

Contemporary Issues in Historical Perspective

Soviet and Russian Masculinities: Rethinking Soviet Fatherhood after Stalin and Renewing Virility in the Russian Nation under Putin*

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After losing the Cold War and enduring a political, social, and economic environment beset with problems throughout the 1990s, Russians yearned for stability and a leader unlike the first post-Soviet Russian President, Boris Yeltsin. Although initially a popular figure who promised democratization in a new Russia, Yeltsin's erratic political behavior and public drunkenness and buffoonery complemented his powerlessness in preventing the decline of Russia's international prestige and economy. When Vladimir Putin replaced Yeltsin as president in 2000, he appeared to offer disciplined and strong leadership as well as a new direction for Russia. Utilizing domestic political strategies, including repression, Putin consolidated power, stabilized the economy, and bolstered the social security of citizens. Barred from a third consecutive term as president in 2008, he retained his political dominance as prime minister until he became president once again in 2012. In 2014 Putin authorized the invasion of the sovereign country of Ukraine and reclaimed Crimea as Russian territory. He has also directed an aggressive military intervention in Syria and meddled in the elections of foreign countries, including the United States. At home, Putin has projected an image of himself as a model of powerful masculinity and promoted socially conservative "Russian" values and policies, some of them homophobic and misogynistic, as part of his effort to advance an anti-Western and masculinized Russian nationalism. Under his rule, Russia has reasserted itself as a masculine world power—flexing its political virility, economic independence, and technological and military might.

Putin's macho image, the media face of Russia's new strength, has fascinated Russians and non-Russians alike and has generated considerable public and

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scholarly analysis.¹ Whether co-piloting a jet fighter plane, sporting a muscular bare chest while fishing in southern Siberia, or demonstrating judo moves in public, Putin has served as an icon of renewed Russian masculinity. Putin's strategic use of hypermasculine imagery, including the sexualization of his male persona, has been an important tool in legitimizing his rule, "remasculinizing" the country internationally and domestically, and reasserting Russia's strength. Although it was first posed as the antithesis to the "flabby and weak" Yeltsin, Putin's virility also serves as a stark contrast to the "gerontological Soviet leadership of the late Brezhnev era" and the impotence of the last Communist leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, in preventing the collapse of the Soviet Union.²

Historically, Putin's strength is also counterposed to the weaknesses associated with the post-Stalin, late Soviet, and early post-Soviet man. Starting in the 1950s under Nikita Khrushchev's new leadership and persisting into the Brezhnev era in the 1960s, a veritable discursive explosion in the media, prescriptive texts, and public venues offered a stinging indictment of the failures of Soviet fatherhood and entreated men to become more engaged fathers. The Communist Party fostered this critique by turning its attention to the "serious shortcomings" in child-rearing and instructing local party organizations to evaluate workers on the basis not only of their public roles but also of their personal conduct, including how men "educated [their] children" and behaved in their families. It rebuked specific fathers who corrupted their sons through their bad behavior and explained that if a "son growing up under the same roof as his Communist father" undermined Communist principles, then the father had neglected to "fulfill his civic and party duties."³ Although the Communist Party directed attention to fathers' roles in children's upbringing and increasingly criticized and disciplined male comrades

¹ T. B. Riabova and O. V. Riabov, "Nastoiashchii muzhchina Rossiiskoi politiki?," *POLIS: Politicheskie issledovaniia* 5 (2010): 48–63, and Riabova and Riabov, "Gairopa: Gendernoe izmerenie obraza Evropy v praktikakh politicheskoi mobilizatsii," *Zhenshchina v rossiiskom obshchestve* 3 (2013): 31–39; Helena Goscilo, ed., *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon* (New York, 2013); Andrew Foxhall, "Photographing Vladimir Putin: Masculinity, Nationalism, and Visuality in Russian Political Culture," *Geopolitics* 18, no. 1 (2013): 132–56; Valerie Sperling, *Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia* (Oxford, 2015); Elizabeth Wood, "Hypermasculinity as a Scenario of Power: Vladimir Putin's Iconic Rule, 1999–2008," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18, no. 3 (2016): 329–50; Alexandra Novitskaya, "Patriotism, Sentiment, and Male Hysteria: Putin's Masculinity Politics and the Persecution of Non-Heterosexual Russians," *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies* 12, nos. 3–4 (2017): 302–18.

² Eliot Borenstein, *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture* (Ithaca, NY, 2007), 226, and Sperling, *Sex, Politics, and Putin*, 61, respectively.

³ *Prezidium TsK KPSS, 1954–1964, tom 2* (Moscow, 2006), 117–18. Also see Edward Cohn, "Sex and the Married Communist: Marital Infidelity, Family Troubles, and Communist Party Discipline in the Post-War USSR, 1945–1964," *Russian Review* 68, no. 3 (July 2009): 429–50.

for demonstrating unworthy family conduct, such as adultery, child abandonment and abuse, and drunkenness, it was not the sole or main actor calling for better fathers.⁴ Experts and teachers armed with pedagogical knowledge and professional authority, as well as educational activists, framed these discussions and created mechanisms for transforming fatherhood in the late 1950s and 1960s. Ordinary people from many walks of life, including fathers, also decried “typical” fathering practices and participated in what I will call the campaign to transform Soviet fatherhood.

This article investigates efforts by institutions, groups, and individuals to advance a new ideal father and family man in the late 1950s and 1960s. It argues that the problematization of Soviet fatherhood can help us to understand the popularity of Putin’s machismo today. The criticism of inadequate fathering, in conjunction with a broader critique of men’s personal conduct by the Communist Party, Komsomol (Young Communist League), comrades’ courts, women’s councils, voluntary street patrols, and many other organizations and individuals, exposed the weaknesses and failures of Soviet men and contributed to the emergence of what Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova have deemed a “crisis of masculinity” discourse in the late Soviet era.⁵ After the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991, the idea of a masculinity crisis persisted as men struggled to succeed in a new political and economic system.⁶ The ongoing narrative of failed manhood provides a window not only into the appeal of Putin and his strongman persona but also into the broader narratives of masculinized nationalism in contemporary Russia.

⁴ For some Komsomol efforts to improve fathering, see “Dela semeinye,” *Molodoi kommunist* (hereafter *MK*) 8 (1963): 71; A. Osmanov, “Muzhskoi vopros,” *MK* 9 (1963): 88–89; A. Kharchev, “O schast’e molodoi sem’i,” *MK* 2 (1956): 98–99.

⁵ Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova, “Krizis maskulinnosti v pozdnesovetskom diskurse,” in *O muzhe[N]stvennosti: Sbornik statei*, ed. Sergei Ushakin (Moscow, 2002), and Temkina and Zdravomyslova, “The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse,” *Russian Studies in History*, ed. Amy Randall, 51, no. 2 (2012): 13–34.

⁶ Marina Kiblitckaya, “‘Once We Were Kings’: Male Experiences of Loss of Status at Work in Post-Communist Russia,” and Elena Mershcherkina, “New Russian Men: Masculinity Regained?,” in *Gender, State, and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. Sarah Ashwin (New York, 2000), 90–104 and 105–17; Irina Tartakovskaia, “‘Nesostoiavshchaia maskulinnost’ kak tip povedeniia na rynke truda,” in *Gendernye otosheniia v sovremennoi Rossii: Issledovaniia 1990–kh godov*, ed. L. Popkova and I. Tartakovskaia (Samara, 2003), 42–71; Rebecca Kay, *Men in Contemporary Russia: The Fallen Heroes of Post-Soviet Change?* (Aldershot, 2006); Tetyana Bureychek, “Masculinity in Soviet and Post-Soviet Ukraine: Models and Their Implications,” in *Gender, Politics, and Society in Ukraine*, ed. Elena Havinsky and Anastasiya Salnykova (Toronto, 2012), 325–61; Jennifer Utrata, *Women without Men: Single Mothers and Family Change in the New Russia* (Ithaca, NY, 2015).

FAMILY AND COMMUNIST MANHOOD PRIOR TO KHRUSHCHEV'S RULE

The study of masculinities in Imperial Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet societies is a growing field of inquiry.⁷ It has shed light on the “hegemonic” masculinity of the New Soviet Man first promoted in the 1920s—a construct that emphasized hypervirility and dedication to building and defending Soviet socialism—as well as other paradigms of manhood during Stalin’s rule (1928–53), underscoring R. W. Connell’s point that “hegemonic” masculinity is not monolithic but is always constructed in relation to both “femininities” and *other* masculinities.⁸ More recent scholarship has examined the diverse masculinities that coexisted during the post–World War II and late Soviet years, such as Cold War masculinities linked to technology, science, diplomacy, and athleticism/sports,⁹ as well as masculinities detached from or opposed to state interests, such as those linked to the *banya* (bathhouse) or to car ownership.¹⁰ Significantly, like the earlier

⁷ This new scholarship first included articles in *Gendernye issledovaniia, Sotsialisticheskie issledovaniia*, and *Sotsiologicheskii zhurnal*; Ashwin, *Gender, State, and Society*; I. A. Morozov, ed., *Muzhskoi sbornik. Vyp. 1: Muzhchina v traditsionnoi kul'ture* (Moscow, 2001); Ushakin, *O muzhe[N]stvennosti*; Eliot Bornstein, *Men without Women: Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917–1929* (Durham, NC, 2000); Dan Healey, *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia: The Regulation of Sexual and Gender Dissent* (Chicago, 2001); Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca Friedman, and Dan Healey, eds., *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture* (Basingstoke, 2002).

⁸ R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge, 1987); Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin* (Pittsburgh, 2008); Frances Bernstein, “Prosthetic Manhood in the Soviet Union at the End of World War II,” *OSIRIS* 30 (2015): 113–33; Catherine Merridale, “Masculinity at War: Did Gender Matter in the Soviet Army?,” *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 5, no. 3 (2012): 307–20; Steven Jug, “Red Army Romance: Preserving Masculine Hegemony in Mixed Gender Combat Units, 1943–1944,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, no. 3 (2012): 321–34; Kerstin Bischl, “Telling Stories: Gender Relationships and Masculinity in the Red Army, 1941–45,” in *Women and Men at War: A Gender Perspective on World War II and Its Aftermath in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Maren Roger and Ruth Leiserowitz (Osnabrück, 2012), 117–33; Dale Robert, “‘Being a Real Man’: Masculinities During and After the Great Patriotic War,” in *Gender and the Second World War: The Lessons of War*, ed. Corinna Peniston-Bird and Emma Vickers (London, 2017), 116–34.

⁹ Erica Fraser, “Masculinity in the Personal Narratives of Soviet Nuclear Physicists,” *Aspasia* 8 (2014): 45–63, and Fraser, “Yuri Gagarin and Celebrity Masculinity in Soviet Culture,” in *Gender, Sexuality, and the Cold War*, ed. Philip Muehlenbeck (Nashville, TN, 2017), 270–89; Julie Gilmour and Barbara Evans Clements, “If You Want to Be Like Me, Train!: The Contradictions of Soviet Masculinity,” in Evans et al., *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, 210–21; Brandon Miller, “Between Creation and Chaos: Soviet Masculinities, Consumption, and Bodies after Stalin” (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2013).

¹⁰ Igor Kon, *Muzhchina v meniaushchemsia mire* (Moscow, 2009); Ethan Pollock, “Real Men Go to the Banya: Postwar Soviet Masculinities and the Bathhouse,” *Kritika*:

hegemonic masculine ideal, these models of manliness were mostly performed outside the domestic sphere, frequently in homosocial settings that celebrated male camaraderie. Although they typically affirmed Soviet gender norms and heterosexuality, serving to demarcate acceptable and unacceptable masculinities and sexualities, members of the LGBT community also enacted their own masculinities (and femininities) in diverse ways, sometimes even in the same all-male spaces.¹¹

The promotion of a new type of fatherhood in the 1950s and 1960s marked a sea change from constructions of manhood in the early Soviet and Stalin years, when fathers were largely marginalized in discourses about the family and active parenting was not central to masculine identity. Although Communist leaders linked normative manhood to fatherhood, they encouraged men to see the family as secondary to the central task of building socialism. The ideal New Soviet Man, envisioned as a worker and citizen who forged his masculinity in service to the party-state, was frequently depicted as a soldier defending the motherland, an industrial worker and collective farmer laboring on the industrial and grain “front,” and a stalwart member of the Communist Party dedicated to the Soviet regime. Meanwhile, new policies and laws that were designed to disrupt men’s traditional patriarchal authority, promote women’s legal and economic equality, glorify reproduction and motherhood, and establish the state as the new paternal power that protected mothers and children diminished fathers’ roles in families (notwithstanding some men’s more significant engagement in child-rearing) and fostered a Soviet model of alienated fatherhood.¹² Despite the Soviet regime’s nod to men’s importance in the nuclear family in 1936 when it made divorce more difficult to obtain, leaders did not fundamentally reimagine fathers’ roles.¹³

Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 11, no. 1 (2010): 47–76; Dunja Popovic, “A Generation That Has Squandered Its Men: The Late Soviet Crisis of Masculinity in the Poetry of Sergei Gandlevskii,” *Russian Review* 70 (October 2011): 665; Brian Hinote and Gretchen Webber, “Drinking toward Manhood: Masculinity and Alcohol in the Former USSR,” *Men and Masculinities* 15, no. 3 (2012): 292–310; Mark Edele, “Strange Young Men in Stalin’s Moscow: The Birth and Life of the Stiliagi, 1945–1953,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 50, no. 1 (2002): 37–61; Zhanna Chernova, “Romantik nashego vremeni: S pesnei po zhizni,” in Ushakin, *O muzhe[N]stvennosti*, 452–76; Lewis Siegelbaum, “Cars, Cars, and More Cars,” in *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia*, ed. Lewis Siegelbaum (Basingstoke, 2006), 96–97.

¹¹ For queer masculinities in the 1950s and late Soviet period, see Dan Healey, *Russian Homophobia from Stalin to Sochi* (London, 2017); Arthur Clech, “Between the Labor Camp and the Clinic: Tema or the Shared Forms of Late Soviet Homosexual Subjectivities,” *Slavic Review* 77, no. 1 (2018): 6–29.

¹² Scholarship on Soviet motherhood and family law is too extensive to cite in full. See, e.g., Olga Issoupova, “From Duty to Pleasure: Motherhood in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia?,” in Ashwin, *Gender, State, and Society*, 30–54.

¹³ David Hoffmann, “Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in Its Pan-European Context,” *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 1 (2000): 35–54, and Hoffmann,

Visual culture reinforced alienated paternity by rarely featuring men as fathers, instead depicting Stalin as the “universal father” of a communal and “great Soviet family.”¹⁴ Stalinist policies removed fathers from children’s lives: forced collectivization and the drive for rapid industrialization as well as political repression and the purges resulted in men’s mass migration, deportation, incarceration, and death. World War II ruptured fathers’ connection to their families even more, as many marched off to war and never returned.

Representations of Soviet men during the first part of the Great Patriotic War (World War II) departed from earlier images by depicting them as essential rather than marginal family figures—as fathers and sons motivated to fight because of the need to defend their families.¹⁵ Nonvisual narratives of the war, such as personal interest stories and “private letters” published in the press, also emphasized men’s motivations as family men to protect their loved ones. After the 1943 victory at Stalingrad, however, wartime press coverage shifted, increasingly emphasizing Stalin’s role in inspiring “heroic feats” and successes among fighting men, reasserting his importance as father-in-chief.¹⁶ As Stalin claimed credit for Soviet victory, the press reported the populace’s gratitude to him for his “wise and fatherly leadership” and “fatherly care” during and immediately following the war.¹⁷ After the war, Stalin’s depiction not only as the paternal leader of the nation but also as the surrogate father in individual families led to “to a domestication of the personality cult that distinguished it from its prewar counterpart.”¹⁸

Facing the huge loss of life (ultimately about 27 million deaths) from the war, Communist leaders adopted a new Family Law in 1944 that reinforced the Soviet model of alienated fatherhood. To increase the birthrate and respond to the significant imbalance in the population’s male-to-female ratio, the law promoted a novel solution, endorsing “single motherhood as [a] site for reproduction.” It barred unwed mothers from claiming alimony or child support from fathers and from listing paternity on their children’s birth certificates, which relieved men of responsibilities for their extramarital offspring, and implicitly “sanction[ed]

Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917–1941 (Ithaca, NY, 2003); Lauren Kaminsky, “Utopian Visions of Family Life in the Stalin-Era Soviet Union,” *Central European History* 44 (2011): 63–91.

¹⁴ Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3d ed. (Bloomington, IN, 2000), 114–35; Catriona Kelly, *Children’s World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890–1991* (New Haven, CT, 2007), 104–7; A. E. Zvonareva, *Sovetskoe otsovstvo: Stanovlenie, konstruktirovanie i transformatsiia praktik* (Ivanovo, 2014), 87–93.

¹⁵ Claire McCallum, “The Return: Postwar Masculinity and the Domestic Space in Stalinist Visual Culture, 1945–53,” *Russian Review* 74, no. 1 (2015): 123.

¹⁶ Lisa Kirschenbaum, “‘Our City, Our Hearths, Our Families’: Local Loyalties and Private Life in Soviet World War II Propaganda,” *Slavic Review* 59, no. 4 (2000): 842.

¹⁷ Jeffrey Brooks, *Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War: Thank You, Comrade Stalin!* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), 204–5.

¹⁸ McCallum, “The Return,” 139.

adultery” and philandering so that single and married men would “impregnate millions of women.”¹⁹ The law encouraged unmarried women to reproduce by promising government assistance for their children, expanding resources for child-care, and further glorifying motherhood by introducing new maternity awards such as the Hero Mother medal (for ten or more children).

The new Family Law created a novel legal category of “fatherless” children and contributed to 8.7 million “illegitimate births” between 1945 and 1955, with similar numbers for the 1960s, resulting in a huge increase in “single-mother” families.²⁰ Although the Soviet regime continued to promote the heteronormative two-parent family as the ideal, it nonetheless legitimated families headed by unmarried mothers.²¹ Meanwhile, with the important exception of official homecoming depictions of demobilized soldiers that emphasized bonds between fathers and children, print media and visual culture in the postwar period tended to marginalize or omit fathers in representations of the family.²² If included, fathers were often depicted negatively as drunkards or as mentally and physically disabled veterans who benefited from the loving care of their wives.²³ These depictions mirrored popular sentiment among women in their complaints to authorities.²⁴

Despite significant changes in society after Stalin’s death in 1953, most scholarship has held that the Soviet model of alienated fatherhood remained relatively stable and uncontested from the early revolutionary years until the late 1960s

¹⁹ Mie Nakachi, “N. S. Khrushchev and the 1944 Soviet Family Law: Politics, Reproduction, and Language,” *East European Politics and Societies* 20, no. 1 (2006): 46–47, 60.

²⁰ Nakachi, “N. S. Khrushchev and the 1944 Soviet Family Law,” 64. As Nakachi notes, the extremely poor supply of contraceptives also contributed to the burgeoning birth rate.

²¹ Helene Carlbäck, “Lone Mothers and Fatherless Children,” in *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Melanie Ilić and Jeremy Smith (London, 2009), 86–103; Greta Bucher, “Struggling to Survive: Soviet Women in the Postwar Years,” *Journal of Women’s History* 12, no. 1 (2000): 146; Susan Reid, “Women in the Home,” in *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Melanie Ilić, Susan Reid, and Lynne Attwood (Basingstoke, 2004), 149–51.

²² McCallum, “The Return.”

²³ Bucher, “Struggling to Survive,” 148; Anna Krylova, “Healers of Wounded Souls: The Crisis of Private Life in Soviet Literature,” *Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 2 (2001): 324–29.

²⁴ For women’s private complaints about men to Soviet authorities, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton, NJ, 2005), 240–61; Cohn, “Sex and the Married Communist,” 429–50; Helene Carlbäck, “Lone Motherhood in Soviet Russia in the Mid-20th Century: In a European Context,” in *And They Lived Happily Ever After: Norms and Everyday Practices of Family and Parenthood in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. Helene Carlbäck, Yulia Gradszkova, and Zhanna Kravchenko (Budapest, 2012), 25–46.

and 1970s.²⁵ Some recent scholarship, however, has disrupted this narrative.²⁶ So too does this article.

AFTER THE DEATH OF STALIN, THE UNIVERSAL FATHER

When Nikita Khrushchev came to power after Stalin's death in 1953, he promoted a series of reforms, including de-Stalinization, that have led many contemporaries and scholars since to characterize his rule as an era of liberalization. Among other things, he denounced the violent excesses of Stalinism. As Khrushchev departed from a politics of persistent overt repression, he relied increasingly on the exercise of Soviet control via "normalizing" techniques (an existing strategy). Seeking to discipline the everyday lives and practices of citizens and to convince the populace "to live according to its tenets," Khrushchev endorsed moral renewal as official policy. As the Communist Party, the state, and volunteer organizations sought to enforce social norms and "Communist morality," they turned their gaze explicitly to personal and family matters.²⁷ These changes

²⁵ Zhanna Chernova, "The Model of Soviet Fatherhood: Discursive Prescriptions," *Russian Studies in History* 51, no. 2 (2012): 43, 54–59; Elena Zhidkova, "Family, Divorce, and Comrades' Courts: Soviet Family and Public Organizations during the Thaw," in Carlbäck, *And They Lived Happily Ever After*, 47–64; Deborah Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev's Russia* (New York, 2007); Sergei Kukhterin, "Fathers and Patriarchs in Communist and Post-Communist Russia," in Ashwin, *Gender, State, and Society*, 71–89; Greta Bucher, "Stalinist Families: Motherhood, Fatherhood, and Building the New Soviet Person," in *The Making of Russian History: Society, Culture, and the Politics of Modern Russia*, ed. John Steinberg and Rex Wade (Bloomington, IN, 2009), 129–52; Natalia Chernyaeva, "Upbringing à la Dr. Spock: Child Care Manuals and Constructing Normative Motherhood in the Soviet Union, 1954–1970," *Ab Imperio* 2 (2013): 223–51; Yuliia Gradskova, "Educating Parents: Public Preschools and Parents in Soviet Pedagogical Publications, 1945–1989," *Journal of Family History* 35, no. 3 (2010): 271–85.

²⁶ Amy E. Randall, "'Abortion Will Deprive You of Happiness!': Soviet Reproductive Politics in the Post-Stalin Era," *Journal of Women's History* 23, no. 3 (September 2011): 13–38; A. E. Zvonareva, "Obraz ottsa v pozdnesovetskoj zhurnal'noi periodike," *Zhenshchina v rossiskom obshchestve* 1, no. 50 (2009): 64–73; Zvonareva, *Sovetskoe otsovstvo*; McCallum, "The Return," 117–43; Claire McCallum, *The Fate of the New Man: Representing and Reconstructing Masculinity in Soviet Visual Culture, 1945–1965* (Dekalb, IL, 2018); Marko Dumančić, "Thawing Soviet Masculinity: The Contested Masculine Archetype in Soviet Film, 1956–1968" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2010); Marko Dumančić, *Men Out of Focus: The Soviet Masculinity Crisis in the Long Sixties* (Toronto, 2020). For efforts to transform fatherhood in Communist East Germany, see Peter Hallama, "Struggling for a Socialist Fatherhood: 'Re-educating' Men in East Germany, 1960–1989," *East European Politics and Societies*, June 2020.

²⁷ For more on Communist morality, see Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality*; Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (Berkeley, CA, 1999); Brian LaPierre, "Making Hooliganism on a Mass Scale: The

in the political landscape, along with other new initiatives, fostered conditions that allowed for a reconceptualization of Soviet fatherhood.

Khrushchev's promotion of greater "socialist democracy"—that is, popular participation in the administration of governmental organs, economic bodies, and social organizations—fostered greater scrutiny of personal conduct. Mass involvement in street patrols and other new or revived mechanisms for "peer" surveillance and judgment resulted in increased inspection of men's reprehensible behavior, such as public drunkenness or violence. So too did the revival of house committees that watched over neighbors and the extension of comrades' courts to apartments—a development that accompanied Khrushchev's mass housing program, which allowed tens of millions of families to move to their own single-family apartments in the late 1950s and 1960s. These committees and courts played an important role in disciplining men for unacceptable conduct, including toward their wives and children.²⁸

The campaign for "socialist democracy" reopened the "woman question"—the question of women's equality—as Soviet authorities acknowledged that women's domestic duties, including childcare, constrained their ability to be active in politics, the economy, and the public sphere.²⁹ Although they called for new household technologies and additional communal services to foster women's involvement in these sectors rather than challenging the unequal division of labor in the home, many ordinary people—including men—criticized men's aversion to domestic work and called for greater male participation.³⁰ A Saratov man explained: "The man who doesn't do housework along with his wife" hindered

Campaign against Petty Hooliganism in the Soviet Union, 1956–1964," *Cahiers du monde russe*, nos. 1–2 (2006): 1–28, and LaPierre, *Hooligans in Khrushchev's Russia: Defining, Policing, and Producing Deviance during the Thaw* (Madison, WI, 2012); Edward Cohn, *The High Title of a Communist: Postwar Party Discipline and the Values of the Soviet Regime* (DeKalb, IL, 2015); Healey, *Homosexual Desire*, 238–44; Healey, *Russian Homophobia*, 93–109.

²⁸ Christine Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home: Soviet Apartment Life during the Khrushchev Years* (Ithaca, NY, 2015); Lynne Attwood, "Housing the Khrushchev Era," in Ilić et al., *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, 177–94; Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality*, chap. 2. Comrades' courts imposed sanctions on those who breached social norms or committed minor criminal offenses; see Yoram Gorlizki, "Delegalization in Russia: Soviet Comrades' Courts in Retrospect," *American Journal of Comparative Law* 46, no. 3 (1998): 403–25.

²⁹ Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1989), 140; Reid, "Women in the Home," 162.

³⁰ Melanie Ilić, "Women in the Khrushchev Era: An Overview," in Ilić et al., *Women and the Khrushchev Era*, 11–12; Susan Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 61, no. 2 (2002): 211–52; Aleksandr Byrulia, "Ia vovse ne stydno!," *Rabotnitsa* 6 (1960): 21; "Esli liubim nashi zhen," *Rabotnitsa* 9 (1960): 16–17; "Komu stoiat' u plity," *Izvestiia*, July 30, 1960, 6.

party-state goals by making it more difficult for women to be involved in “government administration and the building of communism.”³¹

The relaxation under Khrushchev of political and cultural strictures, including censorship, allowed for public discussion about a variety of social problems, including family matters. Party and state authorities, professionals, and ordinary citizens expressed widespread concern about the Family Law of 1944. They criticized the law’s economic promise, arguing that single mothers received inadequate state assistance. They also challenged the morality of the law: children born out of wedlock were denied equal rights because of the prohibition against naming paternity on birth certificates, and men used the law to exploit women and then abandon them once they became pregnant. Both fatherless children and unmarried mothers also suffered social stigma.³² Critics of the law, such as writer Ilya Ehrenburg and composer Dmitri Shostakovich, lamented the “thousands of tragedies” that unmarried mothers and fatherless children experienced because of “philistine convictions” that the children were “illegitimately born.”³³ A complex of social ills in the 1950s and 1960s, including the growth in the Soviet divorce rate, unruly youth, and juvenile delinquency also fed the perception that “fatherless” children—whether a result of nonconjugal relations or divorce—were a “risk group” more likely to engage in bad behavior.³⁴ The “complete” heteronormative family—buttressed by active fathering—was considered a bulwark against unruly youth.³⁵ It was also considered essential for boosting the nation’s population.

These family, youth, and pronatalist concerns informed Khrushchev’s decision to improve children’s education, which had implications for fathers and understandings of Soviet masculinity as well. At the Twentieth Party Congress in

³¹ “Otkrovennyi razgovor,” *Rabotnitsa* 3 (1956): 30.

³² “Oni ne odinochki,” *Rabotnitsa* 1 (1957): 15; Carlback, “Lone Motherhood,” 30–36, 40.

³³ Carlback, “Lone Motherhood,” 86–103.

³⁴ For youth problems associated with fatherless children, see Ludwig Liegle, *The Family’s Role in Soviet Education* (New York, 1975), 53–54, 110; Zhidkova, “Family, Divorce, and Comrades’ Courts,” 60; I. Kon, “Muzhestvennye zhenshchiny?: Zhenstvennye muzhchiny,” *Literaturnaia gazeta* (hereafter *LG*), January 1, 1970, 12. For unruly youth and juvenile delinquency, see Julianne Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford, 2010); Fürst, “The Arrival of Spring?: Changes and Continuities in Soviet Youth Culture and Policy between Stalin and Khrushchev,” and Ann Livschiz, “De-Stalinizing Soviet Childhood: The Quest for Moral Rebirth, 1953–1958,” in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, ed. Polly Jones (London, 2006), 135–53 and 117–34; Kristin Roth-Ey, “Loose Girls on the Loose?: Sex, Propaganda, and the 1957 Youth Festival,” in Ilič et al., *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, 75–95.

³⁵ Natsional’nyi Arkhiv Tatarskoi Federatsii, Kazan (hereafter NART), f. R3682 (Ministerstvo prosveshchenia TASSR), o. 3, d. 112, ll. 50, 136.

1956, Khrushchev proclaimed that “the upbringing of children is a societal affair.”³⁶ Although not a new concept, the Soviet regime breathed new life into it.³⁷ Khrushchev explained that increased societal participation in child-rearing was necessary because of the economic reality of many families in which single mothers as well as both parents worked: “Many children find themselves left in the care of some relative or neighbor, and sometimes without any supervision at all,” often resulting in “bad consequences.”³⁸ In Khrushchev’s view, it was essential to expand opportunities for childcare, particularly nurseries and kindergartens.³⁹ This would aid not only existing families but also women who wanted to have more children.

The regime’s emphasis on “Communist morality” raised the question of how best to inculcate certain values and behaviors among children. As party and government officials as well as professionals promoted standards for proper conduct, they stressed the importance of parents, teachers, and society more broadly in cultivating Communist morality among children so as to correctly forge the next generation of Communists.⁴⁰ “United and directed toward the same goal,” Khrushchev stated, these forces could “extirpate completely and permanently” the negative views among the younger generation, such as nihilism and disdain for labor.⁴¹ Ideally the collective endeavor of many institutions and groups, including schools and families, would help “every young person turn into a fighter for communism instead of a time-server, a hero instead of a philistine, a collectivist instead of an egoist, and a champion of the new instead of an indifferent conservative.”⁴² The context of the Cold War and the spread of Western cultural influences among youth made this societal intervention even more imperative.⁴³

To be successful in producing the next generation of Communists, educational experts and activists argued, “family education” needed to harmonize better with societal education. They advocated greater cooperation between preschools/

³⁶ “Obshchestvennoe doshkol’noe vospitanie v shestoii piatiletke,” *Doshkol’noe vospitanie* (hereafter *DV*) 3 (1956): 3. For educational reforms, see Mervyn Matthews, *Education in the Soviet Union* (London, 1982); E. Thomas Ewing, *Separate Schools: Gender, Policy, and Practice in Postwar Soviet Education* (DeKalb, IL, 2010).

³⁷ Liegle, *The Family’s Role*, 18–19.

³⁸ “Obshchestvennoe doshkol’noe vospitanie,” 3.

³⁹ Buckley, *Women and Ideology*, 163–65.

⁴⁰ “Vserossiiskii s’ezd uchitelei,” *Sovetskaia pedagogika* (hereafter *SP*) 9 (1960): 85.

⁴¹ N. Khrushchev, “Za prochnyi mir vo imia schast’ia i svetlogo budushchevo naroda,” *SP* 8 (1960): 21.

⁴² A. G. Kharchev, *Brak i sem’ia v SSSR* (Moscow, 1964), 266.

⁴³ Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation*; Gleb Tzipursky, “Coercion and Consumption: The Khrushchev Leadership’s Ruling Style in the Campaign against Westernized Youth,” in *Youth and Rock in the Soviet Bloc*, ed. William Jay Risch (Lanham, MD, 2014), 58–79.

schools and families as well as a unified approach to educating children.⁴⁴ Both were considered necessary not merely because of the idea that families could bolster Soviet pedagogical goals but also because of a long-standing concern that they could undermine them.⁴⁵ Many parents, though well intentioned, knew little about children's educational needs or how their behavior could affect a child's development. Moreover, by negatively influencing children via foolish habits, religious ideas, nationalist biases, and poor conduct—such as drunkenness—some families raised “idlers, barins [masters], *stiliagi* [stylish youth who adopted Western clothing and listened to Western music], people with superstitions and prejudices.”⁴⁶ Given these challenges, family upbringing “was not a private affair,” and educators dramatically expanded efforts to teach better parenting in the 1950s and 1960s, focusing not only on mothers but also on fathers.⁴⁷

IT TAKES AN ENTIRE COMMUNITY—INCLUDING SOVIET FATHERS—TO RAISE CHILDREN

The new ideas about children's education and the policies that implemented them stimulated dialogue about fathers' roles in child-rearing. Commenting on how the topic of children's upbringing usually emphasized mothers' roles, an editorial in 1963 in the main preschool journal, *Doshkol'noe vospitanie* (Preschool education), applauded the growing attention to fathers' roles as well as calls for them to take greater responsibility. After all, there were many life examples “that eloquently confirmed the importance of a father's love and fatherly attention to his child,” and, alternatively, “what happened when a father forgot about his parental duties.” When it came to children's upbringing, “fathers, like mothers, did not have the right to stand to the side.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *Doshkol'noe vospitanie*, a monthly pedagogical journal on preschool education, reflected this new emphasis on fostering a closer alliance between parents and teachers in 1958 by introducing a specific section on this topic, initially called “The Kindergarten and the Family,” then “Together with the Family,” and later “Conversations between Parents and Educators.” Similarly, in 1956, *Sem'ia i shkola* (hereafter *SSH*), a monthly journal on family and schools, called for greater collaboration between parents and teachers to advance the “Communist upbringing” of children. “Za tesnoe sotrudnichestvo uchitelei i roditelei,” *SSH* 12 (1956): 1–4; “Blizhe k sem'e,” *SSH* 1 (1956): 5–8.

⁴⁵ “Drug i sovetchik sem'i,” *DV* 7 (1963): 6.

⁴⁶ Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Moscow (GARF), f. A2306 (RSFSR Narkompros 1918–88), o. 75, d. 2414, l. 16. Also see “Obrashchenie delegatov,” *SP* 9 (1960): 85; E. Afanasenko, “O khode vypolneniia zakona ob ukrepleni svyazi shkoly s zhizn'iu,” *SP* 9 (1962): 15.

⁴⁷ Afanasenko, “O khode,” 15; Field, *Private Life*, chap. 6; Liegle, *The Family's Role*; Gradszkova, “Educating Parents.”

⁴⁸ “Drug i sovetchik sem'i,” 7–8. Similarly, see I. Vorov'ev, “Otsy ne imeiut prava byt' v storone,” *DV* 4 (1963): 62.

Noting how students' fathers often discredited the "great and noble title" of father, a middle school director in Rostov explained in 1959 that the problem with fathers was twofold. Particularly difficult were the "bad" fathers: the so-called Don Juans, "deeply egotistical" philandering men who destroyed their families to satisfy personal needs; the drunkards, who drank away the family money, insulted their wives, and beat their children; and the self-aggrandizing men who saw their work as so important that they did not participate in family life. Yet it was not just these types of fathers who gave fatherhood a bad name. At fault too was the typical father—an "honest, modest, and respectable person"—who usually played a marginal role in child-rearing. The director observed: "At best, he glances at a [school] journal, says how to solve a problem, makes a casual suggestion. However, he doesn't have a well thought out plan and system for raising his children. He only passively supports the efforts of his wife."⁴⁹ If the typical Soviet father became a more active parent, the director argued, children would benefit greatly.

At a 1964 meeting sponsored by the journal *Doshkol'noe vospitanie*, a publishing representative similarly pointed to the problem of the distant, nonengaged father. One of the country's main elementary school primers, he explained, which was published in the millions each year, focused overwhelmingly on a mother's contributions: "We open the primer and on the sixth page [we read]: 'Mama cleans the frame. . . .' On the tenth page we read: 'Mama makes soup.' On the twenty-sixth page: 'Mama works at the factory.' And only somewhere around the forty-eighth page does the papa appear, who is reading the newspaper." After meeting participants broke into laughter at these comments, the representative continued: "And we have been publishing this primer already for many years, and no one has thought—how can this be: mama, mama, mama, mama, and papa only reads the newspaper. This is not the whimsy of the author, but a reflection of life, a reflection of the role that we, papas, play in the upbringing of children." The representative argued that it was time to promote the idea "that papas, in addition to reading the paper, must become earnestly involved in children's education."⁵⁰ Agreeing, another participant added that positive examples of fathers' active engagement in home life needed to be included not only in children's short stories and literature but also on the radio and television. In his view, it was necessary to broadcast examples of fathers who could "wash the floors and wash dishes without breaking them." The power of example could be used to promote a new vision of what a good father should be.⁵¹

Members of the educational community struggled with how to engage fathers. Men's attendance at parents' meetings, conferences, universities, and lectures

⁴⁹ V. Tiapkin, "Duma ob ostakh," *SSh* 4 (1959): 10.

⁵⁰ GARF, f. A2306, o. 75, d. 2414a, ll. 43–44.

⁵¹ GARF, f. A2306, o. 75, d. 2414a, l. 70.

was sporadic at best. Moreover, they rarely engaged in community work at school.⁵² Fathers' lack of involvement was due in part to many men's perception that child-rearing was not their job. As one father remarked, "Having contact with a school is women's business."⁵³ "Going to a kindergarten is a mother's affair, not a father's," another man proclaimed when his wife explained that their son's teacher wanted the father to attend a school meeting.⁵⁴

To appeal to men more effectively, educators and activists began to organize meetings and conferences explicitly aimed at fathers.⁵⁵ Schools were central to these efforts. At a Moscow school in the early 1960s, for example, teachers sent out invitations for a special fathers' event and posted signs on school doors that read, "The first meeting for fathers: A heartfelt conversation about raising children." At the four-hour meeting that ensued, fathers talked openly about the difficulties of child-rearing, exchanged accounts of their mistakes, and gave each other advice. In one father's view, "this meeting and conversation gave me a sincere push, and prompted me to look differently at fatherly responsibilities."⁵⁶ At a fathers' conference hosted by a middle school in Kuntsevo, 400 men heard a lecture on the father's role as an educator, and speakers (who were fathers themselves) discussed diverse issues such as blind parental love or excessive parental permissiveness.⁵⁷ "Parent's universities" similarly began to target men, organizing lectures on subjects such as "fathers' attitudes toward teenagers."⁵⁸ *Znanie*, the All-Union Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge (aka the "Knowledge" Society), as well as party and community activists involved in advancing children's education, likewise conducted "fathers' meetings," "fathers' evenings," and "fathers' conferences" at clubs, palaces of culture, and men's workplaces, such as factories and collective farms, which fathers were presumably more likely to attend than gatherings at schools, particularly if they could do so with work friends.⁵⁹ Speakers focused not only on child-rearing

⁵² GARF, f. A561 (Obshchestvo po "Znanie RSFSR"), o. 1, d. 502, ll. 10–11; "Tol'ko soobshcha," *DV* 8 (1964): 73; N. Zhuravleva, "Obrashchaius' k ottsam!," *SSH* 8 (1961): 36.

⁵³ "S otssami-nachistotul," *Nauka i zhizn'* 3 (1962): 86. Also see N. Makarova, *Vysokaia dolzhnost'—otets!* (Moscow, 1965), 7–9; L. Bariutkina, "O 'zhenskikh' i 'muzhskikh' delakh," *SSH* 3 (1964): 6; A. Matiushina, "Eto dolg ne tol'ko materii," *DV* 8 (1964): 35.

⁵⁴ D. Vol'finzon, "Ya khochu govorit' ob ottsakh," *DV* 1 (1963): 71.

⁵⁵ L. Iakovleva, "Ottsy prishli v detskii sad," *DV* 3 (1962): 86–87; "Tol'ko soobshcha," 73; GARF, f. A2306, o. 75, d. 2414a, l. 116; Professor Levitov, "Otets-vospitatel'," *SSH* 8 (1961): 8; L. Petrova, letter to the editor, *Rabotnitsa* 1 (1963): 24.

⁵⁶ Makarova, *Vysokaia dolzhnost'*, 8–9.

⁵⁷ Another Kuntsevo school's fathers' conference had over 300 fathers. A. Filippov, "Konferentsii otsov," *SSH* 9 (1960): 15.

⁵⁸ NART, f. R3682, o. 2, d. 1483, l. 70.

⁵⁹ GARF, f. A561, o. 1, d. 502, ll. 9–11; "Ottsy o vospitanii," *DV* 2 (1968): 66–67; NART, f. R3682, o. 2, d. 1268, l. 5.

and the ways fathers could positively influence children but also on the negative influence of fathers who were “drunkards, parasites, and money-grubbers.”⁶⁰ In at least a few cases, public organizations also awarded certificates of appreciation to fathers for raising their children correctly.⁶¹

Soviet radio—such as the “radio-university for parents” in Penz—buttressed efforts to edify men about children’s pedagogical needs. Radio broadcasts included “the mother’s and father’s role in the family education of children” and “fathers’ responsibility for child-rearing.”⁶² Inspired by a 1963 Moscow school meeting for fathers that she helped to organize, journalist N. Makarova decided to discuss the meeting on the radio. After receiving responses from listeners as far away as Erevan (Armenia), Omsk (Siberia), Orenburg *oblast’*, and places she “couldn’t even find on the map,” Makarova decided to continue her broadcasts about fathers, families, and parenting, which generated a lively response from the public—over 1,000 postcards and letters by 1965.⁶³

Parenting texts in the post-Stalin era also turned their attention to fathers. Although the highly respected pedagogue Anton Makarenko included fathers’ behavior in his examples of good and bad parenting in his foundational text, *A Book for Parents*, first published in 1937, most child-rearing advice from the early Soviet and Stalin years assumed a female readership and focused on mothers’ roles exclusively, or primarily referenced maternal duties when they discussed parents’ responsibilities writ large.⁶⁴ While parenting texts in the post-Stalin era often concentrated on mothers as well, some genuinely discussed both mothers’ and fathers’ responsibilities—such as *The Mother and Father as Educators*.⁶⁵ Moreover, new books focusing on men and fatherhood were published in the 1960s and early 1970s, including *Fathers and Children*, *The Greatest Responsibility Is to Be a Father!*, *The Father as Educator*, *Boy-Man-Father*, *The Father in the Family*, and *Father and Son*.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ GARF, f. A561, o. 1, d. 430, ll. 34–35.

⁶¹ GARF, f. A561, o. 1, d. 431, l. 86.

⁶² “Universitet dlia roditelei po radio,” *SSH* 6 (1956): 36; GARF, f. A561, o. 1, d. 430, l. 132.

⁶³ Based on written responses she received and individual meetings with fathers, Makarova wrote her book, *Vysokaia dolzhnost’*, 4, 7–11.

⁶⁴ A. S. Makarenko, *Kniga dlia roditelei* (Moscow, 1937).

⁶⁵ E. Volkova, *Otets i mat’ kak vospitateli* (Moscow, 1956). Also see *Rol’ roditelei v podgotovke detei k vstupleniiu v pionery* (Moscow, 1960); Nikolai Monakhov, *Roditeli i pionerskaia organizatsiia* (Moscow, 1960); L. I. Krasnogorskaia, *Rol’ sem’i v vospitanii doshkolnika* (Moscow, 1959); A. Shibaeva, *Materialy dlia gigienicheskogo obucheniia rodil’nits* (Moscow, 1962). For more on mothers and parenting literature, see Chernyaeva, “Upbringing à la Dr. Spock.”

⁶⁶ L. Kovaleva, *Ottsy i deti* (Moscow, 1963); Makarova, *Vysokaia dolzhnost’*; Iu. V. Zhegin, *Otets kak vospitatel’* (Leningrad, 1966); L. A. Levshin, *Mal’chik-muzhchina-otets*

The growing interest in men's family roles was particularly evident in two educational journals, *Doshkol'noe vospitaniie* (Preschool education) and *Sem'ia i shkola* (The family and school), which transitioned from being narrow professional publications in the early to mid-1950s to more community-oriented journals in the late 1950s and 1960s. Circulation expanded significantly: from 1955 to 1968 *Doshkol'noe vospitaniie* went from 42,000 to 320,000 issues per printing, and from 1956 to 1964 *Sem'ia i shkola* went from approximately 170,000 to 689,000. Moreover, the journals began to feature parental and societal input on child-rearing as well as the advice and wisdom of educational activists and professionals. Increased circulation allowed them to reach a wider audience, as did their availability in public spaces such as schools and libraries, at "readers' conferences," and in mass-circulation newspapers where some articles were reprinted. Both journals launched a multi-issue discussion about fathers in 1964. An editorial in *Doshkol'noe vospitaniie* explained the new focus: "We will publish negative materials that criticize fathers who avoid educating children in the family, and we will speak in a strong voice about the mistakes of fathers who through their own behavior hurt children's souls." The "main goal," however, was to present "positive" examples of fathers for emulation and to prompt new conversations about fatherhood beyond the confines of the journal.⁶⁷ A similar discussion about what constituted a "a real man, a real father" unfolded in *Sem'ia i shkola*.⁶⁸ The journals included the views of not only pedagogues, teachers, and psychologists but also a broad cross-section of society—including engineers and doctors, single mothers and housewives, machinists and accountants, artists and musicians, and many others. Indeed, they specifically appealed to ordinary Soviet citizens for feedback.⁶⁹

Discussions about fathers extended well beyond educational, parenting, and professional venues in the late 1950s and 1960s. The article "Boy-Man-Father" that effectively kicked off the 1964 discussion of fathers in *Sem'ia i shkola* was published as well in *Izvestiia*, one of the leading Communist Party newspapers, demonstrating the CP's explicit interest in promoting a more engaged model of fatherhood.⁷⁰ The subject of fathering also appeared regularly in a subsection of

(Moscow, 1968); E. Parkhomovskii, *Otets i syn* (Moscow, 1969); *Otets v sem'e* (Moscow, 1970). Similar texts subsequently appeared.

⁶⁷ "Vospitaniie—vsenarodnoe delo," *DV* 1 (1964): 5–6; GARF, f. A2306, o. 75, d. 2414a, ll. 17–19.

⁶⁸ A. Levshin, "Mal'chik-muzhchina-otets," *SSH* 2 (1964): 2–5.

⁶⁹ By July *DV* had received several hundred readers' letters in response to the unfolding "discussion." See *DV* 6 (1964): 10, and *DV* 12 (1964): 16, for the diversity of discussion participants. Both journals' "discussions" served as the foundation for later publications: *Otets v sem'e* (Moscow, 1970); and Levshin, *Mal'chik-muzhchina-otets*,

⁷⁰ A. Levshin, "Mal'chik-muzhchina-otets," *Izvestiia*, January 25, 1964, 6.

the paper, “Izvestiia in the Family Circle.”⁷¹ In addition to *Izvestiia*, a wide variety of printed media, including the *Literary Gazette*, *Science and Life*, *Health*, and the women’s press, raised questions about fathers’ roles.⁷² Many commentators noted disapprovingly that fathers considered child-rearing a mother’s job, casting all responsibility for it on her shoulders, and called on men to become active parents. After all, the obligation for raising children was in “equal measure” men’s.⁷³ Others castigated not only fathers but also society more broadly for men’s paternal negligence. “Despite talk about ‘women’s equal rights,’” one author complained, “the father’s significance in the family” was still minimized, and the idea that mothers were to provide the “main care of children” persisted.⁷⁴ Ideally, fathers and mothers would work together to raise children. According to pedagogue Evdokiia Volkova, the model Soviet father was the “attentive father who always found time to help his wife look after the children, and to actively and responsibly participate in child-rearing: to do anything for his children, to be occupied with them, to play with the little ones, to check their schoolchildren’s lessons, to question them about their studies and their comrades, and sometimes to provide help.”⁷⁵ As a societal debate about fatherhood and men’s family roles unfolded, some common tropes of fathers emerged.

The “Family Man”

One trope was the “family man,” the man who valued family and understood that it was “an important part of personal life.” The family man did not suffer from the “illness” that some fathers did—having “a passive, Oblomovite, consumerist attitude toward his family.”⁷⁶ He did not view the family and domestic affairs with “haughty indifference” and did not consider them unworthy of his attention, merely a “woman’s business.”⁷⁷ He did not consider home life boring.⁷⁸ Nor did the family man refuse his children’s requests to spend time with them by

⁷¹ For example, “Esli ty otets,” *Izvestiia*, December 17, 1960, 6; Ivan Bogomolov, “Ne mogu nazyvat’ ego ottsom,” *Izvestiia*, February 23, 1961, 6.

⁷² Ilić, “Women in the Khrushchev Era,” 12, 31; “S Otssami-nachistotu!,” 86; “V bloknot pape,” *Zdorov’e* 6 (1964): 18; “Chto dolzhen umet’ papa,” *Zdorov’e* 3 (1968): 16; Natalia Dolinina, “Otvetstvennost’ ottsa,” *Rabotnitsa* 3 (1960): 39. For depictions of fathers in *Krestianka* (Peasant-woman) and *Obshchestvenitsa* (Wife activist), see Zvonareva, “Obraz Ottsa” and *Sovetskoe otsovstvo*.

⁷³ Krasnogorskaia, *Rol’ sem’i*, 6, and Volkova, *Otets i mat’*, 16.

⁷⁴ E. Uspenskaia, “U vas doma,” *LG*, December 10, 1960, 2.

⁷⁵ Volkova, *Otets i mat’*, 16.

⁷⁶ Levshin, “Mal’chik-muzhchina-otets,” 3–4. *Oblomovite* is a pejorative term that loosely translates as “slothful person”; it comes from Ivan Goncharev’s novel *Oblomov* (1859), in which the main character, Oblomov, avoids taking action in his life.

⁷⁷ Kharchev, “O schast’e,” 98–99; Bariutkina, “O ‘zhenskikh’ i ‘muzhskikh’ delakh,” 6.

⁷⁸ E. Urma, “Esli ty otets,” *Izvestiia*, December 17, 1960, 6.

explaining that the “government gave him a free day to rest” and he would go to a one-day “rest home” the next Sunday if they did not stop bothering him. Instead, a “genuine family man . . . helped his wife with everything,” such as going shopping or cleaning the home, and “of course spent his free time with his children.”⁷⁹ The family man understood that it was his responsibility as well as his wife’s to attend to the children and to household tasks.⁸⁰

The idea that a family man demonstrated his male virtue by participating in domestic chores and child-rearing disrupted long-standing societal associations of both activities with women and femininity.⁸¹ In one pedagogue’s view: “Masculine worth and the thoughtful treatment of a wife are revealed in the first place in the [man’s] willingness and ability to help with housework.”⁸² According to psychologist V. Kolbanovskii, “The man-father, understanding what significant work is placed on the wife and mother, tries his utmost to take on a large portion of household work and participate daily in child-rearing.”⁸³ In a letter to the editor, Tatiana Morozova proudly pointed out how her father, despite having an important job, promoted a “friendly family life” and acted as a “genuine family man” by doing most of the cooking, assisting with other household tasks, and engaging actively in his children’s lives. Moreover, this behavior was not a threat to his masculinity: “he did not feel like a homemaker, but simply knew his responsibilities as a family man and fulfilled them.”⁸⁴ “My friends think that by doing household work,” Aleksandr Byrulia explained, “I am losing my masculine dignity.” But in his view, men who did not help with domestic chores lost their masculine worth.⁸⁵ I. Podsadnikov, who made dinner and washed floors at home, agreed, noting that rather than laughing at him, his neighbors respected him.⁸⁶ The family man did not flee from domesticity but embraced it as part of his manly identity.

Men’s failure to participate in domestic chores, many claimed, was a recipe for family problems and sometimes even marital disaster.⁸⁷ In Captain Cherenkov’s words: “If we love our wives, if we love our families, then we should help each other with everything. It is a great joy to live in friendship and to have a

⁷⁹ Oleg Kurskii, “Moi papa ne sem’ianin,” *SSH* 1 (1959): 37.

⁸⁰ Bariutkina, “O ‘zhenskikh’ i ‘muzhskikh,’ delakh,” 6.

⁸¹ Rebecca Balmas Neary, “Mothering Socialist Society: The Wife-Activists’ Movement and the Soviet Culture of Daily Life, 1934–41,” *Russian Review* 58, no. 3 (July 1999): 396–412.

⁸² Levshin, “Mal’chik-muzhchina-otets,” 107.

⁸³ V. Kolbanovskii, “I dlia obshchestva, i dlia sem’i,” *SSH* 3 (1964): 2.

⁸⁴ Tatiana Morozova, “Moi otets—nastoiashchii sem’ianin,” *SSH* 7 (1959): 32.

⁸⁵ Byrulia, “Ia vovse ne stidno!,” 21.

⁸⁶ “Sto raz—bud’te schastlivy,” *SSH* 5 (1965): 37.

⁸⁷ K. Kitaeva, *Rabotnisa* 9 (1960): 17.

good family. If a man doesn't do anything in the family, this leads to discord."⁸⁸ Marital tension due to household affairs was no small matter. It contributed to women's unhappiness, and in some cases could even lead to the collapse of the family.⁸⁹ For years, a woman noted, she had "suffered" because her husband did nothing around the house, and small fights turned into bigger ones, until ultimately she decided to leave.⁹⁰ A man's refusal to help at home could also undermine his connection to his wife and lead to a cultural imbalance between spouses, with the wife lagging behind.⁹¹ As a male participant in *Semia i shkola* explained, when a mother-worker was compelled to assume all the household tasks and did not have the time or the strength "to get involved in public affairs, study, and read books and newspapers," this could lead to a narrowing of her interests. These effects weakened marriages, for in these situations many husbands began to "consult less" with their wives, lose interest in their opinions, and claim it was "boring" to be with them or that their wives "didn't understand" them. Some men even began to look to other women for more satisfactory relationships. To prevent wives from "falling behind men in spiritual growth" and to foster "friendship and love in their families," one man argued, it was necessary for men to share domestic and child-rearing responsibilities with their wives, to "work together and relax together!"⁹² A Soviet propaganda poster from 1965 issued the same message, illustrating how if men helped their wives with housework on Saturdays, they could have fun and ski together on Sundays.⁹³

The idea that men's reluctance to be real family men could foster narrow-minded wives mired in domestic affairs was an interesting twist on an old concern. In the 1920s, Soviet leaders feared the negative influence on their families of "backward" women, that is, uneducated and religious women who focused on mundane daily chores and "petty-bourgeois" interests instead of the construction of a new socialist world.⁹⁴ In the context of the 1960s focus on husbands and

⁸⁸ Cherenkov, *Rabotnitsa* 9 (1960): 16

⁸⁹ Makarova, *Vysokaia dolzhnost'*, 109. Interestingly, in socialist East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, some sexologists and psychiatrists also linked men's assistance with household tasks to marital happiness and, more specifically, to sexual happiness. See Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ, 2005), 214; Kateřina Lišková, *Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style: Communist Czechoslovakia and the Science of Desire, 1945–1989* (Cambridge, 2018), 136, 155; and Natalia Jarska, "Modern Marriage and the Culture of Sexuality: Experts between the State and the Church in Poland, 1956–1970," *European History Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (2019): 477.

⁹⁰ "Esli liubim nashi zhen," *Rabotnitsa* 9 (1960): 17.

⁹¹ Kolbanovskii, "I dlia obshchestva," 1.

⁹² A. Labzin, "Vместе trudit'sia i вместе otdykhat'!," *SSH* 8 (1964): 6.

⁹³ Russian State Library (RGB), "Dva vykhodnykh subbota i oba—na dvoiuikh," *ИИ80* 127/3.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Wood, *The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, IN, 1997).

fathers, it was men's unwillingness to do their part at home that helped to produce this kind of problematic wife, who could then "infect" her husband with her "'petty-bourgeois' psychology."⁹⁵ Men's intransigence also helped to produce bad mothers. According to a female socialist labor hero, if a worker-mother had to shoulder all domestic work, including child-rearing, by herself, she would have no leisure time "to read a new book or listen to a lecture" and would "begin to fall behind in life." "How good an educator," this labor hero asked, "could such a retrograde person be?"⁹⁶ Men's attitudes about family and home life influenced women's ability to be excellent wives and mothers as well as happier citizens.

Male engagement in household affairs was also considered necessary because it reinforced the idea of women's equality and promoted its importance among children, an effect that was deemed particularly valuable for sons. Anna Mlynik argued that the revolution had freed women, but that life was still difficult for them because women did not have "wives" to help them with their many household responsibilities. Fortunately, she explained, the "liberation" of women had started in many families, "where the husband respects his wife as a person and is not embarrassed to clean the floor or the dishes." This kind of "new family," which challenged the traditional unequal division of labor in the home, helped sons by teaching them that males too had domestic responsibilities.⁹⁷ G. Fediai, who enthusiastically undertook household duties alongside his wife, argued that to achieve women's equality "not only in society but also in the family, it is necessary to help her, and not be ashamed of this domestic work."⁹⁸ A male doctor claimed his son had a positive attitude toward household tasks because their family "did not underscore any difference between female and male labor."⁹⁹ By engaging in domestic work, good family men promoted a more egalitarian family and helped children see women as equals with men.

A story about Evgeniia Alekseevna in *Rabotnitsa* (Woman worker), a woman's journal, illustrated the purported linkage between a father's and son's home behavior and their support for gender equality. A laboratory worker at an automobile factory and mother of three children, Evgeniia Alekseevna nonetheless managed to pursue higher education in the evening. How was this possible? One photo showed her preparing food with her older son, who was wearing an apron and cutting vegetables at the kitchen table. Apparently he was "her right hand at home" and helped to prepare meals (fig. 1). Another photo showed her husband arriving

⁹⁵ Labzin, "Vmeste trudit'sia," 6.

⁹⁶ Tursunoi Akhunova, "Otnoshenie k rebenku—eto otnoshenie k materi," *DV* 2 (1964): 12.

⁹⁷ GARF, f. A2306, o. 75, d. 2414a, l. 56.

⁹⁸ "Otkrovennyi razgovor," 30.

⁹⁹ S. Mostinskii, "Mozhet byt', nash opyt progoditsia," *DV* 8 (1965): 66.



FIG. 1.—Photo by G. Ter-Avanesov in “Mama uchitsia,” *Rabotnitsa* 9 (1958): 1. Color version available as an online enhancement.

home with bag in hand. The caption read: “Petr Trofimovich is a genuine friend and helper. You see—he’s just back from the store.”¹⁰⁰

Undoubtedly influenced by their own domestic burdens and the difficulties of juggling them while also working outside the home, many Soviet women argued that men who refused to participate in household labor and claimed it was “women’s work” influenced children negatively, and even perverted their “souls” by fostering disrespect toward mothers and women.¹⁰¹ A typographer asserted that if “a husband shuns housework, the son no doubt will acquire his habit. A husband who conducts himself as a *barin* [lord, landowner] at home is a bad husband and a bad father.”¹⁰² “A son would turn into a *barin*,” another

¹⁰⁰ “Mama uchitsia,” *Rabotnitsa* 9 (1958): 1.

¹⁰¹ S. Zimina, “Istoki zhizni dolzhny byt’ chistymi,” *DV* 1 (1964): 11–14.

¹⁰² A. Smirnova, “Otets otkryvaet rebenku mir,” *DV* 2 (1964): 15.

woman claimed, if he saw his father refusing to do housework.¹⁰³ Men who acted as “despots” by dumping household tasks on their wives, a woman similarly argued, taught young boys that a woman’s place in the home was to work, whereas a man’s place was to rest. This kind of father could lead young boys in later years to remember their mothers negatively, as “obedient slaves.”¹⁰⁴ Pedagogues buttressed such arguments, claiming that a father’s contempt for and oppression of the mother could also harm a daughter, leading her to “shut herself off from the father and close her heart to him” and be “infected with negativism.”¹⁰⁵ In their view, if a father did not show respect for his wife’s domestic activities, he would not cultivate this in his children, and if children did not respect a mother’s work, they would not value her as a person. This tragic consequence was not just a family matter: it could have broader societal repercussions by leading children to disregard others, which would in turn impede efforts to achieve communism.¹⁰⁶

The Father as Teacher

The family man was connected to another trope, the father as teacher, because both father and mother were expected to edify children about Communist morality, behavior, and attitudes. Although schools, youth groups, and other institutions were tasked with advancing children’s moral education, Soviet leaders, pedagogues, and psychologists emphasized that the family nonetheless played a key role, since it was in the family that a person’s “will, character, and life principles were developed.”¹⁰⁷ Men’s conduct as husbands and fathers was instructive to children—and therefore linked to the cultivation of principled future citizens. A male deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) explained, “[a] bad or good family man, a bad or good father was a question” of significant social meaning.¹⁰⁸ The family was the nucleus of the nation, the “first collective, where the character of a future Soviet citizen was first formed.” There children would become familiar with the “laws of society,” and there, observing the behavior of the “father toward the mother,” and of parents toward children, they would draw their “first conclusions about the relations people have with each other” and receive their first lessons on the importance of “mutual aid, solidarity, and goodness.”¹⁰⁹ “Love and

¹⁰³ V. Kondrat’eva, “Esli liubim nash zhen,” *Rabotnitsa* 9 (1960): 16.

¹⁰⁴ Zimina, “Istoki zhizni,” 11–14.

¹⁰⁵ A. Lavrov and O. Lavrova, *Vy, Vash Rebenok i Mir Vokrug* (Moscow, 1970), 126.

¹⁰⁶ Makarova, *Vysokaia dolzhnost’*, 20–21; Volkova, *Otets i mat’*, 22; “Ne trudno cheloveku pokhoroshet’!,” *DV* 1 (1965): 12.

¹⁰⁷ L. Verb, “Nravstvennye osnovy sem’i i braka,” in *Za kommunisticheskuiu nravstvennost’* (Leningrad, 1964), 141.

¹⁰⁸ M. Staritsyn, “Pokolenie kommunizma nado formirovat’s detstva,” *DV* 3 (1964): 26.

¹⁰⁹ Makarova, *Vysokaia dolzhnost’*, 8.

respect between parents" influenced children's upbringing positively and allowed each child to feel like "a member of the family collective." And by learning the importance of working together and helping others in the family collective, children would not become "egoists" later in life, allowing them to be upstanding members of the broader Soviet collective.¹¹⁰

Although both mothers and fathers were expected to teach children "love of work," many assigned this particular responsibility to fathers when discussing their familial roles. In part, this was because men's behavior at home was deemed critical for children's outlook on work. A father's laziness and "incorrect attitude to household affairs," critics argued, acted as a "brake" on the development of children's love for labor, hindering their later ability to be responsible Soviet workers.¹¹¹ When a father repudiated domestic chores, children emulated his behavior and refused as well to take on such responsibilities.¹¹² The father who participated in housework, however, fostered love of work in his children. As one woman explained, after her husband finally starting helping out at home, her daughter turned into a little helper because she did "not want to be left out."¹¹³

The association of men with teaching love of work was also a product of economic reality and male privilege. Despite the huge number of women wage earners in the 1950s and 1960s, including in traditionally "male" jobs, Soviet women as a whole had lower-paying, less-skilled, and lower-prestige jobs than men. Workplace discrimination, combined with the persistence of the image of the heroic male industrial worker as a paragon of virility, promoted the idea that men were more important workers than women and therefore better suited for cultivating "love of work." In discussions about teaching this core Soviet attribute, fathers and grandfathers were encouraged to bring their children or grandchildren to their workplaces to demonstrate how "wonderfully people work," and they were praised for their efforts to do so.¹¹⁴ Professor Levitov applauded industrial male workers who "introduce[d] their children to industry, [taught] them several industrial skills and abilities, and encourage[d] their technical ideas." He underscored how a hardworking and successful father, especially an award-receiving one, inspired his children to want to be like him.¹¹⁵ According to another commentator, it was important not to underestimate the power of a son seeing his father's name on the "Board of Honor" at work.¹¹⁶ Child-rearing experts and ordinary citizens also argued that it was a father's duty to cultivate children's inclinations and

¹¹⁰ Volkova, *Otets i mat'*, 19, 25–26.

¹¹¹ V. Serebrennikova, *Rabotnitsa* 9 (1960): 17; Volkova, *Otets i mat'*, 21–23.

¹¹² Krasnogorskaia, *Rol' sem'i*, 28.

¹¹³ Makarova, *Vysokaia dolzhnost'*, 110.

¹¹⁴ Verb, "Nravstvennye osnovy," 143.

¹¹⁵ N. Levitov, "Otets vospitatel'," *SSH* 8 (1961): 3.

¹¹⁶ A. Levshin, "Dusha vospitatelia," *Rabotnitsa* 5 (1956): 22–23.

to provide them with help in choosing a future job or profession, particularly since many fathers were employed in the “leading industries of the people’s economy, science, and technology.”¹¹⁷

Professionals, educational activists, and many others essentially endorsed a collective model of fathering by pointing to the importance of men also teaching other children. They could teach “love of work,” for example, as some in the Dinamo factory apparently did, by bringing a whole class of students to their workplace to show them what they accomplished and how the machines worked.¹¹⁸ The expanded emphasis on “practical education,” that is, vocational training, which was a critical part of Khrushchev’s educational reforms, conveniently provided fathers with additional opportunities for instructing children other than their own. Men could participate in, or even spearhead, the development of “school factories” or “friendships” between workers and students, in which students would learn about and work in various industries, gain skills, and come to embrace “conscious discipline, a Communist attitude toward public property, and a feeling of collectivism.”¹¹⁹ Fathers could also foster industriousness directly at schools. They could form “papas’ parent meetings” where they could brainstorm ways to advance children’s “work” learning. One way to do this, an engineer suggested, was for fathers to locate extra materials in their factories for school projects. They could then initiate “children’s collective work” and develop activities that would not “simply amuse children but divert them from contemplative idleness and captivate them with constructive labor.”¹²⁰

The teaching of politics was similarly associated with fathers in particular, even though this essential task was considered a mother’s obligation as well. This is not surprising as it reflected Soviet reality; despite women’s significant involvement in public and political life, they were largely excluded from high politics. A male government leader argued that taking responsibility for the “spiritual” growth of a child was “one of the most important tasks of the father-educator.” This meant that children’s upbringing could not be apolitical; instead, it was connected to political instruction, to “raising a son or daughter in the great truth of the great revolutionary traditions of the past, in the unshakable devotion to high Communist ideals.”¹²¹ Indeed, a male socialist labor hero reminisced, his father’s stories about revolution and war had initiated his “spiritual awakening.”¹²² An old Kazakh war hero proudly fulfilled this duty, recollecting how

¹¹⁷ Zhegin, *Otets kak vospitatel’*, 14–15; P. Bezukladnikov, “Pust vseгда budet papa!,” *DV* 9 (1963): 51.

¹¹⁸ Elena Turgan, “Oni shire razpakhivaiut dveri shkolu v zhizn’,” *Nauka i zhizn’* 3 (1962): 91.

¹¹⁹ “Shkol’nyi zavod,” *Rabotnitsa* 9 (1958): 26–27.

¹²⁰ “S Otssami-nachistotu!,” 91.

¹²¹ Staritsyn, “Pokolenie kommunizma,” 27.

¹²² V. Blazhenov, “Deti—schast’e i gordost’ ottsa,” *DV* 1 (1963): 8.

when his children “were still little and had only begun to walk on this earth” he told them about “the Revolution, about Vladimir Ilich Lenin.” From this teaching, his son had become a true patriot, learning that “his first responsibility was to defend the Motherland if an enemy attacked her.”¹²³ A pensioner described how he told his son stories about the war and his comrades’ military feats, and how he shared his medals with him, to inculcate “love for military service,” a requirement for young Soviet men.¹²⁴

As with other lessons that fathers could impart, the father’s role as “political educator” transcended the confines of his own individual family. As schools sought to engage men more actively in children’s education, political instruction became another way they could help. One man, for example, who became a father school activist and the head of a class parent committee, explained that he first got involved in school life by talking about the Great Patriotic War and his military comrades to students.¹²⁵ The legacy of male revolutionaries and men’s military roles in protecting the nation (notwithstanding women’s military participation in World War II) contributed to the linkage between fathers and the teaching of political history and patriotism.¹²⁶

The Father as Positive Role Model

In addition to the “family man” and father-teacher, the ideal Soviet father was a positive role model. Fathers’ personal conduct and interests played an important role in inculcating *kul’turnost’*—“culturedness”—in their children.¹²⁷ The embodiment of *kul’turnost’*, a highly valued Soviet quality, involved modern, civilized, and educated practices. By wearing clean clothes, demonstrating good manners, listening to music, and attending cultural events, for example, fathers would instill *kul’turnost’*. As one woman noted, her father was an example to her because she “saw how [her] father left for work, always tidy and collected.” Another woman explained how her father’s love of the Volga River and nature, his ability to sing, and his knowledge of foreign languages shaped her development, making her value the Volga River and nature and awakening in her an interest in music and languages.¹²⁸ Similarly, a contributor to *Doshkol’noe vospitanie* asserted, a boy “learned cultured behavior from his father, who always came to

¹²³ L. Rusin, “Byt’ khoroshim ottsom—podlynni talent,” *DV* 3 (1964): 20.

¹²⁴ S. Chekurda, “Otets neset otvetstvennost’ pered obshchestvom,” *DV* 1 (1964): 25.

¹²⁵ L. Martyniats, “Pust’ ottsy ne zabyvaiut dorogu v shkolu,” *SSH* 11 (1964): 28.

¹²⁶ Zhegin, *Otets kak vospitatel’*, 6–7.

¹²⁷ For more on *kul’turnost’*, see Vadim Volkov, “The Concept of Kul’turnost’: Notes on the Stalinist Civilizing Process,” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London, 2000), 210–30; and Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values*.

¹²⁸ *Otets v sem’e*, 91, 101–102.

breakfast or dinner dressed in smart and neat clothing, and imitated him.”¹²⁹ Conversely, a father with bad manners, such as one who did not remove his hat at the kindergarten, would foster bad habits in his children.¹³⁰ When a father told his daughter to thank her grandmother for dinner but offered no thanks himself, “his words would not be convincing,” since young children “imitate adult behavior.”¹³¹ As children learned from their fathers’ actions, and not just their words, a Soviet father needed to model cultured and respectful behavior. “Good, fair, and courageous” fathers would make their children want to be like them.¹³²

Kul'turnost' entailed self-control as well, so it was necessary for the cultured Soviet father to model sobriety. The scourge of drunkenness—widely associated with men—nonetheless plagued many fathers. Journal editor Zaluzhskaia argued that small children needed to be raised in an atmosphere of “moral cleanliness,” one devoid of drunkenness, because drunken behavior affected children negatively and fostered “rudeness, deceit, and hypocrisy.”¹³³ “Children live[d] in constant fear and hid in the corner,” the painter Tararova maintained, “when a drunken father” came home. Intoxicated fathers ruined “children’s characters,” destroyed their “nervous systems,” and turned them into anxious, short-tempered people.¹³⁴ “Drunkenness and boorish behavior toward women,” a marriage specialist asserted, “destroy[ed] the family and cripple[d] the lives of children.”¹³⁵ Inebriated fathers caused emotional damage because of the fear they inspired and the threat of violence they posed to children and their mothers, as illustrated in a popular health magazine’s drawing of a young boy in bed who has woken up from a terrible nightmare about his intoxicated and violent father (fig. 2).¹³⁶

“The tragedy” of a father’s drunken behavior was not only that it ruined his own family but also that it served to undermine families more generally by fostering “cynicism and a lack of trust in human decency and friendship” in children, hindering their ability to have healthy relationships.¹³⁷ It could also hinder children’s future in another way: many children reacted by “studying poorly or quitting school entirely.” One daughter explained: “In classes we did not notice what was being said, and our thoughts were all mixed up. The entire time we thought about our home, about father and mother. We didn’t have a childhood. We did not see parental kindness and we did not understand what love for parents

¹²⁹ R. Finkel'shtein, “Pedagogicheskoe masterstvo,” *DV* 7 (1963): 83.

¹³⁰ GARF, f. A2306, o. 75, d. 2414a, ll. 12–13.

¹³¹ E. Krylova, *Vospitanie malen'kogo rebenka v sem'e* (Moscow, 1959), 8–9.

¹³² Kliuchareva, “Prav li otets,” *Rabotnitsa* 1 (1963): 24.

¹³³ GARF, f. A2306, o. 75, d. 2414a, l. 12.

¹³⁴ Iu. Tararova, “Dumat' o budushchem nashikh detei,” *DV* 8 (1963): 73; “Pust' peniaet na sebja tot, komu vodka dorozhe sem'i,” *Rabotnitsa* 9 (1958): 30.

¹³⁵ Kharchev, “O schast'e,” 98.

¹³⁶ L. G. Nebratenko, “Podumaite o detiakh,” *Zdorov'e* 12 (1967): 20–21.

¹³⁷ A. Vaksberg, “Vospityvat' khoroshikh sem'ianinov,” *SSh* 10 (1961): 31.



FIG. 2.—Illustration by Iurii Fedorov in L. G. Nebratenko, “Podumaite o detiakh,” *Zdorov’e* 12 (1967): 20. Color version available as an online enhancement.

meant. Fathers similar to ours are worthy of contempt, and such fathers are impossible to love.”¹³⁸

Although some experts and ordinary citizens asserted that children could be raised properly without a father, many others asserted that a father was necessary for proper gender and heterosexual socialization, particularly among boys. In pedagogue Kostiashin’s view, for example, “it was not enough for schools to

¹³⁸ T. Zangiev, “Deti i alkogol,” *SSH* 4 (1964): 43.

try to inculcate in boys a chivalrous attitude toward girls, such as defending them, letting them go first, and making sure that they did not have to engage in heavy physical work." At home and at school, boys needed to be taught to have "deep respect for the weak, and, above all, for a girl."¹³⁹ "The heartfelt tenderness of the husband and father, his careful attention to every detail concerning the wife and mother, his constant willingness to help and work with her on domestic burdens," an editorial explained, served as an important role model. Through this kind of personal example, a boy "learned how to be a real man," how to behave with girls and women, and a daughter developed good "criteria" for selecting a boyfriend and eventually a husband.¹⁴⁰ Fathers who modeled such positive relationships with mothers and daughters helped to raise sons who in the future would become loving and attentive fathers.¹⁴¹

Pedagogues and psychologists warned that fathers who failed to demonstrate love toward mothers, and instead treated them with contempt and verbal or physical abuse, would hurt children and in particular hinder their sons' ability to have healthy relationships in their own lives. Advancing the argument "like father like son," they argued that the unhappy family produced by a father's bad behavior toward the mother would lead to another unhappy family in the future—that of the son and his future wife.¹⁴² A father's cruelty would provoke one of two responses in sons: either they would want to protest it and defend their mothers, or they would come to think that "women deserved to be treated this way." Such nastiness could also foster "rudeness, boorishness, and the tendency toward violence" among boys, who, upon becoming teenagers, might become threats to their female peers and subject them to vulgarity and abuse.¹⁴³ Moreover, if boys did not learn to respect mothers at a young age, this could even lead them to become cads, crass and heartless people, and rapists.¹⁴⁴ Fathers' disrespect for mothers in the form of inappropriate interactions with other women, such as flirting or having extramarital affairs, could likewise affect children adversely and even undermine their belief in love. After finding out about a father's affair, for example, one boy not only despised his dad but also began "to hate girls."¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ E. G. Kostiashtin, "Pedagogichiskie aspekty pologogo vospitaniia," *SP* 7 (1964): 48.

¹⁴⁰ "I k lichnom zhizi nado gotovit . . .," *SP* 3 (1965): 4. Similarly, M. Neimark, "Kakogo papu khotiat deti," *Zdorov'e* 11 (1975): 25.

¹⁴¹ Zhegin, *Otets kak vospitatel'*, 12.

¹⁴² *Polovoe vospitanie i prosveshchenie detei srednego i starshego shkol' nogo vozrasta* (Tiumen', 1973), 33.

¹⁴³ V. Kolbanovskii, "O polovom vospitanii podrastaiushchego pokoleniia," *SP* 3 (1964): 21–22.

¹⁴⁴ Kolbanovskii, "I dlia obshchestva," 2.

¹⁴⁵ V. A. Krutetskii and N. S. Lukin, *O polovom vospitanii podrostkov* (Moscow, 1965), 20.

Paternal guidance was deemed especially valuable for the development of healthy masculinity in boys and male teenagers. It was important for fathers to conduct a “manly conversation” with their sons about how to treat mothers and sisters as well as girls and women they did not know, and “not just on the eve of March 8 [International Women’s Day],” and then to demonstrate these words through actions; this would teach sons the “correct representation of masculine dignity, strength, and worthiness.”¹⁴⁶ Writing to the radio broadcaster Natalia Makarova about fatherhood, Vladimir Kuznetsovo remembered how heart-to-heart talks with his father were critical in teaching him how to be a “real man.”¹⁴⁷ Having discussions with and hearing advice from fathers helped male teenagers navigate the process of masculine self-construction. A father could “inspire confidence in the son” that he would be able to grow into a “real person.” Without a father’s guidance, but with a mother’s, a male teenager might also conclude that certain qualities were “feminine” and try to reject them to demonstrate his manliness, when in fact they were “human” qualities. A father could show, for instance, that gentleness was not merely a womanly attribute. He could also teach a son manly qualities, such as how to be a “good sport” after losing a game, or about “male” activities, such a hunting or fishing.¹⁴⁸

Pedagogues and psychologists argued that fathers had a role to play as well in educating boys and male teenagers about sexual matters. Teaching both younger and older sons to love and respect girls and women, as already discussed, was considered essential for their future ability to have a healthy and happy relationship (including sexual relations) with their wives—a normative goal. Some experts also asserted that when boys reached puberty, it was helpful for fathers to provide useful information about changes in their bodies and sexual maturation. It was “best of all in conversation with his father,” for example, for a boy to learn that nocturnal emissions were completely normal during puberty. Fathers needed to be careful, however, not to engage in overly explicit “physiological” conversations, because they could provide an “impure representation of the intimate side of life,” contributing to unhealthy sensuality and cynicism among teenage boys.¹⁴⁹ Experts also recommended that fathers have a “manly conversation” with their teenage sons about the development of feelings for their female peers.¹⁵⁰ In addition to these proactive steps, fathers needed to avoid certain behaviors because they could inadvertently contribute to their sons’ sexual education in bad ways. Pedagogues argued that swearing, for example, directed undue attention to the

¹⁴⁶ Z. Buslaeva and A. Prosetkaia, *Polovoe vospitanie shkol’nikov* (Moscow, 1968), 37.

¹⁴⁷ Makarova, *Vysokaia dolzhnost’*, 31.

¹⁴⁸ N. Allakhverdova and S. Soloveichik, *Trudnyi vozrast* (Moscow, 1966), 83.

¹⁴⁹ L. Verb, *Osobennosti vospitaniia detei i podrostkov v perekhodnom vozraste* (Leningrad, 1966), 11, 14.

¹⁵⁰ *Chisty i istochnik* (Moscow, 1962), 3–5.

sexual sphere and fostered unhealthy interests in women. It also contributed to boys seeing girls and women as sexual objects to be used rather than as full human beings.¹⁵¹

Some participants in the debate on fatherhood lamented the lack of male influence in schools and families, noting how common it was for boys to learn primarily from women. In their view, inadequate “male education” could adversely affect boys and contribute to “weak development and a damaged character.”¹⁵² This made the need for an engaged and attentive father even more important. But if boys had the wrong kind of father, such as one who subjected his wife and children to verbal and physical abuse, this could be even worse. “The foolish example of the father in the family,” a professor asserted, “[was] the main reason for rudeness, boorishness and the tendency toward violence” among male youth.¹⁵³ “Drunkness, abuse, swear words,” and the “immoral behavior of the father toward the mother,” a doctor explained, was the “soil” upon which the sexual licentiousness of teenagers grew.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, fathers who drank a lot and introduced teenage sons to alcohol, even turning them into drinking companions, were responsible for long-lasting and terrible consequences among their sons, such as criminal behavior.¹⁵⁵

The Modern Father

The ideal Soviet father was also “modern,” that is, a forward-thinking man who rejected outdated and traditional views regarding women and children. He did not subscribe, for example, to older religious beliefs that men should be able to beat their wives because it was allegedly women’s lot to suffer and be afraid of their husbands.¹⁵⁶ The Communist regime’s assertion that among the different Soviet nationalities the Russian people were the “first among equals”—that is, more advanced and talented than other ethnic and national groups—informed understandings of the modern father.¹⁵⁷ Believing that certain cultural and family practices, particularly among some national minorities, degraded “female dignity,” commentators in the debate about fatherhood often pointed to the problematic non-Slavic fathers and husbands who adhered to “backward” ideas and ways, treating their wives and daughters terribly. Writing on this topic, L. Verb

¹⁵¹ Buslaeva and Prosetkaia, *Polovoe vospitanie*, 33–34; Krutetskii and Lukin, *O polovom vospitanii podrostkov*, 21.

¹⁵² Kostiashekin, “Pedagogicheskie,” 48.

¹⁵³ Verb, *Osobennosti vospitaniia detei i podrostkov*, 14.

¹⁵⁴ A. Khripkova, *Razgovor na trudnuu temu* (Moscow, 1970), 45.

¹⁵⁵ Nebratenko, “Podumaite,” 21; GARF, f. A2306, o. 75, d. 2414a, l. 37; P. Prosetskii, *O disputakh po voprosam vospitaniia molodezhi* (Moscow, 1958), 37.

¹⁵⁶ Verb, “Nravstvennye osnovy,” 153–54.

¹⁵⁷ For Soviet nationalities policy, see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1928–1953* (Ithaca, NY, 2001).

drew attention to the plight of a twenty-year-old Tatar girl whose father “wouldn’t allow her to study, leave home, or even talk with female friends,” and that of the Ingush sisters, whose “despotic father and older brother” forced them to wash their feet and wait on them. Verb also referred to the fate of a housewife in Tblisi whose husband would not let her go to the theater, the movies, or even leave the house. Reportedly when he did catch her once trying to go visit her sister, her called her terrible names and spit in her face.¹⁵⁸ Modern men, by contrast, supported their wives and daughters’ wage labor, education, and many other activities, viewing them as having the same capabilities as males. As Tursunoi Akhunova, a labor hero and political leader, proudly explained, her Uzbek father had rejected prejudices he had inherited from the past and instilled in her the idea that a woman could achieve the “greatest deeds and feats.”¹⁵⁹

Unlike old-fashioned and authoritarian fathers, modern fathers did not resort to physical force to discipline children. Critics of this behavior associated it with the prerevolutionary family, in which the authoritarian father brutalized his children and wife.¹⁶⁰ They argued that physical punishment was bad for children, producing fear and anxiety and, in some cases, feelings of inferiority.¹⁶¹ “The method of the fist or the whip is unacceptable in child-rearing,” D. Vol’finzon proclaimed. Moreover, it did not generate the desired results as many fathers thought it would. Instead of cultivating respect, love, and obedience, it produced a rift “between the father and children.”¹⁶² According to a journalist, when a father used physical violence “this was not strength, but weakness,” not an expression of will “but a lack of will,” “not hardness but [a] pathetic lack of character.”¹⁶³ The strength of a father’s authority, the builder F. Roziner maintained, was generated through his “goodness, tact, the ability to internally instill in his children his love and respect for them and their interests, and in his ability to lead them via his charm. The ‘father’s hand’—strong and good—was what supported and protected children from the foolish.”¹⁶⁴

The modern father, in contrast to the traditional father, also acted as a friend to his children. He was not the kind of breadwinner excoriated by the nineteenth-century writer Belinsky, a head of the family “from the past, from a time left behind” who mistakenly “thought it was necessary to separate himself from his children via his strictness, severity, and inaccessible importance.” Instead, the

¹⁵⁸ Verb, “Nravstvennye osnovy,” 153–54.

¹⁵⁹ Tursunoi Akhunova, “Otnoshenie k rebenku—eto otnoshenie k materi,” *DV* 2 (1964): 12.

¹⁶⁰ Volkova, *Otets i mat’*, 14.

¹⁶¹ Verb, “Nravstvennye osnovy,” 146–47; Zhegin, *Otets kak vospitatel’*, 11.

¹⁶² Vol’finzon, “Ia khochu,” 72.

¹⁶³ M. Shur, “Vopsitau v sebe ottsa!,” *DV* 4 (1964): 14.

¹⁶⁴ F. Roziner, “Radost,” *DV* 2 (1964): 21.

modern father respected children and valued their friendship.¹⁶⁵ He spent quality time with them—such as going on walks and attending sporting and musical events together.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, the modern father listened to his children and learned about their ideas and concerns, instead of just lecturing and disciplining them.

FATHERHOOD IN SERVICE TO THE NATION, TO CHILDREN, AND TO ONESELF

Fatherhood was conceived of as not only a personal or family responsibility but also a civic obligation.¹⁶⁷ Advocates of greater paternal involvement quoted the pedagogue Makarenko's words: "You are not only a citizen. You are also a father. And you should strive to fulfill your parenting duties as well as possible."¹⁶⁸ They argued that active fathering was "an honorable civic duty to the Motherland." By working hand in hand with a mother to raise children, the father would encourage the "first sprouts of communism" to "blossom" in them.¹⁶⁹ And if for some reason a wayward son developed, "a son who had grown up under the same roof as a Communist father" but who then undermined the pillars of communism, the Central Committee of the Communist Party determined that the Communist father had "not fulfilled his civic" or "party duties."¹⁷⁰ As these ideas suggest, if in earlier years the father's role had primarily been to provide for and protect his family, by the 1950s and 1960s it came to include much more. Indeed, as "the teacher of all the working people of the world," the Soviet man had a responsibility to engage actively in child-rearing for not only his people and government "but also the whole world!"¹⁷¹

Men had a duty as well to engage actively in child-rearing for children's sake. Child-rearing experts and activists, as well as ordinary Soviet citizens, asserted the significance and power of "fatherly love, fatherly attention to children," to their happiness and proper development.¹⁷² It was "difficult to overestimate" the role of fathers in "strengthening the moral foundations" of the son, the family.¹⁷³ Conversely, if fathers were "foreign" to children and failed to show them love, respect, and attention, this would damage their "moral character," their "psyche," and in some cases lead to "nervous diseases" or even criminal behavior.¹⁷⁴ Although it

¹⁶⁵ Z. Kudriavtseva, "Otets—drug i nastavnik," *Otets v sem'e*, 196.

¹⁶⁶ Natal'ia Dolinina, "Kogda riadom otets," *Sovetskaia zhenshchina* 3 (1960): 39.

¹⁶⁷ Roziner, "Radost," 20; D. Kiselev, "Eto tvoi dolg, otets!," *DV* 3 (1964): 20–23.

¹⁶⁸ Volkova, *Otets i mat'*, 16.

¹⁶⁹ Krasnogorskaia, *Rol' sem'i*, 6.

¹⁷⁰ *Presidium TsK KPSS*, 117.

¹⁷¹ N. Zhuravleva, "Obrashshaius' k ottсам!," *SSH* 8 (1961): 36.

¹⁷² "Drug i sovetchik sem'i", 7.

¹⁷³ Zimina, "Istoki zhizni," 14; Iu. Gorodinskii, "V edinстве-uspekht," *DV* 7 (1963): 61.

¹⁷⁴ "Otets i rebenok," *DV* 2 (1969): 66; Dolinina, "Kogda riadom otets," 39.

was not considered ideal, pedagogues and others recognized the occasional necessity of divorce, not least because of the deleterious effects on children that unhappy marriages could cause, such as increased nervousness and sometimes even “hysteria.” If fathers left families because of divorce, however, they needed to stay connected to their sons and daughters, for children suffered greatly when fathers abandoned them.¹⁷⁵

Discourses of fatherhood naturalized and glorified it. Social experts and many men themselves characterized the yearning to be fathers as instinctual. Professor Malinvoskii, for example, asserted that a strong paternal and maternal instinct was “inherent in everyone.”¹⁷⁶ “The paternal instinct,” a father claimed in *Sem’ia i skhola*, “was no less important than the maternal” one.¹⁷⁷ Fatherhood was also extolled as a source of great satisfaction. Makarova, the radio broadcaster, argued that it was “not only the children who need the attention and advice of the father, but also the father [who needs the children]” because “concern about the child, the sense of connection to the inner lives of one’s children, elevates a man’s soul, and the feeling of fatherhood is a wonderful and noble feeling that enriches a man’s life with indispensable joy.”¹⁷⁸ A male socialist labor hero acknowledged that “everyone experiences fatherly feeling in their own way,” but he also asserted that if a man did not experience “the joy of fatherhood” and was “indifferent” to the birth of a child, he was “spiritually a poor person.”¹⁷⁹ In these formulations, fatherhood was an innate and vital part of masculinity that was essential for a man’s happiness.

The reconfiguration of Soviet fatherhood in the late 1950s and 1960s contributed to the development of a more family-oriented model of Communist manhood by offering men a publicly valorized identity as fathers and new opportunities to realize their manliness through an investment in the paternal. As a lieutenant colonel observed: “Father! What a proud title. In it is everything—good-heartedness, tenderness, male strength, and fairness.”¹⁸⁰ Significantly, however, Soviet authorities never accorded fatherhood the same value as motherhood. There were no fatherly equivalents, for example, of all-Union maternity medals such as the Order of Maternal Glory or the Hero Mother Medal. Still, the promotion of the new Soviet father marked a departure from earlier discourses

¹⁷⁵ “Vmeste s sem’ei,” *DV* 7 (1964): 67; Kiselev, “Eto tvoi dolg,” 22; Kliuchareva, “Prav li otets?,” *Rabotnitsa* 1 (1963): 24; Zhuravleva, “Obrashchaius’ k ottsam!,” 37.

¹⁷⁶ Professor Malinkovskii, “Oshibka molodykh supriugov,” *Sovetskaia zhenshchina* 2 (1960): 31. Similarly, see Nikolai Granat, *Posledstviia aborta* (Moscow, 1966), 26.

¹⁷⁷ V. Popov, “Za synovei my v otvete,” *SSH* 8 (1964): 6.

¹⁷⁸ Makarova, *Vysokaia dolzhnost’*, 11.

¹⁷⁹ V. Blazhenov, “Deti-schast’e i gordost’ ottsa,” *DV* 1 (1964): 6; Roziner, “Radost’,” 20.

¹⁸⁰ Rusin, “Byt’ khoroshim ottsom,” 20.

of manhood, which emphasized the importance of men's public contributions to the building of socialism, but not their familial contributions to it.

Although the image of the new Soviet father was reconfigured, it was still manly, eschewing feminization. Like other officially valorized and dominant constructs of manhood, this ideal entailed a manliness based on self-control, in this case regarding alcohol, sexual behavior, swearing, and the use of physical force at home—a model that implied men were naturally immoderate and violent. Like other models, it was based on service to the party-state. In adopting new and “better” fatherly and husbandly behavior, the Soviet family man served the nation by advancing Communist goals. His conduct at home fostered women's equality, family happiness, the improved education of children, and the successful upbringing of future citizens who would honor Communist morality and contribute to the further building of socialism. By moving beyond his individual role as a father-teacher and educating other children, he contributed to proper youth development. By supporting his wife and promoting family stability, the new Soviet father and family man protected his children and defended the country as a whole.¹⁸¹

Visual representations of fatherhood in the 1950s and 1960s reinforced the new masculine ideal of the involved father. Photos, illustrations, and paintings of fathers with muscular arms and large workers' boots as well as dads engaged in physical activities (sometimes strenuous) with their children proliferated along with depictions of dads strolling with prams and reading to children in their laps.¹⁸² In a departure from Stalinist depictions of Soviet men as revolutionaries, workers, and soldiers, films in the post-Stalin era also began to feature celluloid protagonists as actual fathers “whose masculinity (and happiness) was tied to the domestic sphere” and whose active engagement in their children's lives was not only good for them, but sometimes even redemptive.¹⁸³ In addition, a more “explicitly paternalistic discourse” emerged about Vladimir Lenin, the Soviet leader: images and stories in the popular press characterized him as an “affectionate and surprisingly human” father figure in children's lives.¹⁸⁴ The media also portrayed Soviet celebrities, such as the first cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin and internationally recognized athletes, as not only heroes but also good family men, frequently featuring them alongside their children. Depictions of these

¹⁸¹ While this article has detailed the broad contours of this model, it is important to note that the construction and performance of positive fathering in everyday practices was undoubtedly informed by local and regional contexts as well as ethnic, cultural, and religious differences, a topic worthy of additional exploration.

¹⁸² McCallum, *Fate of the New Man*, 169–80.

¹⁸³ Dumančić, “Thawing Soviet Masculinity,” 144.

¹⁸⁴ McCallum, *Fate of the New Man*, 169.

manly men as fathers, together with the many depictions of strong and virile non-celebrity fathers, underscored the masculinity of the attentive and loving Soviet father.

It is unclear whether Soviet men felt empowered by the new model of fatherhood, if it boosted their sense of self-worth, or if instead they felt disempowered or annoyed by the pressure to adopt new practices, including ones still viewed by many as “womanly.” Significantly, participants in the discussion about Soviet fatherhood frequently characterized men’s contributions to housework in gendered terms, which might have alleviated some concerns about doing “women’s” work. Among other things, the father, and not the mother, was supposed to carry heavy bags from the store, clean floors, take out trash, do home repairs. As one man explained to his son, “there is no war now! Lifting heavy things and doing work [at home] that requires great physical strength—is our manly business.”¹⁸⁵ Moreover, notwithstanding the many calls for an equal partnership in child-rearing and housework, men’s participation was usually characterized as *helping* the mother/wife, with the assumption that women were responsible for both. Speaking to this, one woman complained, “Why does he help—we both work, so housework is a common endeavor. No one should ‘help.’ Just everyone has to do their share of the work.”¹⁸⁶

In the debate about fatherhood, many men already acting as good “family” men spoke with pride about their positive husbandly and fatherly behavior. Other men dismissed calls to act differently at home. There was clearly some tension between the discursive ideal and the lived reality of Soviet fathers, as studies in the 1970s continued to reveal that women spent far more time than men on domestic chores and child-rearing.¹⁸⁷ Meanwhile, initiatives to remake fathering continued. Criticism of problematic fathers and husbands also persisted. This does not mean that efforts to transform men’s personal conduct were a complete failure, but it does signal the tenacity of older gender norms about parenting and the domestic sphere, and the continued association of both with women. Moreover, the new construct of heteronormative paternal masculinity was only one of several forms of masculinity that men could and did perform. These included other socially dominant models of manhood as well as alternative masculinities that entailed the enactment of manliness in ways that in some aspects overlapped or coexisted with the behavioral expectations of the new Soviet father and family man, but in others contradicted or undermined them.

¹⁸⁵ Buslaeva and Prosetkaia, *Polovoe vospitanie*, 37; Zhegin, *Otets kak vospitatel'*, 11.

¹⁸⁶ V. M. Mikhailova, *Nashi starshye deti* (Moscow, 1967), 110.

¹⁸⁷ Kolbanovskii, “O polovom,” 21; V. Volgov, “Muzhchina doma,” *LG*, January 4, 1969, 12.

SOVIET MEN IN CRISIS

As men's family conduct came under greater scrutiny in the Khrushchev and early Brezhnev years, professional concern about men's limitations intensified. In the late 1960s and 1970s, sociologists, demographers, doctors, and other experts began to research men's many problems, including lower life expectancy than women, high rates of alcoholism, and lack of accountability in the family, workplace, and society. In this context, a "crisis of masculinity" discourse emerged.¹⁸⁸ In addition to pointing to the biological weakness of men compared to women, the unhealthy and destructive habits that undermined their health, and the dangers of modernization that contributed to their propensity for fatal accidents and occupational injuries, the crisis narrative portrayed the late Soviet man as "having descended into passive and irresponsible behavior and having lost his 'archetypal male qualities': initiative, independence, courage, and a sense of social or political duty."¹⁸⁹

Some critics of men's alleged weakness argued that it was the lack of strong and capable fathers, combined with mothers' ability "to take care of everything without help," that contributed to the development of infantilized and feminized boys as well as men.¹⁹⁰ Others claimed that the marginalization of males in families and the corresponding masculinization of women in Soviet society had contributed to men's emasculation and decline.¹⁹¹ Not coincidentally, this critique accompanied a huge increase in women's higher education and employment in the second half of the 1960s and 1970s, including in previously male jobs such as engineering. If some people blamed strong women and the Soviet gender order for male degeneration, others proposed that women assume greater responsibility for protecting men and their health.¹⁹² This idea was met with outrage by many women, who thought it was high time for men to "protect" their wives by helping at home and participating in child-rearing.¹⁹³

Women's frustration with "bad" fathers and indolent husbands, in conjunction with sociological, health, and other studies that highlighted men's problems, fueled the idea that men, rather than women, were the "weaker sex," and in the

¹⁸⁸ Temkina and Zdravomyslova, "Krizis maskulinnosti," and "The Crisis of Masculinity"; Sarah Ashwin and Tatyana Lytkina, "Men in Crisis in Russia: The Role of Domestic Marginalization," *Gender and Society* 18, no. 2 (2004): 189–206; Kon, "Meniaishchiesia muzhchiny."

¹⁸⁹ Popovic, "A Generation That Has Squandered Its Men," 664.

¹⁹⁰ Neimark, "Kakogo papu," 25; Temkina and Zdravomyslova, "Krizis maskulinnosti."

¹⁹¹ Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Love, Marriage, and Friendship in the Soviet Union: Ideals and Practices* (New York, 1984), 180–89, 200–204; Lynne Attwood, *The New Soviet Man and Woman: Sex-Role Socialization in the USSR* (Basingstoke, 1990).

¹⁹² Uralnis, "Beregite muzhchin!," *LG*, July 24, 1968, 12.

¹⁹³ Natal'ia Baranskaia, "Muzhchiny—Beregite zhenshchin!," *LG*, November 10, 1971, 13.

1970s and early 1980s, Soviet popular culture began to reflect the idea. Examples include a 1982 film, *Take Care of the Men!*, which featured a successful and strong woman with a “weak” husband. During this time, as one scholar explains, “the image of the good-for-nothing male alcoholic who can only play dominoes with his friends, drink beer, and watch TV took root in the average consciousness.”¹⁹⁴

Under Mikhail Gorbachev’s policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, criticism of the Soviet system, including its gender order, exploded. While official Communist discourse still touted the importance of women’s emancipation, Gorbachev and many others discussed the need for women to be “restored to [their] natural destiny” so they could have enough time to tend to their “households, children, making their homes feel cozy.”¹⁹⁵ Meanwhile, a weakened economy and food shortages made the double burden of women workers even more onerous. Many Soviet women “felt crushed by emancipation.” In this context, the idea that “women are tired of being strong and men are yearning for ‘normal wives’” gained prominence.¹⁹⁶

Academics, professionals, and the media in post-Soviet Russia in the 1990s continued to discuss Russian men negatively, pointing to their high rates of unemployment, “alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and extremely high rates of male mortality.”¹⁹⁷ Men’s inherent “nature,” allegedly, was the reason for much of this destructive behavior. According to this perspective, men’s moral weakness, selfishness, and laziness stymied their ability to respond effectively to economic, social, and political changes and to act as responsible providers for their families. Other critics of men’s behavior blamed the Soviet regime’s authoritarianism and “overemancipation” of women for denying men independence and agency and “undermining proper relations between the sexes.”¹⁹⁸

Perceptions of problematic fathers in the post-Stalin era and failed Communist manhood in the late Soviet era, combined with post-Soviet anxieties about masculinity in a new capitalist-oriented environment, provide a window into the appeal of Vladimir Putin as a forceful patriarchal leader. Putin’s public displays of masculinity harken back to the Soviet-era images of hegemonic manhood that underscored strength, self-discipline, and service to and defense of the nation. Propagandists and Putin’s public relations team have constructed him as an

¹⁹⁴ Irina Glushchenko, “‘I Hate Cooking!’: Emancipation and Patriarchy in Late Soviet Film,” in *Seasoned Socialism: Gender and Food in Late Soviet Everyday Life*, ed. Anastasia Lakhtikova, Anglea Brintlinger, and Irina Glushchenko (Bloomington, IN, 2019), 70.

¹⁹⁵ Gorbachev, quoted in Glushchenko, “‘I Hate Cooking!’: Emancipation and Patriarchy,” 75.

¹⁹⁶ Helena Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex: Russian Womanhood During and After Glasnost* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1996), 9.

¹⁹⁷ Kay, *Men in Contemporary Russia*, 207.

¹⁹⁸ Kay, *Men in Contemporary Russia*, chap. 1.

engaged and robust ruler, an image that stands in stark contrast to the bad fathers and incapable men publicly rebuked in the post-Stalin and late Soviet years as well as the weak image associated with the late Soviet leadership and the post-Communist ruler Yeltsin. Given this historical context, and Russia's decline as a global power in the 1990s, it is not surprising that Putin symbolizes masculinity regained and Russia's regeneration. As many of his supporters proclaim, "[He's] a real man!"¹⁹⁹

Putin's government, meanwhile, has promoted domestic rhetoric and policies that have sought to right the gender disorder linked to the Soviet regime by reasserting men's "natural" roles as the breadwinners and authorities in the household. Among other things, this has included the partial decriminalization of domestic violence in 2017, allowing "lighter" acts of abuse that do not lead to substantial injury, such as beating a woman but not breaking her bones, to go unpunished. To encourage women to fulfill their "natural" feminine roles (and to address a declining Russian birthrate), Putin's government has launched pronatalist campaigns to encourage motherhood, and just as in the post-World War II era this has included the promotion of "single motherhood."²⁰⁰ It has also successfully delegitimized feminism as a "foreign" import from the West and mobilized homophobia to galvanize domestic political support by means including the criminalization of "homosexual propaganda" in 2013. These measures have served to distinguish the supposedly morally superior Russia from the depraved West: in Russia there is a "natural" gender and sexual binary, in which "real" men engage in sexual relations with "real" women and vice versa, and in which feminists, transgendered people, gender fluidity, and same-sex desire do not exist except as so-called national perversions imported from the decadent West.

Putin's performance of masculinity is multifaceted. He appears as a virile military commander who conducts successful wars and as a "dutiful son" who listens to veterans and "promises to keep the memories" of World War II alive; an authoritative alpha male who stands up for Russia's world interests as well as a *muzhik*, an ordinary man of the masses who values independence, male comradeship, and patriotism; a "law and order" commander-in-chief as well as the vigilante who promises to "rub out the bandits"; an intelligent and cultured man as well as a crass man of the street who uses vulgar words and criminal slang.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Helena Goscilo, "Putin's Performance of Masculinity: The Action Hero and Macho Sex-Object," in Goscilo, *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon*, 181.

²⁰⁰ Michelle Rivkin-Fish, "Pronatalism, Gender Politics, and the Renewal of Family Support in Russia: Towards a Feminist Anthropology of 'Maternity Capital,'" *Slavic Review* 69, no. 3 (2010): 701–24; Utrata, *Women without Men*.

²⁰¹ Elizabeth Wood, "Performing Memory: Vladimir Putin and the Celebration of World War II in Russia," *Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 38 (2011): 175; Wood, "Hyper-masculinity"; Riabova and Riabov, "Nastoiashchii muzhchina," 54–55.

These official representations of Putin, along with the violence perpetrated against his opponents and Russia's intervention in and even invasion of sovereign countries, contribute to his strongman image. As the many photos illustrating Putin's physical prowess and macho discipline suggest, his manliness is also "grounded in the body and what the body can withstand," whether spearfishing, piloting a motorboat, diving in the Black Sea, or doing judo.²⁰²

In the context of this article, it is worth noting that Putin is also represented as "father of the nation." This depiction recalls "the prerevolutionary image of the Russian monarch," the caring father figure ("tsar-*batiushka*"), and the Soviet depiction of Stalin "as the stern yet loving father to all Soviet people."²⁰³ Since 2001, Putin has conducted an annual mediated dialogue with the Russian people in an hours-long television and radio broadcast, "Direct Line with the Vladimir Putin," during which citizens ask questions, issue complaints, and praise Putin, and he responds to them as a concerned father figure.²⁰⁴ As "father of the nation," Putin protects Russia from the "machinations of the West"—the pernicious foreign ideas, economic policies, political structures, and decadent ways that purportedly threaten Russia. Putin also defends his subjects against corrupt businessmen and "negligent officials."²⁰⁵ Interestingly, although he has notoriously been sexualized by the media, Putin is presented as the erotic "love object—never subject."²⁰⁶ While Putin's handlers have promoted him as a national father figure, sexually desirable male leader, and strongman, they have downplayed his private role as a family man or father. When still married, Putin rarely appeared publicly with his wife, and since his divorce in 2013 he has seldom appeared with his lover, Alina Kabaeva, a former Olympic gymnast. He has also rarely been featured with his children, and there is a shroud of mystery around how many he has with Kabaeva. Putin's role as public father has been emphasized instead in images of and stories about him "as a loving master of animals and children." Symbolically, scholar Tatiana Mikhailova argues, they serve as "surrogates" for his actual family members as well as for all "Russian citizens," underscoring his role as "Father of the Nation."²⁰⁷

As a strongman and father figure, Putin has reassured many citizens that Russia is moving in the right direction. His assertion of virile diplomacy and his revitalization of the state and economy have strengthened Russia's image abroad and at

²⁰² Goscilo, "Putin's Performance," 184.

²⁰³ Tatiana Mikhailova, "Putin as Father of the Nation," in Goscilo, *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon*, 66.

²⁰⁴ Lara Ryazanova-Clarke, "The Discourse of a Spectacle at the End of the Presidential Term," in Goscilo, *Putin as Celebrity and Cultural Icon*, 121.

²⁰⁵ Riabova and Riabov, "Nastoiashchii muzhchina," 55.

²⁰⁶ Goscilo, "Putin's Performance," 195.

²⁰⁷ Mikhailova, "Putin as Father," 75.

home. His masculinized nationalism, use of patriarchy and gender essentialism as “tools of authority-building,”²⁰⁸ and political strategy of targeting “others” have resonated with many people and served to explain Russia’s challenges and problems.²⁰⁹ Putin’s performance of masculinity and reassertion of Russia’s power on the world stage have remasculinized Russia.

²⁰⁸ Sperling, *Sex, Politics, and Putin*, 222.

²⁰⁹ For construction of the “other,” see Ryzazanov-Clarke, “The Discourse of a Spectacle,” 118; for more on “selfish women” and population decline and the political uses of homophobia, see Healey, *Russian Homophobia*, 140–45.