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Competing Moralities: A Social History of Abortion in Russia

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2014

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An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
Rollins School of Public Health of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Public Health
in Global Health
2018

Abstract

Competing Moralities: A Social History of Abortion in Russia
By Meredith Lowe

In 2017, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESI) determined that the rate of unsafe abortions is four times higher in countries with restrictive policies limiting access to abortion. Consequently, the maternal mortality rate (MMR) in countries with more restrictive policies is three times higher. This correlation is not new. Historical abortion policies and their MMRs provide countless examples of the dangers in restricting abortion. Having identified this correlation, the Soviet Union became the first country in the world to legalize abortion in 1920. The medical procedure has maintained a role in Russian society, serving as the main source of family planning and birth control for the last century. This has culminated in consistently high abortion rates. With the ideological shift that came as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a religious fervor has birthed an anti-abortion movement over the past two decades, similar to that of the American pro-life movement. Strengthening this widespread force is significant support within the government, which under President Vladimir Putin, has become increasingly conservative. Restrictions to abortion access implemented under the current leader threaten the health and safety of women throughout the country. In order to fully understand this profound shift in Russian culture, this paper seeks to trace the competing moralities that have framed abortion for over a century to better understand the country's current restrictive state.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. John Blevins, for his guidance and support. For giving me the opportunity to pursue this area of study, I am profoundly grateful. I would also like to thank Dr. Roger Rochat for introducing me to such an important area of public health. I am immensely grateful for his continued support.

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I. INTRODUCTION

At present, the Russian Federation reports one of the highest abortion rates in the world. At odds with the widespread practice is an anti-abortion movement as polarizing and potentially more threatening than the United States. Over the past 18 years, religious leaders and members of parliament have been exacerbating contentions and infusing society with a fervent anti-abortion sentiment and legislation. From a Western perspective, a religious pursuit of the medical procedure is unremarkable. However, in the context of Russia, where religion was suppressed under the Soviet state, and it was not uncommon for women to have more than ten abortions in her lifetime, a closer examination of the situation is necessary (Luehrmann, 2017). For the majority of the Soviet Union's existence, abortion was the only form of birth control available to women creating a prolific abortion culture and fomenting the procedure as a cultural norm; yet religiously motivated restrictions to access have been successful. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the extent to which an institution can lay claim to assigning a moral value to abortion and the competing moral frameworks challenging its overall acceptance.

Descriptively, morality refers "to certain codes of conduct put forward by a society or a group (such as a religion), or accepted by an individual for her own behavior" (Gert & Gert, 2017). Both facets of this definition are equally important and each puts forth value and tensions, illustrating that morality can, and should, be framed through many lenses. From a Catholic moral framework, one may argue abortion is wrong and bad. From a scientific moral framework, abortion should be safe and is neither good nor bad. An individual can hold their own beliefs on abortion, but it is inevitable that they are exposed to a confluence of frameworks that have shaped their view. Furthermore, that individual will be more significantly influenced by the loudest voices. Scientists do not have parades touting the safety of standard abortion procedures,

but the Russian Orthodox Church and the pro-life groups that it endorses, stage events on a regular basis, putting forth their moral framework on the issue (Ferris-Rotman, 2017). Consequently, tensions between these frameworks only complicate the subject further. For the purpose of clarity and totality, this paper will utilize a theory of morality put forth by anthropologist Jarrett Zigon. He identifies three competing and at times, complimentary, approaches to morality: institutional morality, morality in public discourse and embodied morality (Zigon, 2011). This paper will trace the practice of abortion throughout Imperial and Soviet Russia into present day and examine policy, official literature and primary sources to highlight how abortion was treated, utilized and perceived. Ultimately, a clearer picture of the current state of institutional morality in Russia will emerge and shed light on the state of abortion culture in Russia.

II. COMPETING MORAL FRAMEWORKS

Jarrett Zigon highlights an institutional morality that reflects the "group" referred to in the aforementioned definition of morality. He argues however, that the group must yield some explicit or implicit power in society. Thus, in the context of Russian abortion, governmental policies, Soviet doctrine, religious proclamations, will all be explored from an institutional moral perspective. Notably, Zigon argues that institutional morality "is more akin to a very persuasive rhetoric than it is to truth" (2011, p. 9). Furthermore, he states "Institutional moralities can become negotiable for the practical maneuvering through certain legal, social, and interfaith barriers" (2011, p. 9) This paper will demonstrate the lasting truth of this statement given the shifting tides throughout Russian history.

Accordingly, institutional morality exists alongside the public discourse of morality which Zigon articulates as "those public articulations of moral beliefs, conceptions, and hopes that are not *directly* articulated by an institution" (2011, p. 9). Examples of these are the media, demonstrations, philosophical discussions and "everyday articulated beliefs, opinions and conceptions" (2011, p 9). Finally, there also exists an embodied disposition or embodied morality. These are everyday decisions and actions with an implicit morality, absent of a conscious determination of right or wrong, they are simply carried out. In any exploration of a foreign culture, it is profoundly important to recognize the existence and significance of the embodied disposition. This is especially critical in Russian abortion culture. The remainder of the paper will trace abortion through a century of institutional morality, public discourse and embodied morality in an attempt to shed light on why abortion culture is so prolific in Russia and how the state has repeatedly sought to construct a morality to fit their needs at the time; ultimately this exploration will demonstrate that women's reproductive health behaviors, reflected through embodied morality, have repeatedly challenged the manipulative institutional moral framework. However, underestimating the institutional influence can yield disastrous results as history has demonstrated. Therefore, the proceeding exploration and analysis provide a relevant contextualization of abortion culture in Russia to inform future analyses and health interventions.

III. IMPERIAL RUSSIA: ON ABORTION AND RELIGION

Today's rhetoric surrounding abortion in Russia is most often formally debated in a religious institutional framework. Therefore, a brief exploration of Russian Orthodox Christianity in pre-Soviet Russia will provide a helpful foundation for the development of the institutional moral framework of abortion. Beginning under the Romanov Dynasty in the 1600s,

Russian Tsars were endowed with the divine right of the church, mutually emboldening both the autocracy and the power of the Orthodox Church. As such, Russians living under imperial rule experienced the weight of nationality enshrined in their religion. Russian peasantry incorporated Orthodox beliefs and practices into every aspect of their rural life, elevating the royal family to sacrosanct echelons (Burgess, 2009). At the same time, the cultural and ethnic diversity of the vast Russian Empire provided the context for significant syncretism, blending Orthodoxy with aspects of Islam, mysticism and personal interpretations of Christianity. Icon corners displayed pictures of saints and other religious memorabilia alongside pagan iconography, ultimately demonstrating that while the autocratic and Orthodox institutions wielded exceptional power, other sources of morality were also ever-present.

Concurrent with the Romanov's divine power, abortion was officially illegal in Imperial Russia dating back to the 17th century, when Tsar Alexis Romanov enacted a death penalty for anyone involved in abortion. This was consistent with the decree from the Ecumenical Council of Trulo (691 A.D.) stating "As for women who furnish drugs for the purpose of procuring abortion and those who take fetus-killing poisons, they are made subject to the penalty prescribed for murders" (in Evans, 1981). Quite progressively, Peter the Great revoked the capital punishment clause. Nonetheless, strict decrees against women seeking illegal abortions persisted until 1917 with penalties including exile, deprivation of civil rights, and enforcement of hard labor. Interestingly, sentencing records between 1910-1917 demonstrate that these laws were rarely enforced; only 20 to 60 annual sentences were carried out in the 20th century (Avdeev, Blum, & Troitskaya, 1995). This reality blurs the morality surrounding the practice. Institutional morality was evident in legal rhetoric, however, given the lack of enforcement,

perhaps alternative approaches to morality framed the procedure for the population and even the institution.

Despite the threat of prosecution, the practice was indeed widespread in the pre-Soviet era, illustrated through fragmented statistics and studies. One such study, presented in 1893 to the Pirogov Society[1], provided data demonstrating that more than 22% of pregnancies in the Kharkov region resulted in abortion. In 1913, a leading statistician reported at the Twelfth Congress of the Pirogov Society, that abortion had increased by a factor of 10 in only 15 years (Avdeev et al., 1995). Illustrating this on a local level, a 1914 survey carried out at numerous St. Petersburg hospitals, reported that of the 5,874 pregnant women admitted for delivery complications, 4,374 were the result of complications due to illegal abortions. The social demand for birth control was high and without access to alternative scientific methods, the underground practice of abortion was prolific (Avdeev et al., 1995). Therefore, while abortion had been illegal for centuries, by 1917 it was a widely practiced procedure driven underground and rarely prosecuted. Perhaps these statistics and surveys begin to form the most influential aspect of abortion's morality in Russian culture – embodied disposition. Women sought out the practice regardless of institutional rhetoric and action.

While qualitative data from women of reproductive age is unavailable, some insight into an institutional and public moral framing of the topic does exist. Beginning in the late 19th century an increasingly progressive and public debate among the medical and scientific field regarding abortion shocked the rest of Western Europe. At highly publicized medical conferences, widely covered in the press, the debate was focused on the relationship between abortion and social factors such as poverty, family illness and limited housing. They proposed

[1] Pirogov Society: The most prestigious scientific society in Russia. It was held in high esteem by throughout European and American scientific societies and institutions. (Surovtseva, 2014)

that these challenging social dispositions instigated the need for abortion (Avdeev et al., 1995). Ultimately, this culminated in a scientific recommendation that abortion not be penalized. While the Duma failed to implement their recommendations, the lively and public debate impacted future Soviet discourse.

As early as 1886, there is evidence purporting that abortion was largely framed scientifically within the institutional and public discourse frameworks (Avdeev et al., 1995). The idea that the practice be decriminalized but not promoted sheds, light on the overall moral approach to the practice at the time. Unlike in Western Europe and the United States where widespread ethical and religiously motivated moral discussions dominated abortion rhetoric, Russia focused on the practicality of the issue. At the dawn of the revolution, abortion in Russia sat in an unusually progressive arena in comparison to other societies at the time. Unlike in the West, there was no overwhelming anti-birth control movement, penalization was not widespread, and the scientific moral debate carried far more weight than the positions articulated by the nation's religious institutions. There was a medical consideration, a social consideration and even a notion of feminism. This progressive approach would now be in the hands and minds of the 20th century's largest and most divisive social experiment – the creation of the Soviet Union.

IV. ABORTION: 1921-1936

Russian peasants and urban workers under imperial rule faced hardships unknown to Western Europe. Dire living conditions, a regressive Tsar and effects of two devastating wars in the first 15 years of the 20th century contextualized the proliferation of revolutionary tides steered by Marxist ideology (Bernbaum, 2010). In October 1917, Vladimir Lenin and his Bolshevik comrades overthrew the provisional government and began solidifying power

throughout the empire. While the civil war raged in parts of the country until 1921, a constitution was adopted in the summer of 1918 and major declarations were made throughout the violent chaos (Solomon, 1996).

The Soviet Constitution was a significant change for the Russian population. While public health and healthcare had been a focus for certain tsars during the Imperial years, never before had the population inherited equality and the promise of a standard level of living conditions. In the first few years of the Soviet system, the official socialist ideology maintained that morbidity and premature mortality were the result of flawed socioeconomic structures. While the government purported that the success of socialism would eventually eliminate the social causes of disease, policymakers recognized the need for immediate action. In the context of women's sexual and reproductive health, preventative programs were certainly a focus, but the lack of effective contraceptive technology, the crisis of maternal mortality due to illegal and unsafe abortions and the overarching social issues prompted the government to legalize abortions in 1920 (Semashko,1934; Avdeev et al., 1995).

In an official decree introduced on November 18, 1920 the newly formed USSR became the first country in the world to legalize abortion. The decree began by recognizing the increasing numbers of women seeking out abortions worldwide and the resulting threat illegal abortions posed to women's health. It criticized the global trend of punitive repercussions for those involved in the procedure and confirmed that these actions failed to preclude the practice from occurring (Semashko, 1934).

> This method of abortions has driven the operation underground and made the woman a victim of mercenary and often ignorant quacks who make a profession of secret operation. As a result up to 50 per cent of woman are infected in the course of the operation and up to 4 per cent of them die (Semashko, 1934).

Thus, the first argument presented is in defense of women's safety. The decree continued by analyzing the subject in a social context and described abortion as a temporary fix to social and economic hardships. Furthermore, it purported that ultimately the success of socialism would make abortions obsolete, but until then, legalization was necessary. Following the ideological rationalization, the decree succinctly articulated the means of protection for the safety of women and integrity of their decision (Semashko, 1934). Despite Lenin's vehement belief that the new proletariat women should "[decide] for themselves the fundamental issues of their lives" the overall party rhetoric was focused on science and practically (Potts, 1977).

One could argue invoking a time limit, implied an institutional approach that only would tolerate the practice for a time in order to minimize social hardships – in short, an approach that viewed abortion as wrong, but necessary for the time. However, according to Soviet doctrines, the practice wasn't wrong from the traditional religious framework: "Soviet philosophy recognizes no moral compunction in a killing a human embryo" (Heer, 1965). By placing the practice of abortion within the Soviet institutional framework, the morality of right and wrong would be inherently tied to the survival and proliferation of the state. This monumental social experiment depended on a strong, healthy and large population and workforce. When abortion was legalized, the USSR had suffered over 16 million losses in World War I, the civil war and the subsequent famine (Rivkin-Fish, 2003). Instead of focusing on increasing the birth rate, it appears the ruling institution considered strengthening the productivity of the existing population by elevating their social level as the moral right – for a time (Hoffman, 2000). In a sense, moral relativism dictated what was best for the health and future of the state. Therefore, official decrees and rhetoric did not purport that a women's newly-granted equality translated to ownership of her body; instead, the focus was on the safety and health of women as workers and part of the

proletariat. Demonstrative of the proletariat 'state before individual' philosophy is a quote from a mock trial published in 1925 when a prosecutor asked a woman who had had a legal abortion: "Do you understand that you have killed a future person, a citizen who might have been useful for society" (Hoffman, 2000). Here, the notion of life emerges, not through a religious lens, but morality emerges through public discourse supporting the institutional proletariat framework – an unborn child is a future worker lost.

Complete abortion statistics for the entirety of the USSR between 1920 and 1936 are unavailable. However, studies, projections and citywide and hospital statistics allow for a good understanding of the social shift taking place. First and foremost, the legalization profoundly decreased the practice of illegal abortion performed outside hospitals. In 1923, more than 41% of abortions were performed outside state hospitals; by 1927 the amount had decreased to roughly 14%. Between 1923 and 1926, the total number of abortions in Moscow per 100 live births went from 19.6 to 55.7. In the same time period, the percentage of abortions in relation to live births more than doubled from 12.65 to 26.54 (Field, 1956).

After the death of Lenin and Josef Stalin's rise to power, debate surrounding abortion's legalization grew for a number of reasons. First, the sharp rise in legally performed abortions worried demographers and politicians. This initiated the emergence of pronatalist ideas and rhetoric. As a result, slight alterations were made in 1927 relating to term limits and limitations on first pregnancies. Moreover, there was a rededication to the efforts promised in the constitution to thwart the need for abortions by funding new maternity wards and child care initiatives (Avdeev et al., 1995). Finally, in order to better track overall demographic data and abortion incidence, the USSR implemented a registration card system that same year. This provided the first official figures on abortion incidence in Russia. This system served the state in

two ways. First, it allowed the Commissariat for Health to track health data and social indicators of health. Second, and more instrumental to the government, it was provided demographic statistics on social and economic theories that had never been put into widescale practice. The cards not only tracked abortion incidence but tracked the reasoning behind abortion. By 1932, with the help of the registration system, Soviet demographers recognized that elevated social conditions did not reduce abortion and the rate rose steadily from 1927 into the 1930s (Avdeev et al., 1995). Instead of recognizing accurate social conditions behind the declining birthrate, Stalin's blame on abortion was guised in the idea of a statewide departure from family values (Field, 1956). The concerted propaganda initiative against abortion grew, focusing on the inaccurate claim that abortion resulted in adverse health outcomes for women (Semashko, 1934). The confluence of these events sowed the seeds for Stalin's eventual abortion ban.

V. CONCURRENT WORLD EVENTS: 1917-1936

Margaret Sanger, the "mother of birth control", was on a world tour in the early years of 1930s. In each country, she toured hospitals, spoke with doctors and examined family planning practices, taking notes and corresponding with friends and advocates at home in the United States. Her letters and notes regarding her time in Moscow and St. Petersburg were filled with exuberance at the progressive nature of society, believing feminist equality had truly been achieved. While many of her letters revealed that she saw the Soviet Union as a beacon for contraceptive technology, she was unaware of the fact that by her arrival in 1932, Soviet scientists had all but abandoned their quest for new contraception. In 1925, a Central Scientific Commission for the Study of Contraceptives was established. From its outset, debate among scientists, doctors and statisticians overshadowed any results or breakthroughs. One side

purported that contraceptive technology would reduce the number of abortions and free up hospitals, resources and man power (Katz, Engelman & Hajo, 2016). On the other side, pronatalists argued that contraceptive technology would only contribute further to the increasingly alarming birth rate decline. Ultimately, the debate ceased when Josef Stalin demanded that all production capabilities be entirely devoted to state sanctioned economic endeavors; thereby, fating abortion to persist as the leading method of family planning (Hoffman, 2002).

In a letter to a Russian doctor she had met in St. Petersburg, Sanger declared "You have no priests, nor a pope, to thwart your progress, and I know that the world is looking towards Soviet Russia to give us the key to this problem of contraception" (in Katz et al., 2016, p. 66). This quote exemplified Sanger's contempt for religion, having been the source of nearly all the moral opposition to her family planning efforts in the West. It also shed light on the reality that unlike all other abortion debates at the time, religion played no part framing institutional morality or that of public discourse. Considering that abortion was not publicly pursued in an overtly religious framework prior to the Soviet Union, this comes as little surprise. Moreover, Russian Orthodoxy's place in society had shifted dramatically when Lenin assumed power. He was a true Marxist and promulgated the belief that religion was bourgeoisie, superstitious and undermined the potential value of each individual as a contributor to Soviet society. However, Lenin recognized the danger of attacking religion, especially in the early and vulnerable years of the country. Therefore, given the substantial and nuanced role of religion in the national past, the official treatment was varied. From the outset, Soviet decrees found a balance between discouraging religion, without alienating the masses through overt oppression. The first of these, "The Decree of Separation of Church and State", provided 13 points inhibiting the autocratic

orthodox legacy without fundamentally banning personal practice (Freund, 1945). In addition to plainly stating, "The church is separated from the state", the decree separated church and school and took away the right of religious bodies to own property and collect money (Schlesinger, 1949) It also stripped away the mutually emboldening protective rights that the previous government provided (Burgess, 2009) Finally, it stated that "all civil acts are performed exclusively by the civic authorities [in charge of] the department for registration of marriages and births"(Schlesinger, 1949). This point exemplifies a way in which the Soviets systemically dismantled the symbiotic relationship of the past. Finally, in 1922, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church was forced to abdicate. Accordingly, religion played little, if any, role in the institutional construction of a moral framework around abortion debate for the ensuing decades.

VI. 1936-1955: THE ABORTION BAN

The 1927 changes to abortion policy introduced in the late twenties emphasized Josef Stalin's promulgated notion of the "virtues of motherhood" and were reflective of his ultimate campaign against abortion. Historiography on the issue confirms that his concern for the birth rate was profound. However, the official decree banning abortions introduced on June 27th, 1936, framed the decision outside the birthrate decline. Instead, it argued that socialism had been accomplished and therefore the original intention behind abortion's legalization had become irrelevant (Field, 1965). This was overtly untrue, demonstrated by the registered reasons cited for abortion. He also capitalized on the 1920s medical debates that explored the complications of abortion, pointedly ignoring the ultimate consensus that it was indeed a very safe procedure. Nonetheless, the 1936 decree, banned the procedure in all spaces, for all women, at any point in the pregnancy unless there was medical evidence substantiating a threat to the woman's life or if

the fetus carried a hereditary disease. Furthermore, the Commissariat of Health secretly disseminated a directive in 1936 to confiscate the remaining contraceptive devices available to the public (Solomon, 1996). The law was again enforced through the threat of imprisonment for any medical professional performing abortions, and was made stricter for non-medical professionals carrying out the procedure. Women who underwent the illegal procedure were subject to "social reprimand" for a first offense and a 300 ruble fine for subsequent offenses (Meisel & Kozera, 1953). The decree was accompanied by a comprehensive list of new initiatives intended to strengthen the family through stricter alimony laws, pledges for more family resources and monetary incentives for large families. Considering the law, the only official statistical data available for this time period is (illegal) abortions begun outside of clinics that ended in the hospital and legal abortions sought for medical reasons. In 1940, 500,516 abortions were recorded of which 452,557 were begun out of clinics. Furthermore, this dataset was not representative of the entire country. Finally, reflections of physicians provide overwhelming evidence that illegal abortions returned to pre-ban levels and maternal mortality spiked (Avdeev et al., 1995).

All three aspects of morality frame this event in significant ways and shed light on the power of the institution and the power of embodied morality. To begin, Stalin constructed an institutional framework for abortion with an implicit and explicit morality. The rationale detailed in the official decree serves as the explicit moral framework. The state argued that abortion was not safe for its women and that socialism had removed its necessity in society. However, reverting back to Zigon's insight into institutional morality – this explicit rationale was more persuasive rhetoric than fact or truth (2011, p. 9). Abortion was indeed very safe at the time. Moscow physicians boasted to Western scientists in the 1920s that they had perfected the

procedure to the point where mortality rates were down to .005% compared to 4% for German illegal abortions. (Evans, 1981). In conjunction, the claim that socialism had been achieved, negates the vast majority of the statistical evidence collected since the introduction of the registration system in 1927. Most notably, the Commissioner of Health openly acknowledged in 1934 that women continued to cite social reasons such as housing issues, poverty, illness and large families as the motivation behind their abortion (Semashko, 1934). Therefore, this persuasive rhetoric was utilized as the moral framework, but overlooked facts. Ultimately, the implicit pronatalist morality eclipsed all other frameworks (Soloman, 1996). Stalin's power was at its height and he valued population growth more than women's agency, thereby decreeing abortion morally wrong at the institutional level.

While the implicit institutional morality dictated policy, it is still necessary to understand the public and individual's moral reasoning of the issue at the time. A great deal of insight is provided by the discourse of morality through a public dialogue fostered by the government preceding the introduction of the ban. The Soviet government solicited letters from regular citizens encouraging them to provide their opinion on the proposed ban. These were printed in the state newspaper, *Izvestia*, and the government purported that they would internalize this debate before officially ratifying any provision (Schlesinger, 1949). Here, we have the interplay between the institution and the public, underscored by the repressive climate of the state. However, the letters analyzed in this paper make up the rare, published opposition – which at the time were buried underneath letter after letter in support of the ban. Therefore, these opposition letters most likely provide the true morality through public discourse removed from the institutional power (Avdeev et al., 1995).

The twelve letters analyzed represent mostly women, from all backgrounds: a student, an engineer, a judge, professors, a homemaker raising children, a self-proclaimed housewife and an entire women's farm collective. The overwhelming majority cited personal and logical reasons why abortions cannot categorically be forbidden, and suggest exceptions or a complete abandonment of the issue. The mother and the engineer described abortion as a necessity to reduce the burden that disproportionately affects women due to certain societal factors that the socialism has yet to control for. For them, the morality existed in gender equality and a standard of living. An old woman uses her life experience to emphasize that forcing women to have children will disallow any "possibility at all of participating in social life…a man suffers less" (Schlesinger, 1949). She provided one of the more overt feminist moral approaches. Some acknowledged the inevitability of increased illegal abortions, revisiting the morality of keeping women safe. Most pointed out the imperative of control over child spacing and delaying childbirth, which was the student's thesis. She described her inability to raise a child at that moment in time, but her desire to do so in the future (Schlesinger, 1949). For her, abortion was morally right because it provided her with choices and a future she was able to self-determine.

For totality's sake, an opposition letter was also analyzed in order to provide an example of the larger public discourse influenced by the institution. The Chief People's Judge of the Moscow Region framed his anti-abortion perspective by way of strengthening family values. This was a widely publicized propagandist argument dating back to the late twenties (Schlesinger, 1949). The social climate following the inception of the USSR grew increasingly "wild" as divorce rates soared. Dating among the young flourished, which ultimately contributed to a perceived abandonment of family values and tradition – the moral imperative for Stalin and his conservative cronies propagated that a strengthened family focus would eventually give way

to increased birth rates. Therefore, the public discourse in this context highlighted abortion as a symptom – and crutch – of the much larger social issue (Rivkin-Fish, 2004). Institutional morality, promoted the importance of traditional family units upheld the belief that strengthening the family would eventually raise the birthrate and contribute to the wellbeing of the State.

Soviet Russia displayed a widely accepted presupposition that individuals have a moral compass that direct them to what is 'right' in a given situation (Wanner, 2011). Therefore, Zigon's analysis of morality in relation to moral embodied disposition, is reflected in the prevalence and actions surrounding abortion throughout the period. After the ban was introduced, there was a massive proliferation of underground abortion clinics. Just two years after the decree, abortion rates had risen back to their levels in the early 1930s, suggesting that women and society had embraced abortion comfortably (Solomon, 1996). Prosecution for women and doctors breaking the law was never widespread and the rates of prosecution continued to fall as the ban persisted. This was in contrast to constant calls for more prosecution from higher ranking party officials. Peter Solomon, a historian on criminal justice under Stalin attributes this trend to "the failure of patients and doctors to cooperate with law enforcement and the disinterest, if not passive resistance, on part of legal officials" (1996, p. 218). This brilliantly illustrates a strong moral embodiment: members from all parts of society continued to seek out, provide and even protect abortions. Society was unwilling to change their behavior because abortion was integral to their lives and to their society. It was morally right in the context of the citizen's embodied morality.

Finally, concurrent with the ban was a massive purge of religion. Houses of worship reduced from 23,000 (ca. 1931) to 8000 (ca. 1936) to roughly 200 by 1941. This period was also marked by 100,000 murders of church leaders. These deaths in conjunction with arrests made

during the purge reduced the religious personnel by 85% (Burgess, 2009). Then, 1943 marked complete reversal of Stalin's draconian policies. The regime identified the religious institution as a unifying and hopeful cultural force in the wake of World War II. Under Stalin's patronage the remaining bishops of the Russian Orthodox Council were called to order and a new Patriarch was elected (Krindatch, 2006). Endorsing this process enabled Stalin to rebuild the Russian Orthodox Church under his authority and retain control over its actions and influence. This was codified by the creation of the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church. The ROC was permitted just one type of engagement – conducting worship services. Education and youth engagement were pointedly illegal. Ultimately, this process forced the Church to collude with the government by supporting Soviet ideals and disseminating specific messages (Krindatch, 2006). Nonetheless, it gave the Russian Orthodox Church a presence in society once again. While an autonomous Russian Orthodox Church did not exist or wield any influence outside of what the Soviet government allowed, the reemergence allowed them to maintain a quiet presence until the dissolution of the USSR.

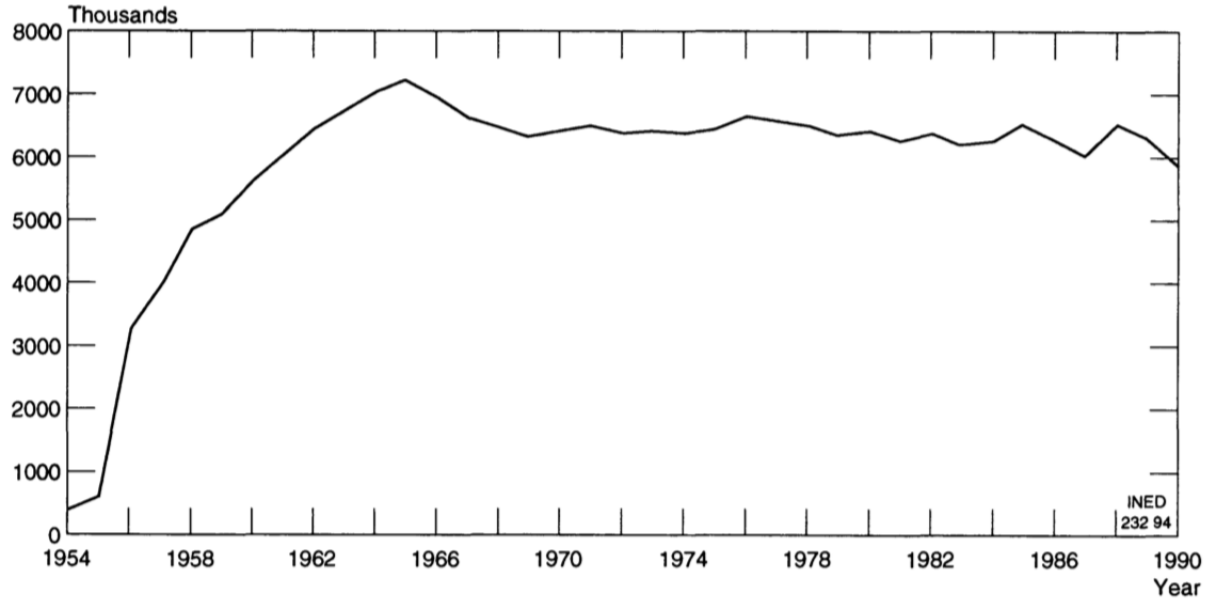
VII. ABORTION: 1955-1991

Following Josef Stalin's death in 1953 and the subsequent shift in focus and policy, a state decree overturned the 1936 ban on abortion. The official rationale for the reversal was that the policies emphasizing "motherhood" had been successful and as such, abortions would be legal under the same guiding principles of 1927 . One change however, was that the practice would be free. It went on to acknowledge that removing the abortion ban would ultimately reduce the incidence of the harmful practice of illegal abortions (Supreme Soviet of the USSR, 1954). However, this was instituted with a simultaneous anti-abortion campaign in reaction to

the vulnerable state of the population following the millions of losses from World War II and Stalin's purges (Rivkin-Fish, 2003).

Statistics have been compiled and later adjusted after the fall of the Soviet Union with increasing accuracy. They demonstrate that registered abortion rates spiked immediately after this reversal and stayed consistently high until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1990, hovering around 6 million abortions per year.

Figure 1. **Legal total abortion number of abortions in the Soviet Union 1954-1990.**



Source: Avdeev et al., 1995.

In any given year between 1960 and 1990 there were 134.44 to 231.95 per 100 live births. These high abortion rates became increasingly troubling for leaders throughout this period, given that they consistently eclipsed the birth rate, at times by a factor of two (Avdeev et al., 1995). While the birthrate had long troubled the state, the 1960s marked a shift to start identifying why the rate was declining and how the state could intervene. Datasets were compiled and analyzed. However, given that the party had purportedly eradicated class systems, demographers were not

allowed to ask questions that would suggest social or economic disparities among the population. Given this limitation, studies in the 1960s yielded no insight on the declining birthrate. As the situation grew more dire in the 1970s, the government allowed demographers to ignore the propagation that social equality existed, in order to accurately evaluate the central research question. Regardless of the unwavering dedicated effort to address the issue of the birthrate, policy was never aimed at abortion again. In fact, the 1980s saw an expansion of abortion access (Rivkin-Fish, 2003).

In addition to the birthrate crisis, the persistence of illegal abortion posed a significant public health dilemma, given the unsafe nature of illegal abortions and its profound effect on maternal mortality. In 1954, 80% of abortions were estimated to have taken place outside state-sanctioned clinics and by 1959 the number reduced to 20%. However, it took decades for this number to reduce further, ultimately landing at 12% by 1986 (Avdeev et al, 1995). There were multiple reasons for the continued practice of illegal abortions. Although legal abortions were free, after-hours or private clinics where abortions were performed charged a fee that usually covered the cost of anesthesia, a luxury in the vast majority state sanctioned abortions. Additionally, women were able to avoid the three-day post-op recovery mandated by the state. Three days of lost work could result in penalties or termination. A final reason to seek out illegal abortions was prompted by the desire to terminate after 12 weeks. To address the final issue, in 1982 the USSR expanded term limits from 12 weeks to 28 weeks for medical reasons. Years later the state removed the medical necessity allowing many social factors to warrant the extension to 28 weeks (UN, 2007; Popov, 1995).

The persisting rates of illegal abortions led the state to revisit their anti-contraception position. Initially, this resulted in a manifested support for contraception when illegal abortion rates were

highest. However, the government failed to take any concrete or measurable steps to make new contraception technology available. In addition to potential moral qualms relating to the recommitment of growing the population, the USSR lacked the raw materials to replicate the breakthroughs occurring in the West. Partly in response to this reality, and to increasing concerns over birth rates, the state banned oral birth control (OBC) in 1974, thereby making abortions the only available source of birth control (United Nations Population Data Bank [UN PDB], 2007).

The reversal of the ban serves as the most overt moral position taken by the state institution. The safety of women was once again placed high in the moral hierarchy. This is especially evident in the expansion of term limits in the 1980s. A source also points to the desired return to Lenin's belief that a woman should be making her own decisions regarding her body (Engel, 1987). Perhaps this feminist morality did exist at an institutional level during the immediate post-Stalin climate – a desire to return to Soviet ideals not reflected in Stalinism alone. However, this could not have persisted in the 1960s and 1970s as the fertility crisis prompted a strong pro-family and anti-feminist movement most apparent in public discourse (Ryan, 1981) Therefore, the morality in keeping women safe emerges as the leading institutional moral approach to abortion at the time. However, the preceding analysis fails to fully address how the state reconciled abortion and the birthrate.

In 1955 Nikita Kruschev declared "Under socialism the raising of the birth rate is regarded not only as a means of providing greater labour power. The socialist state also looks at the matter from the viewpoint of the nation's future" (in Heer, 1965). As a result, sources point to the government's evident acknowledgment that abortion did not impact the birthrate. Its decline continued over the course of the abortion ban and the government accepted this truth. Without attacking abortion access the state began promoting family values through propaganda,

campaigns and rhetoric. This placed the family high in the moral hierarchy and tried to subvert abortion through propaganda, but did not limit safe access or turn the tide of abortion's social acceptance. Because of the lack of alternative birth control methods and the social aversion to having more than one child, the propaganda was met with little acceptance (Popov, 1995). Therefore, while the birthrate was arguably one of the most pressing issues in a post-Stalin Soviet Union, it did not impact access to abortions or abortion rates. It did however, reinforce an institutional morality that abortion was bad for the state, partially evident in public discourse presented below.

Insight to public discourse stems from the studies carried out to understand the prevalence of abortion in 1958 and through the 1960s and 1970s. It contextualizes the belief that abortion is a moral imperative for a multitude of social reasons. The studies identify the same social factors from 1934 as the reasons for abortion. Among the diverse women surveyed across the country many believed that preventing a birth was a necessity given the social factors of their life (Ryan, 1981). However, there was also a concurrent acknowledgement of the birthrate among the same women in Russia that sought out abortions. A published interview with a leading medical director in 1979 demonstrates the way in which two competing moral frameworks can coexist. First, she refuted any question of abortion as "murder by the skilled" and stated "to accuse women of murder when they are having an abortion is mere affectation" (Ryan, 1981). However, she went on to say that terminating a first pregnancy "constitutes a crime against morality" (Ryan, 1981). This dichotomy perfectly frames the public discourse surrounding the morality of abortion in a period of the birthrate hysteria. The practice was morally right but not without consequences on the state – which are morally wrong. Nonetheless,

statistics on abortions and the aforementioned survey suggest that moral embodiment or private morality supersedes the institutional morality.

Outside of the birthrate dilemma another medical professional weighed in on the morality of the practice in a 1989 New York Times article, OBGYN Svetlana I. Markovich stated "We are basically an atheist society…Of course it would be better to prevent pregnancy rather than to have an abortion. But I can't think of abortion as murder, because at the stage when abortions are permitted, this is not a person" (in Cooper, 1989). Here is another public and prominent acknowledgment that abortion is not murder or wrong. Interestingly, it provides a new layer by stating that prevention would be morally superior. This was not a new propagation by the scientific community in any way, but highlights the short comings of the state by failing to provide an alternative. This distinction of reducing the abortion rate from a public health approach versus banning abortion for any other reason is important, especially in the proceeding decades.

Finally, the moral embodiment of abortion culture between 1954 and 1990 is similar to that of the preceding timeframes. Women continued to seek out abortions for personal reasons. While there was an acknowledgement of the moral implications to the state, that did not preclude the prevalence.

VIII. ABORTION: 1990-2000

The decade that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent establishment of the Russian Federation was marked by political instability and economic upheavals. Despite its ongoing challenges, a constitution of the Russian Federation was adopted by Parliament in 1993. While it outlined a litany of political pronouncements and guaranteed

rights, a lack of resources precluded the government's ability to reach its intended potential. Women's reproductive health was a space where these limitations were especially evident – made worse by an overt de-prioritization of family planning. While the constitution ensured universal access to free medical care, including access to free abortions, access varied greatly depending on region. The procedure remained *officially* free of charge until 1994 when federal funding was removed (Center for Reproductive Rights [CRR], 2011). However, the Ministry of Health encouraged local health departments to provide free access resulting in varying degrees of success, again, depending on region. In theory, policy dictated that abortion be available upon request until 12 weeks of gestation with no need to provide reason. The procedure also remained available until 28 weeks by providing one of twelve reasons dictated by the 1988 law (Flood, 2002). In 1993, the list of reasons was further expanded to thirteen. No explanation for this was provided, but a spike in illegal abortions provides a compelling rationale. A final measure that was changed in 1993 was the legalization of sterilization. This provided a new profoundly important opportunity for women who had reached an age when having children was no longer desired (Boutot, 2017)

Despite the initial policy expansion, 1996 saw the introduction of Bill No. 567, which reduced the term limit from 28 weeks to 22 weeks. It further decreased the number of acceptable social determinants that women could provide to obtain an abortion between 11 and 22 weeks. While an anti-abortion movement was gaining momentum – further explored below – revisiting abortion policy was likely influenced by improved medical technology which resulted in earlier fetal viability (Denisov, 2014). Between 1996 and 2000 abortion policy remained constant as rates steadily declined. This period also saw a transfer of power from Boris Yeltsin to Vladimir Putin, elected in 2000.

Concurrent with these policy changes was the establishment of the Committee for the Family and Demographic Policies (CFDP) in 1991. The CFDP focused its efforts on educating citizens on their right to family planning by means of modern contraceptives and traditional methods such as coitus interruptus and the rhythm method (UN, 2007). By 1997, these efforts were abandoned – again due to a lack of resources (Deschner & Cohen, 2003). Despite this, a 1996 report by the Planned Parenthood Federation suggested that 55% of women were using modern contraceptives – these however, varied greatly in quality and access (UN, 2007). Largely due to the government's initiatives, abortion rates fell steadily throughout the 1990s; but the Russian abortion rate remained the highest in the world for the entire decade. At the inception of the new government the official total abortion rate was 3.9 million. However, retrospective estimates place this number closer to 4.1 million (UN, 2007; Denisov & Sakevich, 2014). By the time Putin came to power in 2000 the rate had fallen to 2.1 million, still the highest is the world (Denisov & Sakevich, 2014).

This period is well defined by an institutional acceptance and normalization of the practice. The lack of resources and general chaos deprioritized family planning efforts; however compared to the anti-abortion campaigns popular throughout the post-Stalin period, abortion was not under direct attack by the government. While the term limits were reduced, they mirrored progressive Western guidelines. Nonetheless, religious institutional morality became increasingly antagonistic. This was especially threatening given that a majority of "individuals believed that religious traditions and religious practitioners held privileged claims to moral authority" (Wanner, 2011).

IX. RESURGENCE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Since Gorbachev initiated *perestroika* in the mid 1980s, freer expressions of religion were increasingly tolerated and in 1989, Patriarch Alexy II was elected as the head of the Russian Orthodox Church (Krindatch, 2006). During the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the chaotic months of the power transfer from Gorbachev to Russian President Boris Yeltsin, Alexy II strategically aligned himself with the new president. At the time of Yeltsin's inauguration, the Patriarch was a trusted ally. While the constitution declared a fervent separation of Church and State, and the Patriarch's relationship with Yeltsin yielded significant influence. This culminated in an immediate reclamation of property by the Russian Orthodox Church and the restoration of local parishes throughout the country (Burgess, 2009). The physical renewal of the church marked the beginning of its accumulation of institutional and political influence.

In 1997, the ties between national identity and Russian Orthodoxy were further strengthened by the "Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations". The bill was drafted by the state, heavily influenced by the Russian Orthodox Church, and sought to restrict suspect religious expressions, mainly from foreign institutions prior. In many ways it served as a legal way to promote the Russian Orthodox Church by subverting foreign religions. Furthermore it serves as a profound symbol for the future of Russian Orthodox Church, as well as its relationship with the state and power in the country (Daniel, 2007).

At the dawn of the Russian Federation, the church also developed a renewed focus on institutional and community presence. Beginning in the early 1990s, the Russian Orthodox Church began investing in social welfare projects, establishing orphanages, hospitals and nursing homes. Given its increased presence, church affiliation rose dramatically in the 1990s. In a 1988

Gallup survey only 10% of Russian citizens considered themselves 'believers' of Orthodox teachings. By 1993 that number had risen to 39% (Flood, 2002). Moreover, this is only those who identified as 'believers'; for many in modern day Russians, Russian Orthodoxy is crucial to their national identity outside of religious belief. Therefore, while 39% considered themselves 'believers' it can be presumed that even more felt an affiliation (Burgess, 2009). Furthermore, even by 1990, after 60 years without profound religious currents, 60% of those who identified as religious believed that religion "was the guardian of moral norms;" 48% of those without a religious affiliation felt the same. Consequently, the resurgence of the Orthodox Church and its increasing power throughout the ensuing decades would have a significant impact on the importance of institutional morality (Burgess, 2009).

X. 1990-2000: The Dawn of "Pro-Life" in Russia and the Orthodox Resurgence

The Church remained silent on the issue of abortion in the early years of the new Russian Federation. No modern decrees suggested it as morally evil, nor did members of the Church seek to point out the 1200 year old cannon likening women who get abortions to murderers (Stanley, 1994). And yet on May 19, 1994, a headline for the Dallas Morning News read "Anti-abortion conference opens in Russia – Orthodox growing more vocal on issue" (Stanley, 1994). Referring to the same conference a Chicago Sun-Times article stated:

> At a conference starting this week designed to secure an anti-abortion beachhead in Russia, videos played the made-to-shock film 'Silent Scream'…it was familiar stuff for Americans but almost completely unheard of in Russia. (Hockstader, 1994)

Given its novelty, the Moscow conference only boasted 300-500 attendees, at least 50 of whom were American and Western European. However, the it was the first of its kind, and the most visible anti-abortion presence in Russia ever. The foreign influence comes as little surprise given

that the event was co-sponsored and entirely paid for by Maryland-based, Human Life International. Its Russian sponsor, Right to Live was founded in 1992 and had garnered meager local support until Human Life International proposed the 1994 conference. While the Russian Orthodox Church was also listed as a co-sponsor, their involvement was underwhelming. Patriarch Alexy II purportedly accepted an invitation but failed to show up, sending low level clergymen instead (Stanley, 1994). Right to Live's then President, Galina Seryakova, addressed on this stating "Even the Russian Orthodox Church, which is officially opposed to abortion, doesn't really speak about it" (Hockstader, 1994). While the event failed to bring in huge numbers or disrupt society in a tangible way, it marked the birth of a new era and moral framework for Russian abortion culture. In the next six years three more conferences were held and debate flourished.

The foreign involvement in the conferences truly complicates this issue. While Right to Live was formulated as an anti-abortion group by Russians, how much had foreign ideas, organizations and rhetoric impacted them? It is inaccurate to suggest that the first Russian pro-lifers moral value for abortion was entirely introduced by a foreign institution or rhetoric. However, the mobilization, the tactics at the conference, and especially the decision to use the phrase "pro-life" underscore foreign influences in the movement. While foreigners impacted the start of the pro-life movement, Russian society did not reject it.

In 1998 Patriarch Alexy II made his first public statement on the issue in a broader statement. In it, he called for the end of the death penalty and subsequently condemned abortion, believing both to be murder. As the first comment on abortion from the modern Russian Orthodox Church, this statement is profound in the institution assigning this moral weight to abortion. However, it is interesting to note that while the Patriarch stated that both acts constitute

murder, he only called for the abolishment of the death penalty (Luehermann, 2017). Accordingly, in 1998, the institutional approach was perhaps more reminiscent of that which was employed by the Soviets pre and post Stalin, albeit utilizing different frameworks. The morality of abortion for the Russian Orthodox Church was framed through their moral code of ethics, purporting that taking a life is wrong. However, like the Soviets and their proletariat framework, morality did not dictate a call to action.

Throughout the 1990s there was a clear increase in public discourse surrounding the morality of abortion. While the Russian anti-abortion movement was not an overtly visible presence in society, especially early on, a new moral approach certainly emerged. Furthermore, the national growth in different pro-life organizations points to a huge increase relative to Soviet eras. However, given that the Church had yet to speak out on the abolishment of abortion, it appears that mainstream commentary did not refute or support the procedure (Cichowlas, 2016).

Finally, the embodied moral disposition of the issue is complex given the confluence of events in the 1990s. Rates fell at a precipitous rate concurrent with the emergence of the pro-life movement. However, there was also the introduction of different methods of birth control. Furthermore, while the total abortion rate decreased over the course of a decade, it was still the highest in the world. Women still sought out abortions at an unprecedented rate. This would suggest that a shift in abortion culture certainly occurred in the 1990s; however to entirely attribute this shift to the small and new pro-life movement would be inaccurate. Nonetheless, this period saw the emergence of a new movement encouraged by religion. Furthermore, the Russian Orthodox Church was gaining influence and esteem. The confluence of these two realities posited abortion culture in a precarious arena soon to be dictated by a Putin era government.

XI. THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION: 2000-2017

When Vladimir Putin assumed power in 2000, abortion was legal until 22 weeks and for every 100 births there were 169 abortions. Over the course of 16 years, reproductive policies would dramatic show dramatic shifts not seen since Josef Stalin's total abortion ban in 1936 (Denisov & Sakevich, 2011). On August 11, 2003, the country implemented Decree No. 485, its most restrictive policy since the government's inception. The law reduced the number of social determinants required for abortion access after 10 weeks from thirteen to just four: rape, previous legal deprivation of parental rights, incarceration and severe disability or death of the spouse (Deschner et al., 2003). Members of parliament (MPs) defended the bill by capitalizing on the growing concern for the birthrate, which was still lower than the abortion rate . Marking the beginning of an active partnership against abortion, conservative MPs worked closely with the Russian Orthodox Church on the original draft. This included much stricter proposals, such as written spousal consent, parental consent for minors, waiting periods and forced acknowledgements of sonograms. Ultimately, Parliament refused to pass the bill until these were removed, but they provide insight and foreshadowed tactics that would be revisited constantly (Erofeeva, 2013).

Between 2003 and 2010 a litany of legislation was introduced, influenced and many times drafted by the ROC. These appealed for tighter restrictions on access and education and even proposed a complete ban, except in cases of rape. While the majority of the stricter proposals were rejected until 2010, an increasingly active pronatalist rhetoric dominated society and the government debate. Consequently, in 2006 President Putin launched a new, high-priority initiative "Demographic Policy for the Russian Federation." It hinged on the promise of monetary incentives to increase a woman's proclivity to bear multiple children. 365,000 rubles

(US$10,000) were provided to a mother for every child after her first. By 2007 the birthrate exceeded the abortion rate for the first time since reliable data was available. Demographers and policy analysts staunchly oppose the suggestion that this was a result of the Demographic Policy and instead cite an increase in family planning uptake (Erfoveeda, 2014). Nonetheless, the timing and the government's lack of family planning initiatives provided an opportunity to use the data to rationalize stricter abortion policy.

In 2010 the Ministry of Health returned its focus to reproductive rights and reprioritized their agenda. It replaced the prevention of unwanted pregnancies, the provision of informed access to contraception and the introduction of safer abortion technologies with the *simple* goal of "preventing abortions" (Heinrich Boell Foundation, 2012). To accomplish their new agenda, the Ministry increased psychologists and social workers in clinics, and tasked them with dissuading women from terminating their pregnancies. In an official statement, the Ministry acknowledged its collaboration with Orthodox pro-life organizations (Heinrich Boell Foundation, 2012).

This particular succession of events provides insight into the state's moral framework and reasoning. It is obvious that the primary motivation behind the reproductive legislation was intended to increase the birth rate. This is especially evident considering its departure from all family planning endeavors. Furthermore, restricting abortions had proved useless throughout history. While rates continued to decline beginning with the Soviet Union's dissolvement, they cannot be attributed to this legislation; rates were merely continuing a downward trend given the increased awareness and availability of new birth control methods, despite the government's unwillingness to promote it. Moreover, the continuing acceptance of abortion is overtly evident in the embodied morality. Russia continued to lead the world in abortion. It is likely that the

Kremlin viewed the religious moral framing as a new, effective way to subvert acceptance and change the larger moral approach to abortion.

The next major policy change occurred under President Dmitry Medvedev when a 2010 Ministry of Health directive required mandatory pre-abortion counseling. The script provided to counselors was filled with pointed wording and phrases intended to discourage women from having the procedure (Kivkoshky, 2011). Attempting to further control abortion discourse, an additional 2010 law required abortion clinic advertisements to dedicate 10% of their communication to the dangers of abortion. Additionally, it disallowed for public messaging to refer to abortion as a "safe procedure," entirely contrary to decades of evidence (Center For Reproductive Rights, 2014). By 2013 clinic advertising was banned entirely; these measures markedly impacted abortion culture and the public discourse surrounding it (Michel, 2014).

The measures influencing the public discourse seek to change the moral approach to abortion in multiple ways. First, the Kremlin propagated falsehoods to attack the scientific moral value of the reproductive procedure. It is widely accepted among the medical and public health communities that legal abortions are safer than childbirth (Finer & Fine, 2014). Second, the counseling legislation forced abortion to be considered in a predetermined moral framework dictated by the institutional. Given the overwhelming embodied disposition evident in the high rates of abortion, this effort was not successful. However, it is demonstrative of a coercive manipulation on behalf of the government to politicize a medical procedure. Finally, silencing abortion advertisements not only impacted access but is reminiscent of Soviet era policies suppressing dissent.

Access was the target of additional 2011 policies with the introduction of waiting periods, and forcing the woman to listen to the embryo's heartbeat. Providers were then also able to

invoke conscientious objection. The waiting periods were specific and coercive. Women who were pregnant 8-10 weeks after conception were required to wait a full seven days after their initial consultation. However, they only needed to wait 48 hours if the pregnancy was between 4-7 and 11-12 weeks. From a medical perspective, the varied waiting periods are a genuine conundrum. A potential reason for this bizarre variation could be attributed to national directives and laws on gestational age and the corresponding method employed. It is likely that forcing women to wait seven days at critical points in gestational stages directly impacts the method thereby dictating their level of comfort and ease of the procedure (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2016).

The most recent legislation under consideration in the Russian Federation was introduced on May 19, 2015 by ROC Patriarch Kirill. It seeks to drastically limit access to abortion for the vast majority of women throughout Russia by removing the procedure from national healthcare coverage. It also proposes a ban of all private abortion clinics thereby forcing women to seek out the procedure at local ministries of health, notorious for using the obsolete method of surgical curettage (Denisov & Sarkovich, 2014) . Furthermore, it suggests harsher restrictions on women seeking access to emergency contraception, such as the morning after pill (Cichowlas, 2016). The legislation garnered widespread support among government officials and factions of society. The ROC and its affiliates subsequently provided Putin with a petition signed by a purported million citizens seeking to ban abortion once again (Ferris-Rotman, 2017). There has yet to be a vote on the legislation.

Reproductive rights and family planning under Putin have been targeted throughout his tenure.[2] This is demonstrative of the imposed institutional morality of abortion. The moral

[2] Vladimir Putin became the prime minister during Dmitry Medvedev's presidency and yielded exceptional power and influence (Neef & Scheff, 2011).

discourse surrounding various legislative initiatives have sought to bolster said institutional morality. In December 17, 2017 Putin addressed his constituents in an annual press conference and broke his 17 year silence on abortion. “In the modern world, the decision is up to the woman herself…Any attempt to suppress it, would only push the practice underground, causing immense damage to women’s health” (Smith, 2017) He also cautioned against constricting the country’s abortion laws any further, declaring that future regulatory decisions “must be careful, considered and based on the general mood” (Smith 2017). Both opponents and advocates of reproductive rights, including the church, were blind sighted by this proclamation. While it is impossible to determine the sincerity or motivation behind the quote, its impact is profound nonetheless. The most logical assumption is articulated by a Russian political scientist specializing in Russian sociology, Ekaterina Schulman. Schulman states that Putin’s political party sees the value in supporting the conservative movement for political reasons; however they cannot ignore the reality that “banning abortion would lead to social catastrophe” (in Cichowlas, 2016). Once again, the state, embodied by President Putin, invokes reproductive rights as a political tactic – this time to maintain control by preventing a health crisis.

Finally, the embodied disposition of abortion’s morality is reflected in the statistics and reproductive health trends of the period. With the introduction of better contraception and global health initiatives aimed at increasing contraceptive awareness, uptake has risen significantly. In response, abortion rates continue to fall but remain extremely high, especially for a developed country, seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Total Abortions in Russian Federation 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005-2012

Year	Number of abortions			
	Rosstat data			Data of the Ministry of Health, thousands
	Total, thousands	per 1,000 of 15-49 year old women	per 100 live births	
1990	4,103.4	113.9	206	3,920.3
1995	2,766.4	72.8	203	2,574.8
2000	2,138.8	54.2	169	1,961.5
2005	1,675.7	42.7	117	1,501.6
2006	1,582.4	40.3	107	1,407.0
2007	1,479.0	38.1	92	1,302.5
2008	1,385.6	36.1	81	1,236.4
2009	1,292.4	34.1	73	1,161.7
2010	1,186.1	31.7	66	1,054.8
2011	1,124.9	30.5	63	989.4
2012	1,064.0	29.3	56	935.5
1990 - 2012, -fold	3.9	3.9	3.7	4.2

Sources: [Rosstat 2013b; TsNIIOIZ 2013].

XII. Conclusion

Over the course of the last century, the moral framing of reproductive practices in Russia has undergone a profound transformation. Abortion's progressive treatment early on fomented its cultural significance and acceptance, while Soviet isolationism prevented the unique culture from wielding influence beyond the nation's borders. While religion did not dominate its treatment, there was still an evolution of competing moral influences and frameworks. Within different moral frameworks a constant tension has persisted, at times among different institutions and even within embodied dispositions. Nonetheless, throughout the political, religious and medical shifts, tension between embodied disposition and institutional morality has been the most evident. The state has consistently constructed and conflated a moral framework that prioritizes their collective goals. The Russian Orthodox Church has invoked its own moral authority on abortion. Both institutions have utilized public discourse to launch morality campaigns against abortion, at times working together. Despite the exceptional power that both have yielded at different points in history, women's embodied morality remains as a strong moral framework. The restrictive

measures implemented since Putin's election can certainly have grave consequences on women's health, as demonstrated by countries with similar restrictions and Russia's own history with abortion restrictions. However, perhaps Putin's 2017 statement in support of reproductive rights is a recognition of the power of the embodied disposition. Regardless of the power of competing moral frameworks, women's reproductive decisions are their own. Threatening and restricting access can, and do, have fatal consequences, but the moral value attached to reproductive rights is exemplified in Russian culture. The examination of abortion's role over the past century in Russia demonstrates the extent to which the medical procedure can be politicized through institutional moralities, but ultimately it also demonstrates the need for access to safe family planning methods because the embodied disposition of women has remained constant as a powerful moral space in the midst of the political and religious forces that have ebbed and flowed in Russian society over the last century.

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