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**Spreading Awareness, Not Illness: HIV/AIDS and Youth in the Russian  
Federation**

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**Spreading Awareness, Not Illness: HIV/AIDS and Youth in the Russian  
Federation**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

This research is dedicated to those across the globe working on the frontlines of risk attempting to extinguish an ever-perpetuating infectious wildfire. It is also dedicated to those who spend countless hours in labs working on developing affordable medications and further to those working on the frontlines of a cure. Lastly, this is dedicated to PLWHA the world over and the memory of those whom we have already lost.

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## **Abstract**

# **Spreading Awareness, Not Illness: HIV/AIDS and Youth in the Russian Federation**

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Russia is currently experiencing one of the fastest growing HIV epidemics in the world. Despite the growing rate of infection in the Russian Federation, little is being done by the government to slow the spread of the virus. The epidemic exploded as a result of injection drug use however now includes non-at-risk populations, generalizing to spread via heterosexual contact. Since the government is unwilling to implement harm-reduction programs such as needle exchange or methadone replacement therapies in Russia, there is a need for education and outreach to facilitate slowing the spread of HIV. Methods of outreach need to be implemented as soon as possible to reach young Russians before they engage in risk behaviors. Due to centrally consolidated media and conservative controls placed on the press, messages must reach Russia vis-à-vis the Internet. In support of this, the millennial generation of Russia is not only politically active, they utilize the Internet to educate themselves about controversial and taboo issues.

## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION AND QUESTIONS.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PART I: HIV IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION.....</b>	<b>9</b>
History and Current Statistics on HIV/AIDS in the Russian Federation.....	9
Heroin Chic.....	15
Consumption in Russia: a Whole Different Animal.....	17
Stigmatized, Isolated.....	22
Harm-Reduction Techniques.....	25
Stigma and HIV/AIDS.....	30
<b>PART II: MEDIA PROBLEMS IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION.....</b>	<b>38</b>
Media and At-Risk Populations.....	38
Television and Politics: Historical Origins of Control in Moving Media... Russian Viewers, Filtered Messages.....	44
Glasnost and TV.....	50
Tonight from Moscow: Chaos Live on TV.....	52
Not-So-Subtle Bias and Vladimir Putin.....	56
New Media Shifts.....	59
<b>PART III: THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT.....</b>	<b>63</b>
Cold War Kids.....	64
Gorbachev's Paradox.....	65
More than a Clique: Tusovki and Russian Youth.....	69
Millennial Youth in Transition.....	73

<b>CLOSING THOUGHTS.....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>86</b>
Appendix I: Dina.....	86
Appendix 2: Alexandra.....	91
Appendix 3: Vova and Vladik.....	94
Appendix 4: Vladik.....	97
Appendix 5: Katya112.....	98
Appendix 6: Save a Horse, Ride a Cowboy.....	100
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>102</b>



## **Introduction and Questions**

While discussing facets of Russian culture, HIV/AIDS is not the forefront of conception on the subject. Americans asked to list places with high HIV prevalence would most likely begin with Sub-Saharan African nations. What is interesting considering the popular association with sub-Saharan nations and HIV/AIDS is that Russia's HIV Epidemic is currently beginning to mirror epidemics such as South Africa's. Fascinatingly, the Russian Federation has come to have an HIV epidemic of unprecedented scale for nations located north of the equator.

Part of the Russian visa application for longer than a 30 day stay requires proof of HIV negative status. I have personally been tested for HIV three times, all in connection with Russia. The first two times I had been tested, I tested in anticipation of a journey. Interestingly, both times I had tested before I left for Russia, neither doctor had ever had a patient looking for an HIV test in order to travel out of the United States. Both doctors found it fascinating that Russia required this test, as well. Both times I chatted with the doctors about the political climate in Russia and why the test was deemed necessary, and how excited I was to get my visa. I was looking forward to my results so that I could start my life in a flat on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor in a tall building in a Northern suburb of Moscow.

However, the third HIV test was different. I was not looking forward to the results. In fact, I was more frightened than I had been at the age of 16 after doctors discovered a tumor in my knee. I kept thinking about the differences between

cancer and HIV, and how at least one of them could be irradiated or burned out of a body. The other would be a constant presence, sprung like a sable trap and ready to develop into an acquired deficiency that would steal my immune system's ability to keep me protected from the outside world. In my mind, one had a chance at being beaten, while the other had a chance at beating me.

I recalled the story of Ryan White, I had read his biography when I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade after being curious about HIV/AIDS. Ryan White was a Midwestern boy born with hemophilia in a rust belt city. He had acquired HIV through a blood transfusion at some point in his life as a child. Ryan's status was discovered when he was hospitalized as a young teenager due to extreme pneumonia. During partial removal of one of his lungs, it was discovered that Ryan had developed AIDS and appeared to be on the brink of death. Despite being told he had 6 months to live, Ryan recovered and sought to attend school again. Vocal members of his hometown of Russiaville, IN sought to bar Ryan from coming back to school because of his illness and he was eventually barred from attending the local middle school. The White family filed suit with the district, and the district allowed Ryan to attend school with the case never reaching court. Ryan's biography detailed more than a lifetime's worth of abuse; even after expert witnesses explained there was no risk to the health of other students in the community, some families started their own alternative school. Ryan experienced endless discrimination due to

misunderstandings on the disease and prejudices about the kinds of people who could contract it.<sup>1</sup>

Thinking about Ryan's story made me consider a parallel situation: attending a doctor's office for a routine visit, perhaps to start family planning, or because of the need for surgery on an injury, or a host of other mundane reasons, expecting a cure, diagnosis, or advice. Instead of getting answers on one condition, I would receive paperwork stating that I had HIV-- or was in the throes of AIDS-- and was at risk of dying from a complication I hadn't even considered being a possibility? This experience is similar to that experienced by most Russians diagnosed with HIV. A simple doctor's visit, and a life-changing diagnosis.

While living just outside of Moscow, I observed my peers had a general misunderstanding on HIV transmission. Any and all sexually active persons have a route of potential exposure to HIV, but my peers felt that they had the ability to discern risk well enough to avoid exposure. The technique my peers employed to discern risk was assessing observations on the character or habits of people in order to guess whether or not they were drug users or had multiple sexual partners.

Youth cross-culturally believe in their own ability to accurately assess risk, and so my Russian peers were not atypical in that matter. What was worrying, though, was a general lack of concern for engaging in risk-behaviors in light of the

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<sup>1</sup>Ann Marie Cunningham and Ryan White, *Ryan White: My Own Story* (New York, NY: Dian Books, 1991),

HIV prevalence in Russia, particularly within their age range. Entrenched stereotypes that assert drug abuse is a character flaw or that HIV+ persons are promiscuous are perpetuated by healthcare professionals, lawmakers, and media outlets in the Russian Federation. Young Russians may see themselves as being neither promiscuous nor weak-willed, and consequently assume they are outside the scope of risk. Some of these pervasive beliefs are rooted in a lack of comprehensive education on HIV. This is what is unique to Russia; youth believe they are outside the scope of risk in a high risk environment because the nature of their character, and these beliefs are not challenged by media, government, or social institutions.

There is a serious deficit of information on HIV within the Russian Federation. Almost 25 years after the first Russian HIV case was reported, the overwhelming majority of information and research on HIV is sponsored by organizations outside of Russia. From inquiries on real disease infection rates and investigation regarding government complacency over treatment, a non-domestic community is to thank for assessing the epidemic. Promises for positive change on the subject have been made by both Putin and Medvedev since the early 2000's, but regardless of spoken intentions, ART therapy is dismally under-practiced or not available, preventive protocols and educational programs don't exist, and harm-reduction programs are outlawed

This thesis is an exploration of the topic of HIV/AIDS, youth culture, and political interventions on media ownership in Russia. The thesis takes an

interdisciplinary approach to understanding how youth interact as consumers within Russian society, as individual and collective agents making decisions on navigating both structural and cultural space.

This thesis contains three major sections. The first section is on HIV within the Russian Federation. It begins with a sweeping presentation of statistics on HIV in the region. The Statistics are compiled from a multitude of sources, the majority coming from Russian and English reports from the World Health Organization (WHO). There is also data included from the Russian Federal AIDS Centre and UNIADS. The WHO statistics tend to be higher than the estimations from the Federal AIDS Centre, due to the fact that the Federal Aids Centre data is compiled within the Russian Federation from cases of patients interacting with state/local organizations. The WHO estimates for undocumented HIV/AIDS cases due to the fact that HIV+ or injecting drug users (IDUs) may not seek treatment and therefore not be counted. Further, the WHO estimates for statistical growth, measuring the rate of epidemic in comparison with previous years.

The thesis then discusses heroin use within Russia. A discussion of a short chronology of heroin's introduction to Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union reveals the beginnings of the HIV epidemic in Russia. Letiza Paoli (2000) has investigated heroin consumption extensively, her work details the nature of distribution within the former Soviet Union and is utilized by the CIA. Ethnographic portraits of IDUs from projects by Gilderman (2013) Sarang (2013) and Burns (2007) are included throughout this section to showcase personal

understanding of drug abuse in Russia supported further by my own observations. Harm-reduction techniques are discussed in this section as well, in order to define that they are an effective method of treatment and also slow the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The second major section is a chronology of media control within Russia. Foremost Russian media scholars, Oates (2006) and Mickiewicz (2008) similarly argue that television media has been under tightened controls since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Television history is important to the purpose of this thesis due to the fact that it both outlines deep motivations for Putin to control the medium and also foreshadows little hope for liberalization. Roxburgh (2012) and Herspring (2009) deepen understanding of Putin's obsession with control on television by detailing subtle bias present during election times. I add, considering Evans (2008) findings on the success of harm-reduction messages in countries currently experiencing an HIV epidemic, and, the success of anti-methamphetamine media campaigns in the US, the tight controls on television and media are detrimental. These tight controls suggest that the Putin government, who feels drug-addiction is the result of weak character, will not allow for messages of harm reduction or media campaigns against drug use. Furthermore, I observe that there is little representation of HIV in film in the Russian Federation as compared to the United States. Interestingly, for a period of time during Putin's first presidency, messages on safer sex were available in some youth magazines, however those magazines are currently out-of-print.

The third and final section of the paper is a chronology of youth social organization from the time of perestroika. Using Pilkington's (1994, 2002, 2006) exhaustive research on Russian youth behavior since perestroika, her findings define that Russian youth have been joining together in complex networks to navigate social and structural barriers in Post-Soviet Russia. Riordan (1988) and Baker (1999) support Pilkington with details on the Komsomol youth organization and future political prospects for Russian youth. Through time, Pilkington, Riordan, and Baker have observed slowly liberalizing beliefs amongst youth, Garza (2006) details a politically conservative awakening within Russian youth.

Rogov (2010) believes that there is a predictable political cycle for Post-Soviet Russia, and employing Schlesinger, he argues that an era of stagnation or repression will arise out of Putin's current government. I assert this observation is crucial considering the findings scholars such as Pilkington, Markowicz, Riordan, and Baker have made link periods of stagnation with high political involvement amongst young people in Russia. These unique conditions are validated by Yashin (2011), who argues that a new "hipster" youth generation are more politically involved than the generation previous.

This thesis also contains ethnographic observations employing Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot's (1988) methods of ethnographic portraiture. Vignettes included in appendices provide insight on personal, informal ethnographic exchanges to cogently describe current ideas on sex, HIV, and other topics amongst Russian youth. These are to support the findings of the scholars mentioned above

and further add support to Pilkington's (2006) assertion that Russian youth engage in risk atypically in comparison with other developed nations.

While HIV, media history, and the chronology of youth social trends in Russia may seem far-linked, the purpose of detailing all three is to illuminate a severe deficit in HIV awareness and a lack of media exposure on HIV, revealing there is little hope for the Federal Government to begin media campaigns. Further, the combination of scholarly chronology of HIV, media, and Russian youth culture, in combination with current observations, confirm preconditions currently exist in the Russian Federation to support millennial youth positively receiving HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns on the Internet. Lastly, this argument is reinforced by detailing current popular enclaves of HIV discussion online on Russian-language websites such as [stopspid.ru](http://stopspid.ru), [pereboi.ru](http://pereboi.ru), and [aidsjournal.ru](http://aidsjournal.ru) where online discussions on risk, HIV, and safer sex are already beginning to take place.



## **Part I: *HIV and the Russian Federation***

### **History and Current Statistics on HIV/AIDS in the Russian Federation**

In 2004, a UNAIDS report theorized that the rapid socioeconomic change after the fall of communism created a high risk environment for the spread of HIV. Social shifts from the relative stability of the USSR resulted in loss of livelihood, changes in sexual behavior, an influx of illicit drugs, and dramatic increases in population mobility. UNAIDS observed that those conditions created the perfect environment for a pandemic, and that HIV would spread rapidly within the former Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup>

The wild economic turmoil that followed the dissolution of the USSR left throngs of people without employment or stability. Economic and social uncertainty were the unfortunate currency of the zeitgeist and these anxieties were reflected in breakdowns of traditional institutions such as working organizations, educational centers, and other important social structures. No longer under the

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<sup>2</sup>AIDS Epidemic Update (Geneva, Switzerland: UNAIDS/WHO, 2004), 48, accessed December 1, 2013, [http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/dataimport/pub/report/2004/2004\\_epiupdate\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/dataimport/pub/report/2004/2004_epiupdate_en.pdf).

stringent social control of Soviet planners, the population discovered itself awash in unregulated capitalism and Western goods and trends.

The relative vacuum concerning specific health topics within the USSR isolated its populace from knowledge of the ravages of HIV epidemics in Western Europe, the United States, and Southern Africa. Also, unlike the majority of countries in the West, because HIV was not a health concern in the Soviet Union, Soviet citizens were not exposed to public awareness campaigns on HIV/AIDS and conservative anti-drug propaganda. There was simply no need, as HIV seemed to be a “Western” problem. Due to this, young Russians eager to find a “kaif” (high) did so without the warnings of blood-borne illness, the knowledge of the dangers of sharing needles, and prior exposure to the devastation of addiction. Increasingly liberalized attitudes towards experimental or risky behaviors in Russia appeared when funding for education was inversely decreasing due to the massive economic transition; a dangerous combination for those coming of age at the time.

These preconditions fertilized one of the fastest growing epidemics in the world, centralized in Russia’s most densely populated cities, St. Petersburg having a rash out outbreaks initially. The Russian Federal AIDS center reported that officially registered people with HIV/AIDS went from approximately 1,000 cases in 1995 to 2,000 in 1996, leaping to around 438,000 between 1996 and 2008.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Linda M. Niccolai et al., "The Potential for Bridging of HIV Transmission in the Russian Federation: Sex Risk Behaviors and HIV Prevalence among Drug Users (DUs) and Their Non-DU Sex Partners," *Journal of Urban Health*, 1st ser., 86 (2009): 132. Also see *Zhurnal SPID Seks Zdorov'e* 39 (2001): 11, <http://aidsjournal.ru/journal39.html>.

From 1997 to 2008, there was a 100-fold increase in HIV infected individuals in Russia.<sup>4</sup> From 1998 to 2002, the rate of HIV among pregnant women increased by 1,000 percent.<sup>5</sup> In 2008, the World Health Organization estimated there were 560,000-1,600,000 individuals in Russia living with HIV/AIDS.<sup>6</sup> The most recent tallies by the WHO suggest there are from 730,000 to 1,300,000 people currently living with HIV/AIDS in Russia.<sup>7</sup>

In Russia, HIV+ individuals have historically come from populations of either injecting drug users (IDUs), sex-workers, or both. Russia officially reported over 69,000 new cases of HIV within the year 2012<sup>8</sup>. Up from the state report of 62,000 for the year of 2011, these new cases are also notable because within those cases, 40% were reportedly transmitted through sexual contact.<sup>9</sup> Heterosexual

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<sup>4</sup>Nadia Abdala et al., "Age at First Alcoholic Drink as a Predictor of Current HIV Sexual Risk Behaviors Among a Sample of Injecting Drug Users (IDUs) and Non-IDUs who are Sexual Partners of IDUs, in St. Petersburg, Russia," *AIDS Behavior* 16, no. 6: [Page 807].

<sup>5</sup>Scott Burris and Daniel Villena, "Adapting to the Reality of HIV," *Journal of the Section of Individual Rights and Responsibilities* 31, no. 4 (2004): 12.

<sup>6</sup>World Health Organization. *Epidemiological Fact Sheet 2006 Russian Federation*; 2006. World Bank, "Economic consequences of the HIV epidemic in Russia," May 2012.

<sup>7</sup>"HIV/AIDS in the Russian Federation," World Bank, last modified February 1, 2011, accessed March 9, 2012, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/EXTECAREGTOPHEANUT/EXTECAREGTOPHIVAIDS/0,,contentMDK:20320143~menuPK:616427~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:571172,00.html>

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/EXTECAREGTOPHEANUT/EXTECAREGTOPHIVAIDS/0,,contentMDK:20320143~menuPK:616427~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:571172,00.htm>. See Also, "Statistika," *Tsentr Po Profilaktike i Bor'be so SPID i Infektsionnimi Zabolenianovennami*, last modified 2013, <http://www.medportaldv.ru/?s=9>

<sup>8</sup>These numbers are the numbers of HIV positive individuals reported to the state and may not reflect the actual number of new infections in Russia

<sup>9</sup>A. T. Golusov et al., *Natsionalny Doklad Rossiskoi Federatsii-VICH Spidom* (Moscow: UNAIDS, 2010), [http://www.unaids.org/en/dataanalysis/knowyourresponse/countryprogressreports/2010countries/russia\\_2010\\_country\\_progress\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/en/dataanalysis/knowyourresponse/countryprogressreports/2010countries/russia_2010_country_progress_report_en.pdf).

transmission has been growing, displaying a 4.5% increase from the last three years of reported infection routes.<sup>10</sup> The proportion of new cases reporting heterosexual contact as their route of exposure increased from 6% in 2001 to 25% in 2004.<sup>11</sup>

Russia has broached another important statistic concerning HIV infection rate: Both the CIA and a joint project with the UN and the WHO has estimated a little over 1% of the population within the Russian Federation is HIV positive.<sup>12</sup> In fact, current estimates place the prevalence rate around 1.1% among those aged 15 to 49.<sup>13</sup> A rate hovering around 1% signifies the point at which an HIV epidemic generalizes; referring to the transition towards non-risk averse people becoming infected within a population. Interestingly, Russia's approach to this seemingly small percentage point correlates that the epidemic has now begun to spread via heterosexual transmission and multiple studies have observed this finding within Russia.<sup>14</sup> Within this prevalence marker lies another important metric; young

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<sup>10</sup>RIA Novosti, last modified March 25, 2013, accessed June 9, 2013, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20130325/180244539.html>.

<sup>11</sup>Burchell et al., "Characterization of an Emerging," 807.

<sup>12</sup>"The World Factbook: HIV Prevalence Rates by Country," The World Factbook, last modified 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2155rank.html> see also Spid, Seks, Zdorov'e, "Danniya Po Vich Infektsii v Rossikoi Federatsii" [Basic Facts of HIV in Russia], Zhurnal Spid, Seks, Zdorov'e, last modified 2013, [http://aidsjournal.ru/journal/85\\_6.html](http://aidsjournal.ru/journal/85_6.html).

<sup>13</sup>Ann Burchell et al., "Characterization of an Emerging Heterosexual HIV Epidemic in Russia," *Sexually Transmitted Diseases* 35, no. 9 (September 2008): 807.

<sup>14</sup>Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS at Yale University, "Russia's Twin Epidemics: Addiction and HIV," CIRAcast, podcast audio, October 17, 2007, accessed November 10, 2012, <http://cira.yale.edu/news/multimedia/ciracast>. And Olga Toussova et al., "Potential Bridges of Heterosexual HIV Transmission from Drug Users to the General Population in St. Petersburg, Russia: Is It Easy to Be a Young Female?," *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 86, no. 1 (2009): 5126.

women of reproductive age are increasingly becoming infected through sexual contact.<sup>15</sup> In 2005, 43% of new infections were among young women and of infections transmitted through sexual contact, 70% of those infected were female.<sup>16</sup>

Regardless of the method of transmission, at this current rate around 200 Russians contract the virus every day.<sup>17</sup> The Global Burden of Disease Study conducted by the Institute for Health Methods and Evaluation compares different countries' causes of premature death from 1990 with those causes of 2010. In 1990, HIV/AIDS didn't appear in the top 25 causes of premature death for Russians but in the last ten years has skyrocketed to become 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause behind heart attack and stroke.<sup>18</sup>

Experts suggest that the bulk of people living with HIV in Russia have not begun experience severe health consequences from AIDS.<sup>19</sup> Differently than Russia, the HIV epidemic in the US was realized when people began appearing in hospitals dying from a mysterious syndrome. The disease arose as a harbinger of impending death, and its mechanisms hadn't been clinically identified or observed

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<sup>15</sup>Katya Burns, "Russia's HIV/AIDS Epidemic: HIV/AIDS Among Women and Problems of Access to Services." *Problems Of Post-Communism*54, no. 1 (January 2007): 28-36. Military & Government Collection, EBSCOhost (accessed March 2, 2013).

<sup>16</sup>Burns, "Russia's HIV/AIDS Epidemic" 28.

<sup>17</sup>"Russia Reports 12% Rise in HIV 200 New Cases a Day," BBC News, last modified November 28, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-20526639>.

<sup>18</sup>Note: This study places higher weight on the age at which a population dies off. From the study: Years of life lost (YLLs) quantify premature mortality by weighting younger deaths more than older deaths.

<sup>19</sup>See also Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS at Yale University, "Russia's Twin Epidemics: Addiction."

elsewhere. Because entire populations of people were disappearing as a result of this virus, there was strong incentive for research and education in its wake. Conversely, Russia has successfully identified an HIV epidemic- not an AIDS epidemic. Unlike the US case, the disease was not discovered as it manifested its worst effects on the health care system.<sup>20</sup> The burden of treating AIDS patients on the precipice of Russia's transition from HIV to its acquired syndrome is not yet realized in health care policy or amongst government planners and as of yet doesn't appear to be as "dangerous" as epidemics in sub-Saharan Africa or the United States.<sup>21</sup>

It would seem that considering growing attention focused on Russia's dwindling population, such a dire epidemic would be lawmakers' first priority. Despite this, there has been very little research done on HIV in Russia. Most studies on the virus have been either rapid assessments or cross-sectional surveys.<sup>22</sup> In some regions, HIV screening is a part of every routine doctor's visit, a part of military enrollment, and protocol to receive drug treatment. Approximately 2-3 million HIV screens are run per year in Russia.<sup>23</sup> Historically, Russia has been very good at tallying important metrics on its population, and

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<sup>20</sup>Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS at Yale University, "Russia's Twin Epidemics: Addiction."

<sup>21</sup>Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS at Yale University, "Russia's Twin Epidemics: Addiction."

<sup>22</sup>Burchell et al., "Characterization of an Emerging," 808.

<sup>23</sup>Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS at Yale University, "Russia's Twin Epidemics: Addiction."

counts its HIV infected population to the fullest of its ability.<sup>24</sup> Outside of counting, though, there is little done to prevent the spread of HIV or to support those who have become infected by the virus.

## **Heroin Chic**

Use of the drug heroin introduced HIV to people in Russia, and is the leading cause of the epidemic. Widespread illegal drug use, along with HIV, is new to Russia.<sup>25</sup> Heroin, the second-most consumed illegal substance in Russia, was virtually unknown until 1992. Until the early 1990s, only 5 grams of the substance had been seized across the whole of Russia.<sup>26</sup> During the Soviet period, heroin was trafficked around the USSR to Europe through Iran and Turkey. The collapse of the Soviet state meant open-season for the drug to enter Russia directly from Afghanistan through formerly heavily guarded Soviet territory. In Afghanistan, Heroin cultivation increased in 1989 after the end of Soviet occupation. Since then, production has been steadily increasing, and Afghanistan has been the global

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<sup>24</sup>Often at-risk individuals eschew hospitals and doctors simply to avoid being registered by the government, confounding accurate assessments on real rates of infection.

<sup>25</sup>Letiza Paoli, "The Development of an Illegal Market," *British Journal of Criminology* 42 (2002): 23.

<sup>26</sup>Paoli, "The Development of an Illegal," 25.

leader in heroin production since 1992.<sup>27</sup> To add to the increased distribution of heroin after the collapse of the USSR, some sources suggest that the police helped spread the drug in exchange for profit.<sup>28</sup> Currently, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan serve as some of the more porous border-states through which it is estimated 65% of all Afghan opiate exports travel.<sup>29</sup> In the year 2000, 984 kilograms of heroin were seized in Russia, a dramatic increase from the 5 grams seized only 10 years prior.<sup>30</sup>

Within Russia, there is no evidence of a family, cartel, or mafia group responsible for the supply of the drug. Small groups of dealers exist in different cities, and the trade is not overseen by a larger organization.<sup>31</sup> Crimes committed by organized crime groups represented less than 1% of total drug offenses in the 1990s and only represented 4.1% nine years later.<sup>32</sup> A UN investigation into the nature of drug trafficking in Russia found that the consumer's demands weren't met or fueled by the larger organized crime rings that usually dominate control

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<sup>27</sup>UNODC and Government of Afghanistan Ministry of Counternarcotics, comps. *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009* (Kabul: UNODC, 2009), [http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan\\_opium\\_survey\\_2009\\_summary.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_opium_survey_2009_summary.pdf).

<sup>28</sup>Gregory Gilderman, "Death By Indifference," Daily Beast (videoblog), entry posted July 21, 2013, accessed July 25, 2013, <http://newsbeastlabs.thedailybeast.com/projects/death-by-indifference/>. Also Gregory Gilderman, "Death by Indifference: AIDS and Heroin Addiction in Russia." *World Affairs*. Last modified January 2013. <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/death-indifference-aids-and->

<sup>29</sup>Paoli, "The Development of an Illegal," 25.

<sup>30</sup>Paoli, "The Development of an Illegal," 25.

<sup>31</sup>Paoli, "The Development of an Illegal," 33.

<sup>32</sup>Letiza Paoli, "The Price of Freedom: Illegal Drug Markets and Policies in Post-Soviet Russia," *American Academy of Political and Social Science* 582 (July 2002): 173.



over local markets.<sup>33</sup> Heroin consumption in Russia seems to be market-driven. Dealers may be housewives, users, ethnic minorities or otherwise: those who procure for addicts in Russia are numerous and come from varied backgrounds.<sup>34</sup>

### **Consumption in Russia: a Whole Different Animal**

Considering the near-zero level of heroin consumption in the USSR, why did Russians begin consuming it with an accelerating appetite? The answer is complicated, but part of the answer follows the lives of people who have been “young” since Glasnost. Young adults in the glasnost era were the first in 70 years to experience loosened social control. Their unhappiness with communism in the transitional period before and after the breakup of the Soviet Union led to the popularization of youth forming underground or alternative groups.<sup>35</sup> These social circles played, and still play, an extremely important role in consumption and decision making- illegal drugs included.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Paoli, "The Price of Freedom," 174.

<sup>34</sup>Paoli, "The Price of Freedom," 175.

<sup>35</sup>Hilary Pilkington. *Russia's Youth and Its Culture: A Nation's Constructors and Constructed*. (London: Routledge, 1994.)

<sup>36</sup>William Alex Priedmore, "Social Problems and Patterns of Juvenile Delinquency in Transitional Russia," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 39, no. 187 (May 1, 2002): 195, accessed May 13, 2013, DOI:10.1177/00224278020390023.

Perhaps a legacy of policy or history, a popular cliché regarding Russia is that it has always been “A whole different animal” in reference to Western European culture. True to cliché, the way Russians consume heroin is also “different”. Injecting drug users in Russia are young, educated, and local to their region of residence. The European Project of School Research in Alcohol and Drug use found that 6% of 15-16 year olds in Moscow in 1999 had reported trying heroin at least once. None of the other countries in the survey reported an incidence higher than 2%.<sup>37</sup> Also, unlike the United States and countries within Western Europe, heroin is consumed by Russian youth from all social classes and ethnic groups.<sup>38</sup> In 1996, Medecins sans Frontieres found the majority of IDUs in Moscow were between 12 and 24 years old. In the Far East city of Khabarovsk, it was found that 90% of IDUs were 16-20 years old.<sup>39</sup> Conversely, heroin consumers in the West usually come from highly marginalized, older populations with little income.<sup>40</sup> Also, IDUs have not typically come from migrant or transient communities; most IDUs live relatively close to where they were raised.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Paoli, "The Development of an Illegal," 33.

<sup>38</sup>Paoli, "The Development of an Illegal," 33

<sup>39</sup>Rakitsky, 2000 as cited in Paoli, "The Development of an Illegal," 33

<sup>40</sup>Government Division, CRS Report, H.R. Doc. No. 102-CRS-1992-GOV-0068, 2d Sess., at 15 (9). and Paoli, "The Development of an Illegal," 23.

<sup>41</sup>Martin Wall et al., "Sex, Drugs, and Economic Behavior in Russia: A Study of Socio-Economic Characteristics of High Risk Population," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 22 (October 4, 2009): 137.

In a highly detailed study on youth drug use in different cities in Russia, Hilary Pilkington details that the pleasure of heroin doesn't just come from a physical feeling of wellbeing; Pilkington discovered heroin use is an incredibly social phenomenon in Russia.<sup>42</sup> The social phenomenon of heroin use gives the users Pilkington interviewed a feeling that they are somehow different from *narkomany* (slang for "junkie"). Social circles of drug consumption allow for youth to validate and reinforce with each other a sense of essential difference. Russian users separate their heroin use from tropes of heroin users who have lost their jobs, homes, or have been isolated from their loved ones as a result of their addiction. Furthermore, there is a sense that a specific kind of person that is a *narkoman* or junkie physically appears differently than trendy-looking or mainstream Russian youth. For example, during a drug raid in a popular Moscow club, young people experimenting with drugs have reported feeling safe due to their appearance, perceived social status, or due to the influence of a specific circle of friends.<sup>43</sup> Somehow these feelings perpetuate the idea that there is distance between young, educated Russians experimenting with heroin and the potential for addiction or becoming a person affected by chronic addiction.

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<sup>42</sup>Hilary Pilkington, "'For Us It Is Normal': Exploring the 'Recreational' Use of Heroin in Russian Youth Cultural Practice," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 22, no. 1 (June 30, 2006): 38, accessed June 3, 2013, DOI:10.1080/1353270500508452.

<sup>43</sup>See Appendix 1: Dina

True to the clichés of young adulthood, most Russians reflecting back upon the 1990s argue it seemed that “everyone was doing it [heroin]”.<sup>44</sup> In an interview with *Daily Beast* in cooperation with Gregory Gilderman, Misha Friedman, and the Pulitzer Center for crisis reporting, patient “Alex” details his experiences with Heroin. Alex remarks that growing up in the Soviet Union meant there was no information on other countries or other people, and further, no knowledge of drug abuse. He claims that Russians long used to alcohol addiction wouldn’t be able to recognize drug addiction or comprehend it due to outright non-exposure during the Soviet period. His theory is that the general lack of illegal drugs in the USSR left a vulnerable population who suddenly had “new things” and “drugs” appear in their lives.<sup>45</sup> Those adults still alive currently who partook in the social freedoms of the ‘90s in Russia recount a similar tale to Alex’s. Timur, an addiction counselor interviewed by Gregory Gilderman for *World Affairs* offered that in a world newly introduced to social freedoms, Russians had no way of dealing with imported items, particularly new imports like drugs. A recovering addict himself, he reflects “Lots of new things appeared in our life, drugs too, and we just didn’t know how to manage them. We lost, somehow. We lost ourselves in it, in all those new things in life.”

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<sup>44</sup>Gilderman, "Death By Indifference," *Daily Beast* (videoblog).

<sup>45</sup>Marijuana was used, as well as hallucinogens and prescription narcotics though not widely.

Regardless of how differently drug users in Russia may feel about themselves in comparison with popular assumptions or tropes on narcotics abusers, it is a fact that addiction and chronic dependency can arise out of experimental heroin use. The majority of the scholarship on heroin use reports Russians are unaware that dabbling in recreational heroin can quickly spin out of control. The federal government has even perpetuated the idea that in order to stop drug use, young Russians must exhibit self-control and make good personal choices.<sup>46</sup>

Why does recreational use of heroin become habitual? Heroin is a derivative of opium--an opiate--and carries an extremely high risk of physical dependence. All opioids are dependence producing compounds which trigger opioid receptors in the brain.<sup>47</sup>

Physical dependence is defined as the need to continue use of a drug to feel “normal” or to avoid unpleasant physical symptoms.<sup>48</sup> Dependence is manifested in a strong desire or sense of compulsion to take the drug, difficulty in controlling drug-taking behavior, evidence of tolerance (such that increased doses are constantly required), progressive neglect of other interests, and other harmful

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<sup>46</sup>Natalya Utrovskaya, "Rosyiskaya Aktivistskaya Prinyala Uchasviye v Press Konferensii Globalnoi Komiskii po Narkopolitike," Rylkov Fond, last modified June 14, 2013, <http://rylkov-fond.org/blog/narkopolitika/narkopolitika-nastoyashee/drug-policy-report/>.

<sup>47</sup>WHO/UNODC/UNAIDS, *Substitution Maintenance Therapy in the Management of Opioid Dependence and HIV/AIDS Prevention* (Geneva, Switzerland: WHO, 2004), 4.

<sup>48</sup>National Cancer Institute, <http://www.cancer.gov/dictionary?CdrID=454765>.

consequences. Physical dependence also has been found to alter the function of certain brain circuits and peripheral organs as a result of adaptation to a drug that is used on a chronic basis.<sup>49</sup> When dependent upon heroin to feel “normal”, the body quickly becomes master of the mind, and the avoidance of withdrawal symptoms become a user’s first priority. Heroin dependence reflects on society by impacting economic productivity, social stability, and criminal activity. Furthermore, major health risks include premature death, HIV, and hepatitis B and C.<sup>50</sup> Dependence on heroin is a complex health condition that has social, biological, and psychological determinants. Dependence and addiction are a chronic illness and not a weakness in personal will or character, as suggested by many Russian leaders.<sup>51</sup>

### **Stigmatized, Isolated**

Once an IDU becomes dependent on heroin in Russia, there is a challenging web that must be navigated to successfully get high. Sarang et al present extensive qualitative research on how IDUs find and use drugs in multiple cities across the

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<sup>49</sup>Roy A. Wise, "Neurobiology of Addiction," *Current Opinion in Neurobiology* 6, no. 2 (April 1996): 5, DOI:10.1016/S0959-4388(96)80079-1.

<sup>50</sup>WHO/UNODC/UNAIDS, *Substitution Maintenance Therapy in the Management*, 5.

<sup>51</sup>WHO/UNODC/UNAIDS, *Substitution Maintenance Therapy in the Management*, 5 and also

Russian Federation, and have recorded that many hasty decisions made by IDUs are the result of being terrified of the police.<sup>52</sup> According to their findings, police regularly practice violence in the day-to-day lives of Russian IDUs in the form of 'extrajudicial' policing practices. These include arrest without cause, extortion, physical violence, torture, and rape. Assaults on IDUs appear relentless and limitless and a strong culture of fear pervades everyday street life for those in the throes of addiction.<sup>53</sup>

While IDUs are marginalized in many cultures, in Russia it seems they are preyed upon. The police have a horrific yet symbiotic relationship with IDUs, as they depend on bribes from drug dealers, pick off profits from extortion, or meet work quotas by arresting IDUs. The sight of a bruised, swollen, or freshly used injection site is grounds for a shakedown, most often resulting in extortion of money or drugs-- no justification or warrant needed.<sup>54</sup> Planting of drugs or syringes on people is commonly reported by IDUs. Reports of receiving a one-year sentence for a single syringe or being sent to a maximum-security prison after having bags of heroin planted on a person are not uncommon.<sup>55</sup> Repeat offenders are often abused or set-up in pre-arranged drug deals to meet state quotas of

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<sup>52</sup> Anya Sarang et al., "Policing Drug Users in Russia: Risk, Fear, and Structural Anya Sarang, "Skoro Govorit o Spide Budet Nekomu," Rylkov Fond, last modified June 12, 2012, <http://rylkov-fond.org/blog/narkopolitika/narkopolitika-rossiya/anya-aids-conf/>. Violence," *Substance Use and Misuse* 48 (2010): 818.

<sup>53</sup> Sarang et al., "Policing Drug Users in Russia," 825.

<sup>54</sup> Sarang et al., "Policing Drug Users in Russia," 818.

<sup>55</sup> Irina Teplinskaya, "A Life in Free Fall: A Russian Drug Addict's Story," *Open Democracy*, last modified November 17, 2010, accessed February 23, 2011, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/irina-teplinskaya/life-in-free-fall-russian-drug-addicts-story-1>

arrests, and sometimes other IDUs are lured by police to act as witness against other IDUs within a community in exchange for drugs.<sup>56</sup> Under Russian law, anyone suspected of being a drug user can be arrested, taken for mandatory drug screening, detained for up to 15 days, and fined an unspecified amount of money.<sup>57</sup> This kind of treatment is different than in the United States, where without probable cause or a warrant, a person may legally deny a search except when under arrest.

A major reason that Russian IDUs reuse needles is to avoid being caught by the police.<sup>58</sup> Quickly shooting up around the corner from a purchasing spot ensures a user won't have drugs or needles on their person for too long. Sarang et al found ¼ of their IDU study participants to have injected from a shared needle due to the fear of being caught either with drugs, with a syringe, or both while traveling to retrieve a clean needle.<sup>59</sup> Even in cases of overdose potentially resulting in death, IDUs reported they deliberately avoided calling an ambulance due to fear of police repression.<sup>60</sup> In Russia, the rule of law is subject to the interpretation of those who enforce it and IDUs are on the losing end.

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<sup>56</sup>Teplinskaya, "A Life in Free," Open Democracy.

<sup>57</sup>Martin Wall et al., "Sex, Drugs, and Economic Behavior in Russia: A Study of Socio-Economic Characteristics of High Risk Population," *International Journal of Drug Policy* 22 (October 4, 2009): 218

<sup>58</sup>Balabanova, Y, R Coker, RA Atun, and F Drobniewski. 2006. "Stigma and HIV infection in Russia." *AIDS Care* 18, no. 7: 846-852. CINAHL Plus with Full text, EBSCOhost

<sup>59</sup> Sarang et al., "Policing Drug Users in Russia," 818.

<sup>60</sup>Boris Sergeev et al., "Prevalence and Circumstances of Opiate Overdose among Injection Drug Users in the Russian Federation," *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 80, no. 2 (2003): 216.



## **Harm-Reduction Techniques**

Because of the large percentage of the Russian population that are IDUs, the majority of organizations involved in HIV/AIDS recommends implementing needle exchange programs for those at risk in hopes of seriously slowing the rate of HIV transmission. A multitude of trials overwhelmingly correlate needle exchange programs with reduced transmission rates. Heimer et al., 1993, Watters et al., 1994; Drucker et al., 1998; Heimer, 1998; Blumenthal et al., 2000; Des Jarlais et al., 2000, 2000b; Loff, 2002; Nelson, 2002; Ksobiech, 2003; and McDonald et al., 2003 have all found needle exchange programs to reduce high risk injections, sex behaviors, and disease transmission.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the empirical evidence, Russian authorities for the most part remain unconvinced that harm reduction works. Painful detoxification and abstinence-only programs are advocated and employed for injecting drug users. Recently, the Russian Health Ministry decided to scrap the Global Fund's needle distribution and HIV awareness programs. Russia's perplexing actions only make HIV transmission more prevalent. In a needle-vacuum, IDUs continue to inject albeit with contaminated equipment. For example, in Edinburgh, Scotland,

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<sup>61</sup> Kevin Irwin et al., "Secondary Syringe Exchange as a Model for HIV Prevention Programs in the Russian Federation," *Substance Use and Misuse* 41 (2006): 979, accessed April 28, 2013, DOI:10.1080/10826080600667219.

pharmacists and police reached a decision in the mid-1980s to halt the sale of syringes to customers whom the pharmacists subjectively judged to be IDUs. As a result, there was a highly localized outbreak of HIV due to the use of contaminated needles.<sup>62</sup> In Britain and Australia, expansion of access to syringes without prescription has been shown to lower prevalence of HIV<sup>63</sup>

Needle-exchange has proven to be successful in a Russian setting, as well. In Kazan, a southern Russian city on the brink of an HIV outbreak, a harm-reduction program significantly slowed HIV transmission.<sup>64</sup> Entitled, "Project Renewal", it began in 1999 funded by the Open Society Institute. The project began with two fixed needle exchange sites and mobile outreach workers who visited private sites.<sup>65</sup> The project was successful enough that the local ministry has begun assuming funding expenses and the project has expanded to 11 fixed sites through Kazan, including a mobile van for outreach.<sup>66</sup> A study conducted within the project revealed that participation in the program ensured that 80% of surveyed IDUs used clean supplies, thwarting a large volume of HIVs simplest transmission route

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<sup>62</sup> S. M. Burns et al., "The Epidemiology of HIV Infection in Edinburgh Related to the Injecting of Drugs," *J Infection* 32 (1996): 32. In Ekaterina V. Fedorova et al., "Access to Syringes for HIV Prevention for Injection Drug Users in St. Petersburg, Russia: Syringe Purchase Test Study," *BMC Public Health* 13, no. 183 (2013): 2, accessed August 1, 2013, <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/13/183>

<sup>63</sup> Sheridan J. Strang and Barber N. Glanz, "A Role of Community Pharmacies in Relation to HIV Prevention and Drug Misuse: Findings from the 1995 National Survey in England and Wales," *BMJ* 313 (1996) in Fedorova et al., "Access to Syringes for HIV Prevention," 2.

<sup>64</sup> Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS at Yale University, "Russia's Twin Epidemics: Addiction."

<sup>65</sup> Kevin Irwin et al., "Secondary Syringe Exchange as a Model for HIV Prevention Programs in the Russian Federation," *Substance Use and Misuse* 41 (2006): 981, accessed April 28, 2013, DOI:10.1080/10826080600667219.

<sup>66</sup> Larisa Badireva et al., "Lower Injection-Related HIV-1 Risk Associated with Participation in a Harm Reduction Program in Kazan, Russia," *AIDS Education and Prevention* 19, no. 1 (2007): 19.

in Kazan.<sup>67</sup> Another result of the project has been increased HIV testing by IDUs, from 44.7% to 79%, with testing being concentrated within new clients- indicating a changing social practice within the IDU population.<sup>68</sup>

In further support of positive shifts as the result of needle-exchange programs, in an interview with Yale's Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS, HIV expert Dr. Robert Heimer discusses why programs have organic success when clean injecting supplies are available for IDUs:

“Injecting is a social practice with social norms. When clean supplies are available, the use of clean supplies to prevent transmission of blood borne illness becomes the norm and using contaminated supplies becomes taboo. Contaminators within a population of IDUs become marginalized themselves.”<sup>69</sup> The norms within the IDU population shift to support injecting practices that reduce risk significantly. There is also overwhelming evidence that needle exchange programs do not encourage or increase injection drug use.”<sup>7071</sup>

Another harm-reduction strategy is methadone treatment or replacement therapy. When considering the mechanism of treatment, it is beneficial to compare the chronic disease of addiction with other chronic diseases. Heart disease is an incredibly preventable condition but it is the foremost cause of death in the US.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Badireva et al., "Lower Injection-Related HIV-1 Risk," 18.

<sup>68</sup>Irwin et al., "Secondary Syringe Exchange as a Model," 991

<sup>69</sup>Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS at Yale University, "Russia's Twin Epidemics: Addiction."

<sup>70</sup>J. K. Watters et al., "Syringe and Needle Exchange as HIV/AIDS Prevention for Injection Drug Users," JAMA 271 (1994)

<sup>71</sup>D. G. Fisher et al., "Needle Exchange and Injection Drug Use Frequency: A Randomized Clinical Trial," Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome 33 (2003):

<sup>72</sup>American Heart Association, <http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/>.

Diet, exercise, and regular monitoring of health by a healthcare professional are readily available preventative measures to avoid the condition, yet over 50% of Americans develop the disease in their lifetimes. Once the condition is discovered, lifestyle changes must be supported by medical intervention to keep the body functioning on a path to stabilization or health. In both addiction and heart disease, predisposition, social, psychological, and physical variables are all important factors in the reestablishment of health. Neither can be fixed with willpower alone, and where blood pressure medications and statins regulate the body in the case of heart disease, methadone or other replacement therapies regulate the body in opioid dependency.

Substitution therapy is defined as a prescribed psychoactive substance which is pharmacologically related to the one producing dependence.<sup>73</sup> The aim is to reduce craving for the drug producing the dependence while avoiding withdrawal symptoms while reducing the frequency of administration over time. Substitution therapy is one of the most effective types of pharmacological therapy of opioid dependence.<sup>74</sup> Substitution therapy has been shown in multiple controlled trials and longitudinal studies to significantly reduce illegal opioid use, criminal activity, overdose related death, and also behavior with a high risk of HIV transmission.<sup>75</sup> The WHO reports:

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<sup>73</sup>WHO/UNODC/UNAIDS, Substitution Maintenance Therapy in the Management, 12.

<sup>74</sup>WHO/UNODC/UNAIDS, Substitution Maintenance Therapy in the Management, 13

<sup>75</sup>WHO/UNODC/UNAIDS, Substitution Maintenance Therapy in the Management, 13.

“Several longitudinal studies examining changes in HIV risk behaviors for patients currently in treatment, as well as completion of treatment, are correlated with reduction in HIV risk behaviors related to drug-taking or an increase in protective behaviors. IDUs who do not enter treatment are up to 6x more likely to become infected with HIV than injectors who enter and remain in treatment.”<sup>76</sup>

The WHO ultimately recommends that substitution therapy should be implemented as soon as possible in those communities of IDUs at risk for HIV/AIDS due to the fact that once HIV is introduced into a community of IDUs, there is a possibility of extremely rapid spread and that opioid maintenance therapy is an effective method of HIV prevention.<sup>77</sup>

Despite indisputable evidence displaying that both replacement therapy and needle-exchange programs significantly reduce HIV transmission, economic, legal, and drug interdiction conditions in Russia prohibit the allowance of successful harm reduction programs.<sup>78</sup> High level officials in Russia claim that there is no evidence to support that replacement therapy or needle exchange programs are effective.<sup>79</sup> An anti-drug policy signed into law in Russia in 2010 (and extending though 2020) prohibits substitution treatment. Specifically, the law “prevents the use of substitution addiction treatment by way of using narcotic

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<sup>76</sup>WHO/UNODC/UNAIDS, Substitution Maintenance Therapy in the Management, 18.

<sup>77</sup>WHO/UNODC/UNAIDS, Substitution Maintenance Therapy in the Management, 33.

<sup>78</sup>Kevin Irwin et al., "Secondary Syringe Exchange as a Model for HIV Prevention Programs in the Russian Federation," *Substance Use and Misuse* 41 (2006): 981, accessed April 28, 2013, DOI:10.1080/10826080600667219.

<sup>79</sup>Burkhi, "Russia's Drug Policy Fuels," *The Lancet*.

drugs”<sup>80</sup> and the law similarly contains warnings against “the promotion of drug use under the pretext of syringe replacement.”<sup>81</sup> (Again despite overwhelming evidence that needle exchange programs do not encourage or increase injection drug use.<sup>82</sup>). Regardless of the fact that addiction is a chronic disease, the Anti-Drug Policy Strategy suggests that personal liability over one’s own behavior is responsible to ensure in the reduction of the need for drugs.<sup>83</sup>

### **Stigma and HIV/AIDS**

The conservative nature of Russian Anti-Drug Policy reflects attitudes of many Russians on the subject of both HIV and drug use. HIV+ individuals hide their status from employers, family, and friends. They fear intervention brought on by a third party to remove them from public spaces, loss of employment, and being isolated from family and friends.<sup>84</sup> Discrimination against HIV infected individuals is so prevalent, it is even witnessed in exchanges between HIV+

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<sup>80</sup>Burkhi, "Russia's Drug Policy Fuels," The Lancet.

<sup>81</sup>Burkhi, "Russia's Drug Policy Fuels," The Lancet.

<sup>82</sup>J. K. Watters et al., "Syringe and Needle Exchange as HIV/AIDS Prevention for Injection Drug Users," JAMA 271 (1994), D. G. Fisher et al., "Needle Exchange and Injection Drug Use Frequency: A Randomized Clinical Trial," Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome 33 (2003)

<sup>83</sup>Alexei Mazus and Evgenii Kozhokin, "SPID, Narkotiki, Gei-Kul'tura, i Bol'shaya Politika," Spid.ru, last modified May 17, 2012, [http://www.spid.ru/pub/entity/Spid\\_Hashed\\_InfoArticle/80231/pdf/polosa7-88.pdf](http://www.spid.ru/pub/entity/Spid_Hashed_InfoArticle/80231/pdf/polosa7-88.pdf).

<sup>84</sup>Balabanova, Y, R Coker, RA Atun, and F Drobniowski. 2006. "Stigma and HIV Infection in Russia." AIDS Care 18, no. 7: 846-852. CINAHL Plus with Full Text, EBSCOhost (accessed August 2, 2013).

patients and their healthcare professionals. In detailed interviews with HIV+ patients, Balabanova, Coker, Atun, and Drobniowski report blatant discrimination against HIV+ individuals from healthcare providers. One of the participants recalled, “When I came to our polyclinic to get my cervical cancer smear results, the doctor told me that abnormal cells were found. And when I asked if it was bad she told me that there is nothing worse [than HIV infection] that I already have it [HIV-infection] and that soon I would feel all the consequences of it.”<sup>85</sup> In a different instance, Burns retells a chilling tale from a female HIV patient in Nizhny-Novgorod:

“I found out my status when I became pregnant. I contracted the virus from my husband. When I saw the doctor, he told me I had to abort and that HIV-positive women couldn’t give birth to healthy children. I listened to him and got an abortion. Later, I found out that ARVs [anti retro-viral medication]<sup>86</sup> can prevent mother-to-child transmission. I got very depressed. A few years later I became pregnant again. This time I did not go to the doctor. What’s the point? I waited until my eighth month to go see the doctor. I knew that by that time it was too late for them to force me to have an abortion. My baby was born healthy. I don’t trust doctors anymore.”<sup>87</sup>

These are a fraction of the interactions retold to researchers investigating the stigma faced by people living with HIV/AIDS; in differing cities across Russia, expectant mothers report multiple instances of pressure to abort a pregnancy from

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<sup>85</sup>Balabanova, et al., “Stigma and HIV Infection.” P. 850

<sup>86</sup>Added to quote

<sup>87</sup>Burns, Katya. "Russia's HIV/AIDS Epidemic: HIV/AIDS Among Women and Problems of Access to Services." *Problems Of Post-Communism* 54, no. 1 (January 2007): 28-36. Military & Government Collection, EBSCOhost (accessed August 2, 2013).

a healthcare provider. This is particularly distressing considering the success of ARV therapy in reducing mother-to-child transmission to close to zero.<sup>88</sup>

Attitudes of Russians on people living with HIV/AIDS from the non-infected population often assume that a person with HIV/AIDS “deserves” the disease from their “poor choices”. There is a shared cultural belief that a person living with HIV/AIDS is a drug abuser or leads a promiscuous lifestyle and are most likely living the “wrong way”. A close association with HIV and drug use in combination with an abstinence-only or taboo approach to sex education within Russia has perpetuated these stereotypes. Polling on the subject of how Russia should deal with those individuals living with HIV/AIDS revealed that many suggested sending those persons to live in a separate colony, district, or isolating them from the rest of the population for both work and life.<sup>89</sup> HIV+ persons have little in the ways of social support networks because of the pervading negativity and complete lack of understanding that HIV can be contracted by anyone regardless of the quality of their character.

Adding to the trauma of a positive HIV diagnosis, post-testing counseling for HIV+ individuals is nonexistent. The only “counseling” offered comes in the form of cold legal advice: a document must be signed that states a patient understands that knowingly spreading HIV is a criminal offense under Russian law

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<sup>88</sup>Burns, “Russia’s HIV/AIDS Epidemic”, 33. Also Balabanova, et al., “Stigma and HIV Infection”, 849.

<sup>89</sup>Balabanova, et al., “Stigma and HIV Infection”, 850.



and furthermore if an HIV+ person has unprotected sex and spreads the virus, they will be incarcerated.<sup>90</sup>

Sex workers in Russia are another incredibly high at-risk population. Sex workers do not officially “exist” in Russia; prostitution is illegal and therefore no official surveillance data is ever collected on the subject.<sup>91</sup> However, there are a very high number of sex workers within Russia. Also, many sex workers participate in sex work occasionally to supplement income as needed and therefore do not self-identify as “sex-workers”.<sup>92</sup> Because of barriers present against interviewing and assessing numbers of sex workers within Russia, data on specifically how many are also IDUs varies, however, it is observed there is significant overlap.<sup>93</sup> In one instance, I was advised that my partner would either voluntarily visit a sex worker or have sex workers sent to him and that I should learn to accept extra-didactic relations as commonplace in Russia.<sup>94</sup>

No matter whether a person is a sex-worker, IDU, or HIV+, the stigma and discrimination that come with those intertwined categories of people is distressingly similar. Prejudices towards addiction-afflicted and HIV+ persons create a disincentive against seeking the little support they may find in Russia.

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<sup>90</sup>Burns, “Russia’s HIV/AIDS Epidemic”, 33

<sup>91</sup>Martin Wall et al., “Sex, Drugs, and Economic Behavior in Russia: A Study of Socio-Economic Characteristics of High Risk Population,” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 22 (October 4, 2009): 2184.

<sup>92</sup>Wall et al., “Sex, Drugs, and Economic,” 2182.

<sup>93</sup>Toussova et al., “Potential Bridges of Heterosexual,” 3.

<sup>94</sup>See Appendix 2: Alexandra

Further, at-risk populations are less likely to get tested for STIs, seek a doctor's help when needed, learn to manage overdose, or use clean injection kits in fear of being registered with the state.<sup>95</sup>

Any and all citizens infected with HIV in Russia are guaranteed medical care legally. Guarantees, though, do not mean delivery; in Russia, ART (anti retro-viral) therapy medication is in short supply.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore there is no internal production of affordable, generic antiretroviral therapy drugs. Conversely, other large nations such as India and Brazil produce them domestically at a fraction of the cost. There are rumors that Indar, a Ukrainian company, will begin production of Tuberculosis and HIV therapeutic drugs but the majority of those will be consumed in Ukraine.<sup>97</sup> Many non-governmental organizations have warned the Russian government that medication shortages could arise because of the high cost of obtaining foreign drugs. Those warnings are coming to fruition as shortages have become a part of the antiretroviral treatment atmosphere.<sup>98</sup>

According to the World Health Organization, only between 16 and 24 percent of adults and children with advanced HIV in Russia are receiving

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<sup>95</sup>Toussova et al., "Potential Bridges of Heterosexual,"

<sup>96</sup>RIA Novosti, ed., "Patients Urge Kremlin to Address HIV Drugs Supply Problem," RIA Novosti, last modified January 12, 2010, accessed March 11, 2011, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20101201/161580533.html>.

<sup>97</sup>"GlaxoSmithKline and Abbott to Start Production in Ukraine," The Pharma Letter, last modified March 19, 2013, accessed June 6, 2013, <http://www.thepharmaletter.com/file/120797/glaxosmithkline-and-abbott-to-start-production-in-ukraine.html>.

<sup>98</sup>Tom Parfitt, "Russia's Drug Supply System Leaves HIV Patients Wanting," The Lancet 377, no. 9763 (January 29, 2011): 369, accessed May 22, 2013, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673611601141>.

antiretroviral therapy, despite the treatment being free. In 2006, the WHO ominously suggested that breaks in treatment and shortages in ART medication could lead to drug resistant strains of HIV developing and spreading.<sup>99</sup> Stopping treatment affects individuals differently and manifests in negative and highly unique ways depending on the patient. Interruptions in treatment often results in side effects such as illness, bodily irritations, nausea, and headaches, or resistance to a specific type of ART or a class of ARTs.<sup>100</sup>

In 2011, it was estimated that around 70,000 people were receiving ART, but that at least 50,000 more are estimated to be still in need of ART.<sup>101</sup> A different estimation based on the Federal AIDS Centre's calculations stated that there was medication available for 75,000 people, but that in reality around 120,000 people were in need.<sup>102</sup> Shortages or restricted access to ART were reported by 18 major metropolitan areas in Russia in 2010.<sup>103</sup> Members of the parliament from the State Duma (the lower house of parliament) reportedly complained to the Ministry of Health that in 2010 that it is paying 5-8% higher than the going rate for ART drugs,

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<sup>99</sup>World Health Organization. Epidemiological Fact Sheet 2006 Russian Federation; 2006. World Bank, "Economic consequences of the HIV epidemic in Russia," May 2002.

<sup>100</sup>Parfitt, "Russia's Drug Supply System," 369.

<sup>101</sup>Parfitt, "Russia's Drug Supply System," 369.

<sup>102</sup>Irina Teplinskaya, "HIV Positive in Russia: Where Is Our Medication?," Open Democracy, last modified November 16, 2010, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/irina-teplinskaya/hiv-positive-in-russia-where-is-our-medication>. See also *Zhurnal SPID Seks Zdorov'e* 39 (2001), <http://aidsjournal.ru/journal39.html>.

<sup>103</sup>Teplinskaya, "HIV Positive in Russia," Open Democracy.

suggesting corruption in the supply chain.<sup>104</sup> Since there is no national register of patients in need of treatment or those who are currently receiving treatment, planning for the future involves a great amount of guesswork.

Also, figures on shortages do not include highly marginalized, inaccessible, or unregistered HIV+ persons who may not be able to overcome social barriers in pursuit of treatment. Treatment is only administered to those individuals who go through a series of examinations that assess the person's "social responsibility" and psychological health and is not based on clinical need. Also, a person must pass a drug test, asserting they are not using illegal substances.<sup>105</sup> Anya Sarang, an activist working with the Andrey Rylkov Foundation, stated that the social barriers for treatment for IDUs are so visible that essentially the Russian government has essentially communicated to IDUs that they should "Go away and die".<sup>106</sup>

The Russian government is excessively good when it chooses to provide adequate care to an HIV+ population which is frustrating considering the areas in which it could intervene but chooses not to. In the Russian Federation, mother-to-child transmission has been steadily declining in direct response to support for HIV+ mothers. The rate is decreasing every year; mother to child HIV

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<sup>104</sup>Parfitt, "Russia's Drug Supply System," 370.

<sup>105</sup>Parfitt, "Russia's Drug Supply System," 370.

<sup>106</sup>Parfitt, "Russia's Drug Supply System," 370.

transmission decreased from around 7% in 2004, to 5.3% in 2006 and 3.2% in 2007.<sup>107</sup>

It is a gross understatement to say that HIV is not being given enough focus within the Russian Federation. Government officials have ignored warnings on the trajectory of the epidemic and as a result, the epidemic is generalizing. The official response has been dreadfully slow and inadequately funded. In opposition to strong evidence that pharmacotherapy helps reverse HIV epidemics, the use of methadone is outlawed. Education for at-risk individuals and harm reducing needle exchanges are mostly handled by non-domestic NGOs or private groups and reach a very small percentage of the population, and there are few outreach, network, or peer interventions.<sup>108</sup> There is little to no social support for those living HIV+ and individuals often face structural barriers to healthcare such as shortages of guaranteed medication. Because of current discriminatory treatment from healthcare providers, police, and society as a whole, even if therapies were run through the state it would be hard to predict if IDUs or HIV+ individuals would seek treatment. The brunt of the cost on the public health system because of the epidemic has not yet developed due to the nature of Russia's relatively new introduction to the virus. Undoubtedly, AIDS will cause severe strain on the

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<sup>107</sup>Dmitry M. Kissin et al., "Five-Year Trends in Epidemiology and Prevention of Mother-To-Child HIV Transmission, St. Petersburg, Russia: Results from Perinatal HIV Surveillance," *BMC Infectious Diseases* 11 (October 27, 2011), doi:10.1186/1471-2334-11-292.

<sup>108</sup>"Proekt 'Narkofobia': Narkotiki Kak Instrument Politicheskikh Represii v Rossii," Rylkov Fond, last modified 2013, <http://rylkov-fond.org/blog/projects/current-projects/narcofobia-2/>.

medical system as individuals begin requiring hospitalization en masse. Lastly, the idea that HIV is gender, class, race, and age blind, and can similarly infect anyone that is a human being, is not a part of discourse in discussions of risk behaviors.<sup>109</sup>

## **Part II: *Media Problems in the Russian Federation***

### **Media and At-Risk Populations**

The HIV epidemic in Russia requires immediate attention and intervention. One of the most notable problems regarding the epidemic is the lack of discussion on HIV in popular media sources. No one in Russia is talking about HIV, and so it remains somewhat out of sight and out of mind.<sup>110</sup> There is positive correlation with media campaigns and the reduction of both HIV transmission and drug use in locations outside of Russia. Television, film, Internet, and print media have been successful intermediaries on messages of harm reduction, and could be a part of an educational arsenal employed within the Russian Federation.

Studies in Nigeria, the United States, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, India and Thailand<sup>111</sup> have all exhibited that the more exposure at-risk groups get towards positive messages of controlling risk, the less people participate or initiate

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<sup>109</sup>See Appendix 5: Katya112

<sup>110</sup>Sarang, "Skoro Govorit o Spide," Rylkov Fond.

<sup>111</sup>Douglas W. Evans, "Social Marketing Campaigns and Children's Media Use," *The Future of Children* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 181-203.

risky behaviors. In Nigeria, it was even found that the more exposure people got to anti-HIV transmission messages, the less likely they were to stigmatize HIV positive individuals.<sup>112</sup>

Many differing models of media campaigns already exist. In the US, television and print have been utilized successfully to educate on risk-behaviors. Americans are long used to anti-drug campaigns, especially since the inception of the '80s "War on Drugs". Public service announcements regarding illegal drug use are just another type of advertisement Americans are exposed to on a daily basis. Against the prevalent background noise of anti-drug educational programs, in the early 2000s methamphetamine use exploded across northwestern American states. Methamphetamine decimated western towns, enticing massive proportions of Middle America towards addiction comparatively similar to the use of heroin in Russia. Both were new to the population, inexpensive, and accessible. Like heroin, meth is highly addictive, and despite the old, "This is your brain on drugs" ads meth use grew exponentially. After trying meth once or twice people became regular, chronic users.

In response, a campaign was undertaken by the state of Montana due to a rash of methamphetamine use amongst young people living in the state. Entitled, "The Montana Meth Project", it was started in 2005 to highlight the grim realities

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<sup>112</sup>Douglas W. Evans, "Social Marketing Campaigns and Children's Media Use," *The Future of Children* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 181-203.

of addiction.<sup>113</sup> The Montana Meth Project works towards people associating frightening and negative images of addiction with methamphetamine use before initiating or experimenting with the drug. The billboards are photographs enacting shocking scenes detailing unsavory acts a person could engage in while trying to find the means to get high. One of the billboards pictures a girl seated on the dirty floor of a bathroom, barely illuminated by neon light. Bold script printed over the scene states, “I never thought I would lose my virginity in exchange for meth in a truck stop bathroom: Meth, not even once”.<sup>114</sup> The campaign places billboards and posters in popular places all across Montana, on highways, in bus stations, and near schools and parks. The message the Montana Meth project seeks to convey is that the substance brings with it such dire consequences that it isn’t worth even trying one time.

“The Faces of Meth”, another project dedicated to address the unforeseen consequences of substance abuse, compiles mug-shot images of people who have been arrested in association with methamphetamine use.<sup>115</sup> Their mug-shots are presented in progression and display the accelerated aging, shocking weight loss, skin rashes, and periodontal disease that are the effects of methamphetamine

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<sup>113</sup>Montana Meth Project, last modified 2013, <http://www.montanameth.org/>

<sup>114</sup>Montana Meth Project

<sup>115</sup>"Meth in the Body: The Faces of Meth," Fronline, last modified February 12, 2006, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/meth/body/faces.html>.



addiction. The project, begun and copyrighted by the Multnomah County, Oregon Sheriffs' Department, is used in schools and across the country as part of a shocking educational campaign.<sup>116</sup>

The Montana Meth Project and Faces of Meth media exposure campaigns have been extremely successful. Since the project's inception in 2005, teen meth is down 63% in Montana.<sup>117</sup> The Faces of Meth project has actually been "retired" in Oregon because of reduced youth meth use.<sup>118</sup> After a similar campaign against meth in the state of Colorado, 94% of teens surveyed see risk in just trying the drug just once.<sup>26</sup>

Another route of exposure for young people are through fictional entertainment programs on television or on film. The 1995 movie, *Kids* written by Harmonie Korine and directed by Larry Clark follows the story of several sexually active teenagers in New York City. The film is the duration of one day and follows male and female characters and shows them engaging in sexual intercourse and using drugs as a part of their regular daily practice. The crux of the film involves two main characters, "Telly" and "Jennie". Throughout the film, Telly brags about his proclivity to only have sex with virgins, having had sex with Jennie and being her first and only sexual partner as well. Later, under pressure from her friend who

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<sup>116</sup> Multnomah Sherrif's Department, "Faces of Meth," Faces of Meth, last modified 2004, <http://www.facesofmeth.us/>.

<sup>117</sup> Montana Meth Project.

<sup>118</sup> Multnomah Sherrif's Department, "Faces of Meth," Faces of Meth.

has had multiple sexual partners, Jennie gets tested for STIs. The results are that Jennie's friend's test comes back negative, while Jennie receives the news that she is HIV+. Jennie, in utter shock, quietly murmurs that she's only had one partner. The rest of the film follows Telly and Jennie's day as they unknowingly expose others to the HIV+ virus, Jennie being date-raped by a close friend while under the influence of drugs and Telly convincing yet another girl to have sex with him.<sup>119</sup>

*Kids* received mixed reviews in the mid-'90s due to its misogynistic and homophobic language and sex scenes involving minors. Despite strong language and graphic scenes, the film serves as a very interesting criticism on the carelessness of unbridled urban youth.<sup>120</sup> The fearlessness, risk-taking, and lack of foresight the characters of the movie enact elicit a warning, inspiring feelings of both empathy and shame. There are many metaphors between the film and certain aspects of youth culture, and serve as another perspective on risk-taking.

In Russian cinema or television, there are few programs which feature HIV/AIDS as part of the storyline. Communicable illness isn't even touched in Russian film. There aren't films such as *Philadelphia* (1993) which highlights homophobia and HIV, or *Kids* (1995), or even films that discuss disease such as *Outbreak* (1995), a dystopian scenario on the spread of an Ebola-like virus. The

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<sup>119</sup>Harmonie Korin, screenwriter, *Kids*, by Larry Clark, Buena Vista Pictures, 1995.

<sup>120</sup>Rita Kempley, "Kids (NR)," Washington Post, last modified August 25, 1995, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/kidsnrkempley\\_c029f5.htm](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/kidsnrkempley_c029f5.htm).

only kinds of disease hallmarked in Russian cinema are usually mental disorders. Cultural metaphors to disease are simply avoided in Russian film.

For about a decade, from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, sexual health was discussed in some media outlets. The magazines “*Om*,” “*Kvir*”, and “*1/10*”, had differing features on topics involving safer sex practices and HIV/AIDS.<sup>121</sup> *Om* was incredibly popular and was casually called, the “Russian *Rolling Stone*”. Multiple issues of *Om* in a very short time span discussed safer sex and HIV.<sup>122</sup> Sadly, *Om* and *Kvir* are now out-of-print. Also, some public service announcements on HIV have made appearances on Russian TV. Powerful commercials showing Russians disappearing from everyday actions due to the death rate coinciding with AIDS pointed people looking for further information to a website called stopspid.ru.<sup>123</sup> In 2011 scattered throughout Moscow there were billboards displaying public service messages on getting tested for HIV.

Whether in print, television, or film since around the mid-2000s, there is a serious lack of discussion and exposure to HIV and addiction. As stated before, multiple studies correlate that both risky behavior and attitudes towards HIV+ persons can be changed with the correct media exposure. If by utilizing the media, the stigma of HIV and fear of IDUs could be shifted to support marginalized

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<sup>121</sup> Sergei Kuznetsov, "Profilaktika," *1/10*, July 1996, 15, Valentin Shabalkov, "Igraet Dal'she," *Kvir*, November 2010, 34.

<sup>122</sup> Aleksei Simonov, "Spid, Sto Eto Takoe," *OM*, October 2003, 40, Tatiana Andreevna, "Govoryat o Profilaktiom," *OM*, April 2004, 24, Viktoria Bessarobova, "Luchshii Seks," *OM*, November 2005, 30, Katya Kolchaka, "Vich Infektsii, Kto i Pochemy?," *OM*, April 2006, 18, Igor Koslov, "Seks Voprosii," *OM*, April 2005, 27, Daryia Lomontova, "Spid, Devushki, Spid," *OM*, October 2004, 51.

<sup>123</sup> Video Stav, "Stop SPID," Video Stav, video file, :29, 2009, <http://www.videosostav.ru/video/7774fb262265e879070f2b20968b1008/>.

populations and help prevent the spread of addiction, why isn't blitzing these media outlets a priority?

Like replacement therapy and needle exchange programs, there is a deeply politicized foundation grounding the possibility of media campaigns discussing HIV/AIDS or illegal drug use. Similarly to many rapidly liberalized facets of the Russian Federation, the most highly consumed media source, television, has quickly slid back under control of the Kremlin. There is a complicated marriage between television and politics, and because of a multitude of variables, it is unlikely that messages of prevention or education will appear on Russian television soon. To understand the conservative nature of Russian television, it is important to discuss the history of the medium and furthermore its importance to President Vladimir Putin and his career.

### **Television and Politics: Historical Origins of Control in Moving Media**

On the evening of March 4th, 2012, a teary-eyed president-elect Vladimir Putin proclaimed victory to 110,000 Muscovite pro-Putin rally-goers and stoically thanked them for their support in his most recent campaign to become president. Protests had been going on for weeks before the elections, with thousands of anti-Putin demonstrators lining the streets of Moscow. The possibility of Vladimir Putin

trading his post at prime minister in 2012 to Dmitry Medvedev's seat as president was assumed as fact from the installation of Medvedev as president. The carefully premeditated switch wasn't the root cause of all the upset, however. The "United Russia" party (to which Medvedev and Putin belong) had gone virtually without criticism by the press, and television reinforced Putin's efficacy as a leader with increasing intensity leading up to the elections. Even entertainment television programming seemed to follow the mores of the United Russia party. Simultaneously, the press perpetuated a sense that Russia was a shining hallmark of the democratic process, and reminded everyone of their civic obligation to vote in the coming parliamentary and presidential elections.

To examine television's history in Russia reveals origins for Putin's obsession with controlling the medium. Television was a tool for the Soviets, for Boris Yeltsin's fledgling independent Russia, and for United Russia. These strategies shaped Putin's opinions on the importance of television programming, and upon the opportunity, he wasted no chance in harnessing the power of Russia's most widely-used media source.

From the creation of moving-picture technology, visual media has been an integral part of Russia's history. Shortly after the communist revolution, motion pictures were regarded as a simple and effective way for revolutionaries to whip up the population into a Marxist fervor. Movies with vocal narration were invaluable, they were used to coerce and thrill a largely illiterate and rural countryside. Railcars on communist agitation-trains were transformed into rolling showcases

of the triumph of Marxism. These trains included cars that were convertibles; outfitted with movie projectors, they acted as rolling propaganda theaters which played the latest films on the successes of Marxism. The trains chugged to the far reaches of the Russian countryside and could promote Lenin's idea of communism faster and more effectively than print media, priming the masses with unprecedented speed.<sup>124</sup>

Television in the postwar USSR was used similarly to spread messages reinforcing the triumph of Marxism-Leninism, and the prospect of every citizen having a device to receive this message was tantalizing for Soviet leaders. Central television beamed from Moscow on Russia's First Channel and Second Channel had a unifying set of news and cultural programs presented in Russian for the whole of the USSR. Television was employed to educate and socialize the citizenry, rallying support for the regime and motivating the growth of communism.<sup>125</sup>

In the 1970's, the Soviets planned for an elaborate television system that could cover all corners of the Soviet state. Satellite technology allowed citizenry to intercept television signals, even the far reaches of the sparsely populated Eastern hinterland and the multilingual nations of the Caucasus.<sup>126</sup> For the first time in history, the advances in telecommunications technology granted the state the

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<sup>124</sup> Peter Kenez, *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 59.

<sup>125</sup> Laura Helvey, *Growing Pains: Russian Democracy and the Election of 1993*, ed. Timothy Colton and Jerry Hough (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1998), 214.

<sup>126</sup> Ellen Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 13-16.

ability to address each of the 11 time zones without the limitations of time and geography (as radio had suffered from).<sup>127</sup> While other consumer goods were in short supply, television sets were produced in large amounts.<sup>128</sup> According to government sources, at least 75% of the population had television sets by the end of Soviet rule, which is fascinating considering it is estimated that only 60% of households had a telephone by the early 1990s.<sup>129</sup> Television and its programming were made a priority by the government, and its distribution was successfully implemented. Also, Brezhnev's poorly planned economy resulted in rising inflation. This combined with an unreliable distribution for print media and a paper shortage in turn aided television's trajectory in succession to reigning Tsar of communications.

Programming was decided upon centrally, and entertainment and news programs were molded to fit a set of properties that would both engage a viewer and reinforce the purpose of television in accordance with the position of the Kremlin. Journalists acted as direct mouthpieces for Soviet elites and television personalities reaped the benefits of upward mobility within the restrictive environment of the bureaucratic system. Through precise methods of education and selection, Soviet leaders carefully controlled television by grooming artists of

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<sup>127</sup>Sarah Oates, *Television, Democracy, and Elections in Russia* (London: Routledge, 2006), 11.

<sup>128</sup> Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics*, 14.

<sup>129</sup>Oates, *Television, Democracy, and Elections*, 11.

the craft who fervently supported the party as a part of their personal identity.<sup>130</sup> This avoided the slightest chance that unpredictable or skeptical reports could ever be uttered on-air. Furthermore, information had to pass through a multitude of ideological and political filters before being presented to the public. News reports were siphoned through a central censorship agency well before anchors themselves received the nightly news.<sup>131</sup> For the majority of Russians, television and politics have been one and the same since its inception during soviet times.

### **Russian Viewers, Filtered Messages**

Russian citizens adeptly scrutinized the information being transmitted over the airwaves and utilized their own experience to compare everyday life to that which was reported. In doing so, the public became aware of the filtering the messages of broadcasts had been subjected to. It has been widely observed by scholars such as Mickiewicz, Oates, and Ganley that Soviet audiences developed a keen ability to determine the urgency of news broadcasts. Their scholarship exhibits that citizens were fully aware that everything was presented with differing strengths of censorship within the Kremlin's frame. Somewhat paradoxically, the

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<sup>130</sup>Helvey, *Growing Pains: Russian Democracy*, 214-215.

<sup>131</sup>Hedwig DeSmaele, "Mass Media and the Information Climate in Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 8 (2007): 1300, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20451454>.



bleaching of information did not deter people from watching central TV. In fact, it is reported that people believed it was vital to watch and digest the news, even if doing so meant sifting and winnowing to the truth present in a broadcast.<sup>132</sup>

Oates comments that Soviet manipulation of the media became a double-edged sword for the Kremlin leadership; the vast television machine exposed people to current events more effectively than any other method in the past but as TV became saturated throughout society, it created a citizenry that was attuned to the smallest of nuance or inconsistency. As TV's popularity grew allowing Moscow to transmit more propaganda, so followed an increasingly more curious population that was primed well enough to interpret the slightest hint of societal change.<sup>133</sup> Years of television censorship have not been forgotten in contemporary Russian households, and as explained later in the paper, censorship's effect on the character of Russian television viewers echoes beyond the clanging fall of the mighty iron hammer and sickle.

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<sup>132</sup>See Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics in the Soviet Union*. Chapter 6, "The Impact of Television".

<sup>133</sup>Oates, *Television, Democracy, and Elections*, 11,12

## **Glasnost and TV**

The precursors for radical change in the USSR arose in part due to the Stagnation Era of the Brezhnev regime. As the rest of the globe began to embrace the beginnings of the information age, the USSR did not transition from a production economy.<sup>134</sup> When Brezhnev died in 1982, the lack of a transition to a technologically modern production infrastructure left the soviet people with a faltering economy and little improvement in their daily lives.<sup>135</sup> Upon inheriting a lifeless economy, newly appointed Mikhail Gorbachev pushed for a rapid, technology-fueled modernization plan to jumpstart the centrally planned economy. Gorbachev soon discovered that stagnation's roots were deeply entrenched within the aging bureaucracy and in order to facilitate reviving the economy, the processes of government would need reforms to avoid fueling the corruption and over-regulation of the late 1970's. A string of reforms were implemented including the now-infamous *Glasnost* plan which loosened controls on information distribution and censorship.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, *Brezhnev Reconsidered* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Houdmills, 2002), 57-60.

<sup>135</sup>Bacon and Sandle, *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, 57-60.

<sup>136</sup>Peter Kenez. *A History of the Soviet Union from the Beginning to the End*. (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999), 256.

Gorbachev's *Glasnost* reforms brought about rapid change for television in the Soviet Union. *Glasnost's* effects rippled through print media first, sensational stories were written that exposed corruption and criticism on politics for the first time in seven decades. What began with print paved the way for television programming, and the drama of instant visual reporting acted as an even greater catalyst for regime change.

Television personalities quickly learned that the popularity they experienced from reporting on formerly unspoken topics gave them greater benefits than party bosses could afford, and the incentive to perpetuate the myth of the state disappeared.<sup>137</sup> Audiences were glued to their television sets to see which topic would be covered next. As the power of the central censor eroded, the stories on television grew to cover topics that broached on some kind of Soviet-blasphemy, including criticisms on Lenin himself.<sup>138</sup>

Gorbachev's 1989 Deputy Congress was broadcast live, with the unfortunate consequence of aiding the erosion of the union. Gorbachev believed these broadcasts would exhibit his success as a liberal Communist, however viewers witnessed new members of congress boldly challenge Gorbachev on many of his policies with harsh criticism. In fact, such a high volume of people tuned in to these broadcasts that productivity in the Soviet Union fell during the times congress was broadcast- people preferred to skip work and watch the unpredictable take place

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<sup>137</sup>Mickiewicz, *Split Signals: Television and Politics*, and, Oates, *Television, Democracy, and Elections*.

<sup>138</sup>*My Perestroika*, directed by Robin Hessman, Red Square Productions, 2011.

live on TV. <sup>139</sup> By networks playing to the preference of the audience instead of honoring commands from the elite, television had been changed by the people. Once the last holdfast of central censorship had eroded away under *Glasnost*, the people were duly changed by what they saw on television. Seemingly, there could be no way to coerce the censorship genie back into the bottle.

### **Tonight from Moscow: Chaos Live on TV**

After the 1991 collapse of the USSR, television contained a politically plural programming set. Oates points out that the diversity in programming in '91 was problematic, as most of the media outlets still relied on subsidies from the state as during soviet times.<sup>140</sup> With little money to subsidize former state enterprise and wild inflation rampaging the economy as a whole, all media suffered as a result of the adjustment to a new economic period. The first president of the new democracy, Boris Yeltsin, instituted economic reforms in 1992 that had overnight

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<sup>139</sup>Oates, *Television, Democracy, and Elections*, 13.

<sup>140</sup>Oates, *Television, Democracy, and Elections*, 14

effects on Russia. The prices of goods skyrocketed, taxes increased, and government spending was slashed removing any hope for further subsidization of television.<sup>141</sup>

By 1993, Yeltsin's relations to the parliament had almost completely deteriorated. A constitutional crisis resulted due to factions within the parliament fearing losing their legitimacy as they watched Yeltsin consolidate state control towards the executive branch and away from the legislative. As a part of the 1993 constitutional crisis, Ostankino (the central television complex) was stormed by reactionaries trying to oust Yeltsin for good. Both Yeltsin and the parliament believed that television was the key to gaining support, and neither would budge on deciding who should control programming.<sup>142</sup> Upon the siege of the building, broadcasting was suspended and the resulting conflict for control over the center resulted in 135 dead and many wounded as Yeltsin ultimately turned to use force against the holdouts in Ostankino. People tuned in across Russia interpreted this as the most severe crisis, fearing a complete breakdown into civil war. For Russian TV viewers, the total shutdown of information flow meant that the orderly process of government had failed.<sup>143</sup> After the crisis, Yeltsin ordered a series of presidential decrees which outlined rules for media use and who should govern those rules, once again granting the executive branch the majority of the power.

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<sup>141</sup>Ellen Mickiewicz, *Television, Power, and the Public in Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>142</sup>Timothy J. Colton and Jerry F. Hough, *Growing Pains: Russian Democracy and the Election of 1993* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1998), 216.

<sup>143</sup>Mickiewicz, *Changing Channels, Television, Power, and the Public*, 128.

Yeltsin's laws to monitor television included strict criteria for political programming. These reforms were put in place to prevent factions within parliament from growing strong enough to tip the balance against him for a second time. Surprisingly, pioneering new guidelines for political coverage of the parliamentary election actually proved to create a relatively equal and free television environment. The laws stated that each party participating in the 1993 election was allowed equal time on television networks and could additionally purchase extra coverage if they chose. This was instituted to remove political bias from certain networks that had been rampant during the years between *Glasnost* and the Constitutional Crisis.<sup>144</sup>

While the economy shifted from state-planned to market, advertisements, investors, and funding were desperately needed to keep channels on air and people employed. The financial strain suffered by television channels themselves resulted in an interesting power play closely involving Yeltsin's closest interests and cronies. The state channels were eventually auctioned off to wealthy businessmen who had close ties to his regime.<sup>145</sup> In the new era of "political capitalism", no one complained that the consolidation of television happened with lightning speed. The state needed funding for media outlets, and those who were closest to the table, metaphorically speaking, got the juiciest cuts of meat. Boris Berezovsky purchased controlling shares in the First Channel, the mayor of Moscow purchased

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<sup>144</sup>Colton and Hough, *Growing Pains: Russian Democracy*, 216

<sup>145</sup>Mickiewicz, *Changing Channels, Television, Power, and the Public*, 42 and Oates, *Television, Democracy, and Elections*, 14.

his own channel as well,<sup>146</sup> and a newer channel, NTV, was created from the Media Most banking group, which was headed by Vladimir Gusinsky.<sup>147</sup> While these purchases are a few of a plethora of overnight deals made to privatize television, these men are all important personalities surrounding both Yeltsin's 1996 re-election and Putin's wrath. The 1996 re-election of Boris Yeltsin was where Putin learned how the power of television ultimately decided, undemocratically, to perpetuate his brand of democracy in Russia.

The wild mid-'90s were a bit of a bizarre libertarian dream for a certain part of Russian society. Exponential economic growth and shady back-alley mafia deals created a new legion of ultra-rich businessmen who were unhindered by a large government and rarely forced to pay their taxes. When the government should have been able to intervene, it was busy looking for solutions to untangle a war begun over Chechnya. The government was encumbered by runaway inflation that would eventually lead to the purposeful devaluing of currency by one whole decimal place. The threat of a communist being elected to president had increasing validity; average people suffered under economic shock therapy and were nostalgic about the stability provided by socialism.

Although deep in the throes of a 'bankers-war' over how privatization should continue, Yeltsin's excessively low ratings were enough to scare the nouveau-riche into a combined effort to reelect the president despite their

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<sup>146</sup>Mickiewicz, *Changing Channels, Television, Power, and the Public*, 45

<sup>147</sup>Oates, *Television, Democracy, and Elections*, 14

differences over economic policy.<sup>148</sup> Due to this, television media quickly shifted to a pro-Yeltsin bias. The president of NTV openly joined the Yeltsin campaign<sup>149</sup>. Strangely NTV had separated itself and found success in becoming a channel critical of the government and suddenly, NTV dropped negative coverage of Yeltsin. On ORT and NTV, Yeltsin had near 60% more mentions, and 30% more coverage than Gennady Zyuganov, his communist opponent.<sup>150</sup> *Vremya*, the oldest and most trusted state nightly news hour, went as far as to show little other than photomontages of the various candidates from parties other than Yeltsin's or Zyuganov's. The collusion between the networks caused presenters to focus on the dangers of returning to communism while totally avoiding any discussion of Yeltsin's failing health and recent heart attack.<sup>151</sup>

### **Not-So-Subtle Bias and Vladimir Putin**

Television was still the most widely used communications device, and it was still as Oates coined, a “great leveler of society”.<sup>152</sup> Age, sex, location and socioeconomic status rarely affected people's tendency to consume television, and people were still tuning in despite the poor economic times. Because they were

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<sup>148</sup>Markus Solder “Political Capitalism and the Russian Media”, Chapter 7 p 163 in Stephen White. *Media, Culture, and Society in Russia*. (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>149</sup>Mickiewicz, *Changing Channels, Television, Power, and the Public*, 171.

<sup>150</sup>Oates, *Television, Democracy, and Elections*, 104.

<sup>151</sup>Helvey and Oates, Mickiewicz, and Zassoursky in Sarah Oates. *Television*, 35.

<sup>152</sup>Oates, *Television, Democracy, and Elections*, 49.



aware of the messages being presented through their televisions, the 1996 presidential election had a great effect on how Russians viewed democracy in general. It was apparent that reporting was affected by an alliance between political authorities and big business.<sup>153</sup> That being understood, Russians voted Yeltsin back to office for a second term. By the end of Yeltsin's presidency, the country had endured horrific economic failure from the devaluing of the ruble and was in serious financial trouble. When the ruble was devalued, life savings were swallowed whole overnight and banks disappeared overnight.<sup>154</sup> It seemed as if the country was being run by thugs and the super-rich who embodied a bloodlust for financial growth.

Yeltsin stumbled and slurred his speech, either from drunkenness or illness, and was barely fit to run the country any longer. His "family" of advisers, his daughter, his chief of staff, and Boris Berezovsky (the 51% owner of ORT, the main state television channel) would soon secure Vladimir Putin's post as prime minister.<sup>155</sup> Putin, a former KGB agent, through a series of acquaintances and luck found himself in Moscow. He quickly worked through the Kremlin bureaucracy and became deputy chief of staff to Yeltsin in 1997. In a secret meeting with Berezovsky, Putin was informed of a plan by Yeltsin to make him prime minister. At first Putin felt he was not prepared enough for the job, but then conceded as

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<sup>153</sup>Maria Lipman and Nikolai Petrov, *Russia in 2020: Scenarios for the Future* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011), 536.

<sup>154</sup>Dale R. Herspring, "Vladimir Putin: His Continuing Legacy," *Social Research*, spring ser., 76, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>155</sup>Angus Roxburgh, *The Strongman: Vladimir Putin and the Struggle for Russia* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2011), 23.

Yeltsin would not take no for an answer.<sup>156</sup> At the start of the election cycle for the presidential elections in the year 2000 election, Putin was virtually unknown and had an approval rating of just 2%.<sup>157</sup> Simultaneously, in a dacha outside of Moscow, Yeltsin’s “family” was busily crafting a plan to create a party to secure Putin recognition in the election. The party, “Unity”, had neither roots nor philosophy, but it had the weight of ORT television fully behind it.<sup>158</sup> In a surprise announcement Yeltsin resigned from the presidency on the 31st of December, 1999. Vladimir Putin replaced him as acting president, with elections coming in March of 2000.

There is disagreement among scholars over whether or not Putin’s first presidency was a creation of television.<sup>159</sup> While his ascension to Yeltsin’s side may have dreamed up by a political and social elite, his first moves as president before the March election may have aided his chances in success as well. Regardless, Putin entered his first presidency with full understanding of the power of television in Russia. Some of his swiftest moves were to consolidate an owner’s worth of shares for both NTV and ORT. Using the crippling debt the networks carried, years of back taxes, and fraud and embezzlement charges (that promoted Putin to power in the first place) against the owners. Both Berezhovsky and Gusinsky fled the country

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<sup>156</sup> Roxburgh, *The Strongman: Vladimir Putin*, 24.

<sup>157</sup> Mickiewicz, *Changing Channels, Television, Power, and the Public*, 63.

<sup>158</sup> Roxburgh, *The Strongman: Vladimir Putin*, 23.24

<sup>159</sup> Mickiewicz and Oates assess Putin was not created by television

and remain outside of Russia, and Putin even forced the hand of Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov to turn over his channel.<sup>160</sup>

For Russia, the main source of information, television, actually intervened as a device to restrict people from making informed choices in the chaotic environment of the 1990s. The unpredictability of programming seemed to follow the unpredictability of life. Even for a scrutinizing post-Soviet audience, television had the ability to shape political agendas<sup>161</sup> because programs were carefully groomed exactly for consumers eager to exercise their new rights to elect leaders democratically. The successes Putin witnessed in politics because of deliberately planned television media manipulation reinforced his ambition to control media outlets. The messages were not rife with propaganda- instead they played with subject frequency and subtler tones of bias.

### **New Media Shifts**

Vladimir Putin now desperately wishes to control the Internet, as more and more people have crowded online for news-gathering and entertainment. Similar to the SOPA and PIPA bills proposed in the United States, a law was recently passed under the guise of protecting children and stopping the spread of child pornography. The law was extremely loosely written to allow the state ultimate

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<sup>160</sup>Roxburgh, *The Strongman: Vladimir Putin*, 24.

<sup>161</sup>Oates, *Television, Democracy, and Elections*, 109.

power to shut down any site it wishes. While this is a setback for some online information spaces, unfortunately for Putin, Russia has recently taken the crown for the “most Internet usage” in Europe. The Pew Centre’s Global Attitudes Project measures social network use at an all-time high of 43%, up 33% from last year alone.<sup>162</sup> In an attempt to clamp down his political opposition, the Putin government has employed thousands of people to watch the net for signs of unfavorable activity. Some of the gubernatorial regions have successfully blocked usage by blocking IPs, but in every case users simply move horizontally. That is, when a website becomes blocked or restricted within Russian domains, users look online for other platforms hosted on an offshore domain.

Notorious for consolidating control that would normally be outside of the state’s reach, Vladimir Putin has also effectively changed the constitution so that he may remain at the helm of Russia for another 12 years.<sup>163</sup> He’s removed local control for gubernatorial representative government and put his appointees in those roles. There’s evidence that elections have been tampered with in favor of his United Russia party. Because of his consolidation of power. Putin will most likely remain unchallenged in coming years, and so follows little potential for change in the manner of Russia’s media freedom.

Despite Putin’s ambitions to control the content of the Internet, the nature of the technology and the timing of his presidency makes it harder for him to do as

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<sup>162</sup>Miriam Elder, "The Kremlin Seeks to Purge Russia's Internet of Western Influences," *The Guardian*, April 15, 2012.

<sup>163</sup>Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 38-42.

he has done with print and television media. For example, during the 2011-2012 winter, the politically opposed liberal democratic blogosphere was attacked by what was assumed to be Putin supporters. In response, it moved from its Russian host to Google+ and recovered all of its followers in a month's time.<sup>164</sup> For Putin, plugging up holes in the dam of information will become increasingly challenging, as international domains will always exist for Russians to utilize. A Chinese-style firewall of the Internet at this point in time is virtually impossible. China was able to implement stringent censorship on the Internet because the firewall was built during the inception of the technology in China. Russia, on the other hand, did not get the jump in the infrastructure.<sup>165</sup>

Importantly, the problem with Putin's attempts to control the flow of information on the Internet create another uniquely 21<sup>st</sup> century problem. Open Internet is crucial for Russia to remain competitive in the global market. E-commerce is booming in the infrastructure of global accessibility. The Internet makes products, information, and ideas from different places in time and space globally accessible. Restricting technology hinders progress in not only Russian culture, but also in its economy.

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<sup>164</sup>Elder, "The Kremlin Seeks to Purge,".

<sup>165</sup>Andrew Meier, "Ksenia Sobchak: The Stiletto in Putin's Side," *New York Times* (New York, NY), July 8, 2012, web edition, [Page #], [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/08/magazine/ksenia-sobchak-the-stiletto-in-putins-side.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/08/magazine/ksenia-sobchak-the-stiletto-in-putins-side.html?_r=1).

Though the Internet is being closely watched within the Russian Federation, unlike television, there are excessive international ports of accessibility and infinite amounts of information available all the time. Unlike television, the Internet did not have a codependent political relationship with burgeoning lawmakers, and so its potential flew under the radar of savvy heads of state during its introduction to Russia. Now, it could have the potential to bring channels of information to Russians in the hopes of slowing the spread of HIV.

While physical harm reduction programs such as needle exchanges or methadone replacement therapies help current IDUs, online media outlets could help thwart future IDUs from beginning their habit. Also, sex education, outreach, and exposure campaigns should be implemented in schools within Russia but most likely will not be. The Internet, however, may be another answer in helping slow the generalization of the HIV epidemic for those missing the message in school. Since the government isn't willing to help those currently at risk with physical aid or prevent further propagation of the virus by exposing their constituency to aggressive mass media campaigns on HIV/AIDS, those involved in HIV/AIDS work need to begin routing around government intervention and the Internet is the foremost portal for messages of education and hope.

### **Part III: *The Kids Are Alright***

If seemingly every aspect of Russian culture is dominated by a pervasive conservative attitude regarding HIV, how would educational campaigns on HIV be effective? How could they reach an appropriate audience if there is a significant chance that the messages could fall on deaf ears? A glimpse at youth culture since perestroika reveals that now, more than ever, young people in Russia are eager for discussion on taboo subject and political participation.

Hilary Pilkington, one of the foremost scholars on Russian youth culture, suggests that when thinking about harm-reduction in Russia, understanding youth culture should be a foremost priority. The population of IDUs in Russia is higher than the global average and the bulk of the HIV epidemic is amongst young Russians, and so Pilkington argues that scholars must not ignore the networks created by youth as collective agents in the structural constraints that they face in a transitional society.<sup>166</sup> Pilkington states, “We should understand ‘youth culture’ as a set of practices- including drug use and abstention practices- that individuals and groups enact, not only as their responses to, but as strategies to for negotiating and shaping their structural contexts.”<sup>167</sup> Simply put, the youth of Russia are a

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<sup>166</sup>Hilary Pilkington, Beyond ‘Peer Pressure’: Rethinking drug use and ‘youth culture’, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, Volume 18, Issue 3, May 2007, Pages 213-224, ISSN 0955-3959, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2006.08.003>: 223.

<sup>167</sup>Pilkington, “Beyond ‘Peer Pressure’”: 223.

unique, and we have to approach their drug use and understanding of sexual practice with this in mind.

In the US, radical shifts in youth behaviors from decade-to-decade seem to be pervasive. Shifts in Russian youth culture are not necessarily a reaction to the behavior of the generation prior but rather the interventions the state had on personal life within the Soviet Union. Furthermore, as argued by Hilary Pilkington, Thomas Garza, Adele Marie Barker, and Jim Riordan, those young since the era of 'glasnost' have behaved starkly different than the generations before them. As political institutions shifted within the USSR and stabilized in the 2000s, each new generation of young adults has adjusted accordingly. The story of those young since glasnost tells exactly what Pilkington has advised: Russian youth culture has arisen from strategically negotiated social constraints. Examining this trajectory provides perspective on the latest generation, most at-risk for being affected by HIV/AIDS.

### **Cold War Kids**

Due in part to the stagnation of the 70's young people were growing increasingly frustrated with the monolith of the Komsomol youth organization. The Komsomol was the communist party's state youth group, created in the early days of the Soviet Union to promote the ideals of communism while giving young



people a space to bond through recreation and other soviet-friendly activities.<sup>168</sup> Thomas Garza's words best describe the organization as being "voluntarily compulsory".<sup>169</sup> Participation in the Komsomol was important for future success, though not every Russian was a member. For those in the organization, the Komsomol was used as launch pad to coveted employment posts within the system. During stagnation, older party members were less likely to be removed from their state positions (and most didn't want to), reducing worker turnover and limiting mobility for young people entering the workforce. The system became rigid, and the guarantee that a being a good Komsomol member would lead to better employment vanished. Furthermore, the Komsomol grew out of touch with its youth members as a consequence of eventually reducing the incentive to participate in the Komsomol to near zero.<sup>170</sup>

### **Gorbachev's Paradox**

In the late 1980s, as an alternative to culture halls and Komsomol-organized events, young people hung out (*tusovat'sa*) in the courtyards of their apartments or dorms. To create their own cultural space, they would trade illegally

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<sup>168</sup>Jim Riordan, "Soviet Youth: Pioneers of Change," *Soviet Studies* 40, no. 4 (1988): 556-572.

<sup>169</sup>Thomas Garza, "Conservative Vanguard? The Politics of New Russia's Youth," *Current History* 105, no. 693 (October 2006).

<sup>170</sup>*My Perestroika*.

taped music between friends, ride metro trains, or visit in basements.<sup>171</sup> These alternatives were not a direct protest of the status quo, but a quiet non-perpetuation. Opting out was not a revolution- it was simply something else for these young people to do.<sup>172</sup>

When Gorbachev took the helm of leadership in the USSR, he famously loosened controls via a *Glasnost* and Perestroika. The changes brought by Gorbachev under *Glasnost* permitted the formation and registration of “unofficial” organizations (those being defined as organizations that were not directly tied to the state). This provided an opportunity within public society for groups to gather and be active in the public sphere without legal repercussions. If a group wished to gather, they wouldn’t be immediately arrested for it.<sup>173</sup> Like mushrooms after a spring rain, groups popped up at first chance. Unofficial youth groups had always been in existence underground, but this provided an opportunity for an active civil sphere outside of the confines of the Communist Party and served as an alternative to the outdated Komsomol.<sup>174</sup> Finally, in Gorbachev’s Soviet Union, a person could voluntarily opt-out of joining an official group with increasingly fewer professional consequences.

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<sup>171</sup>Elena Zdrayomayslova and Viktor Voronkov, "The Informal Public in Soviet Society: Double Morality at Work," *Social Research*, Spring ser., 69, no. 1 (2002).

<sup>172</sup>Adele Marie Barker, *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society since Gorbachev* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

Alexei Yurchak, "Gagarin and the Rave Kids": 90.

<sup>173</sup>Kenez, *A History of the Soviet*, 259.

<sup>174</sup>Riordan, "Soviet Youth: Pioneers of Change,".

Glasnost-era youth were the largest demographic to organize themselves together for social and other reasons. A unique set of factors created a “perfect storm” of conditions in the Soviet Union causing such enthusiasm for assembly amongst young people. Hilary Pilkington details these factors in her book “Russia’s Youth and its Culture”. The conditions were as follows:

1. There was a lack of available living space in a shared apartments typical of either dormitory or home life. Many spaces were extremely overcrowded, leading to *dvor* or “courtyard” groups eager to be free of the emotional and physical restrictions in their living spaces.
2. Frequently young people relocated to different areas of the USSR where employment or education opportunities were available. Youth were more likely to move horizontally rather than vertically in the post-Brezhnev economy- a young person would have to change jobs or relocate to find employment, displacing them from their families and causing a desire to reconnect in their new environments.
3. The monolith of the Komsomol and its required regular attendance and participation had become incredibly banal. As *glasnost* progressed, there were fewer employment benefits associated with Komsomol participation.
4. Between 1985 and 1975, the amount of free time for young people increased by 6 to 8 hours a week
5. As mobile technology increased, information from beyond the Iron Curtain permeated the channels of society, including western radio channels such as BBC and Voice of America<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup>Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*, 93.

The first groups to crop up from the underground were the young and passionate fans of rock-n-roll music. Rock-n-Roll, in all its forms, has been touted as one of the largest destructive agents of modern society.<sup>176</sup> This degenerative form of music has been blamed cross-culturally for ruining the happy status quo of the elite since Les Paul electrified the guitar. In the Soviet Union, it was felt the hardened candor of the music and the fact that the majority was imported from the west conjured fears of the degradation of soviet life by destroying communist morale.<sup>177</sup> Interestingly, by the mid-1980s the study of this music and the youth who consumed it became a priority for the party and the Komsomol. The causes of attraction and reactions of listeners were taken into serious consideration and were the subject of studies and roundtable discussions. Fearing the counter culture of dissidence censorship would breed, Moscow attempted to control the distribution of rock music. Using the Komsomol as a model, specific music consumption was encouraged in sponsored rock houses. There was a belief that by manipulating how rock music was consumed once it had a presence in society, there was partial control of its usage and creation could be contained. The rock houses sought to encourage young people to develop a new more soviet-friendly rock style while gently “educating” them on the dangerous messages western music outlined.<sup>178</sup> However, by the late 1980s the influence of non-official materials through the semipermeable membrane of the border was unstoppable. Due to the space given

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<sup>176</sup>Riordan, "Soviet Youth: Pioneers of Change,".

<sup>177</sup>Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*, 106.

<sup>178</sup>Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*, 107.

for public discourse under *glasnost*, the outcries against the soviet system were also unstoppable. The influence of technology, newly imported sounds and ideas, and burgeoning self-reflection on the broken social contracts of soviet citizenship had reached critical mass.<sup>179</sup>

### **More than a Clique: Tusovki and Russian Youth**

This is where the idea of the *tusovka* becomes introduced to the public sphere. The *tusovka*; an association of people that meet in person to form a group, a clique, or a gang. The *tusovka* is a phenomenon that can't be statically defined because in part, it only exists as the result of a gathering-together in person but also remains intact in the social folklore and practices of those members of the *tusovka* while they are alone.<sup>180</sup> Free to exist outside the Komsomol and encouraged by their like-minded peers, different *tusovki* appeared in youthful clumps on the streets. In Moscow specifically, the presence of diverse *tusovki* were quite a shock for loyalists used to the tidy order of earlier days.

In the 2011 Red Square Productions documentary *My Perestroika*, one of the featured interviewees stated that upon returning from the army in '87, he strolled down Arbatskaya and there were groups of *punks* (fans of punk music)

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<sup>179</sup> Barker, *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture--Yurchak*, "Gagarin and the Rave Kids".

<sup>180</sup>See: Pschenichny. 1996, The Art of the Tusovka. *Russian Life*, 39, 10-10. See Also Grachev, M. A. (1995). Where do the Words Tusovka and Tosovat'sya come from? *Russkii Yazyk v Shkole*, 82(3), 84-86.

with mohawks on the streets that the cops weren't arresting or harassing. There were *hippys* playing for money on the street, artists selling their goods- he remarked he had gone away to the army and come home to a completely different country. All of the interviewees of the film noted that the feeling something incredible was happening.<sup>181</sup>

These *tusovki* were noticed by just about everyone, including heads of state who watched Komsomol enrollment drastically decline. Komsomol meetings were conducted to understand the significance of the volumes of youth joining together in *tusovki* and the classification "*neformaly*" was officially adopted to describe those associations that were non-state groups. Within *neformaly* there were many different *tusovki* defined by their varying interests- musical, artistic, political, or otherwise. Much attention was paid to deciphering which of the *tusovki* promoted the ideas of communism and which were just plain trouble. Deciding who was *nash* or *ne nash* (ours or not-ours) was part of the process, and separate institutions were created to manipulate and understand the *neformaly*.<sup>182</sup> Years later some of the political *tusovki* would go on to produce opposition parties and bear hopeful political candidates. Upon examination, the party discovered the paradox of *glasnost* and the dangers of liberalization. Hilary Pilkington pinpoints the phenomenon:

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<sup>181</sup>*My Perestroika*.

<sup>182</sup>Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*, 113-120.

It was at the 19th Party Conference in 1988 that serious reforms were proposed. The promotion of a pluralism of opinions encouraged the mushrooming of informal groups of people that wanted to state their own views, standpoints and candidate preferences in the public sphere. The social significance of those *neformaly* was that they epitomized the Gorbachev dilemma. On one hand, they took up the call for individual responsibility and civic initiative but on the other, they soon began to challenge the one-party system.<sup>183</sup>

Those coming of age in the Yeltsin years were the first generation not guaranteed the stability that once was provided by the state. These members of Generation Y (as they are classified in the west) would have been on the brink of adulthood or young adults during the worst of the 1998 ruble crisis. Their uncertainty in socioeconomic success as adults was exacerbated by the increasingly unstable job market and rising unemployment rate that precluded the crash. When the ruble was devalued, life savings were swallowed whole and banks disappeared overnight.<sup>184</sup>

In an increasingly unpredictable environment, youth on the brink of adulthood were forced to focus on putting their best economic interests forward with the understanding they could not count on state support or financial bolstering by their families. Most of these gen-y-ers forwent expensive and

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<sup>183</sup>Pilkington, *Russia's Youth and Its Culture*, 86.

<sup>184</sup>Dale R. Herspring, "Vladimir Putin: His Continuing Legacy," *Social Research*, spring ser., 76, no. 1 (2009): 151-174.

irrelevant university training in exchange for an education at a technical school that would get them employed immediately upon graduation.<sup>185</sup>

Interestingly, as this generation retreated inward to protect themselves, so did their *tusovki*. Opposing the collective of young folks aligned with an identity or cause, the *tusovka* evolved into a loose association of people- there was no need to register a group with the state, so the *tusovka* began to resemble something like a clique. Rather than the passionate *glasnost* kids who agreed the group existed to perpetuate their ideas or purpose collectively, Yeltsin-youth hung around together with less clearly defined intentions.

*Tusovki* became more dichotomous, being described as either “progressive” or “normal” by their peers.<sup>186</sup> In the late ‘90s, there was no state to rebel against, nor participate in. The *tusovka* became less consistent and more diverse within the confines of the group itself. Even preferred consumption of music is further evidence of a shift; people came to choose clubs that featured house or electronic beats spun by a DJ rather than raucous live rock-and-roll performances. It was noted that young people would gather with their *tusovka* in a club, and dance seemingly by themselves in a strange act of alone-yet-togetherness.<sup>187</sup>

According to Kirill Rogov, Senior Research fellow at the Gaidar Institute for Economic Policy in Moscow, the post-soviet political system follows along with a

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<sup>185</sup>Fran Markowitz, *Coming of Age in Post-Soviet Russia* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2000).

<sup>186</sup>Hilary Pilkington, *Looking West?: Cultural Globalization and Russian Youth Cultures* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002),  
See Chapter, "Progressives and Normals" 101-132

<sup>187</sup>Barker, *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture--Yurchak*, "Gagarin and the Rave Kids"



predictable economic cycle. This model of cyclicity by Arthur Schlesinger Jr. originally described American history, based on the empirical work of his father. According to the theory, the second wave of the cycle occurs during unstable socio-economic times. It is hypothesized that the more turbulent or unpredictable the political system is, the less likely the constituency is to participate in state activities. The actors in the system focus on holding employment and securing resources for themselves and their families. They come to believe there is no influencing change in a system they perceive as broken.<sup>188</sup>

Within Russia, gen-y young adults have become globally notorious for their political apathy, and their opting-out follows Rogov's analysis, arguably this apathy is even reflected in their individual social choices. Generation-y was heavily influenced by the consequences of the post-Soviet state. It is befitting that in an era of unpredictability, they began to retreat away from believing in the efficacy of the government and each other as a consequence of their environment.

### **Millennial Youth in Transition**

Another wave along the model of cyclicity is the period that directly follows political instability. According to Rogov, this reaction to instability comes with an

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<sup>188</sup>Lipman and Petrov, *Russia in 2020: Scenarios*  
See Rogov, "The 'Third' Cycle; is Russia Headed Back to the Future"

acceptance of the centralization of power in exchange for stabilization.<sup>189</sup> Vladimir Putin's presidency has been the embodiment of this phenomenon. When Putin was appointed to office in 1999, the post-crash economy recovered unusually quickly due in part to the high price of oil in the global market. The economy shifted to focus on outbound goods, and the export of Russian energy fueled growth and unemployment rates dropped for the first time in decades.<sup>190</sup>

After the economic recovery and stabilization period, Putin's approval rating was measured at a startlingly high 70-80%.<sup>191</sup> The political cycle hypothesized by Schlesinger seems to follow along with the trajectory of this recent Russian history. As the economy and political landscape stabilized, it appeared people didn't mind the strong arm of Putin pulling the reigns in tightly across the far reaches of Russia. A new pro-Russian psyche was brewing amongst youth as Russia arose from underneath the rubble of the former Soviet Union. Embracing this in their own way, different *neformaly* groups began etching out a unique patriotic identity for themselves in droves. Being Russian was something easier to understand. As domestic stability and prosperity increased, civic pride appeared amongst hopeful forward-looking youth.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Lipman and Petrov, *Russia in 2020: Scenarios*.

Rogov, "The 'Third' Cycle; is Russia Headed Back to the Future", 138.

<sup>190</sup> Pilkington, *Looking West?: Cultural Globalization*.

See Chapter, "Progressives and Normals" 101-132

<sup>191</sup> Herspring, "Vladimir Putin: His Continuing".

<sup>192</sup> Valerie Sperling, "Nashi Devushki: Gender and Political Youth Activism in Putin's and Medvedev's Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 2nd ser., 28, no. Spring (2012): 232-61.

As early as the year 2000, gatherings in support of the newly appointed Putin dotted city streets. The “Walking/MovingTogether” youth political party (*Idushchiye Vmeste*) celebrated Putin’s first year in office by donning t-shirts with his picture and rallying near the Kremlin.<sup>193</sup> In the wake of terrorist attacks in the beginning of the 2000s, these pro-government youth groups hardened their stance. Fearing that liberalization, foreign workers and globalization would shake the foundation of Russia’s most recent success, more than 75,000 young people were said to have a membership in *Idushchiye Vmeste*. In an article entitled *Conservative at Heart? New Russia’s Youth*, Thomas Garza describes the phenomenon as being reminiscent of the Young Communist League, including placing Putin at the center of their cult of personality.<sup>194</sup>

Echoing Russia’s past, Putin has engineered a system of repression that is strikingly Brezhnev-esque. The former KGB man prefers to feign as if he is operating a democratic system, quietly erasing opposition from the landscape without confrontation.<sup>195</sup> Rather than confirming his authoritarian status by using executive order to publicly harangue his opposition, people are forced (by arrest or coercion) out of business, homes are silently raided, and journalists disappear by “accident”. As discussed earlier, Putin has consolidated all of the television the media and most of the print media.<sup>196</sup> In *My Perestroika*, a documentary on adults

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<sup>193</sup> Sperling, "Nashi Devushki: Gender and Political," 235-245 also

Garza, "Conservative Vanguard? The Politics".

<sup>194</sup> Garza, "Conservative Vanguard? The Politics,".

<sup>195</sup> Herspring, "Vladimir Putin: His Continuing,".

<sup>196</sup> Graeme B Robertson. "Managing Society: Protest, Civil Society, and Regime in Putin's Russia." *Slavic Review* Fall 68.3 (2003), 329-530.

who were in their late teens during perestroika, people interviewed remarked that every show is the same, the hosts simply discuss how terrible things were in the '1990s and how wonderful they have become since Putin.<sup>197</sup> It is impossible to challenge him democratically, as he has destroyed the elections processes by the perpetuation of a crony system. The freedoms that were sacrificed to stabilize the post Yeltsin economy have placed Putin and his supporters exactly where he wishes.

As the cliché describes, history might be on the brink of repeating itself. The centralization of power that helped to reign in the inconsistency of the Yeltsin years seems to be causing worry amongst economists who predict a serious period of stagnation as a result of a vertically centralized system. There are predictions that even if oil prices remain high, they may only questionably help foster Russia's economic growth. Because of this, low rates of growth and the stagnation of real income are the most likely situation for the coming years.<sup>198</sup>

If the predictions of these theorists are correct, a centralized, inefficient economy will become sluggish, stalling growth. Stagnation- the first part of Schlesinger's cycle- could reappear in a time of economic repression. With little opportunity for vertical mobility and few outlets, it could then follow that the *tusovka* could grow in popularity.

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<sup>197</sup>*My Perestroika.*

<sup>198</sup>Lipman and Petrov, *Russia in 2020: Scenarios.*; Rogov, "The 'Third' Cycle; is Russia Headed Back to the Future"; See Milov, "The Russian Economy in Limbo".

Half of the Russian population now has been “young” in post-communist Russia. Their younger cousins were the punks skateboarding on the street, braver than they had been had they been alone. Their baby sisters witnessed the hardships faced when grandmother’s furniture was being traded away for foodstuffs, and they used their savvy smarts to race through school and network around the hyperconsumption of the new Russians. Glasnost-kids’ children are turning to [Vkontakte.ru](http://vkontakte.ru)<sup>199</sup> (The Russian version of Facebook) to rally their friends to march arm in arm for democratic reforms. The *tusovka* is so woven into the fabric of society, it has become accepted, commonplace, and perpetuated by each passing generation.

The evolution of the *tusovka* closely followed the political fallout the Russian population has dealt with through time. In Russia, youth are the best environmental indicators of the system and their actions should not be taken lightly. Their groupings can be watched like little mirrors of change, and to ignore them is to ignore the path of the future. Regardless of whether the Pro-Putin Nashi Party trolls spam blogs or liberally minded progressives write and debate online to hoping to encourage fair elections, it’s all becoming virtual.

Young Russians are collaborating online in numbers greater than before and using the technology to find ways around the structural barriers being a young Russian may entail. Russians report using the Internet as their main source for information on sexual health in a society without comprehensive sex education

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<sup>199</sup> [Vkontakte](http://vkontakte.ru), last modified 2013, <http://vkontakte.ru>.

programs or a sex-positive culture of discussion.<sup>200</sup> Not unlike young Americans, visitors from Russia to the University of Texas have acknowledged using the internet to discover the nuances of sex.

Also just as drug use in Russia should be considered from a cultural and structural standpoint, the strategies youth have employed since perestroika have echoes forward for the millennial generation. Hanging out underground comes with less risk, and is instantly gratifying when online. Predicting where to hit youth with messages of harm-reduction and safer sex practices doesn't have to be a wild guessing game; it just has to be easily accessible and in high volume in online sources.

Home and mobile subscription to the Internet is projected to increase by 200% in the next 5 years in the Russian Federation.<sup>201</sup> Aggressive ad campaigns or video public service messages posted on popular sites are an inexpensive way to inundate Russians with messages of prevention anti-HIV brand. Video campaigns could also be uploaded to the website Vkontakte.ru, where video sharing is easy and encouraged. Vkontakte is a website similar to the American Facebook, where peers share information in virtual social networks. According to Alexa.com, a website that monitors web traffic and is a company owned by Amazon, Vkontakte has historically been the most visited website in all of Russia and the Ukraine.<sup>202</sup> If

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<sup>200</sup> See Appendix 6, "Save a Horse" and Appendix 3, "Vova and Vladik"

<sup>201</sup> "Cell Phone Companies in Russia," Annual Reports, last modified September 1, 2010, accessed October 10, 2011, [http://www.mts GSM.com/resources/annual\\_reports/](http://www.mts GSM.com/resources/annual_reports/)  
[http://www.mts GSM.com/resources/annual\\_reports/](http://www.mts GSM.com/resources/annual_reports/).

<sup>202</sup> Alexia.com

there are volunteers in an organization that have time to create V Kontakte groups or user profiles, the same voracious and obnoxious marketing that happens on Facebook in the United States could happen for a much greater cause in Russia. Hypothetical or false user profiles could be created, preserving anonymity of a volunteer while simultaneously raising awareness. If invited to be in a group, a user has to click on the group link regardless of whether or not that person desires to join the group or decline joining. There are very few valid anti-hiv/aids groups on V Kontakte, and aggressive inundation and message sending could be a great weapon in the fight against HIV/AIDS.<sup>203</sup>

Ilya Yashin, political activist, opposition blogger, and leader for the People's Freedom Movement and Solidarnost, visited the University of Texas in April of 2011. He spoke to a community crowd that was standing-room only, people being turned away in fear of violating a fire-code. Yashin has been politically active since his teens, and is a staunch critic of Putin and the corruption taking place in Russia currently.

Speaking with the help of an interpreter, his message to the Austin audience was not a rhetoric-filled anti-Putin tirade. Instead, Yashin chose to detail observations he has had considering political activism in Russia. He argued that at first, people were willing to exchange civil liberties for stability as Putin came to power after the chaos of the Yeltsin years. He argued, however, that this condition in Russia was changing as the unwritten social contract arranged between Putin

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<sup>203</sup> V Kontakte, last modified 2013, <http://vkontakte.ru>.

and Russian citizens has begun to tear as people become frustrated with a stagnant and centralized government.

Leading the edge of change, Yashin stated, is a new generation of politically-aware youth. Calling them, “hipsters” or “the Facebook generation”, he said the millennial generation in Russia isn’t just going online to find other people to interact with, he said they’re using the Internet to seek information about the world around them to make decisions and act as agents in their own lives. For the first time in a while, Yashin explained, being politically active is hip again. He observed that the Internet is the new arena for Russian civil-society, and young people acting as agents in the process of exposing corruption via this medium helped to awaken the Russian middle class in this last election cycle.

Yashin feels that the Internet is integral in dissemination of proof of corruptive practices of the Putin regime. Further, in the organization of mass protests leading up to the presidential election in 2012.

The millennials of Russia have given Yashin hope; so much, indeed, that when asked what he would advise to Russian youth today he remarked that he would suggest that they stay. Stay in Russia, and work towards a better society-one he feels is coming soon under their influence.

There is evidence to support Yashin’s hopeful outlook on the changes happening at the hands of the millennial generation. “Dance4Life”, a youth movement of the World AIDS Campaign, brings people together in hopes of spreading messages about ideas on healthy choices and responsible behavior in



sexual health. It currently exists in 26 regions in Russia and is aimed at 13-19 year olds in Russia. The organization coordinates workshops, flash-mobs, and other social events for young people. The coordinator, Tatiana Yevlapiyeva, has estimated that around one million people have received positive, preventative messages on sexual health due to high participation in this fun and educational organization.<sup>204</sup>

Online collaboration and educational portals are already beginning to crop up in safe places tucked into the World Wide Web. One such enclave, Pereboi.ru (meaning, 'stockouts'), is a website created to act as a network for HIV+ persons in need of medication. The website details the status of medication shortages, has updates on the latest protests from all across the federation, offers advice on activism for awareness-raising, and also acts as a hub for the exchange of much needed medication. The guestbook is filled with entries in either extreme detail or tersely desperate statements in search of medications unavailable in differing locations. The website has 25 pages full of guestbook entries detailing shortages for medication all across Russia. The most fascinating part of pereboi.ru is that it is a living archive of HIV+ persons in need. The shortages written about could serve a separate purpose: highlighting the multitude of Russians living with HIV and to act as an archive to inspire political action to help affect change in attitudes and action.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup>Dance4Life, last modified 2013, <http://www.dance4life.com/ru/home/home/>. (Russian version of Dance4Life Website)

<sup>205</sup> Pereboi.Ru, last modified 2013, <http://pereboi.ru/>. See "Gostevaya Kniga"

User “Katya112” recently posted to stoppid.ru, looking for answers to questions on her recent diagnosis that she is HIV+. An expectant mother for the first time, her questions on her diagnosis were lovingly answered by throngs of other young women, HIV+ and not. The majority of them reassured her that her shock was normal. Some explained to her she may have a normal pregnancy (stating they had) and a healthy baby (like theirs). Also, many wrote that HIV is not a death sentence. By typing a few panicked sentences on a website, she could have instantaneous support, finding solace in knowing there were others just like her. Perhaps if they were okay, she could have that chance as well.

## **Closing thoughts**

This limited study barely broaches other issues facing Russian youth concerning media control, information access, health education, and motivations to lead a healthy lifestyle. In the summer of 2013, a law was passed that allows anyone suspected of showing outward support for “nontraditional” relationships to be arrested and held from two weeks to 90 days, and carries fines as well. In other words, being openly gay has been declared illegal in Russia. Viral pictures in an online gallery detailing protests against this law are gruesome and heartbreaking. Demonstrations against the law ended violently in Moscow, with protesters left bloody, screaming, and being tear gassed. The photos show people

with both blood and tears in their eyes, and there is photo evidence of religious leaders and police attacking protesters<sup>206</sup> Russia seems to be devolving into a hyper-conservative dystopian Putin-run autocracy, and because of this, there are many issues other than HIV and the Internet that Russian youth face today.

Also, the data presented is a broad survey of existing observations, and is thus limited to the availability of information on HIV/AIDS, injecting drug use, and other risk-behaviors within the Russian Federation. Most observations on opinions of sex, drugs, and HIV discussed in this piece were from educated, employed, or middle-class urban Russian youth. The majority of IDUs in Russia also come from this demographic, but for future projects involving media targeting at risk populations, expanding the survey outreach or exploring underrepresented populations in Russia are needed. It is pertinent to create outreach programs for those without Internet access, from urban centers, or for ethnic minorities. Clearly there are limits to the power of the Internet and the scope of its reach. However, messages encouraging risk-averse behaviors do not exist currently, and so work should begin as soon as possible to create them.

Furthermore, it is unpredictable whether the growing epidemic will affect current government attitudes on drug addiction or the possibility for harm-reduction programs in Russia. Currently, the legislation in place until 2020 in Russia fosters an environment in which harm-reduction is either impossible or

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<sup>206</sup> Matt Stopera, "36 Photos from Russia That Everyone Needs to See," BuzzFeed, last modified July 22, 2013, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/mjs538/photos-from-russia-everyone-needs-to-see>.

illegal, and suggests that drug users must employ self-control or good choices in breaking the cycle of addiction. Understanding the tight media controls the Kremlin currently employs and the negative attitude toward implementing harm-reduction for those already engaging in risky behavior, it is highly unlikely the structural barriers against harm-reduction will loosen. Due to the impending pressure that the epidemic may have on the health care system, however, the Russian government may be forced to change its tune.

Until structural barriers erode or cultural norms shift, the Internet is a safe place to explore taboo subjects without stigma or judgment from teachers or parents. Campaigns sent on social networking sites, popular youth portals, or educational hubs online could work towards spreading messages of hope in the fight against the spread of HIV. As described by multiple scholars and witnessed in my own informal ethnographic research with young Russians, there is a severe lack of understanding that HIV/AIDS is blind to whom it infects. The idea is lost that as long as a route of infection exists- such as being sexually active- HIV infection is a possibility. Furthermore, multiple studies have shown that exposure to messages on avoiding risky situations and also on HIV/AIDS both encourage healthier choices and improve attitudes towards HIV+ individuals. Given those findings and the absence of comprehensive understanding on the virus, the Internet has the ability to chip away at current stigma, quietly changing cultural understandings one person at a time.

The unique way Russian youth have navigated social and political space since the dissolution of the USSR foreshadows a coming Internet-led youth charge against areas in which its government has been lacking. As the volume of people touched by HIV grows within the Russian federation, young people will be unable to ignore the injustices against those living with HIV/AIDS. As observed, young Russians have a long history of being unhappy with complacency. Saving their peers from the throes of addiction or keeping them healthy by encouraging safer sex practices could be the next “hipster” trend to inspire itself across Russia. The potential for radical change rests in the virtual hangouts of inspired Russia’s millennial-youth. The millennial generation has the tools, the incentive, and the power to slow the spread of HIV, and instead spread messages of hope for Russia’s future.

## **Appendices**

All of the names presented in these appendices are pseudonyms in order to preserve the anonymity of people with whom these conversations took place.

### **Appendix I: Dina**

I first met Dina on the sidelines of a regional basketball game at a stadium not far outside of Moscow's center. Gregarious and as slender as a prepubescent girl, she was like a model from a tampon advertisement; as carefree as a woman could be. Her hair was cropped in a bob probably from the result of much over-processing and made her round face and pouty mouth appear starkly doll-like for a woman in her mid-twenties. Shuffling her 5" heeled leather-boot encased legs a few seats down to make my acquaintance, she asked me constant questions throughout the course of the sporting event. Neither pushy nor flighty, Dina's questions revealed to me that she had a genuine curiosity and open-mindedness in meeting other people. Over the course of several weeks, I found myself as the subject in an unspoken "project"; Dina decided she had to Russify me as quickly and as thoroughly as she possibly could.

One of Dina's first candid comments was a suggestion on my appearance. It seemed if I wanted to blend in in Russia, I would need to lose about 6 kilos (or 15 lbs.). She sternly advised, "Eat nothing all day. This is how to achieve this. Only coffee, some cookies in the morning, cigarettes, and coffee again. Nothing else."

She warmly warned I carried my weight mostly in my legs and this was an unfortunate place for females to carry weight, as it would be harder to lose and I would not look good in the fashions of the season.

Dina recruited me for endless cultural events as a part of her project duties; shopping in markets, shopping in malls, dining in traditionally Russian restaurants, navigating public transport, nail and hair salons, the list is endless. She would hastily text, "I am waiting on you!" in Russian to my hopelessly cheap Nokia cell phone. Riding the elevator from my flat 13 floors down, I'd often find her standing outside her little red two-door car engaged in an argument over which person should move out of the way with one of my neighbors. Fiercely winding through Moscow traffic while I white-knuckled the cloth seats of her Nissan, she schlepped me to the Banya, the ballet, the movies, her mother's school, her brother's dacha, and everywhere in between.

At the time I had met Dina, she was involved in a relationship with one of the basketball players from the home team of the game at which we first met. By the time I left Russia to return to the states for some time, she had 5 or 6 different steady boyfriends from all walks of life. Dina was by no means a "heartbreaker" or a "player"; she wasn't using these men for personal gain per se, she was sincerely interested in finding a life partner. Her pursuit proved challenging for a number of reasons, and her frequency of dates was not uncommon among her peers.

On a particularly blustery Moscow winter's night, she invited me to her flat to prepare for a night out at the city's most exclusive club. The club was owned by

a famous Russian hip-hop artist, and there was a huge promotional party planned for that evening. These promotional parties had multiple paparazzi photographers, red carpets, velvet ropes, and exorbitant VIP lounges for Moscow's elite. I had managed to peel on a pair of skinny jeans that were so unbelievably tight, I could feel my pulse in my belly button. I tottered up the stairs to her 300-ish square foot flat in over the knee stiletto boots, a purple silk top, and a faux fur jacket. When I arrived she was disappointed with my hair, and took it upon herself to add a 4" pouf to the front, sweeping my hair back into a fashionable ponytail. I felt like a combination of Posh Spice and drag-queen Barbie.

Negotiating a free ride from a car piloted by a young man and his friend outside her flat, we, plus an extra girlfriend fresh from the Moscow metro, all piled into the back of his Lada and took off. She gave him her telephone number after the ride was over, and sweetly told him to call her. We managed to make it past face control and the giant line at the busy club, and slipped inside to join what felt like thousands of Friday-night revelers. After about an hour, the emergency lights suddenly flashed on to illuminate the hazy interior of the club, transforming the space instantaneously. The music was cut off, and for a second the buzzing of confused voices and eyes adjusting to the harsh light filled the club with confusion. Then suddenly, people began to flee for the exits of the club. Dina grabbed my arm and pulling me somewhere, we followed the crowd jamming in shoulder-to-shoulder.



“NARCOTICS RAID!” She shouted back at me in Russian. In front of us, an army of riot-gear sporting policemen flooded in the main entrances. At the time, I didn’t understand what was happening because I didn’t know the word for ‘raid’ in Russian. We slipped down and around the dance floor and through a dark hallway past the bathrooms and quickly out a side door I had no idea existed. I still had my drink in my hand. Coatless and now outside the club, I perplexingly asked her what was going on.

“The police have raided the club, looking for narcotics.” She said in English. Then, “Narcotics raid,” she repeated sternly in Russian, “Let’s go, there is nothing we can do now.”

We walked through an alley to the front of the club, the cold stinging my exposed arms and turning the sweat on my shirt into a sheet of frost. She and her girlfriend conversed in Russian on whether or not we should attempt to get our coats from the coat check. I could sense they didn’t want me to hear what they were discussing. By that time, around 15 police officers had blocked the main entrance, holding shields and massive nightsticks like black storm-troopers in the maroon Moscow evening. It was a terrifying sight. I casually set my glass down on the wet concrete, hoping no one noticed my awkward squat to free myself of the accidentally pilfered drinkware. After a quiet discussion it was decided they would send in Dina’s friend to fish out our winter gear while we waited outside.

Dina leaned in and quietly said, “I’ll explain everything later.” Dina and I walked along the wet concrete holding our arms over our chests to attempt to stay

warm. There was a large crowd forming outside the doors, snaking up the front stairs, filled with those desperately hoping to retrieve their coats. Digging for her phone in her black-hole of a handbag, Dina produced it and began clicking away at the buttons with her acrylic-covered fingernails.

“Let’s go to a café not far from here and wait.” She apologetically said through mostly closed lips as she texted, “Okay?”

We wandered a block or so to a cheesy American-themed “50s” diner and waited for her friend. She sighed and clinked her nails on her coffee cup, hesitant about something. “You know, that was mostly for show.” She shrugged, “We weren’t really in that much danger.”

“Why?” I asked, curious mostly because she felt the need to explain herself.

“We’re not the kind of people they’re looking for.” Dina nonchalantly stated. “But just so you know, my friend has narcotics with her. I told her to dump them in the crowd if she can.”

I resisted the urge to ask what kind, not wanting to seem uptight in her weirdly unflappable presence. “Aren’t you afraid she’ll get caught when she gets our coats?” I asked.

“No,” she shook her head, “Because she has a friend who works in the back with security, so she will find him and he will give her our things. It’s really fine—you don’t have to worry.”

About 30 minutes later, her red-faced friend burst through the door in her Shaggy faux fur leopard-print coat with a wide grin on her face. Our coats were

bundled over her arm. She threw herself down in the diner booth with apparent self-satisfaction. Bobbing her head up and down and planting her hands on the table, she enthusiastically said, “Girls! We’re going to live!”

## **Appendix 2: Alexandra**

Alexandra was introduced to me through mutual friends at Moscow’s elite GQ Restaurant. A launch party for some new DJ was being held, and I attended begrudgingly, frustrated by the exorbitant prices the restaurant boasted. Alexandra had been told that I was in Moscow by a mutual friend who thought it would be nice for us to meet. Gliding up to our group through the crowd, she was dressed in black from head to toe. Even in her platform stiletto Manolo Blahnik pumps she was significantly shorter than me. Alexandra stuck her pale, manicured hand out in offering of a handshake and said, “I am Alexandra, Alexis, I have heard so much about you. How do you like your time in Moscow thus far?”

She had been educated abroad and spoke flawless, accent-less English. I found myself completely enraptured by her steely gaze and cool intensity. At first, I couldn’t quite decipher whether it was her strikingly Nordic beauty that made her seem so expressionless, but after some time, I learned it was partly her approach to life and partly botulism toxin administered to her face.

“I like what you tried to do with your hair.” She stated in plain English, her icy blue eyes blinking up at me from behind giant eyelash extensions. “So, would

you be available to get lunch with me sometime? I'll have my driver pick you up and bring you to the center since I heard you live north of the city."

...How could I possibly say no?

We met for lunch back at GQ, it was her suggestion. Frowning over the menu, the most affordable item was miso soup, so I ordered it and some still water. Alexandra commented that I had made a good choice and that she heard I was on a diet. The soup met her caloric approval, apparently. Alexandra and I conversed tersely while waiting for our lunch. Taking out a slender cigarette from a silver case, she dangled it between her fingers, draping her tiny wrist over the edge of the table. Waiting a second, she flashed her gaze up at the waiter standing halfway across the room.

"Excuse me." She said in Russian, still staring at the young man. He seemed not to notice. "Young man," she said, her tone growing more annoyed. He looked over at her, surprised to be torn from his daydream. She looked down at the cigarette dangling from her fingers and back up at him. He quickly tromped across the restaurant, and, producing a lighter from his pocket, he wordlessly lit her cigarette. Taking a dramatic drag, she shook her head in disbelief as she exhaled through her pursed lips.

Abruptly, looking back at me she stated, "You know there are many prostitutes in Russia." Flicking her hand in a circle at her wrist in an explanatory motion she continued, squinting, "You need to know that your husband will sleep

with them. I am sorry that this is probably hard to hear, but this is Russia and it is very different than the United States.”

I swallowed, a lump forming at the back of my throat, “What do you mean?” I prodded, unsure of what she was expecting me to say.

“There is a difference in cultures that you should get accustomed to. It’s best if you know about it now. For example, when your husband goes on the road for work, the women will already be waiting for him in his hotel room.” She shook her head at me, as if I should already be aware of this practice. “You see what they do is call ahead and tell the hotel staff that they are actually his wife. Knowing his name ahead of time, that’s enough sometimes for them to gain access to the room. It’s part of the business; of the hotel, of the girls, of your husband’s work. Everyone gets paid a little something.”

I smiled, lips closed, “Well hopefully he wouldn’t take such a risk.” I quietly said, exhaling.

“You can never be certain.” She retorted, assuredly, “It is best to understand now; let men be men. The sooner you realize this, the sooner you are free to do what you wish- you’re in Moscow- what do you expect? You’re going to hear rumors; don’t go crazy with them. Everyone understands what happens and no one passes judgment.”

Taken aback by the fact that she was continuing, I leaned forward and asked, “But what about diseases? Don’t people worry about catching something?”

“Well, that is a problem of course, but hopefully your husband will know to pick the clean ones.” She stated.

### **Appendix 3: Vova and Vladik**

A group of students visited our institution for a summer exchange program. These students were from a prominent private university in a large metropolitan city and were the best of the brightest from their class, having won intensive competitions to earn a spot on this exchange program. The students all spoke English with a high level of competency and were bursting at the seams with questions about American culture and politics. In this particular group of students, the young women were more introverted than the young men, sticking together and conversing quietly with each other in Russian on most occasions. The young men, however, were unafraid to ask bold questions about a wide range of topics, including sex.

The boys were mostly interested in the mating rituals of female Americans and also what these females' natural habitats were. Two of the young men, “Vova” and “Vladik” were determined to meet young ladies from their age group. Striding up to me one particularly hot summer afternoon after their classes were finished, they said their hellos and paused, hands on hips, feet in the 5<sup>th</sup> position. Their posture displayed they were both about to argue for something they wanted, as I had observed it several times before.

“So,” Vova started, “Where can we find some nice girls to talk to?” he asked in English.

“Yeah,” Vladik followed, “We're alone with our classmates all day. We want to meet some nice girls. Also, the girls in our dorm are all 14 and we will go to prison if to talk to them. Freedom, right?!” He said sarcastically, mocking the concept of statutory rape in the United States. The concept of adulthood and legal responsibility is a bit more flexible in Russia, so these two weren't seriously considering flirting with adolescents- they were just stating an observation on the legal system.

“What exactly do you mean?” I prodded, crinkling my nose. I understood that they were interested in meeting American ladies, however I wasn't quite sure what specifically they were asking for. I assumed they were hinting at sneaking into a bar or trying to attempt some other potentially illegal behavior that would get both myself and themselves in some sort of trouble. I pushed for clarification, “What do you really want?”

“Well, you know. Being with regular girls, nice girls. Not the kind you meet in a club.” Vova spat out, shrugging open-handed, somehow offended I hadn't gotten his point.

“Well I don't know if that is part of your American tour.” I said back sarcastically. “Why do you need to meet 'girls' so desperately?” I pushed back, swaying my head at the both of them, and crossing my arms over my chest.

“BECAUSE!” Said Vladik, dramatically grabbing at his hair and throwing his head back. “You don't understand, we are really bored of hanging out with the same GIRLS!” he exclaimed, his voice cartoonishly dropping an octave on the word 'girls'.

“Look,” Vova began to negotiate, “We aren't looking for trouble. We just want to go somewhere where we can talk to girls our own age. We don't want to meet sorority sluts or anything like that. We're just looking for a little fun.”

“Sorority sluts? What exactly is a sorority slut? You know, I was in a sorority when I was in college.” I retorted.

Vova and Vladik looked at each other and smirking, chuckled in deep tenor tones. “No, Alexis,” Vova said calmly, “We aren't looking to just go out and fuck some American girls. We just want to get some drinks or something and meet some people. We don't want to find THOSE kind of girls.”

“So what are you saying, gentlemen?” I said in a motherly tone. “Really, I can't find girls for you. Also, you can't go into bars or clubs because you're not 21. I think you're asking the wrong person, because I also don't know what you mean by 'nice' girls.” I sighed. “You're just going to have to talk to girls on your own like every other 19-year old American male has to.”

“Come onnnnnnnnn you have to know some place we can go!” Vova pleaded.

“Try the coffee shop down at the end of the block, that's my best guess. They have huge concerts and serve alcohol as well.” I shrugged.



“No the girls there have tattoos and look like sluts. Where else?” Vova said, eyes open wide with disgust.

“Where exactly did you two become such experts on which girls are 'sluts' and which girls are 'nice'?” I prodded.

“Films.” Vova quickly said.

“And the Internet.” Vladik added, nodding. “Films on the Internet.”

#### **Appendix 4: Vladik**

After a long day touring a city far from our college town, I sat outside by my pool with some of the exchange students that were visiting for the summer. We had driven a few hours in minivans to some local tourist attractions and the entire way to and from I had played the part of chauffeur, expert witness, and mediator during heated debates amongst them involving American politics. Subjects such as the differences between the Democratic and Republican parties, gun control, religion, the market, surveillance, and democracy itself were covered. To say the least, it was an exhausting conversation and a long drive.

The sun had set hours before, but it was still in the triple-digits out and the students had begged to float in the pool before being returned to their dorm. The girls bobbed up and down on pool noodles and conversed quietly about apple products.

The boys were attempting to throw a waterlogged Nerf football around the deep end while treading water but really only succeeded in splashing each other in the face. Vladik, annoyed, left the pool and joined me at a patio table.

“You know how earlier we were talking about abortion and things?” He asked.

“Yeah...” I said.

“Don’t American men know to pull out?” He asked, seriously.

“That isn’t an effective form of birth control.” I stated nonchalantly.

“I do it with my girlfriend all the time. You just pull out! And if you’re drunk, because you can’t control yourself you wear a condom. No one gets pregnant.” He stated.

“Well,” I said, “Do you know what we call people who use that method in the US?” raising an eyebrow.

“What?” He said, grinning in anticipation.

“Fathers.” I said.

## **Appendix 5: Katya112**

Stopspid.ru is a nonprofit, multimedia informational website that serves as an educational portal on HIV/AIDS. Quizzes, videos, photos, interactive blogs, and articles are hosted on the website to inform and provide Russian-language support for people looking for information about HIV.

One of the most recent blog posts on June, 12<sup>th</sup> 2013 by a person using the moniker “Katya112” is hard to ignore. She writes:

I am in a panic! Please, tell me, how can it be true? I am 23 years old and in my 13<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy I wound up in a hospital with the diagnosis, ‘non-developing pregnancy’. My [skin] was cleaned, and I was given antibiotics [by injection], and the hospital reported that I have HIV. This just cannot be! My whole life I have only had two partners; my boyfriend when I was 17 and my current husband for four years. Never in my life have I injected, never received a blood transfusion nor donated blood. Where could I have contracted HIV and what are the chances that my test is a false-positive? As they say, trouble never comes alone.

Original text: У меня паника! подскажите как быть? мне 23 года, на 13 неделе беременности я попала в больницу с диагнозом "неразвивающаяся беременность" Меня почистили, покололи антибиотики, а при выписке сообщили что у меня нашли положительный Вич! Такого быть не может! за всю жизнь у меня было всего два партнёра, в 17 лет мой молодой человек и после 4 лет воздержания мой нынешний супруг. Я никогда в жизни не кололась, не переливала кровь, не была донором. Откуда у меня мог взяться ВИЧ и каковы мои шансы на то, что тест ложноположительный? Как говорят беда не приходит одна.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> "Interactive Blog," Stop Spid, last modified June 12, 2013, <http://www.stopspid.ru/interactiv/blog/p.1/view.20777/>.

## **Appendix 6: Ride a Horse, Save a Cowboy**

One of the exchange programs I worked with involved young adults in their late 20s who were employed in higher education. These young adults held positions of influence in their universities and had extensive educations themselves. This group in particular was eager to explore the greater Austin area, and in working with the group part of my duties were to drive them to and from events.

A day or so earlier, one of the gentlemen and I were having a discussion about country music and what it meant in the United States. The conversation quickly devolved into joking around and ended with someone playing Big & Rich's hit, "Save a Horse, Ride a Cowboy", which the gentleman jokingly switched around to, "Ride a Horse, Save a Cowboy."

In my car the next day, he remarked, "So, that song about horses and cowboys, that's about sex, isn't it?"

I laughed, nodding to his question. "Yes, 'riding' is a euphemism for sex in certain cases in American slang." I explained.

"That is quite funny," he replied, "Considering the conservative attitudes Americans have on sex compared to Europe. I'm curious, did you learn about sex in school?" He then asked.

“I did,” I said, nodding again, “...but in the US, the curriculum for different schools are decided either locally in small districts or for the whole state so it could be the case that some schools have no sex education at all.”

“Very interesting, I would guess that the amount of sex education one gets then must follow the political trends in the regions the schools are in.” He stated.

“Yes, you’re exactly right. Sometimes regime change can be very bad for education.” I agreed.

“You know, we didn’t learn about sex at all in school. The only way I learned about it was through my friends and through the Internet. Believe me, the Internet can tell you anything you want or need to know about sex.”

“Gosh,” I said, “I wonder what people did before the Internet?”

“I don’t know, but I am very happy to have gotten my information online!” He said, smiling a large, toothy grin.

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