



Dreaming of a Mail-Order Husband: Russian-American Internet Romance

Ericka Johnson

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In the American media, Russian mail-order brides are often portrayed either as docile victims or as gold diggers in search of money and green cards. Rarely are they allowed to speak for themselves. Until now. In *Dreaming of a Mail-Order Husband*, six Russian women who are in search of or have already found U.S. husbands via listings on the Internet tell their stories. Ericka Johnson, an American researcher of gender and technology, interviewed these women and others. The women, in their twenties and thirties, describe how they placed listings on the Internet and what they think about their contacts with Western men. They discuss their expectations about marriage in the United States and their reasons for wishing to emigrate. Their differing backgrounds, economic situations, and educational levels belie homogeneous characterizations of Russian mail-order brides.

Each chapter presents one woman's story and then links it to a discussion of gender roles, the mail-order bride industry, and the severe economic and social constraints of life in Russia. The transitional economy has often left people, after a month's work, either unpaid or paid unexpectedly with a supply of sunflower oil or toilet paper. Women over twenty-three are considered virtually unmarriageable in Russian society. Russia has a large population of women who are single, divorced, or widowed, who would like to be married yet feel that they have no chance finding a Russian husband. Grim realities such as these motivate women to seek better lives abroad. For many of those seeking a mail-order husband, children or parents play significant roles in the search for better lives, and they play a role in Johnson's account as well. In addition to her research in the former Soviet Union, Johnson conducted interviews in the United States, and she shares the insights—about dating, marriage, and cross-cultural communication—of a Russian-American married couple who met via the Internet.

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