9 Changes in the Status of Women in Russia and Estonia

Elina Haavio-Mannila and Kaisa Kauppinen

Introduction

Women's life was greatly influenced by perestroika and glasnost, policies which were proclaimed in the former Soviet Union in 1985. Due to the policy of free expression, public critical discussions took place about women's social status, their heavy double role in the workplace and at home, and the workplace climate that favoured men. In Soviet society, the question of the status of women was considered resolved since, officially, women and men had equal rights, obligations and opportunities for self-realization. Great optimism that quick changes and improvements would be forthcoming was attached to the early phase of perestroika.

There were, however, no rapid improvements in the status of women due to the economic crisis in Russia and the other Soviet countries. There were even changes for the worse: after the quotas guaranteeing equal participation in the political system had been abolished, female participation in the processes of political decision-making declined. In addition, their share of the work load was further increased by economic insecurity and problems of everyday life.

Despite the egalitarian socialist ideology and attempts to further gender equality in education, the Soviet woman was not at any stage
in the history of the USSR equal to the man. The female work force was unevenly distributed in the different fields of production; women were underrepresented in politics and positions of authority, and within the family the woman was held responsible for the overall care of the family and its members. Open discussion about the status of women and the relations between the genders is now possible. Women are bringing up issues relating to, among other things, infant mortality, abortion, and problems of health and social welfare.

According to Anastasia Posadskaya (1993b), there was a gender delusion attached to perestroika. Many factors related to the transition process affected the genders differently and were partly disadvantageous to women. Resolving these questions will be a real challenge to post-socialist society. Nowadays, the expressions 'equality', 'women's emancipation', and 'solidarity' have, in common usage, primarily negative connotations. They are associated with the former policy, in which equality prevailed in theory but not in practice. Their use is problematic on account of their politically loaded meaning. The vocabulary must be renewed, according to Posadskaya, or the expressions must get new contents.

This chapter deals with the circumstances and activities of Russian and Estonian women at work, in the family and in politics. In addition to Russian, Estonian and American research, also the results of the research work obtained during the years of bilateral scientific cooperation between Finland and the USSR are used as sources. Besides attitudes toward work and the family, perceptions of women's and men's tasks in society are dealt with, based on attitude surveys carried out in Russia. The status of women is bound up with the political system and women's movements. The transition from communism to the market economy changed the nature of women's political participation and women's organizations. In this chapter, attention is focused on the contradictions which have characterized Soviet policies and culture in connection with the status and roles of men and women. They manifest themselves in the following conflict: on one hand, full-time participation in working life was expected of women, as of men; on the other hand, women were expected to take care of the home, children and themselves according to the traditional female role. Another conflict exists between the tendency to label women as being overemancipated and masculine, on one hand, and on the other, to
expect femininity and subservience of her, following the old sexist tradition.

The development of egalitarian views in Soviet society

According to Marxist-Leninist theory, women's participation in production and public life was a key question of socialist society. Women's public role was seen as important. The family was regarded as an outdated institution that obstructed social activities; the family carried on old traditions, it represented backwardness and it was the core of the bourgeois system (Geiger, 1968; Dahlström, 1989; Lapidus, 1993). The Bolshevist revolutionary vision held that the family should be deprived of its economic status and social foundation, and that society as a whole be redirected from the private sphere towards the public. Some of the caring, rearing and moral functions of the family were transferred to public institutions such as day-care centres, schools, central kitchens, public laundries, party youth organizations etc. Through them, the goal was to rationalize and to annihilate the institutions and views considered bourgeois.

The original Soviet approach strived to achieve equality between the genders by transferring functions from the home to the public sector. It did not include the modern feminist strategy that both the male and the female role had to be defined anew (Lapidus, 1993).

In the former Soviet Union, women were well educated and their status was strong compared to their Western sisters. Partly, this was founded on the communist ideology, according to which women’s emancipation was based on the conception that through paid work women could free themselves from the slavery and oppression of the patriarchal family and housework (Lenin, 1951, cited by Sacks, 1988). The communist ideology was reflected even in the attitudes to work: work was a means not only of earning money but also of personal development. This ideology of work meant that to be a 'good woman' the woman had to participate in work outside the home and, in so doing, be a good citizen and a role model for the children.

During Stalin's rule official Soviet policies became more family-oriented. The significance of the family was stressed as the creator of social stability, and the formerly condemned family values were rehabilitated. Public attention was attached to population growth, and
attitudes toward abortions were negative. Stalin's strategy of industrialization emphasized the construction of heavy industry while consumer goods and service industries received less attention. Light industry would have produced such commodities, facilities and services as rearing a family would demand. This industrial policy forced households to function on the basis of an old-fashioned technology. Social services, such as day-care centres, old-age homes and hospitals, were not qualitatively developed and so the level of care provided by them remained low. As women's participation in working life was very common, the households — and there especially the women — were hard pressed to satisfy everyday needs. The home was, again, the centre of social reproduction, contrary to the original Soviet ideology (Lapidus, 1993; Posadskaya, 1993a and 1993b; cf. Dahlström, 1989).

Soviet society was founded on the dual female role: women played an active role both in production and in the home. Women's participation in working life was encouraged by stressing their equal rights and responsibilities with men, by widening educational opportunities and by transferring the additional costs of the female work force to be paid by the society, for instance, through paid maternity leaves. Women's participation in industrial production, however, did not change the fact that women answered for the family responsibilities and the moral atmosphere in the home (Lapidus, 1993). As an example of this, Russian wives considered it their duty to monitor their husbands' alcohol consumption more generally than did wives for example in the neighbouring Finland (Holmila, Matskovsky and Rannik, 1989).

Education

Literacy gives power, especially in the countries where it is hard to gain and to master. Before the Socialist Revolution in 1917, Russia was a backward country. Only 21 per cent of the population could somehow read and write. In the countryside, only 12 per cent of the men and eight per cent of the women had gone to school for more than three years. After the revolution, there were programmes carried out to abolish illiteracy. School was made compulsory, campaigns were held to abolish illiteracy, and also women who had earlier been denied schooling could take part in it. In 1926, as many as 56 per cent of the population aged from 15 to 49 years could read and write in the USSR. The
difference between men and women soon diminished and disappeared. As early as at the beginning of the 1930's illiteracy had almost entirely disappeared. (Koval, 1989b.)

The high standard of women's education in the former Soviet Union has been considered one of the best attainments of the socialist system. However, women have not been able to fully utilize their education in working life. Women's average pay level is lower than men's because, very often, women's tasks are not commensurate with their education, for one thing. The results of a study show that one fourth of women believe that their work does not correspond to their competence (Rimachevskaya, 1993).

Women's lower pay levels and positions at work are partly due to the fact that women participate in further occupational training less than men. After entering matrimony two thirds of working women do not improve or add to their occupational or professional skills (Rimashevskaya, 1993). The infrequency of further training among Russian women has been due to the fact that in Russia the workdays are longer than, for instance, in Finland (Niemi et al., 1991). So, especially women who have family responsibilities tend to leave out evening courses. According to Lapidus (1993), most women drop out of evening courses after the birth of their first child. Furthermore, women believe less frequently than men that additional training would promote their careers, which diminishes their motivation.

In the USSR, women's promotion in working life was not considered of much importance to society. Many highly educated women thought that a position of authority would cause more disadvantage and envy in the workplace than real benefit. Many of them perceived that their superior position was in conflict with their femininity. The general atmosphere in working life favoured men as superiors and launched them naturally up the career ladder (Kauppinen-Toropainen, 1991).

Paid work

The original Soviet policy started from the egalitarian vision of women's full-time participation in production. Together with the ideological message, the demand for a female work force was created by strong industrialization during the first five-year plan (1928-1932). It grew still greater during World War II, when women replaced the
millions of men who were at war and perished there. In 1945, women’s share of the work force was as large as 56 per cent (Lapidus, 1993).

Contrary to the USA, Britain and Germany, women in the USSR remained in the tasks they had been replacing and did not go back home after the war. In 1946, there were only 59 men for each 100 women in the age group from 35 to 59 years in USSR. This demographic imbalance increased the supply of female work force because many women had to manage by themselves: on account of Stalin’s terror and the enormous losses during the war numerous wives and widows became the main supporters of households. In 1959, the share of the households supported by women was 30 per cent of all households. In the same year, the women’s share of the whole population was 55 per cent, but 63 per cent of all the people over the age of 35 years. By 1985, this demographic imbalance in the numbers of the genders had levelled (Lapidus, 1993). The gradual reversion to demographic balance and the rise in the living standard could have led to a decrease in the supply and demand of the female work force. This did not happen, however. On the contrary, the women’s share in the work force increased from 47 per cent to 51 per cent from 1960 to 1970.

During the recent years of reform policy, women’s share of the work force remained large; in 1989 it was 51 per cent. In 1989, over 87 per cent of women of working age, that is, aged from 16 to 55 years, were in the work force or were full-time students. The only regions in the USSR where women did not participate in the work force on a large scale were the republics of Central Asia and Trans-Caucasia. (Lapidus, 1993.)

The development of labour legislation

Immediately after the Socialist Revolution, legislation was passed in the USSR for the enforcement of equality between men and women. The equality policy concerned mainly working life, where equal pay was prescribed for equal work. In marriage, the principle of equality abolished inequality between the spouses; marriage was seen as a voluntary contract between free persons. Men and women acquired equal rights to property and parenthood. During Stalin’s rule, however, the development towards equality ceased. It was claimed that all matters pertaining to the status of women had already been solved and
that they needed no further attention. This view shut out all critical debate and discussion on the issue. (Posadskaya, 1993a, 1993b.)

Despite the declaration of the equality of the genders in Soviet law, women have been regarded as a work force demanding special protection, as the weaker gender (Rimashevskaia, 1993). For instance, paid maternity leaves and support systems for families with many children were prescribed by law. From the middle of the 1950’s on, different kinds of special benefits were developed for women which were related to maternity as a social institution rather than to women’s physiological role of a child-bearer (Narusk, 1991; Posadskaya, 1993a).

The contradictions in the social views of gender equality can be reduced to the conflict between the equal opportunities of education, culture, politics and work, on one hand, and, on the other hand, the special benefits that women are given for their role in social reproduction. These benefits often led to the discrimination of women in working life (Posadskaya, 1993a).

A decisive step toward the market economy was taken in 1990 when the law pertaining to small enterprises was passed in the Congress of the USSR People’s Deputies. Employment exchange centres were opened the following year, in 1991. Attitudes to women’s work and to women’s participation in working life have changed. Whereas participation in work was earlier considered a duty, it is now considered a right. An unemployed person is defined as a woman aged 16 to 55 years or a man aged 16 to 60 years who is not employed in paid work, who is registered in an unemployment centre, who is seeking work, and is ready to work. In Moscow from 80 to 90 per cent of the unemployed were, according to Posadskaya (1992), women; in the whole of Russia, the share is said to be about two thirds.

Nowadays, if there are any new openings for women, they involve generally manual work: carrying tiles, textile work, sewing, nursing, or child care. As 75 per cent of those looking for employment are specialists with expert technical training, the supply and demand of work do not correspond in quality. It is especially difficult for women nearing retirement age and for mothers of small children to find employment.

Women’s working conditions have been prescribed by law. Women are forbidden night work and working in unhealthy conditions, limits have been set for carrying loads and lifting, and women’s retirement
age is lower than that of men. In spite of this legislation with its restrictions, many women continued to work in unsatisfactory conditions. In 1991, four million women were employed in work which was not in compliance with women's health and safety legislation. In industry, 44 per cent of the women worked in unhealthy conditions (Posadskaya, 1991b).

The road of protective limitations solely for women has come to an end. Researchers maintain that men's working conditions should also be improved. Especially in industry men work in unhealthy conditions; in construction, 83 per cent of those whose work is unhealthy are men. Men's life expectancy in the USSR was noticeably lower (64.5 years in 1989) than women's (74.0 years). Researchers recommend that enterprises should create healthy working conditions for both women and men instead of paying extra for working in unhealthy conditions. Specific regulations directed toward women can be used against the interests of women. (Posadskaya, 1993b.)

**The structure of the female work force**

Although women have participated in working life in Soviet society on a large scale, considerations of gender still define the social roles as far as skill qualifications and social status are concerned. However mathematical ability has not been labelled as 'male' in the socialist countries in the same way as in the Western countries. It was original and unique in the world that there were so many Soviet women functioning, for instance, as physicians and engineers. According to Natalia Rimashevskaya (1993), in 1989 67 per cent of the physicians and 58 per cent of the engineers were women.

Earlier, female engineers generally took on administrative and specialized tasks. According to the information given by the association of engineers in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, 45 per cent of the management (managers, chief engineers) of Estonian industry were women, as well 74 per cent of the technical specialists, the majority of whom were engineers (Kandolin, Rannik and Haavio-Mannila, 1991a). During recent years, the engineering professions have become dominated by women in Russia and Estonia, but the salaries do not deviate much from those of skilled workers. Nowadays, many female engineers are
employed in other than strictly technological or scientific tasks, for example, in office work (Kivinen, 1993).

Although women in Soviet society have generally been functioning as physicians, their share on top of the professional pyramid of physicians is small. In Moscow, 14 per cent of the surveyed female physicians were chief physicians in 1991; in neighbouring Finland, for a comparison, eight per cent of all the female physicians were chief physicians or medical directors in 1988. In both the countries 25 per cent of all male physicians were holding such positions. (Yasnaya, Kandolin and Kauppinen-Toropainen, 1993.)

Even higher education does not seem to guarantee as many positions of authority to women as it does to men, but women seem to succeed in tasks of expertise. According to a Soviet study, 48 per cent of men with a university or intermediate college education, but only seven per cent of women, were in superior positions (Lapidus, 1993). During the last decades of the Soviet rule, women’s participation in such positions increased: in 1956, only one per cent of the managers of enterprises were women; in 1975, they were as many as nine per cent; and, in 1985, no less than eleven per cent (Lapidus, 1993). While women’s share of all positions in business management was six per cent, it was 31 per cent in light industry, and 21 per cent in the textile industry and 14 per cent in the food industry (Rimachevskaya, 1993).

During the war many male teachers and scientists died and women were needed to take over these tasks. In 1986 40 per cent of all scientific workers in the Soviet Union were women, as well as 28 per cent of those holding the masters degree and 13 per cent of those holding the doctorate (Koval, 1989a; Rimashevskaya, 1993). In 1988, one third, that is, 22,855 of the 60,000 scientific workers of the Academy of Sciences in the USSR were women. Women’s share grew larger towards the lower levels of the hierarchy: 1.6 per cent of the members of the Academy were women, 7 per cent of the full professors, 15 per cent of the other professors, 25 per cent of the senior researchers, but nearly half of the younger researchers. Of the directors of the institutes of the Academy 2.1 per cent were women, 12 per cent of the heads of departments, laboratories and sectors, 10 per cent of the chief researchers, 18 per cent of the research directors, 30 per cent of the senior researchers, and 52 per cent of the younger researchers. (Koval, 1989a.)
International comparisons show that the official gender equality policy of the USSR succeeded, despite its deficient realization, in raising women's social status. According to the results of a study in six countries (the USA, Sweden, Norway, Canada, Finland and Russia) which was conducted by Kivinen (1993), female dominance in the Russian class structure is typical in occupations having 'professional autonomy'. While in all the industrialized countries at least half of the professionals are men, in Russia women's share is two thirds. There are also more women than average among the directors and engineers in Russia. Consequently, the core of the new middle classes — if it is meaningful to talk about the middle classes in the Russian context — includes more women in Russia than in the developed capitalist countries.

Working conditions and the quality of work

In industry, construction and agriculture the working conditions of Soviet women were often poor. Their situation has been especially bad in the timber, paper, food, and graphic industries, where their share varies from 30 to 50 per cent of those who are employed in heavy labour. In industry women are more often employed in manual labour while men work at machines and devices. About one third of the women working in industry receive special benefits for unhealthy working conditions (Rimashevskaya, 1993).

Why have women continued to work in unhealthy and difficult working conditions? There are several reasons for the lack of pressure for change, such as the lack of alternatives, the harsh economic situation of the family, as well as the low retirement age, shorter workday, the fairly high pay and longer leave granted in exchange for the hard work (Kobzeva, 1992).

The glorification of manual labour in the USSR (Treiman, 1977) has diminished class differences. For example Kivinen's study measured attitudes towards work by asking the workers if they considered their work pleasant and if they spent their leisure time or entered into friendly relationships with their workmates. His data showed no significant differences in Russia between the core of the middle class, its edge, and the working class. Men's orientation to work did not vary according to social status, and there were no differences between the
genders in white-collar occupations. Working class women’s attitudes to work were the most instrumental: they considered the work unpleasant and they did not relate to their fellow workers as much as the other groups (Kivinen, 1993).

It was the aim of the USSR to abolish class differences. This official policy was successful at least in the respect that some qualities of work, such as independence and the climate of the workplace, varied less according to social status in the USSR than in the Nordic countries and the USA (Kandolin et al. 1991a; Haavio-Mannila 1992; 1993). At the end of the 1980’s working conditions and the quality of work were in the USSR worse than in the Nordic countries and USA. The workdays of engineers, teachers, technicians and factory workers were longer than in the Nordic countries but shorter than in the USA. The strain caused by the work was greater: the work was pressing and the schedules were tight. The work was less independent: it was not possible for the worker to decide about the pace of the work or the working order; the work was neither interesting nor diversified. Compared to the situation in the Nordic countries, the freedom of movement of the Soviet workers was more limited: they were not allowed to leave their workplace, nor were breaks or discussions with co-workers allowed to the same extent as in the Nordic countries. (Haavio-Mannila, 1992; 1993.)

More often than in the Nordic countries or the USA social relations between co-workers in the workplace in the Soviet Union were warm. In Soviet workplaces co-worker friendship networks helped in solving personal problems. Colette Schulman (1977) has described the work collectives of Russian women. They build up a feeling of belonging together and of mutual support in coping with the problems of everyday life. By this, she does not mean the official collectivistic working units, but the unofficial networks which are formed between women in the workplace and which have their own leaders, behaviour norms and laws of friendship.

From the point of view of gender equality it is problematic that in the former communist countries friendships between men and women in the workplace were more easily labelled as erotic or sexual relationships, and flirting and sexual harassment in the workplace were more common than in the Nordic countries. In the USA, sexual harassment was, however, more common than in the Soviet Union and the Nordic countries. Workplace love affairs were nevertheless not frequently
talked about in the former USSR. One reason for the infrequency of love affairs could be that the communist workplace policy actively discouraged romances between fellow workers. It was feared that they would increase the divorce rate, which was high already. It was the task of the party cells and trustees at the workplace to reprimand the lovers and to hinder sexual relationships between co-workers. (Haavio-Mannila, 1992; 1993; 1994; cf. Konecki, 1990.)

The wages and salaries

The disparity in pay between men and women in Russia is at least as dramatic as in the West. The incomes of the women in the core of the new middle classes do not deviate much from the average income of the working class (Kivinen, 1993). Women's incomes in the USSR did not increase with age as much as did those of men. They ranged from 65 to 75 per cent of men's earnings (Rimashevskaya, 1993).

The inequality of the spouses in the family is shown by the fact that the wife's pay was about 60 per cent of the husbands pay, according to recent studies conducted in Estonia and Russia (Haavio-Mannila, 1992; Kauppinen-Toropainen, 1993). One reason for women's low earnings is that in the fields where there is a lot of female labour, such as light industry and services industries, the general pay level is low. Another reason for women's low pay level is that blue-collar occupations dominated by men are, because of the glorification of manual labour, more highly paid than many white-collar occupations dominated by women (Lapidus, 1993). For example, in Estonia in 1988, the pay of teachers requiring higher education was of the same order as that of male workers in industry. Neither did the pay of female engineers differ much from that of skilled workers. (Kandolin et al., 1991a.)

There are differences in pay between the genders also within occupational groups. For instance, in 1991 the earnings of surveyed Muscovite female physicians were reported to be 75 per cent of those of male physicians (Yasnaya et al., 1993). In 1988, according to a survey among Estonian female engineers, three per cent earned more than 320 rubles a month compared to 41 per cent of the male engineers (Kandolin et al., 1991a).
Combining family and work

For a long time low birth rates were a cause of worry to politicians and decision makers in the European regions of the USSR. The first child was born, on average, during the second year of marriage, and the second child 6.6 years from the date of marriage (Rimashevskaia, 1993). This low natality may partly be explained by the low standard of living and the housing shortage. Only ten per cent of the young people entering into matrimony had a dwelling of his or her own. Generally, the family got a separate dwelling ten years after marriage. Three fourths of the families started their life together residing with the parents of one of the spouses (Pankratova, 1989).

The high infant mortality rate, the poor standard of health and the deficient hygiene of the hospitals make maternity problematic (Rimashevskaia, 1993). Since getting contraceptives is difficult, births are mainly controlled by abortions; consequently, Russia is the leader in the statistics of abortions. There were 101 abortions per thousand women aged from 15 to 49 years in Russia in 1992; in France, for example, this figure was 15 in the same year (Garnik, 1993).

Infant mortality has declined although it is still high on the basis of international comparisons. In 1975, 31 children out of a thousand died under the age of one year in the Soviet Union; in 1989 23 out of a thousand (Rimashevskaia, 1993). There were, however, great regional differences in the USSR. In Russia in 1992 the infant mortality was 22 per mil (Garnik, 1993). By way of comparison it may be mentioned that in Finland infant mortality has declined from 33 per mil in the first decade of the 1900's to 23 in 1950 and to 7 in 1992 (Haavio-Mannila and Kari 1980; Garnik, 1993).

In the Soviet economic system, the level of the pay and pensions was based on the assumption that there were two working parents in the family. This system was related to the original communist ideology, according to which everyone had to participate in productive work. The average individual pay provided less than two thirds of what was required for maintaining a family of four. Thus, economic factors required women's participation in paid work also when they were married (Lapidus, 1993).
Being a full-time homemaker has been undervalued in Soviet society. Only few women would have withdrawn from working life even if it had been economically possible. Women had internalized their independent role and did not want to get into a situation in which they would be dependent on the husband's income (Rimashevskaia, 1993). Signs of women's latent opposition to paid work could, nevertheless, be seen under Soviet rule as early as in 1970 and 1979 in attitude surveys carried out among students in the Estonian university town Tartu. It was the ideal of Estonian girls to be less engaged in occupational work than men in order to stay at home as full-time homemakers and to do more daily housework than men do. By way of comparison female students in the neighbouring Finland, more often than those in Estonia, wanted to work like men, to get the same education as men get and to divide the household work equally with men, according to a survey conducted in 1972 (Tiit and Haavio-Mannila, 1981).

In 1990 a law was passed in the Soviet Union to improve women's status as well as to protect children and families. Women were entitled to choose either to stay at home with the child for the first three years or to continue to work for pay (Posadskaya, 1993b). It was a popular argument that day-care centres would be more expensive than paying the mother the minimum wage. The poor hygiene in the day-care centres and the quality of the child care worried the mothers. Maja Pankratova (1989) observed that the attitudes about the care and the food of the day-care institutes were more critical in cities than in the rural areas.

The law guaranteed some benefits for women with families: part-time work, adaptable working hours, and days off for family responsibilities. Earlier, women whose children were under 12 years of age had had the right to move to half-time work. Working part-time was, however, regarded as a deviation during the Soviet period. Full-time work was regarded as the norm. Women were no more interested in part-time work than employers. Not even today are enterprises willing to employ women who want to work part time. On the other hand, part-time work has increased in the service industries and its meaning has changed accordingly. It is no longer considered a special advantage but a form of underemployment (Posadskaya, 1993b).

From the beginning of 1991, fathers have also been able to take parental leave in Russia. What is radical about the parental leave is that
it can also be used by grandparents or some other close relative. The change is mainly ideological because, in practice, very few men make use of this right (Posadskaya, 1993b).

**Household work**

The amount of time spent by women on household work was studied in Russia, Latvia and Finland during the years from 1986 to 1988 (Niemi et al., 1991). In Russia and Latvia, women were engaged in housework for one hour longer daily than women in Finland, while the difference for men was about ten minutes. The time women spent in household work in Russia and Latvia was therefore 66 per cent, but in Finland only 62 per cent, of all the time spent in housework by men and women. In the USA the time spent in household work by women was 67 per cent of all the time spent in it (Robinson, 1988). Russian women were not in that respect in a worse position than women in Western industrial countries like USA. Their greatest problem was the physical demands made by the housework, because there were few household appliances and shopping takes time and is troublesome (Sacks, 1988).

In Estonia household work also accumulated on women more than in Finland. According to surveys among young families carried out in 1984, young married men in Helsinki prepared food, washed dishes, and went shopping, as well as took the children to day-care centres more than did men in Tallinn. Yet, the spouses quarrelled more about household work in Finland than in Tallinn. The pressure for change concerning the division of housework may have been greater in Finland (Haavio-Mannila and Kelam, 1990). In 1993, according to a study based on a representative sample of the whole Estonian population, the division of work in the home was more uneven in Estonia than in Finland (Narusk and Kandolin, 1993).

In Estonia, the attitudes towards the division of labour between the spouses also supported the traditional model. In 1984 about 90 per cent of young Finnish spouses believed that the housework in the family should be equally divided, taking into consideration the amount of work and the interests of the spouses. Half of the Estonian men and 28 per cent of the Estonian women surveyed did not share this opinion. They were either of the opinion that the wife should do women's and the husband men's traditional household tasks, or that household work
should be the wife's responsibility and the husband should help her or that the husband should earn the living for the family while the wife stays at home and devotes herself wholly to housekeeping (Haavio-Mannila and Kelam, 1990; unpublished information from the same data).

It has been said that it is the woman's nature to feel that 'her basic task is to be mother', 'to keep the fire burning', 'to be the homemaker' for whom 'the home is her world'. It is the husband's natural lot 'to be the provider for the family', 'the protector', and 'the public figure'. Stereotyped views of this kind have strengthened opinions that housework is a self-evident addition to the paid work conducted by Russian women. Since household technology is scarce, the mother is estimated to use during one home shift energy equivalent to that expended during a 15-20 kilometers' walk (Rimashevskaya, 1993).

In 1989, 40 per cent of household work time was used in preparing food, according to a study on the use of time among female urban residents in the Soviet Union. From 1980 until 1989, the time used in preparing food had increased by 12 per cent because semi-finished food products were no longer available in the shops. Laundering and alterations took 20 per cent of the domestic working hours, cleaning up 13 per cent and shopping 18 per cent. These figures are from the years before the 1991 and 1992 price increases which raised, for instance, laundry prices tenfold and put public laundries out of the ordinary woman's reach. The heaping up of housework on women can be illustrated by the results of a study conducted in the town of Taganrog in southern Russia: of the 14 domestic tasks listed on a questionnaire only one was reported to be a man's task — that of driving the car. The fact that only three per cent of the surveyed families had a car makes the result quite amusing (Posadskaya, 1992).

The Russian and Estonian woman's burden of work was lightened somewhat by the circumstances created by the housing shortage and the deficiency of public care for old people. There were often other people in the household in addition to the members of the nuclear family, for instance, parents or sisters of the spouses. For example, it was shown that 17 per cent of Estonian urban residents lived in extended families in 1978; only seven per cent of their Finnish counterparts lived in this way in 1977 (Haavio-Mannila and Rannik, 1989). This makes it understandable that in the town of Orel, Russia, according to
a study conducted by Maja Pankratova in 1983, people other than the wife or the husband participated in household work significantly more than in Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Italy. In Orel, some other person besides either of the spouses (typically the grandmother) cleaned up or washed the dishes in every third family, washed the laundry in every fourth and prepared the food in 18 per cent of the families; the corresponding shares were much smaller in the countries of comparison (Haavio-Mannila, 1989).

Through the official policy of the USSR attempts were made to relieve the load of housework. This was done, among other things, by establishing children’s day-care centres. Contrary to the general practice in the Western countries, there were also day-care centres where children could stay for five successive days and nights or even longer at a span. Especially mothers with unusual or irregular working hours took their children to these care centres. In Orel, one fifth of the mothers took advantage of this form of child care and 15 per cent of the mothers considered this system the best possible one (Jallinoja and Pankratova, 1989).

Many researchers point out that Russian men do not participate in household work. As stated above, the share of household work done by women was, at the end of the 1980’s, equally large — that is, two thirds — in the USA as in the former USSR. At the beginning of the 1980’s, when studies were done to find out to whom children turned to find support and consolation, 40 per cent of the parents interviewed in Orel — but only 20 per cent of those surveyed in the Finnish towns — reported that children turned to their father. The children of Orel also turned to their father for advice and guidance more generally than in Finland. The mother was, however, the main listener and helper in both countries. (Jallinoja and Pankratova, 1989.)

**Attitudes to women’s participation in working life**

Attitudes of Russian women to paid employment have changed during recent years. Before perestroika, from 60 to 80 per cent of women were of the opinion that women were supposed to work outside the home under any circumstances. Newer attitude surveys show that the share of the people who think so has fallen to less than a third. (Pankratova, 1989.)
To what extent the high participation in paid work has led to women's 'overemancipation' is a question under discussion in Russia. It is assumed that women are too masculine or aggressive and lack feminine sensitivity and softness. Being labelled overemancipated hinders women's competition with men in the employment market. Labelling of this kind occurs also in Western countries: when women have been successful in their work, they have been observed to have to take risks in their social life.

When Russian women choose their work they value the pleasantness of the working conditions more than the qualitative aspects of its content (Lapidus, 1993). Traditional views emerge in strong support for men in superior positions. According to an attitude survey, 72 per cent of men and 68 per cent of women preferred men to women in superior positions. One fifth of men and 28 per cent of women considered the gender of the superior irrelevant. Only a small percentage preferred women instead of men as their potential superiors. (Posadskaya and Zakharova, 1990.) In Finland, one fifth of female workers and one fourth of male workers preferred to have a man as a superior. To the majority of Finnish people the gender of the superior was of no importance. However, in the same way as in the USSR, few people in Finland placed the woman ahead of the man in their preferences for a superior (Suomalainen nainen, 1989; Suomalainen mies, 1990).

The stereotypical attitudes to women at work have hindered the full utilization of women's educational resources. Women are not, according to Lapidus (1993), considered as creative as men in research work. It is thought that the feminization of the research profession would stop risk taking in research work, which is necessary in producing new inventions.

In the USSR women were regarded as having different mental and physical qualities than men have. This has been seen, for instance, in surveys conducted in Estonia and Finland. In 1978 the Estonian working age population was asked in a survey what women's opportunities for promotion at work and in society were compared to men's. Only six per cent considered women's chances to be better than those of men, 56 per cent thought they were equal and 38 per cent thought women's chances for advancement were worse. Women regarded, more generally than men, women's opportunities as worse. At the same time attitudes in Finland regarding women's opportunities were slightly
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more pessimistic: 43 per cent of the Finns surveyed considered women’s chances to be worse than men’s (Haavio-Mannila and Rannik, 1985; 1987).

In both the countries family responsibilities were regarded as the factor of greatest importance restricting women’s chances of promotion in working life. In Estonia, ‘women’s nature’ was mentioned as the second most important obstacle, and women’s specific physiological qualities were also brought out as an explanation. In Finland more often than in Estonia men’s negative attitudes were considered to be the cause of women’s problems in working life. The lower and different professional training of women was regarded as an important obstacle to women’s success by a third of the Estonians and by a quarter of the Finns. (Haavio-Mannila and Rannik, 1985.) In both countries, the family was the most obvious scapegoat, but the Estonians regarded the innate gender differences, the Finns the prevailing attitudes in society as the major explanations to women’s lesser professional advancement.

Similar results emerged in surveys of young families in 1984. In Tallinn 42 per cent of the women reported that they could make no progress in their careers, because they had so much responsibility for their homes. Only five per cent of the women in Helsinki were of this opinion. Of the Estonians surveyed, 80 per cent thought of their family issues at work; of the Finns, only 40 per cent. The greater importance of the home compared to work was shown by the fact that in Tallinn 70 per cent — but in Helsinki only 38 per cent — of the young married people completely stopped thinking about their work when they came home. Men’s and women’s responses were quite consistent in both countries. (Haavio-Mannila and Kelam, 1990.)

As stated above, the special protection of women in working life may obstruct the achievement of equality between the genders. Natalia Rimashevskaya (1993) strongly criticized women’s special protection, which has caused them to be placed in the role of ‘social invalids’. She characterizes this protective and patronizing view of women with the following three arguments:

— because motherhood is an important part of femininity, women represent a specific work force category;

— because of the specific quality of the female work force society must develop measures to help the woman to combine work and motherhood;
overemancipation is to be blamed for social problems such as divorces, men’s drinking, juvenile delinquency, the decline in morality, etc.

During perestroika, it was demanded that women should diminish their participation in paid work and pay more attention to their tasks in the home. Labelling women overemancipated not only meant calling them masculine, but it was also a way of explaining the origin of social problems (Rimashevskaya, 1993). According to Posadskaya (1993a, 1993b), women often were treated instrumentally, as means to achieve some societal goals: they were seen as instruments of solving demographic and ethical questions. Women’s active participation in working life was thought to have a negative influence on child rearing and the moral atmosphere of the home; it was said to increase crime, alcoholism, etc. Even these attitudes reflect the duality which has been typical of the attitudes towards women. On one hand, paid work was seen as a duty and a criterion for the ‘good woman’; on the other hand, it was supposed to have demoralizing effects.

Glasnost, the freedom of expression, opened people’s eyes to the actual situation of women in Soviet society. As evidence of a freer atmosphere two studies can be cited which were conducted in six republics in 1989 by the All-Union Public Opinion Research Centre, namely The Woman in the Family (N=1,516) and The Woman in Working Life (N=2,604). Urban and rural people over 16 years of age served as the population (Bodrova, 1993). The aim of these studies was to find out if women were overemployed and to what extent the issues surrounding their role in society could be resolved by women returning home and being freed from the chains of production work. At the time of the study there was a lot of discussion on these matters. One of the questions of the survey took this matter up frankly: ‘How do you evaluate the fact that the majority of women work outside the home?’ One out of three chose the extreme items of the response options: 15 per cent of the respondents were of the opinion that every able woman was to work outside the home, whereas 18 per cent said that women who had a family and children were not to work outside the home. It emerges from the responses that the traditional Soviet view is changing to give women the opportunity to choose for themselves between the home and their participation in working life and to create circumstances in which this choice is really possible. (Bodrova, 1993.)
Also the question 'Which is more important to women, family or work?' was answered in this survey. Thirty-six per cent of the female respondents said that only the family was important, 18 per cent considered the family more important than work, 37 per cent found family and work to be equally important, 3 per cent thought that work was more important than the family, and 6 per cent found the question difficult to answer. The younger women emphasized women's family roles more strongly than did the older women. The mothers of women aged from 25 to 29 years had always been engaged in paid work, and they did not want to work again in two shifts, both in the home and in paid work, especially since there was no infrastructure to facilitate combining work with the family and to lighten household work. (Bodrova, 1993.)

In the study *The Woman in Working Life* subjects were asked to respond to the statement 'Now it is the time to make women go back home to the family'. This idea was supported by 37 per cent of the respondents. Another statement on the questionnaire was 'The woman must work outside the home like the man'. This statement was agreed by only seven per cent. Fifty per cent agreed with the statement 'The woman should work outside the home when she wants'. The idea that women should go back home was supported by 31 per cent of the women and by 42 per cent of the men. A greater share of the women (55 per cent) than of the men (45 per cent) hoped that the woman could choose for herself if and when she would work outside the home. The freedom of choice was supported above all by the well-educated. (Bodrova, 1993.)

**Politics**

There were hardly any women in the political elite of Soviet society. For instance, the share of women members in the Central Committee of the Communist Party has never exceeded the level of five per cent reached in 1918. Only two women have been members of the Politburo (Lapidus, 1993).

During the period of Soviet power, there was a quota of one third for women in the Supreme Soviet. In the Congress of the USSR People's Deputies, 75 seats had been reserved for women. The system was criticized by arguing that the women in the quota did not represent ordinary women, but were instruments of a political machinery, mere
marionettes. Women's displacement from politics increased during perestroika. When the quota system was abolished, women's share in the Supreme Soviet fell from 33 per cent to 16 per cent, and in the republics and the local soviets it fell to less than 5 per cent.

Stereotypical views of the genders as well as the notion that women are treated as a special group needing privileges hindered women's participation in politics at the higher levels. The quota system was demoralizing to women and it diminished women's interest in politics. The women who had been appointed to fill the quota had been selected by the Party and had by no means been elected by or from among the people. Women got used to this sham, and as a consequence they have no experience with independent political activity. Keeping politics dirty and unsuitable for women also inactivated women politically (Rimashevskaya, 1993).

In the attitude surveys concerning the qualities the deputies should possess, the respondents reported that the typically feminine features tended to diminish women's qualifications in politics. Women's passivity in politics and the heavy load of household work were seen to diminish their chances of being elected (Pankratova, 1989). As women do not engage in politics, they do not make their own demands heard, but instead entrust the power to men.

Well-being

Subjectively experienced satisfaction and lack of somatic and psychic symptoms have often been used as indicators of personal well-being. The problems of the double work load, which have stood in the way of Russian women's well-being, emerge in several Russian surveys. In one survey, women were asked how pressed they were at work, and the typical response was: 'It is good that my work is mechanical and simple. As I spend so much time queuing and in housework, it is good that I need not think of anything, at least at work.' (Rimashevskaya, 1993). Similar opinions came forth when the question was asked about women's willingness to change work. Provided that in the new employment the working hours would be more flexible, there were better pay, it were closer to home, its working conditions were better, and the work were more creative and independent, 40 per cent wanted to change work. Only few women paid attention to items that were
related to better opportunities to have a career and to participate in the
development or management of production (Rimashevskaia, 1993). The evaluation of work was related to the amount of inconvenience it caused to the hard life outside work.

The dissatisfaction of Russian women with their life is reflected in the opinions of physicians. In 1991, 62 per cent of female physicians in Moscow said that they received satisfaction from their work. Nevertheless, their general satisfaction with life was low: only 30 per cent were satisfied and 70 per cent were dissatisfied (Kauppinen-Toropainen, 1993). The dissatisfaction reflects the many social changes which are taking place in former Soviet society. It is difficult for people to control their lives in the midst of these changes. Lack of command over one’s life may lead to illnesses and stress.

The young couples interviewed in Tallinn in 1984 were more dissatisfied with their work, relations with their fellow workers, marriages, emotional and sexual relationships with their spouses and the way they spent their leisure time — indeed, their whole life — than their counterparts in Helsinki. There was not much difference in the dissatisfaction between men and women. (Haavio-Mannila and Kelam, 1990.)

A study of some occupational groups (engineers, teachers, technicians and workers) showed that men and women in Tallinn and Moscow had many more symptoms of stress than their counterparts in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) and in Michigan, USA, in 1988. Especially women teachers reported suffering from pains, difficulties with sleeping, fatigue, stomachache, anxiety and depression (Haavio-Mannila, 1992; 1993; Kandolin et al., 1991a).

Neither was there much to praise in women’s satisfaction with work in the Soviet Union: engineers, teachers and workers in Tallinn and Moscow and technicians at the Kamaz car factory were dissatisfied with their work, wanted to change it, did not get any satisfaction from it, did not enjoy it, did it mainly for money or would not recommend it to their children more generally than members of the Western comparison groups (Kandolin, Pietarila and Kauppinen-Toropainen, 1991b; Haavio-Mannila, 1992; 1993).

When factors affecting the occurrence of stress symptoms were being studied in Estonia and Finland, it was observed that Estonian women often reported suffering from stress symptoms. These symptoms also were connected with time pressure and, contrary to Finland, with
white-collar employment. Satisfaction with work was explained in Estonia by being a man, autonomy of work, and low time pressure, as well as good workplace climate. In Finland, satisfaction with work was related to autonomy of work, white-collar position and young age. (Kandolin et al., 1991a.) Especially women and white-collar workers thus felt worse in Estonia than in Finland.

Self-esteem or self-respect is one of the indicators of well-being. Good self-esteem means that the person is satisfied with herself or himself and can cope with changes in pressure. Self-esteem is not a finished product but it continues to develop by stages during one's lifetime. It reflects the atmosphere of the childhood environment, that is to say, how the person has been supported in his or her growth in developing an understanding of himself or herself as a functioning individual. The self-esteem of an adult can also be developed or weakened. Responsibility, varied work and a supportive working climate strengthen self-esteem and increase motivation to work. (Kauppinen-Toropainen and Kandolin, 1992.)

A comparison of 137 Finnish women architects and 65 Swedish, 76 Estonian, and 81 US women engineers in 1986-88 showed that the self-esteem of the US women was the highest and that of the Estonian women the lowest, with the Nordic women in between. In the United States, aggressive personality traits were connected with self-esteem. Neither in Scandinavia nor in Estonia were women with high self-esteem aggressive. In Estonia, self-esteem did not correlate with masculinity or femininity, variables that were measured by four-item scales based on the Bem Sex-Role Inventory. (Kauppinen-Toropainen and Kandolin, 1992; Bem, 1981; cf. Kandolin et al., 1991b).

Before drawing conclusions, it is to be considered how culture-bound our indicators are. The high self-esteem of American women may be related to their culture, that is, the beliefs, values and expressive creations of people bound by the social arrangements of American society. Americans tend to see things positively; they are not shy to express recognition and happiness. In Europe, people are less open about showing positive feelings toward themselves and others. Self-praise, especially, is considered egoistic and self-centred. One tries to avoid the biblical judgment, 'He who exalteth himself shall be humbled.' (Haavio-Mannila, 1993.)
The lower self-esteem of Estonian and Russian women may reflect the collectivistic life style which people had become accustomed to in the Soviet Union. People were brought up to believe that individuality was not a quality worth emphasizing. So, it is likely that Soviet culture has supported a self-image which is more collectively anchored and liable to appeal to social relations than American culture.

Conclusion: women's inconsistent status in changing society

In the articles and studies of Russian women the difficulty of combining work and family life is emphasized, and family responsibilities are blamed for women's low social status. There has been but little theoretically valid research in the USSR and Russia, for instance, on how women's living conditions, personality and careers are linked together. Articles present either broad, general statistics of an entire society or figures that have been picked up from individual studies.

Under Soviet rule, women participated in working life in large numbers due to the ideology of equality and to compensate for the losses caused by the wars. Work was seen as a social duty both of men and of women. All able women of working age either participated in working life or studied full time. The rate of women's participation in work was the highest in the world. To maintain a family, both spouses had to be employed: the system was based on two economic providers in the family. However, after World War II, a great part of the families had to manage with the woman's pay only; the share of one-parent families was as large as 30 per cent of all families.

Women's position in Soviet and Russian working life has been very strong. Half of the work force were women, and women have established themselves in fields and professions which have been perceived as masculine in the Western countries. In the medical profession, 67 per cent of the professionals are women, and there have been many women performing tasks which demand technical expertise. Now along with the emergence of the market economy and tightening competition, the status of women may be threatened, and their participation in paid labour may no longer be self-evident.

Contradictory aspects of the image of the woman in the Soviet Union and, since 1991, in the independent republics of Russia and Estonia, appear in many studies. On one hand, women are pictured as represen-
tatives of the weaker gender, who demand special protection and support; on the other hand, women are blamed for being overemancipated and for having lost their femininity.

Also the undeveloped household technology has been a cause of the excessive work load of women; women have had to consume a lot of their energies in daily domestic routines. Also the scarcity of consumer goods, the general insecurity and the queuing of everyday shopping have consumed both time and energy, which is seen in women’s fatigue and overburdening. Researchers have observed that men experience standing in queues as demeaning, and so this task has fallen on the wives or other female members of the family.

Women’s excessive fatigue and stress are brought forth in many studies. Women’s dual role has been referred to when their absence from the political elite has been explained: either women are too exhausted to participate in political life, or politics is seen as dirty and unsuitable for women, which makes them avoid it.

Earlier women participated in politics within a quota system. After its abolition, women’s share in the decision making collapsed. The women who had been elected to the representative bodies of the USSR were not considered to represent women’s real opinion; these quota representatives were regarded as an output of the state machinery. There is no returning back to the old system — and women do not even desire it. In the post-Soviet period it has, however, been difficult for women to get a footing in the new political practices.

From the point of view of the Western industrial countries, the discussion about women’s desire to become housewives may seem strange. This desire may reflect women’s aim to develop new and alternative life styles, because earlier the way of life was dictated from above, and participation in paid work was highly prevalent. The desire to remain at home may also be a protest against the former system, which did not allow individual choices. This desire may derive from the idealization of the Western culture and a yearning for a family pattern which was forbidden under Soviet rule and was labelled as bourgeois. Nevertheless, only very few women in Russia or Estonia have voluntarily become housewives because this decision brings with it not only a loss of independent status, but also insecurity concerning the future. In the few instances when women have remained at home, this has happened out of necessity, either because of unemployment or...
some other external cause. Also the low level of pay has meant that few families are able to live on the husband's income only. At the same time, women are more worried than before about not being wanted in the work force.

Under Soviet rule, before perestroika, there was no question regarding the status of women in society. However, freedom of expression is now permitting the status of women in Russian and Estonian society to be openly discussed, and problems can be brought to the open: the bothersomeness of women's dual role, their unhealthy working conditions, their difficulties in progressing in their careers and in finding self-fulfilment in working life no matter how high their level of education is, their insignificant share of participation in political decision making, as well as the stereotyped and partly conflicting concepts of gender.

According to researchers, the changes during perestroika have favoured men instead of women, for whom life has become more and more difficult in circumstances of economic insecurity. The fall in the standard of living came as a surprise to many people, and the gap between Russia and the rich industrial countries keeps growing (Virтанен, 1992).

The atmosphere has changed from the earlier days of optimism to greater pessimism. For example, the percentage of those who believe that freedom and independence can solve material problems declined in St. Petersburg during the year 1992. Women placed less trust in the market economy than men did. In November 1992, when people in St. Petersburg were asked which they considered more important, freedom or future security, 16 per cent of the women and 26 per cent of the men chose freedom. In another survey carried out in February 1993, only 33 per cent of the women in St. Petersburg, but 55 per cent of the men reported that they could solve their material problems independently, without any help from the state. (EVA, 1993; Protasenko, 1993.)

Difficulties related to the economic transition are reflected in the everyday life and moods of women: they do not believe in miracles performed by the market any more. Women feel that they must themselves try to define how they should participate in the social development. By taking part in political and social activities women can introduce new substance and emphasis into the process of social change.
This chapter has described the change in women's status as a consequence of the social transition in Russia and Estonia. Women's status in the public life was strong in the former Soviet Union compared to many Western countries. Further studies should attempt to determine whether the breaking down of the official ideology of equality after the fall of communism has increased the tension between the genders. Will the abolition of the official policy of equality have a backlash effect on the status of women in public life? Or will a totally new social contract emerge between men and women?

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