Hypocritical Sexuality of the Late Soviet Period: Sexual Knowledge and Sexual Ignorance

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In this chapter I discuss issues of sexual knowledge and sexual ignorance in relation to the social construction of sexual life. I see sexual ignorance as an essential feature of the hypocritical sexuality of the late-Soviet period. I will demonstrate the linkages that exist between the private/public divide, notions of sexuality, sexual knowledge and ignorance and sex education. Hypocritical sexuality here is a metaphor used to describe a configuration of sexual life that combines liberalised sexual practices with a lack of institutional reflexivity towards these practices. This discrepancy of life practices and institutional arrangements in the sphere of sexuality resulted in the multiple deprivations of sexual life as experienced by Soviet people, contaminating it with discomfort, discontent, double standards, sanctimony, psychological and health risks, violence, and so on. The contemporary transformation of sexual life, though charged with commercialisation and politicisation, serves to destroy this configuration, while hypocritical sexuality is giving way to civilised sexuality, based on institutional reflexivity and sexual knowledge. The discussion on sex education is seen as an indicator of the conflict between a hypocritical and a civilised, or enlightened (prosveshchennoe) attitude towards sexuality.

I intend first to examine the ways in which the private/public distinction can be seen to be relevant in a discussion on the topic of sexuality in Soviet society. I then provide a periodisation of Soviet sexual discourse based on this distinction, which will help me to contextualise the subsequent discussion. I will then turn to the late Soviet period of 'Hypocritical Sexuality', and discuss the nature of sexual knowledge and sex education typical for this period. Finally, I focus on the recent discussion on sex education in secondary schools as an example of the conflict between hypocritical attitudes towards sexuality and new ideas of civilised sexuality.
The public/private distinction in Soviet society and issues of sexuality

I consider the concepts of public and private to be universal sociological and ethno-sociological categories, that are used by sociologists to understand the nature of modern societies, but which are also referred to in everyday life. The public/private distinction penetrates every social action, every human experience. According to this distinction, life experiences are formally regulated by procedural rules and critically debated in public but, on the other hand, certain aspects of the same experiences are silenced, tabooed, and excluded from public discussion, left to be considered in private. In the latter case, behaviour is regulated by traditional, religious and informal rules shared in the community. The boundaries between the private and public domains are ever changing, owing to legal reforms and collective action and media campaigns, which challenge hard distinctions and turn issues that were formerly private into matters of public concern. Thus, for example, in Western societies second-wave feminism brought issues of domestic violence, sexual minorities, child abuse, and so on, on to the agenda for public discussion. The slogan ‘Private is Political’ is but one example of such reformulation of the distinction (see, for example, Benhabib 1992, Eistein 1988, Gelb 1990).

The distinction of private and public in everyday life is mirrored in language. In the Russian language the words that are used to signify privacy are ‘честное’ or ‘личное’. The latter is a derivative of the noun ‘personality’ – ‘личность’ and ‘лицо’ (face, individual). It is used in such phraseological configurations as ‘personal file’ (личное дело, that is, an official document), ‘personal issue’ (личное дело, that is, an issue which a person considers and deals with privately), or ‘personal property’ (личная собственность), that is, assets that belong to a person (not to be confused with private property as interpreted in Marxist thought to identify the assets of exploitation) (Boleshaia sovetskaia... 1978, pp. 577–80). In the Russian language, therefore, one set phrase – ‘личное дело’ – has different meanings in different contexts. In one sense ‘личное дело’ was (and still is) a personal issue that should be kept in secret, not discussed in public, and thus should not be either regulated or articulated by the authorities. The meanings of the personal – личное – had to be learnt in the privacy of the family and/or friendship circle, disseminated by word of mouth through gossip and confession, with people sharing their thoughts and emotions in safety. The antonym for personal in this case is ‘official’, as interpreted by the general public.

In another context личное дело was (is) a personal file, i.e. an official document containing information about the person that was kept in the personnel department of the person’s place of work or in the KGB offices. This information could be used to promote or to hinder one’s career. In this case, ‘Personal’ also meant secret, as bureaucratic personal files were considered to be secret information, available to party-state officials controlling one’s career development. This public/personal division pervaded throughout the linguistic intercourse of Russians during the Soviet period (and beyond). Officially, the ‘personal’ was claimed to be subordinate to the ‘public’ (постсоветское vs личное). However, this border between personal and public was blurred, and changed in character quite significantly at various stages in the Soviet period (see, for example Chkadze and Voronkov 1997; Kharkhordin 1998).

All aspects of life experience belong to both private and public domains, and can be regulated by both sets of rules. This is valid for the sphere of sexuality as well. Sexuality has never belonged to the exclusively private sphere of Russian/Soviet society. It has been structured directly or indirectly by different social institutions, such as legislation and regulations, healthcare system and its practices, system of education and its practices, housing conditions, and so on. Certain aspects of sexual life, however, escaped direct official regulations. The very fact that certain aspects of sexuality remained outside the scope of official politics is structurally important for understanding sexual practices. Sexual knowledge and patterns of its production provide a useful example of an arena in which the private and public aspects of sexuality meet, and thus lend themselves well to an analysis of sexual practices.

The public/private distinction in late Soviet society (from 1956 to the end of the 1980s) has its own distinctive features. Researchers identify an official public sphere – one controlled by the party-state – and a non-official public sphere that escaped the rigid control of the Soviet authorities. This latter realm of at least partly independent activities is labelled variously by different writers: the ‘engendering milieu’ of Oleg Ianiitski; the ‘prerequisites of civil society’ of Vladimir Shlapentokh; the ‘spaces of freedom’ of Leonid Iokin; the ‘public-private sphere’ of Viktor Voronkov (Ianiitski 1996; Iokin 1997; Shlapentokh 1989; Voronkov 1997).

For late Soviet society it was characteristic that open public debates on sexuality were blocked, even though they were allowed, according to the law. Criticism, opposition and independent action took place in the so-called privatised or informal public sphere, that is, the sphere that escaped state control and that was instead based on rules established by the community. Soviet sexual practices were thus framed by tradition, official policy (official public discourse) and non-official public discourse. The contradictory messages of the official discourse on sexuality and sexual practices in the late Soviet period created the configuration that we can call ‘hypocritical sexuality’. The discrepancy between what was ostensibly permitted by law, and the lack of institutional reflexivity or relevant provisions (including sex education and sexual knowledge) are characteristic features of hypocritical sexuality. When they are excluded from the official public domain, repressed human practices (including sexual practices) are forced into the illegal sphere. They become difficult to deal with in a frank and open manner.
They escape normative regulations and become risky, distorted, charged with fear, violence and uneasiness. This is exactly what happened to sexual practices in the late Soviet period.

Let us turn now to the periodisation of the official public discourse of sexuality as it is presented in the literature. This periodisation is just an example of the broader periodisation of the public–private distinction in Soviet society. Official discourses on body and sexuality were incorporated into the specific division of private–public domains in the Soviet period. Sexual practices were affected by the lack of privacy, which was relevant to the neglect in the official discourse of issues connected with the body, apart from when it was considered from the perspective of its mobilisation as a state-owned resource.

Three periods of Soviet sexual discourse
Researchers identify at least three periods of Soviet sexual and body official discourse (policy):

1. Sexual experiment and debate on sexuality after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and during the early 1920s.
2. A repressive mobilisation of sexuality and the body during Stalin’s period in office.
3. A period of neglect of the body and sexophobia that started with the liberalisation of Soviet society at the end of the 1950s, and which lasted until the beginning of the societal transformations of the second half of the 1980s (Kon 1995).

The main borderlines for these public discourse periods were made by the legist on questions of abortion and homosexuality. Here I will refer only to the regulation of abortion and show how it structured sexuality and its meanings for common people.

I will not cover the first period here, for it has no apparent influence on the current debate. The policy of the repression of body and sexuality started with the prohibition of abortion in 1936: from that point, sex and the sexual body ceased to exist in the official public sphere. Sexuality was legally abandoned, this coinciding with the period of the policy of mobilisation of the body in general, that is, the purposeful construction of Soviet male and female bodies. To be precise, the onset of the administration of the body started in 1932, when restrictive passport and residency permit systems were introduced. In addition, mass physical training initiatives, mass studies in the use of arms, and campaigns for the cultivation of cleanliness in the household all took place in the early 1930s in the course of forced industrialisation and urbanisation (see Volkov 1998).

In accordance with these regulations, sex became officially limited to reproduction, and was not discussed in the mass media as a separate issue.

Sexual pleasure and hedonistic attitudes towards the body were labelled as decadent, and became illegal in the same way as old classes of the ancien régime (gentry and kulaks) and abortion. Sexuality was officially considered only in terms of reproduction and, in turn, reproduction (for biological reasons) was held to be the duty of female Soviet citizen-workers. Thus it was female sexuality that was seen only in terms of an exclusive reproductive asset, that had to be exploited (or mobilised) by the state. According to Dallin, ‘Soviet officialdom . . . located women on their mental map somewhere between generators and milk cows’ (Dallin 1977: 390), that should reproduce the necessary amount of labour resources demanded by the state for its purposes. Thus abortion prohibition can be interpreted as part of the exploitation of women’s reproductive capacities: women gave birth not to children of their own, but to citizens of the Soviet state.

The socialist protection of women’s reproductive capacities is thus seen not as liberalisation, but as a special type of enslavement grounded on their indoctrination. Women were provided with social security benefits in return for acting as a particular kind of labour force that should be used for a dual purpose: both as a resource of production and reproduction. Opportunities for individual liberal choice did not exist. Both work and maternity for fertile females were considered as social duties (as abortion was prohibited). The degree of sexual ignorance typical for this period very much fits the image of mobilised sexuality and body. Only professionals had training in these subjects – sexual enlightenment was a non-issue in education policy, as it might, if pursued, have led to the breakdown of the policy of personal body mobilisation being conducted by the party-state.

I should state, of course, that things were not completely as the policy makers would have liked them to be, for everyday life differed considerably from the aims set down in the official discourse. With the abolition of abortion, institutions of the regime thus declared that they would not concern themselves with issues relating to sexual practices (only to their consequences). Furthermore, there was lack of spatial arrangements to deal with personal matters. Sexuality, as a personal issue, was thus repressed. Literally speaking, there was no place for autonomous sexuality available for the Common Soviet Man under the totalitarian regime, as the communal flat and hostel were the most common form of accommodation for the urban household. This was only logical for the purposes of the official public discourse, which destroyed private property as the basis of personal–private–individual rights.

As autonomous sexuality was tabooed in official public discourse, it was forced into the private in the world of anecdotes. Further, popular traditions of contraception survived in privatised public discourse, helping to create niches for autonomous sexuality, and furthering its separation from reproduction. Family or peer-group sexual knowledge were enclaves of sexual enlightenment and sexual liberation.
Hypocritical sexuality: liberalisation of practices combined with lack of institutional reflexivity and sexual ignorance

In the second half of the 1950s, certain bodily rights were restored and guaranteed. Mass housing construction policy was being implemented, allowing thousands of people to move into separate flats, and abortion ceased to be a purely illegal personal issue, with the introduction of a guarantee from the state with regard to the reproductive rights of women. The official regulation of reproduction was controversial (as was gender policy in general): its purpose was to promote dominant femininity based on the balance of work and motherhood. The granting of permission to have abortions, and the provision of separate apartments (though occupied often by the extended family), was the first step for institutional reflexivity on liberated sexuality.

Thus, we can argue, in comparison with the previous stage, this phase was much more liberal as far as sexuality was concerned. Structurally, the legalisation of abortion opened the window for sexual practices that would not be overshadowed by the anticipation or risk of pregnancy. Abortions were made available free of charge, they could be made in state gynaecological clinics, and medical certificates allowed three days full-paid leave after the operation. As a result, abortions were widespread, becoming a universal birth-control technique. As abortion was provided on the basis of medical expertise, women had a chance to get to know (better late than never) opportunities for birth-control through consultations with gynaecologists.

However, this is only one side of the coin. Legislation and statistics alone do not reveal the nature of the message that was being given in the official discourse on gender, body and sexuality in this period. The actual practices of legal abortion regulated by multiple local directions do give a picture of the meanings of abortions in the everyday life of masses of Soviet women. Although it had been legalised, the practice of abortion was inhumane, humiliating, and painful both physically and emotionally for women. Abortion in Soviet hospitals was administered without sufficient anaesthesia, and often it was the case that the medical staff were extremely rude towards the patients. This can be interpreted as a form of state-organised punishment for the sin of having sex without reproduction. Soviet Woman was punished by the state medical facilities for the decision not to be a mother, not to give birth for another Soviet citizen, and for the decision to separate sex from reproduction. Symbolic punishment in the form of physiological pain and psychological shame was considered to be the right price for autonomous sexual pleasure, making liberal sexuality very costly for women (see for example, Voznesenskaia 1991). The responsibilities of women for this sin were evident for both genders, as the punishment was executed on the female body exclusively. Thus, we see the contradiction in the Soviet gender policy: although by law bodily rights and reproductive rights had been declared and seemed to be guaranteed, in daily practice body politics handed out punishment for the privatisation of the female body.

The discrepancy between liberal legislation on sexuality and repressive provisions of this legislation via practices is only one of the aspects of hypocritical sexuality of the period. Another aspect of hypocrisy on the level of official regulations concerns the under-development of industrial production of contraceptive products, and the absence of officially transmitted knowledge on the body and sexuality. The absence of sex education is another indicator of the lack of institutional reflexivity towards sexual practices, in which sexuality was neglected by official public institutions and was regulated by rules based on misinformation and misunderstanding, thus leading to the distorted (uncomfortable) sexuality that I call hypocritical.

In accordance with the general policy of bodily neglect, then, sex education was ignored, good quality contraceptives were not available and not used, and, as a result, sexual knowledge was obtained through folklore or through trial and error practices of learning by doing. The sexual discourse that circulated in the non-official public sphere was fragmentary and euphemistic. It remained a private issue of a person. Thus, for example, underground abortions or abortions obtained through blat or bribes (see Ledeneva 1998) became the principal strategy of women in opposing the politics of the sexual body declared in official discourse. Private arrangements of abortion provided by the social networks of the shadow economy worked as coping strategies in the sphere of gender relations.

One more aspect of hypocritical sexuality can be termed sexual privatisation by default, part of a more general trend associated with the liberalisation of Soviet society in the late 1950s, which was characterised by the practice of privatisation by default as a widespread coping strategy among Soviet citizens. People used state public arrangements (state-public places) for ‘personal’ matters: the shadow economy is one of the examples of this phenomenon. This privatisation project expanded also into the sphere of intimacy and sexuality, as sex in public places – sex in communal flats, in common dormitories, sex in pioneer (children’s) camps, sex in the dormitories of student summer and work camps, sex in labour camps, sex in elevators, on the stairs of buildings, in the woods, at work, and so on – became widespread in Russia during the late Soviet period. These sexual practices were part and parcel of the appropriation and privatisation of official public places.

The liberalisation of sexuality and the ‘sexualisation’ of public places, however, coexisted with a lack of sexual knowledge and a lack of opportunities to put even this limited knowledge into practice. Uncomfortable
sexuality in places that were not designed for sexual purposes was contaminated with violence and heavy drinking. The life stories of the older generation are full of narratives of sexual debauches perceived as rape, or intermingled with excessive alcohol consumption, by both male and female partners. As a result, the lack of institutional reflexivity of Soviet arrangements in relation to the body and sexuality made Russian Soviet sexual pleasures unsafe, difficult and risky (Rotkirk 1999, Temkina 2000).

This statement can be illustrated by the research of Mark Popovskii, who carried out interviews with 140 Soviet émigrés in the 1970s. In answer to the question: 'What hampered your sexual life in the USSR?', 126 informants mentioned the lack of an apartment, 122 the lack of a separate bedroom, and 93 the prying attention of neighbours (in Kon 1997b: 184). The question 'Where?' was always the most difficult one for the Soviet people, especially in the case of premarital and extramarital sex. As one architect told Popovskii: 'We are born in the hallway, we make love in the hallway and we die in the hallway' (in Kon 1995: 184).

There was neglect not only of sexual rights but also a huge cluster of other bodily rights in the official public discourse: the provision of insufficient and filthy, stinking public toilets is one striking and extreme example of this policy. In general, the whole service sector of the economy connected with the comfort of the human body was purposefully under-developed. However, the official and non-official understandings of sexuality differed. Two conceptions of justice (that is, of right and wrong) worked simultaneously in Russian society. If officially sexual rights were hypocritically neglected, unofficially, in the privatized public domain, sexual rights were acknowledged, and people developed strategies to assert them. In the non-official public sphere, people tried to give sexuality space, where and when this was possible. However, the discrepancy between official and informal understandings of sexuality resulted in hypocrisy and double standards on these issues.

In the everyday discourse on sexuality of this period, as we can see from biographical narratives and anecdotes, the focus was on distress and frustration, on the lack of sexual pleasure for women, on the affinity of sex with reproduction and violence, illegal or harmful abortions, and a lack of sexual knowledge (Rotkirk 2000; Zdravomyslova 2000). All these features of discourse can be embraced under the umbrella term of hypocrisy in sexual issues.

Sexual ignorance and first trials of sex education

The lack of institutional reflexivity towards sexuality in the Soviet society contains similarities with the situation in the Victorian era as analysed by Foucault. According to Foucault, in the Victorian era sexuality was silenced, tabooed and non-existent (Foucault 1990). However, such public neglect is interpreted by Foucault as plausible for the development of sexual practices, because they were not subjected to rigid discipline. In a certain sense, when sexuality became subject to public discussion it became distorted and oppressed by the discourse of power. According to this logic, the silencing of sexuality can be seen as a favourable precondition for the 'free' development of sexual practices. Although this partly fits the image of liberalized sexual behaviour in late Soviet society, I would argue that the sexual ignorance that follows from the silencing and neglect of sexuality narrows the horizon of tolerance, makes the stereotypes of normality very rigid, and results in discriminatory patterns of double standards and hypocrisy.

Ignorance is a complicated social phenomenon. Mass ignorance, that is, a gross lack of awareness among the public of a topic of major importance, results in rigid attitudes, a very narrow conception of the norms of healthy sex, and hypocritical attitudes towards the body in general. Hypocrisy is a central feature of late Soviet sexual culture. It reveals itself in the difficulties and unease that people in the late Soviet period found in expressing any kind of bodily desire, this discomfort in relation to the body being just part of a larger bodily ignorance syndrome. The contemporary revalorization of sexuality requires such hypocritical attitudes to be broken down, and for sex education to be developed.

Attitudes towards sex education and scientific research on sexuality underwent the same changes as sexuality itself. After the Bolshevik period of experimentation in the 1920s, the picture by the 1930s had changed radically, as if the door had slammed shut and the window been slapped closed.

Research on sexuality revived in Russia in the late 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. In his comprehensive study of Russian sexual culture, Igor Kon states that with liberalisation 'it became clear that both value orientations and the sexual conduct of Soviet youth were moving in the same direction as those of their counterparts in the West (Kon 1995: 85–106). Research conducted in the 1970s identified a number of trends in Russian sexual conduct. Sexual maturation and the awakening of erotic feelings among adolescents were occurring at an earlier age, as were the first sexual experiences of many. Meanwhile, there was greater social and moral acceptance of premarital sex and cohabitation, and a weakening of double standards in the assessment of the sexual conduct of men and women. Further, there was an enhancement of the significance of sexual satisfaction as a factor in sustainable happy marriage, and a re-sexualisation of women. The taboo nature of sexuality was decreased, and an increase in public interest in the erotic was observed. There was a rise in tolerance of diverse forms of sexuality, while a growing gap emerged between generations with regard to sexual principles, values and behaviour (Golod 1996; Kon 1995.).

The discursive institutionalisation of medical sexology (under the name of sexopathology) at that time claimed that normal sexuality was problem free, and that anyone who had a sexual problem was in need of professional help.
Normal sexuality was natural, which meant that it was learnt by doing and not need education. Sexual knowledge should be practised and learned. This development was similar to the medicalisation of the discourse on sexuality in the Latin nineteenth century and in pre-revolutionary Russia (Engelstein 1992). The establishment of sexopathology as a discipline was an attempt to bring sexuality into the public domain and subject it to medical control. But the medicalisation of the discourse went ahead without the simultaneous establishment of a relevant pedagogical subject in the education system. Treatment was impossible without enlightenment and relevant research. The first Soviet opinion survey that covered this topic, conducted by Boris Grushin, showed that young people complained bitterly about sexual ignorance, and professed to a strong need for professional help.

The first wave (albeit limited) discussion on sex education began in the late 1950s, and the Department of Ethical and Aesthetic Problems in Sex Education was set up in the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. At first, sex education was presented as a form of moral education (the subject introduced in the secondary school curriculum was called 'Ethics of family life'). In 1973 the first Consulting Office on Issues of Marriage and Family was established, and in 1983 a two-part course on preparation of marriage and family life was formally introduced in Russian schools. This course was studied by adolescents aged 15, within a course on human anatomy, while a 34-hour course on the Ethics and Psychology of Family life was studied by children aged 16–17. However, the introduction of this subject in the secondary school curriculum was not matched by appropriate training for school teachers. A generation gap between teachers and pupils resulted in the fact that attitudes and demands of teachers delivering these courses were often very different from those of school children. The fundamentals of contraception and safe sex were not taught in this course, drawbacks that made trials in sexual education ineffective, as they merely contributed to the imagery of hypocritical sexuality as described in this chapter. In the late 1980s, the USSR State Committee on Education announced that the course, which was deemed to have been a complete failure, would be replaced.

**Evidence of sexual ignorance in biographical research**

The lack of sexual and bodily knowledge, and the demand for proper sex education, is clearly demonstrated by biographical research on sexuality in Russia. The following analysis is based on the research on sexuality conducted in St Petersburg in 1996–98, as part of a project on 'Social Change and Cultural Inertia in Contemporary Russia' carried out by the Finnish Academy of Sciences and Helsinki University (Project co-ordinators in Helsinki: Elina Haavio-Mannila and J.P. Roos). The guidelines of the interview covered the main landmarks in sexual life, reproduction, family, and so on. Additional topics included parallel relationships, abortion, birth, sexuality transmitted diseases, contraception, sexual debut, violence and sexual abuse. In the course of the study we conducted 50 interviews with men and women belonging to three generations: those born before 1937, those born between 1937 and 1956, and those born between 1957 and 1973. Although there were a small number of homosexual stories, I focus here only on heterosexual relations.

The research revealed distinct generational and milieu differences in the way that people spoke about sexuality, and thus (I would argue) in sexual culture in contemporary Russia. In the third cohort (those born 1957–73), there is an obvious difference with the first two cohorts with regard to issues of institutional reflexivity towards the issues of sexuality: sexual knowledge, sex education, production and usage of contraception, separation of sex from reproduction, and so on. For the first two generations, the repressive mobilisation and neglect of body and sexuality were emphasised. This is expressed in complaints about uncomfortable sexual life in the communal apartments, the lack of contraceptive culture, poor treatment in the abortion and maternity hospitals, the lack of hedonistic orientations in sex. These violations of bodily rights are seen as harmful and depriving. Bodily knowledge for these generations was a privilege of certain professions: medical professions, biologists, dancers, sportsmen, that is, those for whom this knowledge (both practical and theoretical) was the main resource for status achievement in professional careers. Stories from all generations contain narratives of sexual violence and abuse, contamination of sex by alcohol consumption, a lack of body knowledge, and sometimes a feeling of hatred and shame of their own bodies as something insignificant and dirty. The stories give an impression of deprived sexuality and difficulties in expressing sexual desire, organising sexual life, fitting sexual practice into one's life. Elements of the Sex as a Sin script are much more vivid in the first two cohorts than in the younger one.

Public ignorance and a lack of open public discussion make everyday discourse on sexuality hypocritical. This hypocrisy shows itself in double standards in the sexual norms of men and women, a rigid understanding of the nature of 'normal' sex, as well as in risky unsafe and violence-charged sexual practices, and the reinforcement of the traditional mingling of sexuality with officially registered marriage and reproduction. I can illustrate such ignorance and hypocrisy on sexual issues by extracts from biographical narratives.

- **Case one.** A boy of 12 concluded that he had syphilis because he touched a girl with whom he says 'everybody goes'. For him the clear symptom of the disease was his teenage pimples (1997).

- **Case two.** A young woman of 18 learnt from her mother that virginity is a highly valuable resource in her life strategy and that men have double standards with regard to the sexual conduct of men and women. She
started her sexual life when 15 and became a highly experienced sexual partner, yet never had actual sexual intercourse, managing to preserve her virginity (1997).

- Case three. A woman born in 1952 recollected that she had learnt from her mother that she should marry as a virgin, otherwise her husband would never treat her with proper respect. As she had had sexual experience before marriage, she had to simulate virginity on her wedding day, by undergoing vaginal surgery in 1972. Her husband never found out about this.

- Case four. In 1979 a woman of 19 consulted a gynaecologist as she was sure she was pregnant. When the doctor asked her when her last period had been, she answered that it had ended two days before. Her 26-year-old partner was not able to provide any further sexual knowledge.

- Case five. A woman born in the end of the 1920s was sure (in 1985) that her daughter's ectopic pregnancy had been caused by anal sex.

These are just amusing cases for the most part, but there are also dramatic and even tragic accounts. The lack of institutional reflexivity towards the ongoing changes of the liberalisation of sexual culture can be witnessed in the biographical reports on sexual debut, which was often accompanied by excessive drinking, unsafe sex, violence and abuse in an environment not conducive to the romanticisation of sexual practices. The official taboo around late Soviet sexuality was a subject of anecdote culture and children's folklore, that tells us much about the nature of the Russian Eros.

Discussion on sex education (end of 1990s)

A liberation of sexuality is taking place in the course of the current process of social transformation in Russia. One of the first symptoms is the problematisation of this sphere in public discourse. In common with many other post-communist societies, the developing discourse on sexuality has become a hot topic, with numerous TV programmes dealing with the subject, while pornographic films have become available for all ages with the spread of new media and information opportunities (video films and Internet sites are available without censorship). This reinvention of the sexual body – as a body of desire – and the manipulation that surrounds this desire should not be seen as a minor issue to be considered only from the pedagogical point of view. The manipulation of the sexual body is part of the marketisation of every item or aspect of life that is marketable, and part of the politicisation of every possible issue by different political forces. The mass media works as one of the main actors of such manipulation. The evidence of such tendency is the mass spread of pornography on the one hand, and moralising political discussions of conservatives on the other.

However, opinion polls show regularly that since the end of the 1980s, some 60–70 per cent of the population are in favour of sex education, while between three and 20 per cent are against it (Ron 1997a), thus demonstrating a clear social demand for sex education. In 1996 the Ministry of Education of Russia applied to the United Nations Foundation of Population and UNESCO for financial help for three years' support in developing a curriculum for a 30-hour course for the 7th to 9th grades (12–15 year old pupils) of 16 pilot Russian secondary schools. The pilot project started in summer 1996 and included research and trials in 16 secondary schools in the towns of Moscow, Krasnoyarsk, Novosibirsk, Kurgan, Samara, St Petersburg, Arkhangelsk, Izhevsk, Jaroslavl' and other large towns. The project was coordinated by the Russian Association for Family Planning, which has more than 300 regional offices all over Russia. New establishments were also set up, including medical pedagogical centres and youth centres.

Although the programme was not adopted, the research and trials that were made (which were not without their shortcomings) caused a discussion on this topic to take place in the mass media at the end of 1990s. The issue was debated not only in the media, but in the State Duma as well, which led the Ministry of Education to cancel the project on 'Sexual Education of Russian school Children' in April 1997.

Despite the fact that the population in general supported sexual enlightenment, a section of the pedagogical elite as well as parents, mostly from the older generation, rigidly opposed it. In the discussion on the issue of school-based sex education, national patriotic forces, as well as church authorities, started to moralise and criticise programmes of family planning and sex education, as well as the bill on the reproductive rights of women and commercial erotica. Certain voluntary associations of parents also expressed their negative attitude to the practices of the sexual education classes in primary schools (that is, Moscow NGO Parental Initiatives; the Jaroslavl' Committee for the Protection of Life and the Family). In their criticisms they used arguments similar to those of the Pro-life movement in the USA. Religious organisations also supported the anti-abortion attitudes, while a warning that sex education would provoke all of the social problems seen in Western societies was disseminated among the teaching force. This campaign was professionally launched by the Orthodox Church and the Foundation of Socio-Psychological Health of Family and Child. They argued that safe sex is the way to moral dissolution, and sex education in schools would provoke earlier sexual debuts.

The discussion was started by two psychologists, L. Medvedeva and T. Chikhova, opponents of the experiment on sex education, who published a paper that had been presented to the Duma Committee on Security in Rossiiskaya gazeta (15 March 1997). The opponents of the project claimed that it was the sexual revolution and the development of sex education in the USA that was responsible for the growth of the number of teenage abortions,
and sexual deviance, including homosexuality and incest. They brought forward evidence that contraceptive pills resulted in the growth of the spread of breast cancer of women. Sex education, they argued:

Should not be a school subject, but should be part of the enlightenment of one’s soul. When a boy is taught to be brave and generous, and a girl is taught to be prim and proper and a good housewife – this is sex education which starts from the very first days of one’s life.

(Medvedeva and Chikhova 1997)

Similarly, Academician Baranov of the Research Centre for the Health Security of Children and Teenagers in Moscow believed that sexual education programmes would not prevent ‘sexual dissolution (raspushennost)’, which is a threat for the nation’s health’. He noted that:

It would be useful to return to the old traditions of the gender separate education in secondary schools where such educational programmes would be more efficient.

(Baranov 1997)

Another argument against the introduction of sex education in secondary schools was based on the failure of the educational programme of the 1980s. This failure, as was explained above, was caused by the authoritarian pattern of education, as well as the psychologically naive material of the course. The Orthodox Church opposed the programme on the grounds that it was incompatible with Russian culture and had a destructive effect on morality. Church representatives collected more than 5000 signatures against the programme, and passed them to the Duma. The programmes were also opposed by conservative demographers, who argued that they promote a policy of national extinction, and would lead to the demographic decline of the Russian population. With regard to sexual knowledge, an Academician of the Russian Pedagogical Academy, D. Kolesov, even claimed that people have a right to be ignorant:

A human being has a right not to know what he does not want to know. One should not impose the information that is not demanded.

(quoted in Klimov 1997)

On the other side, experts and leaders of the research groups that were involved in the programme (I. Kon, A. Petrovskii, V. Cherviakov and B. Shapiro) emphasised the necessity of sex education for the development of civilised, responsible sexual behaviour. They claimed that opponents of the project misinterpreted statistics, and argued for a sexual puritanism that could not be achieved in the context of liberalised sexuality. It was agreed that the programmes should undergo accreditation, and that a commitment to collaboration among physicians, teachers, parents and the general public should be guaranteed before any programme was launched in the schools. The main issues to discuss are: who should teach such programmes, what forms of education on the topics of intimacy are relevant and effective, and the development of understanding of the cultural specificity of the programme of sex education in Russia.

In reaction to the campaign against sex education, Professor Igor Kon, a famous expert on Russian sexual culture, claimed that the critique was part of a sexual counter-revolution, which he believed would not be successful. He saw the attack on sex education as a part of a broader campaign against sexual liberation, including opposition to the bill on the Reproductive Rights of Women that had been submitted to the Duma by the ‘Women of Russia’ faction (the head of which was then Ekaterina Lakhova – 1993–96). The issue of abortion was at the core of the bill. It was argued that the reproductive rights of women, including the right of abortion and the right for contraception, should be provided legally and institutionally (Kon 1997a). Kon claimed that the school is the only institution capable of dealing with the sexual enlightenment of the younger generation, as the family had proved to be inefficient in this sphere, and the mass media does not provide real education, but is full of cheap erotic material and semi-pornography.

In the end, the criticism aimed at the pilot project resulted in its suspension by the Ministry of Education in 1997, although this suspension may prove to be temporary.4

For civilised sexuality

Debates on sex education in school are symptomatic of debates on social change in post-Soviet Russia. In spite of the protests of conservatives, attempts to establish programmes of sexual enlightenment are being made here and there. For a sociologist it is important to see the reinvention of the body and sexuality as part of the general transformation process in Russia. The revival of sexuality in practice and discourse cannot be perceived separately from the major societal changes that are taking place.

The discussion of sexual knowledge and sex education is only one part of the discourse on sex and the reinvention of the body. When the body and sexuality have started to be public items – widely covered in marketised and politised discourse – the education system can hardly remain untouched by such developments, for the realities of everyday life demand attention from the schools. It has to be seen, then, as an institutional reaction to the changes, and as part of the change itself. As part of the reinvention of sexuality and body, the discussion on sex education has come to the fore among the post-Soviet public. The problematisation of sexuality in the discussion on sexual knowledge and reproductive rights is indicative of the changing understandings of the role of the family, and of the problems of national identity and moral education.
standpoints. The first – the conservative one – is articulated by the proponents of Soviet hypocritical sexuality. The second – the liberal one – is articulated by the supporters of civilised or enlightened sexuality. The main feature for hypocritical sexuality of the Soviet society is the combination of liberalised sexual practices with a lack of knowledge about, and acceptance of responsibility in, such practices. Hypocritical sexuality has harmful consequences for the quality of health and psychological development. The neglect of body and sexuality, and the absence of relevant knowledge has the serious effect of narrowing the definition of what constitutes normal sexuality, and results in sex becoming risky and unsafe. If the public demand for sex education is not provided by educational institutions, then such learning will take place through actual practice and through knowledge transmitted by peer groups. The social demand for sex education is evident, and the education system is being called upon to promote a civilised approach to sexuality, yet civilised sexuality will be difficult to achieve without a real attempt to develop efficient programmes of sex education. The results of the discussion on sex education are dubious. On the one hand, the project was cancelled, but, on the other, the issue was debated in the public domain. This means that there are prospects and hopes for the new developments of civilised sexuality.

Notes
1 Late Soviet sexuality is referred to as hypocritical by such researchers as I. Kon (Kon 1995) and A. Rotkirk (Rotkirk 2000).
2 In a similar fashion, the Hungarian sociologist Elmar Hankiss suggested the theory of ‘second society’. He describes the split into first and second societies under Hungarian socialism, the latter including all actions that were not subject to party-state control.
3 Incidentally, this was also the time when gender division in schools was abolished.
4 The discussion on sex education formed just part of the process of problematisation of the issues of sexuality in the public sphere. In the discourse it is stated that the main feature for contemporary Russian sexuality is a combination of liberalised sexual practices with a lack of knowledge and responsibility of sexual practices. This discrepancy has harmful consequences for health and for psychological development. The level of venereal disease grew 51 times in the period 1994–99, for example, while the number of abortions per 100 deliveries in Russia is eight times more than in the USA, ten times greater than in France, and 20 times more than in Holland (Kon 1995).

References
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