TITLE: WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS, FEMINISM, AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN RUSSIA

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WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS, FEMINISM, AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN RUSSIA

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Abstract

Women's movements in Russia are developing in close contact with and with support from the international women's movement. We studied participants in a series of seminars on civic activism, organized under the leadership of an American feminist, with Russian collaboration, which took place in diverse regional locations: Tver, Ekatrinburg, Cheboksary, Novocherkassk, Izhvesk, Obinsk and Zhukovsky. These seminars, designed to teach political organizing skills to women, seem to be an effective means of providing Western support for the development of civil society in Russia. Our data include surveys, field notes at the seminars and transcribed tapes of seminars and focus groups.

We placed the participants into three broad types: “veterans” of the Soviet-era women’s councils (zhensovet); self-identified feminists with ties to the West; and a majority who were distributed between these two types. The issues that animated their concerns differed only slightly: the “veterans” gave more priority to pragmatic needs (housing, consumer goods, social services), while the “feminists” put more emphasis on labor force discrimination. All participants, however, expressed serious concern about gender inequality, expressed typically in the “international” language of human rights. They also emphasized consciousness-raising both for themselves and for women in general.

There was disagreement, often vehement, among activists about whether women were essentially different from men. This had implications both for their understanding of issues (favoring or opposing benefits for women as mothers) and for their strategic thinking, since those who saw women as essentially different from men expected women to be “naturally” antiwar, and held women to a higher standard of moral behavior in politics. This perception contributed to the loss of support for Women of Russia, since this bloc was seen as inadequately antiwar and insufficiently supportive of social welfare. The lack of support for Women of Russia, however, did not indicate a lack of support for the independent women’s movement.

There was agreement among virtually all participants that women should be active in electoral politics, and that women’s politics should be carried out in collaboration with men. Indeed, activists stressed the need for broad social change, especially for the establishment of “rule of law” in Russia, as a prerequisite for achieving any substantive goals for women as such. Furthermore, they saw their own local activism as part of the process of creating civil society, which they also interpreted as essential to the development of state accountability.
I. Project Overview: 1994 - 1996

In 1994, the principal investigators began a multi-methodological, longitudinal study of women's activism in Russia. Data was gathered primarily by studying a project, “Russian Political and Civic Forums,” designed by Sarah Harder (University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire) and supported by National Peace Foundation funds from the National Endowment for Democracy, and the Eurasia Foundation. The Forums were organized by Harder (past president of the American Association of University Women and current Vice-President of the International Association of University Women) and a Russian partner organization, Prolog, directed by Olga Bessolova. Thus far, twelve Forums have been held throughout Russia. The data presented here were gathered at eight of these three-day seminars during 1995 and 1996. We gathered data during two seminars in Zhukovsky, one in Obninsk, and one in each of the following cities: Cheboksary (in the ethnic Republic of Chuvashia), Tver, Novocherkassk, Izhevsk, and Ekaterinburg. The seminars in Zhukovsky and Obninsk brought together women from various outlying regions with local residents; the other seminars were for women living in those regions. In each seminar an expert team consisting of Sarah Harder, an invited American women’s movement consultant, and four or more Moscow-based women’s movement activists also took part. Some of the seminars included additional invited speakers, either American (e.g., from various funding agencies) or Russian (e.g., politicians and political analysts). The purpose of these seminars was to develop a “women’s agenda” in each region that could be implemented by a coalition of women’s groups. The techniques advanced in the seminars involved media relations, lobbying elected officials and coalition building.

The Data

Research associates attended each seminar and took extensive field notes, taped and transcribed the recordings, held focus group discussions about feminism and discrimination, and fielded the surveys designed for this research. In this paper, we rely on field notes, focus groups and transcripts from the seminars, and the quantitative survey data. We have a survey sample size of 132 women total. The research associates were given much latitude in deciding how to implement the research design, given the challenge of collecting data in regions far from Moscow (including broken xerox machines and participants who came and went because of other obligations).

For this reason, certain components of the design were not completed at every single site. For example, only survey data was collected at one seminar by Harder (Izhevsk). The audiotapes from three sites (Ekaterinburg, Novocherkassk, and Zhukovsky in 1996), were never provided to us by the seminar leaders. In Ekaterinburg, participants were not available in the evenings for focus groups. Due to time constraints imposed by the seminar leaders, we were not able to run focus groups in Tver, Obninsk or the second seminar in Zhukovsky, or to gather quantitative data at Obninsk. In the end, we have field notes from six seminars, taped transcripts of the seminars from three sites, focus group transcripts from three sites, and survey data from six regions.
**The Women Participants**

Perhaps the most remarkable success of these seminars was the sample of actively engaged Russian women leaders who participated. Academics were best represented, with participants from scientific centers in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Tver, Zhukovsky, the Urals, Kharkov (Ukraine) and elsewhere. There also were significant numbers of engineers, teachers, journalists, physicians and psychologists. In addition, in every region, invited speakers and short-term participants included members of City and State legislatures and women working in municipal administration.

The participants at these seminars were not representative of Russian women. They were a highly educated elite of predominantly professional women; virtually all were members and/or leaders of civic organizations. The 132 women represented more than fifty organizations. The gender-focused organizations varied dramatically, ranging from umbrella organizations (e.g., Ural Association of Women), local autonomous women’s groups (e.g., Women’s Light, in Tver), zhensovety (Soviet era women’s councils, e.g., Union of Women of Sverdlovsk), autonomous groups which stem from zhensovety (e.g., Prolog), and academic feminist groups (e.g., Kharkov Center for Gender Studies). Twelve different charity and social services groups were represented, ranging from the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers, to the Popular Movement for Sobriety, to the Humanitarian Institute. Six business-focused groups were represented including the Romashko Fund (Moscow) and several Confederations of Business Women from different regions. There were also a few explicitly political groups (e.g., Women for a New Russia, in Tver), ecological groups (e.g., YuMAN from the Chuvash region), book clubs (e.g., the Society of Book Lovers, in Tver) and youth groups (e.g., Vesta, in Ekaterinburg).

**Defining “Feminism” and the “Women’s Movement.”**

It is important to distinguish between feminism as an international social movement and the women’s movement as a broader, more inclusive mobilization of women. As a participant in the Zhukovsky (1996) seminar articulated nicely, “The whole women’s movement isn’t covered by feminism, it’s broader than that.” The defining feature of feminism is the focus on changes in women’s social status: access to economic resources, power to affect decisions in the community as a whole, and autonomy in relation to personal life choices. “Women’s movements” refer to women who are motivated as women to work on issues that they view as particularly important, such as ecology, health, de-industrialization, poverty or peace, and by definition, involve a collective mobilization of women as social and political actors. Feminist groups, that is, those organizations that are concerned with gender relations as a target of social and political change, are but one part of the women’s movement.

**II. A Typology of Activist Identities**

In these seminars, nearly all participants could be readily classified as part of the women’s movement, in that they were already active in one or more organizations of women with social and political change goals. We see these participants as divided into three basic types.
The first type, a minority of the seminar participants (especially strongly represented in Chuvashia) had a strong self-definition as “long-term activists in the women's movement,” by which they meant the zhensovet, the women's organizations created and integrated into the Soviet system, and controlled by the Communist Party. Zhensovet activities are “pragmatic” (e.g., trying to regain financing for day care centers); they are not overtly designed to alter gender relations in society or undermine gender hierarchy (cf. Molyneux 1985). A variety of non-zhensovet-based groups also were occupied with such pragmatic concerns (e.g., the Women’s Health Center, in Tver).

By contrast, a second type of participant did not consider the zhensovet to be part of the women's movement, because of the political (Soviet) roots of the zhensovet. This type of activist came to the seminars primarily from Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Tver, and often represented explicitly feminist organizations. In most cases, these women were affiliated with Centers for Gender Studies or nascent Women’s Studies Programs at universities. These centers include a number of mostly young women with no experience in the zhensovet. Many of them self-identify as feminists, and most are active only in autonomous women's movement organizations. The self-identified feminists were openly disparaging of the zhensovet, seeing them as “top down” groups, and had explicitly created new organizations “without hierarchy” in opposition to the zhensovet style of organization. These new style feminist organizations were founded by academics who had read and were influenced by Western feminist writings well before the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is only this type, a minority of the seminar participants, that was clearly concerned with gender relations as a target of social and political change. These activists often had ongoing ties to Western feminist groups and feminist academics in the U.S., Germany, and Scandinavia.

The third type of participant falls between these two extremes, neither entirely committed to the old-style zhensovet organization nor fully identified with feminism. They were particularly represented in umbrella organizations of women, in service organizations helping women and in women’s NGOs that run the gamut of civic concern. Some of the participants who fit in this category have worked in the zhensovet but are now also founders or members of autonomous women's groups, business women's groups and chapters of national/ international women's groups such as the Russian Association of University Women. Others were never active on women’s issues before but have recently been mobilized by the economic and social crisis. Many of those in this category have less strong identities as women’s movement activists than do the other two types, being neither “long-term veterans of the women’s movement” nor “feminists.” The majority of the seminar participants were of this third type.

Despite these differences in organizational background, it is not appropriate to make too sharp a distinction in goals and issues between the women with zhensovet experience and continued involvement, and the founders and activists in the new, autonomous women's organizations.
III. Issues: What's Shared and What's Under Debate

Most of these women were self-consciously part of the intelligentsia and particularly aware of the
disadvantages their class is suffering under the form of market capitalism currently in practice (one
described it as "cave [man] capitalism"). Many pointed to the high rate of unemployment among women
with higher education as particularly outrageous. They saw themselves as part of a "women's elite" with
different thoughts and needs from the average "woman in the street." As well-educated professionals,
they felt personally insulted and angered by the dismissive comments made about women by politicians
and in the press. They were quick to remind others -- including the seminar leaders -- of their high level
of professional accomplishment (and of that attained by Russian women as a group).

Perhaps the strongest shared belief was their awareness of sexual inequality as a serious problem
for women like themselves in Russia today. Based on the survey data, we see over half (56%) as very
aware of sexual inequality (they agreed with three or more of these statements: that women are less
recognized than men, that women face discrimination in elections, that discrimination against women is
not due to women's preferences, and that discrimination is due to social organization). Ninety-six percent
of the women agreed with at least two of the above statements, indicating a near universal awareness of
sexual inequality in contemporary Russia among the women who attended these seminars.

While issues of discrimination were widely recognized as serious problems, they were not often
expressed in the language of feminism -- except by those activists of the self-identified feminist type.
The participants framed their concerns in terms of justice, equality, rights, and dignity, and as a response
to the denigration they experience both individually and collectively as women. The use of the word
feminism itself was problematic. As one woman from Novocherkassk said, "for some reason, for a long
time I did not know the exact definition of feminism. I always heard that 'feminist' is a kind of abusive
word." In Zhukovsky this opinion was also expressed by a Russian sociologist, who argued, "other
words need to be used . . . feminist should be avoided." Still, these seminars clearly changed many
women's minds about feminism. Another woman with a previously negative view of feminism said,

"Just in these two days I started seeing a glimmer of hope, hope that everything may
be well. Because I came to the seminar without expecting anything . . . And in these
two days I found something in myself of which I was unaware before. For me feminism
is not only freedom and independence but also realizing your possibilities. I do want
to realize myself. I do want to accomplish something. Therefore for me it is like a little
spark that can become a fire in the future."

Our field notes show that the infamous "click" (the awareness of a personal stake in challenging gender
expectations) that American feminists identified two decades ago happened regularly during these
seminars.

In addition to these common concerns, there were points of disagreement. One point of
contention that often arose between the seminar leaders and participants was whether a women's
movement, and in this case, specifically a women's agenda, had to focus on "women's issues" or could include community concerns. The Russian women invoked children's needs (hunger, lack of supervision, education), problems affecting men (the draft), as well as shared community problems (the need for the rule of law, for solutions to problems associated with economic and political transitions, and for ending the war in Chechnya), as appropriate targets of concern for a "women's agenda." In fact, in every seminar the issues spontaneously identified as priorities were societal problems, such as the need for the rule of law and for renewed industrial investment. At some sites, the need for women's consciousness-raising also emerged spontaneously.

The issue on which the participants were most divided among themselves, and on which the American trainers were themselves very ambiguous, was whether women's movements — indeed feminism itself — should be based on women's distinctiveness, their "essential" feminine values. We refer to this view of women's movements as "maternalist," as it lays claim to special insights and issues because of women's role as mothers. The American seminar leaders sometimes invoked specifically maternalist frames for feminism. It was a seminar leader who encouraged the women to see themselves as able to clean up "dirty politics" because of their "experience in housekeeping" and to invoke "women and children" as the target of social policy. There was open disagreement among the participants in the seminars (with women interrupting each other's statements) and seriously conflicting opinions in our survey data as to whether women are "naturally" created for motherhood and domesticity.

Nearly half (46%) of the women who answered these questions on our survey agreed with at least one of the following statements: that child care was more appropriate for women; that housework was more appropriate for women; that it was better for Russian society for women to make a home and care for children; that the most important thing for a wife to do was to please her husband, that employed mothers cannot give their children as much warmth and security as non-employed women; and that by nature, women are happiest when making a home and caring for children. Slightly more than a third (35%) of the participants disagreed with every one of these statements, and so can be classified as social constructionists who do not believe that women's role is necessarily defined by domestic responsibilities. The rest (12%) agreed with every one of the statements; we interpret this small group of women as "essentialists," true believers in biologically based sex differences.

Many activists directly repudiated maternalist frames, arguing that women should not be defined by their childbearing capacity. For example, at a seminar in Zhukovsky, when one woman from the Don region implied that women should be valued because they create life, another participant, from Belarus, responded, "we need to raise the status of women as people, not just as mothers," and then argued for an end to sex-role stereotyping for children. Many of the women in the room nodded their heads in agreement.

Despite such repudiation of gender stereotyping by some seminar participants, others based
their arguments in support of women's need to be politically active on essentialist beliefs about women's maternal role and character. Some women claimed that women's entry into politics would benefit society because women were on a higher moral plane than men. For example, one woman from Cheboksary declared, "women will never vote for war!" She continued to say that "if women do not enter it [politics], it will stay dirty." Regarding women's maternal roles, several participants stated that women's need to be politically active was related to the state's failure to meet its responsibility to support them as mothers. One participant elaborated on that point:

"Today a mother is [made to feel] guilty that she has kids, that they want to eat, that they want to study... Today a woman feels guilty that she cannot earn enough to feed them, that she was fired from [her] job, guilty that she has two kids. If she had known about it earlier, she would have probably not become a mother... And in addition to this what she hears from the mass media is that a woman should return to the family... The state does not want to take on the main role it was created for, i.e., to protect the interests of the elderly and children. That is, the state refuses to fulfill its functions and considers that a woman, a mother should fulfill them."

The Russian maternalist arguments tend to presume that women have a right to a professional career as well as a right to state support for the family. This argument rests on a concept of the worker-mother that has long been both ideologically supported and experientially grounded (cf. Ferree 1995).

IV. Political Strategies: Shared Presumptions and Debated Priorities

The women who attended these seminars shared a basic belief that women should become politically involved. Over half the survey sample (58%) agreed with all four of these pro-political involvement statements: politics is very important to me; a great deal of attention is needed to women in politics as an issue; both women and men should be elected to the position of Deputy to the State Duma; both women and men should be national leaders. Nearly everyone else agreed to at least some of those statements, only one woman disagreed with all of them. Four out of five (82%) agreed that women should organize an independent movement to eradicate sex-based discrimination.

Even though the majority saw women's social activism as necessary, the question of whether women-as-women had a special role in politics was hotly debated. For some, this issue was resolved by their belief that women had higher moral standards and could, by virtue of their gender be a force for general social reform. Others presumed that women and men share the same political characteristics, for better or for worse. For these women, the need for women's participation in politics was not based on special moral qualities but on the distinctive problems women face2.

The first group of women shared certain essentialist beliefs about women's moral character. They defined women's and men's natures differently, seeing women as more peaceful, cooperative, and altruistic. This self-definition was not linked, as it has been in the US or in Western Europe, with a political stance of separatism from male organizations and "male" electoral politics. Where Outshoorn
(1991), for example, describes the “distaste for dirty hands” as keeping Dutch feminists out of electoral politics for over a decade, these Russian women did not find their own distaste for dirty hands a reason to avoid the electoral arena. One woman, herself a failed political candidate, remarked, “when there are no women in politics, then men pass laws that lead to social discrimination against women, first, and then against society as a whole. Society is also being discriminated against morally … We [women] can do everything in a civilized fashion.”

For others, however, it was evident that women, too, could and would play dirty politics by the “male” rules. They saw the problem as elected women “behaving like men” when they get access to power -- “selling their vote for a Volga” (a Soviet-made car used by state officials), promising one thing and doing another. One participant in Zhukovsky in 1995 said, “I do not equate a woman with something moral and positive in politics.” Others criticized women leaders for being willing to compromise moral principles for the political expediency of alliances with men.

There was, however, no belief among the participants that women should never work with men. Activists, including the self-defined feminists in autonomous groups, apparently considered the issue of when and how to form coalitions with men to be primarily a pragmatic one. It was not uncommon for them to protest an image of feminism as separatist or to affirm the usefulness of broad-based alliances. One participant insisted, for example, that “it is good for men to be in the women's movement. That is why the slogan should be as follows: ‘Everything which is good for women is good for men.’”

The participants seem less concerned over the issue of working with men than with the difficulties of working with women. The lack of solidarity among women in politics was seen as a particularly troubling problem for pursuing a “women's agenda.” If women, like men, cannot be trusted to represent women when given a mandate, what is the use of trying to put women into the parliament? The activists quizzed the American seminar leaders about the likelihood that American women politicians would follow individual ambition rather than collective goals, and about the degree to which women voters accept women candidates as particularly representing them. Some activists wanted to hold women leaders to a higher standard than the men, whom they expected to merely “play the woman card,” seeking their votes but then ignoring their interests, but others argued that women candidates, too, just “play the woman card” during electoral campaigns. One woman in Cheboksary argued:

“When both women-candidates and men-candidates are saying, “I am for women,” it means they are fighting for the women's electorate … It does not mean at all that they will continue working in this direction in the future. Look at these “Women of Russia.” They came to power promising to pursue a women's program. People believed them, supported them, and women believed them. But today in many cases they are not protecting women's interests. How could they have such a stand about Chechnya? Is that a woman's
stand? For war in Russia! And on the budget, they voted neither for nor against. They vacillated between both sides.”

V. Women of Russia and the Women’s Movement

This one woman’s critique of the Women of Russia bloc found other echoes among our seminar participants. The support for Women of Russia (WOR) had been quite significant among these participants in 1993 but had since fallen dramatically. Our findings indicate that about half (52%) of these participants had voted for WOR in 1993. However, asked how many currently believed that the bloc was effective, only 30% agreed. Similarly, asked if WOR represented women in parliament, less than a third (28%) believed they did. Those who did support the bloc were slightly more likely to prioritize factors affecting the quality of daily life such as social services, consumer goods and housing. Otherwise, they held no significantly different attitudes from other participants, including their likelihood of seeing women as essentially different from men, support for women’s political involvement, or awareness of gender inequality.

The WOR representatives were especially strongly denounced for taking what participants perceived to be a position short of complete denunciation of the war in Chechnya. Indeed, some participants interpreted WOR’s stand as a capitulation to “male” politics. The Women of Russia deputies were perceived as pragmatic politicians who entered into coalitions, traded votes, and failed to institute effective social welfare programs as their platform had promised. As our data would suggest, the bloc did not do nearly as well in the 1995 election. This disillusionment, however, was only with this bloc, not with politics or the women’s movement. Although disillusionment with WOR is wide and deep, the strength of WOR as a particular political organization should not be confused with the level of support for the women’s movement in Russia, as evidenced both in the survey and by the fact of seminar attendance.

Placing the Russian Women’s Movement in an International Context

The Russian women’s movement is developing in close contact with, and with much support and encouragement from, the international women’s movement. Some of the activists had been to Beijing for the Fourth International Women’s Conference and others were familiar with the Plan for Action agreed upon there. The Conference’s framing of women’s rights as human rights was clearly seen positively and may have influenced the activists’ tendency to use rights and justice language, for example, promoting a plan to create the office of human rights commissioner who could act against gender discrimination as a type of human rights violation.

At present, forming women’s political organizations that can effectively compete for grants from international fund sources seems to be one way in which educated and articulate women can put their intelligence to work. This is not a negative reflection upon the sincerity of the activists’ convictions, but rather an aspect of the opportunity structure in Russian politics. The NGO form of organization, in contrast to formal electoral politics or “cave [man] capitalism,” offers a route to influence and
economic survival open to women as well as to men. On the one hand, this means that women of
ability have a means of using their energies for the common good; on other hand, it places women's
"autonomous" organizations in a specifically dependent position vis-a-vis international foundations
and NGOs (see Sperling 1997). In the economic collapse and social crisis conditions of contemporary
Russia, women activists experience the women's movement as an opportunity to study, to gain a wider
perspective, to imagine some positive future for themselves and for others. Their volunteer work, as
well as work for which they are paid, thus provides an outlet for the exercise of their talents.

VI. Ideological Beliefs and Strategies in Current Women's Movements

One of the most commonly expressed desires from the seminar participants was for what 1960s
American feminists labeled "consciousness-raising." The participants also clearly valued the seminars
for the chance they offered to exchange experiences, to experience the personal as political, and to
learn more about feminism. One woman positively evaluated the seminar this way:

"To fight alone, to think about something alone, to organize something alone, is very
hard. I realize this. I was struggling for three years in order to comprehend this in two
days. Therefore, it would be very nice to have more of these seminars, much more . . .
Because when you feel this real support, then you really want to work and live."

The activists at the seminars often spoke of consciousness-raising as a pressing need for other women
as well.

For these activists, the question of what constitutes discrimination remains indefinite. Part of
the issue was the absence of a tradition of enforcement of equal treatment in employment. Not being
certain of what is "natural" to the operation of markets and capitalism (and thus inevitable) and what is
a correctable "imperfection" in the market, the women wondered what role the law might play (if and
when the legal mechanisms of the state were developed to a point where laws were enforced). The
activists offered a variety of examples of job discrimination and sexual harassment that under American
law would certainly be actionable. For example, one woman complained,

"A woman is the first to be fired, particularly if she has children . . . And [women] are
given less salary for the same work and [their] merits are not noticed. That is,
everything is so interconnected. This is what makes me crazy and irritates me so much.
But there is nothing to be done about it."

Another woman noted, "It is the same thing as the labor legislation which states that when you are
being hired for a job, discrimination is prohibited. But this is violated all over." But Russian law is
virtually an oxymoron, and there is no practical referent to which an abstract concept of
non-discrimination can be connected.

Thus it is not surprising that women's rights concerns were consistently placed in the context of
establishing the rule of law in Russia as a whole. As one participant put it,

“In starting to reform the state we dreamed of achieving a new level of satisfying our needs ... but we see again that the state is not able to do its job. Because the majority of the population is below the poverty line ... The point is to create a basis for the rule of law ... without solving this problem, without constructing a law-abiding state, women’s social problems cannot be solved [but] the goal is so big that in the nearest future it cannot be attained ... we should look for and take the first steps in this direction.”

In the first round of dot-voting on a women’s agenda (in which participants placed a number of dots reflecting their individual priorities on an overall list of goals created from suggestions by the group), establishing the rule of law placed at or near the top in all seminars.

The near-simultaneous dual transition to a market economy and a democratic polity is one reason that there is no sharp line drawn between activities that promote women’s entrepreneurship, provide loans for women’s enterprises, train women to use computers, or mentor women in business -- pragmatic strategies for survival -- and the more direct and conventional political activities of lobbying, participating in campaigns, or organizing grassroots social services like rape crisis centers or battered women’s shelters. Indeed, many women’s associations are trying to do many or all of these things. Women activists are realistic in assessing the severity of the economic crisis for women, and are adopting self-help strategies to confront it.

However, the shift to entrepreneurial activity can be also seen as part of a political challenge to the prevailing norms of gender relations. Faced with unemployment and the feminization of poverty, the attraction of individual entrepreneurship as a means of securing one’s own existence is obvious. In addition, criticism of the way in which youth, beauty and sexuality have become the only qualities that women can market is tied to projects to help themselves and other women to survive economically without accepting the sexism currently embedded in capitalism. In current social conditions, educated women who want to use their skills are simply treated as superfluous and discarded from the labor market. Thus, a practical form of resistance is to develop an organizational context in which these skills again “count” for something and can secure a respectable existence.

On the whole, there are some features of how feminism is framed among these Russian activists that suggest affinities to the more conservative variants of American feminism (valuing entrepreneurship, affirming natural gender differences, distancing oneself from “victim” identities, e.g., Fox-Genovese 1991) but also are not so different from “radical” feminism (self-help strategies, especially in grassroots service projects, critiques of male violence, and an emphasis on consciousness-raising and self-transformation, e.g., Miles 1996). Given how many individuals mix autonomous self-help projects with activities designed to challenge sexual discrimination, including lobbying and electoral politics, it would be difficult to classify many of these activists into Western
typologies of activism. Indeed, given the simultaneous economic and political transition in today’s Russia, this mixture of pragmatic activities with those that counter discrimination more directly, seem appropriate as well as necessary.

VII. Conclusion

The activists at these seminars clearly stressed the need for broad social change, especially for the establishment of “rule of law” in Russia, as a prerequisite for achieving any substantive goals for women as such. Furthermore, they saw their own local activism as part of the process of creating civil society, which they also interpreted as essential to the inculcation of state accountability. Thus, these seminars, designed to teach political organizing skills to women, seem to be an effective means of providing effective Western support for the development of civil society in Russia.

ENDNOTES

1. Seven percent of the total did not answer all of these questions, and thus were not placed in a category.

2. For additional discussion of differences among participants focusing on the site-specific variation, refer to the report "Regional Differences in Women's Movement Activism in Russia" for the National Council on Soviet and East European Research prepared by the same authors.

REFERENCES


