

## **Battling “Unhealthy Relations”: Soviet Youth Sexuality as a Political Problem**

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**Abstract** This paper explores the way Soviet party and education officials dealt with female youth sexuality, in an effort to get it under control in order to ensure that Soviet girls grew up to be productive members of Soviet society. Many of the policies enacted by the regime reflected profound social conservatism of the majority of the top political leadership of the country and their great fear of youth, and particularly female, sexuality, as a force that could not be overcome, controlled or fully harnessed for the service of the state.

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### **Introduction**

For the Soviet Union, the perpetuation of the Soviet Revolution depended upon successfully socializing and indoctrinating of successive generations of Soviet children. The Soviet state was deeply critical of its children, particularly as generation after generation following the 1917 revolution left the state with the paradox of why Soviet children, living under the best regime in history, continually failed to live up to the requisite ideal(s). Children's failure to meet the high standards set for them by the regime ratcheted up the anxiety for the state, particularly in the years before World War II, and then during the Cold War, when the state worried that generations lacking the tempering of revolutionary struggle would not be able to stand the test of war, whether the anticipated showdown with fascism or the Cold War confrontation with the West.<sup>1</sup> Anxiety over the trustworthiness and battle-readiness of children reflected the state's feeling of impotence as it grew older and felt the generation gap develop.

The state's initial goal of developing a Soviet model for socializing children was to produce ideal, if gender-neutral, Soviet children. Gender equality in the children's sphere was assumed to have been achieved with the proclamation of coeducation in schools (1918) and establishment of the Pioneer organization (1922) – the official political organization for children that was open to both girls and boys. Being a girl was not a permanent disadvantage; provided with a proper social environment, girls could overcome limitations of their gender and eventually, by being more like boys, would grow up to be good builders of socialism.

The question of morality and the virtue of Soviet children preoccupied everyone from parents and teachers to party officials, and served as an unpleasant reminder of the continuing flaws in the Soviet system of upbringing, but also of the limited success in transforming the social environment of the country. Immediately after the revolution the discussion of problems in the children's sphere were discussed in terms of class, not gender. Anti-Soviet activities by children (vandalism, sexually or politically inappropriate songs, impertinent questions, etc.) were attributed to the machinations of class enemies and their nefarious influence on the children, a result of insufficient vigilance and propaganda on the part of teachers and Pioneer leaders. But by the 1930s, the broader societal move away from gender equality and neutrality affected the way moral shortcomings of children and youth were conceptualized and the way in which the plan for combating these shortcomings was articulated. Gender began to be invoked, with most of gendered criticism of children's behavior aimed at girls. Girls were no longer expected to become "like boys," and limited femininity became acceptable.<sup>2</sup> However, girls appeared to be a source of concern for the state; girl-specific deficiencies needed to be eradicated.<sup>3</sup> Girls were considered more secretive and interested in dancing.<sup>4</sup> Girls were interested in marrying well and having an easy life.<sup>5</sup> All of these qualities were deemed unacceptable in future builders of socialism. Boys could be trouble, but while hooliganism was a predominantly male prerogative (or at least defined as such), shortcomings on the part of some boys did not mean that all boys were susceptible. A similar conjecture seemed to be more natural and was more instinctively made in the case of girls. One of the consequences of this shift was that the Soviet system of upbringing began to reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes that it originally intended to combat and eradicate, in an effort to control girls and female sexuality.

This paper explores the way party and education officials dealt with the issue of female youth sexuality in the decades after the revolution, in an effort to get it under control to ensure that Soviet girls grew up to be productive members of Soviet society, and would not fall prey to their physical nature – susceptibility to lose focus on building socialism – an effort to see the triumph of proper Soviet socialization over their female nature. Many of the policies enacted by the regime reflected the profound social conservatism of the majority of the top political leadership of the country and their great fear of youth, and particularly female sexuality, as a force that could not be overcome, controlled or fully harnessed for the service of the state, the main criteria for permissibility of any given phenomenon.

### **Gender, Sexuality and the Soviet Child**

The 1920s in Soviet Russia are associated with sexual freedom and experimentation, as well as a relatively open discussion of sexuality and relations between men and women.<sup>6</sup> All this appeared to significantly affect children during that period, noted by parents, teachers, and party officials. In 1925 a secret internal report on the main work aspects of the Young Pioneer organization (prepared for the Komsomol<sup>7</sup> Central Committee in 1925) described a dramatic situation that unfolded in a provincial Pioneer detachment. A girl who was sexually active since age eleven was taken into the Pioneer organization with the (alleged) intention of reforming her. But instead, she managed to "drag into this matter not only the Pioneers, but the detachment leader as well." The formulation of the problem is noteworthy – the triumph of sexual urges over politics and ideology, limits of the power of ideology in the face of sexual pressure, and destructive power of female sexuality. In another detachment, children were found to engage in rewriting old pornographic poems to add new meanings to them.<sup>8</sup> Instead of doing important political work, Pioneer meetings became an opportunity for kids to get together and flirt and split up into pairs, significant both for the turn from the collective to the individual, and all the implications of such pairings. A report from 1928 cited the fact that children became too undisciplined as a result of Pioneer work. Parents complained that their daughters were modest until they joined the Pioneers. The mixing of boys and girls within the pioneer organization in the eyes of many parents led to depravity.<sup>9</sup> Parents complained that their 10–12 year old children came home at 3–4 am, declaring that they were at the Pioneer meetings and cut off parental protests with threats and accusations of counter-revolution.<sup>10</sup>

The 1930s saw the emergence of increased social conservatism, the disappearance of sex from public discussions, and the establishment of a puritanical model of sexual relations between men and women.<sup>11</sup> The period saw "indoctrination of anti-sexuality into the mass consciousness."<sup>12</sup> This made juvenile sexual behavior even more problematic. The panic exhibited by parents and officials may not have been entirely unwarranted. A number of studies carried out in the late 1920s pointed to increased interest in sex among children in the post-revolutionary period,<sup>13</sup> although it is important to note that the "increase" could be more a statement about perception than reality. While numerous studies on sexual activities, prostitution, venereal diseases and other related issues were carried out in the 1920s, the subject became taboo in the 1930s. But lack of discussion did not mean that the problem

disappeared. The question and answer period for the lecture "Sexual question in school and in the family" delivered to an audience of educators in Leningrad in 1934, offers a unique glimpse into the seamier usually unmentionable aspect of Soviet urban life. Participants talked about schoolgirls who engaged in prostitution after school, buildings "infected with prostitution" ("where 14 year old girls get girls who are 6–8 and go with boys in basements"), "serious or specific cases of sexual perversions in every school," and panic that "the abnormal sexual relations between children have taken on menacing proportions," requiring "extreme measures."<sup>14</sup> Representatives of the medical profession in attendance noted an increase in cases of children with venereal diseases after a drop in the early 1930s.

Real or alleged sexual activity of minors is rarely acceptable to adults.<sup>15</sup> In the Soviet case, with the intimate relationship between public and private behavior, the threat to the social order posed by uncontrolled activity of any kind caused alarm for officials. They were worried about what children might observe on the street or in the homes, that they could be reading erotic materials, and more broadly about "unhealthy relations" between boys and girls in schools.<sup>16</sup> The perception and characterization of youth sexuality both as a moral and a political problem had very concrete political and policy significance in the Soviet Union.<sup>17</sup>

This concern over "unhealthy relations" between boys and girls covered a wide range of behavior. At times, it was only a manifestation of sexual awareness. If relationships between boys and girls were "comradely," "they sit together, play together and help each other in difficult situations" – then all was deemed well.<sup>18</sup> If the relations were "uncomradely," then group meetings would be held in which the meaning of "true friendship" was explained to the students until they understood the error of their ways.<sup>19</sup>

Local Departments of Education were supposed to provide reports on the "politico-moral state of the schools" to keep local party officials apprised of the situation. One such report from Leningrad described "unhealthy occurrences of a sexual nature" – most often cases of sexual advances towards girls. In one instance, two boys were sent to a school for difficult children, as a result of the pressure from parents of other children; the parents petitioned all the way up to the head of the Commissariat of Enlightenment. Apparently the boys were touching girls, lifting skirts, masturbating, and "corrupting" the entire class, while nothing was done about it. Notably, it took almost the entire school year to remove the boys from that school.<sup>20</sup>

But while such serious disturbances left teachers paralyzed, in other instances the full weight of educational authority was levied

on the caught "transgressors." Thus, another "moral report" noted that a boy and a girl in 7th grade [i.e. about 14 years old] were caught kissing – "A talk was held with them. It was uncovered that the situation had not yet reached menacing proportions, but nevertheless they were separated."<sup>21</sup> In another instance, a group of sixth grade girls "demonstrated a frivolous attitude towards work due to the fact that they began to be interested in boys from upper forms. Major explanatory work was done with them through the Pioneer organization, their homeroom teacher, and their parents."<sup>22</sup>

Other reports on crime and delinquency for the 1930s regularly noted sexual violence, rapes, teen pregnancy, and even brothels staffed by schoolgirls.<sup>23</sup> These occurrences evoked concern, but little sensitivity from local officials. Thus, one report noted that schoolteachers did nothing to prevent a fourteen year old rape victim from being mocked by her classmates.<sup>24</sup> In a case of a girl raped by two of her classmates, though the boys were first expelled, they were later readmitted back to the same school as their victim.<sup>25</sup> Because of the politicization of "unhealthy behavior" and the range of activities the term encompassed, in order to demonstrate requisite vigilance it proved much easier to pounce on a kissing couple and interrogate them on the extent of their relationship than to deal with young rapists. The schoolchildren of the 1930s were not worse or more obsessed with sex than the preceding generations; there was a wider spectrum of children who entered schools in the 1930s. But all of this officials could not control. Thus, we see them problematizing any manifestation of youth sexuality, latching on to problems they could control, and ferociously attacking them, out of proportion to their actual danger, overcompensating for their inability to fix the more serious problems threatening the schools and the young generation, most of which were not sex-related.<sup>26</sup>

The anti-sexuality or even "sexophobia"<sup>27</sup> of Stalinist society had a serious impact on the form and content of sporadically available "sex education" in schools. One of the key educational figures for the mid-to-late 1930s was Anton Makarenko, whose approach to the subject of sex education could be summarized as "they will figure it out when they get married." Given his increasing prominence in educational circles after the publication of his books *The Road to Life: An Epic in Education* and *Book for Parents*, and the fact that his ideas fit so well with the broader trends in Soviet society, this approach virtually triumphed. Any allusions to sex and expressions of interest in the subject by pupils appeared to have inspired terror in the teachers,<sup>28</sup> since such interest was perceived in political terms: sexual materials were tools of the enemy to distract Soviet children and youth from taking full part in the productive life

of the country. Thus, attempts at any form of sex education often had disastrous consequences for instigators.

One such scenario took place when in 1935 a civics teacher in one Leningrad school decided to have a class in the form of questions and answers, "primarily of a sexual nature," which proved to be "very popular." We learn of it from a report to the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), when the local education department finally "properly assessed" the situation as part of a ploy to "get students to lose interest in political questions by supplanting their interest in political questions by increasing their interest in sexual questions."<sup>29</sup> But the assessment was not quick enough, and the school officials came under attack at the meeting with district party officials. The party representative's tirade is instructive in demonstrating what appears to be impotent rage at his inability to change human nature (and an amazing display of sanctimoniousness):

Oh, yes, the infamous civics class. Do you know the questions they asked? . . . They ask "who receives satisfaction first, man or woman"? That's what they ask. Here we have enough older people present, and we never occupied ourselves with such questions, and here we have a young man or woman ask such a question. Is this a child's question? There were many questions like this. I don't want to cite more of this filth. The [female] typists asked me when they were retyping it to not give them such filth anymore. I had to convince them that I did not write these questions. . . . And the school officials? They banned the class, but the teacher is still considered a good one. And they did not bother to sit down these kids to properly explain everything to them. . . . So on the one hand, we have the vilest class and on the other, utter political illiteracy. . . . One does not need to be a specialist to know that such a class is not needed. . . .<sup>30</sup>

The reaction to the teacher's actions illustrates the close correlation between counter-revolution and actual or perceived sexual dissoluteness.<sup>31</sup> Open discussion of sexual practices, or sexuality was unacceptable.<sup>32</sup> The official solution was an escape into Puritanism. For the girls, the emphasis was on protecting their honor at the risk of public humiliation (including at the hands of teachers), while for boys emphasis on physical education and exercise was seen as a way to channel their energy into a more healthy venue.<sup>33</sup>

Articles by a professional sex educator, L. V. Pisareva, published in *Soviet Pedagogy*, the premier pedagogical journal in the Soviet Union were a rare exception.<sup>34</sup> She wrote about the talks she had with older students in Moscow schools, which provoked a flood of letters from readers requesting the publication of the actual content of her talks. Pisareva's advice was fairly conservative, emphasizing the moral dimension of sex education:<sup>35</sup> she advocated abstinence until marriage and told girls that wearing high heels could damage their organs and negatively affect their (future) sex life. The official

reaction was quite harsh, if not swift. The verdict from a high level meeting in the Commissariat of Enlightenment was that the article was more than just "unsuccessful, more than just questionable and in some places, simply harmful":

Instead of helping the teacher and the young, they just made it more difficult. We see in the article overly candid, bordering on savoring of sexual problems, describing the development of sexual organs and sexual processes, describing [various] perversions, extremes, not to mention the fact that the article offers absolutely petit-bourgeois advice on relations between the sexes and about happy family life. One (of us) said that it's a marriage newspaper instead of *Soviet Pedagogy*.<sup>36</sup>

The verdict can be seen as policy – the policy of not discussing the topic.

Attempts to avoid any type of sexual implication and controlling girls' sexuality at times reached comic proportions. For example, in a report on health in the premier children's summer camp Artek in 1941, the authors criticized the style of uniforms issued to the girls – "pants are not entirely hygienic for girls, because they cause in them excessive friction in the sexual organs."<sup>37</sup>

The official solution to the problem – expression of sexuality in socially unacceptable ways – was to increase vigilance over the kinds of people with access and undue influence over children, as well as an "increase in political work" – a common Soviet prescription for most ills. However, there was little indication that the state's virtual ban on public discussion of sex and the promotion of the "Victorian" model of gender relations between men and women had any impact on the way young people actually behaved. Rather, there was a widening of the gulf between the promoted state's view on sex and the actuality of popular practices, and a "fantastically sexist everyday consciousness."<sup>38</sup>

### **In Search of a Cure: Separate Education**

The panic over the inability to control youth sexuality fed into other concerns in the late 1930s with the general lack of preparedness of the young generation for the impending war that would require hard work and sacrifices, from the supposedly spoiled and sexually preoccupied young people.

In the years after the 1917 revolution, coeducation was seen as the solution to problems in gender relations – boys and girls, working together side by side would learn to respect each other as human beings rather than sex objects by the time they grew up. But by the 1930s, since "unhealthy relations between boys and girls" in coeducational schools were deemed to be one of the

contributing causes for social disorder, which included moral decay and subversion of traditional gender roles, the discovered solution was to separate boys and girls in schools in major urban areas in the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup> The discursive foundation of the reform was based on the fact that equality of men and women had already been achieved. While the introduction of coeducation by the Bolsheviks in 1918 contributed to the achievement, it had since outlived its usefulness, instead creating problems of a “pedagogical and organizational nature.”

The key to understanding the separate education decree lies in the phrase – “not always healthy relations between boys and girls” – used in behind-the-scenes discussions about the decree. A euphemism for a wide range of problems schools were experiencing all through the 1930s that did not make it into the final text for public consumption, it does indicate another important reason for this reform, though one potentially disproportionate to the resources required to implement it – fundamental social conservatism of the majority of the top political leadership of the country and their great fear of youth, and particularly female, sexuality, as a force that could not be overcome, controlled or fully harnessed for the service of the state, the main criteria for permissibility any phenomenon.

Thus, the decree separating boys and girls in urban schools needs to be seen as part of the state’s quest for greater order, social control, and defensive military preparedness. As children stayed in school longer and longer, the mixing of the boys and girls, and the perceived resulting increase in sexual activity, was seen as distracting children and young people from more serious and important matters, and something the state felt powerless to curb. If the 1930s were a reaffirmation of paternalism when compared to the 1920s,<sup>40</sup> then the separation of the sexes in schools was an ultimate re-affirmation of the fear of youth power, sexual or otherwise.

When considered in a comparative pan-European perspective, the gendering of morality and eventually the decree on separate education does not seem so surprising. However, it was an important discursive shift within the Soviet Union. Because of the war, the changes were destined to remain largely in the representational realm. World War II meant that Soviet women in fact had to be everywhere and do everything. But if in the first decades of Soviet power, there were attempts by the state to transform the deeply entrenched social stereotypes about gender roles as part of the attempt to sovietize and transform society, those aspirations appeared to have been abandoned or relegated to the lowest priority rungs.<sup>41</sup> But the discussions of implementing the reform and its associated problems gave rise to the relatively open (albeit hidden



from public view) discussions about youth sexuality among teachers and party and education officials, otherwise not a permissible subject for debate.

The anticipated positives of the reforms covered a number of perceived problem areas when it came to the education and upbringing of Soviet children. For example, the Minister of Education was very enthusiastic about the introduction of certain specific elements into subjects such as anatomy, physiology, and hygiene in girls' schools.<sup>42</sup> But ultimately no special gender-specific programs actually materialized. Thus the main benefit of separate education appeared in the realm of moral development: it would improve morality, purify the nature of boy-girl relationships, and allow teachers to devote their time to emphasizing the gender-specific aspects of moral and social behavior within single-sex collectives. For example, in a meeting of party officials with Moscow teachers and directors, one participant drew attention to the benefits of the policy: ". . . [Now] on the question of relationships between boys and girls. It is important for future families. We can avoid excessive harmful familiarity. [One already] senses a greater respect for girls. [Boys and girls] start to treat each other better. Separate education creates more normal relations."<sup>43</sup> Implicit in this argument is the danger of mixing the sexes in a public setting, whether based on observation or fear over potential for something "improper" to happen.<sup>44</sup>

For many educators, the emphasis was on the biological differences and their social ramifications: "With separate education, we see less coarseness. Boys became more cultured, they approach girls more seriously. The boys are more focused. Physical education can be different. A woman will be a mother, so she will need a certain amount of physical education, but some she does not need."<sup>45</sup> In this vision, from equal partners in building socialism girls became a group in need of a "special approach," a group defined by how others acted towards them, rather than how they acted themselves.

Some school directors found that "coeducation with boys was difficult for girls." While they may have helped bring up boys, now the grades have improved and students were happy with the separate education – "and of course, in girls we must cultivate their feminine sides, while boys need something different."<sup>46</sup> However, some educators felt that actually the behavior of boys worsened without the civilizing influence of the girls.<sup>47</sup>

Another advantage of separate education was that it would prepare girls for their future lots in life, in particular their reproductive future, the only acknowledgeable aspect of their sexuality: "There are different aims in education for boys and girls . . . Be-

cause of her physiology, a woman will not be doing all that a man does, and therefore there are different goals of upbringing. A woman has her own lot [in life]."<sup>48</sup> The head of Moscow's Department of Education excitedly noted that separate education was a great success: "Grades improved, things are calmer. Girls are not doing their preening and fixing their hair, but rather focusing on schoolwork. It has become easier to teach biology, and conduct after school activities due to the uniformity of interests."<sup>49</sup>

A striking feature of the discussions surrounding the reform was the language used by top party and education officials, who made their proclamations about girls' nature and biological destiny, prefacing them with phrases such as "let's be frank" and "seemingly retrograde admissions."<sup>50</sup> This willingness to put aside all the "politically correct" talk about women's equality was something that would have been condemned just a few years earlier as an expression of petit-bourgeois mentality, because it was precisely such attitudes that were supposed to be eradicated from popular consciousness.

Separate education offered an opportunity to observe children's collectives that were deemed homogeneous due to separation by gender. This was a privileging of a new category for differentiation, replacing that of social background as the category for determining and predicting present and future behavior of a child. These new "homogeneous" collectives opened the teachers' eyes to differences in behavior and development that were not pronounced in the "mixed" pre-war schools. The discoveries confirmed prewar concerns, producing a long list of ways in which girls were found to be deficient to boys.<sup>51</sup> Apparently real Bolsheviks were not going to let laws of biology stop them from valiantly trying to "sovietize" recalcitrant girls – "with good work, these considerable defects in the development and interests of girls can be overcome." The response of local educational officials to such "new discoveries" was to have special conferences for teachers and directors of girls' schools, raising emphatically "the question of necessity of deep systematic work in girls' schools [in order to] cultivate inquisitiveness among girls and young women, broaden their interests and develop greater intellectual thinking in them."<sup>52</sup>

One of the methods was to organize after-school activities to allow for the broadening of the minds and interests of girls. In addition to workshops on needlework, sewing, embroidering, cooking, cleaning, laundry, and childcare, for their intellectual pursuits, girls' extracurricular activity was to work on the topic "Image of Soviet young woman or Soviet woman."<sup>53</sup> Girls were to be taught "greater independence of thinking and courage to express their opinions," but also "the need for modesty, in clothes, hairstyle

and relations with boys." Girls needed to develop "a sense of female honor and a desire to protect it."<sup>54</sup> The concern about female honor acquired strategic significance during World War II. The perceived specificity of the female war experience – cases of collaboration involving young women were frequently became entangled with sex – in the eyes of the state exposed shortcomings of the previous educational approach to their upbringing, further confirming the belief in girls as "weak links" and the need for separate education. In the postwar campaign for ideological purity, girls would require additional effort.

### **Postwar Schools for Girls: Living with the Cure**

After the conclusion of the protracted and costly World War II, both the state and population had a desire for a return to normality. Re-establishing public order – to address the loosening of social controls over children during the war – was an essential component of normality. For the most part, boys' schools presented a very dismal picture.<sup>55</sup> But since one important aspect of separate education was the concern over the instability of the social order due to girls not acting in a proper gender-proscribed manner, the potential of girls' schools evoked particular enthusiasm as providing an excellent opportunity to remedy the problem.

As a result girls' schools at times seemed to resemble finishing schools, or at least reports about achievements made them sound that way.<sup>56</sup> If schools did not intervene in time, the girls' inability or unwillingness to do domestic chores was the beginning of a slippery slope that led them to a life of crime.<sup>57</sup> If attractive girls were not kept under watch, their discovery of the power of their sexuality could lead them into trouble.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the teachers felt responsible not only for the academic education of their female charges, but for their development as future women, the most important aspect of which was the "preservation of their virtue/female honor."

In practice, this could mean, as one woman remembers, constant admonitions from her female teacher to the class about "not giving it up to men."<sup>59</sup> To illustrate this point, girls were provided with evidence of how important preservation of their "virtue" was. For example, fictional boys from a military school (i.e. desirable males) "spontaneously" engaged in discussions of women's virtue, developing a rating system for literary and contemporary female heroines based on their loyalty, honesty, and purity.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, given the degree of attention to the issue and the emphasis placed on it as a major, if not main, way to measure a young woman's worth, the easiest way for a teacher to strike back at a female student was by ascribing unchaste behavior to her in the end-of-

the-year evaluations,<sup>61</sup> serving as an illustration of the use of sexual reputation as a “set of social and linguistic strategies to control girls.”<sup>62</sup>

The “health” of the nature of relationships between girls and boys continued to be a source of concern and something to be regulated. In the ideal version of boy-girl friendship, the more mature boy would guide and lead the girl, making sure she did well in school and developed as a multi-dimensional Soviet citizen.<sup>63</sup>

Though the reform was supposed to be a solution, discussions (in closed meetings) of the situation in separate schools showed that the reform did not bring about the desired stability, and had led to some very disturbing developments in the realm of boy-girl relationships. In November 1948, a select group of school directors were invited to a conference in Moscow to discuss the specifics of teaching in single-sex schools. Some officials expressed confidence in their charges:

I remember in the days of coeducation when [they] organized parties with drinking and trips to the summer cottages, and incidents that we then had to sort out. Maybe kids became more secretive after the war and they still organize such parties, but in my opinion, [such things] do not take place. And this is a result of the fact that we frequently organize Saturday evening mixers, dances, lectures for them.<sup>64</sup>

But the majority noted that the artificial separation made the situation worse, pointing to a “heightened interest on the part of girls towards friendship with boys”:

we try to tell them that it's natural, and there is nothing unnatural in you wishing for this friendship, but they respond that as soon as they are seen at home with boys, people say “why are you always with boys, what will become of you,” and in school teachers look at you funny, even though they say it's natural.<sup>65</sup>

The comment illustrated social attitudes towards boy-girl friendship and the extent to which notions of propriety were affected by existing social norms. The “problematization” of any display of sexuality made the young women's attempts to come to terms with their sexuality fraught with danger: subject to criticism, in both popular and political terms, and public shaming. The public prudery and desexualized official public discourse of the Stalin era meant that adults were not equipped to help the girls, or even deal with youth sexuality in a “mature” manner.

For one female director at this meeting “sex” was the most acute question under separate education: “I don't know if people were sincere when they spoke [about this issue], but let's not look through such rose-colored glasses at what is going on in schools in the realm of sexuality. . . . If in the past, the relations were mostly

comradely, nowadays they are far from being so." Any time boys and girls come in contact with each other in public spheres – at demonstrations, at meetings and lectures – they got excited. Girls began to act in an affected manner:

. . . You say they used to write vulgar notes. Well, you should see what kind of vulgar correspondence is taking place now, how girls relate to the male gender. Totally un-comradely. I am observing a very specific tendency. I have spoken with [another prominent female Moscow school director], and she agreed with me. First, girls started inviting students from military schools to their parties, but now they only want officers. This means that in girls' minds there have already formed an aspiration to find themselves a suitor, if not a fiancé. There is nothing pure and comradely left in the relations between boys and girls . . . In coed schools, girls did not carry themselves as young misses. Now you so often observe affectedness, which totally contradicts our socialist morality.<sup>66</sup>

Though some other participants said that at least pornography<sup>67</sup> was no longer a problem, this director suggested that one only needed to look closer to see the same notes, and "especially, what happens during the joint evenings. The question of sex education is completely unresolved. It was not resolved under coeducation, and it is still unresolved."<sup>68</sup> Continued politicization of manifestations of sexuality meant that the desire of girls to find themselves suitors was treated as a threat to the Soviet system.

Another director added yet another dimension to the problematic relations between the sexes:

The appearance of boys in a [girls'] school, comrades, it can only be compared, maybe with an air-raid, that's the impression it gives. I have to say, that I have strong nerves, and do not succumb to panic easily, but when once boys came to the school with no warning, I flew out of my office barely breathing. There was such squealing, that I was certain someone fell out of a window, that something terrible happened.

. . . [A]fter every event, teachers take the opportunity to point out to me the excited state in which girls return from the dances. And yes, it's true, they are blushing, their eyes are shining, the whole deal. Their minds are not on schoolwork.

It was never like this, comrades. They used to be . . . sexless creatures for them . . . Only in 8th, 9th, 10th grade would boys and other dolling up start. And now, even little girls, they are reacting somehow.<sup>69</sup>

It appears that putting boys and girls into separate buildings for part of the day only fomented the "unhealthy" relations and created new forms, that horrified the observers willing to admit to their existence. The idea that girls were sexual beings did not fit within the Soviet puritanical worldview, although in this regard the Soviet system was not so different from other postwar societies.<sup>70</sup>

Separate education lasted from 1943 to 1954, a year after Stalin's death, when it could finally be abolished.<sup>71</sup> In the summer of 1954, a meeting was held to discuss how the reintroduction of coeducation could proceed. One concern that was raised immediately raised was the unpreparedness of girls' schools and girls themselves for a close encounter with boys:

. . . They are wonderful girls, but they have such a sheltered upbringing. They are afraid of boys, but they dream of them. Girls come to colleges and look at them, and they have not had a release for ten years . . . I remember when we spent ten years side by side and never noticed shorts or bare arms, and now a girl walks by a boy in a sport-suit and he looks at her in such a way, that we don't want them to.<sup>72</sup>

The sheltered upbringing of girls seemed to concern educators more than the moral deficiencies of boys, a reflection of the socially accepted stereotype of girls as the controlling mechanism on naturally uncontrollable boys. While the published concerns were not quite this frank, they did note that as a result of separate education, boys began to judge girls on appearance rather than on their inner qualities.<sup>73</sup>

But if before the war, improper (i.e. any) manifestations of female sexuality were proclaimed to be the fault of coeducation, to be resolved by separate education, now, after a ten year separate education experiment, improper manifestations of female sexuality were attributed to separate education, to be solved by coeducation. Thus, in the battle against female sexuality, again laws and regulations were seen as the primary problem-solving tool. But when it became clear that coeducation would return in the fall of 1954, and as the Komsomol Central Committee's Department of Agitation and Propaganda was busily preparing lectures on "friendship, Pioneer honor, and school traditions,"<sup>74</sup> to facilitate the hard work of "regulat[ing] the relations between boys and girls, which are unhealthy,"<sup>75</sup> there arose concern that too much talk about boy-girl relations could lead to trouble: "We need to check to see who will be these "speakers," what kind of people they are, or they are going to start having talks about love. Kids don't even think about this stuff, but we will push these thoughts on them."<sup>76</sup>

Thus, the Ministry of Education called for vigilance, though such vigilance in the context of Soviet schools could and did lead to unintended and undesirable consequences.<sup>77</sup> The official reaction to any manifestations of boy-girl friendships continued to be swift and cruel, something most famously described by N. Atarov in his thaw-era *Story About First Love (Povest' o pervoilubvi)*, where a chaste young love between a boy and a girl is ridiculed and sullied by ugly insinuations of school officials and other adults. In Atarov's story, the children are free of impure sexual thoughts, and it is

adults who attribute depravity to the relationship. Significantly the story was published after Stalin's death, and needs to be considered as part of the thaw era cultural production, where discussion of sexuality, albeit still limited, became an important venue for criticizing the Stalin era, emblematic of its hypocrisy and damage to young people.<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusion

Transforming human nature was one of the goals of the Soviet project. When it came to raising young future builders of socialism, sexuality was viewed not as a normal part of life, but rather an obstacle to realization of greater goals.<sup>79</sup> It certainly was not an attribute of the ideal Soviet child/adolescent that the state envisioned. Faced with expressions of adolescent sexual behavior, the state perceived sexuality as a political problem, in need of a political solution. In searching for a political solution to eradicating youth sexuality, the state proved unable to change human nature, instead creating more problems for itself and Soviet society. The quest to control female sexuality in the Soviet period illustrates interesting features of the Soviet regime: seeing everything as a political problem that can be solved through legislation, thus the shift from seeing separate education as a solution to seeing it as a problem and coeducation as a solution. The general tendency of de-eroticization of Soviet society meant that female sexuality could only be realized through childbirth.<sup>80</sup> This in turn problematized any expressions of youth female sexuality until appropriate reproductive stage.<sup>81</sup> It also resulted in a paradox: the state characterized sexuality as a problem, but needed to combat it without being able to study it or talk frankly about sex. The worrisome "unhealthy relations" covered a wide range of sexual behavior, from kissing to prostitution, to molestation of girls by boys or by personnel in children's homes. Treating them all as part of the same phenomenon reflected the hypocrisy of the Soviet state and made it that much more difficult to address the arguably more problematic aspects of "relations," such as sexual abuse.

As scholars have noted, Stalinist official moralistic rhetoric corresponded with traditional patriarchal one,<sup>82</sup> so it is not surprising that so many of the features of the Soviet system when it came to dealing with youth female sexuality make for such interesting comparisons not only with other authoritarian regimes, such as fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, but also other postwar democracies, also trying to return to normality and traditional gender roles after World War II. Even the perception of separate education as a way to deal with relationships between boys and girls, regardless of

the impact this has on the quality of education, is not exclusive to the Soviet regime. For example, in a recent *New York Times* article about a proponent of separate education, the need to shelter “girls from sexualized classrooms and sexualized streets” was an important motivating factor for parents, and that “really the most important reason to send a child to a single-sex school was that those kids still go on dates,”<sup>83</sup> a sentiment, if not the actual example, that sounds remarkably similar to that of some Soviet educators

The consequences of these policies, which in turn continued long past the period covered in this paper, are evident in Russia today.<sup>84</sup> Systematic sex education was briefly introduced in the early 1980s, but failed because teachers were not ready to teach it. More recently, the problem of youth sexuality has once again been picked up as a political issue and political scapegoat, this time by the communists and nationalists, who present sex education as “the most serious attempt to undermine Russia’s national security.”<sup>85</sup> The result, now as before, is the perpetuation of the gap between popular practices and official rhetoric, and disastrous public health consequences.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> We see a corresponding concern over American children and youth in the United States during the Cold War.

<sup>2</sup> L. Attwood, “Women Workers at Play: the Portrayal of Leisure in the Magazine *Rabotnitsa* in the First Two Decades of Soviet Power,” in *Women in the Stalin Era*, ed. M. Ilich (Palgrave, 2001), 40–43.

<sup>3</sup> Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial’no-Politicheskoi Istorii (RGASPI), f. M-1, op. 23, d. 443, l. 35.

<sup>4</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 114, d. 346, l. 196.

<sup>5</sup> Tsentral’nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sankt-Peterburga (TsGA SPb), f. 5039, op. 1, d. 15, l. 26. The idea of a “successful marriage” as a way to escape joining the labor force was seen as dangerously contrary to the proper outlook of a builder of socialism.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, “Seksual’naia revoliutsiia 20-kh godov,” in S. I. Golod, *XX vek i tendentsii seksual’nykh otnoshenii v Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1996); I. S. Kon, “Zapretnyi plod,” in *V chelovecheskom izmerenii* (Moscow, 1989), 291–294; E. Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton UP, 1997); S. Fitzpatrick, “Sex and Revolution: An Examination of Literary and Statistical Data on the Mores of Soviet Students in the 1920s,” *JMH*, Vol. 50, no. 2 (June 1978), pp. 252–278; N. B. Lebina, *Povsednevnaia zhizn’ sovetskogo goroda 1920/1930 gody* (St. Petersburg, 1999), esp. 270–275; A. Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia; Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Komsomol – Communist Youth League – an organization entrusted by the Communist party in 1922 with supervision over the Young Pioneers.

<sup>8</sup> RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 23, d. 454, ll. 24–25.

<sup>9</sup> RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 23, d. 882, l. 73. Similarly, parents blamed youth organizations in Nazi Germany for corrupting their children and providing



them with an opportunity to defy their parents, stay out late, and mix with members of the opposite sex. See R. Waite, "Teenage Sexuality in Nazi Germany," in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 8, no. 3 (January 1998), 447; G. Rempel, *Hitler's Children: The Hitler Youth and the SS* (U of North Carolina Press, 1989), 50–51; E. Heineman, *Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?* in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 11, No. 1/2 (January–April 2002), 29–31.

<sup>10</sup> RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 23, d. 446.

<sup>11</sup> Leбина, 275. See also, W. Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> T. G. Kiseleva, *Zhenshchina i sem'ia v posleoktiabr'skii period* (Moscow, 1995), 29. The idea of abstinence and of channeling sexual energy into political work was also heavily promoted in the 1920s.

<sup>13</sup> Shul'gin, "K voprosu o polovom vospitanii," in *Na putiakh k novoi shkole* (1928), no. 12: 39; A. Zalkind, "Polovoi vopros i trudnye deti," in *Detskaia besprizornost' i detskii dom* (Moscow, 1926).

<sup>14</sup> TsGA SPb, f. 5039, op. 3, d. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Recent scholarship points to the fact that perception of child sexuality as normal and healthy was a relatively new concept in the United States in the 1920s–1930s, although this normalization was "conditional and limited." (Hawkes and Egan, "Developing the Sexual Child," 1, 25) At the same time, anxieties over sexualization of children were "clearly articulated in the first decades of the twentieth century." (Hawkes and Egan, "Developing the Sexual Child," 7, 30n10)

<sup>16</sup> TsGA SPb, f. 5039, op. 3, d. 1.

<sup>17</sup> The Soviets were not unique in viewing sexual and moral concerns in political terms. Nazi Germany makes for a good comparison (Waite, 474), but even in non-authoritarian regimes, the moral panic over the perceived or actual sexual practices of young people had important political and policy consequences.

<sup>18</sup> TsGA IPD SPb, f. 24, op. 11, d. 20.

<sup>19</sup> TsGA SPb, f. 5039, op. 3, d. 410, l. 63.

<sup>20</sup> TsGA SPb, f. 5039, op. 1, d. 15, ll. 48–51, 57–58.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 136ob.

<sup>22</sup> TsGA SPb, f. 5039, op. 1, d. 21, l. 56ob. The standardization of the formulation in the different reports is also striking. From what we can gather from diaries of young people, notice from school officials would be the "kiss of death" for any budding relationship. N. Lugovskaya, *The Diary of a Soviet Schoolgirl 1932–1937*, trans. J. Turnbull (Glas, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> TsGA IPD SPb, f. K-598, op. 2, d. 673, RGASPI, f. 77, op. 1, d. 583, TsGA SPb, f. 7384, op. 18, d. 863, RGASPI, f. 17, op. 120, d. 237.

<sup>24</sup> TsGA SPb, f. 5039, op. 1, d. 15, l. 238.

<sup>25</sup> TsGA SPb, f. 7384, op. 18, d. 863, l. 14.

<sup>26</sup> I discuss the problems with the Soviet educational system in my dissertation "Growing Up Soviet: Childhood in the Soviet Union, 1918–1958."

<sup>27</sup> Kon', "Sexuality and Politics," 10.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, L. Holmes, "Part of History: The Oral Record and Moscow's Model School no. 25, 1931–1937," *Slavic Review*, Volume 56, Issue 2, Summer 1997: 294.

<sup>29</sup> TsGA SPb, f. 5039, op. 1, d. 15, l. 40.

<sup>30</sup> TsGA SPb, f. 5039, op. 3, d. 77, ll. 61ob–63ob.

<sup>31</sup> Lebina, 275.

<sup>32</sup> Sexual education and information on such things as birth control was not available for Soviet adults either. (Lebina, 285) A rare attempt to make information about menstruation available to girls was cut from the original manuscript. See RGALI, f. 630, op. 1, d. 1878, ll. 98–99.

<sup>33</sup> In studies conducted during the late 1920s, one frequently encounters triumphant statements about children and young people expressing no interest in sexual and erotic matters as a sign of progress. R. G. Vilenkina, "K kharakteristike nastroenii rabocheho podrostka," in *Pedologiia* (1930), no. 1: 95–97; A. K. Montelli, "Razvedka v oblast' interesov shkol'nikov vtoroi stupeni," in *Pedologiia* (1930), no. 1: 111, 117–118.

<sup>34</sup> Original article – *Soviet Pedagogy* (1939), no. 6; L. V. Pisareva, "Material dlia besed s uchashchimisia o lichnoi gigiene i vzaimootnosheniiakh polov," *Soviet Pedagogy* (1941), no. 1: 65–77.

<sup>35</sup> The emphasis on the moral dimension of sex education in the Soviet Union was similar to projects regarding sex instruction in the United States during this time. (Hawkes and Egan, "Childhood Sexuality," 15)

<sup>36</sup> Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. A-2306, op. 69, d. 2673, ll. 84–87.

<sup>37</sup> RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 23, d. 1473, l. 4.

<sup>38</sup> Kon, "Sexuality and Politics," 10.

<sup>39</sup> Though the decree was passed in 1943 and has been viewed as a wartime measure, its passing was actually delayed by Germany's invasion in June 1941. The implementation of this decree and its significance is discussed in greater detail in my dissertation.

<sup>40</sup> Gorsuch, 185.

<sup>41</sup> The shift from a sociological to a biological discourse occurred not only with gender, but with ethnicity during the same period. For the significance of the shift from sociological to biological, see A. Weiner, "Nature, Nurture, and Memory in a Socialist Utopia: Delineating the Soviet Socio-Ethnic Body in the Age of Socialism." *AHR*, Vol. 104, No. 4 (October, 1999): 1114–1155.

<sup>42</sup> *Soviet Pedagogy* (1943), no. 5–6: 6; (1944), no. 4: 10–11. Sexual hygiene appeared to be the purview of young women only.

<sup>43</sup> GARF, f. 5446, op. 44, d. 1088, l. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Once it was deemed improper to have boys and girls mixing in the classroom of major urban areas, the implementation reports proved to be at times tragicomical. For example, the 1943 report on the Leningrad (a city under siege by the German Army since 1941 and recovering from a siege-related famine that wiped out almost a million inhabitants of the city) school network, admitted that severe artillery bombardment forced officials to reunite a boys' and girls' school in one building. The report hastened to add, however, that "the premises of each school are totally isolated, they have separate entrances, so that the boys and girls do not come into contact with each other." (TsGA SPb, f. 5039, op. 3, d. 594, l. 93.)

<sup>45</sup> GARF, f. 5446, op. 44, d. 1088, l. 24.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 23.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 29–28.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 25–24.

<sup>49</sup> GARF, f. A-2306, op. 69, d. 2954, l. 24.

<sup>50</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 181, l. 52; GARF, f. A-2306, op. 69, d. 2952, l. 66.

<sup>51</sup> GARF, f. A-2306, op. 69, d. 2957, l. 7; TsGA SPb, f. 5039, op. 3, d. 594, l. 94.

<sup>52</sup> TsGA SPb, f. 5039, op. 3, d. 594, ll. 94ob-96.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* Such extracurricular projects seemed to have been the norm in the early post-decree period. See, also *Moskva poslevoennaia, 1945–1947. Arkhivnye dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow: "Mosgorarkhiv," 2000), 602.

<sup>54</sup> TsGA SPb, f. 5039, op. 3, d. 594, ll. 96–97. The obsession with female modesty is also an important component of many religious models of proper femininity. But even in a non-religious model of proper female sexual behavior, the emphasis on modesty is present. (Hawkes and Egan, "Childhood Sexuality," 16)

<sup>55</sup> It is important to note that a number of additional variables contributed to the violent and unstable environment in the boys' schools (overcrowding, high student-teacher ratio, and the score of health and development problems that were not being addressed).

<sup>56</sup> TsGA SPb, f. 5039, op. 3, d. 815.

<sup>57</sup> TsGA IPD SPb, f. K-598, op. 11, d. 301.

<sup>58</sup> Poverty and attractive appearance were also seen as having potential to lead a girl into trouble. (RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 5, d. 349).

<sup>59</sup> *Women and Russia: Feminist Writings from the Soviet Union*, ed. T. Mamonova (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

<sup>60</sup> B. Iziumskii, *Alye pogony* (Moscow, 1948), 249–251.

<sup>61</sup> RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 32, d. 704.

<sup>62</sup> S. Lees, *Losing Out: Sexuality and the Adolescent Girl* (London: Hutchinson, 1983).

<sup>63</sup> B. Aleksandrovskii, *Druzhnoi sem'iei: iz opyta raboty klassnoi komsomol'skoi organizatsii v shkole* (Novosibirsk, 1952). RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 5, d. 481. For descriptions of improper boy-girl relationships, see TsGA IPD SPb, f. 24, op. 46, d. 39, ll. 2–3.

<sup>64</sup> GARF, f. A-2306, op. 71, d. 721, l. 20.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 13.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 32–33.

<sup>67</sup> It appears that "pornography" referred to "dirty" notes and "dirty" pictures, whether hand-drawn or "procured" on the "street."

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 43.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 50–51.

<sup>70</sup> For example, the publication of Alfred Kinsey's "Sexual Behavior in the Human Female" in September 1953 in the United States, with its assertion that women were no less sexual than men, evoked a great deal of concern.

<sup>71</sup> One could not expect a Stalinist policy to be reversed as long as he was alive, even if he lost interest in it. The process and its significance is discussed in my dissertation.

<sup>72</sup> GARF, f. A-2306, op. 72, d. 3680, ll. 37–43.

<sup>73</sup> *Literary Gazette*, 6 August 1953, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 5, d. 559, l. 5.

<sup>75</sup> GARF, f. A-2306, op. 72, d. 3680, ll. 7–9.

<sup>76</sup> RGASPI, f. M-1, op. 5, d. 559, l. 39. Similar sentiments were expressed on the eve of the war as well. Kon notes that after Stalin's death, the official attitude towards sexuality went from "brutal suppression" to "awkward taming." (Kon, "Sexuality and Politics," 11)

<sup>77</sup> For an example of improper attitude by teachers towards boy-girl friendships in *Literary Gazette*, 21 October 1954, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of the thaw, see N. Condee, "Cultural Codes of the Thaw," in *Nikita Khrushchev*. Ed. W. Taubman, S. Khrushchev and A. Gleason (Yale University Press, 2000). The critical approach to certain aspects of Soviet life did not end the desire to control and root out manifestations of youth sexuality by most of the educators.

<sup>79</sup> We end up with a somewhat paradoxical situation, whereas in the West there existed a sexual discourse about shaping the future (Hawkes and Egan, "Childhood Sexuality," 3), the Soviet Union managed to conceptualize the future without sex.

<sup>80</sup> Lebina, 288.

<sup>81</sup> One interesting consequences of the de-sexualizing of Soviet girls is the introduction of school uniforms that remained the say through the Soviet period. It becomes quite noticeable when one looks at photographs of schoolgirls over time. A photograph in 1951 in magazine *Rabotnitsa* depicting a group of girls at a museum outing, could have just as well been taken in 1981 – the uniform styles and hair styles remained frozen in time. One contemporary artist (Dasha Fursey) appears to be dealing with the desexualization of the Pioneer girl figure. In her works, she takes the standard images of Pioneer girls and fills them with sexual images.

<sup>82</sup> Lebina, 276.

<sup>83</sup> E. Weil, "Teaching Boys and Girls Separately," NYT March 2, 2008.

<sup>84</sup> While the 1960s saw the publication of the first serious article about sexuality in *Soviet Pedagogy*, sex education did not appear in the Soviet Union until the 1980s. (Kon, "Polovaia moral' v svete sotsiologii," *Soviet Pedagogy*, 1966, no. 12: 64–77).

<sup>85</sup> I. Kon, "Sexual Culture and Politics in Contemporary Russia."