The “slave soul of Russia” is a metaphorical characterization of a mentality that pervades Russia on all cultural levels. But in the depths of the individual Russian psyche, this “slave soul” is a specific, personified, and gendered entity: it is a woman, most commonly the first and foremost woman in every Russian’s life, namely, the mother. At the national level, as we saw earlier, the “great [female] slave” (Grossman) is “Mother Russia” herself.

Any responsible mother is in some sense enslaved by her children, especially by very small children who require constant attention. Vasilii Rozanov characterized a mother as a slave (“sluzhit rabyneiu”) in a touching vignette about a sick child and its attentive mother. But there is nothing particularly Russian about sacrificing oneself to the needs and whims of what Freud liked to call sa majesté l’enfant.

In Russia, however, there has always been a gross inequality of the sexes which served to intensify a woman’s enslavement. A traditional Russian woman was, in effect, the slave of her man. Among the peasantry, for example, a daughter was expected to be obedient to her father until he married her off, whereupon she was required to submit to the will of her husband. The husband became her “father” within the patriarchal peasant culture, as in the proverb “A husband is the wife’s father, a wife is the husband’s crowning glory” (“Muzh zhene otets, zhena muzh u venets”). Among the gentry the situation was not very different, as can be seen from Professor Stites’s discussion of “the subservience of married women to their husbands in nineteenth-century Russia.” Stites goes so far as to make an analogy with the institution of
serfdom: “In many ways, the wife-daughter’s status under the husband-
father was analogous to that of the landlord’s serf.”

Among the peasantry the husband himself was likely to be a slave (literally until 1861, metaphorically both before and after). There is a famous passage about the complexities of the serf wife’s enslavement in Nikolai Nekrasov’s folkloristic poem *Red-Nose Frost*:

Три тяжкие доли имела судьба,
И первая доля: с рабом повенчаться,
Вторая — быть матерью сына раба,
А третья — до гроба рабу покоряться,
И все эти грозные доли легли
На женщину русской земли.

Fate held three heavy parts:
The first was to be married to a slave,
The second was to be the mother of a slave’s son,
The third was to submit to a slave to the grave.
All of these terrible lots fell upon
The woman of the Russian land.

Here Nekrasov sympathizes with the downtrodden Russian woman, and understandably so. But the picture was really more complicated. The inequality of the sexes was affected in important ways by the fact that both spouse abuse and child abuse were common in the peasant family.

When a peasant wife did not submit to the will of her husband, that is, did not behave in accordance with the ethical principle of *smirenie*, she could expect to be beaten by him. When her children did not submit to his will, they too could be beaten by him. They could also be beaten by their mother, although mothers tended to beat their children for different reasons than fathers did. Nevertheless, both parents were abusive. The abuse was accomplished in a variety of ways: the child was whipped with a rope, hit with a fist, a stick, or a nettle switch, dragged by the ear or the hair, or kicked.

Although from a small child’s viewpoint the mother is a dominating, enslaving figure in any culture (above, 96), as the Russian child grows it becomes increasingly clear that the father is the family slave driver. Among the Russian peasantry the father’s abuse of the mother would often take place right in front of the children. For example, ethnographer Ol’ga Semenova-Tian-Shanskaia reports on one muzhik who, when
drunk, used to threaten his wife with an axe, or beat her on the head with a threshing-flail as the children cried and screamed nearby.\(^7\)

It must be quite an epiphany for the growing Russian child to discover that its master has a master (especially if this occurs in the context of the primal scene—see below). The original enslaver is, after all, a slave. Any hostile wishes that the child may have had against the mother—and even children who have not been swaddled Russian-style have hated their mothers at one point or another—must be reactivated by a male adult who himself lords it over the child’s mother. At the same time, having been lorded over in the past, the child must also be able to identify with a mother who now appears to be a victim. In other words, the child must be torn. At some moment in development the child has the affective makings of both master and slave, both sadist and masochist.

Within the traditional peasant family the father was a harsh disciplinarian who had a right to beat his children, to decide who they married, to determine where they would live, etc. Christine Worobec provides a very typical example in her excellent recent book on post-emancipation peasants:

On 12 September 1871, in Ivanovo canton, Shuia district, Vladimir province, a father charged his son with leaving home and not being respectful of parental authority. When the son defended his action by accusing his father of severely beating him, the father replied that it was a parent’s right to punish a disobedient son. The father reasoned that such beatings were merely instructive; they could not lead to maiming. The cantonal court sided with the father, sentenced the son to twenty lashes, and ordered that he return to his parents’ home.\(^8\)

Such familial authority has always had its political analogue in Russia. Political authoritarianism is expressed with specifically paternal metaphors. The Russian tsars, for example, had since the seventeenth century been affectionately referred to by the naively monarchistic peasantry as “little father” (“Batiushka”). Peter the Great was “Father of the Fatherland” (“Otets Otechestva”).\(^9\) Iosif Stalin, who far outstripped the tsars in the degree to which he enslaved Russia (and the rest of the Soviet Union), was called “Father,” “Father of the Peoples,” “Wise Father,” “Beloved Father,” and so forth.\(^10\)

In the religious realm, as in the political, the paternal metaphor reigned, and continues to reign. For example, a nineteenth-century Russian monk writes: “We must not try to find out why this happened in
this way, and not in that, but with childlike obedience we must surrender ourselves to the holy will of our heavenly Father and say from the depth of our soul: 'Our Father, Thy will be done.' The Russian Orthodox "God" is most definitely a father, not a mother.

The childlike quality of Russian obedience is manifested in the very pronouns Russians used in addressing the authorities. Russian has two second person pronouns, the familiar ти and the polite ви (cf. French тu and vous, German Du and Sie). Initially the Russian child uses only ти, whether the interaction is with adults or with peers. The familiar pronoun is the pronoun of childhood. Among peasants this pronoun remained predominant in adulthood as well, however. Ви was used on certain formal occasions (e.g., matchmaking), or in situations where deliberate distance was desired, or in addressing some members of the gentry (e.g., the landlord's wife). But ти was used toward those in authority, as Paul Friedrich has pointed out:

The household chief, the landlord, Tsar, and God were all addressed with ти and the quasi-kinship term, батюшка ("little father"). Thus a striking feature of authority in Russia as against the West was that ви generally did symbolize greater power, but that when the greatness passed a certain point the speaker switched back to what might be called the ти of total subordination or of an intimacy that could not be jeopardized. From another point of view, ти to God, Tsar, and squire emphasized the fatherly aspect of their jural authority.

In the Soviet period childish familiarity with authority figures decreased, of course. But the paternal metaphor continued to reign. A Soviet woman physician and hospital section head writing a letter to sociologist Larisa Kuznetsova, describes a confrontation she had with another physician who was supposed to be working under her: "Once I permitted myself to make a joke: 'Which of us in this section is the Mama—me or you?' Pedantically he raised his index finger and replied harshly: 'Remember that I am everywhere the Papa.' " Eventually this woman quit her job as section head and went back to being an ordinary physician. As another Moscow woman said: "Inequities don't always give rise to anger. Sometimes they make you subservient."

Patriarchy Conceals Matrifocality

Despite the overt patriarchal orientation of adult Russian culture, the child's early viewpoint should not be neglected. Small children are
preoccupied with their mothers, not their fathers. They cannot eat, drink, clothe themselves, clean themselves, or move about without the mother's assistance and/or permission. The "barin" may not allow you to leave the borders of his estate, and the paternalistic Russian bureaucrat may not permit you to leave the borders of the Soviet Union, but your mother did not even let you out of her arms, or the swaddling bands, or the cradle, or the hut.

To a traditional Russian child the world must seem very "matriarchal" (and even more so if the father is absent or indifferent). Patriarchs do not mother. They can take neither credit for caring for the infant nor blame for subjugating it. Indeed, mothers in all cultures are in charge of their children until they are weaned.\footnote{15}

Actually, a much better term than "matriarchal" here would be \textit{matrifocal}, meaning that the emphasis in Russia is on the mother-child relationship at the expense of the father-child or father-mother relationships.\footnote{16} There is in fact no such thing as a "matriarchal" society anywhere on our planet, and there probably never has been one.\footnote{17} But it is possible for a society, such as Russia, to be intensely matrifocal while at the same time being patriarchal to varying degrees at various time periods.

Even after the Russian child has grown up, the mother remains extremely important. Ivan Petrovich Sakharov, writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, quotes a long peasant incantation designed to neutralize the effects of a mother's anger against her grown-up son.\footnote{18} Referring to interviews with Soviet Russian soldiers, Henry Dicks says: "On the whole the impression was gained that a Russian man's mother remained his most important love-object even though he was married."\footnote{19}

In Russia, according to philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev, "the fundamental category is motherhood."\footnote{20} This statement is not just about individual Russians and their mothers. The matrifocality of the Russian family has spilled out into the culture as a whole. Maternal imagery permeates all levels of Russian society and culture. To the Westerner, there seems to be an excess of signification about mothers in Russia, and this excess indicates that the average Russian needs to continue dealing, even in adulthood, with the experience of having been mothered.

For example, mother earth is the place where, in the native lore, all crops grow ("mat' zemlia-kormilitsa") and all Russians are eventually
buried ("mat' syra zemlia"). Russians speak of the "bosom of the earth" ("lono zemli"). More than one Dostoevsky character has been known to flop down upon the earth, kiss it as if it were a person, and moisten it with tears of joy or grief. On various ceremonial occasions among the peasantry the earth was kissed. Russian peasants sometimes swore oaths by swallowing a handful of earth. Land disputes were decided by peasants who paced boundaries with a clump of earth on their head. In the absence of a priest, peasants would sometimes confess their sins to mother earth.

The Volga, the Oka, and various other Russian rivers, Moscow and some other cities, plants such as rye ("rozh")—all have "mother" or the pleonastic "natal mother" ("mat' rodnaia") as their epithet. "Mother Russia" ("matushka Rus'," "Rossiia mat'") is a very normal way for the Russian to personify his or her country, while "Fatherland," that is, "otechestvo" is less common and less significant (except in contexts of extreme nationalism or war). Some lines from Nikolai Nekrasov provide a famous example:

Ты и убогая,
Ты и обильная,
Ты и забитая,
Ты и всесильная,
Матушка Русь!...

Thou pitiable,
Thou prosperous,
Thou downtrodden,
Thou almighty
Mother Russia.²¹

"Motherland" ("Rodina," literally "Birthland") is another widespread designation, as in the famous recruitment poster from World War II, "The Motherland Mother Calls" ("Rodina mat' zovet"); this term can also refer to the village or general locale one was born in.

The "Mother of God" ("Bogoroditsa" or "Bogomater,'") unlike the "Blessed Virgin Mary" of Western Christianity) is quite as important as the male divinities in Russian Orthodoxy and popular Russian Christianity. She pities those who suffer and who sin, she is a protector, she works miracles, she aids women in labor, churches are consecrated in her name, she was the guarantor of military pacts, her icon was worshipped by soldiers before battle, and so on. Mary is not only Christ's
mother, she is the metaphorical mother of all religious Russians, even of all humankind. Historically, she seems to have inherited some features of the old Slavic fertility goddess Makosh', the “mother of the harvest.”

In the religious lore, there are repeated allusions to the “three mothers” in every person’s life: the Mother of God, Mother Moist Earth, and the natal mother. It is as if one mother were not enough, or not adequate enough. Mother cults, both Christian and pagan, can be traced back to earliest Russia. A central figure of Russian folktales is the maternal hag Baba Yaga, who threatens to eat little children.

The Soviet government traditionally rewarded prolific mothers with the title of “Heroine Mother” (423,000 Soviet mothers had received this award by 1990). The Communist Party itself (“partiia”) was often characterized as the “mother” of Soviet citizens in both official and unofficial lore.

Ambivalence toward Mothers

There are widespread hostile, even sadistic attitudes toward the maternal image in Russian culture. These attitudes are all too often neglected by scholars of Mother Russia.

The most common way to swear in Russian, for example, is to make a nasty sexual reference about someone’s mother. This language is colloquially referred to as “mat” (which is related by folk-etymology to the Russian word for “mother,” i.e., “mat”). The most widespread and ancient expletive in the vocabulary of mat is “eb tvoyu mat,” which has many nuances of meaning and considerable linguistic peculiarity, and which may be very loosely translated as “go to hell!” or “goddamn it!” But the phrase literally means “[I] fucked your mother,” and it is obviously this underlying meaning which stirs emotion in both the addressee and addressee—so much emotion that, until only recently, the phrase was taboo in the Russian press, even for purposes of quotation or linguistic analysis. The attitude of Soviet authorities toward mat was essentially the same as that held by the Russian Orthodox Church and the tsarist censorship.

The Oedipal dimension of mat is not far below the surface, because it is usually spoken by a male to another male, and the third party is somebody’s mother. In effect, the most common mother oath may be translated as: “I fucked your mother, and therefore I might even be your
father.” Such an expression automatically creates an Oedipal triangle, with antagonism between the father and child figures, as well as hostility toward the mother. A variant form, “Fuck your mother!” (“Ebi tvoiu mat’!”) admonishes the addressee to commit incest—also a clearly Oedipal idea.

The Oedipal suggestiveness of mat is expressed by an explicitly Oedipal legend from the Smolensk area about its origin:

Every person has three mothers: his natal mother and two great mothers, moist mother earth and the Mother of God. The devil “disturbed” one person. This person killed his father and married his mother. From that time on humankind has been swearing, mentioning the name of the mother in curses, and from that time this evil has spread about the earth.24

Boris Uspenskii cites numerous religious folkloric texts in which one’s own mother, mother earth, or the Mother of God is horrified and suffers greatly upon hearing mat spoken.25 An inescapable consequence of mat—at least in the fantasy life of the religious Russian—is maternal suffering. All of these texts are of course designed to induce guilt in the addressee. One should, like one’s mother, suffer.

This brings us to the pre-Oedipal aspect of Russian obscenities. When mat is used aggressively, the direct target (given in the accusative case) is the mother. But mat is always understood as being directed at the mother’s child as well. That is, to insult a person’s mother using mat is the same as to insult the person. The person’s honor depends on the mother’s honor. Why this should be so makes sense, psychoanalytically. After all, the person’s self-esteem or core narcissism itself derives from pre-Oedipal interaction with the mother. Indeed, it was during a period when the self was not yet clearly distinguished from the mother, when the boundary with her was not yet clearly established, that the child’s narcissistic core was formed. The insult “I fucked your mother” injures self-definition as much as it injures self-esteem.

A common variation on “I fucked your mother” is “I fucked your soul-mother” (“Eb tvoiu dushu mat’”). This adds a sacral or religious tone, as Uspenskii observes.26 But the extension is psychoanalytically revealing as well. The word “soul” stands in grammatical apposition to “mother” (they are both in the accusative case). Thus the soul as well as the mother are “fucked.” But the “soul” in question is that of the addressee, so the expletive’s target is equally the mother and the
mother’s child. From the viewpoint of the addressee the self and the self’s mother are equally insulted. Again, mother and self are difficult to distinguish—which is a specifically pre-Oedipal problem.

Writer Andrei Siniavskii, when asked recently for a definition of freedom by a correspondent of Literaturnaia gazeta, replied: “Freedom is when someone tells you to go to hell [lit., go to your fucked mother—k edrennoi materi], but you go where you please.” 27 This definition is perhaps not so whimsical as it seems. The insult calls on the addressee to return (psychoanalytically, regress) to the mother he or she was once bound to, but the addressee instead rejects that mother.

Apart from mat, there is much other evidence for hostility toward mothers in Russian culture. Russian autobiographers (e.g., Andrei Belyi in Kotik Letaev, Gork’ii in his Childhood) have a tendency to portray their mothers as psychologically treacherous, as has been established by the late Richard Coe. 28 Matricidal fantasies abound in Russian literature, especially in Dostoevsky’s novels. 29 Various Russian writers have expressed their extreme disillusionment with “Mother Russia,” including Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, who wrote an article characterizing Russia as “The Pig Mother” (“Svin’ia Matushka”), 30 and Andrei Siniavskii, who castigated Soviet Russia for driving out its Jews: “Mother Russia, Bitch Russia [Rossiia-Suka], you will answer for this child too, raised and then shamefully dumped by you.” 31 Maksimilian Voloshin characterized Russia as a “cruel infanticide” (“gor’kaia detoubiitsa”) for the way she treated Pushkin and Dostoevsky. 32 Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn quotes anti-Russian lines that were supposedly popular in the early Soviet period:

Мы расстреляли толстозадую бабу Россию,
Чтобы по тelu ее пришел Коммунизм-мессия.

We shot fat-assed, old-lady Russia
So that messianic Communism could climb onto her. 33

Similarly, Aleksandr Blok’s marching revolutionaries in his famous poem “The Twelve” shoot “Holy Russia” in her fat rear end. 34

More examples could be adduced. Of those given, mother-cursing is probably the most important, because (mostly) men of all social categories everywhere in Russia do it. What is more, they do it from an early age, when interaction with the mother is still intense. According to
Ol’ga Semenova-Tian-Shanskaia, for example, the Russian peasant child learned how to swear before it was even capable of speaking complete sentences. Such behavior was not only not discouraged in the peasant family, it was actively fostered. When the mother refused the child something, the child might call her a “bitch” (“suka”) right to her face—and the mother herself might then brag to her friends about her energetic little “ataman.” If a child beat on its mother’s apron with a switch, grown-ups would express their approval. A child might be beaten for many reasons, but swearing was not one of them (“Za skvernye slova ne bili”).

Expressions of hostility toward the mother should not be separated from the adoration of Mother Russia—and of Russian mothers generally—that is more commonly and more openly discussed in the literature on Russian national attitudes. It can at least be said that ambivalence characterizes the Russian fascination with maternal imagery. The image of the mother can arouse feelings of both love and hate, submission and rebellion. What this ambivalence springs from in individual ontogeny is most probably the overwhelming control exercised by the person on whom one is totally dependent in early development.

The matrifocality of Russian experience is what makes women such a threat to men in Russia. There is a whole series of proverbs which indicate that the peasant male felt inescapably tied down or restricted by his wife, yet at the same time he fatalistically accepted such restriction:

A wife is not a boot (not a bast shoe), for she cannot be kicked off (Zhena ne sapog [ne lapot’], s nogi ne skinesh’).

A wife is not a mitten, for she cannot be thrown off (Zhena ne rukavitsa, s ruki ne sbrosish’).

A wife is not a gusli: having played, you cannot hang her up on the wall (Zhena ne gusli: poigrav, na stenku ne povesish’).

A wife is not a saddle, for she cannot be taken off your back (Zhena ne sedlo: so spiny ne symesh’).

A wife is not this, a wife is not that, but most important a wife is not your mother:

A wife is not a mother, whose body should not be beaten (Zhena ne mat’, ne bit’ ei stat’).
The wife and mother thus form a kind of equivalence class, with the wife functioning as a stand-in for the more forbidding and dangerous mother. Semiotically speaking, a man’s wife is a maternal icon. One may wish (have wished) to beat the mother, but in fact one is only allowed to beat the iconic signifier of the mother.

Here we are dealing with phenomena which are familiar to the psychoanalytic anthropologist. Mother-cursing, wife-beating, heavy drinking, and generally hypermasculine behavior are characteristic of men in matrifocal cultures everywhere. Referring specifically to the Russian culture, psychiatrist Henry Dicks says that Russian men repress the “mother’s boy” inside themselves in favor of “rugged, swaggering, ‘masculine’ behavior.”

The traditional Russian patriarch may from time to time exercise abusive force over his wife (especially when under the influence of alcohol), but he tends to slip back into a subservience and passivity that characterized his early experience with his mother. His wife is then in a position to run his life for him, as if she owned him along with their children. In these periods she will seem a “matriarch” to the outside observer. But in reality she is enslaved by her husband, for taking care of both his physical and psychological needs is a considerable burden. She pays for her imagined control with labor, and besides, the illusion of control is itself shattered every time he flies into a rage and beats her up, or steps in to make an important family decision, or any time she tries to exercise power outside of the family.

Suffering Women

Whether the Russian mother is loved or hated, worshipped or beaten (or both), controls or is controlled by her spouse, she suffers. It is important that she suffer. The Russian mother is almost by definition a sufferer, whereas there is no notion of a suffering father. Mothers sacrifice themselves with their enduring patience, they redeem themselves and others with their misery. Sometimes—not always—their suffering is masochistic in nature. Sometimes also the representation of their suffering seems exaggerated, as though the suffering of their children were being projected upon them.

Mother Russia herself suffers, as in these lines from Nikolai Nekrasov:
IS THE SLAVE SOUL OF RUSSIA A GENDERED OBJECT?

В минуты уныния, о рода-мать!
Я мыслью вперед улетаю.
Еще суждено тебе много страдать,
Но ты не погибнешь, я знаю.

In moments of dejection, O motherland-mother,
I fly forward in my thoughts.
You are still fated to suffer much,
But I know you will not perish.

Similarly, writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn utilizes in his novels what Ewa Thompson terms the “topos of Russia-as-victim.” In Boris Pasternak’s Doktor Zhivago Mother Russia is characterized as a martyr (“muchenitsa”). Ordinary Russians, too, perceive Russia as suffering. In his psychoanalytic study Dicks says: “It was remarkable how often my interviewees expressed the postwar state of Russia in terms of their ‘starving, neglected mother.’”

Mother Russia’s suffering is so great that she needs to be “saved”—especially if one is a Russian nationalist. Hence the anti-Semitic commonplace: “Beat the Jews and save Russia!” (“Bei zhidov, spasai Rossiiu!”). The conservative tsarist censor Aleksandr Nikitenko lamented: “Poor Russia, they insult you so cruelly! God save us from revolution!” Even the liberal newspapers in today’s poverty-ridden post-Soviet Russia constantly speak of “saving” Russia. Because her customary epithet actually is “Mother,” Russia offers a particularly direct example of Richard Koenigsberg’s thesis that “the wish to ‘save the nation’ is the projective equivalent of the wish to restore the omnipotence of the mother.”

Billington says of ancient Russia: “Women quietly encouraged the trend in Russian spirituality which glorified non-resistance to evil and voluntary suffering.” In his Diary of a Writer Dostoevsky heaped praise upon the Russian woman, “that self-renouncing martyr for the Russian man.” Nikolai Nekrasov praises suffering mothers throughout his poetry, for example, the “martyr mother” (“muchenitsa-mat’”) in a poem titled “Mother.” Contemporary fashion designer Viacheslav Zaitsev attributes part of his success to his “sainted mother,” to her “heroic patience, and a saintly capacity for self-sacrifice.”

The Russian mother does not necessarily suffer for her child. The important thing is to suffer. An overworked Soviet mother interviewed by Hansson and Lidén said: “She [a mother] has to suffer the sorrows of
her people. Then her child will turn out well. I'm quite convinced of that.”

In the religious folklore the maternal image is a suffering image. The Russian Madonna tends to be very somber. She is, as Siniavskii says, “suffering incarnate.” Icons of her are said to shed tears or blood. Mary’s chief sorrow is of course the suffering and death of her son, Jesus. This is not a particularly Russian idea, but there are some associated ideas which might seem odd to Western Christians.

For example, Christ’s own suffering tends to be viewed primarily through the prism of his mother’s suffering. Indeed, as Strotmann points out, it is icons of the Mother of God that are the most venerated in Russia. Icons of Christ do not get as much attention as those of his mother. Yet icons of the Holy Mother tend to include Christ anyway, in the form of a child. The divine child is, in effect, inseparable from his mother, is practically implied by the mother: “Il ne faut pas oublier que l’icone de la Vierge est toujours celle de la Mère et du Fils, unis par un lien indestructible.”

In Russian Orthodox theology Jesus and his mother are extremely close. They are close in the sense that they are very often together, with Mary showing special sympathy for everything that her son undergoes. They are also close in the sense that they are similar. Father Isaia of the Troitse-Sergieva Lavra says, for example:

Just as Her Divine Son did, She [the Mother of God] carried Her cross Her entire life. This cross consisted of the scandalous discrepancy between the greatness befitting Her as the Mother of God, and the condition of humiliation in which She lived right up until Her death.

At the foot of the cross on Mount Golgotha this woman suffered intensely with her son. After three days he rose from the dead. Similarly, according to tradition, she herself rose up into heaven three days after she died. This event, the Assumption (“Uspenie”) is the greatest church holiday associated with Mary, just as Easter (celebrating Christ’s “voskresenie”) is the greatest festival for Christ in Russia.

The similarity between the Mother of God and God the Son can give rise to situations where one might be confused with the other. In his 1898 essay on the idea of humanity in Auguste Comte, philosopher Vladimir Solov’ev describes the remarkable icon of Sophia, or the divine Wisdom, in Novgorod. She sits on a throne at the center of the icon,
with a Mother of God in the Byzantine style on her right, John the Baptist on her left, and Christ rising above her with uplifted arms. According to Solov’ev, this central, feminine figure cannot be the Mother of God, nor can she be Christ: "If this were Christ, then it could not be the Mother of God, but if it were the Mother of God, then it could not be Christ."61 This very jumping back and forth between alternatives, however, suggests some higher semantic equivalence between the two, as if the Sophia represented some principle of unity between the divine Mother and her Child.

Christ is so similar to his mother that he sometimes “mothers” her. Andrei Siniavskii refers to an icon of the Assumption in which Christ, standing before his mother’s body, takes her soul into his hands in the form of a swaddled child.62 There may be a revenge fantasy lurking here.

Another aspect of Russian religiosity that will not be familiar to Western Christians is a tendency toward blending the pagan mother earth with the Christian Mother of God. Both of these maternal images suffer because of the sinfulness of Russian people. Boris Uspenskii quotes a spiritual song from the mid-nineteenth century:

Как расплакется и растужится  
Мать сыра-земля перед Господом:
Тяжело-то мне, Господи, под людьми стоять,
Тяжелее того — людей держать,
Людей грешных, беззаконных,
Кои творят грехи тяжкие....

Thus mother moist-earth cries out  
And laments before the Lord:  
It is hard for me, Lord, to stand under the people,  
It is harder still to hold up the people,  
Sinful people, lawless people,  
Who commit grave sins.63

According to the religious lore, both mother earth and the Mother of God suffer terribly whenever people swear using mother-oaths (so-called “mat”).64

The suffering Mother of God is supposed to come to the aid of those in need, that is, those who, like her, are suffering. She has great power as an “intercessor and protector,” according to Joanna Hubbs. But just how “powerful” is she in fact? She is powerless to protect her son from being crucified, and the perpetual sorrow of her expression encourages
the worshiper to accept the trials and tribulations of life. Hubbs says: “Mary is the Tree of Life upon which her son hangs.”65 This is a protector?

Closely related to the Christian cult of the Mother of God in Russia is the old Slavic cult of Paraskeva-Piatnitsa. This cult appealed even more directly to masochistic impulses. Worshipers (women), among their other activities, would beat themselves violently.66

Russian proverbs attest to the abundant suffering of mothers (and women generally). In Vladimir Dahl’s classic collection one can find such items as the following:

A young wife cries till the morning dew comes, a sister cries till she gets a golden ring, but a mother cries till the end of her life (Moloda zhena plachte do rosy utrennei, sestratsa do zolota kol’tsa, mat’ do veku).

A mother’s crying is like a flowing river, a wife’s crying is like a running brook, a bride’s crying is like falling dew—as soon as the sun comes up, it dries the dew away (Mat’ placht, chto reka l’etsia; zhena placht, chto ruchei techet; nevesta placht—kak rosa padet; vzoidet solntse—rosu vysushit).

A mother cries about her own handful (child), not someone else’s (Mat’ placht [po detishchu] ne nad gorstochkoi, a nad prigor-shnei).67

It is a woman’s habit to help out matters by means of tears (Zhenskii obychai—slezami bede pomogat’).68

Some of the proverbs—evidently spoken by men—suggest that women cry more than is really necessary (e.g., “In women and drunkards tears are cheap”). Still, on the face of it, more tears do suggest more suffering.

Russian literature is rich with the imagery of suffering and self-sacrificing women, some of whom are masochistic, some of whom are not. Pushkin’s Tat’iana Larina has already been mentioned. Nikolai Nekrasov’s long poem Russian Women (1872) features a noblewoman who follows her husband to a Siberian mine and, at the poem’s climax, falls on her knees to kiss her husband’s chains.69 Many of Dostoevsky’s female characters suffer on behalf of their men. Barbara Heldt characterizes one of Dostoevsky’s best-known heroines as follows: “Nastasia Filippovna allows Rogozhin to murder her”; “she is given a multitude
of opportunities to cast aside her role as femme fatale or fallen woman; she is shown to be capable of living quietly; but she is ultimately unwilling to live.”

In Lermontov’s *Hero of Our Time* Vera declares to Pechorin: “I am your slave [ia tvoia raba]”—and after suffering great emotional torments over Pechorin, has the good sense to leave him. Tolstoy’s Natasha in *War and Peace* gives up her aggressive charm entirely when she marries Pierre Bezukhov, degenerating into an unkempt “fertile female” and “slave to her husband.” Pasternak’s lecherous old Komarovsky seduces the young girl Lara, making her his slave (“nevol’nitsa”) and causing her great suffering. She then imagines herself to be among the “poor in spirit” who are blessed by Christ.

Anna Akhmatova, author of the long poem *Requiem*, which depicts the terrible sufferings of the wives of those arrested during the 1930s, takes pride in having been “with the people,” “unprotected by foreign wings.” Solzhenitsyn’s Matrona loses her life while helping rapacious relatives haul away a portion of her house.

These are all very different examples, of course, but women’s suffering is seen as somehow exemplary in all of them. Men sacrifice themselves in literary art too, but their suffering lacks a certain emblematic quality. The righteous Matrona can stand for all of Russia, but Nerzhin, or Kostoglotov, or even Ivan Denisovich cannot.

Women’s folklore is a particularly rich source of information on women’s suffering. For example, any self-respecting peasant woman in tsarist Russia knew how to keen. Men, on the other hand, did not. All of the various forms of laments (“plach,” “prichitanie,” “prichet,” “voi”) were sung exclusively by women. In many areas of Russia a woman who did not possess the “art of the lament” was held in reproach.

Does this mean that women had more to lament about than men did? Or were men just more restrained emotionally?

The answer is yes to both questions. Men were not supposed to wail on those occasions when wailing by women was called for: the death of a loved one, the drafting of a loved one into the tsarist army, the loss of livestock or property, etc. These events, theoretically, should have been just as upsetting to men as to women. On the other hand, mothers were closer to their children than men were, daughters were closer to their parents than sons were, and so on. A correspondingly greater degree of
suffering at the loss of loved ones could therefore be expected from women.

In addition, there was one event in life which was much more tragic for women than for men, namely, marriage. With good reason Pushkin declared that “our wedding songs are melancholy, like a funereal howl.” 76 Here a woman, unlike a man, was being torn from her family and was entering into a form of virtual enslavement by the spouse and in-laws. She had every reason to lament this fate—although normally she also accepted it. Indeed, the wedding laments assisted her in accepting it. They served as an instrument for gaining mastery over the idea that she no longer had freedom (“volia”), that she must now obey everyone in the new, patrilocal household (for detailed consideration of the prenuptial bathhouse laments, see below, 195–99).

For the traditional peasant woman to marry was truly to embark upon a life of suffering. The remarkable nineteenth-century anthropologist Aleksandra Efimenko writes that the Slavic (including the Russian) peasant woman is “worn down by slavery and heavy labor,” and that she “by her own admission sanctions this abnormal relationship [with the husband].” 77 Efimenko quotes a folk song in which a Russian woman sings “I, of my own will, am an eternal servant [vekovechnoi slugoiu] to my dearly beloved.” 78

Soviet sociologist Larisa Kuznetsova says that a Russian woman’s willingness to “bend her back” is a habit that has “become overgrown with its own psychology over the centuries [privychka gnut' spinu obrosla v vekakh svoei psikhologiei].” 79 She says that women in some parts of Russia before the revolution were, for all intents and purposes, “house slaves and concubines” who had to be dragged out of the abyss of ignorance and servility “often against their own will.” 80 Kuznetsova characterizes the old patriarchal idea of femininity as “concern for a man, submissiveness to him, obligingness.” 81

Soviet sociologist A. Kharchev refers to the alienation which occurred between the proverbial “enslaver-man and enslaved woman” in the Russian family of tsarist times. 82 Marriage for love was rare in those days, says another Soviet sociologist V. A. Sysenko, who also speaks of the “humbled” (“prinizhennoe”) position of the woman in the old, patriarchal Russian family. 83

Among contemporary Western scholars, Christine Worobec has
gone far in the direction of recognizing that Russian peasant women were complicitous in their own oppression. She characterizes the position of the post-emancipation peasant woman as follows in her recent book *Peasant Russia*:

Despite their position as second-class citizens, Russian peasant women supported or, at least, accommodated themselves to the patriarchy. The isolated individual might resist her subjugation, but peasant women did not stand up as a group to protest their oppression. This accommodation may be explained by the nature of the patriarchy itself, which was careful to give women some rewards, power, and safeguards. Russian peasants honored women as mothers and diligent workers. Because men were dependent on their wives' labors in the household and its environs, they gave women a good deal of latitude in managing their affairs. The patriarchy also placed great store in women's honor, so intricately tied to family and male honor. It protected women's reputations, rigorously punishing those who falsely slandered a woman.

Recognizing that "accommodation" did take place, Worobec does not, however, consider the possibility that a psychological factor such as masochism might have facilitated it. It is true that peasant women gained "some rewards, power, and safeguards" for "accommodating" to their abject position, but these do not have to be the only features that contributed to an acceptance of that position. Worobec herself provides numerous examples of female abjection which must surely have had a psychological basis. Thus, during a typical peasant wedding ceremony the bride was at one point obliged to throw herself at the feet of the groom as a sign of submission and obedience. Later in the ceremony she was obliged to remove his boots for him. She was not supposed to get into the nuptial bed with him until she obtained his permission to do so (these secular rituals corresponded perfectly with the bride's legal obligation "to obey her husband as the head of the family" and render "unlimited obedience" to him). Certainly a masochistic attitude would make such behaviors easier for the bride to perform. Even if the groom threw in some symbolic economic incentive, such as placing money in the boot removed by the bride, the bride's masochism should not be ruled out. Indeed, if such a gift were perceived as humiliating, then accepting it would also be masochistic.

Worobec also points to the deferential attitude of the peasant wife toward her husband. While a wife might address her husband using the
respectful first name and patronymic, or sometimes call him “father,”
the husband would typically use just the first name or such derogatory
terms as “baba” (woman) or “starukha” (old lady).  

Worobec observes that a husband had the right to beat his wife
(even publicly), and quotes proverbs such as: “A husband is the law for
his wife”; “Beat your wife like a fur coat, then there will be less noise”;
“The more you beat the old woman, the tastier the soup will be”;
“There is no court for women and cattle.” Such proverbs have, as
Worobec says, “a decidedly male voice,” and there are many of them. A
few from the Dahl collection may be added here:

The one I love is the one I beat (Kogo liubliu, togo i b’iu).
Beat your wife before dinner, and again before supper (don’t sit at
the table without beating) (Bei zhenu k obedu, a k uzhinu opiat’
[bez boia za stol ne siad’]).
If you let a woman off, you’ll become a woman yourself (Babe
spustish’—sam baba budesh’).
Freedom spoils even a good woman (Volia i dobruiu zhenu portit).
A chicken is not supposed to crow like a rooster, a woman is not
supposed to be in charge of a husband (Ne pet’ kure petukhom, ne
vladet’ babe muzhikom).
A wife is always guilty before her husband (U muzha [pered muz-
hem] zhena vsegda vinovata).
Cry, young wife, but tell your sorrow to no one (Plach’, moloda
zhena, da pro svoe gore nikomu ne skazyvai).

These proverbs are perhaps more indicative of male sadism than female
masochism. A wife did not necessarily want to be beaten, even if there
was pressure to accept such behavior. Indeed, there is evidence of some
resistance to being beaten. As Worobec points out, women chanted
incantations to safeguard against beatings. Sometimes they would run
away from husbands who were prone to “excessive violence.”

Yet there was generally an attitude of smirenvie. Violence that was
not considered “excessive” was nonetheless tolerated. Efimenko tells us
that “wives lodge complaints [in court] only for severe beatings,” mean-
ing that “the lighter ones thus pass without any action being taken.”
IS THE SLAVE SOUL OF RUSSIA A GENDERED OBJECT?

These words ought to be seriously considered by those scholars who think that litigation records, however detailed, are an indication of what was typical in old Russia. Here one proverb is worth many court cases.

Worobec points to the general social approval of wife beating:

Russian peasant society did not countenance a woman’s flight to her parents as a justifiable response to wife beating. In directly challenging her husband’s authority, she threatened the entire power structure of the village. The display of a man’s strength vis-à-vis his wife was important both inside and outside the household. It maintained his propriety as an upright community member and brought honor upon his household.94

Worobec cites cantonal court cases lost by women who attempted to run away from their violent husbands. Only women whose husbands were completely irresponsible about managing the household economy or paying taxes were granted any legal relief—and even then these women were expected to continue living with their dangerous husbands.

Nancy Shields Kollmann, writing of an earlier period in Russian history (fourteenth- through seventeenth-century Muscovy), observes that “women could seek defense against abusive husbands and other male kin.” However, husbands were abusive nonetheless, and wives tolerated the abuse, as we must conclude from the immediately following sentences in Kollmann’s article:

Although men were allowed to discipline their wives, Orthodox teaching urged them to inflict only just and moderate beatings. Litigants declared that excessive beating invalidated a husband’s conjugal authority over his wife.95

Here I have taken the liberty of italicizing some items in order to point up the obvious.

All scholars of peasant Russia in tsarist times agree that wife beating was common. Ol’ga Semenova-Tian-Shanskaia asks, for example, “how often” a husband would beat his wife, not whether he beat her (the answer: often if he was drunk, rarely if he was sober). Semenova-Tian-Shanskaia goes on to observe that, after taking a beating, a peasant wife was more likely to be concerned about whether the object the husband had used to beat her was broken than about the condition of her own body.96

The absence of wife beating was considered abnormal. The fact that most women remained married nonetheless (and only uncommonly
sought recourse with the village assembly or cantonal court strongly suggests that women accepted a bad situation. Some of Dahl’s proverbs bear this out:

This has nothing to do with me, whatever my husband says is correct (Moe delo—storona, a muzh moi prav).

My Ustim is bad, but it’s better being with him (Khud moi Ustim, da luchshe s nim).

With him there is sorrow, but without him it’s twice as bad (S nim gore, a bez nego vdvoe).

He (my husband) won’t beat me, but he won’t leave either (On [Muzh] bit’ ne b’et i proch’ neidet).97

The last item suggests an unclear domestic situation. A man who is not beating his wife would normally be expected to leave, for he must not love her anymore. There were some women, in other words, who felt unloved if they were not beaten. Apparently this was not just a male fantasy. Efimenko, a woman with enlightened views who had plenty of experience living with peasants, states that “Russian [peasant] women regard the blows of the husband as proof of his love.”98 This does not mean that they were enjoying the blows, but that they were semiotizing them in a certain way.

Sexologist Krafft-Ebing, citing a seventeenth-century German source, tells of a certain German visitor to Russia who took a Russian wife and settled with her there. The German noticed that his new wife was unhappy, and asked her what was wrong: “I want nothing,” was the answer, “but what is customary in our country—the whip, the real sign of love.” When [he] adopted the custom his wife began to love him dearly.”99

Maxime Kovalevsky, in his lectures delivered at Oxford in 1889–90, writes: “In more than one popular song the wife is represented as bitterly complaining of the indifference of a husband who never on any occasion gives her a good beating.”100 Earlier, in his 1872 book Songs of the Russian People W.R.S. Ralston translates a series of lyrics sung by a young man and a girl (or more frequently, by two girls) on the subject of “A Wife’s Love.” First one of the singers (representing the husband) declares that he is going to the bazaar to get some fine cloth for his wife. The other (representing the wife) rejects this present, how-
ever. Then the husband sings that he is going to get a golden ring, but
the wife rejects this too. Finally the husband comes back from the bazaar
with a “silken whip” and proceeds to deliver a blow to the wife with it.
The wife’s attitude changes completely. She now looks upon her hus-
band with affection as the chorus sings:

Good people, only see!
How well she loves her Lord!
Always agrees with him, always bows down to him,
Gives him kisses. ¹⁰¹

He has won her love by abusing her.

To repeat: Russian peasant women did not necessarily get pleasure
from being mistreated. On the other hand, as was made clear at the
beginning of this book, pleasure is not a necessary ingredient of masoch-
ism in the first place. I think, therefore, it is best to interpret the evidence
as supporting the existence of masochism among peasant women. This
is not to say that the Russian peasant woman was continually masochis-
tic in all contexts, but that she was at least capable of on-again, off-
again masochism to deal with her mate’s intensely ambivalent feelings
toward her, as well as to deal with her own emotional needs.

To read beatings as a sign of love indicates a need for love. The
ethnographer or anthropologist might object that Russian peasant
women did not marry “for love” in the first place. Even granting that
this might be true (and keeping in mind that these women often did not
have much say in the matter), it has nonetheless never been demon-
strated by any ethnographer that peasant women had no need for love.
Certainly any chrestomathy of Russian folk songs will contain love lyrics
sung by women. To assume that peasant women had no emotional needs
would be condescending indeed. On the other hand, to assume that they
had a need to love or to be loved (as is the case with normal women and
men in the twentieth-century West) is to raise the possibility that they
might have accepted abuse as a next-best substitute for the love they
needed.

The idea that beating signifies love may seem strange to the Western
mind, but if we consider the connections which Russian culture makes
between violence and sexual intercourse (which in turn can be related to
love), the idea will not seem so strange.

It was Freud’s Russian patient Sergei Pankeev, better known as the
Wolf Man, who inspired the famous linkage of sex and violence now known in the psychoanalytic literature as the \textit{primal scene}. By this term is meant the "scene of sexual intercourse between the parents which the child observes, or infers on the basis of certain indications, and phantasies. It is generally interpreted by the child as an act of violence on the part of the father." \footnote{102} According to Freud, Pankeev by chance witnessed parental intercourse at the age of one and a half (or two and a half) years, and mistakenly interpreted what was going on as something terrible for his mother. Yet the mother did not react as if she were being mistreated at all: "He assumed to begin with, he said, that the event of which he was a witness was an act of violence, but the expression of enjoyment which he saw on his mother's face did not fit in with this; he was obliged to recognize that the experience was one of gratification." \footnote{103} Pankeev's mother thus \textit{seemed} to be behaving masochistically—not because she was apparently enjoying sex, but because she was welcoming what appeared to the Wolf Man to be violence directed against her.

When one considers the extremely crowded living conditions of the typical Russian peasant hut, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the primal scene must have been a banal occurrence for every peasant child, not just Freud's Russian aristocratic patient. Parents and children did not have the luxury of sleeping in separate rooms of the peasant's log hut. Rather, sleeping was a communal matter. The whole extended family typically slept together on the "polati," which was a large raised platform. Normally this sleeping bench extended over the stove, which provided warmth for the sleepers in winter.

The crowded communal apartments of the Soviet period must also have been conducive to primal scene experiences. Even apart from the "kommunalka," living arrangements in the Soviet period fostered the primal scene experience. According to psychotherapist Valerii Maksimenko it was recommended that the child not be taken out of the parents' bedroom until the age of three years, while a Western childrearing manual suggested six months. \footnote{104}

Living conditions in Russia have generally fostered a sexualization of the child's discovery that, as I put it earlier, the master has a master. That is, sleeping arrangements have encouraged a sadomasochistic idea of parental sexuality.

At one point in his discussion Freud says of Pankeev: "He under-
stood now that active was the same as masculine, while passive was the same as feminine." 105 This is not a particularly psychoanalytic idea, but is traceable at least as far back as Aristotle and other ancient thinkers,106 and may be found in Russian theoretical writing about sexuality as well. Thus the early Soviet gynecologist A. V. Nemilov, in his very popular book *The Biological Tragedy of Woman,* states: "In the specialization of the reproductive process man has been given the active part (just as the male gamete or sperm cell is active and mobile), while to woman has been allotted a more passive role." 107

Certainly this dichotomy is biologically valid in the narrow sense that a male has to have an erection and an ejaculation in order for intercourse to take place (while the female does not even need to have an orgasm). But, in a Russian context at least, the male’s sexual "activeness" may be thought of more broadly, in part because of the widespread primal scene experience, and in part because of the overall high level of violence against women. That is, the "activeness" of the male encompasses both notions of sexuality and violence.

Linguistic examples of this association may be adduced. There is a Russian verb, "trakhat’ " (perfective "trakhnut’ ") which means "to bang," "to strike." This original meaning of the verb clearly refers to violence. But the verb also has a slang meaning, "to fuck." 108 Only a man can perform this action, however (cf. English "Bill banged Jane," but "Jane banged Bill" is impossible in the sexual sense). Striking a woman is here the lexical equivalent of having sexual intercourse with her.

The common Russian verb "ebat’ " (to fuck) also has very aggressive overtones, and cannot normally have a feminine subject. 109 A man does it to a woman, but a woman does not do it to a man. A woman who utters the ordinary Russian insult "Eb svoiu mat’ " is using the masculine form, even though she is a woman, for she literally says "I, a man, fucked your mother."

These linguistic examples are in consonance with the overall cultural expectation that wife beating is normal. The connection of male sexuality with violence is embedded in the Russian culture on more than one level. From the viewpoint of a Russian woman trapped in this culture it is very easy to interpret the connection masochistically, that is, to accept it as an invitation to masochism. A Russian woman is prepared by her cultural experience (including possibly witnessing the primal scene) to
expect a certain amount of violence to go along with sexual intercourse, or more generally, to go along with living with a man. If she wants sexual intercourse with a man (and, apart from potential autoerotic and lesbian inclinations, we have to assume she does at least on occasion), she may feel that she has to endure some pain into the bargain. If she wants love from a man as well (and again we have to assume she is perfectly capable of falling in love), she may feel that the only way she can get love is to be on the receiving end of the man’s hatred too, that is, she may reconcile herself with his explosive ambivalence. Finally, if she lives with the chronic, low-level guilt experienced by most Russians (as we saw earlier), she may accept spousal violence as a form of expiation.

In this masochistic reasoning sex and love mean violence, but the direction of the semiosis can also be reversed, so that violence means love and sex. Thus a Russian woman may even come to assume that a man who does not beat her does not love her, and that a man who does not have an underlying contempt for her (and all other women) is sexually impotent (see below, 174).

Impotence was indeed a problem among the Russian peasantry. It is a well-known medical fact that excessive intake of alcohol renders a man temporarily incapable of sexual intercourse. A peasant returning home after a spree in the local tavern might have wanted to have sex with his wife, but he could not if he was too drunk. So instead he might beat her (recall Tian-Shanskaia’s observation that the peasant was most likely to beat his wife when drunk). From the wife’s viewpoint there would have been an understandable inclination to interpret her husband’s disgraceful behavior in some positive light, especially if she loved him. When drunk he was incapable of expressing love for her in the normal way, that is, by having sexual intercourse with her. So he only did what he could instead, he beat her. Sex and violence were already in a kind of equivalence class for her, so why not interpret his violent behavior in a positive way? Such an interpretation was of course masochistic in nature, but in some respects it made life easier for her.

There is a revealing expression in Russian: “slave of love.” This can only apply to a woman, however (it is “raba liubvi”—as in the title of Nikita Mikhalkov’s 1976 film—not “rab liubvi”). Similarly, the phrase “slave of the husband” (“raba muzha”) is a commonplace, while “slave of the wife” (“rab zheny”) does not occur. In Russia it is women,
not men who are thought of as being enslaved when loving someone of the opposite sex.

_Suffering from Equality_

In her paper on “The Problem of Feminine Masochism” (1935) psychoanalyst Karen Horney makes a curious statement about women in Russia. Reacting to other psychoanalysts (Helene Deutsch, Sandor Rado) who had made exaggerated claims about the universal presence of masochism in women, Horney emphasizes the role of cultural factors in determining the prevalence of masochism. Under the tsars, she says, women tended to be masochistic, but then a major social upheaval completely altered this attitude:

Masochistic phenomena in women can be detected as a result of directed and sharpened observation, where they might otherwise have passed unnoticed, as in social rencontres with women (entirely outside the field of psychoanalytic practice), in feminine character portrayals in literature, or in examination of women of somewhat foreign mores, such as the Russian peasant woman who does not feel she is loved by her husband unless he beats her. In the face of this evidence, the psychoanalyst concludes that he is here confronted with an ubiquitous phenomenon, functioning on a psychobiological basis with the regularity of a law of nature.

The onesidedness or positive errors in the results obtained by a partial examination of the picture are due to a neglect of cultural or social factors—an exclusion from the picture of women living under civilizations with different customs. The Russian peasant woman of the Tsaristic and patriarchal regime was invariably cited in discussions aimed at proving how deeply masochism is ingrained in female nature. Yet this peasant woman has emerged into the self-assertive Soviet woman of today who would doubtless be astonished if beatings were administered as a token of affection. The change has occurred in the patterns of culture rather than in the particular women.¹¹²

There can be no doubt that an immense sociocultural change took place in Russia in the early decades of the twentieth century. But this does not necessarily mean that masochism disappeared (or even lessened) in Russian women. Perhaps wife beating per se did become less accepted, especially as women moved to urban areas and became more educated than their mothers and grandmothers were. But the Sovietization of Russia also brought vast new opportunities for women to suffer. Women achieved some degree of equality with men but, as one Soviet woman
interviewed in Moscow said, “it seems to me that our women suffer from equality.” How is this possible? Lynne Attwood explains: “the emancipation [Soviet women] have supposedly enjoyed for the past 70 years has saddled them with a hefty double burden of work inside and outside the home, unassisted by husbands or by many of the labour-saving devices of the West.” This “double burden” (“dvoinaia nosha,” “dvoinaia nagruzka”) which most Soviet Russian women bore is well known. Even the conservative Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev recognized it in a 1977 speech in which he asked the members of his audience to express their gratitude for the “self-sacrificing labor” of their female comrades. The typical Soviet Russian woman handled the bulk of domestic-related tasks (cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping) and held down a full-time job. In the words of the same Muscovite woman quoted above, “it’s obvious that the woman suffers the most.”

What drove Soviet women to increase their labor by entering the workforce? The answer to this question is complex, and depends in part on historical context. In the troubled early decades of Soviet power many women simply had to work because there was a severe deficit of males (many women lost their men during the First World War, the civil war, the purges, and the Second World War). Women were also encouraged to work by an ideology of emancipation that glorified those women who worked side-by-side with men in building Communism (the ideology itself was fueled, in part, by labor shortages). More recently two primary factors, according to Gail Lapidus (on the basis of Soviet data), motivated women to be employed: economic pressure to make adequate provision for the family, and the attraction of enhanced status and independence for those who could claim to be gainfully employed. The salary of one spouse was simply not enough to meet expected living standards for a family of dependents, and besides, a job was itself of intrinsic value. This last factor was particularly important, as some studies showed that most women would continue working even if it became economically feasible for them not to, or at least they would continue in part-time employment. A very typical statement was made by a Moscow woman named Natasha: “I think it’s essential for a woman to work. If I don’t work for a period of time, I lose my feeling of self-esteem.”
Although a Soviet woman’s employment brought her positive feelings about herself, she was not necessarily treated equally with men in the workplace. Women were generally paid less than men who had the same amount of education, they held jobs of lesser status, and were underrepresented in managerial positions. This is documented by a variety of Soviet statistical sources.\textsuperscript{121}

Russians like to refer to women as “the weak sex” (“slabyi pol”). But in some areas, such as agriculture, Soviet women were not permitted to operate heavy machinery and had to do the bulk of the manual labor instead (98 percent of the field workers in agriculture were women).\textsuperscript{122} More than one quarter of construction workers and about a third of road workers were women.\textsuperscript{123} Overall, more than half of all the manual laborers in the Soviet Union were women.\textsuperscript{124} L. T. Shineleva wrote: “Our pain and our shame is women pouring asphalt and laying railway cross ties.”\textsuperscript{125}

If women were as active as men in the workforce, they were even more active than men in the household. Lapidus summarizes some of the Soviet sociological studies: “Although men and women devote roughly equal time to paid employment and physiological needs, working women devote on average 28 hours per week to housework compared to about 12 hours per week for men; men enjoy 50% more leisure time than women.”\textsuperscript{126} The differences may even have been greater than this, especially in rural areas.\textsuperscript{127} To some extent the differences extended into grandparenthood: the Soviet Russian grandmother (“babushka”) was much more likely to be involved in the care of her children’s offspring than was the grandfather.

The imbalance between hours spent by men and hours spent by women on household tasks was very roughly similar across developed countries, such as the United States, the Soviet Union, France, Germany, and Great Britain.\textsuperscript{128} What was different about Soviet women is that they endured the imbalance and typically worked full-time. In a time-use study comparing the residents of Jackson, Michigan, with those of Pskov, USSR, it was found that 80 percent of the Pskov women were employed, while only 55 percent of the Jackson women were. In addition, while employed women in Pskov worked forty-eight hours per week on average, employed Jackson women worked only forty-one hours.\textsuperscript{129}
As Vladimir Shlapentokh and others have pointed out, the main concern in a Soviet woman's life was lack of time to do all the tasks she expected of herself. It is no wonder that she fell ill much more often than her male counterpart.

There were of course other things in life that weighed heavily on Soviet women besides their double burden. Women menstruate, get pregnant, have abortions, give birth, and go through menopause. Not for nothing did Dr. Nemilov speak of "the biological tragedy of woman." Russian men, Soviet or otherwise, do not have to do any of these things. True, neither do men from other cultures, but Russian men seem to bend over backward to avoid getting involved, or are prevented in one way or another from getting involved. For example, a man would never have been seen in a Soviet abortion clinic where, because of inadequate educational and contraceptive practices, the average sexually active Soviet woman went two to four times by the end of her reproductive cycle. As for childbirth, it was a lonely, frightening, and painful experience for the Soviet woman. She was obliged to give birth in a special, unhygienic place called a birthing house ("roddom"). There she was typically not given anesthesia, was often treated rudely by the personnel, and was forbidden visits by her husband. Postpartum sepsis was not uncommon, and maternal mortality and infant mortality occurred at rates up to seven times greater than in the developed countries of the West.

As far as their "female" physiological functions were concerned, then, Soviet women bore a heavy, risky burden alone, without the help of their men. It is not surprising that, in the context of a questionnaire about childbirth practices, a sample of ex-Soviet women were much more likely than American women to agree with the statement that "women must be strong and accept the fact that they carry most of life's burdens."

Of the various "female" physiological functions, childbirth was the one most directly related to the double burden. A woman without children did not really have a double burden yet. A sudden increase in a woman's tasks came with the birth of her first child. As Iankova pointed out, although a wife's household burdens multiplied enormously at this stage, the husband's schedule changed relatively little.
The Double Burden and Masochism

Who imposed the double burden on Soviet women? To speak merely of “dual roles” is to avoid the question of who assigned or accepted those roles.

Generally there was a reluctance to blame anyone personally, including the women who took on the double burden. Rather, it was the fault of the “system,” as in this statement by Leningrad feminist Ekaterina Aleksandrova: “by attracting women to the work place and simultaneously preserving the traditional family, the system deliberately condemned women to dual exploitation, at home and at work.” Just how a “system” might “deliberately condemn” women to their double burden is a personification that Aleksandrova does not explain. Later in her paper she blames the “superpatriarchy” created by the Soviet government.

In similar fashion Bonnie Marshall says: “Unfortunately, the women interviewed [in a book about Soviet women] have been programmed by the society to which they belong, so that they take part in their own denigration.” Here “society” is the victimizer, although Marshall is granting that women participated in their victimization as well. Indeed, women even thrived under the patriarchy that oppressed them: “As second class citizens within a patriarchy, women have become accustomed to bad treatment. They have learned to deal with oppression and to thrive under it. Their spirits fail to wither.” The women Marshall refers to seem almost proud of what they endure. This comes very close to what psychoanalyst Charles Sarnoff calls “masochistic bragadocio.”

One of the effects of women’s willingness to work so hard at household-related chores was that men profited in the workplace. Lapidus says: “By freeing males from the performance of routine household and child-care chores, which would otherwise divert time and energy from educational, professional, and political pursuits, women workers in effect advance the occupational mobility of males at the cost of their own.” The phrasing here suggests that women were the agents of the behavior which ended up defeating them (“women workers . . . advance”), that is, they were not forced by men to do what they did. In other words, women engaged in self-defeating behavior, behavior which is masochistic by definition.
Commenting on some of the available statistics, feminist demographer Jo Peers said: "Women's huge contribution to Soviet power, both in the workforce and in servicing the population at home, brings her unequal rewards in terms of money, time, status and political power." The Soviet man, meantime, gained greater rewards while remaining "a relative parasite within the home." Again, to look at the language: one who "services" a "parasite" would seem to be someone who is very close to a willing slave.

How did Soviet women feel about their double burden? They certainly noticed it, and many admitted to feeling oppressed by it. To the question of whether it was easy to combine professional and family roles addressed to a group of Moscow working women, 10 percent said "It is very hard," 10 percent said "It is hard," and 52 percent said "It is bearable"—which is to say that a total of 72 percent of the women questioned recognized the difficulty of their double task. In another sample, roughly half to two-thirds of working mothers reported feeling "extremely tired" toward the end of a work day, depending on how many children they had.

Today these figures would no doubt be larger, given the economic deterioration that has been going on in what used to be the Soviet Union. One estimate has it that, whereas a few years ago women had to stand in line for basic goods an average of ninety minutes per day, more recently they have to stand in line for three hours per day. And of course it is primarily women who stand in line. As Kuznetsova points out, the only line in which men predominate is the line for vodka.

Yet, until rather recently, women have been reluctant to complain about their unfair lot. Old-fashioned smirenie prevailed. True, some resentment was expressed in the Soviet press, even in those media aimed at rural women, that is, at women who had traditionally been most accepting of traditional values. But, by Western standards, Soviet Russian women were very accepting of their lot, their sud'ba or dolia. For example, a woman's marital satisfaction was only very weakly correlated with the extent of her husband's participation in everyday household activities, according to S. I. Golod's survey of 500 Leningrad couples. In a sample of 1,343 married Moscow women with two children, 85.3 percent actually approved of the extent of their husbands' participation in shopping, 74.8 percent approved of their husbands'
participation in cooking and washing dishes, and 85.9 percent approved of their husbands’ participation in taking care of the children (from these and similar data Viktor Sysenko drew the entirely fallacious conclusion that urban men were rather active in domestic work).  

Speaking of a group of women interviewed in Moscow in 1978, Carola Hansson and Karen Lidén say this:

Even if the women rarely explained why their situation was unfair, they agreed, almost without exception, that it was. But when we looked for the desire for change, suggestions for solutions, a unified stand among women and a fighting spirit—what did we find? Almost none of these. It may seem callous to ask for struggle and protest in a country where the opportunities for such action are so much more restricted than in ours. But we seldom found even indignation.

“Their attitude was one of resignation,” the authors add. The most common approach these women took to their double burden was “being able to endure.”

The relevant Russian word here is “terpenie” (patience). Soviet opera singer Galina Vishnevskaya, after living abroad for some years, observed: “No other woman in the world would agree [soglasilas’ by] to live the way our Russian women live. Endless patience [beskonechnoe terpenie] and endurance for dragging everything on to oneself and still, if necessary, forgetting and forgiving everything—that’s what a Russian woman is!”

“Terpenie” has always been an important lexical item in the mind of the Russian masochist. Tsarist censor and former serf Aleksandr Nikitenko once wrote: “Patience, patience, patience. Wisdom is patience [Mudrost’ est’ terpenie]. There is no evil which people cannot bear. It’s all a matter of getting used to it.”

A curiously positive attitude toward the double burden was sometimes expressed: “Of course we’re grossly overburdened,” said one Soviet woman interviewed by Francine du Plessix Gray. “But we’re so used to it we wouldn’t give it up for the world. We take such pride in surviving it.” This declaration falls, again, into the category of masochistic braggadocio. Gray quotes a proverb that captures this attitude very well: “Women can do everything; men can do the rest.” Here the very servitude of women is flaunted as omnipotence. There is a slightly sadistic jab at men, but men can appreciate the joke too. Both
men and women can smile at this proverb because, from an ontogenetic viewpoint, it allows them to access the threatening memory of the mother's omnipotence, while at the same time canceling that memory with the reality of the mother's slavery.

The aspect of the double burden which Soviet women considered to be the most difficult was routine domestic labor such as cleaning, washing, and cooking. One despairing woman interviewed in Moscow said that “housework will continue to impede and hinder women’s progress for the next hundred years.”

Yet, however much women claimed to dislike this work, they still did it (if the statistics are to be believed). As Zoia Iankova emphasizes, women took on even their difficult tasks voluntarily: “The Soviet woman’s choice of activities is made freely, consciously, on the basis of her internal motives and needs.” There is of course no explicit discussion of whether any of the motives and needs in question were masochistic in nature. But the expression this sociologist uses to describe a woman’s domestic chores is psychologically revealing: “domashni i trud po obsluzhivaniu sem’i,” literally, “domestic labor for servicing the family.” The somewhat slavish overtone in Iankova’s oft-repeated “obsluzhivanie” (servicing) is evidently intended, for at one point she quotes Lenin’s writings of 1919 on the topic: “housekeeping is, in the majority of cases, the most unproductive, the most preposterous [samim dikim] and the most onerous work [samim tiazhkim trudom] that a woman performs.” “A woman continues to remain a domestic slave [domashnei rabynei], despite all the emancipating laws, for trivial housekeeping tasks press upon her, stifle her, stupefy and humiliate her.” Lenin complained that not enough efforts had been made in the new Soviet Russia to release women from their “condition of a domestic slave.” The expressions “domestic slave” (“domashniaia rabynia”) and “domestic slavery” (“domashnee rabstvo”) seem to have been favorites of Lenin’s. Such words were of course spoken by a connoisseur of Russian slave soul. Lenin seems, however, to have gotten his idea from Friedrich Engels, who had expounded on “the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife” which supposedly characterized the bourgeois family.

A woman interviewed in the late 1970s in Moscow declared that “some way has to be found to lighten women’s household tasks.” Yet this same woman passively accepted her husband’s idleness:
Of course my husband has more free time. After dinner when I'm busy with the baby and other things he sits and reads and rests. But we never argue about that. Since I have to take care of the baby I might as well do the other chores as well.\textsuperscript{160}

From a Western viewpoint this admission reads somewhat like a Jewish mother joke. But it is no joke at all. It is a factual description of a Russian woman's masochistic attitude. A similar attitude was expressed by the wife of a Stakhanovite fitter in 1936:

I help my husband in every possible way. I try to be cheerful and do not make him worry about taking care of the home. I assume most of the chores myself. At the same time I try to help my husband by advising him.\textsuperscript{161}

In this case the husband was no idler, but an accomplished shock worker. For the husband to sacrifice himself to the state, however, does not lessen the sacrifice the woman was herself making to the husband.

The increased participation of women in the workforce during the Soviet period clearly was not matched by an increased contribution of men in the domestic area. The sociologist N. G. Iurkevich expressed some indignation at this state of affairs:

If women had remained within the family, in order to produce the same quantity of material wealth it would have been necessary for men to work almost twice as much. From this point of view it is possible to say that women liberated men from half of their heavy work. Why, then, should some men not wish, in their turn, to take upon themselves half of "light" women's work?\textsuperscript{162}

A possible answer: because men are not as masochistic as women. I am sure that Iurkevich would not have anticipated such an answer to what was no doubt intended as merely a rhetorical question (the rhetoric being accomplished with a gentle laugh at men's alleged physical prowess). But the very possibility of lesser masochism of men in the relations between the sexes (or its logical equivalent, greater masochism of women in such relations) was never given serious consideration by either Soviet or Western scholars.

To characterize Soviet Russian women as masochistic because they, for the most part, accepted their double burden, is not to deny that other factors contributed to their double burden. At the economic level, a history of labor shortages in the Soviet Union has to be taken into account. At the ideological level, there was an ongoing double glorification, as it were, of female participation in the workforce and heroism in
the domestic sphere, pushing every Soviet woman to be a superwoman.\textsuperscript{163} And of course feminist scholars have pointed to the sexist male psyche.

\textit{The Male Ego and the Male Organ}

Russian women have always understood the potentially harmful consequences of undermining male authority. Much of Russian female masochism is in the service of pampering the Russian male ego, and this pampering, in turn, can help elicit altruism from the man who is likely to be the biological father of a woman’s children. For a variety of reasons—all of them ultimately deriving from an underlying biological-Darwinian cause—the normal heterosexual woman anywhere does not want to be a single mother.\textsuperscript{164} Even Murphy Brown would like to have a good man. The majority of adults in Russia, as everywhere else, are married. Other things being equal, the woman who receives assistance in rearing offspring will be more successful at replicating genes than the woman who does not.

Assuming that the stability of a marriage is worth something to a woman, it should not be altogether surprising that she takes steps aimed at maintaining that stability. One step she can take is to avoid attempting to put constraints on her husband’s freedom of action and independence (one Leningrad study showed that men are significantly more likely to value freedom of action than women).\textsuperscript{165} Another step a woman can take is to avoid being dominant. Iankova found that women were dominant (i.e., made the major decisions and acted as head of the family) in 33.3 percent of the unstable marriages in a Moscow sample, but that they were dominant in only 7.4 percent of the most stable marriages.\textsuperscript{166} Iankova also found that 75 percent of marital conflicts broke out in families where the wife was the “leader.”\textsuperscript{167} Psychologist Valeri Maksimenko found that, in “families in crisis” in Soviet urban areas, it was usually the wife who held the purse strings.\textsuperscript{168}

Male, not female dominance was considered the norm, especially by men. The typical Soviet Russian male, although he may not have been the despot that ruled the pre-Bolshevik extended peasant family, liked to think that he was in charge of his wife and children. He may not in fact have been in charge, and there may have been real equality, or division of authority into various spheres of action. But his sense of moral
authority ("vlast'," "glavenstvo") in the family was important to him.

As a result, Soviet women often found themselves walking what Susan Allott called "the tightrope between their own self-respect and the demands of the male ego." Vera Dunham, in her very interesting article on the "strong-woman motif" in Russian literature, demonstrates that literary works of the Soviet period reflect these concerns:

The woman's success must not threaten the male ego. She saved the economy of the country during the war. However, her armor had to be laid down when the man returned. She did not always have to give up her status-gratifying job, but her attitude had to become more humble. In this double posture, she spurs him on should he show a trace of indolence. He must do the same for her. But here, the woman more than the man must know where to stop. The woman must keep deciding between occupational drives and sacrifices for the sake of mellowing marital strains.

Whether it was in the lyrics of Margarita Aliger, or the postwar kolkhoz prose of Grigory Medynsky, Sergei Voronin, and others, the wife was the one who had to make the "sacrifices." And the ultimate "sacrifice," the one a husband was physically incapable of making, was to bear children. Dunham quotes the words of a high-ranking agronomist to her underling husband in a 1950 story by Yuri Kapusto: "Come along, help me out, catch up. I can't be the boss forever. I'll be having children."

A Soviet Russian man who wished to have power in the family was not inclined to take on household tasks that had been traditionally performed by women. In my opinion this was not so much due to the actual energetic expenditure that would have been required by such labor as to the meaning such labor had in the Russian cultural context.

In Russia domestic labor such as cleaning and cooking is semiotically loaded. It signifies femininity and low status. It is therefore a threat to masculinity and to male authority within the family. A traditional Russian man feels that it is beneath his dignity to cook and clean and shop: "a man often feels embarrassed to do household or household-related chores," said one woman interviewed in Moscow. Both men and women tend to say that such work is for the "weak," and a man is supposed to be "strong"—not merely in the physical sense (for, again, then he could perfectly well do the work), but in the sense of having power and responsibility, that is, in what some Soviet Russian commentators called the moral ("nravstvennyi") sense.
It is one thing for the “strong” man to cede his seat in the metro to a pregnant woman. It is quite another to cook and clean. When the Russian husband does housework, it is typically a grudging service, almost enslavement to his wife. One male respondent, who regarded liberated Soviet women as “cowboys,” wrote in Literaturnaia gazeta that “many self-respecting men do not aspire to absolute rule in the family, but the role of the wife’s orderly [rol’ denshchikov pri suprugakh] does not suit them either.”

Zoia Iankova says that, although women should not be restricted to the domestic role, they are nonetheless in danger of becoming overly masculinized if they begin to think that equality with men means being identical to them: “… women … become coarse [grubeiut] and acquire masculine patterns of behavior [muzhskie manery povedeniia], including masculine patterns of resolving family conflicts. They lose a preference for the kind of domestic behavior and interpersonal relations that has been tested by the centuries.”

The modern Soviet woman became a serious threat to the traditional Russian male ego. In one study of two hundred Leningraders the majority of both male and female respondents agreed that “masculinization” and a “domineering effect” (“effekt dominirovaniia”) could be observed in women employed in the workforce.

Igor’ Kon, in his article on the “masculinization of women” and the “feminization of men” which took place in the wake of massive participation by women in the Soviet workforce, pointed to the “style of thinking, self-assurance, manner of conduct, smoking, etc.” which became more common in women. Actress Larisa Malevannaia, attempting to explain why Soviet men were having a hard time finding wives, said, “We’re all the same—trousers, boots, cigarettes, a profession.” The pedagogues A. G. Khripkova and D. V. Kolesov said that smoking, loud speech, and other behaviors perceived as masculine were appropriate for women who sought a merely comradely relationship with men, but that such behaviors were harmful to love and marriage.

The playwright Leonid Zhukhovitskii, in a feisty article that asked “Where are the real men disappearing to?” said that a “strong” wife injures a man’s self-esteem (and that a woman really “wants to be weak” anyway).

One of the most intimidating “strengths” of the modern Soviet woman was financial. A female respondent to Zhukhovitskii’s article,
after describing how she bent over backwards to please her recently alcoholic husband, mentioned in passing that her salary is nearly twice her husband's. Tamara Afanas'eva wrote: "The title of family bread-winner—an honourable and responsible title—has always helped the man to realize his significance and his essentialness to the people closest to him. Without this role the very earth slips from beneath his feet." The traditional male role of father-provider ("otets-kormilets") would not die easily.

The Soviet Russian male did not just want to dominate. He also wanted to be in a position to render altruism to a woman and her offspring. When he was displaced from this position he felt threatened. Kon says: "However offensive this may be to the strong and proud sex, the man, no longer the sole provider and regulator of the family budget, is falling more and more under the influence of the woman [vse bol'she podpadaet pod vliianiye zhenshchiny]."

I emphasize the original Russian of the final clause here because it is so suggestive of the traditional Russian fear of dominance by a woman, for example, "He is under her shoe" ("On pod bashmakom u nee"), roughly equivalent to English "She wears the pants in the family." Compare Zhukhovitskii's vocabulary of degradation: "After a series of fights, and having with difficulty driven her spouse under her heel [zag-nav supruga pod kabluk], a woman suddenly and with despair and irritation realizes that she is the wife of a wimp [osoznaet sebi a zheno i podkabluchnika]." Unfortunately, even the English word "wimp" cannot begin to convey the contempt a "real man" feels toward a husband who has turned into a "podkabluchnik," literally, "one under the heel."

Arkadii Vaksberg, offended by a call for greater participation of men in domestic labor, believed that men should not be mobilized to "wash floors" ("mobilizui a muzhchin na myt'e polov"). According to Vaksberg, "The emancipation [raskreposhchenie] of the woman from housework is not achieved by the 'enserfment [zakreposhcheniem] of the man.' " N. G. Iurkevich quite justifiably criticized Vaksberg for reacting this way, asserting that it would be a long time before labor-saving devices were sufficiently developed to help Soviet women in their domestic work, and that men should therefore not sit idly by but do their fair share of work in the household too. But Vaksberg's reaction was nonetheless indicative of typical masculine feelings: participation in
domestic labor was not only a form of slavery, it was somehow "low", on the level of the very floor which had to be washed.

There was something distinctly sexual in the humiliation a man could feel before a powerful woman. Literary scholar Vera Dunham, referring to passages in Soviet prose works from the 1940s, says that "it does not seem right that the man be emasculated"; "She offers to support his research out of her own savings. He stands up to this castrating assault." 188

Dunham is speaking metaphorically here, but it is worth mentioning that castration literally occurs in many of the obscene folktales that have been gathered in Russia. A good example is the tale "A Man Does Woman's Work," which was gathered by Afanasii Afanas'ev in the middle of the nineteenth century. 189 In this disturbing little masterpiece a male peasant is depicted as staying home in the hut to do his wife's work one day, while the wife goes out into the fields to harvest the crops. The husband of course proceeds to make a mess of everything in the household. Then he loses all his clothes in the river where he was going to do a wash, so he covers his penis with grass to hide his embarrassment. A mare standing nearby sees the grass and chomps off the penis in one bite. The moral is unstated, but clear nonetheless: a man should not do a woman's work, otherwise he will be castrated. Or, more generally: a man should not try to be a woman (cf. the proverb "He who gets mixed up with women will be a woman [Kto s baboi sviazhet-sia—sam bab a budet]). 190 In the sexist male imagination the danger in becoming a woman is castration.

Nikita, the simple peasant hero of Andrei Platonov's 1937 story Potudan River, suffers a somewhat less cruel fate than literal castration. 191 He doesn't mind doing housework for the highly educated woman he eventually marries. He especially likes to wash the floor. But he is impotent with the woman. That is, he suffers a metaphorical form of castration, for a penis that does not function is as good as no penis at all.

Kon comes close to being sexually explicit about the feeling of humiliation a "strong" woman can elicit in a man: "Women on their part do not always take into consideration the heightened sensitivity of men towards anything which is connected with their ideas about masculinity: a too energetic and pushy woman (especially in love) is involuntarily perceived as an infringer of male 'sovereignty.' " 192
Lynne Attwood’s comment on this statement is rather blunt: “This does not offer much hope to the cause of women’s equality.” But women’s equality does not depend intrinsically on what goes on in the bedroom. To teach women to be sensitive to the possibility of male sexual impotence is not necessarily to bar their way to equality in the outside world. Perhaps Attwood does not understand that Kon is talking about what sexologists call psychogenic impotence—though Kon himself did not wish to be absolutely explicit about this in a Soviet publication that appeared in 1980.

Leningrad sexologist Lev Shcheglov put it this way: “I’m finding increasing male impotence among those couples in which women dominate. . . . The powerful women who say, ‘I want this, I want that, do it this way’—men deeply fear them. They’re afraid of still another oppressor.”

The greatest threat to a man’s masculinity is a threat to his penis, and a “strong” woman in the bedroom is precisely such a threat. The trouble with the typical Russian male, however, is that even outside of the bedroom he often cannot handle a “strong” woman, or even just an “equal” one. He behaves as though a woman were a sexual threat even when the interaction is not sexual (e.g., at the workplace, in the kitchen).

Although there is much evidence that a Russian man fears domination by a woman, there is little indication that a Russian woman fears domination by a man. Perhaps the reason for this is precisely the sexual element: a man’s sexuality is threatened by a powerful woman, but a woman’s sexuality is not necessarily threatened by a powerful man (indeed, it may be enhanced). A psychologist is not likely to be surprised by this, but for some reason other scholars always seem to be surprised at the idea that it is sexuality which lies at the heart of the relationship between the sexes.

From this very fundamental biological dichotomy we may thus perceive yet another reason why the slave soul of Russia is a gendered—that is, a female—object: acceptance of domination by a powerful partner is easier for the sex that does not have a penis to preserve.

This easier acceptance by women is not intrinsically masochistic in nature, but it can quickly become masochistic—and all too often does—if it spreads beyond the bedroom and takes on self-destructive qualities in interaction with men. Russian men, meantime, are no less masochistic in their world of primarily male-male interaction. But to ask whether the
slave soul of Russia is a gendered object is to focus on what goes on between the sexes. There is no gender without gender difference, and there is no gender difference without differences between the sexes. In relations between the sexes in Russia, it is the woman who is most likely to be the moral masochist (despite the fact that it is the man who is likely to be the erotogenic masochist). What Dr. Nemilov said more than half a century ago still applies:

The condescension and contempt marked in the attitude toward woman is so general that often we even fail to notice it. Moreover, women themselves have become so thoroughly inured to it that they are prone to regard a radically different attitude as something unworthy of the male or even as evidence of weakness and perhaps impotence on his part.\(^{197}\)

A woman who thinks a man must have a low opinion of her in order to have an erection has a low opinion of herself without even realizing it. Without knowing, however, how she feels about herself, she will inevitably act out her feelings instead, that is, she will behave in a self-destructive or masochistic fashion.

**The Guilt Factor**

In addition to bearing their double burden of domestic and extra-domestic work, Soviet women endured the resulting psychological strain. Attwood says that, “Just as the grafting of professional work on to their former domestic roles has resulted in a double work-load, the grafting of a range of hitherto ‘masculine’ psychological traits on to their traditional ‘feminine’ personalities has resulted in a psychological double burden.”\(^{198}\) Lapidus speaks of the “extreme degree of nervous strain and fatigue” which was sometimes damaging to health, and which could hinder a woman’s functioning both on the job and in the family situation.\(^{199}\) The “strain,” “tension,” “contradictions,” and “conflict” between women’s two roles were often mentioned in the literature on women in the Soviet Union, though usually these phenomena were not treated in any psychological depth.\(^{200}\)

The psychological strain was not simply a matter of playing two roles instead of one. Guilt was also involved. Alix Holt, who interviewed several Soviet women in 1978, says that working women with young children felt “a certain amount of guilt.”\(^{201}\) In her introduction to the
collection of interviews titled *Moscow Women*, Lapidus says that “an undercurrent of guilt” runs through many of the interviews, that is, guilt over not being able to devote enough time and energy to children. Susan Bridger points to articles aimed at rural women which encouraged self-denial in the family and fostered guilt feelings if the proper attitude of self-sacrifice was not maintained.

The Soviet working woman’s guilt was double. In trying to do two jobs she felt that she never did either job quite right. The double burden meant double guilt. But guilt feelings toward the family came first. This is true not only historically, but psychologically. Guilt toward the family was primary and weighed more heavily on the working mother.

Olga, the protagonist of Natal’ia Baranskaia’s insightful novella *A Week Like Any Other* (1969) is repeatedly late for work, does not get enough work done when she is at work, is reprimanded by her boss, is scolded by her colleagues, etc. All this makes her feel guilty, but she feels even more guilty about the fact that she sometimes neglects her children in order to accommodate work demands. At a political training session she cannot contain her frustration and declares: “I have a degree in chemical engineering, I love my work, I want to work better. But I feel sorry for the children.” The next day, even while apologizing to her colleagues for making life difficult for them, she cannot stop thinking about her children: “A mysli moi v’iutsia vokrug rebiat.” She is especially upset that her sick daughter is in daycare that day when she should really be at home—but then *she* would have to be at home to look after the child.

The novella ends with Olga waking up in the middle of the night in a state of inexplicable anxiety. She goes to her two peacefully sleeping children, rearranges the bedding, strokes their little heads. Everything is quiet. She does not know why she is anxious: “Chto zhe trevozhit menia?”

This is a serious question. It indicates anxiety and guilt. Such feelings are the lot of mothers everywhere. A child, from a Darwinian viewpoint, is a guilt-inducing machine. This is one way the child elicits the altruism it requires to survive. When a mother, for whatever reason, withholds care and attention from the child, she may be expected to feel even more guilty than usual. Working full-time outside of the domestic sphere is one way, from the (especially preschool) child’s viewpoint, to withhold care and attention. A sensitive mother cannot avoid feeling guilt in such
a situation (this is quite apart from the ideological question of whether mothers should or should not enter the workplace).

What is of psychoanalytic consequence is this: holding down a full-time job outside of the home is difficult, especially if one continues to do the majority of domestic chores as well. This difficulty, however, is itself quite handy, for it can make one feel virtuous, that is, it can assuage the guilt felt about withholding care from the children (and from the child-like spouse). It would thus appear that the extradomestic burden carried by Soviet (and now many post-Soviet) women represents not only an increase in needed financial resources, and not only an enhancer of self-esteem, but is also a means of expiating the very guilt it produces. Much of the "tension" and "strain" reported in the literature on the double burden points to the ever-changing psychological dialectic between guilt and punishment.

As we saw above, Soviet women who bore the double burden tended to approve of the extent of the involvement of their husbands in domestic work (Baranskaia's Olga rebels, but only briefly and superficially). Yet we also saw that these women recognized the inequality, even the unfairness of their situation. If, then, they were not blaming their husbands, who were they blaming? Who, indeed, if not themselves?

Women who accepted the double burden accepted responsibility for what they were doing. They were not, in fact, responsible, or at least were only partially responsible, because their husbands were responsible as well. Yet still they accepted the responsibility for themselves, and this acceptance was an ongoing act of masochism. Every woman who accepted her double burden was reasoning as Dmitrii Karamazov did when he accepted Siberia on behalf of others, for the "babe."

An overworked Soviet woman interviewed by Hansson and Lidén declared: "I'm a disgusting mother! I bring up my son on the run." This is very typical. Obviously this mother felt guilty, yet she managed also to relieve herself of guilt:

Naturally, a good mother has to take care of her baby, take it out for walks and make sure it develops physically. But she should also give the child moral guidance—a feeling that life has a spiritual dimension. A mother who is concerned only with the child's health and safety is not a good mother. Of course she has to be a social being as well—she has to suffer the sorrows of her people. Then her child will turn out well. I'm quite convinced of that.
This is a marvelous example of magical thinking. As long as the mother suffers *in some way*, then the child will somehow be alright. In this particular case the mother has to “suffer the sorrows of her people,” which is a very Russian way of describing a mother’s double burden (see the discussion below on masochism and the collective).

**Late Soviet and Post-Soviet Developments**

Toward the end of the Soviet period there were growing indications of resistance to suffering on the part of Soviet women (these began to appear well before the onset of political and economic deterioration in the late 1980s). For example, nearly a quarter of the women in a Moscow sample disapproved of the extent of their husbands’ participation in housework. Some studies indicated a correlation of marital instability with unfair workload on the wife. Attwood, basing herself on statistics provided by Larisa Kuznetsova, asked a quite sensible rhetorical question: “If women are naturally so suited to family life, why is it that they initiate 70 to 80 percent of divorces, and are much less inclined than men to risk marriage a second time?” Again, to supply a psychoanalytic answer to the kind of rhetorical question that feminists so often ask: many women were divorcing their men because they were beginning to understand how self-destructive and self-defeating, that is, how masochistic it would have been to remain with them.

In particular, some Soviet women were coming to understand how undesirable life with an alcoholic could be: male alcoholism was the single most important cause of divorce in the late Soviet period. The overworked woman who tolerated an idle husband was less likely to tolerate him when he became a violent drunkard as well.

One of Francine du Plessix Gray’s Moscow women nicely summed up the reasons for getting rid of a man: “Any young woman in her right mind is better off living alone with her child than sitting home with a man who constrains her by never wanting to go out anywhere, and doesn’t lift a finger at home, and creates scandals with his drinking. . . . Why should any woman be stuck with *two* children?”

This latter image of the husband as a mere child occurred again and again in the literature on gender roles in late Soviet Russia. The popular media in the late Soviet period also presented images of the
husband as a child. Even when the husband was present in the family, he was often absent as an active, responsible adult. He became, in effect, a child in the Russian matrificial world.

Many late Soviet women explicitly rejected traditional female masochism: “At last we’re fed up with being martyrs and heroines, we want fairness, justice,” said one Leningrad woman interviewed by Gray. Irma Mamaladze declared that, “in a society of equal responsibilities women are not up to sacrificiality, compliance, and softness.” Women were rightly throwing away their “traditional virtues.” They became tougher, more authoritarian even (“avtoritarnee”), but men should not be intimidated by this, she said.

There were also calls to subsidize women’s household labor in some way. One idea was to allow women more time at home for childbearing and childrearing, without cutting their pay. The idea of part-time employment (for women, not men!) also became attractive, although women’s employers were usually reluctant to make the necessary adjustments.

Relieving women of part of their heavy burden was not necessarily an end in itself, however. Sociologist Tatiana Zaslavskaya, for example, was concerned about the children of working mothers: “We have a generation of children who have been raised without mothers, who were all out working—an abandoned generation. These children have a lot of problems, including a sharp drop in morality among them. No one can replace a mother.” An anthropologist might interpret this as a plea to retain traditional Russian matrifocality.

Zaslavskaya said that “many Soviet women would like to leave the workforce if their husband’s salary were large enough.” This statement reveals a concern not only with a married couple’s financial total, but with the relative male versus female contributions to the total as well. Elsewhere Zaslavskaya referred to sociological research showing that 40 percent of women would prefer to work part-time. She added that, “to make this possible, however, men’s wages must be raised.”

Men’s wages? Zaslavskaya wanted to aggravate the already existing wage differential between the sexes. The idea struck some Soviet scholars as retrograde in the extreme. Besides, it did not even make mathematical sense. For example, assume that the savings accrued from women cutting back to one-half-time is available for increasing wages.
It turns out that, if male and female wages are roughly equal at the start, then equally increasing both women’s and men’s wages would result in nearly the same income for a couple as increasing only men’s salaries. Why the sophisticated sociologist Zaslavskaya did not think of this can only be explained by her respect for the delicate male ego and/or her low opinion of the value of woman’s labor. There is no intrinsic need to devalue woman’s (or overvalue men’s) labor in the workforce just because many women wish to work part-time.

There were indications of political action as well. An open airing of women’s dissatisfaction with their undue domestic burden was made at the 1987 All-Union Conference of Women, and a declaration was made by the Conference: “We strive to achieve the situation in which husband and wife carry out household chores equally and take responsibility for childrearing.” The concluding document of the First Independent Women’s Forum held in Dubna in March of 1991 supported “a family founded on partnership relations, with equal participation of both parents in raising children, performing everyday tasks, and maintaining a good emotional climate.”

As the Russian economy is being transformed downward in the post-Soviet 1990s, and as women are losing their jobs in droves, there are conflicting reports on whether and to what extent women want to retreat to the domestic sphere. There is a so-called “Go home” (“Idi domoi”) movement being supported by antifeminist women’s groups such as Rossiia. A recent poll reported in the New York Times indicates that only 20 percent of Russian women wish to remain at home. A recent volume edited by Iu. V. Arutiunian reports that a third of Russian men and less than half of Russian women think that wives should continue working when the family is financially secure.

Of course financial security is now uncommon, to put it mildly. Many women have no choice but to look for work. Unemployment lines, like most other lines in Russia, consist mostly of women. Approximately 75 to 80 percent of the people signed up in the unemployment offices are women. Many women are losing jobs or finding it extremely difficult to find new jobs because they have small children, and employers do not want to deal with childbirth leave and days lost to sick children. Women over age forty are having difficulty because they are considered too old to work efficiently.

Already overburdened during the relatively affluent Brezhnev era,
women in the post-Soviet depression are under even more pressure to bring in more income for their families. Some succeed in doing this by engaging in "unofficial" work ranging from production of handmade arts and crafts to prostitution.229

A poor economy is not good for women. It is not good for men either, but men control resources and are in a position to demand greater control over those to whom they allocate scarcer resources. It remains to be seen whether the slight antimasochistic drift in Russian women during the late Soviet period will be canceled by these economic developments.