

# “A Woman Is Not a Man”: The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia, 1921–1928

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The Russian revolution was intended to remove all limits to women's equality. Collective organizations were to take over the kinds of tasks—childcare, cooking, and cleaning—that had traditionally restricted women and limited their full participation in economic life, while legislative actions mandated equal economic, marital, and civil rights. Accompanying these changes was a “sexual revolution” (preached most famously by Aleksandra Kollontai) that encouraged equality in love and sex as well as in economics and politics. The official policies of the Young Communist League (Komsomol) reflected these attitudes as much as those of the party. “The Komsomol member was expected to help liberate women from the supposedly ‘oppressed and enslaved’ conditions they had suffered under the capitalist system” and to “devote special effort” to drawing young women “into League and Party activities.”<sup>1</sup>

Many young women did join the Komsomol in the 1920s hoping that in the young communist organization they might find the equality and opportunity promised by the revolution. In a 1928 survey of 1,000 school youth, the authors noted that the young women were even more eager than the young men to join the youth league: “They sought authentic equality and a society that refrained from the scornful relationships and hooliganish escapades [typical] of the male part of the school.”<sup>2</sup> As representatives of the younger generation and as members of a revolutionary organization, Komsomol women should have had unprecedented opportunities for political and social participation, and young men and women might have been expected to be on the forefront of the effort to forge new standards of gender equality. In the same year as this optimistic survey, however, the journal *Kommunistka* reported that despite a history of Komsomol resolutions aimed at increasing the numbers of women in the youth league and improving

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1. Ralph Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth: A Study of the Congresses of the Komsomol, 1918–1954* (New York, 1959), 67. Founded in 1918, the Komsomol admitted youth between the ages of fourteen and twenty-three.

2. I. IV. “Bez lunny,” *Izvestiia TsIK* 58 (3292) (8 March 1928): 6.

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their conditions, in fact “the status of work among women has not only not improved but in the majority of cases has become worse.”<sup>3</sup> That this was the case will not be a surprise to historians of women in revolutionary Russia. Very good works on women in early Soviet Russia have explained the many material reasons why overburdened and economically vulnerable women did not participate wholeheartedly in the political life of revolutionary Russia.<sup>4</sup> In the first part of this article I will briefly discuss the ways in which young women’s household responsibilities, parental opposition, and the decrease of collectivist enterprises such as cafeterias and creches after 1921 all contributed to young women operating on the periphery of the Komsomol. My principal focus is on a different aspect of this marginalization, however: the relationship between the culture of the Komsomol and women’s participation in the political life of their generation. What happened when women did try to take part in politics, to join the Komsomol, to participate in the creation of a new state and society? In what ways did the masculinized culture of the Komsomol marginalize and exclude them?

First, it must be acknowledged that many changes in relations between men and women did occur following the Russian revolution. Some resulted from legislative actions such as the 1918 Bolshevik Code on Marriage, the Family, and Guardianship. Young men and women also had opportunities to mix in different ways in communist clubs and sports groups and could meet in popular dance halls and movie theaters, which continued to flourish even after 1917.<sup>5</sup> These opportunities may have been greater for young people than for old. In 1926, young women made up close to 20 percent of the Komsomol.<sup>6</sup> Although this meant that the Komsomol included only 2 percent of available young women as compared to 9 percent of available young men, it compared favorably with the party, where by 1927 women comprised

3. S. Kirillov, “Devushka v komsomole,” *Kommunistka*, 1928, no. 9:27.

4. See especially Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (Cambridge, Eng., 1993); Elizabeth Ann Wood, “Gender and Politics in Soviet Russia: Working Women under the New Economic Policy, 1918–1928” (Ph. D. diss., University of Michigan, 1991); and Barbara Evans Clements, “The Effects of the Civil War on Women and Family Relations,” in Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg, and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds., *Party, State, and Society in the Russian Civil War: Explorations in Social History* (Bloomington, 1989).

5. For more on the new ways that young men and women met, see Anne E. Gorsuch, “Flappers and Foxtrotters: Soviet Youth in the ‘Roaring Twenties,’” *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies* 1102 (March 1994): 1–33.

6. B. A. Balashov and Nelepin, *VLKSM za 10 let v tsifrah* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1928), 10; Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, 135; Tsentri Khraneniia Dokumentov Molo-dezhnykh Organizatsii (TsKhDMO, formerly the Central Komsomol Archive), “O rabote sredi devushek,” f. 1, op. 23. d. 864a, l. 2. The largest number of Komsomol women were found in the central industrial regions (22 percent in late 1925) and the smallest in the Muslim-dominated Central Asian republics (8.1 percent in 1925). TsKhDMO, “Report on the Condition of Women in the Komsomol,” 1925, f. 1, op. 23., d. 391, l. 39.

only about 12 percent of the total membership.<sup>7</sup> In these and other ways, gender differences between men and women were being leveled as women were now considered in theory to be the same as men, and women and men worked and played together in new ways and new places. This supposed sexual equality was limited, however, and reactions were mixed. As we will see, much of the language and practice of the Komsomol emphasized instead the differences between young men and women. Much of this differentiation was based on fundamental associations: women with the private sphere of home and family and men with the public sphere of politics. The gendering of private and public was not particular to this period, nor of course was it confined to Russia, but the meaning of this construction needs to be explained in a revolutionary environment otherwise committed to sexual equality. As a result of these fundamental associations, young men and the masculine were defined as revolutionary in contrast to the supposed backwardness of the feminine, and young women were defined as overly adult in contrast to the idealized male adolescent. Because of their backwardness, girls were excluded in language and behavior from clubs and factory cells and from positions of responsibility within the youth league. In addition to showing how the category of young women was constructed by men I also explore young women's own varied constructions of self in response to this Komsomol culture. In all, I will argue that it was this culture of gender difference with its assumptions about men and women (and about the nature of the Komsomol) which was one of the most significant factors inhibiting young women's active participation in the youth league. More broadly, my material suggests the difficulties of restructuring gender relations even in the most conscious of revolutionary environments. When considered together with recent work describing similar kinds of gendered hostilities between adult workers, we gain a new appreciation for the power of entrenched cultural forms to resist transformation in multiple areas of urban life and work after the revolution.<sup>8</sup>

Sources on gender relations in the youth league include Komsomol Central Committee reports on the status of women and articles in Komsomol and student newspapers on relations between young men and women. Soviet sociologists wrote about the daily life of youth using questionnaires, interviews, and participant observation, and educators prepared instruction books and pamphlets for young people on questions of sexuality.<sup>9</sup> Valuable as it is, most of this material captures

7. Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, 112. Also see TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 391, l. 40, and T. H. Rigby, *Communist Party Membership in the USSR, 1917–1967* (Princeton, 1968), 361.

8. See Diane P. Koenker, "Men against Women on the Shop Floor in Early Soviet Russia: Gender and Class in the Socialist Workplace," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 5 (December 1995): 1438–64.

9. Like the early American sociologists and criminologists of deviancy in Chicago, Soviet scholars in the 1910s and especially the 1920s began to make a "scientific" study of youth cultures. A large number of scientific institutes (most based in Moscow and Leningrad and most under the direction of Narkompros or of the Commissariat of

young women as they were represented “on the page.” It is more difficult to find them as they were manifested “on the streets” and in the clubs, and my discussion of what Komsomol women did, and how they saw their lives and opportunities, is therefore more limited than I would have liked.<sup>10</sup> That said, there are some good sources on the culture of young women including interviews and observations; the best information was gathered by older Komsomol and party women about their younger colleagues. Unfortunately, the Soviet sociologists and ethnographers whose research is such a good source for other areas of daily life among young people were interested primarily in young men whom they felt were principally responsible for the most serious problems of adolescence, including hooliganism and juvenile delinquency. Compounding the problem is that girls’ culture was more likely to occur in the invisible arenas of home and family, whereas boys were more likely to be visible on the streets and in youth clubs. One has to be especially sensitive, therefore, to the marginalization of young women implicit in the sources and to the gendered qualities of the discourse on young people in the effort to recover young women’s own voices.<sup>11</sup>

We also have to be aware that there were sometimes larger, if unspoken, meanings to some of these materials, especially those that detailed transgressions against women. Public campaigns against the mistreatment of women increased in 1927 and 1928, probably reflecting, as Eric Naiman has explained with reference to a related campaign against hooliganism, larger concerns about corruption and failed efforts to transform daily life toward the end of the New Economic Policy (NEP). As “the Party began to increase its control over potentially ‘apolitical’ areas of social activity [in the final years of NEP] ‘personal life’ was no longer accepted as an autonomous region, and the Komsomol organs launched a concerted effort to penetrate privacy and organize leisure.”<sup>12</sup> Gender relations were clearly a part of this cam-

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Internal Affairs [NKVD]), examined family life, schools, libraries, street culture, and leisure activities. A valuable account of sociological studies of youth as primary sources can be found in E. A. Semenova, “Materialy sotsiologicheskikh obsledovaniï detei i podrostkov kak istoricheskii istochnik po izucheniu sovetского obraza zhizni (20-gody),” *Istoriia SSSR* (September–October 1986): 112–22.

10. The reference to “on the page” and “on the streets” comes from Joan Neuberger in *Hooliganism: Crime, Culture, and Power in St. Petersburg, 1900–1914* (Berkeley, 1993), 5.

11. Histories of youth culture have typically had little to say about questions of gender, the work of Angela McRobbie on British girls’ culture and Hilary Pilkington on contemporary Soviet girls’ culture being notable exceptions. The imbalance was first pointed out in a chapter by Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber entitled “Girls and Subcultures,” in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (London, 1976). Also see Hilary Pilkington, “Going out in ‘style’: Girls in Youth Cultural Activity,” in Mary Buckley, ed., *Perestroika and Soviet Women* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992), and Pilkington, *Russia’s Youth and Its Culture: A Nation’s Constructors and Constructed* (London, 1994).

12. Eric Naiman, “The Case of Chubarov Alley: Collective Rape, Utopian Desire, and the Mentality of NEP,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 17 (Spring 1990): 7.

paign. This is not to say, however, that the troubling descriptions of young women's lives that pour forth in this period are only constructs. In her work on women and the family, Elizabeth Waters argues that preoccupation with daily life in the mid to late 1920s had a freeing effect on the women's press as "inner tensions [in the proletarian family] were admitted, their causes and effects explored." "More critical about the failures of government policy" and more willing to identify men as "the agents of oppression," the women's press now "highlighted cases of wife-battering, rape, sexual harassment—topics they had almost completely ignored in the first half of the decade."<sup>13</sup>

### Economic Deprivation and Parental Opposition

Despite changes in law and rhetoric after the revolution, conditions of economic deprivation reinforced traditional gender roles. Adolescent girls found their freedoms circumscribed as a result of their parents' poverty and household needs whereas boys were much more likely to avoid the same kind of family responsibilities. In a survey of boys and girls from various social backgrounds living in and around Moscow, the girls did one-half again as much housework as the boys. Although working-class girls were more likely to be literate than their mothers, it was not uncommon for them to be taken out of school to work at home when a new baby was born. Young women often served as surrogate mothers to other children in the family, especially when both parents worked. Boys consequently had more free time; out of every one hundred days, the boys had 230 free hours and the girls just 169.<sup>14</sup> In one family the fifteen-year-old son had the free time to go to the movies, read books, and participate in a youth club, while the thirteen-year-old daughter carried "on her shoulders all the simpler household tasks: looking after a child, feeding her, washing, sewing, and cooking."<sup>15</sup>

Young women's responsibilities at home made it more difficult for them to join political and cultural organizations such as the Komsomol. Young factory women complained that while boys were allowed to do as they pleased, girls were only reluctantly permitted to attend club meetings: "Boys enter the Komsomol much more freely. Their families do not force them to work. They couldn't care less whether they go out biking or to a meeting. Therefore all [the parents'] anger falls exclusively on the girl."<sup>16</sup> According to one female activist, in order to

13. Elizabeth Waters, "From the Old Family to the New: Work, Marriage and Motherhood in Urban Soviet Russia, 1917–31" (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 1985), 59–60.

14. Barskaia, Teleshevskaia, Truneva, Ianovich, and Iakunichkin, "Deiatel'nost rebenka po obsluzhivaniuu sem'i," in A. Gel'mont and A. Durikin, eds., *Trud i dosug rebenka* (Moscow, 1927), 26, 37.

15. E. O. Kabo, *Ocherki rabochego byta: Opyt monograficheskogo issledovaniia domashnego rabochego byta* (Moscow, 1928), 50.

16. Speech by Comrade Petrova, "Iz stenogrammy soveshchaniia devushek-

get along with her family and still go to Komsomol meetings, a girl had to show her family that she was not going to “sabotage it.” This meant going to bureau meetings and club gatherings just three days a week as compared to the most dedicated activists who went daily.<sup>17</sup> Another activist said that she and her mother got along well because although she [the *komsomolka*] had work to do in the Komsomol, when she was free she could do all that was necessary at home: “On Sunday I am free and can always do the wash.” Parents were not always pacified by these efforts to find a compromise, however.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, one young woman suggested that girls who were truly committed to the Komsomol might be better off leaving home to join a commune or to live in a dormitory. This could also be difficult, however, for in order to live in a commune the members generally had to turn over at least half of their earnings to the collective, leaving them little for other needs. If they were living at home, many young women were expected to give most, if not all, of their money to their mothers, which rarely left them with money to buy a newspaper or book, let alone pay Komsomol dues or join a commune.<sup>19</sup>

Economics was not the only factor keeping young women away from the Komsomol. Parents forbade their daughters to join the Komsomol not only because of their household responsibilities but because they did not see any reason why a girl should learn politics or participate in social work when her principal task was to learn how to care for the household and to raise children. Some young women would attend Komsomol meetings but not join the Komsomol for fear of their parents’ reaction: “I have attended Komsomol meetings for four years, but I’m not a member. My parents won’t allow it. I just barely mentioned my decision to enroll in the drama club, and they looked at me as a hopeless good-for-nothing. And the Komsomol—I’m afraid to even discuss it. When I cry or curse, the old folks threaten to throw me out of the house. But where would I go? That’s why I haven’t joined the Komsomol.”<sup>20</sup>

To many parents, the Komsomol seemed like an immoral organization, for it removed young girls from adult control, and then required them to attend meetings that were often held at night. For many rural parents, the Komsomol was associated with corruption and hooliganism because of its urban heritage (and its supposed connections therefore with sexual depravity and big city decadence) and because of its strong antireligious tenets. Urban and rural parents alike worried

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rabotnits moskovskikh fabrik,” in V. Dmitriev and B. Galin, *Na putiakh k novomu bytu* (Moscow, 1927), 27.

17. Provincial activists spent an average of 2 hours and 55 minutes a day in meetings. *Trud, otdykh, son komsomol'tsa-aktivista: Po materialam vyborochnogo obsledovaniia biudzhetrov vremeni aktivnykh rabotnikov RLKSM* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1926), 6:27–28, 32, 36.

18. See the speech by Comrade Beliaeva in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 36.

19. *Ibid.*, 27–28.

20. Vera Ketlinskaia, *Devushka i Komsomol* (Leningrad, 1927), 49.

that young women who joined the Komsomol were “looser” than their noncommunist counterparts. Mothers dropped in at Komsomol meetings to make sure that their daughters were really in attendance and not out at a party. In one case, a young woman’s factory organization had to go visit the girl’s mother at home to convince her that her daughter was working in the factory club, not out wandering the streets. Dislike of the Komsomol was so great that some mothers who heard that their daughters had joined the Komsomol simply disowned them.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, boys had wider opportunities than girls: “Boys are experienced: they enter the army, do seasonal work, meet intelligent people, attend lectures. . . . They have the knowledge that they gained in school. . . . Girls have none of this.”<sup>22</sup> For these reasons, not only were boys more likely to be allowed to join the Komsomol, but they were more likely to want to. With fewer opportunities, young peasant women were more likely to maintain contact with village traditions and young urban women were more likely to stay within the circumscribed world of family.<sup>23</sup> Young women were also more likely to see themselves as intellectually or politically unprepared to join the youth league: “Why would they take me? I don’t know anything.” “I don’t understand anything in the newspapers; the Komsomol wouldn’t let me join.”<sup>24</sup> Or to insist that it was men’s work anyway: “Oh, that’s for the boys; it’s not any of our business.”<sup>25</sup> One group of peasant girls explained: “We don’t refuse work, we always help by cleaning the floors and sewing decorations and cleaning the club so that generally we do everything that is within our ability.”<sup>26</sup> Even in some largely female factories there was a “tradition” which said that for “public, responsible work you need boys.”<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, participating in the Komsomol would do

21. G. Grigorov and S. Shkotov, *Staryi i novyi byt* (Moscow, 1927), 99; Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 27, 46; Petrova in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 26. According to one author, the solution to such concerns was to show parents that the Komsomol was good for girls, that “we don’t teach them just to sing the ‘Internationale,’ but also to sew, to knit, to cultivate two ears where before there was only one.” V. A. Murin, *Byt i nruvy derevenskoi molodezhi* (Moscow, 1926), 94. For more on rural parents and their opposition to their daughters’ participation, see Isabel A. Tirado, “The Komsomol and the Krest’ianka: The Political Mobilization of the Young Women in the Russian Village, 1921–1927,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 23, nos. 1–4 (1996): 1–22.

22. Murin, *Byt i nruvy derevenskoi molodezhi*, 35. Male rural youth were also more likely to travel to big cities like Moscow. The pedagogical archive has a whole series of letters describing young peasants’ vacation trips to Moscow, the plays and movies they saw, and the museums they visited. See Nauchnyi Arkhiv Akademii Pedagogicheskikh Nauk (NAAPNS), f. 1, op. 1, d. 243, ll. 1–3.

23. Peasant girls were particularly underrepresented in the Komsomol. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 391, l. 40. In 1925, peasants represented 46.3 percent of the Komsomol membership as a whole as compared to just 31.7 percent of Komsomol girls.

24. Ketlinskaia, *Devushka i Komsomol*, 48.

25. Murin, *Byt i nruvy derevenskoi molodezhi*, 94.

26. *Ibid.*, 86.

27. Speech by Comrade Shtern in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 40.

little to alter these young women's opinions of themselves as unprepared and unable; indeed, in many cases, it only contributed to it.

### **Young Women's Political and Cultural "Backwardness"**

As Wendy Goldman has explained in her history of women and the revolution: "Rather than reconsider the value society attached to the tasks women performed at home, [Soviet theorists] spurned domestic labor as the mind-numbing progenitor of political backwardness."<sup>28</sup> This was true in the Komsomol as well, where there was little space in either language or experience for women members who carried the new triple burden of family, work, and Komsomol. Little was done to address the realities of a young woman's private life, with her responsibilities to contribute to her parents' household or to care for her own young children. At Komsomol conferences, which were the most common form of work among girls, presenters typically discussed International Women's Day and the status of women workers but said nothing about the problems young women faced in their everyday lives. "There was only one conference for girls," complained one young woman, "which gave us nothing." It was all about politics.<sup>29</sup> Women argued that local Komsomol collectives also failed to pay adequate attention to family issues and were often unsympathetic to the particular demands of children and a household. "If you go to the Komsomol and complain that things are difficult for you," Comrade K. noted, "they'll only laugh." As young married Moscow worker Nadia Borisova explained: "I want to work and be a productive Komsomol member; I don't want to be left behind the Komsomol's work . . . but escaping from the oppression of the kitchen is beyond my strength. My husband works during the day, and in the evening he goes to classes or participates in either some kind of social work or party work. Alone I have to deal with the everyday cleaning, prepare dinner, run to the cooperatives, clean the swaddling clothes, feed the baby . . ." Borisova blamed the Komsomol most of all for her difficulties: "What does the Komsomol do? Absolutely nothing. We married Komsomol women with children are without hope, in the dark; I am thinking of the future when the baby will grow a bit older so that I can work again. But the Komsomol sleeps, leaving its members behind; if a girl gets married there is no place for her in the Komsomol."<sup>30</sup>

Most young women did not go so far as to suggest that the solution to these problems lay in getting their husbands, brothers, or fathers to help around the house, although some of those with helpful husbands

28. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 11.

29. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 391, ll. 41–42; TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, ll. 6, 7. Similarly, young women heard the same tired presentations on "Girls and the Komsomol" so often that they complained they could not tell one meeting from the next.

30. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, ll. 26–27.



did take pride in that fact. On the other hand, young women asserted that the solution did not lie in simply instituting sewing circles and home economics classes, as some male commentators had suggested.<sup>31</sup> One sympathetic female author noted that what young women wanted and needed was for the Komsomol to “discuss not only theoretical questions about the place of the family in socialist construction, but the personal, concrete problems of the home life of youth.”<sup>32</sup> The Komsomol had to stop imagining its constituency in statistical terms and start relating to them as “living” people. If they did so then, this activist argued, young women will “understand that the Komsomol will pay attention to and take account of their needs and family affairs” and “they will quickly enter the Komsomol.”<sup>33</sup>

Instead of taking this approach, however, the strong association between women and the private sphere of home and family contributed to the masculinization of the Komsomol. By virtue of their association with the private, women were thought to embody the dangers of a reactionary past and the Komsomol did not appear eager to help them manage the “private” aspect of their lives. “The political and cultural backwardness” of girls “as compared to young men” is the “principal cause of the slow development of girls’ activism,” concluded a Komsomol Central Committee report. It is the “past historical development” of women that inhibits them.<sup>34</sup> In part this attitude mirrored that of the party. As Elizabeth Waters explains: “For all that Bolshevik ideology proclaimed the equality of the sexes, in practice men were expected to monopolize the revolutionary virtues of militancy and political consciousness, and women to incline towards backwardness.”<sup>35</sup> Some of this in turn reflected a revolutionary belief in the primacy of economic and political transformation. Adolescent and adult males were also replicating traditional prerevolutionary patterns, albeit in new forms and with new “revolutionary” justifications.

When looking at the Komsomol it is not enough, however, to ascribe the marginalization of young women simply to larger or earlier forms of patriarchy. The legacy of Civil War and the uncertainty surrounding the transition to a new economic and cultural policy in 1921 were also important. Young men’s association with the public sphere

31. See for example Murin, *Byt i navy derevenskoi molodezhi*, 94. On men who did help share household tasks with their wives, see Vera Ketlinskaia and Vladimir Slepokov, *Zhizn' bez kontroliia: Polovaia zhizn' i sem'ia rabochei molodezhi* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1929), 77–78, 80.

32. Ketlinskaia and Slepokov, *Zhizn' bez kontroliia*, 93. Also see “Devushka v Komsomole,” *Kommunistka*, 29–30.

33. Ketlinskaia, *Devushka i Komsomol*, 55.

34. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 391, l. 59. Or as another Komsomol Central Committee report concluded: “The influence of the old ways of life, of *meshchanstva* is very strong among girls.” TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, l. 14.

35. Elizabeth Waters, “The Female Form in Soviet Political Iconography, 1917–32,” in Barbara Evans Clements, Barbara Alpern Engel, and Christine D. Worobec, eds., *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation* (Berkeley, 1991), 232.

of work and politics, and their image as active, engaged, important, and therefore revolutionary, had been particularly strong during the war and revolution when the party praised youths' "battlefield virtues" of "bravery, and self-sacrifice," as well as those of "strength, endurance, toughness, and dexterity."<sup>36</sup> The Civil War model of "youth as a warrior and a rebel" was "a male image, for there were almost no female representations of the vanguard in these early works."<sup>37</sup> Official rhetoric about the tasks of the Komsomol changed with the introduction of NEP, which emphasized a more gradual and less militaristic path to communism. The image and iconography of the ideal young communist also changed in this period. As compared to the eager and aggressive young hero of the Civil War whose task was to spearhead the revolution, the Komsomol youth of the 1920s was supposed to be disciplined, politically literate, and organizationally skilled. Some young people accepted the new gradualist role for the youth organization. But for others, maintaining the maleness of the Civil War model and disdain for the private world of home and family may have been a way to preserve the fighting spirit of the youth league, as well as a way to maintain their own identity in a period of great political and personal transition. This militancy differentiated *Komsomoltsy* from adult Bolsheviks, for despite the party's ambivalence about the place of women, the aggressive and oppositional aspects of this Komsomol culture were opposed by Bolsheviks who were trying to create a new kind of "cultured" communist who was disciplined, obedient, and "sensitive to the needs of others."<sup>38</sup>

So fundamental was the public-male versus private-female construct that even when young women were involved in activities outside the home these activities were somehow suspect, tainted as they were by women's association with the private. In the women's bureau of the party, the *Zhenotdel*, activists described apathetic and uninvolved women as "backwards," but in the youth league, even female activists were described as such. Thus male delegates to one Komsomol meeting complained that young women rarely participated in political meetings or joined club circles that required some technical skill, gravitating instead to sewing circles and drama and chorus groups that were

36. Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, 41–42.

37. Isabel A. Tirado, "Nietzschean Motifs in the Komsomol's Vanguardism," in Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, ed., *Nietzsche and Soviet Culture: Ally and Adversary* (Cambridge, Eng., 1994), 240. Some women did enter into new and more public roles during the war as they "joined the Red Army and rode into battle in men's overcoats." For most Bolshevik women, however, "[a] gender-based division of labor and power within the party influenced strongly the types of jobs available . . . and the progress of their careers, even during the most desperate and therefore liberating days of the Civil War." Clements, "Effects of the Civil War," 105, 117.

38. See Peter Konecny, "Creating the Responsible Husband: The Crisis of Masculinity among Soviet Students, 1924–36" (paper, American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, October 1995). For more on Civil War culture in the Komsomol, see Anne E. Gorsuch "'NEP Be Damned!' Young Militants in the 1920s and the Culture of Civil War," *Russian Review* (forthcoming, October 1997).

less important and in which “nothing serious” occurred. That sewing clubs with their exclusively female constituency must have offered a rare forum for like-minded women to meet and share their problems was not acknowledged. Even “women’s work”—among Pioneer youth or in health campaigns—was seen as a sign of women’s backwardness, linked as it was with family and private issues of home and health. Similarly, work organized specifically for women was derided as “baba work,” devalued in comparison with men’s efforts to organize the factory floor or increase production.<sup>39</sup> Women’s fundamental “otherness” made them less than the equals of men: less fortunate individuals who had to be educated into political awareness and “given” something “practical” to do.” Direction from above, from male Komsomoltsy, was all that prevented young women from backsliding into unawareness, and sometimes even that was not enough: “The girls are all interested in housework, sewing something or patching it; that’s what they ask for. We didn’t give them that and they left the club, fell into the surrounding environment and as a result did nothing.”<sup>40</sup>

Much discussion within the Komsomol suggested that young women were the perpetrators of inequality rather than its victims. Although some delegates to a meeting concerned with “advancing women to more active work” admitted that the Komsomol was “guilty” of not successfully interesting women in its work, others argued that the central problem was not the Komsomol but the young women’s own low “cultural level,” which made them interested in less practical and less important kinds of work. They suggested that young women only had themselves to blame for their lack of genuine participation in the Komsomol because they were not interested enough in political tasks, and because “in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases, the girls ‘elected’ to these organs don’t manage to do any practical work, really only visiting the meetings.” The delegates argued that the “promotion of girls to the leadership organs” would be “warranted only when they learn to work.”<sup>41</sup> This is in striking contrast to the perspective of female advocates who argued that the problem did not lie with the young women and their “backwardness,” but with the Komsomol organization’s failure to address women’s specific concerns.

### Women as Adult versus the Ideal Komsomoltsy as Adolescent

The Komsomol’s hostility to “women’s issues” suggests something particular about its attitude, not only toward women and the “private” sphere of home, but toward the entire range of adult issues associated with women by virtue of their ability to have children and because of their household responsibilities.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to the responsible, sober,

39. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 5, d. 13, l. 13; Ketlinskaia, *Devushka i Komsomol*, 21.

40. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 5, d. 13, l. 12.

41. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 391, l. 61.

42. For male Komsomoltsy, the adoption of the adolescent persona and its contrast with the adulthood (and backwardness) of women was principally associated with

and sometimes petit bourgeois family life associated with young women, the ideal young communist lived in a state of permanent adolescence that celebrated the exuberant, unencumbered, and communal life of the teenage male. The adolescent ideal again stemmed in part from the Civil War when youthful qualities of energy and initiative had been needed and glorified and young people had served as full-fledged participants in the forging of a new society as they stepped into adult roles in factories and fought in the Red Army. With the introduction of NEP and its focus on the more moderate and disciplined tasks of social construction, youth were returned to a state of advanced childhood rather than incipient adulthood. Equal participation was denied in favor of training and education as young people were told to focus on learning rather than on political struggle. Some young people turned a necessity into a virtue by transforming their marginalization as minors into a glorification of adolescent qualities. For these youth, maintaining a rebellious adolescent persona was one way to sidestep the party's increasingly paternalistic approach toward young people. Believing "that they [were] further to the left, and more revolutionary than the party" these young militants argued that it was now their responsibility, and the responsibility of their generation, to prevent the further ossification of the party and of communism.<sup>43</sup>

Complications of marriage and children forced young men to confront adult issues and the concrete problems of real life when they often preferred the single-minded, independent, and aggressive identity of the Komsomol adolescent. Male Komsomoltsy often resisted making changes (either personal or social) that would have facilitated either sharing family responsibilities or encouraging young women's full participation in the youth league. Most egregious were the young men who abandoned their wives or lovers when they got pregnant, sometimes skipping from one relationship to the next. In a survey of 500 young women, 27 percent said that their husbands left them "as

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women's reproductive and household roles. Though more "adult" in their private lives, in other ways women were seen as less adult than young men. In the factory, for example, young and older women alike had long been treated by older workers as minors, on a par with unskilled youth in terms of pay and presumptions of ability. It was easier for young men to graduate to the world of the adult worker by acquiring skills; women were more often forced to remain unskilled and thus less than "adult." This idea of women as "minors" is borrowed from Nicholas Stargardt's argument about factory life in late nineteenth-century Europe, which he says was an environment in which "only married, qualified men ever came of age"—an analysis that seems to me to be equally true for Russia. "Young men might under propitious circumstances acquire skills in a trade," Stargardt argues, "or develop a class outlook in social democratic study groups, and so be admitted to the ranks of men; women could find a half-way house in the social democratic women's movement, but never fully escape from being minors." Nicholas Stargardt, "Male Bonding and the Class Struggle in Imperial Germany," *Historical Journal* 38, no. 1 (1995): 190.

43. Report by Komsomol Secretary Chaplin, June 1925. TsKhDMO, f. 37, op. 4, d. 6, l. 34. On the new tasks of youth during NEP see, Vladimir Lenin, "The Tasks of the Youth League," *On Youth* (Moscow, n. d.).

soon as they found out they were pregnant.”<sup>44</sup> Among those who abandoned their families were not just activists, but members of the Komsomol leadership. One leader was said to have berated others for drinking and sexual misconduct while he got one woman pregnant and went out with two others. Sometimes young men did not just abandon their pregnant partners, but tried to force them to leave the Komsomol, perhaps because it was then easier for them to avoid their responsibilities. Pregnant girls were accused of having sexually trapped their former partners. A *raikom* secretary accused his pregnant former girlfriend of being a prostitute, despite the fact that she had been an active member of the youth league since 1920.<sup>45</sup>

The belief that the unencumbered male was better able to devote himself to the revolutionary cause originated in the prerevolutionary period, when “there was pressure not to marry, since revolutionaries argued from experience that family commitments impeded revolutionary action.”<sup>46</sup> But much of this “adolescent” behavior, especially multiple affairs, was justified as part of the “new communist morality” which, at its most extreme, refused to admit that love existed and saw sex as “physiology—nothing more.”<sup>47</sup> When confronted with who was going to raise the children of these unions, some young men answered: “We are communists, and in a communist society there are not families.”<sup>48</sup> Women, of course, were not as free to abandon the children they gave birth to. Young women were also held to different standards in their sexual relations: men could sleep with many partners, but young women who did so sometimes risked criticism. One fifteen-year-old worried that her new boyfriend would be angry when he found out she was not a virgin and begged him not to “judge her,” reassuring him that although she had loved before, “it was not the love of a woman.”<sup>49</sup> A more dramatic example of the consequences for women who replicated the sexual adventures of men can be found in a popular novel for youth called *The First Girl in the Komsomol*. In it, Sania, a

44. Ketlinskaia and Slepko, *Zhizn' bez kontroliia*, 101. The survey was conducted among young women with children.

45. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, ll. 23–24; TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 822, l. 84; “Devushka v Komsomole,” *Kommunistka*, 29. It was also not uncommon for a young man whose advances were spurned to exact retribution by getting the young woman expelled from the Komsomol.

46. Charters Wynn, *Workers, Strikes, and Pogroms: The Donbass-Dnepr Bend in Late Imperial Russia, 1870–1905* (Princeton, 1992), 85.

47. Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930* (Princeton, 1990), 360.

48. S. Smidovich, “Sem'ia i stroitel'stvo sotsializma,” in A. Slepko, ed., *Byt v molodezhi* (Moscow, 1926), 55. Some blamed the transition from Civil War to NEP for the sexual excesses of youth, arguing that young people demanded self-fulfillment after years of self-deprivation. S. Ia. Vol'fon, *Sotsiologiia braka iz sem'i* (Minsk, 1929), 418.

49. From a diary entry as cited in M. M. Rubinshtein, *Iunost': Po dnevnikiam i avtobiograficheskim zapisiam* (Moscow, 1928), 202. Also see Ketlinskaia and Slepko, *Zhizn' bez kontroliia*, 56.

heroine of the revolution “loses her sense of proportion” after the war ends and “surrenders” to “unrestrained sexuality” with “one, then two, then half the Komsomol.” “When a few youth, who through her have become diseased, are going to thrash her and dishonour her in public, she is shot dead by her best friend, who loved her most and possessed her least of all. Only thus could he save her and the Komsomol too from disgrace.”<sup>50</sup>

Those young men who did not leave their wives or lovers often replicated patriarchal family relations. Aleksandra Kollontai had predicted the death of the patriarchal family with the introduction of communism, and Lev Trotskii, too, imagined a shift “from the old family to the new” after 1917.<sup>51</sup> Instead, when young men did get married it was common for them, even the most active and educated, to insist that their politically active wives leave the Komsomol to take care of the house and the children. In this way the young men could continue devoting themselves wholeheartedly to the Komsomol collective and still replicate in some form the “single-mindedness and asceticism for which radical workers strove” before 1917.<sup>52</sup> As several young workers responded to a questionnaire on married life: “It’s good that my wife prepares everything. She isn’t a Komsomol member; she takes care of all the household work. I am the social activist.”<sup>53</sup> Despite official rhetoric welcoming women’s full participation in the creation of a new state and society, young Russian women were still generally assigned supportive rather than leading roles. Lena Kuippe’s case was typical. Lena joined her local factory Komsomol in 1925 where “in production, in social work, at meetings, in political studies—in everything, Lena was top rank.” She then met and married a young man named Slesarev. Her husband did not like it when she read newspapers and told her not to waste her time on them. She agreed. Then he told her to leave the Komsomol, which she also agreed to do. “One often sees cases,” concluded another Komsomol report, “of girls who were energetic, active, spirited before their marriages, [but who] afterwards become inert, passive and by stages withdraw from societal life.”<sup>54</sup> Male Komsomoltsy justified their actions by insisting that married women or those with children were less interested in political work and less able to do it well even when they did participate. “Ah, she got married,

50. The summary is from Klaus Mehnert, *Youth in Soviet Russia* (1933; reprint, Westport, 1981), 86–87.

51. See Aleksandra Kollontai, “The Family and the Communist State,” and Leon Trotsky, “From the Old Family to the New,” in William G. Rosenberg, ed., *Bolshevik Visions* (Ann Arbor, 1990). For views of the family more generally, see Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, and Waters, “From the Old Family to the New.”

52. Wynn, *Workers, Strikes, and Pogroms*, 85.

53. Ketlinskaia and Slepkov, *Zhizn' bez kontrolia*, 65.

54. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 391, l. 64; *Iunyi kommunist*, 1927, no. 2:60. Observers like Ketlinskaia and Slepkov were most outraged by reports of secretaries of Komsomol collectives who made their wives leave the organization and stay home. *Zhizn' bez kontrolia*, 64–68.

that means strike her from the list of activists.”<sup>55</sup> “In my eyes my wife has died politically,” explained another.<sup>56</sup>

### Culture of Exclusion

As Carol Pateman has argued in another context, “To explore the subjection of women is also to explore the fraternity of men.”<sup>57</sup> Through language and behavior, male Komsomoltsy created a masculine identity that was separate from the female sphere; indeed this separation was central to their own definition of self. In the prerevolutionary work floor environment, “locker room” talk had united workers “as men as well as workers.” “Workers’ common sexual identity—at least its presumption—was one of the bonds that united them,” and female relatives “were often spurned” because they “represented competing identities” of “family and kin.”<sup>58</sup> Language and joking were used to much the same purpose in the postrevolutionary Komsomol. Women were commonly called “baba” or “moll” rather than “comrade,” “even when [they had been] in the Komsomol for a long time”—terms that excluded and devalued them. Teasing and practical jokes made the women feel uncomfortable, particularly when they were so outnumbered—a typical cell might have thirty to forty young men and only six young women. One young woman who came to join the Komsomol was welcomed by the club secretary who offered her a seat but then pulled the chair out from under her. The group laughed at her embarrassment, and she ran out of the room.<sup>59</sup> Jokes like these expressed the group’s perception of young women as interlopers. They also reinforced the women’s own anxiety about joining a group that was so overwhelmingly male in culture and in composition. Sexual jokes were also common. “When I was pregnant,” Comrade K. complained, “and went to a meeting, all the boys played tricks on me. Of course after that I didn’t attend any more meetings.”<sup>60</sup> Pregnancy is of course the most female of events and as such could be seen as a threat to the masculine culture of the Komsomol. It also signaled that a woman had been sexually active, which may have made her a more likely target for sexual comments, jokes, and unpleasant remarks.

55. Ketlinskaia, *Devushka i Komsomol*, 75.

56. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, l. 26.

57. Carol Pateman, “The Fraternal Social Contract” as cited in Geoff Eley, “Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century,” in Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner, eds., *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* (Princeton, 1994), 313.

58. Mark D. Steinberg, *Moral Communities: The Culture of Class Relations in the Russian Printing Industry, 1867–1907* (Berkeley, 1992), 78–79.

59. A. Stratonistkii, *Voprosy byta v Komsomole* (Leningrad, 1926), 50, and TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 822, l. 83; I. Dubrovin, “Revoliutsionirovanie byta,” *Iunyi kommunist*, 1923, no.8:20–21; Ivan T. Bobryshev, *Melkoburzhuzhnye vliianiia sredi molodezhi* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1928), 78.

60. Ketlinskaia and Slepkov, *Zhizn' bez kontroliia*, 96; TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, l. 31.

Young women were often seen as sexual objects rather than as individuals with intellectual abilities and aspirations. This was one of the principal ways in which they were distinguished from young men. “Very many boys are of the strong opinion that girls are debauched,” complained a Bolshevik writer, leading them to see “girls,” any “girls,” as easy to “get.”<sup>61</sup> Enthusiastic young women like Liza Kozhevnik who, from the “first moment of full self-consciousness as the daughter of a worker” hoped to “build a bright future” by joining the Komsomol, were too often forced to decide that they had “made a mistake”: “Faced with girls, especially Komsomol girls, our Komsomoltsy don’t see comrades, but see only girls who can satisfy their desires.”<sup>62</sup> The factory worker Petrova similarly complained that even when a young man behaved appropriately at a Komsomol meeting or in the office, “outside the Komsomol he becomes a completely different person.”<sup>63</sup>

The Komsomol leadership acknowledged that “an uncomradely environment” contributed to low levels of participation and leadership among young women, and in 1926 and 1927, sexual harassment was discussed as one of a series of increasing problems in the youth league along with hooliganism and drunkenness, all of which were said to “repel girls” from the Komsomol.<sup>64</sup> In some of these analyses young women appeared as victims, but they were also blamed for the sexual “hooliganism” that occurred in Komsomol clubs; as one report complained: “All the girls want to turn some guy’s head and rope him in. Then the guys lose their heads and nothing serious can be done with them.”<sup>65</sup> Here men are the victims, trapped by the conniving female into relationships over which they apparently have little control. “Roped” into the feminine sphere of individual relationships, these men become no better than women, as “nothing serious can be done with them.” Similarly, in a popular novel from the period, *Dog Lane*, a young woman named Vera, who sleeps with four men a week, is described as a spider whose eyes spread “like a web” over the “feelings, thoughts and desires” of young men. A communist medical student, Horohorin, becomes frightened of her for himself and for all men “who were caught in the web of the huge, white smug spider called

61. Stratonistkii, *Voprosy byta v Komsomole*, 52.

62. As cited in B. Galin, “Bytovye zametki,” *Iunyi kommunist*, 1927, no. 2:63. Also see TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 391, l. 50.

63. Petrova in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 31–32. In some cases, such as at the Moscow Red October candy factory, Komsomol men never went out with Komsomol women, but “always tried to chose good-looking non-party girls.” For this reason some non-party girls would not even join the youth league for fear that they would never get married. Beliaeva in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 38.

64. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, l. 16, 23; TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 391, l. 50.

65. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 5, d. 13, l. 12. There are interesting correspondences between Komsomol views of young women as both “victim” and “villain” and Bolshevik views of prostitutes, especially in the late 1920s. See Elizabeth Waters, “Victim or Villain: Prostitution in Post-Revolutionary Russia,” in Linda Edmondson, ed., *Women and Society in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992).



sex, which was sucking not the blood, but . . . the very best in man—his brain.”<sup>66</sup>

Because they were seen not as comrades but as fundamentally less capable beings, young women were often not even considered for some kinds of work—sports director, secretary of a Komsomol collective, president of a meeting—but relegated to more marginal, and more traditionally female, roles such as working with children in the Pioneer organization or setting up for a club meeting and cleaning up afterward. Young women’s contributions in meetings and classes were frequently criticized or simply dismissed as stupid, and they were often given busy work to do while their more constructive efforts were rejected. In university classes, young women who tried to speak were sometimes greeted with the response, “A lot you know! Stupid! Shut up!”<sup>67</sup> On the factory floor, women experienced hostility from older male workers and from younger Komsomoltsy who argued: “You can’t make a skilled workman out of a baba.” When Comrade Dunaevskaia was assigned as an apprentice to workers in the Red Dawn factory, all the male workers at first “flatly refused” to take her and then finally “cast lots.” At the Proletarian Work factory, a young man entering his apprenticeship was treated “just as he should be,” while a young woman starting at the same time was “criticized from all sides.” Again, local Komsomol cells rarely addressed these problems, as Comrade Bychkova explained: “One needs comradely assistance, moral support, but these do not exist. It is hard to work with the older workers. Almost every girl who is assigned requests support from Komsomol members, but she frequently doesn’t get any.”<sup>68</sup>

When young women were admitted to leadership positions it was often only to fulfill quotas handed down by the raikom or *gubkom*. A factory worker, Comrade Petrova, recounted a case when she recommended a woman for one position and was told: “Moll, we already have three girls and three guys in the office, and if we choose one more girl, then we won’t be ‘maintaining the right percent.’ Therefore we need a guy.”<sup>69</sup> Some women were not willing to be accepted on the

66. Lev Goomilevsky, *Dog Lane* (London, 1927), 68, 102. The characterization of women as sirens who would pull men away from their revolutionary agenda again finds its origins in the prerevolutionary period. Radical worker Ivan Babushkin similarly “rejected two women’s request to join his social democratic reading circle after asking himself, ‘Would the presence of attractive members of the opposite sex not have a retarding effect on our studies?’” Wynn, *Workers, Strikes, and Pogroms*, 85.

67. Ketlinskaia, *Devushka i Komsomol*, 77; N. Vigilianskii, “O studencheskom byte,” *Iunyi kommunist*, 1927, nos. 11–12:77; TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 391, l. 43.

68. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, ll. 17–19. Also see Shtern in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 40. On the percent of young women holding qualified positions in the textile industry, see “Devushka v Komsomole,” *Kommunistka*, 28. These dynamics are very similar to what Diane Koenker has described in her work on men and women on the postrevolutionary shop floor where men still “retained the power of control” and “women were represented as partial workers, incomplete” and “transient.” Koenker, “Men against Women,” 1463.

69. Petrova in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 31. Also see Ketlinskaia, *Devushka*

basis of a quota. One Dunia who “was furious because the boys wanted to elect her so as to have a girl on the committee” argued that if she was not “good enough as a human being” she would not “go on the committee at all.”<sup>70</sup> For these reasons, young women greatly admired other women who were in positions of power within the youth league: “In one of our shop sections there was a guy who was a member of the party and a secretary of the section cell, but the cell had completely disintegrated; there was hooliganism and so on. Then we moved a girl up to the position of secretary. She has now gathered the activists around herself, raised their qualifications, put work on a really good footing.”<sup>71</sup> Komsomol men often objected to being “headed by a baba,” however, and even in the case of the successful female cell secretary described above, activists outside her own cell rejected her and “tried to show that she couldn’t be in charge of work like a guy could.”<sup>72</sup>

Gender inequalities in leadership positions were reflected throughout the youth league. At the fourth all-union congress of the Komsomol in 1921, only 25 of 614 delegates were women. In the mid-1920s, out of more than 3,000 representatives at a Komsomol plenum from *guberniia*, *krai*, *oblast'*, and national republics, only 10 percent (308) were young women. Of these, only 13 were on ruling committees, and 12 of these 13 worked with Pioneer organizations. Although the problem was acknowledged, the situation was no better at the highest levels. Of 18 people on the Komsomol Central Committee in the late 1920s, only 1 was a woman.<sup>73</sup> The situation could be even worse at the local level. In the history of the Orsha Komsomol organization up to 1924, a woman served as chairman of a meeting or Komsomol gathering only once. Of the 273 women members of the local Orsha organization, only 3 were activists in the members’ bureau. As the report noted: “In our area not a single woman from the *uzed* has attended a single conference. And there have been ten congresses.” The author of this report argues that even in the Pioneers, the one area where women were traditionally active, local women from Orsha were “afraid” to participate.<sup>74</sup> The problems remained at the end of the decade. As the Kom-

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*i Komsomol*, 4. Places “reserved” for women were called a “mesta dlia iubok” (places for skirts).

70. As cited in Ella Winter, *Red Virtue* (London, 1933), 99.

71. Beliaeva in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 37. Other examples of women who succeeded in their leadership positions can be found in TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, l. 22.

72. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, l. 21; Beliaeva in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 37.

73. V. E. Maksimova, *IV s'ezd RLKSM*, 5, 9. Reports from the fifth all-union congress in 1922 suggest it may have been even worse. *Iunyi kommunist* writes that there were only “a few girls” at that congress, and not a one at the following all-Russian congress. *Iunyi kommunist*, 1923, no. 8:22; TsKhDMO, “Devushka v aktive,” January–October 1926, f. 1, op. 23, d. 580, l. 108; TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, l. 21. For similar reports elsewhere see TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 391, ll. 51–53 and f. 1, op. 23, d. 428, l. 94 as well as *Biulleten' IV vsesoiuznoi*, 19.

74. *Iunyi kommunist*, 1924, no. 1:27.

somol Central Committee itself admitted in 1928, "Despite the fact that much has been said and decided" about the need to have more women in leadership positions, the situation "is still very poor."<sup>75</sup>

One solution sometimes suggested to the "strong inadequacies" in league work among young women was to "organize separate [club] circles for girls as a means of improving [their] psychological and cultural level," and to use International Women's Day as a way to pull in women who were not party members.<sup>76</sup> There were, however, relatively few successful efforts to provide special activities for young women. "The 8th of March [International Women's Day] is a good thing," observed Comrade Gol'dina, "but it's a shame that it happens [only] once a year; if it took place five times a year that would be better."<sup>77</sup> Indeed there was great ambivalence in the Komsomol, as in the party and the Zhenotdel, about developing separate organizations for women. Many thought there should be no special or separate efforts since this would "put boys and girls in an unequal position."<sup>78</sup> According to one report, *dev'orgi* (girls' bureaus) in the Komsomol had the positive effect of allowing young women to become accustomed to meetings and of helping them maintain ties with the Zhenotdel, but had the unhealthy tendency to separate women's work from men's. The authors described local Komsomol organizations in which the existence of *dev'orgi* meant that the Komsomol cells stopped their general work among women, and the women in turn "did not help and did not contribute to the daily work" of the cells.<sup>79</sup> Young women were often simply discouraged from doing such work. When one young woman who energetically tried to set up a commune for female workers went to the Komsomol for assistance, they would not help her and actively discouraged her from further participation, not just in women's work but in the youth league altogether. In a letter to the Komsomol newspaper *Smena* she wrote: "I was ashamed and hurt . . . I want to work; I love the organization, but they pushed me aside."<sup>80</sup>

### The Culture of Young Women

The masculine culture of the Komsomol asserted the preeminence and prerogatives of public life over private. This ideal was obviously

75. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, l. 20. For more on problems of promotion in rural areas, see Tirado, "Komsomol and the Krest'ianka," 16–19.

76. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, ll. 2, 5; TsKhDMO, f. 1, d. 23, op. 391, ll. 1, 8, 69. Also see "O rabote komsomola sredi devushek" (17 March 1927) and "O rabote sredi molodezhi" (May 1924) in *KPSS o komsomole i molodezhi 1917–1961* (Moscow, 1962), 50, 117–20.

77. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, l. 6.

78. Ketlinskaia, *Devushka i Komsomol*, 21. The party too argued that, although the Komsomol was to make a special effort to bring young women into the league, there were to be no special women's sections. See Fisher, *Pattern for Soviet Youth*, 67.

79. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 864a, l. 8.

80. As cited in Bobryshev, *Melkoburzhuzhnye vliianiia sredi molodezhi*, 80–81.

easier for young men to achieve than for young women. The youth league was generally unable to allow young women to create an identity for themselves that could accommodate both the Komsomol and their familial responsibilities. How did young women respond to this challenge? Many were forced back to the more conventional spheres of female activity. As we have seen, some were urged to leave the Komsomol by their husbands so that the husbands could remain free to pursue their own political work.<sup>81</sup> The “conservatism” of those who left the Komsomol also reflected economic anxiety. As Wendy Goldman and Barbara Clements have explained, many women who were economically vulnerable, who were unskilled or struggling to survive as single mothers, for example, often supported the preservation of the family (even the patriarchal family) as the lesser evil to abandonment and poverty.<sup>82</sup> The traditional safeguards were all the more important as the Komsomol did so little to address the economic and material needs of women. Many also left because of inadequate child care facilities and overwhelming household responsibilities. Creches and daycares had opened during the Civil War, but “more than half of the country’s daycare centers and homes for single mothers had shut their doors” in the first few years of NEP due to the new financial constraints of this period.<sup>83</sup> When creches were available, as in Moscow’s Red October candy factory, Komsomol women were among the first to use them, overcoming the hesitations many mothers experienced about placing their children in state-run childcare centers. In some centers, however, conditions were so poor that no one wanted to leave their children there. The Dukat factory in Moscow had a creche, for example, but it was “very small and very nasty and, in addition, was far away from the factory.”<sup>84</sup> Collective enterprises such as cafeterias (*stolovye*) also suffered with the introduction of NEP. Toward the end of the war in 1921, Moscow *stolovye* were feeding 93 percent of the population. However, “with the end of the rationing system in 1921, the communal dining halls began to close,” and many of those that were left had less than optimal conditions.<sup>85</sup> A young female factory worker in Moscow’s Dukat factory reported that although one of the two cafeterias available to her had food that was “tastier than that prepared at home,” the other was noisy and dark, crowded with the 6,000 workers from her factory and other cooperatives. At the Trekh-

81. Some women left the league of their own accord. Comrade Revina had been an active worker who had chided other Komsomol women when they left the league after getting married. But when she herself got married, she too left. When questioned, she answered: “What do I need the Komsomol for? My husband works and makes 150 rubles. I work and get 70 rubles, and I’m going to live quietly without the Komsomol.” TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 833, l. 16. Underlined in original.

82. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 242–45; Clements, “Effects of the Civil War.”

83. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 127–28.

84. Beliaeva and Shtern in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 35, 40.

85. Goldman, *Women, the State and Revolution*, 128–29.

gornaia factory, the cafeteria had been reported for its rotten cabbages and bad vegetables as well as its dismal basement conditions.<sup>86</sup> Women will want to remain in the Komsomol, one female activist concluded, “only when we have adequate stolovye and creches.”<sup>87</sup>

Some women did not leave the Komsomol but accommodated themselves to the male adolescent ideal. This often meant relinquishing their familial responsibilities. Some of the most committed young women left their children with their parents or in a nursery so that they could continue to be active in the Komsomol. Comrade S. from the October factory noted that because she was so busy she saw her sons only three weeks out of the year. One lived in the Caucasus, and the other with her mother. When she asked the Komsomol secretary for a vacation in order to see them, he told her it was “impossible” as it meant “a break” from her work in the youth league.<sup>88</sup> Other young women emulated the “military virtues” of the Civil War and resented “allegations of femininity.” The “defeminizing element” of these revolutionary women was displayed in their masculine military clothing—leather jackets, “pants, boots and greatcoats.” Thus one “young woman combatant, equipped with over-sized *papakha*, leather coat, and Browning” asserted that she was “not a little girl now,” but a “soldier of the Revolution.”<sup>89</sup> Finally, women’s sections in some factories replicated men’s attitude toward “female questions.” In one Moscow factory the women workers met only when they needed to elect someone to the Soviet. They never met to discuss questions of daily life or talked about them in any way.<sup>90</sup>

Active young women could be as disdainful as their male colleagues of women who were involved only in “female” activities such as drama and sewing groups or who expressed “female” sensibilities. Women look only at books that have “love” in them, complained one young female activist.<sup>91</sup> There are two kinds of female factory workers, explained Comrade Petrova. The majority were “unskilled” workers who were still dependent on their families since they did not make much money. Eager to get married to escape their parents, they were more susceptible to what Petrova (and communist enthusiasts like her) called “hooliganism,” which meant wearing lipstick and powder. The dedicated *Komsomolka* was not supposed to be interested in dressing well; she was supposed to be a lover of books, not of fashion, and the books she read concerned technical topics rather than love stories. Indeed the *Komsomolka* of early NEP developed a reputation for “dressing like a slob” in order to “show everyone” that she was a communist and

86. Shtern in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 39, and Petrova, *ibid.*, 29–30.

87. Petrova in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 32.

88. Ketlinskaia and Slepkov, *Zhizn' bez kontroli*, 89.

89. Richard Stites, *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860–1930* (Princeton, 1978), 322 and n. 11.

90. Petrova in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 35.

91. Petrova and Shtern in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 34–35, 40.

not a young woman who adopted the latest flapper fashions. Petrova notes that by the late 1920s most communist women had left the most extreme manifestations of this behavior behind, although they still rejected makeup and fancy clothes. Petrova makes interesting connections between gender, skill, salary, and political awareness. In her portrayal, the ideal female worker was like her male colleague—skilled, wealthier, and less associated with the private sphere of family responsibilities. She says, for example, that communist women were more likely to be “skilled” women workers. Their salaries were higher and because they could contribute more money to their families they were allowed greater independence.<sup>92</sup> Young female enthusiasts like Petrova defined themselves in opposition to “backwards,” unskilled women in much the same way as young men did.

Not all of what Petrova admired came from a male model. Activist women had their own ideals, also from the Civil War, from which some of these constructions came. As Barbara Clements explains in her study of Zhenotdel utopianism, activist young women in this early period imagined a “bold, impetuous, practical, prudently intelligent” new woman who was a “strong, free citizen, not inferior to man in anything.”<sup>93</sup> This image of the “new women” was “communicated to a younger generation of communist women,” in the early 1920s, especially to “teenagers from the working class and the lower echelons of the urban middle class.”<sup>94</sup> Literature was a powerful transmitter of the ideals of the “emancipated” woman who declared herself in print to be, not just the equal of men, but their “superior”: “We shall be engineers, soldiers, inventors, artists—we shall beat you at your own game!”<sup>95</sup> The “new women” of Soviet Russia did not want to spend their lives cleaning and cooking. “Is this life?” asked one, “No, life should be built on creative possibilities and not on the ancient structure of family happiness.”<sup>96</sup> Like the male adolescent ideal, these alternative ideals of female emancipation had an effect on visions of the ideal marital relationship. Irina Pavlovna, who was twenty years old

92. Petrova in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 27–29. Despite her disapproval of young women who chose the “unrevolutionary” route, Petrova was not unsympathetic to the difficulties of their lives or their reasons for wanting to marry, admitting that economic conditions and parental pressures made it very difficult for a young woman to join the Komsomol. In this she differs from those Zhenotdel activists who rarely admitted that “very real problems were keeping most women occupied,” insisting that “women’s attitudes were the obstacle preventing them from joining the revolution.” See Barbara Evans Clements, “The Birth of the New Soviet Woman,” in Abbott Gleason, Peter Kenez, and Richard Stites, eds., *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution* (Bloomington, 1985), 224.

93. Barbara Evans Clements, “The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel,” *Slavic Review* 51, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 487.

94. *Ibid.*, 486.

95. N. Ogniov, *The Diary of a Communist Undergraduate*, trans. Alexander Werth (New York, 1929), 41. Also see the description of the young daughter in Alexandra Kollontai’s *Love of Worker Bees*, trans. Cathy Porter (London, 1977).

96. As cited in Rubinshtein, *Iunost'*, 195.

when the war began, was married (though the marriage was not registered) but said she wanted to “keep her independence,” earn her own living, and keep her own room. “The two of us together in one small room would have been unbearable.” Her husband wanted them to live together, have children, and asked her to give up her work. “He was a member of the Party, and I wasn’t, yet he was so much more conservative than I,” said Irina. Finally she left him so as to keep working and to maintain her independence.<sup>97</sup> “I won’t have Jura live with me in my room,” explained another young woman, “I’ve only one room, and I don’t want to wash and cook and darn for him. Of course, I don’t mind if he comes in the evening and washes up his plate and cup, but I don’t want him to be there always. I want it to be a fresh conquest every time.”<sup>98</sup> One female factory worker described in admiring tones a marriage in which both the husband and wife were so busy with their respective work (she in the Komsomol and he studying) that “they had little time to see each other, and all went well.”<sup>99</sup>

These female visions of self suggest a blurring of sexual differences. Despite a rhetoric of equality, however, many male Komsomoltsy were uncomfortable with this leveling of gender differences. Women should be equal (perhaps), but not the same as men. One Komsomol cell refused to accept one woman’s membership application because she swore in an “unbecoming” fashion and another’s because she “went out with boys too often.”<sup>100</sup> Both behaviors suggested that these women were becoming too much like men, either in their language or in their sexual conquests. This view echoed that of Nikolai Semashko, commissar of health, who bemoaned the “masculinization” of some Komsomol women in an article published in the Komsomol journal *Molodaia gvardiia*. We too often see young women with “disheveled (often dirty) hair; a cigarette hanging from the mouth (like a man); a deliberately awkward manner (like a man); deliberately rude speech (like a man),” he complained. This “vulgar ‘equality of the sexes’” was not right, he wrote, because women are naturally different from men and have “their own social functions and their own particular characteristics.” This inherent otherness of women was not just cultural but biological. According to Semashko, it was not only undesirable but impossible to have women act like men since the characteristics of masculinity and femininity were determined by the functioning of the male and female endocrine glands.<sup>101</sup>

97. As cited in Winter, *Red Virtue*, 128.

98. *Ibid.*, 136.

99. Shtern in Dmitriev and Galin, *Na putiakh*, 42.

100. “Devushka v komsomole,” *Kommunistka*, 28.

101. N. Semashko, “Nuzhna li ‘zhenstvennost,’” *Molodaia gvardiia* 6 (1924): 205–6. This view is also reflected in the play *Our Youth* in which the character Besais describes the kind of woman he would like: “For my part she may be enlightened about everything; but I should be offended if, while I was stammering out my love she were to clean her teeth with a match-stick and swing her legs—‘Good, Besais my darling, I love you too.’ In a word the girls may be modern if you like, but they may

Although being “different” did not necessarily mean women were unequal to men, in practice this is how young women were imagined and treated. The types of special characteristics Semashko attributed to women—“kindness, consideration, heartfelt attitude, gentle manner”—were not qualities highly valued by revolutionary youth. Indeed, what adult Bolsheviks like Semashko valued in women was precisely what young men disliked. Instead, Semashko’s desired qualities reminded young male readers of women’s “essential” ties to the less important private sphere. “Girls’ minds were not made for politics,” was a common argument in the youth league.<sup>102</sup> Even when young women were involved in political work, it was thought to be for reasons more emotional and less rational than those of men. “This type of Komsomol girl will do everything that is asked of her, not from a sense of discipline, but simply because she wants to,” concluded one observer.<sup>103</sup> In addition, many of the characteristics thought by some to be “natural” to women were not the “positive” attributes described by Semashko. In Komsomol Central Committee documents young women were variously described as lazy, weak, timid, and lacking both stamina and concentration. “In the summer there was absolutely no work [in the club] and absolutely no leadership of the youth section. Of course it is hard to say who was guilty, but the most at fault were the girls themselves who were not very active in this work.”<sup>104</sup> “Some of the girls are active, but we don’t give them the opportunity to especially develop it,” admitted one *Komsomolets*. On the other hand, he says, “girls are naturally more timid and afraid to come forward, while guys are different—bolder.”<sup>105</sup>

The proposed solution to backwardness was to raise young women’s political and cultural level, but there was some ambivalence about this. Could it be done? Should it be done? That the differences between men and women were understood by those like Semashko to be not just cultural but biological must have contributed to the feeling that it was harder (if not impossible?) to persuade women to relinquish the dangerous habits of the past for the revolutionary future. Much of what differentiated young women from young men was after all biological—they were associated with the nonrevolutionary sphere of the private and of the adult partially because of their ability to have children, for

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not lose their capacity for blushing.” As cited in Mehnert, *Youth in Soviet Russia*, 123. Anxiety about the “blurring of the sexes” was not particular to Soviet Russia. In France, according to Mary-Louise Roberts, “the blurring of a proper division between the sexes” was used “as a central metaphor for cultural crisis” and the “fragility of civilization” following World War I. Here it was the waistless, flat-chested dress of the flapper that most symbolized the masculinization of women. Mary-Louise Roberts, “This Civilization No Longer Has Sexes’: *La Garçonne* and Cultural Crisis in France after World War I,” *Gender and History* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 52.

102. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 23, d. 391, l. 50.

103. Murin, *Byt i nrauy derevenskoi molodezhi*, 89

104. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 5, d. 13, l. 13.

105. TsKhDMO, f. 1, op. 5, d. 13, l. 20.



example. But this essentialism was not just biological; the differences attributed to men and women served a larger purpose as young men used these supposed differences to bolster their own shaky senses of self. "A wife should be less developed than her husband," wrote one young man, "then everything will be fine."<sup>106</sup> This sense of self may have been more precarious during the uncertain period of NEP when both definitions of revolution and of gender roles were undergoing uncertain transformations. In this environment, all that it took to marginalize young women was their very sex, which was constructed by male Komsomoltsy to mean everything other than what these young men wanted to be.

106. Ketlinskaia and Slepkov, *Zhizn' bez kontroliia*, 66.