Becoming the New Soviet Woman: Redefining Class and Gender in the Early Soviet Women's Press

Elena Braginskaya

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/history_theses

Recommended Citation
ABSTRACT

This study investigates changes in an early Soviet women’s magazine’s representations of class and gender to shed light on how the image of the new Soviet woman came into being. As the only non-party women’s magazine of the late 1920s, Zhenskii Zhurnal (1926-1930), better than any other publication, reveals the state-imposed process of transforming female identity. Zhenskii Zhurnal started out as the publication for housewives, but by the end of the decade it was forced to avoid emphasizing traditional female roles and concerns related to private life and the domestic sphere. Achievement of production goals – the new priority for all Soviet citizens – became central to narratives on the proper meaning of femininity. In order to transform a woman into an arduous worker, her female priorities needed to be reconfigured and her devotion to the traditional interests of her sex had to be minimized.
BECOMING THE NEW SOVIET WOMAN:
REDEFINING CLASS AND GENDER IN THE EARLY SOVIET WOMEN’S PRESS

by

ELENA BRAGINSKAYA

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
2015
BECOMING THE NEW SOVIET WOMAN:
REDEFINING CLASS AND GENDER IN THE EARLY SOVIET WOMEN’S PRESS

by

ELENA BRAGINSKAYA

Committee Chair: Hugh Hudson
Committee: Denise Davidson

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
December 2015
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would never come to fruition without help and encouragement of my GSU professors, my family, and my friends. I am most grateful to Dr. Davidson for her great patience and always helpful advice. Dr. Davidson’s critical comments made me think deeper and taught me proper way to approach historical analysis. I am also deeply grateful to Dr. Hudson for teaching me so many valuable lessons about Russian and Soviet history during my work on this project and prior to tackling it. Without Dr. Hudson’s seminars that gave me access to enlightening readings and challenging discussions I would not have been able to conceptualize this study.

I thank my mom, Lyubov Braginskaya, and my husband, Ibrahim Ikhmais, for creating a comfortable environment and allowing me to fully engage in my research and writing. Without their love and support I would never have been able to productively combine my maternal duties and my academic commitments. My university friends Allyson Tadjer and Brandy Simpson Miller also provided me with a great amount of support and encouragement.

To all of these people I owe a deep debt of gratitude.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................................ iv

LIST OF FIGURES ......................................................................................................................... vii

1  INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................... 8

1.1 Historical Background: Bolshevik Class and Gender Politics ........................................... 15

1.1.1 The Bolshevik Engineering of Class and Class Identities ........................................... 15

1.1.2 “The Woman Question” and the Bolshevik Way of Solving It .................................. 18

1.2 Methods .................................................................................................................................. 21

2  TRANSFORMATION OF ZHENSKII ZHURNAL ................................................................. 23

2.1 Structure of Women’s Press Before and After the October Revolution ....................... 24

2.2 The Phenomenon of Zhenskii Zhurnal ............................................................................. 29

3  NEW CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS: BYT, WORK, AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM .................... 40

3.1 New Byt .................................................................................................................................. 41

3.2 Work and Social Activism .................................................................................................... 50

3.3 Class Consciousness ............................................................................................................ 60

4  SOVIET WOMANHOOD: FEMALE PRIORITIES REDEFINED ...................................... 69

4.1 Family – Wife & Mother ........................................................................................................ 71

4.2 Relationships – Love & Sexual morality ............................................................................ 83

4.3 Femininity – Fashion & Beauty ........................................................................................... 88

5  CONCLUSIONS ............................................................................................................................ 99
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1: In-house kindergarten organized by the tenants. ............................................. 44
Figure 3.2: Communal dining hall organized by the tenants. ............................................. 45
Figure 3.3: A picture from the “Needlework” section, 1927 ............................................. 49
Figure 3.4: Working women on the covers of Zhenskii Zhurnal. ...................................... 59
Figure 4.1: Mothers with children on the covers of Zhenskii Zhurnal. ............................ 80
Figure 4.2: Examples of “bourgeois” trends featured in “Fashion in Colors.” ...................... 91
Figure 4.3: Drawings for the Fashion Contest. ................................................................. 92
Figure 4.4: Women on the covers of Zhenskii Zhurnal before 1928. ............................... 97
Figure 4.5: Women on the covers of Zhenskii Zhurnal after 1928. .................................. 97


1 INTRODUCTION

One of the guarantees of the first Soviet constitution accepted in 1918 was political and social equality of the sexes. In the eyes of the new Bolshevik leadership this measure seemed sufficient for a prompt resolution of “the woman question,” especially since the party saw the interests of women as inseparable from the interests of men.\(^1\) Following the letter of Marxism, the Bolsheviks put class and not sex at the base of social divisions suggesting that in pursuit of the class interests, the problems associated with traditional gender differences should disappear.

However, it soon became clear that in the new Soviet society class as well as gender, rather ambiguous categories in practice, remained problematic. Firstly, Marx’s formula of antagonistic classes practically ceased to work due to the disappearance of much of the noble and bourgeois classes that opposed the revolution, not to mention the pre-class formation of peasant society. The Bolsheviks, in the words of Sheila Fitzpatrick, “found themselves obliged to invent the classes that their Marxist theoretical commitments told them must exist.”\(^2\) The new ruling party divided Soviet society into the antagonistic classes of “proletariat” and “bourgeoisie.” Yet, as the NEP with its capitalist relationships and private entrepreneurship began to replace the destitution of the Civil War and the rationing system of war communism, the class division the Bolsheviks proposed hardly made sense to the general population.

Secondly, the Bolsheviks claimed that a modification of gender relations and a lessening of gender differences should accompany a well-functioning communist society. The new party anticipated that the revolution would bring immediate positive changes into women’s lives and would turn backward and subservient housewives into proactive citizens and independent


workers. However, in the early and mid-1920s, the depressed national economy, the high rate of female unemployment, and the slow establishment of promised communal services that were supposed to ease housewives’ burden stood in the way of making Bolsheviks’ expectations reality. Against the backdrop of these economic and social problems, Bolshevik attacks on women’s traditional roles were often confusing and ambiguous. Moreover, there was no uniform opinion among the Bolsheviks on gender roles and relations suitable to socialism.

It is in the midst of this ideological welter the Bolsheviks attempted to devise an image of a “new Soviet woman,” independent from “prescribed roles and male domination.” The identity of the new Soviet woman was supposed to represent a complete break with the past and reflect the new revolutionary culture of the present. Due to the principal role of class in the formation of identity, ideas regarding Soviet womanhood reflected both the class and gender politics of the party. Therefore, in the minds of the Bolsheviks, the interests of the country and society were supposed to supersede the personal needs of women. This social engineering project required cardinal changes in collective consciousness. In order to succeed, the Bolsheviks needed to alter both the public and private spheres of life.

A major way in which the new ruling party explained to the populace what it meant to be Soviet was the print media. According to Lynne Attwood, Soviet leaders saw the print media “as a vital agent of socialization.” In addition, Jeffrey Brooks suggests that the early Soviet press was the glue that held all the elements of new society together by conveying “certain understanding” in the situation where the political leaders were at times divided.

---

The role of women’s magazines in creating the new Soviet woman with her unique class and gender roles requires particular attention. Recent scholarship has already touched upon the role of party magazines *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest’ianka*. However, before the leadership was finally consolidated under Stalin, these magazines served only a limited sector of the female audience – female workers and peasants, who were predominantly uneducated. The politically oriented content of *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest’ianka* was of a little interest to housewives, who at the end of the NEP made up almost half of the adult female population. Moreover, since *Rabotnitsa* and *Krest’ianka* were official magazines of the party, their analysis cannot fully reveal the negotiations and uncertainties that surrounded the image of the new Soviet woman before Stalin unleashed his propaganda machine.

Therefore, a much better lens into discussions of class and gender roles taking place in the mid- and late-1920s would be the monthly magazine *Zhenskii Zhurnal (Women’s Magazine)*. It was a private enterprise published by the joint-stock media company *Ogonek* from 1926 to 1930. While *Zhenskii Zhurnal* existed for only five years, its importance in circulating ideas about Soviet womanhood should not be underestimated: the magazine was published during a crucial period signified by the changes in cultural and social values caused by the “Great Turn” from the market economy of the NEP to the re-nationalization of the state resources and rapid industrialization and collectivization. In its first issue, *Zhenskii Zhurnal* declared housewives as its main audience, but it claimed to cater to all women in general regardless of their class or social status. However, by the end of the 1920s, the party realized that the mass of “backward”

---


7 The “Great Turn” is a term typically used to describe the shift in economic policy that came from Stalin’s article “Year of the Great Turn” published in *Pravda* in 1929. See I. V. Stalin, “God Velikogo Pereloma: к XII Godovshine Oktyabrya,” *Pravda*, November 3d, 1929.
housewives, not involved in any kind of socially productive activity, represented a hindrance to the achievement of country’s industrial goals since the level of class consciousness of women, whose worries never went beyond the domestic sphere, was questionable. Therefore, in the beginning of 1929, the party officially asked Zhenskii Zhurnal to change its thematic approach and focus on the process of turning non-partisan women into “humans” and “socialists.” The party encouraged Zhenskii Zhurnal to incorporate more political materials and to include fictional stories that would educate women and put them on a “communist path.” In the last two years of its existence, Zhenskii Zhurnal, under the pressure of the party, significantly reduced the amount of housewife-oriented content and tried to inspire women to acquire professional skills, to join the workforce, or to become social activists. The transformation of Zhenskii Zhurnal’s structure and rhetoric reveals the mechanism of turning a housewife into a proletarian and thereby uncovers the process of redefining conventional understanding of class and gender.

Changes in Zhenskii Zhurnal’s rhetoric indicate that the image of the new Soviet woman underwent a number of transformations. The existence of a popular magazine that initially discounted class and social differences allows me to argue that the concept of what it meant to be Soviet woman was not forged until the beginning of the 1930s and was under a certain amount of negotiation until the final consolidation of power under Stalin. Moreover, the changes in Zhenskii Zhurnal’s representation of proper roles for the new Soviet woman reveal that the meaning of Soviet womanhood became a hostage of political and economic factors such as the war scare of 1927, industrialization, and collectivization. Without minimization of women’s attention to traditional female concerns and interests, the new Soviet woman could not successfully perform her main class role – participation in the production process. Eventually, a Soviet woman became a hybrid of traditional Russian values and Marxists ideals: women were

---

supposed to be simultaneously loving mothers and keepers of the family hearth and selfless and hard-working builders of socialism, but the identity of a worker stood well above the identity of a mother and a wife. And, as this research shows, such prioritization that was expected of women during the whole Soviet period took root in Stalin’s era.

Analysis of Zhenskii Zhurnal reveals that with the emergence of the First Five-Year Plan, the party began to view women as both a critical source of labor and as figures imperative to political propaganda. Hence, my work engages in conversation with scholarship on both the party’s gender politics and the role of ideology in the creation of person’s identity during the first decade after the Civil War. The findings of my study add an important perspective to a central debate in women’s history of the early Soviet period: was the final version of Soviet womanhood the embodiment of liberal or conservative values? On the one side of this spectrum is the study of Elizabeth Wood, The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia, claiming that from the very beginning, Bolshevik ideas of women’s liberation were skillfully masking continuation of the old misogyny characteristic of the pre-revolutionary society. Wood argues that the narrative of female backwardness helped the Bolsheviks both to become the vanguards of women’s liberation and to preserve traditional statuses of each sex even while trying to make comrade out of baba. On the contrary, Richard Stites in his The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Bolshevism and Nihilism, 1860-1930 believes in the Bolsheviks’ genuine commitment to women’s liberation: it was one of the chief features of Soviet ideology that was able to survive Stalin’s era of distortion of Marxist values, according to Stites. My research shows that the changes in Zhenskii Zhurnal’s representations of the new

---

9 See Elizabeth A. Wood, The Baba and the Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).
Soviet woman point to the gradual return to women’s subordinate position, traditional for Russian mentality; this return however was artfully coated in the language of liberation. This conclusion largely supports the position of Wendy Z. Goldman, historian of early Soviet period, whose research leads to a more finely grained argument regarding women’s roles. Goldman demonstrates that while the Bolsheviks’ initial utopian dreams of women’s emancipation were genuine, Stalin’s family policy betrayed these revolutionary ideals. Nevertheless, Stalin claimed that there was ideological continuity between the earlier radical versions of Soviet family codes and his conservative policies of pronatalism and protection of the traditional family that led to eventual control over female bodies and their reproductive function. Goldman succinctly explains that almost two decades after the revolution “despite the emphasis on a strong, stable family, the Party continued to encourage women to enter the workforce, and, moreover, continued to couch its appeals in the older rhetoric of women’s liberation.”11

While the majority of scholarship concerned with the formation of Soviet womanhood during the period under consideration recognizes strong interdependence between Bolshevik class interests and their demands regarding gender roles, no specific attempts have been made before to look at the creation of the meaning of class and gender conjointly. My research shows that achievement of production goals – the main class role of all Soviet citizens in Stalin’s vision – became central to the narratives on the proper meaning of femininity. Analyzing shifts in the meaning of class together with gender allows me to argue that in Soviet ideology the concept of womanhood was constantly and concomitantly reformulated by the changing definitions of citizenship, labor, duty, family, motherhood, and beauty. Hence, my research adds a gender dimension to Steven Kotkin’s understanding of the evolution of Bolshevism, which he defines

“as a cluster of powerful symbols and attitudes, a language and new forms of speech, new ways of behaving in public and private, even new styles of dress – in short, as an ongoing experience through which it was possible to imagine and strive to bring about a new civilization called socialism.”

Historians of the early Soviet period have not studied representations of class and gender in regards to Zhenskii Zhurnal. Therefore, a careful analysis of Zhenskii Zhurnal and its role in disseminating discourse on the new Soviet woman is needed in order to understand how the new cultural meanings of Soviet femininity were negotiated and forged. My research investigates how new notions of class and gender were created by this media outlet; what class and gender aspects of the new female identity witnessed negotiation on the pages of the magazine; and how the official class and gender politics of the party influenced the gradual change of the content in Zhenskii Zhurnal and thus the transformation of the ideal of the new Soviet woman. To answer these research questions, Chapter 1 analyzes structural transformations that Zhenskii Zhurnal underwent to accommodate changes in party class and gender politics. This chapter argues that being not very different form the pre-revolutionary “lady’s journals” at its inception, Zhenskii Zhurnal eventually became a political magazine resembling Rabotnitsa and Krest’ianka.

Chapter 2 focuses on the treatment of byt (mode of life), work, and social activism in order to investigate how the concept of class changed during the years the magazine was active. Through analysis of Stalin’s politics of class struggle this chapter traces the process of turning a housewife into a proletarian and argues that work and social activism were supposed to become the most important elements of the new Soviet woman’s identity. Chapter 3 looks into Zhenskii Zhurnal’s participation in discourses on motherhood, spousal relationships, love, sex, beauty, and fashion around which the concept of Soviet femininity was constructed. This chapter argues

---

that by changing the definition of womanhood, the party expected women to reconfigure their priorities and focus on their contribution to the economy rather than on the roles and interests traditional for their sex.

1.1 Historical Background: Bolshevik Class and Gender Politics

The Marxists viewed the oppression of a woman as predominantly a class problem – her oppression on account of gender was a matter of secondary importance. Based on this premise, the Bolsheviks believed that “the woman question” was supposed be solved through class politics aimed at the liberation of the entire proletariat because equality between men and women could only be achieved in a society based on egalitarian principles. Therefore, the review of both class and gender politics of the party is pertinent to this research.

1.1.1 The Bolshevik Engineering of Class and Class Identities

The October Revolution of 1917 did not follow the logic of historical change described by Marx. According to Marx, revolution was supposed to happen naturally; the oppressed class should have become conscious on its own. To legitimize the Russian revolution, Lenin had to redefine classical Marxism: in his version, the working class was incapable of becoming conscious of the oppression on its own because it could never go beyond its worries about immediate economic needs. According to Lenin, only the party could serve as both the protector

---

13 According to Friedrich Engels, since the relationships in bourgeois family were governed by the laws of property ownership and inheritance, in bourgeois society men dominated over women. In The Origin of the Family Engels argues that a middle-class married woman should be considered proletariat since the bourgeois family relies on domestic enslavement of the woman. See Friedrich Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972).

Since the Bolsheviks had taken power in the name of the proletariat, the new country leadership, using the “vocabulary and rhetoric of Marxism,”\footnote{Harding, \textit{Leninism}, 173.} had to label those who supported the revolution and its ideas as “proletarian” and those who opposed it as “bourgeois.” But in practice, such understanding of classes proved to be rather ambiguous. The Marxist definition of class was based on one’s social and economic position and relationship to the means of production as well as on the ideological and political consciousness of an individual. After the revolution, however, class became ascribed rather than dictated by the socioeconomic position of an individual. The Bolsheviks had to resort to this practice in order to “know its allies from its enemies.”\footnote{Fitzpatrick, \textit{Tear off the Masks!} 71.} Thus, in Soviet society class was no longer determined by the relationship to the means of production but rather by the relationship to the revolution.

Sheila Fitzpatrick explores with great insight the process of creating class relations in early Soviet society. She calls this process “class classification”\footnote{Ibid, 7.} and argues that it was a matter taken seriously not only by the early Bolsheviks but also but the society at large: uncovering class membership of a person became an important activity of the party members and communist organizations; class labels ascribed to people could either ease or ruin someone’s life. A preference in tax rates, courts of law, places in schools and universities, housing, and meal distribution was given to “proletarians” while the “bourgeoisie” suffered discrimination.
According to Fitzpatrick, “the Bolshevik’s discriminatory policies had both a social justice and a social engineering aspect.”18 This “social engineering” aspect of the Bolshevik policies was working rather well since someone’s personal identity became first of all determined by his or her class identity.

The Bolshevik engineering project of class and class identities witnessed its highest form in the Cultural Revolution of the late 1920s. Starting in 1928, the party set the goal of “proletarian seizure of power on the cultural front.”19 According to Fitzpatrick, “cultural front” meant anything from education to literature to science; thus, the Cultural Revolution was a war against intelligentsia occupying these fields. According to Moshe Lewin, in 1929, a third of the professionals and 60% of the college professors were from the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia. To bring the new “proletarian” cadres into these positions, the state introduced a class-engineering policy of spetseedstvo – a persecution of the non-partisan professionals. The main purpose of spetseedstvo was to “force thinking people to desist from their independent thoughts and moral principles” and to identify with the party’s agendas.20

In the early 1930s, Stalin announced that the class war was over. The end of the class war did not mean that the new Soviet society became, in fact, classless as it was outlined in the Marxist definition of socialist society. Instead, the classes in the new Soviet Russia, according to Stalin, ceased to be antagonistic. Thus, in 1936, Stalin at last announced: “The exploiting classes

---

18 Fitzpatrick, Tear off the Masks! 33.
have been liquidated, and the workers, peasants and intelligentsia, which comprise Soviet society, live and work on the basis of friendly cooperation.”

1.1.2 “The Woman Question” and the Bolshevik Way of Solving It

The problem of granting women rights that would make them equal with men, known as “the woman question,” was the “staple of Bolshevik propaganda” until the beginning of 1930s. In Russian society, “the woman question” emerged as one of the central issues among intellectuals after the abolition of serfdom in 1861 since the new economic reality encouraged women to look for financial independence from their fathers and husbands. While late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century thinkers proposed many different solutions to “the woman question,” only the new Bolshevik government finally attempted “to implement a vision of social transformation that included emancipation of women.” But, as Gail Warshofsky Lapidus accurately notes, the new leaders possessed only a “vision” and not “blueprint” of women’s liberation; they operated within a discourse of a “broad set of aspirations rather than a coherent economic and social programs.”

Nevertheless, under the new Bolshevik government women were granted unprecedented rights, such as the rights to vote, to serve as attorneys, and to act as jurors; women also acquired equality with men in social service jobs. More importantly, divorce became easily obtainable since in the Bolshevik view the inability of women to initiate divorce was the “source of

bourgeois degradation, repression and humiliation.”\textsuperscript{25} Also, the Bolsheviks granted equal rights to both legitimate and illegitimate children. Abortion became legal if performed by a doctor. But, according to Lenin’s vision, the final resolution of “the woman question” could not be achieved without the involvement of all women into “socially productive labor” and their liberation from “domestic slavery” and “eternal drudgery of the kitchen and the nursery.”\textsuperscript{26}

Thus, for the Bolsheviks the solution of “the woman question” lay in granting economic independence to women. One of the Bolshevik forerunners of female liberation, Alexandra Kollontai, claimed that “the woman question” was essentially about “a piece of bread.” According to Kollontai, in order to be able to demand equality with men, women should first have solid means of supporting themselves.\textsuperscript{27} However, the economic equality of women was not possible as long as they were burdened by domestic responsibilities. Therefore, the Bolsheviks promised that the new government would take care of such responsibilities through the establishment of a communal byt. The following scheme of gender relations was supposed to take place after the victory of socialism and therefore solve “the woman question” for good:

- Men and women would be equal in their social rights;
- The individual family would disappear and be replaced with the free union of sexes;
- Women would be involved in the production process on a par with men while domestic responsibilities of women would be abolished;

\textsuperscript{27} Alexandra Kollontai, \textit{Sotsial’nie Osnovi Zhenskogo Voprosa} (Saint-Petersburg: Znanie, 1909), 34.
• As a guarantee of gender equality, motherhood would cease to be a private matter for individual women and would be transferred to the state system of maintenance and education of children.28

To inform women of these aspirations and to mobilize their support for the new Soviet regime, the party established the Zhenotdel (Women’s Bureau) in 1919. The control over the execution of the decrees of the party and the spread of propaganda and agitation were supposed to be the main purposes of this bureau. However, in practice the Zhenotdel had to take on larger responsibilities that could bring actual liberation to women, such as help with setting up communal nurseries, kindergartens, and dining halls, making housing arrangements, and providing other social services.

At the same time, the usefulness of the Zhenotdel was questioned by a large number of party members, who were still mentally entrenched in traditional male chauvinistic culture and saw some of the concerns of the organization as unimportant and even potentially threatening to the larger political goals. The Zhenotdel was a female sub-structure of the party, which meant that its existence emphasized the presence of a qualitatively different constituency, “a particular social group with distinctive interests that cut across other identifications, such as family, region, nationality, religion, and even social class.”29 The Zhenotdel appealed to women as women, and in the view of the highest party apparatus such escalated female consciousness was taking women away from the common class struggle.

29 Lapidus, Women in Soviet Society, 71.
In 1930, under the consolidated leadership of Stalin, the Zhenotdel was closed. The abolition of the Zhenotdel was justified by the fact that the emancipation of women in Soviet society was so advanced that no separate bureau was needed to act on behalf of women. In reality, “the woman question” was far from resolved. High female employment – one of the prerequisites of women’s emancipation – was not the sign of liberation; it became economic necessity since the late 1920s a time when food prices went up and real wages went down. Therefore, according to Goldman, “the most successful recruiter of women into production … was hunger.”30 Moreover, by the end of the 1920s it became obvious that the state did not have the economic means necessary for the establishment the communal byt – the other prerequisite of female liberation. In May of 1930, the party adopted a resolution “On Rebuilding the Byt.” In this document blamed “certain comrades” for pushing “extremely unreasonable, semi-fantastic” ideas regarding the socialist transformation of byt. According to the text, such a transformation could not happen without precursory elimination of economic and cultural backwardness of the country and concentration of all resources on rapid industrialization.31 Hence, the promised liberation of women from the burden of domestic responsibilities was moved to the distant future.

1.2 Methods

This work relies on a number of theoretical approaches which together make up the methodology necessary for answering the declared research questions. The following theories were used: cultural analysis as the primary way of understanding trends and influences, and gender analysis as the primary way of understanding the distribution of power. Culture in this

31 KPSS v Rezolutsiyah i Resheniyah S’ezdov, Konferentsii i Plenumov TsK Vol. 4 (Moskva: Politizdat, 1983), 118-119.
work is understood as both context and practice.\textsuperscript{32} Such an approach not only allowed me to gain “access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live”\textsuperscript{33} but also to understand how this conceptual world functions through “a system of symbols and meanings.”\textsuperscript{34} The concept of gender is used in accordance with Joan Scott who established that “gender is a constitutive element of social relationship based on perceived differences between sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying power.”\textsuperscript{35} Gender analysis allowed me to conceptualize gender differences as not a reflection of the biological properties of the sexes, but rather as a result of cultural and historical development of society.

Cultural trends and socially constructed gender differences were detected through discourse analysis, which includes the examination of language and visual material. In my research I relied on the definition of discourse as “a social language created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place.”\textsuperscript{36} This definition was further refined using the ideas of Michel Foucault who concluded that “whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity… we are dealing with a discursive formation.”\textsuperscript{37} The Soviet press that serves as the conduit of discourse is understood here also according to Foucauldian theory: as a major source of power and as an effective tool of social programming.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{32} Culture as context is a theory of Clifford Geertz who argues that “culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions, or processes can be attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is “thickly” – described.” See Clifford Geertz, \textit{The Interpretations of Cultures} (Basic Books Classics, 1973), 14. Culture as practice is a theoretical concept explained nicely by William Sewell. For Sewell, culture is a “semiotic dimension of human social practice in general” governed by a “semiotic logic” like language and other forms of symbols. See William H. Sewell, Jr., “The Concept(s) of Culture,” in \textit{Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture}, eds. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkley: University of California Press, 1999), 50.

\textsuperscript{33} Geertz, \textit{The Interpretations of Cultures}, 24.

\textsuperscript{34} Sewell, “The Concept(s) of Culture,” 44.


Arguably, female mass magazines of 1920s-1930s with their high frequency and huge circulation numbers served as essential transmitters of official ideology and politics.\(^{39}\)

New meanings of class and gender were constructed on the pages of *Zhenskii Zhurnal* through discourse that changed along with the politics of the party. My use of the methodologies described above allowed me to trace “cultural dynamics”\(^{40}\) through the study of *Zhenskii Zhurnal*’s representations of the new Soviet woman. It is necessary to point out that the formation of class and gender relations during the period of consideration was not gradual; instead, it came through a revolutionary break-up of social consciousness. The image of the new Soviet woman thus became an ideologically approved construct through which the party imposed a certain set of class and gender roles. The investigation of this construct allows me to make conclusions about expectations toward roles, values, and behaviors of real women. It also allows me to reconstruct Soviet female identity as it was understood by various ideological leaders at various points within the investigated time frame.

---


17

2 TRANSFORMATION OF ZHENSKII ZHURNAL

In 1919, the Bolsheviks signed a resolution proclaiming that the making of Soviet society was unimaginable without a well-organized press. It was suggested that the most enthusiastic party workers should serve as writers and editors of newly established Soviet newspapers and magazines.¹ The Bolsheviks’ project of engineering the new Soviet person required cardinal changes in people’s mentality; therefore, the propaganda disseminated by the press was supposed to penetrate all spheres of life.² In the case of women, the press, first of all, was supposed to transform their ideas about family and female roles in society. To reach their ideological goals, the Bolsheviks established a number of female political magazines that spread a uniform image of the new Soviet woman.

However, the free winds of the NEP brought back commercial mass magazines that strikingly resembled “lady’s journals” of the Old Regime and publicized an image of the new Soviet woman that did not always conform to the party standard. One such magazine that opened during the NEP was the privately owned Zhenskii Zhurnal. The only non-party magazine for women until the 1930s, it survived despite the negative position of Soviet authorities on the private press. This chapter focuses on the transformations Zhenskii Zhurnal had to undergo during the years of its existence in order to stay in business. The initial concept of Zhenskii Zhurnal was not very different form the pre-revolutionary “lady’s journal.” However, I argue that with the changes in party politics following Stalin’s takeover, Zhenskii Zhurnal underwent a forced transformation from a mass magazine into a political one. To trace this transformation the chapter looks into the changes in the structure of Zhenskii Zhurnal, its intended audience, and the

¹ VII S’ezd RKP(b). Mart 1919 g.: Protokoli (Moskva: Gospolitizdat, 1959), 437.
topics the magazine covered. An examination of the changes in Zhenskii Zhurnal’s format elucidates how the construct of the new Soviet woman changed as well.

2.1 Structure of Women’s Press Before and After the October Revolution

The women’s press of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century is traditionally divided by historians into mass and political. The pre-revolutionary mass press for women, or a “lady’s journal,” had two goals: to offer advice in various spheres of women’s life and to provide light entertainment. Regardless of the multiplicity of magazines available, the mass female press generally had a common structure: practically every “lady’s journal” had sections on literature, religion, housekeeping, family, children, fashion, and arts and crafts. Housewives and women who worked office jobs constituted the typical audience of the mass press.³

In comparison to the mass press, the female political press before the revolution had a much smaller circulation and targeted mostly those women who were involved in political movements. The main goals of the female political press were to create networks of politically conscious women, to familiarize the audience with the ideological platform of particular parties, and to campaign for new supporters. All political magazines also had a similar structure: there were sections on the theory of women’s movements, analytical sections informing readers about the lives of women in Russia and abroad, and a bibliography section.⁴

At the dawn of the October Revolution, magazines for women were the most popular type of press in Russia.⁵ Therefore, it was not accidental that when the Bolsheviks came to power, they saw the women’s press as a convenient and already well-established way to

communicate their message. The Bolsheviks especially needed the help of the press by the end of the Civil War when the new government had to look for the support of the masses necessary for the realization of many social projects. Propaganda became an essential tool during this period. By Lenin’s demand, the press was supposed to spread “everyday propaganda” that was “genuinely communist in its character.” He wrote: “All organs of the press that are in the hands of the party must be edited by reliable Communists who have proved their devotion to the cause of the proletarian revolution.”

The first women’s magazine that the new Bolshevik government created was *Kommunistka (1920-1930)*. The magazine was designed for the Bolshevik female activists who were engaged in organizing the female workers all over the country. On the pages of *Kommunistka* female readers could find mostly political information of propagandistic nature. The authors of the magazine primarily discussed the possible ways of solving “the woman question” and the political education of women. Lenin’s spouse and political activist Nadezhda Krupskaya served as the editor of *Kommunistka*, while other prominent female activists Alexandra Kollontai, Inessa Armand, Konkordia Samoilova, Zlata Lilina, and Klavdia Nikolaeva were the main contributors to the magazine.

Further, in order to reach their ideological goals, the Bolsheviks established a number of political magazines that targeted women laborers and peasants. According to Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, “the major function of such journals was to emphasize the link between the emancipation of women and the establishment of socialism.” *Rabotnitsa* had the highest

---

8 *Rabotnitsa* (1914 – present), Krest’yanka (1922-present), Batrachka (1925-1929).
circulation compared to other political magazines and was aimed at “simple, uneducated and politically undeveloped women for whom the general press was considered too difficult.”\textsuperscript{10} Women thus were viewed much the same as the peasantry as a whole—benighted beings requiring a special, simplified form of communication from the party.\textsuperscript{11} The main purpose of \textit{Rabotnitsa} was to “facilitate an organized resistance of the female proletariat against the corrupting influence of the petty bourgeoisie.”\textsuperscript{12} The magazine informed women about Bolshevik politics and encouraged them to become active members of the communist party and productive proletarian workers. The magazine also advocated for a mode of life that involved minimal housework claiming that the new Soviet women should not concentrate all their attention on household chores and instead find some time for ideological self-education or social activism.\textsuperscript{13} Thus, \textit{Rabotnitsa} was promoting an image of a female activist, worker, and citizen.

Once the NEP brought back freedom of the press, mass magazines for women came back into circulation. A few private mass magazines that were popular before the Bolshevik takeover also resumed their work. For example, two of the most prominent “lady’s journals” of the past – \textit{Zhurnal dlia Zhenshin} and \textit{Zhurnal dlia Khoziaek} – began to be published again in 1922. Before the revolution, \textit{Zhurnal dlia Khoziaek (1912-1926)} was deemed “the most successful project of the century,”\textsuperscript{14} reaching a circulation of 150,000 copies. In the introduction to the first issue of the magazine the authors stated that even though female involvement in the work force was very important, a contribution to society made by a woman who entirely dedicated herself to

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Rabotnitsa}, Vol. 1, 1923, 1.
\textsuperscript{13} Kolomitiitseva, \textit{Otechestvennye Zhenskie Zhurnaly XX Veka}, 66-69.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 36.
motherhood and home was no less valuable.\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Zhurnal dla Zhenshin (1914-1926)} had a similar orientation and published “everything that could interest a woman.”\textsuperscript{16} Both \textit{Zhurnal dla Zhenshin} and \textit{Zhurnal dla Khoziaek} had a rather similar thematic structure: articles offered advice on housekeeping, hygiene, medicine, parenting, cooking, fashion, and arts and crafts. Both magazines also discussed aspects of feminism and women’s place in society. In addition, they both had literature sections that offered not only light fiction but also more serious stories that reflected on many issues and troubles of the current day. After the revolution, both magazines had to make some changes in order to better fit in with the new political regime. However, the reorganization mostly affected the magazines’ structure, but not their goals and objectives. Both journals again catered strictly to housewives, eventually limiting their content to fashion, housekeeping advice, and fiction. Both magazines also avoided publishing articles about communal mode of life and working women.\textsuperscript{17}

In 1926, the party signed a resolution “On the Immediate Tasks of the Party for Work among Female Workers and Peasants,” which suggested that private women’s press should be eradicated and, therefore, \textit{Zhurnal dla Zhenshin} and \textit{Zhurnal dla Khoziaek} should be closed.\textsuperscript{18} The party saw the necessity of taking such actions clearly based on the fact that these magazines completely ignored class and social differences of their audience. These media outlets targeted any woman in general that needed advice in keeping various household tasks. Hence, the magazines purposely disregarded the social status of their audience or their involvement in politics and the production process. Such an approach went against the tasks of the party: Soviet

\textsuperscript{15} Zhurnal dla Khozyaek, Vol. 1, 1912, 1.
\textsuperscript{16} Zhurnal dla Zhenshin, Vol. 1, 1914, 1.
\textsuperscript{17} Kolomittseva, Otechestvennye Zhenskie Zhurnaly XX Veka, 71-72.
\textsuperscript{18} “Ob Ocherednih Zadachah Partii po Rabote Sredi Rabotnits i Krestyanok (iz Postanovlenia Orgburo TsKVP(b) ot 1 Marta 1926g.)” in O Partiinoi i Sovetskoi Pechati, Radioveshanii i Televidenie: Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov, (Moskva: Mysl’, 1972), 141.
authorities wanted to see a press that spread Bolshevik propaganda and agitation, that educated their readers politically, and that “mobilized the masses around the main aspects of building socialism.”¹⁹ In the case of the women’s press, Soviet authorities preferred to see magazines that eradicated gender differences, encouraged women “to become producers as well as consumers,” and urged women to leave the private sphere of family life by joining the labor force.²⁰

A traditional “lady’s journal” upon which many women relied for entertainment and advice no longer satisfied the Soviet authorities because such media mostly targeted housewives – a group of the population that was serving the needs of the family rather than the needs of society. Marxist theory considered housewives “marginal to the socialist struggle.”²¹ However, during the late NEP almost fifty percent of Soviet women were still unemployed.²² Women whose primary responsibly was taking care of the household most likely had little interest in the thematic content offered by the official party magazines. A joint-stock media company Ogonek attempted to fill this information gap by creating a monthly female magazine that catered primarily to housewives and yet tried to stay ideologically in line with party politics. The magazine went into print under a name of Zhenskii Zhurnal.

2.2 The Phenomenon of Zhenskii Zhurnal

Zhenskii Zhurnal first appeared in 1926, the same year that the party closed Zhurnal dlia Zhenshin and Zhurnal dlia Khoziaiek due to their classless nature. In this situation, an appearance

---

¹⁹ “O Kompanii Posvyashennoi Dnyu Pecahti: Pis‘mo TsKVKP(b) ot 14 aprelia 1928 g.” in O Partiinoi i Sovetskoi Pechati, 156.
²⁰ Attwood, Creating the New Soviet Woman, 12.
²² According to Lewis H. Siegelbaum, nationally 42.8% of women were unemployed in January 1924; by January of 1925 the number of unemployed women reached 47.5%. See: Lewis H. Siegelbaum, Soviet State and Society Between the Revolutions, 1918-1929 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 105.
of another magazine that regardless of the usual front page motto “Proletariat of the World, Unite” strikingly resembled a “lady’s journal,” was truly phenomenal. Moreover, just like Zhurnal dlia Zhenshin and Zhurnal dlia Khoziaek, Zhenskii Zhurnal initially saw its main audience as housewives and focused primarily on the interests and needs of these women. The editorial of January 1927 explained that housewives more than anyone else needed a specifically female magazine since these women “deeper than anyone else are locked in 4 walls of their apartment or room, more than anyone else are cut off from public life, less than anyone else have an opportunity to read general books.”

Unsurprisingly, Zhenskii Zhurnal quickly emerged as a clear competitor to the women’s press published by the party. During the first year the circulation of Zhenskii Zhurnal amounted to 50,000 copies, the following year it reached 100,000 copies while the circulation of Rabotnitsa during the same year was at 150,000 copies. Such a high popularity of Zhenskii Zhurnal was easily predictable since the magazine appealed to traditional female interests and needs instead of offering political agitation typical for the party press for women. Female readers were very grateful to have a magazine that once again satisfied their interests and needs, so they called Zhenskii Zhurnal “a friend and companion of a woman.”

At the same time, Zhenskii Zhurnal could not ignore the social changes that came with the new regime. This fact probably explains why the government allowed the magazine to exist. Based on content analysis of the first page editorials of Zhenskii Zhurnal, it seems that the creators of the magazine imagined their readers as modern, progressive women who were deeply interested in the policies that could improve their lives. The message Zhenskii Zhurnal wanted to convey was that women’s lives had changed for the better: if under the Old Regime most

---

housewives could not imagine their lives outside of home and family, after the revolution they were promised equality with men in social activities, work, and education. The magazine created a special section called “Social and Political Life” that introduced women to the new ways of Soviet life and familiarized them with areas of activity that were unreachable to women prior to the revolution. In 1926 and 1927 this section of the magazine featured the following articles: “The Organization of Education for Homeless Children” and “Homeless Children Should be Taken Care of” by M.K; “Protection of Women’s Labor” by L. Bronstein; “The Role of Women in the National Defense” by E. Demezer; “Women-Fighters in the Days of the Great October Revolution” by A. Kollontai, etc. Such articles typically took the first pages of *Zhenskii Zhurnal* and were presented to the audience as the main focus of the publication. However, much of the other sections of the newspaper focused on more traditional female interests with titles such as “Needlework,” “Nutrition,” “Home and Garden,” “Mother and Child,” “Women’s Health,” “Fashions in Colors,” and “Children’s Corner.” By mainly concentrating their attention on more gendered topics, the editors of *Zhenskii Zhurnal* were clearly attempting to fulfill an information gap created by the political women’s magazines that refused to write about particularly female concerns.

The biggest section of the early *Zhenskii Zhurnal* was “Fashions in Colors.” It took seventeen pages of the magazine and consisted of a number of rubrics such as “Fashion Chronicle” that was dedicated to the European fashion trends; “For the Stage” where women could learn about the art of make-up; “Dressmaking” where women could find sewing patterns and descriptions of different sewing techniques; and “Needlework” that taught women knitting, embroidery, and lace weaving. The rest of the pages – normally around eight – presented colorful drawings of European fashions for women and children. This part of the magazine was
the only one printed in color; the rest of Zhenskii Zhurnal, except the cover page, was in black and white.

“Home and Garden” comprised, on average, five pages. Here women could find advice on housekeeping along with the recipes, weekly meal plans, and articles about diet and nutrition. “Children’s Corner” initially occupied four pages of the magazine; however, in just one year it doubled in length raising the total number of magazine pages from forty in 1926 to forty-four in 1927. In this section women could find stories and poems for kids as well as suggestions for children’s games. The “Children’s Corner” was edited by Natalia Sats – a famous music teacher and director of the Moscow Musical Theater for Children since 1927. The magazine also had a section called “Mother and Child” which offered advice from many doctors, nurses, and educators on how to raise children. The subjects this section covered included different aspects of children’s health, development of children’s creativity, children’s day regimen, information about children diseases, first aid to an ill child, etc.

If the sections on fashion, housekeeping, and childcare were usual for the “lady’s journal” type of magazine, the approach that Zhenskii Zhurnal took in discussing some aspects of female sexual health in the section called “Women’s Health” was rather innovative and bold. Never before had the Russian female press published detailed illustrated articles with such titles as “Fertilization and Heredity,” “Pregnancy Hygiene,” “Postpartum Hygiene,” “Normal and Abnormal Sexual Life of a Female.” Most of these articles, which were written by Doctor Nadezhda Mikulina-Ivanova, differed enormously from the “intimate conversations” of the pre-revolutionary female press. In Tsarist Russia such intimate aspects of female health were prohibited from public discussion; whilst the post-revolutionary political women’s press only offered small articles warning about venereal diseases and the dangers of abortion. However,
women were interested in sexual education since the lack of valid information on the subject of sexual health in the era of “free love” was causing serious problems for society. According to Igor Kon, in the 1920s “the absence of scientific sex education resulted in widespread sexual ignorance.”

And Zhenskii Zhurnal attempted to fight this ignorance by providing, in practically every issue, clearly explained medical articles with an abundance of illustrations. In addition, in “Women’s Health” the audience of Zhenskii Zhurnal could find general medical advice on improving health and the treatment of illnesses. For example, the readership was offered such articles as “Women’s Heart” by professor N. Afonskii; “Spa Treatment,” “Physical Education of Young Women,” and “Neurasthenia” by R. Borisov; “Dandruff Treatment and Hair Loss” by V. Nikitin-Gorskii.

In addition to the sections named above, early Zhenskii Zhurnal also had three regular columns: “Legal Consultation,” “Mailbox,” and “Conversations with Readers.” The topics of discussions in “Legal Consultation” were based on readers’ letters. The most common questions asked by readers revolved around family and labor law. A number of new Soviet decrees created a lot of uncertainty for women. For example, the new family law simplified enormously both marriage and divorce procedures.

Thus, the 1920s witnessed an unprecedented surge in weddings and divorces. Discussing early Soviet society, Wendy Z. Goldman notes that “increased sexual and social freedom” gave many advantages to men but “made the woman’s burden harder to bear.”

Faced with such problems as the birth of children out of wedlock, the failure of the father to pay child support, or property disputes in divorce cases, women did not

know how to defend their interests most of the time as they had a very little knowledge of family law. Readers’ letters also suggest that women lacked knowledge of labor law as well. The number of Soviet working women was growing; however, most often those women who joined the labor force not only lacked experience, but also did not have a clear idea of their immediate professional rights and responsibilities. Thus, the legal section of Zhenskii Zhurnal helped women work though such questions as the calculation of payroll, bonuses, and pensions; the appeal of firing; the guarantees of social security; etc. Sometimes, because of the overwhelming number of letters sent to “Legal Consultation,” answers to questions about the law ended up in the regular section called “Mailbox.” In addition to legal advice, in “Mailbox” women could find information about professional training, art classes, literature recommendations, general housekeeping advice, and addresses of stores where purchases could be made through the mail.

The subject matters addressed in the section called “Conversations with Readers” were very close to the questions raised in the legal section. Tatiana Pletneva was the regular author of “Conversations.” Her articles aroused serious interest among readers, as she often talked about the changed image of women in the new Soviet society. Her writings mostly dealt with questions of love and family. In numerous articles she tried to explain what the changes that came with the Soviet regime meant for women or what were the problems and perspectives of the new Soviet family. By and large, Pletneva guided women through the new freedoms that came with the new laws. The major themes of Pletneva’s “Conversations with Readers” were often similar to the subjects of short stories that appeared in the literature section of the magazine. Even though official doctrine preferred literature that promoted ideas of collective happiness and wanted to see heroines who found joy and contentment in contributing to the development of the country,
the search for love and personal happiness nonetheless dominated the heroines’ concerns in the fiction published in early Zhenskii Zhurnal.

By 1928, however, the subjects of love and personal happiness began to disappear not only from the fiction offered by Zhenskii Zhurnal, but also from the overall content of the magazine. In the May 1928 issue, the editors announced that the thematic focus of the magazine did not satisfy everyone in the audience. A number of women, the editors claimed, wanted to see Zhenskii Zhurnal changing from a housekeeping companion into a magazine that would help women understand socio-political issues.28 The editors now also envisioned that their audience consisted not only of housewives, but also of working women, female artisans, and social activists. However, a survey of the audience conducted in the middle of 1928 showed that only four percent of female readers were laborers and 28% of women held clerical jobs. The majority of the audience consisted of housewives. Moreover, ten percent of women readers were married to laborers while 86% were married to clerks.29

Undoubtedly, it was not the audience but the party that forced the changes in the structure of the magazine, and in the middle of 1928, Zhenskii Zhurnal implemented a number of modifications. Gradually the content became more politicized: the emphasis was especially on production goals and needs. The magazine increasingly used titles that sounded more like political slogans: for example, “Working Woman, Get Ready to Fight,” “Toilers of the East! Ensure the Enforcement of Soviet Laws: They Will Give You Freedom,” “Mothers, Organize Summer Playgrounds for Your Children,” “Working Women – Prepare for Defense.” The magazine began to be filled with celebratory articles dedicated to the anniversaries of important revolutionary and post-revolutionary events. Zhenskii Zhurnal began to resemble the typical

---

Soviet press of the late-1920s. Essays and reportages – the most popular genres of that time – replaced most of the magazine’s fictional stories.30 The editors added a section called “Our Page” where they published letters from social activists reporting on their volunteer work beautifying courtyards and parks, organizing playgrounds, and supervising school and kindergarten meal services.

The literature section after 1928 not only shrank but also overwhelmingly changed its thematic orientation. Instead of searching for love and personal happiness the new fictional heroes strived for collective happiness and pondered over the problems the new country faced. Women readers of Zhenskii Zhurnal were presented a wide range of fiction that was essentially based on the antagonism of an antihero, typically a self-interested meshchanin (philistine), and a hero who struggled to increase production or worked especially hard for the common good. Some examples included “Point of Contact” by S. Reznik; “Ivan Ivanovich” by S.G.; “Spring” by A. Pil’chevskii; and “Letters on Bayonets” by A. Kartsev. The new Soviet government saw fiction as one of the most powerful tools to change readers’ mentality since it was read primarily for pleasure and therefore the effort at persuasion was less obvious to the reader.31 In order to keep the literature section appealing, the editors of Zhenskii Zhurnal called on the audience to write short stories for the magazine. Zhenskii Zhurnal had several literary contests; the magazine even published a few creative writing lessons for the amateur participants to get them familiar with the basic rules of fiction writing.

Thus, by the fifth year of its existence Zhenskii Zhurnal underwent some serious structural changes. By 1930 the magazine consisted of the following sections: “Socio-Political Life,” “For the increase of Real Wages,” “About Children,” “Family Health,” “Our Page,” “

31 Attwood, Creating the New Soviet Woman, 17.
Housekeeping,” “Craft and Decorative Arts,” “Cultural Activities,” “Fiction and Poetry,”
“Fashion,” and “Children’s Corner.” “Legal Consultation” and “Mailbox” appeared only a few
times that year. The content of sections on crafts and fashion became drab and dull; moreover,
“Fashion” shrank from nine pages in the beginning of 1930 to two pages by the end of the year.
In other words, Zhenskii Zhurnal was no longer the housekeeping companion that the editors of
the magazine initially tried to create. The useful tips for taking care of individual households
were replaced by articles about communal living titled as “Serve Dinner from Canteen at Home,”
“Chats about the Collective Mode of Life,” “Organization of Communal Laundries.” The section
on children mostly concentrated on how to organize communal nurseries or kindergartens. In
other words, the participation of housewives in the life of the new Soviet society became the
overarching theme of the magazine.

The magazine editors finally acknowledged the drastic content change in the July 1930
issue: “Zhenskii Zhurnal had changed its program tremendously. It moved from a housekeeping
companion to a practical business magazine that is aimed at organizing its female readers to
change their byt.” In addition to changing the content, the editors explained that the title no
longer suited the publication: “the name Zhenskii Zhurnal currently does not satisfy either
women readers, or the magazine’s editors. This name emphasizes a kind of specificity,
reminding us that the magazine should serve the interests of women in general. This name no
longer determines the essence of the magazine: the first reason is that the magazine is not
addressed to all women in general, but rather to working women… Secondly, the magazine
covers issues related not only to women, but also to the entire family.”

Since Zhenskii Zhurnal’s name was never changed, it was obvious that it was the party and not the editors who initiated this revision. The country leaders did not want to see a magazine that potentially catered to housewives when the official doctrine was aimed at turning this group into working women. However, despite the efforts of the party, not only were a large number of women still unemployed, but also housewives still made up the biggest segment of the audience of Zhenskii Zhurnal. The survey conducted by Zhenskii Zhurnal in 1930 and published in the December issue showed that 55% of the readers were stay-at-home wives (43% clerks’ wives and 12% workers’ wives) while only 40% of the audience consisted of working women (28% worked in the office and 12% were women-laborers). Additionally, only 10.5 % of the audience were the members of the party and Komsomol.

It is hard to tell whether the results of this survey were real or were fabricated by the editors of Zhenskii Zhurnal in order to stay in business; even though the number of working women was still not high, the difference between the outcomes of the survey conducted in 1928 was significant. The 1930 survey was conducted with the purpose of figuring out if female readers found the content changes helpful. The editors also asked for suggestions for improvement. According to the results, Zhenskii Zhurnal incited “thousands of housewives” to become social activists and to participate in the life of the country and reorganization of byt. The surveyed readers also made several suggestions for improvement: they wanted to see more help from Zhenskii Zhurnal in raising the general educational level of women, teaching housewives different handicrafts, and providing ideas for social activism. In addition, surveyed women said that they wanted to see more articles about raising children, promoting hygiene, and rationalizing housework. Women also suggested replacing light fiction with non-fiction feature stories or with

---

34 Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 12, 1930, 11.
“modern fiction” that would “mobilize” them.\textsuperscript{35} At the same time, some respondents sent rather obnoxious and negative feedback. For example, one reader wrote: “I hope the Soviet state fails and that you go with it;” another woman said she would like to send her opinion about the magazine, but was afraid of persecution.\textsuperscript{36}

The December 1930 issue of \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal} proved to be its last. The closing down of the magazine surprised both the publishers and the readers. At the end of the overview of the survey, the editors invited women to keep sending letters with suggestions how to improve the magazine. A few pages later however, in a small note at the bottom of the page, it was announced that \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal} would no longer be published; women who have already subscribed to it were told they would receive the magazine \textit{Ogonek} instead. Moreover, women-readers were informed that all of the previous issues of \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal} were completely sold out and could no longer be requested.\textsuperscript{37} Interestingly enough, at the end of this issue there was a big advertisement inciting “every woman-worker and housewife” to subscribe to \textit{Rabotnitsa}.

\textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal} serves as a great example of a transformation of a mass magazine into a political one due to the ideological shift within the party. In the five years of its existence, \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal} went from targeting housewives of all social statuses to catering primarily to working women and women-activists. Yet, regardless of \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal}’s attempts to get in line with the party class and gender politics, the magazine was still called “philistine and classless,” continuing to serve only the interests of housewives. One of the reviews of the magazine printed in 1929 suggested that \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal} should either be closed or transformed

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal}, Vol. 12, 1930, 11.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid}, 11.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibid}, 15.
into a magazine “serving the interests of a wider audience,” primarily those housewives that are heavily involved in social work.\textsuperscript{38}

It was obvious that the proposed and already made changes to the content of \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal} were not sufficient to satisfy the party, and therefore the magazine was closed. By the time of \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal’s} closing, the Soviet press became uniform and dull; most women’s magazines were no longer satisfying the true interests of their audience and no longer reflected their lived realities. The party only allowed for the existence of women’s magazines that specifically defined their audience as the working class, like \textit{Rabotnitsa} and \textit{Krest’ianka}. \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal} not only continued to carry a name that appealed to women in general but also kept on addressing subjects concerning housewives’ private lives. Yet, concentrating too much attention on private matters went against the political goals enforced by the party. In other words, by refusing to exclude housewife-oriented subjects from its content, \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal} continued to focus on personal female needs and problems, while the party only permitted media that focused on agitating women to put the interests of the country before their own.

3 NEW CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS: BYT, WORK, AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM

One of the promised features of the new Soviet woman was her equality with men. According to Bolshevik theory, such equality could only be achieved if women acquired economic independence by joining the workforce which required their liberation from domestic responsibilities. The Bolsheviks borrowed their formula for solving “the woman question” from Friedrich Engels, who claimed that the “emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large, social scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree.”\(^1\) However, Bolshevik promises of equality were slow to come to fruition: after the revolution female unemployment remained high and state resources for freeing women from housework and childcare were limited. In the 1920s, a woman’s place was still largely at home that in Bolshevik theory was synonymous with petty-bourgeois, philistine values. Therefore, the discussion of the subjects pertinent to female liberation, such as byt, work, and social activism, was often turned into a conversation about women’s class identity.

This chapter investigates how Zhenskii Zhurnal addressed the Bolshevik two-step solution for “the woman question” – liberation of women from domestic duties and their involvement in the workforce. Based on analysis of Zhenskii Zhurnal’s treatment of byt, work, and social activism, this chapter argues that in the years the magazine was active the concept of class and, subsequently, the interpretation of women’s class roles changed. This chapter demonstrates that early Bolshevik theories about women’s liberation through transferring household duties to the state organizations were replaced by Stalin’s aggressive politics of emancipation of women through achievement of industrial goals. Thus, a politics of liberation

was replaced by a politics of proletarianization: women who previously were not involved in industrial work were called to take their place in the proletarian class in the shortest possible time. But this required a fundamental transformation of women’s mentality, which Stalin envisioned achieving through the politics of intense class struggle.

The ideological and structural changes that Zhenskii Zhurnal underwent after Stalin’s takeover show that the hardest part of this class struggle was to turn a housewife into a proletarian, to tear her away from her children, to change her existing lifestyle and beliefs, and to make her care primarily about the public interest and not the welfare of the family. Analysis of Zhenskii Zhurnal shows that in order to inspire housewives to become builders of socialism, the magazine started promoting three grand ideas: a need to generate the class consciousness of women as the ideological basis for unity with the working people; a need to create conditions that exempted women from housekeeping tasks; and a need to enhance the cultural and educational level of women, especially in the areas most essential to the national economy.

### 3.1 New Byt

Propaganda promoting the new byt was one of the methods of constructing class identity for the new Soviet woman. The politics of the party concerning byt was first of all aimed at the eradication of practices and beliefs considered bourgeois relics of the past. In the 1927 edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, the concept of “new byt” is explained as the “new everyday relations, which are characterized, above all, by decisive and ever-increasing preponderance of social life over the private life.”² The biggest enemy of the new byt was the mentality of meshchanstvo – a term “which encapsulated all that was politically, culturally and socially unacceptable in the old way of life, from the comfortable settees, the canaries and the net

curtains of the petty-bourgeoisie to the self-complacency and conservatism of the traditional family.”  

In Bolshevik theory women were perceived as the “major carriers of meshchanstvo values,” because of their isolation at home. The biggest obstacle on the path of female liberation was the individual kitchen which consumed the majority of women’s time, impeding their cultural and political development. In the view of the party, finding time for women’s political education was necessary because “meshchanstvo was incompatible with political consciousness.”

To make the transition to the new byt possible, the early Bolshevik intellectuals dreamed up a utopian idea of house-commune (dom-kommuna), which Richard Stites defines as a model of “socialism in one building.” The ideological purpose of house-commune was to “reconstruct the individualist bourgeois quarters…by subverting the structure of the bourgeois family and instituting the relationship of proletarian comradeship.”

The new proletarian mentality was supposed to be achieved through collective living and communal byt. The Bolshevik ideologists planned that all the dwellers of a house-commune would not have individual housework and would rely on communal amenities for meals, childcare, and laundry. However, only a few house-communes were actually built, and the experimentation with communal byt was mostly done in already existing housing.

---

2 Ibid, 280.
3 Ibid, 283.
Analysis of Zhenskii Zhurnal shows that in the mid-1920s, the most popular solution for communizing household duties and, at the same time, promoting spirit of communism was “housing partnership” (zhilishnoe tovarishestvo). Such a way of living implied that all the dwellers of one building (or a group of buildings standing next to each other) would cooperate with each other for organization of on-premises communal canteen, children day-care, and laundry. For example, one Zhenskii Zhurnal’s author explains that because one of the Moscow houses on Sadovo-Spasskaya Street was able to organize a “housing partnership” using only three women for cooking dinners for every household, at least thirty women who were freed from individual kitchens were able to attend literacy classes, sewing classes, and lectures on political education.9 Another author counted how many women in Moscow could be liberated from the yoke of the individual byt if they were to participate in “housing partnership.” The author argues that out of 200,000 Moscow housewives, at least 70%, or 150,000 women, could be freed by switching to collective byt.10

In the early issues of Zhenskii Zhurnal, the ruminations about collective byt in the editorials and feature articles looked odd next to the practical advices concerning everyday household tasks of housewives that comprised most of the magazine’s content. By 1927, calls for collective byt became especially rare. Such irregularities in discussions of communal life during the NEP indicate that the majority of population saw the redesign of byt based on communist principals as a possibility of a distant future. However, with the institution of the politics of rapid industrialization and collectivization, increasing labor shortages brought back active promotion of communal byt. But if in the early issues of Zhenskii Zhurnal the authors talked about communal byt mostly in theory, after 1928 they only described successful examples of

communal kitchens, laundries, or kindergartens. For example, the April 1928 issue filled the whole front page with six photos showing the successful “first steps” of collectivizing of byt. The captions to the pictures explain that the communal byt “deeply penetrates our life” and wins support of more and more people every day (Figs. 3.1, 3.2).¹¹

---

¹¹ Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 4, 1928, 3. The pictures were taken in one of the Moscow houses on Arbat that switched to collective byt.
Thus, in the late 1920s it became clear from the rhetoric of Zhenskii Zhurnal that the state was unable to fulfill its promises of providing social services that would make the transition to communal byt possible. So, if a woman wanted to be liberated from the yoke of domestic duties and become equal with men, she herself had to take the initiative with organizing communal services. In an article “Establishing of Nurseries Should Become the Duty of Population Itself” Zhenskii Zhurnal reminded female readers that they could not perform their work duty or engage in social activism on an equal basis with men as long as they had to take care of small children at home. Therefore, women were urged to dedicate their utmost efforts to organizing communal nurseries and kindergartens.12

By the last year of Zhenskii Zhurnal’s existence, practically every issue of the magazine was filled with aggressive slogans inciting housewives to dedicate themselves to the establishment of communal amenities. In the March 1930 issue, one such slogan was used as a sub-title for the section addressing social organizers, “Our Page.” Speaking on behalf of the most progressive readers, the slogan declared: “We will destroy the causes preventing our political and cultural growth. We declare war on pots, kerosene stoves, and individual kitchens. Arrangements for collective dining must become the duty of the women themselves. Workers and progressive housewives, call each other on the socialist competition. Who can better and more quickly organize communal canteens, community laundries, and children’s rooms?"13 The rest of the page was filled with the letters form social activists reporting their success in organizing various communal services in their cities.14

---

A discussion of the early utopian idea of house-communes was also revived in the late Zhenskii Zhurnal. However, by the beginning of the 1930s it was thought that house-communes should be built as a part of a “socialist city” – a term describing an urban arrangement around industrial factories. An article authored by N.K. (actually written by Lenin’s widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya),\(^{15}\) describes the possible set up of a socialist city. Krupskaya especially concentrated on the way children should be housed in socialist cities. She was known for her previous radical ideas of housing children separately from their parents in special villages located 15-20 miles outside of the industrial centers. This idea however received such adamant opposition from working mothers during a public discussion of this project that in the version printed in Zhenskii Zhurnal in October of 1930 Krupskaya proposed a less-radical alternative: “nurseries, and kindergartens, and schools will be connected with the adult housing by a warm corridor. Thus, parents will be able to constantly observe the life and upbringing of their children.”\(^{16}\)

However, before such socialist cities with well-organized house-communes could be built, the readers were encouraged to organize “in-house communes” (bytovie kommunni) – a type of collective living where about ten to twelve people live in one facility (typically one big room) and share all property. Another article by N.K. enthusiastically talked about successful examples of in-house communes in Moscow where communards shared everything evenly: from responsibilities to salaries. Hence, “from the common money pool, smoker Petya gets money for his cigarettes, Zhenya – money for new shoes, Anatoliy – money for a vacation trip, Nina-sweet-tooth…money for her favorite mints.” According to the author, it was hard for the communards to stop using possessive pronouns like “mine,” but with time everyone really began to enjoy not

---


using it. Interestingly enough, when the article provided examples of instances when people couldn’t handle living in a commune, they were always about women.17

Switching to communal byt meant that attachment to the comforts offered by individual byt should disappear from the mentality of the new Soviet woman as well. In its critiques of home comfort, Zhenskii Zhurnal always connected it to the problem of class. In Bolshevik theory, the home was the source of the petty-bourgeois worldview; therefore the new authorities believed that in Soviet society the home should be redesigned to eliminate signs of meshchanstvo and to accommodate new socialist values. In the August 1926 issue, one author argued that the comfort of home is cultivated by the “patriarchal system” for the purpose of isolating the family from the larger society. Such isolation bred philistinism and mediocrity. According to this author, in Soviet society, the “rationality and feasibility” of every item in the household should replace the artsy-craftsy décor.18 In another article published the same year the author argued that female social organizations should initiate a campaign against people bringing their old bulky furniture that reminded of the Old Regime into the new compact dwellings created by the socialist regime. According to the author, the comfort of a new Soviet home should not be in “Voltaire” armchairs, “massive Turkish sofas,” or “any upholstered furniture per se,” but rather in “the convenient placement of comfortable furniture.”19 Thus, according to the magazine, the new Soviet woman was supposed to get rid of all her “domestic trash”20 such as colorful wallpapers, knick-knacks on the shelves, and massive ornate furniture.

20 “Down with Domestic Trash” was a 1928-1929 campaign launched by the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda (Komsomol Truth). The newspaper encouraged its readers to get rid of “tasteless bric-a-bracs” because “with all these dogs, mermaids, little devils and elephants, meshchanstvo invisibly approaches.” See Komsomolskaya Pravda, Nov. 4, 1928.
However, the letters female readers wrote to the early Zhenskii Zhurnal show that at the end of the NEP, women’s class identity was still open for negotiation. For many actual Soviet women, the refusal to switch to communal _byt_ was not necessarily synonymous with _meshchanstvo_, and the traditional elements of home comfort were still important to them. Thus, in the early Zhenskii Zhurnal one of the readers argued that women should put flowers and fresh linens on the dining tables and serve their husbands’ dinners on elegant, clean plates without being afraid to be condemned for philistinism.\(^{21}\) Another reader complained that the articles printed in the magazine about communal kitchens were simply theoretical musings about a distant future, and that women of today needed more of the practical advice promised by the magazine on how to deal with individual kitchens. With her letter, this reader wanted to rehabilitate the individual _byt_ by arguing that the family hearth was “the soil” and “the fundament” of contemporary life and that family stood for “all women’s interests, their material wellbeing…their happiness and sadness, their worries and dreams.”\(^{22}\) Even though the reader specified that “she was not a reactionary,” the editors of the magazine felt it necessary to point out that the they did not share the reader’s opinion, and that the letter was being printed in order to demonstrate “a rather clear and straightforward presentation of ideas and attitudes typical of a petty-bourgeois woman.”\(^{23}\) However, such claims of the early Zhenskii Zhurnal contradicted the majority of the magazine content: on a regular basis sections like “Needlework” taught women how to make crochet pillowcases, embroidered tablecloths and napkins, and ornate room dividers and lampshades (as an example, see Fig. 3.3); “Home and Garden” encouraged women to decorate their dwellings; and “Nutrition” suggested recipes of rather sophisticated dishes that only women with individual kitchens were able to cook.


\(^{23}\) Ot Redaktsii, Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 4 1926, 8.
Zhenskii Zhurnal’s war on meshchanstvo through condemnation of home comfort continued until the middle of 1928. The debates about the markers of meshchanstvo were finally settled by the article “About Curtains.” The author instructed the female readers of the magazine to always question the reason behind their pursuit of “beauty and comforts.” According to the author, when the pursuit of beauty becomes an end in itself, when love of foreign frippery overshadows the joy of life, and the four walls of home become one’s only microcosm, then “geraniums and curtains become a symbol of smug philistinism.”

With the changed politics of the party and the later introduction of the Cultural Revolution, the magazine’s articles discussing home comfort no longer left room for negotiation of markers of class. Instead, the magazine began to promote the idea that the meaning of comfort was only in keeping dwellings clean and in accordance with hygiene standards. Women were

24 Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 7 1927, 32. The picture was supplemented by a detailed description of how to make similar bedding set.
told by the magazine that house duties like cooking, washing, or ironing ruin the “culture of the home” and therefore should be transferred to communal services. The overall structure of the Zhenskii Zhurnal was changed to promote this idea. For example, toward the end of 1928 the “Nutrition” section, instead of featuring weakly meal ideas for individual family, began to offer meal plans for communal canteens; while the sections on home, garden, and arts and crafts shrank noticeably leaving more room for sections filled with aggressive articles promoting the new class consciousness by inciting women to join the workforce or get involved in social activism.

3.2 Work and Social Activism

One of the most extolled qualities of the new Soviet woman was her equality with men in the area of work. The Soviet labor code guaranteed the equal pay for equal work for men and women: the decree of September 16, 1918 set the minimum wage for every “adult without distinction of sex;” the decree of June 17, 1920 addressed women more specifically by postulating that “women doing the same work as men both in quantity and quality are paid equally with men.” At the same time, the labor code provided women with certain privileges and benefits. For instance, working women were offered insurance in case of pregnancy: the allowance was equal to the full salary of a woman and was issued within eight weeks before the supposed delivery date and eight weeks after the birth. Employers were also forbidden to use women’s labor during this time. Breastfeeding women-workers received an extra allowance at the end of the paid eight-week post-partum period in the amount of a quarter to a half of their

earnings for another nine months since the day of delivery. Also, breastfeeding women-workers were supposed to be given a break every three hours for no less than half an hour. The working day for nursing mothers during the nine-month postpartum period was no more than six hours per day.28

Yet, regardless of these seemingly favorable conditions for entering the labor force, the number of working women in the new Soviet state overall increased slowly. Moreover, during the NEP, when many unprofitable state enterprises were closed, the factories practiced the system of cost accounting, and the state cut spending on promised communal services, a large number of women, who entered the workforce before the revolution or under the pressure of labor shortages induced by the Civil War, lost their jobs. Even when the politics of the NEP began to wrap up, women were not given the same employment opportunities as men. For example, the percentage of women in large-scale industry remained practically unchanged from 1926 to 1930 compromising about 28.5%.29 Moreover, only by the end of NEP, the total number of women in large-scale industry has returned back to its pre-revolutionary level.30

However, employment opportunities looked bleak for many women not just because of the economic conditions created by the NEP. According to Wendy Z. Goldman, the main reason behind high female unemployment in the mid-1920s was the rather limited official definition of the working class. Before the First Five-Year Plan, which created huge demand for workers, the Bolsheviks believed that “the worker was not a peasant, a simple toiler, or a member of the laboring mass…the worker was not female…he was removed from the customs, beliefs, and worldview of his peasant forebears; he had severed his ties to the land; and he depended solely

30 This number was 723,900 women in 1913, and 725,900 women in 1928. See Goldman, Women at the Gates, 14.
on a money wage.”

He also came from a family of workers and had prerevolutionary work experience and industrial skills. Therefore, in the early and mid-1920s, only those unemployed who fit the party’s definition of a worker were protected and offered help at labor exchanges while the labor unions were used to guard access to the working class.

An article published in Zhenskii Zhurnal in May 1926 paints the grim reality of female unemployment. It tells a story of two sisters, Sima and Anya, who were nineteen and seventeen years old respectively. Both girls finished secondary school, but could neither access higher education nor find jobs. Anya, a talented painter, wanted to enter an art school, but was told that since her family belonged to the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia she could not be accepted; the school only accepted children of workers. Sima, who wanted to become an agronomist, was also refused entry to a college because it only accepted orphans and peasant children. The sisters went to look for work every day for a few years in a row, but received rejections everywhere. The author calls this situation a “circle of damnation.” The girls could not register at a labor exchange because they were not members of a union, but they could not be accepted into a union because they had never worked for wages before. At the end of the story it was hinted that the oldest sister Sima decided to go work the streets – a way of earning many women were forced to choose during the NEP.

This article was followed by Zhenskii Zhurnal’s response containing a possible solution to this problem “that worried many.” Using the quotes from the protocols of MGSPS (The Moscow Provincial Council of Trade Unions), the magazine informed readers that the party had encouraged unions to stop following strict guidelines for their membership and to begin accepting “single women in need” who have not previously been members of a union. However,

---

31 Goldman, Women at the Gates, 6-7.
the magazine pointed out that only the unions themselves could decide whether to follow these recommendations. In reality, the unions continued to prevent a massive number of women from entering the workforce, because, from the Bolshevik perspective, only pure proletarians who had participated in the revolution should enjoy the benefits of the new socialistic regime; the intelligentsia, the petty bourgeoisie, and the peasantry were discriminated against.

Understanding that neither unions nor the party itself could provide real measures that would eliminate female unemployment, Zhenskii Zhurnal suggested that women take matters in their hands. A number of the magazine’s articles encouraged women to organize all sorts of working cooperatives (arteli). For example, one of the letters responding to the story of Anya and Sima suggested that unemployed women could use their craft skills and create sewing or embroidering co-ops. Another article assured female readers that they could achieve anything through hard work and perseverance. The author suggested that women needed to stop whining and look for things they could do cooperatively: “we can turn our individual pieces of land into agricultural centers…we can breed bees, establish apiaries, breed domestic birds, and organize milk production…we can sew, draw sewing patterns, and make hats without leaving our homes.” A few pages later, this 1927 issue offered a detailed description of profitable jobs women could perform at home individually, like ironing or propagating flowers.

At the same time, the editorials of Zhenskii Zhurnal continued to praise the Soviet regime for emancipating women by giving them employment opportunities they did not have before the revolution. Occasionally, the early Zhenskii Zhurnal published articles describing the new professions that women were able to enter since the establishment of Soviet state. It should be

noted, however, that these professions were all intellectual ones. Zhenskii Zhurnal celebrated the new Soviet women-court defenders, women-judges, women-astronomers, or women-inventors. And each time the magazine noted that these women performed their tasks even better than their male colleagues.\footnote{37 See: S. Larionov, “Zhenshina – Zashitnik v Sude,” Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 7, 1926, 5; Vera Kulakova-Mitkevich, “Zhenshina – Izobretatel’nitsa,” Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 7, 1926, 6; A. Stol’makhovich, “Zhenshini – Sud’I,” Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 2, 1927, 2.}

The stories about women who performed physical labor did not sound that cheerful. For example, an article from the September 1926 issue described living conditions of Soviet women working at the textile factory at a distant village of Yakhroma. All of the factory workers were housed in five barracks which were divided into extremely small dens. Despite its size, each den was supposed to have five people living in it, and most of the time men were housed with women. Therefore, women were often taken advantage of or even raped. The author commented on the long lines of women waiting to enter an abortion clinic that could be observed every day. Regardless of all these difficulties, the article emphasized women’s aspirations to achieve equality with men and become independent through professional training and hard work.\footnote{38 Dav. Khait, “Yakhroma,” Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 6, 1926, 16.}

However, the rhetoric of Zhenskii Zhurnal started to change in 1928. The magazine began promoting working-class professions to its female readers, and the tone of these articles was always optimistic while the difficulties endured by working women were no longer mentioned. For example, a 1928 feature article about women working at a confectionery factory claimed: “almost all of the work here is on the shoulders of women, yet for them this work is not a heavy yoke but a happy common duty.”\footnote{39 N. Kal’ma, “Konfetchitsi I Biskvitchitsi,” Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 4, 1928, 15.} To make their message more appealing to the audience, Zhenskii Zhurnal began to fill its front pages with large photographs of women-workers who performed both traditionally female jobs and jobs that had become available for
women only after the revolution. The May 1928 issue dedicated a whole page to photographs of the new Soviet women in different professions: among them were a woman-metalworker, a woman-typist, a woman-telephonist; a woman-sailor, and a famous woman-sculptor, Vera Mukhina.40

Often these photos were followed by detailed articles about numerous training courses available for women or by specifics on the new professions women could enter. In an article titled “Free Labor” printed in the February 1928 issue, Zhenskii Zhurnal informed its readers about training courses available at the Center of Industrial Labor. One of the women featured in the article came to the Center to acquire the profession of turner; she told the author that she was really eager to work and to have a profession. Further, the author met four women working on the milling cutters. The author specified that among these four women “one is the member of the Komsomol, one is the member of the party, and one is a union worker.” 41 This phrase emphasizes that politically conscious women were the first to respond to the demands of industrialization and that together with the forth woman, who represents the mass, they all share a common task.

By the last year of Zhenskii Zhurnal’s circulation, the gendered division of labor became virtually non-existent. In addition, every issue of the magazine explained to women that the interests of all workers in the country, regardless of their gender, were the same and that together all workers made up one class. For instance, in the November 1930 issue, a small editorial entitled “Enthusiasm of the Working Class” explained to the readers that shortages of workers in different industries got liquidated with the help of women: wives of miners in the Ukrainian mines of Donbas joined their husbands in coal extraction; wives of workers in the regions of

sugar production organized brigades to help with harvesting sugar beets; peasant women in the lower Volga basin helped with harvesting wheat. This editorial further claimed that the “working class overcomes difficulties …without listening to whiners and non-believers from the camp of the right opportunists.”

Another article from the December 1930 issue tells a story of three housewives who encouraged other women living in a town near a coal mine to help the male miners reach the production goal. The article emphasizes a strong desire of housewives to work: “everyone wanted to work – old and young, healthy and feeble…only the physically strong ones were selected since the expected work was hard…the rejected women stood aside and furiously complained.” The author also points out that the male miners tried to obstruct women’s involvement, but housewives ignored it: “instead of backing out, twice as many women showed up to help the next day.”

Such drastic changes in party labor politics were prompted by Stalin’s strategy of rapid industrialization. Stalin believed that his policies could create an economic miracle in a short time “by a single tour de force.” In a situation where hopes for world revolution have faded, the new Soviet state needed to become self-sufficient which required strong industry and dependable agriculture. Thus, the idea of building socialism in a single country became Stalin’s priority. Stalin’s policy of industrialization and collectivization was articulated in the First Five-Year Plan, launched in October of 1928. To emphasize the urgency of the task, the party announced that the Plan would be completed in four years instead of five. In order to fulfill his ambitions Stalin had to purge the unions as gatekeepers to the working class and transform them into “the organizational ‘levers’ for raising production.”

Analysis of the last years of Zhenskii Zhurnal

---

45 Goldman, Women at the Gates, 66.
shows that by 1930 women had representation in practically every sector of the economy. The number of women entering the industrial sector was unprecedented. According to Goldman, due to Stalin’s policy of “productionism” women “assumed significant roles in industries long dominated by men, transformed the gender composition of the workforce, and subverted older lines of sex segregation.”

A great lens into the transformation of Zhenskii Zhurnal’s representation of female labor would be the magazine covers. The first time a picture of a woman at work appeared on the cover of Zhenskii Zhurnal was January of 1928. It was a drawing of polished-looking women who worked as typists and, most likely, were the daughters of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia. The cover of the November 1930 issue provided a completely different image of a working woman. She was a daughter of either a peasant or a worker; she looked rough, and she was obviously employed in an area that required hard physical labor (see Fig. 3.4). Thus, with the introduction of the First Five-Year Plan, the main focus of Zhenskii Zhurnal was on depicting any kind of labor as the greatest benefit for a woman herself and the economy as a whole.

While accommodating Stalin’s policy of “productionism,” Zhenskii Zhurnal nevertheless tried to advocate on behalf of working women. In 1929, it added a regular section “For the Increase of Real Wages” since food prices rose and wages dropped significantly after the introduction of the First Five-Year Plan. In addition, occasional articles about the effects of hard labor on women’s health also appeared in the magazine. For example, an article entitled “Female Labor and Female Illnesses” published in the March 1930 issue argued that hard physical labor could interfere with women’s reproductive function. The author contended that lifting heavy objects, sitting or standing on one’s feet for a long time, or working with toxic materials, especially while pregnant, could make irreversible damage to a woman’s body and her ability to

46 Goldman, Women at the Gates, 71.
have a child.\textsuperscript{47} Even though this article praised the Soviet Union for its advanced occupational health laws, the general content of the story was rather at odds with official politics. While the official rhetoric boasted that the health of working women was protected in the Soviet Union, the labor laws promulgated by the party were oriented at ignoring physical differences between male and female bodies. One of the party resolutions from 1929 declared that “the tremendous growth of industry... allows, without any harm to maternal function to expand the use of female labor in production, including heavy industry.”\textsuperscript{48} Clearly, Stalin’s industrial goals could not allow for the restrictions in usage of female labor – hence, even medical science was twisted for the sake of active involvement of women into production process.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{cover_jz.png}
\caption{Working women on the covers of Zhenskii Zhurnal.\textsuperscript{49}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{48} KPSS v Rezolutsiyah i Resheniyah S’ezdov, Konferentsii i Plenumov TsK Vol. 4 (Moskva: Politizdat, 1984), 517.
\textsuperscript{49} Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol.1, 1928; Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol.11, 1930.
Thus, analysis of Zhenskii Zhurnal shows that with the beginning of rapid industrialization, participation in the production process was presented to women as their main class role. To achieve Stalin’s goal of building socialism in one country at the pace desired by the party, both women and men needed to be proletarianized, in other words, to dedicate all of their energy and hard work to the advancement of the country. However, in the late 1920s, work was most feasible for those women who didn’t have to take care of small children. An alternative path for turning this vast army of housewives into the conscious builders of socialism was either by engaging them in various working co-ops or involving them in social activism.

Social activism truly became the most convenient way to make housewives worry about the tasks the party put forward. Trying to incite its readers to become social activists, Zhenskii Zhurnal suggested that “a housewife should take an active part in the cultural reconstruction of byt.”\(^{50}\) Women-activists had to participate in organizing communal amenities, to fight speculation, to check the membership books, and to look after public order, cleanliness of streets, and the quality of products in stores. The ideal image of the new Soviet woman-activist is drawn in the feature article “Four out of the Millions.” One of the women described in the story, after moving from her village to Moscow “began to visit factory meetings, got involved in social work, intensively engaged in political education, and joined the party.” As a part of her social duties the woman featured in the story examined the work of some cooperatives and thirteen Moscow markets; she also supervised one of the train platforms and worked as an organizer at the Kursk train station. “She is 34 years old, she has a husband and four children – one is a member of the Komsomol, the other one is a Pioneer, and the last two are babies. She cooks at home, washes clothes, and sews. In short, she has not abandoned the household.”\(^{51}\)


3.3 Class Consciousness

Analysis of Zhenskii Zhurnal shows that women had an important role in the creation of the meaning of class. Regardless of early Bolsheviks rhetoric promoting the liberation of women through work, women were largely excluded from the working class in whose name the revolution was made. In the early Soviet state, a woman’s class identity was questionable, often leaning toward petty-bourgeoisie because of her connection to the privacy of home. In an attempt to win women over to Bolshevism, the party (through the Zhenotdel) tried to excite women about the perspectives of liberation, the first step to which would be their support of the new byt. However, an overview of Zhenskii Zhurnal shows that during the NEP the idea of communal byt, with its emphasis on the social and rejection of the individual, remained largely on the level of theory and found little support among housewives.

Women’s support of the Soviet regime became even weaker toward the end of NEP. Women were becoming increasingly disgruntled about deteriorating economic condition: first, the war scare of 1927 induced a commodity panic leading to a return of rationing; then, forced collectivization and industrialization created food shortages and drove food prices up and wages down. The party decrees published under the new leadership of Stalin demonstrated concern that with the introduction of the First Five-Year Plan “class enemies” could “turn the mass of backward women against the state.”

Class consciousness of women needed to be raised: involvement in work and social activism could turn a housewife into a conscious builder of socialism while communization of byt would allow her to perform this function successfully. Unions were purged to allow women’s inclusion into the workforce. In addition, the party encouraged the nomination of women on leadership positions in factories, in unions, and government. Therefore, instead of the previous policy of preserving the ideological purity of the

---

52 Goldman, Women at the Gates, 21.
working class, the party aggressively tried to turn everyone into one class through the politics of proletarianization.

With Stalin’s push for industrialization, Zhenskii Zhurnal made a number of structural changes that were supposed to generate women’s class consciousness as the basis for their unity with the working people (proletariat). A housewife needed to understand why she should leave her household unattended, her children in nurseries or kindergartens, and get involved in work that typically did not pay much or in social activism that paid nothing at all. By 1929, when wages dropped so low that both spouses had to work to support a family, the regime needed to make women believe that they were forced to enter the workforce for a greater good. Thus, propaganda about building socialism in one country and the necessity of female participation in this process became the overall theme of Zhenskii Zhurnal starting from 1928. By the middle of that year, in the issue dedicated to international Workers’ Day, Zhenskii Zhurnal announced that: “May 1st should be an indication that USSR women understand and want to perform the same tasks as the entire working class.” In other words, female readers were now constantly reminded of the importance of their role in the life of society.

Ideological changes in Zhenskii Zhurnal show that active propaganda of class struggle was launched by the party in order to raise women’s class consciousness and thus ensure their participation in building socialism. The thematic content of the articles that began to be published in Zhenskii Zhurnal with the introduction of the First Five-Year Plan could be roughly broken down into the following categories:

• propaganda showing the benefits of the Soviet regime versus the grave plight of
  the masses under bourgeois regimes;

- exposure of the shortcomings and difficulties in building socialism;
- escalation of war threats in order to instill a sense of unity among women in their participation in advancing defense capabilities of the country and in possible military actions;
- creation of an image of a class enemy in order to boost women’s awareness of the necessity of defending the achievements of the Soviet regime, especially on the labor front;
- promotion of antireligious propaganda in order to destroy the old bourgeois consciousness that hindered the participation of women in the construction of socialism;
- promotion of culture as the means of overthrowing everything “bourgeois” and ideologically harmful.

Looking at these themes in more details should help understand the mechanism of boosting women’s class consciousness and, as a result, the creation of the meaning of class. 

*Zhenskii Zhurnal* published a good number of propagandistic articles that discussed the advantages of the Soviet regime over bourgeois regimes. The magazine often emphasized grave conditions of people, especially women, in bourgeois societies. An article published at the end of 1928 argued that “in capitalist countries the ruling classes think of women as slaves…if she is beautiful, a bourgeois forces her to abuse her body in dirty brothels and on the street…if she is less beautiful, he sends her into perpetual slavery of machines.” According to the author, the Soviet Union had no signs of social inequality among women: “a woman-director of a factory or a plant is a phenomenon which is possible only in our country, the workers’ country.”

To make

the differences between the bourgeois and proletarian regimes even more evident, in 1929 Zhenskii Zhurnal created a new editorial section “International Review” consisting of two contrasting columns “At Home” and “Abroad.” According to historians of the early Soviet press, “the image…of strident opposition between Soviet Russia and the surrounding world” was a clever tool “to crystallize a clear notion of Soviet political authority.”

To further forge female class consciousness, Zhenskii Zhurnal used a method of systematic exposure of the shortcomings and difficulties in the way of socialist construction. Overcoming common difficulties was supposed to mobilize women and to strengthen the spirit of proletarian class consciousness. For example, an article from 1929 argues that the obstacles of socialism building arise from the overwhelming number of tasks a housewife has to perform at home: the author blames “poverty, lack of culture, uneasy living conditions, and harmful remnants of byt we have inherited from the past.” The author further asked female readers to show initiative in organizing communal amenities. Such an open discussion of perceived shortcomings was designed to promote an understanding that nothing should be hidden from the people, united in their feelings and aspirations.

An exposure of the shortcomings and difficulties, however, would not have nearly the same effect as the exposure of a real class enemy. Zhenskii Zhurnal’s authors used images of both internal and external enemies to ensure the class unity of its female readers. The magazine began to persuade women that their contribution to the defense of the homeland was highly important. An editorial of May 1928 claimed that “the capitalists of all countries are feverishly gathering strength to strangle the world’s first workers’ state.”

Women – Prepare for Defense,” furthers this thought. According to the author, the threat of attack became more serious with each year; moreover, the author predicted that the main weapons of a new war would be gas attacks and fighter planes which will put the entire Soviet nation in danger. The article strongly encouraged women to join the courses organized by OSOVIAHIM (Society for Assistance to Defense, Aviation and Chemical Construction) and to become familiar with the basics of urgent medical care, to learn how to use a rifle, but, most importantly, to prepare themselves to take men’s places in factories in case of war. It is important to point out that the war scare of 1927 served as an impetus of the aggressive defense campaign against perceived foreign threats. Jeffrey Brooks, a historian of the early Soviet press, calls the war scare of 1927 “a foil for a Soviet identity” since this theme was often exploited by journalists to promote loyalty to the regime. Fear of losing the great conquests of the revolution was supposed to raise the masses to protect the system.

In addition to foreign class enemies, Zhenskii Zhurnal’s authors used images of domestic class enemies lurking everywhere among honest Soviet workers. This new image opened endless opportunities for the promotion of class struggle and ability to affect consciousness of the masses. Thus, in the middle of 1929, Zhenskii Zhurnal printed a mobilizing article “On Purging Soviet Institutions.” The author informed female readers that purges of class-alien elements of the proletariat have already begun in many parts of the Soviet Union: “in the province of Smolensk 1313 people were purged, including 260 landowners and prominent former officials, 242 capitalists, merchants and homeowners, and the rest – the people who served in the White Army, clergy, etc.” Clearly, in addition to Nepmen and kulaks who were the first victims of class struggle at the end of NEP, anyone who could be even loosely associated with the “former

people” became the new target. According to the author, the percentage of “former people” reached “incredible numbers” in some institutions – for example, in Siberian Land Administration 34% of people were purged based on their connection to the Old Regime. The article further explained that in the forthcoming purge, the proletariat must clean up Soviet institutions from the “corrupt elements distorting Soviet laws and coalescing with kulaks and Nepmen.” Significantly, the author claimed that the deciding factor in this purge should be one’s quality of work and not one’s class origin. Thus, addressing the magazine’s female readership that was mostly unemployed, the article signaled that the final goal of this purge was to escalate the involvement of the masses into the work force while increasing the productivity of labor.

In order to destroy the old bourgeois consciousness that hindered female participation in the construction of socialism, the new Soviet authorities also needed to sever women’s ties to religion. According to the party, religion and its representatives embodied a hostile class essence while religiosity was incompatible with the proletarian consciousness. Zhenskii Zhurnal dedicated an enormous number of articles to the question of the detrimental influence of religion. Zhenskii Zhurnal first started this conversation in 1928 with articles explaining the history and meaning of religious holidays while pointing out the ridiculousness of rituals and the questionable role of the church in modern society. For example, in the March 1928 issue, an article entitled “Maslenitsa” informed female readers that the church used this holiday to play masterfully on people’s feeling of guilt in order to collect donations. The author argues: “the

60 “Former People” was a term used after 1917 to describe the nobility, state officials, and intelligentsia. Douglas Smith argues that “former people” like many other “despised minorities” became a “scapegoat” for the failures of the Bolsheviks, and an easy target toward which the popular anger “could be directed without fear of reprisal.” For more see Douglas Smith, Former People: The Final Days of the Russian Aristocracy (New York: Macmillan, 2012).
62 Maslenitsa is a traditional Slavic religious holiday that grew out of pagan traditions. Maslenitsa is celebrated during the week before Lent with big carnivals, music, jumping over bon-fires and consumption of crepes. Maslenitsa represents the last chance to consume dairy products and engage in festive activities before the eight weeks of Lent.
church staged a war on this pagan holiday, but could not win and had to recognize it … since the Christian church could not overcome pagan customs, it turned them for its benefit.”

Later articles took an even more critical approach and addressed women more specifically. For example, in the article “Byt, A Woman, and Christmas” the author asserts that for many centuries the Gospel was used to exploit and oppress people: “chains stronger than chains of iron were needed to control slaves, so that they would not violate the serenity of their masters. Therefore, religion was invented.” The author also adds that women are especially poisoned by the “religious moonshine” due to their tardiness in cultural development and the fact that the Cultural Revolution has not fully embraced them.

Another article argues that housewives were particularly vulnerable to the influence of religion because they were shut off from the social and cultural life of the country. In an article, “Under Sectarian Flag,” Zhenskii Zhurnal told women that “the goal of sectarian workers was to distract women from the tasks of socialist construction, from participation in public life, from the construction of a new life, from parenting based on the Leninist principles.” The author explains that to entrap more followers, sectarians organize craft and sewing circles for women, clubs for youth, and choirs for children; they also approach working women “under the guise of material support.” Thus, Zhenskii Zhurnal argued that the religiosity of the masses inhibited the establishment of socialism: women needed to mobilize in the class struggle against the influence of the church since “religion was one of the means of enslaving women... it convinced a woman that she was an unequal person.”

A war on religion was only a part of the Cultural Revolution that targeted anything deemed “bourgeois” for its ideological incompatibility with proletarian mentality. Following the

---

campaign of promotion of culture, the authors of Zhenskii Zhurnal attacked traits of character, manners, and approach to byt. Laziness, or apathy to work, was one of the traits the magazine ascribed to the bourgeoisie. One author of Zhenskii Zhurnal compared lazy people to the main hero of Ivan Goncharov’s famous novel Oblomov (1859) arguing that they “cursed work that dignifies and gives meaning to human life.” Negligence, unwillingness to think hard, and slipshod work were the signs of modern Oblomovshchina, according to the author. The author further reminded women-readers that “every decent Soviet citizen ... must remember that his personal interests were in accord with the interests of society.” A few months later, this author again attacked petty-bourgeois mentalities in the article “No extremes.” This time, he waged a war on the family economy, claiming that some traditions needed to be abandoned since they belonged to the old way of life. The author argued that both avarice and squandering were equally ugly manifestations of the petty-bourgeois ideology generated by the way of life of the pre-revolutionary gentry. The author proposes practicing prudence in byt since “petty-bourgeois psychology manifests in lines for flour, soap, sugar, textiles, creating an artificial boom, panic.” It is important to note that the magazine often reminded readers that a better way to show financial prudence and avoid these extreme behaviors would be putting whatever savings the family had into the state bank to “help out the country.” Hence, as the part of the Cultural Revolution, women were urged to learn more about the national economy.

This chapter’s overview of Zhenskii Zhurnal’s treatment of such subjects as work, social activism, and collectivizing of byt reveals that the construct of class and women’s class roles changed with the introduction of Stalin’s politics of building socialism in one country. Before the

70 Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 11, 1930, 17.
First Five-Year Plan, women were for the most part excluded from the working class based on their rather philistine class identity. However, with the institution of policies aimed at rapid industrialization, women were urged to enter the workforce, and, propaganda of all kinds of female labor became the central focus of the magazine’s representation of class. Moreover, analysis of Zhenskii Zhurnal shows that the meaning of female labor had to be broadened since the high rate of female unemployment was still posing a problem in the late 1920s. Women who could not find jobs were encouraged to either sign up for training courses, engage in artisanal work, or become social activists.

The ultimate goal of these political changes was to drive women, mostly housewives, away from the dangerous seclusion and comforts of their homes. To make a woman care about the interests of the country before her own, Stalin deployed the tactic of class struggle. Images of enemies lurking everywhere and condemnation of alien ideologies penetrating every sphere of life were used to raise the class consciousness of women and to mobilize them to take part in any kind of work that could help bring about the establishment of socialism more quickly. Thus, work and social activism became the most important elements of the new Soviet woman’s identity.
SOVIET WOMANHOOD: FEMALE PRIORITIES REDEFINED

Early Bolshevik theories promised that rejection of the old stereotypes regarding family, love, sex, beauty, and fashion would help bring gender equality into the new Soviet society. The party focused its ideology on eradicating differences between the sexes arguing that men and women “should relate to each other primarily as comrades, regardless whether they were co-workers or husband and wife.”¹ Before the revolution, women’s identity was for the most part confined to the roles of housewife, wife, and mother while conventional femininity was associated with softness, domesticity, and self-adornment. The official ideology looked for ways to change the meaning of womanhood by liberating women from traditional domestic roles and defining some aspects of traditional femininity as bourgeois and consumerist. Hence, Soviet authorities tried to control discourse on gender and to establish an ideologically pure model of female identity that all women of the new society had to accept.

In the early 1920s, some party ideologists actively began to promote the idea that free unions should replace marriage while child rearing should become the responsibility of the state. With the decline of importance of marriage, the norms of sexual conduct had changed as well. As a part of this gender engineering project, the Bolsheviks also hoped to change the meaning of female beauty: the new ideal sought to desexualize women’s bodies and their style of dress. However, the introduction of the First Five-Year Plan brought some serious alterations to the image of the new Soviet woman: while attacks on “bourgeois” understandings of beauty continued, the official ideology completely stepped back from the early utopian ideas about women’s spousal and maternal roles and began supporting a return to traditional gender roles and strict sexual morality.

This chapter argues that while the late 1920s witnessed a stabilization of traditional women’s roles, the meaning of these roles had to evolve to accommodate Stalin’s policies aimed at rapid industrialization and intense class struggle. As the party began to conceptualize involvement in production as the feature central to Soviet womanhood, this idea penetrated Zhenskii Zhurnal’s discourse on spousal relationships, motherhood, love, sex, beauty and fashion. Zhenskii Zhurnal started out as the publication for housewives but by the end of the decade it was forced to avoid emphasis on traditional female roles and interests connected with private life and domestic sphere. In order to transform a woman into an arduous worker and a loyal comrade, her priorities needed to be reconfigured and her devotion to the traditional interests of her sex had to be minimized. The party emphasized that in Soviet society there should be no specific women’s interests separate from the interests of the class as a whole. By analyzing Zhenskii Zhurnal’s discourse on gender, this chapter traces the mechanisms the party used to re-conceptualize traditional femininity and to subordinate it to the interests of class.

4.1 Family – Wife & Mother

The early Bolsheviks believed that female liberation was supposed to begin with the family – Marxist theory viewed this institution as the main source of women’s oppression and inequality. Friedrich Engels suggested that once the economic equality between men and women was reached, the individual family would “wither away.”\(^2\) The Bolsheviks interpreted Engel’s expectation that the family would disappear in various ways. For example, Alexandra Kollontai believed that in communist society, living in collectives should replace living in families. Kollontai suggested that such cohabitation would make all kinds of intimate unions acceptable,

---

whether they were based on “a healthy instinct for reproduction prompted by the abandon of young love, or by fervent passion, or by a blaze of physical attraction or by the soft light of intellectual and emotional harmony.”\(^3\) Vladimir Lenin and Nadezhda Krupskaya held more traditional views on the family: in contrast to Kollontai, they believed in monogamous relationships.\(^4\) For Lenin, it was not the family structure itself that posed the problem, but rather the “reactionary hold” the family had on individuals. For him, “reliance on the party” had to replace “the social influence of the family.”\(^5\)

In 1918, the Bolsheviks introduced The Code on Marriage, the Family and Guardianship as the first step to female liberation. According to Wendy Z. Goldman, the Code’s creators believed that this law would initiate a gradual process of making the family obsolete.\(^6\) At the same time, Roger Pethybridge has argued that Lenin’s conservative views prevailed in the Code, whose main purpose was to eliminate the influence of religious traditions through the replacement of church marriage with a civil union.\(^7\)

One of the significant changes brought by the Family Code of 1918 was a simplified divorce procedure. The Bolsheviks believed that this provision would aid, first of all, women who, being the most oppressed party in the marriage, would become the primary initiators of divorce. However, the reality proved otherwise: statistics showed that in Moscow during the first seven months of 1918, women initiated only about 30% divorces.\(^8\) By the mid-1920s, the divorce

---


\(^7\) Pethybridge, *Social Prelude to Stalinism*, 53.

rate in the Soviet Union was three times higher than in Germany and France, and twenty-six times higher than in England and Wales. Such high rates of divorce posed a sharp problem of division of common property. The Code of 1918 postulated that property acquired during marriage was owned by the person at whose expense it was purchased. Thus, the new law placed housewife into the most vulnerable social position because her work was not paid, and therefore she could not claim her share of family property.

Cancelation of church marriage also established a new kind of morality. It became commonplace in early Soviet Russia to live in domestic partnerships without registering the relationships legally. The Code of 1918 guaranteed child support in the event the de facto marriage ended; however, it required a lot of effort from women to prove that the relationships, in fact, took place. Unmarried women who had multiple partners at once or women who were raped were also entitled to child support, but in most of these cases, men met women’s attempt to collect child support with opposition and denial. Even an issued court order did not guarantee that a woman with children would get sufficient monetary compensation: often, the amount of ascribed child support was ludicrous because men either had other children in their new families or their earnings were little; and sometimes men simply ignored the orders and paid nothing at all. The inability of some women to support their children led to a devastating rate of child abandonment in the early and mid-1920s.

---

9 Goldman, Women, the State and Revolution, 107.
10 See Attwood, Creating the New Soviet Woman, 42.
11 In the whole country, on average, 70% of men who engaged in short-term unions with women denied their paternity; in towns alone this number was at 92%. For further discussion of short-term unions, see Goldman, Women, the State and Revolution, 137.
12 According to Goldman, in 1922 the number of children besprizorniki (homeless waifs) was at 7.5 million. This number was a direct consequence of the devastation left from the Civil War and was further affected by the famine of 1921. By 1927, the number of abandoned children was close to 300,000. According to Goldman, although the number of besprizorniki “diminished considerably…they remained a vexing concern to the state well into the 1930s.” See Goldman, Women, the State and Revolution, 59-100.
By the mid-1920s, Soviet authorities realized that women’s “new right to ‘free union’”\textsuperscript{13} looked good only in theory. In contrast to the Bolsheviks’ expectations, freedom of relationships only brought troubles, frustrations, and deprivations. The early issues of Zhenskii Zhurnal were full of heartbreaking stories describing the consequences of the new morality. Village women who had believed in the new ideals were hit the hardest. In the countryside the fear of public opinion proved to be strong even ten years after the revolution: village folk condemned the new norm – numerous short and unregistered marriages – and the cult of the patriarchal family with its traditions and responsibilities continued to prevail. In a letter to Zhenskii Zhurnal one village woman exclaimed: “If you only knew how many lives got crippled, how much torture is tolerated by women. Women injure themselves, kill their babies (and often themselves) and then suffer physically and mentally to the point of hysteria and insanity ... bathhouses, stables, and barns keep the secrets of the terrible sufferings and brutal child-murders.”\textsuperscript{14} In the city children were also the first to suffer from simplification of marriage and divorce. The editorial of the June 1927 issue featured a story of a girl abandoned by her parents: “First, her dad completely disappeared and her mom found a ‘new dad.’ Then, the new dad divorced her mom and married a ‘new mom.’ So, the child found herself living with complete strangers and no one knows where her real parents are.”\textsuperscript{15}

High rates of child abandonment and deteriorated women’s position forced Soviet officials to call for improvements in the Family Code. In 1926, state lawyers put together the draft of the new Code; however, the party did not accept it and demanded modification. The authorities called for a public discussion of the draft, allowing women themselves to propose

\textsuperscript{13} Goldman, \textit{Women, the State and Revolution}, 103.
\textsuperscript{14} Tatiana Pletneva, “Besedi s Chitatel’nitami: Tam Gde Bessilen kodeks...” Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 8, 1926, 12.
\textsuperscript{15} Peredovaya, “Byt i Deti,” Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 6, 1927, 2.
changes that could improve their plight. Zhenskii Zhurnal too encouraged its readers to participate in a discussion of the law. In the regular section “Conversations with Readers,” Tatiana Pletneva invited the readers to respond to the following question: “How should the law be structured so a woman’s inherent right for love and maternity would be ensured?”

Generally, readers’ opinions were divided into two categories. Some insisted that Soviet citizens should be able to enjoy complete freedom in personal (i.e. sexual) relationships and that the state, not the individuals, should assume responsibility for the care and support of the children that resulted from these free unions. Others possessed more traditional views calling for the restriction of sexual freedom and more stringent measures ensuring the responsibility of fathers. For example, one reader compared de facto marriages to “legal prostitution.” Another reader suggested imposing a special tax that would be used for establishing social services necessary for collective child rearing and thus offering more security to women who decided to have children without entering marriage.

Once accepted, the new Family Code of 1926 brought some slight improvements in women’s rights. Ironically, it also reinforced women’s dependence on men. One of the most important provisions of the new Code was complete equalization of registered and de facto marriages. This time, however, the Code provided a definition of “de facto marriage” which included “a common household, the joint upbringing of children, and the expression of marital relations before a third party.” In the case of de jure and de facto marriages alike that ended in

16 According to Goldman, many representatives of the party, including Mikhail Kalinin, identified their values as conservative. They demanded public debate of the Code draft hoping that “its more radical provisions would be tempered by the conservatism of the peasantry.” See: Goldman, Women, the State and Revolution, 215.


19 Goldman, Women, the State and Revolution, 236.
divorce, the new Code guaranteed a payment of alimony for a year to the spouse that was unemployed or sick. Lynne Attwood notes that while this provision “was couched in gender neutral language,” it was clear that the “ex-spouse who would receive this support would invariably be the wife.” Moreover, the new law established equal rights of both spouses to the property acquired in marriage regardless of whose money was used to purchase it. Hence, the unpaid domestic work of a housewife was recognized as no less valuable than the paid labor of men. While it was a definite gain for women, such provisions only reinforced traditional gender relationships (men perform productive labor, women perform unproductive domestic work) that the Bolsheviks had been trying to destroy.

Zhenskii Zhurnal showed strong support of the new guarantees offered by the Code of 1926. However, Pletneva noted that no family code could completely protect a woman and her child from irresponsible men. Pletneva admitted that until the establishment of socialism, people should continue to live in families, but called on women readers to reject the view that in the new Soviet society marriage was a private matter. The author suggested that there should be “social control” over the family and that the party should be able to make sure that the relationship between a man and a woman contained the “spirit of dictatorship of the proletariat.” Hence, Pletneva’s argument signaled to women that gender relations could not be considered separately from class interests and should come under the control of the state.

Even though it became obvious toward the end of the NEP that the party’s family politics retreated to more traditional ideas about relationships between sexes, Pletneva continued promoting views on family that were tinted with the utopian visions of the early Bolsheviks. Up until 1928, Pletneva claimed that individual family was the main source of female unhappiness

---

20 Attwood, Creating the New Soviet Woman, 42.
because women relied too much on this “fragile cell” and “support of individual males.”

Pletneva argued that once the new Soviet state had better economic conditions, the individual family would disappear and women would not be bothered by the idea of letting the state raise their children. In another article Pletneva claimed that a Soviet woman did not need a husband to fulfill the “female right for love and maternity.” With great enthusiasm Pletneva told a story about a single woman who decided to have a baby without getting married even though her elderly mother “of old views” thought it was shameful. Overall, Pletneva wanted women to believe that with the establishment of socialism not only the form of the family would change but also that “the feelings that are connected with it (love, jealousy, maternity)” would become completely different.

Thus, the early issues of Zhenskii Zhurnal made it clear that the emergence of the new Soviet woman was supposed to be preceded by the creation of new type of family based on the free union of two people. As a guarantee of gender equality, maternal responsibilities were supposed to be transferred from the shoulders of individual women to the state system of child rearing. But the utopian projects of transmitting the functions of the family to the state and diminishing economic importance of the family did not stand up to reality. The acceptance of the Family Code of 1926 already signified a retreat from earlier revolutionary experiments. The final break with the early Bolshevik ideology was manifested in the party resolution of 1936 “On the prohibition of abortion…” which toughened the family laws. This resolution made obtaining a divorce more difficult and no longer recognized de facto marriages. In addition, it increased

---

financial aid to pregnant women, established state aid to families with many children, expanded
the network of maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens, and increased criminal penalties
for non-payment of alimony and child support.\textsuperscript{26} The new orientation toward monogamous
relationships, family upbringing of children, and forced legalization of marriage signified
Stalin’s break with Marxist understandings of solution for “the woman question.” Stalin’s family
policy brought back traditional family structures and patriarchal values, and put private
relationships under the strict control of the state.\textsuperscript{27}  

Careful reading of \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal} allows us to detect the beginning of this change in
family politics that eventually “anathemized”\textsuperscript{28} the idea that the family should “wither away.”
Pletneva’s “Conversations with Readers” that mostly promoted the early Bolsheviks views on
the questions of marriage and love had not appeared in the magazine after February of 1928 even
though the author’s last publication invited women to answer some questions. Further, in the
April 1928 issue, the section “Mother and Child” was renamed into “Family and Child” pointing
to the growing recognition of the importance of stable family relations. All discussions of
familial disintegration under socialism stopped. Moreover, by 1929, the discussion of marital
problems completely disappeared from the pages of the magazine while “Family and Child” was
turned into “About Children.” This meant that monogamous, long-term relationships were the
norm again, but in the light of the country’s new industrial goals and toughened class politics,
family matters should no longer be the woman’s priority.

\textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal}’s discussion of motherhood also allows us to reconstruct the process of
transforming the new Soviet woman’s family roles. The Bolsheviks believed that every woman
had a right to be a mother and that maternity needed to be protected. At the same time, children

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Postanovlenia KPSS i Sovetskogo Pravitel’stva ob Ohrane Zdorov’ya Naroda} (Moskva: Medgiz, 1958), 264-272.
\textsuperscript{27} See Goldman, \textit{Women, the State and Revolution}, 296-336.
\textsuperscript{28} Goldman, \textit{Women, the State and Revolution}, 297.
kept women in the dangerous seclusion of home, and thus the Bolsheviks hoped to organize society in such a way that rearing children would be the state’s responsibility. In the early issues of Zhenskii Zhurnal some authors suggested that a woman, liberated from raising children, should spend her free time educating herself politically or engaging in social activism. However, analysis of readers’ letters shows that women were not ready to accept the party’s views on the meaning of motherhood, especially since the promised networks of well-established child services were slow to come. One woman-reader argued that if she were to choose social activism over the needs of her family, her kids would be either dead or homeless (besprizorniki). The reader called herself “meshchanka” because her family and her kids were the “closest and most precious” priority to her.

While Zhenskii Zhurnal editorials reflected the party’s gender politics, the rest of the magazine’s content conceptualized motherhood as the main role of a woman. In the first two years of Zhenskii Zhurnal’s existence virtually every cover featured a drawing of a woman with a child (see Fig. 4.1), and the magazine’s discussion of parenthood emphasized the importance of mothers in the process of child raising. Introducing the first appearance of the section “Mother and Child” in the July 1926 issue, the editors wrote: “We see the mothers who read our magazine not simply as housewives, but also as the teachers of their kids…We will try to help mothers in their everyday tasks of children’s education.” Advice given by this section was clearly intended for mothers who could dedicate a great amount of effort and time to caring for individual children.

29 For example, see Peredovaya, “Oktyabr’ i Osvobozhdenie Zhenshini,” Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol.6, 1926, 2.
Later, in the January 1928 issue, the editors announced that in the course of the year “Mother and Child” would offer a series of articles concerning different areas of children’s

---

pedagogy written by prominent educators. Zhenskii Zhurnal began with the series titled “On Walks with Children” written by a famous geographer and educator, Sergei Barkov. In his first article, Barkov informed mothers-readers that walks were the best way to promote observation skills in children. He also advised mothers to prepare for walks in advance and devise a plan regarding what to have a conversation about and what to look for while outside.\textsuperscript{33} In the following issue, Barkov suggested that “walks with children provide an excellent means to identify the child’s tendencies, interests, and tastes,” and advised women about topics that could be discussed during winter walks.\textsuperscript{34} The approach to children’s upbringing promoted in these articles was clearly entrenched in the pedagogical traditions of the upper classes of the Old Regime.

But Zhenskii Zhurnal could not fulfill the promises given to its readers in the “Mother and Child” section. In early 1928, the name of the section was changed (see above, p. 71) and the magazine actively began to push for teaching social values outside of the home. This change took place after Stalin’s rise to power; the new party leader viewed the time children spent at home with their philistine mothers-housewives as dangerous to the formation of incipient class consciousness. An article from the October 1929 issue explains the new official approach to pedagogy: “during the sharpening of class struggle that we are experiencing at the moment, the tasks of children’s education become of particular importance. After all, our children are still exposed to the harmful effects of a petty-bourgeois environment therefore we need to fight for children... [because]...what’s acquired in childhood has a stronger grip on a human’s mentality.”

According to the same article, public education of children allowed the state to battle the petty-bourgeois influence of the family, its religious superstitions, and its promotion of personal

interests over the larger interests of society. Hence, the role of a mother in the upbringing and education of her children began to gradually decrease.

By the end of 1920s it became clear that the new Soviet mother kept only her reproductive role. After Stalin’s takeover, the state’s role in a child’s education became more important than that of the mother. While the idea of the state rearing and educating children was also the ideal of the early Bolsheviks, Stalin’s program did away with the early utopian approach and moved from theory to firm action. Moreover, if the Bolshevik’s ultimate goal of making childcare the state’s responsibility was female liberation, Stalin pursued strict control over female class-consciousness. Starting from the middle of 1928, even those women who had not yet found jobs were rather aggressively recommended to put their children into communal crèches and kindergartens and to volunteer as nannies at the facilities their children attended. In addition, Zhenskii Zhurnal instructed women to send their children to summer camps and told them not to bring special treats for their children because “in the camp all are equal members of one collective.”

Toward the end of 1929, Zhenskii Zhurnal launched a nationwide “preschool campaign” that targeted kids under the age of seven and had a goal of “organizing the collective upbringing of all children without exception.” The magazine explained that the political meaning of preschool education lay in female liberation since it gave women “the opportunity to participate in building socialism, to improve their skills, and to increase labor productivity.” By 1930, the explanation of the meaning of the “preschool campaign” became even more aggressive. A

slogan, printed in the January 1930 issue stated: “For the construction of socialism we need new kind of people. The preschool campaign helps prepare good human material.”

Mothers of school-aged children also came under fire with the beginning of industrialization. Zhenskii Zhurnal asked them to get more acquainted with the ideals that were being taught in school in order not to disrupt children’s education with “poor explanations of the aspects of Soviet life” and with “prejudices and superstitions” preserved in the family. Thus, Zhenskii Zhurnal began to conceptualize the traditional role of a family in children’s education as an obstacle. The only families that were trusted with children’s education were of proletarian origin. One author argued that more workers needed to join parent-teacher committees (soviet sodeistvia) because the kind of people who served on them at the time often did not support school campaigns and initiatives. Another author claimed that schooling becomes efficient only if the workers get involved in educating “future strugglers and builders of communist society.”

Thus, mothers, for the most part, were removed from children’s education. The only responsibility the state assigned to them was the maintenance of children’s health and hygiene. An article titled “Health of the Family,” published in Zhenskii Zhurnal at the end of 1929, informed readers that regular health screenings of school children found about 50% of pupils lacking basic hygiene (lice, dirty nails and ears). Based on this statistic, the author concluded that mothers did not always maintain the “hygiene skills” that the school gave children. The author called upon mothers to work on improving hygiene standards within the family. In other words, for the successful development of socialist society, mothers needed to limit their influence on their children to hygiene and cultural skills and then send their clean, tidy, and healthy kids to

---

kindergartens and schools to be mentored and taught proper socialist values there. This was the new meaning of the maternal role of the new Soviet woman.

4.2 Relationships – Love & Sexual morality

In Marxist theory, speculations about the abolition of the family were tied to the idea of free love. Kollontai, more than any other Bolshevik theorists, focused her writing on the topics related to personal relationships and the sexuality of the new Soviet woman. Kollontai argued that in order to achieve women’s emancipation, the simple collapse of capitalistic relationships was not sufficient. The transformation of sexual morality and personal relationships was also necessary: “all the experience of history teaches us that a social group works out its ideology, and consequently its sexual morality, in the process of its struggle with hostile social forces.”

In her interpretations of Marxism, Kollontai defended ideas of free love and argued against monogamy in marriage. Kollontai’s views on proper sexual morality of the new Soviet woman are best described in her novel *The Loves of Three Generations* (1923). Here Kollontai juxtaposes three generations of women: a woman of the past who lives in marriage; a woman of the present who does not believe in marriage but nevertheless spends too much time and energy worrying about her love life; and a woman of the future who has many lovers whom she treats rationally by not mixing emotions with her sex life.

Vulgar understandings of Kollontai’s famous phrase that “the sexual act should be recognized as neither shameful nor sinful, but natural and legal, as much a manifestation of a

---

44 Kollontai, *Selected Writings*, 249.
healthy organism as the quenching of hunger or thirst\textsuperscript{46} produced a “theory of a glass of water” widely popular in early Soviet society.\textsuperscript{47} People who followed this theory completely rejected the necessity of love and argued that sexual relationships between men and women should be satisfied without any conformity. In other words, satisfaction of sexual needs should be as simple and meaningless as quenching thirst by drinking a glass of water. The “glass of water theory” did not simply reject old sexual norms. Questions of love and sex began to be articulated in the language of class: many people of the early 1920s became convinced that love was a shameful, bourgeois feeling and deemed sexual restraint as \textit{meshchanstvo}. According to Richard Stites, this primitive understanding of the meaning of free love contributed to the creation of special sexual culture where “brutalism, abandonment, crude sexuality and prostitution flourished under the N.E.P.”\textsuperscript{48}

The authors of \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal} were highly critical of such understanding of free love. In a letter to the magazine one female reader, Seraphima Rodionova, argued that the new Soviet society needed a new sexual morality that was based not on physiology but on the treatment of a woman as a comrade. She further suggested that young women should be taught that sexual restraint was not \textit{meshchanstvo}.\textsuperscript{49} The curator of the “Conversations with Readers” Tatiana Pletneva supported Rodionova’s position by reprinting an excerpt from \textit{Pravda} claiming that “anarchy in sexual relationships” was a “petty-bourgeois distortion of proletarian ideology.”\textsuperscript{50} In another article, Pletneva argued that love was not “bourgeois prejudice” and that “from the

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 13.
communist point of view, love was not something prohibited or shameful.” According to Pletneva, sexual relationships should not take place without love. She advised her readers: don’t be afraid to be accused of meshchanstvo or sentimentalism and do not give yourself away without the “strong and bright” feeling of love.51

Thus, the majority of Zhenskii Zhurnal’s authors believed that romantic feelings should not be alien to the new Soviet woman. Moreover, some of the authors published in the magazine viewed love as the ultimate meaning of female happiness. This thought was mostly expressed through fictional stories printed in the early issues of Zhenskii Zhurnal. For example, in a short story Mashinistka (Typist), the main character did not feel happy, despite that fact that she had a job and was able to support herself and her mother. She longed to meet someone she could fall in love with.52 In another story entitled Schastlivaya Zhenshina (Happy Woman) the hero, recently divorced, was so lonely and unhappy that she made herself believe that only suicide could resolve her “unsuccessful situation.” By a twist of fate, her attempt to end her life was interrupted by a small child who later became her adopted son and whose father became her new husband. At the end of the story the woman confessed that being a mother and being loved were the highest forms of female happiness.53

Debates about the meaning of love even penetrated the health section of Zhenskii Zhurnal. Doctor Nadezhda Mikulina-Ivanova argued that love had a tremendous influence on personal development while sex reflected the individuality of each human being. A series of Mikulina-Ivanova articles entitled “Normal and Abnormal Sexual Life of a Woman” further reveal important ideas about female sexuality that prevailed in society at the time of the late NEP. For example, Mikulina-Ivanova argued that after becoming a mother, a woman typically

stopped worrying about her sexual indulgences: motherhood satisfied her emotionally and gave her abundant happiness and joy. Men, on the other hand, continued to look for new sexual experiences all their lives and preferred diversity of sexual partners. The author also suggested that marriage should be monogamous and that women, due to their maternal function, should adhere to this ideal.\textsuperscript{54} In the same series Mikulina-Ivanova discussed in particular depth female frigidity since, according to numerous readers’ letters, many divorces happened because of this reason. Mikulina-Ivanova explained that on average 50% of women were either temporary or permanently frigid, and she advised men to be understanding and patient with their wives.\textsuperscript{55}

Finishing her series at the end of 1927, Dr. Mikulina-Ivanova asked women-readers to send letters to the magazine with stories about their sex lives, their first sexual experiences, and normal and abnormal expressions of “sexual instincts.”\textsuperscript{56} However, since then, \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal} never brought up the subject of female sexuality again. With Stalin’s takeover of the party, questions of female sexuality completely disappeared from the magazine while the discourse on love took a different shape. Attention to matters involving love decreased significantly. Love, if discussed at all, began to be presented as inseparable from marriage. Moreover, love no longer appeared as a romantic feeling. Relationships between spouses were supposed to take a form of comradeship, rather than love.

An article entitled “The New Woman on the Soviet Theater Stage” published in the July 1928 issue provides unambiguous examples of approaches to love appropriate for the new Soviet woman. The author began her article with a remark that on the Soviet stage “women-comrades”


\textsuperscript{55} Dr. N. Mikulina-Ivanova, “Normal’naya i Nenormal’naya Polovaya Zhizn’ Zhenshini,” \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal}, Vol. 10, 1927, 14-16.

\textsuperscript{56} Dr. N. Mikulina-Ivanova, “Normal’naya i Nenormal’naya Polovaya Zhizn’ Zhenshini,” \textit{Zhenskii Zhurnal}, Vol. 10, 1927, 16.
replaced “women-lovers” of the Old Regime. Then, the author gave an overview of four plays. In one of the plays, *Lyubov’ Yarovaya*, the main character thought she lost her husband in the beginning of the Civil War. Later, she recognized her husband in one of the Red commissars, who, in a moment of passion, revealed that he was a provocateur and a spy for the Whites. The woman, who was a supporter of the Bolsheviks, then had to make a choice between love and the interests of her country. Even though she still loved her husband very much, she decided to turn him in to the Reds knowing he would be brutally executed. The author of the article argued that this choice was easy for the heroine because she knew that she made it in the best interest of the proletariat. In another play, *Cement*, the female main character was able to transform from docile housewife into an independent woman who wanted to and, according to the author, was able to achieve equality with men. The husband of the main character still thought of his wife as his property, however, and took the change in her behavior as a sign of lost love between them. But the author of the article explained that the meaning of love in the new Soviet society had evolved and complete equality between partners should be the new ideal.  

By the beginning of 1930, the subject of love completely disappeared from the pages of *Zhenskii Zhurnal*. Russian historian Natalia Lebina argues that at the turn of the decade, “official norms of sexual and family life in Soviet society” were at last formed. According to these norms, the new Soviet woman was supposed to stick to monogamous marriage, the only way of expressing her sexuality was having sex for the purpose of procreation, sex before marriage was deemed immoral, and any deviations from traditional sexual norms were harshly criticized.

---

Thus, the new Soviet woman was completely “de-eroticized” while love was envisioned as the matter of her least concern because preoccupation with personal feelings and sexual needs stood in the way of accomplishing industrial goals.

4.3 Femininity – Fashion & Beauty

In the writings of the early Bolsheviks, new gender roles for Soviet women entailed new concepts of femininity. The revolution completely changed standards of female beauty and fashion. As Soviet authorities advocated for austerity in dress, new social perceptions of beauty emerged. Markers of gender differences in clothing and hairstyle were blurred and minimal attention to style, hair, and make-up were encouraged. A leather jacket (kozhanka) became the wardrobe staple of those men and women who wanted to stress their allegiance to the new regime and the revolution; and sometimes the only thing that differentiated a male from a female supporter of Bolshevism was a red headscarf worn by women.

According to Raisa Kirsanova, a Russian historian of fashion, after the Bolshevik takeover, an individual’s costume no longer had a decorative purpose; the style of the new Soviet person was supposed to make one inconspicuous as well as to emphasize loyalty to the new regime. When the return to the market economy during the NEP brought back consumer culture, clothing became an especially important marker of class, often leading to judgments about political and ideological affiliation of its owner. While a great number of women during the NEP tried to replicate European fashions, the party and Komsomol officials criticized such

---

60 Lebina, Povsednevnaya Zhizn’ Sovetskogo Goroda, 290.
61 Ibid, 214.
manners of dressing as “bourgeois.”⁶³ Both high-ranking party members and regular supporters of Bolshevism put on “deliberately proletarian look.”⁶⁴ Even with the rise of the NEP, a woman could easily become an ideological suspect for her choice of fabric, for adorning her dresses with frills, or for wearing silk stockings.⁶⁵

The double standard in fashion that was triggered by the market economy of the NEP was well reflected on the pages of the early Zhenskii Zhurnal. On the one hand, feature articles called for following “Soviet style of dress” that should be as “simplistic as possible,” “comfortable for movement,” and free from “bourgeois pretentiousness.”⁶⁶ On the other hand, styles offered to women-readers for replication in the section “Fashion in Colors” were the same “bourgeois” fashions that the party criticized (See Fig. 4.2). Sometimes, this double-standard in Zhenskii Zhurnal’s discussion of style even reached a point of absurdity: while editorials criticized the “perverse” fashions of the West,⁶⁷ the end pages of the magazine featured a regular column “Fashion Chronicles” where an author with an alias “Parisian” described in detail the latest trends worn by modish French women. Pictures and tales of Parisian chic coexisted on the pages of the magazine with readers’ letters attacking extravagant clothes, furs, and jewelry worn by Soviet citizens. For example, one reader who called herself a “proletarian” was full of outrage over the clothes and manners of some Soviet clerks vacationing in the spa city of Kislovodsk. While vacationing at the same spa, she observed how some “regular Soviet employees” tried to

---

⁶³ See Lebina, Povsednevnya Zhizn’ Sovetskogo Goroda, 215-216.
⁶⁴ Ibid, 216.
⁶⁷ For example, see M. L., Moda na Zapade Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 1, 1926, 14-15.
imitate the old bourgeoisie: the women referred to each other as “madam” and flaunted around in “tasteless, motley” clothes “wanting to seem richer than they actually were.”

Admitting an obvious discrepancy between the realities of the new Soviet life and the style and beauty standards promoted in Zhenskii Zhurnal’s fashion section, the magazine editors announced a contest among their female readers. Women were encouraged to submit drawings and patterns of more “practical clothing” which would signify “a break with Europe in the questions of fashion.” The magazine’s editors attached a letter from a female reader who called for “spitting on the latest fashion trends of Paris and Vienna.” The reader argued that Soviet women should have been ashamed of themselves for blindly copying “the tastes of the idle and

---

vulgar crowds of the Parisian boulevards.” She also claimed that European styles were designed for loungers and socialites and therefore were inappropriate for working Soviet women. The necessity of such a contest indicated that at the time of the late NEP the new Soviet woman had not yet developed her distinct style.

The drawings sent to Zhenskii Zhurnal were marked by simplicity of form and design; some costumes even tried to incorporate Russian folk motifs (see Fig. 4.3). Zhenskii Zhurnal’s editors claimed that the contest turned out to be a great success but nevertheless continued to copy styles from European magazines and kept “Fashion Chronicles” that emphasized Parisian women’s ideals of individuality and uniqueness. The “Fashion Chronicles” made their last appearance in the magazine in February 1928; after that, Zhenskii Zhurnal’s feature articles actively promoted the so-called sport style in dress. One reader of the magazine argued: Soviet

---

women involved in industrial and public work “have no time to come up with fancy styles, as foreign ‘ladies’ do.” Another reader suggested that the “sports style, as the most simple and convenient,” was the best solution for Soviet women.

With Stalin’s introduction of class struggle politics, the party moved fashion under state control and turned it into an important tool of ideological influence. An article published in the March 1928 issue explained the ideological significance of dress: “fashion, form and style are one of the links in the complex chain of ideological superstructures. Style does not only characterize people, it also influences them.... Therefore, to some extent, the creation of ‘Soviet-style’ clothing is one of the conditions for developing special Soviet psyche.” Showing off large assortments of outfits became ideologically unacceptable; the new emphasis was made on practicality of clothes. One author suggested that “one dress can combine up to three outfits: 1 - for work; 2 – for street walks; 3 - for workouts. The blouse stays the same, only the bottom of the dress changes.”

Zhenskii Zhurnal presented the modesty of Soviet style as a new virtue and an achievement of the revolution: the magazine authors tried to convince readers that Soviet women, unlike their bourgeois counterparts, were satisfied with two or three simple dresses on which they spent as little money as they could. Even the materials used for making clothes were supposed to be ideologically correct: Zhenskii Zhurnal recommended that women no longer use fabrics adorned with flowers, wreaths, or stripes because they were supposedly associated with philistine values. Hence, after 1928, Zhenskii Zhurnal’s articles began to promote a

---

74 O Stile Sovetskogo Kostuma, Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 3, 1928, 12.
peculiar style of clothing appropriate for the new Soviet woman: it was supposed to be practical, made with the use of artless fabrics, and emphasize a break from bourgeois fashion traditions. Interestingly enough, the editors continued to borrow drawings for “Fashion in Colors” from European fashion magazines until the closing of Zhenskii Zhurnal. The styles however became a little less fashionable toward the last year of the magazine’s existence; moreover, in 1930, the “Fashion in Colors” shrunk to four pages from seventeen and the “Needlework” that used to teach women how to make lace gloves and fabric flower brooches switched to explaining how to mend and darn old clothes.

Beauty was also turned into an ideological construct in the new Soviet society. Class became one of the most important factors in determining one’s attractiveness: official discourse of the late 1920s repeatedly juxtaposed “bourgeois” and “proletarian” beauty and this trend was reflected on the pages of Zhenskii Zhurnal. The state ideologists imagined bourgeois beauty as artificial, engineered, and even ostentatious. On the contrary, proletarian beauty resulted from naturalness and sincere modesty. The poetry printed in Zhenskii Zhurnal best reflects the new Soviet understanding of beauty. For example, according to the author of “A Poem to the Beautiful Woman” printed in the September 1926 issue, in the new Soviet society, glamorous appearance had no value. He thus suggested that women “throw beauty into the fire to better light the freedom” given by the revolution. The poem explains that bourgeois understandings of female beauty resulted in coquetry, showing off, and pursuit of vulgarity. The author pejoratively called women who continued to follow bourgeois beauty standards “picturesque dolls” and claimed that men quickly forget them “as beautiful lapdogs.”

In the next issue (October, 1926), a “Poem to the Beautiful Young Woman” compared new proletarian concepts of beauty to old bourgeois ones. According to the author, proletarian

---

women did not resemble pale and “theatrically pensive” bourgeois beauties who could spend hours in front of a mirror working on their makeup – proletarian beauty was natural and was not achieved with the help of cosmetics. Proletarian women were not interested in Parisian chic or popular dance moves; their beauty was expressed through desire to work, to study communist theory, or to defend their country on par with men.79

Just like with fashion, the early issues of Zhenskii Zhurnal promoted a double standard of beauty. While the end of the magazine featured ads for cosmetics and taught women the art of using makeup, articles published in the front of the magazine called for modesty and denounced the use of beauty aids. Some authors accused women who worried too much about their appearance of philistinism. For instance, one article argued that “once the dress, haircut, manicure, etc. become the center of all interests and desires of women, almost the whole purpose of life – we see the face of ‘pureblooded meshchanka.’”80

With Stalin’s takeover of the party, however, acceptable forms of beauty became much less ambiguous. Beauty could exist only in a form that would not distract people from participation in the production process. Moreover, according to the official ideology, the key characteristics of female attractiveness laid in bodily features that accentuated woman’s physical capabilities or her involvement in work. As Lynne Attwood noted, when “Soviet society stood poised on the brink of the first Five Year Plan, beauty and the capacity to work were inextricably tied together.”81 In poems published in the later issues of Zhenskii Zhurnal the authors praised women’s “robust masculine shoulders”82 or “strong sunburnt hands.”83

---

81 Attwood, Creating the New Soviet Woman, 71.
Hence, at the turn of the decade, masculinity and strength of muscles became the most important features of women’s beauty. Starting from the middle of 1928, images of stocky women with rough facial features and strong arms replaced slim and delicate-looking women on the covers of Zhenskii Zhurnal (see Figs. 4.4, 4.5). Such beauty ideals could only be achieved either through hard physical labor or through sport and physical exercise. The number of Zhenskii Zhurnal’s articles that encouraged women to perform daily workouts spiked after the introduction of the First Five-Year Plan. The party aimed its ideology at eradicating differences between sexes. This pursuit of gender neutrality was best manifested through Stalin’s invention of mass sport parades, whose participants were typically dressed in identical unisex underwear (see Fig. 4.5, first image). According to Russian historian Natasha Tolstikova, unisex knitted cotton undershirts and boxers were offered to the new Soviet women as the most acceptable choice of underwear: they “meant to signify comfort, ease of movement, simplicity, and hygiene.” Thus, in the process of creating the new Soviet women, the two sexes were merging and female beauty was expressed not through highlighting traditional gender differences but through showing off woman’s involvement in social and economic production, and therefore her “class dignity.”

---


Figure 4.4: Women on the covers of Zhenskii Zhurnal before 1928.\textsuperscript{87}

Figure 4.5: Women on the covers of Zhenskii Zhurnal after 1928.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{87} Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 9, 1926; Zhenskii Zhurnal, Vol. 8, 1927.

Analysis of Zhenskii Zhurnal shows that the ideal of sexual equality that the Bolsheviks promoted could only be achieved if women changed their priorities. And if the early Bolsheviks, faced with the freedoms brought by the NEP, were not very successful in their social engineering projects, Stalin was able to put the discourse on gender under strict state control and to subordinate women’s identity to the interests of the country and class. To begin with, Stalin moved away from early Bolshevik ideas of free love and “withering away” of the family. Thereby, the new Soviet woman got to keep her traditional feminine roles of wife and mother, but they were no longer central to her identity. Zhenskii Zhurnal’s treatment of topics connected with spousal relationships, motherhood, love, and sex demonstrated that in the late 1920s women’s priorities were supposed to lie outside of the private sphere of life. The new Soviet woman was expected to put class interests above personal ones; family thus came under the ideological control of the party and began to be envisioned as the “political nucleus of society” rather than a private matter.

In Stalin’s vision, work had to become central to female identity, and matters connected to private life were not supposed to distract women from participation in socially productive labor. After Stalin’s takeover of the party, Zhenskii Zhurnal no longer pictured women as loving wives and caring mothers. Instead, women were expected to become more masculine and act as men’s comrades at work and at home. The later issues of Zhenskii Zhurnal actively promoted an image of a woman who worked hard for the common good, who spent minimal time on her domestic responsibilities, who trusted the state to take care of her kids and to teach them social values, and who had no time to worry about her love life or her looks. Hence, starting from the late 1920s, Zhenskii Zhurnal negated the earlier definition of femininity and gender norms and

---

89 Lebina, Povsednevaya Zhizn’ Sovetskogo Goroda, 274.
presented a woman’s contribution to the economy and to building the new Soviet society as the ultimate meaning of Soviet womanhood.
5 CONCLUSIONS

On November 25, 1936, commenting on the draft of the new constitution, Stalin said: “it is not property status, not national origin, not sex, nor office, but personal ability and personal labor that determines the position of every citizen in society.” With this phrase Stalin pointed out the centrality of work in Soviet identity. Following the introduction of the First Five-Year Plan, Stalin’s policies encouraged massive involvement of women into socially productive labor. To ensure a woman’s active inclusion into building socialism, her priorities needed to be reconfigured and her identity needed to be altered: if in the 1920s a great number of women imagined themselves as housewives first, by the beginning of the 1930s, public identity of a woman was primarily associated with her contribution to the economy and society.

The pages of Zhenskii Zhurnal reflect the dynamics of post-revolutionary changes in female identity. By and large, the case of Zhenskii Zhurnal reveals the history of making a proletarian out of a housewife. Zhenskii Zhurnal began as a housekeeping companion for homemakers; toward the end of its existence, the magazine became highly politicized, claiming to serve the interests of working women or those housewives who were social activists. The importance of socially productive labor became a major theme of Zhenskii Zhurnal after the party announced its new political goal of rapid industrialization. By 1930, the content of the magazine aimed almost entirely at the formation of proletarian consciousness, often addressing women in a rather aggressive form.

While early Bolshevik propaganda claimed the establishment of sexual equality in Soviet society, it was rather difficult for women to find their place within the proletarian class. Women were perceived as backward carriers of meshchanstvo values due to their connection with the

---

domestic sphere. In the late 1920s, Stalin had to broaden the meaning of the working class in order to include women and create an integral group of Soviet proletariat. The definition of proletarian class consciousness had to be expanded as well: by the 1930s, it simply meant “enthusiastic support for the construction of socialism and political loyalty.” Modification of female class identity was inextricably connected to the redefinition of gender norms and new understandings of womanhood. In the late 1920s, the official discourse tended to de-emphasize differences between the sexes and popularized an image of a woman who had no specific female interests separate from the interests of the entire proletariat. Changes that affected Zhenskii Zhurnal’s content imply that Soviet ideology imagined the source of female happiness laying not in the home, family, or children, but first of all in a woman’s participation in industrialization and the advancement of the country.

A chronological look at the issues of Zhenskii Zhurnal dedicated to International Women’s Day provides great insight into transformations of the meaning of womanhood in early Soviet society. The 1927 front-page editorial offered inspiring prose about the unity of all women around the world in their desire to solve larger social problems. The author suggests that “on the 8th of March women evaluate their plight, weigh their accomplishments, and for a short time step away from cribs, laundries and kitchens to think about how to save youth from the atrocities of life, how to stop the violent wars, and how to end the oppression of humans in the future.” In contrast, the 1928 editorial underlined female unity with the working class: “The October Revolution gave an opportunity to women – the most oppressed part of the proletariat – to participate in the building of socialism.” In the same article, the author calls on women to “actively participate in the implementation of priority tasks” such as industrialization,

collectivization, lowering of prices, austerity, and raising the cultural level of the country. A 1929 editorial drew attention to the ways women had benefitted from the Soviet regime: “In the Soviet Union the roots of women’s inequality are undercut. Women workers are involved in the management of the state on par with their husbands and brothers. The female worker receives the same salary as a male worker. Motherhood and childhood are protected like in no other country in the world.” The prose of the 1930 editorial is even more aggressive and is mostly filled with propagandistic slogans demanding that women participate in bringing the industrial and agricultural plans to fruition. The article that follows the editorial explains that International Women’s Day is nothing less than a day reminding all of the fight for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat, that this is a day of “Communist propaganda that forges class consciousness of female cadres.”

Such changes in Zhenskii Zhurnal’s rhetoric suggest that by the late 1920s, “controversies over the role of women under socialism came to an end.” The ideological construct of a new Soviet woman lost its earlier utopian overtones and finally acquired its emblematic features, most of which remained in place until the dissolution of the USSR. After Stalin’s takeover, women were forced to participate in all kinds of productive labor, and the role of worker became central to the identity of the new Soviet woman. Women were expected to become more masculine and to take on physical labor on par with men. Selflessness, modesty, and ability to perform hard work became the most extolled feminine qualities. The new Soviet woman’s attractiveness was measured by her physical strength and endurance while female beauty was defined by naturalness and unpretentiousness. Moreover, in order to minimize Soviet citizens’

---

distraction from the fulfillment of the new economic and political goals, the party pushed for gender-neutral standards in dress completely de-eroticizing female body.

At the same time, the new Soviet woman was the embodiment of conservative gender norms. Stalin declared that the idea of the family “withering away” was ideologically harmful and instead focused his gender politics on strengthening the family. Sexual relationships without formal registration of marriage became a deviation once again; moreover, party ideologists argued that reproduction was the only purpose of intercourse. However, the return to family values in the beginning of Stalin’s era did not imply that a woman could entirely dedicate herself to family hearth or motherhood. In her role as mother, the new Soviet woman kept only the reproductive function while her importance in the parenting process was secondary: the party argued for the primary role of the state and school in children’s education and socialization. After giving birth to a new Soviet worker, a woman was expected to promptly join the labor force again.

Thus, in the early 1930s, the identity of the new Soviet woman was first of all defined by the roles of comrade, worker, and social activist. By the middle of the decade, when a decrease in birth rates became threatening, the importance of the role of mother further complicated the popularized image of the new Soviet woman. According to Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, starting from the mid-1930s, the party propaganda presented female maternal obligations and participation in production as easily compatible and being equally necessary “for real womanhood.” Hence, the meaning of class and gender had been redefined again: female proletarian identity began to imply both being an equal partner of a man at work and serving his needs and the needs of his children at home. While this double burden remained the case for

---

many women since Stalin started his politics of proletarianization of housewives, the female ability to equally excel at performing domestic and work duties became glorified through the image of the new Soviet woman only toward the end of the 1930s.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


“O Kompanii Posvyashennoi Dnyu Pecahti: Pis’mo TsKVKP(b) ot 14 aprelia 1928 g.” In O Partiinoi i Sovetskoi Pechati, Radioveshanii i Televidenie; Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov, 156-157. Moskva: Mysl’, 1972.

“Ob Ocherednih Zadachah Partii po Rabote Sredi Rabotnits i Krestyanok (iz Postanovlenia Orgburo TsKVP(b) ot 1 Marta 1926g.)” In O Partiinoi i Sovetskoi Pechati, Radioveshanii i Televidenie: Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov, 141-142. Moskva: Mysl’, 1972.


