

The Emerald Research Register for this journal is available at  
[www.emeraldinsight.com/researchregister](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/researchregister)



The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at  
[www.emeraldinsight.com/0964-9425.htm](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/0964-9425.htm)

# The woman question? Gender and management in the Russian Federation

The woman question?

Beverly Dawn Metcalfe and Marianne Afanassieva  
*University of Hull, Hull, UK*

429

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The aim of this paper will be to examine the social and economic changes that have shaped women's work identity in the USSR and Russian Federation. Based on interview research with 30 female professionals in St Petersburg, Russia, we unravel the complexities of the "woman question" in soviet discourse and explore the individual subjectivities of managing gender and managing transition.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper adopts a life-history qualitative research approach. We examine how transition from a Marxist system to a free market economy has impacted employment experiences of women.

**Findings** – It is shown that women have traditionally progressed in managerial and professional fields in Soviet society but that this advancement is being reversed during transition stages. Emphasising the socio-political legacies of the Soviet gender order, we highlight how dominant gender roles are being reinforced along essentialist lines. The results highlight how women's work identity is being reconstructed along stereotypically feminine lines. This feminisation of work identity however, focuses on the aesthetic qualities of being a professional woman rather than on personal managerial qualities. We argue that the construction and reconstruction of a feminine professional self is an important aspect of managing gender and transition. The results also highlight an increase in discriminatory practices in HR systems and that women face both cultural and organisational barriers to their career advancement.

**Originality/value** – The paper argues that socialist ideology did not solve the woman question, but rather produced different forms of gendered inequalities. It suggests that equal opportunities will only be achieved when organisations comply with employment legislation. The research provides important insights into the gendered management processes within transitional contexts, which have previously remained uncharted.

**Keywords** Women, Russia, Feminism, Sexual discrimination, Transition management

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

There is limited research that has considered gender and management research within the Eastern and Central European context. Equally, within international and business research, there is limited critique of management practices that consider the nuances and socio-cultural dynamics within transition states (exception Puffer, 1996; Ardichvili and Gasparishvili, 2001; Ardichvili and Gasparishvili, 2001). Accounts of women in management tend to derive from the USA and UK (for example Davidson and Burke, 1993). Reasons for women's limited advancement have been well documented and include: the social and cultural stereotypes of femininity and masculinity (Davidson

The authors kindly acknowledge support from University of Manchester Research Initiative, which funded fieldwork visits to St Petersburg and research support.



Women in Management Review  
Vol. 20 No. 6, 2005  
pp. 429-445  
© Emerald Group Publishing Limited  
0964-9425  
DOI 10.1108/09649420510616818

المنارة للاستشارات

and Cooper, 1992); discriminatory practices prevalent in organisation hiring policies and training assignments; the association of masculine characteristics with effective leadership (Schein, 2001); the limited number of females in senior positions, as well as the fact that it is usually women who assume greater responsibility for childcare and housework (Davidson and Cooper, 1992). Research has also highlighted how organisations are gendered, reinforcing male working practices and behaviours, such as the power relations that exist in decision-making processes between men and women (Metcalf and Linstead, 2003; Halford and Leonard, 2001; Acker, 1990), and the importance of informal relations and male business networks in sustaining gender hierarchies. While there are undoubtedly shared experiences in the lives of women they cannot be assumed to be the same within different socio-cultural locations. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 has created many employment challenges for women since it is argued that women have been disproportionately affected by market transition (Sen, 1996). There is a requirement, therefore, to expand the knowledge of women in management beyond those writings positioned within Western discourse and build on gender and management studies that are now emerging in post soviet academic culture (Chirikova, 2002a, b; Chirikova and Krichevskai, 2002; Chirikova and Zhenscchina, 2003). In the following, we first outline the nature and position of women in Soviet and post-Soviet society. We highlight the limited accounts of gender and management research in the Russian context. Our life methodology is then explained. The experiences of women managers in transition is then explored. We conclude with suggestions for gender-sensitive employment policy in the Russian Federation and stress the importance of linking employment policy reform within broader debates of gender relations in society.

### **Gender, equality and USSR constitution**

A central feature of communist work and political organisation was equality (Ashwin, 2002). The official commitment to gender equality was based primarily on women's equal role in economic production alongside men. Immediately after the revolution of 1917 a commitment to women's equal economic role in Soviet society was declared (Bilshai, 1956). A working decree was issued stipulating an eight-hour working day for both men and women. This equality in the public sphere was a cornerstone of socialist political and economic philosophy. The importance of allegiance to the state was placed above that of the family and the family was seen as an economic unit as that supporting state objectives. The Constitution of USSR drafted in 1936 stated that:

... a woman is afforded equal rights in all areas of economic, civil, and cultural and socio-political life (The Constitution of USSR, 1936, Article 122).

Marxist concepts of women's emancipation rests on patriarchal ideology. According to Marxist theory (outlined in works such as Marx, Engels, Lenin) the class is the basic category of social studies. Differentiation of the social roles of man and woman is considered to be governed by the class structure. Women's equality can be achieved through socialist revolution with women acting as "supporters and allies" to men in that class struggle (Voronina, 2004). The construction of state and political identity, and allegiance to the party system was therefore seen as more significant than a

prescribed gender identity. These developments were officially declared by communist authorities as the resolution of the women's question in society.

Historically, women's labour market participation in the USSR has been the highest among any economy in the world (Standing, 1994; Ashwin, 2002; Rzhantsyna, 2000). Women's share in industrial and service employment was 24 per cent in 1928, 39 per cent in 1940, 47 per cent in 1960, 51 per cent in 1980 and 51 per cent by the beginning of the 1990s. In terms of agricultural employment women's share is as follows: 52 per cent in 1939, 54 per cent in 1959, and 45 per cent by the end of the 1990s (Goskomstat, 1990, p. 24). Women's role in the public sphere was far more established than in western economies. Women's labour market participation was supported by extensive childcare support, generous maternity and leave allowances and flexible working arrangements. The "Children's institutions" as they were called in Soviet society enabled women to combine work and family responsibilities and permitted career progression in a wide range of professional fields. While there is evidence of gender segregation in employment, with women positioned primarily in public sector fields such as health and education, women's representation in political administration and scientific fields was significant when compared to the West (Standing, 1994; Kay, 2001). The high number of women in science and engineering-based fields and in politics is one of the key arguments presented for women's equality under Soviet communist rule. From 1937 there existed an unofficial communist party policy to increase the number of women in political executive roles. This resulted in women accounting for 30 per cent of all deputies in USSR's Supreme Soviet Council and around 40 per cent in local Soviets Councils. This high figure for female representation existed until 1989 when these quotas were abolished (Yevstratova, 2001). There were also a high number of women participating in scientific and engineering education courses. The Academy of Sciences at Moscow University for example had equal participation and qualification attainment of both men and women in scientific programmes, and high numbers of women were appointed when establishing engineering and biological science research centres (Monousava, 1996; Kay, 2001).

However, the concept of gender equality in the employment and political sphere in Soviet times is being reassessed by East European and political scholars who stress Marxist systems created social and economic gender inequalities that were silenced by state regimes and political authorities (see Linz, 1996; Riess, 1995; Rubchak, 2001; Wilford and Miller, 1998). It is argued that women were:

... [a] glorified socialist worker, mother and wife, who, supported by the state, combined these three roles. Any existing domination was carefully concealed by the absence (or fabrication) of statistics (Ashwin, 2002, p. 5).

Generally, it is now argued that the communist state institutionalised a gender order based on patriarchal principles (Ashwin, 2002).

Nevertheless, within public discourse women's equal rights to employment, education and political representation remained unquestioned in the Soviet Union until the late 1980s (Ashwin, 2002; Sperling, 1999). Economic and social pressures challenged the Soviet commitment to an equal gender ideology as a number of social issues alarmed Soviet leadership under Brezhnev (Mesli and Miller, 1993). There was government concern about a perceived breakdown in gender and family relations.

There had been persistently low birth rates and rising levels of divorce (see Ashwin and Lyktina, 2004). There had also been an increase in domestic violence and increasing reports of rape. This led to the rise of single parent families. There were also concerns of ethnic imbalance (Kay, 2001; Sätre Åhlander, 2000). As a consequence, public policy development began to promote a new balance of women's public and private responsibilities (Sperling, 1999; Gorbachev, 1987). Policy makers promoted biological differentiation as part of a strategy to encourage women to stay at home and look after children, thereby freeing up jobs for men. This new approach was deemed necessary in order to prepare young people adequately for adult roles which would now be presented clearly structured along gender lines (Riess, 1995). The strengthening of a family unit that supported the state also required intervention in terms of changing women's economic and political participation. A series of legislative measures defined women as a "special category", including the barring of women from certain occupations (i.e. chemical industries) on the grounds it could affect their fertility (Kay, 2001; Chirikova and Krichevaskai, 2002). The "physicality" of work in a broad range of occupations was also used to specify gender-associated skills and qualities and limit women's participation in heavy manufacturing industries (see also Metcalfe and Linstead, 2003 and Adkins, 2002 analyses on feminine skill). At the same time women's rights to maternity leave and other benefits linked to pregnancy and childbirth were extended, though this was not codified in legislation (Kay, 2001; Mesli and Miller, 1993).

The era of *perestroika* (restructuring) which was promoted under President Gorbachev further reinforced gender policy as the key to driving employment sector and family reform, especially the "double burden" of women managing home and family (Monousava, 1996). Gorbachev reanimated discussion of gender by focusing on what became known as "The Womanly Mission" discourse in Soviet culture. He argued:

... the contribution and selfless work (without which) we would not have built a new society nor won against fascism ... over the years of our difficult and heroic history, we failed to pay attention to women's specific rights and needs arising from their role as mother and home maker, and their indisputable educational function as regards children ... What we should do is make it possible for women to return to their purely *womanly mission* (Gorbachev, 1987, p. 117).

Soviet ideology thus began promoting a distinct gender order that was premised on the separation of public and private worlds. This effectively meant encouraging women to return home and focus on the first part of their threefold societal role as mother, worker and party activist. Socialist systems thus attempted to engineer social and work relations based on essentialised gender differences (see Irigaray, 1985; Fraser, 1992). While acknowledging women's public participation, this was constructed in ways that supported gender differentiation and subordination (see Belsey and Moore, 1997; Weedon, 1999). To support this gender differentiation regime the human resource systems of state-run organisations promoted flexible hours, working from home schemes, reduced working hours and generous leave allowances relating to pregnancy, childbirth and care of young or sick children (Kay, 2001). These support systems were only for women. Political and economic discourse thus emphasised, we would argue, the importance of an essentialist gender order. Yet paradoxically it is also important to

appreciate that women's identity was portrayed within soviet culture as having a "masculinised face" (Rubchak, 2001, p. 157). Harden (2001) highlights how women's identity drew on women's patriotism and heroic deeds through wars and revolutions. Representations of women were conceptualised as a larger than life "Soviet superwoman", liberated from the constraints of traditional patriarch households and celebrated as "heroines" of socialist labour (Rubchak, 2001). This further reinforces the ways in which the female and feminine qualities were subsumed, and constructed as lesser than (Irigaray, 1985; Fraser, 1992) within dominant Soviet culture.

The foregoing discussion has highlighted how gender equality was constitutionally embedded within Soviet culture, yet gender relations are also subject to cultural and historical reformation. While equality in the Soviet era was underpinned by almost an asexual approach to gender relations, through reference to communist political ideology and an "individual" political identity, political and economic restructuring have had significant gendered employment and social effects. While political commentators are keen to interrogate restructuring in the transition context, gender reform and reconstitution in Soviet society cannot be socially and politically isolated within the transition era: gendered dynamics of transition must be seen as process which started before 1989.

### **Gender, management and transition in the Russian Federation**

Following the dissolution of the Soviet state in 1991, the commitment to equality seemed to be nothing more than lip service, indeed reinforcement of gendered roles was emphasised by political leaders. Gennadii Melikian, employment minister in the Russian Federation in the early years of transition, stated:

Why should we employ women when men are unemployed? It is better that men work and women take care of the children and do the housework. I don't want women to be offended but I don't think women should work while men are doing nothing (Kay, 2001, p. 57).

The state-supported child care programmes were dismantled overnight and organisations shed labour in a bid to become more cost effective. While it must be acknowledged that these schemes were implemented partially (Kay, 2001), the restructuring of state enterprises towards profit-based accounting led managers to question the benefits of employing women. As political ideology began to hold the view that a smaller, more productive workforce held the answer to the Soviet economic problems, women quickly began to predominate among those affected by restructuring/redundancies. There have been ongoing wage reductions by corporations and this has impacted both men and women, but since women tended to earn less than their male counterparts and take responsibility for childcare these reductions have made household management a predominantly female issue. It is widely argued that the feminisation of poverty is a defining feature of Russia's economic problems (Sätre Ählander, 2000).

Khotkina (2002) points to a qualitative difference between male and female unemployment. First, the majority of men found a new job relatively quickly, whereas the majority of women, who were pushed out of employment, remained jobless for long periods of time. Second, the demand for female labour was low on account of the gendered perceptions of the value of men's labour over women's labour. This means

that in the majority of cases women moved from being economically active to being economically inactive not voluntarily, but as a result of discriminatory practices in the labour market.

The gendered aspects of transition were also visible through the ways in which there was a silencing of debates about gender equality. During Soviet times and in post-Soviet society gender labour market data (and much gender and health data) were not collated as they were felt not to be relevant (Sperling, 1999). Gender research was also limited in universities and it is only since the early 1990s that gender studies was promoted in universities, although it is still marginalized (Sperling, 1999; Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2003). Unlike the situation in the Soviet state, gender analysis elsewhere was closely connected to the rise of women's movements and political rights (Belsey and Moore, 1997; Weeden, 1999; Hughes, 2000). Feminist literature that began to critique sex and gender identity spearheaded debates within political, social and economic spheres, was both repressed, and not translated into Russian. The commitment to equality between the sexes endorsed by state political ideology reinforced the view that western female experiences and western feminism were irrelevant to everyday Russian females (Sperling, 1999; Ashwin, 2002; Temkina and Zdravomyslova, 2003).

As a consequence of this development process there is no legacy of feminist-inspired research writings, nor an established genre of feminist discourse within political and economic theorising, though the academic terrain is quickly changing. Research deliberations have developed multiple layers of gender and feminist discourse, including liberal feminism, the concept of sexual roles, radical feminism and political actions, the essentialist (universalistic) approach to women, and the notion of gender as a social construction. A good example is that Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* was not translated into Russian until 1994, at the same time as Adrienne Rich's *Of Women Born* (de Beauvoir, 1994; Rich, 1994). Post-Soviet gender analysis is embedded in a multi-paradigmatic and multi-cultural intellectual environment.

A further consequence of the limited gender and feminist scholarship is that there is little critically-inspired gender, organisation and management research among academics in Russian universities (exception Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2003); although the lack of institutional support for gender research is a contributory factor. A great deal of gender literature that is emerging is written from a feminist economic perspective and explores differentials in labour market activity (Linz, 1996; Standing, 1994) and pay variations (Monousava, 1996). Even so, feminist economic analysis is not highly valued in Russian society. It was not until 1997 that the Russian State Commission of Statistics, for example, published for the first time a complete compilation of gender and employment statistics (Gvozdeva and Gerchikov, 2002; see also Chirikova and Krichevskai, 2002). Correspondingly, explorations of women in management are scarce in Russian contexts and few are published in English.

According to a study compiled in 1997 by the Institute of Sociology in the Russian Academy of Sciences, women managers head or belong to the directorship of about 20 per cent of businesses (Gvozdeva and Gerchikov, 2002, p. 56; see also Chirikova and Krichevskai, 2002). Similar to Western business there was also found to be segregation in managerial roles. The study reported that women accounted for 54 per

cent of managers in housing and social services; 5 per cent in transport; 7 per cent in construction and 11 per cent in science.

Supporting the essentialist ideology embedded within political and economic discourse, a number of Russian studies have also concentrated on the differences in men and women's leadership style (Gvozdeva and Gerchikov, 2002; Chirikova and Krichevskai, 2002; Chirikova, 2002a, b; Chirikova and Zhenscchina, 2003). These accounts draw on stereotypical notions of women and management, such as women being more sensitive and supportive and also that women adopt consultative management styles. The gender order in Soviet culture has also been found to have institutionalised gender roles resulting in women reporting that they do not feel qualified to take on managerial roles (Chirikova and Krichevskai, 2002). Pay differentials are also not challenged on account of man's assumed superiority and authority. Chirikova and Krichevskai comment:

The professional community of analysts and academics share persistent stereotypes according to which female leaders have fewer capacities than male leaders, and female leaders follow "indirect" strategies in their management of the private companies (Chirikova and Krichevskai, 2002, p. 55)[1].

Similarly, Russian business commentators argue that what makes women's approach to management "special" is that women:

- are more inclined to care about the interests of their subordinates than men, and they prefer not to make administrative decisions on their own but to involve their staff;
- they are much less likely to engage in conflict with others; and
- in situations that require discipline they make use of a broad array of preventative measures and show more flexibility and kindness... whereas male managers are oriented towards restructuring the sphere of rules and norms, female managers are more oriented toward restructuring the sphere of relations (Gvozdeva and Gerchikov, 2002, p. 67).

This analysis resonates with the writings of Rosener (1990), and reflects the ways in which emerging scholarship rests on essentialist notions of leader behaviours.

An interesting but significant difference from the Western literature is the emphasis on being able to manage a feminine professional management identity. A substantive account of this is not unravelled but is linked to the broader analysis of leadership and managerial differences between men and women. There is importance placed on women's grooming; dress and feminine style (see Metcalfe and Linstead, 2003; Hearn and Parkin, 1995; Halford and Leonard, 2001). The "feminine" phrase is used purposely in Russian discourse as it relates to women dressing in skirts and bright colours, paying attention to their looks and make-up and generally paying attention to style and demeanour. These are considered an important part of being professional. These debates resonate with contemporary gender and management studies that focus on aesthetics and body management, and which highlight the fluidity of the gender category (see Metcalfe and Linstead, 2003; Adkins, 2002).

There is thus an interesting economic and social political dynamic shaping women's work experiences. Political discourse is promoting the natural role of women in raising

families but is not providing childcare as in the past. At the same time it holds on to the legacy that Soviet society is an equal society. A significant contribution to the literature therefore is to explore how women are managing the transition processes and what opportunities and barriers there are that affect women's advancement.

### Research approach

The research is based on empirical research conducted in St Petersburg. The project was supported by the St Petersburg Centre for Gender Studies[2] and the Professional Club of Business Women in St Petersburg. A total of 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with professional women in a range of industries including education, manufacturing, public management, marketing and law. The women held professional roles across the hierarchical spectrum including operational level management, middle management and executive management. The Centre for Gender Studies is an independent NGO dedicated to the empowerment and educational development of women in Russian society. Its main activity is concerned with educating women about employment rights and legislation. The centre also plays a key role as a networking centre, bringing together professional women who are committed to improving the status and role of women in public and political roles.

The interview contacts were arranged on an opportunistic basis through the two women's organisations. The interviewees varied in age from 19 to 58, although the majority were in their 30s and 40s and interviews lasted between one and three hours. All the women had degree-level qualifications, primarily in scientific fields such as biochemistry or in education and psychological sciences. A key difference of the older women (over 35) was that they had also undergone retraining and had qualifications in economic and education sciences.

The interviews were based on a life-history research methodology (Musson, 2004). The concept of life history implies eliciting narratives from an individual in which these individuals describe and comment on their lives in whole or in part. Usually, the data that one elicits is retrospective and not the corroborative evidence implied by the term "life history". The approach is especially relevant to gender studies in the Russian research context since it highlights the fluidity of organizational and managerial experiences. Further, the life history approach unveils how the roles, activities and status of an individual (at the micro-level) are related to socio-cultural, environmental and historical changes at the macro-level. Respondents were asked to describe their management roles, career histories and, as is the practice with life history approaches, individuals were allowed to elaborate and explore significant work-life events. A total of 15 of the interviews were carried out in English and 15 in Russian. The second author acted as translator. The interviews were tape-recorded and data written up by the first author. The women volunteered to participate in the study. The majority of women preferred to be interviewed away from their place of work, as they did not want colleagues to know of the project.

It should be highlighted that undertaking feminist research in a culture that in general is anti-feminist is complex in terms of power relations between researcher and researched and the fact that one of the research team was Russian was extremely useful in forming more open relationships and putting interviewees at ease (see Acker *et al.*, 1983; Adkins, 2002). The lead author is a proclaimed feminist and it is important



to appreciate that within Russian culture “feminism is a curse word, and gender studies a usual muddle of the civilisation-satiated Western mind” (Voronina, 2004). All women interviewed had been involved in one of the two women’s organisations and to an extent had some exposure to feminist theories and writings, or at least, felt that women’s issues were an important aspect of reform. The sample therefore cannot be considered representative of Russian professional women for, as Sperling (1999) and Kay (2002), have stressed, the lack of feminist consciousness and feminist agenda for social change is a striking feature of gender identities.

### Managing gender, managing transition

Overall, respondents highlighted that the position of women had worsened during transition. Job prospects and training aspects had also deteriorated. Yet there was also a glimpse of positivism and opportunism, but this was largely reported by younger respondents. Older women felt that there was little opportunity for them.

#### *Masculine management characteristics*

The Soviet gender order has helped construct social and economic roles based on biological essentialism. Consequently, business culture supports gender segregation in the public sphere. Individual subjectivities reaffirmed this macro gender order. When asked to describe effective management characteristics the respondents highlighted stereotypical characteristics similar to those identified by the Schein Descriptive Index (SDI) (Schein, 2001), including, assertiveness, rationality, toughness and resilience. Schein’s (2001) global research has found that culturally and socially effective management is related to masculine traits so that the “think manager think male” construct serves to devalue feminine qualities and abilities. Masculine traits were also those most prized in Ardivicili’s (2001) research in the leadership styles in Russian manufacturing enterprises (see also Ardichvili and Gasparishvili, 2001).

Significantly, masculine and feminine were tied to essential sex gender categories as it was felt that men and women had different leadership styles. This reaffirms the difference standpoint advocated by Gvozdeva and Gerchikov (2002). Women reported that men were “naturally” suited to authoritative roles and had the capacity to make executive decisions more effectively. It was felt that while “relationship” criteria were important for a management role, what was most significant was an individual’s skill in making difficult decisions, being objective and maintaining a rational composure. Significantly, women’s role was to support this gendered hierarchy of power and decision making:

Men do the main job, take decisions and women assist and support. A clever woman can influence her husband but it is deployed as his decision (Zhanna, 37, Manager NGO Administration).

Men have natural authority and natural capacities for senior roles, it is in their genes (Tatiana, 33, Personnel, Manufacturing).

Men do not feel there are barriers – the assumption is that men are usually better than women – in organisations men are seen as natural leaders (Yelena, 45, President International Federation of Businesswomen).

My husband career comes first ... I like to look after him (Tatiana, Director St Petersburg Administration).

The last narrative is interesting as this women had reached one of the highest roles in public administration yet clearly valued her husband's work more than her own who was a government official. Tatiana also had responsibility for equal opportunity policies in government administration. She highlighted that the "household" was women's domain and that her husband needed to be supported in his job, which she was very happy to do. Every night she would prepare going to bed and recalled with fondness that her husband would place on her pillow all the necessary government reports she had to read before the next day.

The capacity of women to support executive decision structures, and their lesser than status (Irigaray, 1985) is related to the resurgence of traditional essentialism in economic and political discourse described above. The symbolic order of gender which positions masculinity and femininity in a hierarchical relationship places a higher value on men's work capacities (and work roles) than on women's (Fraser, 1992). The separation of the public and the private in Russian culture tends to be more blurred and not so distinct when compared to western critiques of social structure and gender. The combining of public and private roles is seen as a natural one for women to undertake. The responsibility for childcare and household management is seen as a natural division of labour between men and women:

I am a woman. Our duty is to do a double shift (Tatiana, 49, Senior Manager Public Administration).

I have my role as carer of the family and I accept that (Svetlana, 38, Public Administration Manager).

I am a woman – working and raising children cannot be separated (Svetlana, 37 Business Consultancy).

Women thus supported the "double burden" and the "essentialist gender order" and did not expect, or receive, help from their partners or husbands with childcare or household tasks. Inequalities in family and work responsibilities was perceived as public administration issues associated with the dismantling of state child services, rather than about gender relations within the family sphere. This view was reported across the age spectrum. The negative effects on women, when compared to men's social situation of withdrawing state child services was rationalised as part of nature's natural order "I am a woman". Yet social studies have reported the gendered effects of the state's separation from family management (Ashwin and Lyktina, 2004). Women have the increasing burden of managing child-care and combining work roles, whereas men have now to take on responsibility for the family. The new work regimes are based on working hours and systems that are based on the male worker (Dickens and What, 1998). The "crisis of masculinity" in post-Soviet culture is strongly associated with men's struggle to take on an active father role (Ashwin and Lyktina, 2004). Both these gender role changes highlight conflicts in the domestic sphere and are cited as the key reasons for increasing divorce rates, rising alcoholism and violence against women.

The foregoing discussion has highlighted the gendered ways in which men's and women's jobs are valued, and that managerial and professional roles are perceived as being more suitable to the natural capacities displayed by men. The discussion highlighted that the private domain and family are crucially intertwined with debates about management, organisation and transition. As highlighted by Watson in 1993, state socialism created female identities that were not constituted from a sense of inferiority and exclusion, but from a labour burden which prevented them from being proper wives and mothers (see also Rubchak, 2001). Managing gender and managing transition has helped reinforced inequalities in the private sphere. At the same time transition has reasserted the value of the masculine in the public domain and supported the downgrading of a feminine identity. Within the Russian context this natural and different division of labour is rarely challenged. Indeed, the concept of equal opportunities is not a term that is conceptually understood, since it is assumed that men and women have equality; this was especially felt by the younger women. If you asked the respondents the question "do you feel that men and women are equal?", their response would be "yes", whereas if you got them to unveil their life work histories the themes of difference, inequality and women's responsibility in the private sphere would recur again and again. The devaluing of the feminine is further illustrated by the ways in which the aesthetics of female bodily presence is being constructed as a key performance indicator in the public sphere and is explored in the following section.

#### *Managing a professional feminine identity*

A great deal of critical gender and organisation research has begun to explore how identities in organisations are gendered and help reinforce and recreate hierarchical organisation and managerial practices (for example, Acker, 1990; Halford and Leonard, 2001; Metcalfe and Linstead, 2003). The symbolic order of gender has shown how the values of feminine and masculine are positioned unequally with feminine attributes being classified as lesser than, and "other" (Metcalfe and Linstead, 2003; Adkins, 2002; see also Luce Irigaray, 1985). Sociological research has also highlighted how feminine attributes are valued as forms of cultural capital in work organisations, that is, feminine qualities can be seen to be embodied in service and customer exchanges (Adkins, 2002). In the interviews many women highlighted how transition has enabled them to "transform" themselves and become "real women". The expansion of business services especially in food, fashion retailing and make up has changed the lifestyles of everyday Russians. Women, for example, on average queued three hours a day for food in the Soviet era. The increased consumer choice of fashion styles and beautifying accessories has assisted in reconstructing the traditional gender identity of a female masculinised Russian (Rubchak, 2001).

The construction of a feminine identity was thus considered an important part of a woman creating a professional work identity:

A woman should be a good hostess, look attractive and entertain her husbands' business colleagues (Tatiana, Director, 54, Public Administration).

A woman always has to look tidy, as if she has just stepped out of the shower. No holes in the pantyhose and a sense of style should always be maintained (Larisa, Journalist, 22).

Russian women, who think of themselves as real women, feminine women, they feel more assertive and feel better about themselves. A real woman is a feminine woman (Svetlana, 55, Head of TU Committee, Manufacturing).

Men view women as women – they say she is a man wearing a business skirt. It is in the air that we should wear make-up, a smart business suit, think about the shoes that you are wearing, does it match my handbag, and you have to show you are business-like (Zhanna, 37, NGO Education).

It should be noted that the linkage of the feminine, femininity and business is not a socially constructed concept that could be used to describe male behaviours. While the translation of feminine is difficult in Russian, the feminine is linguistically and culturally associated with women, the female. As one of the respondents highlighted “displaying” and performing a feminine work identity provides women with confidence and the assurance that she can be successful in her business relations. The value of managing the feminine is also supported by the training services of The International Federation of Businesswoman in St Petersburg which focused on colour analysis, grooming and dress decisions, in essence the whole package of image management, although clearly tailored (and needed) for women in the management sphere.

The management of the feminine then is seen as an important aspect of professional advancement. The emphasis on the aesthetics is an important aspect of feminine cultural capital (see Adkins, 2002; Hearn and Parkin, 1995) is significant, as without the “proper” feminine look training and professional opportunities would be limited:

You have to look feminine, pay attention to make up, have long hair preferably. If you do not look the part you know that other woman will be given the opportunity (Yelena, 33, Manufacturing).

The aesthetics of women’s professional identity also had age implications. Older women felt that they could not construct this beautiful image:

You know that it is younger women that they really want, we are left on the side (Svetlana, 55, Head of Trade Union Committee, Manufacturing).

We would argue that the aestheticisation of women’s professional identity be described as part of a broader process of feminisation (Fondas, 1997) which characterises organisation development and change. Unlike western economies feminisation is associated with the increasing number of women in a professional occupation, and occupations being characterised in stereotypically feminine terms. This process of feminisation has resulted in the devaluing of an occupation, or feminisation processes simply not being “surfaced” or “named” (Fondas, 1997). The implication is that feminisation will have implications for recruitment and development policies because a feminine business image will continue to be an important criterion for entry into an occupation as well as being a performance measure for promotion.

The individual’s responses were supported by broader analysis of recruitment and selection advertising in St Petersburg. Women reported that job advertisements and job descriptions specified that women needed to have “long hair”, wear “short skirts” and “wear make-up”. Our own observations of job vacancies advertised also confirmed this. In addition to specifying only “young pretty candidates”, preferably under 25,

there is a reluctance to take on women who are married. The social cost of employing women is now a significant factor that affects decision making in recruitment. In the Soviet past, state childcare support provided structures that helped facilitate dual working family arrangements. Legislation is still in place since the *perestroika* era, which provides for some maternity leave and pay. However, as with much Russian legislation, the law is disregarded and blatantly overruled (Ashwin, 2002).

A key aspect of managing transition there has been the reconstruction of professional female work identities. Neo-liberal ideologies have restructured gendered inequalities and forged new gender identities. While communist policy advocated a gender-neutral stance to institutional development, socialist systems acknowledged the importance of women's double burden via the provision of state children's institutions. Post-Soviet gender relations have seen the differentiation between men and women clearly marked in the work sphere. The association of masculinity with effective management and the association of aesthetics, femininity and managerial work competence has created work and social systems that reinforce biological essentialism. A striking feature of our interviews was women's complicit support of these work and social relationships.

### Conclusion and directions for further research

This study has analysed gendered aspects of transition as the Russian economy has developed from Soviet systems to free-market political structures. While our research approach and epistemological understanding of gender roles and gender identities acknowledges gender as a fluid category and subject to ongoing reformation and change (see Weedon, 1999), the respondents in our study and within Russian academia tend to differentiate between men and women and treat sex and gender as the same. This reflects the multi-paradigmatic nature of gender discourse in Russian society and so our commentary needs to be read/re-read within this socio-cultural and spatial context.

The empirical data examined women managers in the Russian Federation and considered the opportunities and constraints for women in managing transition processes. The results revealed that stereotypical perceptions of managerial skills and qualities, alongside the devaluing of feminine traits, are widespread among women professionals; women have to actively manage femininity and sexuality in order to acquire job opportunities, gain access to training and be considered for professional management development. The results highlight the gendered process of transition and unveil the contradictory organisation pressures and new market structures that are shaping women manager's experiences and identities. In addition to managing the complexity of being a woman and managing transition there is clear evidence of employment discrimination in HR recruitment and development practices and this is exaggerated by a business and political culture that has no respect for legal authority. Indeed, a key aspect of transition to market has been the way in which organisation and managerial practices have been tainted with corruption and bribery. The *woman question* in post-Soviet culture is still as prevalent today as it was in the 1980s when Brezhnev and later Gorbachev, began to reassess women's role and contribution to Soviet politics and economy. There is, however, a need to move beyond positioning women as a problem category and broaden out sociological and managerial inquiry

into unravelling gendered power relations and the socially constituted nature of gender identities in organisation (Fraser, 1992). Recent literature has begun examining the nature of multiple masculinities and multiple femininities and this area of research should be encouraged (Temkina and Zdravomslova, 2003).

While we can make comparisons with Western female managers' experiences in terms of limited career and training opportunities, there are undoubtedly different socio-political pressures on women's ability to progress and develop. The anti-feminist agenda and limited attention to gender and employment policy is a significant contributory factor (Temkina and Zdravomslova, 2003). Indeed, the lack of commentary from the Kremlin, even under Putin's governance, on gender issues reaffirms the gender-neutral stance towards transition politics and economics. It may come as no surprise that within soviet culture Putin is regarded as a "ladies man" and has made several statements about women's beauty and style in nationwide speeches including comments about the attractiveness of Cherie Blair (Kay, 2001). The lack of attention to women's issues is also evident in international employment constitutions. The Russian Federation, although signed up to the United Nations Confederation for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), has not made any progress in advancing women's and employment issues. The latest report to CEDAW in 2000 was specifically concerned with health and fertility issues. While a commitment to social policy reform is to be encouraged, employment advancements and real wages equivalent to men would help alleviate inequalities. The concept of gender mainstreaming is not commonly used within political discourse and the UN report (UN, 2000) makes no mention or acknowledgement of it. The inclusion of gender mainstreaming methodologies within public administration development would thus help raise the profile of gender issues.

#### Notes

1. Please note that all translations were written in order to maintain the integrity of Russian expression.
2. The society has been in operation since the late 1980s and is funded by Scandinavian governments who sponsor various gender and development projects. In 2004 the centre was folded as funding had run out but the women activists associated with the centre are still involved in feminist empowerment projects.

#### References

- Acker, J. (1990), "Jobs, hierarchies, bodies: a theory of gendered organisation", *Gender and Society*, Vol. 4, June, pp. 139-58.
- Acker, J., Barry, K. and Esseveld, J. (1983), "Objectivity and truth: problems in doing feminist research", *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 6 No. 4, pp. 423-235.
- Adkins, L. (2002), *Revisions: Gender and Sexuality in Late Modernity*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Ardichvili, A. (2001), "Leadership styles and work-related values of managers and employees of manufacturing enterprises in post-communistic countries", *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 363-83.
- Ardichvili, A. and Gasparishvili, A. (2001), "Human resource development in an industry in transition", *Human Resource Development International*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 47-63.

- Ashwin, S. (2002), "The influence of the Soviet gender order on employment behaviour in contemporary Russia", *Sociological Research*, Vol. 41 No. 1, pp. 27-37.
- Ashwin, S. and Lyktina, T. (2004), "Men in crisis in Russia: the role of domestic marginalisation", *Gender and Society*, Vol. 18, April, pp. 189-206.
- Belsey, C. and Moore, J. (Eds.) (1997), *The Feminist Reader*, Macmillan Press, London.
- Bilshai, V. (1956), *Resheniye Zhenskogo Voprosa v SSSR*, Gosudarstvennoye Izdatelstvo Politicheskoi Literatury, Moscow.
- Chirikova, A.E. (2002a), "Zhenshchina-menedzher v sovremennom biznese", in Malysheva, M.M. (Ed.), *Gendernyi Kaleidoskop*, Academia, Moscow.
- Chirikova, A.E. (2002b), "Zhenskoye predprinimatelstvo v Rossii: kontseptualnye podkhody i napravleniya issledovaniy", in Mezentseva, E.B. (Ed.), *Gender i Ekonomika: Mirovoi Opyt i Ekspertiza Rossiiskoi Praktiki*, Russkaya Panorama, Moscow.
- Chirikova, A.E. (2003), "Zhenshchina I muzhchina kak top-menedzhery rosskikh kompaniy", *SOSTIS, Sotsioloicheskie Issledovaniya*, Vol. 1.
- Chirikova, A.E. and Krichevskaya, O.N. (2002), "The woman manager", *Sociological Research*, Vol. 41 No. 1, pp. 38-54.
- (The) Constitution of USSR (1936), *Article 122*, December, available at: [www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/36cons01.html](http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/36cons01.html)
- Davidson, M.J. and Burke, R.J. (1993), *Women in Management: Current Research Issues*, Paul Chapman, London.
- Davidson, M.J. and Cooper, C.J. (1992), *Shattering the Glass Ceiling: The Woman Manager*, Paul Chapman, London.
- de Beauvoir, S. (1994), *The Second Sex* (Russian translation), Blackwell, Oxford.
- Dickens, L. (1998), "What Means for gender equality", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 23-40.
- Fondas, N. (1997), "Feminization unveiled: management qualities in contemporary writings", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 22 No. 1, p. 237-82.
- Fraser, N. (1992), "Revaluing French feminism: critical essays on difference, agency and culture", in Fraser, N. and Bartky, S. (Eds), *French Feminism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN.
- Gorbachov, M. (1987), *Perestroika: New thinking for Our Country and the World*, Collins Publishing, London.
- Goskomstat (1990), *Zhenshchiny v SSSR: Statisticheskie Materialy*, Gosudarstvennyi Komitet SSSR po Statistike, Moscow.
- Gvozdeva, E.S. and Gerchikov, V.L. (2002), "Sketches for a portrait of women managers", *Sociological Research*, Vol. 41 No. 1, pp. 55-68.
- Halford, S. and Leonard, P. (2001), *Gender Power and Organisations*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Harden, J. (2001), "Mother Russia at work: gender divisions in the medical profession", *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 181-99.
- Hearn, J. and Parkin, W. (1995), *Sex at Work: The Power and Paradox of Organisation Sexuality*, St Martins Press, New York, NY.
- Hughes, K. (2000), "Painting new (feminist), pictures of research for political change", *Management Learning*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 51-65.

- Irigaray, L. (1985) Ed., *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Porter, C. (transl.), Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
- Kay, R. (2001), "Liberation from emancipation? Changing discourses of women's employment in soviet and post-Soviet Russia", *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol. 18, March, pp. 51-71.
- Khotkina, Z.A. (2002), "Gendernyi podkod k analizu truda I zanyatosti", in Malysheva, M.M. (Ed.), *Gendernyi Kaleidoskop*, Academia, Moscow.
- Linz, S.J. (1996), "Gender differences in the Russian labour market", *Journal of Economic Issues*, Vol. 30 No. 1, pp. 161-86.
- Mesli, V.L. and Miller, A.H. (1993), "The gender bias of institutional support in Lithuania", *Ukraine and Russia, Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 45 No. 3, pp. 505-33.
- Metcalf, B.D. and Linstead, A. (2003), "Gendering teamwork: rewriting the feminine", *Gender Work and Organization*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 94-119.
- Monousava, G. (1996), "Gender differentiation and industrial relations", in Clarke, S. (Ed.), *Conflict and Change in the Russian Industrial Enterprise*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.
- Musson, G. (2004), *Life-histories, Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organisation Research*, Sage, London.
- Puffer, S.M. (Ed.) (1996), *Business and Management in Russia*, Edward Elgar, Brookfield, WI.
- Rich, A. (1994), *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Riess, N. (1995), *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation During Perestroika*, Cornell University Press, New York, NY.
- Rosener, J. (1990), "Ways women lead", *Harvard Business Review*, November-December, pp. 119-25.
- Rubchak, M.J. (2001), "In search of a model: evolution of feminist consciousness in Ukraine and Russia", *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 149-60.
- Rzhanitsyna, L. (2000), "Working women in Russia at the end of the 90s", *Problems of Economic Transition*, Vol. 43 No. 7, pp. 68-86.
- Sätre Åhlander, A. (2000), "Women and the social economy in transitional Russia", *Annals of Public and Comparative Economics*, Vol. 71 No. 3, pp. 441-65.
- Schein, V. (2001), "Bias in the evaluation of women leaders: a global look at psychological barrier to women's progress in management", *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 57 No. 4, pp. 675-705.
- Sen, G. (1996), "Gender markets and states: a selective review and research agenda", *World Development*, Vol. 24 No. 6, pp. 821-30.
- Sperling, V. (1999), *Organising Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Standing, G. (1994), "The changing patterns of women in Russian industry", *World Development*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 271-84.
- Temkina, A. and Zdravomslova, E. (2003), "Gender studies in post-soviet society: Western frames and cultural differences", *Studies in East European Thought*, Vol. 55 No. 1, pp. 51-61.
- United Nations (2000), *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: Russian Federation, Fifth Periodic Report*, UN, Washington, DC.
- Voronina, O. (2004), "The philosophy of sex and gender", available at: [www.bu/wcp/Papers/gend/GendVoro/htm](http://www.bu/wcp/Papers/gend/GendVoro/htm)



- Weedon, C. (1999), *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.
- Wilford, B. and Miller, R. (1998), *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism: The Politics of Transition*, Routledge, London.
- Yevstratova, A.I. (Ed.) (2001), *Zhenshchiny Rossii na Rubezhe XX-XXI Vekov: ot Proshlogo k Nastoyashchemu*, Kostromskoi Gosudarstvennyi Tekhnologicheskii Universitet, Kostroma.
- Zdravomyslova, E.A. and Temkina, A.A. (2003), "Sovetskii etakraticeskii gendernyi poryadok", in Pushkareva, N.L. (Ed.), *Sotsialnaya Istoriya. Yezhegodnik. Zhenskaya I Gendernaya Istoriya*, Rossiiskaya Politicheskaya Entsiklopediya, Moscow.

### Further reading

- Brainard, E. (2000), "Women in transition: changes in gender wage differentials in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union", *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 138-63.
- Davidson, M.J. and Burke, R.J. (2000), *Women in Management: Current Research Issues Vol II*, Paul Chapman, London.
- Fournier, V. and Keleman, M. (2001), "The crafting of community: re-coupling discourses of management and womanhood", *Gender Work and Organization*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 267-89.
- Grapard, U. (1999), "Theoretical issues in the transition from socialist regimes", *Journal of Economic Issues*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 665-83.
- Reza Arabsheibani, G. and Lau, L. (1999), "Mind the gap: an analysis of gender wage differentials in Russia", *Labour*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 761-74.
- Zdravomyslova, E.A. and Temkina, A.A. (2002), "Institutsionalizatsiya gendernykh issledovaniy v Rossii", in Malysheva, M.M. (Ed.), *Gendernyi Kaleidoskop*, Academia, Moscow.