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Better to Be Alone Than Settle for Just Any Man

By Viktoria Dyomkina

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"He is so unreliable and always cheats on me!"

Any Russian woman may say this, but when asked if she would like to divorce or leave him, she usually lowers her eyes and with a strained look says: "He is not that bad. After all, he has some good qualities."

What is it that makes a Russian woman think that she is better off in a relationship than being alone, even if her husband is unfaithful or otherwise abusive?

One explanation is that there is a craving among most Russian women to belong to a group, and the flip side of this is a fear of not belonging to any.

Watch a Russian woman at work. She rarely goes to lunch alone, always with a friend or a group of friends — or at the very least a cell phone pressed to her ear. It is not that one does

not like eating in silence every now and then. It is because she seems to be afraid of being seen alone.

If a women attends a friend's party without a significant other, she is sure to arouse some whispers such as "Yes, she is still alone." Likewise, answering "No" to the question "Do you have a husband or boyfriend?" is likely to be accompanied by a suspicion that there is something wrong with you.

In the U.S., many Americans believe in the myth that money will make them happy. In Russia, many women believe in the myth that a man will make them happy.

My mom would often make a sad face and say to me: "Why have you quarreled with your boyfriend again? If you don't get your act together, young lady, you will suffer forever alone!"

My mother is a progressive, intelligent woman, but having lived all her life in Russia she has really internalized this belief that you need someone else to make you happy.

My friend often complains to me about how worthless she is because she is not married at 28. I always try to explain to her that it is not something from outside but the feelings from within that make us feel joyful or gloomy, worthless or not.

Strong, healthy, fulfilling and lasting relationships are never easy to build. Although I have never done a scientific study on the topic, it seems that relationships are much more difficult to build and maintain in Russia than in the West.

In Russia, it is still considered better to have a man and relationship at all costs — and all too often, those costs are exorbitantly high for women. In these cases, it is clearly better to be alone.

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