

Men in crisis in Russia: The role of domestic marginalisation

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Men are kind of confused after all these reforms and crises. Things get to them more than they do to a woman. She's more stable in the face of any crisis. (Unemployed single mother, 3-51-1)

Although women were initially expected to be the primary victims of economic reform in Russia, it soon became clear that reform was having a catastrophic affect on Russian men. They were dying earlier, drinking more, committing suicide in greater numbers than in the Soviet period;¹ they were, it seemed, proving significantly less able to adapt to new conditions than women (Burawoy *et al.* 2000; Kiblitckaya, 2000a). In retrospect, this is perhaps not so surprising: phenomena such as unemployment and falling real wages are known to pose a threat to male identity and self esteem in societies in which masculine self-definition is closely bound up with work. Since the collapse of communism Russia has undergone what has been called the deepest and most sustained recession in recorded world history (Clarke, 1999: 1) so various manifestations of distress were only to be expected among men whose identities, as will be seen, were primarily defined by their work. But it is not only male identity which is threatened by

¹ Male life expectancy declined from 64 in 1989 to 58 in 1994 (Goskomstat, 1998: 12) and had reached 59.8 by 1999 (Goskomstat, 2000: 71). Meanwhile, female life expectancy remained more constant declining from 74 in 1989 to 72.2 in 1999. The number of alcohol related deaths more than tripled between 1990 and 1995, with men approximately four times more likely to die from alcohol-related causes than women (Goskomstat, 1996:

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economic crisis in Russia. The argument pursued here is that the men who have suffered most during the reform era have seen themselves pushed to the margins of the most important spheres of Russian society – the workplace and the household. That is, it is not only a question of masculine identities being challenged by economic change: the worst afflicted men have faced marginalisation from mainstream society. This paper deals with the question of male marginality within the home; their relationship to work is a topic worthy of separate analysis. This idea has been developed using data drawn from a longitudinal qualitative research project on gender differences in employment strategy during economic transition in Russia.² Before moving on to discuss the data and findings, however, it is important to provide some historical background regarding the Soviet gender order.

The Soviet gender order

The Soviet state promoted and institutionalised a distinctive gender order in which the roles of men and women were defined according to the perceived needs of the communist state.³ As is well known, Bolshevik leaders of the 1920s had a deep distrust of the traditional peasant family which they saw, in the words of Nikolai Bukharin, as ‘the most conservative stronghold of the

88). Meanwhile, the male suicide rate increased by approximately two thirds in the same period; the female suicide rate showed only a marginal increase (*ibid.*: 17).

² This project, which is directed by Sarah Ashwin, is funded by INTAS, grant number INTAS-97: 20280. We would like to thank all those involved in this research for their valuable assistance, in particular Marina Ilyina, Irina Tartakovskaya and Sveta Yaroshenko. Sarah Ashwin would also like to thank Katie Willis and Simon Clarke for valuable advice.

³ The ‘gender order’ can be defined as the historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of masculinity and femininity in a given society (Connell, 1987: 98 – 9). For a more detailed exploration of the content and contradictions of the Soviet gender order, see Ashwin, 2000.

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old regime' (Lapidus, 1978: 83). In particular, Bolshevik leaders were suspicious of the traditional patriarch, for not only did relations within the patriarchal peasant household reproduce in microcosm Tsarist relations of domination, but men's private control of women within the household was also seen to obstruct the Party's access to half the population. The beginning of the Soviet era thus saw a legislative assault on male prerogative within the family, backed up by selective coercion (Kukhterin, 2000). Women, meanwhile, were to be integrated into the workforce and liberated from their domestic burden by the transfer of domestic functions from the private to the public sphere. Although women were drawn into the workforce in large numbers during Stalinist industrialisation, however, the proposed socialisation of domestic work never occurred, except to some extent in the realm of child care. The Bolsheviks never challenged the idea of domestic work as inalienably female, and women continued to be responsible for this. Meanwhile, their biological role as mothers was proclaimed to be 'the highest form of service to one's people and state' (Kaminskii, 1936, cited in Issupova, 2000: 33).

The resulting gender order, the institutionalisation of which was accomplished in the Stalin era, was one in which women were expected to combine the roles of worker, mother and household manager, while men were prescribed the far more limited role of serving the state as soldiers, workers and managers: the communist authorities placed very little emphasis on male roles in the domestic arena.⁴ Instead, the state assumed responsibility for the fulfilment of the

⁴ Although the ideological justifications may differ, this privileging of male public roles is something which occurs in many other developed societies. For example, within the context of the British welfare state, social policies for men have also 'prioritised their role as workers, citizens and soldiers or ex-soldiers, rather than

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traditional masculine roles of father and provider, by affording women access to paid work and according them ‘protection’ in their role as mothers. Men and women were, however, expected to live together in families – for after the dekulakisation⁵ and collectivisation of the peasantry there was little reason left to fear peasant patriarchs, and from the mid-1930s the family was accepted as the ‘primary cell’ of rapidly industrialising Soviet society. But despite this re-legitimisation of the family (which was supposed to be a functional unit in the Soviet polity, distinct from the private ‘bourgeois’ family) the domestic role of men was never seriously re-evaluated. This may have partly been due to a lingering distrust of private patriarchal power among the communist elite, but the main reason was that essentialist views of sexual difference were taken for granted not only in the ruling party, but also within wider society. Only in the 1980s was serious consideration given to the private role of men, when it was realised the falling birth rate in the Slavic republics might have something to do with the fact that women, the vast majority of whom worked full-time, received such scant assistance in the home (Attwood, 1990).

In this context, it is not surprising that work became so central to masculine identity and status. Men’s estrangement from domestic and caring work meant that they were only weakly

directly as fathers’ (Williams, 1998: 65). The main distinguishing feature of Soviet policy lay in the role prescribed for women. While policies which emphasise the public role of men are usually complemented by those which construct women as wives and mothers, the Soviet state defined women as worker-mothers (Ashwin, 2000). This is similar to the policy of the ‘weak breadwinner states’ such as Sweden (Lewis, 1992) but differs markedly from the policies of countries where the male breadwinner norm is more deeply entrenched such as Britain, Germany and Ireland. For a classification of breadwinner states see Lewis, 1992.

⁵ The expropriation of the richer peasants, the kulaks, who were sent to Siberia and other inhospitable regions of Russia during the collectivisation campaign 1929-34.

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integrated into the Soviet family: as Anna Rotkirch puts it, ‘The frailty of men’s presence and position in the family has been a constant ingredient in the everyday knowledge of Soviet people’ (2000: 111). Soviet social reproduction was matrifocal with everyday family life relying ‘heavily on cross-generational help and caregiving relations, taking place mostly between women. This further lessened the functional necessity of the husband and also helped to estrange him as a parent’ (ibid: 112). Thus, while the public position of men depended on their standing at work, the respect they were accorded within the household depended chiefly on their role as primary breadwinners. The latter role retained its importance as a component of masculine identities in the Soviet era since, although men were rarely the sole earners in families, they tended to earn more than women (Kiblitckaya, 2000a). In this sense, a man was primarily bound to the household by his work. Meanwhile, the centrality of work in men’s lives was further compounded by the absence of an autonomous civil society, and the lack of opportunities for public sociability beyond the workplace in Soviet Russia. As Sergei Kukhterin puts it, for men unable to realise themselves in the world of work ‘there was little on offer’ (2000: 85).

The Data

This paper is based on data from an on-going research project designed to examine gender differences in employment strategies through longitudinal qualitative research which traces the labour market activity of specially selected groups of men and women through a consecutive series of semi-structured deep interviews. The four groups selected are defined by a series of distinct labour market transitions at the beginning of the research. Equal numbers of men and women (thirty in each group) have been selected and are being interviewed at six month

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intervals for a period of two years. The research on the four different groups is being carried out in four separate cities. The groups are: new entrants to the labour market, graduating from a university and a technical training institute (in Ul'yanovsk); those confronting the labour market involuntarily as a result of the acute financial difficulties of their employer (in Moscow); those who are unemployed and seeking work through the employment service (in Samara), and those whose incomes are so low that they qualify for state social assistance (in Syktyvkar). This paper is based on a detailed analysis of the first three rounds of interviews with the male respondents from Samara and Syktyvkar. These respondents were chosen since they had by definition acknowledged that they had problems in the labour market through their act of registration as poor or unemployed. Although the primary focus of our research was labour market behaviour, the interviews provide ample material on which to base the analysis presented here since respondents were asked questions in each interview regarding the domestic allocation of labour and relations with other members of the household and/or family. Since Russian flats are small, it was not always possible to conduct interviews in private. Interviewers took advantage of the presence of other household members to elicit additional information, but also attempted to conduct at least part of the interview away from the ears of others. Each interview is referred to by three numbers: the first indicates the city;⁶ the second, the respondent, and the third, the stage of the research. When percentages of those holding particular attitudes are cited they refer to the sample as a whole.

In addition to this, the article also refers to findings from the 1998 ISITO household survey. This was carried out in Samara, Syktyvkar, Kemerovo and Lyubersty, a large town

⁶ Numbers 1-4: Moscow, Ul'yanovsk, Samara, and Syktyvkar respectively.

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near Moscow. Random samples were drawn in each city and a total of 4000 households and 6000 individuals were surveyed. For more details see Clarke, 1999: 6-7.

Male marginality in the post-Soviet household

To return to the argument of the introduction, it is widely accepted that problems in the workplace tend to have a more dramatic impact on men than on women. The reasons for this are very well expressed by Lillian B. Rubin in her classic study of the US working class in the early 1990s (1994):

For most women identity is multifaceted, which means that the loss of a job isn't equivalent to the loss of self. No matter how invested a woman may be in her work, no matter how much her sense of self and competence are connected to it, work remains only one part of identity – a central part perhaps, especially for a professional woman, but still only a part. She's a mother, wife, friend, daughter, sister – all valued facets of the self, none wholly obscuring the other.... For a man, however, work is likely to be connected to the love of self. Work isn't just what he does, it's deeply linked to who he is (Rubin, 1994: 104).

Interestingly enough, our male respondents, when asked about the relative impact of unemployment on men and women, made similar assessments, as can be seen in the following quotations:

Now it's hard for both. Now you won't last long on one pay packet... Probably in purely psychological terms it's harder for men. A woman, you see, she's all the same sort of at home, she's got more work to do in the home than a man. But a man's only got heavy work, or a hobby if he takes one up afterwards. Knitting, sewing or something... (4-52-3)

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A man takes it harder. Because he ought to bring in the money, you see. It means both moral and financial difficulties. A woman is generally speaking a housewife, and if she's a housewife all well and good, but if it's a man then he's a househusband [*domokhozyain*]. If a man supports her, then why not? But for him it's harder in purely psychological terms if he can't feed the family and on top of that he has to sit at home. (4-53-3)

According to these men, women cope better with unemployment than men because a woman, even if she works, is also 'all the same sort of at home', a 'housewife'⁷ – that is, as Rubin stresses, she has other sources of identity to fall back on, accomplishment as a mother or household manager acting as a form of compensation for labour market problems.⁸ At the same time, however, the comments of these men do not just concern self realisation and identity. They are also about having a role, a *place* in the home: while women are seen as being 'at home' in the home, men feel they have no place there. This is highlighted by the comment that if a man is at home 'then he's a *domokhozyain*'. The word '*domokhozyain*' sounds strange in this context. Househusband is an inadequate translation because in English this refers to a position which is gaining social acceptability, whereas the respondent uses the word to draw attention to the self-evident inappropriateness of a man being confined to what is a woman's place. It is this sense of double exclusion – from work and from the home – which we think underlies the particular problems experienced by Russian men who are either unemployed or have endured a sharp drop in status within the labour market.

⁷ Both the respondents quoted are married to women in full-time work.

⁸ In this sense, Soviet women's 'double burden' of work and home, although much bemoaned by both Soviet and Western sociologists before the collapse of communism, may paradoxically have made it easier for women to withstand the privations of the transition era.

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What underlies these men's sense that they do not have a place in the home? The definition of the domestic sphere as feminine is so commonplace in modern societies that this may seem to be a question hardly worth asking. But as writers such as Jane Lewis (1992) and Birgit Pfau-Effinger (1998; 1999) have shown, the gender orders of superficially similar European countries differ quite significantly with regard to issues such as the norms and practices surrounding breadwinning, motherhood, parenthood and childhood. Thus, in order to understand the relationship of Russian men to the domestic sphere it is important to explore the precise nature of the prevailing gender order, in particular with regard to breadwinning and domestic labour.

As argued above, the Soviet man was supposed to devote himself to work within the public sphere – he was not to be diverted from the higher task of building communism by petty domestic concerns. Has anything changed now that the state no longer rigidly prescribes gender roles from above? So far the main elements of the Soviet gender order are being reproduced in post-communist Russia despite the collapse of the state which underwrote them. Most importantly as far as the current argument is concerned, Soviet norms and practices with regard to breadwinning and household management are being actively maintained by both men and women.

The dual-earner family in which the man is the chief breadwinner and the woman takes primary responsibility for household management remains the norm in Russia.⁹ Predictions that,

⁹ In the ISITO household survey both husband and wife worked in 72% of households headed by couples of working age, in 18% the husband worked while the wife did not, in 8% the wife worked but the husband did not, while in the remaining 3% neither partner was in work.

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once liberated from the state injunction to work, women would gladly return to the home have proved unfounded. Women have not voluntarily left the labour force in significantly greater numbers than men: the reduction in overall economic activity rates is accounted for by the withdrawal from labour market activity of the young and those of pension age, and only to a very limited degree by the exit of women from the labour force (Clarke, 1999: 118). Women's economic activity rate fell by the almost exactly the same as men's between 1992 and 1998: 8.3%, as against 8.1% for men (Goskomstat, 1999: 8).¹⁰ This is not surprising: quite apart from the financial incentives for women to remain in work, studies have repeatedly shown that work constitutes a crucial part of Russian women's sense of identity; provides them with sense of meaning, of being needed and socially useful, and is a source of companionship and support, even when the work itself is unpleasant and provides little intrinsic satisfaction (Ashwin and Bowers, 1997; Gruzdeva, 1995; Kiblitckaya, 2000b; Zdravomyslova, 1996). Eighty per cent of our female respondents said that they would continue to work if they had the financial possibility of not working, as against 72 per cent of male respondents. While they have retained their presence in the labour force, however, women's secondary status at work has been preserved. For example, it is estimated that in the Soviet era women earned on average 65-70% of men's wages (Lapidus 1988: 95) and during the transition era, the wage gap seems to have remained more or less constant with women estimated to earn between 63% (Arabsheibani and Lau 1999) and 70% (Newell and Reilly 1996) of men's wages. Meanwhile, there is some evidence of changes in the pattern of job segregation by sex – some research

¹⁰ Meanwhile, since its introduction in 1992 the Russian Labour Force Survey has shown the male unemployment rate to be slightly higher than the female.

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suggests that men are moving into areas such as banking and accounting, which were female dominated and low-status in the Soviet era, but are now highly lucrative (Monousova 1998) – but there is little evidence of a reduction of overall segregation. Thus, in a period of economic flux the relative position of men and women within the labour market has remained more or less constant.

In line with this, Soviet norms regarding work and family still command wide acceptance. Thus, both men and women consider that men should perform the role of main breadwinner. Seventy two per cent of our female respondents thought that men should take primary (but not sole) responsibility for providing for the family, as did 79 per cent of male respondents. The corollary of this is that women are expected to take primary responsibility for the home. Sixty five per cent of our female respondents, and 47 per cent of male, thought that women should bear primary responsibility for running the household. Meanwhile, as will be seen, the 43 per cent of men who said that men and women should share responsibility for running the household tended to envisage a very strict division of labour in which the majority of domestic tasks were defined as female.

Why should this model in which the man has the main responsibility for earning and the woman for running the household create the preconditions for the marginalisation of men within the household when they endure a drop in earnings or unemployment? To understand this it is necessary to take a closer look at the precise division of labour within Russian households. Although nearly half of our male respondents said that responsibility for running the household should be joint, their vision of their role tended to be rather limited, as can be seen in the following exchange:

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Who should take primary responsibility for running the household?

Both should take responsibility for running the household.

What's your view of how the tasks should be divided up?

There are some kind of unofficial male duties, anything concerning the maintenance of the flat, repairs and other things like that. But as regards the comfort of the flat, the design of the flat – that's up to the wife. (3-22-1)

Women are often referred to as the creators of 'comfort' – a role which, unlike 'maintenance', requires regular tidying, cleaning and washing. Attempts to question why women should shoulder most of the domestic burden when both partners work often result in confusion, as can be seen in the following exchange:

Who should take primary responsibility for providing for the family?

Both [the man and the woman]...

Who should take primary responsibility for running the household?

The wife.

So a husband and wife should earn the same, but she alone should take responsibility for running the household?

Of course, who on earth else?

And why?

She's a more responsible person than a man.... A woman is by her nature more responsible for the family.

Why?

Well how should I know? ... that's how it's supposed to be [*tak polozheno*].

Says who?

That's how things have been set up [*tak zavedeno*].

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By whom? In the Domostroi¹¹ do you mean?...

Yes, yes [laughs]. (4-53-2)

Studies of the domestic division of labour in Russia have repeatedly shown that women do the vast majority of housework, while men confine themselves to tasks which they perceive to have a masculine character.¹² In ‘private’ (wooden) houses without modern conveniences such as running water there is a significant amount of such ‘male’ work to be done: water must be fetched, the boiler lit and tended to, while in rural areas added to these duties are tasks connected with domestic food production such as maintaining outhouses and slaughtering animals.¹³ In modern flats, however, which is where the majority of Russians live,¹⁴ the only work that men see as unequivocally their own is carrying out repairs and, in some cases, taking out the rubbish. As one respondent acknowledged:

A man is a man [*muzhik est' muzhik*], and where there's dishes to be washed up and cooking and clearing up to be done – that's a woman's job. And then in the town, of course, it's for a woman to clear up, wash and cook – that's all up to the woman. In the town you haven't even got the upkeep of the house and garden, or any animal husbandry. But, look, in the countryside – there you've got the upkeep of the house and

¹¹ The Domostroi was a sixteenth century manual on household regulation whose dictates were implicitly endorsed by both church and state. The text proclaimed the main virtues of a good wife to be docility and obedience, and recommended the beating of those who erred.

¹² The 1998 ISITO household survey found that in over 90% of households women were responsible for tasks such as cooking, cleaning and washing. In over 80 per cent of households they were responsible for shopping, while men were responsible for carrying out repairs in over 90 per cent of households.

¹³ For a description of the work involved in living in a ‘private’, wooden house see Ashwin, 1999: 40–43.

¹⁴ No all-Russian statistics are available on the proportion of the population living in the so-called ‘private sector’ of wooden houses. A recent study of housing in Syktyvkar, however, estimated that 7.8 per cent of the city's population lived in private wooden houses (Burawoy *et al.*, 1999: 19). Over 90 per cent of such houses do not have modern conveniences (p. 39).

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garden and perhaps animals, there you won't get by without a man. There in the countryside of course the man plays the primary role in the household and the woman – she's a helper. (4-49-2)

As this respondent all but admits, given the currently accepted domestic division of labour, men are virtually redundant within the typical urban Russian household.

What of household management and decision-making? This is another area in which the Soviet legacy reveals itself: the Bolshevik attack on traditional patriarchal prerogatives has meant that men's ability to enforce their will within the household has been significantly reduced. Easy access to paid work, divorce and the social acceptability of the latter have all strengthened women's bargaining position. Thus, whereas in many societies women's responsibility for the performance of domestic labour is not associated with decision-making power,¹⁵ in Russia women take the leading role in household management, while they also tend to run the household budget (Clarke, forthcoming). Of course, gender power dynamics are complex, and the above is not meant to imply that Soviet or post-Soviet Russian women never suffer(ed) under the yoke of tyrannical husbands. None the less, the Russian household is generally female-managed, and, some would argue (Rotkirch, 2000, Lytkina 2001), dominated.

In spite of this, many men aspire to the role of 'head' or 'master' of the family. Close inspection of this ambition, however, reveals that it largely represents a desire to be accorded symbolic

¹⁵ See, for example, Benería and Roldán (1987) on household dynamics in Mexico. Here, the obligation of working class women to show their husbands 'respect' does actually limit their freedom of action. For example, Mexican working class husbands, in contrast to their Russian counterparts, exercise a significant amount of control over women's ability to dispose of their own labour power.

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respect rather than to achieve day-to-day control of the household and its members.¹⁶

Moreover, this position of respect is seen as being conditional on men fulfilling their obligations as main breadwinner, as can be seen in the following quotations:

In principle he [the man] is responsible for maintaining and providing for the family. The master of the family [khozyain sem'i] shouldn't be the person who shouts and gives orders, but the person who can be the master – who can mend something, bring in money. The head of the family must be the master of his household.... It's difficult to be a leader with three kopeks. (3-37-1)

In any family money is the most important thing – whoever brings in more money, whoever is the breadwinner – that person is the head. It's fair, I think. (4-16-1)

Even when a man succeeds as an amateur repairman and breadwinner, however, his position as head of the family is a precarious one. For a male 'head' of the family, though he may be the chief financier of family life, is often completely disengaged from the day-to-day operation of his household. As one respondent, to whom we will return, explained:

I brought home the money and gave it to my wife. Of course, if [we were buying] something big, then yes: we discussed it in advance, kind of saved up. And where the rest went – I didn't poke my nose into that business. I took my dinner money and that was all. Perhaps that was bad really. Now I regret it. You need to kind of take an interest, it brings you closer together, makes the family more solid, than when she discusses everything

¹⁶ This is almost exclusively the case among our male respondents, though we do have one respondent (3-07, a would-be entrepreneur) who adheres strongly to 'neo-traditionalist' ideas regarding gender relations which have recently gained ground among some New Russian men. These men seek to exhibit their new-found wealth by keeping their wives at home. Although this practice has gained attention for its novelty in Russian society, at present it remains very much a minority phenomenon. For more details see Zdravomyslova, 1996, Meshcherkina, 2000.

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with her mother and I'm just the person who puts the money on the bedside table. That is, there wasn't any solidarity. (3-15-1)

This quotation highlights very clearly that not only does a man's standing within the household depend on his role as breadwinner, but that the latter is often the *only* role he plays in the family. In this sense, a man is linked to the household by his monetary contribution and little else.

In a context of economic collapse, this is rather a precarious position. Unemployment, falling real wages and wage delays have all undermined the ability of men to perform as providers. Indeed, some of our most demoralised male respondents perceived the male breadwinner norm to be breaking down altogether. As one such respondent put it:

Overall, I feel sorry for women – men don't love them properly. They can't provide them with anything. A women is forced to be constantly waiting for something from a man, and then there's the snotty children running around, always wanting to eat. And what about him? He can't find work, and if he finds it he doesn't get paid. (4-22-2)

The vulnerability of men in this situation is paradoxically increased by the strong attachment of Russian women to the labour market. Although this implies those living with or married to women are likely to have a source of financial support, it also means these that women are capable of providing for themselves. And women who are confident in their own earning ability can come to view non-earning men as superfluous: that is, within the current Russian gender order women 'are pushed to use men as instruments in their life-strategies, as sources of income for the realisation of their plans.... [I]n order to retain their position in the family men need a good income' (Lytkina, 2001: 64). It could therefore be argued that working class Russian men need women more than the other way round: certainly those women who have divorced during

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the lifetime of the research have seen this as a joyful liberation, whereas our male respondents, as will be seen, have been devastated by it.

When the money stops coming in...

So how do men respond when their position as main breadwinner is challenged, either through declining earnings or job loss? The following sections explore not only the responses of men, but also the more complicated and interesting question of the constraints they face. For although this study proceeds from a non-determinist understanding of gender as ‘something evoked, created and sustained day-by-day’ (Thompson and Walker, 1989: 865), the pressures to ‘do gender’ (West and Zimmerman, 1987) in the accepted way are enormous. As West and Zimmerman point out, while in one sense ‘it is individuals who “do” gender ... it is a situated doing, carried out in the virtual or real presence of others who are presumed to be oriented to its production’ (p.126). In working class Russia individuals doing gender are acting not so much on a ‘presumption’ of the normative orientations of others as a cast-iron guarantee.

The most obvious question to ask is: do men who lose their position as breadwinners attempt to compensate for this by taking on a larger share of domestic work? The most indicative group as far as this question is concerned are non-working married men. Data from the 1998 ISITO survey provide a clear answer to this question.

Hours spent on housework in working age couples (n=1275 couples)

	Average weekly hours of housework, husband.	Average weekly hours of housework, wife.
Both work (n=866)	8.7	23.9

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Only husband works (n=245)	8.7	35.9
Only wife works (n=128)	15.4	22.1
Neither work (n=36)	12.8	34.0
Mean	9.5	26.3

This shows that men do less than seven hours a week more housework if they are not employed and are being supported by their wives. Non-working women, meanwhile, do on average twelve more hours than their working counterparts, who themselves already devote on average almost three times as many hours to housework as men in households where both partners work. Even in the most extreme case where a non-working man is being supported by his wife, he does not in general ‘compensate’ for this by significantly increasing his hours working in the household.¹⁷ These quantitative findings are supported by our qualitative evidence. A couple of our respondents said that they had ended up doing more housework as a result of being at home, but it was clear from their comments that the change was not very significant. As one of them, whose wife was working, put it, ‘If she’s tired, I cook. When she’s not so busy she cooks and clears up the flat’ (3-22-1). Others had, by their own account, refused even to make a token gesture in this direction, as can be seen from the following exchange with an unemployed man who was being supported by his wife:

[My wife] runs the household.

Who cooks?

¹⁷ This is in line with research in other countries such as the UK, which suggests that following unemployment men’s contribution to housework increases only marginally (Binns and Mars, 1984; Morris, 1988, 1990; Pahl, 1984; Waddington *et al.* 1998).

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My wife, of course.

Who does the shopping?

My wife....

Don't you participate at all in domestic matters?

Not at all, I don't even clean the floor.

What do you do all day?

Sleep on that sofa over there (3-60-2).

This retreat to the sofa is a common reaction of men to problems in the public sphere, and one which gives a physical expression to their disconnection from domestic affairs.

The most extreme form of male marginalisation from the household occurs when women simply leave 'failed' breadwinners. Indeed, three of our respondents had been left by their wives after the financial balance of the relationship changed. As their reflections reveal, all of them attributed this to their failure to live up to the role of breadwinner:

As soon as that *perestroika* [began], money became tight, I already couldn't support her.... And then I already couldn't give her money as I did before, [and] she, clearly, had second thoughts. (3-2-01)

A man should earn more, right? Well that's also my policy. Our recent disagreements – I've broken up with my wife – started up because when I got 190 [roubles] at the factory, she got 82, but then everything changed and she began to get one and a half times more, and began to reproach me, while my mother-in-law urged her on, and the result was those differences between us. Because of the fact that I started to earn less than her at the factory. Continual reproaches. So we split up. (3-15-2)

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For the first time in 53 years this winter I found out what hunger is, just real hunger. It just worked out that the benefits that I got from the employment service were reduced to the minimum... My wife [pronounced very slowly and unwillingly], well the thing is, I didn't want to talk about this topic, [but] I must acknowledge that she couldn't stand it, and now we're not divorced, but she's living with her mother, so that right now I'm living on my own. (3-22-2)

Of course, not all men who fail to perform as main breadwinners are left in this way. Wives' reactions are influenced by a range of factors such as the quality of the relationship prior to the change in circumstances, the husband's response to his new situation, and possibly the importance of the role of breadwinner to the husband's identity (Ashwin, 2001). The decisiveness of the wives considered above was also no doubt conditioned by the fact that none of them had young children at the time of their separations.¹⁸ Nonetheless, the cases starkly highlight the potential consequences of men's weak integration into the household. As the case of respondent 3-15 shows, simply being 'the person who puts the money on the bedside table' leaves a man very exposed: if his financial contribution comes to be seen as insufficient he risks domestic 'redundancy'.

Degrees of freedom and constraint

The above might seem to suggest that men are authors of their own exclusion from the household. If failed breadwinners do not take on other duties in the household, then it is not surprising if they come to be seen as superfluous. But how far are men able to take on an active role within the household? This section will consider the obstacles to them taking on what are

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traditionally seen as ‘women’s’ duties, while the following section will look at the ‘masculine’ occupations available within the domestic arena.

First of all, the degree of discomfort experienced by men forced to perform what they see as ‘women’s work’ should not be underestimated. The association between domesticity and femininity in Russian popular consciousness is very strong, and disruptions to prevailing norms can be very disturbing for those involved. This can be strikingly illustrated by reference to the only man in our sample who has adopted a thoroughly ‘feminine’ role. He is a widower with a young son, and he has taken it upon himself to maintain to the letter his late wife’s standards in the household. Although he enjoys and takes comfort from his closeness to his son, he does not find his new position easy:

Judge for yourself, you see, at home in the evening when there’s a mother and a father, then how does the father usually reply to any question or request? ‘Go to mummy’. Not because he’s a bad father: he’s got his responsibilities and tasks, and mummy – hers. She’s closer to the children, to their upbringing. And here, where there isn’t a mother, I do everything myself, and it’s very hard, well, for a man [*muzhik*] – it’s just really [hard]. Sometimes, I give you my word, you don’t understand who you are – a woman or a man [*baba ili muzhik*]. (4-14-3)

Indeed, not only does the respondent sometimes have doubts about his gender identity, the Russian sociologist who interviews him also finds the contrast between his behaviour and his sex hard to process at times. Interviews with this respondent always involve long descriptions of ‘women’s’ work, and hence, the interviewer confided, she finds herself ‘thinking he’s going to

¹⁸ Respondent 3-02’s wife had been unable to have children, 3-15 had one son who was in his mid-teens at the time of his parents’ separation, while 3-22’s only son was in his late 20s.

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start talking about himself in the feminine.’¹⁹ In a climate in which gender difference is relentlessly naturalised, performing a non-traditional role presents major challenges to the masculine or feminine identity of the individual concerned.

Meanwhile, the case of the only inactive or unemployed male respondent in the sample considered here who had taken over a significant part of the housework fully supports findings from the UK, US and Australia that women often do not welcome male incursions into ‘their’ territory. This is seen to compromise domestic standards, and, more importantly, represents a threat to female power (Morris, 1990: 34; Russell, 1987; Lamb *et al.*, 1987). The respondent concerned is a former pilot who has been granted early retirement. Despite the financial need his family is in, he does not want to look for work since this would involve doing work of far lower status than that to which he has become accustomed.²⁰ Instead, he prefers to play the role of ‘housewife’,²¹ and considers himself to have swapped roles with his wife who is supporting the family through her work as a junior research chemist at a regional research institute. Although during the second interview his wife declared herself to be satisfied with this situation since it meant her husband could keep an eye on their two adolescent sons, by the third stage of the research it was clear that not only was she finding this role reversal stressful, but also that she saw it as far less complete than did her husband. The following exchange neatly captures the couple’s different perceptions of their situation:

¹⁹ Russian adjectives follow the gender of their noun, while Russian verbs in the past tense have different endings according to the gender of their subject.

²⁰ Working while receiving a pension is common in Russia – especially since retirement ages are low. The respondent concerned was born in 1952, and his basic pension is very low: less than \$20 a month.

²¹ He always referred to himself using this feminine term.

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Respondent: At home I do practically all the female tasks: I'm the only one who washes the dishes, I do practically all the cooking, I do the floor.

Wife: Yes he helps do the women's work...

Respondent: What do you mean 'helps'? I do it all! I only don't do the washing. Here I'm not a specialist. (4-02-3)

One of the symptoms of this wife's discomfiture was the fact that she had developed a nervous skin complaint. At the time of the third interview she was supposed to be spending time in hospital in order to recover. Despite having a 'housewife' at home, however, she did not feel able to leave him to run the household in her absence and kept returning from hospital:

All the same I feel uneasy, for example, today I got here and N.'s not here, he just got back from his mother's, what's more, after a drink or two, and it's already after eight.

Do you often come home?

Not every day, but I try, all the same, you want to clear up the house and keep an eye on them.

Is that with permission, or secretly?

Of course, I don't ask the doctors... I ask permission from the nurses, you see all women understand that men need to have an eye kept on them. (4-02-3).

The respondent's somewhat helpless comment about not being a 'specialist' in washing clothes suggests that his wife might have reason to feel that she retains ultimate responsibility for running the household, but it is also likely that she is reluctant to cede control of what she regards as her domain. As she explains, 'all women' understand that men need to be supervised in the household: that is, it is not socially acceptable to leave men to their own devices, to let them decide what needs doing. A woman who did this would be failing to do gender appropriately.

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There are thus major problems involved in men attempting to compensate for loss of the status of breadwinner by doing more work in the home. First, this is unlikely to be a satisfying solution for men concerned: the experience of doing women's work is only likely to compound their sense of being 'unmanned' by their loss of work or earnings. Second, women can also find men's encroachment on 'their' sphere of work uncomfortable. That is, it is no 'compensation' but can even add insult to injury by compounding the destabilisation of accepted gender relations within marriage. Meanwhile, research in other contexts has shown that women's attempts to retain control of the domestic realm can be dispiriting for men who do attempt this transformation (Morris, 1990: 33). In short, the pressures discouraging men from playing an a leading role in the household are very strong, and crucially, they emanate from both men and women.

Alternatives to work-centric forms of masculine self-definition

Are there any socially legitimate 'male' activities with which unemployed or economically inactive men can replace paid work? As already mentioned, the small minority of men living in the 'private sector' or countryside have the opportunity to occupy themselves with a whole range of 'masculine' work. Among the respondents considered in this article, there are two cases of men carving out what can be considered as 'male' alternatives to paid work. One, a former engineer, preferred economic inactivity to compromising his professional standards and, like the pilot considered above, was dependent on his wife. He lived in a house which was, according to him, over 100 years old, and required major repairs. This provided him with a welcome alternative to work, and also a means of justifying his decision not to work to his wife. As he explained:

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Your home – that’s absolutely fundamental! My wife and I decided, what if we hired someone? But if we hired someone we worked it out – I won’t earn that kind of money!

There’s simply no alternative. (3-09-2).

But while the respondent himself was happy with his new occupation in life it was clear that his wife, like that of the pilot, was feeling dissatisfied by the third stage of our research. Meanwhile, the respondent had nearly finished his repairs and was being faced with the prospect of nothing to do:

My wife – she understands everything, but I think that there’s just a while before it starts.

Because, it’s understandable, it gets to her. She gets up in the morning, hurries to work, and I don’t have to. Her friend comes round with her daughter and asks about it – and she’s not comfortable about the fact that, yeh, all’s not quite right. She feels uneasy. But at the moment she’s quiet. There is friction. Yes, I’ll get a job. (3-09-3)

Whether or not he will look for work is another question, but the example again highlights the strength of the male breadwinner norm. Even though this respondent had found a useful means of contributing to the household, his wife still felt uncomfortable in front of other women. Her husband was failing to fulfil his masculine ‘duties’, and this reflected badly on her (the ideal Russian wife would either cajole him back to work or leave him).

The second example is provided by a former head designer in a construction institute. At the first stage of our study he was unemployed, while his wife, an endocrinologist, was still practicing as a doctor even though she was past retirement age and on her pension. By the second interview, the respondent had also reached retirement age and was receiving a pension approximately equal to his wife’s wages and pension combined. He had found a rewarding alternative to work in grandparenthood. As he explained:

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I already haven't worked for about one and a half years, you see. At first I missed it, well, my rhythm sort of changed. But now I'm used to it, it even seems that I haven't got any time. I get up, clear up a little bit, then by the time I've been out with my grandson it's already lunch-time. And so with going here and there the day is filled with something.

And has anything changed in your family?

The only change is that I've got another granddaughter.... Before I went to get milk once a week, and now it's two or three times. I've started spending more time with my grandson. Now it's got warm he and I go out for about three to three and a half hours nearly every day. (3-49-2)

Since this respondent's response to economic activity did not appear to cause any tension in his family this can be judged as the most successful attempt to sustain masculine identity in the absence of paid work considered here. But it should be stressed that his wife's acceptance of his new way of life is almost certainly conditioned by the respondent's status as a pensioner. Retirement (though not necessarily early retirement) is a socially legitimate form of economic inactivity, and in this case one that provides a reasonable income.²² Meanwhile, though it is usually women who become professional grandparents after retirement, being an active grandfather does not represent a major deviation from locally accepted norms of masculinity.

As can be seen from these examples, it is very hard for men to define a place and occupation within the household which does not violate local norms of masculinity. Both the respondents discussed above found themselves in particular circumstances in which it was

²² This respondent's position differs from that of the pilot (4-02) considered above in that he has no dependents living at home. The pilot has two sons for whose further or higher education he and his wife will need to pay.

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possible for them to find a satisfying alternative to paid work. But far from all men have such choices available to them. In such cases the outlook is very bleak. Even when their wives choose to support them, such men are vulnerable to depression and alcoholism. Meanwhile, in cases where 'failed' breadwinners are excluded from the household the risk of demoralisation is even greater. This can be illustrated by reference to the three cases of men left by their wives referred to above. Even though all these respondents had found work by the second or third stage of our study (in every case, work that represented a compromise in terms of professional level and pay), all of them were experiencing psychological problems by the third stage of the study. The most dramatic case, 3-22, was exhibiting signs of mental illness, and behaved in an unpredictable and intimidating fashion during the interview. Meanwhile, 3-02 was working at a factory on appalling terms and conditions, and 3-15 had accepted a job as a watchman for 500 r a month, without registration of his labour book. Both of them were distressed and demoralised, as their comments reveal:

I'm going under. I'm going under. You see, I can't even speak – my tongue's trembling.

Last night I thought that my heart was just going to give out.

You're having health problems?

Both with my health, and from a moral point view. Work's getting to me. Things are getting worse and worse. I've started to drink. The strong stuff. I've stopped feeding myself. I didn't sleep at all last night.

Things are that bad at work?

I drink at work, and after work. The main thing is that in this situation I've been driven [to a point where] I've lost everything. I have to ease the stress somehow. (3-02-3).

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And in general, what do you think of this work?

Not much. I'm getting more stupid with every day there, I'm becoming more and more degraded [*Ya degradiruyu i degradiruyu*]. (3-15-3)

Such 'degradation' is not at all surprising. As 3-02 put it, such men have 'lost everything'. Since they have been marginalised at work and in the household, there is little hope of recuperation. In this situation, vodka provides by far the most accessible 'solution', albeit a temporary and treacherous one. In some cases alcohol simply acts as an anesthetic, while in others, when drinking takes place in groups, it offers what Karen Pyke calls a 'compensatory' form of masculine self-definition (Pyke, 1996: 538). Such compensatory forms of masculinity are characterised by the risks they pose to male health, and also serve to intensify the social exclusion of those who engage in them.

Conclusion

The argument presented here is that loss of work or status at work does not only threaten working class male identity, but also faces men with a double marginalisation from both work and household. Such social exclusion can have a dramatic impact on those afflicted, and provides part of the explanation for the demoralisation of men at the lower end of the labour market which has been such a prominent feature of the Russian transition.

Although we have argued that the problems afflicting Russian men cannot merely be seen as a crisis of gender identity, however, the pressure to 'do gender' appropriately shapes the *form* of male social exclusion by constraining the choices that men feel are open to them. A good example of this is provided by the case of respondent 309 who devoted himself to

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domestic repairs in preference to seeking paid work. This respondent confessed himself to be very content within the home environment, though ironically he did so within the context of an assertion of 'traditional' values. Criticising the Soviet policy of full female employment, he opined, 'Ideally a woman should stay at home. It's because of our poverty – they just set things up like that and they stayed like that for all those 70 years. *If I were a woman, I wouldn't ever leave the house – I am by my nature a home bird [domosed]*' (3-09-1, emphasis added). Seeing as he was a man, however, he could only legitimise his position as a '*domosed*' through strenuous masculine activity. Being a home-centred man is, as we have seen, not an option for the vast majority of Russian working class men.

Meanwhile, precisely because female identity is tied up with the household, women may find it difficult to accept male incursions onto their territory. Lamb *et al.*'s comments regarding motherhood are equally applicable to other domestic duties: 'As long as motherhood remains a central aspect of self-definition for many women and as long as prospects for fulfillment in the employment arena remain uncertain, many are likely to fear abdication or partial abdication of responsibility for parental care' (1987: 115). Many Russian women claim to want greater male involvement in the domestic sphere (Ashwin, forthcoming; Kiblitckaya, 2000b). But, as has been seen, women generally accept primary responsibility for running the household and, correspondingly, what they tend to want from men is 'help' (in the tasks which they deem to be necessary and to the standards which they define). The subordinate role of assistant is unlikely to appeal to men, however, and certainly does nothing to shore up their masculine identities. Thus women, though they frequently lament and suffer as a result of male disengagement from the household, inadvertently contribute to its cause.

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The combination of the work-centric character of Soviet society, and the domestic power of Russian women, means that Russian men are particularly weakly integrated into the household. But male marginality within the household is also a feature of other developed societies. Here too the 'crisis of the male breadwinner' can be seen as stemming as much from the lack of alternative means of self-definition outside work, as from a lack of well-paid work for men.²³ There is no easy solution to this problem. The weakness of the feminist movement in Russia means that essentialist ideas regarding gender are particularly prevalent and tenacious, but even in societies where feminism has a stronger cultural influence, the pressure to assume particular forms of masculine identity can be very powerful, especially in working class communities. This makes the problematisation of men's role in the household even more important.

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²³ It would be interesting to compare Russian men with working class Afro-Caribbean men who in many contexts also have a precarious attachment to the household.

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TABLE 1

Hours spent on housework in working age couples (n=1275 couples)

	Average weekly hours of housework, husband.	Average weekly hours of housework, wife.
Both work (n=866)	8.7	23.9
Only husband works (n=245)	8.7	35.9
Only wife works (n=128)	15.4	22.1
Neither work (n=36)	12.8	34.0
Mean	9.5	26.3