Filling the Gaps: How Women’s Groups Meet Changing Needs in Post-Soviet Russia

Thesis

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By
Molly Goodwin-Kucinsky
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Thesis Committee:
Jennifer Suchland, Advisor
Jill Bystydzienski
Abstract

This paper examines the role of independent women’s organizations in Post-Soviet Russia. I analyze to what extent women’s organizations challenge existing social policies and hold the state accountable to protect women’s rights, or collaborate with the state to enforce the existing social contract. Based on case studies of six independent women’s organizations, I argue that it is impossible to say that women’s groups either exclusively advocate for change or act as partners with the state. Contemporary women’s organizations balance the public’s need for social services with the desire to advocate for political solutions to women’s concerns, all the while operating under the eye of an increasingly controlling state.
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Vita

2002..................................................St. Ignatius College Prep

2006..................................................B.A. Russian/Physics, Grinnell College

2007 to present..............................Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellow,
                                       The Ohio State University

2009..................................................M.A. Slavic and East European Studies, The
                                       Ohio State University

Fields of Study

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# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................... ii  
Acknowledgments .......................................................................................... iii  
Vita ...................................................................................................................... iv  
Introduction ...................................................................................................... 1  
Beginnings of Russian Independent Civil Society ........................................... 7  
Debate over Women’s Organizations ............................................................... 10  
Obstacles to Effective Action .......................................................................... 14  
Current Role of Women’s NGOs .................................................................... 17  
NGOs Studied and Analysis ........................................................................... 20  
ANNA ................................................................................................................. 24  
Ekaterina ........................................................................................................... 29  
The Crisis Center for the Help of Women ......................................................... 32  
 Independent Social Women’s Center (ISWC) ..................................................... 35  
Stimula .............................................................................................................. 38  
Anima ............................................................................................................... 42  
Conclusions ...................................................................................................... 45  
Works Cited ..................................................................................................... 48  
Appendix A: Survey Questions ....................................................................... 52  
Appendix B: List of NGOs Studied ................................................................. 54
Introduction

What is the role of women’s organizations in contemporary Russia, a country renowned for having ‘liberated’ women, yet now watching Soviet-granted women’s rights begin to erode in the post-Soviet years? Do women’s groups step in to provide services the state has slashed from its new, post-socialist budget, and thereby legitimize the existing social contract? Do they demand the state be accountable for protecting women’s rights, even if overtly political action alienates many of their potential supporters? Based on my research, I suggest that independent women’s organizations use both social services and advocacy efforts simultaneously to promote women’s rights in Russia. Their programs cannot be reduced to starkly black and white categories of direct services or lobbying, but rather many organizations have much more complex agendas, working within the existing social contract to provide social services, and, at the same time, challenging the political status quo by campaigning on the local and national levels for better policies protecting women’s rights. As the case studies below will demonstrate, Russian women’s groups must continually work to re-balance the competing needs of local communities, international donor organizations, and demands from state authorities in order to achieve the goals set out in their mission statements.
This research is based on studies of six Russian women’s organizations geographically dispersed throughout the country. These organizations provide programming that challenges public opinion about the role of women; some organizations stress that gender-based violence is an expression of women’s secondary status in Russian society, others demand that women be guaranteed equal access to jobs and housing, one even explicitly states that it hopes to challenge patriarchal attitudes and traditions. Although women’s organizations in Russia have a variety of opinions on women’s rights and gender roles, organizations that espouse rigid, traditional gender roles, or advocate for women’s rights only in relation to women’s reproductive capacities were not included in this survey. The organizations studied were united by a common desire to raise awareness about gender-based violence and discrimination, and work with the state to develop more consistent policies protecting women’s rights. “The degree of a society’s freedom, the level of development of democracy in that society is defined by the position a woman in that society” (personal communication from Anima director). This concept guides the work of all of the NGOs presented in the paper.

Most of these organizations offer crisis services to women experiencing domestic or sexual violence, as well as programs that address a wider range of women’s issues.

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1 A total of 170 women’s organizations were chosen from among the member organizations of the Women’s Information Network, crisis centers affiliated with the Moscow center, ANNA, the Association of Independent Women’s Organizations, and the Consortium of Women’s Non-Governmental Associations. Of those organizations chosen, only six responded to the email survey I sent out; in fact, half of the emails came back undelivered, indicating that many organizations have either closed or do not have consistent access to the Internet. For this paper, some information came from organizational websites where they were available, in others cases the analysis is based on organizational leaders’ responses to email surveys (see Appendix A for survey questions).

2 See Appendix B for a list of these organizations.
including health, employment, and gender discrimination – all issues the Russian
government has been slow to address and in some cases even ignores altogether. These
groups focus primarily on women’s issues and challenge gender norms, rather than
advocating for mother’s rights or rights for women based solely on their reproductive
capacities, as is the case for some other women’s organizations working in Russia. This
overt demand for women’s rights on the basis of gender equality immediately puts these
groups at odds with the dominant discourse on the role of the sexes in Russia today, and
hence invalidates the idea that providing social services necessarily means accepting the
societal status quo. Despite their diverse organizational structures, different approaches
to women’s rights, and different relationships with local and national power-brokers,
these groups all combine social service programs with advocacy to achieve their goals
and recognize the importance of doing both in order to protect women’s rights.

One criticism of women’s groups is that they are merely “responsible for the
reproduction of society” and neither work to challenge societal perceptions of gender
roles, nor do they hold the state accountable for protecting women’s rights (Hemment,
2007, 68). By providing social services instead of demanding changes in the social
contract, these groups lose sight of the ultimate goal of gender equality and equal
opportunities for men and women and instead become satisfied with merely addressing
immediate, concrete problems for individuals, not groups. On the other hand, the public
accuses organizations that prioritize lobbying and political work over direct assistance
programs of neglecting their perceived “duty to provide help and support for any women
in need or in crisis” (Kay, 2000, 149-150).
I argue that black and white distinctions between service providers and advocacy organizations are no longer useful in understanding contemporary Russian women’s organizations, since many groups use both approaches in their attempts to raise the status of Russian women. A more nuanced analysis is necessary to truly grasp how Russian women’s organizations promote women’s rights. Although they have existed since perestroika, contemporary Russian women’s groups do not play a central role in contemporary independent civil society. Indeed, public perceptions linking independent action with Communist forced ‘voluntarism’ have plagued women’s groups, and a strong backlash that links feminism with forced Soviet ‘emancipation’ and Western influences has hampered efforts to gather public support for women’s issues. The fact that a vibrant, cohesive nation-wide women’s movement has not yet developed in Russia has made it even more difficult for women’s groups to gain recognition as legitimate organizations serving women’s needs and bringing women’s issues to the national attention.

Independent women’s organizations must balance pressure from local women demanding social assistance programs with the desire to address the underlying causes of women’s issues through broad-based advocacy campaigns, yet they often have little outside support; it is neither surprising nor condemnable that they are unable to satisfy all parties. However, the groups that are able to successfully balance these concerns are adaptable and exceptionally prepared to deal with new problems as they emerge.

While pressures from constituents and state authorities are often at cross-purposes in Russia, in the case of women’s organizations, this has been especially evident as the state has laxly enforced laws on gender based violence, sexual harassment, and employment discrimination and at the same time privatized or ended social welfare
services that had allowed women to remain employed and raise children at the same time. There is often neither enough time, money, or personnel to coordinate both social support programs for local women and lobbying efforts to fight for more support for women’s issues from the state. The vagaries of the political situation in the post-Soviet years and the uncertainty of reliable funding for women’s rights projects has meant that organizations are forced to shift priorities or abandon projects altogether when political or monetary support falls through or fails to materialize. Thus, it is not surprising that although women’s groups function as catch-all social service providers and have been instrumental in pushing the state to actually enforce laws protecting women’s rights, they are unable to do both at the same time with equal efficacy, and hence they open themselves up to criticism from all sides.

However, Russian women’s organizations are aware of their own precarious position and have opted to walk a line between partnering with the state to provide services and advocating for policy change, risking either assistance from state agencies by challenging the status quo or condemnation from local women who do not see the value of lobbying. Given that the Russian state has once again begun restricting the autonomous operation of independent groups, it is clear NGOs must quickly find ways to balance the needs of their constituents and collaboration with the government, and it becomes even less possible for women’s groups to address women’s problems without to some extent partnering with the state. Today, it is no longer important whether or not organizations collaborate with the state – this collaboration is almost a given – rather, it is more important to ask how these groups collaborate with government agencies and at the same time keep sight of the greater goal of creating political solutions to women’s
problems. Knowing that the continued existence of their organizations is dependent not only on funding (often from international sources) and local support, but also upon the continued goodwill of local and national government officials, leaders of women’s groups must work to satisfy all of these interests to ensure that they are able to continue to work towards their organizational goals.

In the next sections I will give a brief history of independent organizations in Russia and the debate over the role of women’s organizations. Next follows a summary of the political and social barriers that hinder the effective action of women’s groups, including the pervasiveness of essentialist gender roles and politicians’ apathy to gender equality. All of the NGOs studied in this paper provide many services: advocacy, information, social and legal support and consultation, and referral to other services. However, the central issue is how these groups balance direct social services and lobbying programs in order to alleviate immediate difficulties while working to end the root causes of women’s problems.
Beginnings of Russian Independent Civil Society

In order to understand the work of contemporary Russian women’s groups, it is necessary to situate their work in the wider context of civil society organizations. Broadly defined, civil society is “the sum of institutions, organizations and individuals located between the family, the state and the market in which people associate voluntarily to advance common interests” (Anheier, 2004, 20). Under this definition, civil society includes all those groups, formal and informal, registered and unregistered, volunteer-driven, professionally staffed, or even consisting of a single individual that are formed to address a specific issue or issues; this definition makes no distinctions as to funding sources, programming choices, or whether an organization collaborates with state agencies. This last point is important in that, as will be shown later, women’s groups often exist in a complicated symbiosis with government offices and do not necessarily fit within understandings of civil society demanding complete independence from the state.

Evans (2006a) notes that although in the USSR voluntary associations had begun to develop and expand membership openly under Gorbachev, dependence on state funding and tacit state support of their goals hampered their work. These organizations were not the independent, multi-faceted ones that exist today and have been touted by international development researchers and politicians as the path to fully realized democracy in Russia. Although by 1988 there were 30,000 known unofficial
independent groups operating in the Soviet Union, in the early years their functions and programs were very much confined by the state (Lapidus, 1995). Indeed, Soviet authorities, “recognizing the limited capacity and resources of the state to address a variety of social needs” encouraged these groups to offer social assistance and support programs as the state phased out social welfare policies and political and economic upheavals loomed on the horizon (Lapidus, 1995, 140). In this sense, early independent organizations were often independent in name only, hampered by the dictates of Soviet policies and still subject to intense coercion from the state. It is hardly surprising that all but the most politically outspoken groups stopped short of demanding an end to the Soviet state, and instead focused on reforming the existing political system (Lapidus, 1995).

Many early organizations were founded by Soviet elites, and thus “Soviet interest groups had no identity separate from the nomenklatura hierarchy, so there was no question of their formulating their distinct interests [in opposition to official policy], let alone of forming associations in order to defend them” (Hosking, 1995, 91-92). Forcing the state to respond to popular demands was unthinkable until much later. Most of these early organizations were one-dimensional, focusing on only one specific issue that neither effectively challenged existing power structures, nor mobilized a large segment of the population in support of the issue. Their main events were meetings and protests about issues such as environmental degradation, perestroika reforms, or the Soviet-Afghan conflict; however these actions were largely ineffectual in bringing popular demands to the attention of the state. Unlike in Czechoslovakia, popular dissent did not coalesce into a Velvet Revolution in Russia. Moreover, the political turbulence of the
early 1990s guaranteed that those few groups that did garner wide public support still had uncertain at best access to policy-makers.

Fish (1995) suggests that in the first few years after the collapse of the USSR, Russia did not have a civil society but rather, a “movement society” wherein various disparate interest groups struggled to be recognized as legitimate representatives of national or local interests while a shifting political climate made it harder for any one group to either solidify political ties or articulate an opposition platform (153). Those few organizations that positioned themselves explicitly in opposition to current political thought achieved little success in influencing policy, since government officials responded indifferently to the initiatives of non-state actors. The ability to effectively have a voice in the policy-making process was highly dependent on the ability to curry favor with individual politicians and independent groups had middling success persuading political parties to include them in the legislative process. Unfortunately, as Sperling (1998) and Johnson (2005) have noted, this remains the case today, hampering the ability of independent groups to influence government and law enforcement protocol and instead putting them in the position of reacting to or adapting to policies created often without input from those groups that will be affected. As will be discussed later, official apathy towards independent organizations is especially apparent in regards to women’s groups.
Debate over Women’s Organizations

For this paper I will dispense with the debate over civil society versus third sector and professionalized NGO versus grassroots organization and the merits of these different organizational structures. There is plenty of material on these distinctions (see for example Hemment, 2007; Johnson, 2004; Kay, 2000; Popkova, 2004) but they are not always useful in examining how a group operates and how it balances local needs, pressures from the state, and other concerns. Moreover, none of the organizations I surveyed referenced these distinctions, or described themselves in these terms, indicating that such terminology is not always a necessary framework for understanding NGO programs. Henceforth I will refer to all of the organizations studied as ‘NGOs’ or civil society organizations without distinguishing between the two. Although their goals and methods vary, all the NGOs I studied occupy a unique role in Russian society; their programming is distinctive because it addresses problems often ignored by the state while contending with societal attitudes opposing the foundation of their work – women’s equal rights. The gendered nature of their work sets women’s NGOs apart from other organizations, often putting them in opposition not only to state policies, but also to public opinion. Organizational differences are important, but in the cases presented in this paper, the common focus on women’s rights is the more central issue than number of professional staff or percentage of foreign funding.
The debate over the role of independent groups has been present since their inception, and the increasing accessibility of Russia to outside scholars, as well as proliferation of Internet and e-mail, has exposed the world of women’s NGOs to ever increasing scrutiny. It seems that everyone has an opinion on how these groups should function, and how they have failed to live up to externally defined expectations. For example, one Russian women’s group leader complained that many NGOs are little more than “a vehicle for creating jobs for elite[s]”, part of a realm of professionalized action so focused on securing international grants that it neglects to find solutions to the everyday needs of Russian women (Hemment, 2007, 1-2). Yet as international donors have broadened their outreach from Russia’s largest cities to include the provinces and have restructured their grant processes to be more inclusive of smaller projects, receiving foreign funding is no longer the defining factor in how a group will function or what programs it offers. The public accuses groups that run national-level campaigns for women’s rights of ignoring the realities of everyday women in favor of esoteric debates about feminism, gender, and other concepts ‘imported’ from the West. As one Russian woman put it, these groups are too busy lobbying the State Duma and debating amongst themselves to actually do anything about “women drug addicts or… proper, decent conditions in abortion clinics” (Kay, 2000, 183). However, in reality, few organizations are dedicated exclusively to lobbying; the majority make that only one part of their agenda.

Although Russian women are unhappy when an NGO focuses on political solutions without offering any immediate support for the average woman, even social service programs come under fire for collaborating with state authorities to enforce the
existing social contract. Women’s groups that provide social services have “very specific aims of addressing and dealing with the practical consequences of the gender climate and the traditional gender” and thus tacitly accept that the state plays no role in protecting its citizens’ rights and livelihoods (Kay, 2000, 119). In providing social services, NGOs collaborate with the state to “pursue its social policies” while working within the boundaries already established by the government (Popkova, 2004, 189). Yet this collaboration obviously limits not only the autonomy of these groups but also makes it more difficult for them to challenge problematic state policies. If NGOs assume that the state policies are always the best policies, they become “reconfigured as “partners” of the state, stepping in to take on the responsibilities it divests itself of” (Hemment, 2007, 52). However none of the organizations I studied would describe themselves as ‘partners’ to the state; the reality is much more complex.

Collaboration with the state is a contentious issue for independent organizations in Russia, due to the legacy of Soviet interference into public and private life. For NGOs, cooperation with authorities is a double-edged sword: it can bring unprecedented influence in local and national politics, funding or office space, and the ability to suggest reforms in legal and law-enforcement policies. However with this new access groups must often trade in the right to be harshly critical of state policies, lest they lose government support. Many women’s organizations find themselves trying to balance the need for state support with the desire to still be able to objectively evaluate and criticize government actions. Johnson (2006) describes these complicated relationships as “public-private permutations” with the state often contracting with NGOs to provide social services in exchange for free office space or funding. However, this “permutation”
does not necessarily mean that an NGO has lost all autonomy of action, but rather that its leaders recognize the difficulties of funding an independent organization and are willing to work with the state if doing so ensures the continued existence of their projects.

In fact, as Evans (2006b) points out, government crackdowns on the autonomy of NGOs under Putin severely restricted their ability to act independent of government approval. Putin’s criticism of NGOs with foreign ties or funding as ‘un-Russian’ or beholden to foreign interests has been frequently used to silence or delegitimize those organizations that are outspokenly critical of government policies. Considering that four of the six groups I studied mentioned receiving foreign funding at some point, these criticisms have far-reaching effects. In recent years, it has become clear that Putin’s plan for Russian civil society is one “in which social organizations are subordinated to the authority of the state,” leaving little room for the open dialogue necessary to tackle systemic issues such as gender based violence or discrimination against women in the workplace (Evans, 2006b, 149). While scholars continue to debate the value of collaborating with the state, it becomes increasingly impossible for independent organizations to provide any continuity of services without at least tacit endorsement from the state. However this complicated dependence on government approval does not mean that NGOs completely give up challenging state policies that negatively affect women’s freedoms.
Obstacles to Effective Action

For the outsider looking into Russia, civil society (in its broadest sense) is “an integral component” to helping the country transform from socialism to democracy and the free market (Henderson, 2003, 2). Civil society is credited with bringing an end to authoritarian states the world over, and initially hopes were high that Russian civil society organizations would help guide the country out of the quagmire of a planned economy and onto the world market. Foreign aid flowed into Russia to support the development of these independent groups, yet international aid agencies often implemented their own agendas, missing those problems identified as most important by local communities and NGO leaders (Hemment, 2007; Richter, 2002; Sundstrom, 2006). Indeed, donor preferences for women’s groups with an openly feminist orientation meant that those few women lucky enough to be versed in Western feminist terminology and foreign languages, or have contacts abroad were much more likely to secure grants for their organizations while other groups struggled to make their proposals fit within these constraints (Richter, 2002). An unintended side-effect of these donor preferences is tension between self-declared feminist groups and other women’s organizations, making it more difficult to build lasting coalitions of women’s groups, undermining the hope that civil society promotion would be an answer to Russian women’s problems.
Additionally, the Russian government itself has been especially slow to address violence against women, women’s rights in housing and employment, and gender discrimination, and so women’s organizations not only provide services in response to these issues, but they also have the task of pushing the state to be responsible for protecting women’s rights. However, women’s NGOs face many problems that are specific to the gendered nature of their work, in addition to struggling to find consistent funding and navigating the complex bureaucratic process necessary to stay open. Persistent negative societal attitudes towards feminism and lasting essentialist understandings of gender roles create an environment in which many Russians dismiss women’s groups as insignificant. These attitudes have meant that, although many women use the services of women’s NGOs, few return as volunteers or contribute to the creation of a large-scale women’s movement.

Women’s groups also face difficulties on the political front, and have little support from Russian political parties or individual politicians. Politics remains a male dominated field, with only thirteen percent of representatives in the current Duma being female, and politicians still regard the opinions of women’s NGOs as special interests, not important to the majority of the population (Russian State Duma website). Although the low number of female deputies is not unique to Russia – the 2009 U.S. Congress is only seventeen percent female, and Canada reaches twenty-two percent female representation – it is a significant decline from the days of Soviet quotas for women in politics (Amer, 2008; Canadian Parliament website). Andreenkova (2002) blames the low number of female politicians on the Soviet legacy of women holding token positions in government, the inability of women’s groups to effectively support female candidates,
and gender bias in the party-list election system. Unfortunately, all of these factors are only slowly changing, meaning that this route to political influence is far from expeditious. Moreover, Shevchenko (2002) suggests that the few women serving in the State Duma tend to vote along party lines, ignoring notions of gender solidarity. Politicians still consider women’s issues so marginal to the functioning of the country that in 1996, the political party, Women of Russia (a party dedicated to women’s issues), rebuffed suggestions from Russian women’s crisis centers to expand the definition of rape; the resulting legislation created a more narrow legal definition of rape, and made it more difficult to prosecute (Johnson, 2005). Perhaps even more disheartening is that even successful lobbying campaigns can prove “fruitless because of the Russian state’s inability to implement its policies and laws,” leaving women with little real recourse when problems arise (Sperling, 1998, 160).
As Kay (2000) points out, during the Soviet era Communist Party officials arbitrated a variety of individual complaints, yet post-Soviet Russia has not yet developed similar official outlets for addressing problems and so the burden of remedying these situations falls on individuals. Women’s groups step into the void left by the collapse of the Soviet state and offer immediate social assistance as well as advocate on behalf of individual clients pursuing claims of domestic violence or employment discrimination. Women’s NGOs provide services the state no longer deems important, and in doing so keep the need for these programs in the public view, challenging the assumption that women’s rights are of secondary significance to economic or other problems. Indeed, their focus on issues openly ignored by the state embodies the idea that the state has failed to recognize and address problems affecting more than half of its population. By refusing to accept the state-sponsored idea that women’s problems arise from conflicts between individuals and insisting that they are “condoned or even sanctioned by states,” women’s NGOs do not absolve the state of its responsibility to protect women’s rights (Bunch, 1990, 488).

These groups must not only deal with problems that were swept under the rug during the communist years, such as domestic violence and essentialist conceptions of gender, but they must also contend with new issues that have sprung up as a direct result
of Russia’s transition from a tightly controlled society to the free market and liberalism. Cutbacks in state-funded social services such as subsidized childcare that the IMF required as a pre-condition to funding Russia’s transition to a market economy have disproportionately affected women, as they are still responsible for the majority of childcare (Hemment, 2007). Eroding public programs combined with largely female unemployment left women with few resources to solve their own problems. Although many women’s groups sprung up in the early 1990s as generalized ‘crisis centers’ – offering assistance and support for women dealing with unemployment, violence at home, alcoholic husbands, or housing shortages – those that have survived until the present day have branched out and now try to bring women’s needs to the national attention. To do this NGOs often collaborate with local or national politicians to support laws protecting women’s rights or changes in government policy that negatively impact women.

However before they are able to accomplish any policy changes, women’s NGOs must first convince apathetic politicians and government workers that women’s rights are, in fact, human rights, and not merely special interests. This is especially true when considering gender based violence, which is still shrouded in victim-blaming myths or popular conceptions that it is a ‘family’ matter. In fact, women’s crisis centers often have the difficult task of forcing disinterested law enforcement officers to collect evidence and follow through on reports of gender based violence. When women experiencing domestic or sexual violence have little success getting their concerns heard, women’s groups advocate on behalf of clients in the court system to help women to pursue their
claims. Additionally, women’s groups work to re-educate law enforcement officials and policy-makers about newly emerging problems such as human trafficking that have arisen since the end of Soviet control and in doing so force the state to be responsible for protecting women’s rights and ending gender based violence.
NGOs Studied and Analysis

A total of six women’s NGOs were studied for this paper; all of these groups work on issues the Russian government does not adequately address. While there are many women’s NGOs that do not address gender equality, but instead work for mother’s rights, or even support traditional gender roles, they were not included in this survey. Five of the NGOs studied offer emergency services to women experiencing domestic or sexual violence, however all of them have broad agendas promoting gender equality and women’s rights. ANNA has a nationwide campaign bringing domestic violence to the forefront of public attention. The Ekaterina crisis center website dispels myths about gender based violence. The Crisis Center for the Help of Women in the town of Sayansk has projects on sex trafficking and HIV prevention. The Independent Social Women’s Center operates one of the few battered women’s shelters in Russia. Stimula offers programming on women’s health and support for women diagnosed or at risk of breast cancer. Anima’s openly feminist stance distinguishes it from many other Russian women’s NGOs that advocate for legal protections of women’s rights without specifically discussing patriarchy. Although these organizations represent a broad swath of women’s NGOs, working in large cities and small towns, having professional staff or being all-volunteer run and having different priorities, their common commitment to protecting women’s rights is more important than structural differences.
Each of these organizations has chosen to tackle the ‘woman’s question’ using a unique approach, yet they all represent the complex balancing act between community and state concerns that women’s NGOs must achieve in order to work towards gender equality and women’s rights. Their constituents want NGOs to provide social services and support programs and are generally disinterested in any kind of political activism, even though lobbying has brought some improvements for women. The public accuses NGOs that engage in political campaigns of getting lost in theoretical debates and neglecting the immediate problems women face, while women that do not take advantage of NGO programs believe they give special treatment to clients that are acquaintances of NGO workers (Kay, 2000). Although Russian women will readily acknowledge the less than equal status of women in society, nevertheless they do not necessarily trust that NGO programs will do anything to change the situation. In short, “Russian women’s groups do not have legitimacy among most Russian women” unless they are providing direct services (Hemment, 2007, 5). However, as has already been noted, the public and politicians rarely view women’s NGOs as legitimate representatives of women’s interests in the political sphere, dismissing them as special interest groups. In addition to providing social services on an often limited budget, NGOs must work to convince the government that women’s concerns deserve attention and demand state action protecting women’s rights, even as the state curbs the freedom NGOs have to make statements critical of government policy.
Women’s crisis centers were some of the first groups to formally organize in Russia in response to challenges arising following the end of the Soviet state. Beginning in the early 1990s Russian women began to come together to address gender based violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and forced prostitution and trafficking. From these meetings was born a wider anti-violence consciousness and awareness of the clear need to establish organized centers to assist women facing violence, provide support for victims, and be a clearinghouse of accurate, honest information about how women are victimized, dispelling the persistent myths that women are somehow to blame for their own abuse. Yet the climate in which these crisis centers began to develop was far from accepting of their input, with politicians and officials creating barriers at every step of the way.

Although Soviet law had criminalized rape and domestic violence, it made “no attempt to understand violence against women as something structural, part of the social scripts of gender relations” (Attwood, 1997, 101). The post-Soviet Russian government has also been slow to respond to gender based violence, and law enforcement has been disinclined to acknowledge the problem of violence and exploitation of women. In fact, with the demise of the Soviet Union, women lost one of the few sources of assistance against domestic and sexual violence – the Communist Party. For over seventy years
women had been able to appeal to Communist Party officials for protection from abusive partners and although there was no separate law to prosecute domestic violence – it was prosecuted under ‘hooliganism’—nonetheless Soviet officials were somewhat responsive to women’s complaints (Johnson, 2005).

However the end of Soviet power and its accompanying scrutiny of private life has left women with little recourse in violent situations. Beginning with Gorbachev’s loosening of state control over society, police began to dismiss reports of violence against women without even conducting a preliminary investigation (Johnson, 2005). Police today treat domestic violence as a private affair and are reluctant to step in and reassert state control in a suddenly liberalized society demanding rights and privacy (Atwood, 1997). In response to reports of sexual assault, the police “often obstructed the [reporting] process at every point” with delays and misinformation (Johnson, 2005, 152). In addition to police obstructionism, no nationwide social movement against domestic violence has arisen despite the prevalence of rape and domestic violence and there is virtually no state-sponsored support for domestic violence or rape survivors. It is in this environment that ignores gender based violence that women’s crisis centers work to provide services the authorities do not consider necessary and change the opinions of law enforcement and government officials about violence against women. At the same time, by advocating for survivors through the court process and at the police station, crisis centers push the state to enforce its laws and provide women the protections the law guarantees them.
ANNA

*ANNA*, based in Moscow, is a women’s crisis center dedicated exclusively to providing services for victims of domestic and sexual violence and exploitation. Founded in 1993, it has the distinction of opening the first domestic violence hotline in all of Russia, which began operating shortly after the center was organized. As one of the oldest crisis centers in Russia that is still in existence today, *ANNA* exemplifies the changes the crisis center movement has undergone since its beginnings. Starting out as a direct service provider, the center has expanded its programs to include human rights work, advocacy, and a desire to increase the state’s involvement in protecting women’s rights. In addition to its commitment to support women experiencing gender violence, two of *ANNA*’s main goals are the creation of better laws addressing violence against women and raising public awareness of this issue. Today it offers a broad range of social support services, works to re-educate state officials so they will be responsive to gender based violence and have policies in place to protect victim’s rights, and runs a national campaign raising awareness about violence against women.

Since its inception, *ANNA* has served over 26 thousand Moscow women and currently receives on average two hundred calls from women experiencing domestic violence every month (personal communication). Direct services include individual and group counseling, special programs for children and adolescents experiencing violence in
the home, and online information about gender based violence and debunking common victim-blaming myths. ANNA’s website also has a section devoted to sexual assault victim’s rights, so that women will be aware of their rights through all stages of the reporting process. This information is invaluable, given that in many cases women have been turned away by the police or deliberately misled about their rights and what they should do if they have been raped. Indeed, law enforcement officers have actively discouraged women from reporting rape in an effort to fulfill quotas in annual crime reduction; the low conviction rate in rape cases also discourses prosecutors from bringing these cases to trial, making it an almost pointless exercise to report a rape to authorities (Johnson, 2005). As in many other countries, in Russia the overwhelming majority of rapes are unreported, uninvestigated, and do not result in a conviction. Given these barriers, ANNA’s programs educating women about their legal rights become the first line of defense against apathetic police and courts that ignore their obligation to uphold laws protecting women.

A biased legal system and lax enforcement of the law are two of the obstacles crisis centers like ANNA work hard to overcome. In order to combat official indifference toward rape and domestic violence, ANNA offers educational programs for law enforcement, government officials, medical workers, and journalists, and also offers trainings for other crisis centers. Between 2001 and 2003 the center worked with the prosecutor’s office to study how the court system can help women experiencing domestic violence (personal communication). Based on this research ANNA created a model for cooperation between crisis centers and prosecutors in order to work together to more effectively resolve problems for domestic violence victims. Many of ANNA’s projects
since then have included plans to increase cooperation between the crisis center network and social services, medical workers, law enforcement, and the court system so that all of these agencies will be responsible for preventing and responding to violence against women. These types of projects are slowly forging lasting connections between crisis centers and law enforcement and medical workers in the hopes that they will work together to provide assistance and refer women to appropriate and needed services, rather than dismissing their claims. This collaboration is one of the key ways in which crisis centers have the opportunity to improve conditions for women.

In an effort to strengthen the ties between crisis centers and officials, ANNA participates in the Moscow Committee on Family and Youth Affairs and collaborates with the committee to run programs geared toward helping families adapt to difficult circumstances without resorting to violence (personal communication). Programs like these demonstrate that local officials are beginning to recognize that independent groups can provide valuable services and realistic solutions to endemic societal problems and are becoming open to suggestions from the NGO sector. It is clear that government officials view ANNA as a valuable source of information and advising on women’s issues and are willing to work with the center to create viable solutions to women’s problems. Indeed, representatives of the U.N., the OSCE, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the executive branch of the Russian government have attended ANNA’s roundtable meetings on human trafficking, indicating that the Russian government recognizes the organization as a legitimate participant in the discussion about women’s rights (personal communication). Clearly, although ANNA keeps direct social services and crisis support at the heart of its mission, its ability to influence policies about women is growing.
Between 1998 and 2007 ANNA also ran a nationwide domestic violence prevention project in seventy cities that included education programs, publications, and media campaigns dedicated to changing societal perceptions of gender based violence.

Through this campaign, the center offered social service providers and government agencies seminars on gender violence similar to those offered at its Moscow office and suggested best practices for collaboration between crisis centers, police officers, and medical workers. However, the largest part of the campaign focused on counteracting myths about violence against women and victim-blaming stereotypes. The center created short video clips with fictional domestic violence scenarios wherein neighbors ignore repeated instances of violence, ultimately resulting in a woman’s death. These videos highlight the fact that women are killed not only by their partners, by also by “our indifference to what happens behind closed doors” and challenge the public opinion that violence against women is a personal, not societal, problem (ANNA website). Through innovative programs like these, ANNA works to counter negative and inaccurate public perceptions of gender based violence and create a society that is intolerant of violations of women’s rights.

In many respects, ANNA’s evolutions mirrors the trends in the Russian crisis center movement, which has evolved from its original focus of meeting clients’ needs through emergency support services to address newly emerging problems (such as human trafficking) that have arisen in the new market economy. ANNA has kept its focus on solving women’s immediate problems without losing sight of the ultimate goal of stamping out the causes of these problems through the collective efforts of independent and state agencies, drawing on local resources, foreign funding, and volunteer labor to
achieve its goals. Its work is illustrative of the fact that women’s organizations do not exclusively pursue only client services or advocacy and that both approaches are necessary to effectively raise women’s status in Russian society.
The women’s crisis center, *Ekaterina*, was founded in 1996 in the city of Yekaterinburg. Located on the eastern side of the Ural mountains, the city has a population of just over one million people. The center’s mission is to combat domestic and sexual violence and human trafficking, provide support services to women experiencing violence, and to raise awareness about these issues. Its programs have expanded over time to include problems that have become more prevalent in the post-Soviet economy, such as sexual slavery and international trafficking of women. *Ekaterina* offers free, in-person psychological and legal consultations as well as a crisis hotline. In 2005, the center provided services for 1094 clients, including 294 legal consultations (Assembly of Public Associations of the Ural Federal District).

Like many other women’s centers, *Ekaterina’s* goals have widened since its original incarnation as an emergency service and information provider serving the local population. As part of its public education initiative, the center’s website offers advice to women seeking work abroad on how to prevent being trafficked as well as factual information countering myths about gender-based violence. Given that Russian society still blames the Soviet ‘over-emancipation’ of women and ‘emasculcation’ of men for gender-based violence, rather than blaming the perpetrators, challenging widespread stereotypes about gender roles is an essential part of addressing women’s problems. The
idealization of women as “weak but totally self-sacrificing… plac[ing] the preservation of her family above her personal well-being” stands in stark contrast to the stereotype of men as easily overwhelmed by ‘uncontrollable’ aggression or desire, unable to help their own ‘natural’ tendencies toward infidelity, violence, and rape. (Johnson, 2004, 263). While these arguments are not exclusive to Russia, they have gained currency in the liberalized climate of the post-Soviet years and have been fed by the conflation of feminism and women’s equality with western decadence and attacks on the traditional family. To counter these myths, Ekaterina collaborates closely with local media outlets to raise public awareness about violence against women. By providing accurate information about gender based violence and exploitation of women, Ekaterina works to restructure societal attitudes towards gender and create an environment where abuse of women is less acceptable.

Over time the center has expanded its projects beyond the city of Yekaterinburg and in 2006 began to provide training for women wishing to open their own crisis centers through the Urals and Western Siberia regional crisis center coalition, Vmeste My – Sila (Together We are Strong) (Ekaterina website). In doing so, Ekaterina has moved beyond merely “addressing and dealing with the practical consequences of the gender climate” to strengthening a collaborative network dedicated to challenging societal attitudes towards women (Kay, 2000, 119). These types of coalitions are vital in maintaining the crisis center movement’s visibility on the regional and national level and ensuring that the crisis center movement has the strength in numbers necessary to attract attention from policy-makers.
Although *Ekaterina’s* first goal is to provide emergency and support services for women in crisis, at the same time the center continues to push the state to recognize the problems women face because of their gender and challenges officials to be more responsive to the needs of the female half of the population. *Ekaterina* offers training to law enforcement, teachers, social workers, and doctors on how to recognize domestic violence and how to assist women experiencing violence in the home or sexual assault survivors (*Ekaterina* website). As is clear from the many stories of police officers turning women away or discouraging them from reporting gender based violence (Johnson, 2004), these trainings are desperately needed to change the way law enforcement officers address violence against women. It is precisely through programs like these that the center re-educates service providers so they will have an understanding of women’s issues and how government and social organizations can work together to protect women from violence and punish the perpetrators. In a state that persists in viewing violence against women as a problem between individual persons and not a societal issue, *Ekaterina’s* educational programs directed at local officials are slowly shifting the responsibility for crime prevention and prosecution back onto the state.
The Crisis Center for the Help of Women

The Crisis Center for the Help of Women was founded in the Siberian town of Sayansk during the 1998 economic crisis. With a population of just under 44,000, Sayansk is a small town, but nevertheless the Center serves 800 clients a year and “practically every inhabitant” of Sayansk is aware of the Center (personal communication). The Center’s programs include crisis services, an emergency hotline, human trafficking projects, sexual health programs, self-defense classes for women and children, and a program for preventing HIV among sex workers and drug users. Its main goal is to provide support services for women experiencing gender based violence but the Center also works with the media and local government agencies to raise awareness of exploitation of women and promote women’s rights. In fact, the Center views local media as a vital way to raise awareness of gender based violence. As one Center leader said, “We work in constant contact with the media. Through the media we have huge support” for our work (personal communication).

Sayansk’s small size means that the Center does not need to advertise its services; most clients find out about the center through word-of-mouth or other clients, and some even come from other nearby cities. Volunteers run all of the Center’s programs, and there is no permanent paid staff. The volunteers, the majority of whom hold jobs in addition to working at the Center, provide a vital means of distributing information about
the Center’s work (personal communication). However international grant funding does allow the organization to hire temporary staff, as is the case with the HIV prevention project. Programs like these, aimed at preventing the spread of HIV among sex workers and drug users, are desperately needed to counteract public ignorance and misinformation about AIDS. By taking on this challenge, the Center not only works with two segments of the population many other Russians regularly shun, but it also fills the need for public health information and programs that the state is in no way meeting.

The Center also sits on the Sayansk Municipal Commission on the Rights of Women, where it advocates for women’s rights and legal protections for women experiencing domestic or sexual violence or trafficking. The Center sees a special need for better laws preventing sex trafficking, which remains a problem due to lax enforcement of laws preventing trafficking and half-hearted investigations into alleged traffickers. By focusing on trafficking as one aspect of violence against women, of equal importance with domestic violence and sexual assault, the Center takes a stance decidedly in opposition to public and government opinion that these problems are all individual or ‘private’ matters, and not part of a larger manifestation of women’s secondary status in Russian culture. Although according to the Center, Sayansk municipal authorities have been slow to subscribe to the idea of gender based violence as a systemic issue, as Sperling (2006) points out, national level advocacy efforts from crisis center coalitions have yielded better results, notably the 2002 creation of a department within the MVD dedicated to violence against women. Through its municipal advocacy efforts and participation in various crisis center coalitions including the Association of Crisis Centers of the Russian Federation, the Coalition of Crisis Centers of Siberia and
the Far East, and the Baikal Regional Center *Angara*, the Sayansk Center works to keep women’s rights on the political agenda, and in doing so, is another example of a women’s NGO that balances service and advocacy programs in order to promote women’s rights.

However the fact that the Center receives free office space from the city and is a member of the municipal commission on women’s rights puts it in a complicated relationship with local authorities; the Center must remain on good terms with city officials in order to keep its office space, yet its mission often puts it at odds with municipal apathy towards women’s rights. This is a good example of Johnson’s (2006) “public-private permutation” that blurs the line distinguishing NGOs from privatized providers of state services, compelled to uphold the existing social contract dictated by the state. Nevertheless the Center has a good working relationship with local officials and at the same time has the autonomy to make suggestions on local policies and laws affecting women (personal communication). Although it exists in a complex symbiosis with the municipal government, the Center nonetheless recognizes the importance of holding authorities responsible for creating and enforcing laws protecting women.
Independent Social Women’s Center (ISWC)

The Independent Social Women’s Center (ISWC), located in the small western city of Pskov near the border with Estonia, offers crisis services as one facet of its programming. The mission of the ISWC is broader than that of many crisis centers, including not only emergency services for women in crisis, but also women’s leadership programs, women’s studies research, and a media relations service that disseminates information about women’s rights and accomplishments. However crisis services remain the largest program and ninety percent of ISWC clients come to the center seeking domestic violence support (ISWC website). Since opening in 1995, the ISWC mission has expanded and now includes projects with local media as well as training programs for law enforcement, students, and medical and social workers on gender based violence and women’s rights.

In addition to psychological and legal support services, the ISWC also operates a women’s shelter in space donated by the city (ISWC website). The scarcity of easily obtained, affordable housing is a known factor leading to worsening domestic violence, as women, out of necessity, continue living with an abusive husband or even ex-husband for lack of other accommodations (Gavrilova, Gavrilov, Semyonova, Evdokushkina, & Ivanova, 2005; Attwood, 1997). This shelter is one of the few that operates in Russia, and meets two needs unmet by the state: first, affordable housing, and second, separating
victim and perpetrator of domestic violence. Although the state’s responsibility for the first need is debatable, under Russian law the court system is allowed to evict persons accused of domestic violence, however the police and judges have been loath to do so (Johnson, 2001). While as Johnson (2001) notes, other crisis centers work with the court system to ensure that women will retain possession of their residences and not be forced to move to new housing to protect their safety, the ISWC operates on the assumption that these types of interventions are slow to produce results. It is more expedient to offer women emergency housing than to try to change the opinion of apathetic officials that are decidedly not interested in enforcing laws in women’s favor.

This shelter, run by an independent organization using government resources, is another example of one of the aforementioned “public-private permutations” (Johnson, 2006). No doubt the ISWC worked very closely with local officials to open this shelter, yet its future existence is dependent on the city’s continued goodwill, a thing that in Russia often has strings attached. By collaborating with the state to open the shelter, the ISWC, although pursuing its own independently defined goals and trying to work within the system to find realistic solutions to women’s problems, nonetheless becomes in some ways dependent upon the state in order to achieve these goals. Yet considering how difficult it is to run an independent organization, find space for operations, and navigate the paperwork needed to open an emergency shelter, this dependence on the state does not necessarily indicate that the ISWC blindly accepts whatever policies its local patrons have supported. Limited collaboration with the state is first and foremost a practical decision, and does not negate the ISWC’s ability to be critical of government procedures that are harmful to women.
Indeed, the ISWC is an excellent example of the complicated status of women’s groups in Russia: its shelter is donated by the city, its leaders were trained by British women’s crisis center leaders, it is funded by the regional Housing and Communal Services agency as well as municipal and international grants, it participates in regional crisis center networks, and collaborates with the media to create television broadcasts on domestic and sexual violence. It is hard to claim that the broad scope of these projects and connections fits exclusively into either social services or advocacy work or that the ISWC ‘partners’ with the state in unquestioningly enforcing state ideas about social policy. Clearly the work of the ISWC includes both social service and advocacy categories and tries to balance pressures from the local community, the state, and donors to work for gender equality. It is yet another example of how women’s organizations work within the constraints dictated by society and the state and at the same time subtly challenge the existing gender climate and notions of what role the state should play in protecting women from violence.
Stimula

Based in the 67,000 resident town of Dubna outside of Moscow, *Stimula* grew out of the *zhensovet* of the Incorporated Institute of Nuclear Research, and following the end of the USSR it evolved into an independent group dedicated to women’s rights and educational and charitable projects (*Stimula* website). Although it has received grants from many different international organizations, *Stimula* remains volunteer-driven, with no permanent paid staff (personal communication). *Stimula* got in on the ground floor of the new Russian women’s movement that developed in the 1990s, and participated in historic events such as the First and Second Independent Women’s Forums in Dubna in 1991 and 1992 (*Stimula* website). In 1997 it also offered the first seminar on gender issues designed specifically for journalists (*Stimula* website). Since then, its programming has widened to include women’s leadership promotion, women’s health, housing reforms, discrimination against women in employment and business, and political activism.

The organization runs a domestic violence hotline and, like many of the crisis centers, offers informational seminars on gender based violence for local law enforcement, medical workers, and employees of the prosecutor’s office (*Stimula* website). In 2008 the group expanded its focus and launched a new women’s health project that works with women diagnosed or at risk of breast cancer (*Stimula* website).
Designed to address the difficulties of getting oncology care in Dubna, the project offers women assistance with medical consultations, help finding and paying for medicine, and special psychological consultations. Since neither the state nor the medical community runs effective public health campaigns, the program also provides women with information about preventative gynecological care and stresses the importance of routine exams. Additionally, women can participate in art-therapy programs and support groups. Through this program, *Stimula* takes on a role that would normally be filled by the state – promoting public health and offering need-based assistance with medical bills.

In addition to providing social and support services, *Stimula* also seeks to increase cooperation between women’s groups and all levels of government to address women’s rights and public health issues (*Stimula* website). However relations with city officials are not always cordial. In 2001 “antagonism” on the part of local officials and a lack of municipal support forced the organization’s rehab center for drug-addicted children to close after barely a year of operation (*Stimula* website). The breast cancer project has elicited more cooperation from municipal authorities and the medical community (*Stimula* website). As Sundstrom (2006) points out, cooperation between NGOs and local government is often inconsistent or unreliable and government officials view the work of independent groups as somewhere between “helpful to them and society” and a “threat to the stability of current political leaders’ careers” (103). This unpredictable attitude of local officials often hampers the work of independent groups, making it even more difficult to make sustained progress in the field of women’s rights. Nevertheless, *Stimula* continues to view collaboration with the state as an integral component in improving women’s lives.
Besides domestic violence and women’s health, *Stimula* identifies discrimination against women as another area in which the state does not fulfill its obligations to women (personal communication). As the Soviet era drew to a close, Russian society debated the merits of all Soviet policies, including socialist welfare, emancipation of women, and easily obtained abortion and divorce. As jobs became scarce and companies downsized in order to remain competitive on the open market, women were the last hired and first fired, and a ‘back to the kitchen’ mindset became popular, despite the fact that economic difficulties made it almost impossible for single-income households to survive. In fact, women’s rights in general were called into question, with many Russians urging women to embrace their ‘natural’ inclinations to domesticity and subservience. Trends toward increasing unemployment for women and discrimination in the workplace have not subsided as Russia’s economy has become more stable; rather, these are now recognized and accepted facts of life in post-Soviet Russia. Ries (1994) notes that in addition to being displaced as jobs were privatized and redundant tasks consolidated, women were “being left behind… [due to] an aesthetic in which youth, physical attractiveness, and even a willingness to provide sexual favors” determined whether a woman would be hired (250). Even though discrimination is common and often blatantly unapologetic, the new post-Soviet government has done little to enforce anti-discrimination statutes.

Given the pervasiveness of discrimination against women, *Stimula* believes that political solutions are needed in order to protect women’s rights. It lobbies for the State Duma to pass the bill “On the Equal Rights and Equal Possibilities,” which would provide a stronger legal guarantee of gender equality and equal access to resources and opportunities. However, as *Stimula’s* director points out, the organization is “not always
successful” in influencing policies on the national level, since women’s issues do not hold much importance in the still male dominated political world (personal communication). In addition to direct lobbying, the group works in collaboration with other women’s organizations to demand that the Russian state protect women’s rights and meet international standards on discrimination against women. “Practically every project of ours is with partners,” says the director (personal communication). At a recent conference, Stimula worked with other women’s NGOs to create an action plan outlining how the Russian government can implement the Platform of the 1995 Beijing Conference on women and CEDAW (Second-All Russia Women’s Congress website). Through its lobbying work and attempts to incorporate government agencies into its projects, Stimula indicates that it expects the state to play a vital role in guaranteeing that women are treated as full and equal members of society, and that NGOs alone cannot ensure that women’s rights are protected. At the same time, its direct service programming shows that NGOs recognize the state’s apathy in remedying women’s problems and consider immediate assistance for individual women an equally important part of raising women’s status.
Founded in 1999 in the southern town of Krasnodar, the women’s group, Anima, has taken a novel approach to women’s issues. Its decidedly feminist stance sets Anima apart from other women’s organizations that focus on women’s rights as mother’s rights or workers’ rights or advocate for special protections for women based on their reproductive capacities. The director of Anima stated that “in Russian society patriarchal attitudes and traditions still reign, expressed in the view of a woman first of all as a mother, keeper of the domestic hearth” (personal communication). These attitudes prevent women from being accepted as equal members in all aspects of public and private life. It is clear from the organization’s mission statement and commitment to feminist principles that it does not shy away from tackling systemic discrimination against women. Like most women’s groups in Russia, Anima does not focus on just one issue but instead offers information and programming on everything from human rights, women in business, health, and alternative sexual orientations; in fact its mission statement addresses over twenty issues (Women’s Information Network). Projects have included publications on women’s rights, forums on gender inequality, and a unique project of women’s folk art created by clients that became a permanent exhibit in the city center. Current programming focuses mainly on education about women’s rights, legal
and social services, consultations for women with disabled children, and exhibitions of women’s craft work (personal communication).

Like most women’s NGOs, Anima’s first priority is to provide immediate social services to its clients. One of its most unique projects is a folk art program, which showcases the works of amateur female artists and brings together artists and artisans from around the Crimea to hold lectures and master classes. This project has sponsored folk art exhibitions in 2004 and 2008 in Krasnodar, and eventually developed a permanent exhibit of local women’s art (Semya.ru website). The artists are given an opportunity to sell their work, and the remaining proceeds of these exhibitions are used to fund Anima services and educational projects for women in the Krasnodar region.

Programs like these give unemployed women a chance to earn small amounts of money by working at home, an invaluable opportunity given the high rate of female unemployment in the official market.

While Anima was originally conceived as a women’s mutual support organization, it has moved beyond merely filling the gaps in public services and now also assumes the task of holding the state responsible for ensuring women have equal access to all resources and opportunities and are not persecuted because of their gender. In 2002 the organization entered the political arena by partnering with other women’s groups to urge the Duma to pass a bill guaranteeing equal rights to men and women (personal communication). By going beyond only providing social services to also openly advocating for women’s rights and educating the public about women’s issues, Anima challenges the common perceptions that women should be secondary in importance to men. Their feminist programming pushes the envelope of acceptable female behavior.
and in doing so presents new understandings of women’s roles and accomplishments. The fact that *Anima* lobbied on behalf of women for passage of an equal rights bill marks its transformation from a social service provider to a more complex organization, offering services but also attempting to address the underlying causes of women’s problems, namely gender discrimination in employment, wages, and business. In this respect, *Anima* embodies the balance women’s NGOs strive for, offering social services to meet immediate needs and at the same time confronting systemic inequities and pushing the state to address these.
Conclusions

Although this research is based on a small number of women’s organizations, the fact that none of them focus exclusively on either social assistance programs or lobbying efforts contradicts the black and white categorization of critics; indeed, all of these groups recognize the need for both types of work in order to effectively protect women’s rights. While these diametrically opposed categories may have held true in the early 1990s, contemporary women’s NGOs operate in a different political and economic environment, and they have opted to balance community demands for social services with the need to force an apathetic state to create better policies. Moreover, the idea that NGOs that provide social services ‘partner’ with the state to enforce, rather than challenge the existing social contract is disproved when organizations like the six presented in this paper are examined. The six NGOs studied all determine what social programs they will offer based on the needs of the local community, rather than government dictates, and although their services are offered because the state ignores these needs, this does not indicate that these NGOs are accepting of the state’s policies. As is indicated through their programs to re-educate law enforcement, medical workers, and politicians about the importance of women’s issues, it is clear that these NGOs do not agree with the state’s ambivalence in its role as guarantor of women’s rights. Through their lobbying and political activism these NGOs demonstrate that they believe the state
should play a lynchpin role in upholding women’s rights and that, until it does, NGOs will continue to work to hold the state accountable for its part in preventing women from becoming full and equal members of society.

Equating collaboration with the state with loss of NGO autonomy belies the fact that the Russian state, when it chooses to marshal its resources toward a particular goal (state pressure on the media comes to mind) has considerable influence. Women’s NGOs choose to collaborate with the state for two reasons: first, from a practical standpoint, it has become very difficult for an NGO to continue to operate in Russia without some ties to the state. As Sundstrom (2006) pointed out, Putin’s attempts to curb NGO autonomy have led to arbitrary government inspections of NGOs, pressure on the media to ignore those NGOs that have incurred official disfavor, and the creation of government-led NGO forums that exclude organizations that do not have a supporter somewhere in the state apparatus. Not working with the state on an at least a superficial level virtually ensures that an organization will have an impossible time finding funding, registering legally, and locating office space, to say nothing of being considered a legitimate advisor on women’s issues. Second, NGOs work with state agencies in the hope that, ever so slowly, the state will be persuaded to protect women’s rights and develop policies promoting gender equality. Although this day may be a long way off, nonetheless contemporary women’s NGOs are laying the groundwork for future legislation and government policies through their current lobbying and education efforts. In no way do these collaborative efforts necessarily mean that women’s NGOs become partners to the state or dependent upon it. Rather they are a reflection of the practical realities of running an NGO in Russia.
It would be interesting if future research focused on how Russian women’s organizations are adapting to governmental restrictions on their operations and how many of them have simply ceased to operate. Based on my research, a large number of women’s organizations that were operating a few years ago are now defunct or restructured as new organizations. Of the 170 email surveys I sent out, over half of them were returned undelivered, and I received two replies from former NGO leaders that the organization was no longer operating. Whether these closures were due to funding problems, government pressure, or other reasons is hard to say, although the problems of running an independent organization in a political climate that does not necessarily accept civil society groups as legitimate actors surely makes it more difficult for Russian NGOs to remain open. As this paper has illustrated, women’s NGOs work hard to adapt to the changing needs of Russian women and shifting demands from the state while maintaining autonomy of operation, however a larger and more nuanced analysis of contemporary NGOs is needed in order to ascertain how the balance between providing for the needs of their constituents and contending with pressure from the state has shifted in recent years.
Works Cited


Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. What is the name of your organization?

2. When and why was your organization founded?

3. What are the goals of your organization?

4. Have the goals of the organization changed since it was founded?

5. What kinds of problems does the group want to change?

6. What projects has your organization had in the past?

7. What are the organization’s current projects?

8. What role does your organization play in the local community?

9. Does your organization provide any social services, for example legal consultation, help finding employment, psychological counseling or any other services? How many clients are served each year?

10. How do clients find out about services? Does your organization advertise its work or do people find out through friends or other means?

11. Does your organization publish any reports or pamphlets about women’s issues? If yes, how do you distribute them to the community?

12. How many paid employees does your organization have? How many volunteers?

13. Is the organization part of any networks of other women’s organizations? If yes, which ones?
14. Do you collaborate with other organizations in your city or region? If yes, which organizations did you work with, and what projects did you do together?

15. Does your organization ever work with the media to spread information about your center or women’s issues? What projects have you done with the media and how do you think this changed people’s understanding of women’s issues and the work of your organization?

16. Do you work with city, regional, or national government offices to complete projects, get information to the community, or for other reasons? If yes, what projects have you worked on and with which government offices?

17. Are politicians and legislators receptive to your organization’s ideas about women’s issues?

18. What sources of funding does your organization have? Do you receive any support (financial support, office space, training, etc) from international organizations? From private individuals or businesses? Does the city or regional government support your organization’s work in any way? If yes, what kind of support have you received?

19. Have there been any changes in recent years in the status of women in Russia? Please describe.

20. What kinds of problems still exist for women in Russia today?

21. Is there any other important information about your organization or its projects?
Appendix B: List of NGOs Studied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anima</td>
<td>Krasnodar</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Promoting women’s rights; legal consultations; promotion of female folk artists; advocacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANNA</td>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Domestic and sexual violence crisis services; emergency hotline; education programs for medical and law enforcement workers; publications, media campaigns, and advocacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Center for the Help of Women</td>
<td>Sayansk</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Domestic and sexual violence crisis services; emergency hotline; human trafficking; HIV prevention; advocacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekaterina</td>
<td>Yekaterinburg</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Domestic and sexual violence crisis services; emergency hotline; human trafficking; strengthening crisis center network; advocacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Social Women’s Center (ISWC)</td>
<td>Pskov</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Domestic and sexual violence crisis services; education programs for law enforcement, students, and social workers; women’s studies research; domestic violence shelter; advocacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimula</td>
<td>Dubna</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Domestic and sexual violence crisis services; emergency hotline; education programs for medical and law enforcement workers; breast cancer support group; public health programming; advocacy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>