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The study of gender in post-Soviet society: western perspectives and cultural differences

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Abstract

This article is based on seven years of teaching experience and seven years of study in gender studies in modern Russia. During the initial years of the 1990s, the concepts of gender, feminism, and women's subjectivity were first introduced to the Russian population. The incorporation of Western concepts and theories has played a significant role in the advancement of gender studies in Russia. This essay explores the development of gender studies within the framework of the "Russia – West" dichotomy in Russian gender studies. It analyzes the evolution of gender studies over the course of the last ten years, considering contextual variations and the emergence of different theoretical viewpoints.

Keywords: Gender studies, the "Russia vs. the West" dichotomy, and theoretical methods to gender study are all things that are talked about.

Introduction

Within the framework of Russia, our group has spent the past seven years conducting major research and educational activities related to the field of gender studies. Our focus has been on the Russian environment. The purpose of this research is to analyze different patterns that are present within this particular field. The core ideas of gender research, including gender, feminism, and women's subjectivity, were presented to the Russian public for the first time in the early 1990s. These ideas were borrowed from Western feminist discourse and served as the basis for gender research. The incorporation of Western ideas and theories paved the way for the growth of gender studies as a field of study in Russia, which was assisted by this process. To get things started, let's do a condensed analysis of the development of gender studies over the course of the prior ten years. After that, a succinct exposition of the contextual differences that have been validated by scholarly investigations,

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including the research that we have conducted, will be offered. Following this, we will be concentrating on the theoretical stances that have developed in the field of gender studies in Russia as a direct result of the split between the West and Russia.

The History Of The Institution In Russia That Studies Gender

The early 1990s were a formative period for the new academic subfield known as women's and gender studies in Russia. The essay titled "How the Women's Question Was Resolved" (Posadskaja, Rimashevskaya, Zakharova) was published in *Kommunist* in 1989, marking its significance as the inaugural piece to broach matters pertaining to gender (Posadskaja, Rimashevskaya, Zakharova). This is the general consensus among individuals. In 1990, the Institute of Social and Economic Problems, which is a part of the prestigious Russian Academy of Sciences, became the first organization of its kind to be dedicated to the study of gender issues. Several localities, including Saratov, Tver', Omsk, Ul'ianovsk, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ivanovo, and Saramara, were able to successfully develop educational and research institutes over the course of ten years. In addition, these educational programs were implemented at universities that had recently been formed as well as those that had been there for a long time. They were also distributed through condensed courses and summer schools. The majority of financing for innovative research and educational endeavors has traditionally come from foundations located in Western countries.

Research and instruction in a variety of disciplines, including as philology, history, philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology, are all included in the scope of this field. It is essential to recognize that the field of political science displays a level of sensitivity toward the gender perspective that is on the whole rather low. The majority of researchers who have contributed to this field have predominantly published their work in the English language (Sperling, 1999; Racioppi and O'Sullivan, 1997; Konstantinova, 1996, etc.). This is despite the fact that the investigation of women's political participation has garnered considerable scholarly interest. In spite of the fact that it still occupies a marginal place in the world of

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academia, the area of gender studies has witnessed substantial expansion and variety. In post-Soviet Russia, the field of gender and women's studies has arisen as a recognized academic discipline.

These studies offer a platform for inclusive dialogue and stimulate engagement on topics that were previously excluded. This new development has made it easier for traditionally marginalized groups to have their voices heard and has contributed to the de-stigmatization of sensitive topics such as violence, discrimination, abortion, reproduction, and sexuality. Methodologies have been developed by experts in the field to ensure that fresh social science efforts are compatible with the existing institutional structure. There was a huge increase in the number of conferences and publications beginning in the late 1990s and continuing into the present day. This development was complemented by the publication of specific issues on gender studies in a number of different publications. In addition, there was a discernible increase in the editing of handbooks, readers, textbooks, and collections of works that had been translated. When it comes to the institutionalization of gender studies, academics utilize not one but two distinct strategies, namely "autonomization" and "integration."

In the beginning stages, there will be an emphasis on the formation of independent educational initiatives, specialized publications, conferences that will be centered on gender-related subjects, and specialized networks. Within the context of broader educational and research endeavors, the term "integration" refers to the methodical absorption of disciplines such as sociology, history, and psychology, as well as other relevant fields. Participation in professional conferences and the publication of research findings in highly regarded academic journals are both regular aspects of this approach (Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2001; Klecina, 2002).

How Unique The Social And Cultural Context Is And How Gender Order Works

Russian gender studies are evolving within a specific social and cultural context. In the present, society is reacting to the lasting impacts of the Soviet gender hierarchy. The "crisis of masculinity" or "failed masculinity," the

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prominent role of women in society, the gender accord around the "working mother," and the alleged healing of gender inequities during the Soviet period are examples. The official declaration on the woman's question and Soviet emancipation called for state regulation of reproductive conduct, strong societal support for the mother's role over the father's, and gender equality through universal suffrage and equal economic and social participation. The mandated "working mother" gender contract and state-sponsored motherhood social aid improved women's social status. This led to women playing a key part in many facets of daily life, reducing social and economic inequality.

Our investigation into the crisis of masculinity shows that late Soviet liberal rhetoric held that men were physically, mentally, and demographically inferior to women. Males becoming more feminine and females more macho were considered negative effects of Soviet women's independence. Both genders agree with the critique (Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2002). Many Russian women do not see their social status as unfair compared to men. Women's deprivation is generally linked to working mothers' work-life balance issues rather than gender discrimination or economic dependence on men. Empirical evidence suggests that many people share interpretations. This information is crucial for gender studies scholars, especially those who compare Soviet women to those in western Europe and the US. Party-state organizations shaped, regulated, and promoted Soviet femininity. A gender hierarchy and social contract are called "etacratic".

An alternate view of the Soviet gender system uses the global feminist concept of "patriarchy," to highlight patriarchal features in state socialist society. Patriarchy is associated with male-dominated bureaucratic structures, militarization, workplace division of labor, exploitation of women for unpaid domestic and service tasks, and devaluation of the female body. This view sees males and the government as patriarchal figures that oppress women. In the Soviet era, "equality" for women meant full-time work within and outside the home. The "glass ceiling" affected women outside the home. In patriarchal societies, women earned 30% less than males. Women had a harder time

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achieving high-ranking posts due to a gender gap in qualifications. Labor segregation also devalued women-dominated occupations, lowering their status. At the same time, the discrimination was called the "socialist emancipation" of women, forging a negative link between feminism and Soviet "state feminism".

Many Russian historians have characterised post-Soviet gender relations as a pattern of women being excluded from politics, high-paying jobs, and successful business initiatives. The "revival of the patriarchy" describes the current gender hierarchy (Posadskaja, 1993). Russia's political revolution is often called "male democracy". Posadskaja believes democratic change does not ensure women's rights. Novel legislation shows how democratic governance affects women's civil liberties. The standing of women is inferior. Gender stereotypes, societal cohesion, and work-life balance are major concerns. Working Mother's organizational framework has weakened. State-sponsored Soviet motherhood is losing effectiveness.

Most experts believe gender studies and the women's movement are in poor shape. This milieu is seen as perpetuating women's victimization, reinforcing gender stereotypes, and promoting biological determinism-based essentialism. Public discourse portrays women as victims of political and economic turmoil. They are generally presented as single mothers without social support who struggle. Women are also seen as change agents, creating new identities that reflect different femininities. These new identities typically free users from socialist emancipation and state-mandated labor. Women are more dependent on men and the family as a post-communist society emerges. The possibility to enter previously inaccessible companies and follow alternative career paths has also opened new doors. Economic autonomy is often seen as a burden due to the need to support family and children. Gender studies have methodological obstacles due to traditional gender roles. Scholars note that the media underrepresents gender disparities. The cultural milieu in which gender studies thrive does not support feminism in Russian public debate. Finding gender studies-appropriate theoretical frameworks is difficult.

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HOW THE FIELD HAS GROWN THEORETICALLY

It has been hypothesized that the discipline of gender studies experienced two breakthroughs at the same time in the middle of the 1990s. Despite having significantly divergent points of view on the intricacies of gender roles within a society, both of these people have made substantial contributions to the investigation of interpretive frameworks. These dissimilar concepts can each be traced back to their own unique starting point. The first component focuses on feminist grassroots organizations that are active within the framework of post-Soviet Russia. The differences in treatment that women encounter within society have been the primary emphasis of this study. Additionally, the unique experiences that women have in respect to discrimination, hierarchical systems, and unfairness have also been taken into consideration. This research makes use of Western feminist theory as its foundational theoretical framework. Western feminist theory encompasses a diverse range of perspectives, including those that are liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, postmodernist, and others that have been investigated by academics. The fundamental goal has been to study and critically scrutinize the status of women (as well as men) and their collective experiences within Soviet and post-Soviet society. This has been done with the intention of advancing gender equality. The movement has recast itself as an analytical feminist philosophy as part of its mission.

The second tendency is connected to the "official" part of the Russian women's movement, which has campaigned for the values of social protection throughout the movement's history. The individuals who advocate for this point of view don't use any terminology or notions that are associated with feminism, gender inequality, or patriarchy. On the other hand, there is a significant emphasis placed on the numerous tasks that are carried out by women in all aspects of society. The theory of gender roles is the fundamental concept that underpins women's studies as well as the feminist movement. This movement has a blatant relationship to the legacy of the Soviet Union, which included the investigation of sex roles, the research of women's social

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difficulties, the exploration of psychology, the investigation of the sociology of the family, and the analysis of demographics.

It is important to remember that the search for new theoretical frameworks in the field of gender and women's studies is an ongoing process. At the end of the 1990s, there was a discernible loosening of the formerly strict division between the two predominant trends and the educational orientations that were connected with each of them, which led to increasing interaction between the two groups. The term "gender" has become more widely used in the social sciences, despite the fact that its meaning has continued to be left with some room for interpretation. Researchers who consider themselves either feminists or nonfeminists have used this word in their work. The meaning of the term has evolved to incorporate a number of distinct points of view regarding the workings of intersexuality. The hierarchical structure that exists between persons of various genders is part of what is referred to as gender roles. Specifically, this structure pertains to the dynamics and interactions that occur within male-female relationships. In addition to this, the concept of gender roles encompasses the idea of separate and complementary responsibilities that are ascribed to men and women within society.

In addition, it is frequently used as a substitute for the phrase "women." The Soviet Union had a long-standing tradition of researching various sex roles; however, the introduction of the ideas of "gender" and "gender studies" represented a departure from this. Through the employment of these tools, they communicated a desire to develop original concepts relevant to the legitimacy of gender-based authority, the establishment of gender hierarchies, the societal construction of individual identities, and the growth of said identities. In the present situation, the legitimacy of the discipline was established through the acceptance of "Western theory" as the primary source of knowledge.

Despite this, the legacy of Soviet sociology is still present in the subject of sociology, notably in areas such as the study of the dynamics of families and sexuality. On the other hand, there is still some room for interpretation

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regarding the concept in question. The field of gender studies in Russia largely draws inspiration from a diverse array of Western theories and ideas. Within the realm of Russian gender studies, one of the most important areas of investigation is centered on the topic of whether or not these theories and concepts are applicable elsewhere, in addition to the best ways to put them into practice. According to Oushakin (2000), the discipline of gender studies is investigated by placing it within the context of intellectual globalization and the historical impact of Western colonization. This inquiry concerns to the decision of whether it is more important to prioritize worldwide trends in current or postmodern development, or to place more emphasis on distinctively Russian traits and the "gender cause." The subfield of gender studies has only recently begun to investigate the divide between "domestic" and "international" points of view in relation to the environment of Russia. On the other hand, it is important to point out that there hasn't been a lot of specific discussion about this particular subject. Academics shed light on their connection to Western feminist theory by making use of the authentic research procedures and conceptual frameworks developed by that school of thought.

The investigation of the logic of the social sciences, as carried out by academics such as Voronina and Klimenkova (1992) and Voronina (2001), has attempted to shed light on the fundamental concepts and lines of reasoning that underpin Western feminism and gender studies. This academic endeavor tries to provide an explanation for the birth of these studies as a critical perspective on mainstream ideologies, while also stressing the function that these studies play as a reflection of the pervasive gender discrimination that is common in Western society. We have decided to pursue this line of inquiry in order to explore, through the prism of social theory, the numerous Western viewpoints that can be found within the field of gender studies. We go into the Marxist perspective, the social and structural constructivist perspectives, postmodernism, feminist theory, and the sex-role approach within the functionalist-structural theory throughout the course of this conversation. This study also contains the reconstruction of social and cultural

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differentiations within the gender hierarchy and the women's movement since it inspired the formation of feminist frameworks for understanding gender dynamics and revisions to traditional social theory. Additionally, this study includes the women's movement.

This method is relevant to the overall discursive environment that exists within the realm of Russian social sciences. Within the span of the past ten years, there has been a discernible increase in the amount of discursive openness that has been noticed. There is a confluence between the legacy of Russia and the Soviet Union and the advent of Western classical and post-classical discourses inside this particular discursive framework. This convergence exists within this particular discursive framework. The many schools of Western social theory went through a process that may be described as a "translation" in a broad sense. During this time, criticism was frequently prioritized over the theoretical basis that was initially proposed. The phenomenon that was initially connected with the rationality of social science in Russia was referred to as "pluralism," "eclecticism," or "fragmentation of theory." These terms were used interchangeably at the time. Gender studies and feminist theory have, for the most part, remained confined to a limited discursive sphere, and as a result, they have had a modest impact on social theory.

This is despite the fact that they have the ability to challenge the norms that are currently in place. For instance, culture and the variety of sociocultural environments are very important factors to take into mind. The investigation focuses primarily on the investigation of gender politics as well as the pervasive expression of gendered behavior. The examination of the construction of gender and gender identity in various contexts, including the media, various text genres (such as biographies), various institutions (such as political parties, science, and the family), and in relation to social issues (such as abortions and violence), has been the subject of a significant amount of academic research. Discrimination, violence against women, sexual harassment, rights of minorities, and the experiences of disabled women are some of the pertinent study topics that have been brought up. The Western

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worldview is by far the most influential in determining what is considered to be the standard opinion on gender issues in respect to these topics.

In addition, Russian gender studies demonstrate a strong interest in the so-called "women's agenda," which was born out of the women's movement that took place within the country. Researchers in academic institutions work hard to find solutions to a variety of socioeconomic problems. These problems include, but are not limited to, the marginalization of women in the public sphere, unemployment in the wake of the communist era, protective legislation, women's reproductive autonomy, and the precarious involvement of women in small-scale businesses and illicit markets. The phenomena of the "feminization" of poverty and long-term unemployment is frequently highlighted as an important feature in the examination of these societal challenges. This is done in order to draw attention to the fact that these social problems disproportionately affect women. A vast amount of empirical study has been carried out in order to investigate and find ways to avoid these hazards.

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