

**BABUSHKI AS SURROGATE WIVES:
How Single Mothers and Grandmothers
Negotiate the Division of Labor in Russia**

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Abstract: Much like husbands and wives, single mothers and grandmothers struggle over the sharing of paid work and “second shift” responsibilities. Using in-depth interview and ethnographic data from Russia, this article applies elements of Hochschild’s (1989) framework to illuminate sites of tension and reciprocity among single mothers and their children’s grandmothers, or *babushki*, demonstrating that women’s negotiations across the generational divide resemble those between husbands and wives across the gender divide. However, the rules of reciprocity are relaxed, women seldom opt out of domestic work entirely, and conflicts lead to diminished support rather than “divorce.” The author argues that both generational mothering ideologies and outer circumstances shape how women ultimately share responsibilities. When mothers and *babushki* pursue similar generational mothering strategies, conflict is minimized.

Feminists have long quipped that – in the absence of husbands taking on an equal share of housework and childcare – what working mothers really need are wives. This old refrain is given a new twist in Russia, where grandmothers frequently serve as surrogate wives once their daughters become mothers. Many Russian single mothers, in particular, do not raise their children alone. Instead they rely on the support of their own mothers – their children’s grandmothers, affectionately called *babushki*¹ by Russians – to manage the triple burden of paid work, childrearing, and housework.

The way we think about family support and conflict, and the division of labor more generally, is based on the heterosexual, nuclear family model. According to this model, as husbands and wives negotiate home and work responsibilities, economic activity, when coupled with gender, emerges as a key source of power. Even among same-sex couples, domestic work produces gender and the management of gender identities, with lesbian and gay families resembling heterosexual families (Carrington 1999). My study innovates by examining a parallel case of the negotiation of home and work responsibilities, where the key division is generation rather than gender. The Russian case of single-mother families offers a unique perspective since the division of labor takes place outside of a heterosexual, or even sexual, context, with the power derived from economic activity linked to generation. Yet, as women bridge the generational divide to support one another, they nonetheless reflect patterns in society’s broader gender division of labor. Although generation trumps gender as the key divide within single-mother families, negotiations over the division of work and home responsibilities closely resemble patterns found among husbands and wives. Like husbands and wives, single mothers and grandmothers also obscure asymmetries in the division of labor by espousing egalitarianism

(DeVault 1991), suppress comparisons to other mothers and daughters, and perform emotion work to try to feel the right feelings about their domestic arrangements (Hochschild 1989).

However, negotiations across a generational divide diverge somewhat from patterns found in nuclear families. First, the rules of reciprocity (Hansen 2004) are relaxed between the two generations of women, with exchanges made over the longer term. Second, because both Soviet and post-Soviet ideals of Russian womanhood valorize being able to juggle home and work responsibilities effectively (Ashwin 2000), mothers and grandmothers seldom opt out of childcare or domestic work entirely. Third, conflicts between single mothers and grandmothers – though just as volatile as marital conflicts – do not take place within a divorce culture (Hackstaff 1999). A sense of kin obligation and mutual economic need helps to cool conflicts, and when conflicts do flare up, they typically lead to cutbacks in support rather than “divorce.”

The Russian case illuminates the dynamics of co-parenting in female-headed families, where women must overcome a generation gap to obtain mutual support. I argue that the Russian mother-daughter support system puts into stark relief processes of negotiation and support that routinely occur among women elsewhere over the division of labor, particularly after an unplanned pregnancy or marital breakup (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1986). Recent research in the United States suggests that the generational divide between mothers and grandmothers, though less-studied than the gender divide, is just as contentious (Edin and Kefalas 2005; Nelson 2005). With rates of single motherhood showing few signs of abating, and more people living in multigenerational households even in the United States (Navarro 2006), it is important to understand how women, in hopes of improving their lives, overcome the generational divide and negotiate reciprocity and conflict.

Borrowing elements of Hochschild's (1989) framework to analyze the negotiation of conflict and reciprocity between Russian mothers and grandmothers, I argue that both generational mothering ideologies (traditional, egalitarian, and transitional) and outer circumstances influence how Russian women share responsibilities. When mothers and grandmothers agree on which mothering strategies to pursue, there is less conflict in the relationship. Conflicts occur when mothers and grandmothers disagree over which mothering strategies to follow, or when they agree on the mothering strategy but outer circumstances make it difficult to follow their preferred strategy. However, even as the two generations of women redistribute responsibilities, manage conflict, and modify the division of labor over time, gender persists as a secondary divide. Both generations of Russian women still rely on language, and mothering strategies, imbued with gender and power.

SHARING THE DIVISION OF LABOR: GRANDMOTHERS AND SINGLE-MOTHER DAUGHTERS

This paper connects two distinct literatures: the research on the division of paid work and domestic tasks within households and research on kin support between single mothers and grandmothers. My analysis of Russia's single-mother families adds to these bodies of research both theoretically and empirically. First, the Russian case shows how gender still influences the division of paid work and home responsibilities even when other divisions, in this case generation, are primary. The vast majority of studies focus on marital conflicts over the division of labor and the emotional and practical consequences for work and family life (e.g., Hochschild 1989; Goldscheider and Waite 1991; Potuchek 1997; Stacey 1998; Wilkie, Feree, and Ratcliff 1998), emphasizing how tensions between husbands and wives are linked to changing gender expectations within marriage. Other studies foreground how the division of labor itself – especially performing or failing to perform domestic work – produces gender (Berk 1985;

DeVault 1991). But domestic work has a gendered component beyond a heterosexual context since gender relations are reproduced in same-sex households (Carrington 1999; Natalier 2003). Extending this literature, the Russian case shows that even when a generational divide is the key source of conflict, gender remains as a secondary influence on family members.

Gender ideologies affect how husbands and wives view marital roles and share responsibilities, and what I call “generational mothering” ideologies affect how single mothers and babushki share responsibilities and manage conflicts. Yet ideology alone tells us little about how much husbands in two-job marriages actually do at home. What tells us more is “the interplay between a couple's particular gender ideologies, the economic realities of their lives, and the gender strategies through which they consciously or not reconcile these” (Hochschild 1989: 73). Much like husbands and wives pursue various gender strategies, single mothers and babushki uphold traditional, egalitarian, and transitional ideologies about the proper generational distribution of mothering labor – views of how the ideal single mother and ideal babushka should behave that are shaped by society’s broader gender division of labor – and they pursue mothering strategies that attempt to reconcile these ideologies with outer circumstances.

Second, by mapping analytical elements of Hochschild’s study onto the case of intergenerational negotiations between mothers and grandmothers in Russia, this article advances the literature on the mutual support of single mothers and grandmothers. In contrast to studies highlighting the conflicts between husbands and wives, parental contributions to families – and the contributions of grandmothers especially – tend to be portrayed as either marginal, or unproblematic, boundless, and freely given. Survey research has highlighted the importance of the mother-child bond for the maintenance and quality of intergenerational ties (Rossi and Rossi 1990), and the grandmother-daughter tie is significant since women are more likely than men to

participate actively in kin support networks (Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg 1993). But even though studies of grandparents became more frequent with the rise of divorce and remarriage after the 1970s, we still lack detailed knowledge of how grandparents contribute to family life (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1986; Presser 1989).

Studies of the urban poor stress the significance of kin support, but with few exceptions they minimize the difference between kin support in general and a grandmother's support in particular.² Tight kinship networks, for example, alleviate some of poverty's effects in African-American communities (Stack 1974). But although the assistance of kin, including grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and cousins, offsets the lack of resources like income (Edin and Lein 1997; Garey 1999; Hill-Collins 1991; Newman 1999), studies seldom focus on grandmothers as pivotal points in kinship networks.

New evidence points to extensive kin support among contemporary single-mother families, but research lags behind. Many studies assume that the extensive support of grandmothers is an African-American or immigrant phenomenon in the United States, but recent studies document a historic decline in the availability of kin networks for minorities. Being a single mother increases access to kin among both blacks and whites, and people with more education and economic resources (irrespective of race) are more likely to participate in kin networks (Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg 1993; Roschelle 1997). Family breakup overrules group differences in access to extended kin since it "recreates a functional role for grandparents similar to ...when higher parental mortality and lower standards of living necessitated more intergenerational assistance" (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1986: 197). Edin and Kefalas (2005) offer additional evidence for the extensiveness of kin support in contemporary single-mother families; among poor U.S. white, black, and Puerto Rican unmarried mothers alike grandmothers provide

free babysitting, childrearing advice, financial support, and housing. Single mothers complain about meddling grandmothers and dream about their own homes, but extensive support from grandmothers occurs in spite of intergenerational conflicts (Edin and Kefalas 2005: 66-67; see also Hertz and Ferguson 1997; Jarrett 1998; Presser 1989).

Scholars have begun to explore how reciprocity, and even conflict, function within kin support relationships (Hansen 2004, 2005; Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg 1993; Nelson 2000, 2004, 2005). Most concur that although the family has a special place in relationships of reciprocity, family obligation alone does not permit unreciprocated assistance (Cotterill 1992; Nelson 2000). Gouldner (1960) distinguished between reciprocity that creates a normative imperative versus kin obligation, but scholars have since noted that kin obligation (rather than emerging naturally from blood ties) must be socially constructed and recognized. Hansen (2004: 27) argues that “kin can and do have reciprocal relations with each other over and above their status duties,” observing “the asking rules of reciprocity.” Single mothers manipulate the concept of reciprocity by developing strategic explanations for how they can accept support without creating dependence (Nelson 2000, 2005).

In what follows I show how Russian single mothers and grandmothers negotiate reciprocity and conflict as they share work and home responsibilities. I argue that Russian grandmothers not only support their daughters, but function (to varying degrees) as surrogate wives, while reaping benefits in return. Although intergenerational negotiations bear striking similarities to the negotiations between husbands and wives, the rules of reciprocity are relaxed between Russian mothers and grandmothers, and they do not take place within a divorce culture where “marrying is an option, marriage is contingent, and divorce is a gateway” (Hackstaff 1999:2). The mother-daughter support relationship is a special one where divorce is rarely

considered and there is considerable leeway concerning how and when debts will be repaid. Though conflict causes reduced support, women also make returns over a more extended period of time, exchange goods and services that are not equivalent, and use nonmaterial items of exchange to repay or postpone debts, including gratitude, deference, and emotional support. After providing some contextual background, I identify my data sources and describe three patterns of mutual support between single mothers and grandmothers and two sources of conflict.

RUSSIAN FAMILIES AND THE INSTITUTION OF BABUSHKA SUPPORT

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, most studies of Russian families have underscored the difficulties men have experienced in adapting to life in the post-Soviet transitional period (Ashwin and Lytkina 2004; Burawoy, Krotov, and Lytkina 2000; Feshbach 2001; Kiblitckaya 2000; Rotkirch 2000). This makes sense given the dramatic decrease in male life expectancy and men's increased rates of suicide and alcohol-related deaths. But women have also suffered. Poverty is feminized in Russia, with single-mother families and single elderly women making up the poorest of the poor. Numerous labor market developments have weakened women's job prospects and state supports for mothers have declined (Fodor 2002; Klugman and Motivans 2001; Prokofieva 2000). The Soviet Union had one of the highest divorce rates in the world since the 1970s (Stanley 1995). But now in addition to Russia's still-high divorce rate,³ close to one-third of all births are nonmarital (Goskomstat 2002).

Most single mothers cope, in part, through relying on the support of grandmothers, a long-standing institution in Russian family life. Russia experienced a catastrophic loss of men during the Second World War, so several generations of men and women were raised without fathers present. Soviet families resembled African-American families in that the role of the father was often put on the mother, and the mother's role was in turn carried out by the grandmother.

Although marriage was nearly universal, Soviet family structure was matrifocal (Ashwin and Lytkina 2004; Rotkirch 2000, 2004). Everyday life in the Soviet era was supported by caregiving relations among women engaged in “extended mothering,” (Rotkirch 2004) with women provisioning their families in a shortage economy and performing household labor in addition to wage work.

Recent research suggests a continuation of these patterns, with women’s triple burden eased by the support of grandmothers (Gurko 2003). Survey research reveals that although most single mothers live alone with children, the number of mothers living with children and their grandparents increased during the 1990s (Lokshin, Harris, and Popkin 2000). Twenty-seven percent of children from single-mother households live with at least one grandparent (Kanji 2004). Irrespective of where children’s grandparents reside, relying on one’s parents, especially mothers, is the primary survival strategy for single mothers (Clarke 2002; Kiblitckaya 1999; Lunyakova 2001). However, contrary to local stereotypes, support is negotiated and flows in both directions, with daughters also assisting their mothers.

The responsibility for ensuring a household’s survival is gendered, and in Russia it is led by women (Burawoy, Krotov, and Lytkina 2000; Clarke 2002; Semenova and Thompson 2004). But the importance of the Russian grandmother is obscured by a gap between discourse and practice. The two-parent nuclear family is the dominant cultural ideal in Russia (Kanji 2004), considered by most a “complete family” (*polnaia sem’ia*) rather than an “incomplete family” (*nepolnaia sem’ia*). But in spite of the near universality of marriage (and the ubiquity of divorce), families still function matrifocally, centered on mother and child and frequently with a babushka’s support – with men linked more tenuously to the household through paid work (Ashwin and Lytkina 2004; Gray 1989; Rotkirch 2000).

Grandmothers are constrained by tradition and economic necessity to become surrogate wives, whatever their personal desires might be. Several factors, however, contribute to growing uncertainty about grandmothers' capacity and willingness to help their children. Cutbacks in state subsidies for childcare and children's afterschool activities have burdened parents, and by extension grandmothers, with new responsibilities for taking care of children's needs. Since the state no longer ties men to families as it once did through housing policy and the strict enforcement of child support, single mothers are more frequently turning to their mothers to compensate for a lack of male support; but more grandmothers now work after retirement to supplement their meager pensions, complicating the cost in time and money of providing kin support. Finally, as social values change with the transition to capitalism, more women value autonomy and self-fulfillment, so fewer embrace the traditional babushka's self-sacrificial duties. Even before the onset of *perestroika* (restructuring), older women had begun associating retirement with leisure rather than continued employment, babysitting, and housework (Sternheimer 1985).

Yet societal expectations of babushka support remain high. In Russia's single-mother families, men are minor characters, while grandmothers perform starring roles. Finding a man to provide babushka-like support is almost unimaginable in the Russian context, where gender flexibility is a characteristic of femininity, not masculinity (Ashwin and Lytkina 2004). Mothers wield a variety of strategies for coping with a perceived deficit of reliable men, but they most often turn to their own mothers.⁴ Scholars have observed that the challenges of the post-Soviet transition are "likely to put inter-generational relationships under severe pressure...." (Clarke 2002: 207-208). I investigate one crucial intergenerational relationship, analyzing the tensions and mutual support within it: single mothers and the babushki who support them as surrogate

wives. Generational mothering ideologies and outer circumstances converge to influence how mothers and daughters support one another and deal with conflict.

STUDYING SINGLE-MOTHER FAMILIES IN RUSSIA

I gathered interview and ethnographic data during one year of fieldwork among single mothers in Russia (June-November 2003 and May-October 2004), including 90 in-depth interviews with contemporary single mothers. Single mothers were raising at least one child under 18 years of age without a partner, regardless of marital status (divorced, widowed, never-married, or separated) and current living arrangement (whether living with relatives or alone with children, but excluding women cohabiting with men). To maximize generalizability, I interviewed 20 women in Moscow, but most interviews took place in the medium-sized city of Kaluga, an *oblast'* (state) capital city of 335,000 located about 200 kilometers southwest of Moscow. Although no one city is representative of a country as vast and diverse as Russia, mid-sized, provincial cities like Kaluga are more typical of where most Russians live than the cosmopolitan metropolises of Moscow and St. Petersburg.

I used a snowball sampling method to facilitate trust. Interviews included discussions of marital breakdown, nonmarital childbirth, work strategies, and sources of support. I usually interviewed women in their homes, with most interviews averaging three hours. Though the sample is not random, I included representatives across the spectrum of single mothers in the general population, stratifying by income, education, age, marital status, employment, and living arrangement. Respondents ranged from 23 to 54 years of age and about half had higher education. Reflecting national trends, most single mothers were divorced and had one or two children, though one in four had never been married. Hiring local typists for transcription, I

conducted all of the interviews myself in Russian, coding and analyzing the data using a grounded theory approach. All names are pseudonyms.

The importance of babushka support in the lives of single mothers, and the complexity of this mother-daughter support system, became clearer to me as the research progressed. I expanded the scope of the project to include 15 interviews with Soviet-era single mothers who were currently grandmothers and 15 interviews with grandmothers following interviews with single-mother daughters. Two in five single mothers sampled lived with their mothers, but frequently extensive support took place though grandmothers and daughters lived separately.

This article also draws heavily on field notes. Patterns of support between single mothers and babushki emerged from the interviews, but I also observed intergenerational conflicts and negotiations informally. During fieldwork I lived with two different Russian families, gradually becoming a part of several networks of single mothers and grandmothers. I spent time with single mothers and grandmothers walking around the city, running errands, attending local performances and events, and spending time in women's homes. Of the single mothers and grandmothers interviewed, I saw about half of the women at least a second or third time for a follow-up interview, outing, or conversation over tea, which deepened my understanding of how intergenerational arrangements evolve.

FINDINGS

The mutual support system of Russian single mothers and babushki is continually challenged by complex negotiations between the two generations. Instead of unconditional support, single mothers and babushki invoke both kin obligation and rules of reciprocity as they manage tensions and assist one another. Most babushki function, to varying degrees, as surrogate wives, easing their daughters' balance of home and work. But babushka support, like the support

of daughters, falls along a continuum and shifts over time. A babushka's wide-ranging support includes childcare, shopping, meal preparation, housework, financial assistance, access to a larger kin network, and moral support. A daughter's support includes supplementing babushka's pension, helping her find the best medical care, weeding or planting at the family's *dacha* (summer cottage with garden plot), offering advice and companionship, and assuring future care in old age. Support is mutual but adult children rely heavily on their parents in the post-Soviet period (Clarke 2002).

Immediately after a divorce or breakup, mothers turn to babushki for assistance, but over time women improvise the sharing of tasks to benefit both generations. Arrangements for sharing the division of labor are not static, nor are the power dynamics between the generations. Gradually, relaxed rules of reciprocity come to define the give-and-take of the relationship between single mothers and babushki. Single mothers apply a different logic of reciprocity to various relationships (Nelson 2000), and Russian mothers and grandmothers do not generally hold each other to a norm of balanced reciprocity in which exchanges of equivalent goods and services are required in the short-term. Returns are made over an extended period of time. Mothers sometimes note a grandmother's pleasure in being with her grandchildren as evidence for a cancelled debt, but single mothers still offer reciprocal gestures that require significant time and emotional energy, from remaining in contact through regular visits to harvesting potatoes at babushka's *dacha*.

Generational Mothering Ideologies & Strategies: *Traditional, Egalitarian, and Transitional*

Hochschild's (1989) framework of traditional, egalitarian, and transitional gender ideologies and strategies helps illuminate sites of tension and reciprocity between single mothers and babushki. Mothers' and grandmothers' beliefs about the proper generational distribution of

mothering labor – “generational mothering ideologies” – affect the ways that women share home and work responsibilities. Mothering ideologies include notions of how the ideal single mother and ideal babushka should behave and what kind of work they should do; such ideologies are, in turn, shaped by society’s broader gender division of labor. Particularly during a period of social transition in Russia, with ideas about being a proper mother and grandmother in flux, ideologies, in conjunction with outer circumstances, shape people’s actions. The lives of mothers recovering from a divorce or breakup are temporarily “unsettled.” For women leading unsettled lives and living through fairly unsettling times, culture is more visible since mothers use cultural tools to develop new strategies of action (Swidler 1986, 2001). Neither ideologies nor outer circumstances (factors such as perceived economic need, shift hours, commute time, or individual resources) alone determine how mothers or grandmothers share the division of home and work responsibilities. But just as “a person’s gender ideology tends to fit their situation” (Hochschild 1989, 17), some ideologies resonate more than others to women given their overall situation. I do not address here the multitude of factors that lead women to favor some ideologies about the proper distribution of mothering labor over others. Instead, I apply elements of Hochschild’s framework to analyze sites of reciprocity and conflict in three main patterns of sharing the mothering labor that women used. Before examining the sites, I summarize the ideologies that shape patterns of sharing mothering labor:

Traditional: Mothers and grandmothers favoring traditional mothering ideologies resemble couples favoring a traditional, specialized division of labor, with breadwinning husbands and homemaking wives. Married Russian mothers generally take care of the household and children, in addition to working for pay outside the home as a second-order breadwinner (Ashwin 2000; Clarke 2002). But in the Soviet era, it was common, even “traditional,” for a

single mother – relying on a babushka’s support – to concentrate on primary breadwinning, essentially becoming the “man” in the family through supporting her children and mother materially. Paradoxically then, the most traditional of single mothers specialize in breadwinning while relegating most housework and childcare to retired babushki, who support single-mother daughters backstage as surrogate wives. Pure traditional single mothers spend time with their children, but they postpone much of the hands-on work of mothering until they become babushki themselves.

Egalitarian: Some single mothers and babushki favor a more equal sharing of breadwinning and second shift responsibilities, seeking balance. Egalitarian babushki still support their daughters as surrogate wives by looking after grandchildren and by helping out financially and on the second shift, but they enforce more limits on their support. Especially since grandmothers in contemporary Russia have new employment and leisure options besides caring for grandchildren after retirement (age 55 for Russian women), pursuing egalitarian strategies is on the rise.

Transitional: Just as most husbands and wives embrace transitional gender strategies (Hochschild 1989), most Russian single mothers and babushki embrace transitional ideologies concerning the generational distribution of mothering labor, reflecting a blend of traditional and egalitarian views. Like the egalitarians, transitional babushki want to work and have leisure time, but they sometimes concede to tradition by caring for their grandchildren most of the time. Transitional single mothers, like egalitarians, want to work and have leisure time in addition to spending time with their children, but, like the traditionals, they frequently assume that babushka should make herself available for backstage support.

Generational mothering ideologies fall on a continuum, and, in conjunction with outer circumstances, affect the kinds of generational mothering strategies that women pursue. Because several combinations of mother-grandmother generational strategies are possible (and strategies shift over time), I analyze three patterns of sharing paid work and home responsibilities that women presented, identifying the fissures in each pattern. Conflicts surface when mothers and babushki disagree about which mothering strategies to follow, or when mothers and babushki agree on mothering strategies but outer circumstances make it difficult to follow them. Most women, regardless of class, espouse transitional views of the proper distribution of mothering labor, but there are more middle-class women among single supermoms and backstage babushki, and more working-class women among co-mothering partners.

1) Single Supermoms & Backstage Babushki

Some mothers present themselves as single supermoms even though a babushka's support makes this supermothering possible. This Soviet model of mutual support (Gurko 2003) mirrors the traditional division of labor between husbands and wives. Single supermoms take over the primary breadwinning responsibilities expected of husbands, while babushki support single mothers backstage by taking over the housework and childcare expected of secondary breadwinners, usually wives. Supermoms emphasize that their lives became simpler after a divorce or breakup. They describe mothers who pity them after a long day and serve them meals or willingly look after grandchildren on weekends. Although some contribution to babushka's welfare is expected, it is not necessary to reciprocate precisely, because, single mothers claim, their mothers "feel sorry for them" and "love their grandkids."

Supermoms who fail to credit babushka's more invisible backstage efforts with the same importance as their own breadwinning reflect gendered views about the status of primary

breadwinning over second shift responsibilities. Supermoms wield economic power over babushki earning small pensions and over other mothers in the labor force lacking backstage support. Some mothers describe needing to “be like a man,” specializing in breadwinning while minimizing other distractions in order to succeed, using gendered ideas about the division of labor in order to make sense of their arrangements. Besides financial support, and pitching in on the second shift, mothers reciprocate babushki through offering non-material items of exchange, such as gratitude, loyalty, and deference. Other mothers reciprocate babushki by deferring to them in childrearing and praising their abilities. Many single supermoms experience minimal conflict between providing and mothering since they enjoy traditionally masculine advantages at home, with babushki facilitating their careers and easing their second shift burdens.

Single supermoms and backstage babushki who share generational mothering strategies – like Vika, a manager at a vodka factory, and her mother Nastya, both “pure” traditionals – face minimal conflict. Vika reflected:

Maybe I haven’t [experienced discrimination] because I have someone with whom I can leave my child – my mom. . . . I trust in her 100 percent and she’ll look after him even better than I can at times. And we get along very well. She never hindered my professional growth or job searches.

Nastya facilitates her daughter’s primary breadwinning efforts, much like a traditional wife facilitates a husband’s primary breadwinning in exchange for economic support. Though Nastya is devoted to supporting Vika’s career, Vika acknowledged that many mothers face conflicts with babushki: “Many of my girlfriends’ mothers don’t want to spend time with their grandkids. Well, maybe it’s not that they don’t want to, but their relations have certain peculiarities, and they don’t often. . . well maybe they cannot always be with them.” Conflicts occur between Vika

and Nastya, but they do not destabilize their support system since both women share traditional generational mothering ideologies, which make sense given their economic circumstances.

Vika's family background is middle-class; she earned two degrees and now earns enough to support herself and her son, while helping her parents out financially. However, previously Nastya worked to support Vika and her grandson, retiring only after Vika returned to work.

Women who disagree on mothering strategies face high conflict, or even diminished support. Not surprisingly, "pure" traditionalists (like "pure" egalitarians) are less common than women with different ideas about motherhood. For instance, Alla favors traditional mothering strategies, and she is willing to take primary responsibility for housework and childcare, but she resents having a transitional daughter who earns money but neglects the second shift. Her daughter Nina, a divorced taxi driver, rarely helps out at home but praises Alla as "a real Russian woman" who can "do everything":

I seldom see the children. Babushka is the one most occupied with raising them, because I'm forced to earn money. . . . I have to relax and get rid of tension. I can't do this at home because there's always noise. My mom always shouts and screams at everyone. . . . But she knows everything so she's very serious support. It's difficult for me to get along with her, but on the other hand, she can do everything, you know? . . . And she would like me to spend more time with the kids. We fight a lot over this.

Nina minimized her debt by pointing to her mom's lack of options and love: "Well, she doesn't have much choice. She sees that there's no one else. And of course she loves them very much." As a transitional mother, Nina works hard to support the family, but unlike Alla, who sacrificed herself for others, Nina believes in her right to leisure. She spends time with her boyfriend, dances in nightclubs, and has her long nails regularly manicured. Alla, overburdened with

housework, dacha, and childcare responsibilities, wants Nina to do more, but feels helpless to change the situation. The mother-daughter leisure gap was obvious when I visited the family's dacha. Nina and her boyfriend slept in and picked up a cake and some beer at the store, arriving at the dacha just before Alla served a homemade multi-course lunch featuring home-grown produce. After lunch, swimming at the nearby watering hole, berry-picking, a brief siesta, and tea, Nina dressed to go out with her boyfriend before driving her night shift. Meanwhile, Alla, after sweating over an outdoor stovetop, spent the remainder of the afternoon washing up, weeding, harvesting vegetables, and supervising her grandchildren.

Alla cannot accept Nina's dedication to her leisure interests over her children. As a traditional babushka, she longs for a traditional single-mother daughter who would earn money while spending all of her free time with her children. Nina is a transitional single mother, but expects her own mother to be a traditional babushka. Due to outer circumstances (Nina's higher-than-average earnings and Alla's layoff from her factory job), both generations of women feel they have little choice but to support each other. But theirs is a high-conflict partnership.

Rather than living with conflict, other babushki and single mothers avoid clashes by limiting support. Inna and her mother Raisa, both transitionals, have traditional expectations of one another. Inna refuses to comply with Raisa's demands that she have friends over less often, dump a burdensome boyfriend, and work full-time. Raisa, a retired teacher, is frustrated by her daughter's generosity with non-kin:

Inna's husband sends her money for the children, but she has all sorts of dependents who attach themselves to her. We quarrel over this. We have constant disagreements over the way she lets herself waste her money and time. She spends her money not only on her

sons but also on others . . .Of course she feeds and keeps her children, but she doesn't sufficiently carry out her duties.

Raisa pursues interests of her own (church, English lessons, etc.), but she stands ready to sacrifice for her grandchildren if required. Yet she cannot accept that her daughter is not a traditional single supermom. To Raisa's dismay, Inna writes children's books rather than working at a steady job, invites guests over frequently, and desires male companionship. Babushki are often pressured by cultural tradition to sacrifice for their grandkids, but single mothers like Inna face judgment, too, for failing to become stereotypically successful breadwinning supermoms.

Since Inna can survive on child support from her wealthy former husband, however, she resists pressures from Raisa to change her lifestyle, reconciling herself to less support. Raisa, too, can survive thanks to her father's generous military pension. Though they might otherwise support one other more extensively, each has different ideas of what counts as something extra, as a gift. Like most couples' conflicts, struggles are seldom simply over who does what, but over the giving and receiving of gratitude (Hochschild 1989, 2003). Raisa feels that her traditional gift of self-sacrifice in raising Inna should merit a return in the form of Inna devoting all of her time to her kids and keeping money in the family, whereas Inna longs for a modern gift of a mother to support her without micromanaging her life. Supermoms and backstage babushki have adapted a Soviet pattern to new circumstances, but a second pattern is becoming more common in the post-Soviet period.

2) Co-mothering Partners

Rather than proclaiming self-reliance, many single mothers present themselves as partners on a co-mothering team. Several of these mothers exclaimed: "But I'm not really a

single mother at all...my mom helps me with everything!” Though most women espouse transitional ideas regarding the division of mothering labor, more co-mothering partners support egalitarian in lieu of traditional generational mothering strategies, with mothers and daughters hoping to share breadwinning, childcare, and household responsibilities. Negotiations occur between co-mothering partners, but women tend to diminish their importance, arguing that they naturally “just do what needs doing.”

Co-mothering babushki often work to supplement their pensions. Some babushki feel appreciated among co-workers they have known for years, whereas others work to help support the family. But even when co-mothering partners are cash poor, they rarely confront situations of dire need, subsisting in part on the ingenuity of babushki with extensive social networks. Egalitarians like Zoya are quick to express gratitude for babushka’s support. In Zoya’s view, Soviet women were robbed of motherhood’s joys, forced to put kids in day care and work in factories, whereas she is able to live freely, albeit modestly, pursuing her passions of painting and pro-life activism: “Mama and I share one household, for she couldn’t survive on a pension of 800 rubles and I couldn’t survive without her help as a nanny. Therefore we united and we’re together, and we share everything with each other. We have a kind of communism!” Although Zoya argues that she and her mother, Larissa, have little choice but to support one another, shared generational mothering strategies reinforce their support system.

After Zoya’s second pregnancy, she and Larissa faced a serious conflict. Both women embrace egalitarian mothering strategies, but tensions mounted because outer circumstances – Zoya’s pregnancy (which threatened the family’s already-precarious economic situation) – made it difficult for them to follow their preferred strategy. Larissa was upset over Zoya’s pregnancy, arguing that they needed more money, not another baby. But shared ideas about mothering

promoted compromise and avoided the escalation of conflict. Both Larissa and Zoya believe women have a right to motherhood as much as a right to work. Currently Zoya takes care of her new baby and works part-time, while Larissa cleans neighborhood building hallways and tutors her school-age grandson.

Outer circumstances influence, but do not solely determine, generational mothering strategies. For example, though it would make sense for Sasha and her mother Nadia to support one another extensively, they live separately and support each other selectively due to their radically different views of motherhood. Nadia has an extra room in a small town a 40-minute bus ride from Kaluga, but Sasha and her 7-year-old daughter Anya live in the city, in the dormitory room she inherited from her Soviet-era factory job. Sasha tries to give her daughter everything she missed as a child – including a mother’s time. She takes her daughter to parks, theatres, and festivals on her days off, whereas during her own childhood Nadia had worked all the time, did not believe in spoiling children, and made little time for Sasha. If Nadia were to look after Anya regularly, she would likely impose her own childrearing conditions. So Sasha and Nadia support one another, but theirs is a limited, and balanced, exchange. When Sasha needs to travel, she still asks her mother to look after Anya for a day or two, and Nadia asks for Sasha’s help when her ill health requires it. Sasha shares cabbage and cucumbers from her Kaluga garden plot, sending crops home monthly to her mother via a trusted bus driver, and Nadia sends potatoes and onions from her garden plot to Sasha. Economic need warrants more extensive mother-daughter support, but with different generational mothering ideologies Sasha and Nadia retain their literal and figurative distance from one another.

Grandmothers face social pressures to function as surrogate wives to their daughters, but many also enforce limits on support. Since power dynamics in the household are influenced by

who brings the money home, babushki who work outside the home are particularly diligent about pointing out work responsibilities to daughters who also work. Yelena, a retired teacher who pays for her grandson's private tutoring, described this process of negotiation:

Let's assume she says, 'Mama, take Seriozha today,' but I say 'I can't.' Of course this happens at times. I can't say that I'm such an ideal babushka, that I do everything. No. But I can see for myself how she is doing, and if it's really needed, then naturally I help. But if she simply wants to rest, well then . . . 'no, I raised you, enough! You raise your own kids yourself.' But generally we don't ever resent one another.

Even grandmothers favoring egalitarian mothering ideologies like Yelena slip into describing the "ideal babushka" as one who will "do everything." While values of self-fulfillment are ascendant in Russia, they are assumed to apply more to the younger generation. Luba, a 41-year-old grandmother, also underscored the limits she enforces: "When my granddaughter was born, I clearly said to myself, yes, I'm a babushka. But not constantly . . . I also have my own plans!" As a babushka with egalitarian views, Luba reduces her support when she feels that her daughter is relying on her too much. She described two kinds of babushki:

Natalya Ivanovna took in her grandson at her own expense and now the parents are complaining, saying that she didn't raise him right, didn't do this or that. . . But then there's Alefina Mikhailovna. Oh, how I admire that woman! She helps out only when she considers it necessary. She takes care of herself as a woman should: She reads, dresses well, devotes time to herself. But when she has free time, then sure, she says: 'I'll go buy some groceries for them.' That is, when it's not to the detriment of her own life!

In praising a babushka who "helps out" but still "takes care of herself as a woman should," Luba aligns herself with a new generation of babushki who insist that their support be treated as a gift,

as something extra, and not simply taken for granted. Women like Luba question the generational leisure gap just as some wives wield various strategies to reduce the marital leisure gap, from demanding more support to cutting back on their second shift work (Hochschild 1989).

When co-mothering partners share mothering strategies, conflicts are more easily averted. Though retired, Galina teaches full-time and helps her daughter Tanya a great deal, encouraging Tanya to spend time with her new boyfriend Oleg on weekends. Tanya and Oleg, in turn, make an effort to drive Galina to her dacha on Saturdays, helping her with the hard physical labor required there. Galina's weekend care of her granddaughter Varvara, and Tanya's help at the dacha are both recognized as gifts by the other. Gifts are occasionally "misreceived" – like when Tanya brings cookies to her mom's place rather than giving her the cash she needs for everyday staples, or when Galina indulges Varvara and contradicts Tanya's childrearing preferences. But each embraces transitional ideas about combining work and childcare, so these "misgivings" tend to be overlooked. Galina prioritizes her grandchild, but lets Tanya know when she needs money or has plans. Tanya works hard to improve her career prospects but does not feel judged by her mom for occasionally splurging on *Vogue* magazines.

Like many husbands and wives, co-mothering partners also subscribe to a "family myth" (Hochschild 1989) of egalitarianism even when babushki do more in practice. Similar to the leisure deficit wives experience relative to husbands, babushki spend more time in the kitchen and with grandkids, whereas single mothers visit saunas and cafés more often. Some babushki argue that their daughters deserve generous support since they are doing all they can at home without jeopardizing their jobs. In any case, the shared belief that arrangements are fair fosters solidarity. Natasha and her mother Yulia expressed satisfaction with their arrangements, despite Yulia's heavy burden. According to Natasha: "If I lived alone, then things would be difficult. But

my mom and I have a common household. I handle all of the childcare...my mom doesn't really help me with childrearing. But she does the laundry, cooks, and handles everything else." Yulia argues that their arrangements are relatively equal since Natasha gets up in the middle of the night with her toddler, works at her computer after hours, and brings work home during the day. But she also added that she has little choice but to help her daughter: "I worked my whole life with nothing, not even a penny, to show for it. And what if I get sick? I cannot expect anything from the state. I can only count on my daughter." Because she will rely on Natasha's financial support as she ages, Yulia is willing to be a supportive babushka now; she anticipates assistance from Natasha in the future, thinking in the long-term about mutual support. And though Yulia encourages Natasha's primary breadwinning efforts, previously Yulia earned money while Natasha cared for her baby.

Women's partnerships as co-mothers are as fraught with tension as single supermom and backstage babushki partnerships. Like wives who compare their lives to the lives of husbands or compare husbands to other men, later suppressing these comparisons (Hochschild 1989) to keep the peace, single mothers and grandmothers try to refrain from comparing their partners to ideal mothers and babushki, thus suppressing resentment and containing conflict. Marina and her daughter Katya, for instance, are mothering partners in a tense relationship; but conflicts rarely erupt because Marina engages in a great deal of emotion work; that is, she tries to feel the right feelings and suppresses comparisons to her own years as a single mother. Marina, who works at a low-paying factory job she loves, has egalitarian ideas, but her transitional daughter Katya expects extensive support. Marina sacrifices a lot to take care of her grandson, walking to work to save money on trolleybus fare and seeing her boyfriend less often, so she is upset that Katya rarely reciprocates. Katya is pursuing her dream of becoming a photographer, contributing little

materially or on the second shift. When Marina compares Katya's behavior with her own experiences as a Soviet single mother, Katya comes up short. Frustrated by Katya's tendency to indulge in coffee and taxi rides, Marina complained: "When things were hard, I tried to stock up on certain things. . . . Everything depends on what kind of homemaker you are. I could live on that money." Marina suppresses feelings of disappointment in her daughter ("she didn't turn out the way I had wanted") and represses conflict, but continues to assist Katya. Katya praises her mother's cooking effusively, visits almost daily, and admits that she would be lost without her support, which helps, though incompletely, to reciprocate Marina's efforts. Feeling responsible for kin ("maybe Katya is impulsive because her own father was that way. . . I should've left him earlier"), and hoping support will come their way through Katya's new boyfriend in the future, Marina resigns herself to receiving less-than-ideal support now. But some babushki, particularly solid breadwinners, do require that their daughters reciprocate in the present, if not materially, then on the second shift.

3) Breadwinning Babushki & Supportive Single Moms

When grandmothers ask lower-earning daughters to focus on childcare and housework, they reverse the traditional model of intergenerational mother-daughter support. This division of labor is usually temporary, but it demonstrates the flexibility of women's mothering strategies and the ability of grandmothers to enforce conditions for support. However, unless defined as temporary, this arrangement feels uncomfortable for both generations of women since it violates expectations about the gender-coded generational division of mothering labor. While babushki typically function as surrogate wives, this arrangement instead gives single mothers primary responsibility for the second shift, with babushki contributing in the traditionally male realm of primary breadwinning. Olga, for instance, gave birth while still in college, and her mother has

supported her ever since Olga's boyfriend disappeared. In exchange, Olga takes care of most household chores and prepares dinner. But now that her daughter is older, Olga plans to live separately. She knows that life may be more difficult materially, but thinks long-term about her mother's retirement, hoping her mother will have more time to support her then.

While Olga's situation is temporary, Lada feels guilty about failing at primary breadwinning since she cannot easily change her situation. A 30-year-old filter operator, Lada earns little money but keeps her job due to a lack of options, the camaraderie among women at work, and the welcome respite it provides from housework: "In my free time I'm busy with the house, nothing more. There's the constant cleaning, then the family's laundry. . . .I hand wash the laundry. Then there's the dishes, and repairs. And I cook for the family, because I have more spare time. . .my parents are retired but they work full days." Although she dislikes housework, doing it reciprocates her parents for their financial support. Lada searches for higher-paying jobs, but with a small child and no full-time backstage babushka, she has not yet succeeded. In the meantime, Lada's parents earn the pensions and salaries that put food on the table and provide for Lada's daughter, including private lessons and some modest savings. Lada hopes to get a better job when her daughter starts school, but for now she resigns herself to feeling uncomfortable about the division of labor, having failed to become the successful "man" in the family through primary breadwinning.

Mothering ideologies and outer circumstances both influence how women negotiate conflict and share responsibilities, but outer circumstances play a greater role in shaping the division of labor among breadwinning babushki and supportive single moms. Unless temporary, few embrace this pattern. The strength of gender-coded generational arrangements (where backstage babushki support single mothers in primary breadwinning, or where both mothers and

babushki share paid work and second shift responsibilities) makes it difficult for single mothers to depend on breadwinning babushki. Most single mothers support breadwinning babushki temporarily, but this ephemeral arrangement is significant since it provides mothers with the means to acquire additional skills or education.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the pattern of support, negotiations among women are just as complex and conflict-ridden as the more well-known struggles between husbands and wives in two-job marriages. Drawing on elements of Hochschild's study, I have shown that insights from marital conflicts over the division of labor can, and should, be applied to negotiations over the division of labor between mothers and adult daughters. Instead of grandmothers unconditionally helping their single-mother daughters, women improvise arrangements for sharing the division of labor, shifting arrangements over time.

Yet as they improvise across a generational divide, gender, too, influences mothering strategies and conflict negotiation. Most babushki serve as surrogate wives to their single-mother daughters, either through supporting their daughters backstage by taking over second shift responsibilities, or through juggling work, home, and childcare alongside their daughters. Arrangements that violate the gender-coded generational division of mothering labor, unless defined as temporary, are uncomfortable for both grandmothers and single mothers. Russian women, unwittingly or not, are affected by the traditional gender division of labor even as they negotiate across a generational divide. While most aspects of the way they share the division of labor seem "natural" to mothers and daughters, as gender arrangements often do, women also rely on society's broader gender division of labor to justify their strategies, fine-tune negotiations, and manage conflicts.

The Russian case of single-mother families demonstrates that family relationships continue to be defined by gender and power even when neither is expected to be influential. Like lesbian families who reproduce gender patterns common among heterosexual families (Carrington 1999), single mothers and grandmothers, though bridging a generational divide, resemble more than they differ from heterosexual families. Both generational mothering ideologies, whether traditional, egalitarian, or transitional, and outer circumstances, shape how single mothers and grandmothers share responsibilities and manage conflicts. When a mother and a babushka pursue similar generational mothering strategies, there is less conflict in the relationship. Conflicts occur when mothers and daughters pursue different generational mothering strategies, or when they agree on strategies but outer circumstances make preferred strategies hard to follow. Though some women find ways to live with high conflict, many instead reduce support.

Wives have a stake in pushing harder for changes on the second shift, with more husbands satisfied with the status quo. In a parallel manner, in Russia it is grandmothers – those who function as surrogate wives to their single-mother daughters – who are increasingly pushing for change and setting limits on support. Ironically, even though the survival, and success, of Russia's single-mother families depends on the support of babushki, single mothers, most of whom were once wives themselves, frequently lapse into taking babushki for granted. More single mothers than grandmothers apply transitional ideas to their own mothering, while expecting babushki to remain traditional. With the transition to a market economy, values of self-fulfillment and autonomy, as well as the value of money itself, have gained prominence, but grandmothers confront intense social pressure to become self-sacrificial babushki. Much like husbands and wives, single mothers and grandmothers use several strategies for reducing tension

over second shift conflicts: they create family myths, suppress the politics of comparison, and perform emotion work to try to feel the right feelings about their arrangements. But as surrogate wives supporting their single-mother daughters, whether backstage or as co-mothering partners, babushki, more than their single-mother daughters, resemble wives dependent on primary breadwinning husbands.

The conflicts between husbands and wives occur within a divorce culture (Hackstaff 1999), with negotiations constantly threatened by the specter of divorce. However, conflicts between single mothers and grandmothers in Russia typically lead to reduced levels of support rather than “divorce.” Rules of reciprocity are relaxed in that there is a great deal of flexibility concerning the repayment of debts, with women using gratitude, deference, and emotional support as items of reciprocation, and promising returns over an extended period of time. As one mother put it, “no matter what happens, you’ll never divorce your mother, and of course your mother will never divorce you.”

While the mother-daughter support system is under strain due to new pressures and expectations, I found little to suggest that it is strained to the breaking point (Clarke 2002). Fortunately, the support system is changing to accommodate the needs, values, and priorities of post-Soviet Russian society. Unfortunately, the workplace is changing too slowly. In the absence of structural changes in the workplace, access to babushka support enables single mothers to become more like the unencumbered male ideal-typical workers that many employers seek. But many women, especially single mothers without babushka support (while not discussed in this paper due to space constraints, a significant number of Russian single mothers lack babushka support), struggle to earn a living in workplaces that are far from family-friendly.

Research on reciprocal kin support suggests that there may be “a steadier beat to the quality of the relationships between women in the family” (Rossi and Rossi 1990). Yet, behind the mutual support flowing between single-mother daughters and grandmothers, reciprocity and conflict are continually negotiated, keeping up the steady rhythm. Through analyzing the conflicts and negotiations among women who share a gender, but must bridge a generational divide, and treating them as just as complex as marital negotiations, my research expands our knowledge of how women’s reciprocal kin support systems operate. I have argued that the negotiations between single mothers and babushki in Russia are only an extreme case of routine negotiations that occur among women elsewhere. With the rise of divorce, cohabitation, nonmarital births, and new family forms, the issue of how women bridge generational divides to support one another is critical. After a divorce or unplanned pregnancy, many women find themselves in circumstances where men are either absent or marginal, and state support is minimal, but their own mothers represent at least a real possibility, if not a probability, of support. Moreover, women’s intergenerational negotiations over the division of labor bear striking similarities to second shift struggles between husbands and wives. The Russian case suggests that domestic conflict is not only caused by ideologies rooted in patriarchy or men’s power. Instead, domestic conflict may be to some degree inevitable in a world where the demands of employment mesh so poorly with the demands of the home.

¹ *Babushka* means “grandmother” in Russian and *babushki* is the plural form. Russians address any woman of grandmotherly age as *babushka*, a term of endearment and respect.

² Anderson’s *Code of the Street* (1999) is exceptional in its in-depth treatment of the grandmother’s role in the African-American community. Anderson foregrounds the grandmother’s critical contribution to family life while still noting her occasional feelings of ambivalence about providing extensive support.

³ According to Goskomstat, in 2002 the divorce rate in Russia was 4.3 divorces per 1,000.

⁴ Single mothers also seek out paternal grandmothers, grandfathers, sisters, former husbands or boyfriends, and friends for support, but they depend most on maternal grandmothers.

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