships are more fluid. Through this ongoing broader engagement, they open up a social space through which they complicate

conventional Russian media and political gender representations. See, for example, my discussion of Ekaterina and her community service activities in Chapter 5.

Therefore, while I find Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and distinction invaluable to this project, I also stress the agency through which women form their own capitalist subjectivities. Women are not involved in a social movement, because this is very politically and personally risky in today's Russia. Yet, their self-presentations and entrepreneurial practices make new notions of gender and personhood publicly legible, as many contemporary social movements do.

The context: urban Russia in the late 2000s

In the 2000s there has been an exponential increase in the number of Russian women who own their own businesses. However, these women remain a small minority of entrepreneurs in Russia, and they face many challenges in the workforce and their broader social lives in light of the fact that business is widely perceived as incommensurable with womanhood. As Erika Johnson (2007) writes, "For women, having a career (and not just a job) in the new marketplace involves somehow balancing contradictory identities of being professionally capable and being a normal woman, that is, one who is not interested in a professional career (73)." Scholarly work on women and post-socialism has generally emphasized poor and working-class women. Even my Russian friends and fellow ethnographers of Russia have volunteered that businesswomen (*delovye zhenshchiny*, or *bisnesledi*) are exceptions or abnormal (*nenormal'nye*), and therefore have little to reveal about contemporary Russian issues. I contend, however, that these women, by virtue of their unique position at the intersection

of class, gender, and social anxieties about contemporary life, can reveal a great deal about social forces in Russia and how these forces have led to the formation of new experiences and social spaces.

Most of the women participating in my research own small, service-based businesses in sectors such as tourism, private educational services, and intercultural communications. Others are the heads of larger corporations or are actively trying to start their own businesses—by attending business school, for example. Also included in the first group are women who are affiliated with a transnational cosmetics company, who have moved from being direct-saleswomen of cosmetics to the title of “Director.” This means that they are no longer selling cosmetics, but organizing the training and sales work of other women, from whose sales they significantly profit. These women are in certain respects self-employed: their incomes depend entirely on the profits of the people they manage.

I choose to group together women from these various professional categories primarily because they constitute a group at the level of Russian political and popular public imaginaries: during my fieldwork between 2005-2009, Russians I know have used the terms for “businesswoman” or the term “career-oriented woman” (*zhenshchina, orientirovannaya na kar’eru*), with various connotations depending on speaker and context, to denote women who do not let the “obligations” of “personal life,” such as housework, child and elder care, and role expectations by spouses and others, delimit their advancement to prestigious work positions. In other words, I begin from the position that what matters more than a woman’s actual work status are her goals and the everyday ways in which she strives towards them. Women of a variety of statuses are

grouped together in everyday life, as a category of people possessing specific character traits (i.e. “tough,” “decisive,” or “purposeful”). These associations were themes in print and television media, at dozens of conferences run by politicians and businesswomen, among entrepreneurial women, and in my everyday conversations with Russians of various professional backgrounds. The lives of women in various career stages and positions reveal something about business as a site of social tensions for women. Throughout this dissertation I will be as explicit as possible about which women I am discussing. I further discuss my rationale for participant selection in my subsequent chapter on methodology.

The largest part of my field research took place in St. Petersburg, over twelve months during former President Vladimir Putin’s “Year of the Child” (2007) and “Year of the Family” (2008).^{vii} Billboards featuring young, white, attractive families with two children could be found on each city block in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Posters lining the long subway escalators read “Love for the motherland starts with the family” (*Liubov’ k rodine nachinaetsia s sem’i*). One prominent poster featured the traditional painted wooden *matrushki* dolls with the seven or eight figurines inside the “mother” doll taken out and encircling her. State-sponsored commercials warned young men and women about the isolating effects of childlessness in later life. One television show after another featured the President and his officials rewarding the mothers of large families for their service to the country, and talk show hosts alternately reprimanded or rewarded

^{vii} By January 2008, I began to make trips to Moscow to meet with informants who had relocated there as well as the friends of St. Petersburg women I knew. In Chapter 2, Methodology, I discuss my reasons for choosing St. Petersburg as the original setting. I also had many conversations in the United States during 2008 and 2009, when research participants traveled to New York City for business or visited me in Providence from American cities where they had relocated.

young women who prioritized their careers or their husbands and children. State-sponsored public holidays and conferences for local professionals celebrated models of the nuclear family that suggested men were the breadwinners and women were the housewives. Even some popular women's magazines such as *Businesswoman* contained advice columns instructing professional women to support relationships with their husbands by feigning ignorance about business, finance, and the world outside the home, as well as instructing them on other behaviors to reassure men of their intellectual superiority.^{viii}

These discourses were not distinctive to 2007-2008. Rather, they were a continuation of those in the 1990s through the 2000s, connecting Russian women's reproductive practices with the nation's vitality and morality. Such messages reflected and reproduced pro-natal popular attitudes that first grew more intense during 1991-1992, the year when death rates first began to outnumber birth rates in Russia and widespread moral panic ensued. In the 1990s, pro-natal messages found reinforcement from the abrupt removal of state welfare services such as childcare, including the spikes in gender discrimination that I have already noted. During the Putin era (1999-2008) birth rates remained far below replacement level and divorce rates continued to be high.^{ix} Pro-natalist discourses intensified at a political level and by extension, on state-owned television and other sectors of the media. They were accompanied by policies such as

^{viii} Pro-natalist policies and discourses are multi-vocal and reflect various framings of motherhood and its relation to an imagined Russian nation. In Chapter 4, *A History of Tensions*, I elaborate on these nuances.

^{ix} As of August 2008, divorce rates in Russia were 58 per 100 marriages (Sokolova 2008). The birthrate as of December 2009 was 1.5 children per woman (Population Reference Bureau).

Putin's restriction on second and third-trimester abortions in 2003—the first since the ending of Stalin's ban in 1955—as well as more positive local and federal measures (2006-) offering limited material rewards to mothers and young families for foster care, adoption, and births, especially of second and third children. Russian sociologist Anna Temkina (2008) calls these public messages and policies during the 2000s a “cultural patriarchy” (*kul'tur'ny patriarkhat*). She describes a “strengthening of patriarchal tendencies in the symbolic sphere [of politics and the media]...and the maintenance of structured gender inequalities (53),”^x despite contradictory trends among educated, urban women, who “describe themselves as responsible, competent, and active,” and “strive for control over their own lives (21).”^{xi} The 2000s have been a period of rapid economic growth in Russia, and more women than in the previous decade have been able to pursue careers by starting their own businesses. Educated young women therefore face a dilemma distinctive from women pursuing entrepreneurial careers the 1990s: expectations of loved ones and representations of womanhood on the urban landscape contrast with improved opportunities to be breadwinners by running their own businesses.

Alexandra and Svetlana: subjectivity and place

^x “Я же остаюсь исследователем, чья позиция связана с российским контекстом, для которого характерна значительная степень гендерной модернизации и сексуальная революция, хотя такая модернизация происходит в России в контексте усиления патриархатных тенденций в символической сфере (‘культурный патриархат’) и сохранения структурного гендерного неравенства (Темкина 2008:53).”

^{xi} “Женщины описывают себя как ответственных, компетентных и активных, они ориентируются на партнерские отношения и стремятся к контролю над собственной жизнью (Темкина 2008:21).”

During the fall of 2007, I realized that women sometimes spoke of their dilemma of balancing home and family as that of a “fragmented self” (*razryv lichnosti*). Through their participation in activities such as motivational seminars, I observed them creating what Denise Roman would call a “new, empowering women’s ‘sayable (113),’”—in the case of my research, making themselves legitimate as businesspeople and as women.^{xii} This legitimization of subject positions was geared primarily towards themselves; it enabled women to move through their everyday lives with certain behaviors that reflected and reinforced inner confidence. Yet, as I discuss in this dissertation, self-legitimization also held more readily observable repercussions for these women’s social and public lives.

Women had different strategies for navigating tensions they saw in public gender discourses. In the fall of 2007, I met twenty-five year-olds Alexandra and Svetlana through a loose network of women affiliated with the United States consulate in Saint Petersburg. Alexandra was a manager and head engineer at a transnational firm based in New York. She told me upon our first meeting that when she looked around herself on the street, she did not “see” herself anywhere. Public representations of women featured them either as married mothers and housewives (in state-sponsored media), or as young,

^{xii} In 1989, a number of North American “motivational” companies such as Lifespring, Inc., arranged to come to Moscow and St. Petersburg, with the assistance of the Russian Academy of Sciences. These companies offered seminars and lectures to a variety of audiences, including and especially aspiring Russian entrepreneurs. The ideologies and media sources first promoted by these companies focused on particular ideals of self-sufficiency and profit and related them to aspects of peoples’ lives that reached far beyond the workplace. These seminars and their ideas and media have gained wide popular resonance over the past two decades. In this dissertation, I refer to a variety of such activities in which women participate as “motivational seminars.”

sexually attractive businesswomen (in women's magazines such as *Cosmo*). Women, Alexandra said, were treated in politics and the media in terms of isolated social functions. Because they had little voice in mainstream media and in public policy,^{xiii} the concept that they could be both businesspeople and caretakers was left out in these circumscribed portrayals. Alexandra, herself unmarried and without children, worked hard and spent a lot of money on maintaining a "feminine" appearance but also cared for ill elderly relatives who were the reason she left her home city for St. Petersburg in the first place. She worked hard to support them financially and not just for her material gain. Alexandra was not a mother and could not benefit from recent policies by the state to provide mothers with financial rewards; but she had her own familial responsibilities. Alexandra had a boyfriend of several months. He was a graduate student and unemployed, and he lived in the apartment that Alexandra owned and stayed in part time, when she was not with her family. She had little to talk about with him, she said, but he kept her company. She volunteered that the sex was also not bad.

In Russia, Alexandra did not see a future for herself in marriage and children and it was partly because of this that she wanted to leave one day for the United States. Although her social future was uncertain abroad, as well, she knew that there was more economic stability in the United States for her to survive on a pension. We were sitting in a café and Alexandra pointed across the street to one of the city's most expensive shopping malls, outside of which stood a tiny crowd of elderly communist activists holding portraits of Stalin. She told me that in many ways, she believed that Russians

^{xiii} In making this claim, I am not asserting that there were no women in politics or the Russian media. Rather, their presence has declined dramatically since the late 1980s. Furthermore, gender scholars studying Russia have asserted that those women who do work in these spheres are complicit in the dissemination of gendered representations.

would be better off if they returned to a socialist government, where resources were distributed more equally. However, she believed that people such as herself, who had wealth, would be the first to be persecuted, as they had been in Russia each time there had been a totalitarian ruler. As a woman, Alexandra thought that there would be nothing for her to do under such a regime because the work opportunities that women were placed in even under socialism were highly limited and marginalized. She feared that Russia was indeed moving towards a totalitarian future, and that she would have “no place” in that future—although she did not know what exactly having no place would mean on the ground.

More broadly, Alexandra’s emigration plans were connected with her sense of uncertainty (*neuverennost’*) about her future in Russia. She sensed that her presence in St. Petersburg was not helping her relatives much, anyway, and that money was what they really needed. Most striking to me about Alexandra’s story was the tensions she saw between her problematic role as a businesswoman—tensions inflected by attitudes about both class and gender—and her ability to have a sense of social worth in Russia. She herself had grown up in an upper-class family in Russia and was the daughter of wealthy businesspeople who had once been engineers. Alexandra had learned English from an early age and had the education and financial resources to leave Russia and survive in the United States on her own. She was actively trying to do this. Her background and career should theoretically have made her completely capable of thriving in contemporary Russia. However, anxieties she had about social uncertainties in Russia and especially, for unmarried, childless women, compelled her to leave. As Alexandra spoke about her emigration plans, she sometimes spoke about her boyfriend joining her, and other times,

not. He was willing to go but Alexandra found herself doing most of the work to fill out his visa applications. Therefore, she feared that he would be someone she would be responsible for taking care of when she moved to the United States.

Alexandra's story shows that one's ability to survive in Russia is not necessarily about having people around who supply you with material needs; indeed, Alexandra did not see a husband or anyone else other than herself as willing or able to do this. Rather, she believed that not being married and being childless would make her feel as though she had no place in Russia. She had no concrete ideas about what social illegitimacy might entail in her future. However, throughout our conversations she did bring up topics, such as her fear that no one would be available to care for her if she was sick. In Russia where healthcare facilities can be understaffed and poorly resourced, it is up to family and those close to a person to help negotiate more attentive, humane conditions. One's personal connections also ensure that essentials such as food and clean bed-linens are supplied during a hospital stay. These concerns came up when I asked Alexandra about her friends, and she told me that they had either emigrated from Russia, had ended up in prison for involvement in the drug trade during the 1990s, or that she had trouble maintaining contact with them since moving to St. Petersburg and assuming her familial and work responsibilities there. During a blizzard one night in February 2008, after Alexandra learned that I was sick with the flu, she showed up at my apartment with medicine and a carton of orange juice. She smiled kindly as she stood in the doorway and said that no one had been able to care for her when she first arrived in St. Petersburg and a childhood illness began recurring. She said to me, "In Russia, you could die, and no one would know."

In her book, *Dreaming of a Mail-Order Husband*, Johnson (2007) characterizes women's decisions to leave the country—"to find a better man (154)"—as indexing a range of gendered and socioeconomic problems that they experience in Russia. Through this reasoning, Johnson argues, a woman can justify "a relinquishment of one's civil responsibility to stay and try to build a just and equitable society (154)." Alexandra was organizing to leave permanently because she could not imagine remaining in Russia and feeling valued enough to survive there, let alone acting as an agent of change, as Johnson suggests. That is what our conversations were really about: not even a scenario in which she faced political persecution like the older Soviet elite she referred to, but total social irrelevance, and the absence of a conceivable future.^{xiv}

While it may be crucial to understand the reasoning through which women such as Alexandra justify leaving Russia, my focus in this dissertation is to examine why and how other professional women remain in Russia and forge social lives there. I am particularly interested in how some women appropriate discursive resources from a diffuse variety of sources, including self-help literature (most in translation, but some local) and motivational seminars in corporate and smaller public settings such as New Age bookstores, for example.^{xv} This body of work can be full of internal contradictions in that its Russian leaders sometimes condemn a focus on profit-making, evoking an older, socialist solidarity among Russians in the workplace, even as the techniques these

^{xiv} In a future project, I will examine the experiences and logics through which women such as Alexandra decide to leave Russia permanently.

^{xv} The first traces of these media and programs appeared in Russia in 1989, when the American corporation New Life, entered Russia via an agreement with the Russian Academy of Sciences—the week before the Berlin wall fell. New Life offered seminars and lectures about the meanings of success to Russians of all different professions, women and men.

same leaders teach at other times include material profit as a major goal. Some women take considerable risks in order to engage in motivational seminars, for example, and have lost a great deal of money. Yet, amidst so many contradictory ideas, women internalize ones that help them to legitimate their unconventional career aspirations to themselves.

Those who are most involved in these activities take the idea of positive thinking (*kak pozitivno myshlyt'*) and incorporate it into ideals of womanhood that emphasize self-reliance and a willingness to venture into uncharted gender roles with hope (*nadezhda*), rather than pessimism (*pesimism*). Since Russianness and especially, Russian femininity have long been associated with suffering (Ries 1997:57-58, 108-110, 143), it is socially significant for women to reconceptualize how hope about their prospects for upward socioeconomic mobility is commensurable with womanhood. Further, through their engagement in self-affirming activities, women are finding other professionals for whom their ideas about the future are legible—and who therefore exchange support in a variety of ways. In discussing these knowledge-based networks, I offer a response to the question posed by Jennifer Patino (2009) about how middle class Russians' moral framings of their own entrepreneurship achieve wider social resonance: "If the intersection of expanding commercial activities and long-standing moral narratives is not an antagonistic confrontation of two opposite and conflicting forces, how can it be better described? If these small moments are not 'trivial,' then what is their significance in the long run?" (219) I contend that in intensively reflecting on the purpose of entrepreneurship and how it fits into their lives, women have an audience of other professionals. Most of these professionals are female, with similar social dilemmas.

Furthermore, through their involvement in alternative forms of media, such as the local woman-run Petersburg magazine *Zhenshchina i Politika* (“Women and Politics”), women gain a wider public voice.

Some of the women I focus on in this dissertation have neither the resources nor the opportunities to emigrate permanently as Alexandra does. However, it is in part because of this that they have had to find people who can help them gain cultural capital and experience within Russia. These are people with whom they can engage in what Patino calls the “moral alchemy” of rendering market activities socially legitimate.

The story of Elena has a great deal to reveal about currents of change in gender constructions within contemporary Russian culture. When I met Elena, she was working as a project director at a small business owned by two other women, where she was the second in command. During my fieldwork, she applied and was accepted to a two-year master’s program in international business and public relations in the United States. Instead of thinking about her education as a stepping stone to permanent emigration, Elena planned on using her degree to return to Russia and establish a tourism firm that would teach foreigners about everyday customs and values in Russia. Elena’s plans to begin her firm were intricately tied to her efforts to care for her aunt, who had raised her. Elena’s aunt was a former doctor in her forties who had been severely depressed and unable to work since Elena was eighteen. For Elena, talking with her aunt nightly about her plans to return to Russia and found her own business was a way to instill hope in the older woman that the two of them would have a prosperous and interesting future together in Russia. Elena had used this strategy as a way of caring for her aunt since the latter first returned from a psychiatric hospital in the late 1990s:

I tried to hold my own every day, to arrive home in a good mood so that I could pull her into this good mood with me; to joke somehow, to show her the world. To show her how interesting the world is, to invite her to the theater, to share with her my impressions of the world. Somehow, to spend time with her. I cannot say that this was easy.^{xvi}

Beyond financial security, Elena viewed her career as vital to her existing familial responsibilities. She saw her upcoming professional education, her friendships with foreigners such as me, and her correspondences with her American boyfriend, whom she had met over the Internet, as parts of building this future, which would be full of interesting things to do and to learn. Elena had approached me herself at a dinner thrown by a mutual American friend whom we both knew through the United States Consulate. This was in September, 2007. She had heard that I was interested in the lives of Russian businesswomen. She wore a long blue sequined gown that on anyone who carried herself with less confidence may have seemed overdone for the informal occasion. In a gesture uncharacteristic among Russian women I knew, Elena extended her hand and firmly shook mine. She explained to me what her job was and the plans she had to move to the United States. She said, in English as fluent as Alexandra's, "I think we can really help one another."^{xvii} She asked me if I would talk in English about my research to high school students at a nonprofit where she facilitated foreign language programs in the evenings. Also, she said, "I have a lot to say to you about business. I believe it is the

^{xvi} "Я старалась просто каждый день держать саму себя, приходить в хорошем настроении, чтобы ее этим настроением вытаскивать; шутить как-то, мир показывать—какой он интересный там. Звать в театр или как-то, делиться какими-то впечатлениями. Как-то время с ней проводить. Не могу сказать, что это было легко."

^{xvii} Unlike Alexandra, whose parents had sent her to the United States for a year in the 1990s, Svetlana had learned English through a British boyfriend whom she met on the Internet.

most important form of international diplomacy: Russians aren't otherwise interested in understanding people from other cultures. Of *course* people want to understand one another when they can make money," she said.

In my experience, it was not uncommon for Russians to initiate social interactions in ways that clearly spelled out what they expected of me in return for some form of assistance—with my work or otherwise. In circumstances such as my relationship with Elena, both the offering and reception of help on both our parts were mutually rewarding: She wanted to tell me about her work and what it meant to her, as much as she wanted my assistance with the nonprofit. In the end, I felt the same and learned a great deal through the conversations I had with her students.

Two days later, Elena and I sat having tea at the company where she worked. I was reading about her nonprofit work and she was reading my dissertation proposal. After some time she looked up and said, "I see myself here." I asked her what she saw and she told me one reason was that she had given up on finding a Russian man to marry. The last man she had been with was a Russian she had lived with for two years, who had grown jealous of her close friendship with a female professor at university. He would forbid Elena to talk with this woman and discourage her also from establishing relationships with other friends. Elena explained that it was difficult to find men in Russia who recognized women as more than wives and mothers—from her perspective, just as Putin and his administration did not. The problem was that Elena wanted to stay in Russia and establish a business there.

By the time I met her, Elena's peers from school were married and had young children. She did not feel estranged from them, but felt that she and they had nothing to

talk about. Elena expressed a similar perspective as Alexandra's: that the state and others were removed from her own interests, not all of which revolved around marriage to a Russian man and childbirth. She believed that federal resources might have been devoted to concerns such as political stability and a cleaner environment; such provisions would in turn help to heal her aunt's emotional state. Instead, Elena said, these resources were devoted to encouraging women to have more babies, in addition to building up Russia's military. Elena also thought that it would be difficult to find a man in Russia who was both responsible and hardworking himself, and who was able to relate to her as a friend and not simply a wife. She felt obligated to her aunt, for whom Russia was home, and, as I will show in this dissertation, she was creating a social space for herself in Russia. She had begun to participate in motivational workshops at a local New Age bookstore, which promised men and women "success" in their "personal and professional life" through a series of positive thinking techniques. The seminar was a space where Elena worked out her ideas for how her business could play a positive role in her country. She also learned more techniques that she could use to cultivate hope in her aunt, whom she feared was suicidal. It was also through this seminar that Elena met a growing network of women and men who were similarly interested in what she referred to as "self-development."

Elena learned about the seminar in the first place when she approached an older businesswoman, Vera, giving a lecture called "How to Succeed in Business" at the bookstore. Vera invited her to the seminars. Throughout this dissertation, I use the term "self-development" as a locally common proxy denoting a range of activities that play a large role in many women's lives, including and especially the practices through which they establish their businesses. In corporate settings as well as in many other settings

such as that bookstore, women I knew were spending a great deal of time, money, and energy trying to develop themselves as whole persons by reflecting on their purpose (*tseľ*) in life and by thinking about how this purpose could be applied to a variety of different situations in order to live through periods of great difficulty—periods when they felt alienated.

For example, Vera had spent the 1990s taking part in an entrepreneurial training program for managers in Moscow, led by a company from North America. Her story sheds light on certain foreign corporate practices in the 1990s that held ambiguous implications for businesswomen just starting out—even though Vera ultimately deployed the knowledge she gained to her advantage. Using her Soviet university education in foreign language pedagogy, Vera in 1995 had opened a highly profitable small business contracting out foreign language tutoring to local businesses.^{xviii} She told me that the business afforded her total financial self-reliance vis-a-vis her husband. She learned about the entrepreneurial training program through her sister, a musician, who had participated in self-development seminars by another North American company and mentioned to Vera another program in self-development specifically for businesspeople. Vera entered a five-day workshop in Moscow and was highly skeptical at first of the claims made by the workshop's foreign leader, including, for example, that Russians needed to take responsibility for their lives rather than complaining about a deficit of state services. By the third day, she was convinced, however, of the program's efficacy

^{xviii} In Chapter 2, I further comment on generational differences in women's access to social, symbolic, and financial capital. See Kristin Ghodsee's work, *The Red Riviera* (2005), for a more direct discussion of how women educated during the late socialist period (1960s-80s) have drawn upon previously gained skills in their contemporary market practices.

for her own life. She eventually was persuaded to give up her company and join the team of trainers, opening her own franchise in her home city of Belgorod. Despite being responsible for all of the overhead, Vera was contractually obligated to turn over a portion of her profit to the company headquarters in Moscow each month. During the 1998 financial crisis, the company went bankrupt, and pulled out of the Russian market. This left Vera and her Russian associates in severe debt. However, Vera was ultimately able to use her training and the cache she gained from having worked with foreigners, in order to establish her own moderately profitable motivational seminar business.

In addition to eventually enabling her new career, these seminars taught Vera a particular set of life skills that she continues to use. These include the ability to remember moments from her past in which she felt strong, in order to feel that way in any new situation; the ability to articulate her purpose in life, so that any difficulty that she experienced became less important by comparison; and using her certainty in herself in order to develop particular communication skills. For example, Vera learned to quickly determine whether or not she could trust a person she did not yet know. Later on, she used these skills in various situations. After doctors diagnosed her with a fatal illness, Vera focused on her personal strengths and her purpose for the future in order to struggle with the symptoms. Later on in 2004, a close friend and her husband were killed by the local mafia in a property dispute. Vera again convinced herself that she was able to help build a more peaceful future. She similarly reflected on her goals and life possibilities and decided that she was not getting enough satisfaction out of her marriage. She decided to divorce her husband, who, along with her sister-in-law, continually belittled her and tried to discourage her from working. In November 2005, after Vera lost her

apartment in Belgorod, she gathered the courage to move to Saint Petersburg in order to build her life anew. Vera's story is a particular example of dealing with the challenges faced by many Russians in the post-Soviet neo-liberal socioeconomic landscape of 1990s Russia. She negotiated between the capitalistic rapaciousness of foreign companies and a diminished state support system. Vera ultimately translated these challenges into a sustainable set of local entrepreneurial practices that she also applied to her interpersonal relationships.

Vera and other women of various ages took part in similar motivational seminars that covered many different topics and aimed to help people achieve various purposes. What these seminars had in common was a focus on people changing themselves at the personal level in order to change other parts of their lives. Many women began to take part in these activities within their corporate workplaces, when they or others they knew brought in outside companies who specialized in teaching people how to be more self-sufficient and how to apply certain traits, such as confidence, in order to succeed in multiple areas of their lives. Some of these activities have roots in Western corporations. Others involve group psychotherapy led by Russian professionals; and women such as Vera create certain motivational services themselves from an eclectic collection of sources and sell them to other corporations and people. As a group, these women rendered challenges such as others' insults of them as opportunities to test, affirm, and develop skills they learned in self-help settings. They are also sites where women meet other Russians who are similarly interested in self-development and forge social ties based on friendship, companionate romances—with Russian and foreign businessmen and with each other—and the sharing of professional experience. Women's knowledge

that there are others who share an interest in self-reliance legitimizes major life course decisions such as divorce or going to business school abroad.

Through the bookstore seminars, Elena articulated how business was intertwined with her role as a caretaker for her aunt and her future children. It was also a space in which she met others who she would keep in touch with over the coming year, who she knew would help her resettle once she had returned to Russia and help her to start her business. Their presence in her life supported her decision to end her relationship with her American boyfriend when he eventually began calling and writing to Elena less frequently. Throughout our conversations, Elena emphasized to me that the motivational seminars she first attended at the bookstore had helped her to become more “certain” (*uverenna*) of herself and to be focused on her own goals as a businesswoman, rather than on the uncertainties she saw in Russia’s political and economic future.

Complicating the neo-liberal subject

In this dissertation, my focus lies on women such as Elena: women who envisioned themselves living in Russia in the future and who were trying to carve niches for themselves—to build intimate relationships with others who respected them both as women and leaders in the business world. Elena did this by actively engaging discourses that I refer to continually in this dissertation as “neo-liberal.” Scholars such as Wendy Brown (2005:37-59) posit neo-liberalism as a pervasive ideology that “figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for “self care (40).” Brown critiques neo-liberal rationalities for displacing any leftist critique of structural inequalities. Analyses such as those by Ehrenreich (2009) and

Martin (2007) advance similar critiques of corporate training programs, life coaches, and self-help literature in American culture. Accounts of neo-liberal policies and attitudes in post-socialist territories have emphasized diminished public services in the wake of IMF-led structural readjustment policies, growing socioeconomic stratification over the past twenty years, poorly resourced social services such as reproductive healthcare, and a disproportionate focus among Russians and foreign aid workers alike on “individualized” solutions to structural problems (Rivkin-Fish 2005:148-151). Both Michele Rivkin-Fish (2004, 2005) and Galina Lindquist (2005) have underscored how conversational methods on the part of St. Petersburg healthcare workers and magical healers, respectively, encourage personal responsibility. From the perspectives of some of the health practitioners in Rivkin-Fish’s work, for example, for a woman to control her sexual health means making decisions with her future roles as wife and mother in mind (Rivkin-Fish 2005:13). Both Rivkin-Fish and Lindquist point out that these forms of self-reliance actually do reflect shifting ideas of Russian morality.

The “natural” selves that people are asked to develop reflect the political order of the contemporary moment—a diminished social safety net and concurrently, the growing resonance of narratives of personal responsibility and self-sufficiency that are actively promoted in institutional contexts. Rivkin-Fish names such strategies, which locate “‘transition’ in one’s own attitudes, behaviors, and commitments,” “individualizing strategies (2005:7).” In this dissertation, I sometimes use Rivkin-Fish’s term to call attention to women’s ideas that change should or does happen at the level of a singular people, not collectively. In her work, Rivkin-Fish also uses the term “personalizing strategies” to designate survival strategies that rely on peoples’ personal networks. In

lumping together what are really these two approaches under one term, I want to place the analytical focus squarely on these women's ideas of certain successes as primarily self-orchestrated. In Chapter 4, I parse out the different forms of self-reliance that women deployed and the social circumstances surrounding their strategies. When I am speaking more generally rather than about specific cases, I use the term "self-reliance" as a proxy to designate multiple ways in which women understood their own resourcefulness.

The "individualizing strategies" that some Russian businesswomen use—for example, walking on hot coals to develop confidence and decisiveness—are different in that some women see these efforts self-consciously as part of an ongoing effort of "self-development," which also includes a deliberate effort to dissociate themselves from long-term sexual relationships and friendships. Emotional self-reliance, even when one is married, means awareness that another person could leave or perish at any time, and confidence at being able to carry out one's daily routines even in such a situation. In varying ways and with varying degrees of self-reflexivity, women are infusing a sense of an *independent* self with its own moral integrity. Women's selfhoods, furthermore, were determined by their own (allegedly entirely reflexive) self-images rather than others' fragmented expectations of them. An important qualifier is that women sometimes believed that motherhood was a crucial part of any woman's identity. The difference was that self-reliance was the basis for motherhood—not marriage—as it was the basis for being effective managers. The latter might be seen as equally novel as theorizing self-reliance as a basis for motherhood; sometimes, the only way for women to gain material capital to start firms was through wealthy husbands. I observed some women, rather than

marrying, making shorter term connections with wealthier people whom they approached on the Internet and at international events in urban Russia. These were not relationships that women cited as helping them start businesses, but often, what women saw as relationships of mutual and equal benefit.

Distinctive from the scholarship on neo-liberalism I have just cited, these women's individualizing strategies focus decidedly on self-reliance—in relation to other people, and from outside definitions of morality—as a moral end in itself: women are valuable for more than just what they can do for others. The quality of their experiences matters, as well, and further, enables the social roles that others expect of them.

A fascinating nuance, however, is that the process itself of gaining self-reliance implicates and requires the participation of other people—particularly in the cases of women who pursue more collective forms of self-development such as motivational seminars. To the extent that these women are either pointedly ignoring others' social expectations or appropriating them on their own terms, an analysis of these women's lives enables me to further complicate Brown's philosophical argument that neo-liberal ideologies of self-care are devoid of social critique.

It is important to note that an emphasis on independent selfhood is present in Russian culture and literature—a point I elaborate on in Chapter 4. In certain instances when women appropriate what we might characterize as neo-liberal messages, their interpretations may just as easily reflect Russian cultural and historical currents as they do transnational discourses. These are complexities that I explore throughout this dissertation.

Belonging: a post-identity politics

In their narratives, women used all kinds of language to describe the ways they were or were not a part of Russian society. As with Alexandra and Elena, there were different degrees to which women saw or envisioned making social contributions as professional women. One theme that emerged across women's narratives was a heavy emphasis on emotional self-reliance as a mode of being. Emotional self-reliance included deliberate, situational rejections of stable allegiances, not just to people but to institutions and ideas, such as being Russian. These social strategies were neither stable nor universal among entrepreneurial women. Therefore, I believe that treating women's reconfigurations of selfhood as processes of identity formation would not adequately capture the significance, to them, that the idea of complete self-determination held.

How might these processes be conceptualized? What lies at stake for women? In my view, self-development and the temporal communities that women form in the process may more accurately be characterized as new forms of *belonging*. In using this term, I mean to underscore a more visceral sense that one "has a place," to use Alexandra's terminology, not necessarily a physical place but that one does things in society that one believes others need. Elena's plans for her tourism business and the multiple ways she saw it promoting peace and understanding constitute one example of what I characterize as belonging.

In the lives of businesswomen I know, belonging can also entail the knowledge that there exist people in the world with similar priorities and intellectual interests. For Elena, this meant the possibility of talking about her favorite books on positive thinking and business with Russians as well as foreigners. In a very different vein, Alexandra and

other wealthier women emphasized the importance of having something to do (*chem zanimatsya*) that developed the self (*lichnost'*) and that was less unaffected by the uncertainties of family life and the global economy. Alexandra's martial arts classes were a good example, in that she used these classes to cultivate calm and self-reliance. Implied in the value Alexandra placed on her favorite pastimes was the fact that there were other people with whom she could do these things, albeit not always the same people. The interactions women talked about were based on the development and internalization of a very diffuse body of knowledge concerning self-development and its social implications for subjects. They were not based on long-standing, local social ties—which these women understood as less reliable and important. Women stressed how their knowledge of others' existence whose priorities better aligned with their own expanded their imaginations of what was possible and legitimate for them.

In designating the term “belonging” to describe what lay at stake for women, I hope to place this research in dialogue with scholarship that I see as grappling with how to theorize social connectedness in a contemporary era of mass migration, highly permeable national borders, rapid international flows of capital and information (Biehl and Moran-Thomas 2009; Comaroff 2009 ^{xix}; Hausner 2009 ^{xx}), as well as in contexts of political instability—of stark disjoints between peoples' contemporary social lives and

^{xix} I refer here to remarks by Jean Comaroff during a talk at Brown University's Pembroke Center for Research and Teaching on Women, on October 14, 2009. During her discussion of her and John Comaroff's book, *Ethnicity, Inc.* (2009), she referred to what she saw as a common search in contemporary societies for “a more tangible, felt, real identity.”

^{xx} Talk by Sandra Hausner, entitled, “Work, Migration, and Professional Belonging for Nepali Nurses in Great Britain.” Population Studies and Training Center (PSTC), Brown University, April 9th, 2009.

their pasts (e.g. Han 2004; Biehl 2005). I build on this scholarship by showing the complicated links between women's everyday narratives of self and highly pervasive neo-liberal and nationalistic public messages—discourses that remain to be more clearly linked with peoples' subjectivities. In this way, I demonstrate how what may appear to be peoples' disengagement from social life, may actually represent new forms of subjectivity and sociality. These new ways of being have consequences for women themselves as well as Russian society—the kinds of families women form, the ways they make decisions in their pre-existing and future relationships, and the meanings that business begins to hold for women.

Repackaging the person

Self-development involved women's repackaging of themselves as consisting of their own emotions and thoughts rather than their interpersonal relationships: to use Margaret Strathern's terminology, moving from being "dividuals" to "individuals" (1988:13). For example, I attended a five-day seminar in Moscow, led by Vera. Five other local businesswomen she knew from the 1990s were there, along with a friend's brother, Alexei. He was a computer programmer who told me that it was his participation in a different North American training program that made him feel able to leave his career in the army. What happened during these programs was multi-layered and complex, but I will describe one exercise on the last day that illustrates this repackaging:

Vera asked us each to repeat statements beginning with "I am" (*Ya*), asking us louder until we shifted from defining ourselves in terms of relationships (i.e. "I am a mother" or "I am a manager") to defining ourselves in terms of our emotions (i.e. "I am

calm,” “I am strong,” or “I am empathetic.”) The idea was, as Vera put it, to learn to control our experiences by controlling our emotions. The participants who went before me reported many changes in their emotional states during the single exercise, such as “I am sad,” “I am hopeful,” and “I am joyous,” and two alternately laughed and cried. The former soldier, Alexei, and I had the longest periods of questioning, before we began to talk about our emotional states—for instance, “I am tired” (Alexei) and “I am anxious” (me). Vera turned on the lights and looked at us. “The only thing that we can control,” she said, “are our emotions. Nothing else. The better we know ourselves and our internal states, the better we are able to control them.” Addressing Alexei, she said, “Women have a special ability to do this,” and he nodded respectfully. Then Vera looked at me and said:

The twin towers were supposed to be built so that they were indestructible, but the builders knew that they weren’t indestructible, and they just didn’t want people to know the truth. That there isn’t any stability in the world, actually—that there is no guarantee that we can get a piece of bread the next day. That the only guarantee is that we are calm emotionally. Everyone wants stability, but the only stability that is possible is emotional stability—stability in your internal state (*stabil’nost’ po vnutrennom sostoianii*).

Vera’s reference to the twin towers suggests that instability is everywhere, not just in Russia—and is the fault of a ubiquitous “they” (*oni*) who Vera referred to in different conversations but would never identify.^{xxi} She looked at me as she referred to the twin towers, and several times during that seminar, I sensed that I was being addressed as an

^{xxi} Later on that day Vera would bring up the twin towers again. She was encouraging us to make “dream collages” representing our futures. She told us that we could include money—indeed, an earlier exercise in telepathy had taught the other women in the room how to increase their profits—but she warned them to have other goals for their businesses, as well. Looking at me, she said, “You know why the twin towers fell, don’t you?” I shook my head slowly. “It’s because people working there were focused only on profit. God was saying that it was time for businesspeople to pay for their greed in blood (*Bog dumal, schto krov’ nuzhna byla rasplatit’*).”

American who would benefit from her knowledge, as a Russian woman, of how to manage instability.

Certain things that Vera and other businesswomen said suggested that they embraced, rather than distanced themselves from, contemporary Russian gender constructs. Along with suffering, the association of women with emotions is a theme in Russian culture spanning pre-Revolutionary times to the present. The idea that women are more “emotional” and therefore best suited for caretaking roles is common in everyday conversations among urban Russians. Vera’s discussion of emotions, however, is distinctive from conventional framings because she treated them as instruments of self-possession and social control for people to wield in a multitude of social contexts.

One afternoon during the seminar, she, the other participants and I sat drinking tea. Vera picked up a wooden *matrushka* doll from the living room shelf and took it apart, revealing the many little wooden figures inside. She looked at the rest of us and said, “We are becoming like fractals of the universe (*fraktaly vseleniya*).” (The hour before we had been discussing a version of a classic Mesoamerican calendar and its notions of fractals, on which Vera had based much of the seminar.) “We are also fractals of one another; we can understand one another even though we are different.” A message throughout the seminar discussions was that the emotional competency we were gaining would enable us to function successfully in various settings, including by using the “womanly” (*zhenstveny*) traits of nurturance to become more empathetic and effective managers and deal brokers. I interpret Vera’s statement as suggesting that contained within each person are a range of traits that may be developed—the same range of traits that others have as their potential.

Vera's discussion of fractals presents an interesting contrast to a statement she had made earlier that week, when the two of us were on an escalator in the Moscow subway. I had pointed up at the poster that read, "The nation begins with the family," with a photograph of the same *matrushki* dolls featured. Before I even asked Vera what she thought of the poster, she had cut in: "For the past thirty years in Russia, we have become less focused on things and more focused on values. Putin knows the importance of women in building this country. He knows that the family is a fractal of the nation." Vera herself had no children and was told by doctors when she was in her late 20s that she would be unable to conceive, due to complications from cancer of the uterus. Yet, she never talked with me about wanting children. Reflecting back, I am intrigued by her two, potentially contradictory points about family as fractal of the nation, and each person as a fractal of the universe. In my view these two statements suggest that she sees a place for herself—including her "womanly" qualities—in many social contexts in, but also beyond, Russia. Yet, for her and other women, as a part of a nuclear family, Vera's husband and relatives' expectations suggested a far more limited place for her than what she imagined now. She was engaging older gendered constructions, such as an association of women with emotions and caretaking, giving them new meanings in the context of self-development and business.

Sketching the Scene: The moralization of self-reliance in post-socialist Russia

There are a number of social influences in Russia since the late 1980s that have contributed to the salience of individualizing strategies in peoples' attempts to survive and locate meaning—among Russian businesswomen, and also Russians of various genders and professions. Here, I provide an overview of these social trends in order to

set the scene for subsequent chapters. In Chapter 4, I provide a more detailed analysis of self-reliance in Russia, which incorporates influences from the Soviet period.

One reason that Russians have turned to individualized models of social change are widespread attitudes about social institutions that range from ambivalence to intense mistrust. People are wary of the potentially homogenizing and dehumanizing aspects of identifying with a larger cause—including, among older generations, a fear of political persecution. Even new civil society organizations in Russia have sometimes been run by former Soviet elite, a fact that can generate mistrust in the broader communities such organizations claim to help (Hemment 2003). The cluster of people a person even has time to get to know tends to be smaller than during the socialist period, when Soviet institutions such as labor unions (*profsoiuzy*) and the *komsomol*^{xxii} made education and work deeply social activities.

A second change, to which I have already alluded, is a disintegrated state-sponsored safety net and consequently, the urgency for people to develop new survival strategies. The privatization of formerly social services in Russia post 1991 has involved the emergence of pay-for-service healthcare, the lifting of guarantees for housing and employment, periods of rapid inflation, and the massive devaluing of Russians' pensions. During the early 1990s there were periodic shortages of food and other basic supplies. Procuring necessities sometimes depended on one's social connections just as much as how much money one had. When Elena was a young child in 1992, her stepfather, a well-connected builder, regularly procured bricks of dark chocolate for Elena and her

^{xxii} A Soviet youth organization

aunt to eat. Sometimes, that was the only thing they had for dinner aside from the potatoes and pickled vegetables that Elena's grandmother had grown at her *dacha*.^{xxiii} These changes are upshots of agreements made between the Russian government in 1991 and the IMF, which allowed the newly formed Russian Federation to default on outstanding loans in return for massive cutbacks in public services. They have entailed dramatic decreases in the standard of living for the vast majority of the Russian population, spiking unemployment rates, and the feminization of unemployment as Soviet hiring quotas were lifted and jobs once occupied primarily by women were among the first cut from new state and private enterprises. Aside from time, friends and family members have less material resources and energy to provide for one another's various needs. Socioeconomic disenfranchisement, including among some women who were beginning to engage in business at the time, meant that the circle of people who would be able to help a person in need had diminished significantly.

Accompanying all of these changes of the past two decades have been deteriorating public health indicators in Russia. Not always equipped with the resources and staff to deal with these problems, healthcare practitioners in both public and paid clinics have tended to resort to models of care encouraging peoples' sexual morality—they urge women to abstain from sex until marriage and childbearing, for example. This serves as a vehicle to stem the spread of STIs as well as a symbolic means of addressing other deteriorating health indicators, such as exponentially increasing rates of sexually transmitted diseases, continually high maternal and infant mortality rates, and high rates of abortion. Reactions of doctors and sex educators to these trends underscore changes in

^{xxiii} A Russian country home.

personal behaviors as a means to safeguard health and the nation's vitality, further propagating ideas about personal morality as the source of Russia's problems.

Practices in healthcare institutions are reflections of much broader moral panic in Russian politics, the mass media, and everyday life. As I discuss in Chapter 4, these ideas can be traced to older notions about the nation as a feminine entity that is reproduced by women.

An encounter during my fieldwork in the summer of 2005 illustrated how associations between women's sexuality and social and demographic changes can arise in everyday conversations. Ivan, the husband of one research participant, Alisa, learned from his wife that I was at the time researching sexual culture (*sexual'naia kul'tura*) among women. He turned to me and said that if I was interested in sexual culture, then I needed to look at young Russian men who were involved in the drug trade and other forms of organized crime. His rationale was new to me: most of these men, he continued, were raised by single mothers who could not provide them with proper moral upbringing (*vospitaniye*) without the discipline a husband offered and the stability of having married parents. Ivan's wife Alisa nodded in agreement. I was struck by the connections Ivan drew between extra-marital sex, single motherhood, and lack of proper discipline and moral example in a child's upbringing. Nevertheless, on a separate occasion, Alisa and her sister Tatiana—also a small business owner—acknowledged that crime and alcoholism among Russian men made marriage difficult for women in the first place.^{xxiv} They acknowledged the complexity of population changes, but treated the

^{xxiv} In Russia, the difference between male and female life expectancy is 13 years (59 vs. 72), compared with the United States, for example, where it is 5 years (75 vs. 80). The

issue of women's changing sexual behaviors as the most socially and culturally consequential to these changes.

This encounter demonstrated how the subject of sex and women's reproductive choices can be embedded in popular discussions of marriage, motherhood, the family, and the moral well being of society. The moralization of personhood in contemporary Russia, then, has to do with the ways in which people sometimes conflate gendered notions of personal morality with much bigger demographic and social changes. The changes I have described and the massive uncertainties that have been produced in their wake have led Russians in many professional and class groups to think of morality—their own, and others—as a vital resource in contemporary Russia.

Gender after socialism: continuity or change?

In her work on gender in 1990s contemporary Russian media and literature, Helena Goscilo (1996) argues that little has changed in gender roles following socialism. She cites everything from fictional accounts, to popular journalism, to pornographic film and magazines that feature women either as de-sexualized mothers or as whores. Goscilo concludes from her analysis: “If cultural rhetoric offers eloquent clues to the mores of a given society—and I believe it does—then anyone seeking a re-conceptualization of gender roles in post-communist Russia will enjoy more success if she looks for snow in Africa (48).” Specifically addressing the issue of pro-natalism, Rivkin-Fish (2005) writes in a similar vein, “Amidst these vibrant political campaigns, there has not been a substantial, mass response against pro-natalism by Russian women (217).”

most important factors contributing to these differences include alcohol-related illnesses and accidents, and interpersonal violence (Yin 2007).

I agree overall with these arguments that attitudes about women did not become more accepting of variation in the 1990s and remain extremely narrow. However, I differ with Goscilo's statement that "attempts by Russians to revise notions of gender," such as the Gender Center in Moscow, amount to "miniscule islands of activity and change in a sea of sameness (49)." Islands of activity, however miniscule, should not be dismissed. Especially in Russia where the state and very specific elite networks wield considerable control over the media, a nuanced understanding of gender and social change demands looking beyond literature and popular culture into peoples' everyday lives—beyond places where we might expect change, such as a Gender Studies program.

Entrepreneurial women are forging social niches where the ranges of acceptable behavior are considerably wider than they are in women's heterosexual marriages, in their families, and sometimes, in their immediate workplaces. Women approach both work and forms of self-development with goals of becoming more independent—not of forming relationships. In the process, new and interesting subjectivities and relationships develop, which are less constrained by the expectations that women and others bring to different contexts. Alexei Yurchak (2006:298) points out that business is actually a site for the production of new, non-authoritative meanings in contemporary Russia—a site where people are most removed from state-authored discourses of Russianness. This dissertation analyzes ways in which business has become a site for the production of emergent notions of gender—albeit not pointedly "feminist" ones. Women are living in Russia on terms that they see as their own. Their positioning at the crossroads of nationalist gender discourses does exemplify the irony of "natural" personhood as a reflection of social forces. Yet, located as they are at the crossroads of nationalist gender

discourses and neo-liberal narratives of self-sufficiency, women have a wide range of discursive resources at their disposal. By virtue of this contemporary, urban location, they are therefore able to construct a sense of personhood themselves, drawing from multiple information sources (Giddens 1991).

While focused on alternatives to social movement models, my analysis sheds light on the transformative potential of self-development and confidence-building in existing local women's organizations in post-socialist contexts. Anthropologists have noted these themes in projects they have studied (Hemment 2007:53, 61, 68; Phillips 2005:260; Sperling 1999:166-167), especially among women's support groups addressing unemployment. As Valerie Sperling notes, for example, one NGO's motto is "It's harder to fire a confident woman (167)." Based on the stories of businesswomen I know, these programs might actually index a whole range of personal and more collaborative efforts through which women find gainful employment and seek out more satisfying personal relationships—relationships in which femininity and entrepreneurial careers are not treated as mutually opposing.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation is based on 17 months of fieldwork in urban Russia and the United States. I spent time with highly educated, entrepreneurial women, their families, spouses, romantic partners, colleagues, and friends. I conducted this research over the course of five years, with my longest continuous period of fieldwork taking place largely in St. Petersburg over twelve months (2007-2008). Methods included participant observation, analysis of print and television media, and participation in local meetings and press conferences that involved politicians, journalists, and businesspeople. I mapped out the social landscapes of entrepreneurial women, traveling with them throughout Russia and in the United States and by maintaining Internet contact. Most women in my research owned small businesses and a few occupied top positions in corporations. Some women were trying to start their own businesses. In pursuing careers in a highly unstable, male-oriented sector of the workforce, these women were pursuing strikingly agentive lives. I strove to understand these women's strategies for becoming materially, emotionally, and socially self-reliant.

I kept in touch with twenty-six women more consistently than others throughout my research. These women introduced me to other businesswomen, local officials and journalists. Sometimes they volunteered lists of events that they believed it would be productive for me to attend—similar to the to-do lists I saw some give the people they managed at work. I collated these lists and followed common suggestions I identified

across lists. I conducted formal interviews with most of these women and developed detailed knowledge of their pasts, their everyday lives, and their plans for the future. Several of them became my own friends and confidants, with whom I spoke with or saw several times a week in 2007 and 2008, and visited during follow-up research in Russia during the summer of 2009. Throughout this dissertation, I refer to these twenty-six women as “key research participants” because of my extended communications with them and their proactive role in this project.

Throughout this research I spoke with well over 100 businesswomen in addition to key research participants’ families, friends, and acquaintances, as well as numerous policymakers working in St. Petersburg and at the federal level on issues related to family policy and labor. Sometimes the most fleeting of interactions with people were more informative than interviews with key research participants. An example is a conversation I had with two local small business owners about the timing of starting one’s own business in order to be able to successfully leave one’s husband—a conversation which I entered while standing in line in a women’s restroom during a conference on St. Petersburg demographic policies. Or, when my landlady and I walked through her village outside of St. Petersburg on New Years day, an elderly neighbor struggling to make end’s meet began lamenting the decline of the village’s youth-run collective farm post-socialism, his own difficulty surviving without the basic necessities such farms used to provide, and what he saw as the interest of younger generations in business rather than “real” forms of work, such as farming. More fleeting interactions such as these helped me to fill in a landscape of contemporary urban Russia, into which I would weave the

lives of businesswomen I knew.

Research objectives

Work and family are subjects highlighted by professional women themselves, as well as Russian politicians and journalists, as separate spheres for women, requiring completely different sets of behaviors and different “mentalities” (*mentalitet*). Further, in order to be “normal” (*normal'nye*) women, even those who pursue professional careers are expected to prioritize family—or at least create the semblance that they do. My research objectives were the following: 1) to understand the meanings and social contexts of work and motherhood to these women, 2) to elucidate the social interactions and experiences through which women negotiate these meanings, and 3) to examine how women experience and respond to social tensions and structural incompatibilities between these spheres.

My research led me to an examination of the highly innovative ways in which women were critiquing the ontological division created between work, on the one hand, and family, on the other—divisions made by conservative political and popular discourses encouraging them to orient themselves towards the latter. They did this through idioms of self-development (*samorazvitie*, or *razvitie lichnosti*). An example was a St. Petersburg seminar led by a Russian ex-patriot, Erika, who was visiting one of my research participants, Natasha, from Italy. She was giving a talk to Natasha and her friends and acquaintances about a book of poetry she was writing about her experiences as a Russian woman balancing her household responsibilities and previous work life as a professor. Erika’s main message in her opening talk was that women should “find

themselves” (*naiti sebya*) through their careers before deciding if they wanted to be mothers. Later on after the seminar, Natasha, described to Erika and I over tea how important the message was to her of being able to “pick and choose what to put in my life,” including raising her two small children on her own and running her business—endeavors she understood as complimentary and intertwined. Another woman present at the seminar, Dina, critiqued Erika for the same argument, raising her hand and pointing out that rearing her four young children, was in itself a way for her to find herself, even as childrearing, as she had told me on other occasions, informed and was informed by her work as a small business owner.

Some women find others’ ideas of personhood equally limiting as more official pro-natalist discourses, and others find these idioms to be expansive of their own imaginations of themselves. Women develop these critiques and along with them, positive self images, through a variety of self-affirming activities, including corporate motivational workshops and more individualized activities, such as martial arts. All of these activities help women to think of themselves as whole people rather than as a set of conflicting social functions, as some see themselves reflected in Russian media representations. Women are authoring new identities for themselves that stress the mutual translatability of their skills and values as mothers and managers, as well as aspects of themselves that they do not see as fitting neatly within these domains. These activities can hold important consequences for women’s lived experiences and the ways in which they negotiate sexuality, family, work, and migration. In this chapter, I trace the research activities that prompted me to look more closely at work on themselves.

A note on language

The terms “self-development,” “finding the self,” and “self-realization,” demand extensive unpacking, which I undertake over the course of this dissertation. Scholars have noted tendencies in contemporary societies towards the atomization of people—a widespread taking for granted of the person as an independent, self-contained entity (Giddens 1991; Zdravomyslova 2007; Martin 2000; Wanner 2005; Dunn 2004). For the time being, it is important to note that I talk about self-development and related terms not naively, assuming that women’s framings of personhood are unproblematic truths. I choose to employ the language that women used to talk about their lives.

Other than the reflexive pronoun, “oneself” (*sebia*), a Russian word for self that women themselves sometimes used was *lichnost’* (i.e. *razvivat’ lichnost’*, or “to develop the self”). *Lichnost’* is a Russian word that is roughly equivalent to the word “individuality” in English, except that it holds strong moral connotations—involving peoples’ ability to fulfill appropriate gender roles as well as their knowledge of Russian art and literature. For example, the physicians in Rivkin-Fish’s study of reproductive healthcare in St. Petersburg conceptualize women’s *lichnost’* as encompassing a desire to devote their adult lives to being mothers and wives (2005:12). Widening this framing, my research participants refer to other parts of their lives as comprising part of their *lichnost’*. They have emphasized the importance of their jobs in business, and just as critically, various artistic and intellectual interests.

I do not always place terms such as “self-realization” in quotations. I nevertheless use these terms bearing in mind the cultural specificities of personhood in Russia. In

Chapter 4, I further historicize women's language in order to illustrate the potential stakes, for them, of having oneself devalued or crushed in some way.

Recruitment: Where are all the businesswomen?

When I got to the field, I was faced with the challenge of finding businesswomen and building trusting relationships with them. In Russia, it can be extremely difficult for any newcomer to a city to meet people. I made numerous attempts to phone organizations of local businesswomen that I found on the Internet and even to stop by the addresses where they were listed. The numbers for the few organizations I found were listed as out of order and the addresses where I went to led me to abandoned buildings on the outskirts of the city or places that were altogether different—such as a bakery and a kindergarten. I decided to stop looking for some time and wait until my colleague at CISR could introduce me to businesswomen she said she knew. My colleague eventually did introduce me to a businesswoman she knew, a woman who had lived in St. Petersburg all her life, had been honored by the governor Valentina Matvienko for her service in the business world. This woman introduced me to a whole network of businesswomen that intersected with organizations I had tried futilely at first to find through the Internet. The reasons for this are complex and have to do with Putin's legislations beginning in 2006 restricting the activities and funding sources of nongovernmental organizations.ⁱ

ⁱ As Putin consolidated power in the late 2000s, his administration passed a series of measures that severely restricted the activities and funding of local projects. As a result of these measures, many domestic violence and other organizations have closed down or exist in name only. (Johnson 2010) Another difficulty that NGOs in Russia must navigate today are trends among foreign donors. In the late 2000s, human trafficking has

Recruitment of research participants began in St. Petersburg and I accomplished it through several different means: I met some women unexpectedly at a United States consulate orientation dinner for Fulbright scholars studying in Russia. These women were actively involved in trying to leave Russia, permanently or temporarily, to go to business school or on shorter term work-related trips. They spent a lot of time at the consulate because they valued forming friendships and sharing professional experience with foreigners, improving their English language skills, and gaining connections abroad that would help them to settle abroad. These women tend to perceive foreigners as more “open” (*otkryty*). They approached me themselves, having heard the topic of my project announced. I could not have anticipated meeting them in this way, and I could not have known ahead of time that they were businesswomen. I actually knew one woman beforehand because she is also a Russian scholar affiliated with the same loose network of researchers as I am. However, she did not want to let anyone in our mutual circle know what she did for a living, fearing that her pursuit of profit would undermine her reputation as a scientist. I would soon begin to notice that women who approached me themselves were operating according to a shifting set of stylistic standards that they used to distinguish people whom they could trust, based partly on their expectations of how Westerners looked and acted, and their optimistic expectations of the kinds of friends and colleagues they would be.

The women I met through direct introductions by CISR colleagues introduced me to their own friends, acquaintances, and sisters who worked in business. Their networks

been at the top of international funders’ lists, and this has restricted the kinds of projects for which local NGOs in Russia can get funding (Hemment 2007:134, 136). These are among factors that might help to explain why some of the organizations that I initially sought out during recruitment no longer existed if they ever had.

were more localized. These women knew little English and were not interested in speaking it with me, as other women were. Nor were they particularly interested in interacting with foreigners, as other women valued for various reasons. I had to work much harder to develop trusting relationships with these women, and these relationships formed slowly, as women grew more interested in my research topic.

Research population: forms of diversity

In her ethnography of transnational romances among Mexicans, Hirsch (2003) considers how to say something of broader social significance, based on a sample that is not randomly selected. She argues that the goal of ethnographic research can lie in identifying salient forms of stratification within a particular population that in turn reveal something about the larger social context in which people are living. She writes, “My response here is to represent types of people. For example, in a jar of five colors of marbles, the goal here is to select marbles of each color, not to discover what proportion of the marbles is which color (32-33).” The kind of project that Hirsch proposes makes sense from my perspective: What does business entail for educated women? How are the opportunities it presents women for self-reliance stratified?

In 2006 and early 2007 as I considered how to proceed with this research, I grappled with many different starting points for defining my population: What groups of women should I focus on? What kind of business was I interested in? What age groups should I include? Should I include only women who are mothers, or only women who are married with children? My conversations and observations up until then suggested that business was an emergent and shifting category for women. It might encompass, for example, women who had risen up through the ranks of direct sales (such as the

cosmetics company where I conducted participant observation) within a larger corporation, exercising autonomy over their schedules and management strategies. There are nevertheless arguments for excluding these women and focusing only on those at the highest positions in corporations, women who own their own small businesses, or both.

I decided to cast a wide net, including women with higher education, who worked in commercial structures and held the highest positions of authority within these structures. I also included women who were actively starting their own businesses because their activities and the dilemmas they expressed bore important similarities with what older, more established businesswomen said about their own earlier careers. With time, I noticed certain important axes of diversity among women. I will briefly introduce them here, as a prelude for more in-depth discussions in subsequent chapters:

As the previous section suggests, one of the key axes of diversity that I found among women emerged through the recruitment process itself: I needed to meet some women through colleagues at CISR and then, through people these women knew well, because they were more embedded in tight-knit, local networks of friends, acquaintances, and relatives. Other women had no problem approaching me themselves, perhaps in part because a willingness to meet strangers (and especially, a Westerner) was a part of the way they thought about themselves. When the reverse occurred, and women I had approached myself at conferences initially expressed interest in my project, I found it extremely difficult to sustain these relationships. These women I had approached did not show up for meetings they had agreed to, or did not call or return my calls or e-mails that they had suggested. Even less productively, some agreed to meetings and were so excessively rude as to make clear that they were no longer interested in talking with me.

In other words, if I was the one doing the approaching, I was unlikely to succeed in building sustained relationships.

Within each of these groups, certain forms of diversity also appeared important:

Age

A narrow majority of my research participants were in their 20s and 30s and I have found that the tensions they manage can be particularly intense: since these women are in a period of their lives when their relatives and peers expect them to marry and become mothers, they are actively making decisions about marriage and childbirth.ⁱⁱ Yet, older women who are entering marriage and/or motherhood later, or who are caring for grandchildren, face similar tensions between their work and personal lives. The individualizing strategies that I discuss in this dissertation apply to them, too, and sometimes there are remarkable cross-generational similarities in the strategies that women use. Further, in speaking with women in a number of age groups I was able to identify relationships that are extremely important parts of women's social lives and subjectivities—relationships such as the intergenerational friendships that I discuss in Chapter 5. Age was important in specific respects, and sometimes it was important because younger women were looking for women who were *not* their age—women who were drawing on earlier social connections and professional experiences, and who could therefore teach them something about survival in contemporary Russia.

Migration

ⁱⁱ By 2005, the average age of first birth in St. Petersburg, for example, was 25.3, up from 22-23 in the 1990s (*Komitet po zaniatosti naseleniia Sankt-Peterburga* 2007:79). Despite this increase, I often hear Russians comment that women who have not had a child by age 25 are “not normal,” or that a woman's hopes of finding a husband (and a father for her children) if she is not married by age 25 are slim.

Migration status tended to be another important category of differentiation among women. Those who had grown up in St. Petersburg and remained there tended to engage less actively in collective forms of self-development such as motivational seminars. These women nevertheless consumed self-help literature and other individualizing strategies that focused on cultivating self-reliance, in a very broad sense, as a way of life. Women who either had migrated to St. Petersburg from other cities, or who were preparing to leave foreign countries, knew one another, and met me, as part of their efforts to form communities that were not limited to Russian cities. Migration was both a cause and a result of certain kinds of social and economic disenfranchisement. Vera, for example, left for St. Petersburg from Belgorod after a series of difficulties, including a painful divorce, and experienced loneliness and poverty when she arrived knowing nobody. However, upon later reflection she saw all of these challenges as enhancing her own emotional self-reliance and the cultural capital she had to offer as she networked within St. Petersburg and rebuilt a business of offering motivational seminars in various venues. As her case exemplifies, migration both indexed how social processes converged in women's lives to influence their experiences of marginalization, and led to innovative strategies by which women carved out new social niches.

Social class

Class deserves its own section because it is so fundamental to an understanding of entrepreneurial women's social opportunities. A class-based analysis is nevertheless complicated in Russia by its Soviet past and its post-Soviet present. In ostensibly classless Soviet Russia, there were considerable differences in peoples' access to

particular goods, services, and experiences (such as international and even domestic travel). The Soviet *nomenklatura*, or Party bureaucrats, played a major role in these differentiations; they discriminated among Soviet citizens based largely on professional group, family origins, and patronage, and considered some to be more productive and valuable citizens (Rivkin-Fish 2009:84-85). During the post-WWII Soviet period, it was the *intelligentsia* ⁱⁱⁱ who gained this kind of prominence (2009:85). Official rank was nevertheless not the only thing that shaped peoples' socioeconomic positioning. People who were not in these privileged ranks could rely on their informal personal networks of family, friends, and other contacts in order to obtain things such as foreign goods. They could also simply circumvent cumbersome bureaucratic procedures, such as standing in long lines for food or at healthcare clinics. This process of obtaining goods and services through networks was called *blat* (Ledeneva 1998:1). Thus, during the Soviet period, former professional rank overlapped with who people knew, as routes towards different privileges. Both these official positions (Eyal et. al 1998:7) and informal networks (Ledeneva 1998:170) functioned as forms of social capital, and played a major role in Soviet citizens' living conditions and experiences.

Women occupied a complicated position within this system because they occupied higher ranking positions less often than men. ^{iv} As I will illustrate momentarily through one woman's story, what sometimes mattered just as much in terms of status and privilege were women's families' rankings and connections during the socialist period.

ⁱⁱⁱ A broad and elastic term to describe intellectuals, scientists, artists, teachers, and others deemed to contribute to Russia's cultural life. For historical and social background on this group, see Masha Gessen's *Dead Again: The Russian Intelligentsia after Communism* (1997).

^{iv} See Chapter 4.

Evgenia learned French, Spanish, and English as a child in the 1960s and 1970s, in part because her grandparents, part of the pre-Revolutionary intelligentsia, were fluent in French. Also, her family had pre-revolutionary wealth in emeralds and was able to pay Russian teachers who knew Spanish and English to tutor her. Her grandparents and parents had connections in the first place to people who could teach her because they (her grandfather and mother, specifically) were very prominent scientists and knew other members of St. Petersburg's intellectual community. When I asked Evgenia if her family worried about being found out for their wealth or the fact that they were training their children in Western languages, she said, "My grandfather was already accepted throughout the whole world for his work, so no one was going to bother him here. We were also past Stalin's period, so they no longer had to be afraid." Evgenia's family also helped her to secure admissions to a prominent university and to graduate school.^v In the late 1970s, she became a professor of physics. She thus remained a part of the *intelligentsia* in terms of her profession and knew people with skills such as foreign language. However, as a single mother and without yet having access to her family's emeralds, she still had to work nights as a tutor in order to support them both. As an adult, Evgenia's professional position in itself was not enough to secure the same quality of life that her parents and grandparents had lived as well-known, well-connected scientists and as two-income families. While Evgenia's story is unique in many ways, it

^v People could apply to whatever universities and jobs they wanted, but there were important formal and informal restrictions. Without special permission from the government, one had to study or work in the city where one's passport was registered. Additionally, university admissions and job hiring were affected by differences in wealth (bribery), patronage, and various forms of discrimination based on gender and ethnicity, for example. I deal with the issue of gender discrimination in pay and hiring later in Chapter 4.

illustrates the forms of access that social capital could afford women during socialism, when their families or they were well positioned in professional hierarchies.

In 1991, Evgenia stopped getting paid by her university.^{vi} An amalgam of factors including her language background, her family's emeralds, and her analytical acumen as a scientist proved vital to Evgenia's ability to switch out of her role as a professor. These factors all played important roles as she began to travel to Poland and Germany to import clothing back into Russia: She knew how to communicate with foreigners when she traveled, had been given emeralds to use to buy clothing, and learned very quickly through close observation, trial, and error, how to quickly travel across national borders with large amounts of goods, and avoid getting defrauded by racketeers. At a moment when prospects of attaining a paid professional position were very low for educated women, Evgenia instead turned to Russia's newly opened borders with the West and converted her wealth and scientific and linguistic abilities into a profitable enterprise. Drawing on Bourdieu's work on different forms of capital, Gil Eyal and his colleagues argue that peoples' management of post-socialist transitions depended on their abilities to reconfigure older, devalued forms of social capital into new, valuable forms of cultural capital (1998:7-8). Applying their point to my analysis of gendered class formation, a small minority of women such as Evgenia took what had once been the social capital of

^{vi} In the early 1990s, thousands of workers in Russia who were still officially employed stopped receiving their wages for months on end, or had long delays in receiving their wages (Bridger et. al 1996:103). Particularly between 1990 and 1993, rapid price inflation for raw materials, drastically reduced industrial output, and cutbacks in state funding for social welfare institutions such as healthcare facilities all influenced these delays for employees of former Soviet enterprises.

being connected to a certain family, and relied on the abilities this kind of upbringing had afforded her.

Older women without the same social privileges during socialism, as well as younger women, turned to unconventional forms of social and cultural capital in order to establish themselves as entrepreneurs. In 2000s Russia, a market emerged in Russia for women as consumers and entrepreneurs of new, (trans)national motivational services being offered all over Russia. Seminars for men and women on personal growth and themes of success were one such service. It became possible for even women without connections or capital to strike out on their own and begin to sell their experiences as knowledge. Dina, a professional athlete with a working class background, had been freelancing as an athletic trainer to make ends meet through the early 2000s. When I met her, however, she was approaching local firms in St. Petersburg and pitching herself as a motivational trainer for those companies' personnel. I discuss in Chapter 4 how her history in Soviet professional athletics played a role as a form of cultural capital for her. Some younger women, as well, saw a market niche for themselves in new corporate motivational cultures. Elena viewed the bookstore seminars that she attended as integral both to her own continued pursuit of her goals, as well as informative in terms of the communication skills and values she wanted to instill in her own future employees. In Russia's gendered, neo-liberal environment, women were able to apply cultural capital, as a sets of abilities and status markers that they had carried with them over time. For Dina, this capital was her former experiences as an athlete and a mother. As I demonstrate in Chapter 6, Elena valued her own knowledge from motivational seminars and books, as well as her previous experiences dealing with foreigners through the Internet, her work,

and her travels, as evidence of her worldliness. These women's experiences demonstrate that cultural capital, as an analytical category, is a way of thinking about a multitude of (gendered, socially and historically specific) forces that converge in individuals' lives and widen their possibilities. Under particular circumstances, social connections and wealth are less important than peoples' abilities to draw on their own pasts and experiences. To return then to Hirsch's metaphor about the marbles and diversity, I want to emphasize that generation, class, and life histories (i.e. migration) converge in dynamic ways to influence women's work trajectories.

St. Petersburg

Throughout most of my field research I have lived in St. Petersburg, and I began my recruitment of research participants there. I will sketch a few details by way of setting the scene, as I experienced it:

Founded in 1703 by Peter the Great as a military outpost, St. Petersburg is located on the Bay of Finland and is the northernmost major metropolis in the world. Reflecting its founder's love of Western Europe, the city center is full of Italian-style architecture, mixed with large, imposing buildings from the Stalin era, and more modern office buildings. On the outskirts are large expanses of tall, boxlike buildings where many Russians of a variety of social classes live. From my perspective, these buildings are striking in their similarity to one another. That, on top of the fact that their street numbers can be very difficult to locate, can make it impossible for Russians and non-Russians alike to locate peoples' apartments. (With people I had already visited, I would do so by making note of the graffiti on the walls.) These buildings remind me of American slums at first approach, with their duct-taped windows and dank hallways

smelling of cigarette smoke and urine. However, many of them house apartments that are modern and luxurious inside—containing brand new fixtures and appliances and expensive furniture. Relatively well-off professionals such as lawyers, businesspeople, and college professors live in some of these buildings, albeit in limited space, by some American standards. A two-room apartment with a small eat-in kitchen is often considered very fortunate for a professional, two-income family of four. Buying or even renting one's own apartment in the city center today can be prohibitively expensive for the vast majority of people living in St. Petersburg, although some people live in far less expensive communal apartments there, where the kitchen and bathrooms are shared with other tenants.

Sometimes nicknamed by Westerners the Venice of the North, St. Petersburg is intersected by a series of canals that divide it into islands. These islands are linked by bridges and the city's fairly extensive underground transport system, the *metro*. The canals add to St. Petersburg's picturesque nature but also introduce certain inconveniences: The *metro* closes at around midnight each evening. In the summer, bridges open up at various points during the night to let cargo ships pass through, keeping taxi rides (which are extremely expensive and not entirely safe, anyway) from being a viable option. Around midnight, when my friends or I find ourselves on an island away from our own living quarters, we need to either run to catch the nearest public transportation or find a place on that island to spend the night.

Public transportation in St. Petersburg is affordable for women I know. Aside from the *metro*, which can take you from one end of the city to the next in about an hour and a half, there are *marshrutki*, or group taxis, as well as buses and trolleys. Compared

with Moscow, where traffic and the city's large geographical expanses make it not uncommon for people to spend over two hours commuting to work, it is more feasible to live in a more affordable neighborhood in St. Petersburg and commute to the center each day for work. St. Petersburg is also only a few hours from the border with Finland, so weekend trips to Helsinki for work and other purposes are relatively easy and affordable. St. Petersburg's proximity to Western Europe makes it a prime spot for Western tourism, including sex tourism. This has been one of the reasons given for St. Petersburg's particularly high rates of HIV/AIDS, relative to other Russian cities (Amirkhanian et. al 2003). Residents of St. Petersburg I know have stressed that St. Petersburg is Russia's "cultural capital." These ideas are conflated with its proximity to the rest of Europe, and the number and popularity of theater, opera, ballet productions, and museums in the city.

At other times, people reminded me that St. Petersburg was built as a military city—not with human habitation in mind. This subject came up often in the context of complaints about the weather, which is raw, wet, and cold for a good part of the year. For most of December, for instance, the sun rises at 10 o'clock and sets at around 3:30, making days very short. The city saw its last snowfall of 2008 on May 15th, with snowfalls occurring well into April—weather patterns that are not uncommon. During the wintertime, the city seems to subside into a kind of muted quiet, with people treading precariously over streets covered in black ice, and the rivers freezing over. When the ice began to melt in March and April, I heard loud cracking sounds like gunshots when shards of it broke away from one another. Vera compared this sudden movement to her own unanticipated ability to walk one morning in the spring of 2007, having been bedridden for months after her move to St. Petersburg. I made the same observation as

Dale Pesmen (2000:20-36), that Russians sometimes use weather as a metaphor and an explanation for shifts in their internal states. Alexandra told me that a stomach problem that she had had since childhood flared up because of the raw, wet Petersburg weather. In the course of this discussion she also talked about other features of social life that were frustrating to her: Russia's fragmented healthcare system (even more difficult to navigate given that she was not from St. Petersburg), and a sense that she would have no one to care for her if she ever grew more seriously ill.

At the start of 2007, the population of St. Petersburg was 4,571,000 (Kostkina 2007:4). The city (and the Northwest region of Russia, in general) has been the subject of particular focus in federal demographic policies because of its particularly low birth rates during the past two decades (Pankratov 2007:18)^{vii}. Since 2006, local officials have responded to this by implementing subsidies for new parents and adoptive families, on top of federal subsidies that new parents receive. Although Russia in general has experienced large flows of in- and out- migration since the late 1980s, St. Petersburg is a prime destination for Western men looking for sex tourism with Russian women, and on the other hand, a large influx of migrant laborers from former satellite nations of the USSR (Collinson 2009). As in the rest of Russia, the substantial influx of immigrants from the southern republics (i.e. Ingushetia) has precipitated a resurgence of racist, anti-immigrant discourses that I find extremely ironic when considered against the backdrop of anxieties over population decline.

^{vii} In 2004, the birth rate of Saint Petersburg was 1.15 was lower than in any other region in Russia, aside from the Leningrad Oblast as a whole, which was 1.13. (*Komitet po zaniiatosti naseleniia Sankt-Peterburga* 2007)

Another important thing to note is that St. Petersburg has been the focus of numerous transnational public health development and research projects, aiming to improve health services, particularly for women and infants. These have included the Healthy Cities Project (Rivkin-Fish 2005:15), for example, and the research project conducted to compare reproductive healthcare in Helsinki and St. Petersburg. An implication of such projects is that neo-liberal discourses about health and sexuality, locating morality in personal choices, have blended with and reinforced Russian ideologies of personal morality.

I base my choice of this city as a research base on several factors: the unique opportunities for travel, trade, and contacts with Westerners that the city's location next to the Finnish border offers residents; the previous working relationships I have developed with other social scientists and former informants through CISR, which have made it more feasible for me to meet and develop trusting relationships with some women even as an outsider; and logistically speaking, the city's smaller size relative to Moscow. The latter factor allows me to participate in women's lives (and at a minute's notice, which is how their invitations arise), even though they and I live throughout the city.

Finally, the subject of motherhood and entrepreneurship for women is one of St. Petersburg public debates. My project findings have the potential to contribute insights to these conversations, from women's perspectives. In St. Petersburg's local government over the past four years, politicians and local business leaders have been basing some of their programs and media campaigns for raising birth rates on the premise that a stable, meaningful career for a woman will motivate her to have more children (Pankratov

2007:19). These efforts, however, have not taken active measures to address sex discrimination and sexual harassment in hiring practices and within the workplace or the enforcement of laws protecting pregnant women's rights to maintain their positions and pay levels; nor have they addressed the disproportionate domestic workload that women in Russia tend to face, relative to their male partners. Some women are greatly affected by these problems.

New locations

Women's physical locations are constantly in flux. Many of them develop relationships over the Internet with foreigners and Russians in other cities. For all of them, inter-city travel plays a key role in their social and working lives. Some of my most interesting conversations with women take place while we are away from the city together, or when they are traveling and communicating with me by phone or e-mail in the process. An example is the string of text messages I exchanged with Elena during her boat ride to Norway to meet her American boyfriend for the first time. During this conversation she raised a number of hopes and concerns about her future marriage and business partnership with him. She also talked about the risk of disappointment she felt in the hours before seeing him.

When research participants talk about traveling, particularly the emotions they experience in the process, they share some of their hopes for the future. While I am traveling with them they sometimes discuss what about their lives in Russia make certain hopes less realizable, such as limited opportunities on the job market and the way family members and peers perceive them as professionals. Some women talk about the need to literally separate their work and sexual relationships, on the one hand, and on the other,

their family lives (*semeinaia zhizn'*), according to different locations. The latter is a strategy that is very important for some of them who want all of these things but see them as incompatible right now in Russia.

Rather than confining my project to a particular location, I adopted a strategy inspired by Caldwell (2004), of following research participants “out into their daily lives and into the social networks that were important to them (19).” As my research progressed in 2007 and 2008, its geographical locations expanded. Some women I knew began to commute more regularly between St. Petersburg and Moscow, and to travel to other regions in Russia. I traveled with them and visited them in these locations, particularly in Moscow. Following my return to the United States in 2008 and 2009, I met with women in different cities here while they were traveling for business or staying here for extended periods of time.

Finally, I cannot overestimate the significance of the Internet—in my own ongoing communications with women, and as a site of social interaction in their lives. I have spent significant amounts of time sitting with women as they meet and talk with people on Internet dating and networking sites such as *VKontakte*, and as they talk to friends and boyfriends via Skype. Against a backdrop of crowded urban living conditions, a way for women to hold private conversations (especially with people they do not want family members and housemates to know about) has been to carry these relationships out over the Internet. Sometimes, these relationships result in women actually meeting others in person. These correspondences can also be valuable in and of themselves to women. Sitting with women while they chat with friends and romantic partners and talking with them about these exchanges, I have learned a great deal about

their social lives and networking strategies. The Internet has also been a way for women and their families and I to communicate when we are in separate countries.

Why women?

Absent in this dissertation is a sustained discussion of Russian notions of masculinity. I did not interview or spend as much time with men in the field. My decision to focus on women was conscientious: in Russia, there are widespread and salient cultural ideals of womanhood as biologically based and involving particular traits, such as being “emotional” rather than “rational.” These are not stable ideals; on a popular level, older, Soviet ideals of women as strong and resilient are sometimes expressed. These essentialisms reinforce heteronormative relationships with men, based on character traits many see as complimentary (but unequal). Some businesswomen I knew believed in gendered essentialisms, but they were trying to show that supposedly feminine traits were valuable and even preferable in a whole range of contexts. For example, the first time Vera explained her decision to divorce her husband, this is what she said:

God made men and women for a reason. They are meant to give things to one another. Men say that they think, and they teach women how to lead, how to manage others. Women feel things. They feel things but they still say that they think, because it is not acceptable to say that they feel things. The reason that there is so much war in the world is that women have failed to teach men how to feel—how to be kind and nurturing and compassionate. Instead, they have learned from men. This was the reason for my divorce, when I was still living in Belgorod. I decided to leave my husband and the reason was this: I had failed to teach him what I, as a woman, knew.

Vera proceeded to tell me of her recent move to St. Petersburg and the isolation she had felt there, not knowing anyone. She compared the city to “a man that has not yet learned from women how to feel,” and rationalized her remaining there for some time; she said

that she would be able to teach St. Petersburgers how to listen to one another and empathize with one another, particularly in the business world, by conducting her motivational seminars.

In several cases women's words might be read as contesting Russian notions of femininity that other women took for granted—such as the notion that they are guided by their emotions: Yulia gave birth to her first child, a baby boy, in March of 2008. When I asked her one day over tea how life had changed since she became a mother, she said: “Motherhood has helped me, because the responsibilities have gotten so much greater. It helps because in some way, you become harsher or something, more decisive...” I often notice that Russians associate women's supposedly emotional nature with their roles as mothers and the empathy and care such roles demand, but Yulia's statement suggests a different interpretation of motherhood and femininity. There were moments such as this in my conversations with women, when they characterized parts of their lives with qualities that other women associated with masculinity.

In writing about women I run the risk of reproducing—and reinforcing—the idea of womanhood as a natural and fairly monolithic identity. I mean to portray it as a set of diverse and dynamic subject positions. Naturalizing discourses about women and the male-female binary are nevertheless salient in contemporary Russian life; to quote Judith Butler, they comprise “a compelling illusion, an object of *belief* (520).” A way of complicating these objects of belief is to work within them, but to study the experiences of women who live at the intersections of local notions of femininity and other more transnational ideologies—in this case, corporate life and ways in which it intersects with Russian discourses of moral personhood.

Furthermore, I fully acknowledge that a spectrum of gendered subjectivities exist in Russia, within and beyond the categories of male and female. To quote Gayatri Spivak in her discussion of “strategic essentialisms,” I do not see the study of women as an error. However, it is important to acknowledge “the dangerousness of something one cannot not use (1993:5).” Taking essentialisms as starting points for an analysis is, as Spivak argues, “one stand among many (5).”

Finally, why not study men as well as women, and interrogate both categories? My decision to focus on women to the exclusion of men was largely pragmatic: I had limited time, and while there are certainly contexts in which women and men interact and are companionate, most of the times when women spoke openly with me was when we were in all-female spaces. It would have been far more difficult for me to build as many trusting relationships with men involving confidential discussions, especially if I wished to avoid women’s suspicions of romantic relations with their partners. My relative exclusion of male voices nevertheless can be considered a major drawback of this research. Femininity is in certain respects constructed through direct interactions between women and men. Throughout my time in Russia I have spent time with men in business and a variety of professions, including those who participate in and have made careers of leading the motivational seminars that are part of this dissertation. These interactions have been very important in helping me to understand research participants’ social worlds, including how men sometimes participated in discursive strategies for personal transformation. In weaving descriptions of these interactions into my discussions, I hope that I will keep masculinity from becoming a ghost in this dissertation.

Men and masculinity

What should be said, then, about men, in order to help frame this research? Due to a complex set of demographic, social, and historical processes reaching through the Soviet period, it is very common for Russians to infantilize men in everyday life and the popular media. A conversation I had with two key research participants, Alisa and Tatiana in 2006 exemplified this attitude: Over tea in Tatiana's kitchen, I was telling them about my research, part of which concerned the conditions under which educated women have children. Alisa said to me, "The reason women don't have children is that they're egotistical (*Oni egoisty*). All they care about is making money and buying things for themselves." Alisa, a married mother of two, had told me this very thing about Tatiana before she introduced the two of us. Now she glanced around Tatiana's spacious, sunny kitchen. Along the tiled wall hung a row of cooking utensils Alisa had told me about, with their tags attached. The following year, Alisa would begin her own small technology business from her home, after her new boss at the research university where she worked decided all employees had to work full time. She needed to stay home and care for her young sons while her husband, a business executive, worked. Tatiana had no intention of marrying or having children. Now, Tatiana cut in: "The problem is, there are no men!" Tatiana said. Then she modified her statement, adding that there were some men, but that the ones that existed were like children (*kak deti*). Tatiana explained: Since the massive male death toll during World War II, most people in their parents' generation had grown up with female household heads, who were breadwinners while taking care of everything at home. Subsequent generations have grown used to this

model, and even though today there are some potential husbands, neither women nor men themselves think men need to do anything for their families. Alisa nodded in agreement. She herself would later tell me that after her first pregnancy she feared her husband was going to leave her; she believed many men did this after the birth of a child, because of the stress a child introduced into a home, and because women are less youthful and beautiful after they give birth. These conversations with the two sisters illustrate how many different ideas can shape a common expectation among women that husbands were neither capable nor committed partners.

Yet, on a separate occasion in 2005, Alisa agreed with her husband, Ivan, when he pointed out that the reason there were so many young men involved in the drug trade was Russia's large number of single mothers; men provided a model of someone who was strong and decisive, especially important for sons, her husband explained. A number of other comments she has made over the course of our friendship likewise suggest that the presence of a father in the family is essential to providing children with an adequate moral upbringing. Her own assumptions about men's childishness contrast with such statements, which are consistent with a separate set of equally strong discourses about men in contemporary Russia: hyper macho representations of men that have intensified since the late 1980s. Political and popular portrayals of men also include hyper-macho representations of men. Elena Zdravomyslova (2008) suggests that amidst much economic and social instability in the Russia's wider environment, self-legitimization by cultivating particular self images has become important among men, as well as women. Trends such as the popularity of Rambo movies suggest models of Russian and other post-socialist men as paternalistic (as the family breadwinners), as hyper-sexual, and as

willing to use violence to solve problems (Bird and Zhrebkin 2008; Shashkin and Salagaev 2008:246-263; Kon 1995:211; Zagurskaya 2008:203-223; Eichler 2006).

Portrayals of masculinity suggest that these are not separate ideals. Numerous women I knew told me that they valued men who were strong—including in their descriptions men who were muscular, and who looked like they were capable of physically protecting them if needed.

Another part of new masculine ideals is hyper-sexuality. As an example of this, a prominent 2008 billboard advertisement for an energy drink in St. Petersburg featured a map of the city's *metro* system with the names of different women next to each of the dots representing a stop. The slogan beneath the advertisement read: "What is your maximum?" When I pointed at the ad and smiled quizzically, my friend Ivan, who was walking with me at the time, shrugged: With a serious expression on his face he told me that if men did not get enough sex, they would become physically ill. Because women did not want as much sex as men did, men needed to sleep with several women at once to meet their own physical needs. In citing this conversation I am not suggesting that men are the only ones who cheat. They certainly are not. Nor, of course, do I know whether or not most men believe these things. My point is that sexual promiscuity is widely encouraged among men. However, aside from some businesswomen I know, who make a virtue out of having multiple lovers at once, Russians do not generally look favorably on this.

What does this all mean for the urban women in my research? It means that there are conflicting expectations of men, and women's own expectations sometimes seemed contradictory to me. Sometimes women wanted men to be a certain version of strong and

macho, although the assumption was that they were not this way—that they are weak and unreliable. Perhaps these are not altogether contradictory. However one thing is certain: that the paternalistic model of man as breadwinner is not something that women expect men to live up to, especially in the long run. Further, by definition, it is associated with a hyper-sexuality that suggests even men who are capable of being breadwinners are unlikely to be faithful to women in the long run.

Both models of masculinity, for different reasons, make it important for women to embrace a whole range of forms of self-reliance: Having a weak man means that you need to be capable of supporting a family (including one's husband) economically, and emotionally—an attitude common among older women I knew. Being with a macho man also suggests that you need the emotional resources to shore yourself up against his lack of support (and that of your relatives), and to support yourself and your children, in every way, should he leave.

What are the statistical realities intertwined with these attitudes? First, while mortality rates among men are much lower than they were in the early 1990s, Russia has among the highest death rates for working-aged men in the world, meaning that there are literally very few healthy men for women to marry and partner with. Deaths linked with diseases, car accidents, and violence linked to alcohol and drug-consumption are particularly common (Mironov 2009). Particularly in the 1990s, statistics among men painted a very dire picture: For example, while over 60% of the total increase in mortality rates between 1989 and 1999 were the result of age-related deaths, 70% of deaths among men were caused by factors unrelated to age (Population Reference Bureau 2006). Important also have been the causes of death. Vital statistics in Russia are

inconsistently recorded for lack of reporting and the structural difficulties regional agencies sometimes face consolidating information amongst one another. Between 1991 and 2005, mortality from “ill defined conditions” increased in all age groups, *particularly* among younger men. Analyses of medical death certificates issued in Kirov and Smolensk, for example, found that deaths from ill-defined conditions correspond to human bodies in a state of decomposition. On top of increasing death rates for men, Gavrilova et. al (2008) interpret the fact that the causes of death are frequently unknown to suggest in itself a profound level of social isolation and interpersonal violence among Russian men.

Data collection

Semi-structured and unstructured interviews

I conducted a series of at least four interviews with most of my key research participants, lasting anywhere between half an hour and three hours. Interviews were a way for me to learn about the important people in women’s lives—past and present, and ways in which they had developed ideas surrounding gender. To quote Jennifer Hirsch (2003), interviewing a smaller number of people over a more extended period of time allowed me to “see how people struggle to find meaning and satisfaction in their lives instead of depicting them as automatons acting out a rigid set of cultural rules (40).” In order to first earn women’s trust and to designate a set of topical domains on which interviews would focus, I usually waited until several months after meeting them before initiating formal interviews. I identified and continued revising a list of important areas of inquiry: kinship and friendship, work, marriage, motherhood, and sexuality.

My interviews did not follow a chronological scheme. I early on started to realize that when women talked about their lives, they collapsed moments in their pasts, presents, and futures in theoretically compelling ways. Margarita, for example, talked about the “dream collages”^{viii} she was making in American motivational seminars she attended in Moscow. She said the colleagues enabled her to feel and act differently in the present—something that was valuable in itself, aside from helping her to achieve particular goals in the future. Following Hirsch’s model, I began interviews by telling women that I wanted to learn more about their lives but was unsure of which questions to start with. Then, moving through different domains, I asked each woman to tell me about important moments in her life when it came to certain topics such as motherhood, for example. This left room for each woman to talk about how something she learned in her natal household might have influenced her present life as a mother; or if a woman was not yet a mother but planned on becoming one, she could also talk about her future.

My list of domains and this approach served as more of a field guide than a strict rubric that I applied in every interview. Sometimes I turned on my voice recorder and women simply began talking, seemingly having already decided what I needed to know about them as pertained to my topic. I usually ended my conversations with women with the statement: “Is there any question that you have wanted to discuss, which I have not yet asked?” Some women offered insights that I incorporated into subsequent interviews and into my framing of the project itself, making it important for me sometimes to loop back and do follow-up interviews with women with whom I had had similar

^{viii} I discuss dream collages in Chapter 1, as an example of an exercise that appeared frequently in motivational seminars that some women attended. They involved pasting magazine cutouts on poster board in order to represent what women wanted their lives to look like at specific points in their futures.

conversations with earlier. After more substantive conversations, I collected demographic information (such as age) that may not have come up previously.

Before each interview, I conducted an oral consent process, including whether or not women felt comfortable having the interviews tape recorded. All did, except for particular moments when a few asked me to turn it off, not wanting their exact words recorded. In such cases, I never tried to reconstruct the conversations, instead incorporating the information into the general background knowledge informing my analysis.

I abandoned formal interviews with a few women when I realized that more spontaneous, non-taped conversations, which tended to involve more two-sided exchanges of information, were more productive. In these cases I tended to interject more often during participant observation, making comments such as, “That’s super interesting to me because it reminds me of x theme in my research. Could you tell me more about that?” I found this to be a valuable way of reminding women that I was conducting research, and a response that made them collaborators in the process of information-gathering—especially because I sensed that these women would tell me if they thought I was misinterpreting what they were saying.

Participant observation

Participant observation formed the cornerstone of my work. I paid attention to particular to moments in which women’s paid work and caretaking roles conflicted or could be creatively mobilized in support of one another, such as when women who had children spoke of how skills they had learned as mothers trained them for their work as managers. Such incidents drew my attention to the importance, for these women, of

controlling which identities they expressed in different settings. These women were working to manage lives that felt fundamentally fragmented, both in the different kinds of behaviors and aesthetics others expected of them and in the ways in which work demands and schedules conflicted structurally with those women had at home.

As part of these women's attempts to live with these disjunctures and the emotional and physical stress they felt in navigating them, I soon found that they were engaged in a variety of activities involving self-development, such as the motivational seminars I mentioned above, that helped them to critique these discourses of work versus family orientation and to develop confidence in their own integrity and self-reliance.

In attending motivational seminars and participating in a wide array of activities, women were trying to cultivate certainty in their abilities to keep living, working, and supporting their families regardless of what happened with spouses and partners or in Russia's broader political and economic environment. For some women, self-development was a service that they marketed for others, whether on its own, or in the context of consultations for more profitable business management or English courses. Increasingly, I spent time with women participating in these activities, helping to organize them, and talking about them.

I also began to observe the vital social consequences of some of these women's work on themselves. I showed how as these women cultivated images of themselves as the singular protagonists in their life stories, they were forming new social networks consisting of the sharing of professional experience, romantic partnerships, and friendships. These networks were based on the protection of a body of knowledge concerning personal transformation and its social implications and not on long-standing,

local ties, which certain women had been unable to sustain for reasons related to the breakdown of a social safety net in Russia since the late 1980s, or which could not afford women the forms of emotional, economic, and professional support that they needed. These networks and relationships were not readily visible to me because women did not often talk about them, and because they were constantly changing and transnational in nature, taking place over the Internet or when women traveled throughout Russia and abroad. However, as I grew more deeply involved in women's lives, I began to observe how social relationships underlay the parts of their stories when they attributed material gain or improvements in health, for example, to their own psychic or intellectual powers, and less often, when they explained difficulties achieving the things they wanted or needed to a wavering of these powers.

Analysis and write-up

During the 2008-2009 academic year, my interviews and media recordings were transcribed with the help of research assistants in Russia and the United States. I read through those, my notes, and print media I had collected and made several attempts to organize them into categories that appeared most relevant—categories that I had hypothesized as important while I was still writing my field notes. For example, I started from the premise that “self-development,” “self-realization,” and a number of other recurring themes concerning personhood were important to many women. I made these the names of separate files and continued pasting examples from interviews, field notes, and media, of how that language came up, noting the sources. As I organized various categories, I recognized constellations of meaning that helped me to develop my arguments.

This dissertation contains numerous conversations that I myself have reconstructed from my field notes. By far, the most revealing moments of my time with women took place when the tape recorder was off—on walks through the city, over meals, while watching television together, or doing any number of everyday activities together. For example, Larisa (36) said very little about her husband during our first interview, reporting only that their relationship was “normal,” and that he provided well for her and her children. It was only during a car ride together later that year, on our way to a meeting with a client of hers, when she pointed out the apartment that her husband had moved to after she had learned he had a girlfriend and two additional children “on the side” (*na storone*). In 2008 she was already living with her husband again, having agreed to give him another chance. I carried a notebook with me at all times, learned to remember key phrases and developed quick pneumatic techniques for reconstructing conversations, to the best of my knowledge, as soon as I could—associating topics, for example, with particular places that my conversant and I were passing at a given time on a walk. Sometimes, I would ask women to repeat phrases or sentences they had just said, if it was important that the language was exact, and when I sensed that this would be appropriate. Women were usually very willing to help me get things right; some even pointed out when they wanted me to take special note of what they were saying and to write it down. After any conversations, I recorded as much as I could on my own—while riding the subway, sitting in a nearby park, for example. Using these notes and my own memory I spent all of my late nights reconstructing every interaction and conversation that I judged to be important.

My priority in writing down direct quotes is not to provide flawless, word-for-word reconstructions. Since my research is about drawing from particulars to suggest cultural patterns, I need to do my best to capture the details—to “seize situations in their particularity and thereby make available their generality (Rabinow 2007:115).”

Additional notes

I conducted interviews either in Russian or in English, depending on women’s preferences. Most were conducted in Russian. In cases when I quote transcribed passages, these are my translations. I provide the original passages in a footnote, using Cyrillic characters. When I am reconstructing Russian dialogues from participant observation, I transcribe words that I deem to be particularly important, using Latin characters so that Russian-speaking and non-Russian speaking readers alike may get a feel for the actual language used. In my transliterations I use the system developed by the United States Library of Congress.

The reader may find that I focus more heavily on certain women, at the expense of providing just as extensive details about others. I am not claiming that particular women’s lives are representative of all other Russian women in the business world, or even of those women in their particular sectors of business. I have no way of knowing how common, for example, motivational seminars are, and what the demographics are of women who attend them; so many of them happen outside of the auspices of corporations that are registered with the Russian government. On the contrary, following the approach by Erika Johnson (2007:4), I choose to detail the lives of certain women more than others because their stories illustrate heterogeneities in the experiences of professional women that are most often overlooked in public and other scholarly accounts. Simultaneously,

the stories of women whose lives I discuss most in depth do resonate with broader social processes reflected in other women's stories—most critically, a tendency to selectively pursue individualized, rather than more collective, means of living with social instabilities and a sense of isolation, in a national setting where the expansive presence of Russia's authoritarian state displaces discussion of professional women's lives and interests.

CHAPTER 3

“A PURPOSE IS LIKE A GUIDEBOOK”: PERSONALIZED GOALS AS MEANS FOR NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY

Introduction

Pursuing ambitious lives with little social support, Russian entrepreneurial women develop highly personalized strategies for navigating their everyday lives. Women engage in multiple activities through which they develop a sense of their own self-reliance (*samostoiatel'nost'*) or independence (*nezavisimost'*)—terms that women emphasize is broad and includes above all, self-reliance in their emotional lives. I first began to pay attention to these activities because of the common ways in which women speak about them: They refer to them variously as parts of the processes of “self realization” (*samorealizatsiya*) and “self development” (*samorazvitiye*, or *razvitiye lichnosti*). Some women do not use these terms. However, they are a useful proxy to denote the importance to women of cultivating interests that they could pursue independently, or in a multitude of social contexts where they found themselves. To avoid self-development becoming a catch-all category, it needs to be theorized: Are there consistencies in the meanings that women give to these activities? Put another way, are there common aspects of the social context to which these highly personalized strategies are a response? In answering these questions, my goal is not to provide an exhaustive account of self-development in its various manifestations. Rather, I spotlight a key theme that will surface also in other narratives throughout this dissertation.

In this chapter, I discuss the activities entailed in self-development and women's narratives about them, highlighting the significance to women of being self-motivated. First, I analyze the social and political implications, to women, of having a personalized "purpose," or *tseľ*, at a moment when public policies and discourses reflect highly limited notions of what women should want.

Second, I further contextualize the meanings that women attribute to purpose by describing feelings of *anomie*, powerlessness, and depression surrounding work in the 1990s through the present. Many professional women concerns about their own and dependents' lack of motivation in the 2000s, particularly in a context of increasingly conservative attitudes towards women in Russia's neo-liberal workforce. The indeterminacies that Russians experienced in the early 1990s recur in women's lives in big and small ways, having to do with both the people women feel responsible for and periods when women feel that no one depends on them or values their contributions. In this environment, many women find it important to articulate their own motivations that guide and sustain their everyday routines.

The concluding section of this chapter considers how the meanings that women attribute to being goal-oriented might complicate Wendy Brown's notion of the neo-liberal subject as self-serving and lacking social vision. At this moment in Russia, for a woman to articulate her own desires demands courage and creativity and enables her to affect important forms of personal and social change. Women's goals, however fantastical and expansive, can function as important forms of social critique; I interpret them as political statements about alternative forms of social life.

Selfhood and purpose

Having an personally defined purpose, or *tseľ*¹, can be a constant source of motivation in a woman's life, in a setting where her interpersonal future is full of contingencies. It also motivates her to create her own daily routine, as opposed to circumstances when she might do nothing at all.

There were varied levels of abstraction to the goals that women defined. Margarita (age 34), for example, told me that her purpose was to renovate her apartment within the year. She had articulated this among other sales directors for the corporation where she worked, in a Moscow motivational seminar. She emphasized to me and to the sales directors she lectured to in St. Petersburg that a purpose must be broad enough to be divided into everyday actions over a sustained period of time: "If I say I want to make 40,000 rubles this week, that is not a purpose," Margarita told us in her lecture. "But let's say that my purpose is to renovate an apartment within a year. What am I going to need to do for that? I need money, I need to find a team, I need to buy materials; but the renovation is not going to be my monthly plan, right? It is going to be my purpose, something to bring to realization. Based on my purpose, I am going to be taking some kind of action." She went on to say that our purpose could be "personal" or "professional"—what mattered was having one, and that it could be broken into steps. "You need to know why you get up in the morning, and you need to have something to do each day," she said. "A purpose is like a guidebook. It tells you where to go."ⁱ In our private discussions, Margarita stressed that having goals such as renovating her apartment was a way of being a single mother, occupied with the day-to-day challenges

ⁱ Цель—это как путеводитель. Она показывает тебе дорогу.

of caring for her teenaged son, while giving herself something to look forward to. It was especially important for her to have things to do outside of the context of her relationship with her boyfriend in Moscow, which was pleasurable but less certain to her in terms of its prospects for the future.

Vera told me about her purpose the first time we met in March of 2008. I asked her how she liked St. Petersburg and she told me that while the move there had been difficult, the whole experience had given her a clearer sense of her purpose. I asked her what hers was. “To connect people. To make them realize that we all really want the same things—love and understanding.” She continued, “If you have a purpose, then that protects you against others’ judgments (*osuzhdeniia*) of you.” Through writing in her journal after arriving in St. Petersburg, Vera was able to reflect on events in her life before she migrated, and articulate what she most valued in life. This was a turning point enabling her to walk, after she had not been able to for weeks. She began to develop her own consulting business in St. Petersburg, through which she realized her ideals by teaching management teams to work together more peacefully.

It might be argued that Vera and Margarita were talking about very different kinds of goals—one of them material and finite, and another one, abstract and unbounded. Yet, for both of them, one of the ways in which having a purpose was significant was that they articulated their own, and these motivations enabled them to take everyday actions, including and especially going to work.

These women’s emphasis on self-defined goals is theoretically relevant because of the ways in which official Russian discourses of personhood, or *lichnost’*, sometimes prescribe what women’s goals for the future should be. *Lichnost’* is a morally loaded

term, one that has been used by Soviet and post-Soviet policymakers, health professionals, and Russians in everyday life to refer to a kind of moral selfhood (Rivkin-Fish 2005:12, 115-119). Michele Rivkin-Fish's work is emblematic of this in the particular social field of reproductive healthcare: In the case of Russian reproductive healthcare providers in the mid-1990s, *lichnost'* "was quite distinct from the self-sufficient individual of the American imagination. Rather than conceived of as an autonomous 'individual,' *lichnost'* is best rendered through the concept of a fully mature self-in-relation, a person with self-knowledge, self-respect, and the ability to engage in ethical relations with others—relations that similarly respect other selves' unique needs, and *seek their fulfillment* (2005:119)." Healthcare providers stressed the importance of pleasurable sexual relationships as stepping stones to women's eventual roles as wives and mothers. In a later talk entitled "Representing What Women Want," Rivkin-Fish focused more explicitly on ways in which Putin era media and policies circumscribe women's desires and interests. She argued that even articulating ideas about autonomy and priorities for women not connected with mothering demands a great deal of bravery. (2010)

Some official narratives during my own research complicated this picture somewhat. Local St. Petersburg policymakers sometimes gave lip service to the idea of work as central to women's identities, while still framing it as a part of their social roles as mothers. In June 2008, I attended a St. Petersburg conference among policymakers and local entrepreneurs, called "Women in National Projects" (*Zhenshchiny v*

Natsionalnykh Proektakh).ⁱⁱ Aside from a few questions from the men and women in the audience about a plan then under discussion to make it easier for entrepreneurs to rent real estate, the conference seemed like a kind of pep rally, during which policymakers outlined their ideological platforms and received varying degrees of applause from the audience. The Vice Governor of St. Petersburg, Lyudmila Kostkina, got up to speak. Loud applause erupted when the moderator announced that she was the mother of four children. She began her talk with the lines: “For a woman, the most important priority should be the development of her *lichnost*’. But every *lichnost*’ is unique (*opredelennaya*).” She then proceeded to characterize women’s personhood in sweeping terms:

Personal life, which for women means the birth and raising of children, is an important part of their citizenship, because the number one priority of the St. Petersburg government right now is the defense of motherhood. Beyond that, however, motherhood is a support to women’s participation in the workplace. Having children is essential in order for a woman to understand, “Why am I going to work?” The answer is that it [work] is essential, as an example for being able to teach our children how to work. A woman is a mother, and also someone with something to do (*chem-to zanimatsia*).

Kostkina’s speech is striking in its emphasis on work. However, work is important in her rationale only insofar as it is motivated by and cultivates a kind of motherhood focused on raising patriotic and hardworking citizens. Furthermore, the Vice Governor spoke about, but has done nothing to address, structural problems that make women’s participation in managerial work positions prohibitively difficult. Kostkina mentioned the difficulty that women had going to work after the birth of a child, making a general reference to discrimination, especially at the highest levels of politics and business.

ⁱⁱ One of my research participants, who knew local government officials, had obtained permission for me to attend.

Discrimination in Russia is illegalⁱⁱⁱ but nothing has been done yet in order to ensure that anti-discrimination laws are enforced. Across the board, women I knew who had worked for larger corporations tried to ensure that they did not get pregnant until leaving their jobs to move on to something else; or they simply hid their pregnancies from their bosses until the latest possible periods. Furthermore, the Vice Governor did not even address the prospect of getting men to help women with domestic work. She mentioned men once and the high rates of alcoholism among them, citing this as another reason why women needed to be the ones to work and provide everyone in their families, including husbands, with a good example.

Possibly, the contradictions and silences in official representations such as the Vice Governor's could be what leaves room for women to see this framing as open to some interpretation: Motherhood and work together should be what women aspire to, yet the institutions to enable this do not exist. As a result, these expectations hold less authority for women. Women themselves have criticized the state for doing nothing to address alcoholism or abandonment by men, despite media campaigns encouraging motherhood. The notions of personhood that they articulate for themselves may include motherhood, and usually include being a caretaker for *someone*, especially older relatives. Yet, sometimes work is the most important motivation for women, in and of itself—especially when they are self-employed. Moreover, other activities, such as some women's athletic and artistic activities, comprise part of their *lichnost*,⁹ and are important to them above and beyond enabling them to be emotionally stable enough to remain caretakers.

ⁱⁱⁱ Constitution of the Russian Federation, Section 1, Article 37

There were many times during my fieldwork when I was struck by the sudden intensity with which women encouraged me and one another to focus on self-development, especially when this meant steeling oneself against a male partner's eventual abandonment. In the winter of 2008, I told Tamara (age 22) that I had started to take photography lessons in St. Petersburg, to have something that was "mine" (*svoye*) to do outside of work. Her eyes lit up and she said: "That's the right thing to do, Andrea." This is very important for a woman to have something of her own, something to develop herself (*razvivat' lichnost'*). You work so hard, and then what do you have that is really your own? Then later down the road, let's say you get married. You won't be young forever. Let's say you turn 35, 36, and he leaves you for someone younger and more beautiful. It's absolutely imperative that you're doing something for yourself." Self-development is socially significant because it implies an expansion of traditionalist notions of women's futures to make room for parts of women's lives that have less to do with their relationships with other people—especially with marriage.

Uncertainty as anomie

Among Russian entrepreneurial women and in other ethnographic literature on post-socialism, a recurrent theme is peoples' uncertainty over what motivates them and with whom they belong—an upshot of the disintegration of the former Soviet ontological collective. In 1992, Eric Hobsbawm considered the social casualties of the breakdown of Soviet institutions and public values, writing: "Now that both the material framework and the routines of everyday life have broken down, now that all the established values are suddenly denied, what is the citizen of the USSR, what can he or she believe in

(1992:6)?” The multitude and rapidity of transitions that Russians experienced during the 1990s cannot be overemphasized: There were no longer groups such as the *komsomo* ^{iv} and labor unions—institutions that made school and work deeply social activities in Soviet society. Forms of social security such as jobs and housing were no longer guaranteed. People migrated to other cities and countries in order to find jobs, left Russia permanently, or simply disappeared. In the mid-1990s death rates among middle-aged men rivaled those in wartime countries (DaVanzo and Grammich 2001). Alcoholism, tuberculosis, and STIs began to spread exponentially, and along with all of these changes, moral panic ensued over low fertility.

Vera was taking me for a drive through Moscow when we passed the building that used to house the Soviet secret police, the KGB. I looked at the enormous building with its white columns and said, “Wow,” with what must have been an ominous tone because she said, “You know, socialism was not all bad. It was much easier than living today, because at least then there was something to believe in (*bylo v chem verit'*). A form of change that is sometimes difficult to capture is the sense of social disorientation that

^{iv} The Communist Union of Youth (Russian: Коммунистический союз молодёжи), established in 1918 and reaching its peak in the 1970s, with tens of millions of members. The ages of rank-and-file members of the *komsomol* ranged between 14 and 28. The *Komsomol* served as a ready supply of labor and political activists for the Communist party apparatus, with branches in peoples' workplaces and universities. Members who were in the higher ranks were sometimes given priority for job promotions and the *komsomol* sometimes served as a ladder towards political office. At the 20th Congress of the *Komsomol* in 1987, the rules of the *Komsomol* were radically revised to reflect market-oriented reforms, and some senior members were given property and financial capital in order to give them a head start in opening their own businesses. Although many of the older women I knew occupied positions of authority within the *komsomol*, they were not given these privileges during the 1980s. However, these women continue to point out that the skills and less frequently, the social connections they gained through the *komsomol* have been instrumental to the founding of their own enterprises. Gradually in the late 1980s, the purpose and aims of the *komsomol* grew blurry and the organization dissolved.

Russians felt when formerly pervasive socialist ideologies such as collectivism and artistic creativity were widely questioned in new media discourses in the early 1990s.

Vera became a very successful business owner in the early 1990s, but she went through periods when she was making a lot of money but the choice of what to do with their days seemed completely arbitrary. The story of Vera's changing attitudes towards self-development is a striking illustration of just how important it became for her to have something to believe in: In the late 1980s, she reported on and had expelled two students from the university where she was a *komsomol'ka* and head of the Department of Mass Culture. Those students had come to her carrying pamphlets from the training company that Vera would eventually begin working for. The pamphlets proposed meditation exercises so that people could develop an "independent mindset" (*nezavisimoe myshlenie*), and Vera deemed this literature subversive to the Soviet ideologies she was in charge of promoting. In the 1990s, however, a culmination of factors made the same company and its programs and literature very important to Vera as a new way of thinking about her life.

Some of Vera's narratives and many other women's suggest a state of social disorientation and lack of values that Emile Durkheim has described as *anomie* (1993[1902]:78-79). After a spouse left unexpectedly, a loved one grew ill, work was lost, or women moved to a new city, they sometimes found it impossible to get out of bed in the morning. For women, this had to do with having no one for companionship or for help meeting other material needs. It sometimes, but not always, had to do with not having anyone who relied *upon* them. As Caldwell writes, both needing and being needed are flip sides of the same coin, as both have to do with being a part of a web of

social relations (2004:99). Yet, even women with children struggled to find motivation during critical periods in their lives, when they lost work, or were abandoned by a spouse, for example. It was the articulation of goals that enabled women to get out of bed each morning and carry out routines.

There were situations during this period and into the 2000s when women found any action or movement unthinkable, both because they were without people in their lives and because they had nothing that they valued, nothing to strive for. The weeks that Vera spent in bed after migrating to St. Petersburg exemplifies this state; she even had a job available to her at a local company, but she was not at the top, making her own decisions as she once did, and she did not feel that practices within the company were ethical. As Durkheim points out about *anomie*, the pursuit of self-interest is not freedom; people need publicly defined moral duty. He wrote, “[T]he circumstances in which we live must keep us awake (1993[1902]:79).” Sometimes, the moral duties that women prescribed for themselves had a great deal to do with interests beyond the family, such as the social functions they saw their work fulfilling—a contrast from the narrowly defined ideas of selfhood and work that I encountered at the policymaking conference, for example.

A parallel and related set of concerns women had were that they and/or their family members would not wake up in the morning. In Chapter 1, I discussed Elena’s concerns about her aunt, who she said had lost her “taste for life” (*vkus dlia zhizni*), during a particularly difficult period her aunt had working as an emergency room doctor in St. Petersburg. When I asked Elena one day during the winter how her aunt was, Elena’s face lit up and she told me that her aunt had gone shopping that day. “She has started to want things,” she said, “She has reasons to leave the house now.” She told me

about the skirt her aunt had purchased for herself. Elena consistently linked her aunt's desire to get up in the morning and to leave the house with her own abilities to talk with her aunt about her day-to-day experiences working in St. Petersburg's downtown, and her hopes to return to Russia after business school and found her own firm. Other women echoed similar comments about their older relatives and their worries that they had nothing to motivate them.

In a setting in which multiple aspects of social life have come unmoored since the 1990s, these professional women viewed lack of motivation as a major problem threatening their own and their family members' abilities to do things with their days. An important caveat is that concerns about lack of motivation are not simply natural or inevitable responses to social change, but rather, products of a particular cultural and historical context. Possibly echoed in these concerns, and in women's relatives' difficulties weathering the loss of older livelihoods, is a Soviet past in which production was kept up as a moral end in itself, even past the point of any actual need for consumption or actual demand.

The 1990s: Russia "up for grabs"

Most interesting about women's responses to the fall of older value systems and institutions is how strikingly agentive they are. Women are certainly not responding in ways that scholars have already discussed. That is, women are not forming explicit new group allegiances, a process that can be closely intertwined with modern state projects (Nfa and Heyat 2002; Forest et. al 2005; Tishkov 1997; Uehling 2004; Pelkmans 2006; Bringa 1995:33). Katherine Verdery (1992), for example, writes that the subject position

formerly cultivated during socialism was “dependency, rather than the agency cultivated by citizenship or the solidarity of ethno-nationalism (1992:8).” However, among entrepreneurial women I know, the question regarding with whom to identify has been so ambiguous as to be irrelevant. An alternative social strategy they have utilized entails defining themselves as independently motivated and resourceful, qualities that have resonated with the exigencies of their lives.

As an alternative to new group affiliations, conversations I have had with women and some men have painted a picture of the 1990s as a pivotal period when a person either did something new with his or her life, or did not. For many women, alongside the unmooring of older forms of social life came new possibilities for self-definition. Lack of state regulations for new businesses and inconsistent law enforcement made a multitude of pursuits, from starting an enterprise to simply food shopping, highly uncertain and challenging. However, this also meant that men and women had to do things in order to survive that were beyond what people might expect of them due to their gender, for example. Julie Hemment describes this time of chaos and possibility as a period when “Russia was up for grabs (2007:4).” For Russian entrepreneurial women, the chaos and social transformations of the 1990s meant possibilities to participate in social life in ways that official and everyday gender discourse did not condone. However, the consequences of *not* doing something new with one’s life were great, in light of widespread cultural attitudes that people themselves were responsible for poverty or poor health (or that of their family members).

Women I knew who were above the age of 35 and therefore in a position to work during this period described how new ways of earning a living and of interacting in

society became possible. During the financial crisis of 1998, Nadezhda (age 53), for example, lost her job as an engineer at the same time that her husband did. She began a new private school and textbook publishing press and gave her husband a job. Nadezhda also saw the school as filling an important social function because she was able to provide an education to people of all ages who could not find work in 1990s Russia: “In the first years of the school, there were very many people who finished the ninth grade,^v or vocational school, and who returned from the army, and it was already another country. They had nowhere to go. The factories were not open, and no one needed these peoples’ work...For many this [her school] was their only chance to get a basic education...”^{vi} Nadezhda lost contact with her older friends, with whom she reported no longer having anything to talk about. Nevertheless, she attributed her ability to build a business and maintain one to the fact that others in her family and community relied on the services she provided for employment. It was not unusual for women who entered business during the 1990s to employ their husbands in the process.

Other women framed starting a business to deal with crises in their own lives, to “lift themselves up,” rather than directly helping their family members through employment or financial support. An example was Oksana, who started her own

^v Basic general education in Russia lasts for nine years, after which students may enter a senior high school to receive secondary general education, or a non-university vocational school or non-university higher educational institution. Further, a year of army service is compulsory for men in Russia upon finishing their education.

^{vi} И если, вот, в первые годы, когда мы работали, очень много было ребят, которые... окончили девять классов, там, да, окончили техническое училище, ну, получили рабочую специальность, ушли в армию, вернулись из армии, и уже другая страна. И им вообще никуда было. Заводы не работают, их рабочие руки никому не нужны. И у них у многих был единственный шанс, вот, получить среднее образование...

language instruction and motivational seminar business in 1998 at the very beginning of the financial crisis in Russia. She did this right after her first husband left her and she started living with her parents alone. Oksana would have been more financially secure had she remained in her position as an English instructor for a local medical school. She sold the car she had bought for her husband and purchased a business from someone she knew. She would not begin to make money for over a year, and she lost more money at first. However, Oksana stressed that during that time, work gave her something to do (*chem zanimatsya*) and a reason to get out of bed each morning (*chtoby ya znala, zachem vstavat'sya*). Her example, as well as Nadezhda's, mirror how the 1990s and other crises in women's lives inspired new work projects, partly out of a need to support their own and their family members' morale.

These personalized strategies must be understood within an environment where official and popular narratives emphasized transition as a personal process, and peoples' inabilities to adjust to Russia's new neo-liberal market as personal failures. These attitudes were mirrored in political, corporate, and everyday discourses. Mikhail Gorbachev, himself, in his 1988 book, emphasized the importance of change, or restructuring (*perestroika*) at the personal level. The book was entitled: *Perestroika and a New Way of Thinking for Our Country and for the Entire World* (1988).^{vii} Having described numerous economic policy changes that had been made and were forthcoming, as well as new freedoms of speech and press, Gorbachev assessed what these changes would mean for Soviet citizens:

^{vii} ПЕРЕСТРОЙКА И НОВОЕ МЫШЛЕНИЕ ДЛЯ НАШЕЙ СТРАНЫ И ДЛЯ ВСЕГО МИРА

What is this world, our present day human world? It is many-sided, variegated, full of hostile forces, sharp contradictions. This is a world of fundamental social displacements, of all-encompassing scientific and technological revolutions, of intensifying global problems—economic and with regard to natural resources, as well as radical transformations of information. This is a world where unprecedented possibilities for development and progress coexist with fierce poverty and extreme backwardness. But running to the past is not an answer to the calls of the future. Rather, the answer is adventurousness, in place of fear and self doubt. (1988:137-138) ^{viii}

Note the emphasis, in this passage, on personal action as the strategy for living amidst a number of different social changes. Scholars of Russia have noted that Russian public discourses overwhelmingly emphasize peoples' immoral behavior as a source of social problems, and not structural inequalities (e.g. Glanzer 2002). Olga (age 25) told me that as a child in Moscow in the early 1990s, her classmates used to tease her because her clothing was not as expensive looking as theirs. She attributed her family's lack of wealth relative to her peers' to the fact that her parents, formerly well-off engineers, had not been able to change their way of thinking to conform with Russia's new capitalist system:

What happened was that people who earned a lot of money had to change their way of thinking (*perestroit' myshlenie*). What came first was not intelligence, or intellect, but those qualities such as certainty, domination, and the ability to direct a collective. To be quiet sometimes, sometimes maybe to lie. My parents did not have these qualities, and they were also old [over 50, in 1991 when they stopped getting paid]. Maybe for those reasons and others they could not change their ways of thinking. My Dad certainly could not. My Mom by this point has

^{viii} Какой же он, наш общий мир, мир нынешних поколений рода человеческого? Он многолик, пестр, пронизан противоборствующими тенденциями, острыми противоречиями. Это мир фундаментальных социальных сдвигов, всеобъемлющей научно-технической революции, обострения глобальных проблем — экономических, сырьевых и др., радикальных перемен в информации. Мир, где соседствуют невиданные возможности развития, прогресса и свирепая нищета, отсталость, средневековье. Но бегство в прошлое — не ответ на вызовы грядущего, а авантюризм, замешанный на страхе и неуверенности в себе. (1988:137-138)

changed (*perestroilas'*), and that's why she does her own work now, and doesn't work for a boss.^{ix}

When I met her in 2007, Olga was the public relations director at a mid-sized advertising firm in Moscow. She, a female friend, and her mother were beginning to put together a small cosmetics business from the apartment Olga shared with her mother. That is what she meant when she said that her mother does her own work.^x Most interesting to me about her narrative is that Olga attributed her parents' relative lack of wealth to their own inability to change the way they thought, in order to become more assertive, manipulative corporate citizens.

On other occasions, Olga described social and economic factors that had made the 1990s difficult for her parents: Olga was born late, so that her grandmother, who might otherwise have been in charge of childcare,^{xi} was already too old to spend much time with her. She spent the time she did have with Olga's cousin, whom she allegedly

^{ix} “Случилось то, что людям, которых брали на высокие денежные оклады требовалось перестроить мышление. То есть на первый план выходил не ум, не интеллект, а такие качества как уверенность, доминирование, умение управлять коллективом, умение где-то смолчать, где-то может быть сказать неправду. А у них этих качеств не было, и в силу возраста и, может быть, еще каких-то причин они не смогли перестроиться в своем мышлении. Папа так и не смог. Мама сейчас перестроилась, поэтому она сейчас занимается своим делом, а не работает на работодателя.”

^x Ten months after this conversation took place Olga e-mailed me and said that her mother had been robbed on the street at gunpoint. The two of them had stopped their work for the time being until her mother recovered from the “shock.” I never learned if the robbery had anything to do with their business, and I never heard back from Olga again after that.

^{xi} It is common practice in Russia for grandparents (and especially grandmothers) to provide childcare. However, as people are having children at later ages and increasing numbers of elderly must work themselves in order to survive, the practice is becoming less common than it was in the socialist period and the early 1990s.

avored. Olga's mother therefore worked less than she might have otherwise, resulting in less money for the family. Also, for complicated reasons related to the family's limited privileges during socialism, they had no apartment of their own. Instead, they lived together in a communal apartment, where the rent became high in the 1990s. Despite these factors, Olga still saw the 1990s as a time when her parents might have changed themselves in order to survive in the new economic order.

Self-fulfillment, not social obligation

The goals that women articulate through self-development are more expansive than the ones represented in public discourse. They are intimately tied to women's efforts to care for dependents without sacrificing the wide diversity of goals that they have for themselves. These are two important meanings to which I will call attention in the following story. The story concerns the younger sister of a research participant, Tamara (age 22), who was neither trying to start her own business nor the head of a corporation when I met her. However, she was trying to advance up the ranks of a United States-owned technology firm in order to work in management. I relate her story in order to show how subsuming the need to fulfill personal obligations within a larger project of personal fulfillment can make room for other projects within a woman's life. It is a fresh example of how debt can produce the social (Roitman 2003; Han 2004): Tamara found creative means for meeting familial obligations that involved activities that she found personally and socially rewarding.

In the winter of 2008, Tamara left her job as an engineer and project manager in a Russian office of an American corporation. The company was not offering more money,

which she needed for a number of reasons: Her mother, who worked for St. Petersburg's public transportation system, had a back injury preventing her from continuing to work full time. Also, Tamara's older sister, Alla (age 29), was pregnant and had voluntarily left the company where she occupied a top management position. Although Alla's husband made some money as a mid-level administrator for a company, both sisters felt that the family would need more support in order to make ends meet. Tamara's sister had paid for her university education and now Tamara felt the need to take over supporting her mother financially, supplementing the income of her sister's family. This was why Tamara left her job in order to seek a position that offered her better financial rewards. Alla grew concerned about Tamara when she began to spend days in bed and came down twice with the flu in one month. She gave Tamara money to attend a training that she herself had been through, and through which she had met other young women with similar interests as her own. The training was a ten-hour seminar costing approximately \$500, and led by a psychotherapist. It was called, "I am a woman."^{xii}

Four other women attended the training—two business owners, one housewife, and a woman who worked as a secretary at a company. With the psychotherapist, Tamara and the other women discussed what they did for a living, the people in their lives, and the things that they worried about. They received advice from the psychologist about how to think and behave differently, in order to be more satisfied with their lives. Tamara told me that it was through this training that she learned to "think more positively (*boleē pozitivno myshlit'*)" about her life. As she put it the following day when I visited

^{xii} Vera, while not acquainted with this psychotherapist, had also led a motivational seminar by the same name.

her, “Rather than trying to be happy, I would have fallen apart (*opustilas’ by*).”^{xiii} After the motivational seminar, she began to seek out other things to do such as swimming at a local pool, creating a routine in her day while she searched for a new job. Most significant to her was the idea of having the motivation to get up, in addition to knowing that she would be capable in the future of giving structure to her days should the circumstances arise again when the choice of what to do was similarly wide open and ambiguous.

In particular, Tamara discussed in the group her worries about work and her family responsibilities. She had looked for work and only found two positions of lower status and pay than at her previous company. Tamara saw her mother and sister as having sacrificed a great deal for their families. In addition to wanting to support them in return, Tamara sought to forge a career for herself that would afford her material and emotional self-reliance. In other words, Tamara wanted her career to be interesting (*interesno*) enough that she would not feel as though she needed to marry, as her mother and her sister had. Yet, in order to find better work, Tamara felt it was necessary to learn to speak English.

During “I am a woman,” the psychologist convinced Tamara that she was not in any way obligated to her sister; the latter had helped Tamara for her own sense of satisfaction. I find this aspect of Tamara’s participation interesting in that she learned to interpret the same actions as self-fulfillment rather than social obligation. Tamara started to think about helping her sister as a positive purpose, or *tse*,’ for herself and not as an

^{xiii} The verb “to fall apart,” or *opustit’sia*, was one that came up often in women’s conversations about themselves, when they had reached a point of not knowing what to do with their lives.

obligation. This way of thinking about a purpose mirrors what Rivkin-Fish (2005) has said about personhood being oriented towards the interests of others. However, it is worth noting that doing so included other life plans that were directly related to Tamara's own fulfillment. Tamara also articulated her dream to live in London for several months during the summer of 2008, before her sister gave birth. That is, several important goals coincided in Tamara's life during those two months: to earn enough money on which to live and support her sister and mother, to learn to speak English, and to travel to England. The latter never became a reality for Tamara because her English skills were not deemed strong enough in order for her to receive an entry visa. Tamara worked a number of sales jobs in 2008. By the time I returned during the fall of 2009, she had found a new job working as director of advertising for a local newspaper. She did this with the help of a friend whom Alla had met at a different training run by an employment agency for people seeking jobs in the business world.

Tamara's goal of going to England never struck me as realistic because she did not have the money to finance living expenses and education there. Often, both my Russian acquaintances and I were skeptical when I talked about motivational seminars and the kinds of goals I heard women articulate within them. "What exactly has changed in women's lives as a result of participating in these seminars?" asked my writing tutor at Herzen University. I was not always sure what the answer was to that question.

Talking with Tamara and other women I knew who had attended motivational seminars, I decided that what had changed was that daily life in Russia had become full of new and interesting possibilities: Although she did not make it to England, when this plan failed she sought out and found a former colleague of Alla's who would tutor her in

English. She did not find a job right away, and her new job did not pay significantly more than her old one. However, Tamara's new job did reflect many of the qualities that she was looking for in a job: a chance to use her degree in economics, to meet new people every day, to interact with foreigners, and to make her own creative decisions. Tamara continues to work at least one other part-time job and is frequently exhausted. However, she found ways of doing things in Russia that were meaningful to her.

Above all, she found herself among colleagues and friends who similarly placed a priority on being independent and caring for themselves. One day in the winter of 2008, I arrived at Tamara's apartment shortly after she had finished with the training. She looked much less tired than I had seen her, and I noticed that she was smiling again, as she had not in some time. She said to me, "The best thing I got out of this was the idea that I need to take care of myself (*zabotitsia o sebe*).” Tamara described to me her swimming, some new cosmetics that she had bought, and the concerted effort she was making to seek out friends on the Internet who shared similar hobbies and interests. The motivational seminar she attended gave Tamara energy to pursue her daily life and it helped her to find others among whom those goals made sense. In these respects, even a self-development exercise that had to do with Tamara articulating goals that were care-related still ended up encompassing much more than that.

Women were aware of various popular avenues in Russia for managing stress and uncertainty, such as alcoholism. Tamara contrasted this possibility with her own decision to attend "I am a woman," and subsequent motivational seminars.^{xiv} Like Tamara, most

^{xiv}Alcoholism is a major problem and has been linked with stress related to the broader social context (Pietila and Rytönen, 2007), although reported rates of alcohol-related

other women I know who attended motivational seminars did not drink. Another possibility that Tamara could have continued to pursue was emigration.^{xv} Tamara seriously considered answering several ads she saw for work in Europe, although friends warned her about other women they knew who had left under similar circumstances and disappeared. It was during the same period that Tamara was considering trying to leave that her sister encouraged her to attend the motivational seminar. At this time, Tamara turned her energies from exploring options for migration toward seeking out new opportunities for self-improvement within Russia.

Women who spent the most time in motivational seminars tended to have less money than others and to be younger. Those who were in their late 40s and in their 50s entered the post-Soviet period with significant social connections and cultural and social capital, based on their families' positions in the Communist party structure. They took extended trips to get away from the stresses of their everyday lives and meet with foreign friends and lovers. Some had husbands with more respect for their work lives. This was partly because these women were no longer in positions where they were held responsible for childcare. Tamara and some other younger women did not see salvation in marriage, nor did they always have money, language skills, or social connections to

deaths and illnesses are lower among women (Ashwin and Lytkina 2004; Rotkirch 2000:265).

^{xv} Hundreds of thousands of young women leave Russia each year to marry Western men or pursue jobs, and an estimated 176,000 get caught in the sex trafficking industry (Mendelson 2008).

leave Russia. For them, motivational seminars were costly and time consuming, but a viable alternative.^{xvi}

For Tamara as well as some other women, developing themselves ultimately entailed the formation of communities where women really did find others who appreciate them and the kinds of lives they want to lead. By contrast, Yulia (age 29) and her sister, Anastasia (35), lived next door to one another and had each had owned or run their own enterprises at one point. They did some of the same exercises on their own (i.e. creating vision boards), which other women did in motivational seminars. Yet, they were not particularly close with one another; Anastasia claimed to have little in common with her sister, who had a child much later than she did. Each sister wanted to know from me about who were the other businesswomen in the city—what they did, what their life concerns were, etc. Both were married and their husbands demanded a great deal of their time. Yulia was at the time occupied with her work, although Anastasia had recently left her job. So, they had little time to devote to activities such as motivational seminars. Other women who started out in motivational seminars in order to gain connections and professional knowledge were poorer but gained communities of friends and colleagues that formed alternatives to the nuclear family.

Personal goals and social activism

Conversations with other women echoed the efficacy of having goals, but sometimes women drew explicit links between their own lives and broader social change. This was something that came about especially in motivational seminars that emphasized

^{xvi} For further commentary on class differences shaping the forms of self-development in which women engaged, please see Chapter 6.

developing peoples' psychic and mystical powers. I have already discussed the New Age bookstore seminars that Elena attended in 2007 and 2008, promising personal growth (*lichnoi rost*). During one of those sessions in early 2008, the leaders predicted the end of the world in 2012 ^{xvii} due in part to widespread violence. They believed that extraterrestrial beings from another planet would obliterate Earth because they were angry at all of the violence and war here.

In Elena's own interpretation of the seminar leaders' predictions, powerful politicians throughout the world cared more about their own wealth and their nation's acquisition of territory and resources, than they did about human concerns such as healthcare and the environment. I knew that this interpretation had been informed by Elena's own relationship with her aunt, who, as an emergency room doctor in the 1990s, had become deeply upset by rapid removals of state supports and its effects on her own and her patients' lives. ^{xviii} Elena saw her plans to establish a tourism firm as a small way of building up mutual understanding between Russians, who she perceived as extremely close minded, and foreigners. If enough people such as she pursued activities that would help build mutual understanding, then the attack would be averted.

^{xvii} Elena is referring here to an apocalyptic vision based on widely disputed popular, scientific, and philosophical interpretations of a calendar from pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.

^{xviii} Over tea with Elena and her mother, the latter had spoken about a variety of factors that had made the 1990s difficult for her. Her salary as an emergency room doctor decreased in value by over 50% in 1992. The hospital where she worked witnessed a drastic depletion of resources such as medicine and food. Further, there was an increase in patients who entered the emergency room with problems that she saw as related to stress: alcohol poisoning, violence, and cardiovascular arrest. Elena's mother did not attribute these changes to any particular political decisions or figures. However, Elena saw the problems that had affected her mother as having to do with a complete absence of state support post-1991.

We were sitting in a crowded café one evening while she told me about the predictions and the role that she envisioned her own business playing in averting global disaster. Elena had sent me a text message just an hour before, telling me it was urgent that we meet; she had to tell me something. She was speaking English because, as she told me, she did not believe that most Russians sitting around us were “ready” for the information that she had to share. Hearing her story, I was not sure of my own readiness. I blurted out, “Do you *really* know the world will end in 2012?” She looked at me for a moment.

“What’s the difference? Elena replied. “Is peace not a good thing to want?”

I nodded at her. “I think that peace is a good thing to want.”

Elena believed in the prophecy, but she valued her belief because she was able to situate her entrepreneurial activities within a much larger aim of encouraging peoples’ curiosity about one another’s diverse perspectives. On the ground, this meant a number of actions both directly and indirectly related to Elena’s plans to run a tourism firm: She and her aunt regularly hosted foreign tourists in their apartment, through Elena’s involvement on an international traveler’s website. At the nonprofit that she managed in the evenings, Elena invited speakers whom she believed represented interesting career possibilities and cultural perspectives for the high school students she taught: for example, local musicians and artists, as well as a Native American tourist she met at a party, who spoke about Cherokee holidays.^{xix} Finally, while Elena did not have as much

^{xix} Elena had very particular notions of what culture entailed. She placed a great deal of emphasis on the holidays that people from different cultures celebrated as a way of “knowing” those cultures. The societies that Elena valued teaching students about included the United States, which she saw an economic and cultural value in knowing about, and indigenous cultures in Russia and around the world. Elena saw as valuable for

decision-making power as she preferred at her current job, she understood her own efforts to forge contracts teaching Russian language and culture to foreign businesses as part of her broader vision. Elena took very seriously the idea that she could create a more peaceful and understanding world through her everyday actions. I understood that evening in the café that it was important for her to ground these actions within a larger motivational framework.

In Elena's case, these goals must be understood in a context where there were little to no avenues for women to affect change through political involvement or civil society.^{xx} She was reaching beyond Russian society to more mystical means of enacting change. In her analysis of popular American beliefs about space aliens, political scientist Jodi Dean has argued that peoples' beliefs about politicians' manipulations and conspiracies have less to do with their literal meaning than with notions of "how people will live and work together (1998:8)." Elena's rationale for her business aspirations takes Dean's ideas a step further to illustrate how beliefs about political corruption can operate as more than a critique; they can also function as a guide for peoples' everyday social actions. I often got the sense that wanting something mattered more to women than whether or not their goals and visions were literally realizable in every way.

their apparently universal insights on how to live a healthier, more satisfying life. Another notion of culture reflected in Elena's programming was the Russian idea of "culturedness" or *kultur'nost'*—meaning in this context, knowledge of literature, music, and the arts.

^{xx} See the section in Chapter 2, "Recruitment: Where are all the businesswomen?" for a discussion of late 2000s federal legislations that placed severe legal and financial restrictions on nongovernmental organizations in Russia. In contemporary Russia, anyone who takes on a public organizing role faces the prospect of fines, harassment, or being shut down by officials if their activities are deemed by the federal government in any way to interfere with state interests. For more information on this topic, see *Gender Violence in Russia* (2009), by Janet Elise Johnson.

The reasons that these mystical means of enacting social change resonated so strongly with Elena are complex and might have as much to do with her particular life history and aspirations, the people whom she wanted to be around, and her own caretaking responsibilities. However, Carla Freeman (2007) in her discussion of women entrepreneurs in Barbados offers some explanations as to why “New Age” religious communities might be particularly appealing: She argues that these women are looking for a more intimate environment within which to forge business connections. (261) Part of the incentive for Elena to participate in this seminar was that Vera, the woman who she most admired at the time, was taking part in it and valued it as well. Speaking more broadly about entrepreneurial men and women, Freeman points to peoples’ attempts at “self-mastery” in the face of the uncertainties that come with global economic flexibility (261)—attempts that they make through these spiritual communities as well as other practices such as yoga and psychological counseling. (261) Freeman’s statement sheds some explanatory light on what the seminars might have meant to Elena, but she leaves open the question of exactly how these practices help people to face uncertainties. In my view, the emphasis within the seminar on mystical channels for change resonated strongly with Elena’s desire to play an activist role in the world. The mystical element of the seminar—its connection between peoples’ actions on the ground and satisfying an extraterrestrial entity—gave Elena the intellectual freedom to formulate a response to structural violence under circumstances when the causes of structural violence were multiple and obscure.

An intergenerational context: Elena’s story

Elena's story is valuable also in the light it sheds on the role of interpersonal relationships in young women's articulation of their own goals, specifically in one-on-one interactions with older women who were teachers, therapists, or their mentors in the business world. Elena's story illustrates the centrality of being a purposeful person with her own willingness to think carefully about what she wanted and what, in her life and relationships, was not permissible—a kind of self-reflection that she believed made her unique among the peers with whom she went to school.

Elena recalled conversations with two women in her life who had a profound influence on how she thinks of herself today: her professor of existential psychology from when she was a university student, and a psychotherapist that she visited regularly during the same period of her life. It is in the context of these relationships that Elena began to think in more optimistic terms about her future.

Elena was 19 when she began to see a psychotherapist. She was in her second year of living with her boyfriend, a Russian businessman whom she had met online and moved in with two weeks later, after her aunt began a period of hospitalization. Elena's description of her relationship with her professor suggests the value negotiated among these two women, of leading a reflective, goal-oriented life in which one does not take for granted certain constraints placed upon them by others:

E: As a student I had one teacher with whom I literally fell in love. I didn't even expect this of myself. I don't even know what about her attracted me...She taught existential psychology. Basically, topics such as the meaning of life, and the freedom of choice.

A: The same themes that interest you today, right?

E: Yes. Self-realization, self-development. In my view she had a somewhat nonstandard approach to teaching. She always said, "You can take a written exam, but you don't have to. You can also read a book from this list." She gave

us a list. “And we’ll discuss it,” she said. I remember that out of seventy people, I was the only one in the class who chose the latter route. I read a book. She advised me to read a book by Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist* I think it is in English. It is written like a quest. Unbelievable book, because it exposes so many layers of reality...and a person can never figure out what the truth is. He always has to make a particular choice in life...And I read and I came to her and said, “Let’s discuss.” I was the only person who did not take a ticket.

What always drew me to her was the fact that she related to students differently. You didn’t simply arrive, read something, and leave. She sought students who were interested in something, students who strive ...goal-oriented students . I think that I was one of them. We had informal meetings, when we simply spent time together. We went to a museum. We met on the street and went shopping, looking at various hats, purses. She attracted me from a feminine point of view. I wanted to learn that. With my aunt I never saw a certain...But here it was...This was the type of femininity that I sought. That’s one thing. Another thing was that she always was pushing me towards self-development. And in such a way! This is very interesting. She frustrated me. I mean that I always found myself in such a state as though someone was booting me from behind, saying, “Think, girl!”

A: She didn’t let you simply be comfortable with life.

E: All the time, it wasn’t as though she was telling me what to do, but she made me think. There was the time when I lived with my first boyfriend, with whom I had a horrible relationship. My boyfriend was even jealous of her. There was a point when he said, “Either she, or I.” Can you imagine?

A: Yes.

E: He didn’t like that I talked with her on the telephone. I loved talking with her in the evenings and discussing something. I actually had something to discuss! Things were happening with me, changes, and I needed to consult with her, to ask her things. And she answered my questions. That was when my boyfriend simply lost his mind. He started forbidding me to talk on the phone. And she asked, “Do you need this? What is this crap? What is going on?” She made me think about what, in general, I allow myself to do.

Soon after, conflicts with her boyfriend began about this relationship. Elena cried often.

Her boyfriend told her there was something wrong with her, gave her money, and simply told her to go to the doctor. Elena chose to visit a psychotherapist. Her conversations with this woman, as she described them, similarly reflect an ongoing project of reflecting on who she wanted to be and what she wanted in life:

I analyzed from whom I took my various approaches to life: my relationship to money, the way I think about holidays, about love. As I analyzed, I understood that my strongest character traits—the ones that help me to get out of any situation, from any period of depression—are from my stepfather. He taught me to be strong. And not to strengthen myself from suffering. He had a very good sense of humor. Even when he was having a hard time, he got himself out of bed and said “The autopsy will show it! If I die, then the doctors will figure out why. Right now I need to live and take care of business!” I had this example of a person who lifted himself up no matter what and did what he had to do. With humor and a smile on his face.

In an un-taped conversation, Elena told me about a timeline she constructed with her therapist, in which she described and drew visual images of different points in her future to which she looked forward. These were moments she later revised as her goals changed and expanded. Six years ago, for example, she wanted to be married and have children by age twenty five. By the time I first met her in 2007, Elena had revised her plans to include business school in the United States and beginning her own tourism firm, in addition to learning to think more positively (*positivno myshlit'*). The walls of her room were plastered with magazine cutouts and drawings representing these different plans and images: a young woman in a business suit, carrying a briefcase, a little girl swimming underwater reaching for a starfish, and a sign in magic marker that read, “What you think about, you become” (*O chem dumaesh', tem i stanovish'sia.*)

Elena left her boyfriend several months after starting therapy, during a particularly bad fight when he was hitting her. She described how she left quickly to escape his rage and so that she would not change her mind; she did not even have time to put on her snow boots. It is unclear whether or not the relationships she had with her professor and her therapist directly influenced her decision to go. What is clear to me from our conversations is that Elena framed both of these relationships as encouraging her to be reflective of what she wanted in life, and what her womanhood consisted of.

These discussions, she sets in the context of a heterosexual relationship and forms of physical and epistemic violence that she might have otherwise taken for granted. Note, however, that while these renegotiations of selfhood took place among women, the model that Elena looked to from her past in order to define herself as strengthened by a sense of humor, was her stepfather, who left her aunt weeks after her aunt's illness began.

Psychotherapy is not new in Russia. It existed during the early Soviet period, but in the late Soviet period authorities dismissed it as a bourgeois practice. However, specific Soviet educational programs, such as school classes on sex roles initiated under Stalin in the 1930s, drew directly from Freudian ideas regarding innate gendered traits that should be cultivated throughout a child's socialization. In the post-Soviet era, anthropologists and journalists have documented the growing popularity of psychotherapy, particularly among wealthier businesspeople (Lindquist 2002, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2006).^{xxi} Wealth can carry extremely negative moral connotations in Russia (Ries 2002) and the popularity of psychotherapy among businesspeople has also lent it a negative stigma in popular discourse. Some women nevertheless valued the process as a means of changing the way they thought and envisioned their futures. Elena's decision to go to therapy might be further read as challenging gendered notions of selfhood in Russia, in that their decisions further challenge notions of class in which gender can be so heavily embedded.

The gender of self-development?

^{xxi} There is ethnographic evidence that many such practitioners exist, although Russia's only state certification institution has approved just fifteen therapists. A multitude of different approaches to psychotherapy nevertheless exist and have significant followings, although they are quite diverse in content.

Women's reconfigurations of selfhood complicate both contemporary political gender discourses, as well as older Russian notions of gender spanning through the Soviet era and before— notions of women as gaining moral authority and social worth through suffering and passivity and a willingness to suffer (Ries 1997:42-83; Marsh 1998:8; Goscilo and Lanoux 2006:8). On the other hand, sometimes the Russian adaptations of media and programs with which women engage are exclusionary of them as capable of being decisive, goal-oriented, and strong players in the business world—people who know what they want. Picking and choosing from a variety of sources, women are articulating themselves as both decisive and feminine, and some find social settings where a decisive woman is legible and normal. This confluence of circumstances—what Jennifer Patino might call “moral alchemy” (2009)—enables women to legitimate themselves as gendered subjects who are markedly different from their mothers and many of their same-age peers.

Notably, self-development media and programs that are important to women's life projects can themselves assume a male audience, or dismiss outright the possibilities for women to actualize themselves through business. Yulia lent me a book by a Russian author, Marina Melia, called *Business is Psychology: The Psychological Coordinates of the Modern Business Person* (2005).^{xxii} Yulia gave me the book to read but had read it so long ago that she could not recall exactly what about it she had found compelling. I read it myself. A paragraph on the inside cover assumes a male reader: “Why doesn't money solve our problems? Why are our children so thankless? Why doesn't our family life work out? How can we build these relationships, so that our wives and children

^{xxii} A bestseller in Russia when it came out in 2005. The author had been a psychologist for Russian athletic teams and later became a director at a Russian-American company.

become our sources of support?” Only later does the book contain a chapter on women and different management styles, relating each to a role in the family. A “princess,” for example, is a woman who receives her business as a gift from her wealthy husband, and treats business as a “game”; someone else ultimately answers for her failures in management and finance. The last category is that of a “Commander.”

A woman “behind the wheel” sometimes seems like a stereotype: It is not womanly to command. One woman who was director of a large firm was asked what in her life was missing, given that business had become the successful part. She answers, “Being a man.” It was quite visible that the feeling motivating this woman was the desire to become like a man. She has male ambitions and male behaviors. She wants to conquer, subordinate, and control situations. She is strict, harsh, and too demanding. These women, striving to imitate men, cannot in actuality constitute any kind of competition. They are neither dangerous nor understandable from men’s perspectives. (216-218)

Even some of the books and programs that women accessed in order to develop themselves were highly gendered. They portrayed women in the business world as either imitating men or as having gotten a business because of their connections with men—with husbands, lovers, or fathers. Vera said that the basic seminars she originally attended in Moscow turned her from “a real bitch,” when she was questioning the trainers’ motives, into a “new woman.” It was during a period of intense questioning that she underwent with two Russian trainers, in a windowless room, when the trainers told her to come up with a reason for being that had more to do with making money. It was then that she began to think about how she could serve other people through her business. It was significant to Vera that the trainers who did the questioning were Russian men; that is, they themselves had been trained by Americans but had gone on to become trainers. She associated their problems with her making money with their being Russian men who did not accept that about women, but also ultimately believed that what they

were saying was important. Self-development can be a big influence on women's decisions to define purposes that are socially oriented, and therefore more stereotypically feminine, as I demonstrate further in Chapter 5. Even so, the motivations that they name enable them to live lives that are significantly different from the definitions of women's self-reliance that I describe at the beginning of this chapter. For example, Vera cited the same seminars, which taught her to "think for herself," as enabling her to leave her husband. Vera is a businesswoman, single and childless, and part of an ever-changing community within which she leads and takes part in motivational trainings. The different activities that self-development entails take place within particular cultural contexts and are infused with the gendered attitudes of people who orchestrate them.

Conclusion

Self-development is first and foremost about women's continual reflection on their own purpose or priorities. It is about having a vision of the future that is highly personalized, and at least from women's perspectives, *personally defined*—although, they clearly articulate their sense of purpose within particular social fields and relationships. From a gender perspective, this way for women to navigate their lives is significant in two respects: They end up imagining futures that encompass more than representations of moral selfhood in official pro-natal discourse, as well as some self-development discourse. These women's lives resonate with Betty Friedan's claim in *The Feminine Mystique* that thinking about the future was an important way for women to create identities for themselves that lay outside of existing cultural discourses (1963:310-311). Second, this way of thinking about their lives is related to their abilities to live their lives

on their own terms, especially by leaving relationships that do not fulfill their expectations. In a context where certain kinds of suffering have been normalized socially and historically, the fact that women are deciding not to suffer can be interpreted as a window on changing gender constructions. On a broader level, these women's emphasis on purpose can be understood in a social landscape where *anomie*, and concerns about it, is a widespread phenomenon. In other words, having a purpose is a way of living with the fact that it is still not clear to many Russians what the post-socialist transition is a transition *to* (Lovell 2006).^{xxiii}

Contextualizing self-development in contemporary Russian life and gender constructions, my analysis suggests novel ways to think about neo-liberalism and the creative spaces that women form through their efforts to articulate personalized goals. Literature in the humanities and the social sciences has examined how people think about their futures (Nordstrom 2005:65-66; Lindquist 2006; Brown 2005b; Rabinow 2007:99-103; Fassin 2007:79)—and the social significance of hope, prognoses, and activist claims. An insight emerging from this work is that conversations about the future can really be about social life now and peoples' notions of how it should be. More specifically, work dealing with how people cope with uncertainty shows how peoples' anticipation of the future affects their present status (Patel 2006; Lakoff 2008)—when people find out they have the gene for an illness, for example, and they begin, to an extent, living as though they are already sick (e.g. Lock 1998). In this case, the

^{xxiii} In Chapter 5, I delve more into the kinds of selves that women are forming and how their justifications of their career choices, to themselves and their families, constituted a more direct challenge to Russian ideas about women and their place in society.

contingencies in women's lives are related to their partnerships with men as well as numerous other political, economic, and social factors in the environment around them.

Rather than taking a defensive stance against specific problems, women's efforts at self-development appear more focused on self-defined solutions: goals that are sometimes most important because they are goals, with the possibility of their realization being less significant than the ways in which having them in mind keep women motivated on a more day-to-day basis. Nordstrom discusses how vital it is for people to be able to imagine the future, including and especially the very next moment—whether or not it will make a difference for a person to plant crops in a field that could be bombed the next day, for example (2004:66). Women repeatedly emphasized to me that they did not know what the next week or even the next day would entail. Sometimes, women did not have concrete and literal ideas of how their visions will be realized. When women may not have either the social or the material resources to get exactly what they want, it is the vision itself and what it stands for that is most important to them—as a kind of moral ideal towards which they can improvise their ways.

As I discuss in Chapter 7, it is the fact that self-development by definition requires thinking “outside of the box” that it can be a site for change. I mean to emphasize here that these women are taking discourses of self from both local and transnational sources and they are making them the bases for imagining new lives for themselves. Their goals usually include ideas of social responsibility, which they can fulfill on their own, as well as in more collective settings.

To the extent that women are both disrupting contemporary gender ideals in the process, and enabling themselves to care for other people on their own, their self-

development represents a kind of social theorizing, similar to what Brown herself has described in her essay, "Untimeliness and Punctuality." "In a contemporary moment that is "pounded by undemocratic forces yet lacking a *forward* movement (2005:10)," these women's visions of their own futures represent what Brown calls "alternative possibilities and perspectives in a seemingly closed political and epistemological universe." These visions become "a nonviolent mode of exploding the present (14)." In urban Russia, there are very few viable means for women to affect both personal and broader social change. To want something more extensive than what is immediately available can be a way of saying that society can look radically different than it does right now. Sometimes, the things that women wanted had as much to do with how these desires made them act differently in the present, as it did with the literal feasibility of their goals. Even Margarita's desire to renovate her apartment was also part of making her own life as a single mother more pleasurable. In an earlier part of her book, *Edgework* (2005), Wendy Brown calls for a progressive solution to life in a neo-liberal society that would entail tapping "the desires--not for wealth or goods but for beauty, love, mental and physical well-being, meaningful work, and peace--manifestly unmet within a capitalist order and to appeal to those desires as the basis for rejecting and replacing the order (57)." The case studies that I have presented in this chapter complicate Brown's claim that the neo-liberal, capitalist order does not accommodate things such as beauty, love, and meaningful work. Women's desires for wealth and material goods are part and parcel of larger projects of personal and social transformation.

My discussion in this chapter complicates her assessment of what progressive change might look like: Any attempts for women to create a better life for themselves, whether this is about personal pleasure or activism in Elena's case –can be interpreted as going against the grain of official discourse that posits motherhood as central to their identities and goals. For these Russian women, then imagining new, expansive, and ambitious personal futures is radical in the face of uncertain, but in many cases, limited options.

CHAPTER 4

GENDER AND WORK IN LATE 2000S RUSSIA: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In this chapter, I explore how Russian gender essentialisms as well as discursive possibilities for women to transform them have developed over time. I spotlight important events and processes from the Soviet period (1917-1991) and the two decades that followed. Rather than provide a chronology from a distinctive historical period, I underline several key political and cultural trends that have taken place over the last 100 years. These trends shape the contours of the late 2000s gendered expectations that entrepreneurial women navigate.

Introduction: gender, professional class, and transition

In their book, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism* (2000), Susan Gal and Gail Kligman examine how “men and women have been differently imagined as citizens (3)” in countries transitioning from socialism. They demonstrate that important insights on economic and political transformations emerge from a gendered analysis of transition. Gal and Kligman offer the point, for example, that politicians have used neo-traditionalist ideologies in order to claim public legitimacy and thereby distance themselves from socialism with its doctrines of gender equality (15-36). Their work stresses ways in which public discourses such as politics and the mass media have constructed gender.

While much has been written about the post-socialist period and new forms of social inequalities, very little research has been done on professional women, and what transition has meant for them. However, there are two important studies of women in post-socialist territories and their strategies for upward socioeconomic mobility, and these studies offer a useful framework for this chapter's inquiry on the historical bases of self-reliance. One is the work by Farideh Heyat Nfa (2002) on Azeri professional women. Her research demonstrates how, in the presence of intensified nationalist pressures by family members for women to stay home, women defend their continued professional involvement by drawing on certain official Bolshevik ideologies of gender equality in the workforce. In a similar vein but emphasizing skill sets from socialism, Kristin Ghodsee (2005), in the context of post-socialist Bulgaria, shows how women in older generations are able to gain relatively prestigious positions within the tourism industry by drawing on "valuable cultural capital in the form of skills and experience inherited from communism (17)." Both of these works stress complex intergenerational variations in how educated urban women navigate their contemporary work lives. Socialism gave some women an important set of skills and discursive language to draw upon to justify their careers, although as Nfa emphasizes, this period was not simply one of gender modernization as Soviet policymakers continually emphasized:ⁱ Azeri women encounter and interpret both local and Soviet ideas, across a variety of social contexts, and with varied degrees of effectiveness in enabling them to maintain their work positions and family lives (6-8). The works by Nfa and Ghodsee are distinctive from

ⁱ For another discussion of Soviet narratives of modernization and their intersections with gender and ethnicity, see Alexia Bloch's *Red Ties and Residential Schools* (2003:88-118).

other historical research on transition. They are good examples of works that complicate notions of transition as a unilateral process consisting of two stages: before the end of socialism and following the implementation of Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the late 1980s (Lemon 2008:236). Similar to research by Nfa and Ghodsee, I seek to examine intersections of socialist identity with women's modern strategies of belonging.

I maintain this attention to the complexities and internal contradictions of both socialist and contemporary Russian gendered expectations on the parts of state officials, women's spouses and others in their lives, and women themselves. My analysis in this chapter departs from Nfa and Ghodsee's, however, in one key respect: My focus is not on particular aspects of official socialist *ideologies* that older women evoke in order to inform and justify their social strategies. I emphasize instead a history of women's improvisations: a history of compensating for gaps between state ideologies about equality between men and women and inadequate legal and material support for women. In thinking about their own lives, women draw from examples of themselves, their mothers, and their grandmothers, who made do with gaps between Soviet officials' claims of gender equality and the forms of discrimination against women that the same officials promoted or overlooked.

From the 1920s onward, in multiple Soviet social contexts, women devised forms of social, emotional, and material self-reliance under an inadequate system of state provisioning. Women have had to reconcile gaps between cultural attitudes about their place in society and what they want or need to do, both in the present and in the past. Russian women have a history of inventiveness, especially as it regards managing the exhaustion and everyday logistical dilemmas of weaving together work and family lives.

Even some younger entrepreneurial women know about this history, seek to emulate it in their contemporary lives, and draw a certain sense of pride and belonging from their own abilities to do so—even some younger women with few or no recollections from the socialist period. In one interview, I asked Tamara what her mother did for a living when Tamara was a child. She told me that in the 1980s and early 1990s her mother worked in the “male” sphere of management (*muzhskaia sfera*).ⁱⁱ Her mother had told her that it was because of that and because her mother was single that she was able to be “a man and a woman in the same person”—that is, a manager and head of the family, as well as a mother. Tamara and her mother both understood this ability to embody both sets of gendered traits as a strength brought about by the necessities of life under late socialism. Tamara herself admitted to having difficulties being “male” sometimes at her former engineering job—that is, suppressing anxiety or depression—but she strove to emulate these qualities in her mother. Through her mother’s recollections, Tamara experienced the late Soviet past as one in which her mother subjectively made due with the difficult realities of single motherhood and work within a setting where men vastly predominated.

In using the phrase “history of improvisation,” I underscore forms of creativity that Soviet and contemporary women demonstrate as they adjust to continually changing social, economic, and cultural realities. In the previous chapter, I focused on how younger women used their own visions of the future as sources of hope and guidance as they responded to day-to-day social and economic challenges. For example, some women’s ideas of the kinds of businesses that they wanted to run helped them to get up in

ⁱⁱ Very small percentages of women occupied the highest posts in Soviet government and manufacturing enterprises, although it was not unheard of for women to occupy these positions alongside men (Sperling 1999:168).

the morning or served as blueprints for the kinds of activities that their entrepreneurship would entail. Paul Rabinow's analysis of the value of policymaking prognoses captures this use of the future: he argues that the function of a prognosis "resides in the form it provides for a quick adjustment to an unexpected reality (2007:102)." In addition to drawing on fantastical notions of a future world, women also draw on the socialist past as a source of self-legitimization and inspiration. Older women today deploy a variety of strategies for managing inadequate cultural, social, and material capital—strategies that they began to develop during the late socialist period.

A history of professional women's improvisation sheds valuable light on their contemporary strategies of self-reliance. Older women have their own historical bases from which to draw, as they devise forms of relative autonomy from male colleagues and spouses, and include younger women in their efforts. For example, in Chapter 6, I analyze the concept of a "natural economy" from the perspective of Ekaterina. I discuss how she recycles a particular version of cooperative networks among women from the socialist past, in order to help women of various ages keep their enterprises afloat during difficult economic times. More broadly, I aim to provide perspective on the contemporary resonance of motivational seminars and self-help literature in urban Russia. Contrary to some American and Russian trainers' understandings of their work in the 1990s as enabling Russians to "take responsibility for their own lives," there are many reasons why personal initiative and self-reliance are not entirely new to Russians and especially, Russian women.

A wide variety of Soviet and contemporary social forces have converged over time to form a context in which women feel compelled to develop all kinds of self-

reliance—material, emotional, and in terms of their social networking capabilities. Soviet policies and media that ostensibly promoted women’s full equality with men brought women into public roles and left some adult women in the late 1980s with skills and social connections to navigate post-socialist economic changes. Women have developed their own forms of personal initiative despite Soviet officials’ negligence, inadequate public services, chronically high death rates among male partners and spouses, and structural gender inequalities in the socialist workforce. All of these problems have persisted in post-socialist Russia, although Boris Yeltsin’s removal of a social safety net in the late 1980s and early 1990s as part of IMF-mandated structural adjustment exacerbated these problems.ⁱⁱⁱ

Although my aim in this chapter is to highlight historical continuities, I want to emphasize one significant change in the urban workforce from the outset. In the 1990s and 2000s, unlike during the Soviet era, women have had particular difficulty justifying their pursuit of professional careers and greater autonomy—to themselves and to others—within many domains, especially their heterosexual relationships and workplaces. Some media and political narratives in the 1990s associated socialism with women’s forced participation in the workforce and, by extension, the emasculation of men. These same sources correlated Russia’s transition from socialist oppression to women’s return to the home (Goscilo 1993; Funk and Mueller 1993). Media and policy campaigns during Vladimir Putin’s presidency (1999-2008) only helped to intensify these neo-traditionalist attitudes among Russians.^{iv} These campaigns have helped to intensify

ⁱⁱⁱ See Chapter 1, “Sketching the scene.”

the creative challenge, for women, of articulating connections between their work lives and their own womanhood.

In order to make my argument about improvisation, I review two simultaneous and overlapping historical trends, which frequently come into tension with one another in women's lives: First, I provide a broad historical overview of neo-traditionalist politics in Russia post-1917 through the present. I discuss how and why earlier Bolshevik ideas about women's emancipation in the 1920s began to coincide with more polarizing state media and policies during the 1930s, under Josef Stalin. The latter set of discourses depicted men and women as distinct cognitively, in terms of their social proclivities, as well as their abilities in the workforce. These narratives and policies influenced gendered divisions of labor in the paid socialist workforce and less official settings. During successive Soviet regimes, a tension developed between official emancipatory discourses and simultaneous media and programs that reproduced essentialisms and justified different forms of inequality. I have already discussed contemporary neo-traditionalist policies in the Introduction—specifically those that encouraged women to devote their energies to motherhood and homemaking. I expand on my discussion in this chapter by highlighting similarities between these policies and media campaigns and earlier ones.

Second, I historicize the development of individualizing strategies and discourses in Russia since the late 1980s. There are important socialist precedents for the value that women place on different forms of self-sufficiency today. From the 1920s onward, Soviet officials disseminated narratives that lauded women's participation in the

^{iv} See, for example, my discussion of “cultural patriarchy” (Temkina 2008) in the Introduction, under the section “Urban Russia in the Late 2000s.”

workforce. These officials were concerned with increasing economic production and sometimes also attempted to paint an international picture of the Soviet state as modern and superior to the West. Additionally, as I have discussed, multiple generations of Soviet women have had to navigate harsh realities such as periodic material shortages and insufficient childcare, for example. In other words, the strategies of self-reliance in the contemporary period have been informed by generations of women who adjusted to the state's failure to live up to claims of women's emancipation. A final factor influencing contemporary notions of personhood is the importance of self-expression as a form of activism in the 1970s and 1980s, among *samizdat* journalists.^v As Julie Hemment (2007) points out, female journalists sometimes saw writing about their experiences as women as part of a bigger political project of critiquing the socialist state, although their male counterparts did not always accept their projects as valid (75-76). A number of factors therefore have influenced the significance of self-reliance and self-expression for many contemporary Russian professional women: Soviet emancipatory discourses, the need to survive in Russia's new economy, and the historical significance of having a social space within which women could tell their own stories.

Bolshevik gender essentialisms (1920s)

The first trend that I review is historical constructions of gender essentialisms in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. Even the earliest Bolshevik narratives calling for

^v A grassroots movement of writers that took root during the post-Stalin years. Writers reproduced censored materials by hand in addition to writing poetry, fiction, and nonfiction as forms of self-expression. For a critical analysis of late 1960s and 1970s *samizdat* documents, see Sergei Oushakine's article, "The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat" (2001)

women's full participation in the socialist workforce took for granted that a woman's capability as a mother was central to her social contribution. These conceptions would prove foundational to later Soviet attitudes and policies. I illustrate such attitudes in this section in order to reinforce that even Soviet discourses that supported women's workforce participation did not exempt women from compulsory motherhood.

In 1923, Communist revolutionary Alexandra Kollontai ^{vi} wrote about the progressive changes that she envisioned taking place in Russia's new communist regime. She wrote, "Anyone who can see and observe will admit that everyday life (*byt*) is changing before our very eyes (166)." ^{vii} Kollontai's vision entailed numerous changes that would result in a radical transformation of Russia's formerly bourgeois, class-stratified society: the development of state services such as universal food provisioning and healthcare, some alleviation of domestic work for women through the provision of childcare services, and women's universal participation in the workforce. (Kollontai 1923:166-184) These particular changes that she advocated had already been encoded

^{vi} Kollontai was widely considered among policymakers and the urban populace in 1920s and 1930s Russia to be the foremost Bolshevik theorist on the "woman question," or *zhenskii vopros*—the question of how to ensure women's equal participation in the new socialist economy without jeopardizing their reproductive role. Kollontai herself was never in a policymaking position on the Central Committee. She founded the Zhenotdel, or "Women's Department," in 1919, which was responsible for improving the lives of Soviet women mainly through literacy education and the dissemination of information about their legal equality. In this role, Kollontai also recommended policies (sometimes successfully) to the Central Committee. She was influential in many ways during the early Soviet period before her death in 1952, but her relegation to auxiliary committees in handling domestic affairs kept her from playing a central role in national policymaking. For more information on Kollontai's career and ideological platform, see Barbara Evans Clements' "Emancipation through Communism: The Ideology of A.M. Kollontai" (1973), *Slavic Review* 32(2):323-338.

^{vii} "Что быт меняется на наших глазах, признает каждый, кто умеет видеть и наблюдать...."

into the first Bolshevik constitution signed in 1918, and would remain in the subsequent three Soviet constitutions.

Kollontai was not making an argument for personal liberties, however. In the manifesto, she emphasized her intention to make full use of women's productive capacities for the state, without sacrificing their equally important reproductive roles. She made this position clear as she outlined the provisions and their meanings, in a St. Petersburg public speech:

Regarding the security of motherhood, Soviet Russia operates from the point of view of the workforce and its main interests: the development of the country's productive capacity, of the volume and sustainability of production. In order to accomplish this, first it is necessary to free as much of the workforce as possible from unproductive work, so that we may use all free working hands for economic production. The second task is to ensure an uninterrupted flow of fresh workers for the future—that is, to ensure the normal growth of the population.

As soon as we adopt this point of view, the question of freeing the woman from the time she spends on motherhood solves itself. The state is operating under a completely new principle: concern for rearing the next generation, concern about children. That task regards society and the state more than it does the family. It is not only in the interest of women to guard and secure motherhood, but even more, in the interest of the peoples' economy as it transitions to a new working order: we must save the strength of women from being expended on unproductive work for the family, and use that strength more wisely in the service of the collective. We must preserve women's health, and in doing so, preserve the supply of healthy workers for the future. (1923:170-171) ^{viii}

^{viii} К вопросу обеспечения материнства Советская Россия подошла с точки зрения основной задачи трудреспублики: развития производительных сил страны, подъема и восстановления производства. Чтобы задачу это осуществить, надо, во-первых, освободить возможно больше число трудовых сил от непроизводительного труда, умело использовать в целях хозяйственного воспроизводства все наличие рабочих рук: во-вторых, обеспечить трудовой республике непрерывный приток свежих работников в будущем, т.е. обеспечить нормальный прирост населения. Как только встать на эту точку зрения, вопрос о раскрепощении женщины от времени материнства—разрешается сам собой. Трудовое государство устанавливает совершенно новый принцип: заботу о подрастающем поколении, о детях—это задача не часто семейная, а общественная, государственная. Материнство подлежит охране и обеспечению не только в интересах самой женщины, но еще больше, исходя из задач народного хозяйства при переходе к

Kollontai's narrative portrays women and their multiple work capabilities in instrumental terms, stressing women's foundational responsibility to ensure future economic production. As Kollontai had said in an earlier 1918 speech, the pregnant woman "ceases to belong to herself—she is in service to the collective—she produces out of her own flesh and blood a new unit of work, a new member of the labor republic (cited in Murav 1995:32)." With one of the foremost Bolshevik theorists having framed birth within the rubric of production, women's bodies became part of the Soviet Union's industrial infrastructure and their reproduction became a subject of public concern.

Despite the inscription of women's (re)productive bodies into early Soviet political discourse, public figures and policymakers still delineated certain choices for women: A 1920 law legalizing abortion was a case in point. Kollontai advocated for and advised members of the Central Committee who drew up the statute, with the rationale that abortion was necessary as part of Russia's transition from a capitalist to a socialist system (Hansson and Lidén 1983:13). Her position reflected a more general consensus in the Soviet medical and legal community that women were victims of past class differences and had to forego motherhood by economic necessity. This was an era of rapid industrialization and urbanization and millions of Russians were still integrating into new Soviet industrial workforce (Pushkareva 1997:258; Engelstein 1991:184-189). The abortion law and public figures' reasons for supporting it is emblematic of new legal

трудоустройству: надо сберечь силы женщины от непроизводительной затраты на семью, чтобы разумнее использовать их для коллектива; надо охранить её здоровье, чтобы разумнее использовать их для коллектива; надо охранить её здоровье, чтобы этим самым обеспечить трудреспублике приток здоровых работников в будущем.

rights for women framed in the language of what needed to happen so that they could participate in the workforce.

The emergence of Stalinist pro-natalism (late 1920s and 1930s)

Following Lenin's death in 1924, Joseph Stalin took office as General Secretary of the Communist Party. He would remain in this position until his death in 1954. The gender essentialisms that Stalin constructed were distinctive from original Bolshevik framings. They marked a turning point that would help set the tone for later policies and propaganda. From the outset, Stalin and other members of the Central Committee voiced concerns about death tolls during World War I and the famine of 1920-1921^{ix} and the implications for the workforce. Based on these demographic issues as well as moral concerns, officials began to call into question women's equal participation in the workforce, to step up their propaganda campaigns to encourage women to have more children, and to construct domestic and caretaking work as women's responsibilities.

Key to Stalin's multi-pronged pro-natalist approach were propaganda campaigns that encouraged women to bear more children and devote more time and energy to childcare and housework. A particularly telling example of his attitudes towards women and work were medical research agendas meant to pinpoint work sectors that endangered women's reproductive capacities. In 1931, Stalin ordered teams of doctors to enter factories, calculate fertility rates among female workers, and draw up a list of jobs that endangered women's reproductive capacities. Doctors focused on the relation between heavy lifting and rates of miscarriage. They did not recommend that women leave

^{ix} Deaths sustained by the Soviet Union in WWI and the ensuing famine totaled an estimated 16 million (Lorimer 1946:40-41).

factories. However, they also did not recommend widespread measures to improve labor conditions through measures such as the introduction of conveyor belts. Instead, these doctors increased the frequency of research conducted on factory women, in addition to women in other areas of the workforce (such as university professors and wives of the intelligentsia, who sometimes did not work).^x The 1920s and 1930s were also a time of rapid medicalization of childbirth and pregnancy, which expanded doctors' potential influence in women's lives. Popular journals encouraged women to regularly visit doctors as soon as they became pregnant, and many physicians from the outset scared and shamed women from having abortions or requesting birth control, even when these were legal and available.^{xi} The medical surveillance of factory women's reproduction exemplifies Stalinist efforts to fully make use of women's productive and reproductive labor without the extra expenditure of scarce resources.

Beyond the workplace and doctors' offices, state-run propaganda campaigns grew in number and intensity during the 1920s and 1930s. Describing this period, Hoffman writes, "Articles in the Soviet press stressed the happiness that children brought to women's lives. One testimonial from a woman with five children described how much her children loved her, while another article claimed that children took care of each other,

^x Women in various professions were subjected to frequent mandatory experiments such as those in which doctors sought to correlate pelvis size, number of children, and type of work. Doctors then advised women whether or not to have children—and how many to have—based on considerations of work performance, maternity leave costs to their workplaces, and the likelihood of having a healthy pregnancy. Doctors also made recommendations to physicians more broadly about criteria for advising women on whether and when to have children. (Hyer 1996:115-117)

^{xi} See Elizabeth Waters (1992) for a fuller description of this period and what medicalization entailed on the ground.

so that having many children was an advantage rather than a burden (Hoffman 2000:5).” Other media used fear tactics in order to support particular models of motherhood. For example, one poster in the 1930s read, “Breast feeding of the baby by the biological mother is one of these iron laws of nature which cannot be broken without serious consequences (Waters 1992:125).” Waters describes the imagery of the poster: “The consequences were graphically spelled out in a poster entitled 'Mothers, Breast Feed Your Babies', which featured a bottle-feeding mother, inset against a cemetery, and a breast-feeding mother beneath a scene of healthy little children playing games (125).” Even as women were expected to fully participate in the workforce, state propaganda added to the list of things motherhood had to entail and emphasized large families as a source of highest prestige and emotional satisfaction for women.

In addition to symbolic means to promote motherhood, Stalin also instituted a number of policies in the 1930s that drastically reduced resources and attention towards support for working mothers. Most critically, in the early 1930s Stalin pronounced the question of women’s equality to have been resolved by their nearly full integration into the workforce. His decision translated into a number of measures. He ordered the closure of the *zhenotdely* (women’s departments), which Alexandra Kollontai had set up in the early 1920s in order to ensure women’s representation in politics. (Hemment 2007:8) For better and for worse, this meant the near absence of political bodies that devoted attention exclusively to “women’s issues” until the late 1950s, when Nikita Khrushchev set up “Women’s Councils” as auxiliary political committees. These committees served similar functions of service provision (i.e. distributing vacation vouchers and finding slots for children in summer camps), as well as drumming up

women's support for the Party (Sperling 1999:108).^{xii} As part of his effort to encourage childbearing, Stalin did increase funding for maternity leave and daycare and he introduced monetary awards and medals for women who had more than six children. Nevertheless, daycare services during the 1930s did not—and never would—suffice to accommodate the number of working mothers.^{xiii} Stalin and the Central Committee channeled virtually all of their resources into the expansion of the Soviet Union's urban industrial infrastructure and the state's commitment to complete support for mothers and children remained only in principle (Hoffman 2000:42). In future decades, officials would introduce some additional support for mothers such as augmentations of maternity leave and child subsidy payments in 1974 and again in 1981 for second and higher-order births (Rivkin-Fish 2002:292). However, successive Soviet governments implemented very few structural changes in women's working conditions that would enable them to combine domestic and paid work.

In addition to cutting back on women's political representation, Stalin intensified propaganda campaigns with images of motherhood to represent women's national belonging. In the process, he helped to set a precedent for successive Soviet regimes' symbolic reinforcement of motherhood and domestic roles—not entirely a bad thing in

^{xii} An additional political presence was the Soviet Women's Committee, which Stalin created in 1941 as an anti-fascist committee. Following the war, it was the sole legal representative of "women's interests." Its function, however, was to persuade foreign women's delegations of the high social and economic status accorded to Soviet women. (Sperling 1999:108)

^{xiii} See Issoupova (2000). During the 1930s, the Soviet government abandoned attempts to fully socialize childcare, ostensibly out of concerns that full-time, overnight institutional care for children was harmful socially and physically. Over time, however, a more comprehensive state infrastructure of low-cost infant and childcare and kindergartens developed in the Soviet Union.

that subsequent administrations would help to develop an infrastructure for childcare and maternity support. The growth of symbolic and material support for motherhood help to shed light on the conversation that I had with Alexandra in Chapter 1: Even though she believed that most contemporary Russians such as her elderly relatives would fare better should the country return to socialist rule, she also believed that such a shift would nevertheless hold ambiguous implications for young, childless women such as herself: Stalin and successive Soviet regimes created models of citizenship that stressed motherhood as the way for women to belong and contribute to Soviet Russian society.

Soviet gender essentialisms (1930s-)

In addition to targeting adult women in the workforce, Stalinist and later Soviet propaganda disseminated educational programs that promoted essentialized gendered behavior. In the 1930s, Stalin created a genre of popular education called *polovoe vospitanie*, or moral education, which continued to proliferate throughout the socialist period. On premises of raising the level of “culture,” or *kul’turnost’* in Soviet youth, officials created books and manuals on family life, sex-specific bodily hygiene, and the evils of abortion as a “betrayal of women’s maternal nature (Rivkin-Fish 2005:96-97).” Sex education literature warned women that if they did not have children, they would ruin their marriages, and call into question their womanhood, as well. Meanwhile, sex education literature that targeted young men warned them against masturbation as having the potential to drain them of energy for productive labor (Rivkin-Fish 2005:97). The 1970s, in particular, were a period of resurgence of conservative gender discourses. Demographers and politicians grew increasingly concerned after four decades of

continually declining birthrates. They turned their attention from arguments about socialism as a modernizing force for women in the workforce and made fertility decline a key political problem of focus. This resulted in a proliferation of media that reinforced women's roles as mothers and homemakers. These gender discourses painted a picture of caretaking work as women's natural and moral domain. The same discourses emphasized men's role in the workforce, and similar to later Soviet discourses, left their role in family relationships highly ambiguous.

In 1983, Gorbachev instituted a revised course, called "The Ethics and Psychology of Family Life," which attempted to socialize children into polarized gender roles within the home. Friends of mine who were in school during the 1980s sometimes recalled that class. My friend Olga (age 31), for example, told me that at her school in St. Petersburg, girls cooked on a regular basis while boys worked in a separate room, building wooden furniture for the school. When she and her classmates finished cooking a dish, they called in the boys and served the dish to them. The latter were not required to do anything for their female classmates in return. The story mirrors a broader set of circumstances in Soviet domestic divisions of labor: Men were expected to participate fully in the building of a socialist empire through paid labor. Women, meanwhile, were expected to do both. The example of gendered assignments in Olga's class reflected and reinforced more general public silences throughout the socialist period surrounding men's roles in the home. This ambiguity, combined with the state's inability to provide adequate resources for women's caretaking "responsibilities," contributed to a situation in which women were frequently overworked and their energies stretched thin.

Gendered workforce segregation during socialism

Despite earlier claims of full gender equality, women predominated in lower paying, lower status jobs throughout the socialist period. They were overwhelmingly represented in clerical jobs, sales and service, light industrial work, and caretaking occupations, including medicine. Men predominated in managerial, skilled, technical work such as engineering, and heavy industrial work. (Gal and Kligman 2000:57) Women's disproportionate domestic workloads and both formal and informal workforce discrimination contributed to these trends.

Soviet public policies and propaganda never attempted to change the disproportionate amount of domestic labor that Russian women already performed in the home. This meant that from the outset, women dealt with a “double burden” (*dvoinaia nagruzka*) or “double shift” (*dvoinaia smena*) of household and paid labor. They worked full time and also cared for children and elders, cleaned their homes, and did food shopping in the tiny margins of time between when work ended and stores closed.^{xiv}

Contemporary Russian women recognize the irony of Soviet claims of equality that did nothing to foster men's domestic involvement. For example, I went with Alisa from her small technology firm one evening to pick up her two sons from the nanny and elementary school. The four of us pushed our way into a packed mini-bus, Alisa at one end with her older son on her lap and I at the other with her younger son, our arms acting as seat belts for the boys. Suddenly the younger one began to wail for her mother and wriggle on my lap as I tried to keep him from kicking the other passengers. Even though

^{xiv} For a vivid description of work-domestic conflicts that women navigated during socialism, see the collection of fictional short stories by Natalya Baranskaya, *A Week Like Any Other* (1989)

both Alisa and her husband worked full time, she always picked up her daughters. In the minibus, strangers glared at us. Alisa slumped back in the seat, sighed deeply and looked across the bus at me. Then she rolled her eyes, laughed, and motioned towards her younger son. She called to me above the wailing, “*This, Kollontai, is women’s emancipation!*” Amidst the serious faces of the other passengers, I noticed a woman seated in the middle of the bus smile in Alisa’s direction. Two months later, Alisa would let her business partner buy her off and she would return home to take care of her sons full time. She was exhausted and felt unable logistically to continue to work and care for her children full time. She and her husband owned one car, but he took it each day to work; his job was half an hour further away by public transport. She therefore was left to public transportation to shepherd her children home each day—usually on her own. Alisa’s joke that evening on the minibus reminded me that the legal “right” for Russian women to work, first established during socialism, has only ever gone so far to ensure their equal participation.

A second trend that influenced gender segregation in the socialist workforce was discrimination against women, on multiple fronts: hiring, promotions, and pay. Various media and socialization practices in schools and families taught girls from an early age that they were best suited for caretaking professions, which likely influenced the extent to which some aspired towards higher status professions. In the workplace itself, gender discrimination was always an issue in Soviet Russia (Sperling 1999:73). Women were on average just as highly educated as men. Nevertheless, Party representatives determined hiring, promotions, and pay in each workplace, and often at their own discretion; gender

and patronage played significant roles in these decisions.^{xv} Sometimes, women's reproductive roles influenced their unequal opportunities in the workforce. As Gal and Kligman point out, Soviet policies such as maternity leave “produced an image and reality of women as less dependable workers, and so reinforced their subordinate position in the labor force (2000:49). That Soviet women did not enjoy equal opportunities is evidenced in multiple ways: Of the approximately one quarter of all Soviet Russians who occupied managerial positions in state production enterprises, three quarters were men (Melin 2002:72). Soviet women in the 1980s earned on average 70% of what men earned—far from equal, although better than the 40% to which the figure had dropped by 1994 (Sperling 1999:155).^{xvi} Thus, by the late 1980s, the stage had already been set for men to enjoy advantages during privatization: During the early 1990s, state property such as real estate, manufacturing equipment, and profit ownership was divided overwhelmingly among men (Sperling 1999:154). My own ethnographic work shows that even women who had occupied managerial positions did not enjoy access to this distribution along with their male counterparts of the same professional status. I illustrate this later on with the case of Ekaterina in the section, “Gendered ways of making do.”

Third, the Soviet government placed formal restrictions on women's professional training and participation, in the form of lists of jobs that women were not permitted to do (Sperling 1999:156). Policymakers' rationale in drawing up this list included both perceived physical and “psychological” limitations of women, as well women's roles as

^{xv} For more information on the organizational structures of Soviet enterprises, see Nikula 2002:13-15 and Melin 2002:70-73.

^{xvi} More recent studies suggest that women earn between 60-70% of men's wages (Ashwin 2007). The gap increases in the private sector and in workplaces where men predominate (International Trade Union Confederation 2006).

mothers. At the top of this list included heavy lifting and the operation of heavy machinery, including driving tractors—although, many factories disregarded these restrictions. In professional and technical education, girls were barred from training for a third of the 1100 professions available to Soviet citizens, which involved heavy labor. Soviet constitutions included restrictions on nighttime work for women and prohibitions for pregnant women, nursing mothers, and women with children under the age of one year. Women with children between one and eight years of age had the legal option to forego overtime work and travel. (Blekhner 1979:94-95)^{xvii} Even though these last provisions gave working women choices, they also may have helped to reinforce the effect that Gal and Kligman noted of constructing women as less reliable workers.

The contemporary Russian government inherited this list from the Soviet era, and successive leaders have added it as they see fit. In 2000, Vladimir Putin modified and signed off on the most recent list of 460 restricted jobs, adding the restriction that women could not drive the city's underground *metro* trains (Golloher 2009). The list has real effects in women's lives today. In 1995 after her factory shut down, Tamara's mother Kira moved with her two daughters to St. Petersburg from their small hometown in the southern Ural Mountains. She found a job doing technical repairs in St. Petersburg's metro system for over ten years until 2006, when she injured her back at work. Unwilling and unable financially to live on unemployment,^{xviii} Kira would not have been able to obtain the slightly more lucrative position of driving the metro trains. She actively considered the option of announcing stops to passengers, but did not take this

^{xvii} Taken from A. Abramova, 1972, *Okhrana truda zhenshchin. Spravochnik po zakonodatel'stvu* [Protection of female labor. Legal Handbook]

^{xviii} Under the state insurance plan, she received 30% of her earnings.

because it paid much less than her other position. She found a job working as a concierge in an apartment building instead, which paid slightly better than this announcing job. This is an example of how socialist workforce segregation continues to impinge on women's work opportunities in contemporary Russia.

A final aspect of the socialist workforce that deserves consideration is the continually marginal role that women played in national and local politics. Soviet quotas ensured some political representation for women, as well as representation within Party structures such as labor unions and the *komsomol*. Throughout the socialist period, women occupied one third of the deputy posts in national parliaments and one half in local councils, or *soviets*. These figures however do not account for the low representation of women in the highest decision-making posts. Following the partial removal of quotas in 1989, women occupied 15.7% of all posts among USSR Communist Party Deputies, and following the total removal of quotas in the March 1990 elections, there were only 5.5 percent women in the Russian Congress. (Sakwa 2002:324) This growing disparity had to do with changing public attitudes and women's rising domestic obligations with the removal of daycare (Sakwa 2002:324).^{xix} Patterns of underrepresentation and political marginalization for women that began during socialism thus continue in the contemporary period.

Gorbachev's pro-natalist policies (1980s)

^{xix} For more information on the dynamics of women's political representation from the late 1980s through the 1990s, please see Sperling 1999:98-145. Women's political participation has risen slightly since the early 1990s—curiously, during the 2000s under Putin (Johnson 2010).

Despite his international reputation as a driving force of democracy, Mikhail Gorbachev (1985-1991) took a very clear position against women's equal participation in the workforce. Gorbachev, along with state demographers, was concerned with what had been a continuous decline in fertility rates in Soviet Russia since the 1920s. During the late 1980s, he initiated a barrage of policies and media targeting women, which attempted to nudge women out of the workforce and back into the home. Bridger et. al (1996) describes the public climate towards working women during the mid to late 1980s:

Crude propaganda eulogizing heroine mothers, bearers of ten or more children and a medal instituted at the acme of Stalinism, was overtaken by a more subtle preoccupation with the theme of femininity. Women whose paid work was indispensable to the Soviet economy were exhorted to be equally industrious within the home. The existing gross inequality within marriage and the resulting overburdening of women, so well documented by Soviet social scientists, were cheerfully ignored as the media promoted self-sacrifice as the highest expression of femininity. (23)

The shift noted by the authors from “crude propaganda” to “a more subtle preoccupation with the theme of femininity” is important. These new gender discourses explicitly detached womanhood from the workplace and imagined the home as the new “feminine” domain. For example, in his much-quoted 1987 public speech, Gorbachev urged women to return to the home as a womanly “right”—a speech that echoed earlier Soviet political speeches during periods when the government was concerned with raising birthrates (i.e. in the 1970s). He wrote, “We are proud of what the Soviet government has given women: the same right to work as men,...But over the years of our difficult and heroic history, we failed to pay attention to women's specific rights and needs arising from their role as mother and homemaker.” The quote exemplifies the subtle ways in which public figures during *perestroika* began to dissociate women from the public workforce, and reinsert them into domestic life.

I illustrate these tendencies in order to show how the general public climate began to shift in the 1980s, with femininity emerging as a powerful symbol of Gorbachev's attempts to distance his own administration from Soviet tyranny. Nevertheless, it was also due to Gorbachev's expansion of civil liberties that some women's groups were able to confront these gender discourses and new conservative policies towards women. After 1987 when Gorbachev began to loosen control over the media and public gatherings, the Soviet Women's Committee became a grassroots organizing hub through which various women's groups that were emerging at the time began to exchange information, publish critiques of policies and pro-natalist media, and lobby the government for or against new policies (Sperling 1999:108). In 1989 at the initiative of Supreme Soviet deputy Marina Rakhmanova, the Committee on the Affairs of Women and the Protection of the Family, Motherhood, and Childhood formed, and succeeded in introducing a law expanding maternity leave to apply to fathers and grandparents, as well. Thus, there were efforts to protect women's interests in the workforce, even if framed only in terms of their family roles. (Sperling 1999:113) When the USSR dissolved in 1991, this Committee along with all other Soviet state committees was eliminated, leaving only the Russian Supreme Soviet. However, a number of groups from Russia's nascent women activist community remained active in politics and succeeded in aggressively lobbying against the Family Law, which, among other things, would have made property ownership possible only for families, and would have required women with children under the age of fourteen to work no more than a 35-hour week (Sperling 1999:114). Gorbachev's efforts to encourage women's return to the home were therefore met with significant resistance.

Women who were young adults during the 1980s rarely brought up these pronatalist discourses at all when we talked about that time. They talked about new economic necessities and opportunities. Tatiana graduated from law school in 1991, the same year (she told me with a roll of her eyes) the USSR disappeared and practically everything she had learned had become useless. She nevertheless saw *perestroika* as an “organic” part of her life because she had known nothing else. She found a day job where she applied her older engineering education and attended night school in economics simultaneously. She portrayed the panic about birthrates as irrelevant to her priorities at the time:

Everyone in the country was saying, “Women aren’t having enough children! [laughs] Russia is dying! they said. Well, Russia was completely new to me. If I had had a child, *perestroika* would have felt very different. It would not have been a time to learn new things. It would have been a time to worry about how to put food in someone’s mouth. I never starved or lacked a roof over my head. It was possible but I wasn’t afraid of that, for myself. I’m not afraid of anything. With a child, I would have worried.

Later in the 1990s, some of Tatiana’s friends from school began to have children. She had gotten a job as a manager at a large corporation in St. Petersburg through connections she had made in law school. “Some people measure success by how many children they have,” Tatiana told me. “Sometimes it’s how many people they manage. Neither one was for me. I wanted two things: my own apartment, and to travel the world. My apartment, especially, became my own world at home. It meant I depended on no one. It wasn’t money that I wanted. But money bought me these things.” Tatiana was the only one who brought up the panic about birthrates independently of my asking. For her, it was a murmur in the background against which she juxtaposed her own self-reliance and search to adapt to Russia’s new economy.

Pro-natal trends after socialism

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, pro-natalist discourses have continued to proliferate in Russia, in response to the widespread political and popular dislocations that I discussed in the Introduction. In the following section, I will identify strands of pro-natal discourses found in the literature on post-socialist Russia and elaborate on their nuances and their meanings to entrepreneurial women.

Michele Rivkin-Fish (2005) offers a concise summary of pro-natal public arguments through the 1990s and mid-2000s. She identifies three general strands of argument that have emerged in Russia during that period: members of Russia's Communist Party, who have blamed the "death of the nation" from low fertility on Yeltsin's market reforms and increased poverty since the early 1990s; anti-communists, such as Moscow University sociologist Anatolii Antonov, who blames low fertility around the world on the "breakdown of family values" and advocates family-based businesses whose purpose is not solely personal profit; and religious nationalists, who have attacked family planning programs as a "foreign perversion" designed to "warp Russian youth psychologically and brainwash them to despise family life." All three groups have focused on low fertility as the major problem that threatens Russia's future and have published widely in Russia's popular press. The group that has been by far most successful in lobbying the government for legislative reforms has been the religious nationalists. As Rivkin-Fish points out, these activists' petitioning in conjunction with other nationalists and the Orthodox Church have led to the 2003 restrictions on abortion and numerous other measures. (Rivkin-Fish 2005:213-218)

Of these three sets of discourses described by Rivkin-Fish, the anti-communist position resonates most strongly with some entrepreneurial women's understandings of their work lives during the 2000s. Some women used their businesses to keep their families together and healthy, especially by giving their husbands and sons employment; these were the family members they most worried about. Women's own motivations were nonetheless distinct from the anti-communists' in two key respects: This kind of rationale on their parts was sometimes a response to Russia's contemporary cultural climate in which women were held morally responsible for their family members' actions. Ekaterina, who owned a small construction machinery firm, encouraged younger entrepreneurial women to find roles in their firms for their husbands, for their families' sake but also for women's sake. She related a story of how the husband of a young woman she knew committed suicide when he lost his job. The local newspapers blamed her and the fact that she was too busy with her career to pay attention to him.^{xx} Thus, sometimes having a business to care for one's family was a strategy for women to protect their public images. The second distinction from the anti-communists is that they do not address the question of who ran family businesses, and whether or not and what kind of support women in leadership positions received from other family members. The older women I knew who employed their husbands and grown children received a significant

^{xx} This was not the first time I heard a woman say such a thing. In 2007, I attended a conference panel of journalists and businesswomen of various stripes, called "The Image of Businesswomen in the Mass Media" (*Imidzh biznesledi v sredstve massovoi informatsii*). One of the speakers, an older woman who ran a programming firm in downtown St. Petersburg, spoke in her talk about the risks that family members posed to women's public images. Journalists might point to alcoholic husbands as a symptom of certain individual women's dedication to their careers. In the media that I collected, I found no such accusations.

amount of moral support from their family members whom they employed. Nadezhda's husband Vadim helped her to manage the small publishing house that she founded alongside her private school in 1998. He was a soft-spoken man in his 60s who beamed at his wife as she told me over several family meals about the history of her enterprise, and he occasionally interjected with his own examples of her ingenuity. When men such as Vadim supported their wives' work lives, this did not mean that they did the housework, too. (It is important to note, however, that Vadim did not contribute to housework such as cooking and cleaning.) The fact that women ran their own businesses with some support from family members marked a significant departure from the anti-communist position.

Working mothers in the late 2000s

During my fieldwork in 2007 and 2008, I observed that some Russian public discourses had begun to explicitly encourage women's roles as family business owners and breadwinners.^{xxi} Exemplifying part of this shift was a speech at the 2008 conference, "Women in National Projects,"^{xxii} by Natalia Nikholaevna Karpovich, a deputy in the DUMA and United Russia's coordinator "on questions of family, children, and women." Karpovich advocated that women head family businesses. She agreed with

^{xxi} Additional examples of this position and policymakers' rationales can be found in a 2007 collection of articles by St. Petersburg and federal policymakers: Демографическая политика Российской Федерации [Demographic Politics of the Russian Federation], published by the Saint Petersburg Social-Economic Institute. See, for example, the article by the Chairman of the Saint Petersburg Employment Committee, P.B. Pankratov, "Демография и занятость населения Санкт-Петербурга" [Demography and Profession for the Saint Petersburg Population]."

^{xxii} See Chapter 3

Vice Governor Kostkina's statement that women should value such careers as opportunities to "teach their children how to work"—not as paths to their own independence (*nezavisimost'*), she added. Karpovich used a striking play on words to drive home her point: "Gender (*gender*) sounds remarkably like the word tender (*tender*) [meaning money here]. Tender, for women, comes not from freedom but from collaboration (*ne iz svobody, a sotrudu*).” In this statement, work and money are legitimate for women only insofar as they enable women's service to a collective good, which Karpovich juxtaposed with women's self-reliance. Unlike earlier Soviet discourses, which emphasized how women's paid work contributed to national productivity, service in Karpovich's speech was about women's financial and caretaking support to their families. Her statement reminds us that Russian public representations of women and work are complex. Some women (i.e. Ekaterina) did see self-reliance and a woman's family business as compatible to certain degrees. On the other hand, other women, such as Tatiana, might have seen having anyone to support as encumbering; she wanted her money to spend on very specific things for herself. In both cases, women were self-aware about why work mattered to them.

Other political narratives in St. Petersburg have begun to actually support women's pursuit of leadership positions outside of the family, but similarly defined what women's motivations should be. These narratives departed radically from Gorbachev's encouragement of women to return to the home, even more so than the arguments I just cited about family businesses: The former were about reintegrating into the workforce women who had already had children. For example, Kostkina's speech lauded women's pursuit of all kinds of ambitious work positions, emphasizing corporate and political

posts. At a different conference that I attended, “Women Changing the World,” Moscow policymakers talked about the common problem of pregnant women losing their jobs. They discussed the problem primarily in terms of how to ensure that “career-oriented” women had children nevertheless—not in terms of how to protect women from discrimination. While 1990s representations overwhelmingly stressed women’s domestic roles and financial dependence on their husbands,^{xxiii} these discourses neglected men’s roles in the family almost entirely.^{xxiv} They conceived of women as breadwinners and educators for their families who were portrayed as navigating the working world and their caretaking responsibilities largely on their own.

These gender discourses are significant in a number of respects. Theoretically, the conversations that took place at these conferences had the potential to effect public opinion as well as the decisions of policymakers. The panel I attended at a November 2007 conference, “Women Changing the World,” was full of journalists from different publications who recorded the proceedings. I tried and was unable to trace any

^{xxiii} See Bridger et. al 1996, pp 22-28.

^{xxiv} The last person to speak at the conference “Women in National Projects” was an officer from the Moscow Department of Health. She stressed how important it was that women got ultrasounds in order to determine whether or not their fetuses had birth defects, so that their husbands would not leave them after the birth of their children. Some women I knew (in and outside of my study population) had brought this same concern up to me themselves—that they had worried that their husbands would leave if there were anything wrong with their children’s health. This is one example of how men are assumed to be the disruptive, unreliable forces that women needed to tiptoe around, rather than active participants in the family. For more analysis on the ways in which men are configured in contemporary Russian demographic discourses, please see Isola 2009.

publications that resulted from the conversations that I just described.^{xxv} The purpose of the conference, “Women in National Projects,” was ostensibly to formulate a report for Russian President Medvedev with a list of priorities and policy recommendations surrounding national demography, although I was unable to access whatever report was formulated and to get any clue as to what the President might do with it. The proceedings themselves suggested that policymakers were imagining women’s roles in various work sectors. However, then and there, they did not outline plans to help them legally or socially, in terms of workloads in the home.

Among entrepreneurial women, there was a considerable diversity of responses to public discourses surrounding reproduction, in terms of whether politicians’ words meant anything at all. Some women did not care what policymakers said. They took for granted that motherhood was a central part of a woman’s identity, that they were responsible for their children’s material support and upbringing, and that neither public policy nor male partners could be expected to support their participation in the workforce using any concrete measures. Alyona was a young woman I met at the conference, “Women in National Projects.”^{xxvi} She owned a tourism firm in downtown St. Petersburg, which arranged educational class trips for schoolchildren to different cities in Russia. Alyona explained to me that she was at the conference to learn about a law that

^{xxv} Journalists who I had spoken to briefly did not return my calls or e-mails and when I checked the online conference reports, for instance, the sections on business and legal advocacy were blank (and continue to be).

^{xxvi} Alyona approached me in the restroom because she recognized me from an earlier conference that we had apparently both attended. This was a rare instance when I was able to meet a research participant without any prior social connections.

was then under discussion in local government, which would have enabled small business owners to purchase state-owned premises that they rented. In subsequent conversations, I learned that she had started her business three years before divorcing her husband, himself a wealthy corporate executive. He did not support Alyona's decision to start a firm. For her, the alternative to upsetting him by working was to risk being left without something to do and a means of financial support if her husband decided to leave her anyway. By the time I met her, she supported herself and her two young sons, on her own. I asked Alyona over coffee what she thought about the speeches about women that we had recently heard at the conference. She shrugged and told me that the speeches did not give her any information she did not know. She elaborated: Men were not reliable. It was hard for women in the workplace, so finding some control through your own business was the only way to be independent, or *nezavisimy*. Alyona was an example of someone who attended similar events that I did and did not see anything new or helpful in these speeches advocating women in management positions. By working, she was doing what she felt was necessary to care for herself and her family, and what she heard at the conference was simply a reflection of the gender roles and essentialisms she already took for granted.

I have already discussed how some other women felt the absence of their interests in more traditionalist political and media portrayals.^{xxvii} Women such as Alexandra and Svetlana, for example, saw in more prevalent, traditionalist state pro-natal advertising a similar set of messages about the importance of women as mothers. It bothered them that most state-pro-natalist discourses so narrowly defined women's roles in the workforce—

^{xxvii} See Chapter 1, "Alexandra and Elena: subjectivity and place."

not only by positing them as wives but also as mothers, to the exclusion of other caretaking roles. Such messages mattered to women because they resonated with experiences that they already had—of responsibility for so much but a deficit of social support. Thus, from my perspective, it seemed significant that at least some policymakers had expressed support for women’s participation as leaders in the workforce; the speeches at the conference may herald the beginnings of a change in public attitudes to better reflect the lives that many women already try to lead. On the other hand, such narratives resemble the kind that Kollontai originally put forth, which celebrated multiple responsibilities for women and effectively displaced responsibilities of men and the state.

Self-reliance

I have so far emphasized historical continuity in terms of state representations of women as mothers. Another form of continuity is the efforts of Soviet and Russian women to be more autonomous—albeit in various ways, and from various entities. During the Soviet period, many women found that they were beholden to the socialist state to provide them with material necessities, and post-socialism they were encouraged to rely on men (Gal and Kligman 2000:100-101). This is important because when I use the word “autonomy” in each case, I am referring to specific entities that women are trying to be autonomous from—depending on the circumstances and time period. This helps to put into perspective why some of the strategies that I describe in this dissertation involve groups of people, and not just one person.

I would add to Gal and Kligman, however, that during Putin's administration, women's dependence on the state in some ways increased compared to what it had been in the 1990s and even in the 1980s, during Gorbachev.^{xxviii} Some women, for example, worried about the fact that Putin's policies were growing more restrictive on travel within cities in Russia. When I traveled with Evgenia and her family to a city in eastern Russia, so that she could do consulting work with a mining company, an army officer on the train saw that her passport was registered in St. Petersburg and tried to prevent her from going to the city. I watched Evgenia make a case for the fact that her daughter-in-law was conducting environmental research for her dissertation. This was true, although Evgenia also believed that the officer would not let us pass if she told him that we were on a business trip, perceiving that as a less legitimate reason. After the incident, Evgenia admitted to me that she was concerned about the Federal government's growing restrictions on movement and the opaqueness and arbitrariness of the way these restrictions were applied. This was also the case in that she so often served as a liaison between foreign visitors to Russia and Russian corporations. During that trip, I needed to

^{xxviii} The Soviet government was characterized by tight control over citizens' freedom of movement—including between cities in Russia. Citizens were registered in cities where they were born and were limited to applying to jobs and using health and other public services there. It was possible to relocate through marriage and state-sanctioned job transfers, but not simply as people wished. Officials also tightly controlled travel to particular cities. Officers checked peoples' documents on trains and also randomly on the street and it was sometimes necessary for residents from one area to gain official permission to travel to another. Gorbachev gradually lifted these restrictions in the late 1980s, such that domestic and international travel became more feasible for Soviet citizens, at least according to Russian law. Under Putin, controls over movement have increased again, albeit in different forms. Visa requirements for foreigners to enter and move within Russia change at the speed of light, largely because of federal officials' concerns with illegal labor migration from Caucasian republics. It is sometimes hard to know whether or not the original visa requirements under which one entered Russia are still legal. Additionally, as the example with Evgenia demonstrates, certain cities are closed off to Russians, either by law or at the discretion of officials checking documents.

travel with Evgenia in order to fill in for her daughter-in-law as a record keeper of the meeting proceedings; the latter had to stay back at the hotel with her sick child. We had learned from the officer on the train that foreigners were restricted from that town, so I needed to travel with her daughter-in-law's passport and not talk, because of my accent. We were followed by a young man in a military uniform with a gun, and he even asked to verify our passports. I handed him mine but he did not realize that the picture on it was of a different young, white woman. As we drove back from the town that evening, Evgenia said, "I don't know what this is going to mean, if we had to sneak you in." She meant that she did not know what it would mean for her foreign business partners who had to come in for reasons other than sitting there silently and taking minutes. Less than her own freedom of movement, now it mattered that the foreigners whom Evgenia relied upon for her profits could move around less freely.

As Putin's government became increasingly restrictive of citizens' lives, some women's older concerns about self-reliance vis-a-vis the state began to grow just as important as autonomy from men. This distinction is important to keep in mind in my discussions of women's attempts towards self-reliance. Having said this, I now turn to an exploration of forms of self-reliance that women devised during and after socialism.

Public roles for women during the socialist period

A theme throughout this dissertation is the significance of extra-professional organizations in women's lives during late socialism. These organizations were means

by which many women participated in public life and gained valuable connections and skills that they later applied in post-socialist work settings.^{xxix}

Key among these organizations was the *komsomol*, or communist youth organization.^{xxx} Its membership was not mandatory, although it was a virtual prerequisite for admission to universities (Yurchak 2006:80-87). Some entrepreneurial women who I knew served as non-professional secretaries and were in charge of activities at their universities and workplaces, such as delivering ideological speeches and organizing parades and national holiday celebrations. This former involvement meant a number of things for women post-1989: First, they knew other rank-and-file members who respected their abilities as leaders and with whom women exchanged forms of material, social, and emotional support. For example, when Vera opened up a firm that offered language instruction in the early 1990s, she recruited former *komsomol* members who had foreign language and pedagogical training and whom she used to lead in the organization; trusted them and their linguistic and teaching abilities.^{xxxi} Social connections were valuable to women in a range of ways, including the knowledge that

^{xxix} In Chapter 3, for example, I referenced Vera's involvement in her university's branch of the *komsomol* as an important source of social belonging for her in the 1980s.

^{xxx} See Chapter 3 for more background on the organization's history. The *komsomol* included five ranks of professional members who performed Party duties such as writing ideological speeches, in addition to non-professional *komsomol* secretaries who led chapters at their factories, universities, and secondary schools. Men were disproportionately represented in the upper ranks of Party organizations, as well, although women, too, occupied these positions.

^{xxxi} Also, in Chapter 5, I discuss how Ekaterina's *komsomol* connections from her former workplace continue to form a kind of fluid community for her.

there existed others who had witnessed the skills that women once demonstrated as leaders in the *komsomol*.

Second, women's entrepreneurial activities today reflect some of the skills that they learned during their involvement in the *komsomol*. I define "skills" broadly as Gal and Kligman do to include abilities such as "time flexibility" and others that have long been taken for granted in post-socialist settings as part of women's voluntary caretaking and household labor. Gal and Kligman point out that as women in post-socialist settings entered service-oriented professions such as social work and domestic work, these skills were central to their abilities to earn money (2000:58-59). Ways in which skills, broadly defined, have enabled women to form their own profit-making ventures, remains to be explored. I observed how women applied in their work lives certain abilities that were also important themes in their stories of life during socialism—particularly through their involvement in the *komsomol*. Such skills included the ability to distinguish themselves to party leadership in factories through effective public speaking and a willingness to be "active" (*aktivnaya*) as a volunteer—to organize recreational activities with other workers or students and help to plan the celebration of holidays, for example. This skill of standing out in the right kinds of ways emerges in Ekaterina's story later in this chapter, and is just one example of the abilities that women gained through the *komsomol*.^{xxxii} In addition to Gal and Kligman, Yurchak too discusses the kinds of abilities that people

^{xxxii} Other examples of common abilities that women emphasized in their *komsomol* and contemporary business stories included the ability to teach others writing composition and foreign languages, as well as delegating tasks. Sometimes women spoke explicitly about how their skills (*navyki*) from the *komsomol* aided them later on, and sometimes these were themes that I observed as threads in their narratives—and designated myself as "skills."

cultivated during socialism—especially during the *komsomol*—as they apply today to the building of profit-making enterprises: Key among the activities that people learned in the *komsomol* was the ability to distinguish between what was necessary and what was not, and to render unnecessary or potentially controversial activities “invisible to, or misrecognized by, the state (296).” ^{xxxiii}

During socialism, people also enjoyed a range of opportunities to get involved with public activities outside of their studies and paid work. These included inexpensive music, dance, and painting and drawing lessons, in addition to athletic training in gymnastics, figure skating, and other sports such as track and field, for example. People had to qualify to take part regularly in many of these activities, but they were inexpensive. One sphere of activity that deserves mention in this chapter is athletics, because Dina was an athlete from the time she was in high school in the 1970s. ^{xxxiv}

There were a number of benefits that Soviet youths’ involvement as athletes conferred later in their lives post-socialism, which I further comment on in Dina’s story in Chapter 5. First, they were able to travel internationally to competitions when this was forbidden to most Soviet citizens. Dina traveled to Sweden and other countries in Western Europe from the time she was in secondary school. Today, the fact that she has traveled (and continues to do so for competitions) gives her more leverage when she talks with clients for her motivational business, given that she has previous international experience. I

^{xxxiii} Yurchak’s broad definition of entrepreneurship is also very helpful to conceptualize what being a “businesswoman” means to these women. Yurchak writes that entrepreneurship belongs “to a family of governing activities that are not restricted to the sphere of economics, markets, and profits (2006:296).” I develop the theme of entrepreneurship as a broad spectrum of activities in Chapter 7.

^{xxxiv} She was recruited in high school by a state coach from Moscow, who then arranged with Dina’s parents for her to be sent to a special boarding school where she would learn to become a professional runner.

have found that Russians who work in the upper ranks of profit-making enterprises widely perceive Western “culture” as business culture, involving qualities such as assertiveness. Further, Westerners are the clients and investors for many Russian firms. Dina, in simply mentioning that she has ongoing experience with Westerners, has been able to gain leverage with other business owners to whom she sells her services training their personnel. Second, some of the first Westerners who arrived in Russia in order to “train” Russians to be good consumers and businesspeople were themselves athletic coaches in their home countries.^{xxxv} That Dina was once an athlete first enabled her to set up her own business as an athletic trainer for other athletes in the early 2000s. Later, it became an experience she cites in order to market her services and those of people she has taught to lead seminars. Her case is one illustration of how opportunities during socialism have translated into sustainable entrepreneurial practices in the present.

That myriad extra-professional and curricular activities were available during socialism is not lost on some young people today. The female high school students who I tutored in English through Elena’s evening program often emphasized what they believed to be their mothers’ greater choices of “things to do” (*chem zanimat’sya*) during socialism. These students emphasized that if it were not for Elena’s program, they would have been unable to afford anything but walking around together on the streets looking at clothing and makeup in store windows. Both in entrepreneurial women’s lives and in a

^{xxxv} Interview with Natalya Tuganova, Curriculum Director, International Institute of Coaching, Moscow, June 15, 2009. For more information on the intersection of contemporary motivational seminars in Russia with athletic coaching, please see *Максимальная Самореализация: работа как внутренняя игра* [Maximal Self-realization: work as an inner game], by Timothy Golvi (2007).

wider popular imagination, socialism created more opportunities for citizens to remain occupied, meet people, and gain skills that translated into other parts of their lives.

Gendered ways of making do during socialism

During socialism there were certain institutionalized means for women to gain skills that remain translatable today, but they devised other skills out of necessity: lack of sufficient resources for women to be mothers, workers, and pursue other goals inspired new forms of creativity. This was my second point in the introduction to this chapter, and I develop it in this section. Examples of women's navigations between gendered expectations and their own realities can be culled from various fields. In this section, I focus on women's negotiations of health issues and labor.

Many socialist women negotiated inadequate provisions for their health needs, particularly surrounding pregnancy and childbirth. Women I spoke with cited a variety of reasons to minimize their contacts with doctors and take control of their own health, which prompted them to become independent information seekers and to trust their own judgments. Most critically, some women perceived doctors as intervening excessively in their lives with unsolicited advice that women often deemed harmful and inaccurate. Evgenia had a friend whose doctor had prescribed her "vitamins" during her pregnancy after she got a bad cold, which purportedly made the friend feel even more ill and weak than she did from the cold. Evgenia herself went to the doctor once during her first trimester and was annoyed by the long list of instructions that the doctor gave her about how to eat and what activities she could engage in and not. She herself decided to build on her extensive scientific training and study everything she could about pregnancy. She

monitored the process and her own nutrition by herself throughout the rest of her pregnancy and her birth. She purportedly even induced her own childbirth when her calculated due date had arrived, by going rowing with her friends on a lake; and she gave birth by herself in her home. In her narrative, Evgenia stressed the control that she was able to exercise over her own body. She also took pride in the fact that she managed her pregnancy herself, and told me that she boasted to her friends about the fact that she even was able to give birth when she wanted to. She told me this laughing with a glint in her eye. I think that part of the joy of her story was being able to tell it: I asked her why it was so important for her to induce her own labor on the day had told people she would give birth. She grinned and said, “So that I could be right.” We both laughed. When I asked Anna to tell me about her pregnancy in the 1980s, she said that her doctor had told her to have an abortion because she had a weak heart; the doctor was certain that Anna would not survive birth. She chose to ignore the woman’s instructions, visited the doctor as little as possible in order to avoid reprobation, and had a healthy childbirth. Both of these examples capture the context in which self-determination and ingenuity became important to some women during socialism, in the context of managing their own reproductive health. While women did not directly cite how these skills with their health influenced their lives later on, this is a part of their historical context that might help to shed light on the qualities they bring to their entrepreneurial lives in the present.

Women’s attempts during socialism to gain promotions at work also formed a basis for their successes later on. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, far fewer women occupied prestigious, high-status positions during socialism than did men. Women in my research who grew up during socialism were often exceptions to this, as were some

younger entrepreneurial women's mothers.^{xxxvi} Ekaterina worked as an engineer at a state-owned enterprise in the 1970s and 1980s, testing military technology. She moved very quickly up the "career ladder," until she became the only woman in the enterprise's uppermost group of managers at the age of 24.^{xxxvii} Ekaterina attributed her rapid rise in status to the fact that she was very active (*aktivna*)—and more so than other women colleagues—as secretary of the factory's *komsomol* organization. A higher ranking regional *komsomol* officer, who was in charge of promotions at the factory, recognized Ekaterina's dedication and promoted her. The following narrative illustrates the links she drew between her own "activeness," on the one hand, and her high *komsomol* ranking and management role, on the other:

I was secretary of the party organization, at the factory. It wasn't a matter of prestige. When a person leads an active lifestyle, they notice him and they offer him such opportunities. That's why I had somewhere in the order of 100 communists working under me by the time I was 24. I was the only woman on a management team of five men. It was exactly from that [experience] that my business came. All the time, you occupy an active position in life. You strive for something, you help someone. You are always thinking of something. Maybe I should have just sat for a while and kept occupied with my business, but I wanted to be active with other women, as well.

A number of things are going on in Ekaterina's narrative, all of which involve using her own behaviors and initiative to distinguish herself as worthy of leadership positions and partnership with men. During socialism, Ekaterina was able to rise in status in an

^{xxxvi} The mechanisms through which women received their jobs and positions at universities were varied.

^{xxxvii} There were more opportunities during socialism for anyone to become a manager because state enterprises were often run by committees rather than individuals. Moreover, state enterprises were structured such that party organizations such as the *komsomol* had leadership structures parallel to work management. Both *komsomol* officers and peoples' actual bosses made decisions about hiring and promotions. (Melin 2002:70-73) This meant that to stand out in extra-professional activities could confer advantages to people in their work positions.

inequitable environment; she believed that the extra enthusiasm and time she put into Party activities distinguished her from other women as well as men. She was able to stand out to Party higher ups in all of the right ways; it was autonomy from a situation where the odds might have otherwise been against her as a woman.

Post-socialism, it became important for Ekaterina to become professionally autonomous by starting her own business—first *through* her marriage and other partnerships with men, and then to gain autonomy *from* these men. In the early 1990s, Ekaterina lost her job when the enterprise where she worked stopped receiving money from the government. Some of the men with whom she had worked as a director were able to get access to the equipment and start private enterprises, but Ekaterina did not have this access.^{xxxviii} She decided that it was time to “think of something new” (*pridumyvai’ schto-to*). Here again, she raised the significance of being “active,” in her establishment of a new professional life for herself. She bought new books on finance and economics and read extensively. She also was unafraid to approach men at exhibitions in St. Petersburg and Moscow and to initiate conversations with them, which demonstrated her growing body of knowledge. Ekaterina also gained material and cultural capital through her husband: He also had occupied a high-ranking position in a socialist enterprise, and remained in charge when this turned into a real estate development company. He had access to expensive construction materials and

^{xxxviii} In the early 1990s, many state enterprises either shut down or were privatized. Men who had occupied management positions were sometimes able to gain equipment, real estate, and ownership rights of the privatized enterprises. Women were overwhelmingly left out of this division of property (Sperling 1999:168), although I have been unable to get clear information—from informants and from the literature—on how this process of exclusion took place. For more information on how and by whom property was divided in the early 1990s, see Ruble (1994).

machinery from the United States, and Ekaterina managed to buy some of that equipment at a low price. Thus, it was also her possession of this equipment and her connection with Western construction materials that gave Ekaterina leverage in finding men as partners. She convinced several men from Moscow to be her partners in her first enterprise in 1993. In Chapter 5, I further describe her methods for gaining their respect and a wider reputation as a businessperson, so that she was able to later start a firm on her own.

A prominent theme in Ekaterina's narratives during and after socialism was her readiness to take extra steps of information seeking and self-advertising, which enabled her to eventually gain greater autonomy from men. However, her narrative that I cited above is also one of growing interdependence with women. She moves directly from her description of being "active" in the workplace as a vehicle for advancing her own status, to activity organizing with other women. It was the same qualities that enabled her autonomy that formed the basis for a network of women who address problems in the workforce together. Ekaterina encouraged younger women in this network to be "active" by attending nighttime business classes and reading about finance and the economy, for example. It is still possible to conceptualize the skills she and other women develop together as forms of autonomy; the most significant relationship of dependence from which women seek to free themselves is from men—husbands, bosses, and business partners.

Life during socialism facilitated forms of self-reliance among women that were not directly intended by the state. Women of numerous professional backgrounds have found themselves in positions where all kinds of self-reliance have been vital to their

abilities to provide for themselves and their families: the absence of male partners due to war, political violence, alcoholism, and other factors; chronic shortages of healthcare and childcare; and gendered discrimination during socialism. During these periods, it was important for women to make do on their own. As Professor of Russian Literature Vladimir Golstein told me during a conversation about my research, “By the time *perestroika* came along, Russian women had gone through so many *perestroikas*, and that they were ready for another one.” He followed that it was no surprise that so many women were active in business. The life stories of entrepreneurial women I know suggest that transitions, big and small, are experienced by them monthly and daily, and have as much to do with gendered expectations that are older than the social upheavals of the early 1990s.

Post-socialism and self-reliance

In a post-Soviet context of growing traditionalism, women have continued to develop strategies of self-reliance and self-legitimization in order to deal with their worlds. They incorporate older narratives about womanhood as ingenuity and perseverance, neo-liberal narratives “imported” from the United States, and material survival strategies to accommodate new economic realities. In the following sections, I delineate the different strategies that women used. Some of women’s strategies reflect multiple historical and social influences, and I will be explicit about what those influences are

Younger women and socialist gender narratives

As women made sense of their own work lives, they recalled their own or older women's forms of self-reliance during socialism. Even younger women who had fewer recollections of life during socialism cited the ingenuity of women they knew who had lived during that period, as inspirations as they navigated their own contemporary lives.

Inna had migrated with her husband to St. Petersburg in 2005, from a small city in the Ural Mountains. She divorced her husband six months later, even though she, unlike him, had been unable to find a job. Inna contacted a former psychology professor and mentor from her home university—Zara. The latter helped Inna to eventually find a job as director of advertising for a local magazine, through a variety of means: Zara arranged for Inna to attend a seminar with an acquaintance of hers, for free, called, “Transitions in Women's Lives,” in which Inna articulated goals of what kind of job she wanted. A young woman that Inna met at the seminar helped her to get an interview with an advertising company and Inna was offered a fairly lucrative and prestigious upper-level management position. However, her potential boss asked her to sign a contract that she would not get pregnant within five years of coming to work for the company.^{xxxix} Zara encouraged Inna to keep looking and arranged for her to attend another, similar seminar at an employment agency, for men and women. It was through Inna's informal connections within this agency that she found a job as Director of Advertising for a local magazine.

^{xxxix} In a 2008 survey of over 2000, highly educated St. Petersburg women between the ages 16-34, 4% claimed that they were asked at job interviews to sign a statement promising that they would not get pregnant. Sixty percent were asked if they had children during a job interview. The survey sample included managerial women but the results were not divided by profession. (Mendelson 2008)

Inna noted many social factors that influenced her ability to get this position, but she stressed Zara's example and encouragement: Zara urged her to find a position that was "hers" (*svoe*)—one that suited her interests and did not require of Inna making any compromises that she did not want to make. Zara, for her part, had almost completely stopped receiving her pay at the university in 1991 and 1992. During that time, she had built up a local practice of offering psychological counseling to local women who were in similar situations. Inna told me that Zara was a constant source of direct support to her when the latter encouraged her not to give up on finding a position that was interesting to her. She also valued that Zara had been unwilling to give up (*opustit' ruki*) when she stopped receiving her pay and was unable to find a job elsewhere. Instead, as Inna said, "She was able to think of something new for herself (*pridumat' schto-to dlia sebia*)."^{x1} She acted (*Ona deistvovala*). I respect that and carry it with me," Inna said. ^{x1} To have a living example and source of inspiration that certain steps are possible can be just as valuable to young women navigating the workforce, as social connections that get them job interviews and the like. Education and employment opportunities are worth only so much if women did not believe that they were capable and deserving of them.

Seeking listeners—ethnography and motivational seminars

In order to render themselves able to adapt to various circumstances, women sought out various forums for reflection on their lives and who they were. Many looked

^{x1} Inna's own mother had been a kindergarten teacher for over twenty years, and she had kept her job and her pay during the 1990s.

for people who would listen to them as they did this: psychotherapists,^{xli} motivational trainers, and in the case of my research—me, an American ethnographer whose job was ideally to listen and not offer advice. In the following section, I elaborate on these last two sites of interaction.

Ethnography

During interviews, some women seemed to have already decided what stories that they wanted to tell me; I often wondered whether or not they had already thought about some of the questions I had asked them. For example, most did not pause when I asked them to tell me about the people or events that had influenced the development of their careers.

Women for whom it had sometimes mattered to see themselves in certain ways stressed that weaving different moments into a story only crystallized their notions of their own strengths and how these strengths might be mobilized. Oksana, for example, told me at the end of our last interview that she valued the opportunity to reflect on her life. She said, “Parts of my own character that have helped me were refreshed in my memory. It’s some sort of strengthening from inside, to think about these questions of who I am.” She had just told me a story about her decision to leave her second husband, even though her parents had been upset with her and she had not had a place to live separately from them. During our interview, Oksana reflected on her own ability to make decisions and “not to suffer” when others judged her for what she did. Other women, such as Elena, sought me out as the ethnographer so that they could tell me about things that they had learned in motivational seminars, or day-to-day challenges that they had

^{xli} See Chapter 3.

overcome. See, for example, my conversation with Elena in Chapter 3 about the year 2012. It had been urgent for her to tell me about a Mesoamerican prophecy for that year, mainly because she perceived me, as an American, to be more “open” to new information than Russians would be. Participating in an ethnographic project was important to some women as a way to tell someone their stories of navigating everyday challenges, large and small. From their perspectives, I was an outsider to whom they could talk with fewer interventions than they might receive from Russian friends or family, and some also perceived me as more accepting by virtue of being an American. These encounters shed light on a moral economy of listening. Sometimes, for women to talk about their lives was a way to legitimate their decisions and highlight their strengths, to themselves. However, it mattered to whom they spoke.

That listening was an important and potentially scarce resource for these women was sometimes reinforced in my conversations with other Russians. My friend Yana, a middle-school teacher, asked me to come in and talk about my research to a group of female students in her class, whom she taught business English. I asked if there was anything in particular that she wanted me to emphasize. First she told me to emphasize that women “in business” (*v biznese*) probably had a “plan” for what they wanted in life; they had thought about how to use their skills (*navyki*) and best personal qualities (*lichnie kachestva*) in their careers. Then she added that I was probably one of few people in Russia with access to such stories because these women likely did not have families or many friends; her rationale was that these were women who put career, and not “personal life,” “in the first place” (*v pervom meste*). I knew that Yana believed that having listeners was important as a way to “let off steam,” for help making decisions, and so that

a person felt good about him or herself. She also believed that Americans relied on their therapists for this, whereas Russians had friends who listened. The exchange with Yana on our way to the class reinforced two points: that from her perspective, listening was an important resource, and that Russian businesswomen,^{xlii} by virtue of their self-imposed alienation, were like Americans. This perspective was similar to those of other Russian men and women I knew who assumed that the women in my research would have few opportunities to talk to someone. They “othered” these women by virtue of their foreign and un-womanly preoccupation with work, even as some people, like Yana, also believed that being “in business” reflected skill and was advantageous in Russia’s contemporary economy. Her narratives offer a powerful example of how business, for women, is constructed more broadly among Russians: There was a lot to be said for a woman to enter the business world, but the move meant having to negotiate the vicissitudes of daily life alone.

Contrary to some Russians’ views, the entrepreneurial women I knew had people they talked to. The difference that women sometimes sought out through ethnography was talking about topics that *interested* them: their own accomplishments despite certain odds and their intellectual interests. As I noted in the Introduction to this chapter, there is a history in Russia of self-expression being an important way to move on from socialism and to complicate generalized understandings about people, including about women—whether people, in talking about their experiences, are openly critical of the government

^{xlii} Yana’s husband was a manager at a motivational company and she considered him a “businessman.” However, she did not consider him as alone because she talked to him every night. He also had friends through work.

or not.^{xliii} In other parts of this dissertation, I have spoken about the social significance some women saw in telling their stories.^{xliv} That women valued and went to significant lengths to talk about their lives demonstrated less about their access to social connections writ large, and more about the extent to which they felt they had a voice in society, discussing issues that were important to them.

Motivational seminars

The motivational seminars that I reference throughout this dissertation are settings where women similarly talk about their lives. In these cases, instead of responding to my agenda as an ethnographer interested in their social lives as professional women, women respond to particular agendas of foreign “trainers” and their Russian offshoots. Based on my conversations with Russian and American executives and trainers from different companies who entered Russia, these actors have had a very wide range of interests: to profit off of the market they have seen among Russians of different genders and professions struggling to develop forms of self-reliance, a sincere desire to foster intercultural and interpersonal understanding among Russians and between Russians and Americans post-Cold War, to train Russians to become more profitable entrepreneurs, and altruistic desires to offer specific audiences a way to adjust to changing social worlds. Most significant to me are not the contents of motivational seminars themselves,

^{xliii} For example, some *samizdat* publications by women critiqued the state’s failure to provide adequate childcare and other services to relieve women’s workloads, and the exhaustion that women felt as a result. Some of the stories that women tell me today are more about how they heroically manage work-family challenges. (Hemment 2007:76) Both sets of stories, in my view, reflect more widely on social circumstances and gendered problems that women navigate.

^{xliv} See my conversation with Elena in Chapter 3. I also discuss later on in this chapter how some women draw on their own experiences in order to sell motivational services.

but how entrepreneurial women have used them to formulate a self-reliant philosophy and to feel good about themselves in this society. These seminars offer one of the new languages with which post-socialist women can engage.

The history of motivational seminars in Russia is difficult to trace. Not all of the foreign companies that entered Russia at first survived, and many of their Russian offshoots are not registered with the government. I will nevertheless highlight several key historical shifts that have influenced the entrance into and growth of these seminars within Russia, focusing on one of the largest corporations to have established a presence there: New Life.^{xlv}

The first significant shift was the development of a number of motivational companies within the United States in the 1960s. New Life was among them. A group of social psychologists who worked within the University of California system founded them. These companies were national in scale, offered motivational “trainings” to a variety of audiences, including former drug dealers and people who were fighting addictions, people making transitions in their careers, and elderly retirees. Another significant group consisted of American women who were just beginning to aspire towards managerial positions in commercial enterprises during that time. Trainings with New Life lasted between five days and three weeks, and consisted of a variety of levels,

^{xlv} The history I offer in this section grows from interviews and informal conversations with men and women in both the American and the Russian contexts, who were instrumental in the development of this company and some of its Russian offshoots post-1989. I decided to discuss this company largely because it was the only one I was able to research in the limited amount of time that I had. Several women in my research had also been involved with the company at different points in their lives.

from “basic” to “advanced.”^{xlvi} In the latter, trainers taught participants to become trainers themselves and to establish their own franchises. New franchise owners were responsible for all of the overhead costs and monthly contributions of thirty percent of their profits to the larger corporation. Despite the financial risks involved, involvement with companies such as New Life may have been an important form of alternative professional education and experience for American women who did not see other routes. Thus, from the outset, companies such as New Life offered people professional opportunities even as they financially exploited their labor. In Russia, the development of New Life would hold similarly mixed social implications.

In January 1989, the same week that the Berlin Wall fell, a group of eleven trainers from New Life entered Russia for the first time and ran a basic training. The company had contracted with psychologists from the Russian Academy of Sciences. They paid these psychologists to make visa arrangements and to recruit young, university-educated Russians to attend the first trainings. Most of these initially recruited trainees held university degrees in psychology and related fields such as pedagogy and linguistic/cognitive sciences. These were incidentally fields where women predominated. New Life managed to recruit three hundred participants who would attend the seminar, or *training*, free of charge. The five-day, all-day event took place in a hotel ballroom overlooking Moscow’s Red Square. The three hundred university graduates were not the only ones who showed up. A total of six hundred Russians attended the seminar, but not all at once. One of the American trainers told me that the intended participants’ siblings,

^{xlvi} Costs varied with the time period, training level, and the place. In 1965, for example, a five-day basic motivational seminar with New Life cost \$30. In mid-1990s Russia, three of my research participants began to take part in basic seminars. These cost \$250.

parents, grandparents, and friends arrived alternately and sat behind each originally assigned name tag. This in itself reflects how New Life was intriguing to a significant number of Russians of various genders, professions, and age groups.

New Life operated according to the same structure in Russia as it did in the United States: people who were trainees could become trainers and set up their own franchises. According to my own conversations with Vera, her friends, and women from other social networks, it was not unheard of for women to give up their current occupations in order to become involved with this company, even though they knew from the outset that becoming trainers would prove less lucrative than their previous work.^{xlvi} Other women were able to build franchises on their own even without having first had their own firms. Notably, it was Russian men who attained the majority of salaried, management positions with the company in Moscow. Among other responsibilities, they were in control of converting profits from franchises from rubles into dollars before sending these profits back to the United States. They had the option of receiving their paychecks in dollars, which was especially important given what would happen during the financial crisis in 1998.

^{xlvi} See Chapter 3 for my discussion of Vera's involvement with this firm and how it represented a meaningful alternative to making money without any higher "purpose." In addition to the sense of meaning and direction that some women gained through their involvement with New Life, it was also an opportunity to interact with Westerners. This meant improving their English skills and gaining professional leverage in Russia, from having worked with foreigners.

In August of that year, inflation began to rise exponentially in Russia.^{xlvi} New Life went bankrupt and exited Russia. This left Vera and a number of other franchise owners in a great deal of personal debt, because they could not pay what they owed to the corporation based on their earnings in rubles. For Vera, executives in Moscow had raised the percentage of what she owed to 50% of her monthly profit, because she had been so successful. Substantial numbers of people opened up their own training firms after that, incorporating the cultural capital of having worked for an American company, as well as their particular skills such as educational backgrounds in psychology and foreign languages. These Russian offshoots have persisted and some have grown into larger corporations. Meanwhile, other companies have arrived in Russia during the past twenty years and remain in operation. New Life and its history is one of several examples of companies that achieved a substantial amount of popularity in Russia and led to several foreign offshoots. Women such as Vera have been able to adapt this corporation's strategies and others' to their own lives and their own businesses.

What took place within some of these original motivational seminars in Russia, which have been important to entrepreneurial women? In addition themes of purpose^{xli} and mutual translatability,¹ I elaborate here on two additional themes. These

^{xlvi} Foreign investors pulled out of Russia out of fears that the government would dramatically devalue the ruble in response to the financial crisis in Asia in 1997. Inflation in Russia reached 84% during 1998 (Ingram 1998).

^{xli} See Chapter 3.

¹ See Chapter 5.

include learning to craft personal histories and changing mundane, everyday social behaviors, both of which trainers sold as routes towards a confident inner state.

One common activity was for seminar participants to narrate or write stories about their pasts, framing themselves as confident, self-sufficient agents. In New Life's basic training in the mid-1990s, the Russian trainer asked Vera and the other participants to tell a story about their lives when they had experienced some sort of difficulty (*trudnost'*) or unpleasantness (*nepriyatnost'*). They were to tell the story until it became a source of self-sufficiency and certainty (*uverenost'*) in themselves, although he never explained how the strategy actually worked. As Vera related to me, in the seminar, she had described her experiences since 1991 with cancer, culminating in a dramatic hospital scene in 1994. She had survived despite the fact that her doctors told her after her fifth surgery that she would die. Right after her doctors made this announcement in her hospital room, she got up and forced herself to walk a few steps; she wanted to demonstrate to the doctors that she was healthier than they assumed. She also insisted on being discharged rather than undergo another surgery. Vera believed that it was the surgeries killing her. During the basic training, Vera retold this story to the trainer, seated on a chair in the middle of a circle of participants, who stood and watched her. Each time the trainer deemed that she had reflected weakness, he yelled, "Stop!" getting louder and closer to Vera's face each time. Then he made her begin the story again and omit the censured part.^{li}

The narrative would become important to Vera at different moments in her life, when she recounted it to herself or wrote it out in her diary. She told it to herself before

^{li} An example was when Vera expressed her worry that her refusal of more surgery had worried her mother further.

leaving her husband, for example, and again when she moved to St. Petersburg and felt depressed. Each time, she did not have people to consult with who might have helped her make difficult decisions. So, she literally listened to her own voice: “It helped me to take a first step,” Vera said, describing how the narrative had helped her seek work in St. Petersburg.

A year after Vera recounted the story to me, I found a detail that she must have added years *after* both the original event in the hospital room and her original telling of the story within the training. She had reported saying to the doctors, “How do you like me now?” in English, right after she had stood up from her hospital bed. As she told me the story, she said, “I thought of my friend Susan,” referring to the American trainer. Vera met Susan in 2001, when the latter had told Vera to repeat that to anyone who doubted her abilities. She saw Susan as a “kinder, gentler” trainer in comparison to the Russian man who had interrogated her in the original seminar. Despite having met Susan later than she could have incorporated her into the hospital event and her original narrative about it, Vera told me the story as though it had all taken place when she said it had. Her original narrative from the motivational seminar must have changed with each iteration over the years. I think that what mattered to her was not so much whether everything happened literally at that hospital, but her own ability to assimilate helpful moments into a story that spurred her actions. Even though the trainer had portrayed the exercise as mysteriously transforming participants into confident, self-sufficient people, Vera had taken the practice of narrative reconstruction with her in order to use when and how she saw fit.

Other women who did similar exercises in different seminars used narratives in similarly self-affirming ways, although I have yet further explore the mixing together of different time periods in their narratives. Inna, for example, told me that she journaled about her story seeking work in St. Petersburg, when she knew she would likely encounter uncomfortable situations—even those as fleeting as having to confront companies that had defaulted on their debts to her. She too, learned to recount her story during a seminar exercise with a similar intent, during “Transitions in Women’s Lives.” Like Vera, she was the one who devised the specific technique of repeating the narrative to herself when she needed it. These two women’s examples reveal the subtle ways in which women have been able to adapt exercises from trainings to their lives during moments when they are on their own, even though the original exercises in corporate motivational settings were not designed to grant people this degree of agency.

Another theme across motivational seminars—more a stated purpose than a specific technique—was the development of “certainty in themselves” (*uverenost’ v sebye*) or “self-sufficiency” (*samostoyatel’nost’*). During an initial meeting with Inna over dinner, I mentioned my interest in motivational seminars. She began to tell me about those in which she had participated, starting with a recent one. The Moscow headquarters of her journal had flew her there to participate in a five-day seminar with a Russian company, called “Success is in the Person” (*Uspekhi—eto lichnost’*). She had been invited to go because of her success bringing in ad money for the newspaper, and the company wanted to invest more in her as an employee. The training focused on changing peoples’ habits of behavior, but Inna managed to appropriate its more generalized philosophy of personal transformation, applying it to her own life:

The training literally taught me how to move (*kak dvigat'sia*)— for instance, how to leave the room in a business setting, how to walk, how to hold myself when I am speaking in public, how to listen to someone. The trainers tried to change every aspect of my behavior—all of the little concrete things. The main philosophy was that change always begins at the personal level (*na urovne lichnosti*). You know, there is so much that we cannot control. I don't know if I'll continue to bring in so much money. I didn't have a job for six months [after she moved to St. Petersburg], but my husband did. I looked for a job but didn't fall apart when I hadn't found work. I learned that any kind of change must begin with the person. Sometimes the first way to respond to changing circumstances is to change how you respond to them—how you feel inside. Then you start to act.

The intent of the training may or may not have been to help participants change other parts of their lives. Inna nevertheless developed her own theory of change and what it meant. She learned and valued behaviors such as looking a person squarely in the eye while that person spoke to her. However, she incorporated these teachings into a broader idea she had already been cultivating, that her own behavioral and emotional responses mattered—in themselves, and to legitimize certain social steps.

I relate Inna's example here to stress how women sometimes appropriated not only the specific methodologies of trainings, but also their stated purpose, in ways that were most relevant to them. Relevant, in many of the cases I have shared in this chapter, means helpful to women during moments when they either want or have to navigate challenges and make decisions on their own.

In this section, I have demonstrated how women respond to particular agendas—ethnographic and motivational, with their own stories of self-reliance. Thus, alongside and overlapping with shifting essentialisms of women as mothers are discourses that posit people as self-sufficient and censure out suffering. Women appropriate these different discourses and develop and use them flexibly, in accordance with their own changing social realities. In doing so, they index moments when they lack social support or when

they feel they are in some ways, pushing the envelope, and need some additional self-justification.

Self-help literature

The range of social spaces in which women can develop self-reliant philosophies has also grown post-1989. The proliferation of self-help media in Russia has meant that women can pursue inner transformation in less communal settings, within the sometimes crowded confines of their apartments.

Women learned about this media through motivational seminars, friends' and sisters' recommendations, and on their own, browsing bookstores and the Internet. They accessed multiple sources. These included business magazines from the United States such as the *Harvard Business Review*, which women received copies of through the language classes that they took; translated and Russian-language self-help literature such as *The Secret*, the book version of which became a bestseller in 2008^{lii liii}; and myriad

^{lii} A key source that appears throughout this dissertation is *The Secret*. The main message of the book is that people can make their goals come about both by articulating them and making visual representations of them—such as through the “dream collages.” The book emphasizes the ways in which articulation shapes peoples’ actions and also mystical processes that occur, enabling people to get what they want. Some of this media entered Russia through motivational corporations, themselves. In a later book version of this dissertation, I intend to make a case study out of *The Secret*. I will further analyze its content and my conversations with different women about it.

^{liii} Other books that several women had read included *Training in the management of organizational changes* (*Тренинг управления изменениями в организации*), by Elena Ivanova (2007); *A manager in velvet gloves: from merciless leadership to effective management* (*Менеджер в бархатных перчатках: от беспощадного лидерства к эффективному управлению.*), by Steve Mengler and Dwayne Beck (2008); and *Leadership and teambuilding: the holodynamics of a new world*, by Victor Vernon Wolf.

Russian- and English-language Internet chat rooms—discussion forums where women discussed media and other forms of self-development that interested them.

For entrepreneurial women in my research, the consumption of media was significant for a variety of reasons. Some valued that reading on their own was more feasible than leaving home to take different classes or to attend motivational seminars, in light of the need to justify to family members the time and money that they spent on themselves.^{liv} Instead, they could pursue self-development on their own, when they wanted, in often crowded apartment conditions. Anastasia and Yulia, for example, both read about the psychology of management and strategies for managing their own time amidst competing demands on their time and energy—issues that other women sometimes addressed more communally.^{lv} Anastasia told me that she tried to attend courses during the day so that she could be home in the evenings with her family. “I pick and choose what is interesting and read on my own, when the situation presents itself,” explained. Another reason that media was important was women’s use of certain sources as common reference points when they networked with foreigners and other Russians over the Internet. I discuss this in the case of Elena’s romance in Chapter 6. Vera, as well, met women friends in Moscow through an Internet chat room, where women were

^{liv} Time that women spent away from home “for themselves” could be as problematic as work for their spouses and families. See Chapter 5, “Business and Family for Women,” for further discussion of this issue.

^{lv} An example was skits that sales directors had written at the cosmetics company, which other directors and direct-sales associates performed during a Saturday training. In some, women explicitly justified the time that they spent at work to family members and friends. In others, they talked about ways to weave their various responsibilities together. These issues—justifying their use of time and making competing demands more structurally manageable—were also issues that came up in the literature that some women read.

discussing the book, *The Secret*. A third reason why media was important to some women was that books and the ideas contained within them were things that women held on to over time. Some women compared learning and books with the kinds of things a romantic relationship or friendship might offer them, in terms of introducing them to interesting new perspectives, ideas, and personal examples, which women could use in their own lives. Tatiana was the one who first made this point to me. I asked her during our first interview to tell me about the important people in her life. She said:

You know, there isn't really anyone exceptional in my life. I have never listened to any authority. Maybe I'm wrong and people have influenced me, but I don't feel it. And I never had an idol either. You'd have never seen me chasing around Michael Jackson for his autograph, for example. I think my own signature is much nicer. But since my school years, I have found certain genres absolutely stunning: the French classics (Balzac, Maupassant, and Flaubert), English classics such as Dickens, and our writers, as well—Dostoevsky, Tolstoy. These are the books that influence me. Dostoevsky has been gone for many years, but he influences me, because I live his ideas; I hold them close to me and carry them with me.^{lvi} But people in my life—they are all interesting and I love all of them very much. I simply don't think that my life would have turned out any differently without them.

It was difficult for me to learn about anyone in Tatiana's life in the more formal context of an interview, so I waited until the tape recorder was off and asked casually if she was dating anyone after she had asked me. She told me that she had been dating a man she had met on the Internet three weeks ago, but that the relationship was about sex. "You can get sex from pretty much anyone," she told me, "but not interesting conversations." She told me that this was what she meant about books. Like Elena and Anastasia, the worlds that Tatiana accessed through books made it possible for her to expand her knowledge and social field beyond the confines of a particular time and place.

^{lvi} I could elaborate on which of Dostoevsky's ideas were important to Tatiana and how, but could not do justice to these questions here without distracting from the argument about media and ideas as more flexibly appropriable by women.

Athletics

Physical activity was another pastime that women could pursue in different times and places and that was meaningful as an element of their own self-reliance. These women often drew interesting parallels between the gradual strengthening of their bodies through regular practice and their own growing sense of self possession. More generally, individualized sports constituted another set of abilities that women could carry within themselves, as a flexible set of tools for reacting to different social challenges.

In particular, some women emphasized activities that helped them to develop particular inner states, regardless of the circumstances under which they found themselves. The martial arts were particularly popular among women. Several of them practiced aikido and one of them took Brazilian jiu-jitsu. As Alexandra explained to me, aikido was a way for her to feel calm (*spokoinoi*) and self-sufficient (*samodostatochnoi*). It was something that she did for herself (*dlia sebia*) with no relationship to others' expectations of her, at work and among the relatives she cared for. When I asked Alexandra, she could not name a concrete situation in her life that stood out to her as requiring this. However, she wanted the ongoing sense that she would be able to control her reaction to events. "Aikido teaches you balance and calm," she said, "even if the person is bigger than you are." She continued that the balance and calm worked because they existed inside of you (*vnutri*).^{lvii} One of the key premises of aikido is that thinking in a certain way enhances your physical strength and ability to (literally) stand your

^{lvii} I never attended aikido with Alexandra, but I did take it up after returning to the United States, intrigued by her descriptions of the martial art and figuring self-defense would not be a bad skill for an anthropologist who travels alone. That's when I began to read and learn more about the underlying philosophy.

ground when someone larger than you attacks. I think it works, and perhaps this is part of what Alexandra meant. Tamara and one of her colleagues at the old corporation where she worked invited me to take part in a series of Brazilian jiu-jitsu classes with them. I went to five classes, which were full of young men and women and led by three men who were black belts. We learned a number of moves that focused on what to do when someone pinned us down. The premise of the sport, as Tamara explained it to me, was that most fighting took place on the ground. I found Tamara's choice of sport interesting because it is yet another one that physically empowers the underdog in a social interaction; she was at a point in her life right after losing her job, and was more generally seeking to keep herself from "falling apart." Yet she herself emphasized having something "for herself" that would keep her motivated from day to day.^{lviii} As she, her friend and I ran to catch the bus home after practice one night, Tamara asked me if I had fun and I said that I did before asking her the same. Tamara replied, "Of course!" That felt good, to get some exercise." Then she laughed and said, "Besides, it couldn't hurt to learn how to fight someone like Ruslan." She was referring to our demanding instructor, who was over six feet tall and built like a quarterback. We laughed in response and agreed. Self-defense was simply fun for some women but it may also be framed as a source of empowerment and confidence in their everyday social encounters.

In these cases, we see women asserting their own interests through athletics. They conceptualized these activities as investments in their own sense of well-being and abilities. In this respect, these activities and their meanings to women differed from earlier formulations of athletics as a way to represent the Soviet Union and its strength—

^{lviii} Tamara soon abandoned *jiu jitsu* for swimming because the latter was more affordable.

at least in official accounts. Especially in the case of women such as Alexandra, who was explicitly concerned with finding her own place, activities such as athletics offered a space apart within which women formulated their own attitudes of self-reliance.

Silences, old and new

All of the forms of social expression that I have discussed in the second half of this chapter are meaningful to women as spaces where they have agency: as opposed to both the silences surrounding many of women's problems in the Soviet past, and contemporary political displacements of women's diverse interests. In the work of Hemment (2007), grassroots feminist groups in contemporary Russia have been valuable to women as not only means to social ends, but also, sites where women can critique "existing structures of power and social relations (2007:5)." Similarly, for Vera and other women I have discussed, motivational seminars, martial arts classes (and discussions about them with other women), and psychotherapy are places where they can reinsert themselves into semi-public discourse, making visible what state policies and history have refused to discuss. For example, Vera valued the motivational seminars that she attended and led as opportunities to explore her past in a new language of popular psychology.^{lix} Vera self-consciously distinguished between her reality in the Soviet era and the present climate in Russia. For example, she explained to me the source of her own and her mother's illnesses during the early 1990s, she said, "People in the Soviet Union, they believed in material things only, and metaphysical things made you crazy."

^{lix} See Chapter 1

Motivational seminars gave Vera and her mother a language and an environment to discuss issues in their marriages in a way that had previously been impossible. Vera attributed her decision to leave her marriage to having spoken about her husband and their relationship in the initial Moscow seminars that she attended.

The problem that I discuss here originating during socialism and addressed within these settings applies to younger women without the same historical context, as well. It was a common concern among women in their 20s that they had not always known how and to whom to express frustrations about their own intimate relationships with men—the many uncertainties of these relationships, and forms of gendered violence that took place within them. Alexandra, for example, had a boyfriend who began to hit her—a problem she attributed to his own anxieties about her plans to leave Russia. She did not believe that anyone would be sympathetic to her experiences and to her idea that there was something unjust about his behavior towards her. In Russia, for example, a common saying is, “If he beats you, it means he loves you.” (*Vzbit’ znachit’ lyubit*).^{lx}

Alexandra took refuge in martial arts and other activities that she conceptualized as important to the development of her *lichnost’*, both as a practical means of defending herself on her own, and in order to have something in her life that existed regardless of her interpersonal (romantic, especially) relationships.^{lxi} In my view, omissions of the interests of women apart from their families, in addition to years of social silences, have

^{lx} Among the women’s organizations that began to proliferate in Russia from the mid-1990s through the early 2000s, domestic violence crisis centers have been the most successful in influencing public attitudes towards gender violence and even in gaining support from the federal government.

^{lxi} Interestingly, domestic violence is one of the few gendered social justice issues that has been taken up in contemporary Russia—first by transnationally funded women’s groups, and more recently in the late 2000s by the Federal Government (Johnson 2010).

contributed to the significance of personalized routes to combating the problem.

Furthermore, some younger women worried about the effects of not talking about their own problems, because of the impact they believed socialist silences had on their own mothers.

These examples show that women in multiple generations identified public silences surrounding the interests of women. In certain cases, younger women's recognition that their mentors and mothers had experienced gendered violence and inequalities both reflected and gave further legitimization to their own experiences with similar issues. More broadly, forms of self-development have offered both communal and more solitary spaces within which social problems become legible and manageable to women.

Markets for gendered personhood

An additional form of self-reliance that women have deployed in the post-socialist period is financial. They have taken notions of personhood that began to achieve wider social resonance post-socialism and have marketed them in the form of motivational and psychological services that they, as women, perceived themselves to be in a privileged position to create. I illustrate this argument primarily through the case study of Oksana and the way she understood her own entrepreneurial activities.

I observed how women capitalized on a number of social trends. These included corporations' attempts to disseminate ideas in Russia that people had to take responsibility for their lives. For example, in the firm she ran with Yulia, Oksana offered "psychological trainings" (*psikhologicheskie treningi*) to Russian and American

businesspeople on one another's "mentality" (*mentalitet*)—among other topics.^{lxii}

Oksana drew on several trips she had taken to the United States, her own business interactions over the previous ten years, and her own fluency in English in forming her own ideas of what the Russian and American mentalities consisted of. Her "psychological trainings" involved seminar-style English lessons and lectures to groups of Russian businesspeople, as well as young university women aspiring to be businesswomen, about a whole constellation of qualities and habits that they should expect to observe in American colleagues, clients, and higher-ups. These included punctuality, shaking hands upon meeting new people, and the ability to meet deadlines. Oksana's curriculum was based on the assumption that if people learned these qualities, then they would have a protocol for acceptable social behavior around people in the business world, simply by knowing where people came from. In his discussion of self-help radio shows in Russia, Tomas Matza (2009)^{lxiii} writes that instructions about communication are about "controlling the social context" and "owning the interaction." Such skills, Matza argues, allow people to expand the circle of people with whom they could communicate, beyond close circles of friends to include even people standing in line at the store. (504) This is where self-help enters into instructions about

^{lxii} *Mentalitet* is a Russian word that denotes a person's psychological makeup. It allows for someone's particular personality traits, in addition to denoting the characteristics the speaker assumes a person to embody based on nationality, profession, and sometimes, gender. I frequently hear people use the word "Russian mentality" to describe what they perceive to be the psychological characteristics of Russians, and peoples' definitions often dramatically contradict one another.

^{lxiii} Matza is analyzing Mikhail Labovsky's national radio show, *For adults, about adults* (*Vsyroslym o vsroslykh*).

communication such as the ones that Oksana offered, and that Vera offered in her own psychological trainings, as well ^{lxiv}: These women's advice, like the talk show hosts that Matza describes, translates into portable social skills that allow one to quickly discern a set of perceived rules for communication. Regardless of whether or not these communication protocols actually worked for people, Oksana had clearly been able to tap into and reinforce a larger social demand for these kinds of services.

Concurrently, Oksana believed that people would be willing to pay for listening and other kinds of social support in this kind of hyper-individualistic setting. In other words, she saw a global demand for personal tools of social and economic survival, born of peoples' labor migration, the need to work long hours, and friends and family members' own lack of time, and also understood how these same factors created a need for social interaction. Oksana believed that people often signed up for language lessons because they wanted to talk with someone about their problems. This was especially the case for company bosses who had little time and few friends. Oksana added that it applied to the wives of American businessmen, who she believed came to her for Russian lessons because they felt isolated in Russia. She herself had expressed to me the desire for company and someone to listen to her and perhaps this was a way of translating her own experiences into a way in which she could earn money while also serving a greater social good. Dina, likewise, told me once that she thought in Russia, people were not rewarded for their ability to make friends (*umeniye druzhit*). ^{lxv} One of the things she

^{lxiv} See Chapter 6.

^{lxv} Dina's 14 year-old son had been given an award at school for his "ability to make friends." This had surprised her because she believed that distinguishing oneself in this way in Russia was not looked upon as a good thing. The award nevertheless reflects a

had started to do in 2009 was offer psychological trainings to sales personnel at St. Petersburg corporations, in which she taught them to be “open to communication/social social life” (*otkryto obshcheniyu*), but also understood her own interactions with them as a potentially valuable interaction in itself, when they could talk with her about their own fears.^{lxvi} Matza notes that many callers to self-help radio shows were frustrated with the communication skills that they learned because of the “rudeness” (*khamstvo*) that they nevertheless encountered in everyday life (2009:507). What is interesting about the business models that Oksana and Dina offered was that they perceived the Some women, such as Oksana and Dina, seemed also to understand the potentially isolating effects for people of navigating social worlds on their own and sought to temper that by making their own business practices as sites where they (profitably) met these multiple needs.

Some women also saw themselves as uniquely able to provide these services, because they perceived themselves as valued communicators on the national and international market. The business that Oksana founded and ran with Yulia exemplifies how women sometimes saw their gender as a basis of professional knowledge. Oksana told me that she believed being a woman was extremely advantageous to her role managing a business that provided language lessons and “psychological trainings” to

trend in Russian education since 2001, when the Minister of Education passed a decree that reframed Russian education from aimed at teaching students particular bodies of knowledge, to shaping particular kinds of people. Education was now meant to create people who “can make decisions independently in a situation of choice, can cooperate with others, who stand out by their mobility, dynamism, and creative thinking, who are open to cross-cultural communication, and feel responsible for the fate of the country (Constitution of the Russian Federation 2002:1,2).” At the level of education then, teachers are expected to promote a certain individual psychology.

^{lxvi} Note to the reader: I could use help figuring out where to expand examples into quotations and longer descriptions of my interactions with women, and when to summarize. Any one of the examples in this section could be blown up to 5-6 pages of dialogue, description from participant observation, and analysis of interviews.

other business people. She believed that clients were more likely to buy her services in light of the fact that she was a woman and that the majority of her teachers and trainers were women: “Women are better listeners,” she told me, “They talk less and they listen more. They are also more intuitive. They know when a person has signed up for an English lesson simply because he wants someone to listen to him, and not because he wants to learn English.” Oksana was able to take her idea of herself as a woman and turn it into a set of sustainable business practices that made sense to her and to others. It was part of the way in which she saw herself. This is an example of how gendered notions of personhood that were arguably problematic for women in particular settings such as the home could actually be a basis for women to articulate and market new consumer needs in Russia’s neo-liberal market.

In other respects and for other women, entrepreneurial practices had nothing to do with altruism. Sometimes women’s profits came directly from their promoting models of personal responsibility that justified corporate practices for their own and transnational corporations’ profits. By way of another example, Evgenia, her Russian partners and her grown children negotiated contracts between Russian mining companies and local rural communities so that the companies would comply with international environmental standards and have their products marketable. This involved traveling to local communities and justifying to them why the mining company had rights to cut down the forests; people needed to get jobs and rely less on hunting and gathering berries and mushrooms to live on and supplement their pensions.^{lxvii} Individualism was a theme in Evgenia’s lectures but the intention was to get people to sign an international document

^{lxvii} This was pretty ironic since the only local company people could work for was the mining company, which did not always pay people regularly.

agreeing to allow for continued deforestation—not to help people. She sold her services as a mediator between Russian businesspeople and various foreign professionals, believing that being a woman and someone who was well-traveled made her able to understand and anticipate others' (cultural, gendered, and class-inflected behaviors). In her case, she did not so much motivate others to pursue solutions to all kinds of problems, as justify the corporation's practices through the lens of personal responsibility.

In an economy where many have been left economically disenfranchised, these women have found economic niches for themselves. Perhaps the transition from socialism was less of an experience of disenfranchisement for them because late socialism contained few career opportunities for them, relative to their male counterparts. The opening up of the market to free enterprise therefore introduced the possibility for creativity: As one research participant, Yana, said, what seemed to matter most during *perestroika* was not so much a lack of money, but a lack of ideas; Russians were looking for new services in order to survive and thrive in the new economy. These women, in various ways seized upon a market in Russia for independent, moral, often gendered personhood. It helps to explain why so many women described their transformational moments in their careers—the times when they began businesses—as happening in the early 1990s or during the financial crisis of 1998.^{lxviii} Then they were able to get by because these were precisely the times when people needed a change, and women were able to offer it. Neo-liberal forces and a number of influences coincided with cultural and economic forces nudging women back into the workplace during these difficult periods.

^{lxviii} During both periods, inflation rates skyrocketed. Many women did not get paid for a good year after they started to offer services to people. They relied upon work from their own homes, in certain cases, and in others, getting real estate from their husbands or by selling items such as cars.

Business practices themselves are therefore sites in which women make do with the discursive resources available to them: older gendered essentialisms as well as a new market for self-reliant personhood that they have had a part in creating.

Back to work, on their terms

In this chapter, I offered examples of women who managed to navigate through complicated gendered expectations in their societies, attempting to live and work more on their own terms. I offer two ethnographic examples in order to tie up my argument about the ingenuity women have used to navigate their lives during both the socialist and post-socialist time periods. These are of women who accepted certain socially prescribed gender roles for their times, and then found the lives that they were leading to be untenable. These examples underscore that the shifting gendered expectations I have described in this chapter sometimes held weight for women but did not dictate the lives that they ultimately pursued.

Larisa told me that she quit her mid-level management job at a bank in the late 1990s after giving birth to her first son. Her family lived on her husband's lucrative corporate salary. However, she did not like being at home that year. She said: "I love my children, Andrea. I absolutely do. But after just three months at home with Oleg, I thought I was going crazy. It was so quiet and so uninteresting. There was nothing to do and one to talk to!" It was that experience of being bored that inspired Larisa to start a nanny business to enable mothers like her to work or to be kept company at home. Larisa's business was a topic of continual conflict between herself and her husband, even though he had been the one to give her money to rent an office to begin with. However,

it would prove crucial as a way for her to support her two young sons on her own for four years, shortly after she realized that he had a mistress and two other children simultaneously, behind her back. Larisa's case illustrates that even when women's economic circumstances are such that they have been able to follow particular gendered roles, they sometimes find themselves unable to. They find a space of creativity and self-reliance within their workplaces and live with the tensions that may ensue in their marriages.

Tensions between social expectations and women's needs and desires also came out in young women's discussions of their mothers. At 55, Yulia's mother had gone on a pension, but in 2008 had recently returned to work as a mid-level manager at a programming firm in St. Petersburg. Yulia told me how much better her mother felt after her return to work. Yulia's older sister Anastasia and her father, retired himself, could not understand why she would choose to do so: she had a comfortable apartment, a new grandchild (Yulia's baby), and plenty of money from the fact that both daughters and their husbands helped support them. Yulia herself might have had the most to gain from her mother remaining at home. After her baby was born, she sometimes expressed wistfully that she longed for her mother to be there with her more often and teach her what to do. However, she said, "My Mom has completely changed since she went back to work. Work is so good for her (*toniziruetsya*). Yulia's Mom apparently looked happier and younger, had met new friends, and spent more time in downtown St. Petersburg exploring activities such as shopping, theater, and the ballet. Yulia had reasons to encourage her mother to remain at home, yet she did not. This example of her mother was important in light of the fact that her mother had been one to discourage

Yulia from working in other circumstances. Both she and her mother were navigating their own paths through post-soviet narratives about gender and work. The story itself illustrates that transition—political and personal—is something that some women try to navigate on their own terms. The result is that the actions of older women, if not their advice itself, can help to legitimate and make more understandable the life paths of younger women who similarly seek to forge their own ways.

CHAPTER 5

MUTUAL TRANSLATABILITY AND NEW FORMS OF BELONGING

In previous chapters, I described how social, political, and economic constraints in Russian entrepreneurial women's lives limit their possibilities for developing personal lives that are more expansive than marriage and motherhood. In their efforts to develop business careers that will provide them with greater emotional and material self-reliance, women face the challenge of justifying their work to unsupportive spouses and relatives. This process involves believing that they have productive contributions that they can make, on their own, within Russia and the world. It also involves finding colleagues and clients who respect women's capabilities as entrepreneurs. "Personal life" in Russia is narrowly construed in political and media discourses, and sometimes constructed by the people closest to women as a completely separate and opposing sphere from "professional life." Even in local St. Petersburg government discourses that posit entrepreneurial careers as part of motherhood, policymakers portray personal life as marriage and motherhood. In addition to ignoring women who are not married or not mothers, such discourses avoid questions about how women's hypothetical spouses and children perceive their work lives.

Given that entrepreneurial women's lives are more complex than those delineated by cultural stereotypes, several questions remain to be examined: Where do these women go to remedy loneliness? Where do they find intimate relationships—friendships and romantic partnerships—with people they consider to be their intellectual equals? What

kinds of personal lives do women with professional careers seek out for themselves, when people in their private circles rarely see them in the same ways that they strive to portray themselves? Under what circumstances do women find people who accept them as “feminine” in women’s own definitions of the term, as well as professionally and intellectually capable? These are the issues that frame the ethnographic narratives in this chapter.

I elaborate on how women’s understandings of selfhood can anchor them in what is often a hostile or indifferent social environment. I call attention to the array of personal and communal processes by which women cultivate particular self-images, as ends in themselves as well as foundations for novel social spaces. Specifically, women have ways to make sense of how internal personality traits often perceived by spouses, for example, as “not normal” for women, can actually be feminine. Women also articulate ways in which these “feminine” traits are applicable to their professional careers. Alternately, some of these same women have used a different kind of logic: To one another and among male coworkers, they make sense of how they can possess both supposedly masculine and feminine traits at once, rather than changing who they are across situations.

I call these various discursive practices processes of *mutual translatability*. It is a set of shifting rationales that women apply depending on the social contexts in which they find themselves. In particular, I am referring to the social interactions throughout a woman’s life, through which she contemplates exactly how skills perceived by some as “masculine” or “feminine” can be applied effectively across situations, and are contained within her selfhood. Among other things, mutual translatability involves reading self-

help literature, discussing it with people online, writing about one's life in a motivational seminar, talking with others in various social settings (including participating in ethnography), and using self-justifications to obtain work positions and other important social resources.

First, I illustrate the problem of work and family as conflicting spheres of activity for women, elaborating on how this problem manifests itself in their everyday lives. Particularly young, married women with wealthy husbands face formidable challenges to being professionals and maintaining family lives.

Second, I illustrate the practices through which some women create mutual translatability, specifically as *mothers* and professionals. I layer different examples from the lives of these women in order to complicate my argument. I then move on to discuss the concept of mutual translatability as it applies to the lives of working women who articulate other definitions of womanhood and incorporate these notions with their own working lives.

Third, I reveal the unintended social outcomes of women's efforts. In the context of travel as well as virtual and on-the-ground communities within Russia, women are finding other people who ostensibly see them as they do themselves—as professionally capable and “feminine,” as well. These groupings form and dissolve according to women's needs for social support and material resources. Sometimes, the social interactions within which women are able to pursue their own self-development include foreigners—Western men who women meet on international dating sites. Paradoxically, women's quality of life within Russia derives in part from the knowledge that they are not limited to their social networks within its borders.

My concluding section discusses the broader theoretical implications of mutual translatability for my analysis of social belonging. Literature on women's organizing in post-socialist territories has demonstrated that self-help and confidence building are central tenets of organizations that help women manage problems in their lives (Johnson 2007:73; Sperling 1999:18; Bridger et. al 1996:130-131). Johnson, for example, refers to one women's organization whose motto is, "A confident woman won't be fired (2007:73)." My research develops these observations to ask what self-development entails for women, and what its social implications are in their own lives as well as more broadly. These questions are important in a contemporary Russian context where women's organizing has confronted many challenges. Women's accent on selfhood as a locus of change provides a vital window on shifts in gendered subjectivities that are not immediately visible in the work of institutions such as NGOs.

"Business and Family for Women"

Messages in the mass media, from women's male partners, and even within their educational environments encourage women to act "feminine" (*zhenstvenny*) around their husbands even as work might demand a completely opposing set of traits. I spoke in 2009 with a business professor at an elite St. Petersburg university— Elena Alexandrovna,ⁱ a woman in her 50s who was the only female on the economics faculty. This was the former advisor of one research participant, Yulia. Over tea in her office, Elena Alexandrovna told me that she privately reinforced to all her female students that "maintaining their womanhood" (*poderzhyvat' zhenstvennost'*) was central to their

ⁱ I use the Russian formal address here to denote a greater social distance between myself and Elena Alexandrovna, as I met with her only once.

“success” (*uspekhn*) as businesswomen. A way she illustrated this point to her students was by advising them to “act weak” (*predstavliat’sia slabymi*) around their husbands, not confident and capable—for example, feigning ignorance about certain “masculine” household tasks such as fixing furniture. Elena Alexandrovna called this strategy “role management (*upravlenie roliami*).” The purpose of acting in such a way was twofold: for women to make their husbands believe in women’s femininity, and for women to convince *themselves* of it. The implication was that such gendered behaviors can be performative, helping women to create a sense of a “real” self and by extension, of authentic (heteronormative) relationships with their husbands.ⁱⁱ

Some young, married women believed that they needed to portray very different qualities of self, including separate sets of behaviors and distinct physical self-images, in their dichotomized “personal” and “professional” social spheres. Recall the example that I offer in Chapter 1, of Yulia lying to her husband about visiting family on nights when she worked late.ⁱⁱⁱ Being at work was generally very important to Yulia because it had taken the place of having friends. She explained to me very matter-of-factly once that

ⁱⁱ I asked Elena Alexandrovna if she herself had tested these tactics and she laughed and told me that she was already at an age when she did not need to: She and her husband had spent over thirty years together. They had both owned profitable businesses, and there had been times, such as the early 1990s, when he was making less money and the family relied on her income. In other words, the complexity of her character and abilities were already evident to him because of the economic and political circumstances that had given him no choice but to recognize them. Yet, Elena Alexandrovna saw the strategy as important for younger women and the generation of men among whom they had found spouses.

ⁱⁱⁱ Yulia told me that she and her business partner, Oksana, thought of this strategy themselves. Her actions nevertheless exemplify the “role management” that her former teacher described.

she simply never had many close friends; her interests lay in her studies and her work. When Yulia was in the office, she talked about all kinds of topics animatedly with Oksana, Svetlana, and the women who worked for them as secretaries and language teachers. Work was a social space for her. However, getting the time that she wanted and needed to spend at work was not easy. Yulia's narrative points to the existential conflicts that she experienced:

While I'm at work, I think to myself, "I'm at work. I'm a grown person. I work and hold responsibilities." With my husband I start walking around with my tail behind my legs. Oksana and I were talking about this because she has the same situation. At work, you're one person: You make decisions, just like she does with her children. She has two children. Yet, it's this constant cycle (*krugovorot postoyany*). My husband says, "When are you going to be home?" I have to decide whether I am going to lie. It is as though you are struggling with yourself. Sometimes I tell him, "This is my decision. I want to do this. I feel fine,^{iv} and I'm going to do this. Period. I don't want to hide it from you, either." The last time I said that, right away he grew quiet and put *his* tail behind his legs. I don't know what is going to come of this situation.

Yulia's narrative suggests that "role management" incurs greater costs for women than inconvenience, energy, and in her case, the possibility of her husband finding her out.

Her feeling of not knowing "what is going to come of this situation" had dissipated by the time I spoke with her during the summer of 2009. Yulia's husband's corporation had lost the support of foreign investors and he had been out of work since November 2008. Now he helped care for their baby and she was able to go to work more frequently. Yulia earned a third of what her husband had once made but now they were dependent on her income. Moreover, he was finally eager to collaborate with her on a separate venture of designing and selling magnets together. She had wanted to do a creative project with him for a long time but had been unable to convince him. During

^{iv} Yulia was pregnant during 2007. Her husband responded more negatively to her work because of his alleged concerns for how it would affect her and their child's health.

my 2009 visit, I told Yulia about the situation she had described to me of lying to her husband when she went to work, and asked her if that was ever still an issue. She said that it was not and that she barely remembered having had to do that.^v The irony in Yulia's story is that it took a downturn in her family's socioeconomic circumstances in order for the sense of uncertainty she previously described in her personal life to apparently vanish, and for her husband to become more of the friend that she wanted him to be.

Work was not a social space for some women as it was for Yulia, and these women sometimes emphasized a lack of time for themselves outside of both that and family. Whereas Yulia managed her firm's finances, Oksana was its public face. Oksana collaborated with Svetlana to negotiate contracts with other companies, find clients, and lead trainings on intercultural communication among businesspeople, open to the public. She also handled the hiring and firing of employees and stepped in when somebody was not doing their job. It was perhaps because of these more public roles that Oksana saw a greater need to guard her public image. After the birth of her third child in the summer of 2008, Oksana told me somewhat jokingly about the elaborate certificate that she was sent by the federal government, designating her as a "Mother of Many Children" (*Mnogodetnaya Mat'*). "What do they think? That I am going to hang it up above my desk at work? Do they think that people are going to take me seriously as a Mother

^v Small businesses in Russia have fared far better than corporations since the recession began in the fall of 2008, and this is the sector of business where women predominate (Orlova 2009).

Heroine?”^{vi} When Oksana’s pregnancy began to show, some men and women she knew in business made remarks implying that she would soon step down from her work position. This annoyed Oksana and was further confirmation that she had best reveal as little as possible about her family life. With neither home nor work serving as a real social outlet, Oksana felt a lack of time that was her own. Here, she responds to me at the end of our first interview, when I asked her if there was any other question that she had wanted me to ask her:

If you are successful as a businessperson, if you are successful as a Mom, and as a wife, what do you feel a lack of? As for me, I feel an extreme lack of not even free time, but lack of time to stay in a café *alone* with a friend and a glass of wine, just to talk. This does not mean that I dislike my kids and my husband, my work, but now my life is divided mostly in two parts: work and family. That’s all. I would say that when I find myself depressed, it is because I do not have this.

Time was a problematic resource for many women, especially when they were married with young children, as Oksana and Yulia both were. Oksana had met her current husband through work; he had been one of her clients and they became friends before their romance. Yet, she was not surprised that once they were married, he said to her, “Remember: Family comes first. Not work.” She and Yulia had to justify to their husbands why they were spending time away from home, and one of the few acceptable explanations was to visit family members—certainly not to do something for themselves. There were moments when this became very clear to me. One of my neighbors in St. Petersburg, a schoolteacher named Diana, was curious about my work and asked me about the dilemmas that women described. I summarized Oksana’s point about having

^{vi} This was an honorary title established by Stalin in 1944, awarded to mothers of ten or more children. Mother heroines were entitled to wear a gold medal and were given certain privileges, such as pension supplements, help with utility payments, and supplemental food and other basic necessities.

time for herself and included the part about sitting in a café with a glass of wine. I started searching my mind for another example when Diana's indignant response surprised me: "Sit at a café?! What the hell kind of woman thinks about sitting at a café with a glass of wine? I for one would absolutely *love* to have a glass of wine at a café, but I have a child to take care of." I stared back at her. Diana went on to point out how expensive going to drink at a café was. She was right that such a luxury is out of reach for most people in the city. This exchange further showed that for a woman to seek time for herself—let alone expensive things—can be a bold move in Russia from her own and others' perspectives.

When women were away from home, a sense of guilt sometimes prevented them from focusing on what they were doing. Anastasia pointed out, for example, that she considered herself the "emotional guard" (*emotsional'ny okhranik*) of her husband and teenage daughter. The time that she spent contemplating how to protect their overall well being stretched way beyond the time when she was actually at home. Based on an exercise in a book she was reading called *Time Management*, Anastasia had made a ray diagram with the word "I" (*Ia*) in the middle. The rays contained boxes in which she described different things she wanted to be able to manage on a given day, such as hugging her daughter and husband a certain number of times. She looked at it in the morning in order to remind herself of everything she had to do. However, it was impossible for her to quantify or limit the energy she devoted to thinking about her family. This was one of several reasons that she eventually left the advertising company where she had served as financial director for five years.

Anastasia wanted to start her own tourism firm and had begun to enroll in a number of classes at a local adult education center. Public speaking was on her list of priorities. As her first assignment, she had written and delivered to the class a speech called “Business and Family for Women (*Biznes i Sem’ya dlya Zhenshchin*).” During the speech, she unexpectedly began to cry when she began talking about her attempts with the ray diagram and her feeling that she could not accomplish everything on it. She was ashamed but pushed through her speech. However, the feeling only worsened when the instructor, a woman, told Anastasia in front of the class that she should “cut back on personal examples next time.” The incident reinforced for Anastasia that it was socially very difficult to find spaces where it was possible to even talk about problems of work and family.

Anastasia did not talk about her experiences managing work and family with her sister Yulia, even though they lived across the street from one another and both had wealthy husbands who disapproved of their working. Anastasia even told Yulia sometimes that she disapproved of her lying to her husband. When I asked Anastasia if she ever talked to Yulia about the kinds of things she discussed in her speech, she said, “No, we’re not really that close. I mean, we help each other out [with childcare]. But you know, before Yulia had a child, she did not really know what family was. She was like a little bird, off doing her own thing.”^{vii}

^{vii} Anastasia was referring to the fact that Yulia waited longer than she did to have a child and that she had gone to a finance university, against their parents’ wishes that she be educated as an engineer in the transportation industry, as they had been. Anastasia had gone along with their wishes, although she regretted having done so and was trying to piece together an education in business and finance for herself.

Financially and in terms of social connections, the women I discussed in this section were ideally positioned to establish successful firms, and some had indeed. They either came from wealthier families or received financial support from their husbands. Furthermore, some of them had been to prestigious universities that their relatives had helped them get into and financed. They knew people who helped them to establish their client bases and with numerous other important tasks. However, people in these women's lives seemed to think of them in very limited terms, tolerating only activities that were somehow functional—in other words, which obviously comprised women's roles as mothers or professionals. Women valued having time or space for themselves that was less circumscribed than the roles that spouses and others expected of them. Their work lives as well as their attempts to improve themselves sometimes—but not always—provided that space.

My vignettes in the following section are about women who similarly saw a radical fragmentation in the roles that people expected of them. However, these women found ways to at least develop a more integrated *self image*, as a source of ongoing motivation when social affirmations were little and far between. The women who focused on self image tended to have fewer stable financial and social sources of support. They were used to gathering resources such as money and advice from multiple sources and walking away from people who were not supportive in the ways that women sought.

Guides, not teachers

In her work, “Spinning the Market,” Jennifer Patico (2009) alludes to the importance, among St. Petersburg schoolteachers, of conversational strategies in which

they justify their own entrepreneurial side projects. These teachers find ways of convincing themselves that their own market activities “could be framed and legitimated (209).” Patico emphasizes how people formulate their ideas of moral selfhood by justifying their entrepreneurial activities to others. Likewise, my own data suggests the significance of building a certain self-image through one’s social interactions.

This section expands on Patico’s findings in several key respects: On a fundamental level, I analyze how women legitimate themselves and what it can mean to them. Furthermore, I show how legitimating oneself and one’s entrepreneurial activities becomes more complicated when a gendered dimension is added to the analysis. My discussion of Alexandra in Chapter 1, for example, illustrates how making money, while already morally questionable in Russia, can be perceived by women as less socially acceptable because of their gender. For professional women, self-legitimization is in certain ways very difficult and its social stakes are high.

In the following vignette, I recount the story of Dina. Talking about one’s own experiences to receptive listeners can itself be central to the process of constituting oneself as both valid and having a social role to play. Sometimes, for women to share information about themselves and have it be recognized by others constitutes a form of social action.

A single mother of four children, Dina lived with three of them in one half of a two-room apartment in downtown St. Petersburg. She divided the apartment with her ex-husband in the 1990s, constructing a wall between the two rooms herself.^{viii} When I first met her in 2007, Dina had been a professional athlete and athletic trainer for two years,

^{viii} This is not an uncommon practice in an urban environment (St. Petersburg and Moscow) characterized by highly limited and prohibitively expensive housing.

having lost her job as the manager of a construction supplies store in 2001. She attributed the owner's decision to replace her to his belief that she would not be able to handle the position following the birth of her fourth child. When I first met her in 2007, Dina was beginning to approach local firms in St. Petersburg in order to market her services as a corporate motivational trainer. She was attempting to transition to this from her role in athletics.^{ix}

By 2009, Dina had established a profitable enterprise of her own, involving running motivational seminars on management and contracting out other local professionals whom she had taught to be trainers. Dina's eventual ability to market a set of skills as a trainer is an outcome of a longer process that she traces back through the early 1990s. At that time, it became important for her to strive for a particular self image in order to weather political, financial, and personal changes occurring in her life.

Dina saw her own self-development as ultimately geared towards being independent in every way. More than once over tea at my apartment, while she was telling me about how she procured resources for her family in the 1990s, she pointed out the window to a birch tree that stood out of the way from the others, in the park across the street. She said, "The strongest birch tree stands on its own." Then she leaned across the table and looked me in the eye, as if to emphasize her point.

^{ix} My conversations with owners and curriculum developers at different "training" firms suggested that the corporate market for motivational seminars had grown since the fall of 2008, when the effects of the recession first hit Russia. Under these circumstances, women such as Dina, who had benefited from similar seminars in the past, were in a position to draw on their experiences in order to establish their authority as trainers, themselves. The fact that she was a professional athlete served her well because some of the original foreign and Russian trainers were former athletic coaches who drew upon their experiences to manage company employees.

Integral to that self-reliance was her ability to see being a woman, of which motherhood was central, and her professional life as mutually informing one another. Over our two-year acquaintance, Dina continually emphasized to me that her own skills as a mother, raising her children to be as self-sufficient as possible, enabled the paid work that she had done throughout her life. Throughout her own participation in various forms of self-development, Dina wrote and spoke with others about how motherhood and work constituted, for her, applications of the same set of skills: empathy (*sochuvstvo*), encouragement, and her own emotional self-reliance. She recalled herself applying these skills as she used to manage people at the construction store and work with customers there. Both subordinates and clients tended to be men, but Dina surprised them with her knowledge of management techniques as well as construction. Dina has worked to create and maintain this conviction in the applicability of her own skills through an amalgam of everyday conversations, readings, and motivational seminars, which she now designs and conducts for a living.

One sunny day in August of 2008, Dina met me in downtown St. Petersburg to go for a walk. I was accustomed to the fact that she usually started talking within a minute of our greeting one another, constructing philosophical monologues. How had she been? I asked her. It had been a month and a half since we had seen each other. In the fall and winter, she would regularly show up on my doorstep on Saturday mornings for coffee, following the first time when I had invited her. Although, the visits had stopped until she appeared suddenly that morning. We walked along the bank of the Neva River.

“Wonderful (*belikolepno*)!” she replied, a big smile on her face. “Andrea, I want to tell you about a conversation I had with a woman at a wedding last Saturday.” Dina

had taken part in a friend's wedding, and she described to me what had happened afterwards:

At the reception, a woman approached me. When they had introduced me at the wedding they had said that I am a professional athlete—that I was a mother-heroine (*mat'-geroina*). A term that is already a joke. This woman asked, "Are you really a professional athlete?" I say, "Yes." She says, "Do you mean you are an athletic trainer? I say, "No, I'm an athlete." She said to me "All of these things about you go together in a surprisingly good way—I mean, that you are an athlete, that you have children, and what I see in front of me—that you are very feminine (*Udivitel'nyy obrazom i ochen' schastlivo sochetaetsia, eto—to, chto Vy sportsmenka, i to, chto deti, i to, chto ya vizhu—Vy ochen' zhenstvennaia*).^x

This woman was able to see the holistic aspect of Dina in her professional and personal roles. I asked Dina how she responded. She said:

Very pleasant. I told her, "That is exactly my task (*zadacha*). I want to show that this is possible. To be strong and to be feminine at the same time. Of course there are people who say, "Only you can do that (*Tak mozhes' tol'ko ty.*)" Or they start to say, "You lucked out (*Tebe povezlo*)." What does that mean that I lucked out? Did I buy successful children at a store? How can that be? [Pretending to address people who say this:] And what are you, the rejected ones (*brakovanny*)? To explain that in order to receive all of what I have, you need to work very, very hard, is not possible.

It was gratifying to Dina to be acknowledged by this woman in the same way as she saw herself. This meant having someone point out that she is a mother, a professional, feminine in her appearance, and able to manage these multiple positions deftly. However, Dina was not trying to be recognized as exceptional—as different through no agency of her own. She valued and was able to market her ability to show people by example that it was within their power to realize particular selves.

After telling me about the wedding, Dina brought up the book, *The Secret*, which she had recently read. She brought up an online discussion forum that she had found that

^x Please see Chapter 4 for further discussion of the gendering of professions in Soviet and post-Soviet life.

contained a translated review of the book by an American psychologist who happened to be a man. Dina told me about her surprise that this man, drawing on a section of the book that specifically addressed women, was emphasizing how women's "strength" (*sil'*) as mothers could benefit society—through ways in which they applied qualities such as nurturing within numerous contexts. Speaking of the sense of affirmation that she felt when she read this article, Dina said:

On our own we understand poorly what we are capable of (*chem obladaem*). Our main task is to figure that out about ourselves. More often than not, a person needs a guide (*provodnik*) for this. Not a teacher, not a trainer, and not a mentor (*nastavnik*), but a guide, who simply spends a little piece of time with them.^{xi}

There was no one in particular who had played this role for Dina. Speaking of her own life, she referred to multiple "guides," such as her online reading, her weekly meetings with a psychotherapist with whom she read and discussed books on gender and psychology, and motivational seminars that she had attended. Despite doing the latter, Dina did not always share her work with the trainers who were leading them. She gave me the example of an essay one male trainer had assigned each participant to write, on the events that they looked forward to in the distant future. Because he was a man, Dina was afraid that he would laugh at the fact that her past and her future encompassed so many different spheres of activity. She followed the directions of the exercises and kept the fruits of her labor to herself.

Whether or not Dina was accurate in her assessment of this man, trainers and others with whom women consulted to better themselves were not simply sources of

^{xi} Просто мы сами плохо понимаем, чем мы обладаем. И основная наша задача, как мне кажется, разобраться самим в себе и понять, чем же мы обладаем. Чаще всего для человека здесь нужен проводник. Не учитель, не тренер, не наставник, именно проводник, который бы просто взял и на какой-то кусочек времени повел.

empowerment from women's perspectives. Anastasia's rhetoric teacher is a case in point. They had their own varied views and agendas, and often these were based in a desire to make women "better" performers in the workplace. Other apparent places for women to better themselves can also turn out to be unhelpful. In light of examples such as Anastasia's, the meaning that Dina gave to having a "guide" is profound: Her concept suggests the importance of pulling from multiple social examples and interactions in order to create an idea of oneself and one's social role.

This was important to Dina in a context where state policies and media did not reflect her interests. During our conversations over tea, she had spoken about the Russian state's lack of both symbolic and material support for women as mothers and as workers. She talked about the insufficiency of Putin's administration to enable mothers to work as well as to recognize motherhood, itself, as a form of work—symbolically through their social advertising and by compensating mothers who stayed at home. She referred to the absence of more complicated representations in state-sponsored social advertising, and the lack of legal protections for women in the workplace.^{xii}

In this political climate, Dina believed that the only way to create change lay in exemplifying a more complicated gendered life. She said to me, "All it takes is one living example of an exception (*isklucheniye*) and then you know something about human potential." She drew on her reading of *The Secret* in articulating links between personal

^{xii} Former President Putin's Maternity Capital Program, which began in January of 2007, provides women who have second and third children with the option of receiving the value of approximately 10,000 dollars (about 250,000 rubles) upon the child's third birthday. However, women must choose between using this money towards the purchase or expansion of an apartment, their child's university education, or their own pension. In other words, women who have more children receive more material subsidies than they used to but must make extremely difficult choices about how to use this money.

and social transformation. She said, “The message of *The Secret* is that the most effective way to distinguish yourself is by articulating your desire for things. I knew from another conversation that Dina’s primary desire was to “realize her creative ideas,” which included demonstrating to others that multiple aspects of her life were sites of *creativity*. Dina’s vision for her life was inextricably connected with showing others what kind of person she was.

When Dina first agreed to participate in my research, she said it was because she wanted to tell her story to as many people as possible. She was carrying a pamphlet with her that she got at the nonprofit that Svetlana managed.^{xiii} It was entitled, “Work for the benefit of women around the world,” and had the websites and brief descriptions, in Russian, of nonprofits such as Amnesty International and a whole range of organizations. She asked me if I knew whether any of them existed in St. Petersburg and I told her that I did not know. The two of us looked for some of them and found that there were no local offices for these organizations.

However, Dina emphasized that in Russia, distinguishing oneself could be personally risky and limited in its social impact. On our walk that day, Dina said, “In Russian society, you are punished if you distinguish yourself (*vydeliaesh’sia*). As I understand it, in America, you are rewarded when you do that. In Russia, there are too many prohibitions or limits (*zaprety*) for the message of *The Secret* to work.” Here, Dina recalled her disbelief at having been hired at the construction store after being home with her children for so long. She had demonstrated her knowledge of construction and presented herself not as a mother, but as a “specialist in child development,” lying about

^{xiii} Elena had told Dina about my project and given her my contact information.

having graduate education. It was this same owner who fired her when her fourth pregnancy began to show. Dina said to me, “It is the same people who recognize your potential who belittle you later on. It is because you become too threatening to them.”

It was only very recently, having begun to contemplate her past, when Dina came to believe that she had succeeded at this. In Dina’s view, change might come about through personal interactions such as her boss’s apparent recognition of her abilities. She herself drew on these examples—examples of being successful as a mother and a professional—in order to think of herself in more integrated terms.

Dina’s case is analytically important because it suggests how personal and social change might be intertwined in an environment where obvious channels for both are lacking. Begoña Aretxaga (2006) describes the public effects of the “dirty protest” by Irish Republican women, who smeared feces and menstrual blood on the walls of the Armagh prison. She argues that the move itself marked a “reformulation of feminine subjectivity” and that “such reformulation in turn sparked a transformation of dominant discourses of feminism and nationalism (2006:308).” In other words, the protest led to an opening up of the kinds of roles imaginable for women. On a smaller scale, Dina saw her own actions as having social value because of the ways that she could affect attitudes about women. Her belief that she had indeed achieved something social helped to impact her self-image. Discussing notions of honor among Cameroonian Beti women, Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2006) writes, “women perform physical behaviors associated with specific intentional states in order to cultivate the inclination for those states (65).” Thus, it is in conjunction with their social performances that women develop a belief in their own honor, as they adjust to changing economic circumstances. My research

contributes to these studies by showing that women's subjectivities can be an anchor for them in uncertain social environments—even when these subjectivities are *not* widely legible in society.

Dina was not the only woman who saw herself and her cumulative experiences as the key to managing everyday conflicts. Anna, top manager of a mid-sized technology firm, described how being the mother of a (now adult) child diagnosed with autism had informed—and was informed by—her work roles:

Motherhood is a colossal, foundational life experience—the largest that I have ever received in my life. I mean exactly the fact that I ended up with such a difficult son. One learns to reach agreements, to take one's stand carefully. So that there is no conflict, but all the same you have your own solution that you want to somehow get across to the person you are talking with. That experience with my son was my education. I have learned that there is no need to hurry. Things need to be done carefully and thoroughly. It's necessary not to do everything efficiently. Work, on the other hand, has taught me how to make quick decisions. When you are deciding the fate of your child, and society is structured in this way, and life in general is structured this way, there is no one to consult with.

One factor that Anna is referencing in the last part of her statement is an absence in post-socialist society of social institutions within which she could seek education and treatment for her son, who had not fared well socially within the Russian school system. She is also highlighting her husband's unwillingness to help her make important decisions about their family, such as those regarding their son's education. Unlike Dina, who had few relatives and little consistent social support, Anna had relatives who helped her care for her child when he was young. Sometimes, her husband, who she employed, had stayed home with her son. Structural factors such as these made it easier for Anna to manage and socially justify her work to her extended family. However, similar to Dina, Anna saw her own persistence at home and at work as contingent on a set of internal

personality traits and skills—in the absence of various forms of social support. Both women’s ability to be satisfied with who they were was inseparable from the social and economic environment in which they lived.

Womanhood beyond motherhood

The challenges of negotiating childcare make motherhood an aspect of womanhood that is particularly difficult for women to combine with their careers. Both entrepreneurial women who are and are not mothers think about womanhood in broader terms than their caretaking work, seeing it as involving a whole constellation of meanings. Suvi Salmenniemi and her colleagues provide examples of these meanings in their recent study of St. Petersburg small-business owners (2009): Women described themselves as:

...more emotional, cautious, considerate, and responsible in their business dealings than men. They saw themselves as more committed to their businesses, more communicative and social than men (cf. Bruno 1997, 71). Men entrepreneurs, for their part, were characterized as more ambitious, selfish and taking more risks in business than women entrepreneurs. (2009:8)

These characterizations are consistent with my own research and the personality traits that my research participants saw themselves possessing as women. Also consistent with Salmenniemi (9), my research participants view their “feminine” traits with great ambivalence. For example, they sometimes discussed ways in which their more “emotional” nature makes them able to create more democratic workplace environments, for example. On the other hand, the same women point out that they are less likely to make profits because of their risk averseness. In this section, I explore the potential effects of these self-justifications on women’s subjectivities, as well as the particular

social contexts in which thinking about their own womanhood becomes important to women. I draw on the example of two women: one who works in the construction business, where men are far more prevalent than women, and another who operates a franchise within a larger transnational cosmetics corporation.

Ekaterina is the owner of an extremely profitable construction equipment business that she had founded in 1998. She is also at the center of a network of entrepreneurial women spanning St. Petersburg and Moscow. Ekaterina and former colleagues from the *komsomol* conduct award ceremonies for other businesswomen in St. Petersburg. They extend loans, advice, and moral support to less experienced businesswomen and organize seminars on management techniques. They draw examples from their initial gatherings in 1998, when they first began to work out behavioral strategies to get male businessmen to cooperate with them and respect their input. Ekaterina used a combination of persistence and what she called “professionalism” (*profesionalizm*) to gain respect. She and the other women studied Russian politics and the economy in whatever ways they could, shared this information with one another, and reminded one another that it was possible over time to gain male coworkers’ respect. I asked Ekaterina to tell me about the kinds of encouragement that she and the other women exchanged. She said:

We remind each other that everything becomes evident with time. A woman does not suit everyone when she is their boss. You need to be very professional and know your theme on a professional level. When he comes to you and covers his ears, you need to know how to say correctly, “No need to do that. I’m not worse than you at this, and right now, this is what we need to do. Then if I am his boss, the manager, and I need to say that this needs to be purchased, and so on, I need to substantiate everything economically. And figure everything out. It’s necessary to be professional, in order to work with men. You need to be a head higher than they are and show them this tactfully, because all the same, you need them. You’re going to keep working with them. You need to tell them tactfully: “Right now, you are not right. Maybe tomorrow you’ll be right, and I won’t be. But each time, each time that he’s not right...you’re eventually going to win

authority. At this point I'm not ashamed to say that my partners, and even my former partners in Moscow—they're young men. They have told me more than once that I am a good manager, a worthy manager—a worthy manager, and a worthy partner.

Younger generations of men (beneath the ages of 40) have been able to achieve the most success as entrepreneurs, and are represented in popular print and visual media (Yurchak 2003:72). Ekaterina and other women who worked with men stressed many economic advantages in doing so. Because of their access to foreign technologies and financial capital, men predominate in areas of business such as manufacturing, which is more lucrative (Slavic Research Center 2008).

It was simultaneously important for Ekaterina to form a certain image of herself as a woman. She accomplished in the company of other entrepreneurial women, when they went on religious pilgrimages together to worship old, female Russian icons in Finland. These events made it possible for women to perform their spirituality and womanhood, both of which Ekaterina presents here as being in opposition to business careers:

We study the history of our country, the history of Christian Orthodoxy. That is a kind of spiritual and moral support for women. When you work all the time under so much pressure, and then you go away somewhere through our program, we become completely different people. I even see women. Speaking of that trip, I have one woman in the program, one of those strong women—Nastya. She has been in business for a long time already. Maybe she's even richer than all of us. I saw her in the Church, and how there were tears dripping down her face. In church everything becomes moral, spiritual. In church everything turns out to be different.

Recently, we traveled to Finland to a monastery. I could not turn away from the icons there. A certain aura comes from the icon of the Madonna. She pulls you to her. A person standing before her wants to reveal their soul to that icon, to pray to that icon. That somehow helps women a great deal. For some time it strengthens our spirituality and our sense of morality (*ukrepliaet nashu dukhovnost', nravstvennost'*). Why did I even start gathering female entrepreneurs around me? It is some sort of strengthening, a belief in

something. Support comes from within (*poderzhka iznutri idet*), spiritual support.

Ekaterina's statement reflects an idea of womanhood as counter-posed to a woman's success in business and especially, to making money. However, her efforts to maintain a tension between different identities also was a way of making business doable for herself and the other women by confirming that they were capable of being moral women elsewhere. There were moments of particularly difficult negotiations with men when Ekaterina used to feel as though she was operating on their terms rather than her own; she was spending her own energy and time proving herself rather than conducting business. During those times, she remembered her regular trips to the monastery and said to herself, "I am a woman (*Ya—zhenshchina*)."

When they were together, Ekaterina and other women she knew also exchanged forms of support, or *poderzhka*, when their work lives grew difficult. She most emphasized support in its intangible forms—encouragement or simply listening:

To this day, I maintain my relationships from when I was a *komsomol'ka*. These people are my colleagues now in the business world. For example, there is one woman who was having a tough time. I ran into her in the 1990's and we agreed to go for tea. I said to her, "What is this, Yulia? What's going on with you? You and I worked together in the *komsomol*. You are capable of everything. You're an engineer and you're good at what you do. Find it in yourself to do something. Go to some accounting courses." Now, she is a government administrator here in the city. It's necessary to support one another. That, perhaps, is exactly what remained from the *komsomol*. I mean some kind of support from one another. The other things—the certainty that everyone would have an apartment, work—these are things about socialism that are funny to talk about today. But we can offer one another support.

The only kind of support that Ekaterina can guarantee other women is encouragement. It is impossible to say how the woman that she mentions in her narrative was affected by Ekaterina's momentary support, but Ekaterina values her own ability to give it. Other

women who receive this kind of support have pointed out how greatly they value talking to someone who knows about their pasts and can remind them of their capabilities.

Often, women emphasized their pasts as resources that others could help them to mine for examples of their own strength—especially but not always, their socialist pasts. In her research with St. Petersburg schoolteachers, Patico highlights how these they justified their own entrepreneurial projects to themselves. She writes: “Whether one had to offer something *good* and *of oneself*, something meaningfully tied to one’s past experiences, skills and ongoing interests, was what made the pivotal difference (2009:217).” The case study of Ekaterina shows how this process can be socially driven. Working in a predominantly male environment, it was significant for her to be able to draw examples from a time when women occupied public leadership roles and enjoyed greater respect. More broadly, it illustrates how personal histories can be valuable to women at a contemporary society where professional women live with a significant amount of hostility.

Workplaces that were predominantly female formed the bases for some women’s social lives. Women felt as though they could engage with one another and with some of the male employees on topics that were familiar and interesting to them by virtue of their experiences in Russia as women. Maria was a Sales Director ^{xiv} at the international

^{xiv} In her discussion of direct sales in Thailand, Ara Wilson argues that this form of entrepreneurship and its self-help discourse enables marketers to construct “representations and enactments of flexible entrepreneurialism (403)” that resonate with the neo-liberal logics of financial organizations such as the IMF. In other words, this form of capitalism enables people of various socioeconomic backgrounds to adjust to the economic realities of structural adjustment and participate in corporate and media narratives about self-reliance. However, this kind of work also gives people considerable creative liberty; the emphasis in trainings on self-determination enables

cosmetics franchise where I conducted participant observation. She told me about going to work as a direct salesperson for the company in 1998. She had been unemployed for a year after leaving her job selling bibles for an American evangelical organization. This had been a profitable and professionally valuable experience for Maria in that she learned certain skills, such as how to sell people ideas.^{xv} She had left ultimately because she did not believe in the organization's ideological platform. Maria went to seek work again in the fall of 1998 after the start of Russia's financial crisis. Her parents, who had gotten jobs with the St. Petersburg department of transportation, were receiving their salaries only intermittently and could no longer support Maria, her older sister, had grandparents and her young daughter.

Maria had first approached the company when a woman on the street in downtown St. Petersburg handed her a pamphlet one day about job opportunities there. She reasoned that she would be able to use the marketing skills that she had already learned with the Christian organization, although Maria also thought that it would be interesting to be in a role that enabled her to teach and manage others. She understood this to be a natural strength of hers that she had recently discovered after she began to take on an informal role training other bible salespeople. However, Maria was concerned about her lack of university education and felt she did not have adequate knowledge or educational prestige to become a Director at the organization. The woman she had spoken with on the street told Maria that this did not matter: As Maria gained experience

peoples to define their work in terms that are meaningful to them: to "narrate the possibilities for self-fashioning (403)."

^{xv} Maria had not been able to afford to attend university in the early 1990s because her father had lost his job. She needed to work full time in order to support her family. She considered work for this organization to be her university education in the experiences she gained in accounting, sales, and spoken and written communication.

as a direct salesperson she would attend a series of eight nighttime seminars every six months, for free. In each of these seminars, she would learn something new about sales and later, management.

Maria began to work under this woman and she attended her first series of eight nighttime seminars. She learned skills such as sales techniques and how to cultivate a particular physical image for herself as a salesperson of beauty products. Maria's had never thought much about her own physical image. However, makeup and clothing were topics that interested her as a woman, and about which she felt she could ask questions with some self-assurance. As Maria described the first year that she spent with the company, she emphasized her pleasant surprise that these topics were part of her workplace discussions, in the seminars and afterwards, among other sales associates with whom she became friendly. This realization that many kinds of discussions were fair game was what Maria emphasized when I asked her what it had been like to transition to a new field of sales. "Personal" (*lichnie*) subjects such as caring for herself and her appearance were part of professional discussions:

I started to understand that life is not just a narrow spectrum of interests. That is, these interests can be much broader. I came here and started to get to know older women who were all done up, from the tips of their fingers to their toes. It was so interesting to me! Exactly that pure feminine moment—when femininity is so strongly expressed in women. Life becomes something different when you believe that others have something interesting to teach you. I interact with many people, but we do not have common interests. That is, it is not as clear in these other exchanges that each of us believes the other has something to share, something to teach.

The amount of time and money that many young Russian women spend on their appearances can be a source of pride in upholding their reputation among Russian and Western men alike as among the most attractive women in the world, but it can also be a

source of unease at being considered sexual objects (Temkina 2008:341). For example, Lilia, Director of public relations at a large Russian corporation, loved buying beautiful clothing for herself but also was anxious about looking “like a woman” to Russian men that she met: dressing in certain ways, making her face up so that she looked younger but not as though she had tried too hard, and keeping her weight down. She believed that all of these things were especially important in light of the fact that she was a woman in a powerful professional position. For Maria, the experience of being a woman was a source of confidence, cultural capital, and social significance as she integrated into her new workplace environment. It may have been more valuable to her that training seminars integrated topics that she already knew something about because Maria did not have as prestigious an education as some of the other women, such as Yulia and Ekaterina, who had attended elite financial universities. Maria had technical education, which would not have given her the connections or the skills (i.e. knowledge of foreign languages) to start her own independent enterprise.

By the time I met her in 2007, Maria’s sales volume and participation in subsequent seminars had enabled her to become financially independent, capable of supporting herself and her daughter on her own. She had also moved up the company’s “career ladder” to a higher title. She sometimes sold cosmetics on her own but was also in charge of helping to carry out curricula designed by the European company for new sales associates. Some of the discussions that Maria led appeared constraining to me in terms of the images they prescribed for women and the ways in which such lectures posited female clients as objects of male attraction. For example, during a two-hour evening lecture that Maria and Margarita led entitled “Women and Professional Image”

(*Zhenshchiny i Professionalny Imidzh*), there were separate discussions on how to sell make-up to businesswomen (*bisnesledi*) and to housewives (*domokhozyaiki*). They used power point slides from the company's Swedish headquarters to demonstrate how sales associates could convince their clients of the necessity of wearing makeup: One slide had the following statement at the top: "A businesswoman should be strong but womanly and attractive at the same time. Men should be attracted to her but not afraid of her." Beneath it was a list of bullet points on the kinds of makeup that was meant to project this image.

During times when they were not listening to or delivering lectures, Maria, Margarita, and some of the sales associates treated questions of appearance as topics that they could discuss with one another and with their female clients. In 2009, I sat over tea with Maria and her sister, who was one of her sales associates, as they told me about their experiences with the global recession. Maria said to me, "None of us are making as much money these days, and this is when it is especially important for us to have common themes "*obshchi temy*" to talk about. At work during times such as these, what starts to become more important is the human factor (*chelovechesky moment*)." Her sister voiced her enthusiastic agreement. Maria did not take extremely seriously the strict instructions about beauty that she herself delivered. She was always impeccably dressed in the latest fashions and wore subtle, earth-toned makeup on her face, but one evening she met me for dinner wearing darker, more dramatic makeup echoing the picture in her lecture and asked me, "Do I look like a serious business lady?" We both laughed. Maria warned female sales directors to "care for themselves" by watching their weight, never eating a meal that was more than 800 calories, for example. Yet she followed our meals

together with huge slices of cake, never once seeming to care about the calorie content. Maria and the other Directors in St. Petersburg were not the authors of the corporate narratives of beauty that they interpreted and reproduced. On the other hand, they were operating within a setting where these narratives started to mean something different. Such narratives became a basis for social life rather than being valuable only for their literal meanings. This is an interesting contemporary reflection of Yurchak's argument concerning how language in late socialist communal settings took on the function of performative reproduction rather than constitutive meaning (2006:77-125), except that Maria's example illustrates Yurchak's closing suggestion about business as a new site of community and the creation of new meanings in contemporary Russia (298).

In this section, I related two different examples of entrepreneurial women doing things they deemed feminine within the context of their professional networks. For Ekaterina, this meant drawing creatively on gendered religious iconography in order to steel her own sense of womanhood within a working environment she considered to be "male" in certain respects. Maria interpreted a transnational corporate discourse of womanhood as one of the things that made her workplace meaningful. These examples demonstrate the interesting social outcomes that come about when women detach femininity from the hetero-normative context of the home and apply it to workplace settings. In making business feel more feminine for themselves, women are engaging in social interactions through and within which they begin to circulate these meanings more widely.

In her discussion of the "masculinization of female labor" in India, Ramamurthy (2010) discusses the increasing prevalence of men in agricultural labor formerly done

mostly by women. As men took over what she calls “floral sex work,” or cross-pollination, they began to make it a normatively “male domain.” They developed a certain aesthetic and advanced up the ranks to become small-shareholders rather than pickers, relying in large part upon the free labor of their female relatives. The opportunity to own and harvest land becomes an important part of being a floral sex worker for men. In contrast to Ramamurthy’s example, my research represents a case of the “feminization of male labor”—a case in which women are populating a work sector where men still predominate. The work that women do becomes viable to them because of the gendered ways that they are able to make it personally meaningful.

The cases in this section demonstrate that having a leadership role in the business world means in certain ways owning the terms of self-definition: There are social contexts in which communities of women become more internally referential. Some of Ekaterina’s gatherings with other women and Maria’s conversations about makeup are examples of social actors negotiating meanings for gendered narratives, which are different from the meanings that may have been intended by their more influentially situated authors—by women’s colleagues and journalists in the larger Russian social environment, where they are often considered incapable of being appropriately female and entrepreneurial; and in the case of Maria, the men in Sweden who author the power point presentations that she and Margarita delivered. Business in these cases is an example of a place where new speech communities form because people can communicate with one another without having to worry about being understood more broadly (Bourdieu 1991:229-252).

Choosing your own communities

In this chapter, I have so far highlighted the meanings of mutual translatability to women. I now focus on the social formations that are a result of women's efforts to make sense of their social identities. I return to Patico's inquiry on the social implications of Russians' attempts to ground their entrepreneurial activities in local moralities—a question that I first introduced in Chapter 1:

If the intersection of expanding commercial activities and long-standing moral narratives is not an agonistic confrontation of two opposite and conflicting forces, how can it be better described? If these small moments are not 'trivial', then what is their significance in the long run? Stated otherwise, how do narratives...get spun over time, and who 'buys into' them? Which spins become most shared and least questioned, and in whose eyes? (219)

The examples that I have shared thus far in this chapter do encompass moments as seemingly trivial (i.e. fleeting) as the ones that Patico describes in her article, although they can usually be contextualized in longer processes of reflection by women, about the moral connotations of being female and an entrepreneur.

New forms of social life become possible based on self-development practices in which women engage. When peoples' focus is to develop themselves, they pay less attention to older social categories that might structure their relationships elsewhere, such as marriage. Or, they deliberately focus on rethinking these categories (i.e. womanhood) so that they better reflect their own lives. Women sometimes use universalizing languages that highlight perceived similarities among all human beings. Recall, for example, Vera's discussion of fractals in Chapter 1. Turning on its head the image of the motherly *matrushka* dolls in the state billboard, Vera appropriates language from a Mesoamerican calendar and stresses that everyone on earth possesses the full range of possible character traits possible among human beings. Often, most critical to women is

sharing the same kinds of language with others—for example, having a purpose (*tsef*'), regardless of whether that purpose is to renovate one's apartment or to bring about world peace.^{xvi} Focusing on self-development and making general language work for oneself can have the effect of underplaying other kinds of social divisions such as generation, class, gender, heterosexuality, and common local origins.^{xvii}

In this section, I focus on just one of the social categories that women bridge when they prioritize their own self betterment: generational divides. I have yet to address the importance, to young women, of having met women who represent something about the futures they want for themselves. Some young entrepreneurial women I knew explicitly spoke about their difficulties finding older, more established businesswomen who could help them begin their careers. Svetlana told me when we met in fall 2007 that she wanted somebody to help her understand how to open and run her own firm. However, she saw no obvious means for meeting other businesswomen. Some older women, for their part, valued that people looked to them for moral support and advice. Many of them grew up and were educated in an era when they had public roles and were

^{xvi} See Chapter 3.

^{xvii} In making this observation, I drew on Anthony Giddens' insight in his discussion of intimacy (1991). Giddens writes: "A pure relationship is one in which external criteria have become dissolved: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship as such can deliver (9)." In self-conscious reflections of what they can learn or get out of relationships, women pay less attention to their public image and others' expectations of them.

respected within their wider communities—their universities and their workplaces. In contemporary Russia, it was not always clear where women belonged, including for older women after they began running their own firms and making more money than their peers.

This issue of ambiguous belonging is at play in the story of Nadezhda. Nadezhda started her own private school and academic publishing house in St. Petersburg in 1998. Her work was important to her in many ways, including that at the time, she literally provided one of her young sons with an alternative school to attend when he was not doing well in the public Russian system. She also gave her husband employment after he lost his job that same year. Nadezhda began to appear in the business and education sections of local St. Petersburg newspapers, offering her advice on various matters. Even as she emerged as a more visible public figure, her own network of close personal friends from childhood in St. Petersburg dissipated:

We didn't argue or insult one another. My friends disappeared from my life because I was so busy. Also, we no longer have commonalities between us (*U nas ishesaiut obshchi temy dlia zhizni.*) We have nothing to talk about. Some of my friends, who are already on pensions, have far less money to live on and they resent me for that. They have to wait on long lines at polyclinics.^{xviii} I can pay to go wherever I want when I get sick. I understand all of that, and I also am very afraid that I too could face the same quality of life when I am no longer working. This is why it becomes important to seek out other acquaintances. People who understand when you complain to them about the tax collectors and what they are demanding. My old friends don't understand these problems and they don't want to. Nor am I interested in theirs—about what hurts, or what they want but cannot have. I can solve those kinds of problems in four seconds.

^{xviii} In this case, Nadezhda is referring to state-owned health clinics, which are paid for by peoples' insurance. She used more expensive, private healthcare.

Several related factors contributed to the distance that Nadezhda describes between herself and her same-age friends. One of those factors is wealth. Nadezhda's friends were at or approaching pension age, which for women in Russia is 55.^{xix} At the time of my research, pensions consisted of 3,000 rubles per month—about \$120. This was barely enough to rent one room in a communal apartment. Nadezhda earned enough money herself to travel abroad, to pay for private healthcare, and to afford her current pastime: driving lessons so that she would not need to rely on her husband and two sons as chauffeurs. Substantial differences in financial means, desires and tastes, and as Nadezhda points out, everyday problems, meant that she and her old friends were no longer interested in one another's lives.

In 2001, Nadezhda started to teach management and educational administration courses at a night school simply because she thought it would be intellectually interesting for her. In the classroom, she unexpectedly found friends among a group of young women. The following narrative illustrates the changes that took place in her social life and shows how an accent on improving the self—in this case through teaching and learning about business collaboratively—becomes a site for meaningful exchange among women:

Then new acquaintances began to appear, among the same group of people that Larisa is also a part of. That was simply very interesting. I teach management courses, and in 2001 I had my first group of private school directors. Honestly, I was afraid of them. I had been running my school for all of two years, and some of them had already had theirs for ten—they were that experienced. I asked myself, “How am I going to teach them?” As it turned out, among them I found friends.

We travel a great deal together. We travel endlessly to Finland, because it's close by. We went twice to Italy. We went to France. We went to China.

^{xix} For men, it is 60.

Wherever we go, we try and meet up with other private school directors. Although, this is not always interesting to everyone, because we have in our group kindergarten directors. Yet they come with us, of course, because where else are they going to go?

For me, it is always interesting to share a purpose with others. When that purpose is there, everything else falls into place. Lara, for example, is very financially secure. Her husband is a wealthy businessman, she has her own firm, and she herself is successful in business. If she wanted, she could not work. But Lara says, "Being with you is amazingly interesting. I'm going."

So we go. We stay in a three-star hotel, although everything is neat and clean. Lara stayed with us, but when she travels with her husband, they stay in five-star hotels. She travels with her children and they stay in hotels that are more than five stars. She can allow herself a whole other lifestyle. But when she travels with us, she travels the way we do. I value this a great deal because she never indicates that she is above us.

Nadezhda was surprised that she found friends among Larisa and her other students, whose presence initially intimidated her. These were eight younger women, some of whom had wealthy spouses and who enjoyed an even higher material standard of living than Nadezhda did. A combination of these women's experience, their youth, and their wealth and consumption habits, made them seem like unlikely students and friends from Nadezhda's perspective.

Nearly ten years after Nadezhda and Larisa had met, the pleasure in Nadezhda's voice was evident to me as she spoke of her friendship with Larisa: She told me when I visited her in 2009, "She calls me out of the blue simply to talk. I don't hear from her for a month or so and then she calls. Sometimes we simply reminisce about our travels together. She told me the last time, 'Nadezhda Nikolaevna, I can talk about such different things with you than I can with my own mother!' Her mother doesn't understand why she works."

During a separate conversation with Larisa, she said that her mother urged her to work less and spend more time at home with her husband and children. She blamed Larisa's husband's perennial infidelity on the fact that she worked. She and Nadezhda, meanwhile, had "general themes" (*obshchie temy*) to talk about—themes that were "interesting" (*interesno*) to Larisa. In Russia, to say something is "interesting" is often to signal that it is relevant to one's life. Yurchak (2006) writes about the negative of this term, "not interesting," in his ethnography about Russians' recollections from Soviet life. He writes that "considering something *uninteresting*" refers to that conversation or social activity being "irrelevant, because the person, although living within the system, is not tuned into a certain semantic field of meaning (132)." Larisa and Nadezhda's descriptions of their times together suggest that their multiple shared experiences formed the basis for a new, "deterritorialized milieu (Yurchak 2006:77-125)."

Across generational groups, these professional women may be seen as one another's "guides," to use Dina's term. They shared priorities and values and affirmed one another's decisions to pursue careers. In the case of Nadezhda, Larisa, and the women with whom they traveled, this was true in a literal sense; on each of their trips, they took on self-driven projects of learning about particular landmarks of interest so that they could lead and educate one another.

Nadezhda and Larisa's stories are different from some other women's in many respects. They did not read translated book on self-help or attend motivational seminars. I asked Nadezhda once if she had heard of "trainings" (*treningi*) and she replied, "Oh yes, I've heard of those. Do you think they actually work?" She thought that people attended

in order to make more money and that trainers took advantage of poor people—a view shared by some other women and not without truth.

Furthermore, Ekaterina, Nadezhda, and the women they knew spent time more consistently with one another than did some other women, and had remained friends for a longer time. Part of this difference had to do with the fact that Svetlana and Vera each would relocate several times in the two years since they first met. However, the meanings that they gave to their relationship also had to do with how they thought about their own lives: They structured their narratives to me around shifts in their own internal states rather than events in their relationships and social surroundings, and it took me time to figure out who the people were surrounding those shifts.

Despite these differences, it took me time also to learn about Nadezhda and Larisa and the other entrepreneurial women in their lives, which is theoretically interesting: I initially introduced my project as one about businesswomen and their personal and professional lives, a description that I assumed was sufficiently vague so as not to circumscribe the stories women would tell. I would however soon learn just how loaded the term “personal life” was for these women—and thus, that some women probably thought I wanted to know only about their immediate and natal families. I started my initial interviews by asking women to tell me about the people in their lives, and often clarified by asking about the people they saw or corresponded with on a regular basis. The most obvious responses for women included their spouses, their children, their mothers and their sisters, although these people were not always sources of the kinds of

support that women valued.^{xx} Then one day, a young woman named Marina paused for a long time after that question and stared down at the table with a puzzled expression on her face. Then she replied that one of the most important people in her life was a German man she knew for two weeks during a trip to Berlin, because he treated her “like a woman” and made her feel beautiful. She was not sure that this “counted” for my research.

This exchange prompted me to reflect on the questions I asked and how they influenced the people whom women talked about. Sometimes, the people who had been most significant to their experiences of becoming women were not in their kin groups or even living in the same country. Granted, a great many of us can say the same about who has influenced our lives. These women, however, are living in a society where having interests and relationships outside of their households and kin can be controversial. Larisa’s husband, like Svetlana’s ex-boyfriend in Russia,^{xxi} was jealous about the relationships that she sustained outside of the home. He expected her to be home when he was and apparently would not even sit down at the table and eat something unless she was sitting next to him. However, he did not engage in conversation with her, either. Larisa had to protect her time with her friends and part of that strategy was not talking about it with him. That women did not immediately speak to me about one another may have had to do with multiple social circumstances in which they lived: a lack of others’

^{xx} Some younger women in their 20s and 30s to have mothers who occupied rare positions in the higher ranks of Soviet bureaucracies, but who nevertheless actively discouraged their daughters from pursuing careers. I can elaborate on who was less supportive, why, and to what effect on these young women.

^{xxi} See Chapter 3

acceptance and recognition of relationships in their lives that were not hetero-normative; in addition to socioeconomic factors such as some women's frequent labor migrations.

The relationships that I describe in this chapter have to do with what women need in certain times and places. They go against the grain of political discourses that posit generalized and static ideas of "what women want (Rivkin-Fish 2010)." Rivkin-Fish calls programs such as former President Putin's maternal capital examples of "political ventriloquism." She argues that state-owned media, as well, reflect and perpetuate gendered imaginaries such as heterosexual relationship roles. One of Putin's inaugural theme songs, for example, "A Man Like Putin," features a young woman longing for a man who is the breadwinner, decisive, and physically formidable. Women sometimes want these things in their partners. However, messages such as the one in this song suggest that *all* women do, and they erase the historical circumstances under which strong men have become so important to some women. The term "political ventriloquism" aptly captures the silencing of women's own diverse desires, as well as the extent to which men, women's families, and state officials attempt to speak for women. This concept helps frame the importance to women I have discussed in this chapter of choosing whom they spend time with and walking away when others are unhelpful or constrain their terms of self-identification. It is women's knowledge that they are both resourceful and free in these ways that constitute what I call in this dissertation a sense of *belonging*.

Beyond the phenomenological security, for women, of knowing there are people who recognize them more holistically, women's collaborative work on themselves sometimes leads to highly innovative forms of activism. For example, during her trips

with other women to the monastery, women discussed how they could use their relative wealth in order to contribute to society, through various charity projects such as delivering supplies to local orphanages. This was in part a public performance. Ekaterina said, “We try and show the city these women...a woman, she is, how to say, part of society (*sotsium*), and she wants to help poorly defended layers of the population—the disabled, the elderly, for example.” Local journalists documented their efforts. They published interviews with Ekaterina in which she explained her interpretations of business as a tool for certain kinds of social activism. However, there were projects that Ekaterina did not discuss with the press. In 2009, she and her network started to help women who were recently released from prison to find employment, using their social connections. Here is an example of a social role that deviates significantly from Russian attitudes about normative womanhood: Rather than reinforcing women’s roles as mothers, they were prioritizing their roles as workers. Telling me about this project, she said, “All women need to be self-sufficient. It is women who carry Russia through difficult economic times. They need to have work.” Here is an example of how women’s attempts to perform certain self-images have involved gendered representations that begin to look different from more traditionalist portrayals.

This is one of many examples in which women’s attempts to perform their subjectivities as feminine and professional lead to interesting new social outcomes. For example, my discussion with Svetlana about goals illustrated that she thought of her own tourism firm as a way of advancing a global society more embracing of cultural

differences.^{xxii} She and Ekaterina both illustrate how living on one's own terms can be a way of enacting social changes.

Discussion: Organizing women through an accent on the subjectivity

In this chapter, I have illustrated the subtle forms of personal and social change that come about through entrepreneurial women's exchanges with one another. My discussion contributes to literature on civil society in Russia and other post-socialist contexts. Ethnographers, political scientists, and historians working in Russia have examined challenges faced by various actors in encouraging people to become socially active—whether through direct engagement in politics and civil society organizations in general (Ries 1997; McAuley 2001; Gibson 2001); or through attempts to organize among women (Sperling 1999; Oushakine 2006; Hemment 2007; Johnson 2007:29-40; Salmenniemi 2003; Yurkina 2007). Women's organizations and popular perceptions of feminism have been particularly engaging subjects of study. In her analysis of women's organizations in contemporary Russia, Julie Hemment points out that highly educated, professional women “who were accustomed to having a particular role or input into society” value these organizations as places to “articulate a new role and place for themselves (16).” Her observation offers insight into the importance for women of having people with whom they can find ways to belong in Russia. Hemment's point, and my own observation of the importance, to women, of having forums for discussion, suggests that a greater emphasis on self-help as an idiom for such forums might help women's organizations in Russia to gain wider resonance. Clearly based on my

^{xxii} See Chapter 3

discussions of Anastasia, Yulia, and Oksana and their difficulties locating forums where they were not pigeonholed as mothers or workers, a less controlled, more “grassroots” approach towards women’s organizing might be useful to a great many women.

By and large, however, scholars usually mention self-help as a theme emphasized by some women’s organizations, leaving open questions of its meanings and efficacy for women. More attention could be devoted to why changing peoples’ behaviors and subjectivities are such a compelling basis for discussing social concerns.

My research suggests how this theme in literature on feminist projects speaks to larger theoretical questions about the salience of self-reliance and identity construction over collective avenues for change (Rivkin-Fish 2004; Lindquist 2002; Lerner 2009). For the professional women in my research, developing clear understandings of why their work and aspirations reflected their womanhood was socially consequential in various ways, including by making their own lives more pleasurable. In social science literature there has been no documentation of Russian women’s resistance to cultural attitudes positing motherhood as women’s central contribution to the nation. Yet in the context of their professional relationships, women are asserting a wider variety of interests and making themselves more socially visible. Through these ethnographic examples, my research demonstrates how broader transformations in gender ideologies within Russia are being propelled by everyday exchanges among women.

CHAPTER 6

EXCHANGE, NOT CHARITY: SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL NETWORKING

There are multiple forms of stratification that influence the material and social resources available to women. These include educational background, generation, marital status, English language skills, and the number of children or other dependents a woman has. Also important, as I demonstrate in this chapter, is a woman's migration history, and correspondingly, whether or not she knows anyone in her local setting with whom to socialize, get help finding work and housing, and locate reliable social services. In highly dynamic ways, these factors influence the resources at women's disposals in order to develop stable sources of employment, remain free of poverty, and pursue lives that are meaningful to them.

Women also sought to improve their quality of life through their engagement with neo-liberal discourses of self-development—particularly, their participation in motivational seminars and their readings and discussions of self-help literature. Certainly it was not only younger, poorer, and less well educated women who participated in self-development, but it tended to be these women who relied on the individualizing strategies that they gained, as forms of self-education that enabled them to expand their social fields. By social fields, I mean the degree to which women were able to approach other people and initiate relationships regardless of cultural ideas they held about how wealth and consumption practices might affect other peoples' assessments of them. Sometimes,

women's abilities to be agents in developing relationships with men, people with more money, and Westerners were contingent on the work that they did on themselves, as were women's rationales for making sense of themselves as partners, not solely recipients, in these relationships.

The driving questions of this chapter are: How do some women understand their own contributions in relationships with people who are at certain advantages to them, with regard to gender, wealth, or nationality? How do women's ideas of what they have to contribute affect their social horizons? I show how women conceived of the insights they had gained through self-development as forms of knowledge they could impart to others, and that these insights constituted equally valuable resources among many that were shared within their social relationships. The rationale that they had things to offer despite relative lacks of wealth or social clout made it possible for them to initiate relationships with other people they may not have otherwise deemed realistic. My analysis in this chapter advances the general argument of this dissertation by demonstrating how self-development can entail developing a set of sustainable networking strategies, even and sometimes especially for poorer women aspiring to improve their social and economic standing. Women's networking rationales enable them to take more agentive roles in their relationships than have previously been observed by scholars such as Anna Temkina (2008:232-291) and Olga Chepurnaya (2009).ⁱ In the case studies I share in this chapter, women were able to forge new

ⁱ These two works highlight a trend among 2000s urban Russian women towards seeking economic self-reliance through their careers. However, they both paint a picture of contemporary Russian women as continuing to see themselves and be seen by men as sexual objects. For example, women are chosen by men because of their physical

relationships that were meaningful to them in various ways. More specifically related to this chapter, I seek to contribute to literature on social networking and class in Russia, which has focused on the simultaneously social and economic significance of peoples' personal networks and overlaps between social and material capital. I illustrate circumstances under which women with few local social connections were able to use cultural capital in order to forge new relationships and gain material resources.

After I stress the most relevant ways in which social networks have been meaningful to some women, I turn to vignettes about women who found themselves without these networks at particular points in their lives. I discuss moments when they had fewer social and material resources at their disposals than other women, and fewer than they themselves had enjoyed during earlier periods of their lives. Elena approached a wealthier American businessman online, certain that he would value their common interests in books about business and self-development, rather than viewing her as simply a "Russian woman," i.e., a potential housewife. Dina considered it a prerequisite and a constant condition of motherhood that she was willing to initiate social interactions regardless of socioeconomic differences, and to teach her children to be similarly open to new relationships regardless of their socioeconomic status. She saw this social readiness and pride as something that she had to offer in her relationships with others—a form of wisdom she could teach them to possess as people and as caretakers of others. Vera moved from her hometown of Belgorod to St. Petersburg in 2005, and later from St.

attractiveness but do not choose partners themselves. Women seek out certain things, such as emotional warmth, in their relationships with men, and find ways to steel themselves from its loss. Yet, there is no evidence in these ethnographic studies of what women believe they themselves offer to their partners, as potential sources of security and their own dignity as social agents.

Petersburg to Moscow in May, 2008. During both of these migrations, Vera envisioned that the self-knowledge and internal resolve she would obtain through relocating would enhance the skills that she had already acquired as a psychological trainer. She also believed that her migration experiences would prove valuable to both her future work leading seminars and to her ability to find friends and acquaintances in her new homes. These three women's relatively limited material means during the time of my research in 2007 and 2008 were related to divorce, business failures, and gender discrimination at work. They translated the particular strategies for self-reliance that they had accumulated for dealing with challenges in their presents and pasts into internal resources that they could share with people both globally and locally, as forms of knowledge.

The value of knowing people: natural economy

One basis for women's social lives consisted of their acquaintances and friendships with other entrepreneurial women whom they had met in various settings—through past involvement in the *komsomol* or the pioneers, through forms of continuing education, and through professional gatherings with one another. Ekaterina explained the term that she used to think about her own circle of local entrepreneurial acquaintances: a “natural economy” (*naturalnoe khoziaistvo*):

In Russia, we have this term, a natural economy. That means that you don't need to go anywhere to get what you need. Everything can be done in one place.ⁱⁱ If someone needs to send her child to school, we send them to Nadezhda Nikolaevna. If somebody is sick and needs a doctor, we have one. If I need

ⁱⁱ “Все в этом стакане можно сделать.” This literally means, “Everything can be done in one cup.”

business cards made, we have a graphic design firm. I need to look beautiful and I know which salon to go to. A natural economy.ⁱⁱⁱ

Ekaterina was the only woman who used this term with me. However, I find it to be a locally relevant proxy denoting the significance to women of knowing people to whom they could offer business, their own quality services, and help finding trustworthy employees. The issue of consumption is very important in contemporary Russia: While in the 1990s, periodic shortages of supply were a problem, many Russians that I know describe a flooding of goods and services into the market whose quality they do not always trust.^{iv} A “natural economy” also provides women with support, or *poderzhka*—including of an emotional nature. An example is in Chapter 5, when Ekaterina offered encouragement to a woman she knew from her involvement in the *komsomol*.

The question of who enjoys the benefits of natural economies is complicated, especially because women’s circles of acquaintances changed more frequently than I would have guessed. Ekaterina and some other women nevertheless were able to more consistently exchange various resources with people. This was either because they had lived in one place for a long time or had been educated in one of Russia’s more prestigious four-year universities, during socialism and in contemporary Russia. The latter factor meant that they knew people who occupied higher status positions in

ⁱⁱⁱ Within the network of approximately thirty businesswomen (*delovye zhenshchiny*, or *bisnesledi*) that Ekaterina knew, there were women representing a wide variety of small- and mid-sized businesses. These included private schools, beauty salons, and other small service-based businesses where women in Russia tend to be more prevalent, as well as industries where men predominate or are more numerous, such as construction.

^{iv} For example, Alisa often remarked when I accompanied her grocery shopping how difficult it was for her to decide what food to buy for her family. She wanted her young daughters, especially, to have the most vitamin-rich meals and as few synthetic chemicals as possible. She missed the fact that during socialism, groceries were locally produced and contained very few chemicals.

business and government and who were better positioned to provide different sources of support.

The concept of a natural economy is also applicable to other social formations besides local professional networks. It was a basis for women who emigrated from Russia to maintain systems of social support and clientele for their own small enterprises. Natasha's friend Irina married an Italian man and moved to Rome to live with him in 2003. She returned to Russia almost monthly in order to lead meditation workshops based on Buddhist philosophy, and to teach Russians to lead these workshops. Irina's own entrepreneurial involvement within Russia helped her to maintain and even strengthen contact with female friends in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Through these connections and her entrepreneurial activities among them, Irina gained financial self-reliance for traveling back and forth between her adopted and native countries.

The examples of natural economy that I have offered demonstrate ways in which having common histories with people can be significant to these women, including when these relationships are not part of women's everyday lives. Although, it may be the case that keeping one's own entrepreneurial activities within a group of acquaintances can ultimately limit a person's ability to adjust to new social realities in ways that some of these same women valued.^v How women navigate their social worlds when local options are insufficient is a question that I address in this chapter.

^v This point arose in a conversation Zdravomyslova and Temkina in June 2009, at European University in St. Petersburg. Specifically, I offered the example of women such as Evgenia who employed and educated their relatives through their businesses, providing within their families some of the same benefits that natural economy provides women within wider circles of acquaintances. Zdravomyslova and Temkina pointed out to me that relying on local and especially familial connections has its limits, such as when

Individualizing strategies: sources of authority

In Chapter 1, I cited Rivkin-Fish's term "individualizing strategies" to describe the agency that women attribute to themselves in particular situations, to manage various problems in their social lives. The remainder of this chapter deals with women's individualizing strategies in the domain of social networking: What do some women do under circumstances when their ambitions exceed their social and material resources? In particular, I am concerned with the kinds of subjectivities that allow women to see social possibilities in the world around them and to pursue those possibilities. There are ways of making social connections, getting the necessary experiences, and starting a business that do not depend on attending a prestigious university, already knowing English, or being wealthy and well-connected. Women's command of certain kinds of knowledge and linguistic repertoires give them confidence and social clout in markets for romance, friendship, and employment—in Russia and transnationally. Some women built more expansive social and entrepreneurial lives by sharing with others their past consumption of a variety of neo-liberal media and motivational seminars. These women also used certain skills of discerning others' trustworthiness, which they gained from some of these sources, in order to help them distinguish who would be receptive to what they had to offer to begin with. The three women I discuss were certain that people who were similarly interested in their own personal growth, and who referenced similar media sources on the topic, were more likely to respect them.

a woman or her children feel compelled to pursue a career path that is different from what local networks allow.

My focus in this chapter is to show how socially efficacious this kind of social confidence could be for women, but it is worth first briefly reviewing the local forms of authority that women's narratives of self-development reflect and reinforce. In her analysis of a Galina Lindquist (2002) discusses the multiple forms of authority on which practitioners of magic in contemporary Moscow draw during their interactions with clients:^{vi}

Both science and the church are important sources of authority in post-Communist Russia, and the practitioners of magic resort to both in their attempts to cast their craft as legitimate. Elsewhere, I have analyzed the advertisement of magic and healing and singled out four strategies of legitimation employed by the practitioners (Lindquist, 2001a). The first is to represent the craft as stemming from tradition, which can comprise both Russian village tradition and the Russian Orthodox Church. The second is to refer to conventional science, the third is to employ one's personal charisma. Finally, the fourth legitimation strategy, becoming increasingly widespread, is the reference to the distant exotic Other and to the globalized origins of the craft. In the self-presentation of most magi, these strategies overlap in varying combinations, although usually the Church and science do not go together. (331)

Lindquist provides an inventory of the cultural resources that practitioners of magic evoke. This inventory is useful in explaining how the women I know legitimize their own methods for building trusting social relationships, to themselves and to others. It is important to note that there are no rigidly defined professional criteria in Russia for practitioners of magic or for trainings or psychotherapy. These are services that people have considerable flexibility to design and gain reputations for on their own, if they draw on the right forms of authority.

^{vi} In this article, Lindquist analyzes a case study of a businesswoman who offers magical services to local Moscow businessmen. She helps them with everything from enforcing business contacts to manage all kinds of dangers and risks of betrayal in their professional lives.

However, women need to reference these sources in particular ways and contexts, drawing on Russian gender essentialisms in the process. Of the sources of authority that Lindquist mentions, several stand out as especially important. The first is charisma. Some women see their own narratives of having surmounted certain challenges as a source of self-confidence and social contributions.^{vii} Women sometimes share their own experiences with people whom they meet as a kind of contribution to these relationships. This ability is gendered in many respects; women often see their gender as enabling them to have successfully overcome hardships and to translate these experiences into forms of wisdom for others, even in certain cases when women did not attend motivational seminars or consume self help literature.

Other sources of authority are references to the exotic, distant Other and to science. It is sometimes women's *reference* to these domains rather than detailed cultural/scientific knowledge that are important—as ways to sustain their own professional clout and of locating acquaintances, lovers, and colleagues. My discussion of Lindquist situates the case studies in this chapter within broader Russian cultural attitudes.

An internet romance

For several women, conversations about motivational seminars and the books that they were reading on self-development formed an important part of their romantic relationships with men. I observed how their positive self-images reinforced their belief that they had something to bring to their relationships. More specifically, knowledge of

^{vii} See Chapter 1 for my discussion of Vera and the kinds of narratives that she developed during Moscow motivational seminars in the 1990s.

common bodies of popular self-help literature and a command of certain language concerning self-development gave women something to talk about with men. Even under circumstances when they were looking for husbands, financial providers, and colleagues with more connections and knowledge than they themselves had, women believed that they had knowledge to offer these relationships. This was the case especially in light of some women's beliefs in their own unique capabilities *as women* to discern others' needs and provide psychological advice. Furthermore, women saw themselves as sharing with these men similar aspirations of being successful businesspeople and self-confident. Women's experiences of conversing with men about topics that interested them enabled women to view these relationships as successful and beneficial, regardless of how they ended. Elena's story provides a vivid illustration of this idea, i.e., that discussion of common interests was a woman's way of contributing to a relationship, as well as something valuable that she could take from it.

"Whenever I meet a guy on one of these sites, the first question I ask is, 'Why are you looking for a Russian woman?'" Elena was telling me about an internet dating agency "for highly educated Russian women," as she described it, to meet American, Canadian, and Western European men. It was through that agency that she met her boyfriend Mike, an American, six months before. It was October of 2007. She and I were sitting in her downtown St. Petersburg office. She had pulled up the photograph of her American boyfriend to show to me, and then switched from Russian to English so that her colleagues in the room could not catch what she was saying.

"Are you looking for a particular answer?" I asked her.

Elena turned to the computer screen. Staring back at her was a professional shot of a smiling young man in his thirties, with close cropped hair, wearing an oxford shirt and glasses. She turned back to me. “I can tell you what the wrong answer is,” she said. “The wrong answer is that they do not want to date American women.” She had heard that reply more than once. “If they say that, they are looking for service.” Elena thought that these men wanted wives who would cook, clean, and take care of them. They wanted mothers, as she believed Russian men did. “American women won’t do this. So these guys think that Russian women will.” I nodded. This was not the first time I had heard this interpretation from one of the professional women whom I knew in Russia, who approached internet romances with Westerners with a combination of excitement, hopefulness, and skepticism over the intentions of men who sorted women online by their nationalities.

As though Elena anticipated my next question, she said, “It is not sex that they want. These men can get sex in their own countries.”

I asked her how Mike responded to her question. She smiled. “He said it was because Russian women are intellectuals. He wanted someone to have a good conversation with. Then he said I looked like someone who thought about the world differently, like he did.” Months later, after Elena’s first meeting with Mike, she mentioned to me casually that he was married and had a child. He had promised to divorce his wife soon, after she gave birth to their third baby. I was shocked that Elena was telling me this only then, and I asked her if she thought that he would follow through on his promise. She believed he would, and added that his problem with his wife was that she did not think positively and plan her life as proactively as Elena did. According

to Mike, she sat at home most of the day, watched television, and complained that her husband did not pay enough attention to her. His wife would not watch *The Secret*, which he was urging her to do.

Later that evening, I met Elena for tea at the nonprofit organization where Elena worked. I asked her to tell me more about how she and Mike met. She told me that she had not been able to pay the 1,000 ruble registration fee (about \$40 in spring 2007) that would have allowed her to communicate with men on the site. So, she signed up for a free trial search that would allow her to create a profile, search for men who matched her criteria, and view their profiles, without being able to contact them. Elena included on her profile a list of books she had been reading and several of her favorite films. The list included films such as *The Secret* (2006), the translated book version of which would become a bestseller in Russia in the spring of 2008. Also included on Elena's list was the film *What the Bleep do we Know?! (2004)*. I would later watch that film in a motivational seminar led by Vera with businesswomen in St. Petersburg. Incorporating the story of a young woman whose romantic life flourishes after she decides that she is attractive to men, it focused on how changing one's expectations of the social world could dramatically alter one's life. There was Dr. Phil's *Self Matters: Creating Your Life from the Inside Out* (2003), and *Leadership and Teambuilding: the Holodynamics of Building a New World* (2005). Elena ran down this list for me and then smiled impishly. She told me about how she had managed to bury her e-mail address in this list. This way, if a man looked at her profile and read that section, he would see it and be able to write to her.

Having created her profile, Elena entered the phrase “The Secret” into her search, hoping to find a man who was also interested in her favorite film. Mike’s profile was the first to come up. She saw that he also had listed several of the other books that were on her profile. Elena took this as a “sign” (*priznak*) that he was “hers” (*svoye*). She hoped that his attention would be drawn to the things she liked to read, and that within her list he would spot her e-mail address and contact her.

He did. In his first e-mail, Mike told Elena how beautiful she was in her photographs. He also brought up the *The Secret*. He had told her about how that book and others like it had helped him to think more positively about everything, including his possibilities for building more profitable businesses. To Elena, her relationship with Mike represented many different kinds of possibilities for her future, from the very beginning of their correspondence. For example, he told her about the six businesses he was running, the Lamborghini he wanted to buy, and the motivational lectures he attended with various speakers. Elena would gradually grow skeptical about Mike’s claim to own eight businesses, although she believed that he must have been successful in business on some level; the designer clothing that he began sending her was proof to her of his wealth. Elena told Mike about her work and about the tourism business which, at the time, Vera was helping her to plan. She told Mike about a training she had recently attended at a local bookstore, on themes of positive thinking in indigenous traditions throughout the world. He related to her details of the self-help lectures that he attended with other businessmen he knew.

“I fell in love with him during the first month of our exchange,” Elena told me. Weeks after first contacting one another, she and Mike began to speak each night. Elena

realized how much they had in common, with their mutual interests in psychology, business, and positive thinking. “We are like the same person,” Elena told me. They were already talking about marrying two years from then, having two children of their own, and purchasing a house together in the United States. The two of them would live there along with Elena’s aunt, whom she supported and cared for. Elena and Mike were also talking about going into business together. He would help direct Western clients to her and she would share her profit with him.

On a later occasion, I would ask Elena how she thought the two of them would handle work around the house, such as cooking. She replied that they would hire a maid to clean the house and go out to eat. As for childcare, she wanted to spend some time with her children, but there would be a nanny to help out, as well. She and Mike had discussed this. I was impressed—but not surprised—by Elena’s proactive decision to make sure that Mike was not looking for a housewife, or as she sometimes had put it, for “service” (*servis*).

What Elena most emphasized throughout our discussions about their relationship were their common interests. Each time I saw her, she told me about a recent conversation she had had with Mike, about a book they were discussing on psychological techniques in management, or the meditation techniques that she was learning that would help people get what they wanted by creating visual representations of their goals. “We have so much in common,” (*U nas stol’ko obshchevo*), as Elena repeated to me on several occasions. Sometimes she would qualify this: “...intellectually (v

intelektual'nom planye),” she would say, or more often, “spiritually (*v dukhovnom planye*).”^{viii}

I knew that Elena appreciated other parts of their relationship, including that Mike, in professing to own so many companies, was an experienced businessman and had much knowledge to share with her. He was helping her to write a business plan. Elena also would reference his wealth in particular ways. For instance, she would say that Mike told her about one day driving her around in his new Lamborghini. She showed me his text messages containing photos, which she and I admired together, of the clothing he was planning to give her during their first meeting in Sweden in December 2007.

In other cases, Elena alluded vaguely to sources of money she had acquired, and it was only after their breakup later that spring that I discovered the money had been from Mike. For example, one evening that winter over dinner, Elena announced to me that she had come up with enough money to pay for medical specialists for her aunt, a problem she had been worried about for some time.

^{viii} The Russian word, *dukhovny*, roughly translates as “spiritual” or literally, “soulful.” It is an important cultural term, which derives from the word *dusha*, or “soul.” Soulfulness can be a highly moralized word denoting individuals’ curiosity about philosophy, literature, and the arts, as well as their affinity with metaphysical powers—not necessarily God in Christian Orthodoxy. For more a detailed discussion of this term and its contemporary nuances see Dale Pesmen’s *Russia and Soul: an Exploration* (2000). Elena’s usage of it in this case study is interesting because she is using a term that is locally very significant within Russia in order to describe what she can gain from her relationship with a Western man. She believed firmly that the vast majority of Russians would not be receptive to *The Secret* or other literature she was reading.

“That’s great!” I told her. “How did you come up with it?” Earlier that week, she and I had been brainstorming: she could tutor more in English, postpone some dental work she had been planning to do, or try to get a loan from a bank.^{ix}

Elena smiled. “It’s amazing,” she said. “I asked the universe (*vseleniia*), and it appeared to me.” She had been explaining events in her life in this way since beginning to attend the St. Petersburg bookstore seminars. I decided to try and learn more about the social circumstances surrounding the money by waiting until the topic came up in a different conversation. At the time, I was unsure of how to ask this question about context without sounding as though I was discrediting Elena’s explanation of the money’s appearance.

Later that winter, in January, I learned that Mike had wired Elena the money for her aunt’s doctors. Elena told me this soon after Mike stopped calling her and began to send her text messages less frequently. His wife had just had a second baby. Despite his earlier promise to Elena that he would ask for a divorce as soon as the baby was born, he seemed lately to be too busy with his family to contact her. Elena called me one evening and told me about a conversation she had just had, when she confronted him about the fact that he was contacting her less frequently. “He told me that I wasn’t independent enough for him,” Elena said. For the first time in our many conversations, her voice sounded to me as though it was on the edge of tears. She explained that Mike had raised the instance of when he had given her money for her aunt’s medicine. I asked her how she had responded to him. Elena replied that she told him he was wrong. He had offered

^{ix} This is prohibitively difficult in Russia as loans are primarily available to bank shareholders who represent large firms.

her the money freely, without her asking for it. “Who doesn’t get help sometimes?”

Elena asked. “Of course I’m self sufficient,” she said.

“I know you are,” I said. From Elena’s perspective, her relationship with Mike was not one significantly influenced by their different financial situations. The money he had from the time they first started dating was as much something they shared as the time they spent talking about *The Secret*, or discussing his frustrations with his marriage.

Elena’s correspondence with Mike continued into May, but they exchanged messages much less frequently than in the fall. He asked her to be patient, telling her that he was under too much stress with the baby in order to do what he had promised right away. Elena would mention to me how much she missed him, but she continued to talk with me and with Vera about a future with him, when the three of us met over tea. Vera began to urge her to “find a better man,” insisting that a married man was “hopeless” (*beznadezhny*). Elena sometimes would look down at the table at these moments, blush, and say, “I know, I know, but I love him.” Eventually she stopped bringing up the subject with Vera. The moment when it sounded to me as though Elena’s resolve was breaking was after he accused her of not being independent enough.

The relationship seemed to drag out for a long time. Then one day in May, Elena and I were standing in line at a store when she turned to me and said, “I told Mike I didn’t want to hear from him anymore.”

I nodded, feeling relieved about her decision. “I don’t see how you could have had a future with him,” I said, forgetting my ethnographer role. She studied me.

“No,” she disagreed. “In the future, anything is possible.” She explained that the problem lay in how Mike’s idea of her as dependent upon him. “Do you know how unpleasant it is, to be treated as though you cannot take care of yourself?” she asked.

Elena told me later that day that she had begun dating a man from the motivational seminar at the bookstore. His name was Oleg. He was twenty-seven, originally from Moscow. After finishing secondary school he straightaway joined a movement at a center there called “Spring,” and had begun to give lectures on themes such as success and self-realization. He and Elena were spending most nights together in the apartment of his girlfriend, who was traveling for the summer. The fact that he had a girlfriend did not bother Elena. Nor did the fact that she was leaving for business school in the United States in two months discourage her from developing a relationship with him. They cooked together. They had conversations that lasted all night about the books they were reading and what they learned in the seminar. Elena believed that it would be sad to say goodbye to Oleg, but that his friendship over e-mail and Skype once she got to the United States would be valuable to her. Elena valued her conversations with Oleg in ways very similar to her conversations with Mike: they were able to speak together about a variety of interests related to their own self-education as businesspeople and more generally.

Elena’s story demonstrates the enormous value that she placed on knowledge of a canon of literature and practices, and the ability to talk about how they had applied this knowledge to their own lives. Her boyfriend was not able to satisfy the other expectations that she held of long-term partnerships, and indeed, it was not clear that this was the most important thing to her. Based on my conversations with Elena, the fact that

she shared a set of interests and beliefs with Mike obviated her other concerns that he might see her as subordinate to him by virtue of her nationality and gender. It was her dignity and belief in self-sufficiency that was at stake in her choice to leave him, and not any failed promise of marriage. Elena and other women believed that marriage and motherhood were attainable at any time they decided they wanted these things.^x On the other hand, from their perspectives, spending time with a man who they found interesting and who treated them as companions—including for men to share with women their professional aspirations and collaborating with them professionally—was rare.

Elena's example provides a fresh way of interpreting a seeming paradox identified by Johnson (2007): on the one hand, the efforts of hundreds of thousands of Russian women annually who seek marriage with Westerners, and on the other hand, a tendency among these women to seek greater agency in controlling their futures. Citing a survey of women who used international dating agencies, Johnson writes: "...across the board their responses echoed the answer I received from Larissa, who wrote, 'Like most women, I want to have a family, a loving husband, believe in tomorrow and know that my fate depends on me, and not on the political and economical situation of my country (15).'" Later, Johnson notes the apparent irony that "...the method these women were using to try to take control of their future involved binding their destiny to another person, to a husband, yet none of them mentioned the lack of control and self-determination such a relationship could potentially involve (38)."

^x For example, Tatiana announced to me late in 2008 that she was having a baby. I asked her when it was due and she told me she was not pregnant yet. She needed to find a man to have sex with, first. Later that winter, her sister Alisa informed me that Tatiana was expecting a baby in January, 2010. She is now a mother but still single.

The women that I came to know placed a striking emphasis on demonstrating and developing their own capabilities, including social skills with foreigners. Some professional women, such as Elena, view these international relationships as granting them the possibility to find a partnership based both on romance and on friendship and collegiality. In such a relationship, they might gain access to financial and social capital and professional connections, which they might not have otherwise, but neither they, nor the men they meet interpret this as a sign of women's dependence. In Elena's case, it became possible to enter this relationship because, first, she believed it had formed because of her own successful and intelligent strategizing on the website, and second, she entered it because she believed that she had something to offer: a common and well formed set of intellectual interests. It was her boyfriend's deliberate decision to point out the (presumably, to him) one-directional relations of gifting that had taken place between them that made the relationship no longer desirable for her. In other words, he was no longer attracted to her in the ways that she had originally thought—as an equal partner with information and mutual social concerns to share. In the following case study, I illustrate how the similar values that Vera placed on relationships with others enabled her to approach strangers in a new geographical setting.

Changing selfhood, changing locations

Migration and correspondences with foreigners are channels by which women forge new relationships, and means by which they further their more personalized quests to meet challenges and accumulate stories of triumph that they can later relate to others. Women sometimes seek out connections with Westerners for knowledge and material

assistance, such as when the men they meet through international dating agencies help them financially. Another way in which global experiences and connections make a difference is that having had experiences working with foreigners can be an important source of credentials in the Russian business world. This is especially when one has learned English from a native speaker, for example, and can then go on to sell language and “cultural” consulting to other local Russian entrepreneurs. A related way in which transnational experiences are important to women is that they can enhance women’s own beliefs in their social competencies. Here, by “transnational experiences” I mean having traveled, seen the world, and adjusted to the culture shock, isolation, and logistical dilemmas of living in another city or country; as well as having had the confidence in oneself to forge relationships with people outside of one’s local community. These are also things that women view as sources of confidence, because of the way such experiences confirm their own skills at navigating the social world stretching beyond their places of birth.

Vera experienced many challenges both before and after moving from Belgorod to St. Petersburg in 2005. Yet, she was able to overcome difficulties, such as little money and no financial connections in her new home, through the belief that she contributed to a valuable social project in coming to St. Petersburg. That Vera could explain both her decision to move to St. Petersburg and her own survival there in terms of her intuition were points that she shared with new friends and colleagues that she met there; and later on, after her move to Moscow.

I recall my first meeting with her in March 2008, more than a year after she made the move to St. Petersburg. Elena had placed us in contact. Initially striking to me in our

conversation was her focus on a particular thought process—intuition—as influencing her decision to move, although I realized that intuition also existed in the context of dynamic social processes. We sat in a St. Petersburg bakery, eating bowls of Jell-O, and talking. A heavy sleet was falling outside. I was surprised by the openness with which Vera began to talk about her life, after I briefly told her that I was interested in the experiences of Russian businesswomen. She brought up her divorce and how she believed it happened because she had failed to “teach” her husband to be more compassionate to women.^{xi} Later on, she moved to St. Petersburg. I asked her to talk more about why she had decided to relocate to St. Petersburg and Vera elaborated about her motivations for the move.

“It just came to me,” she said. “Not to here.” Vera pointed at her head. “But to here.” She pointed at her heart. “Within a few days, I was on a plane to St. Petersburg.”

“Did you remember where you were when it came to you? What you were doing?”

“I closed my eyes and asked my intuition to tell me where to go.” She told me that intuition was something she had worked hard to develop, by learning to know herself and to trust the emotions that arose in her body.

I lacked the language to continue this line of conversation focused on internal transformations. I tried to direct discussion to the physical circumstances of Vera’s move. “Were you sitting in a café eating Jell-O, like we are?” I asked. She smiled at me, understanding what I meant.

^{xi} See Vera’s narrative in Chapter 2, under “Why women?”

“It was November. My landlady called. Her daughter, who was very young at the time, had just had a baby. The apartment she and the baby were living in was too cold. She told me I needed to move out in five days.”

“Did it occur to you to move in with your mom and brother?” I asked. Her mother had a house in the same town as she.

“No. It was very important for me to live on my own. I am like a bird without a nest. I am a woman without a country, without borders. I grew up in Belgorod, right near the border with Ukraine, but that is only in name.” Vera’s case suggests that even though women may have certain social and financial resources, they will not necessarily rely on them. The factors that coalesce in women’s lives and lead to moments when they are isolated or face poverty, are not reducible to any singular predictors, and often have just as much to do with highly personalized searches for meaning.

When we were talking about the motivating factors of her move, however, Vera emphasized her intuition. Later that afternoon as we talked over tea, she told me that she thought her intuition had correctly guided her:

I came here knowing no one whatsoever. It was a very difficult year for me, but one full of learning. One I grew from. My first thought was that the city had changed from the time that I knew it, when it was Leningrad. I had been there nine times before, as a child. At that time, St. Petersburg was kind, and people were open—and gentle. It was easy to get someone to help you out when you were lost. Now people look tired. Their expressions are very serious and sad.

Vera pointed out the window to two people passing by, staring at the ground and not talking. I found nothing unusual about this reserved demeanor. One of the first things that I had learned in a college Slavic linguistics class years before that Russians tended to place a great value on being reserved and emotionally reticent (*sderzhaniye*) in public. I had a hard time adjusting to this affect as well, but I rationalized that the explanation lay

in cultural difference. Cultural or not, for Vera it was not acceptable. She elaborated on the experience of her move:

I feel this especially in the metro. People have no problem pushing one another around. They don't get out of your way when you want to get off the train, unless you call out loudly. But the purpose in life is to develop yourself, to grow as a person. I have grown a great deal as a result of my year here. I have had to learn to live without a lot of things—certain things that I could buy in Belgorod. I had no social connections when I moved here. I didn't even have a job. All the same, I don't miss these things. I have what I need—an apartment, clothing, food. I have everything that I need. I can afford to pay the 20,000^{xii} rubles per month for my apartment.

Vera has highlighted the challenges she faced after moving to St. Petersburg many times. More difficult than having less money was the fact that she had little reason to get up in the morning. There was no place where she could make decisions that she felt were right. She had no one to talk to or who relied on her companionship and support. In this state, Vera began to write in her journal, a tool she had learned in the original Moscow motivational seminars with New Life in the 1990s.^{xiii} There, she reflected on past experiences of social isolation and how she had been able to overcome these situations using her own resolve. It was through journaling that Vera came to the realization that her intuition had guided her to St. Petersburg because she had something to teach other people there. Vera's rationalization was part of what eventually enabled her to approach the owners of the bookstore where a seminar on positive thinking was being advertised. It was here that she met people who shared her interests in self-development, and began to find clients so that she could begin leading motivational seminars for a living. Through her new social connections, she was able to locate affordable housing and find

^{xii} About \$500 through 2007 and 2008. This was very cheap for Vera's three-room apartment close to downtown.

^{xiii} See Chapter 1

reliable healthcare with an acupuncturist who listened to what she had to say. Vera also later used her stories of overcoming personal hardship through her own intuition, as part of the motivational seminars that she offered others in different settings.

It is significant to note that Vera's initial intuitive reason for believing she had something to do in St. Petersburg was based on both magic and scientific symbolism. After days of writing in her journal, what appeared to her were physics formulas. "I had never in my life seen them, but there they were," Vera told me. She took the formulas to the best scientists in St. Petersburg, and nobody knew what they meant. When Vera entered the bookstore, she saw a book on the Incan Calendar, next to an advertisement for the same seminars that Elena would eventually sign up for. Printed on the front of this book were the same physics formulas that Vera had written in her journal. Vera took the formulas to be a sign that the seminars were for her. When Vera's reference to science in these cases could be seen as an example of what Lindquist has written about concerning magical practitioners' use of science as a form of authority to legitimize their own work.

The trying experiences of overcoming her physical immobility and creating a new life in St. Petersburg gave Vera more to teach others. She began to lead motivational seminars in business throughout the city, where she taught people how to be both more confident in their decision making and more empathetic with the views of others. She also worked in private settings. In multiple settings, including her own social and professional networking and her corporate consulting, I observed Vera speak about the powers of her own intuition in guiding multiple forms of decision making, including her attempts to understand the motives of strangers. She incorporated into her narratives the

appearance of the physics formulas and the fact that the best scientists in St. Petersburg could not understand them.

In May 2008, Vera decided to move to Moscow, where she believed there would be more business opportunities. There, she began to make friends with people whom she met conducting trainings, and through her broader interest in developing herself. One weekend before her move when the two of us traveled to Moscow, we met and had sushi with two women Vera had contacted through a website the day before, having noticed they were interested in some of the same self help literature she was. Over dinner, Vera mentioned to the woman and her friend that she had been doing work in “self-development” for eighteen years. When one asked her with great interest what she meant, Vera responded by sharing stories from her life, and how she had dealt with them by changing how she thought about herself. Later, both women asked if they could attend Vera’s next seminar.

This is a good place to briefly reflect on Vera’s methods of locating people that she deemed to be trustworthy; her story reveals the importance of very broad shared interests in some women’s portable networking strategies. We performed a variety of meditation exercises and discussed complex ideas concerning the self, our futures, and that of human society. At the end of the workshop, Vera discussed the implications of self transformation for our social lives: If we took seriously the ideas in this training and attended others she would be leading, we would become able to read other peoples’ thoughts and motivations, and in doing so, recognize those around us who were ours (*svoi*)—people who were also trying to become more independent-minded, purposeful subjects. The Russian word *svoe* is fluid and context-dependent in meaning. I have

heard Russians use it to refer to just a handful of trusted relatives and friends, or more broadly, to refer to people they considered to be true Russians. Despite its fluidity, however, use of *svoye* can hold powerful social implications--reflecting, reinforcing, or helping to redefine who it is that people can trust as confidants, or for help obtaining material support or services. Other ethnographers have discussed the contextual meanings of collective pronouns such as *svoye* (Yurchak 2006:77-125) and *nashi*^{xiv} (Caldwell 2004:144), and the salience of identities as “symbolic repertoires to which social actors lay strategic claim according to their particular needs and interests in a given situation (Caldwell 2004:154).” At this point in the seminar, I asked Vera how we could recognize such people. She put her hands to her temples, in deep thought, and said to herself, “How can I even express this using human language?” when another participant cut in and offered an explanation. “We would just feel it,” she said to me. Even if we had never had been through this training together, she went on to explain, any one of us would recognize the others as *svoi*. She and I could be standing in line together to buy food, and if she asked how I was doing, she would listen to my response. Based on this small conversation, one of us could invite the other over for tea, and this would not be strange. Vera nodded as the other woman spoke, and said, “Exactly.”

This encounter illustrates the potential importance for women such as Vera to be able to appropriate Russian cultural terminology of belonging more broadly, to include people who they believed to be similarly interested in self-betterment. As I illustrate in Chapter 7, these strategies were not always easy, and not always as portable as women might have liked. Women’s social networking strategies reflected taken-for-granted

^{xiv} Roughly, “ours”.

Russian cultural ideas of what self-realized people looked like and how they behaved. Vera's criteria for locating "her own" might have been intuitive but they were far from arbitrary.^{xv} They reflected her own experiences learning to survive and eventually thrive within Russia's neo-liberal economy.

Vera's experiences as a trainer formed the basis for her to make many new connections for work in Moscow and throughout the world. She obtained a prestigious and very well paying management and development position at a corporation that designs and contracts out motivational seminars. With the help of one of my academic contacts, Vera also began to explore a job opportunity at a German consulting firm, which was looking for a trainer in personal growth that they could commission to work for a Russian company. In discussing these new relationships, Vera places emphasis not on particular people that she has met, but on her ability to build new relationships whenever and wherever she wants—including also, short-term sexual relationships.

Vera was not moving in order to provide financial support to family members she had in Belgorod—although she did do a great deal to financially support and care for them—nor was she using migration as a strategy for motherhood or to build valuable social capital for family members (Pilkington 2002; Leinaweaver 2008; Parennas 2001). Instead, by proving that she could settle in new places, Vera built up confidence in her ability to manage difficulties. She saw herself contributing to a broader movement of self-help and entrepreneurship in Russia, which was her way of making an impact there

^{xv} In understanding how Vera found social connections, I find it useful to think about Bertrand Russell's theory of truth (1912). Russell discusses the importance of "instinctive belief," or beliefs that people hold to be true without needing proof (19). It sometimes mattered more to woman that a shared language or set of cultural references created a space for social interaction—more so than determining whether or not they and their acquaintances shared the same values and views.

and in the wider world. She, like Elena, believed that the substance of her work—in this case, helping people to better understand themselves and the perspectives of others—would make a positive impact. This in turn gave her life a greater sense of purpose. Vera’s devotion to self-development motivated her to move to new places regardless and sometimes because of the challenges she might face in those places. As in the past, Vera felt compelled to frame her entrepreneurship in a way that was socially acceptable in her own view and in others’. Her case exemplifies the dilemma described by Carlos Docena (2008) in his study of Dominican immigrant gay men in New York, “when the very conditions of migration, survival, and (imagined or real) upward mobility depend on peoples’ continuing reliance on the networks and resources that facilitated their geographic displacement in the first place. (341)” Vera was looking to make a fresh start in a large city, using her acquired knowledge of self-development. However, she was still operating within a society where there were limits (self-imposed and otherwise) to the kinds of selves that were morally acceptable.

Independent motherhood

Another aspect of women’s lives where consciousness mattered was in their ability to care for others. Those who had children sometimes emphasized that a positive self-image and a sense of emotional and material self-sufficiency were qualities they saw as central to taking care of their children—even when they were married. As I demonstrate in Chapter 5, Anna had been married to her husband for over twenty years, and the two of them had a grown son. She talked about how important it had been all along to run the technology firm that she had with her cousin, even though her son had been ill for a long time as a child and required a great deal of attention at home. She said,

“I understood that a husband is a different kind of person. I have a very good husband, a decent husband, but it is necessary to build one’s life independently, and in any case have the possibility of not depending on him in any way.” Anna had a large and very close extended family in St. Petersburg and her concerns about economic security were not as great as they were in the 1990s, before her firm became profitable. Her comment about not depending on a husband “in any way” points to the value of multiple forms of self-reliance, including the satisfaction she gained from her work. The emotional self-reliance that women derived from work sometimes was what enabled them to be in their marriages. What made a family viable regardless of whether and how a male partner was involved was a particular kind of subjectivity for women. This is evident also in the following vignette.

Dina, too, believed in the necessity of a woman’s self-reliance vis-a-vis men. She, however, had far fewer social and economic resources than Anna, and saw her self-reliance as a form of resourcefulness. As I described in Chapter 5, she was providing for three of her children and her elderly mother alone in a tiny apartment. She had no relatives nearby to help her with childcare, and she was barely getting by financially when I first met her. Her self-conception as a realized subject would eventually become central to her own entrepreneurship. As I wrote in Chapter 5, in 2007-2008 Dina was actively trying to establish her own motivational services at local firms. When I returned in 2009, she had succeeded and was working with salespeople for a local software company. However, more than work, Dina emphasized her own self-reliance as central to her identity as a mother, enabling her to build social relationships that would be helpful

in supporting her own children. She also saw her own social capacities as a set of skills that were vital to teach her children.

Dina used a variety of metaphors in order to explain how self-knowledge and a positive identity enabled her to feel confident in social situations in which her lower socioeconomic position was evident:

Everyone knows only one kind of apple—sour—and that’s what they eat. Depending on their material circumstances, they might simply eat sour apples, or sprinkle sugar on them—some a little more than others. Others might spread jam on their apples, or even drizzle honey on them. Then I come along and I start talking about apples that are sweet from the start. It is very hard for them to believe me—especially the ones who put honey on their apples. It all comes down to your ability to own yourself (*vladet’ soboi*). Not to own someone or something, but yourself. Then you can say, completely calmly, “I am completely myself.” In order to be this way, you have to be willing to try things, to take a first step. Or to see things with your own eyes, or to feel them.

Dina asked me to imagine that I was standing in a long line to buy tokens for the *metro*,^{xvi} getting jostled around somewhat by people trying to cut in front of me or push the line forward. There might be another sales window open off in the far corner of the station. However, I would not know this unless I thought to look in that direction, and it is possible that I would be too focused on the length of the line before me. However, all it would take was one look askance in order to see that open window. Only a few people were aware enough of the possibilities in their surroundings to do this. The moral of Dina’s story was that some social possibilities existed in Russia for everyone, but only the people who fathomed their existence could access them. To do so meant striving to “own oneself”: deciding to perceive the world as one wanted to rather than how others dictated it should be perceived. This in itself was going against the grain because Russia, in Dina’s view, was full of skeptics.

^{xvi} The subway

One way Dina learned to own herself was through athleticism. The stronger her body became, the more she was able to be independent and in control. It was her belief that she already possessed all of the resources that she needed in order to give her life constancy and stability. I asked Dina if she could give me an example of a moment when she felt fully realized. She answered:

When you understand—when you feel—that your body is starting to move differently. Suddenly you feel this large amplitude of motion. It becomes easier for you to run. Other things become easier. You start to juggle like a professional. That’s it. Those skills are always going to be with you.

Running, in turn, motivated her to take other, social steps. Because of this, it doesn’t matter to me at all where in the world I end up. Even if I started to work as a dishwasher, I’d still attract attention. Not because I’m dressed up—absolutely not because of that. No, because all the same I am going to start to socialize with people (*obshchat’sya*). All the same, I move. All the same, I am going to start to do something.

Dina also frequently drew connections, on the one hand, between her own internal strength and the ways in which it helped her to take initiative in the world, and on the other hand, the values and skills that she taught her children:

Very many people have gotten used to relying on others, using others, really, to do things that they should have learned to do themselves—solve their problems, complete their tasks. Other people have learned from the start to do things on their own. That is very hard. It is also hard, as a mother, to pry your child away from yourself and say, “Do it yourself.” (*Sam.*) But there are no other possibilities. I could disappear at any moment, and I need to prepare them [her children] for that. So that they don’t sit the way we’re becoming, here [Dina slumps her shoulders forward and hangs her head over the table, imitating our slouching posture at my table]. My children have always been told, “We can do everything.” I have always planted new possibilities in their heads, from the time they were very young. That they can go to the store, prepare food, clean up after

themselves. Responsibility. That is responsibility for your own life. When you answer for yourself.

As I discussed in my introduction, neo-liberalism has been critiqued by scholars for the ways in which it can blame the victim for social misfortunes (e.g. Wendy Brown 2005, Ehrenreich 2009). Dina's comment echoes this "victim-blaming" perspective in her comment about using people. However, for her, it was simply a fact that she needed to maximize her own and her children's self-reliance, and continuing to do so was also a source of pride. Dina sought not only to secure her children's future (and in other cases I have described, her own), but also, enable them to think about their own lives ambitiously. She continually encouraged them to do things such as attend conferences in Moscow on professional and academic topics that interested them, to pursue artistic hobbies and an appreciation of the arts (by attending local museums, for example), and to think carefully about the professions that they wanted to pursue. Like other women such as Anastasia, Dina had sent her children to local motivational seminars for teenagers, in which they made dream collages of the things they wanted to accomplish in the future. Dina's parenting strategies were an extension of her own beliefs in the potential social efficacy of self-reliance and confidence.

Among the skills Dina taught her four children was a social and emotional competence. At our first meeting, she explained that after she lost work in 2001, she applied for food aid through a German organization.^{xvii} She ended up sustaining a

^{xvii} Dina accessed this family through a Christian organization that had first arrived in Russia from Germany in 1998 during the financial crisis. Like a handful of other transnational religious and secular organizations, the organization had arrived to minister to and provide food and other aid to Russians who were unemployed at the time. Dina knew people who had received aid in 1998. Later on, she approached this organization

relationship with a particular family who sent her and her children food because she initiated a correspondence with them via letters. Over time, this resulted in a friendship with the family that Dina greatly valued, especially for the opportunities it gave her to tell her friends about challenges she had faced in her own life and ways in which she had overcome them. Dina also considered herself to have worked in part for this food by sustaining social relationships with that family, including because she had attended nighttime English courses in order to communicate with them. Dina emphasized to her children that building relationships with others, thanking them when they extended help, and valuing these relationships were just as important a part of life as the job she used to have to support her family—not only because of the aid they received, but also because this aid symbolized and was a part of a friendship. In a discussion about social networks in Moscow soup kitchens, Caldwell (2004) reflects on the symbolic importance of exchanging material goods: “Because exchange practices are possible once personal relationships have been established, Muscovites’ abilities to share information, food, money, concern, and responsibility demonstrate that they are solidly grounded within a viable collectivity (193).” The case of Dina is a vivid illustration of this idea. It also shows how a sense of inherent worth, independent of class positioning or nationality, prompted her to form these relationships of exchange in the first place. Her initiation of a friendship with the German family is just one instance in which her confidence enabled her to support her family and impart a valuable lesson about confidence and social resourcefulness to her children. Her narrative contributes to scholarship about

herself and they arranged an aid relationship between her and one of their earlier donor families. Because Dina managed to establish an independent relationship with this family, she did not have to maintain her relationship with the Church in order to continue receiving aid.

parenthood and the multiple social activities that it entails (Townsend 2002; Garey 1999; Johnson-Hanks 2006; Juffer 2006). It suggests that a deeper examination of personal experience might help social scientists to further understand women's motivations and survival strategies as mothers.

Conclusion

How do these entrepreneurial women, whose economic and social aspirations extend beyond their present means, understand their own social possibilities? What contributions do they understand themselves as making within relationships where they are at disadvantages in terms of wealth, gender, nationality, or local knowledge?

Elena's story about her relationship with an American on the internet, Vera's migration story, and Dina's experiences with motherhood each reflects an instance when these women perceived particular social divisions between themselves and others. Vera had no social connections when she moved to St. Petersburg and found the city to be much less friendly and open to newcomers than she had remembered it as a child. She had very little money. She was also a single, childless woman in her early 40s, and might have had to find people who were accepting of her status; although, this was not an issue that she talked about. However, Vera was convinced that she had a personal and social project in St. Petersburg. The impetus to conduct motivational seminars to help people to find their purpose in life would eventually motivate her to leave her home and look for friends and work. With a family to support and no steady income, Dina looked to motivational seminars and athletic activity as sources of energy and self-worth, which would enable her to initiate relationships with others. Finally, Elena agreed to begin

corresponding with her boyfriend based on the belief that she had something to offer him that he valued: she was knowledgeable about the books they were interested in, and she was a good listener when he encountered problems with his wife. All three of these women overcame a sense of being outsiders by focusing on and cultivating their strengths as individuals. Their strategies for finding others and contributing to relationships drew from an eclectic combination of spiritual, corporate, and self-help discourses, which women saw as adaptable in a variety of geographical and cultural contexts. Their stories reflect the social circumstances in urban Russia, where single, professional women do not always have the resources at hand to support themselves and their dependents, and where self-image and self-confidence are valuable assets essential to survival.

Myriad individualized strategies enabled these women to feel differently and to lead more proactive lives, taking steps they would not otherwise have taken if they had let restrictions of class and gender distinctions shape their actions. This also meant that failures of expectations became more acceptable because of the ways the learning experiences broadened women's knowledge and expanded their sense of personal strength.

Dina, Vera, and Elena show that women with limited social and material means can render themselves capable of initiating social exchanges in multiple social settings. These women convinced themselves of their own equal social contributions to relationships with people who have more material and social capital. Their having been in these relationships, even temporarily, also fed their sense of confidence at having deftly navigated their social worlds.

In the cases I have discussed in this chapter, women have initiated relationships and more temporal exchanges that are often global in nature and that afford them valuable resources. Through complicated processes of self-education and betterment, women have rendered these relationships meaningful as social exchanges in which they take part as equals—not as forms of charity.

CHAPTER 7

NEO-LIBERAL BELIEF SYSTEMS AND THEIR LIMITS

In this concluding chapter, I return to key questions that I posed in the beginning of my dissertation concerning gender, national belonging, and social formations in urban life. I then proceed to offer fresh food for thought. I elaborate on my point in the Introduction that self-cultivation and entrepreneurial work by definition require women to distinguish themselves from more widely held Russian definitions of womanhood around them. Yet, as women pursue ambitious lives, they also come up against certain limits. Some of the same institutions that they draw from to formulate self-reliant philosophies—namely, family and their workplaces—also significantly hinder their ability to think and act as flexibly as they sometimes would like. These women, who make a virtue of being imaginative and ambitious with their lives, reveal both creative ways to work within their existing social environments as well as the structural limits that these same environments pose.

The ethnographic cases in this dissertation help me to craft a response to Leo Coleman's methodological inquiry, which I first raised in the Introduction. Coleman calls for social scientists to examine ways of thinking about solitude in urban social life, without reducing solitude to the opposite of solidarity or community (2009). Although I did not make solitude central to my analysis, I did look at the social lives of women who sought self-reliance. I will briefly sum up my approach to studying these entrepreneurial

women's social lives, and then I will extrapolate to the broader methodological contributions that I hope to make.

At particular moments in their lives, women either knew few people locally or felt unable to rely on people they cared about. Yet, they still inscribed the social in their contemporary lives. They pulled meaning and moral guidance from different personal examples in their pasts—including examples they recalled of their own demonstrations of strength—and even moments that they envisioned in their own futures. Such processes of reflection enabled women to articulate self-reliant philosophies that they carried with them to different urban settings, such as in Vera's migration stories, for example. Other women carried a sense of self-reliance to different contexts over the course of singular days, using this as a guide for how they would relate to their social worlds. Anna, for example, knew that her own past experiences as a manager would inform her everyday experiences as a mother, and vice versa. These philosophies of self-reliance influenced women's willingness to initiate new relationships and take new professional and social risks in the present. In women's histories, there lie clues to the social dimensions of how women legitimate their own lives and pursue ambitious goals.

The social for some people exists in more fleeting interactions during their everyday lives, as well as in their narratives of the past. In my own day-to-day fieldwork, these fleeting social relationships took place at bookstores, in motivational seminars, during athletic activities, and in some women's workplaces. Women shared a purpose and "general themes for life" to discuss with others in these settings, and were able to formulate philosophies of self-reliance. Yet, these interactional settings did not

look like social movements and women did not even necessarily bring them up in their own narratives.

A focus on the cumulative significance of peoples' social relationships reveals forms of belonging that are alternatives to local communities. In my introductory section on belonging, I emphasized that fragmentation in the contemporary world takes place between people and their social pasts, in addition to their communities (local or national) at a given moment. I cited ethnographies by João Biehl (2005) and Clara Han (2004), which reveal disjuncture between peoples' present lives, their pasts, and in Biehl's work, a young woman's future, as well. Describing the situation for Catarina at Vita, Biehl writes, "The human being is left all by herself, knowing that no one will respond, that nothing will crack open the future. Catarina had to think of herself and her history alongside the fact of her absence from the things she remembered (11)." Yet Catarina also develops a kind of poetic dictionary of her life in her interactions with Biehl, which connects her to him and to the wider public who will read his book. In Han's piece, a working class woman donates the little money she has to a socialist youth organization, and in doing so connects with her country's socialist past and her own role in it (2004). Engaging these insights, my work shows how peoples' links with their pasts and presents can be more than ways to cope with social abjection from their families and broader communities. They are also a means by which people navigate mundane everyday life in their families, workplaces, and their broader social environments.

Social implications of pro-natal nationalism

In my Introduction to this dissertation, I posited the need for work examining women's engagements with pro-natal and traditionalist discourses in Russia. As these

women pursue lives “in business,” they must engage messages from family members, colleagues, and the broader political and media environment that attempt to define womanhood narrowly in terms of motherhood, or that designate women’s “place” as the home. Some women do so more directly and forcefully than others. For example, Ekaterina’s attempts to “show the city these women” through her charitable projects does reinforce notions of women as caretakers but it also helps to make the possibility of “womanly” entrepreneurs more publicly imaginable. So have her efforts to prove her own worth through self-education and persistence to male colleagues, and her encouragement of other women to do the same. Other women, such as Evgenia and Elena, for example, complicate gender stereotypes indirectly, by virtue of what they have to do to thrive in Russia’s economy and support their families. For all three of these women, their ideas of themselves as businesswomen implicate many forms of ingenuity, drives for personal satisfaction, and public influence, which exceed Russian cultural attitudes about women, their “natural” qualities, their roles in the workforce, and their desires.

I briefly return here to Helena Goscilo’s quote in my Introduction, about 1990s Russian literature, popular media, and pornography. She addresses the implications of representations of women as either sexual objects or de-sexualized mothers: “If cultural rhetoric offers eloquent clues to the mores of a given society—and I believe it does—then anyone seeking a re-conceptualization of gender roles in post-communist Russia will enjoy more success if she looks for snow in Africa (48).” The media perpetuate gendered stereotypes and discourage representations of women that might push the envelope. Goscilo goes on to argue that “attempts by Russians to revise notions of gender,” such as

the Gender Center in Moscowⁱ amount to “miniscule islands of activity and change in a sea of sameness (49).” Underlying this claim is the assumption that small groups of people who are not widely visible to the public lack the potential to affect any kind of meaningful change. Many of the women I know did not see themselves and social life in this way.

They saw themselves not only as able to survive political and economic transitions in Russia and in their lives, but as playing instrumental roles in determining their directions. In their own lives, people who had been able to live more on their own terms with little social support were sources of inspiration, and these women likewise sought to effect change through their own examples and the practices that they could maintain themselves as entrepreneurs. It was sometimes at the level of the most fleeting interchanges among women, their colleagues, and those with whom they read, discussed ideas, and developed new skills, that they expanded normative definitions of being a woman.

Entrepreneurial subjectivities

Innovation within and through one’s own life was part of what it meant for many women to be “in business.” To pursue a business career meant to manage others and create something new—to create excess value—in domains that included but spanned beyond their work. Based on David Graeber’s work (2001:1-22), I define value broadly to include ideas of what is good and what people ought to seek in life, what individuals

ⁱ A Moscow-based group of feminist activists and scholars established in the early 1990s under the directorship of Russian feminist activist and scholar Anastasia Posadskaya. For more information on the Center, see Hemment 2007:78-82.

will give for objects, and “meaningful difference (1-2).” Through the management of diverse internal and social resources, each of the women in this dissertation sought to create value, in the form of goods or ideas that could be imparted or sold to others. The three women whose case studies I elaborated in the previous chapter had just begun to plant the seeds for their own motivational training firms. For them, a prerequisite for this was their ability to ask for what they wanted and to make social connections with few material or social resources to begin with. All of these activities would eventually incorporate narratives based on the ways these women themselves had survived transitions in their lives and their broader political environment. Other women already owned profitable firms when I first met them. Some of these women had never considered attending “trainings.” They had already gained connections and money through their husbands, their educational backgrounds, and their experiences during socialism. Broadly, they shared with women in the first group the fact that they sought to apply skills that they had learned in their personal relationships to their work lives, and vice versa. They relied on an accumulation of thought and behavior strategies, in order to manage work-family conflicts and to operate within many spheres of their lives.

Alexei Yurchak’s discussion of 1990s Russian (male) small business owners provides a useful framework to think about entrepreneurship, as a set of activities that draw from multiple aspects of peoples’ lives, and not as a particular business (2001). He argues that to be an entrepreneur is to have “entrepreneurial governmentality,” to make it “‘thinkable and practicable’ to relate to different aspects of the world—people, relations, institutions, the state, laws—in terms of symbolic commodities, risks, capital, profits, costs, needs, demands, and so on (279).” Yurchak emphasizes how former *komsomol*

officers and people who worked in science and technology during socialism were able to transfer certain skills of relating to people and institutions, to the opening of small businesses in the 1990s. The most crucial conclusion that Yurchak's work makes is that people learned during Soviet times how to distinguish between what institutional rules needed to be followed and what activities lent themselves to creativity. For example, *komsomol* officers replicated certain rhetoric in the speeches they presented to rank-and-file members; the meetings where they gave these speeches contained many other kinds of activities and conversations that the Party did not dictate (2001:279-280). From the late 1980s, it was these people who were able to translate skills such as this to the establishment of successful small businesses in the private sector.

Building on Yurchak's argument, I posit that female entrepreneurship is informed by and inflects other relationships and experiences in women's lives, beyond their formal education, their previous workplace, and past socialist experiences. These relationships include their care for children and other dependents. What the socialist state used to attempt for women—that is, legal and material assistance to balance caretaking and paid work—now lies almost completely in women's hands. That means that women need to be creative and garner skills and experiences from the different domains where they have to spend much of their time and energy. Raising a child or caring for an elderly parent can provide inspiration and management skills to run an enterprise or manage personnel, for example. The skills and experiences that women cultivate through their work lives also feed back into their other relationships, including their relationships with themselves. This more holistic understanding of entrepreneurship as a way of creating sellable

products, childrearing practices, and personal meaning out of what are often very little social and financial resources is what I call “entrepreneurial subjectivities.”

These women’s lives also show how an ability to create new meanings, as Yurchak defines it, enables them to expand what it means to be a working woman through their practices and narratives. Many of them speak the same language as pro-natalist state media and people in their lives who advocate motherhood as women’s central role. Yet, they are also expanding the definitions of motherhood and caretaking to include the benefits that women are able to impart to their dependents from their work lives, and vice versa. In other words, motherhood, as a normative part of Russian womanhood in many popular accounts, entails a vast range of activities and is not limited to the domestic sphere.

My research differs from other anthropological work on entrepreneurship, neo-liberalism, and gender. This work often takes a unidirectional approach of the relation between the work space and the private sphere, such as the latter buttresses the former. I have found useful Carla Freeman’s research with Barbadian women entrepreneurs at different stages in their careers, as a point of reflection and departure. Freeman writes, “The entrepreneurial aspiration is not just a structural one related to business creation but also underlies the creation of entrepreneurial selves (2007:261).” She is referring to “reformations of religious practices and institutions into more individualized, entrepreneurial forms (261)...” Freeman describes smaller, “New Age” religious communities that convene in peoples’ living rooms, as manifestations of new entrepreneurial women and men’s lives. People use these more intimate forums to establish business contacts and to meet like-minded people who consider business to be a

respectable sphere. These communities are facets of entrepreneurial lives, in addition to activities such as yoga, reading self-help books, spas, and gyms, which Freeman characterizes as “very new services intended to salve the stresses and struggles of contemporary neoliberal life (262).” All of these things Freeman nevertheless portrays as instruments that enable people to have businesses: to meet contacts and to be able to stomach participation in an uncertain social and economic environment.

The cases that I have analyzed tell us something different about what it means to pursue an entrepreneurial life, which accounts for my term, “entrepreneurial subjectivity” rather than Freeman’s “self”: I use subjectivity to call attention to the fact that being entrepreneurs affects how women feel as well as what they do and how they represent themselves to others. The work lives sometimes make them feel more confident as caretakers, for example. For these women, the ability to create and sell things and to manage people is one central facet of a broader set of skills, personality traits, and ways of seeing themselves and the world. For a woman to know what she wants, to strive for that, and to consider herself special in some way because of this, are all part of being an entrepreneur or a “businesswoman” in Russia. Often, what women want is far more than what is immediately available in Russia—including to be more widely recognized as a woman and someone with certain professional skills simultaneously. As in the case of Dina, for example, what seemed to me to be just as important to some women in such cases is the pursuit of such goals, as a way of life—the act of continual striving, as its own end. Business is a domain of activity that requires fresh ideas of women and also creates a setting where women foster them as they connect with people and media transnationally. For example, Maria’s idea that make-up and discussions of beauty can

be a basis for social life resulted from her attempts to render socially meaningful and accessible a sphere of activity—upward mobility within a corporation—that was not obviously meaningful and accessible to her at first. Entrepreneurial activities are part and parcel of women’s broader philosophies of self-reliance and legitimization.

My research builds on scholarship on neo-liberalism that emphasizes more broadly how hegemonic discourses construct individuals as sites of accumulation for all kinds of skills instrumental to their survival (e.g. Brown 2005:37-59; Martin 2000; Ong 2006). This work emphasizes a dearth of social welfare services to provide more equitably for peoples’ basic needs. Neo-liberalism in this scholarship is primarily about peoples’ service to a set of political, corporate, and popular imaginaries that are much bigger than they are. In Russia, women are dealing, for example, with the moralizing discourses of local political discourses, which simultaneously reproduce ideas of women as mothers and displace attention and towards structural support for women in the workplace.ⁱⁱ As a result, women author self-reliant philosophies in order to live with little social support, time, and financial resources. They are doing more than coping with a neo-liberal order, as Freeman suggests; they appropriate its language and use it to thrive. This is what I meant in the Introduction when I wrote that “women are infusing a sense of an *independent* self with its own moral integrity.” In my view and some of these women’s, asserting interests not related directly to motherhood is a personal feat and a political statement: a mode of caring for the self and others (for these are often not separable things), and a way of meeting people among whom being a woman with a broad set of interests becomes more socially legitimate.

ⁱⁱ See Chapters 3 and 4.

In the remainder of this chapter, I illustrate my point about entrepreneurship as a potential means of personal, professional, and broader social transformation for women, through local narratives of women in different career stages. In the second half of this chapter, I move on to explore the personal and social limits of personalized solutions.

“I cannot not strive for something.”

As I discussed in Chapter 4, the question of who gets to organize everyday life, or *byt*, was a guiding one for Kollontai; recently, new scholarship on gender in urban Russia has also underscored the influence of mundane everyday details (i.e. work schedules) in influencing gender roles (Zdravomyslova, Rotkirch, and Temkina 2009). Similarly, in my work, I posit the realm of entrepreneurship as a site for formulating and articulating answers to questions of gendered roles.

In June of 2009, I sat in Ekaterina’s St. Petersburg office, sipping tea with her and one of the younger businesswomen in the network that she facilitates. Irina (age 29), a single mother, had founded a business in 2006 offering website design and business cards to other local St. Petersburg corporations. Profits had decreased since the fall of 2008, when the number of clients approaching Irina and her small team for their services decreased significantly. However, she remained hopeful that Russia’s economic situation would improve. In the meantime, she told me when Ekaterina left the room to answer a phone call, the older woman had begun referring more of her own acquaintances who owned small firms in St. Petersburg towards Irina for her services, in order to help her business stay afloat. When Ekaterina returned to the room, she asked me to tell Irina more about my project. I started by explaining that I was interested in the lives of

entrepreneurial women in Russia and the meanings that business held for them. Irina smiled at me. She said, “I’ll tell you what it means.” Ekaterina instructed me to take out my tape recorder. I looked at Irina, and she shrugged, “I’ll wait while you get yourself organized.” I took it out and then Irina seemed to stop herself and think for a moment.

Well, probably there is something about my character (*kharakter*) that pulls me to be an entrepreneur, because I am the kind of person who has always wanted to create something on my own (*sozdat’ chto-to sama*). I also have a little girl to support. But it’s also very important that once you start working for yourself, and making your own decisions at work, it is simply not possible to do anything else with your life but business. Something happens inside of you (*vnutri*). In order to survive, you always have to be thinking of something new (*vsegda pridumyvai’ shto-to novoye*)—new things to sell, new ways to sell them, and the possibilities are endless. You begin to think about everything in your life that way: how much is possible, how much you can make happen on your own. I cannot not strive for something (*Ne mogu ne stremlyat’sya chemu-to*).

I asked Irina what she meant by that last point and she shrugged. She said, “Creativity (*tvorchestvo*) is very important to me. I could *never* go back to working under someone, first of all. Who wants to take orders from someone else?” She went on to say then, “But business also makes you want things. I want to travel, to see the world. I want to meet new people, to learn new things. I want new clothes for myself.” Even Ekaterina, who always seemed to wear a stern expression, smiled. Irina was dressed in a stylish business suit and wore lots of sparkly jewelry.

I never had a chance the opportunity to speak again with Irina as I was leaving Russia the following week. Her narrative is nevertheless a poignant articulation of business as a social field, which both causes and results from women’s desires to be creative in multiple areas of their lives. This creativity, or *tvorchestvo*, furthermore, depends upon and facilitates women’s self-reliance in the workplace. Based on the stories of many other entrepreneurial women, I would add that creativity also implicates

their own emotional self-reliance, especially from marriage or from unsupportive spouses. Business, creativity, and all kinds of self-reliance, are mutually constitutive parts of many Russian women's lives.

The romance of business

My encounters with women have shown that some Russians view business as a domain of social change—for better or for worse. For the entrepreneurial women I got to know, it is for the better. People in all different professions and career stages sometimes view business (i.e. running or working for a commercial organization) as an opportunity to change their own lives and even Russian society. My conversation with Victoria, which I present in the coming passage, exemplifies this perspective on business from someone who aspires towards it as a way of life in addition to a particular line of work.

Formerly an academic, as of my 2008 fieldwork, Victoria had been working for a year in upper-level management at a national corporation that produces alcoholic beverages. She and I had spoken several times during an earlier project of mine and mutual friends suggested that I reconnect with her about her experiences at her new job; in their view, she now fit my research criteria. I invited Victoria over for tea one evening after work. Unlike her earlier casual attire of jeans and t-shirts, she arrived at my apartment wearing high heels, dress pants, and a very loose fitting sweater and blazer. Her face was exquisitely made up. Victoria was eager to help with my research and tell me about her motives for going to work for the company and her experiences there. My conversation with Victoria illustrates how women making career transitions perceive their new, market-based careers as opportunities to live and think differently:

A: You said earlier that people did not seem as you expected they would, when you arrived at the company. Could you tell me more about that?

V: Before I went to work there, I was a student. I conducted research and was part of a group of people who lived similarly (*v etom kluche zhivut*). There are many very simple things that distinguish a person's lifestyle. The fact that a person does not have a tight schedule, that they can work when it is convenient for them. You can meet with people often, read, and discuss things. These are simple things that form a person's character—ways of thinking about the world. People like that would rather go to the museum often than buy themselves a new car, right? At the same time, I had friends who worked in business. What's interesting about that? You go to work, you sell things, you have an office, and you make money. I liked to think about museums, about high culture.

Then I met someone who was very active in the business world and he had a very harsh character (*zhestkii kharakter*). I grew more interested in that way of life. Because people like him simply could not be a part of the social circle that I was in. This guy I met did not answer his phone, because people called him 500 times per day. Before that I had never known a single person who let themselves not answer the phone. That seemed terrible—pure selfishness. That's one difference. Also, people who work in business have completely different interests. There is more money and they can allow themselves new forms of entertainment. I began to think, "What kind of world do those people live in?" Then I started to look at my friends who also work in business.

Victoria's initial impressions of people who work in business depict these people as

"other" in terms of lifestyle and personality, as well as culturally inferior. I asked

Victoria how she had formed these friendships with people who were not from her social circle.

V: Well, from school. I have a girlfriend who I studied with as a child. She is a director of sales at a company in Petersburg. She has her own apartment downtown and she has a somewhat different approach to life. A lot of her time is spent with men, but she lives alone—that is, she is not married, although she has a young daughter. She went back to work three months after giving birth.ⁱⁱⁱ That is very quick. But that's how she is. She said to me that she almost died in those three months. That it was absolute torture.

A: Ha. I know many women who feel that way.

ⁱⁱⁱ Article 255, Work Code, Constitution of the Russian Federation. Women (not men) are entitled to take leave 70 days before and 70 days after birth, and receive 50% of their salaries.

V: Really? She really does need to be around people and to be doing something of her own. She is not a housewife, although she is very feminine—very attractive. I mean that she does have domestic (*domashniye*) qualities. I started to call her more often and she began telling me all kinds of fascinating stories—about her different relationships with men, about her work, about the people she knows there. Watching and listening to her, I grew more interested.

Victoria's narrative reveals a number of important cultural associations that held true among many other women I knew who were pursuing entrepreneurial careers and who were not. First, there is her association of business with a range of practices, including having multiple sexual partnerships and a desire to be socially active outside of the home. Recall, for example, my schoolteacher friend Masha's point that entrepreneurial women are more goal-oriented, eager to take responsibility for managing groups of people, and planners of their own lives.^{iv} Second, Victoria's language suggests that she used to assume that business and femininity are separate and opposing cultural domains. Nevertheless, the realization that her childhood friend was a living example of someone who represented both of these domains was part of what made Victoria interested in this new world. Subsequently, she asked her school friend to introduce her to more people she knew, and Victoria applied her older skills as a researcher to learn about these peoples' work lives. What she garnered from these conversations reinforces the notion of business as a category that includes all kinds of personality traits, everyday habits, and proclivities. This included for her a general orientation towards goals: a theme that has appeared throughout this dissertation:

V: I started to wonder, "How do I get to live that kind of life?" I decided to go to driving school and got my license. I bought a car a little while later. I went to work. At first, it was very difficult for me to adjust. I needed to get up early, to

^{iv} See Chapter 4.

be at work at a certain time. Then the lifestyle quickly became very interesting to me. People in business can say “no” to things. They are always traveling to places, always carrying out some kind of project. They are more goal-oriented—always moving towards a purpose. Otherwise nothing happens. I grew so fascinated by these things, and by the kinds of character traits that might grow out of them. I would say what attracted me was the romance of business (*romantika bisnesa*).

A: The romance of business?

V: I’d call it that, yes. I mean what attracted me was the possibility to develop my own independence (*vosmozhnost’ proyavleniia svoei samostoiatel’nosti*): the necessity to form my own opinions and to stand by them. That’s what it was. The necessity to fight for certain things. And to think creatively, to think of new things (*pridumyvat’ schto-to*). All of these kinds of things, I was doing for the first time.

A: Was this difficult?

V: I liked it. This was what I wanted to try. This was what I had never done before. It didn’t even have to do with knowledge. It had to do with your personal qualities.

For Victoria, the romance of business had to do with its potential to inspire her imagination and strengthen her resolve. Her change in lifestyle and working with new people who already embodied certain qualities enabled her to cultivate the same in herself. Business was first and foremost about self-transformation. This came in part from lifestyle factors such as a rigid schedule and having money to spend, but these factors did not entirely explain the transformation. For Victoria, I think that the romance of business had to do with the fact that people she met seemed different from her older group of friends, including a woman who worked and was “feminine” at the same time. This had given her a sense of possibility for her own life. Victoria did not say this to me during our conversation that day; in fact, she could not entirely explain what she meant by the “romance of business” and how it engendered transformation. After talking with her I looked at an interview I had had with her two years before, because I remembered

something she had told me during a conversation about sexuality and a friend of hers who had multiple sexual partners at once: “When you know about other practices and other people, it makes you more flexible in thinking about how you can behave, what is possible, what is impossible. Even if you do not think you will do those things yourself, it offers a certain freedom inside (*svoboda vnutri*).” Perhaps, it was the freedom of recognizing diversity, including new possibilities for being a woman, which imbued business with an inexplicable sense of possibility for her.

During that same conversation, I asked Victoria for examples of things she had had to fight for, or situations when she had to stand by her opinions. She shrugged and named several examples from her job, which was specifically to design and direct a team that conducted consumer research projects. Sometimes, there were conflicts between her and marketing people on the same level, who did not agree with the surveys that she designed, and she had to defend them. The conversation began to lag and I switched to a new topic: whether or not she still planned to have children, as she told me years before she would. Here, her face lit up and she announced that she was three months pregnant. She pointed to the baggy sweater on her thin frame and told me that she was hiding this from her boss as long as possible. She had received a pay raise and promotion to a new position the week before, and had not wanted to jeopardize that by sharing her news right away. I asked Victoria if she thought that people at work would treat her differently if they knew she was pregnant. She replied that they might, so she was going to wait to tell her boss until just before she began to show—in about a month. Then she switched to the topic of her mother, and said that the latter had told her after she became pregnant not to wear high heels to work. “I told her it didn’t matter—that I didn’t need to dress

differently because I was pregnant. I'm not sick, or injured, or any weaker. I guess that's an example of fighting for something. Fighting to wear high heels to work," she said with an amused little laugh.

Victoria is able to fight with her Mom, but she has to hide from her boss. The fact that Victoria's very physical gendered condition exposes her in a way she worries is disadvantageous shows that this new emancipatory space is not as accommodating as she would like to represent it. Sometimes, women's work lives helped them to develop skills in other areas such as their family relationships, so that it was easier and a source of pleasure to insist on doing things in their own ways. However, Victoria was also clearly concerned with not giving away her pregnancy too soon to coworkers, and dressing differently might have done so. Her story is a woman's version of distinguishing between what must be done to relate to an institution and where there is room for maneuvering. She has to hide her pregnancy at work but uses her new subjectivity to stand up to her mother on a mundane level that is novel and important to her.

Victoria thus complicates my argument about mutual translatability in an important way. The pregnant body is in her case far more problematic in the workplace than being a mother is, for some of the other women, including her friend. Although she downplays the possibility of losing her promotion due to her pregnancy, Victoria's case illustrates the limits of gendered practices in the neo-liberal work environment. Especially, for someone as self-aware as she is to brush off the fact that she is hiding her pregnancy suggests how insidious these limits are.

Self-cultivation as a social act

Victoria's case is a telling example, but nevertheless her story about her mother and how she feels in her new job shows how women's recognition of their own abilities to control their choices and experiences—however mundane—yielded personal satisfaction. Everyday acts of self-care and self-defense matter, personally and in an urban environment saturated with rigid expectations of women as mothers and wives, and on the other hand, very little social support in the form of legal protections against discrimination and a comprehensive social safety net. In a contemporary environment where both state and popular narratives co-opt questions of “what women want” while ignoring their actual perspectives, routine practices in which women assert or protect their own interests foster a sense of dignity and agency that make a difference in their lives.

Sometimes, self-affirming practices are means by which women subtly impact their broader social environments. Consider Dina's goal to continually undermine peoples' gendered expectations through her own identity as someone who is both feminine and an athlete,^v or Elena's belief in their business practices as channels to encourage Russians to become more understanding of one another, and of foreigners. These are all women with highly ambivalent attitudes towards their government. They each in their own way thought motherhood was socially valuable, but found state and public ideas of motherhood, womanhood, and ethics to be impoverished. They did not have anyone in mind who they resisted; rather, their actions were “responses to power—and forms of personal power—that go beyond collaboration, co-optation, or any narrow

^v See Chapter 5

understanding of resistance (Farquhar 2005:310).”^{vi} Even Ekaterina framed her own community service with other women as a way to construct their images and sense of themselves as female entrepreneurs who used their money in appropriately feminine ways. Through activities as diverse as charitable projects, consulting and tourism services, women’s everyday conversations, and the support they exchange with others they meet at motivational seminars, self-development holds social implications for women.

Family as motivation and limit

A recurring theme throughout this dissertation is the multiple ways in which women’s families are implicated in their pursuits of self-reliance and -determination. Many women’s narratives of selfhood underscore the importance of being daughters, nieces, sisters, and mothers, as motivating them to be driven and emotionally independent. Simultaneously, these same kin ties sometimes limited women’s pursuits of their goals. In this section, I reflect on the complicated relations between kinship and women’s self-reliance. I focus on how women’s narrative strategies can sometimes transform kin obligations from a constraining to a motivating force, under circumstances of limited financial and social options.

In different respects, women’s familial obligations sometimes protected them against the possibility of becoming depressed or unmotivated. When I asked Oksana to

^{vi} Judith Farquhar’s work on pensioners in Beijing is interesting also because of her articulation of the concept of practices of *yangsheng*, or self-cultivation, which include several of the activities that women in Russia practice (i.e. martial arts)

tell me how life had changed following her third child, the first thing she told me was that she felt “defended,” or *zashchishchena*:

I am not afraid of some kind of life affair that could happen to me. I can’t imagine what that situation might be, but I am quite strong right now, with three kids. I am *zashchishchena* (defended). I am defended with three kids. [A: How so?] I am responsible for them. I have no chance to be very weak. Even if I am tired and I want to sleep, I have to wake up. I have to go and do things—for their sake. Right now, materially, my husband is absolutely responsible for everybody. That’s why I don’t even know why I’m talking about this situation. Nevertheless it’s important to me that I feel very, very strong right now.

Oksana made a similar point about her first pregnancy at age 26: Her husband at the time had wanted her to abort the child, so she left him. Her parents, with whom she had to move in, were angry at Oksana for leaving her husband; ironically, they thought that with his wealth and faithfulness to her, he would make a decent father. For Oksana, it was a sense of obligation for and joyful anticipation of her child that helped her to remain steadfast in her decision and to block out other peoples’ judgments of her. “It was very important that I not suffer,” she said, referring to her own resolute cognizance of her reasons for leaving, as a way to shield herself from her parents’ reprobation. In both situations, Oksana’s sense of responsibility towards her children helped her to remain emotionally independent from men and from her parents. Her narratives about motherhood as a motivating force reminded me of how her emergent firm in 1998 helped her to remain active following her first husband’s departure.^{vii} I brought up this connection to Oksana and she agreed with me. Hers is one example of how women’s connections with their dependents can form the basis for what I have called, echoing Freeman, their “entrepreneurial selves”; these connections feed women’s drive for self-legitimization and self-reliance.

^{vii} See Chapter 3.

The same kin connections that help to strengthen women's resolve also are what ultimately can limit the extent of some women's self-determination. Take the example of Alexandra in Chapter 1: She had moved to St. Petersburg from Moscow in order to care for a great aunt and uncle after her grandfather, because her parents feared that they were depressed following the death of Alexandra's grandfather. This is not a move that Alexandra herself would have chosen, and it delayed what had long been her dream to move to the United States; although, her experiences there only strengthened Alexandra's desire to leave Russia. While living with her aunt and uncle, Alexandra enrolled in a doctoral program in large part to please the two of them. They were former academics who had lost their jobs in the early 1990s, and they saw in Alexandra a possibility to have their kin do something meaningful. Alexandra chose a dissertation topic related to her own personal interests in business and struggled to balance her research with her full-time job. Her own familial obligations in this case hindered her self-reliance in that it hindered her ability to decide for herself what she wanted to do. Two sources of fulfillment for Alexandra in the meantime were her martial arts^{viii} and her pastime of riding her motorcycle—which she also used to visit a boyfriend periodically in Moscow. She found ways to facilitate her own self-reliance and freedom of movement within Russia, as she dealt with the reality of her sense of kin obligations. Alexandra's case is a reminder of how the same kinds of relationships that motivate—or necessitate—women's self-reliance also ultimately place limits on it: She had found innovative ways to enrich her own life by virtue of the fact that she was in a city and a country where she did not

^{viii} See Chapter 4.

want to be; yet these were compromises, and Alexandra did not believe that she was strengthened by her move to St. Petersburg.

Women are also limited from fully pursuing their goals by virtue of others' discrimination against them as (potential) mothers. Victoria hid her pregnancy at work for as long as possible so that she would at least receive her promotion. She did this successfully by continuing to wear baggy clothing through her third month of pregnancy, until after she was awarded a promotion. It is unclear whether or not her pregnancy would have directly hurt her prospects in the workplace because after having it, Victoria decided to remain at home with her child; she believed that it would be too much to handle being a mother and working full time. Women's own and their families' expectations of them as mothers, as well as their anticipation of workforce discrimination very often limit the extent to which the continued pursuit of their careers looks feasible.

Sometimes, women maintain a certain image of themselves as independent, by conceptualizing what they once perceived to be obligations as part of their own self-fulfillment. This kind of discursive shift is very important. Tamara, for example, attended the psychological training "I am a woman" and reframed her sense of obligation towards her sister Alla, into her own self-articulated purpose of helping her sister financially following the birth of her child. Their relationship on Tamara's end shifted from one of debt and inequality—a relationship defined by who had done what for whom in the past—to one focused on her own ability to help her sister in the future. I also observed how Tamara subsumed other kinds of goals within that broader rubric of self-fulfillment—goals such as traveling to England. Although she was not able to go on this trip, she nevertheless found other things to do in Russia in order to feel good about

herself and her life. When her debt to family was the focus, Tamara felt ready to “fall apart” (*opustit'sia*)—tired, overwhelmed with all she owed others, and unsure of what to do with her days. Taken in conjunction with Alexandra’s story, Tamara’s shows that there can be a big difference between caretaking as a result of debt—imposed by oneself or others, and that for which women designate the meaning and content. Women’s kin relations motivate and limit their self-determination, although changing how they understand these relationships can make substantive differences in their own and their families’ lives.

Small crises of confidence

Throughout this dissertation, I have taken a largely optimistic outlook on these Russian entrepreneurial women and their strategies of self-reliance. This came from my attempt to portray women as they portrayed themselves to me, to larger publics, and to one another, at least in my presence. My fieldwork itself was punctuated by tense moments when I questioned—directly or to myself—women’s stories and specifically, who or what else besides themselves had played a role in these stories. Certain encounters suggested that what mattered most to women in their personal narratives was less whether or not their goals were realistic or the pasts that they narrated were “true,” than whether or not other people believed these stories. I have edited out many of these moments because it seemed as though it could be painful to women to have their stories questioned or even for me to probe for more details about the social actors involved. To write that I was often skeptical would be to undermine ways of representing themselves that could prove vital to some women.

Towards the end of my 2008 fieldwork, I attended a lecture that Elena gave to high school students at the youth program that she directed in the evenings.^{ix} Elena planned to show clips of the film version of *The Secret* and discuss them with students in English. A set of exchanges among her, one of the students, and myself illustrates the tensions that arose when other people—or social circumstances—challenged their self-reliant philosophies.

Elena had just told the students about her own “vision board” in her room—a technique that she got from the film.^x She referenced the vision board, positive expectations, and how “the universe” (*vseleniye*) responded to grant the goals a person articulated—all in order to explain how her upcoming trip to study in the United States had become possible. (Elena did not talk about the years she had spent studying English on her own, the long hours that she worked, and the many influential connections that she had cultivated with American expatriates in St. Petersburg and Moscow—all factors that I believe contributed to her receipt of the scholarship) She told the students about her plans to one day marry her boyfriend, with whom she would break up in a month. The students who had come that night, all eight of them girls, listened with serious, intent expressions on their faces. Elena stopped now and asked for their reactions to the film and a 14 year-old girl raised her hand:

In perfect English, she asked, “If the message of *The Secret* really works, then why is life here so hard?” Elena looked at me as though I might provide a cue for how to answer. I just stared back at her and she turned to the girl again.

^{ix} A major component of the program that Elena ran was to teach English to Russian youth.

^x See Chapter 3

“Because people in this country complain. All they do is complain about their lives, and then they wonder why things fall apart. They do nothing to make things better. When you do that, bad things happen to you.” The girl nodded slightly, looked at Elena, and said nothing. She looked as taken aback by the change in tone as felt.

I knew Elena believed literally that expectations brought about results, as long as a person demonstrated to the universe that they were putting effort into getting what they wanted. However, I was curious as to whether or not she thought this would be true for everyone. I raised my hand.

“Are there any limits to what a person can do?” I asked. “Are there any other realities that keep us from getting what we want? Can anyone start their own business and buy a home in the suburbs?” I asked, referencing something that she had said.

“We make our own reality,” Elena replied. Her voice was firm and tense. She held my gaze for a moment and then turned on the film again and let everyone watch it until its finish. Elena and I did not speak to one another later that evening as we left the building and walked towards the street corner where we usually parted our separate ways. Instead of smiling and giving me the bear hug she usually did, she looked at me and said, “People ask hard questions, don’t they?” I nodded in agreement and scrutinized her deadpan expression. Then she touched my arm, thanked me for coming that evening, turned around, and walked away. I called goodbye after her.

It would be another week before Elena called me again, and this time it was to tell me about a “training” that she had just attended with Vera and another trainer from Moscow. The retreat had taken place in the woods and it was called “A return to yourself” (*vozvrashcheniye k sebye*). Elena’s tone was upbeat and cheerful again and she

talked for a solid hour about the meditation exercises she had done with a group of men and women who also attended, and how peaceful (*spokoinoi*) and strong (*sil'noi*) she felt now. Elena told me that her boss had gotten angry because she was late for work that day. Elena had also chosen that day to tell her boss that she would be leaving for the United States in two months, and the latter had been angry that Elena had not told her sooner. Elena was not bothered at all by what might otherwise have been an unpleasant confrontation. “I feel completely calm,” she told me. “Protected (*zashchishchena*). Anyone could say anything to me, and I would not be bothered.” Her voice was giddy. I did not ask Elena who or what she felt defended by. As she talked, I remembered our tense exchange the week before. It occurred to me that it was just as important for Elena to tell someone (me? Her American friend?) about her experience at the retreat and to be believed, as it was for her to attend it in the first place. As would happen several months later with her boyfriend, the ruptures in her sense seemed to come when the people she assumed shared her self-image cast doubt or disbelief.

Tomas Matza argues that everyday social relations, including domestic conflicts as well as passing instances of rudeness (*khamstvo*) – such as a young person refusing to give up a bus seat to an elderly person – make confidence-building and self-help problematic for Russians. I have argued here that it is more insidious, interpersonal tensions which hinder women’s self-improvement projects, rather than the directly confrontational interactions which Matza illustrates for us. Women often prided themselves, in fact, specifically in their ability to persist with their routines through what they perceived to be rude, “uncultured,” or “unpleasant” behaviors or events. What most

disturbed and disrupted these women's projects, instead, was others' expressions of doubts as they told their stories of self-reliance, stoicism, and achievement.

All of the women I worked with, with the singular exception of Inna, recounted these moments of tension and difficulty as their interlocutors expressed doubts about their self-fashionings. Most of them did not believe in mystical means of changing their lives, as Elena did, but their narratives were nevertheless highly agentic. In these moments of tension, in fact, these women are redoubling their efforts to self-fashion – against opposition and obstacle in the first place, and then again in the retelling. These narrative strategies of self-reliance are really about the social possibilities they create in the present, lived moment. When women told stories about overcoming challenges or reaching an ambitious goal, their stories became another source of pride, of further confidence. They not only are capable, but are able to portray themselves as such to others. Not least of all, there is significant pleasure in being listened to, and in sharing laughter and amazement of these stories. It was women's social experiences in the present – and even in the present retelling – that held the key to imagining their futures and believing that anything was possible in their lives.

LIST OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Tamara

22, St. Petersburg (2000-)/born in Samara, loves athletics, degree in Engineering, formerly a mid-level manager and Engineer for transnational company, left her job in 2007, director of advertising for a local newspaper (2009-), working class background

Alexandra

25, St. Petersburg (2000-)/born in Moscow, single, head engineer at St. Petersburg branch of transnational technology firm, degree in Engineering, getting Ph.D. in history, loves aikido and riding her motorcycle, bought her own apartment in 2005, responsible for her great aunt and uncle, privileged background, daughter of wealthy businesspeople, dreams of retiring in the United States, spent a year as an exchange student with a Louisiana family at age 17

Elena

25, St. Petersburg/United States (June 2008-), single, lived with mother, accepted to two-year MA program in business and communications in the United States (2008), Project Manager at small firm (2005-2008), degree in Psychology, fluent English, struggled financially due to mother's medical expenses, full of energy, plays the guitar

Olga

25, Moscow, degree in Economics, loves classical music, met her boyfriend at a concert during a trip to St. Petersburg, public relations manager at a mid-sized firm in Moscow, simultaneously beginning to sell cosmetics with her mother, poor background

Marina

26, St. Petersburg (2000-)/born in Murmansk, shares four-room apartment with cousins, middle-class background, highly proficient in English, degree from a theater institute, has a serious boyfriend, co-manages a small international dating agency, started out translating letters between Russian women and Western men, loved this part of her work, enjoys the theater and local rock concerts

Victoria

27, St. Petersburg, married and expecting a child, degree in Sociology, graduate degree in sociology (2007), works in middle/upper-level management at a large corporation (2007-), middle-class background, proficient in English, well traveled, curious and adventurous

Inna

28, St. Petersburg (2005-)/born in Stavropol, divorced, shares a one-room apartment with a friend from hometown, fan of jazz and local bands, self-taught photographer, director of advertising for a local magazine, degree in psychology, loves St. Petersburg, considers the city her “little motherland”

Lilia

29, St. Petersburg (1998-)/born in Murmansk, Director of Public Relations for a national beer company, single, education in Technology, graduate education in Management,

privileged background, boyfriend of one year in Moscow, travels their often to visit him, loves her own apartment and reading work by the Russian philosopher Lermontov

Alla

29, St. Petersburg (1995-)/born in Samara, former project manager at a large national printing press, married with young daughter, left her job in 2008 to raise her newborn daughter, working-class background, degree in Economics, loves to travel, very close with her mother and her younger sister Tamara

Yulia

30, St Petersburg (1996)/born in Murmansk, married, mother of infant daughter, Managing Director of small firm with Oksana (2000-), degree in Economics and Finance, *nomenklatura* background (father retired secret police, mother bureaucrat in Murmansk transportation system, privileged, well-connected, married to a wealthy corporate executive who lost his job in 2008, lives across the street from parents, her sister and sister's family, considered the rebellious one in her family

Milena

31, St. Petersburg, married, working-class background, degree in Engineering, managing engineer at St. Petersburg branch of transnational technology firm, enjoys yoga, loves to cook with her husband, husband designs video games for a company in Moscow

Alisa

33, St. Petersburg (1991-)/born in Vladivostok, married with two young daughters, middle-class background, loves being a Mom, university and graduate degrees in Economics, designed and marketed online textbooks from within a university research lab (2005-2008), currently beginning the same operation from her home, with a friend in

a similar situation, loves to travel to the United States, takes courses there in economics and programming

Oksana

33, St. Petersburg, in third marriage, mother of three children (infant-7 years old), founder and Financial Director of small language and “psychological training” firm (1998-), degree in Philology, fluent English, intelligentsia background (both parents physics professors), married to a wealthy corporate executive, went to a special high school for aspiring actors, loves the theater

Maria

33, Sales Director for international cosmetics company, attributes sales skills to experiences selling Bibles with transnational Evangelical organization, very witty, working-class background, divorced, mother of one pre-teen daughter, remarried in 2008, loves to follow Russian politics, supports and employs her older sister and parents, in addition to daughter, husband drives a van, has good friends among other women (directors and sales associates) at work, degree in Engineering

Margarita

34, St. Petersburg, Sales Director for international cosmetics company, travels frequently to Moscow to visit boyfriend there, divorced, mother of one pre-teen son, loves to go to work conferences in Moscow, wants to get married again

Alyona

35, St. Petersburg, divorced, mother of two sons (ages 8 and 12), owner of a small tourism firm; middle-class background, enjoys traveling around Russia, degree in Economics

Anastasia

35, St. Petersburg (1992)/born in Murmansk, married, mother of teenage daughter, actively seeking to start her own small tourism firm, takes day courses in finance, management, and public speaking, loves to read, former upper-level manager, degree in Public Transportation, former public relations director at a mid-sized business, married to a wealthy corporate executive, *nomenklatura* background, privileged, likes to read non-fiction

Larisa

36, St. Petersburg, married, mother of two sons (ages 6 and 11), owner of a small nanny firm and summer camp, middle-class background, degree in Pedagogy, loves to travel globally, married to a very wealthy corporate executive, loves children, witty and gregarious

Tatiana

38, St. Petersburg (1991), born in Vladivostok, Alisa's sister, has a baby daughter (Dec 2009-), degree in Engineering, graduate degree in law, former manager at a large corporation (1998-2006), owns two stores selling Italian clothing (2008-), loves to read classical French, British, and Russian literature, told me she considered buying her apartment at age 30 the most important moment of her life (2008), lives in a spacious four-room apartment

Erika

39, St. Petersburg, degree in Engineering, Financial Director for St. Petersburg branch of transnational technology firm, single, enjoys reading Tolkien in translation, currently learning English

Vera

42, St. Petersburg (2005-2008)/Moscow (2008-)/born in Belgorod, divorced, lives with and cares for mother, executive at large transnational motivational corporation, former small-business owner, degree in Philology, working-class background, former *komsomol* secretary, very well-connected, wants Russia to cease its military engagements in the Caucasus, warm and charismatic

Natalya

44, St. Petersburg, degree in Psychology, highly proficient in English, single mother of two daughters (ages 7 and 19), lives in spacious four-room apartment in downtown St. Petersburg, loves to cook foreign cuisines, interested in East Asian healing arts (i.e. *reiki*), owns a small honey store in downtown St. Petersburg

Dina

45, St. Petersburg, divorced, mother of four children (ages 14-23), lives with and cares for mother, three younger children, and one daughter's boyfriend, started motivational personnel training firm (2009-), former construction store manager, degree in Psychology, former professional runner (socialism and post-socialism) and part-time athletic coach, well-traveled, significant cultural capital due to these last two factors, working-class background, struggled financially in 2007-2008 but later became financially self-sufficient, talkative and eloquent

Anna

45, St. Petersburg, co-manager of a mid-sized technology firm (former state enterprise), provides computer programming services for a branch of local government, degree in Mathematics, intelligentsia background, traveled the world with professor parents, tight-

knit extended family in St. Petersburg, employs husband, lives with husband and grown son, very articulate

Yana

45, St. Petersburg, co-manager with Anna of a mid-sized technology firm, degree in Mathematics, working class background, started out as a programmer for factory equipment in the 1970s, programmer and manager for a new branch of Dutch Telecom in St. Petersburg (1990s), single mother of one grown daughter, lives with and financially supports elderly mother, daughter, son-in-law, and granddaughter, loves to read classical Russian literature and discuss it with her colleagues

Nadezhda

53, St. Petersburg, married, mother of two grown sons, owner of a private school and small printing press, intelligentsia background, degree in Education, enjoys world travel, well-connected, former *komsomol* secretary, recently learned how to drive

Evgenia

53, St. Petersburg, degree in Physics, former physics professor during the 1980s, founded and manages a group of environmental consultants in St. Petersburg, financially responsible for mother, adult son, daughter-in-law, and grandson, privileged *intelligentsia* background, substantial pre-Revolutionary wealth, great storyteller

Ekaterina

57, St. Petersburg, married, mother of one grown son, owner of a small construction equipment firm, middle-class background, degree in Engineering, well-connected, former *komsomol* secretary, organizes among local St. Petersburg entrepreneurial women

Additional interlocutors in the dissertation (whose info I do not provide in the text):

Irina

29, St. Petersburg (2000-)/born in Moscow, Ekaterina's acquaintance and colleague, single mother of young daughter, degree in Economics, graduate degree in Programming, owns a small graphic design business providing business cards and web design (2006-), loves to travel

Lyudmila

29, St. Petersburg, Evgenia's daughter-in-law, middle class background, graduate student in environmental science, degree in Sociology, married with young daughter, lives with husband, mother-in-law, and daughter, looking forward to being done with her dissertation

Roman

29, St. Petersburg, Evgenia's son, intelligentsia background, well-traveled, graduate student in sociology, degree in Sociology, married with young daughter, lives with wife, daughter, and mother, loves to spend time in the countryside

Ivan

37, St. Petersburg, Alisa's husband, middle-class background, self-taught photographer, well-connected, degree in Engineering, programmer for a local St. Petersburg firm, loves spending time in the countryside at his parents' *dacha*

Alexei

44, Moscow (2005), degree in Engineering, soldier for 17 years stationed in Georgia, single, significant social capital through sister, who is a motivational trainer for a

transnational company, loves watching soccer, patriotic, is proud of having been in the army, soft-spoken and with a dry sense of humor

Tatiana

44, St. Petersburg, Svetlana's mother, degree in Medicine, cardiologist (-1998), divorced, loves to be with her daughter

Vadim

60s, St. Petersburg, Nadezhda's husband, director of small printing press, working-class background, Institute degree in light industry, married with two grown sons, good storyteller

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