

Women and higher education in Russia: Preparation for careers in the apparel industry

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Abstract:

This qualitative study explored the motivations, goals, and experiences of 25 female apparel majors enrolled at two large Russian universities. Data were collected via in-depth interviews and a demographic questionnaire, and interpreted thematically to explore commonalities and differences across student narratives. Substantial reforms resulting from profound socioeconomic and political changes have affected both higher education and industry in Russia. Based on the analysis of student narratives, three topical areas are used to structure the thematic interpretation and to address key issues stemming from the students' perceptions regarding the relationship between Russian apparel programs and the country's apparel industry. The results establish the significance of apparel programs for facilitating Russian women's career aspirations and have implications for understanding the educational and employment goals of women from an international perspective. Further research is needed to understand the roles these Russian women take on within the industry after graduation.

Keywords: apparel industry | higher education | Russia | women

Article:

Since the advent of glasnost and perestroika at the end of the 1980s, the system of national education in Russia has undergone substantial reform (Eklof & Dneprov, 1993; Jones, 1994). Included among the outcomes of such reform is the drastic cut in state subsidies that defined education during Soviet times, resulting in what has been called the “commercialization of education” happening throughout Russia today (Kerr, 1995). Between 2000 and 2002, the number of institutions of higher education increased from 880 to 1,000 (Davydov, 2004; UNESCO, World Education Forum, 2000). Davydov found that the number of students enrolled in these institutions doubled in the period between 1990 and 2002, even though only 50% of these students received free education in 2002, in contrast to 100% in 1990.

Similar to the situation faced by Russian higher education, the apparel industry experienced a fundamental upheaval as a result of the shift from communism to a capitalist democracy. Whereas higher education experienced growth, however, the Russian apparel industry found itself on the brink of collapse. At the same time that the industry faced the challenge of

transitioning from being state-run to a free enterprise, it was also forced to compete against apparel imports flooding the Russian marketplace (Singer, 1997). During the Soviet era, the apparel industry produced a basic, uniform style of clothing (Argenbright, 1999). The State Plan Agency regulated the number of each garment produced by each factory, including size, price point, as well as how and where it would be sold throughout the USSR. Apparel producers did not have to consider consumer demand or preference, because they knew that Russian consumers had to buy clothing, regardless of whether they were satisfied with style, quality, or fit. Nor did these producers worry about competition from imports. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, an unprecedented consumer demand for Western merchandise would lead to what some would call a shopping revolution (Manrai, Lascu, Manrai, & Babb, 2001).

In light of the social, political, and economic upheavals experienced in Russia during the past decade, the purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to examine the motivations and expectations of female students enrolled in apparel programs, and (b) to explore these students' perceptions of the implications of Russia's transition economy for their professional goals. It is important to explore the link between the development of the apparel industry and that of higher education in Russia because the literature describes both a state of decline and the potential for growth in regard to this industry (Parshukova, 2003; Russian Apparel Industry Report, 2003). Taking into account industry dynamics and an overall increase in Russians pursuing higher education, the women's motivations for selecting the apparel major are examined alongside their perceptions of opportunities for industry careers after graduation.

Background

The Economics of Higher Education

The shift from communism to democracy in Russia involved more than just a transition to pluralism, freedom, and capitalism; it brought with it instability and socioeconomic change on an unprecedented scale. From the turmoil sprang widespread corruption and an extensive black market. In the rush toward a market economy during the 1990s, Russians suffered astronomical inflation, an intense period of recession, and unemployment. Such challenges had not existed during Soviet times. What was once a stable and predictable socioeconomic system was turned on its end, resulting in an abrupt stratification of the Russian population at a pace that the global economy had yet to witness. Maksakovskii (2006), a leading economist and academic, argued that "no other country in the world has ever experienced such a profound and rapid stratification of the population in terms of level of income" (p. 2). The author pointed out that most Russians do not enjoy the economic benefits common in other capitalist democracies, because only 15% of its population owns 92% of the country's total wealth.¹

During this time universities sought to survive unprecedented cutbacks in state subsidies,² yet had to accommodate a nationwide boom in demand for education. As of 2002, there were 5.9 million students enrolled in Russia's institutions of higher education (Korotkov, 2006). At the

¹ In comparison, the wealthiest individuals in the United States (10%) account for 30.5% of the total country's income (Maksakovskii, 2006).

² In absolute terms, the U.S. government spends 165 times more on higher education than the post-Soviet Russian government (Kolesnikov, Kucher, & Turchenko, 2005).

same time, however, there were only 1,000 such institutions located throughout the entire country (Davydov, 2004). To frame the situation another way, the proportion of college students in Russia in 2002 was 407 students for every 10,000 people, far exceeding the numbers in countries such as Great Britain (350), France (340), and Germany (216; Arapov, 2006). This lack of supply in the face of growing demand has led to severe problems for universities throughout the country, including a decline in the quality of higher education, an overall lack of an adequate legislative base, and a systemic failure to enforce existing regulations (Berulava, 2005; Kolesnikov, Kucher, & Turchenko, 2005).

Considering this sharp increase in enrollment in light of the disappearance of a tuition-free education, one might think that acquiring a university degree in Russia is a relatively inexpensive endeavor. Compared to other developed nations, however, it is not. According to a study by Arapov (2006), the average Russian student faces \$750 tuition at \$2,140 GDP per capita, which is not so different from \$25,000 in expenses at \$30,200 GDP per capita in the United States. It is important to take into consideration the fact that for Russian students, education-based loans are scarce and difficult to obtain. Furthermore, the price of higher education is increasing exponentially: Between 2000 and 2003, average tuition costs increased between 15% and 30% each year.³ Not surprisingly, a survey conducted in 2002 found that Russians perceived the accessibility of higher education to be severely diminished (Arapov, 2006). Moreover, 42% of the young people surveyed reported that to obtain a tuition-based education, they had to give up all other expenses, whereas 45% concluded that obtaining a tuition-based university education was impossible.

Given the financial hardships that come with paying for higher education in Russia, what could be the driving force behind the rapidly increasing enrollment? Arapov (2006) posited that the answer lies in the notion that higher education leads to better opportunities, an idea prevalent within the modern capitalist paradigm. That is, when investment opportunities in a country are very limited and the overall political and economic environment is unstable, the focus shifts to investing in human capital. Russia is, however, still in the early stages of the transition to a market economy. Korotkov (2006) clarified this distinction, reporting that the “economic payback from higher education in Russia is, on average, half that of the United States” (p. 33). As is the case in other developed countries, in Russia, a university degree has become an expectation rather than an exception. Seeking to recruit employees with the potential for professional growth, many companies prefer to hire people with college degrees for positions that do not necessarily require them (Arapov, 2006). This trend threatens to undermine the noneconomic benefits of a college degree in Russia, particularly the increased social status that previously came from having a university degree that in some cases compensated for low salaries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1999).

Korotkov’s (2006) analysis of job announcements found that a university degree was the primary qualification required for jobs that involve intellectual (versus manual) activity, including secretarial work. Korotkov reported that employers were less interested in the graduate’s “set of

³ In Russia, a university-level education traditionally involves 5 years or more depending on the major. Typically, this includes a combination of general and professional education. This is the case for apparel programs that focus on the development of technical design and pattern-making skills and prepare students for production management-related jobs.

specific knowledge but rather his [*sic*] overall level of culture, his intellectual horizon, and his ability to think” (p. 35). Similarly, Arapov (2006) reported that roughly 80% of job announcements did not require a specific educational profile. For example, graduates of the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology were recruited for mid- and top-level manager positions with companies that had nothing to do with physics or technology. Ultimately, it appears that many university graduates end up in jobs that have little relation to the subject they focused on in college, leading to the question of whether the recruitment practices of the Russian job market will affect enrollment in some university programs more than others.

Higher Education and Professions

According to Jones (2006), contemporary Russian higher education is in “a somewhat anarchic situation” characterized by general confusion as to what occupations people should be trained for within the new Russian economy (p. 3). This is coupled with a growing indication that young people in Russia are also questioning the value of training for a specific profession (Jones, 2006). Kanikov and Trun’kina (2005) noted that by the late 1990s, there was a drastic change in young people’s attitudes toward certain professions. For example, as a result of stagnating industrial production, engineering and other technical professions suffered a decline in labor demand as well as decreasing pay levels, leading to a loss of prestige for these professions. Other such traditional professions as education, agriculture, and even medicine underwent a similar decline in popularity (Mkrtchian, 2006). At the same time, non-state institutions were the first to address the consumer demand for those professions that were becoming more prestigious by offering education for future economists, lawyers, bankers, psychologists, and managers. State universities sought to capitalize on this trend, and, in addition to training professionals for specific industries (e.g., light industry, agriculture, and education), quickly opened new programs offering degrees in the more desirable majors (Filippov, 2005).

Kanikov and Trun’kina (2005) posited that, in Russia, the choice of profession, and subsequently the choice of college major, is directly influenced by the social prestige associated with a profession. They explained that professional prestige is a function of three factors: the content and creative potential of the profession, the social and stratification possibilities of the profession (e.g., level of earnings), and beliefs about the future of the profession. Kanikov and Trun’kina surveyed high school seniors, who reported that the primary reasons to enroll in a university program were to upgrade social status, build a successful career, and obtain a high-paying job in the future. Moreover, Korotkov’s (2006) findings with regard to high school students in Moscow revealed that one third of those surveyed reported that the most important reason for getting a university degree was the potential for increased earnings. Kanikov and Trun’kina (2006) stressed another important factor that often determines the choice of academic major: the individual’s financial situation. Those majors perceived to be prestigious require significant financial investment, whereas traditional ones are either relatively inexpensive or free.

Arapov (2006) posited a link between the increasing stratification of Russian society and the importance that the country’s younger generation assigns to individual economic success. Approximately 56% of high school seniors rated economic success as the most important factor, twice as many as those who cited family values as the primary factor (Independent Institute of Social Policy, 2003). The acute interest in earning power and social status may be explained by

the fact that the younger generation of Russians, referred to as the *Market Generation*, was brought up during the country's economic transition and thus places higher priority on material considerations than any previous generation (Mkrtchian, 2006).

Baskakova (2004) indicated that the current educational boom in Russia reflects a marked increase in the number of women pursuing higher education, which nearly doubles that of men. Although most women believe there to be little difference between men and women in regard to the opportunity to obtain a degree, more than half recognize there is inequality in terms of wages and salaries on graduation (Baskakova, 2004). Razumnikova (2005) likewise argued that despite the declared equal opportunities for men and women in Russia, gender stereotypes play an important role in distinguishing between majors that are traditionally female and those that are traditionally male. In a study of 200 freshmen, Razumnikova found that some professions—military, construction work, agriculture, politics, economics, and information technology—are perceived as masculine, whereas the one profession seen as clearly feminine was home economics.

According to Berulava (2005), a significant proportion of students who are enrolled in traditional majors no longer viewed as prestigious assume that they will not get a job related to their major area of study after graduation. Considering this finding, along with a fundamental shift in the real cost of attending college in Russia, we sought to understand the professional benefits that students associate with having a university degree in general, and specifically with majoring in apparel. That is, why do they choose the apparel major? What are the primary motivations for their decision? And, do these motivations relate to their professional goals? Based on an interpretation of opinions and insights expressed by students already enrolled in the apparel major, this study sheds light on the diversity of perceptions they have with regard to the link between college major and the potential for professional success.

Methodology

Because no study currently exists that examines the motivations and perceptions of female students enrolled in apparel programs within Russia, a qualitative approach to data collection and interpretation formed the methodological basis of this study. Data were collected at two universities: the St. Petersburg State University of Technology and Design and the St. Petersburg State Academy of Service and Economy. Both are leading Russian universities that offer longstanding 5-year programs for students interested in careers in the apparel industry. In-depth interviews and a demographic questionnaire were used to collect the data. Institutional review board (IRB) approval was received prior to the data collection process.

In-class announcements were used to solicit research participants. A total of 25 women from the two universities volunteered to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted one-on-one in Russian and audiotaped with the permission of the respondents. To ensure a systematic approach to the data collection process, the interviewer followed an outline containing 15 open-ended questions. Every question was followed by a series of probes. Each interview began by asking the participant to reflect on when she decided to pursue the apparel major. Participants were encouraged to talk about any issues related to this decision, including parental responses to it.

Participants were also invited to discuss their views on the Russian apparel industry in general, and specifically in regard to employment opportunities relative to their own career aspirations.

After the interview, each participant completed a brief questionnaire, also in Russian, that was used to collect basic demographic information. The average duration of data collection with each participant was one hour. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 25 years. As such, the sample consisted primarily of members of the aforementioned Market Generation—that is, they were brought up during the country's transition to a market economy and therefore experienced very little of life during Soviet times (Mkrtchian, 2006). All of the participants were Russian citizens with the exception of one, who was from a former Soviet Union republic. All but one were pursuing their first undergraduate degree. Of the 25 participants, only 2 were paying tuition.⁴

The interviews were transcribed with the simultaneous development of notations by one of the authors, a native Russian speaker, who then translated all data into English. For reliability purposes and to ensure cultural equivalence, a second native Russian speaker was then asked to review the translations. In keeping with the tenets of interpretive analysis (Nelson, LaBat, & Williams, 2002; Spiggle, 1994; Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1990), narratives were developed from the transcriptions and then interpreted for significant themes that could be used to describe participants' motivations, perceptions, and expectations related to their chosen major and professional goals. Both authors worked separately to analyze the narratives and then together to merge them into a consistent whole.

Interpretation

A phenomenological interpretation (van Manen, 1990) of the responses led to the development of three overarching topical areas connecting similar issues that surfaced across the student narratives: deciding on the major, professional goals, and thoughts about the industry. Within each of these areas, several themes emerged that help to elucidate commonalities and differences among participants' responses. The first topical area, *deciding on the major*, summarizes participants' motivations and the rationale behind the decision to enroll in the apparel major. *Professional goals*, the second topical area, describes participants' career expectations in light of their country's transitioning economy. The last topical area, *thoughts on the industry*, addresses participants' views about the present and future Russian apparel industry.

Deciding on the Major

Participants' motivations for pursuing a 5-year degree in the apparel major could be divided into two types. For one group of students, the choice of major meant being able to do something they enjoyed, hence the first theme of *enjoyment*. In contrast, other participants indicated little actual interest in the major itself and instead chose the major simply out of the desire to earn a college degree, comprising the second theme, *availability*. Without exception, however, and as described by the third theme, *practical benefits*, all of the participants agreed that the knowledge acquired in the major was of a practical nature and would therefore serve as a cushion of protection in the event that the job market proved unstable for women in the future.

⁴ One student was not a Russian citizen but was from a former Soviet Union republic, and the other was pursuing a second undergraduate degree.

Enjoyment. When asked to reflect on what led them to the apparel major, an overwhelming number of participants indicated that they wanted to study something they enjoy doing. For some, this enjoyment stemmed from a young age, particularly the point at which they learned to manipulate fabrics and construct garments.

I made outfits for my dolls, mostly for Barbie. I used to make them without a sewing machine, stitching everything by hand, when I was little. But I really enjoyed it. (Olga)⁵

I love crafts. I love sewing and bead work. That's why I decided to choose this major. (Lyuda)

I loved doing crafts, any hands-on projects: sewing, embroidery. I made lots of clothing for my dolls. (Tonya)

The importance of having skills and interest in the subject prior to starting college is prevalent in the participants' narratives. All participants but one reported that they had at least some experience making their own clothing before starting in the major. For these participants, the choice of the major seemed to be so natural that it was somewhat difficult for them to provide a rationale for the decision. Indeed, the following statement was quite common across the narratives: "I like it! Just because I like it. I don't know how to explain it. I guess it's just me" (Mary).

Availability. Some participants described their decision to enroll in the apparel major as being somewhat arbitrary in nature. These participants focused more on the degree than on the major, explaining that the major area of study mattered less than the degree in providing career opportunities: "I just have to get a 5-year degree; [the] major does not matter" (Katya). Interestingly, those who had a pronounced passion for the subject matter commented on the motivations of their classmates who did not. For example, as Oksana pointed out, "[They] did not really choose this major. They just wanted to go to college, just to get a university degree." It is important to note that participants were enrolled in a major that does not require tuition, and therefore some may have been pursuing the major not just to get a degree but also to do so without having to pay for it (Kanikov & Trun'kina, 2005).

The pragmatism exhibited by some of the participants supports the reported relationship between higher education and the labor market in Russia, wherein a university degree has become the basic requirement for most jobs (Arapov, 2006; Korotkov, 2006). Indeed, some of the students saw this as the reality of the country's current economy:

There's a trend now that one must have a university education. (Nataly)

Generally, it's more difficult to get a job with an associate degree. But when you have a university degree, then it becomes much easier. And you don't even have to have a job related to your major. (Sonya)

⁵ For the purposes of confidentiality, all participants are referred to by pseudonyms.

Because now you can't do much without a university degree. I'd like to have a nice job, but in order to have it, you need the degree. (Lyuda)

These participants either indicated that they did not plan to look for a job that uses the knowledge acquired through an apparel degree, or expressed concern about whether they would be able to get a job in the same area as their major. They indicated that pursuing a second undergraduate degree was something they were contemplating for the future.⁶

I may get another degree later. I'm currently working on my English. Maybe my second degree will be in foreign languages. At any rate, I need a 5-year degree and my diploma first. It will be the foundation. I'm not going to transfer right now. I'm going to graduate with this major. (Sasha)

I was thinking of doing economics or law. But first I want to finish this program and get the degree, and then, later, I might think about getting another degree. (Oksana)

Interestingly, even students who were determined to work in the apparel industry after graduation thought that they would benefit from getting a second undergraduate degree. Participants who expressed entrepreneurial interests also thought that a second degree, specifically in economics, would prove beneficial to them at some point.

In order to start my own business, I have to have several degrees, because being just a technical designer is not enough. I also have to have an education either in law or in economics. (Lisa)

Actually, in the future—ideally—I would like to get a [undergraduate] degree in economics because I believe I'll need it to run my own business. (Tanya)

These participants expressed the opinion that to be successful, they must know the business side of the apparel production process. This goal of acquiring a second degree, specifically in economics, reflects how strongly apparel programs in Russia are focused on developing production management rather than general business skills. Due to curriculum constraints, students enrolled in apparel programs are presently not permitted to take courses outside of the major, including business courses like accounting or marketing.

Practical Benefits. Even though participants commented on several positive changes in the Russian apparel industry, they expressed concern that as consumers, they have difficulty finding fashionable, well-fitting, and reasonably priced apparel. Such experiences were partly why participants chose the major. They wanted to be able to make their own clothing, clothing that would allow them to look good and be fashionable. Some participants mentioned that they avoided buying clothing in stores because they wanted to make it themselves.

⁶ In Russia, it is very difficult to transfer from one major to another, even within the same university, because each program has its own enrollment requirements and entrance exams.

What I really wanted was to be able to make my own clothing. And I wanted to be able to make clothing because you can't simply go and buy something nice. But with this major, you know, you can make anything you want. (Nata)

I wanted to learn how to sew well and to make pretty clothes. First of all, I wanted to sew for myself. I wanted to wear styles I wanted to wear, and that the clothing would be as I wanted it to be. (Olga)

I realized that it was almost impossible to find clothing that would fit me properly. That's why I wanted to make my own outfits. (Ekaterina)

One justification for selecting the apparel major stems from Russia's recent economic and social instability: the idea that the knowledge gained in the major is of a practical nature. That is, all of the participants thought that this major would be very handy in the future because they could make clothing for themselves and for others. Their skills would guarantee them an income even if they failed to find a job after graduation, and would support them through any future upheavals caused by the country's transition economy.

With this major, you can always make some money on the side. After all, I can always make clothing for myself and for my family, too. (Tanya)

This is the major you can always have a side job with and get some pocket money, if it gets that bad. (Lisa)

According to the participants, parents can also see the benefits and have a similar view of the economic usefulness of the major.

My mom always says, "Even if you can't find a job for one reason or another, you will always be able to make a living with this profession because you can do tailoring work at home. You'll never starve with this profession." And you never know what might happen in the future. (Vlada)

My dad says that with this profession, I will always be able to make money for bread. If I know how to make clothing, then I can make or alter things for myself, and I don't need to buy things. Also, I can make clothing for my family. And I can make money by taking orders from others, too. (Tonya)

Even those students who did not intend to have a career in apparel did not express any regret for having to invest 5 years to get a degree in this major. As Olga explained, one of the big reasons for being in the major was its perceived usefulness: "This major, at least it's useful. If I study here and don't get a job, at least it's going to be useful. Not just a waste of time. I mean that I can make my own clothing." Even those who planned to get a second undergraduate degree and pursue another career noted that they would use the knowledge gained in the major, if only as a hobby: "Even if I end up working in another field, I won't give up sewing. I'll make clothing for myself, for my friends, for my family. I'll be sewing anyway" (Nataly). Clearly, the participants consider the apparel major to be a good choice, stating that through the major, they are acquiring

useful skills (such as patternmaking and tailoring) and earning a university degree, a combination that could substantially expand their job opportunities.

Professional Goals

In talking with participants about what led them to decide on the apparel major, it became clear that frequently the choice was directly tied to what they envisioned doing as a career, and, therefore, the idea of professional goals surfaced as important to understanding the participants' decision to enroll in the major. The first theme in this topical area, *earning what I want or doing what I love*, highlights work values deemed important by participants. Participants distinguished between the short-term, immediate postgraduation goal of finding a job and their long-term, overall career aspirations. The second theme, *postgraduation goals*, describes participant expectations related to the job opportunities right after graduation, whereas the third, *long-term career goals*, describes their ultimate career goals.

Earning What I Want or Doing What I Love. During the interviews, the extent to which students were aware of the challenges faced by Russian apparel companies today became fairly obvious. Participants worried about the fact that having a college degree in apparel does not guarantee a long-term career in the industry, nor does it ensure decent pay, particularly in the beginning stages of their careers. In fact, according to the participants' comments, low earning potential is most often cited as the primary drawback of going into the apparel profession. Given these circumstances, the question of why most of them still plan to pursue a career in the industry was critical. An interesting distinction between participants surfaced with respect to their expectations, much like with their motivations, placing each participant into one of two groups. In one group were those who placed very little emphasis on what they hoped to do for a living, but rather on what they hoped to earn. In the other group, the emphasis was on doing something they enjoyed doing. The former consisted of those participants who did not see their apparel degree as important to their future professional lives. They expressed little excitement when discussing the nature of their anticipated careers. Instead, they emphasized the importance of salary, status, and position.

Good salary. I don't want to be in an entry-level position. I'd like to be a manager. After working as a shop assistant, I realized what a humiliating job it is. (Vera)

I guess to get the status. Yes, I guess so. To accomplish something. To make a career, as they say. (Tonya)

It bears noting that the declining prestige associated with the apparel major has paralleled that of the Russian apparel industry. As a consequence, it is not one of the most highly sought after majors. Because the more desirable majors tend to require tuition, the lack of enthusiasm displayed by some may stem in part from the fact that they were restricted in their choice of major by financial considerations.

In contrast were those participants who expressed a desire to be passionate about their job:

It's very important to me that I enjoy my job. I want to love my job. I like seeing people who are excited about what they are doing. It's great when you can do what you love and get paid for that. (Elena)

Although they saw being able to support themselves and the need for financial independence as important, they emphasized that it was critical to love their job and be excited about going to work every morning. The paycheck, although important, clearly came in second.

To have a job I like. I want to get up in the morning thinking, "Today, I'm going to do this and that." And I want to want to go to work [every day]. Of course, I want to be paid reasonably for my work. That's important, too. (Olga)

First of all, it's important for me to enjoy my job. Second, I should be able to make a living out of it. Third, self-realization. I don't want to drag myself to work every day, thinking, "Oh, my God! I have to go to work again!" I want to love my job. This is important to me. (Vlada)

Postgraduation Goals. Naturally, only those participants who planned on having a career related to the major envisioned themselves working in the apparel industry, having sketched out possible career scenarios. Comprising roughly three fourths of the sample, these participants were prepared to accept almost any kind of postgraduation job offer that would allow them to use their apparel knowledge. They reported that starting at a low level and for a minimal salary was not necessarily an issue, provided that in exchange, they acquired the experience and skills needed to move up.

I'll try to find a job related to this degree, even if the salary is minimal—just to get some experience. (Tonya)

Maybe just being an assistant designer. I don't mind doing that for a couple years in order to get experience and then move on somewhere else. (Nataly)

For some, starting out in the trenches was important, because it was an opportunity to learn as much as possible about the various facets of the apparel business hands-on: "I wouldn't mind starting from the lowest entry position available. I want to know everything: the production side, the financial side—everything" (Ekaterina). But when asked to be less practical and describe their ideal job on graduation, participants remained fairly conservative in their responses. It is unlikely that this was due to lack of confidence in their own abilities; rather, it reflected a lack of confidence in the stability of the industry and the country's overall economic situation. As Sveta explained, "I haven't thought about it yet because everything might change in 2 years. In our country, it is better not to do any long-term planning."

An overwhelming number of those participants determined to find a job in apparel exhibited a boutique (as opposed to mass production) mentality regarding where they wanted to work after graduation. When asked to explain why, these participants pointed out that they would rather not work in the large, formerly state-run operations, but instead preferred jobs at small, privately owned establishments. The perceived advantages of working within this type of environment

stemmed from a general desire for greater flexibility and creativity, and the ability to work one-on-one with customers.

I wouldn't like to deal with mass production, even though this is what they are preparing us for. I would like to work at a company where they make custom-made clothing, or at least limited editions. I think this type of job will be more creative. (Olga)

I would like to be a technical designer. I would probably like to work for a private company with a medium-size production. I don't like big factories like Bolshevichka [one of the largest apparel producers since Soviet times]. I think the styles they produce are not interesting. All styles are similar. I'd rather work with individual customers. (Nata)

It is clear that respondents perceived the benefits provided by small and medium-sized companies to be more attractive than those of large companies, with the former perceived as being more competitive, flexible, and receptive to changes in the market and fashion trends. Moreover, as Masha and Lina explained, the future belongs to these smaller enterprises because they are able to adapt to the country's changing economic reality.

The [large] factories are closing down right now. I think that it's the small companies that are emerging and developing. Big companies are not developing. (Masha)

The big companies are shutting down. There are more and more small private companies. (Lina)

The participants' general opinion of large, formerly state-run apparel companies was quite negative. These enterprises are viewed as slow to change due to their more rigid corporate structure, and therefore unable to produce good-quality, fashionable apparel or change quickly enough to meet the demands of the market. As the following responses illustrate, the participants think that such companies will soon become extinct.

I think finally those big apparel factories will disintegrate into small-size companies. And the latter will be more flexible and able to adapt better. And they will produce nice, higher-quality apparel. Maybe not in large quantities, but the quality will be better. (Tonya)

We used to have huge factories that produced the same-looking clothing in large quantities. These companies are not able to survive now. They are from the past, and we don't need them. No one wants to wear uniform-like clothing. (Sasha)

Long-Term Goals. When asked to envision what their potential career trajectory might look like, nearly all who aspired to an apparel-related career expressed a desire to eventually own their own business. Considering that this is a country where the opportunity for private enterprise has been around for only about 15 years, it is interesting to note how popular entrepreneurship has become. As Dasha pointed out, "I'd like to have my own business. Of course, now everyone

wants that.” Entrepreneurial ambitions ranged from owning a small dress-making shop to running an entire couture house.

I want to have my own clothing line, or at least my own shop. (Ekaterina)

I’m thinking about starting my own business, maybe a dress-making shop. I work at one now, and most likely I’ll become a partner there. And then, in the future, I’m planning to divide it into two companies. (Mary)

I would like to have my own business [laughs]. I have ambitious plans to open my own fashion house. (Oksana)

The students provided a variety of reasons for favoring self-employment, including increased opportunity for financial reward as well as increased potential for self-actualization and self-expression as designers. The primary reason, however, was the perception that they would be able to do things their own way.

Of course, in an ideal world, I would like to have my own company because then you can have everything the way you want it to be. I would like to have a small-size firm for limited customers that produces interesting styles. And it would be high-quality apparel; this is the most important. (Olga)

Only one participant did not express a desire to own a business at some point in her career: “I’m not really interested in it. I would rather work for somebody. I don’t really like managing and organizing things. I like to organize my own work, and not be responsible for someone else or for the whole company” (Vlada).

Thoughts on the Industry

The participants were acutely aware of the challenges faced by business in general within the country’s transitioning economy and the impact these challenges have had on apparel companies in particular. Participants were encouraged to share their vision of the future of this industry and their thoughts on the implications that this future may have for the job market. The first theme, *crisis and competition*, summarizes their opinions related to the country’s apparel industry, whereas the second, *implications for the job market*, describes how participants relate the state of the industry to their professional futures.

Crisis and Competition. Having lived with the challenges of a transition economy, all of the participants were keen to point out the transient nature of enterprise within their country. The participants, however, held varying opinions as to how the apparel industry was going to survive. Some of them were optimistic, positing that it is in the process of gradual growth and development. As a few of them explained, the industry is currently going through what they consider to be a period of revival since the crisis of the 1990s.

There are positive changes. I think that the industry is not at the highest level now, but it's reviving gradually and slowly. It's not a very fast process, of course, but, gradually, step by step, it's definitely rising. (Masha)

It's started developing. I mean, it's existed before. Then the crisis hit, and now it's getting out of the crisis situation. New companies are opening, new shops and stores. (Lyuda)

I think that the whole situation is much better now than, let's say, 5 years ago. I think we are moving in the right direction. (Ekaterina)

These participants pointed to industry efforts to upgrade outdated machinery and technology (most of which was Soviet-era equipment), and noted that existing apparel companies are increasingly producing more interesting and up-to-date styles for the Russian marketplace. Local apparel businesses have also begun using marketing to their advantage by promoting brand recognition among Russian consumers.

It's developing slowly. For example, Zarina and Oggy are the new apparel companies that have their own stores. You can see their ads. They produce nice, high-quality clothing, and the prices are reasonable. (Oksana)

It's at the development stage right now. It's getting back on its feet. . . . For example, Zarina is quite a famous brand. Everybody knows it because they make nice clothing. (Lada)

Others expressed a much more negative perception of the industry, citing factory closings, outdated machinery, and inadequate management as the heart of the problem. As Dasha lamented, “[Sigh] I believe that the Russian apparel industry is almost dead.” Participants who espoused a more pessimistic view perceived the current efforts toward revival to be too weak to alter the industry's continued decline.

It's in a deep crisis. In St. Petersburg, there are only a small number of major companies left. . . . Very low salaries. Companies don't have resources to develop new lines and products. (Sonya)

It's in a decline, I think. Even though new small companies are getting into the business, they can't compensate for the overall decline. (Lisa)

When asked to discuss the reasons behind the industry crisis, the participants blamed it on the residual influence of the Soviet-era business model, wherein apparel producers were simply fulfilling government orders and did not worry about consumer demand.

During Communism, the apparel industry produced standard clothing. Everyone was wearing the same styles. You could hardly buy any fabrics or anything like that. I guess this affected people's mentality a lot—they did not have to create anything. All clothing was standard and typical. (Oksana)

Although the participants, as members of the Market Generation, did not necessarily experience Soviet reality, a definite socialist orientation surfaced throughout their responses. That is, even though they felt the state was at fault for the lack of style and choice provided by the apparel industry of the past, they also felt that the state should take care of the problems faced by the apparel industry of the present. As the following responses illustrate, some participants think that the industry's problems could be resolved if only the government would make investments, provide subsidies, and ensure stricter import regulations.

People with power are absolutely indifferent to what is happening in the apparel industry. I think they should finance the industry, so it would get more investments and new technology and machinery. Then it will be much easier. Because right now the government doesn't care much about it. (Masha)

The government needs to be interested in bringing the industry up to a higher level. Maybe cut down imports somewhat, which would give a chance to the Russian apparel manufacturers and support them. It's a question of the state's economic policy. (Elena)

Only one participant embraced a more entrepreneurial outlook on the situation, pointing to the industry itself as the answer: "I think a lot depends on its people. Maybe it's true that taxes should be reduced. Maybe something else needs to be done. But I don't think that [its survival] depends on any external factors" (Nadezhda).

The participants appeared to be angered by one of the more recent changes in the industry: the use of local apparel factories by European companies to outsource relatively inexpensive Russian labor. This trend has become increasingly common, and although they will not earn a college degree to become sewing machine operators themselves, it makes it no less upsetting for these students, who saw no benefit to this form of economic cooperation and expressed anger about the exploitation of their country's workforce as a source of cheap labor within the global market.

What I don't like at all, is that they [foreign companies] acquire our large apparel companies to simply make money by using our workers. . . . They acquire everything, and it turns out that we are simply cheap labor for them. (Nadezhda)

They get orders from abroad. Our people are simply cheap labor. At many factories, a sewing machine operator is a very low-paid job. I think that's bad. (Nataly)

Other participants pointed out that the inability of the Russian consumer to purchase more expensive Russian-made clothing has forced them to settle for garments of lesser cost and quality imported from China. They perceive that this competition only adds to the industry's problems, because Russian producers cannot compete at this stage.

It depends on the overall purchasing power of the people in our country. When one goes shopping for clothing and has limited financial resources, then naturally he'll be looking for cheaper products. It will be cheaper because of lower quality. Even though we have

Russian apparel manufacturers who produce nice, quality clothing, such clothing is priced higher. (Kseniya)

Implications for the Job Market. When asked what these problems mean for themselves as future job seekers, roughly half of the participants had a positive outlook. This response was particularly common among those, like Tanya and Olga, who were already working part-time in the industry.

I don't think that it will be hard [to get a job after graduation]. Real professionals will always be in demand. (Tanya)

[C]ompanies are interested in hiring recent graduates—fashion designers and technical designers. I don't think there would be any problem with that [finding a job]. And with respect to mass production, large-size companies usually hire people with some working experience. You have to demonstrate your potential. You have to be competitive in order to get a job. (Olga)

Participants exhibiting a positive outlook seemed to be flexible in that they were prepared to accept any job offer to start a career in the industry.

I believe that I can easily find a job related to apparel. Even if it's not exactly in technical design, but just a job related to apparel, it won't be a problem. (Elena)

You have to try really hard to find something. But if a person wants to, he [*sic*] can find a job in any circumstances. Well, it might be not exactly in your specialization, not a technical designer. Maybe you have to deal more with production management, or do something else. But if you really want to, then I believe you definitely can find a job. (Nadezhda)

Other students were less optimistic about future job prospects. In contrast to their classmates, these participants were notably less flexible with respect to the type of job they would be willing to accept after graduation and placed greater emphasis on specific criteria such as pay, schedule, and location.

I think that it's hard to find a job with a good paycheck and nice schedule—a job you would be satisfied with. (Oksana)

There are no jobs here [in Russia]. I know so many girls who graduated from this program and now are killing themselves for money you can't live on. (Dasha)

Others expected that their job search efforts will be curtailed by the same conundrum faced by graduates in any country: If companies will hire only people with experience, then how does one gain experience?

It's quite hard because we don't have working experience, and they [employers] want to hire people with working experience, which we simply don't have. From this perspective, it will be a serious problem to find a job when I graduate. (Nataly)

Overall, the situation is quite bad. . . . Nowadays, companies are only hiring people that have some working experience. (Mary)

Regardless of their perceptions as to the difficulty of securing an apparel-related job, a common concern among the participants was that professionals working in this industry—including managers—were not compensated adequately. Indeed, faced with the prospect of making a small salary, some even expressed disappointment about the possibility of having to get a job in another field simply to support themselves financially.

As far as I know, nowadays, people who work as [apparel] production managers have low salaries. And I'm discouraged by that. (Vera)

I like my major, but during my last internship I worked at a company where the technical designer had so many tasks, and only made 6,000 rubles [about \$215 a month], at most. This discourages me—the low pay. And now I start thinking that I might do something else. (Sonya)

Unfortunately, these participants anticipate a time in their lives when they will need to make a choice—a choice that apparel graduates even in countries with long-standing market economies often face—between doing something they love and earning the wage that they need.

Discussion and Implications

The goal of this study was to examine the motivations and expectations of female students currently enrolled in Russian apparel programs. Motivations for selecting the major, career expectations and employment opportunities, as well as opinions about the state of the apparel industry were explored through in-depth interviews with 25 students attending two large state universities in St. Petersburg, Russia. A popular topic of research and discussion within the field of education in the United States, several studies have shown how selection of college major is a complex process influenced by a wide variety of factors (Cebula & Lopes, 1982; Malgwi, Howe, & Burnaby, 2005). In Russia, however, this process is further complicated by the political, economic, and social changes that the country has undergone since the late 1980s. The present study sheds light on some of the ways that these changes affect students' decision-making and the implications they have for students' professional goals and expectations.

In the interpretation of interview narratives presented here, a noticeable difference was found among students regarding their motivations for selecting apparel as a major course of study. The three topical areas used to structure the overall interpretation are not mutually exclusive when viewed in relation to these two groups of participants. One group was composed of students who deliberately chose the apparel major, whereas the other group enrolled in it as a means of earning a college degree. Not surprisingly, participants who felt strongly about their decision to enroll in this major were committed to the idea that they should love what they do, both immediately after

graduation and for the long term. Financial concerns, although important, were not a priority in their decision. This commitment to a profession was tied to their motivations for seeking employment related to apparel and may explain the optimism that surfaced regarding the future of the Russian apparel industry. Those who were determined to work in the industry recognized more employment opportunities than those who prioritized material benefits over job type and who responded that it was unlikely that they would look for a job related to apparel because of a perceived lack of opportunities afforded by the industry.

All of the participants expressed concern that in the country's present economic condition, the apparel profession is behind many others in terms of social prestige. Certain college majors are regarded to be of low status and are therefore less desirable for students due to the perceived profitability of the profession ultimately associated with the major. In the case of apparel, because the industry has not been given priority status within the country's emerging market economy, it has not received enough sizable investments to become modernized and therefore competitive (Mkrtchian, 2006). This study reveals that this reality has, in turn, begun to shape student perceptions of apparel programs within Russian universities. That is, the participants in this study were aware of the situation described by Mkrtchian: that two professionals with the same level of education and qualifications (e.g., a baccalaureate degree in apparel versus a baccalaureate degree in economics) are likely, as a reflection of the prestige associated with the profession, to experience substantial differentiation in terms of earning potential. This finding suggests that the commercialization of education in Russia forces students to choose a major based on their family's financial situation. Ultimately, this trend could serve to increase inequality and stratification among college graduates in the country.

It is important to point out that those participants who anticipated moving into a career in the apparel industry after graduation were aware that they were making a choice between achieving higher status (and greater economic benefits) and working in a job that they loved, yet they chose the latter. This finding is in contrast to Kanikov and Trun'kina's (2005) study indicating that members of Russia's Market Generation make decisions regarding a program of study based mostly on the social prestige of the profession that is associated with that program. Clearly, some students choose majors such as apparel out of the desire to do something they enjoy despite the lack of social prestige associated with the profession. Currently, students enrolled in the desirable or prestigious majors (such as economics) are often required to pay for their own tuition, whereas, in contrast, students enrolled in less prestigious majors (such as apparel) continue to receive free tuition. Even though some of the participants in this study entered the apparel major to get a tuition-free education, positive feelings about the choice were based on the fact that they really enjoyed the subject matter and felt that the skills they were acquiring could serve them in a practical sense later in life.

An important finding that surfaced within the interpretation was the focus on small business as well as entrepreneurship with regard to participants' professional goals. Nearly all of the students who intended to look for a job in the apparel industry reported that they would prefer to work for a small or mid-sized privately owned company. Although the typical explanation for this plan was that such companies afforded greater flexibility and creativity, it is likely that they were also considering earning potential, which is usually higher in private enterprises compared with those that are state-run (Mkrtchian, 2006). Most of the participants who envisioned a career in apparel

had plans to eventually own their own business. An awareness of their country's social and economic instabilities may foster the notion that they would have a greater degree of control over their professional lives if they were managing things themselves as opposed to being vulnerable to layoffs if employed by someone else. Moreover, they clearly viewed the skills that they were learning as practical in the event that times turned bad again. Further research into the psychosocial reasons behind the increasing popularity of owning one's own apparel business within Russia is needed, because it would shed light on the relationship between higher education and career development for women in this burgeoning market economy. Such research may also be applicable in the development of curricula that address students' entrepreneurial interests.

Results of this study point to the need for the consideration of teaching business-related skills within existing apparel curricula in Russia. Creating connections between apparel and business programs would provide a degree of interdisciplinarity that is currently absent within apparel curricula, and, at the same time, would meet a need expressed by the apparel students in this study. Such connections may prove to be too difficult to make given the tuition-based nature of Russia's business programs; however, increased integration of internship opportunities within small business settings would provide a great deal of benefit, given the professional aspirations revealed by the participants. Although apparel programs have been and continue to be designed and determined by the state, educational reforms currently taking place could lead to a time when Russian apparel programs and curricula are the result of input from a variety of stakeholders, including students, faculty, administrators, and industry leaders. Further exploration of student perceptions and expectations may serve to bring this to fruition sooner rather than later.

Although the students in this study exhibited a noticeable amount of ambiguity and anxiety as to the long-term health of both the apparel industry and the country's overall economy, most expressed a desire to actively participate in Russia's future economy by working for cutting-edge apparel companies and, in many cases, becoming entrepreneurs themselves. That is, they envisioned themselves working within what they viewed to be the future of the Russian apparel industry—smaller, privately owned business, perhaps even their own at some point, as opposed to the larger, mass-production-based, state-run operations so emblematic of the Soviet era. Further research could shed light on how graduates of Russia's apparel programs are a vital part of the country's apparel industry. That is, those graduates who choose to pursue a career in the apparel industry, in spite of the low prestige and earning potential associated with it, could be seen as advocates for the industry and an important means of ensuring its future success. Graduates who find success in the apparel industry could also be seen as role models for currently enrolled students and partners in the recruitment of new students. Bridging the gap between industry and higher education, these graduates may, in turn, help to increase enthusiasm about and support for the professional opportunities provided by Russian apparel programs.

The availability and quality of a country's higher education help to ensure that its human capital will adequately meet the needs of its economy. In a situation wherein university education moves from being provided by the state to becoming a commodity, as is the case in Russia, the economic and social payoffs of a university degree become critically important considerations. This is particularly true with respect to those professions, such as apparel, that are traditionally associated with women (Razumnikova, 2005). Broadly speaking, the results of this investigation establish the significance of apparel programs for facilitating women's career aspirations and

have implications for understanding the educational and employment goals of women from an international perspective. Given the fact that the apparel industry of today is inherently global in nature, investigation into the role of education relative to the professional success of Russian women will ultimately have international implications for understanding the role of women in general within this industry. More research needs to be done to determine the extent to which these young Russian women will succeed within the context of their country's transition to a market economy and, conversely, the degree to which the dynamic nature of Russia's economic context will impact their success.

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