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A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirement or the Degree
Master of Arts

By
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May 2016

Date Recommended 03/29/2016

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Acknowledgments

There are many people who have helped me in my research and writing throughout the last two years, who without, this thesis would never have come to fruition. I would first like to thank my fellow graduate students, especially Wayne and Abby, in the History Department, who were always willing to “talk shop” and who were frequently around to ease the academic tension with a well-timed joke. I would like to extend my gratitude to my committee members, Dr. Dorothea Browder and Dr. Eric Reed, for believing in me, writing letters on my behalf, and for being easily accessible in this lengthy and multi-step process. I would like to thank the Director of Graduate Studies in the History Department, Dr. Beth Plummer, for her open-door policy and for providing the subtle reminders every graduate student needs. I owe an enormous thanks to Benjamin, who I had the pleasure of meeting at Middbury College’s intensive summer Russian-language program, and who introduced me to a wealth of new resources. I would also like to extend a special thank you to my academic advisor, Dr. Marko Dumančić, who has facilitated my transformation from student to scholar over the course of the last two years, and who has been keenly insightful of all things intellectual and emotional.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my family and friends, who have supported me and encouraged me to pursue my academic and professional goals, especially my mother Marina and my best friend and fellow graduate student Chloe. Finally, I want to extend the sincerest of thank yous to my partner, Hilary, who supported me emotionally throughout this entire process, and who always kept me grounded in the real world. Thank you all.
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Between 1987 and 1991, Soviet filmmakers and journalists utilized Gorbachev’s glasnost reform policy to depict or discuss sexuality in cinema and the popular press. I argue that Soviet film and popular press discourses on sex in this period reveal a continuity of conservative sexual mores, which were interwoven with social and moral conservatism regarding the centerpiece of Soviet society, the Soviet family. Furthermore, these discourses take on a fundamentally misogynistic tone, in that women are tasked with defending sexual purity, and thus familial integrity, while simultaneously being cast as those most susceptible to the power of sexual enticement. Thus, the comparatively permissive discourse about sex and sexuality in the 1980s can be interpreted not as a “sexual revolution,” but as an explosion in social and moral anxieties, that were unique to the glasnost period, about the Soviet way of life. Additionally, this study challenges the concept of the totalitarian Soviet system by highlighting intellectuals’ persevering conservatism during a period where the state did not expressly govern or censor discourses on sex and sexuality.
INTRODUCTION: A SOVIET PARADE OF HORRIBLES

The April 27, 1991 issue of Sovetskaia kul’tura featured a full-page article titled “The Magic of the Forbidden Fruit,” a discussion about the recent wave of erotica, pornography, and general “sexual permissiveness” sweeping the USSR in the late 1980s and early 90s. Encased within the text is a sizable photo (Figure 1) of a topless woman sunbathing, and a photographer who has broken off from a large group of people to voyeuristically photograph the unaware woman. The photo represents the unique gender and sexuality anxieties of the glasnost period to full effect. The freedom that came with glasnost to showcase the nude form, even in a nonsexual way, is undercut here by a sense of impending danger. The photograph suggests that the man, who has departed from a crowd to snap photos of the sunbather, may be a predator in the making. The woman, on the other hand, lays oblivious to her two photographers and ignorant of the sorts of troubles her nudity may bring. Ironically, the photographer who captures the scene acts as a secondary voyeur. The photojournalist, representing intellectuals more broadly, is given a pass to depict nudity while he simultaneously decries its destructive power. Featuring this photo, the journalists would argue, is for the ultimate benefit of the readers. By characterizing sex as predatory or destructive, intellectuals behind glasnost-era journalistic and cultural discourses utilized sex as a proxy to address social and moral anxieties. This ostensible parade of horribles privileged intellectuals’ use of sex as subject matter, because their productions acted as discursive proxies which addressed perceived societal problems. Intellectuals between 1987 and 1991 embodied the supposed social transparency of the glasnost period by shocking Soviets with a sort of

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aversion therapy. This is the paradoxical context in which discourse on sex in the glasnost period was situated.

Figure 1. Topless woman sunbathing (photo by S. Kompaniichenko)

Increased visibility of sexuality in public discourse is frequently tied to expanded social, moral, and cultural liberalism. Such was the case with the Sexual Revolution in the West during the late 1960s. This connection is also made in regards to discourses on sex in the last years of the Soviet Union, known as the perestroika and glasnost era, referring to Mikhail Gorbachev’s reform policies. Following the premiere of Gorbachev’s glasnost reform, political scientists and communications scholars generally regarded glasnost as politically and culturally “liberating,” at least in the western sense of the word.² Political scientist Isaac J. Tarasulo, for example, argued in 1989 that sexuality in

² Communication scholars and political scientists such as Joseph Gibbs, Isaac J. Tarasulo, and Elena Androunas argued in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the journalistic discourses of the glasnost era represented expanded social and moral liberalism in the Soviet Union. Their definitions of “liberalism,” however, typically drew from western notions of egalitarian society, as well as democratic capitalism. Joseph Gibbs, Gorbachev’s Glasnost: The Soviet Media in the First Phase of Perestroika (College Station:
art and the popular press represented a foothold into moral, philosophical, and cultural “progression” for the Soviet Union. The assumption that sex discourse during the perestroika years was a sign of liberalism are bolstered when considering that the discourses were made possible by Mikhail Gorbachev’s glasnost reform policy, which softened official censorship in many facets of social and cultural expression. Furthermore, these discourses occurred in the years leading up to Russia’s transition to democracy. Yet examining the two most far-reaching cultural and social mediums, cinema and the popular press, complicates the presumption of liberalism. Filmmakers and journalists, members of the intelligentsia class, utilized the new freedoms of glasnost to portray and discuss sex. Their use of sex as a discursive proxy, however, did not reflect intellectuals’ increased acceptance for sexual permissiveness.

I argue that Soviet film and popular press discourses on sex in the glasnost period, between 1987 and 1991, reveal a continuity of conservative sexual mores, which were interwoven with Bolshevik social and moral ideology regarding the centerpiece of Soviet society, the Soviet family. Furthermore, these discourses take on a fundamentally misogynistic tone, in that women are tasked with defending sexual purity, and thus familial integrity, while simultaneously being cast as those most morally and physically susceptible to sexual perversion. In essence, the intelligentsia relegated women to the status of “weakest link,” in that their sexuality held the most disproportionately severe repercussions for the Soviet family and society. The Bolshevik notion of gender equality, then, became strained and threatened to snap in this period. Thus, this study reflects the


3 Tarasulo, *Gorbachev and Glasnost*, xviii.
limited potential of glasnost to liberalize the Soviet intelligentsia’s social and cultural values, and concludes that there was a greater degree of continuity in the way intellectuals conceptualized sex and sexuality over the course of seventy years than ideological departure in the glasnost period. It further reveals the limits of glasnost more generally, challenging the notion that conservatism was exclusively a top-down phenomenon in the Soviet Union, even by the end of its existence.

**Perestroika and Glasnost**

In 1985, shortly after becoming the Soviet Union’s final General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev delivered a speech to Communist Party activists in which he said aloud what had been widely known for many decades: the Soviet economy had failed to provide a “first world” standard of living for its citizens, and production output and commerce was only getting worse. Several months later, Gorbachev introduced the perestroika (rebuilding or restructuring) reform policies at the 27th Congress of the Communist Party. Perestroika was designed with the Soviet Union’s long history of economic malaise in mind. However, Gorbachev’s reforms were aimed at all facets of Soviet society, as he recognized the problem was not purely economic, but brought about by decades of mounting political corruption and social alienation, as well as a steady decline of Soviet ideological and moral values.⁴

Gorbachev’s holistic approach to reform was buttressed by glasnost (referring to the quality of openness or transparency), a corresponding reform policy which decreased official censorship and allowed for freer public discourse. According to communications scholar Elena Androunas, Gorbachev initially had a rather contrived conceptualization of

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glasnost, in that it was not meant to lead to widespread challenges of socialism or the Soviet system, but was instead meant to be an instrument in Gorbachev’s policy of “improving socialism.” Gorbachev makes this point himself in a short chapter of his 1987 book, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*. The chapter, titled “More Light to Glasnost!,” follows the trajectory of the rest of the book, in that glasnost is limited to that which would improve the existing system without presenting fundamental challenges. “Beware! Glasnost is aimed at strengthening our society. And we have a lot to assert,” writes Gorbachev. The limitations of glasnost are paramount to recognize the context in which discourses on sex took place.

Thus, glasnost was not envisioned as “freedom of speech” in the western sense. Instead, Gorbachev aimed to remedy seven decades’ worth of political, economic, and bureaucratic complacency, brought about by a lack of oversight. An alternative analysis suggests that the Party’s control over media and mass communications was breaking down by the late 1980s due to increased globalization and technological innovation. This explanation proposes that Gorbachev was pushed into glasnost. According to media and communications specialist Brian McNair, Gorbachev instituted glasnost largely because he recognized that the global information revolution would bring unregulated and questionable discourse within Soviet borders, as was the case with the spread of unfettered information following the Chernobyl crisis. Thus, Gorbachev’s ultimate goal with glasnost was to maintain a degree of control over a seemingly inevitable process.

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8 Ibid.
Alternatively, diplomatic historian Robert English suggests that Gorbachev’s penchant for liberal reform was undercut by the need to placate Party hardliners. According to English’s argument, Gorbachev was only able to make incremental changes, rather than transform the system wholesale. In either case, perestroika and glasnost were not policies which aimed to transform the system, a point Gorbachev reiterated several times in his book and in public speeches. They were envisioned and designed to enhance an existing social, moral, political, and economic system, which had been perpetuated by hardliners, to fit the needs and challenges of globalization in the late 1980s.

The limitations of glasnost as a period of liberalization can be better understood when juxtaposed with another purportedly liberal period in Soviet history, the Khrushchev-era “Thaw.” Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech,” or his denouncement of Stalinist coercion, given to the Party activists at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in 1956, along with his release of hundreds of thousands of Gulag prisoners between 1953 and 1960, have cemented his place in history as a reformer. However, historian Miriam Dobson has challenged the idea of a social and political “binary,” in which political leaders clung exclusively to conservatism or reformism. Khrushchev instituted crackdowns against crime and recidivism, and significantly complicated Gulag returnees’ reintegration into society. Additionally, Dobson highlights the central role ordinary citizens played in renegotiating the terms of the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, and their resistance to accepting widespread amnesty for Gulag returnees. Similarly, citizens in the Gorbachev period played a vital role in perestroika, and in fact, their cooperation

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was of paramount importance in the policy’s success. Both Khrushchev and Gorbachev faced the seemingly irresolvable puzzle of trying to reform the system without undermining the proclaimed infallibility of Bolshevik ideology. Additionally, ordinary people in both the Khrushchev and the Gorbachev period tended toward conservatism, independent of top-down influence. The comparison further highlights the circumspect nature of glasnost as a reform policy, and challenges the idea of the disenfranchised Soviet citizen. In fact, during glasnost it was Soviet citizens, filmmakers and journalists, who resisted social liberalization.

**Sexuality and Soviet Morality**

Discourses on sex in the glasnost period reflect the complexity of Soviets’ problemized history of conceptualizing human sexuality, which presented Bolshevik ideology with one of its fundamental paradoxes. On the one hand, sexual harmony was a central principle of the socialist utopian idea. On the other hand, sexuality separate from procreation represented, in the words of prominent Soviet sexologist Igor Kon, “the irrational, individualistic, capricious, and spontaneous. All things anti-Bolshevik.” However, few members of the intelligentsia suggesting that “free love,” or the idea of love and sex separate from the patriarchal nuclear family, was a piece of the utopian puzzle. Ultimately, this conservatism in a period of relative journalistic and creative freedom is a result of Soviets’ historical legacy of sexual conservatism.

Early Soviets’ ideals of “free love” stemmed from a wider nineteenth-century philosophical trend. Late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Russian philosophers, such as Vladimir Solov’ev (1853-1900), Nikolai Berdiaev (1874-1948) and Nikolai

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Fedorov (1829-1903), suggested that humans were fundamentally unique from other animals in their ability to connect with the divine. Solov’ev contended that man existed on three levels – natural, social, and divine – and that only when man could transcend the procreative instinct and infuse sexuality with his divine nature, could sexuality reach its utopian potential. Yet even in pre-Soviet Russia, the intelligentsia’s propensity to favor communal society inspired unease about nonprocreative sexual relations, which were thought to be “insufficiently communal.” The intelligentsia value of communal society was emboldened by Bolshevik collective ideology, and so was the anxiety surrounding sexual relations.

The notion that early Bolsheviks widely embraced “free love” is not entirely accurate, and does not illustrate the complexity of how Bolsheviks conceptualized sexuality in the 1920s. Vladimir Lenin, for example, held far more restrictive views on sexuality than the fathers of communism, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Lenin’s primary occupation was ultimately revolution, and while he condemned religious asceticism, he viewed energies expended on sex as distracting to the revolutionary struggle. Early Bolsheviks’ ideas about sex, then, were never as liberated as were those of their ideological forefathers’. Bolsheviks’ convoluted notions about sex and sexuality promoted a sense of apprehension about sex and its social and cultural contexts in the first decade of Soviet rule. According to literary scholar Eric Naiman, 1920s discourses about sex revealed anxieties about the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP), which

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essentially stipulated a postponement of utopia.\textsuperscript{15} Naiman writes, “Sex may act as symbolic shorthand for all forms of contamination feared by mentalities that produce utopian texts.”\textsuperscript{16} Censure for NEP took on the form of sexual metaphor in Marxist literature during the 1920s. Thereby, the glasnost-era adoption of sex as a discursive proxy for tenuous social, political, and economic predicaments finds its roots in another period commonly thought to be sexually progressive, the Soviet 1920s.

Examining early Bolsheviks’ problemized conceptualization of sex and sexuality suggests that Joseph Stalin’s 1930s turn away from “free love” and toward a more restricted, procreative model of sexuality was not so extreme an ideological deviation. Stalin’s measures ultimately aligned with Lenin’s view of nonprocreative sex as disruptive. Thus, measures such as the criminalization of homosexuality in 1933 and the ban on abortion in 1936 were justified by appealing to the revolutionary logic, in that nonprocreative sexual activity was labeled a product of capitalist decadence, and a symptom of hedonism that was strictly anti-collectivist.\textsuperscript{17} Kon argues that official “sexophobia” became the standard ideology in the early 1930s, as nineteenth-century intellectuals were gradually replaced with a more conservative nomenklatura.\textsuperscript{18} However, while sexophobia may be viewed as a retreat from Marxist “free love,” it reflects the fact that Bolshevik leaders, and the Soviet public, were never completely comfortable with the idea of nonreproductive sexuality.

Unlike his predecessor, Lenin, who viewed sex as merely disruptive, Stalin placed sex and sexuality squarely within the perimeters of Soviet morality. Stalin tasked the

\textsuperscript{15} Naiman, \textit{Sex in Public}, 7-12.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 16.
\textsuperscript{17} Kon, \textit{Sexual Revolution}, 71-9.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 82.
Soviet school system to create a qualified curriculum of sex education that was synonymous with moral education.\(^{19}\) According to this restrictive model, sexuality was denied a discrete existence and was acknowledged only as a necessary aspect of Soviet morality, in that procreative sex was necessary for the proliferation of a bright communist future. Those who fornicated, then, could stand accused of anti-collectivism.

The Khrushchev-era “Thaw” mitigated some of the more extreme notions of treason associated with nonprocreative sex during Stalinism. Officially, however, sexuality remained restricted to the context of domestic duty. Khrushchev laid out a moral rulebook at the 22\(^{nd}\) Congress of the Communist Party in October 1961 called the *Moral Code of the Builder of Communism*. The code’s simplified twelve-point format was a call to arms against antisocial, and more importantly, anti-collectivist behaviors.\(^{20}\) While the mention of sexuality was not explicitly written into the moral code’s all-inclusive points, historian Deborah A. Field points out that Khrushchev’s morality drive aimed to eliminate sex outside of marriage as a dangerous, antisocial behavior that led to the birth of children who shared their parents’ moral weakness.\(^{21}\)

Sexuality continued to be officially linked to morality in the 1960s and 70s. Yet, the birth of Soviet medical sexology, called “sexopathology,” represented a progressive step, in that the official silence around sex was finally eased. However, this “progressive” move proved to be quite limited in scope. Kon argues that the establishment of sexopathology was an attempt to bring sexuality under medical control without also


\(^{20}\) Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev’s Cold Summer*, 211.

\(^{21}\) Deborah A. Field, *Private Life and Communist Morality in Khrushchev’s Russia* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 52.
establishing it as a pedagogical discipline.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, even medical professionals who treated issues related to sex or sexuality received practically no training in sexuality per se.

Because sex was circumscribed to a moral context for nearly the entirety of the Soviet experiment, the “sexual revolution” that began in the mass media and cinema in 1987 proved to be far less radical than it at first appeared, and actually reflects a continuity of restrictions typical of the Soviet period as a whole. Relatedly, public discourse about sex was long associated with social and moral concerns. As Naiman notes, erotic literature and art of the 1920s mirrored concerns about NEP and other socio-political changes that came with the Bolshevik Revolution. Even the evolution of medical sexology in the 1960s and 70s did not connote a more liberalized public discourse about sexuality. The term “sexopathology” denotes the problemized conceptualization of sex in Stagnation-era public discourse, insofar as normative sexuality did not require public acknowledgement.

The comparatively permissive discourse about sex and sexuality in the 1980s, then, can be interpreted not as a “sexual revolution,” but as an explosion in social and moral anxiety about the Soviet way of life. As Kon notes, the discourses of the glasnost era did not entail the heralding of a “sophisticated sexual-erotic culture.”\textsuperscript{23} Even decadent sex scenes in glasnost-era \textit{chernukha} (filthy) films echoed concerns about the social and moral status of the Soviet family in the tenuous period of perestroika. Soviet intellectuals were ill prepared to appreciate and examine sexuality separate from a problemized moral context. On the other hand, there was significant precedent in utilizing sex discourse as a

\textsuperscript{22} Kon, \textit{Sexual Revolution}, 91.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 271.
proxy to proclaim social and moral anxieties in the 1920s, followed by several decades of officially imposed sexophobic silence. Both phenomena reflect sexually conservative ideologies, sustained in the glasnost period by filmmakers and journalists. Ironically, it would seem, a reform movement strengthened reactionary impulses when it came to sexuality.

**Emancipating Women?**

Soviet conceptualizations of gender and sexuality were inextricably linked. Glasnost-era filmmakers’ and journalists’ discourses about sex were disproportionately focused on women as moral bastions of the Soviet family. In this way, glasnost-era intellectuals were following the legacy of past Soviet thinkers, who debated the limits of women’s emancipation, and decisively concluded that it could not include a sexual component. While the sexuality of men had been deliberated by Russian nineteenth-century philosophers such as Vladimir Solov’ev, the Bolsheviks were the first to publicly debate women’s sexuality. According to historian Barbara Engel, the “woman question” of the nineteenth century, which primarily revolved around education and labor, was augmented to embrace women’s sexuality as a public concern in the 1920s. She writes, “In response to the increasing number of women who penetrated into public and previously male space, women’s bodies became part of the terrain over which educated society struggled for power.”

Ultimately, however, women’s sexuality separate from motherhood was never widely acknowledged, even in the 1920s. Arguably the most well-known female revolutionary, Alexandra Kollontai, was never successful in her effort to popularize “free

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love,” and demolish the traditional family, which she argued restrained women from achieving their capacity for self-sacrifice and self-abnegation on a revolutionary scale. Revolutionary posters of the 1920s represented healthy female sexuality as synonymous with reproduction, by depicting vibrant young women surrounded by young children. While the 1920s were certainly the most sexually permissive period of the Soviet Union prior to glasnost, it should be kept in mind that the comparison with the “sexophobia” from the 1930s onward has a tendency to emphasize the emancipatory potential of the NEP period for women’s sexuality without taking into consideration some of the conservative realities. The lack of adherence for women’s sexual emancipation in the 1920s ultimately set the stage for Stalin-era sexually restrictive policies, which most profoundly affected women. The Stalinist reward system for “heroine mothers,” or women who gave birth to ten or more living children, left no room for doubt about the social value of women’s sexuality.

Women’s sexualities were not notably more “emancipated” in the Khrushchev era. The full potential of the Thaw was never applied to the question of women’s sexuality. The Khrushchev administration rushed to address the demographic crisis, caused by the tremendous loss of male life in the Great Patriotic War, by more explicitly connecting women’s sexuality with morality and the civic duty of childbirth. The Khrushchev-era popular press, however, did temporarily suspend its unofficial restriction on discussing sexuality in the summer of 1957, during the World Festival of Youth and

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25 Ibid, 156.
26 Ibid, 161.
Students, a gathering in Moscow of more than 34,000 students from 131 countries. The criticism in the media, notably Komsomol’skaia pravda, was highly restrained, because the Youth Festival was meant to ease tensions with the West. However, the discourse in the popular press about sexual promiscuity provided a preview of the sort of homily that would occur extensively in the glasnost-era press, in that the censure was focused primarily on young women and western sexual infiltration. Journalists derided “loose girls” (devushka legkogo povedeniia), who failed to guard their “maidenly honor” from foreign guests. This rare example provides insight into the continuity between the late 1950s and the late 1980s. In both cases, women are tasked with defending sexual morality from foreign elements. Failure to do so, then, also falls directly on their shoulders.

Brezhnev-era stagnation further solidified the idea of women as the moral beacon of the Soviet family. In the 1970s and early 1980s Soviet society began to more openly acknowledge a range of social issues. However, these issues, such as alcoholism and disenchanted with the professional realm, were thought to affect mostly men. According to Engel, “For these ills, femininity provided both a cause and cure.” That is, women who attended to their maternal and domestic duty were viewed as aiding in combatting the prevailing societal ills. Women whose ambitions, professional or sexual, outstripped their prescribed roles were viewed with contempt. This is evident in the most popular film of the stagnation period, Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears (1979), where

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30 Engel, Women in Russia, 246.
31 Ibid.
protagonist Katerina’s professional success in her role as an executive director at a large factory keeps her from connecting with the love of her life, Gosha. Gosha, a talented tool-and-die maker, is unwilling to compromise his masculinity by accepting a woman who outranks him professionally. Only when Katerina is willing to abandon her professional career in the name of love does Gosha return, with his masculinity intact. While the film leaves inexplicit whether or not Katerina has left her position at the factory, it is her willingness to do so in order to rise up to a traditionally feminine role that holds significance.

Intellectuals’ discourses about sex in the glasnost era overwhelmingly revolved around concerns for women and family, evidencing conservative continuity. In fact, it can be argued that the perestroika era saw recognition for women as autonomous sociopolitical actors reduced. Literary scholar Helena Goscilo argues just that in an essay titled “Perestroika or Domostroika” (“dom” referencing “home” or the domestic space). She notes that journalists’ coverage of women in any given context was decidedly more misogynistic when editors were less concerned with meeting the ideological standard for “women’s equality” during glasnost. “The majority of Russians, including those trained in deciphering the values and political allegiances attaching to ostensibly innocuous discourse, seemed impervious to sexist language or strategies,” writes Goscilo, “They could not detect the articulation of gender politics in verbal formulations that any educated Westerner would find crudely chauvinistic.”

If women’s increased sociopolitical autonomy is a measurement for liberalization, which it often has been, then

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misogyny in film and the popular press indicates the Soviet Union was moving in the other direction in the glasnost years.

Ultimately, the film and popular press discourses of the transitional years rely on an intellectual tradition of steadfastly associating women’s sexuality with reproduction and familial (dis)harmony. The fact that the intelligentsia acknowledged women’s sexuality separate from the maternal context, by broaching such phenomena as prostitution and pornography, does not indicate approval. In fact, extensive coverage of women’s sexuality corresponded with a widespread moral panic. The proliferation of discourse acknowledging women’s nonreproductive sexualities was unsubtly linked to pervasive moral anxiety, as both filmmakers and journalists utilized discursive proxies to examine and explain the social ills plaguing Soviets in the last years of the USSR.

Lastly, gender anxieties in the perestroika period were also characterized by a “crisis of masculinity,” or loss of men’s sense of masculinity as fulfilled through professional and political pursuits. This “crisis” was first identified in 1970 by demographer Boris Urlanis in Literaturnaiia gazeta, at the beginning of the so-called stagnation period.\textsuperscript{33} Many scholars, including Elena Zdravomyslova, Anna Temkina, and Marina Kiblitskaya, typically ascribe men’s sense of depreciation in this period as fundamentally linked to economic malaise, since the Soviet system defined masculinity through success in the professional realm. However, it is important to acknowledge that men’s sense of crisis was not exclusively tied to their professional and political prowess, but also their societal role vis-à-vis women. According to cultural scholar Lynne Attwood, men’s failures to be breadwinners were amplified by the relatively new role

women had in production, as well as the home.\textsuperscript{34} In the Soviet period, men were stripped of their hegemonic familial dominance and instructed to defer to women in the domestic sphere. Thus, their masculinity hinged on the whim of the economy, which proved tenuous at best in the late-Soviet period. Attwood writes, “The masculinity of men has been damaged by the fact that many of the tasks which once fell to them have been taken over by the state or by women.”\textsuperscript{35} This sense was amplified by women’s purported loss of femininity in the late-Soviet period, in that they failed to have enough children to replenish the population. For men, it seemed, women were increasingly encroaching on their masculine territory in the late Soviet period while shirking their domestic duties. Thus, when Gorbachev called for women to return to the domestic sphere en masse in his sociopolitical manifesto, stating, “Women no longer have enough time to perform their everyday duties at home,” men were emboldened with a sense of confirmation that, indeed, women had violated their part of the social contract.\textsuperscript{36} The misogyny that seeps out of glasnost-era journalistic and cultural discourse can then, in part, be seen as symptomatic of a the perceived late-Soviet crisis of masculinity.

**Filmmakers – Sexual Revolutionaries or Defenders of Morality?**

For the majority of the Soviet Union’s history, filmmakers were considered elite members of the creative intelligentsia. Cultural scholar George Faraday argues that the intelligentsia, those most educated and elevated to the status of “highly cultured,” were also implicitly tasked with upholding superior moral standards.\textsuperscript{37} In 1980, prominent

\textsuperscript{34} Attwood, *New Soviet Man and Woman*, 167.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 103.
Soviet director Eldar Ryazanov gave a speech before the Filmmakers’ Union where he addressed the perceived moral degradation in recent cinema. Among other things, he said, “There is only one concern – the state of the people’s soul, their health, their stomach, their garb. And if all this does not inspire the artist, what kind of artist is he, anyway?”

Ryazanov’s remark was a stab at a segment of filmmakers of the stagnation period who had taken to creating films purely for entertainment’s sake, those perceived as abandoning their claim to the status of intellectual, and guardians of public morals.

The shared notion of moral duty was widespread amongst filmmakers, and was bolstered by the Fifth Congress of the Filmmakers’ Union in May 1986, where a “revolution” was set into motion. The 1986 cinema revolution provided glasnost-era filmmakers with notably more autonomy, and constituted the official end to the Party’s systematic efforts to utilize film as an ideological platform. Filmmakers utilized their newfound freedoms to establish a new aesthetic, chernukha, literally meaning filth or dirt. This new mode of film turned up the volume on the seamy aspects of Soviet life. These films featured ample doses of violence, drug use, and sex, all depicted in an unsubtly gray setting which implied moral and physical destitution. Scholars of Soviet culture and history, however, argue that the creative intelligentsia’s moral tradition burned brighter than ever in the glasnost period, as filmmakers utilized their new liberties to shock audiences into recognizing social issues long censored in film. Literary scholar Seth Graham writes, “[one argument] understood chernukha as an exercise in compensatory excess designed to call attention to problems that were undeniably real, but hardly terminal, beneath which lay the true ideals of the society, ideals that, after an

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38 Ibid, 21-2.
39 Ibid, 125.
uncomfortable but necessary encounter with ugliness, would reemerge to redeem that society.” Cultural scholar Eliot Borenstein’s echoes this sentiment, by writing, “The sheer negativity of perestroika-era chernukha – the deliberate épatage and the dogged depiction of a world full of cynics – distract from the fact that chernukha functioned within a profoundly moral context, one that was all the more powerful for not being readily apparent.” In this framework, then, chernukha can be understood as echoing the nineteen-century Russian intelligentsia tradition of intellectuals and artists as moral arbiters.

It is within this context of moral aversion therapy that filmmakers portrayed sex on the silver screen in the glasnost period. Their depictions of prostitution, teen pregnancy, abortion, or even Komsomol orgies can no more be analyzed as approbation than their concurrent portrayals of drug use, familial abandonment, or violent crime. According to film analyst Valeriia Gorlova, “In a normal world, sex would be seen as a ‘closed topic,’ not fit for the public exhibition. But in a world where everything is turned on its head, as it was in the perestroika years, sex became open for public discourse.”

Filmmakers steadfastly proclaimed that their intentions were not to exaggerate or sensationalize Soviet ills, but to fulfill their intellectual duty of upholding morality in a period where they were entrusted with creative autonomy. The twenty-eight-year-old director of the most well-known chernukha feature, Little Vera (1988), reportedly stated, “For a long time people have lived trying not to see the world around them. My film has

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angered and upset them and they ask: How could you show this? But I’m not from Mars or America…I grew up in this system, am a product of it, a man from this country, and these are my reflections.” Ultimately, there is little to no evidence to suggest that filmmakers abandoned their sense of moral mission and adopted sensationalism in the glasnost period. Their 1986 revolution was aimed, in part, at restoring moral integrity to the film medium and steering away from the western notion of creating films “just because,” or simply for entertainment.

Furthermore, glasnost-era filmmakers’ celluloid discourses on sex are fundamentally misogynistic, in that they implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, punish sexually active female characters. Moreover, female sexuality frequently acts as the catalyst to familial discord and destruction. It can be said that women’s sexual activities in chernukha disproportionately lead to instances of death and destitution in a way that male sexuality does not. Even in their portrayals of seemingly “sexually emancipated” women, filmmakers insert profound anxieties about the fragile nature of the Soviet moral and social order.

**The Popular Press**

The popular press was the intended and primary target of glasnost. Examining newspapers and journals provides arguably the most diverse, while still admittedly contrived, portraits of Soviet discourse in the perestroika years. According to communications scholar Mary Dejevsky, the style and format of the popular press changed dramatically following glasnost, and upon Gorbachev’s call to action in his

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45 Borenstein, *Overkill*, 122.
Perestroika volume, the Soviet public was brought into the discursive fold in “roundtable” discussions and increased numbers of editorial letters and professional correspondent discourses. This new journalistic diversity was supplemented by a relaxation in the editorial process. Tarasulo notes that, “Under glasnost, Soviet newspapers and magazines have developed into semi-autonomous bodies.” This new style, along with the dynamic sociopolitical milieu of the perestroika years, led to an exponential rise in the circulation of daily newspapers, literary journals, and sociological pamphlets. Papers like Izvestiia, Sovetskaia kul’tura, and Pravda all saw their circulation skyrocket in the perestroika era. Argumenty i fakty, a relative unknown before glasnost, gained a readership of around 23 million by 1989. It is fair, then, to conclude that the popular press became a “national obsession” in the perestroika period.

Scholars generally view the glasnost years as a unique period for the Soviet press because of fewer official restrictions, increased readership, and the novel roundtable format. Additionally, the popular press is seen as having very quickly supplanted Gorbachev’s circumscribed definition of “criticism” in the months after glasnost was made a reality. Tarasulo writes, “All attempts to define the limits of glasnost have failed. It has taken on a momentum of its own, becoming a powerful modernizing force in an outdated an oppressive political system.” Communications scholar Joseph Gibbs echoes this sentiment, noting, “Glasnost had pushed factionalism into the open, destroying the

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48 Tarasulo, Gorbachev and Glasnost, xviii.
51 Tarasulo, Gorbachev and Glasnost, xvi.
monolithic image cultivated by the CPSU since the early 1920s.” These views reinforce the idea of Soviet history as disjointed: before glasnost and after glasnost, and ultimately conclude that glasnost was a disruptive policy to a hegemonic system.

Yet such a notion does not capture the complexity of the popular press during the perestroika period. Anthropologist Aleksi Yurchak argues against the idea of the late Soviet period as a binary, in which the elite nomenklatura ruled through coercion and the rest of the public had little to no agency. Scholarship which views the popular press as discrete from the Soviet regime, and driven by wholly separate interests, ultimately undermines the interconnected nature of the system. “Everyone was to some extent complicit in the system of patronage, lying, theft, hedging, and duplicity through which the system operated.” Thus, it is inaccurate to cast Soviet political leaders and journalists as diametrically opposed interest groups in the glasnost period.

Like filmmakers, journalists, overall, remained willingly loyal to social and moral conservatism. According to Borenstein, the Soviet media followed the wave of chernukha, in that their journalistic discourses in the glasnost period were a form of “muckracking,” situated within a higher moral and social purpose. Journalists utilized glasnost to tackle social issues they perceived in society, and yet they did so within the context of a circumscribed, morally-driven rulebook. Discourse about sex existed in its most prolific form in response to the wave of explicit sex in popular cinema and in pornography. In this realm, journalists expressed nearly universal condemnation. However, the most revealing indication that journalists remained conservative in regards

52 Gibbs, Gorbachev’s Glasnost, 1.
53 Yurchak, Everything Was Forever, 3-4.
54 Ibid, 7.
55 Borenstein, Overkill, 12.
to sex and sexuality was their widespread resistance to expand the definition of normative sexuality away from the strictly heterosexual, marital context. Their steadfast adherence to sexual conservatism, and their discourses on how sexual deviance could lead to domestic, social, and economic decay, reveals continuity with the conceptualization of sexuality in the Soviet period as a whole. The most apparent continuity is the idea that nonreproductive sexuality had the potential to be disruptive to the revolutionary mission, which for men included excellence in the professional and political spheres, and for women meant mastery of the domestic and familial domains. Moreover, this continuity presents a fundamental challenge to a binary view of Soviet history, where “the state” enforced social and moral codes through coercion and the public meekly complied.

**Overview**

This thesis is ultimately a narrative about intellectuals: filmmakers and journalists. I analyze how they approached, utilized, and portrayed sex and sexuality in their respective mediums, cinema and the popular press, and what their discourses ultimately tell us about the social, political, and moral concerns of the perestroika and glasnost era. Examining their productions, which were created with comparative autonomy in relation to the Soviet past, reveals conservative attitudes that transcend the notion of top-down coercion, and challenges a binary view of Soviet history.

Their discourses on sexuality and morality are especially revealing because the Russian, and then Soviet, intelligentsia was traditionally entrusted with strengthening the moral fiber of the public, a role most intellectuals felt obliged to fulfill. Faraday concludes about the intellectuals of the late-Soviet period, “For an educated person to refuse to assume any kind of responsibility to society would imply forgoing his or her
claim to the positively valorized status of intellectual.”

Ultimately, then, the intelligentsia was beholden to embody the highest moral values, which may or may not have aligned with Soviet ideology at any particular time.

As an examination of discourse, this study does not seek to evaluate Soviets’ actual sexual behaviors and trends in the glasnost period. In fact, it is worth noting the disparity between intellectuals’ discursive conservatism and Soviets’ real behaviors in regards to sexuality in the last years of the USSR. Glasnost was a period in which the rate of sexual violence, teen sex, and abortion increased by nearly a third. While the reality of actual behavioral patterns does not necessarily align with discourse in the case of sex in this period, the difference between ideology and practice further illustrates the overarching theme of this study: that Soviets acted with varying degrees of sociopolitical autonomy, whether they were reinforcing the Party line or acting against it.

Chapter 1 examines glasnost-era films of varying style and popularity, which all fall under the chernukha aesthetic, and each feature explicit sex scenes. Chernukha was the dominant trend in Soviet film from 1987 to the end of the USSR. It broke new ground in that filmmakers put on display the seamy aspects of Soviet life never before expressly depicted. Whether they were “airing dirty laundry,” or indulging in artistic excess after a cultural draught, their onscreen discourses reflect notions that existed within filmmakers’ artistic vision, and thus reproduced a perception of life that was undeniably Soviet. I examine nine films from the chernukha cycle, released between 1988 and 1991, of varying target audiences and styles. The selection includes detektiv (detective), drama, and films from the burgeoning coming-of-age genre. Likewise, I analyze films that

56 Faraday, Revolt, 28.
topped the box office and those that received miniscule viewership. Despite the diversity of the selection, each film was debated in the Soviet cultural press during the glasnost period, and singled out as reflective of the wider aesthetic trend.

I argue that onscreen sex in the glasnost years existed within a misogynistic framework which revealed a moral crisis about the state of the Soviet family, social structure, and the domestic sphere. By portraying sex in a profoundly negative light, filmmakers embraced conservative ideas about sex and women in chernukha to communicate concerns distinct to the perestroika era. Their artistic “parade of horribles” indicts women’s sexualities directly, and links them to ostensible consequences onscreen. Thus, this chapter suggests that the sex and sexuality portrayed in this selection of films is reflective not of filmmakers’ sense of sexual permissiveness, but of their endured conservatism.

Chapter 2 examines the glasnost-era popular press, and the discourses on sex which occurred within the pages of newspapers and journals. The print sources represent the popular press broadly, and include dailies such as Pravda, Izvestiia, and Argumenty i fakty, as well as cultural reviews like Sovetskaia kul’tura, and satirical journals like Krokodil. These sources prove especially valuable to this analysis, as they represent journalists as intellectuals with a moral mission and journalists as the primary targets of Gorbachev’s glasnost policy. My examination reveals that journalist, as well as the experts and letter-writers they featured, generally expressed conservatism about sexuality, especially women’s sexuality. As with filmmakers, their main premise in regards to sex was connecting sexual permissiveness with perceived degradation of social and moral values.
Examining these discursive tools together adds breadth to an analysis of this kind, allowing for a more robust understanding of both how filmmakers and journalists defined sexuality in social and moral contexts and how they voiced their concerns. Cinema and the popular press had a symbiotic relationship during the glasnost years. While film frequently masked societal commentary with plot, characters, setting, or other artistic devices, the popular press utilized film as a pretext to address moral and social concerns, such as violence and sex.

The concluding chapter is an epilogue which briefly considers post-Soviet discourses on sex, especially in the last ten years. While many twenty-first century Russian journalists and cultural producers have veered away from frank depictions of social issues, sex as a theme has grown to encompass a dominant role in contemporary discourse. Moreover, these depictions continue to be characterized by blatant misogyny. Contextualizing modern discourses on sex proves to be problematic, as the social, political, and economic changes in Russia over the last quarter century have thrown concepts of family, gender, and sexuality into disarray. In fact, it is difficult to conclude whether journalists and cultural producers of the twenty-first century continue to represent the intelligentsia class, or whether the class still exists. However, one overarching concept remains intact from the Soviet to the post-Soviet period: the expansion of visible sexuality does not necessarily correlate with a more egalitarian society.

Ultimately, the evidence suggests that intellectuals in the glasnost period did not see themselves as sexual revolutionaries, but as the moral vanguard of the Soviet Union. Their discourses on sex, then, must be analyzed within this context. Although their
prolific use of sexuality within journalistic and cultural productions initially seems contradictory, in-depth analysis suggests that they deemed drastic circumstances were necessary in forewarning Soviets about the consequences of an ostensibly new sexual permissiveness. Filmmakers and journalists elected to depict or describe in graphic form their social and moral anxieties by utilizing sex as a discursive proxy in a parade of horribles.
CHAPTER 1 – AVERSİON THERAPY: SEX AS CULTURAL CONSERVATISM IN CİNEMA

By no means was the glasnost era a golden age for Soviet cinema. Filmmakers were openly discussing the “death of national cinema” by 1989.\(^\text{58}\) In the late 1960s and early 1970, the Soviet cinema industry rivaled Hollywood by producing almost 150 feature films annually. That number had withered to around a dozen domestically-produced full-length films in 1988 and 1989 respectively.\(^\text{59}\) The film industry was in such an abysmal position by 1989, that there exist few reliable box office figures for the two subsequent years. In large part, film critics attributed the decline of Soviet cinema to filmmakers’ newly adopted permissiveness in displaying sex onscreen.\(^\text{60}\) Explicit sex was discussed as the primary negative trend within the larger film aesthetic, chernukha (literally meaning dark stuff), which aimed to expose the long-censored “seamy” side of Soviet society. Indeed, the relatively few films produced in the glasnost years utilized onscreen sex for the first time. Especially notable was the regular display of women’s sexuality and nudity.

This chapter explores portrayals of female heterosexual sexualities in cinema and how they related to filmmakers’ anxieties about the moral and social state of the Soviet Union during the perestroika and glasnost period. Misogyny emerges as an essential characteristic of a moral crisis expressed by filmmakers during the glasnost years. In their films, fear of women’s sexual emancipation penetrates as deeply as concerns for the

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\(^{58}\) Faraday, Revolt, 1.

\(^{59}\) Ibid, 2.

continued existence of the Soviet moral and social order. I conclude that in the final years of the Soviet Union one of the primary characteristics of intellectuals’ (in this case filmmakers’) moral crisis included a misogynistic framework.

Briefly examining the production of films in the glasnost years promotes a more nuanced context in which to place filmmakers’ onscreen misogyny. This time period is unique, and as with many phenomena in the perestroika years, the cinema industry was in a state of flux. Misogyny, however, is a central characteristic of this period’s aesthetic in the face of both continuities and an emerging crisis, as the subsequent analysis reflects. Although filmmakers enjoyed a higher degree of autonomy after the 1986 cinema “revolution,” virtually all those creating films in the glasnost period were graduates of the oldest film school in the world, the Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (VGIK). They were also subject to the same rules and restrictions of Soviet filmmaking until the fateful Fifth Congress of the Filmmakers’ Union meeting in May 1986, which began the deconstruction of the Soviet cinema monolith. Thus, there is a model that most filmmakers in the period immediately following the Union meeting still fell into, in terms of education, production, and bureaucracy. Despite these similarities, however, the films analyzed in this chapter were created by filmmakers from multiple generations, who embraced various definitions of art, culture, and cinema.

It is not the mere presence of sex and nudity in glasnost-era film that suggest an overt sexism. Instead, it is often the subtext and the nature of sex that points to this conclusion. As Graham notes on glasnost-era film, “Sex is represented most often as rape, though rarely acknowledged as such. Female nudity is common, and often signals

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61 The net result of this “revolution” was filmmakers gaining a much greater degree of autonomy in production and distribution of film.
the imminence of a rape scene.” Previous scholarship has aimed to contextualize the chernukha mode in a cultural context, suggesting that chernukha was a combination of culturally representative responses and filmmakers’ internal sentiments. Cultural scholar Liudmilla Budiak’s analysis of the state of Soviet cinema in 1990 suggested that filmmakers were preoccupied with basking in their new artistic freedoms by amplifying the seamy aspects of life that had been previously censored, and that their glasnost-era works cannot be held up as culturally representative. This conclusion corresponds to what scholars have evaluated as late-Soviet filmmakers’ propensity to “create films for themselves.” However, such analysis proposes that there was some degree of validity in filmmakers’ glasnost-era social commentaries, even if they happened to be amplified or exaggerated. They “turned up the volume,” so to speak, on the negative aspects of Soviet living. The harshest critics of the trend commonly accused chernukha filmmakers of inverting socialist realism, the state’s official film aesthetic that painted an idealist picture of Soviet life. One of the most vocal proponents of this view was film critic Sergei Dobrotvorskii, who denied that chernukha held any cultural capital in the perestroika years within several issues of Iskusstvo Kino (Cinematic Art), the leading film periodical.

However, other scholars argue that chernukha film carried a significant degree of cultural and moral capital in a tumultuous perestroika period. Faraday examines the relationship between late-Soviet filmmakers’ sense of creative mission and a broader

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63 Liudmila M. Budiak, “‘We Cannot Live This Way’: Reflections on the State of Contemporary Soviet Film”. *Film Quarterly*. 44, no. 2 (1990): 33.
64 George Faraday identifies this tendency in late-Soviet film in his monograph, *Revolt of the Filmmakers*. Faraday, *Revolt*, 87-120.
65 Faraday, *Revolt*, 175.
pattern of social consciousness characteristic of the Soviet intelligentsia, finding that Soviet filmmakers, along with other cultural producers, felt a sense of responsibility to uphold moral superiority. Rather than dissipating during the glasnost era, this prevalent sense of purpose was bolstered by filmmakers’ renewed vigor following the “cinematic revolution.” According to Borenstein, this turn of events imbued glasnost-era filmmakers with renewed tenacity, and a drive to create “muckraking” films which exposed the darker, hidden aspects of Soviet life. Such analyses suggest that glasnost-era filmmakers imbued films with a sense of civic, and indeed moral, duty.

Examining a film cannot definitively answer whether filmmakers were projecting their own misogyny or if they were reproducing their social experiences onscreen. However, repeated instances of sexism in glasnost-era films do reveal a wider pattern in the chernukha aesthetic, suggesting that the dominant means of expressing womanhood or relating to women existed within a misogynistic framework. While Faraday states that, “the key characteristic that united the works of the chernukha genre was the unrelenting hopeless picture of life they presented,” filmmakers disproportionately held women responsible for these deplorable circumstances. Misogynistic tendencies manifested themselves through general trends in the chernukha genre. These include the portrayal of women as incidental or secondary characters, casting women as the catalysts of familial dysfunction, and denying female characters the opportunity for resolution or redemption typically afforded to male characters. While these broad trends apply to the spectrum of women and womanhood depictions in glasnost-era cinema, I single out sexuality for

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67 The “morality” of the intelligentsia did not necessarily align with that of the state at any given time in Soviet history. Faraday, Revolt, 21.
68 Borenstein, Overkill, 12.
69 Faraday, Revolt, 175.
individual scrutiny. This reveals filmmakers’ fear of women’s sexual emancipation was the foremost concern in regards to misogyny in glasnost-era cinema. Women’s sexualities are depicted as inextricably linked to dysfunctional families, youth idleness, and moral corruption in these films, thus suggesting that women’s sexual permissiveness was the fundamental component of societal degradation.

**The Incidental Woman Paradigm**

Scholars have examined the “women as incidental/secondary figures” trope in glasnost-era cinema. Cultural scholars Andrew Horton and Michael Brashinsky attribute this incidentalization to the absence of a clearly delineated contemporary feminist movement during the late-Soviet period.\(^7^0\) Attwood has argued that with women’s reorientation towards the domestic sphere under Gorbachev, and a lack of a “women’s genre of film” during the same period, there existed a propensity to marginalize women in film.\(^7^1\) Most academic interpretations of women’s secondary status in glasnost-era film rely on the explanation of external forces such as the “return to the home” trend or the lack of a western-style feminist movement during the glasnost years. Additionally, scholars have attributed women’s marginalization as the product of very few women working within the film industry, itself probably a symptom of Soviet sexism. According to literary scholar Barbara Heldt’s analysis of women in film and literature during the glasnost period, “Women have most often been spoken and written for by men.”\(^7^2\) Rather than presuming that the onscreen marginalization of women was a result of women’s

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absence in the production of glasnost-era cinema, I analyze what I term “the incidental woman paradigm” as a product of glasnost-era filmmakers’ misogynistic framework, most notably characterized by a fear of women’s sexual emancipation. Not only did filmmakers portray women as merely incidental or secondary, but their utilization of this archetype in concert with their portrayals of sexual violence bestowed a clearly subordinate status onto women in many glasnost-era films. This analysis goes beyond filmmakers’ “incidentalization” of women, which might be implicit in nature. Instead, the analysis suggests an active model of filmmakers’ subordination of women, which was unequivocally explicit. Exploring this distinction provides crucial insight into the degree of misogyny present in glasnost-era films and cultural productions.

Pavel Lungin’s *Taxi Blues* (1990), a narrative that focuses around an ultra-masculine, chauvinistic protagonist Ivan and his unexpected and possibly homoerotic relationship with drunken musician Aleksi, functions as the primary example of women’s marginalization in glasnost-era cinema. As women are relegated to secondary status in this film, Ivan’s rare tender moments are reserved exclusively for Aleksi, an alcoholic who initially skips out on his cab fare. Ivan’s callous treatment of women is inextricably linked to his concern for men in terms of homosocial bonds. As a regular patron of a prostitute named Kristina, Ivan takes her to a remote location outside the city to inquire about the value of a saxophone he has taken from Aleksi as collateral for the cab fare. Upon learning of the substantial value of the instrument, Ivan abandons the prostitute to sordid gangsters as he races off to return the expensive saxophone. Ivan’s sense of honor, in that he will not appropriate an instrument that far out-values Aleksi’s stiffed cab fare, is far more imperative than a woman’s well-being. In fact, returning the instrument is so
important that Ivan interrogates and physically assaults Aleksi’s estranged wife, Nina, to ascertain the location of the hapless musician. In these two episodes, *Taxi Blues* not only incidentalizes women, but unequivocally relegates them to subordinate status.

One particular incident in Lungin’s film further supports this conclusion. This episode bonds the incidental woman paradigm to sex and sexual violence, ultimately reflecting misogynistic tendencies that revolve around women’s sexualities. Weeks after Ivan and Aleksi begin sharing quarters, Ivan brings home a drunken prostitute, Kristina. He forces Aleksi to play the saxophone for them while they eat and continue to drink. Eventually, Kristiana is drawn to Aleksi over Ivan for his talents and caresses him as he plays. Enraged, Ivan rapes the prostitute as Aleksi exits. However, the audience is left wondering whose affections the unhinged Ivan truly seeks, Aleksi’s or the young woman’s. The sex turns consensual in the next scene and is only interrupted by a phone call from Aleksi, who has been arrested for public intoxication. At this, Ivan’s attentions immediately shift from Kristina to his alcoholic friend. The scene not only incidentalizes the sexual assault, but further marginalizes Kristina, whose relevance is suspended for the sake of Ivan and Aleksi’s homosocial bond.

The incidental woman paradigm takes on sexually violent dimensions in several other glasnost-era films. Sergei Snezhkin’s *An Extraordinary Incident on a Regional Scale* (1988), a film focusing on a stressful week in the life of First Secretary Nikolai Petrovich of the Leningrad Komsomol District Committee, is one such episode. After a break-in which leaves the Komsomol headquarters vandalized and missing its regional banner, the young, upward-bound Nikolai is slated to take the blame due to bureaucratic absurdity. With his professional life in shambles, Nikolai takes his sense of loss and
betrayal out on the women around him. Women are not only passive secondary figures, but actively the targets of Nikolai’s explosive anger as he struggles to come to terms with his lost opportunity to join the nomenklatura. At his breaking point Nikolai calls his wife, Galia, and casually demands a divorce. They agree promptly and the phone call ends. Nikolai then proceeds to the home of his mistress, Tania, and rapes her without discernable provocation or explanation. Cultural scholar Vida Johnson has described the rape as one of the most well-motivated sex scenes in glasnost-era cinema, as she suggests, “We can observe the political and social impotence of men in a system which has systematically stripped them of power: they do to the women what the state has been doing to them.”

This explanation is made all the more meaningful since the scene features the voice of Brezhnev on the victim’s television. Nikolai’s attack on Tania may be understood as the protagonist transferring the abuses of the state onto women. The relationship would then function as “state-man-woman,” relegating women to an unmistakably inferior status. In Attwood’s words, “Nikolai was really ‘fucking’ the system.” While Snezhkin’s film certainly charges the Soviet system for the hardship that befalls the protagonist, Nikolai abuses women in lieu of retaliating directly. This sexual violence indicates that women are distinctly other, and unambiguously secondary, in a system that pits man against an abusive Soviet state.

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74 Rather than identifying the state as either masculine or feminine, some scholars have suggested that a “triangular” model was constructed in which the state occupied a dominant position. I further argue that within glasnost-era cinema, women are relegated to an unequivocal subordinate position in this power positioning. Zhanna Chernova, “The Model of ‘Soviet’ Fatherhood,” Russian Studies in History 51 no. 2 (2012): 37.
75 Attwood, Red Women, 115.
The 1989 film *Assuage My Sorrow*, directed by Victor Prokhorov and Alexander Alexandrov, offers another portrait of broken masculinity and pits women as the target of masculine rage. The film centers around a disintegrating young family, focusing on husband and father Boris. Due to the USSR’s chronic housing shortage, Boris is forced to continue living with wife Liuba, even as both parties desperately want a divorce. The living arrangement often dissolves into vicious verbal and physical entanglements and the lines between married couple and singledom are hopelessly blurred. Both husband and wife become involved with new partners in the midst of the messy separation. However, Boris’s reactions to Liuba’s sexual explorations reveal a double-standard between husband and wife. When Boris encounters an intoxicated Liuba returning from a night of drinking and flirting, he accosts her at the metro station. Boris calls her a pig and physically assaults her in public. Although Liuba is drunk, she reasons, “We are in the midst of a divorce. Why do you think you can tell me what to do?” In response, Boris grabs her roughly and sexually molests her in plain view of pedestrians, ripping off her clothes. A passerby asks if everything is alright, and Boris confidently offers, “Yes, she is my wife.” The scene is meaningful in several ways. First, it clearly showcases inequalities between men and women. While Boris feels entitled to drink and flirt, Liuba is not afforded such liberties. Second, Boris’s sexual attack on Liuba and his proclamation of “She is my wife” further evidences his sense of entitlement. The bystander’s acceptance of this explanation reveals that the sentiment is not only confined to Boris, but is shared by other, reasonable and concerned men in society. Above all else, the initially concerned passerby’s acknowledgement of Boris’s privilege to discipline his wife demonstrates the sexually violent character of the incidental woman paradigm. After
the sexual assault, Liuba follows behind Boris as he walks home, swaying and sobbing. She is unsubtly disgraced, as Boris struts tall and unaffected at the forefront. While his emotions are dissected throughout the film, Liuba’s state of mind about the divorce and the attempted rape remain quite two-dimensional.

While Snezhkin’s and Prokhorov’s features cast women as incidental and secondary figures in a conjugal sense, Savva Kulish’s *Tragedy Rock-Style* (1989) marginalizes the influence of women in the life of teenage track-star-turned-drug-addict Viktor (Vitia). Although the film features several female characters, the major figures in Vitia’s life remain male. When his father, a respectable member of the nomenklatura, is arrested in connection to mafia activity, the previously well-adjusted teenager falls instantly into despair. Vitia consequently latches onto the disreputable Cassius, whose calculated plan to extort Vitia’s father hinges on pushing Vitia into complete heroin addiction. Meanwhile, the women in Vitia’s life, who express a profound concern for his wellbeing, are pushed to the sidelines by the disaffected teenager. The primary incidental figure is Vitia’s girlfriend Lena. She is deeply infatuated with Vitia, and occupies herself with daydreaming about the two of them locked in a passionate embrace. When Vitia struggles to cope after his father’s arrest, Lena refuses to leave his side, even as he derides her and pushes her away. Eventually, Lena abandons her promising future to follow Vitia into heroin addiction. While Vitia seeks escapism to cope with his father’s ordeal, Lena follows Vitia into the dark and depraved underground subculture for no discernibly authentic reason. Her character functions as an appendage to Vitia, and it is not until the two become hooked on drugs that Vitia gains the silence he initially craves from Lena. Unlike the women in *An Extraordinary Incident* and *Assuage My Sorrow*,
Lena is given a degree of autonomy as she actively pursues her love interest into a dark abyss. However, the motives are not her own and the plot is only moved by Vitia’s emotions and actions.

Lena is also marginalized in a fundamentally sexual manner, similar to the women in the abovementioned films. During Cassius’s regularly sponsored drug-fueled orgies, Cassius singles out Lena as his personal victim, raping her countless times throughout the film. Unlike the rapes in Taxi Blues and An Extraordinary Incident, we are not numb to Lena’s palpable suffering after her assaults. We see Lena cry, scream, vomit, squirm, and shake in the aftermath of her rape. Yet even here Lena’s anguish is not her own, as each scene splices with a visual of Vitia’s parallel and comparatively stoic suffering. In her physical distress, Lena acts as an auxiliary force to Vitia’s emotional turmoil. The incidental woman paradigm in this film, as within the aforementioned, manifests itself most fundamentally when concerning women’s sexualities.

Victor Sergeev’s detective film, The Assassin (1990), provides a unique perspective on the “incidental woman paradigm” because the protagonist is, indeed, a woman. Yet this film typifies glasnost-era filmmakers’ tendency to cast female characters as peripheral even as they act as primary protagonists. Sergeev’s film stars Ol’ga, a well-off young professional, who returns from a party after being gang-raped by four men. Ignoring official channels of justice and the concern of her friends, Ol’ga chooses to seek vengeance by hiring a mafia-connected hitman to exact revenge. Initially infused with a

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76 In her analysis of girls in youth cultural activity, Hilary Pilkington writes, “[in glasnost youth films] rape is portrayed not through the eyes of the girl concerned, but through the suffering of the male whose ‘girl’ is being raped...Boys’ activity in youth cultural groups is generally seen as being ideologically motivated, while girls’ is not.” Pilkington, “Going Out in ‘Style’,” 146.
large degree of sexual and emotional autonomy, Ol’ga acts thoroughly unaffected by her assault and instead plots to humiliate her assailants. We are even given the impression that the rape has bolstered Ol’ga’s sexuality as she prances about her apartment in loose fitting blouses that threaten to blow away in the wind. However, the scale of power tips decidedly against Ol’ga when her hired mercenaries go rogue, gang-raping one of the men’s teenager daughters as a form of revenge. Although horrified by the punishment, Ol’ga stays resolute and even phones the remaining assailants to inform them of their impending fate. When the youngest of her assailants, Andrei, shows up to reason with Ol’ga, she quickly falls in love with him in an unlikely turn of events. Ol’ga’s power is then inverted as she fails to call off the mercenaries she hires. Her position shifts from controlling the situation to becoming another victim on the run. Attwood has likened the course of events in The Assassin to Hollywood’s film noir of the 1940s, where female characters who challenge male authority are killed or “neutralized” by their romantic union with a male hero. This case is particularly severe, as Ol’ga is joined to her former rapist. Even as Ol’ga serves as the film’s primary protagonist, her reckoning is effectively neutralized by what filmmakers dub a more appropriate feminine pursuit, love.

Women were subject to the incidental woman paradigm in many Soviet films, in which males drove the narratives and which utilized female characters as little more than animate setting pieces. When it comes to sexual violence in Taxi Blues, An Extraordinary Incident, Assuage My Sorrow, Tragedy Rock-Style, and The Assassin, however, women are not only secondary figures in a male-focused world, but clearly subordinate ones. Subordination, as channeled through sexual violence in these films,

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77 Attwood, Red Women, 120.
shifted how women were portrayed from a model of passive disregard to one of active
disdain. This mutation signified that, at least in film, women were at the bottom level of
the “state-man-woman” hierarchy.

**Kto vinovat’?**: Women’s Sexuality as a Catalyst for Familial Ruin

Because women were considered the traditional bearers of Soviet familial virtue
and stability, it is not surprising that much of glasnost-era filmmakers’ moral crisis
existed around the idea of women as the catalysts of familial ruin. According to Goscilo,
“From time immemorial, the dominant Russian iconography has projected nationhood as
female, its ethos and moral identity metaphorized as maternity.”\(^{78}\) While the Motherland
(rodina-mat’) paradigm offers a maternal image of nationhood which characterizes
patriotism and national pride as a celebration of the feminine, so, too, does it fault women
and womanhood when the inevitable question of “Who is to blame?” (Kto vinovat’?)
arises. In her analysis of this seemingly double-edged archetype, Attwood concludes,
“We had repeated examples of female characters being used throughout Soviet history to
represent Mother Russia and the heights of morality. Now, it seems they are being
offered as symbols of the Soviet state and its distorted values.”\(^{79}\) Female characters’
sexualities, then, act as catalysts to familial ruin in glasnost-era film in two ways. First, a
daughter’s misguided orientation toward carnal desire destabilizes her
parents/grandparents and siblings. Second, a mother’s inappropriate or unchecked
sexuality breaks apart a family either physically or symbolically. While scholars have
analyzed the misogynistic, paradoxical implications of the feminine national identity
trope, I further highlight an antipathy to women’s sexualities within it.

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\(^{78}\) Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex*, 69.

A daughter’s misguided focus on sexuality spelling destruction for her family can be observed in a new genre of film in glasnost aimed at youth. These films, firmly situated within the larger chernukha phenomenon, fed on the cultural media’s burgeoning fascination with young people’s entanglement with hippy, punk, biker, and criminal themes.\textsuperscript{80} Vasili Pichul’s \textit{Little Vera} (1988), a film about a disenchanted and rebellious eighteen-year-old girl wasting away a summer in a provincial city, proved to be the flagship feature of this sub-genre and indeed glasnost-era film more broadly, drawing over fifty million viewers.\textsuperscript{81} Pichul, a twenty-eight year-old first-time filmmaker, also proved that a new model of Soviet film, one based on independent cooperatives that existed by the grace of their investors, could produce critically acclaimed and financially successful features, a new concept for Soviet cinema.\textsuperscript{82}

The film encapsulates the chernukha aesthetic with its drab, dreary depiction of youth and its sardonic title which literary means “little faith” (nothing is lost in the translation). Vera spends her days with a motley crew of youths, most involved in some sort of illegal activity. The characters in \textit{Little Vera} fall into apathy, idleness, and immorality because of a fundamental lack of opportunity in society. The teenage wasteland in \textit{Little Vera} is defined by drunkenness, hooliganism, and especially sex. Teens in the film are cast as losers (\textit{neudachniki}), and their hedonistic behavior comes at the cost of the collective well-being, their families in particular. Vera, who is portrayed as a sensual being, fully invested in earthly pleasures, is a fatally flawed character. Her sexual transgressions eventually lead to the downfall of her family. Her improvised

\textsuperscript{80} For a more in-depth analysis of “the public’s almost morbid fascination” with such themes from 1986 onward, see Hilary Pilkington’s essay. Pilkington, “Going Out in ‘Style’,” 143-5.
\textsuperscript{81} Galichenko and Allington, \textit{Glasnost – Soviet Cinema Responds}, 110.
\textsuperscript{82} Horton and Brashinsky, \textit{The Zero Hour}, 18.
marriage to a local bad-boy, Sergei, is motivated by Vera’s naïve hope of escaping prescribed Soviet dullness. However, Vera gets more than she bargained for when tensions between Sergei and her father boil over, leading to a vicious assault on Sergei and her father’s untimely death due to a heart attack. Vera’s sin in this film, then, is pursuing personal pleasure instead of her family’s wellbeing, primarily by focusing on sex. This is a point that is made ironically, as Vera jumps into marriage (a traditionally appropriate female pursuit) and even pretends to be pregnant for no discernable reason. Vera’s seeming mockery of Soviet domestic life leads to a rupture in her strained family.

The undisputed runner-up in terms of box office success during the glasnost era was Pyotr Todorovsky’s film adaptation (1989) of Vladimir Kunin’s novella Intergirl, with forty-one million tickets sold.83 The film, following a Leningrad twenty-three-year-old nurse by-day and prostitute by-night found widespread success because it featured the first cultural portrayal of prostitution in the USSR, a topic already extensively dissected by journalists. Apart from her moonlighting, the protagonist Tania appears to be the ideal of femininity. Physically, she is traditionally attractive and stylish. Intellectually and emotionally, Tania also proves to be an ideal Soviet woman as she dedicates herself to her patients and her mother. She also reads romantic Russian poetry in her free time. Tania’s exemplary qualities, however, cannot compensate for her deviant sexual activity. Like Vera, Tania’s mistake lies in her erroneous assumption that she can utilize her sexuality to control her circumstances, a mistake for which she pays dearly. In Intergirl, Tania’s deviant sexuality provokes familial destruction in a very literal sense. Her mother ultimately commits suicide after rumors of her daughter’s illicit transgressions reach her.

The disapproval of female sexuality in both *Little Vera* and *Intergirl* stem from filmmakers’ sense of crisis about the deterioration of the Soviet family. In both cases, the heroines’ sexualities go beyond the prescribed bounds of marriage and reproduction, thus rupturing their families and eliminating the possibility of a morally-sound future generation.

Additionally, filmmakers tasked mothers with the ultimate moral weight in glasnost-era film, utilizing the Motherland (*rodina-mat’*) paradigm. This folkloric view of women and motherhood was emboldened, however, by the Soviet state’s pragmatism. In the 1930s, the state concluded that it could not realistically rear children in a truly collectivist fashion, and essentially affirmed an uneasy compromise with mothers. According to sociologist Ol’ga Issoupova, “The emerging politics [in the 1930s] of motherhood was seen as a state function, for which women should be rewarded. Second, in line with this, the state was concerned with the quality of future generations. This implied women’s bodies were valuable vessels in which the state had a legitimate interest.”

In return, women were given ultimate authority in the domestic realm. This is evidenced by the Soviet system’s deconstruction of paternal power and its vitalization of the “heroine mother” iconography. This arrangement was bolstered by Gorbachev’s vow to liberate women from their double burden of professional and domestic obligation, allowing them to retreat to the domestic domain to address a demographic crisis.

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86 Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex*, 71.
net result of these measures was the thorough construction of women as maternal beings, and consequently, the imbuing of mothers with the moral responsibility of the country. Glasnost filmmakers’ moral crisis, then, was reasonably expressed through troubled motherhood imagery. Thus, women’s sexualities, particularly if those women were mothers, were of great concern for filmmakers during glasnost.

Kulish’s chernukha film *Tragedy Rock-Style* is one such example where a mother’s sexuality is seen as the major destabilizing force for her children. Star student and athlete Vitia’s decline into drug-fueled depravity is pinned, in no small part, on his absentee mother, who calls him occasionally. He sardonically refers to her as his “telephone mother,” and sees images of her nurturing him as a small child as he slips into a psychedelic state. Despite his father’s mafia affiliation, and Cassius’s calculated effort to hook Vitia on drugs, the truant mother acts as the reservoir of blame, the true source of Vitia’s inability to cope. Although the details are deliberately murky, we are left to believe that Vitia’s mother left the family to pursue a lover.

*Assuage My Sorrow* is sustained almost completely by the destructive mother archetype. The film, a grim tale about a couple in the midst of a messy divorce, is more fundamentally about a hopelessly broken morality system. For all intents and purposes, the wife and mother, Liuba, is held responsible for tearing the family apart. Liuba spends her days priming in the mirror in preparation to meet new suitors, a symbol of her vanity and general indifference to domestic duties. Her young son, Zhora, wanders about the apartment complex with seeming free reign. He engages seedy characters and holds his own. We are given the distinct impression that Zhora is headed toward a sordid path, in great part because of his mother’s disinterest in raising him. Notably, this disinterest
stems from her preoccupation on her own sexuality. On one occasion, Boris rebukes
Liuba when she reveals she has no idea where young Zhora might be. Her tone is
thoroughly unconcerned and her gaze never shifts from the mirror in which she prepares
for another night out with a suitor.

Liuba’s disinterest in motherhood becomes unsubtly more active as the film
proceeds. When Boris’s plan to move out fails because of the housing shortage, Boris
tries one final time to resuscitate the marriage. He prepares a romantic dinner and even
puts on cologne. Boris and Liuba initially enjoy each other’s company, having sex and
reminiscing about better times. However, when Boris asks her for one final chance, Liuba
is thoroughly uninterested. Her refusal is not only a denial of romantic ties, but of her
familial and moral obligations. At this juncture, Liuba’s impassive attitude regarding her
maternal duties is replaced with a more definite renouncement. Liuba’s rejection sends
Boris into a seeming tailspin, and he begins acting carelessly in all aspects of life, even
raping a young traveler to whom he initially offers lodging for a night.

One film amalgamates both the maternal and filial destruction mode by utilizing a
multi-generational approach. Unique from other glasnost-era films which offer women’s
sexualities as catalysts to familial destruction, Viacheslav Krishtofovich’s theater-
inspired *Adam’s Rib* (1990) associates women with stagnation rather than wholesale
destruction. The film, which focuses on three generations of women who share an
apartment in an unnamed provincial city, seemingly suggests that women are doomed to
repeat a lonesome existence from one generation to the next. The film defies its title,

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87 Helena Goscilo offers an analysis of this female multi-generational approach, stating, “Films
such as *Adam’s Rib* operate on the principles of ‘time forward’ and ‘time back,’ collapsing them into a
paradoxically timeless image of stasis in the ‘present.’ This is part of a more general tendency ushered in
which automatically conjures the image of women as secondary to men (i.e. Eve being created from Adam’s Rib), and turns the tables by introducing men as merely transient forces in women’s lives (i.e. fathers and husbands). However, *Adam’s Rib* remains within a misogynistic framework which holds women’s sexualities responsible as the source of stagnation. Goscilo has argued that glasnost-era films that invert the incidental woman trope do so in a way that offers a stagnated picture of female-driven life, one that does not hold the same level of intellectual complexity as male-driven narratives.

“One might reasonably object that these works, rather than offering a fresh perspective, actually perpetuate the dusty habit of equating women with body, reproduction, domesticity, and conservative attitudes. Indeed, to some extent they do. Moreover, in troping history along gendered lines, they implicitly supply to the imperishable question, ‘Who is to Blame’ [*Kto vinovat’?*] an ominous answer that attributed moral responsibility to Russian womanhood.”

The moral responsibility for stagnation in *Adam’s Rib* is not only communicated through women’s physicality, but primarily via their sexuality. This moral charge rests mostly with the middle-aged single mother, Nina, and her daughters, Lidiia and Nastia. Throughout the film, Nina is caught in a whirlwind between two ex-husbands and a potential lover. Sensing that her time to attract a suitor is limited, and bent on avoiding growing old and alone as her mother has, Nina organizes a party (ironically for her mother’s name day) and invites all three men in a last-ditch effort to secure one. However, Nina’s bombastic attempt to provoke love hinges on the remnants of her sexual appeal, which degrade with each passing day. Ultimately, Nina’s hare-brained scheme collapses and all three men leave. She is pushed by her waning sexual appeal to sabotage

by glasnost – that of pinpointing the origins of and deviations in what Russians perceive, somewhat linearly, as the developmental course of their history.” Ibid, 72.

88 Ibid, 77.
her prospects, once again faced with the likelihood of solitude. Not unsympathetically, filmmakers cast Nina as predestined for loneliness because of an insincerity which stems from feminine sexuality.

Nina’s daughters do not fare much better. Lidiia, a twenty-something professional, becomes involved with her married boss, Andrei, who promises to whisk her away for a holiday abroad. However, Lidiia’s vision of romance abroad dissolve when she learns from Andrei’s wife that he has taken another lover on Lidiia’s promised jaunt. She also sees the result of her infidelity in the suffering of another woman, Andrei’s wife, who struggles to reign in her energetic children while begging Lidiia for information. The woman’s amplified loneliness shocks Lidiia, whose misguided hope for love rested on an unsound foundation of lust.

Lidiia’s fifteen-year-old sister Nastia’s sexuality, however, ultimately ensures the family of women is fated to repeat its current dilemma. The young girl is impregnated by a naïve boyfriend, Misha. While certainly ill-equipped, Misha displays a genuine desire to be with Nastia and to help raise their child. He shows up on Nastia’s doorstep no less than three times, turned away without explanation repeatedly. The film ends with Nastia’s pregnancy announcement, followed by a seeming miracle as the bedridden grandmother joins the family and begins singing. While this finale is inconclusive, the men have fled and we are left to assume that it is women who are to bring about a new generation, although a stagnated one. It seems that for a third generation, the women have failed to close the circle of family with permanent fathers and husbands. Given this repeated pattern, we can safely assume Nastia’s child will be a girl, likely to perpetuate the shattered domestic edifice.
When it comes to moral crisis about family, these films indicate that women are largely to blame. In *Little Vera* and *Intergirl*, a daughter’s misguided utilization of sex for adventure and material gain respectively bring about the downfall of the parents, who have failed to propagate a morally sound progeny. *Assuage My Sorrow* and *Tragedy Rock-Style* suggest that a mother’s inappropriate focus on sex impedes her ability to concentrate on domestic and familial duties. Moreover, the films imply that sex deteriorates a woman’s sense of maternal instinct, a more profound denunciation. Finally, these motifs are amalgamated within the image of a pregnant, fifteen-year-old Nastia in *Adam’s Rib*, whose female relatives provide a vivid reminder or women’s emotional and romantic destitution when sex is misused. The generational struggle in this film suggest that the crisis regarding mothers and daughters is ultimately one and the same.

**No Rest or Redemption for the Wicked**

Arguably the ultimate feature of glasnost-era filmmakers’ constructed misogynistic framework is a double standard in regards to redemption and second chances, afforded to women at a nominal rate in comparison to their male counterparts. Sexually liberated female characters are rarely endowed with the chance for resolution or reformation, and more often met with a death sentence. While this can be said to be a general trend in chernukha, women’s “death sentences” are typically punishment for sexual transgressions. Chernukha suggests that both men and women have been haplessly tormented and deformed by the system. Yet, the blame for moral degradation falls on women, who corrupt morality with sexuality. Similarly inspired as the aforementioned model, filmmakers of the glasnost period equate women with familial and moral responsibility, while freeing men of these same obligations. Drawing on a literary
tradition of the Silver Age, even the most contrite female characters must be neutralized if plagued with sexuality. As women are continuously denied a chance for redemption, this trend acts as the dominant misogynistic mode in glasnost-era film, ensuring punishment for female sexuality even after the film’s conclusion.

A lack of redemption for sexually conscious women is most prevalent in Intergirl, a film which utilizes the “hooker with a heart of gold” archetype to full effect. According to Goscilo, Tania’s seeming Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde duality syndrome is a symbol of Russia’s own troubled transitional process in the perestroika years: her penchant for high culture poetry and her affection for animals starkly contrasts to her economically motivated sexual services. The moral crisis in Intergirl stems from an uncertainty about importing capitalism during perestroika, and for Soviet filmmakers, prostitution optimizes the corrupting power of capitalism at every level. We witness Tania’s selfless actions on multiple occasions. She is silhouetted by the sun’s bright rays whenever she tenderly treats her patients, highlighting her altruistic nature and relating her to godliness itself. Even after she successfully emigrates from the Soviet Union, material plenty soon loses its luster and Tania becomes deeply concerned about the family and friends she left behind. Yet even as Tania throws away her luxurious western lifestyle to literally race back across the border, redemption is denied to her as she crashes in a foreign car at the literal and metaphorical border between Russia and the west.

89 Goscilo, Dehexing Sex, 69; Borenstein, Overkill, 30.
90 Goscilo, Dehexing Sex, 74.
91 Ibid, 79-80.
At the same time, we witness numerous second chances afforded to men in Todorovsky’s film. In her quest to leave the country, Tania must procure the official consent of her estranged father. Surprised and concerned by the bureaucratic delay, Tania nevertheless seeks out her biological father, who she finds living with a new family on government assistance. Seemingly no less besmirched by capitalistic incentive than Tania, her father refuses to give consent unless Tania provides him a sizable ransom. Her father’s cupidity pushes Tania into one last act of prostitution, a profession she swears off after Edward’s proposal. Tania’s father is a repugnant image for Soviet viewers, as he willingly trades his daughter’s virtue for rubles. Likewise, his embodiment of the absconding father trope and his willingness to live on welfare in lieu of a profession epitomizes the perestroika period’s “crisis of masculinity.” Yet his second incarnation with a new family and the eventual pay off from his daughter constitutes a second chance not afforded to Tania herself. The dichotomy suggests that Tania’s sexual sins surpass even the most abhorrent male transgressions.

Tania’s death demonstrates arguably the most powerful example of women’s inability to find redemption in the chernukha film mode. Escaping from the capitalist “prison” that is Edward’s Swedish villa, Tania speeds back across the Swedish-Soviet border as she senses something gravely wrong. Simultaneously, Tania’s mother discovers her daughter’s past and commits suicide by inhaling fumes from her oven. Death by kitchen appliance holds a highly symbolic role for Tania’s mother, who has lived and died by the domestic standard, and whose only sin is rearing a morally corrupt offspring. In that moment, Tania spins out of control and dies in an automobile collision. Utilizing Goscilo’s analysis of “time forward” and “time back,” which collapses generations of
women into a paradoxically timeless stasis in the “present,” we can assess that Tania and her mother are inextricably linked as one.\textsuperscript{92} Inexplicably, Tania senses her mother’s impending death and dies herself. This conclusion also suggests that moral culpability for deviant sexuality rests not only in the female perpetrator, but with previous generations of women.

Other glasnost-era films with female protagonists offer similar circumstances where a likeable heroine is ultimately given the death sentence for her sexuality while her male co-star is awarded a second chance. Sergeev’s noir-inspired \textit{The Assassin} provides one such example. Ol’ga’s love affair with Andrei seems like an infraction against literary dogma, unless we are to understand rape as a minor offense. According to Attwood, “Andrei’s part in the supposed sexual abuse is seen as nothing more than a male prank, a mere sexual misdemeanor.”\textsuperscript{93} Although both characters die, Andrei’s death is ultimately shouldered by Ol’ga, whose dissolute quest for vengeance has cost him his life at the hands of the very rogues she hires. Her own death, a suicide by shotgun, is only initiated by her lover’s demise. In the ultimate film noir conclusion, Ol’ga’s sexual autonomy is so profoundly neutralized that her death automatically follows Andrei’s. Andrei is exculpated by Ol’ga’s forgiveness, yet Ol’ga receives no such leniency for attempting to redeem her violated sexuality.

This trend is further observable in Abay Karpykov’s tawdry feature \textit{Blown Kiss} (1990), a film about an 18-year-old nurse’s (Nastia) sexual awakening after her fiancé’s refusal to consummate the relationship before marriage. Nastia engages in a steamy sexual affair with a mysterious, bandaged race car driver under her care. She also learns

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid, 72.
\textsuperscript{93} Attwood, \textit{Red Woman}, 120.
to utilize her sexuality to get what she wants from the males around her, including a
crudity friend who works nearby as a gardener. When Nastia’s surgeon fiancé, Sergei,
discovers the two locked in a kiss, he confronts Nastia. He admits his abstinence is
motivated by a rape he committed in his past. Seemingly unfazed, Nastia proclaims it was
Sergei’s lack of interest that drove her into the arms of other men. The film ends with the
two reconciling and speeding off on Sergei’s motorcycle. However, they crash and Nastia
dies due to Sergei’s recklessness. Because of Sergei’s past history of sexual violence, he
chooses abstinence to prevent repeating the act on his fiancé. Nastia, on the other hand, is
unable to control her sexual desire for even a moment. Unlike Nastia’s repeated instances
of sexual immorality, Sergei’s sexual restraint is held up as morally exemplary. Only
when Nastia finally persuades Sergei into sexual activity does he speed out of control on
his motorcycle and crashes. Miraculously, it is Sergei who survives the high-speed
impact, while the sexual seductress, Nastia, receives the death sentence.

Once the question of “who is to blame” is answered, the rules of literature would
demand a fitting punishment. Sexually emancipated women in glasnost film are faulted
for the weakening of the Soviet family, which ultimately leads to the vulnerability of
future Soviet generations. In turn, women are deprived of redemption or second chances
when they seek them in Little Vera, Intergirl, The Assassin, and Blown Kiss. These films
suggest that the appropriate punishment for sex outside the marital-procreative context is
death. However, this standard is applied primarily to women, whilst men are given either
an exemption or a second chance in these films. This trend indicates that filmmakers held
substantially more trepidation about women’s sexual liberation than men’s.

94 Lynne Attwood argues this scene is an evident metaphor for sexual violence, as Nastia implores
Sergei to slow down while he ignores her pleas. Attwood, “Sex and the Cinema,” 75.
“Becoming Men Again,” But at the Expense of Women?

Examining women as incidental figures, women as architects of familial destruction, and women as irredeemable sinners showcases a pattern of misogyny in glasnost-era film. However, a more robust analysis of the late-Soviet “crisis of masculinity” provides a degree of affective motive for consistently grim portrayals of women in the chernukha aesthetic. As expressed by writer and literary critic Viktor Erofeev in his 1999 book, Muzhchiny (Men),

“Late Soviet liberal discourse in both academia and society saw men as biologically, psychologically, and demographically weaker than women – engaging in risky behaviors that indicated a ‘crisis of masculinity’ because of their inability to perform their traditional roles as family breadwinners. That was then, this is now. The Russian guy is getting up off all fours. It is time for him to become a man.”

Erofeev was neither the first nor the last to recognize a “crisis of masculinity” in the late Soviet period. Soviet demographer Boris Urlanis launched the ongoing discussion in an article published in a 1970 edition of Literaturnaia gazeta. The notion that it was indeed time for the Soviet muzhik (sneaky male) to “become a man” (stat’ chelovekom) was widespread in late-Soviet literature, and is recognizable in cinema as well. Thus, analyzing an expressed antipathy to women’s sexual emancipation in glasnost-era film illustrates a fuller picture of the degree and nature of misogyny in these films.

Whereas women felt the wrath of disgruntled men in chernukha, the power dynamics between men and women were ultimately defined and intertwined with the state, which figured prominently in gender relations. A rudimentary explanation of the power quotient between the Soviet state and the Soviet man equates the state to the

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95 Zdravomyslova and Temkina, “Crisis of Masculinity,” 13
96 Ibid, 16.
“Motherland,” and thus the state’s gender is unambiguously female. Consequently, the affective punishment exacted on women in chernukha cinema can be interpreted as symbolic denouncement of the Soviet state and system. However, an alternative explanation considers the social consequences of power balance between the Soviet state, men, and women, and suggests that the Soviet state’s measures to “embolden” women bred men’s sense of resentment towards women. According to cultural scholars Elena Zdravomyslova and Anna Temkina, there were several reasons why men could have reasonably fostered negative associations toward women. These reasons include the fact that men were the demographic minority and had a life span of ten years less on average than women. Additionally, men felt a mounting pressure to succeed professionally from both the state and their families even while the country’s economic predicament steadily worsened in the late 1980s. This occurred while women were given a supposed reprieve by Gorbachev to retreat to the home. Thus, anger towards women under the abovementioned conditions cannot be completely explained as an allegorical response to a system that fostered unachievable standards of masculinity. While the state may be blamed for perceivably disenfranchising men, the films’ depictions of sexism must be considered as addressing women themselves, separate from the state. Whether women actually benefitted from the state’s social engineering is less relevant here than how men

97 Goscilo, Dehexing Sex, 69.
98 Cultural scholar Zhanna Chernova offers an alternative gender dynamic between state, men, and women, arguing that the state occupied a “third,” and hegemonic gender in the late-Soviet period. Chernova, “The Model of ‘Soviet’ Fatherhood,” 38.
may have perceived women’s privilege. Therefore, the misogynistic framework in these films extends beyond the state and indicts women.

Much of the male ire around women’s sexualities in glasnost-era cinema is associated with the domestic sphere, and men’s own inability to actively control their collapsing private lives. The trend of disenfranchising fathers began almost immediately following the Revolution, and the Law Codes of 1926 essentially deprived fatherhood of its economic and legislative base. Examining men’s strained roles as fathers and husbands, specifically in cases where men endeavor to fulfill these roles in spite of stacked odds, demonstrates the level to which male immorality and dysfunction relies on women in glasnost-era cinema. Examples of this phenomenon are observable in Assuage My Sorrow and Tragedy Rock-Style, films in which fathers and husbands try and fail to realize these proscribed roles. Filmmakers may not have intentionally aimed to scapegoat women as the sole cause of men’s failed familial ventures, and indeed the films’ substance often indict the Soviet system for restricting men’s ability to reasonably function in a domestic capacity. However, women’s primary function as bearers of moral virtue exists disproportionately with their otherwise secondary roles in both films. In these depictions, the crisis of masculinity stems not only from the system’s dysfunctional and corrupt nature, but also from the shortcomings of women in a domestic sphere (usually because of sexual distractions). Thus, glasnost-era films that aim to put on display the system’s emasculation of men also charge women, to whom the system grants absolute authority in the domestic sphere.102

102 Until adulthood, the typical male upbringing was dominated by female nurture and pedagogy. This was a trend that continued in a more metaphorical sense in adulthood, as absolutely everything came under the control of the “powerful, maternal Communist Party.” Kon, Sexual Revolution, 151.
This is evident in *Assuage My Sorrow*, as the film’s bleak setting and Boris’s inability to physically vacate the apartment are mostly products of the Soviet system. The feature was delayed by the artistic council of the company which created it, Mosfil’m, which argued Prokhorov’s and Alexandrov’s film portrayed a Soviet reality that was “too gloomy” and would probably be blocked for its subversion of ideology by the Conflict Commission. Yet the Conflict Commission, in an unusual turn of events, rejected the ruling of its lesser organ and allowed the film to be screened unchanged. This may have been because the primary indictments for the “gloomy” setting are the mother and wife models, not of the Soviet system directly. Any doubts about whom Boris blames for his broken family are resolved in the aftermath of his failed reconciliation attempt with ex-wife Liuba, when he takes out his frustrations on another young woman. The vagrant El’ia, who Boris houses for a night, stands in as the embodiment of failed Soviet motherhood in the absence of Boris’s ex-wife. She is literally without a meaningful anchor, as she wanders without a home. El’ia escapes the domestic sphere, seeking an abortion early in the film. Boris equates her with his failed marriage when she prances around naked, “trying to get comfortable.” Boris replies to El’ia’s nude liberties with, “Comfortable? All you *dogs* [emphasis added] have become far too comfortable.” The subsequent rape of the young woman, who has gotten far too “comfortable” outside a prescribed domestic standard, evidences who the filmmakers authentically find guilty.

Boris’s lack of dignity and his subsequent loss of control are certainly not exclusively his ex-wife’s fault. Yet Boris’s chronic malaise at being forced to live with

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104 There is an element of irony here, as this is the first time Boris is reasonably able to gain physical distance from Liuba. Instead of the relief he desires, we witness what appears to be a mental break.
his ex-wife, who persistently pursues other men in his presence, is deeply troubling. He struggles to keep hold of whatever “compensatory masculinity” he can by beating and raping women.\textsuperscript{105} Boris views women as imbued with the task of keeping domestic harmony and the resources to do so, and yet women ostensibly ignore their obligations by insisting on divorce or aborting their children. Unable to remedy the familial trouble himself, Boris abuses women. The state, the force which ultimately prevents Boris from moving away and starting anew, is never expressly charged in the film. While we can reasonably assume that Boris’s attack on his wife and El’ia are allegory for his disdain for the state, his pronouncement that “all you dogs have become far too comfortable” suggests his animosity is primarily aimed at the sexually emancipated women he encounters.

Alternatively, \textit{Tragedy Rock-Style} initially presents the uncommon scenario of a healthy, single-father home.\textsuperscript{106} However, the tranquility is decimated by an immoral and emasculating system, encapsulated within a corrupt legal system riddled with mafia connections. According to Horton and Brashinsky, the film “is the father-son narrative that embodies the contemporary [glasnost-era] Soviet crisis.”\textsuperscript{107} Vitia’s posthumously recorded reflection, that “children brought up on lies cannot be moral,” is unequivocally directed at the Soviet system. However, Kulish’s fumbles in his attempt to conclusively cast the system as nefarious and unjust, and the male mafiosi villains come across as clunky, generic, and two-dimensional figures. Instead, Vitia’s strained relationship with

\textsuperscript{105} Borenstein, \textit{Overkill}, 45.
\textsuperscript{106} In 1999 the Russian Academy of Sciences’ Institute for Socioeconomic Problems of the Population (ISEPN) and Institute of Sociology (IS) estimated that less than 1 percent of divorced fathers keep the children in Russia, a number that has actually increased since the Soviet era. Chernova, “‘Soviet’ Fatherhood,” 36.
\textsuperscript{107} Horton and Brashinsky, \textit{The Zero Hour}, 78.
his “telephone mother” appears definitively more formative for the teen. This also holds true when considering whom Vitia blames for his desperate situation, the mafia or his mother. Evidence that he casts his mother as guilty is present when Vitia enters his altered, psychedelic state and envisions idyllic beach-side walks with his mother during his childhood. Vitia’s mother proves to be the last image he sees even before he dies.

Such flashbacks featuring Vitia’s father, the parent we are led to believe primarily raises the teen, are curiously missing. “Even when the father was physically present,” writes Kon about late-Soviet domestic spaces, “his influence and authority in the family and his role in bringing up the children were usually considerably less than that of the mother.” Even in Vitia’s rather extreme case, where his mother is completely absent and his father is an exemplary parent, the culpability for Vitia’s suffering rests with his mother, just by her physical absence, as much as with the Soviet state. She does not make an onscreen appearance until after Vitia’s death. It is not until after her arrival that she is informed of what transpired and collapses into tears. While the mafiosi go unpunished in this film, we are left with the brutal image of a mother grieving her child.

Depictions of men failing to dominate in the domestic sphere, and indictments against women for moral deterioration, can be found in almost every era of Soviet film and literature. The trend of disenfranchising patriarchal institutions was rooted in Marxism from the beginning. Yet the crisis of masculinity in the perestroika era expanded beyond the familial realm and existed as a discrete sort of anxiety of the

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109 According to Denis Ioffe and Frederick White, Gorbachev’s policies gave rise to a new class of “businessmen,” who were perceived to be criminal in nature. They write, “Soon, crime and violence were associated with economic and social success.” This depiction is evident in *Tragedy Rock-Style*, as the mafia stands in for the transitional state. Denis G. Ioffe and Frederick H. White, “Taxi Blues: The Anxiety of Soviet Masculinity,” *Journal of European Studies* 44 no. 3 (2014): 265.
perestroika years. According to cultural scholar Brian Baer, the Soviet system deconstructed male-male homosocial bonds and systematically minimized a space for platonic male friendships, which could be viewed as a brotherhood separate from the Soviet collective.\textsuperscript{111} Additionally, the perestroika period witnessed the importation of a variety of western products and ideas for the first time, including the previously forbidden topic of homosexuality.\textsuperscript{112} Thus, men in the perestroika years had the additional challenge of reclaiming homosocial bonds with the taboo threat of homosexuality supposedly undermining the process. In some ways, homosexuality embodied an ostensible western ideological onslaught. Thus in glasnost-era film, and even more so in the post-Soviet 1990s, the dominant means by which men relate to one another becomes via “compensatory masculinity,” where hyper-macho linguistic and bodily expressions preclude the possibility of being labeled a homosexual or not sufficiently masculine.\textsuperscript{113} Yet this male homosocial crisis can be interpreted as characteristically misogynistic. As Baer notes, in these chauvinistic depictions of masculinity, “women almost always function as a means of exchange between two rival males.”\textsuperscript{114}

In this respect, Ivan in \textit{Taxi Blues} is a deeply troubling glasnost-era figure. While certainly the embodiment of compensatory masculinity, in that he can regularly be found brawling or working out, his longing to establish a homosocial bond with musician Aleksi result in an unwinnable situation for the cab driver. While the Jewish, well-

\textsuperscript{111} Brian James Baer, \textit{Other Russias: Homosexuality and the Crisis of the Post-Soviet Identity} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1-8.
\textsuperscript{112} Kon, \textit{Sexual Revolution}, 240.
\textsuperscript{113} For more on “compensatory masculinity,” see Borenstein, \textit{Overkill}, 41-50 and Zdravomyslova and Temkina, \textit{Crisis of Masculinity}, 21-6.
\textsuperscript{114} Baer, \textit{Other Russias}, 79.
dressed, and often emotional Aleksi clearly lacks either hegemonic Soviet masculinity or perestroika-era compensatory masculinity, Ivan vows to help him “become a man.” There are several instances in the film that may suggest that Ivan implicitly desires Aleksi sexually, a sign that Ivan’s makeshift masculinity is poorly equipped to nurture a healthy homosocial bond with the troubled Aleksi. According to cultural scholars Denis Ioffe and Frederick White,

“The homosocial relationship in Taxi Blues is framed within a structured institutional relationship that mandates certain roles for men and women, boundaries that Aleksi and Ivan cannot so easily transgress, thereby demanding that Kristina [the prostitute] become the agent for the two men to consummate their relationship.”¹¹⁵

This can be observed in the scene where Aleksi plays the saxophone for Ivan and Kristina, and ultimately entices her attention. The bisecting of Kristina as a sexual object between Ivan and Aleksi sublimates a deeper, subconscious sexual attraction the two men have for each other, which has been bred through the suppression of Soviet platonic male friendship. Notably, this depiction of masculinity in crisis utilizes a woman as an essentially inanimate intermediary between two males, suggesting that even a “strictly male” crisis could still be utilized for misogynistic effect in glasnost-era film.

The notion that it was time for the Soviet man to retake the mantle of dominant masculinity was widespread in the perestroika and glasnost years. While economic and political deterioration had endangered the ideal of masculinity engineered by the state, men’s aggression toward women in films like Tragedy Rock-Style, Assuage My Sorrow, and Taxi Blues cannot be fully understood as allegorical indictments against the state. Instead, the sexual violence against women, or sexual dominance to be more precise,

¹¹⁵ Ioffe and White, Taxi Blues, 274.
should be interpreted as symptomatic of men’s inability to view women as equals and their sense of powerlessness in the domestic sphere.

**Conclusion**

During the Silver Age of Russian literature, women’s sexual consciousness was represented as a socially threatening phenomenon. A similar tradition was adopted in early Bolshevik literature. As Borenstein states, “In the years prior to and following the revolution of 1917, the image of Mother Russia as either the helpless victim of rape or the wanton whore selling herself to the highest bidder could be found across the spectrum.” Analyzing women’s sexualities within glasnost-era filmmakers’ broader misogynistic tropes suggests this trend is not limited to Imperial Russia or the Revolutionary period, and can indeed be applied to the glasnost era as well.

Filmmakers were permitted to repurpose the Silver Age double-edged sword of Russian womanhood in chernukha film thanks to the new freedoms of glasnost. While analyzing their portrayals of women’s sexualities does not provide conclusive evidence of filmmaker’s sexism, it can reveal common anxieties expressed by filmmakers with diverse cultural and social philosophies and agendas. The duality of Fin-de-Siècle Russian womanhood, mother and whore, mirrors filmmakers own glasnost-era concerns about women as both the most morally vital and morally susceptible in Soviet society. Thus, the sex in glasnost-era films cannot be seen as decidedly liberating for women. Instead, it represents a continuation of a fairly conservative social and moral Russian

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cultural tradition: defending women’s sexual virtue from a predatory outside world which seeks to destroy it, and the family bedrock with it.

This continuity is complicated, however, by unique circumstances of the perestroika period. Women’s sexualities come into crisis as they encounter circumstances that are uniquely “glasnost,” such as foreign-currency prostitution and youth culture. Thus, filmmakers utilize a misogynistic framework to express age-old concerns as well as anxieties about their contemporary dynamic and uncertain cultural, social, and political milieu.
CHAPTER 2 – THE WEAKEST LINK: POPULAR PRESS DISCOURSES ON SEX IN SOVIET SOCIETY

Sex as a topic was opened to public scrutiny in Soviet newspapers and journals during glasnost. Like with film of the same period, the presence of sex in the popular press hardly indicates a fundamental shift in how sex was conceptualized in the Soviet Union. Journalistic discourses do not suggest that intellectuals’ attitudes about sex, nor sexuality, became markedly more permissive. In fact, the dominant trend in the glasnost print media was the continuation of previously restrictive principles regarding sexuality. Nonetheless, sex and sexuality did become new discursive proxies in this period, revealing social and moral anxieties about family and society.

The news media’s apprehensions were grounded in fears about the supposedly dissolving state of morality and the family in the perestroika period. Perestroika brought with it economic, political, and social instability, and thus led to higher instances of crime, family breakups, and destitution in general. Journalists regularly suggested that sex was the root cause of these social ills, and their preparedness to make this connection reflected profound unease about reforms affecting perestroika-era Soviet society. Moreover, press discourses about sex’s potentially destructive force disproportionately singled out women as both the most vulnerable victims of a new sexual permissiveness, and those who could most profoundly damage society with their sexual transgressions. In essence, then, women are described as the weakest link, whose sexual compromise could be most disastrous to Soviet society.

Journalists’ discourse about sex in the transitional years reflect the liberties and limitations of glasnost more generally. According to Dejevsky, Gorbachev’s primary
intent with the glasnost reforms was not endorsement of “freedom of speech” in the western sense. Instead he aimed to achieve a goal of more limited proportions. Before 1985, the Soviet people widely looked to newspaper publications for the “official” party line, and with only minor discrepancies in the coverage and details of news events. However, newspapers continued to serve as the single most effective method to distribute ideas to a mass segment of the public. According to Androunas, Gorbachev’s glasnost was primarily targeted at the print press, who envisioned limited critiques of policies in order to improve aspects of the socialist system that had been degraded by lack of review. “Glasnost was allowed as an instrument of Gorbachev’s policy of ‘improving socialism’, ” writes Androunas, “and a weapon of his struggle against orthodox Communists and the party nomenklatura.” Thus, the scope of glasnost was meant to be fairly limited, intended to improve the system without advocating any fundamental challenges.

Soviet journalists focused on social problems, such as alcoholism, orphans, and homelessness because there was considerably less “red tape,” or state-enforced restrictions, in pursuing these narratives than in reporting on political developments. Reporting on the Afghan War, party corruption, or expressing “heretical ideas about market economics,” remained treacherous territory for journalists, who could still not hint at the system’s fundamental inadequacies. Thus, discourse on social issues, notably sex, became increasingly common in the glasnost years.

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119 Ibid.
120 Androunas, Soviet Media in Transition, xii-2.
121 Ibid, 2.
123 Ibid.
The nature of sex discourse in the popular press evolved within this distinctly glasnost context. Journalists’ reportage of sex relied on a circumscribed, morally-driven rulebook. Thereby, the new availability of sex as a discursive proxy did automatically connote more liberal attitudes about sex and sexuality. Instead, popular press discourses suggest that conservative perspectives about sex and sexuality prevailed in the last years of the Soviet Union.

No (Wo)Man’s Land: Between Erotica to Pornography

The difference between “erotica,” or artistic depictions of sex or sexuality meant to evoke an aesthetic or emotional response, and “pornography,” or visual imagery of sex that are primarily meant to satiate sexual desire, were contested in the media in the glasnost period. “There must be a way to get away from asexual cinema without falling into dirt and vulgarity,” writes Krokodil film correspondent Pytr Smirnov in 1989, “However, we have yet to discover that way, and films like Little Vera, which depict young girls involved in sexual affairs, pardon my language, are simply pure bestiality.”

Smirnov’s comment reflects the media’s disinclination to differentiate between “erotica” and “pornography,” and indicates a reluctance to establish, in the words of sexologist Igor Kon, a “sophisticated sexual-erotic culture.” Furthermore, such declarations demonstrate a continued loyalty to the idea of sex as a procreative necessity. The press displayed a widespread refusal to acknowledge a difference between sensuality and sexuality in the glasnost period. Their expressed hesitations rested upon the perceived negative effects sexual imagery could have on women and families. Thus, even within a time period where the state did not actively prevent the development of an erotic culture,

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125 Kon, Sexual Revolution, 271
journalists argued against such a phenomenon because they ruled that the stability of the social and moral order outweighed the need for erotic culture. In essence, the established sexual conservatism triumphed over sexual liberalism in the print media.

The primary means by which the popular press expressed unwillingness to acknowledge erotica lies in discussions of sex in glasnost-era popular cinema versus pornography. The difference between sex and nudity in cinema and the burgeoning pornography industry was largely lost on popular press correspondents. Explicit sex scenes in popular cinema are described as precursors to full-on pornography. Journalists and film critics exclaimed that sexually “perverted” filmmakers aimed to intentionally undermine Soviet morality by normalizing explicit depictions of sex in cinema.

One could argue that a sociopolitical system that circumscribed sex to the role of procreative necessity, as the Soviet civilization largely had, would be hard-pressed to observe a difference between erotica and pornography once suddenly given the freedom to do so. However, chalk ing up the press’s resistance to erotic culture to growing pains does not adequately reflect the complexity of journalists’ social and moral concerns during this period. Most notably, the denunciation of erotic culture was expressed largely through journalists’ discourses on women’s loss of wholesomeness and virtue in both popular film and pornography. As Graham observes, “The polemics surrounding chernukha largely mirrored the major sociopolitical debates regarding perestroika itself: how much critical exposé is too much? What symbols and ideals, if any, should remain ‘untouchable’?”

One of these “untouchable” ideas proved to be the concept of women’s sexual purity. The popular press claimed to defend women from explicit

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displays of sexuality in both popular cinema and pornography. A Pravda correspondent laments on this seemingly downhill battle, writing about how pornography sales had spiked over a two year period. The November 1990 article states,

“I see these ‘dead eyed’ girls, pictured nude on these magazine covers sold at metro kiosks…Surely this is not the life they envisioned for themselves. Do they not long for the conventions of the old world – love, family, a home? They have convinced themselves that the highest privilege is to appear in Playboy or to become a Hollywood ‘star,’ when really these western conventions are toxic for society and family. These are the new lessons taught to us by the heroines of Little Vera and Intergirl, and further perpetuated by pornography. What we need now is not erotica or pornography, as Dr. Igor Kon would suggest, but support for our Soviet families.”

This blurb typifies the popular press’s categorical resistance to screened sex in any form. Their opposition was united by a moral crisis that was female-oriented, and focused principally on the threat posed to women in their prescribed roles as morality bearers and heads of family.

Discourses about sex in glasnost film and pornography were united by a discussion of potential repercussions that applied solely to girls and women. Journalists argued that sex in cinema and pornography place girls and women into real danger. This disproportionate anxiety about women’s safety and moral virtue indicate journalist and film critics were concerned about how sexual imagery adversely impacted women’s ability to focus on family and the domestic space.

Journalists’ apprehension applied primarily to young women, characterizing them as the most vulnerable targets of “erotic propaganda.” A letter featured in a March 1989 issue of Sovetskai kul’tura, signed by nine teachers and doctors of the “older

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127 The pornography business was booming by mid-1992, and rivaled other perestroika-era novelties, such as kiwis and deodorants, in sales in major Russian cities. Goscilo, Dehexing Sex, 135.
generation,” expresses concern for the state of teenagers’ morality and concludes that, “The screen is mostly to blame.” However, references to “teenagers” more often refer to teenage girls than to boys. The jointly-written letter laments, “At the age of 11, young girls and boys are already engaging in sexualized games, and by age 14, girls are lining up for their first abortions.” Even though both teen boys and girls are reportedly affected by screened sex, the mention of repercussions exclusively references young girls, who are impregnated and seek abortions.

Moreover, journalists’ sense of anxiety about derailing girls’ and young women’s path to domesticity is expressed similarly in discourse about both film and explicit pornography. Two quotes, about popular cinema and about pornography respectively, exemplify this trend. “Films like Little Vera and An Extraordinary Incident aim to dissuade young people from the natural life path, which is love, marriage, and family, and wish to convince them that their selfish goals are more important,” writes a Pravda correspondent in November 1989. A Sovetskaia kul’tura article from the same year suggests that, “Pornography has the greatest effect on adolescents ages 13-14, whose perception of what is valuable in life – love, marriage, and family – becomes fundamentally warped by sexual imagery.” The fact that these two statements are nearly interchangeable highlights journalists’ lack of differentiation between erotica and pornography. The primary force that prevented this distinction is an overarching concern for women as domestic bastions, defending mainstays such as “love, marriage, and family.”

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130 Levshina, “Kritik beseduet s chitatelem,” 4.
131 Ibid.
The print media’s consolidation of erotica and pornography under the umbrella of one destructive, anti-social phenomenon was not implicit. Instead, journalists, film critics, and other cultural commentators acknowledged the possibility of erotic culture in the glasnost era, and then actively vetoed it. Their explicit denouncement suggests a more active standard of conservatism than the comparatively passive model associated with the inability to decipher art from obscenity. Their arguments centered on the idea that the Soviet public was not prepared for, or “could not handle erotic culture.” Such expressions reflected journalists’ hesitations about a lack of censorship or regulation in portrayals of nudity and sex. However, they ultimately argued that the need for morally-upright Soviet families overshadowed whatever cultural openness or educational opportunity erotica could offer. Their public debates about the pros and cons of erotic culture indicate that journalists actively deciphered the nuanced difference between artistic sensuality and carnal desire. And yet, their acknowledgement did not translate into approval.

According to cultural commentators, erotica had a similar effect on the Soviet population as pornography and incited violence against women. Analyses that suggest that erotica was just as harmful as pornography hint at journalists’ profound sense of anxiety about women and the Soviet family, who are deemed extraordinarily fragile in this period. An article published in Sovetskaia kul’tura in April 1991 discusses the USSR’s December 1990 commission on regulating obscenities.

“We must recognize the dangers these obscene images pose to our population, and take all measures to block them…As for erotica: unfortunately, this is not the time for erotica to flourish. We must first

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focus on stabilizing our society and only then can we think about the possibility of erotic culture.”

The correspondent’s focus on timing suggests anxieties about erotica were not wholly interchangeable with those of pornography. Instead, journalists expressed concerns that were specific to the unstable conditions of the perestroika years. They concluded that the public was experiencing a particularly vulnerable moment, and that protecting moral virtue was of principal importance. The commentator disclaims that, “These sort of regulations can border on absurdity, as they did in the old days,” suggesting that the commission’s proposed solution was recognized as an extreme measure, and yet a necessary one in a period of particular fragility.

According to historian Paul Goldschmidt, the division between “high” and “low” culture in Russia was always more extreme than in the west in any given period. Yet, resistance to establishing an erotic culture in the glasnost era reflects unique anxieties in the glasnost era. According to Kon, an erotic culture did begin to take shape during perestroika. Novels that contained eroticism, such as Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* and James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, were published in their unabridged forms from 1985 onward. Artists held exhibitions of erotic paintings, books, and photography for the first time since the 1920s. At the same time, however, pornography which depicted all manner of sadistic sexual activity was recorded and distributed around the country. Occurring simultaneously was a nearly twenty-five percent increase in rape and sexual assault between 1988 and 1989, as well as increased instances of familial abandonment, teen

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136 Ibid.
pregnancy, abortion, and prostitution.\textsuperscript{139} The print media suggested a direct link between pornography and the abovementioned social statistics. Given these circumstances, they were largely unwilling to consider erotica separate from pornography. It would be better, they argued, “to snuff out the cult of violence and sex at its root.”\textsuperscript{140} Figure 2, a comic from a 1990 issue of \textit{Krokodil}, encapsulates journalistic fears about exposing the public to erotica.\textsuperscript{141} It emphasizes the Soviet public’s inability to appreciate erotic art during the perestroika years and underscores the undesirable traits sensuality may inspire. In declining to differentiate between erotic art and pornography, the popular press exhibited an steadfast loyalty to sexually conservative principles. They also implicitly revealed startlingly low faith in the common Soviet citizen.

\textbf{A Legacy of Misogyny: Reporting on Prostitution}

Discourse about prostitution in the USSR proved to be misogynistic, as it almost always cast female prostitutes as the source of the growing epidemic. Additionally, the

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, 29.
\textsuperscript{140} “Pro eto,” 10.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
popular press suggested that the solution to combating prostitution began and ended with reforming prostitutes, and did not consider the “johns.” Thus, the media’s call to battle prostitution on “economic, moral, legal, and ideological fronts,” can be interpreted as exclusively targeting women. Ultimately, the focus on women aligns with the popular press’s conservatively-based moral crisis about women as the foundation of Soviet family, and the need to protect their sexual virtue.

Discourses on prostitution during glasnost were just as novel as discourses on sex itself. Often viewed as an infiltrating mechanism of the west, sex was frequently dissected in a critical manner. The added burden of sex-for-pay solidified skeptics’ denouncements of the taboo topic. The early Bolsheviks declared victory over prostitution in the 1920s. For them, it symbolized the most malignant form of capitalism: selling the female body to the highest bidder. Furthermore, Bolsheviks quickly did away with the notion of “free love,” assigning non-marital sex the status of idle distraction at best and anti-revolutionary menace at worst. Prostitution was anathema to multiple facets of Bolshevik ideology. Thus, the print media’s discussion of prostitution was not limited to the context of sex, but extended to encompass poverty, crime, social justice, and womanhood. By the 1980s, many journalists acknowledged that the “war against prostitution,” was in fact, far from won. Although most did not seek to prove that prostitution had existed all along (thus undermining the regime), they provided conclusive evidence that at the very least, there had been a “resurgence” of the “vanquished” social ill.

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142 Levshina, “Kritik beseduet s chitatelem,” 4.
This burgeoning reportage, however, was almost exclusively one-sided, focusing on the female prostitutes and ignoring the pimps and “johns” altogether. Glasnost-era journalists’ tendency to emphasize female prostitutes and overlook male patrons does not conclusively evidence sexism. However, the tone and nature of the media’s fascination with the seamy world of sex-for-pay was paradoxical, highlighting the need for social reform at the beginning of an article and castigating prostitutes as nefarious and materialistically motivated by the end. “Society must fight the factors that cause prostitution,” wrote a Pravda correspondent in 1989, “but not prostitutes themselves.”

This statement, made in the conclusion of the report, conflicts with the correspondent’s evaluation that, “Prostitution is melting away the virtue of young girls…It is young girls tempted by wealth who are at the greatest risk of becoming entrenched in this deviant subculture.” The correspondent’s relatively mild contradiction is augmented by other, more severe assessments. As the topic gained media attention, Chief Director for Combating Organized Crime and Corruption Ministry of Internal Affairs Aleksandr Gurov embarked on a media tour to quell concerns. His interviews in Sovetskaia kul’tura and Argumenty i fakty both began by identifying prostitution as a “disgraceful phenomenon of capitalist society, one which aims to sell the bodies of women.” Yet Gurov further assessed prostitution to be a fundamentally selfish endeavor on the side of women, who he identified as turning to the practice not out of economic need, but because of an “unwillingness to work.” Additionally, Deputy Gurov dismissed

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144 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
accusations of a “moral dilemma” surrounding the practice of prostitution, and inferred that the issue was strictly economic. “Right now we have a mass problem, as in western countries,” concluded Gurov, “But is this a question about the exploitation of women? Nothing of the sort!” Notably, statements about the male patrons that kept this underground industry lucrative were omitted from Gurov’s assessment.

Media ambivalence on the issue is most strongly evident in journalists’ interviews with, or exclusive profiles of, sex workers. These reports channel a fascination with the practice and lives of prostitutes. Naturally, these pieces disproportionately hinged on the phenomenon of foreign-currency prostitution, brought to the limelight by the film *Intergirl* (1989). Journalists simultaneously ignored the vast majority of the underground industry, where destitute women exchanged sex in dingy pay-by-the-hour hotels or railway stations for a few rubles. A *Krokodil* correspondent’s 1987 profile of a high-end prostitute who tricked on the streets of Sochi under the alias Laura provides an example of how the media’s fixation on prostitution predated *Intergirl*. The article is one of the few to acknowledge johns in the world of prostitution, but within a context that places the blame exclusively on the female practitioners. “I felt dirty the whole time I was covering the story, and then I began to have negative [sexual] thoughts about every young woman I saw on the street.” This correspondent’s conclusion, then, suggests that women were wholly responsible for prostitution rather than responding to the demands of a male-driven market. Thus, the media’s call to battle prostitution can be interpreted as a call exclusively made against immoral women.

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News media fascination with prostitution in the glasnost years was a phenomenon unique to the milieu of the perestroika period and represented a profound duality in regards to sex and women. It was purportedly the embodiment of capitalistic excess, and yet, multiple surveys suggest that one-third of high school girls freely admitted that they would exchange sex for currency in a sample size of one thousand. Another survey revealed that over half of Soviet women viewed sex work as a “feasible” career option in a sample size of over two thousand. Prostitution was also not so far removed from the misogyny of the film industry, and to a much greater extent, pornography. According to Goscilo, the film and popular press industries had normalized “the exploitation of women’s bodies as marketable commodities and objects of displaced male violence.” Prostitution proved to be on the extreme end of the spectrum, and yet a natural extension of the sort of sexual exploitation seen in glasnost-era cultural media. Ultimately, prostitution represented the culmination of Soviet paradoxes about women and sexuality. On the one hand, prostitution was entertained as a legitimate career option for women because it empowered them to gain a degree of economic autonomy. On the other hand, prostitutions’ normalization in everyday thought and in popular cinema elicited the print media’s expressed concern about moral wholesomeness in the perestroika years.

Another theme that arises within prostitution reportage that is distinctly “perestroika” is the “capitalist nature” of this social ill, along with a sense of crisis about western ideology’s infiltration during an uncertain perestroika and demokratizatsiia (democratization) endeavor. Since the media’s attention was disproportionately focused

on high-end prostitutes who catered to foreign, western clients, prostitution and prostitutes became symbolic of capitalism and material excess within the print media. Historian Elizabeth Waters concludes that, “The prostitute became established as a symbol of the ‘golden world’ of dubious pleasures and unearned income, with a permanent place in the rogues’ gallery of ‘unlaboring’ types whose economic and ideological sins were, allegedly, responsible for the country’s present plight.”\textsuperscript{152} Thus there was a sense of panic in these pieces that western men were infiltrating the USSR and stealing the virtue of its women, or more precisely, those who were charged with leading the Soviet Union into a bright, morally wholesome future. In his interview with the high-end prostitute “Laura,” correspondent V. Vitalev from \textit{Krokodil} asked, “Would you marry one of your western clients and emigrate?”\textsuperscript{153} Laura’s answer that she would not hesitate, echoed a profound trepidation about the future of the Soviet Union and western elements infiltrating the country, and worst of all, absconding with its women, and thus, Soviet virtue. This anxiety would draw over 40 million Soviet viewers to theaters two years later to see Todorovsky’s \textit{Intergirl}, a film that gave artistic form to this palpable moral panic. Reflecting the double-sided coin of Russian national identity, one part maternal nurturer, one part whore, journalists’ sense of metaphorical panic was amplified when western clients were thrown into the mix of prostitution.\textsuperscript{154}

The reportage on prostitution amplified the character of the glasnost era. Journalists’ implications that prostitution had been eliminated up to perestroika and their disproportionate coverage of foreign currency prostitution reveals their anxieties about

\textsuperscript{152} Waters, “Restructuring the ‘Woman Question’,” 7. 
\textsuperscript{153} Vitalev, “Chuma liubvi,” 4-5. 
\textsuperscript{154} Goscilo, “Gendered Trinity,” 78.
west-inspired reforms. Additionally, the press’s undivided attention on women within prostitution, both as criminals and as victims, reflects a world in which women’s sexual transgressions were judged on a far harsher scale than their male counterparts. Their suggestions that prostitutes choose their profession primarily to escape familial obligation and to pursue material comfort exposes a profound concern about the social and moral state of the Soviet people.

The Threatening Force of Youth Culture

Popular press discourse positioned itself against sex in burgeoning youth cultural movements. According to cultural scholar Hilary Pilkington, perestroika and glasnost helped to reorient the public’s attention away from the private sphere and onto a novel and fascinating public sphere, because reform policies focused on “bringing operations out into the open.”¹⁵⁵ Paradoxically, it would seem, this reconfiguration increased expressed anxieties about the private sphere in the print media. A new focus on the public over the private brought about a blossoming of “youth culture,” where teens built peer networks around rock-n-roll, biker, and hippy subcultures, networks that existed separate from state-sanctioned youth communities such as the Komsomol. Thus, rock-n-roll, punk, biker, street, and hippy subcultures were widely considered deviant youth activity by journalists in the glasnost press. Moreover, girls and women were publically viewed as the objects of young men’s sexual desire within these youth movements. Journalists observed that girls within youth cultural activity were vulnerable, misguided, and attention-starved. As with the aforementioned phenomena, journalists referred to young

¹⁵⁵ Hilary Pilkington, “Going Out in ‘Style’,” 144.
women as both the most at-risk within youth culture, and themselves potentially the most sexually deviant perpetrators.

The film *Tragedy Rock-Style* captured the public’s fear about “the cult of sex” surrounding rock music by literally combining the reportedly destructive forces of youth culture with cultism, painting a distinctly negative picture of punk music and youth “escapism.” The popular press etched a similarly dark depiction of youth culture, one that viewed girls as those most vulnerable to the ill effects of youth culture and also those most susceptible to falling into hedonistic behaviors. A December 1990 profile of punk culture in *Sovetskaia kul’tura* denounced the entire scene, highlighting young women. “The girls that go to the punk concerts, they show up with their pimpled faces and their sagging breasts (wearing no bras), and they will do anything to gain the attention of the band or any other male who will take notice. They stand around, with their short skirts and their ridiculous black eye makeup, just begging for it.” The correspondent concluded by stating, “We must save our kids from rock-n-roll and the sex industry.”

Yet signals within the article suggested that the focus is preserving young girls’ virtue. Additionally, teens’ hedonistic behaviors proved to be a widespread concern, as questions about rock-n-roll “deviance” arose in casual interviews. An interview with the USSR’s popular thrash metal band *Corrosion of Metal* in December 1990 brought up such questions, and the correspondent asked group leader Sergei Troitsky about Satanism,

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158 Ibid.
drugs, and sexual excess in “rock-n-roll.” Troitsky’s flippantly acknowledgment of these phenomena further presents readers with a sense of youths’ reckless hedonism.

Furthermore, the activities of young people were said by many journalists to reflect the problems of the wider Soviet public, as one correspondent argued in an article titled “The Youth is a Mirror of Society.” Another correspondent noted that although people ages 13-24 comprise the largest segment of Soviet society, the membership of the Komsomol had shrank considerably while crime statistics continued to skyrocket. The popular press expressed anxieties about a large youth population that was steadily losing its interest in socialist values.

In covering young people’s movement away from the status quo, newspapers focused primarily on sexually active teenage girls. Newspapers provided alarming statistics about teen pregnancy and abortion. Focusing on pregnancy and abortion in regards to teen sex assured that the discourse would be centered on young women. In November 1989, Argumenty i fakty presented a study of worldwide abortion rates which ran in TIME magazine and suggested that the USSR had the highest level of abortion by more than two times, with 181 per 1000 women between the ages of 15 and 44 receiving an abortion each year. Moreover, the correspondent does not dispute the figures, which came from the west and ordinarily would be questioned.

Journalists further condemned what they viewed as the ultimate consequence of deviant youth sexual activity, teen motherhood. Motherhood was viewed as the

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162 “Iazykom tsifr,” Argumenty i fakty, Nov. 11, 4.
culmination to Soviet love and marriage, the means by which the Soviet future was ensured, and so its compromise appeared especially urgent. The press pointed to the widespread orphan problem as the ultimate consequence to youth sexual activity. A November 1987 report stated that 300 thousand children live in orphanages and 700 thousand orphans were in guardianships. The correspondent noted that the delegate from the Soviet Children’s Fund stressed educating young [my emphasis] women about family and motherhood. Another, more pointed article stated,

“According to the Ministry of Health, 95 percent of these orphans’ parents are alive [my emphasis]. 71 percent of orphans are born to young, single women...Apart from the strictly moral argument, we must recognize that girls ages 15 to 19 cannot afford to have children. Let us encourage our young girls to avoid sexual temptations and wait until they are married and stable, so that their children may avoid falling into a vicious cycle.”

The correspondent’s concern about repeating a “vicious cycle” reveals the extent to which teen pregnancy came to be seen as a detrimental phenomenon. Ultimately, the threat of teen pregnancy transformed what may otherwise be explained as a harmless teenage phase in a harmful phenomenon for future Soviet generations. Children raised without a mother were seen as far less likely to fit the Soviet ideal of patriotic, productive citizens. Journalists, then, expressed anxieties about young women’s abilities to compromise an entire Soviet generation with early pregnancies.

Journalists argued there was an inextricable link between youth culture and sex, and films like Tragedy Rock-Style and Little Vera bolstered their statements. Thus, the print media also reported on the possibility for enhanced “sex education,” which provided for arguably the most liberal sex discourse of the glasnost-era. Yet even as

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164 Ibid.
correspondents entertained the notion of expanding sex education to encompass the realities of teens’ sexual behaviors, their discourses remained fundamentally conservative as they focused once more on the ultimate goal, marriage and family. An article published in Argumenty i fakty in February 1987 espoused the need to educate the youth on sex. “Every young person should have knowledge of hygiene and a healthy lifestyle. There is plenty of sex in the west, and yet the west does not educate people about it. Their ruling class utilizes sex as a tool to isolate and distract the public from the problems at hand...A socialist society does not have such individualist moral permissiveness.”

While the correspondent advocated for a limited expansion of “sexual hygiene,” he did so within a moralist context. Rather than taking the restrictive approach, some journalists leaned toward expanding young people’s informational standard. Ultimately, however, the goal was not the sexual emancipation of the public. Rather, journalists argued that curing sexual ignorance would embolden young people against the lure of hedonism, and would lead them toward a path free of “individualist moral permissiveness.”

Another article, published in 1991, echoed this sentiment in response to a 15-year-old’s question about masturbation. “It’s about time we cleared up these myths about the harmful nature of masturbation. Science long ago proved that there are no harmful effects to this natural practice. If we are to nurture a generation with strong marriage and family values, we must accept the reality of people’s sexual natures.”

Such calls to expunge myths about sex also favored expanding young people’s base of knowledge, rather than promoting wholesome restriction of any nonprocreative sexual activity. However, they

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did so with a sense of resignation, or an attitude of, “If you can’t beat them, join them.” In “joining them,” the ultimate goal was to retake control of young people’s sexual behaviors, and in a roundabout way, lead them back to love, marriage, and family.

Thus, seemingly opposing discourses from those against and those for expanding sex education proved to be more united than they at first appear. These new discussions of sex education elicited strong restrictive responses. Historian James Riordan quotes a reader’s response to a “mildly” educational column about sex in the youth paper Moskovskii komsomolets, “People old enough already know or can find out for themselves...We knew nothing about ‘sex’ or ‘erotica’ before, but we still produced healthy children...We had real love, a sense of duty, love for our mothers, our country, patriotism, and so on.”168 This statement condemns sex education taught to teenagers, and yet, such denouncements were not so different from calls for sex education. They were both impassioned responses to a crisis of youth sexuality, which called for drastic and unorthodox actions, such as the expansion of sex education. The letter-writer’s statement about “real love,” and a “sense of duty,” reflected the stated goals of sex education proponents. These goals were fairly conservative in nature, and did not call for the disposal or even the relaxation of the old model of duty-bound, morally wholesome sex.

The moral crisis surrounding youth culture, moreover, was overwhelmingly targeted at young women. According to Attwood, there was considerable media attention focused on teenage girls during the perestroika period as they headed into their child-bearing years.169 There were also clinical studies conducted that suggested that girls and women were less capable of making morally sound choices under stress. One such study

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168 Kon and Riordan, *Sex and Russian Society*, 3.
conducted in the 1980s by sociologists L.S. Sapozhnikova found that teen girls had a greater tendency to defer to males in morally challenging situations, and were generally less likely to be “guided by moral principles.”\textsuperscript{170} Such studies reinforce the conclusion that the popular press generally treated girls as the weakest link in Soviet society, and explains why girls in youth subcultures received disproportionate attention in the print media.

**Men as Hostages of Female Sexuality?**

Although the vast majority of popular press sex discourses in the transitional period focused on women, there are traces within the texts that reflect the period’s “crisis of masculinity.” Recognizing and examining the crisis of masculinity in the popular press uncovers a more complete picture of the degree and nature of journalists’ social and moral anxieties. A December 1990 issue of *Krokodil* features a full spread of cartoons, depicting the pervasive role of sex in everyday life.\textsuperscript{171} A ubiquitous theme in such comics is men’s distraction from everyday professional and martial duties. Two cartoons included a wife coming home to find her husband with a nude woman (or women), while another featured a wife and husband arguing about nudity on television while their son sits by and watches. A third portrayed a man daydreaming about pornographic magazines instead of focusing on a Party meeting. Cartoons of this nature suggested that men were ultimately powerless to control their sexual urges. More fundamentally, however, they hinted at men’s vulnerability in the face of women’s transparent sexuality. They bemoaned women’s explicit sexuality as a harmful phenomenon not only for stability in the domestic sphere, but also for men in their personal and professional lives. Women

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid, 127.
\textsuperscript{171} “Pro eto,” 10.
were ultimately imbued with the power to derail men in their most fundamentally masculine endeavors: Party and professional life. Additionally, men’s moral integrity was placed into crisis, as men found themselves unable to resist sexual enticement. Popular press discourses, then, exposed journalistic fears about the feeble-minded Soviet male, unable to resist sexual lures. Furthermore, they suggested that women’s sexuality had the power to jeopardize economic and political stability in society.

The primary anxiety about male sexuality in the glasnost popular press related to the integrity of an already endangered masculine identity, then further subjected to degradation thanks to explicit depictions of female sexuality both in erotica and in pornography. As in film, the popular press implicitly entertained the debate about how to once again restore masculine identity to its revolutionary potential. According to Goldschmidt, the primary cultural concern revolved around the *muzhik*, the archetype of an artful and immoral male who fails to live up to masculine standards, and who “finds a way to entertain himself with smut and scandal.”172 To a certain extent, men found themselves in a public double bind in regards to reacting to an onslaught of sexually explicit material. Unable to attain the ideal of Soviet masculinity through fulfillment of professional goals thanks to the abysmal economic climate of the perestroika years, men sought to ameliorate the crisis of masculinity by exercising “compensatory masculinity.”173 This macho image required men to ostensibly display abundant virility. Thus, men could not completely denounce pornographic images without forfeiting this last expression of masculinity.

172 Goldschmidt, *Pornography and Democratization*, 47.
Journalists who passionately vilified pornography and prostitution also subtly acknowledged its irrefutable draw for men. “I felt dirty the whole time I was covering this story,” reported a correspondent who profiled urban prostitutes for a 1987 issue of Krokodil, “I showered three times a day...I began to notice that I was having negative [sexual] thoughts about every young woman I saw on the streets.”174 A 1989 article in Sovetskaia kul’tura about explicit sex in cinema fretted, “Our correspondent in Ordzhonikidze was afraid [my emphasis] to finish watching the films for this report because he feared seeing blatant sex acts.”175 Articles like these openly expressed angst about the power of sexual imagery on men, whose compensatory masculinity required a carnal response to the naked female form. Moreover, these implicit statements imbued sexually “emancipated” women with a degree of power over men, elevating female prostitutes and porn stars to the dreaded status of succubi.

Journalists’ conclusions that women’s preoccupation with sex degraded the domestic sphere appear to be a logical deduction, since women were traditionally tasked with both the physical and the moral upkeep of the home and family. Yet journalistic anxieties about women’s sexuality came full circle in discourses about how pornography and prostitution distracted men from professional and political obligations. In essence, journalists regurgitated the concerns Lenin expressed about “free love” in the 1920s, that preoccupation with sex diverted men from their revolutionary pursuits. However, a more complex, and uniquely glasnost-era fear also emanated from the discourse of this period: that men’s newfound obsession with pornography and prostitutes was drawing them further into compensatory masculinity and farther from the traditional, hegemonic

174 Vitalev, “Chuma liubvi,” 4-5.
paradigm. A correspondent for Izvestiia reported in May 1990 on his experiences interviewing men who were waiting in line to buy pornography in metro kiosks. “They were like zombies…They thought nothing of wasting an hour in line, losing their sense of purpose and themselves.”\textsuperscript{176} The anxieties about women’s sexuality, then, transcended the domestic and familial arena and permeated economic and political contexts, by threatening men’s sociopolitical priorities.

**Conclusion**

Journalistic discourse on sex in the glasnost era can be more fully contextualized as part of a conservative, “profamily” trend among intellectuals. Reactionary discourse about women was one of the products of social, political, and economic instability during the perestroika era. Journalists considered the state of the Soviet gender hierarchy from many angles during the glasnost period, hoping that within gender would lie a remedy for their anxieties. One of the most frequent questions was about women in their capacities as mothers. After an ostensible spike in youth violence and crime, journalists questioned women’s abilities to bear the double burden of professional and familial responsibility. An *Argumenty i fakty* correspondent questioned Secretary Galina Suhorochenkova of the Trade Unions of the Soviet Union about the needs of working mothers. Ultimately, both the correspondent and Secretary Suhorocehnkova tended to agree that, to some extent, professional obligation interfered with women’s domestic duties and with the moral upbringing of the next Soviet generation.

Correspondent N. Akritova: “Gorbachev has claimed that women’s rightful place is in the home, raising our future generations. People seem to agree with this statement. How then can we help working women?” Secretary Suhorocehnkova: “We need to expand women’s access to part-time hours, and get them away from the strenuous, long work conditions

\textsuperscript{176}“Ochered’ za ‘klubnichkoi,’’ *Izvestiia*, May 24, 1990, 5.
which might ultimately damage their health, and which definitely impede their ability to have children and to raise them morally.”

Secretary Suhorcehnkova’s statement represents a reactionary step because it suggested that women’s reproductive sexuality was more important than women’s labor in the perestroika period.

In addition to the more obviously “profamily” discourse, such as the erstwhile article, journalists expressed their conservatism by highlighting nonreproductive sex and its potentially negative implications. The use of sex as a discursive proxy was a novel technique, made possible by glasnost. Examining journalistic discourse on sex suggests that the dominant trend in the glasnost print media was the continuation of previously restrictive principles. Public debate over sex, especially in regards to women, did not signify that the intelligentsia’s attitude about sexuality in social and moral contexts had become notably more permissive. Moreover, the nature of sex discourse suggests that journalists retained a significant degree of conservatism during glasnost in the absence (or reduction) of top-down coercion.

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The idiom “parade of horribles” originates from parades of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States and Europe, which featured participants wearing comic and grotesque costumes and scaring parade goers. However, as a rhetorical device it refers to showcasing a list of extremely undesirable events that will supposedly result from a preliminary action or phenomenon. The idiom is classified under “appeal to emotion” in any logician’s handbook. In the case of glasnost-era discourses on sex and sexuality, filmmakers and journalists employed this hyperbolic method to full effect. Glasnost provided intellectuals a new discursive proxy, which they utilized in order to express both anxieties about the state of social and moral affairs in the perestroika period, and to offer prophetic visions of a world consumed by sex.

It is ironic, then, that in the two and a half decades following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, sex has become a mainstay in all things cultural and journalistic in Russia. In 1989, a periodical titled SPID-info (AIDS Info) came into print, aimed originally at combatting Soviet ignorance regarding sexually transmitted diseases. However, these prophylactic goals were steadily replaced with nude images of women, lifestyle and sex advice, as well as tabloid coverage of Russian and international celebrities. By 1994, SPID-info had the highest subscription rate of any periodical in Russia. In that same year, the editorial board voted to add a masthead to the cover page of Spid-info, reading “SPEED” in Latin letters. The transformation of Spid-info, from defender of Soviets’ health and wellbeing to soft pornography with no social mission, widely reflects the arguments of many glasnost-era intellectuals who used sex as a discursive proxy, that the

178 Borenstein, Overkill, 35.
179 Ibid.
Soviet public “could not handle erotic culture.” The periodical’s metamorphosis further illustrates intellectuals’ anxieties about the abundance of newly transparent sexuality, which began in the glasnost years; Spid-info’s focus has shifted from collective good to individual hedonism, with no obvious moral qualms from the editors. The name change, too, is a meaningful expression: “SPEED” represents a desire for instant gratification, a veritable denouncement of Soviet ideology. Likewise, the use of bold, capitalized Latin letters signifies the adoption of a sexually permissiveness that intellectuals would characterize as unequivocally western.

Figure 3. The March 2011 issue of Spid-info. The article on the right is titled, “Husband sends me off to stripper courses.”

But, sex as a theme has not been confined to intentionally seamy publications like Spid-info, and has extended into every conceivable aspect of Soviet life. Women made light of being “gold diggers,” a newly acceptable term in post-Soviet Russia, referring to women who sought men primarily for their wealth. Beauty contests, which featured a particularly risqué bikini portion, became prominent. The winners frequently, and

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unabashedly, made it known that they were looking for an eligible, and very wealthy suitor. Women also competed to procure a rich husband from the “New Russian” stock, men who had made their fortune during the Soviet collapse.¹⁸¹ For those who lacked the luck or physical assets to draw one of these rare entrepreneurs, there was another opportunity: the infamous world of “mail-order brides,” which became an ever more popular trend with the internet explosion of the late 1990s. This option allowed Russian women the opportunity to escape the widespread poverty of the post-Soviet period. It also encapsulated the anxieties present in Inter girl on a massive, coordinated scale. Ironically enough, the moralizing intelligentsia of the glasnost era, who denounced a proliferation of sexually explicit material, may not have imagined such trends in their worst nightmares.

Sex has also become a mainstay in television, popularly thought to be beyond reproach. During the late Soviet era, television was a vital ideological apparatus of the state. A handful of channels screened Party ideologues’ speeches at intermittent intervals, ideological cartoons for children, and documentaries following upstanding Soviet citizens. While some programs were imported from the west during the glasnost period, there was hardly a trace of sex or sexuality in Soviet television. Television’s role as a predominantly state-controlled medium remains a characteristic of post-Soviet Russia. Recognizing television’s potential as an ideological engine, President Putin seized control of several independent channels in 2000, bringing them once again under state control.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Engel, Women in Russia, 263.
¹⁸² Peter Pomerantsev, Nothing is True and Everything is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia (New York: Public Affairs, 2014), 6.
Yet in a post-Soviet television milieu that continues to be primarily state-controlled, sex has become an omnipresent phenomenon.

Journalist Peter Pomerantsev describes how the “gold digger” phenomenon has infiltrated Russian television in the 2000s, drawing on experience working on his first television production job in Russia. He chronicles his involvement in producing a program called *How to Marry a Millionaire (A Gold Digger’s Guide)*, a reality show following the Gold Digger Academy in Moscow, a course teaching women how to utilize their sexuality to hook a wealthy man, as either for a husband or a lover. According to Pomerantsev, there are dozens of such “academies” in Moscow and St. Petersburg, with names like “Geisha School” or “How to Be a Real Woman.” The message behind shows like these is quite unambiguous: a woman’s sexuality is her greatest asset. This idea has steadily expanded into various television programs, even in seemingly nonsensical ways. In 2000, a television show called *The Naked Truth* aired on a major channel, and featured an attractive young woman undressing as she delivered the latest news. Engel contextualizes this phenomenon by noting, “In a highly competitive market, where funds were scarce and the rate of failure high, seasoning a product with women’s sexuality boosted sales.” It would seem, then, that post-Soviet Russians have embraced the concept of “sex sells.”

Cinema has also felt the pull of a newly competitive market, as filmmakers battle for Russian viewership against domestic and foreign opponents, as well as the expanded realm of television. According to Faraday, Russian viewers lost their appetite for “the

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184 Ibid.
185 Engel, *Women in Russia*, 262.
186 Ibid.
discourses of sobriety,” and the chernukha film cycle faded out by the end of 1991.\textsuperscript{187} He further argues that post-Soviet filmmakers did not lose their proclivity for creating films with moral and ideological messages, despite their move away from highlighting social problems.\textsuperscript{188} Yet filmmakers recognize that their productions must fit certain criteria to preform successfully in a post-Soviet film industry that only recently began its recovery from the economic crises of the 1990s. Faraday notes, “the post-perestroika period produced films that fell under the category of messianic populist, in that they offered audiences a moral message in popularly accessible form.”\textsuperscript{189} It is difficult to say without further analysis which tendency, moral or commercial, currently dominates the contemporary Russian cinematic milieu.

Post-Soviet Russian cinema has tended to depict life as generally light-hearted and fun, or as Pomerantsev notes, “rosy.” While aspects of Russian life, such as career and family life, have been portrayed in more buoyant ways in post-Soviet cinema, sex, however, has largely remained characterized by aggressive misogyny.\textsuperscript{190} According to Engel, “No film appeared [in the post-Soviet period] without at least one graphic, frequently brutal and sadistic, sexual encounter, sometimes entirely unrelated to the plot.”\textsuperscript{191} The violent sexuality in contemporary Russian film reflects more than the fulfillment of criteria in the production of a commercially viable film, but as Borenstein argues, the continuation of implicit aggression towards the metaphorical “Motherland,” which has ostensibly failed to make good on perestroika-era promises.\textsuperscript{192}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[188] Ibid, 179.
\item[189] Ibid, 180-1.
\item[190] Pomerantsev, \textit{Nothing is True}, 32.
\item[191] Engel, \textit{Women in Russia}, 262.
\item[192] Borenstein, \textit{Overkill}, 41.
\end{footnotes}
The question, then, is: what is the social and moral context of this seemingly unrestrained sexual permissiveness in culture and the popular press? Pomerantsev argues that cultural producers of Russia’s twenty-first century can no longer be classified as the intelligentsia class, which has been steadily replaced by aggressive capitalists, searching for the perfect profit formula. They have adopted the concept of “sex sells,” first popularized in the west. Yet economic motives do not fully account for the continued proliferation of sexual imagery, especially violent and sexist depictions, in contemporary Russian culture. Feminism continues to be a dirty word in Russia, gender roles are still largely viewed as binary and innate, and the concept of the heterosexual-procreative family is buttressed rather than challenged. Sociologist Elena Omelchenko concludes that young people, the “children of perestroika,” are generally in favor of state regulation in regards to what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate sexuality, citing “protecting the family structure” as their primary concern. This data is reinforced with the establishment of several “profamily” measures since 2006, mostly targeted at limiting the collective power and visual presence of LGBT Russians. Thus, like in the glasnost period, the proliferation of explicit sexual material has not generally aligned with the stated moral values of many Russians, both private citizens and members of the governing body.

This contemporary situation constitutes a paradox: legal norms and public opinion grow more conservative while the cultural media perpetuates explicit sexual imagery.

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Women are ostensibly given robust sexual agency within the “gold digger” trope, and yet public opinion and “profamily” legislation would suggest that many Russians continue to view women’s appropriate path as one towards marriage and family. It is important to keep in mind, however, that while women’s sexuality has been allowed more public visibility, sexual visibility does not necessarily mean that the definition of normative sexuality has expanded in post-Soviet Russia. The “gold digger” utilizes her sexuality towards the goal of securing a wealthy husband, for the purpose of acting as wife and mother to children. In this instance, perhaps, the ends justify the means. Ultimately, the link between women’s sexuality and family remains unbroken from the glasnost era to the post-Soviet years: women’s sexuality is acceptable insofar as it eventually leads to marriage and children.

The concept of the virile Russian man, however, has definitely gained traction in the post-Soviet period. According to Engel, the newly established market has provided men an ostensible means in which to redeem their masculinity after a perceived period of crisis. It rewards such traits as aggression and competitiveness. President Putin is well known in Russia and the west as the encapsulation of this new masculine paradigm. The rehabilitated Russian man is also sexually dominant, seen as retaking his innate control at the top of the gender hierarchy, and possibly even punishing women for their perceived transgressions during the Soviet period. Sexual violence towards women in Russian culture, can then, in part, be analyzed within the dynamic gender constructions of the post-Soviet period.

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197 Pomerantsev, *Nothing is True*, 16.
It is impossible, however, to make conclusive statements about the social, political, and moral contexts of contemporary Russian discourses on sex without a rigorous scholarly analysis. Within such a study, as in this one, it is necessary to establish the identity of the cultural producers and journalist who generate these discourses. Although the social, political, and economic changes of the last quarter century have painted a convoluted picture of who produces discourses on sex and what their explicit and implicit motivations may be, scholars should continue to be wary of associating visible sexuality with egalitarianism.

The erstwhile examination of filmmakers’ and journalists’ discourses on sex during the glasnost period provides one such example of a time and place where the widespread circulation of sexual discourse cannot reasonably be associated with sexual liberalism or gender egalitarianism. The misleading portrait of sexual progressivism in the glasnost era, which superficially masked intellectuals’ enduring notions of sexuality as primarily associated with procreation, proved to be the latest chapter in Soviets’ problematic history of conceptualizing human sexuality. Intellectuals’ discourses on sex in the perestroika period reflect a wider sense of social, moral, and political disharmony, not a fundamental reevaluation of sex’s role in Soviet society. Sex appears regularly in cinema and the popular press in the glasnost period, and yet the presence of this previously forbidden theme does not reflect a major change in how intellectuals conceptualized sex and sexuality. Filmmakers and journalists ascribed sexuality a “negative” connotation, linking it to familial instability and moral decay. Moreover, the disproportionally destructive weight women’s sexualities carried in glasnost-era film and news media suggests that intellectuals did not implicitly or explicitly extend gender
equality to the sexual realm. Ultimately, sexuality, especially women’s sexuality, was assigned the role of preliminary phenomenon in a Soviet parade of horribles, one which was purported to conclude with social, political, and moral anarchy.

An analysis of discourses on sex in contemporary Russian society would also require an evaluation of the extent of interconnectedness between the state and the producers of discourse. It will be necessary to establish to what degree, if at all, the producers of discourse in the twenty-first century directly represent the state. Even in post-Soviet Russia, and especially in western journalism, the state is frequently deemed to be interchangeable with nongovernmental bodies. It would be a mistake to neglect the sociopolitical autonomy of modern filmmakers, journalists, and television producers, and to assume that contemporary Russia is a totalitarian state. With that said, evaluating the extent of interconnectedness between discourse producers and the state in Russia’s twenty-first century may yield interesting results, considering the state’s renewed involvement in journalism and television, with the establishment of state-controlled news sources like Russia Today and NTV (National Television).

Challenging the notion of the Soviet totalitarian state has been an overarching theme of the preceding chapters as well. The state had varying degrees of power over journalistic and film discourses at different periods in Soviet history. In the last years of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev’s glasnost reforms created the comparatively highest levels of autonomy among cultural producers. In fact, the Soviet Union was flooded with hardcore pornographic materials, both foreign and domestic, by the beginning of the 1990s. Soviet officials never established a comprehensive system of censorship to regulate pornography to replace the previous catch-all system. Intellectuals, filmmakers
and journalists, also utilized sex in their productions. However, they expressed conservatism by using sex and sexuality as a discursive proxy to bemoan the perceived damages of supposed sexual permissiveness. They did so without the prompting of any official bodies, in part as a fulfillment of their unofficial yet obligatory roles as moral vanguards. Thus, this study contributes to a growing series of scholarship in the twenty-first century that challenges the notion of autocracy in Soviet Russia at various points in its history, and aims to reveal a more nuanced understanding of Soviet’s social, moral, and political concerns in the glasnost period.
Filmography


Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears (*Moskva slezam ne verit*). Directed by Vladimir Menshov. 1980. USSR: Mosfil’m.


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