

SEX EDUCATION AND CONTRACEPTIVE ACCEPTANCE:

FROM THE SOVIET UNION TO RUSSIA

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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In Russia today women use traditional forms of birth control at unusually high rates, whereas, conversely their use of modern contraceptives is unusually low. During the Soviet period, women's access to modern contraceptive methods may have been limited. However, one would postulate that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the nature of the new reforms that developed would have lent itself to an increase in modern contraception usage on par with other countries. In Russia today there is not a lack of availability of modern contraceptives. Yet, women are still not using modern contraception at a rate that is congruent with an increase in availability. What then is influencing Russian women's decisions? The contraceptive acceptance of Russian women today is shaped by cultural legacies of the Soviet Union surrounding both contraceptives themselves and sex and sex education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyzes the history of contraception and sex education in Russia, from the Soviet era to the present, as a way of better understanding contraceptive practice and sex education policy in Russia today.

In Russia today women use traditional¹ forms of birth control at unusually high rates, whereas, conversely their use of modern contraceptives² is unusually low. During the Soviet period, women's access to modern contraceptive was limited. Information about certain forms of contraception, like oral contraception ("the Pill") was limited and contraceptive devices such as condoms were scarce and chronically under-produced. However, one would postulate that once the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the nature of the new reforms that developed and the more open and democratic form of government would lend itself to an increase in modern contraception usage on par with other countries. In Russia today, in the years since 1991, there has not been a lack of access or availability to modern contraceptive methods as there was during the Soviet period. Yet, women are still not using modern contraception at a rate that is congruent with an increase in availability. What then is causing, or influencing, Russian women's decisions in choosing contraception? Why are women still continuing to use high-failure and unreliable traditional methods of contraception? While there are a number of possible

¹ "Traditional contraception," for the purpose of this thesis, is defined as a contraceptive method that is often high-failure and unreliable. These include the withdrawal and rhythm methods. For more detailed information about the definition of these contraceptives, please refer to Chapter III.

² "Modern contraception," for the purpose of this thesis, is defined as a contraceptive method that is not a traditional method and that is not abortion. For more detailed information about the definitions of these contraceptives, please refer to Chapter III.

answers to this question, this thesis will seek to show that one answer in particular may be a strong contributing factor that has influenced present day Russian women's decisions regarding contraception. Of course factors such as cost, distribution, religion, and movements like feminism all may play a role in the contraceptive decision making process of Russian women. However, as this thesis will explore, the contraceptive acceptance of Russian women today is shaped by cultural legacies of the Soviet Union surrounding both contraceptives themselves and sex and sex education.

This thesis will explore the history of sex education and contraception during three separate time periods: the Soviet period until the 1980s, the 1980s, and 1991-present. In a very general sense, the Soviet period until the 1980s laid out the foundation for sex education policy and contraception practice. The other two time periods represent a change (or potential to change) from the Soviet period before the 1980s. In terms of sex education, the beginning period of the Soviet era saw some sexual liberation, but eventually sex was linked with morality and chastity and was taught under the limited scope and framework of upholding Soviet family values, goals, and notions of civic duty. Contraception during the Soviet period consisted primarily of abortion and traditional (often high failure) methods, whereas modern contraception was not always available and was often portrayed as dangerous to women's health.

However, the 1980s represented a moment of potential change. With Gorbachev's *glasnost*, the Soviet Union became more open. As a result, the Soviet people began to become more aware of western contraceptive practices and sex education policies. Some Soviet citizens seemed to embrace the new influx of western notions of sex and contraception, while others seemed to fervently view the import of western "sex" culture

as distasteful. While the 1980s was a moment marked with potential to shift the way that contraceptives were used, significant change did not come to fruition, and the cultural ways of the earlier Soviet period persisted and remained.

After the Soviet Union collapsed Russians had access to almost all forms of modern contraception. However, it has become clear that since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the contraception practices of Russian women are strikingly similar to that of Soviet women. Despite a modest upsurge for a more universal sex education program during the 1980s, Russia still does not have a national sex education curriculum.

This thesis is divided into three parts, one about sex education, one about contraception, and the third is devoted to case studies of two contraceptive methods; condoms and abortion. Russian language sources, especially during the Soviet period, are scarce for Chapter II on sex education. The information has been difficult to obtain. For a more thorough understanding of sex education during the Soviet period from Russian language sources, unfettered access to Soviet archives would be necessary, and a future, more developed paper might contain more detailed information.

Most of the source material for this thesis derives from NGO data, survey data, government data, newspaper articles, and anecdotal data from interviews conducted in Moscow during the summer of 2013.

CHAPTER II

SEX EDUCATION

This chapter examines the history of sex education in the Soviet Union and in Russia. Generally speaking, sex education was non-existent during the Soviet times, and has continued to be largely absent in Russia even today. Nevertheless, despite a weakly developed curriculum, there have been other means of gaining information about sex, and ultimately, about contraception. In schools, “hygiene education” was the typical form of a sex education course. But outside of the classroom, Soviet citizens learned about sex from information being passed down orally from parents to their children, or from friends to friends. This oral tradition has certainly persisted into present Russian times. These factors have shaped Russian peoples’ attitudes and cultural perspectives surrounding sex and sex education.

Soviet Period until the 1980s: Morality Defined

Initially, during the early years of the Soviet Union, there actually was some degree of openness towards sex. However, when Stalin came into power, that changed, and the government’s conservative and repressive views towards sex remained essentially the same until the 1980s. During that time, sex education was taught through the lens of “hygiene education.” The “hygiene education” courses linked sex with morality and chastity. This made it difficult for Soviet citizens to obtain accurate information about sex, anatomy, or STIs “Sexually Transmitted Infection” from sources other than parents and friends or physicians.

In the early decades of the Soviet period engaging in sexual intercourse was common amongst both married and unmarried heterosexual couples. In the 1920s:

According to various research data, pre-marital relations in those years involved 85-95 percent of men and 48-62 per cent of women. Men normally started their sex lives between the ages of 16 and 18, while about a quarter had had sexual experience before they were 16. Women's sex lives began later. The principal motivating factor for having sex was cited by women as 'love' (49 per cent), 'passion' (30 per cent), and 'curiosity' (20 per cent). The percentage of extramarital pregnancies and single mothers was very high.³

In fact, sex was openly discussed during this time. The Soviet people talked about Freud, and surveys and questionnaires about sex were widely circulated. The Soviet Union was also a member of the World Sexual Reform League, which was to hold its annual conference for 1931 in Moscow (but it was never held there due to changing political times).⁴

It is apparent, then, that in these early years of the Soviet Union, men and women seemed somewhat sexually liberated. They were discussing having sex, they were having their first sexual encounter at a fairly young age, and many Soviet citizens were having sex outside of marriage. But when Stalin took power after Lenin died, sex was dealt with in an entirely different way. By the 1930s, all formalized sex education ceased, abortions were banned (but later re-established after Stalin's death), homosexual sex was criminalized, and all sex-related surveys and open discussion essentially ended.⁵

³ Kon, I. S., and James Riordan. 1993. *Sex and Russian society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 23.

⁴ Ibid. 23.

⁵ Ibid. 23.

Anton Makarenko became a leading figure in the way the Soviet government officials were to think about sex education during the Soviet period. Makarenko was a prominent progressive educator during the early years of the Soviet Union and his many works of non-fiction have even continued to influence educators today.⁶ In 1949, a series of public lectures of Makarenko were posthumously published in a collection entitled, "Lectures on Raising Children." This article became the foundation of sex education policy in the Soviet Union for decades, which helped create the framework of using sex as a way to promote state goals such as family stability, public health, and civic duty.

In his lectures, Makarenko framed sex education by equating sex with a sort of animal instinct that must be quelled. According to Makarenko, people living in socialized states, such as the Soviet Union have created a "laxity and vulgarization of relationships unworthy of man, cause difficult personality problems, unhappiness and disruption of the family."⁷ Therefore, Makarenko believed that the animal instinct of sex must be properly dealt with, and that many socialized Soviet citizens do not have a healthy and worthy relationship with sex, which has contributed to a disruption of the family, something that is at the core of importance for Soviet citizens.

So, in order to properly address these issues, Makarenko soon began to couple morality, family stability, and civil duty with the everyday understanding of sex and the way that it was to be taught and dealt with within the Soviet Union. According to Makarenko, every citizen "cannot ignore the demand of social morality which is always on guard over the interests of society as a whole and in the realm of sex makes definite

⁶ Filonov, G.N.. "Anton Makarenko." UNESCO. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/publications/ThinkersPdf/makarene.pdf> (accessed January 28, 2014).

⁷ Makarenko, Anton. "Lectures on Raising Children." supplement to *Sovetskaya pedagogika*, 1949, pp. 87-9 Sex Education.

demands of each citizen.” To further illustrate this point, Makarenko believed everyone must “foster his integrity, working capacities, sincerity, directness, habits of cleanliness, the habit of telling the truth, respect for others and for the troubles and interests of others, love of his country and devotion to the ideas of the socialist revolution” at all times.

Additionally, Makarenko believed that this linkage of sex education with morality would, “as a whole determine to a large extent our success in educating the future family member, husband or wife.”

When talking specifically about sex education, Makarenko had a somewhat idealistic view on the naivety of Soviet youth. Makarenko believed children and adolescents should be treated differently in regards to sex. According to Makarenko, children do not have any “persistent interest in sex.” He suggested that if a child does ask about sex, a parent should “tactfully divert the question with a joke or smile that the child will forget his question and become absorbed in something else.” If a parent does feel the need to address the question, then, according to Makarenko, the discussion “should be held in strict secret between father and son or mother and daughter” and that “such talks must also cover sex hygiene and particularly questions of sexual morality.”

For adolescents, however, they only become interested in sex after puberty, but at that point, there are “no longer any secrets of sex.” This implies that information about sex will just divinely come to teenagers, and that information does not need to be taught.

On the topic of specific school curriculum, Makarenko addressed this issue in a letter, explaining that sex education in schools is primarily “education for love, that is, great and profound feeling enhanced by unity of life, yearnings and hopes.”

This letter shaped Makarenko's policies about sex education and sexual attitudes. Makarenko was a very influential man, and because of his initiatives essentially to limit access to information about sex, he was able to shape an entire people's notion of sex, and change how they gathered information on the topic.

According to Makarenko, discussions of sexual intercourse should be held only in a physician's office, and only in the realm of hygiene.⁸ This notion of linking sex with hygiene was a persistent cultural trend in the Soviet Union. Soviet officials did allow for education on topics of hygiene and morals in lieu of formalized sex education. Medical officials and health workers tried to teach students that being clean was moral and the way to maintain moral and social purity.⁹

One publication from 1977, details the importance of hygiene education (гигиеническое воспитание). Very little is said about sex related topics, but the structure of hygiene education is clearly defined. The article suggested that the Soviet Republics dedicate 12 course hours to hygiene education in the 10th and 11th grade (noting that in the Latvian Republic, hygiene education traditionally had taken place in the 6th grade).¹⁰ The education, according to this article, was supposed to include moral and gender education and adhere to ministry education standards for each Republic.¹¹

It has not been absolutely clear exactly what Hygiene Education courses entailed. However, there are some hints at what the course content could have been during the

⁸ *Sex and Russian society*. 24.

⁹ Rivkin-Fish, Michele. 1999. "Sexuality education in Russia: defining pleasure and danger for a fledgling democratic society". *Social Science & Medicine*. 49 (6): 801-814. 803.

¹⁰ Loranskii DN, MI Krasil'shchikov, and MM Merman. 1977. "Gigienicheskoe vospitanie naseleniia v formirovanii zdorovogo obraza zhizni". *Gigiena I Sanitariia*. (6): 8-11. 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 9.

Soviet period. In an *Izvestiia* article from March 29, 1950, there is a brief summary of hygiene education progress in the country. According to the article, the Soviet Minister of Health, V.S. Ershov presented the progress of hygiene education programs in the Soviet Union over the last year. According to Ershov, the hygiene education courses were set to help with the development of health promotion within the Soviet Union, and that in the last year there were 8 million lectures that discussed the prevention of diseases through a hygienic mode of life and work. Ershov also commented that 12 million books had been published and distributed.¹²

What is interesting is that in this article, the Russian phrase that is used is “Sanitarnoye Prosveshcheniye” (Санитарное Просвещение). While this phrase can be translated into English as “hygiene education,” it may also be translated as “sanitation education.” In English, “sanitation education” evokes an idea of cleanliness at an institutional level, whereas “hygiene education” may denote education of one’s own personal cleanliness and health. In this sense, the use of the term “sanitarnoye prosveshcheniye” evokes the idea of a more widely distributed and systematic approach to the subject matter.¹³

Teachers and educators seemed to approve of the weakly developed sex education program in schools, and even went a step further, believing that sex didn’t belong in other non-private areas of life. In the January 8 issue of *Literaturnaya Gazeta* from 1969, a

¹² *Izvestiia* "Hygiene Education in the U.S.S.R. (Санитарное просвещение в СССР)," March 29, 1950.

¹³ Throughout this paper, the terms “hygiene education” are found by looking at texts that are in Russian as “Sanitarnoye Prosveshcheniye” (Санитарное Просвещение), “gigienicheskoye vospitaniya” (гигиеническое воспитание) or “gigienichnoye vospitaniya” (гигиеничное воспитания).

group of teachers from Tyumen wrote a letter saying that they were against sexual matters being discussed in the press.¹⁴

In the July 16 issue of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, from 1969, there was an article published entitled “Sex Explosion” (Взрыв Секса). The article is actually a reprint from the January 1969 issue of the American Journal *The Plain Truth*.¹⁵ *The Plain Truth* is a monthly magazine that has heavy Christian overtones. The article “Sex Explosion,” that appears in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* is not a complete reproduction of the original *The Plain Truth* article, but the main concepts and themes remain in the Russian version. In this article, the idea that there is an increasing danger that has come with the sexual revolution is present throughout. In the Russian article, sex was viewed as something that had inundated people’s lives as a “saturation bombardment, a torrential attack, a deluge of perversion.” The end result, of course, according to the article, was the presence of venereal disease, something that was “out of control.”¹⁶ This article is a reprint published in an American source, however, it is revealing in that it shows the kind of information that the general population had access to regarding sex. This article portrays sex as something almost to be feared, and it certainly falls in line with the Soviet government’s stance on how sex should be viewed.

By the mid 1970s, however, the ardent supporters of hygiene education seemed to wane a little. In the September 25, 1973 issue of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, there is an article that discusses “sex education” (половое воспитания) in a classroom of 14-15 year olds.

¹⁴ *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (Moscow), “More Chastity (Больше Целомудрия),” January, 8 1969.

¹⁵ For a full copy of the English article “Sex Explosion,” please refer to the following link: [http://www.herbert-armstrong.org/Plain%20Truth%201960s/Plain%20Truth%201969%20\(Prelim%20No%2001\)%20Jan.pdf](http://www.herbert-armstrong.org/Plain%20Truth%201960s/Plain%20Truth%201969%20(Prelim%20No%2001)%20Jan.pdf) The article may be found beginning on page 9.

¹⁶ *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (Moscow), “Sex Explosion (Взрыв Секса),” July 16, 1969.

The article details some of the subjects that are covered in the gender education course, such as how to properly put on a bra and a condom using models and dummies. Apparently, the students absorbed the information “calmly, seriously, and without smiling or snickering.” The article claims that this course was an effective way to foster tolerance for sexual misconduct, and to pave the way in a new sexual revolution.¹⁷ Even though this was an experimental class, it shows that there was at least some modest inroads in introducing sex education into classrooms during the Soviet Union, and that it was seemingly well-received.

Despite this, hygiene education was still present and it was estimated that in 1977 alone, over 900,000 rural university students had received “hygiene education” in over 5,000 institutions all over the Soviet Union.¹⁸

In summary, the beginning of the Soviet era was a time where people were sexually liberated. When Stalin took power, however, that seemed to change. Makarenko (a Stalin appointee) did not allow sex to be taught in schools, and instead replaced it with a “hygiene education” program that linked sex with chastity and morality. For the most part, it seems as though Soviet citizens adopted the policy without too much complaint. However, by the 1970s, despite an acceptance of Makarenko’s policies, there was a pilot program that did incorporate sex into middle school curriculum.

The 1980s: An Open Window to Sex and Opinions

The 1980s was a time of much change in the Soviet Union. In the mid-1980s, Gorbachev’s *glasnost* started a pace of reform that gave way to more publicity, more

¹⁷ *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (Moscow), "Pedagogy (Педагогика)," September 25, 1973.

¹⁸ Loranskii DN. 1977. "Gigienicheskoe vospitanie naseleniia v SSSR." *Gigiiena I Sanitariia*.(11): 18-21. 20.

media, and more open discussions about all matters of life. Sex was one of the conversations that began to become commonplace during the 1980s, and especially during *glasnost*. In the early part of the 1980s, some adverse effects of a weakly developed national sex education curriculum began to become more apparent. Not only were Soviet citizens more vocal about the need to create a sex education program, but it soon became clear that a weakly developed sex education policy had affected Soviet citizens' understanding of some of the basics of sex.

The years of a not having a state run sex education policy had finally begun to show some serious negative results by the 1980s. It became clear to some that the Soviet policy surrounding sex (or the lack thereof) had created some strange understandings of sex.¹⁹

Not only was the sex act often misunderstood, but the weakly developed sex education programs in schools may have been at the root cause. According to one scholar, the weakly developed sex education program forced many to view sex as an “alien commodity.”²⁰

In one survey conducted in 1984, 307 sex therapists were asked about their attitudes regarding sex education and its importance. From that survey, it was found that 98% of the respondents supported some form of sex education development.²¹ Of those, 79.1% not only supported sex education, but also thought that a sex education program could help to combat such psychosexual issues that were seen to negatively affect

¹⁹ Shtern, Mikhail, Avgust Shtern, Mark Howson, and Cary Ryan. 1980. *Sex in the USSR*. New York: Times Books. 91.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 91.

²¹ Iakobashvili RD. 1984. "Gigienicheskoe vospitanie naseleniia po voprosam seksual'nogo zdorov'ia". *Sovetskoe Zdravookhranenie / Ministerstvo Zdravookhraneniia SSSR*. (8): 24-6. 25.

relationships.²² Of course, this doesn't mean that they thought that a weakly developed sex education program was the sole cause of problematic sexual relationships, but still, they thought that adding sex education programs could alleviate some of the problems that were being seen by sex therapists.

The respondents also were asked what they thought would be the most important aspect of a new sex education program. More than half, 65%, believed that the most important aspect of a theoretical burgeoning sex education program would need to be learning about what makes a healthy marriage, for both the man and the woman.²³ It is not surprising, then, that the main area that the respondents wanted addressed was marriage. And as we have seen previously, the Soviet Union's policy towards sex was always within the framework of a marriage, morality, and chastity.

The 1980s brought about the era of glasnost (or openness). This meant an influx of foreign media and information that was not previously accessible to Soviet people. The foreign media showed rape, sexual violence and abuse, child abuse, group sex, and prostitution.²⁴ In Soviet media, these sorts of things began to become commonplace and sensationalized. Pornography was available (albeit not on every street kiosk) for the first time. For many Soviet citizens, this was the first time they had ever heard of such things, and admittedly, it caused a shock.²⁵ In fact, on December 5, 1990 Gorbachev, pressured by public outcry, created a commission to safeguard the country's morality.²⁶

²² Ibid. 25.

²³ Ibid. 25.

²⁴ Berry, Ellen E. 1995. *Postcommunism and the body politic*. New York: New York University Press. 164.

²⁵ *Sexuality education in Russia*. 805.

²⁶ *Postcommunism and the body politic*. 164.

Perhaps as a result of the influx of media inpouring as a result of glasnost, articles began appearing in newspapers suggesting that sex education programs that are present in other countries is somewhat desirous and should be included within the Soviet Union. In 1988, one such article appeared in an issue of *Pravda* from December 16. In the article entitled “Two watermelons in one hand...the problems of protecting the health of mothers and children” (Два арбуза в одной руке....О проблемах охраны здоровья матери и ребенка) the topic of sex education in the Soviet Union was addressed. According to the article, words like abortion and sex were “pronounced with monastic modesty” (произносятся с испугом и монашеской стыдливостью) in schools.²⁷ According to the article, the only way to have combatted this issue was to look at the examples of other countries where pamphlets on sex education and condoms could be purchased practically everywhere in other European and western countries.²⁸ And, of course, the underlying subtext of the article is that the infiltration of this kind of information in Europe and other western countries was a good thing and something that should be in the Soviet Union.

In the February 7, 1987 issue of *Argumenty i Fakty* the lack of a fully developed national sex education program is addressed. According to the article, the situation within the Soviet Union was so dire that the need for sex education program had become “a necessary condition for the harmonious development of one’s personality.”²⁹

²⁷ Kulakov, V. "Two watermelons in one hand...the problems of protecting the health of mothers and children (Два арбуза в одной руке....О проблемах охраны здоровья матери и ребенка)." *Pravda* December 16, 1988.

²⁸ Ibid. December 16, 1988.

²⁹ Romanenko, V.. "Everyone from one's youth should have the knowledge of hygiene and lead a healthy lifestyle. A topic for a serious discussion. (Каждый человек смолоду должен иметь знания в области

In an August 8, 1987 from *Argumenty i Fakty* the issue of a lack of a fully developed sex education program in schools in the Soviet Union is discussed. According to the article, a man named E.I. Chazov spoke at a meeting of the Soviet Ministry of Health saying, “Throughout the world 7th and 8th grade students already learn subjects like sexology. And for us, the idea is seen as a forbidden topic. Why? I don’t know” (Во всем мире уже в 7 - 8-х классах школьники изучают такой предмет, как сексология. У нас же это считается запретной темой).³⁰

Chazov was not the only person who believed that the lack of a fully developed sex education program in schools in the Soviet Union was a problem. According to the article, many *Argumenty i Fakty* readers criticized the state of sex education in schools, and that, according to the readers; the level that existed was simply insufficient.³¹

In fact, the *Argumenty i Fakty* article cites a study that was conducted by looking at the fertility and abortion dynamics and statistics in Sweden, Denmark, and the USA for the previous 10 years. In the study, sex education was taught in all three countries, but it was much more limited in the U.S. because of conservative politics (think Reagan). Over the 10 year period studied, the rate of unwanted pregnancies and abortions declined in the Scandinavian countries, while both metrics increased in the U.S.³² This article uses the U.S. as a case study of what happens to a country’s rate of unwanted pregnancies and abortions when sex education courses are limited, and that the high abortion and

гигиены, вести здоровый образ жизни. Тема для серьезного разговора)." *Argumenti i Fakti* (Moscow), February 7, 1987.

³⁰ *Argumenty i Fakty* (Moscow), "Continuing the conversation. To forbid or to explain? (Продолжаем разговор. Запрещать или объяснять?," August 8, 1987.

³¹ *Ibid.* August 8, 1987.

³² *Ibid.* August 8, 1987.

unwanted figures in the Soviet Union might be lower if sex education programs were more akin to those in Sweden or Denmark.

This new abrupt introduction into sex culture and media caused a clear split of morals and a “left” and “right” divide, which led the issue of sex to become more and more politicized. Many on the left saw glasnost as a chance to educate and change the way sex was viewed, and they soon became advocates of sex education. This pro-sex movement was small, but most vocal in years shortly after the Soviet period.³³ This pro-sex movement was led by both researchers and citizens. According to one researcher at the time, Ada Baskina, “half of all divorces were the result of simple ignorance of the basic facts of human sexuality.”³⁴ Even if this claim was not accurate, it is telling that researchers who were living in the Soviet Union at the time were aware of the problems a weakly formalized sex education was creating for fundamental institutions like marriage and divorce.

However, despite the fact that there seemed to have been a modest movement within the Soviet Union to create a sex education program, there was still a widespread amount of disapproval of sex education. The disapproval of sex education within the Soviet Union from the people came in various forms, including people writing to newspapers. In an article in *Argumenty i Fakty* from 1987, a man writes, “I don’t respect the youth of today, nor do I share any of their views or beliefs... We must work hard so that there is no free time and no time to think about sex.”³⁵

³³ *Postcommunism and the body politic*. 197.

³⁴ *Sex in the USSR*. 130.

³⁵ *Continuing the conversation*. August 8, 1987.

As a result of views like this one, the strand of a modest pro-sex education movement was small and not long-lived or supported. The “right,” or anti-sex education strand, was much more powerful, and soon many Soviet citizens became even more ardently opposed to sex education than before.³⁶

Thinkers on the right began not only to point to the introduction of sex education into schools as a bad thing (as suggested by “left” thinkers like Baskina), but they also began to associate “sex education” with contempt as nothing more than a “western” idea. These “right” wing thinkers began to think of sex education, as imagined by thinkers like Baskina, as “westernized” and that this “western” sex education was seen as a stepping-stone to the depravity that they were witnessing in the media. To them, they believed that the “west” directly influenced all amoral sexual behavior. Many posited that sex education was commonplace in the “west,” and since the “west” had such amoral sexual media coverage (as was depicted in their newly acquired media reports), they thought, therefore, that sex education would naturally lead to similar sexual depravity.³⁷

While some of the extreme thinking of “right” thinkers that associated sex education with amorality and “western” beliefs was not a universally accepted notion, the idea that sex education was perhaps not necessary began to permeate the minds of the Soviet populace. A survey that was conducted by the All-Union Public Opinion Center shortly before the collapse, in February 1991, asked Soviet citizens how they learned about sex. One of the questions was “Did your parents talk to you about sex education?” Less than 13% said yes, and 87% said no. When divided by gender, only about 10% of

³⁶ *Sexuality education in Russia*. 805.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 806.

men answered yes, and 15% of women answered yes.³⁸ It seems, from this survey, at least, that parents did not see the need to talk to their children about sex.

A study conducted in 1990 by the same research institute asked college aged students where they thought it would be most effective to way to get information on sex.³⁹ The results were:

- Special school course or college course: 45.6%
- Special popular literature: 42%
- Special films or TV programs: 28.7%
- Specialist medical advice centers: 22.2%
- Parental discussions: 21.4%
- Discussion with peers: 5.3%
- Personal experience: 5.9%
- Other means: 0.7%
- Young people have no need for sex education: 3%
- Hard to say: 6.2%

From this data, which of course is not wholly representative of the entire population of the Soviet Union, a large percentage of students responded that they wanted to get information in school or in books. This is revealing in that, despite the fact that students did not have access to sex education materials, there was a significant desire to have access to this kind of information. Only 3% of respondents said that they didn't think sex education was necessary. If the Soviet policy of a limited sex education curriculum was

³⁸ *Sex and Russian society*. 30.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 30.

effective and well-accepted, we would expect the number of people who believe that sex education isn't necessary (which is aligned with Soviet policy) to be much higher than it was in this study.

In summary, it is clear that the 1980s brought about big changes regarding sex in the Soviet Union. In the years leading up to the 1980s some experimental sex education programs appeared. By the 1980s, the discussion for change was facilitated by *glasnost*. It appears as though the roughly three decades of no-sex education caused the notion of sex to be a bit skewed by some Soviet citizens. The 1980s and *glasnost* brought about a platform to openly discuss changes to the Soviet curriculum about sex. Some pushed for a fully integrated sex education program, while others merely mentioned its merits. Overall, it seems that many Soviet citizens were open to the idea of a sex education program, despite the fact that one never fully materialized.

1991-Present: A Return to Nationalism

In the years right after the collapse, Russia was experiencing sweeping reforms under Yeltsin. In the 2000s, Putin came into power and brought with him a nationalist regime and tenor that has endured in Russia to the present time. All of this is to say that sex education, like politics, has also undergone some rapid changes. Because of the more open nature of Russia under Yeltsin's government of reforms, more public opinion surveys and polls were conducted. From those surveys, it is clear that some Russian citizens wanted a sex education program. It was also clear that many Russian citizens were still unaware of some basic functions of sexual reproduction.

Despite the immense amount of change and growth that occurred under Yeltsin, the Putin years seems to have slowed down a push for a government adopted sex education

program. In keeping with Putin's more conservative and nationalistic tenor Russians are still not ready, or willing, to fully adopt a sex education program in schools.

Shortly after the collapse, survey data began to appear clearly showed the impacts of a Soviet style sex education policy. One thing that became clear was how Russian citizens obtained information about sex. A 1995 study found that that 88% of those surveyed said that they did not receive any information about sex before their first sexual encounter.⁴⁰ Of those who did get information, 56% got information about sex from their friends or close acquaintances; 22.7% from books, magazines, and movies; 9.7% from their parents; 3.8% from people in the medical community; and just 1.2% from teachers or in school.⁴¹

In the July 10, 1996 issue of *Argumenty i Fakty* the source of information regarding sex is addressed. According to the article, about 1.3% of girls believed in the Soviet era axiom "Sex-We Don't Have Any," which refers more to the amorality of sex and the notion that sex is something that shouldn't be practiced without concern for morals.⁴² While this was a small portion of the population, it is significant in that the Soviet mentality regarding chastity and sex had infiltrated into at least some Russian girls after

⁴⁰ Rossiiskaia konferentsiia po planirovanii u sem'i. 1995. Reproduktivnoe zdorov'e i seksual'noe vospitanie molodezhi: materialy konferentsii, 13-14 dekabria 1994 g. Moskva: RAPS. 91.

⁴¹ Ibid. 91

⁴² Nikolaeva, Iuliya. "Intimate relationships with teenagers that only 14% will talk about with their parents. What they wanted to know about sex? (ОБ ИНТИМНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЯХ С ПОДРОСТКАМИ БЕСЕДУЮТ ЛИШЬ 14% РОДИТЕЛЕЙ. ЧТО ОНИ ХОТЕЛИ ЗНАТЬ О СЕКСЕ)." *Argumenty i Fakty* (Moscow), July 10, 1996.

the collapse of the Soviet Union. The article also points out that 68% of boys and 53% of girls got information about sex from the media and “erotic shows from the world.”⁴³

In the Tomsk region of Russia, it was recorded that more than 15% of all children born in 1995 were born to women 20 years old or younger.⁴⁴ Of course, there are many factors that lead to having children at a young age, but one factor may be a lack of education. The report doesn't delve further into whether or not the pregnancies of these young women were planned, but it does detail the high number of abortions amongst women in Tomsk (upwards of 30% of all women of childbearing age had at least one abortion at the time of the report), which could indicate that many of the pregnancies in Tomsk were unwanted.⁴⁵

Despite the fact that there was survey data to suggest that there was a weakly developed and formalized sex education program in the years directly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was some government movement to develop education programs, even in the years shortly before the collapse. In 1987, the chair of the International Fund for the Health of Mothers and Children called for the formation of the Russian Family Planning Society (RAPS).⁴⁶ While RAPS didn't form at that time, the campaign was at least partially successful. In 1991, Russia teamed with Planned Parenthood for the first time, and developed a joint campaign to deal with the issue of family planning. The Russian Planned Parenthood venture went under the slogan of

⁴³ Ibid. July 10, 1996.

⁴⁴ *Reproduktivnoe zdorov'e i seksual'noe vospitanie molodezhi*. 44.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 44.

⁴⁶ Assotsiatsiia "Zhizn'". 1997. *Planirovanie sem'i-- ugroza natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossii: analiticheskii vestnik*. Moskva: Assots. zhizn'. 6.

“Together for procreation—means and methods against procreation” (which meant contraception, sterilization, and abortion).⁴⁷

Of course, at that time, RAPS was just partially associated with Planned Parenthood. There was a strong push for RAPS to become more permanently joined with Planned Parenthood through their international arm, the International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF). So, after much lobbying, RAPS joined with the IPPF in 1993.⁴⁸ This allowed RAPS to become a fully formed and funded foundation within Russia. The founders of RAPS believed that women should have a choice of whether they wanted to have a family with the aid of modern scientific methods such as abortions, sterilizations, or contraceptives; and that women should not be denied access to these methods based on their age, sexual orientation, financial status, or where they lived.⁴⁹

One of the main draws of RAPS working with the IPPF was that the IPPF had a campaign to bring safe sex into schools (from their April 1993 bulletin).⁵⁰ By 1994, RAPS, in accordance with IPPF mandates, set about their plan to “focus on providing access to family planning services and safe abortions.”⁵¹

There was some mentioning of sex education in the press. In a *Literaturnaya Gazeta* article from January 9, 1996 the concept of sex education appears. The article entitled “How to raise children?” (как воспитать детей?) asked how educators can help better

⁴⁷ Ibid. 6.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 7.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 7.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 18.

⁵¹ Ibid. 19.

raise children in the future. The answer, according to the article, was to incorporate new courses into children's curriculums, including sex education (половое воспитания).⁵² So, even though a government enforced sex education program had not been adopted, there were Russian citizens who believed a sex education course was a way to better raise children.

In 1994, the Dutch pharmaceutical company Organon conducted a small sex survey called "What do you know about yourself?" (Что ты знаешь о себе?). The survey was conducted in schools in St. Petersburg, Moscow and its environs, Arkhangelsk and its environs, the Krasnoyarsk region, and the Udmurtia and Komi republics. Some of the results of the survey were published in the July 12 issue of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*. According to the article, it was concluded that many school children did not know much about sex or sex related matters. The authors of the article asserted that this was probably because most information about sex comes from doctors, and that many Russian citizens do not want to get their information about sex from physicians. According to the authors, this was a big problem, one that in the U.S., for example, does not exist in the same way as in Russia. The reason for this, according to the authors, is that the U.S. spends roughly \$400 million annually on sex education programs, where Russia does not spend anything.⁵³ Again, this survey is interesting in that it suggests that there were Russian citizens that wanted, or encouraged, a sex education program.

The idea that an introduction of sex education programs may be warranted can be found in the December 4, 1999 issue of *Moskovskii Komsomolets*. According to the

⁵² *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (Moscow), "How to Raise Children (как воспитать детей?)," January 9, 1996.

⁵³ *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (Moscow), "Children giving birth...(Рожают Дети...)," July 12, 1994.

author, a lack of a fully developed sex education program in Russia had caused the entire youth generation to be “lost, disorientated.”⁵⁴ And that this had resulted in the fact that the youth in Russia “do not know how to build relationships.”⁵⁵

According to the article, many readers wrote into the paper discussing ways to solve this problem. The author asserts that Russian citizens mainly wrote that the only way to save the younger generation’s problems related to sex and their relationships was to implement a countrywide sex education program.⁵⁶

However, by the 2000s, despite a clear need for sex education, and support from RAPS and the IPPF, Russia still did not have any formal sex education. This was partially because of lobbying efforts of anti-sex education groups, akin to right wing thinkers of the 1980s and glasnost. The two largest and most vocal opponents of sex education were the Orthodox Church and hardened Soviet communists who were nostalgic for the “good old days.”⁵⁷ Some Russians believed that school-aged children don’t need sex education because when it is time to know, they will “learn anyway,” whatever that may mean.⁵⁸

In fact, in 1996, the UN sponsored a sex education program for 12-14 year-old children in Russia, but it met with so much protest that the program was cancelled.⁵⁹ At

⁵⁴ Shestakova, Irina. "Sex in the law (Секс в законе)." *Moskovskii Komsomolets* (Moscow), December 4, 1999.

⁵⁵ Ibid. December 4, 1999.

⁵⁶ Ibid. December 4, 1999.

⁵⁷ Torabi MR, JW Crowe, S Rhine, DE Daniels, and I Jeng. 2000. "Evaluation of HIV/AIDS education in Russia using a video approach". *The Journal of School Health*. 70 (6): 229-33. 230.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 230.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 230.

that time the UN had begun implementing over 100 sex education courses all over the world in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.⁶⁰ However, according to UN officials the UN workers the “massive and fierce resistance” that they were met with in Russia was unlike anything else they had seen in the world.⁶¹

And, like the in late Soviet era and early post-Soviet Russia, many continue to believe that sex education will inherently lead to sexual looseness. A new aspect of this rhetoric was that not only would sex education bring sexual looseness, but it would also lead to psychological pathologies that would inevitably lead to drug addition and alcoholism.⁶²

Aside from these negative attitudes associated with sex education, held by many people in Russia, there have been modest inroads into the acceptance and need for sex education. In a study published in 2009, women aged 15-44 were asked if they supported sex education in schools. 88% of those surveyed supported sex education. 50% believed that children should learn about childbearing before they reach the age of 14, while 44% of the remaining women surveyed believed that information about childbearing should be taught between 14 and 15 years old.⁶³ This is a marked difference from beliefs about sex education in the previous decades.

By 2009, some schools had implemented sex education courses. In the same survey above, women were asked about if they had received formalized sex education in school.

⁶⁰ Mashkina, Katya. "Тампак- a weapon of the proletariat (Тампак- оружие пролетариата)." *Moskovskii Komsomolets* (Moscow), January 27, 1998.

⁶¹ Ibid. January 27, 1998.

⁶² *Evaluation of HIV/AIDS education in Russia using a video approach*. 230.

⁶³ Ministry of Health. 2012. *Reproductive Health Survey Executive Summary Russia 2011*. Moscow, Russia: United Nations Population Fund; United States Agency for International Development; Division of Reproductive Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 36.

According to the survey, 90% of all 15-24 year olds reported that they had at least one school course in sex education. A larger percentage (95%) of those living in Moscow received formalized sex education in school. Overall, in rural parts of Russia, 88% said that they received some form of sex education in school, and 87% of those living in other cities (aside from Moscow) reported having a course on sex education in school.⁶⁴

Additionally, in 2008, approximately 42% of Russian youth reported being adequately informed about issues surrounding sex.⁶⁵

Another interesting change related to sex education between the Soviet era and the 1990s is where people gathered their information about sex. Recall that during the Soviet era, Makarenko instituted a nationwide practice of gaining information about sex from doctors, and *not* in school. In the survey in 2009, that trend appears to have ended. The survey asked respondents from where they believe they receive the most important information about sex. The following table shows their responses.

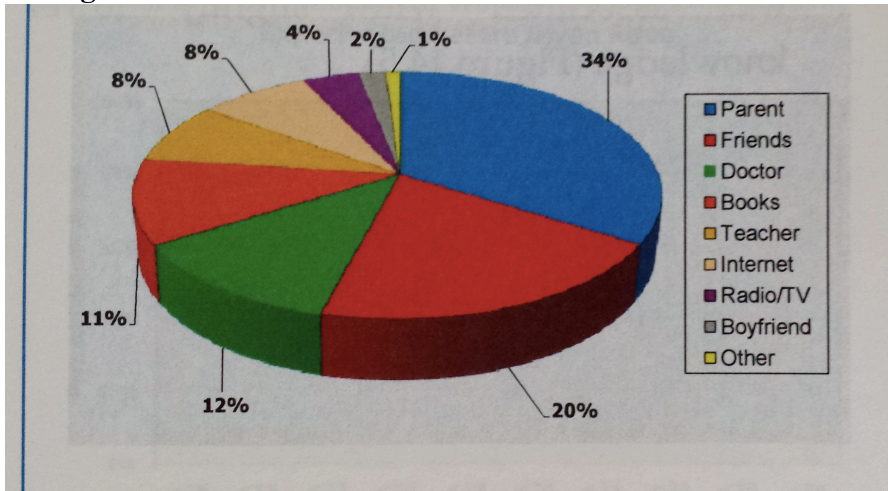
The highest percentage was from a parent (34%) and the next highest was from a friend (20%). 12% responded that they received their information from doctors, which was just 1 percent higher than from books. The rest of the trends can be seen in figure 1.

However, in a Russian Public Opinion Research Poll conducted in 2011, parents stated that they did not believe it was their job or role to talk to their children about sex, despite the fact 34% of young Russian adults get their information about sex from their parents.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 37.

⁶⁵ Solntsevo, Tatiana. "Sex after classes (Секс после уроков)." *Trud* (Moscow), June 19, 2008.

Figure 1: Most Important Source of Information about Sexual Matters Reported by Young Adults 15-24



Source: Ministry of Health. 2012. *Reproductive Health Survey Executive Summary Russia 2011*. Moscow, Russia: United Nations Population Fund; United States Agency for International Development; Division of Reproductive Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Additionally, 81% of these parents said that they would be for inclusion of sex education in schools for 14-16 year old and just 10% stated that they would be against it.⁶⁶ But, despite this, however, formalized sex education has not been adopted nationwide in Russia.

Even though there is some evidence that sex education now has been integrated into schools in Russia, in some way, there is not a countrywide standard, and it is not entirely clear what these students are learning in their sex education course.

Certainly, a more rigorous and expanded sex education program would help to alleviate these problems, but instituting nationwide sex education standards that incorporate *all* aspects of sexual health is almost impossible. As two researchers put it:

⁶⁶ Lukovitskaya E, and D Buchanan. 2011. "Reproductive health knowledge, attitude, and behaviors of technical college students in Velikye Novgorod, Russia". *International Quarterly of Community Health Education*. 32 (2): 2011-2012. 216.

Many scholars assert that current discussions around sex education in Russian convey a tone of ‘crisis symptoms,’ where everyone understands that ‘we need to do something’ and ‘we need to do it now.’ However, in Russian society today, issues for discussion with respect to sex education are legitimate only if they are based on traditional values, which include the traditional division of gender roles, the importance of family and motherhood for the welfare of the nation, and adherence to Christian Orthodox values. Conversely, issues such as gender equality, women’s reproductive rights, the role of sexuality and childbearing outside of marriage, and other topics are not welcomed in the current system.⁶⁷

In summary, the period from the 1990s to the present saw some changes in sex education in Russia. More Russian citizens have sex education programs in schools. However, there is still no standardized sex education curriculum in Russia. Surely, some sort of sex education impetus will be needed to change drastically the way that sex is taught and discussed in Russia.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 116.

CHAPTER III

CONTRACEPTION

As noted previously, sex education took various forms during the Soviet era, and has had differing effects on the nature of relationships and sex for men and women in Russia today. One of the most interesting aspects of sex in the Soviet Union, and in Russia, is the story of contraceptives and what kind of impact their use (or non-use) has had on women in Russia and during the Soviet era. Russian women today use modern contraceptives at a far lower rate than in western countries. The culture of contraception during the Soviet Union, as a direct result of the history of contraception, has shaped generations of people, and these cultural influences affect Russian women today.⁶⁸

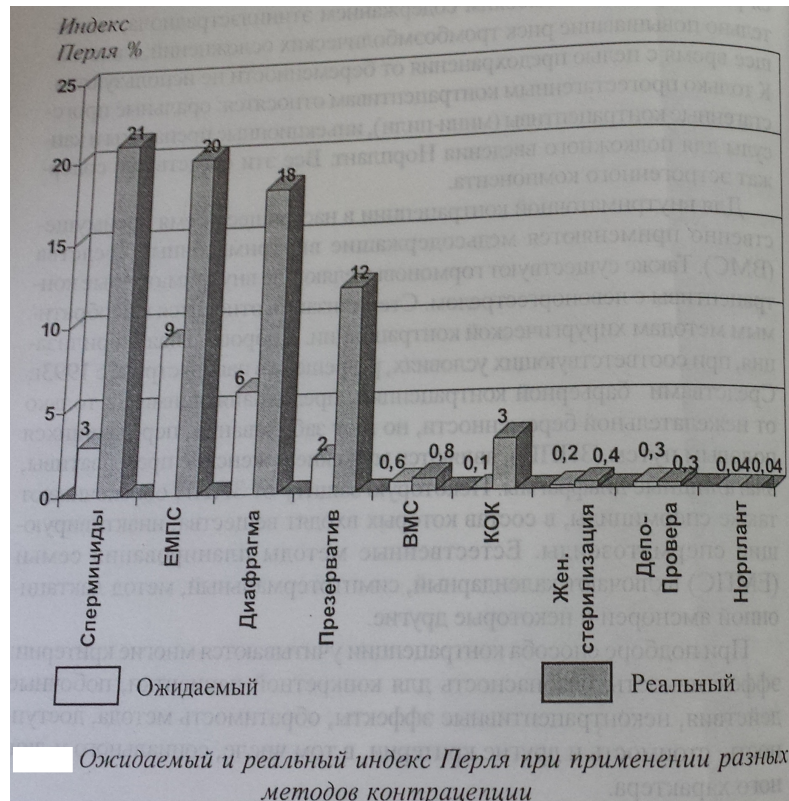
By way of background, a basic understanding of the various kinds of contraception is necessary. There are traditional methods that do not include chemicals, or special devices, which have been used by women for centuries. For the present purpose, the two most pertinent forms of traditional methods are the rhythm method and the withdrawal method. There also are barrier methods including the cervical cap, diaphragm, and condoms. There also are hormonal forms of birth control including the Pill, the patch, and the Depo-Provera shot. And there are also physician-implemented methods such as Norplant, an IUD, sterilization, and in the case of the Soviet Union and Russia, abortion.⁶⁹ For the purpose of this thesis, all forms of birth control, other than the natural methods, are considered “modern” forms of birth control.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Abortions were the main form of birth control during the Soviet period; however, other forms of birth control do have a role within the Soviet context. Because of the complex nature of the history of abortion in the Soviet Union, a separate chapter has been dedicated to this topic (see Chapter IV).

⁶⁹ According organizations like Centers for Disease Control (“CDC”) and Planned Parenthood, abortion is not considered a form of birth control. For more information, refer to Rengel, Marian. 2000. *Encyclopedia*

Another important point to keep in mind is the actual effectiveness of various methods of birth control. There are many methods of determining effectiveness, but one of the most widely accepted formats is the Pearl Index.⁷¹ Figure 2 shows the effectiveness of certain forms of birth control according to the Pearl Index.

Figure 2: Desired and Real Effectiveness of Birth Control According to the Pearl Index



Source: Ailamakian, E. K. 1997. *Planirovanie sem'i, metody kontraktsepsii: prakticheskoe rukovodstvo*. Sankt-Peterburg: Sotis. 26.

of birth control. Phoenix, Ariz: Oryx Press on page 1-2. However, because of the way abortion was used during the Soviet Union, it may be considered a form of birth control, at least that is the way that the government advocated their use. For more on this, refer to Chapter IV in the abortion section.

⁷⁰ There are many kinds of birth control. For a fairly complete list of all forms of birth control, refer to the following website for more information:
<http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/unintendedpregnancy/contraception.htm>

⁷¹ The Pearl Index is a universal mathematical scale of contraceptive effectiveness. For more information, refer to Balakrishnan, N. 2010. *Methods and applications of statistics in the life and health sciences*. Hoboken: Wiley, specifically page 658.

The y-axis represents percent chance of becoming pregnant. Therefore, the lower the percentage (the y-axis) the more effective the birth control method is. From the left, the methods of birth control listed are: spermicides, natural methods (which include rhythm and withdrawal), diaphragm, condoms, IUD, oral contraceptives (such as the Pill), female sterilization, Depo-Provera, and Norplant. For each type of birth control method, there is a light and dark bar. The light bar represents the ideal or “wished” effectiveness. This simply represents the effectiveness of the method in the scientific setting, and does not take into account human error. The dark bar represents the “real” effectiveness for any given method. As can be seen, for methods like spermicides, natural methods, diaphragm, and condoms, the wished effectiveness is much higher than the actual effectiveness. This is because these methods rely heavily on humans to be implemented, and there are a lot of ways in which these methods can get “messed up” when being used. For example, a condom could be put on incorrectly, or a diaphragm could be improperly inserted. For some of the other methods, the real and desired effectiveness are virtually the same because there can be very little human error involved; these include Norplant, and female sterilization.

One note, however, that should be made from this figure is where the IUD and oral contraceptives are placed. According to current data, an IUD’s real and wished effectiveness is even better than female sterilization at about .05% for real and wished effectiveness. On the other hand, oral contraceptives’ Pearl Index rating should be closer to 9% for its real effectiveness.⁷² The reasons for these discrepancies are unclear.

⁷² There are many places to obtain information on contraceptive effectiveness. One easy-to-read figure can be found through the CDC at the following website:
http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/UnintendedPregnancy/PDF/Contraceptive_methods_508.pdf

Regardless, it is important to help with the understanding of this paper to remember that the IUD is one of the most effective forms of birth control, that the Pill and condoms are not as reliable as other modern methods, and that traditional methods are significantly less reliable than other methods.

Aside from all of this, the most common form of modern contraception worldwide, as of 2011, was the Pill.⁷³ Since its inception, it has remained one of the most popular forms of contraception worldwide. The Pill was first developed in the United States, and the patent was granted on May 1, 1956.⁷⁴ The FDA approved the sale and distribution of the Pill in 1957.⁷⁵ It wasn't until 1960, however, that full FDA trials had been completed, and the Pill was deemed safe and effective to use as a way to prevent births.⁷⁶

Soviet Period until the 1980s: Fear the Pill

Contraceptive use and policy during the Soviet period did not exactly mimic that of other European or western countries. Despite the fact that modern methods of contraception were available, Soviet leaders adopted policies that made it difficult for many Soviet citizens to trust the effectiveness and safety of modern contraceptives, as well as obtain them.

⁷³ UN data. Figure can be found at:
http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/contraceptive2011/wallchart_front.pdf

⁷⁴ Watkins, Elizabeth Siegel. 1998. *On the pill: a social history of oral contraceptives, 1950-1970*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. 24.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 24.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 32.

In the United States, the Pill was overwhelmingly popular. By 1965, just five years after its introduction into the market, over 6.5 million women were using the Pill as their primary form of birth control, and it was the most popular form of birth control in the United States at the time (with over 95% of gynecologists and obstetricians prescribing it to their patients).⁷⁷ But the popularity surge in the Pill that was seen in the United States, and other countries in the early 1960s, did not happen in the Soviet Union. Many Soviet officials were reluctant to allow oral contraceptives into the country, and as a result, there were no factories producing oral contraceptives in the entire Soviet Union for its entire history.⁷⁸ Plainly put, Soviet women simply did not use the Pill as a form of birth control in the 1960s.

In later decades, Soviet officials cautioned the use of oral contraceptives. Often they were prescribed solely for the purposes of treating select medical conditions and their use came with severe warnings, citing about 30 contraindications, including cancer risk.⁷⁹ Additionally, the Soviet government, with the use of propaganda materials and campaigns, heavily lauded anti-oral contraceptive campaigns. At the height of the campaign, it was thought that the main thrust of the propaganda targeted doctors and patients warning them that the contraindications applied to upwards of 90% of potential birth control users.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid. 35.

⁷⁸ Jacobson JL. 1990. "Out from behind the contraceptive Iron Curtain". *World Watch*. 3 (5). 30.

⁷⁹ Regushevskaya E, T Dubikaytis, M Nikula, O Kuznetsova, and E Hemminki. 2009. "Contraceptive use and abortion among women of reproductive age in st. Petersburg, Russia". *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. 41 (1): 51-8. (51).

⁸⁰ Perlman F, and M McKee. 2009. "Trends in family planning in Russia, 1994-2003". *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. 41 (1): 40-50. (40).

According to some sources, the Soviet Ministry of Health (“MOH”) banned oral contraceptives in 1974, which were disparagingly called “hormones.”⁸¹ Other sources, however, indicate that the Soviet MOH did not outright ban oral contraceptives, but rather, that it simply issued a letter called “On the Side Effects and Complications of Using Oral Contraceptives” (О побочном действии и осложнениях при применении оральных контрацептивов).⁸² Regardless of an official or unofficial ban, the actions of the Soviet MOH left an estimated 70 million women of childbearing age without access to oral contraceptives.⁸³

In summary, oral contraceptives were the main target of the Soviet government’s anti-modern contraception campaign. The Pill was deemed unsafe, and as a result, many women did not use the Pill or even have access to it.

The 1980s: Changing Trends in Use and Popularity

The 1980s was a time for great change in contraception. The IUD outpaced abortion as a contraceptive method for the first time in the Soviet Union’s history. Women were more aware of the Pill, and other forms of modern contraception, than during the earlier Soviet years. However, despite these changes, traditional forms of birth control were still popular, and modern contraceptives were not universally used or known.

⁸¹ *Sexuality education in Russia*. 805.

⁸² Vishnevskii, A. G. 2006. *Demograficheskaia modernizatsiia Rossii, 1900-2000*. Moskva: Novoeizd-vo. 227.

⁸³ *Out from behind the contraceptive Iron Curtain*. 30.

By the 1980s, oral contraceptives were used by just 1-3% of the population of Moscow, and probably lower in the rest of the Soviet Union.⁸⁴ This 1-3% still represented a large people, and by 1988, it was estimated that approximately 120 million women were using, or had used, some form of oral contraceptives in the Soviet Union.⁸⁵

This modest use of oral contraceptives by Soviet women in the 1980s may be explained by a second letter that the Soviet MOH issued in 1981 entitled, “Adverse reaction and complications caused by oral contraceptives” (о побочных реакция и осложнениях, вызываемых оральными контрацептивами).⁸⁶ In this letter, the attitude of the MOH seems to be less harsh, and perhaps a bit uncertain as to the negative effects of the Pill. In the letter, the MOH wrote that it “seems difficult to agree that the positive and social consequences oral contraceptives outweigh their risk.” Of course, in the letter, the Soviet MOH argued that oral contraceptives are ill-advised, but by having mentioned that there are potential positive effects of oral contraceptives MOH’s hardline stance seemed to have weakened.

This does not mean that all women suddenly believed the Pill to be safe and effective. In the August 1984 issue of *Feldsher i Akusherka* an article was published entitled “Present-Day Anti-Abortion Propaganda.” The article was written by a midwife who promoted the use of different forms of birth control over abortion. However, in the article, the author wrote, “Some women prefer hormone pills to other means of

⁸⁴ Попов, А. А., А. П. Visser, and E. Ketting. 1993. "Contraceptive Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice in Russia during the 1980s". *STUDIES IN FAMILY PLANNING*. 24 (4) 233.

⁸⁵ Antonov, A. I., Sh. Kh Kadyrov, and Giorgi Culaze. 1988. Planirovanie sem'i i natsional'nye traditsii: tezisy dokladov Vsesoiuznoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii, Tbilisi, 28-30 noiabria 1988 g. Moskva: In-t sotsiologii AN SSSR. 40.

⁸⁶ *Demograficheskaia modernizatsiia Rossii*,. 227.

contraception. Thus it is essential for midwives to stress the negative effects of their use without a prescription, as well as their long-term use even with a prescription.” So, even though this article emphasized the negative aspects of abortions, and urged women to use other methods of birth control, the Pill was still seen as a method was to be used with caution.⁸⁷

Accounting for all of the efforts put forth by the Soviet MOH, by the collapse of the Soviet Union at least one third of women were aware of the Pill, but it was the lowest ranked form of contraceptive that was used.⁸⁸

But what about methods of birth control other than the Pill? Women’s understanding and awareness of other forms of birth control were still limited. In the same *Feldsher i Akusherka* article from above, the author wrote, “Inasmuch as coitus interruptus is still practiced very widely as a means of avoiding pregnancy, midwives should emphasize its detrimental effect on the health of both spouses and its ineffectiveness. They should also explain that vaginal douches are effective only in conjunction with other devices (such as the diaphragm), and that the ‘rhythm method’ is unreliable.”⁸⁹

In the 1980s, there were several studies that were conducted in various parts of the Soviet Union that asked women about their use of contraceptives that can help explain women’s attitudes and usage of various methods of birth control.

In table 1, the percentage distribution of contraceptive use in Moscow and Saratov in 1984, in Moscow in 1982 and 1984, and in Moscow and Tartu in 1984 can be seen.

⁸⁷ Polchanova, S.L.. "Present-Day Anti-Abortion Propaganda." *Feldsher i Akusherka* August (1984): 18.

⁸⁸ *Contraceptive Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice in Russia during the 1980s*. 233.

⁸⁹ *Present-Day Anti-Abortion Propaganda*. August (1984).

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Contraceptive Use, According to Studies Conducted in Urban Russia

Contraceptive method	Moscow and Saratov 1984				Moscow 1982	Moscow 1984	Moscow and Tartu 1984	
	Moscow	Saratov					Moscow	Tartu
Rhythm (calendar)	27 (29)	28 (29)			36	30	34	55
Condom	24 (26)	21 (24)			32	21	25	11
Vaginal douche	8 (5)	17 (11)			—	17	17	5
Withdrawal	25 (26)	21 (23)			19	14	15	11
IUD	10 (9)	9 (8)			—	11	5	14
Orals	2 (1)	3 (2)			3	4	3	3
Spermicide	3 (2)	3 (3)			5	3	2	1
Diaphragm	1 (1)	— (—)			—	1	1	1
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)			95 ^a	100	100	100

Notes: The percentages for males are in parentheses.

In the Moscow 1982 and Moscow and Tartu 1984 studies, respondents were permitted to indicate only one contraceptive method. In the other two studies, a combination of methods could be given; combinations have been eliminated here, for the sake of comparability with the other studies.

^a 5 percent unknown.

Source: Popov, A. A., A. P. Visser, and E. Ketting. 1993. "Contraceptive Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice in Russia during the 1980s". *STUDIES IN FAMILY PLANNING*. (4) 229.

From table 1, we can see that the most widely used birth control method for any year in any of the three cities was the rhythm method. The next most commonly used contraceptive method was withdrawal, and the third most commonly used method was vaginal douche. All three of these forms of birth control are considered unreliable and can be categorized as traditional.

These three methods made up about two-thirds of the contraceptive choices for women in this study. Of course, it is impossible to say for sure what all women in the Soviet Union were using for contraceptives, but with the historical and contextual background of what was going on during that time, especially in terms of education (See

Chapter II) about contraceptive methods, it is probably safe to assume that most women in the Soviet Union were in fact following the same trends as in the table, and that most women were using traditional methods an overwhelming amount of time as their primary form of birth control.

The study also looked at the reasons why women were not using other forms of contraceptives. As we can see in table 2 the two main reasons women were not using contraceptives was because of a lack of availability and lack of information. This is to say that some women perhaps wanted to use contraceptives, but couldn't get them, and/or they did not even know about other forms of contraceptives. This is consistent with what we know about the state of sex education, and congruent with the notion that if sex education was banned, information about contraceptive methods was also limited, if existent at all.

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Women's Reasons for Not Using Contraceptives, According to Studies in Urban Russia

Reasons	Moscow 1984	Moscow and Tartu 1984	
		Moscow	Tartu
Lack of availability	34	37	38
Lack of information	24	24	30
Danger to health	18	19	—
Unwillingness of husband to use a contraceptive	12	10	14
Disappointment with previously used contraceptives	12	9	4
Religion	—	—	11
Local traditions	—	—	1
Preference for induced abortions	0	2	3
Total	100	100	100

Source: Popov, A. A., A. P. Visser, and E. Ketting. 1993. "Contraceptive Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice in Russia during the 1980s". *STUDIES IN FAMILY PLANNING*. 24 (4) 230.

One interview that I conducted was of a 72-year-old pensioner named Masha.⁹⁰ Masha had been a psychiatrist for 40 years and had lived her whole life in Moscow. She went to medical school during the Soviet Union at Moscow State University. By all accounts, Masha was a well-educated woman. She had traveled around the world, and she was very sharp for her age. She even had to perform abortions during her medical school training. Despite all of this, however, when I asked her what kinds of contraceptive methods she was aware of, she was just able to name four: IUD, condoms, Norplant, and the Pill. Initially, she was quickly able to name the IUD and condom, and said that was it. However, afterward, she looked at me and asked if there were more forms of birth control. I simply told her that I wanted to know what kinds of birth control that she knew (perhaps I non-verbally gave away the fact that there were more forms of birth control). She then thought again and was able to name Norplant and the Pill. After she named these four methods, she seemed quite proud that she was able to name so many. This is just one story, but it illustrates, how on an individual level, awareness of birth control methods, even of a highly educated and sharp woman, was quite limited.

In another instance, I interviewed 27-year-old Tanya.⁹¹ Tanya is a Muscovite and works in the fashion industry. Both of her parents are physicians. She is well-educated with a dual degree from the Moscow School for Higher Economics. She is pleasant and outgoing. She loves the United States. She spent a year in New York as part of a work

⁹⁰ Pseudonym

⁹¹ Pseudonym

exchange program, and has traveled all over the U.S.. She travels frequently, and she is almost fluent in English.

When asked what forms of birth control she was aware of, Tanya was able to name four: the patch, the Pill, condom, and IUD. She also had vaguely heard of the morning- after pill, but said that she got that information from her time in the United States. She also mentioned several traditional methods as viable forms of birth control; two of the most interesting were the idea of standing in front of the TV for an extended period of time directly after having sex, and the other was douching with lemon juice.

Clearly, Tanya and Masha are of different generations, but regardless, they both seem to have quite limited knowledge about contraceptive methods. What is perhaps the most significant is that both of these women are fairly educated, as compared to most Russian women, and yet their understanding was still remarkably poor.

Aside from awareness of various forms of contraceptives, this study also looked at how reliable these men and women thought various forms of contraceptives were, which can be seen in table 3. As we can see from the table, no method was perceived as all that reliable. According to the respondents, the most reliable method was either the condom or withdrawal. The Pill and IUDs were cited as not being reliable. A related question asked respondents how safe they felt specific contraceptive methods were.

A note about the concept of “Safety” in regards to contraceptive methods. Recall that during the Soviet era, the government issued warnings about the safety of oral contraceptives, saying that the Pill was unsafe because of its unhealthy side-effects. In this sense, “safety” has to do with health and the associated negative side effects. This is perhaps a different notion than many Americans may have when they think about the

“safety” of a birth control method. To Americans, a “safe” birth control method may prevent STIs or pregnancy, but the negative health effects are rarely, if ever, considered. In the Soviet context, and in Russia today, “safe” contraceptive methods are ones that do not have negative health effects, not ones that are reliable at preventing STIs and pregnancy. Keep this concept in mind when parsing through the data in regards to Russians’ attitudes towards the safety of various methods of contraception.

Table 3: Percentage of Respondents Who Considered Specific Contraceptive Methods Reliable, by Method, According to Studies Conducted in Urban Russia

Contraceptive method	Moscow and Saratov 1984		Moscow 1982	Moscow 1983
	Moscow	Saratov		
Rhythm	21 (23)	25 (31)	29	31 (35)
Condom	42 (37)	46 (35)	35	22 (37)
Vaginal douche	2 (16)	8 (14)	—	10 (5)
Withdrawal	43 (41)	40 (40)	15	12 (10)
IUD	22 (30)	24 (27)	—	32 (15)
Orals	13 (18)	4 (7)	7	3 (3)
Spermicide	3 (4)	3 (7)	6	3 (4)
Diaphragm	12 (6)	3 (6)	—	4 (5)

Notes: The percentages for males are in parentheses.

Dash (—) means that the method was not included in the questionnaire.

Source: Popov, A. A., A. P. Visser, and E. Ketting. 1993. "Contraceptive Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice in Russia during the 1980s". *STUDIES IN FAMILY PLANNING*. 24 (4) 230.

In table 4 we can see what methods the men and women surveyed considered safe. As predicted, oral contraceptives were not seen as safe, and in fact, oral contraceptives were seen as the least safe method. This is not surprising because of the

heavy campaigns by the Soviet government to portray oral contraceptives as unsafe and unhealthy. Clearly, then, these campaigns were effective.

Table 4: Percentage of Respondents Who Considered Specific Contraceptive Methods Safe (and for the last study, methods ranked by safety,) by Method, According to Studies Conducted in Urban Russia

Contraceptive method	Moscow and Saratov 1984		Moscow 1983 (ranking) ^a
	Moscow	Saratov	
Rhythm (calendar)	65 (75)	64 (77)	1 (1)
Condom	61 (49)	50 (46)	3 (3)
Vaginal douche	22 (36)	23 (38)	2 (3)
Withdrawal	10 (10)	10 (7)	7 (5)
IUD	20 (21)	18 (26)	5 (4)
Orals	5 (6)	6 (5)	10 (9)
Spermicide	8 (12)	9 (9)	9 (10)
Diaphragm	25 (15)	14 (15)	9 (5)

Notes: The percentages and ranking for males are in parentheses.

^a In this study, methods were ranked in order of safety: 1 = most safe; 10 = least safe.

Source: Popov, A. A., A. P. Visser, and E. Ketting. 1993. "Contraceptive Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice in Russia during the 1980s". *STUDIES IN FAMILY PLANNING*. 24 (4). 231.

As we can see from this study, the Pill wasn't the only form of birth control that women were using during the late Soviet era. Especially during the late Soviet era, women's access to other forms of birth control began to increase. Additionally, close to the end of the Soviet regime, anti-contraceptive campaigns began to become less frequent and harsh. On July 25, 1985 the Soviet MOH issued an order that called for the immediate need to promote modern contraceptive methods, including the IUD.⁹²

⁹² *Demograficheskaiia modernizatsiia Rossii*. 227. (The order is No. 590).

Additionally, at the July 15, 1987 session of the Collegium of the USSR Ministry of Public Health, the Union-republic Ministers of Health were ordered to expand “the use of intrauterine contraception and modern hormonal birth-control methods.”⁹³ According to the Chief of the USSR Ministry of Health for Medical and Preventative Care for Children and Mothers, V. Alekseev, IUD governmental promotion was to take place for 10 years.⁹⁴

As a result, in the late 1980s, the IUD became the most popular form of birth control, outpacing abortions for the first time in the history of the Soviet Union.⁹⁵

By 1988, a study was conducted that looked at the factors that influenced women’s use of an IUD. The study looked at women throughout the Soviet Union, in almost all Republics. The women were asked to tell what factors, from “Information,” “Attitude,” and “Availability” influenced their decision to choose to get an IUD. In almost every republic, about 85-95% of women said that Availability was a contributing factor to choosing an IUD.⁹⁶ Attitude and Information were less important factors for women, but there was still a large percentage that took these factors into consideration. This shows, perhaps, that a reason for the surge in IUD use in the 1980s was because of its increasing availability, rather than an increase in a positive and aggressive campaign touting its effectiveness.

⁹³ "IN THE COLLEGIUM OF THE USSR MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH." *Meditinskaya Gazeta* July (1987): 2.

⁹⁴ *Argumety i Fatky* (Moscow), "Question-Answer," April 22, 1989.

⁹⁵ Denisov BP, VI Sakevich, and A Jasilioniene. 2012. "Divergent trends in abortion and birth control practices in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine". *PloS One*. 7 (11). (5).

⁹⁶ *Planirovanie sem'i i natsional'nye traditsii*. 26.

In summary, women in the 1980s used modern forms of contraceptives more readily than earlier decades, but the increase in use was modest. Many women were still not completely aware of modern methods of contraception. Additionally, the Soviet backed campaigns designed to emphasize the negative health effects of modern contraceptives seemed to persist, as many women thought that these methods of birth control were not safe. By the end of the 1980s, however, the Soviet government pushed for inclusion and adoption of IUDs by women. With the support of the government, women readily used IUDs, outpacing abortions for the first time in the history of the Soviet Union. This signifies, perhaps, that women relied heavily on the guidance of the Soviet government to inform them of the safety of various methods of birth control.

1991-Present: Tradition and Culture Win, Maybe

Reproductive behavior of women after the collapse of the Soviet Union must be looked at differently than during the Soviet period. This is primarily because of the differences in the way women got information, the way they accessed various methods, and the availability of different methods of birth control. Remember, that during the Soviet times most forms of birth control, outside of abortion (which will be discussed in Chapter IV) were not used. It wasn't until the late Soviet period that women began to use other modern contraceptive methods (most likely due to a decrease in anti-oral contraceptive campaigns and an increase in acceptance, by the government, of forms of contraception other than abortion). By the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, there is a clear increase in the acceptance rate of modern forms of birth control. The Pill, IUD, and condoms were more readily accepted. Additionally, the abortion rate plummeted once the Soviet Union collapsed. However, despite these changes, traditional

forms of birth control are still used at an unusually high rate, and women still think that modern forms of contraception are mildly unsafe.

Because of the new wave of reforms and openness associated with glasnost in the 1980s, not long after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a plethora of information and advertisements about various methods of contraception became available.

Some example advertisement for the IUD, the Pill, and condoms can be found in the 1997 Moscow publication, *Family Planning, Methods of Contraception: a Practical Guide. (Planirovanie sem'i, metody kontraktseptsii: prakticheskoe rukovodstvo)*.⁹⁷ This publication details almost every aspect of almost every form of contraception, including, Depo-Provera, IUD, and Norplant. For each method of contraception, there are exhaustive charts that details side effects of each methods, and its effectiveness, according to the Pearl Index. There are also contraindications listed which include epilepsy, hepatitis, pregnancy, cirrhosis, and anemia. Additionally, there are charts on how to correctly implant an IUD as well as full color page advertisements of different bill control pills, condoms, and even Depo Provera.

But what kind of changes actually occurred in the acceptance or usage of contraceptives for Russian women after the collapse of the Soviet Union? Figure 3 is from a survey conducted in 1993 that looked at contraceptive practices of women.

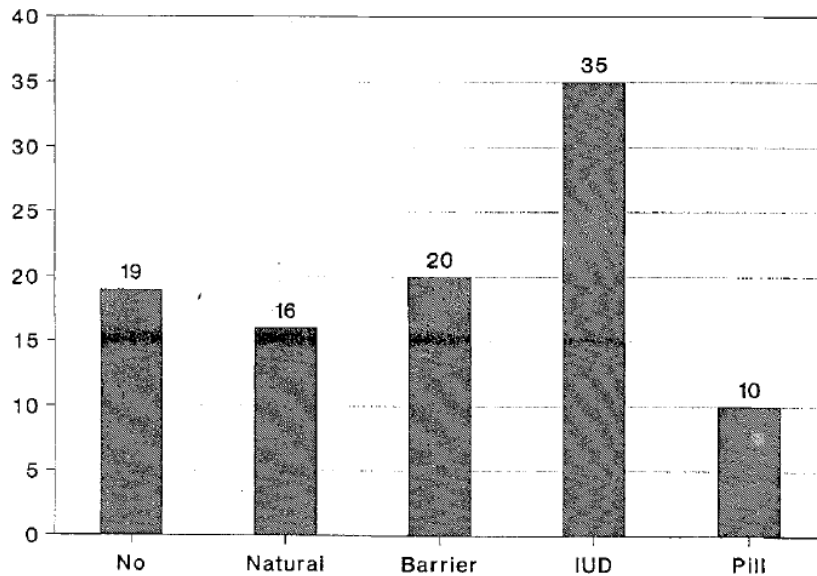
One thing that is interesting is that very few women used any form of chemical contraceptive. What is also interesting from this survey is that 31% women chose traditional (often high failure) methods, such as coitus interruptus (withdrawal) and rhythm. 18% of women used no form of contraception at all. Of the women who did use

⁹⁷Ailamakian, E. K. 1997. *Planirovanie sem'i, metody kontraktseptsii: prakticheskoe rukovodstvo*. Sankt-Peterburg: Sotis

contraceptives, 39% had used their main form of contraceptives for three years or longer.

The two most common forms of birth control were condoms and the IUD.

Figure 3: Contraceptive Usage of Russian Women by Percentage



Source: Visser APh, I Pavlenko, L Remmenick, N Bruyniks, and P Lehert. 1993. "Contraceptive practice and attitudes in former Soviet women". *Advances in Contraception: the Official Journal of the Society for the Advancement of Contraception*. 9 (1): 13-23. 15.

According to this data set, women were exhibiting similar reproductive behaviors as during the Soviet era. This can be explained by several potential factors. One is that the changes of an increase in information had not taken effect/could not be represented in survey data by 1993. Another answer is that women did in fact have more information about contraception, yet still chose to use traditional methods, or methods that were used most frequently during the Soviet era. Of course, from this data alone, it is really impossible to draw any definitive conclusion.

However, an article in *Trud* from February 15, 1997 indicates that the reasons Russian women were still using high-failure contraceptive methods (or no method at all) was because of the legacy of contraceptive policy during the Soviet period. In the article entitled “A choice based on love or an ‘accident,’” the author asserts that many children that were born in Russian accidentally and were not planned. Something that “just happened.” And, this was all “despite the fact that pharmacy shelves today are loaded with fully up-to-date and effective means of contraception.”⁹⁸ Additionally, according to the article, many Russian women were afraid to even *talk* about contraception. 25% of women didn’t talk to anyone about contraception, and just 40% would discuss contraception with their husbands or partners. Additionally, the article asserts that the IUD was the only contraceptive method that Russian women had “mastered,” based on the fact that 1 in 5 women in Russia were using an IUD at the time.⁹⁹

Table 5 is from data collected in 1992 and it shows the number of registered users of the IUD and the Pill (oral contraceptive). From table 5 we can see that the number of registered users of the Pill was substantially lower in every region than users of the IUD. Remember, this survey was conducted in 1992, just one year after the collapse of the Soviet Union. And recall that the IUD outpaced all other forms of birth control in the final years of the Soviet Union, and that throughout the Soviet Union’s history, the Pill was under heavy propaganda attacks touting its ill health effects, and as a result, very few

⁹⁸ Roschchina, Tatyana. "A choice based on love or an 'accident'." *Trud* (Moscow), February 15, 1997.

⁹⁹ Ibid. February 15, 1987.

women, shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, were voluntarily opting to use the Pill as their primary form of birth control.¹⁰⁰

Table 5: Officially Registered Users of IUDs and the Pill in Russia by Province in 1992

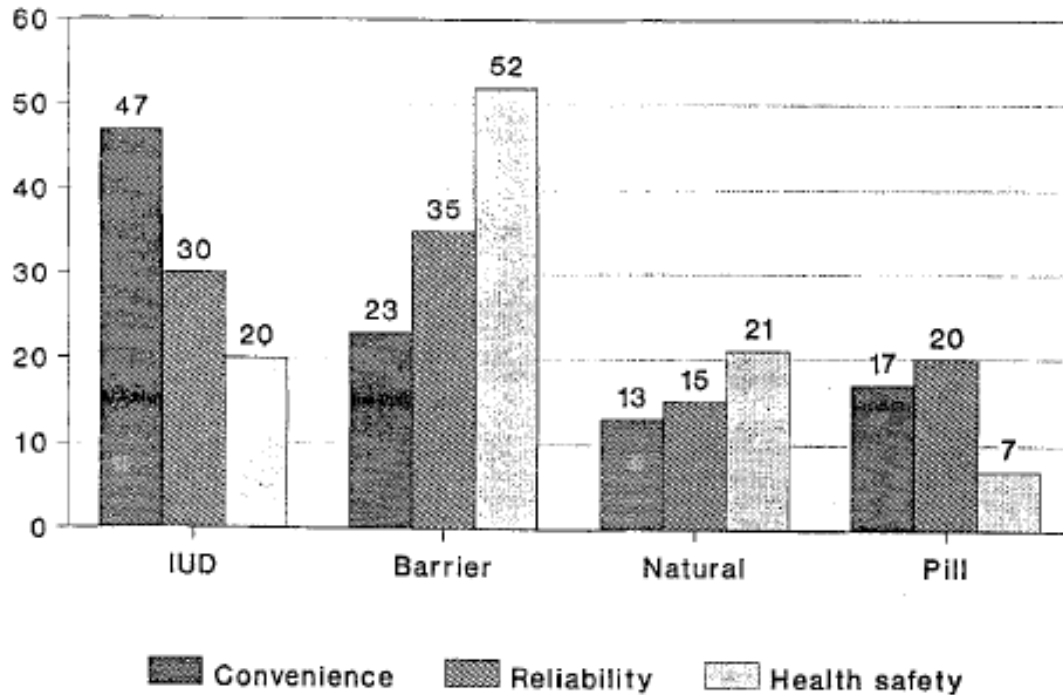
Provinces	Number of officially registered users per 1000 women aged 15-49 years	
	Intrauterine devices	Pills
1. Northern Region	269.4	31.8
2. North-West Region	100.0	31.4
3. St-Petersburg Ct.	66.7	13.0
4. Central Region	116.2	26.2
5. Moscow Ct.	77.0	18.4
6. Volga-Vyatsk Reg.	225.4	22.4
7. Cntr.-Blackearth Reg.	147.7	23.1
8. Povolgskiy Reg.	232.0	46.2
9. North Caucasus Reg.	142.5	24.6
10. Yral Reg.	n.d.	n.d.

Source: Popov, Andrej A. 1994. *Family planning and induced abortion in the post Soviet Russia of the early 1990's: the unmet needs in information supply*. Moscow: Center of Demography and Human Ecology

In 1993, a study was conducted by Visser APh, I Pavlenko, L Remmenick, N Bruyniks, and P Lehert called *Contraceptive practice and attitudes in former Soviet women* that looked at perceived reliability, safety, and convenience of various forms of birth control. In figure 4 the results can be seen. 52% of women found the IUD to be most desirable, despite the fact that only 35% of women used the IUD. From the study, condoms were believed to be the safest form of birth control and not the IUD, despite its convenience. Again, coming from the perspective of “safety” in terms of health, it is quite logical to think of condoms as safe (as compared to the IUD) because they are just made of rubber, they do not contain chemicals, and they do not require any doctor visit.

¹⁰⁰ Popov, Andrej A. 1994. *Family planning and induced abortion in the post Soviet Russia of the early 1990's: the unmet needs in information supply*. Moscow: Center of Demography and Human Ecology. 103.

Figure 4: Perceived Convenience, Reliability, and Health Safety of Various Contraceptive Methods



Source: Visser APh, I Pavlenko, L Remmenick, N Bruyniks, and P Leher. 1993. "Contraceptive practice and attitudes in former Soviet women". *Advances in Contraception: the Official Journal of the Society for the Advancement of Contraception*. 9 (1): 13-23. 19.

The relatively high acceptance and perceived reliability of the IUD and the condom was much higher than during the Soviet period. So, despite the fact that this study was conducted in 1993, just two years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is some small evidence that attitudes were slowly beginning to change, at least in regards to the IUD and the condom, and at least in regards to these women surveyed.

However, the Pill was still not being used at very high rates. In 1995 an article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* was published that mentioned the issue of acceptance of the Pill of Russian women at the time. In the article the author wrote, "Hormone drugs are having a

hard time gaining acceptance in Russia. They aren't very popular with gynecologists, especially those who graduated from medical school 10 or 15 years ago. They aren't very popular with women, either: The word 'hormone' signifies something frightening to them.” And, according to that article, just 3.7% of women were prescribed the Pill by their doctors.¹⁰¹

As may be expected, then, the Pill did not rank very high in terms of health safety, reliability, or convenience in survey data. In the study conducted in 1993 by Visser APh, I Pavlenko, L Remmenick, N Bruyniks, and P Lehert the researchers found that there was no correlation in oral contraceptive use and socio-demographic factors like education, geography, or urbanization. However, there was a noticeable decline in the use of oral contraceptives, as women got older.¹⁰² Again, this is not surprising because these older women most likely had most of their reproductive years during the Soviet era when anti-oral contraceptive campaigns were at their height.

But how does this information, and contraceptive acceptance compare to other countries? In 1995, another report was published in Moscow. From that survey it was estimated that just 22.3% of women were using modern forms of contraception.¹⁰³ At the same time, just 3% of women of reproductive age in Russia in 1995 were using hormonal forms of birth control. For comparison, in countries like The Netherlands, England,

¹⁰¹ Melnikov, Alexandr. "An Abortion in Russia is More than Just an Abortion: Russian Women Score a Crushing Victory." *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* (Moscow), October 10, 1995.

¹⁰² VisserAPh, I Pavlenko, L Remmenick, N Bruyniks, and P Lehert. 1993. "Contraceptive practice and attitudes in former Soviet women" *Advances in Contraception: the Official Journal of the Society for the Advancement of Contraception*. 9 (1): 13-23. 19.

¹⁰³ *Reproduktivnoe zdorov'e i seksual'noe vospitanie molodezhi*. 20.

Denmark, and Switzerland more than 50% of women at the same time used hormonal contraceptives.¹⁰⁴

Despite all of this, however, oral contraceptives were more readily available in the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union than during the Soviet period. For example, in April 6, 1995, an order from the Moscow city government's Department of Pharmacy mandated that certain pharmaceuticals be available in all pharmacies in the city. Of the drugs mentioned, oral contraceptives were listed. The order mandated that not only are the drugs to be available, but they are to be constantly available.¹⁰⁵

A study was conducted in 1997 by RAPS and according to that survey, just 4.3% of women in Russia believed that hormonal contraceptives (such as the Pill) was an effective means of contraception. 19% of women, aged 20-49 years, claimed that they didn't use hormonal contraception because they thought it was bad for their health; 25% thought it would lead to infertility; and just 9% weren't using the Pill because they were trying to have children.¹⁰⁶

From this study it appears that by 1997, the legacy of Soviet policy of the anti-oral contraceptive campaigns seemed to still have an effect, as many women chose not to use the Pill, not because of cost or availability issues, but rather, because they thought it would be unhealthy to do so. This perception stems directly from the notions propagated

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 20.

¹⁰⁵ Moscow Government, Department of Pharmacy. April 6, 1995. Order 172. "An Obligatory Assortment list of Drug and Medical Supplies for all Pharmacy Agencies." (Об Обязательном Ассортиментом Перечне Лекарственных Средств и Изделий Медицинского Назначения для Всех Аптечных Учреждений).

¹⁰⁶ *Planirovanie sem'i-- ugroza natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossii*. 35.

during the Soviet period. Furthermore, by 1998, IUDs were used by about 20% of women of reproductive age.¹⁰⁷

By the 2000s, and into present times, general awareness of various methods of birth control had at least improved. In 2009 an estimated 99.5% of women in Russia had heard of at least one form of modern birth control.¹⁰⁸ Of that, 99% recognized condoms, 97% could recognize oral contraceptives, and 93% could recognize the IUD.¹⁰⁹

Worldwide, these are the three best-known birth control methods, and it appears that current Russian women are on trend with the rest of the world, at least in their awareness.

Figure 5 shows the awareness and knowledge of all the major contraceptive methods amongst Russian women 15-44 years olds from a RAPS study from 2009. Despite the fact that many women were aware of the most common forms of birth control, women's understanding of the effectiveness, or reliability, of various forms of birth control was not as accurate. In the following table from the Reproductive Health Survey from 2009, we can see how effective women viewed various forms of birth control.

The figure is labeled on the bottom in order of actual effectiveness, with tubal ligation (female sterilization) being the most effective and withdrawal as the least effective. From the data, most women were able to correctly identify tubal ligation as the most effective form of birth control, which is interesting, despite the fact that 31% of respondents had never even heard of it. From this figure, it is also clear that women

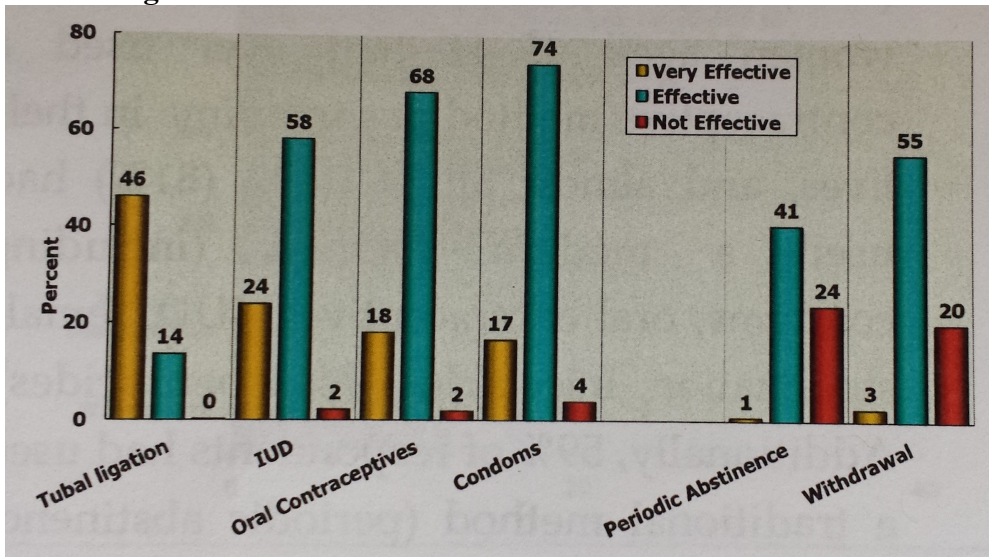
¹⁰⁷ Stephenson, Patricia. 1998. *Improving women's health services in the Russian Federation: results of a pilot project*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. 4

¹⁰⁸ *Reproductive Health Survey*. 17.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 17.

tended to underestimate the effectiveness of the IUD. The IUD is 99% effective, yet just 24% of respondents indicated is as “very effective” and 58% identified it as just “effective.”

Figure 5: Opinions on the Contraceptive Effectiveness of Specific Methods Among Women Ages 15-44 Years



Source: Ministry of Health. 2012. *Reproductive Health Survey Executive Summary Russia 2011*. Moscow, Russia: United Nations Population Fund; United States Agency for International Development; Division of Reproductive Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

One of the most interesting pieces of information that can be gathered from this data set is women’s opinion on the effectiveness of oral contraceptives. Recall that in the Soviet period, many women believed oral contraceptives to be ineffective. However, the respondents in this survey were correctly able to identify that oral contraceptives are “effective” (68%) and only 2% still believed oral contraceptives to be “not effective.”

An enduring concept surrounding birth control is the notion of the effectiveness of traditional methods. According to Vera Prilepskaya, the chief specialist on contraception in Russia in 2008, speaking at a conference about contraception in Moscow in March of

2008, she said, “but we all know that the main method of contraception in the country is coitus interruptus.”¹¹⁰ And according to Prilepskaya “The continued popularity of this method of birth control may be the reason that the most popular contraceptive pill sold in Russia is Postinor, a ‘morning after’ or emergency contraceptive pill, sold in the United States under the trade name Plan B.”¹¹¹

To help corroborate the assertions made by Prilepskaya in 2008, according to the *Reproductive Health Survey*, 55% of women said that withdrawal was “effective” (almost on par with the IUD’s perceived level of effectiveness) and 41% of respondents believed that periodic abstinence is “effective.” In fact, 3% of respondents believed withdrawal to be “very effective.” This is evidence that despite a slowly changing understanding of contraceptives, some old notions are still persistent in Russia, and that some understanding and knowledge is still misinformed.

Another aspect of contraceptive acceptance rates is why women chose to use a particular method. According to a *Moscow Times* article from 2008, women were quoted saying that they don’t use the Pill usually for simple and almost petty reasons. One woman, Irina, said that she doesn’t use the Pill because as she puts it, “I hate pills. They make me fat and kill my libido.”¹¹² Another woman said, “When I start taking pills, I feel no desire for sex. So then why bother to take them?”¹¹³ According to the article, scores of

¹¹⁰ Osadchuk, Svetlana. "Simply an Issue of Control." *Moscow Time*, April 16, 2008.

¹¹¹ Ibid. April 16, 2008.

¹¹² Ibid. April 16, 2008.

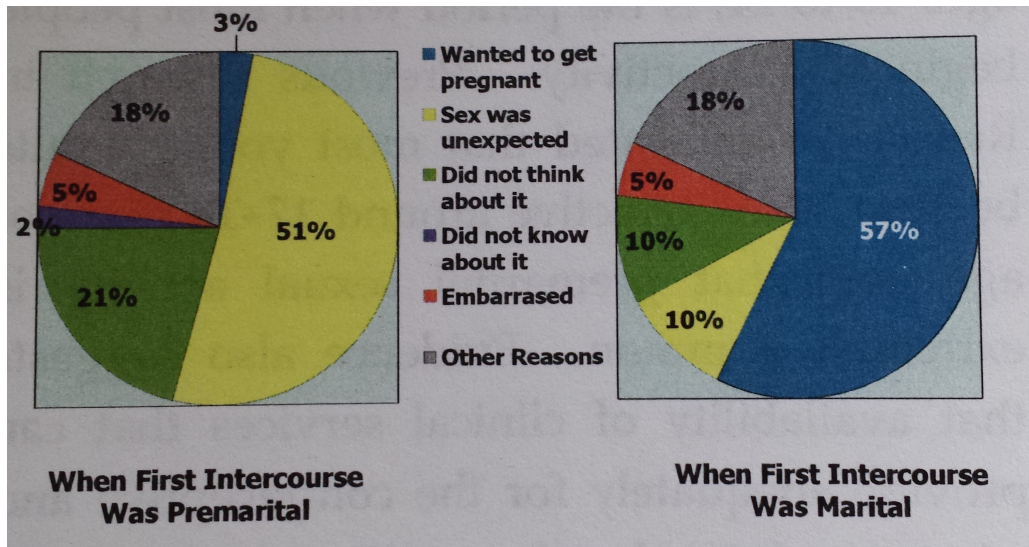
¹¹³ Ibid. April 16, 2008.

other women choose not use the Pill simply because it is too difficult to remember to take regularly everyday.¹¹⁴

And, according to the *Reproductive Health Survey*, women were asked why they did not use contraceptive methods during their first sexual encounter, which was approximately 41% of women surveyed.¹¹⁵ (10,010 women were surveyed in total¹¹⁶).

The information can be seen in figure 6.

Figure 6: Most Commonly Cited Reasons for Not Using Contraceptives at First Sexual Intercourse among Young Adult Women Ages 15-24



Source: Ministry of Health. 2012. *Reproductive Health Survey Executive Summary Russia 2011*. Moscow, Russia: United Nations Population Fund; United States Agency for International Development; Division of Reproductive Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Of the reasons cited, 47% said that they did not expect to have sex, 20% said that they did not think about using a method of birth control, 9% said that they wanted to get

¹¹⁴ Ibid. April 16, 2008.

¹¹⁵ *Reproductive Health Survey*. 40.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 5.

pregnant, 7% believed that it was a safe time of the month, and 5% said that they were embarrassed to use a method of birth control.¹¹⁷

Clearly, again, misinformation or understanding of contraceptives led a lot of women not to use protection during their first sexual encounter. (Of the 47% that said that they did not expect to have sex, perhaps this was because they didn't know about what sorts of actions could lead to sex, which would be a fault of not having a solid sex education background, and maybe an enduring legacy of the Soviet era's policies on sex education?) Additionally, 7% believed it was a "safe" time of the month. According to sex educators, there is never a "safe" time of the month for a woman to have sex, since theoretically, a woman can get pregnant at any time of the month due to natural variations in menstrual cycle durations and rhythms. And of course, for the 5% that said they were embarrassed, perhaps this could have been circumvented if these women had had proper sex education, and then they would have not been so embarrassed if they had more exposure during their lessons.

Nonetheless, it is hard to say for sure why so many women are not using modern forms of birth control in Russia. One reason, however, simply might be tradition.

Again, my interviews can help shed a little bit of anecdotal evidence on this subject. In my interview with Tanya, she said that she got all of her information about sex from her mother. When I asked her why she accepted sex information from her mother, her answer was simply that that was just the way it always was. In her circle of friends, her male friends got information from their fathers, and women got information from the

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 36.

mothers. Tradition, therefore, at least with Tanya, was something that was very real and relevant.

Another reason could be lack of access. Despite the fact that there was a theoretical increase in the availability of contraceptives after the collapse of the Soviet Union, studies have shown that as late as 2002, a large swathe of Russian women did not have access to contraceptives, despite wanting them. Beginning in 1990, the Demographic and Health Survey (“DHS”) began surveying women all over the world to assess the availability of contraceptives. In conjunction with the Division of Reproductive Health, which is part of the CDC, these surveys have been regularly conducted since 1990.¹¹⁸ According to this statistical data, in 2006, there was an estimated 3.6 million Russian women with an unmet need for contraceptives, and 122.7 women in the former Soviet Union.¹¹⁹ (Women who used traditional methods as their primary form of birth control were omitted from the data, as they were deemed as having a form of contraception available to them therefore, the study really was looking at women who had an unmet need for *modern* form of contraception. Therefore, perhaps the real number is much higher, as it is likely that many women who use traditional methods also don’t have access to modern forms). This was defined as women who wanted to space time between births, or postpone a birth, but was not able to receive contraceptives in order to reach that need.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Ross, John A., and William L. Winfrey. 2002. "Unmet Need for Contraception in the Developing World and the Former Soviet Union: An Updated Estimate". *International Family Planning Perspectives*. 28 (3): 138-143. 138.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 139.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 139.

In summary, the collapse of the Soviet Union brought about an increase in availability and acceptance of modern forms of contraception. Even though women are not using modern forms of contraception to the same degree as women in western countries, Russian women's increase of modern contraceptives should not be ignored. It is significant, and perhaps it indicates a trend that more women in the future will adopt modern forms of contraception. However, despite this, many Russian women are still using traditional methods of birth control, and many women are still unsure of the safety of modern methods of contraception. It is unclear what direction contraceptive acceptance will take in the future. Perhaps the trend will continue and women will soon use modern methods on par with other western countries. Or, maybe the legacy of Soviet era policies is too strong, and as a result, Russian women will not soon change their reproductive behaviors.

CHAPTER IV

CONDOMS AND ABORTION

Chapter III dealt with the history of contraceptives in a general sense. This chapter presents a case study and focuses on the history of two forms of contraception during the Soviet era and in Russia: condoms and abortion. The intent of this chapter is to analyze the overall contraceptive acceptance and usage practices of Soviet and Russia women specifically through the histories of condoms and abortions in Russia as contraceptive methods.¹²¹

Condoms

Condoms have had a relatively low acceptance rate from the Soviet Union era until today. The reasons for this will be explored in greater detail, but in a nutshell, it seems as if condoms were not reliable during the Soviet period, and therefore, not readily used. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the usage of condoms was still fairly low, probably because there was no real change that would have prompted Russian citizens to adjust their condom usage. In Russia today, however, it seems as though men are using condoms more than they did in the past. This finding, though, may be the result of erroneous information such as by respondents giving a false impression of condom compliance to researchers; or, it could be that Russians are actually using condoms more frequently than before. If actually true, the reasons for the increase in condom usage could be due to the result of a global understanding of STIs and HIV/AIDS, it could also be the result of more agency on the part of women, or it could be a combination of

¹²¹ Because condoms and abortions are being treated like case studies, this chapter does not follow Chapter II and Chapter III's chronological format. Instead, the information is presented in a semi-chronological format, going into specific details about the history of each method.

factors. This section reviews the history of condom usage in order to help frame the current situation of condom “culture” in Russia.

The history of the usage of condoms in the Soviet Union and Russia, and supporting quantitative data, is scarce. In post-Soviet Russia, the reason for this lack of information is somewhat complex. There are a bit of usage statistics and survey data, however, a lot of information about condom use in Russia is connected to HIV/AIDS research.¹²² In the Soviet era, the dearth of information seems to be simply because it wasn't deemed important to collect any statistical and demographic data about condom use. Additionally, the condoms that were available were often of such poor quality that many women and men felt as though they were unreliable. And condoms were always in deficient quantity.¹²³ A common term for condoms during the Soviet times was “galoshes.”¹²⁴

Particularly in light of the unreliability and insufficient quantity of condoms, systematic tracking of their usage during the Soviet period is scarce. According to some sources, however, during the Soviet period condoms were so under-produced that there were just 1-2 condoms per capita per year.¹²⁵ By 1980, it was estimated that just 20% of

¹²² HIV/AIDS is a rapidly growing problem in Russia for many reasons. One is the explosive prison system that has compounded the AIDS epidemic with a TB outbreak; and another is the lack of condom usage due to condom “culture.” This paper will look at condom usage “culture,” but will not address the HIV/AIDS aspect, although some of the cited survey data is from HIV/AIDS research. There are many sources of information on this topic. One good place to start might be: Pape, Ulla. 2014. *The politics of HIV/AIDS in Russia*. Or Borodkina, O. I. 2007. *Sotsial'nye aspekty epidemii i profilaktiki VICH/SPIDA*. Sankt-Peterburg: Izd-vo S. Peterburgskogo universiteta.

¹²³ *Sex and Russian society*. 31.

¹²⁴ *Out from behind the contraceptive Iron Curtain*. 30.

¹²⁵ Korchagina, Valeria. "City to Get Condom Machines." *Moscow Times*, April 17, 1998.

potential condom customers were able to purchase them.¹²⁶ Or, put in another way, it was estimated that by 1988, there was a need of 1 billion condoms each year in the Soviet Union, but that there were just around 220 million condoms available.¹²⁷

In a December 6, 1988 *Pravda* article the poor quality of condoms was addressed. According to the article, the poor quality of condoms within the Soviet Union was so bad that they cannot guarantee the reliability of the prevention of pregnancy, nor can they effectively protect against the AIDS virus. Additionally, according to the article, just about 1 in 4 eligible men use condoms in the Soviet Union per year, which the author writes is a “ludicrously” (смехотворно) low number.¹²⁸

In the August 24, 1988, edition of *Literaturnaya Gazeta* an article entitled “About cheese, AIDS, and Health Education” (О Сыре, СПИДа, и Санпросвете) was published. The article describes the fact that information about condoms was common in the U.S. because there was a respect for a conversation about condoms. Conversely, the article, points out, that media portrayals of condoms show them as “unromantic, and inconsistent with the impulse of love” (неромантичным, несовместимым с порывом любви).¹²⁹ This idea of condoms somehow impeding on romance is a theme that continued after the collapse of the Soviet Union and will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

Despite the fact that the media often portrayed condoms as unromantic, there were Soviet citizens who did approve of their usage, especially in light of the growing

¹²⁶ Попов, Andrei. "When There's No Other Choice: A Plea for Comprehensive Family Planning." *Ogonyok* 33, no. August (1988): 18-19.

¹²⁷ Gladyshev, V. "Answer-Question (Вопрос-Ответ)." *Arkumenty i fakti* (Moscow), February 27, 1988.

¹²⁸ *Two watermelons in one hand...* December 16, 1988.

¹²⁹ *About cheese, AIDS, and health education.* August 24, 1988.

AIDS epidemic. In the July 27, 1988 issue of *Literaturnaya Gazeta* an article was published where several men in their 20s were interviewed and asked about their condom use. In one instance, a 25-year-old man said,

I think that AIDS is as dangerous for us as it is in other countries. The disease does not stop at the borders, and I could get sick. This idea has also influenced my behavior... When I sleep with a girl, with whom I have not yet established a strong relationship, I always use condoms. That was not always the case previously.¹³⁰

Another man, Ivan, 27 years old was interviewed and said this regarding his condom use. "Ever since I learned about AIDS, I have felt even more terrible. Before, I never used to use condoms, but now I use them, and I even keep a few on me at all times."¹³¹

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, even more information about condoms can be found. In 1993, there was a digital-dial survey conducted where 435 men in St. Petersburg between the ages of 15 and 55 answered questions about their condom usage. Of the men surveyed, 6% of the respondents reported consistent condom usage, and 78% reported no or infrequent condom usage.¹³²

In another study, in 1994, it was found that less than half of sexually active adults used a condom in their most recent sexual encounter.¹³³

¹³⁰ Vasileva, Larissa . "Open person (Открой человека)." *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (Moscow), July 30, 1988.

¹³¹ Ibid. July 30, 1988.

¹³² Gerber, Theodore P., and Danielle Berman. 2008. "Heterogeneous Condom Use in Contemporary Russia". *Studies in Family Planning*. 39 (1): 1-17. 2.

¹³³ *Evaluation of HIV/AIDS education in Russia using a video approach*. 230.

In 1995, a study asked 455 high school students in St. Petersburg to gauge their condom usage and acceptance. In that study, it was found that 29% of sexually active respondents consistently used a condom.¹³⁴

In 1996, the Russian Women's Reproductive Health Survey indicated that just 13% of 15-44 year old women, in three major Russian cities, had their male partners use condoms.¹³⁵

Collectively, these studies indicate that in the years shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, condom acceptance rates were relatively low. Of course, these studies were conducted only in St. Petersburg and Moscow, but it still is safe to assume that Russian citizens living in these cities probably used condoms more than people in other cities in Russia, as they are the most populous and had the most access to "western" influences.

But, Russian government officials were not completely oblivious to the low condom usage rates of its citizens. In fact, in Moscow in 1998, a campaign called "Capsule of Love" was started to install condom vending machines throughout the city. The campaign was targeted at 13-20 year olds to help combat issues of embarrassment associated with purchasing condoms. The goal of the campaign was to eventually install 1,000 machines (It was unclear how many were actually installed). The Russian manufactured condoms would cost 5 rubles for a three pack and be in majorly accessible parts of the city like railway station, shops, nightclubs, and casinos.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ *Heterogeneous Condom Use in Contemporary Russia*. 2.

¹³⁵ *Evaluation of HIV/AIDS education in Russia using a video approach*. 230.

¹³⁶ *City to get condom machines*. April 17, 1998.

In present times, condom usage acceptance rates have remained relatively low, despite modest increases. In 2002, a survey asked Muscovites aged 30 and younger about their condom use, and the researchers found that 44% reported using condoms consistently.¹³⁷ This was an increase in condom usage as compared with the survey data from the 1990s.

However, the culture surrounding condom usage has changed since the Soviet era and the early post-Soviet era. In fact, there now is evidence suggesting that since the 1990s, it actually has become more stigmatizing not to use condoms in Russia because of the increase in HIV/AIDS. Perhaps, then, respondents felt more of a need to *say* that they were using condoms in the 2002 survey, even if they really weren't. Compared to the 1990s, there was no social stigma to use condoms, and, therefore, no need to lie about usage. Nonetheless, it may still be reasonable to say that condom usage increased over the 10-year period of these studies.

Of course, all of these studies looked at condom usage in general, and not consistency of use. One group of researchers tried to find if there was heterogeneity between condom usage. Their basic findings were that condom use and regularity depended wholly on context and situation. That is, if one man used a condom in one situation, that same man could go without a condom in another.¹³⁸ Some of the contributing factors that would lead a man to change his condom usage, according to the

¹³⁷ *Heterogeneous Condom Use in Contemporary Russia*. 2.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* 2.

researchers, were alcohol consumption, certain traits of the sex partner, and the nature of the sexual relationship.¹³⁹

This study was quite exhaustive. Table 6 shows the makeup of the people that were interviewed. We can see that this was a longitudinal study in that the researchers interviewed the same group of men and women in 2001 and again in 2003.

Table 6: Percentage of Sexually Active Respondents Ages 14-49, by Selected Variables, According to Respondent's Sex and Survey Round, Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey.

Variable	Male		Female	
	2001	2003	2001	2003
Used condom at last sex event	21.2	25.3*	17.4	18.5
Missing: condom use at last sex event	1.0	1.5	1.1	1.3
Age (mean years)	33.0	33.0	33.0	32.8
Marital status				
Never married	20.9	21.4	12.6	12.4
In registered marriage/cohabiting	72.9	71.6	75.0	73.9
Formerly married	6.2	7.0	12.4	13.7

Source: Gerber, Theodore P., and Danielle Berman. 2008. "Heterogeneous Condom Use in Contemporary Russia". *Studies in Family Planning*. 39 (1): 1-17.

From table 6, the most relevant and revealing information is the first line in the table, regarding the percentage of men and women who used condoms in their last sexual encounter. As is evident, in 2001, 21.2% of men and 17.4% of women reported using condoms during their last sexual event. In 2003, 25.3% of men and 18.5% of women reported using condoms during their last sexual event. From these groups of men and women, there was an increase in condom use across both gender groups from 2001 to 2003. The increase in usage of condoms amongst men was found to be statistically

¹³⁹ Ibid. 2-3.

significant.¹⁴⁰ The change in condom usage among females was not found to be statistically significant.¹⁴¹

The study found that Russians' non-usage of condoms was not linked to lack of access, cost, availability, or pressure from a partner to forgo condoms. Therefore, the researchers concluded that the most likely reason for non-usage of condoms was due to a dislike of condoms and to a perceived notion that they were unnecessary.¹⁴² The study also found that men were most likely to use a condom with new sexual partners, but would drastically drop usage in relationships that lasted 12 months or longer, the idea being that the longer men and women were in relationships, the more trust they had between each other and the less likely they were to use a condom.¹⁴³ Of course, this would signify that most men and women were using condoms primarily as a means to prevent STIs rather than as a means to prevent birth. However, in the study, men and women were asked why they used condoms, and the risk of contracting an STI was not a factor. This is interesting, as it contradicts data and respondents' perception.

While a study like this may not be wholly representative, it does show a change in attitude over time of these people and, therefore, can be extrapolated to a larger overall trend in Russia. The researchers interviewed Russians in 1,850 counties (*raions*), which means that it covered a large swath of Russia, and therefore, it can reasonably be

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 8.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 8.

¹⁴² Ibid. 9.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 10.

presumed that trends that are found in the study are not specific to any particular region.¹⁴⁴

Despite a seemingly small increase in condom use, even by 2005, condoms were not readily accepted as a means of safe and effective birth control by some Russian government officials. In a *Moscow Times* article from December 2, 2005, entitled, “Prayer and a Warning Against Condoms” the author reveals feelings and attitudes of several government officials towards condom use. According to the article, Moscow City Duma Deputy Lyudmila Stebenkova, who was the head of the public health commission for Moscow said that the “City Duma did not advocate condom use” and that the city of Moscow was going to implement an ad campaign in the metro warning that “condoms do not guarantee safe sex but faith in one’s partner does.” (This idea of faith, and trust, will be revisited shortly). Stebenkova even went on to say that “it is a question of sin, of immorality. There is no such thing as safe sex” and that “we have to propagandize safe behavior and family values.”¹⁴⁵

Additionally, in the same article, Father Anatoly Berestov, the director of drug a rehabilitation center was quoted as saying that in 1990s, “as an expert, I already knew that 'condomized' Europe had 50,000 cases per year [of HIV], while in Russia we had 100.”¹⁴⁶ Of course, this is making the assumption that condom use in Europe was unsafe, and Russia’s low condom use in the 1990s actually made the country safer from HIV.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 3.

¹⁴⁵ Shea, Dan. "Prayer and a Warning Against Condoms." *Moscow Times*, December 2, 2005.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. December 2, 2005.

Both Berestov and Stebenkova, according to the article, felt as though their views on the use of condoms were appropriate partially because of then President George W. Bush's abstinence only and AIDS policies. And as Stebenkova succinctly put it, similar attitudes regarding condoms and family values are "being implemented in America."¹⁴⁷

This idea of not needing to use condoms once trust had been established in a relationship was supported in another study that was conducted in 2006.¹⁴⁸ The study looked at 30 males and females in St. Petersburg. The men's average age was 19.4 and the median years of education was 11.8. The women's average age was 18.9 and their median education was 11.1 years. Therefore, while this group was small, it represented a group of men and women in one of the most progressive and "western" cities in all of Russia.

In this study, it was found that condom usage was an issue *only* of trust. What was interesting was that the respondents seemed to understand that condoms are important in preventing STIs and pregnancies, but in practice, these issues seemed to be irrelevant in deciding whether or not to use a condom. In general, the respondents said that a condom was unnecessary when in a "steady relationship." However, the definition of a "steady relationship" did not seem uniform. The consensus, nonetheless, was that the maximum length of time to develop a steady relationship was 2 months.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. December 2, 2005.

¹⁴⁸ Takács J, YA Amirkhanian, JA Kelly, AV Kirsanova, RA Khoursine, and L Mocsonaki. 2006. "'Condoms are reliable but I am not': A qualitative analysis of AIDS-related beliefs and attitudes of young heterosexual adults in Budapest, Hungary, and St. Petersburg, Russia". *Central European Journal of Public Health*. 14 (2): 59-66. 61.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 63.

In the study, condom use was always initiated by the partner who “worried more.”¹⁵⁰ This is interesting in that it signifies that condom use was not something that was seen as necessary or obligatory, but rather, something to acquiesce the fears of a partner. Usually, the women were the ones who were worried. The study found that their worries usually surrounded fear of pregnancy and fear of contracting an STI. Therefore, it was found in the study, that most women requested that condoms be used. Conversely, the study found that most men would not ask about condom usage, especially if they knew that a woman was using some other form of contraceptives, like the Pill. In general, when one partner was not clearly “worried,” it was found that it was seen as primarily the man’s responsibility to initiate condom use, especially because it was seen as reinforcing gender roles and that it showed women that the man “cared for them.”

Universally, it was found that once condom use had disappeared from a relationship, it was nearly impossible to reintroduce them. This was because it was seen that asking to use condoms in a relationship once condom usage had ended could be construed as the partner not being faithful. Again, this solidifies the idea that condom usage is surrounded by the idea of trust, rather than health concerns. In fact, the study found that once a relationship was defined by the couple as being “steady,” then the fear of STIs usually diminished and was no longer a concern. Of course, in reality, the mere fact of defining a relationship does not eliminate the chance of catching an STI, but, regardless, once in a relationship defined as “steady,” these respondents felt as though their risk of getting an STI was non-existent.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 63.

The study also analyzed Russians' negative experiences with condoms. Apart from their previous responses regarding when they use a condom (in a relationship or not in a relationship) many respondents reported that they didn't like using condoms simply because they had a previous negative experience. Their negative experiences were related to lack of education on how to use a condom. Many cited things like not knowing how to put on a condom, the length of time it takes to put a condom on, the frustration with putting a condom on, and the general lack of knowledge about condoms. This self-reported acknowledgement of lack of understanding of condoms is telling in that it means that not only are Russians not educated about condoms, but that they internally recognize this as a problem. As we have seen earlier, this is yet another area where the lack of a fully developed sex education program has permeated into real problems Russians are being faced with today.

Another study, conducted in 2009, asked whether or not a wife had a right to ask her husband to use a condom. In the study, 91% of respondents believed that women had a right to ask for a condom to be used by her husband, but only if he had a STI.¹⁵¹

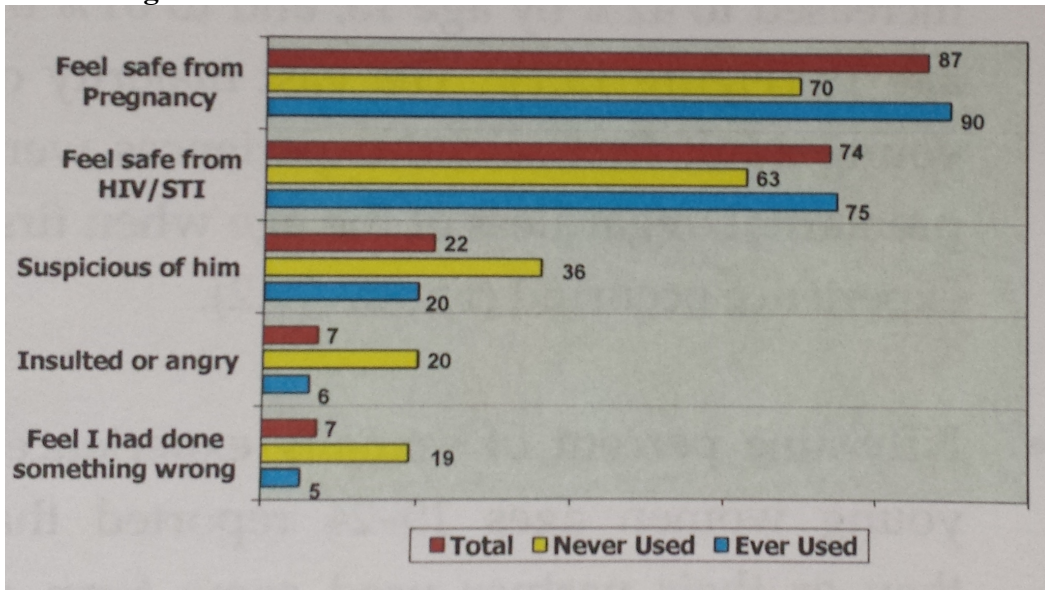
The same study looked at attitudes about condom usage among young women, ages 15 to 24. Figure 7 shows how these women would feel if their partner suggested using a condom. Figure 7 is divided by total women, women who have never used a condom, and women who have used a condom.

What can be seen from these surveys is that there is a marked difference from the early 2000s (and even earlier) in terms of reported data about condom usage and today. Today, many women stated that if their partner suggested using a condom, they would

¹⁵¹ *Reproductive Health Survey*. 26.

feel safe from pregnancy. This was not something that was a strong motivating factor for condom usage previously, but now it is the most common feeling amongst women in Russia aged 15 to 24. The next largest group was the feeling that women would feel safe from STIs or HIV. Again, this is a change from trends in the early 2000s.

Figure 7: Agreement with Statement about How Women Would Feel if Partner Suggested Condom Use, According to Ever Use of Condoms, Among Sexually Active Women Ages 15-24



Source: Ministry of Health. 2012. *Reproductive Health Survey Executive Summary Russia 2011*. Moscow, Russia: United Nations Population Fund; United States Agency for International Development; Division of Reproductive Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

One of the persisting trends, however, is women feeling like they had done something wrong if a condom were to be suggested. Fully 19% of women who had never used a condom cited this as a feeling when condom use is suggested. This suggests that there is still a substantial group of women who do not want to use condoms because of a trust issue with their partner, something that was consistently common in the study conducted in the early 2000s.

In summary, condoms have seen an increase in usage from the Soviet times. Condoms during the Soviet era were poorly made and scarcely available, and therefore, led to a lack of usage. Shortly after the collapse, it appears as though condom usage was low, however, in the early 2000s, and into present Russian times, it seems as though condoms are being used at higher rates. The potential reasons for the change are complex. Russian women may insist on condoms to be used because of a fear of STIs or pregnancy. However, a lot of condom usage in Russia today still seems to circle around the notion of trust, fear, and lack of understanding.

Abortion¹⁵²

This section will look at abortion during the Soviet period and in Russia today. The Soviet Union had the highest abortion rate in the world before its collapse in 1991, accounting for 10-20% of the world's total abortion rate.¹⁵³ Official data shows that women had 1.2 abortions for every live birth, but in some regions this number was actually as high as seven abortions per live birth.¹⁵⁴ Since then, Russia is amongst the world's leaders in abortion rates.¹⁵⁵ The intent of this section is to provide a historical analysis of Russian women's choices surrounding abortion, as it relates to their agency. It is important to note that abortions during the Soviet Union era did not have an ethical and moral debate linked with it. Any debate regarding whether or not to have an abortion

¹⁵² Like with the previous section, information is presented in a semi-chronological format, but focuses on specific pieces of information in an attempt to help explain abortion as part of the global context of contraceptive acceptance and sex education in the Soviet Union and Russia.

¹⁵³ *Trends in family planning in Russia*. 40.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 40.

¹⁵⁵ WHO data from January 2013.

during the Soviet period, from the point of view of Soviet officials, was always from an egalitarian and communist perspective (e.g., does having an abortion help the greater good and the work force?). From the perspective of women, there was not an idea (at least from the general populace) that abortions were an ending of a life, but rather, a “product of conception,” and abortions were just seen as a “special type of surgery.”¹⁵⁶ This does not mean, however, that women were able to have abortions without hesitation. Just like with abortions today, the decision can be difficult and emotional, but the question of morals, especially from a religious point was basically non-existent.

Furthermore, abortions were often performed without the use of anesthesia, so from this perspective, knowing that the procedure was going to be excruciatingly painful, the decision to have an abortion or not, might be framed around the willingness to endure the pain, rather than the moral issues of today to end a life. In fact, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union abortions were being performed without the aid of pain medication. In 1995, for example, a quarter of abortions in the Moscow region and an eighth of abortions in other parts of Russia were performed without anesthesia.¹⁵⁷

As a further point of corroboration, in all of my interviews, the topic of abortion was never something that made the women uncomfortable, even when talking about their own abortions, or in the case of Masha, when she was talking about the abortions that she herself had performed. For all the women that I interviewed, abortions really were just a fact of life.

¹⁵⁶ *Sex and Russian society*. 46.

¹⁵⁷ *An abortion in Russia in more than just an abortion*. October 19, 1995.

Further, to this end, abortion has never been about choice, but rather, a necessity. As noted previously, other reliable forms of birth control were not consistently available, and with no other form of consistent and state-backed birth control, getting an abortion was something women had to do as part of their lives. It is difficult to pass judgment on these women, as their choice clearly was constrained. And without other options and the freedom to choose what form of birth control a woman wanted to use, it is impossible to say that these women were “choosing” abortions. Even when oral contraceptives began to become commonplace in the western world, the Soviet Union did not allow the introduction of oral contraceptives. As discussed earlier, Soviet officials linked oral contraceptives with extreme health hazards.

During the entirety of the Soviet period, abortions were the main form of birth control for women.¹⁵⁸ When the Soviet Union was first established in 1917, its abortion policy was the most progressive in the entire world.¹⁵⁹ Soviet women could have an abortion free of charge in state run hospitals without any problem or bureaucratic hassle.¹⁶⁰ The Soviet Union was the first nation in the world to legally allow abortion when it passed its groundbreaking legislation that decriminalized abortion in 1920.¹⁶¹ Because of the Soviet Union’s communist regime, it was easy to make sweeping changes in abortion policy. However, it is this fact that actually muddies the justification for abortion. In many communist countries, abortion policies have been enacted in broad and

¹⁵⁸ *Sex and Russian society*. 46.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 45.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 45.

¹⁶¹ *Divergent trends in abortion and birth control practices in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine*. 4.

grand measures as a way to manage the population in a way that is fitting for the regime.¹⁶²

Once passed, the abortion policy seemed to be almost too effective. In 1928 (just 8 years after the legalization of abortion), the birthrate was 42.2 births per thousand, and in 1932, the number dropped to 31.0 births per thousand.¹⁶³ The Soviet government tried to combat this issue and encourage birth by offering money to women who had a lot of children. Women were offered 2,000 rubles for every child they had over five, and a 5,000 ruble bonus for every child over 10.¹⁶⁴

These measures were not effective, and in 1936 the Soviet Union passed a law to outlaw abortions unless they were deemed medically necessary.¹⁶⁵ During this time, abortions were still practiced, albeit illegally. There was a surge in medical costs associated with these illegal abortions.¹⁶⁶ Soon, the state shifted its propaganda campaigns from promoting high fertility to anti-abortion campaigns, but again, these tactics were found to be more or less ineffective.

Stalin's death in 1953 marked a change for abortions and reproductive health practices in the Soviet Union. Stalin's death allowed for slightly more transparency for problems facing the Soviet Union. That is why a study into the effects of abortions on

¹⁶² Ginsburg, Faye D., and Rayna R. Reiter. 1995. *Conceiving the new world order: the global politics of reproduction*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 316-317.

¹⁶³ Hoffmann, David L. "Mothers in the Motherland: Stalinist Pronatalism in Its Pan-European Context." *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 1 (2000): 35-54. 37.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 41.

¹⁶⁵ *Divergent trends in abortion and birth control practices in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine*. 4.

¹⁶⁶ Randall, Amy E. (Amy Elise). 2011. "'Abortion Will Deprive You of Happiness!': Soviet Reproductive Politics in the Post-Stalin Era". *Journal of Women's History*. 23 (3): 13-38. 14.

women's health was allowed to be conducted following his death. The results of that study found that there were approximately 4,000 annual deaths associated with complications arising from illegal abortions and hundreds more women suffered medical complications or disabilities as a direct result of illegally performed abortions.¹⁶⁷

Not only did Stalin's death mark a new trend for more transparency when it came to abortions, but the early 1950s saw a new era of attitudes towards reproduction in general.¹⁶⁸ After WWII, many countries, including the Soviet Union, had huge population losses and the countries wanted to enact policy changes to help combat the dwindling populations and to maintain a healthy growing population.¹⁶⁹ The Soviet Union was already seeing a semi-population crisis in the interwar period, so government officials were eager to adopt similar policies to other European nations. These new policies, in fact were clearly pronatalist (the idea of needing to boost births and reproductions in an effort to grow and build a nation). So, in 1955 the ban on abortions was overturned, and once again the Soviet people could have abortions legally.¹⁷⁰

Legalizing abortions may seem, from a cursory glance, an "anti-natalist" policy, but in fact it was quite in line with the pronatalist ideals of the Soviet leaders. Bearing children and motherhood was seen as a "government necessity."¹⁷¹ Many Soviet officials believed that legalizing abortions would reduce the deaths of women of childbearing age

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 14.

¹⁶⁸ Hartmann, Betsy. 1987. *Reproductive rights and wrongs: the global politics of population control and contraceptive choice*. New York: Harper & Row. 93.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 94.

¹⁷⁰ *Abortion will deprive you of happiness!* 14.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 20.

and that performing legal abortions would help preserve a woman's fertility once she decided to give birth (as opposed to illegal abortions that would somehow destroy a woman's ability to conceive in the future).¹⁷²

Additionally, Soviet policy makers firmly believed that women would choose motherhood over abortions.¹⁷³ To that end, physicians in the 1950s and 1960s were told to try to persuade expectant mothers not to get an abortion and instead counsel them on the merits of motherhood for the common good of the Soviet Union.¹⁷⁴ In attempt to maintain the pronatalist ideology, the 1955 abortion legalization came with restrictions. After 12 weeks, a woman would have to have a medically necessary reason to abort.¹⁷⁵ This was coupled with a general push by the Soviet authorities to medicalize abortions and reproductive health.¹⁷⁶ The highest recorded number of abortions was in 1964 with 5.6 million.¹⁷⁷

In 1960, the United States sent scientists and medical officials to the Soviet Union on a Medical Exchange Mission to assess the state of maternal and child healthcare within the Soviet Union. In line with Soviet policy, the US committee members noted that there was a strong line of anti-abortion propaganda. One way they witnessed first hand the anti-abortion propaganda was in some education films that they were shown.

¹⁷² Ibid. 15.

¹⁷³ Ibid. 15.

¹⁷⁴ *Sexuality education in Russia*. 803.

¹⁷⁵ *Divergent trends in abortion and birth control practices in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine*. 4.

¹⁷⁶ *Abortion will deprive you of happiness!* 15.

¹⁷⁷ Bobylev, Sergey N.. Millennium Development Goals in Russia: Looking into the Future. National Human Development Report in the Russian Federation. Moscow. 2010. 71.

The films that the U.S. officials were shown were films that were generally shown to the Soviet public at Houses of Culture and workers' clubs.¹⁷⁸ One film in particular that the U.S. committee members described was about abortion, where, in the film, women were warned about dangers of abortion in order to “discourage abortion.”¹⁷⁹ According to the U.S. committee members, “The [Soviet medical] staff was quite willing to admit that the danger was exaggerated in order to frighten women enough to keep them requesting an abortion.” In their final report, the U.S. committee members noted that the “film was technically good, though its philosophy might be questioned.”¹⁸⁰ Even to foreign medical professionals, the Soviet medical staff was open and forthcoming about their blatant attempt to curb abortion numbers.

Despite the fact that abortion rates continued to climb, and attempts at curbing abortions were not very effective, a somewhat paradoxical set of laws was passed in 1987 that gave women more freedom and ability to get an abortion. With the new legislation, women could get an abortion for up to 28 weeks. The law also expanded the definition of a “medically necessary” abortion to include a slew of non-medically related things. Some examples in the new legislation included the ability to get an abortion: if a husband died during pregnancy, if either the man or woman became imprisoned during the pregnancy, if a woman already had 5 or more children, if a couple got divorced during the pregnancy, if the pregnancy was the result of rape, or if the woman already had a disabled

¹⁷⁸ United States. 1962. *Report of the Medical Exchange Mission to the USSR: maternal and child care, October 12-November 11, 1960*. Bethesda, Md: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Public Health Service, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Blindness. 66

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 66.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 66.

child.¹⁸¹ This new legislation effectively made it so that abortions could be freely accessed and utilized by all women in the Soviet Union. And since all health care was free, cost was not a factor for women at that time.

One of the main reasons, that one can postulate, about the reasons for the growing abortion rate, despite heavy anti-abortion campaigning was simply the fact that there was no other viable option for women, and with the 1987 expansion of the ways women could get an abortion, it became truly the only reliable and cost-effective method of birth control women had.

By the 1980s the Soviet Union had the highest abortion rate in the world.¹⁸² Even compared to other countries in the Soviet Bloc, the Soviet Union's abortion figures were far higher. For example, in 1984, the Soviet Union had registered a little less than 6.8 million abortions. The next highest was Romania with a little over 400,000 officially registered abortions.¹⁸³

In the late Soviet period, according to official data from 1987, the abortion rate was 111.9 per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44. This is roughly equivalent to a lifetime average of three abortions per woman.¹⁸⁴ Some researchers believe that the abortion rate in 1987 was more likely 181 per 1,000 women, which equals five abortions per woman over her lifetime.¹⁸⁵ Compared to figures from the US and the UK, the Soviet Union's

¹⁸¹ *Divergent trends in abortion and birth control practices in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.* 4.

¹⁸² *Contraceptive Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice in Russia during the 1980s.* 233.

¹⁸³ *Planirovanie sem'i i natsional'nye traditsii.* 22.

¹⁸⁴ *Contraceptive Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice in Russia during the 1980s.* 233.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 233.

abortion rate was 6.5 and 13 times higher respectively during the Soviet era. And compared to Denmark, the Soviet Union's abortion rate was 18 times higher.¹⁸⁶ From these figures, many believe that the only explanation for such a high abortion rate is that abortion had to be these women's primary form of birth control. Not only that, but the Soviet Union's policy regarding abortion during the late Soviet period was to advocate it as a "chosen birth control strategy" over contraceptives.¹⁸⁷ This, of course, was a marked change from the policy of the 1950s and 1960s.

Figure 8 shows the overall trend of abortions versus births from 1970 to 2000. The dark color represents abortions and the light color represents births. The x-axis represents year and the y-axis represents numbers in the millions. As is clearly visible from the figure, during the Soviet period, abortions outnumbered live births substantially, almost three-fold.

By the end of the collapse of the Soviet Union, abortion had put a huge economic strain on the system. It was estimated that the overall loss of productivity, healthcare costs, and material loss had run into the billions of rubles.¹⁸⁸

We can also see from the figure that there is a clear and abrupt drop in the number of abortions right around 1990s. Of course, it is hard to say *why* women were choosing to have less abortion, what can be seen is that there was in fact a large drop. There are many speculative reasons as to why there was such a huge drop. Perhaps there were just less

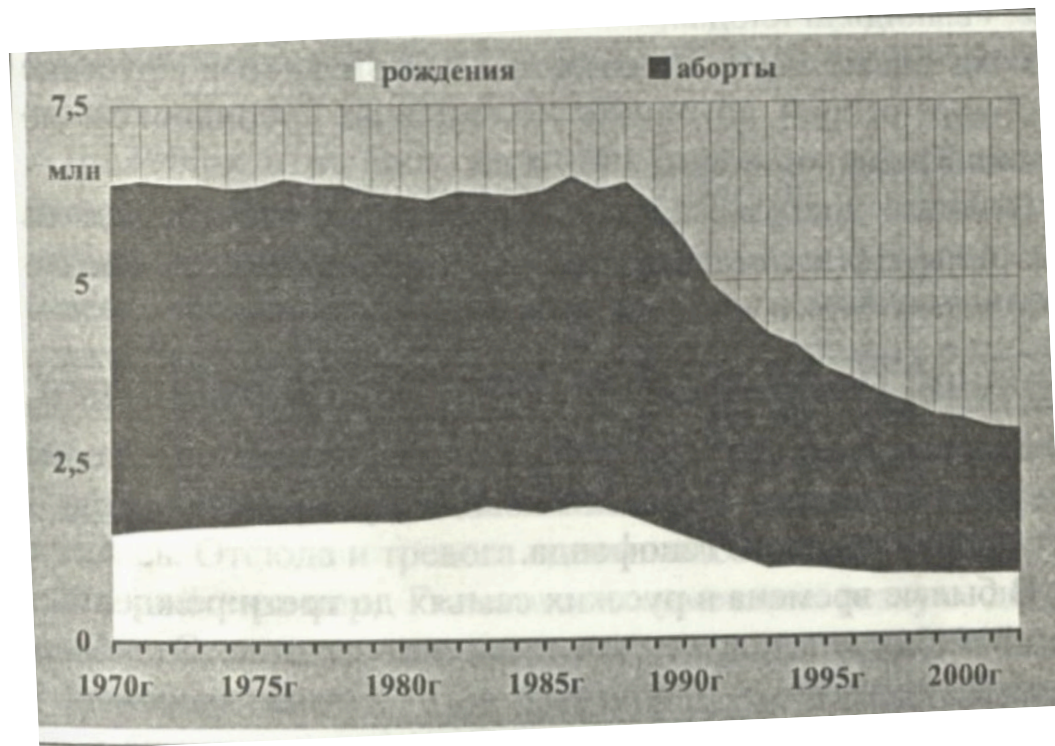
¹⁸⁶ *Out from behind the contraceptive Iron Curtain*. 30.

¹⁸⁷ *Postcommunism and the body politic*. 23.

¹⁸⁸ *Sex and Russian society*. 31.

women due to shifting demographics caused by the end of the Soviet Union. Perhaps there was a decrease in availability of abortion, or perhaps costs were a factor.

Figure 8: Number of Abortions compared to Births in Russia from 1970-2000



Source: Bashlachev, Veniamin Anatol'evich. 2006. *Demografiia: russkii proryv nezavisimoe issledovanie*. Moskva: Belye al'vy. 51.

Another possible reason for the drop in abortion rates could be the fact that other means of contraceptives became more readily available. With the introduction of other forms of birth control came campaigns to distance abortion from women's mindsets as a form of contraceptives. RAPS began campaigning against abortions as a means for contraception with slogans like, "Contraception- Abortion Alternative," "Your friend- Condoms," and the more politically charged, "Abortion is Infanticide."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ *Planirovanie sem'i—ugroza natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossii*. 32.

Despite efforts of these kinds of campaigns, in 1997, the official government stance towards abortions was that “abortions can only be interpreted as a means for family planning.”¹⁹⁰ This, no doubt may have played a role in why abortion numbers were still relatively high, despite the initial drop after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The abortion-to-live birth ratio in 1992 was 2,165 per 1,000 live births. At that time, it is estimated that the average woman had six to eight abortions in her lifetime. By comparison, the abortion-to-live birth ratio in western countries varied from 90 per 1,000 (the Netherlands) to 346 per 1,000 (U.S.). It was found that most abortions that had occurred in the Soviet Union (71.4%) were done by women in their peak reproductive years, while 10% of abortions were done by teenagers, and nearly 19% of abortions were done by women 35 years or over. Moreover, 32% percent of abortions happened within the second trimester (when the risks of maternal mortality or morbidity are much higher).¹⁹¹

By 1993, according to official Russian data, there were million abortions performed. Of those, 10% were done on women 19 years old and younger. This equates to more than 3000 abortions performed on women aged 15-19 in 1993.¹⁹² However, there were, no doubt, decreases in abortions in the early years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1991, there were 4.5 million registered abortions; five years later, in 1996, there were just 2.7 million registered abortions.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ *Planirovanie sem'i—ugroza natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossii.* 33.

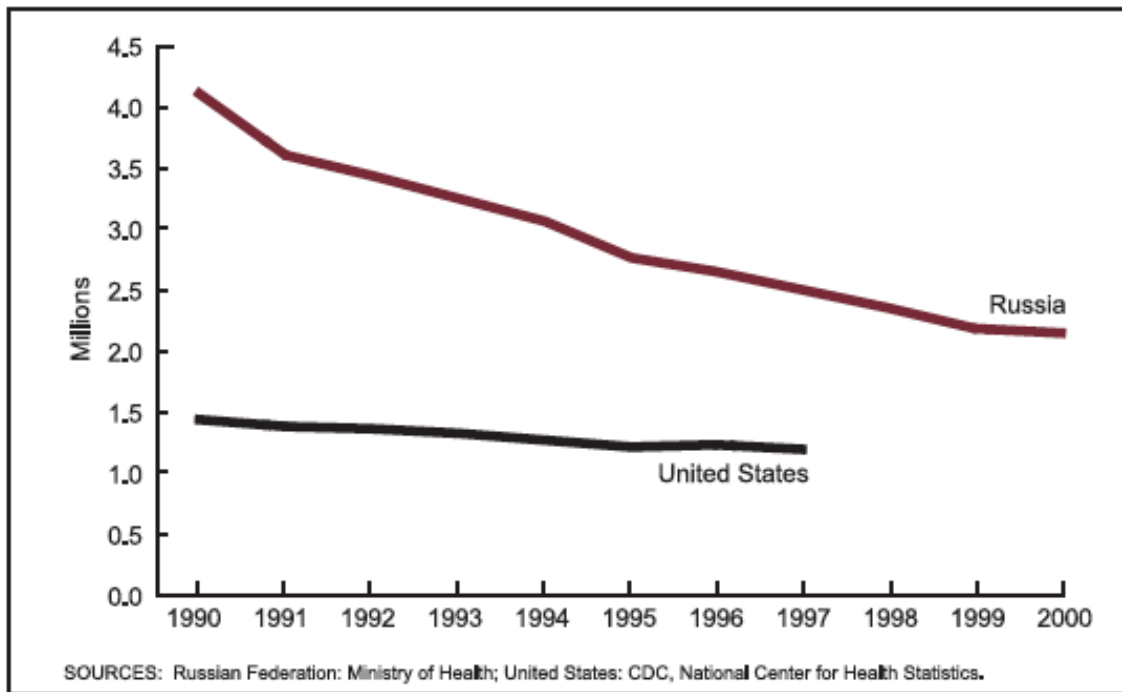
¹⁹¹ *Improving women's health services in the Russian.* 4.

¹⁹² *Reproduktivnoe zdorov'e i seksual'noe vospitanie molodezhi.* 91.

¹⁹³ *Planirovanie sem'i—ugroza natsional'noi bezopasnosti Rossii.* 32.

Despite the fact that directly after the collapse of the Soviet Union there was an abrupt drop in the number of abortions, abortion rates are still very high in Russia today. In the following figure we can see the trends of abortion in Russia from 1990-2000. As can be seen by the figure 9, the number of total abortions in Russia is still much higher than in the U.S., despite a steady and rapid drop since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Figure 9: Abortion Rate (in millions) in Russia and the United States from 1990-2000



Source: Notzon FC, Komarov YM, Ermakov SP, et al. Vital and health statistics: Russian Federation and United States, selected years 1985–2000 with an overview of Russian mortality in the 1990s. National Center for Health Statistics. Vital Health Stat 5(11). 2003.

To further help illustrate the decline, in 1990, there were 3 abortions for every women, in 2000 there were 1.9 abortions per woman, and in 2009 that number dropped to

one abortion per woman.¹⁹⁴ So, despite the fact that there was a major decrease in abortion rates in Russia, the number of abortions occurring in Russia today is still very high.

According to a study published by the Russian MOH in conjunction with the United Nations Population Fund (“UNPFA”), the United States Agency for International Development (“USAID”), and the Division of Reproductive Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (“DRH/CDC”), by 2009, over 35% of women surveyed had at least one abortion during their lifetime.¹⁹⁵ When just older women were asked about their abortion history, 56% of women ages 35 to 39 reported to having at least one abortion, and 61% of women ages 40 to 44 reported having at least one abortion.¹⁹⁶ This is not surprising as the older women grew up during the Soviet period and experienced their first sexually active years during the Soviet period when abortion was the only real viable option for birth control.

The survey also examined why women chose to have an abortion. Previously, in the Soviet era, data like this did not exist, but nonetheless, knowing today why women chose abortion is telling, especially since abortion rates in Russia are still much higher than in the rest of the western world. In the survey, 33% said they had an abortion because their socioeconomic situation prevented them from being able to support the child. This may or may not have been a driving factor for women during the Soviet times. 24% said it was because of a desire to cease their childbearing altogether, 17% said it was

¹⁹⁴ *Reproductive Health Survey*. 10.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 11.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 11.

because their partner was opposed to them having a child, 11% cited health reasons, and 10% cited their desire to space the birth of their next child.¹⁹⁷

In sum, there are many factors that may have contributed to the trend of diminishing abortion rates. One of the most significant is the increase in availability (at least in theory) of other forms of contraceptives and a less heavy government-controlled campaign to push abortion over all other forms of birth control. We can also see that the abortion rate compared to other former Soviet Republics and the rest of Europe is still much higher in Russia, despite a general decline.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 12.

¹⁹⁸ Notzon FC, Komarov YM, Ermakov SP, et al. Vital and health statistics: Russian Federation and United States, selected years 1985–2000 with an overview of Russian mortality in the 1990s. National Center for Health Statistics. *Vital Health Stat* 5(11). 2003. 17.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, the history of sex education and contraceptives, including abortion, in the Soviet Union and in Russia have been examined in detail. Women in Russia today are using modern contraceptive methods at a rate that would not be accepted in western countries. While the reasons for this are complex, sex education policy and the history of contraception during the Soviet period has impacted Russian women today.

This paper first examined sex education. Sex education was essentially non-existent during the Soviet period. The results, essentially, led to an entire society without meaningful education about sex in schools. Information about sex, therefore, was usually from friends, and family, and physicians. In lieu of sex education in schools, the Soviet government, mandated “hygiene education,” which linked sex with morality.

During the late Soviet era there were modest attempts at bringing sex education into school programs, but they were all unsuccessful, partially because many Soviet citizens began to associate moral depravity with sex education as a result of glasnost and an opening of western media. Today, Russian citizens have some forms of sex education, although there is no universal approach or curriculum.

This thesis examines sex education and its history at a very basic level. If there was more time, there are several areas that could be potentially interesting to research in more depth, such as the curriculum of hygiene education. Other potential areas of research could be to examine sex education policies in Russian schools now, and determine what the curriculum is and find out what students, parents, and teachers think of the program. Another area that could be researched is Russians’ attitudes on sex

education today and what it means to them. Additionally, research could be conducted that addresses where Russians get information about sex, and what their preferences are for obtaining information about sex.

While these are merely academic avenues of research, these have enormous potential outside of academia. These potential research projects could help educators (both in Russia, and world wide) with their understanding of sex education acquisition, and use the information to help develop sex education programs.

Not only did this paper examine sex education, but it also studied the history of contraceptives (condoms and abortions were used as special case studies) during the Soviet Union and in Russia.

In summary, during the Soviet era, abortions were the main form of birth control for women. When the Soviet Union collapsed, abortion rates dropped, but were still much higher than in other parts of the world. The abortion rate in Russia today is still one of the highest in the world. Coupled with the high abortion rates, there has been a persistently high use of traditional (high failure rates) forms of birth control throughout the Soviet period and into present Russian times. Modern forms of contraceptives have had a relatively low acceptance rate, but in the past decade, the usage of these forms of contraceptives has begun to rise.

It is hard to say with any certainty why women have chosen the kinds of birth control that they have, however, there are some interesting historical moments that may have influenced women's decisions. Regarding abortions, there really was no other easily accessible form of birth control during the Soviet period. This may have created an abortion culture that has been passed down from generation to generation, making

abortion a more approachable form of birth control than in other parts of the world.

Regarding the Pill, there were heavy anti-Pill campaigns launched during the Soviet era, and perhaps this created a stigma surrounding the Pill, making women hesitant to choose the method because of a developed generational bias. Regarding condoms, their product quality was poor and quantity was very low during the Soviet period. Therefore, perhaps, this created a culture of not using condoms, since they were hard to come by. As a result, condom use had been low despite a growing epidemic of HIV/AIDS in Russia.

Of course, there are many factors that contribute to a woman's decision regarding her birth control method. Cost, availability, access, education, information, and risk factors (real or perceived) are but just a few. While this thesis briefly explores some of these factors, by no means does this thesis go into great detail about these factors. As a result, this could be a potential area for future research- the motivating factors behind women's choice in contraceptives. Aside from that, there are other areas of research that could be explored. One area of future research could be to examine different diaspora populations of Russian people and see what their contraceptive practices are compared to Russians currently living in Russia. Where women get their information about various methods of contraceptives and how reliable they believe that information to be, could also be an avenue of future research. All of these research areas can help government and non-government organization develop plans on distributing contraceptive materials, as well as addressing potential biases and counteracting potential misunderstandings of different forms of contraceptives.

Of course when dealing with any issue of this complexity and detail, it is important to consider the context. Russia, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, has gone through many changes. The years right after the collapse were times of chaos for many. When Putin came into power in 2000, he ran under a campaign of stability. His popularity and reign have proven, at least minimally, that the Russian people seem to embrace the idea of stability, even if that comes with the price of life being somewhat restricted. With men and women that I have spoken to who are living in Russia I can say this, at least anecdotally. Putin's reign has given them a sense of comfort and warmth, and they are reminded of the Soviet "good old days." As a result, it may not be surprising that Russian women's contraceptive behavior more closely mimics the behavior of Soviet women, rather than present-day Russian women forging their own unique contraceptive behavior.

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