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Regulation and Negotiation of Queer Subjectivities in post-Soviet Kazakhstan

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Thesis Declaration

I confirm that this thesis, presented to the University of Edinburgh for the degree of

Doctor of Psychotherapy and Counselling, has:

1. been composed entirely by myself

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Abstract

There is a limited amount of academic research within social sciences investigating the experiences of queer people in post-Soviet Central Asian countries. My study aims to address this gap in the literature by focusing on the everyday narratives of queer people in Kazakhstan within a framework of power and agency, primarily using the theories of Michel Foucault and other scholars such as Hannah Arendt and Erving Goffman. In this study, 'queer' is understood as broadly encompassing the whole spectrum of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender identities. By looking at the narratives of queer people within their socio-historical context, this study aims to elucidate two key issues: in Kazakhstan, what regulates queer lives, and how do people negotiate their queer subjectivities? The qualitative study uses a Foucauldian-informed thematic analysis of interviews with eleven people who identify as queer and live in Kazakhstan. The findings reveal that practices of regulation of queer people in Kazakhstan range from legal and medical regulation, surveillance within different everyday contexts, limiting career prospects, and internalised gaze and oppression. Crucially, I argue that despite the manifold regulatory practices, the narratives of queer Kazakhstani participants of this study highlight the artful ability to navigate and negotiate the existing regulatory and power structures to live fulfilling and authentic lives. This study contributes to the scholarship on post-Soviet gender and sexualities by developing a deeper understanding of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender subjectivities in the context of Kazakhstan.

Lay Summary

While Kazakhstan decriminalised consensual same-sex conduct in 1997, the lack of legislative protection along with a climate of fear and societal homophobia characterise the lives of Kazakhstani queer people. Currently, a limited amount of research has investigated experiences of queer people in Kazakhstan, most of which focuses on public health risks. This study addresses a gap in the literature by asking what regulates the lives of queer people in Kazakhstan, and how they negotiate their identity. To answer those questions, I conducted interviews with eleven people who identified as queer and live in Kazakhstan. The analysis reveals the complex interplay of regulations that circulate through different aspects of everyday life, including the family and the workplace. Furthermore, the findings show that despite the regulations, queer Kazakhstani people are able to navigate skillfully, and creatively negotiate the structural and societal constraints to live authentic and fulfilling lives. This research contributes to the scholarship on post-Soviet gender and sexualities, and helps to develop a deeper understanding of queer lives in Kazakhstan.

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Tables, Figures and Images

Chapter One: Introduction

While Kazakhstan was the first of the Central Asian countries to repeal Soviet era anti-sodomy legislation in 1997[1], the lack of legislative protection along with the climate of invisibility, fear and societal homophobia remains characteristic of the lives of queer people in Kazakhstan (Vanner, 2009; Article 19, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2015; ALMA-TQ, 2016). Growing up as a queer person in Kazakhstan, I had first-hand experience of the silence and invisibility surrounding non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people in the region. The silence extends itself into the academic literature domain. While some non-academic publications exist on the lives of queer people in Kazakhstan (Vanner, 2009; Article 19, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2015; Alma-TQ, 2016; Kazakhstan Feminist Initiative, Feminita, and AlmaTQ, 2019), their primary focus is on human rights violations. There is limited academic research into the lives of queer people in today's Kazakhstan (for example, Buelow, 2012; Latypov, Rhodes and Reynolds, 2013), with no academic studies engaging directly with non-heteroseuxal and non-cisgender people's narratives. Indeed, research on postcolonial sexualities has highlighted ethnocentrism in current gender and sexuality scholarship, showing the need for research focusing on theoretical and empirical studies of the lives of queer people in the global South (Murray, 1995; Boellstorff, 2005; Jackson, 2009a, 2009b). This study contributes towards a limited but growing body of work on gender and sexuality in Central Asia (Wilkinson and Kirey, 2010; Buelow, 2012; Latypov, Rhodes and Reynolds, 2013; Boemcken, von, Boboyorov and Bagdasarova, 2018) by exploring the forms that queer subjectivity takes in Kazakhstan.

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[1] Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan followed suit in 1998, while Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have maintained their prohibitions

This project developed out of a confluence of professional interests and personal experiences; a desire to address the research gap on gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan and a personal affinity with the Kazakhstani queer community. Moreover, my counselling work with non-heterosexual and non-cisgender clients has increased my interest in the subject - as a counsellor, I find it essential to engage with the socio-historical background of my clients.

In recent decades, there has been increasing interest in social constructionist theories within the field of counselling and psychotherapy (Gergen and Kaye, 1992; Brown and Augusta-Scott, 2007). As explained by Burr (2003), a social constructionist researcher views human experiences and perceptions not as predetermined or fixed aspects, rather as mediated linguistically, culturally and historically. Consequently, from the constructionist perspective, the client in counselling needs to be acknowledged as situated within a specific socio-historical context rather than viewed as an isolated entity (Tatar and Bekerman, 2002; Bekerman and Tatar, 2005). Furthermore, there has recently been a call for more critical contextualising approaches, inviting scholars to interrogate the basic epistemological assumptions of counsellors (for example, assumptions about reality and culture) and examine the operations of the power both outside and within the counselling dyad (Thomas, 1996; Lolas, 2010; O'Reilly and Lester, 2017).

Influenced by social constructionism, the theories of Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt and Erving Goffman as well as queer theory and the intersectionality framework, I set out in this thesis to look at narratives of queer people in Kazakhstan to understand how they are constrained by, reflect and/or resist wider discourses around gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan.

This research is positioned on the intersection of several multidisciplinary fields: Counselling and Psychotherapy, Central Asian/Eurasian Studies, and Queer/ Gender and Sexuality Studies. As well as contributing to the literature on gender and sexuality in the Central Asian region, I hope it will contribute to promoting the rights of queer people in Kazakhstan in particular.

1.1. Outline of the thesis

Following the introduction, Chapter Two sets out the context for the participants' narratives, offers a review of contemporary research and considers shifting discourses around gender and sexuality in post-Soviet countries and in Kazakhstan in particular. Chapter Three outlines theoretical and epistemological underpinnings central to this research and concludes in formulation of my research questions. Chapter Four focuses on methodology of this research. The most substantial chapter of this thesis - Chapter Five - presents the findings of interviews and engages with the narratives of the participants, concentrating on the core themes emerging out of the narratives. Within it, I integrate international qualitative research on queer lives and consider participants' narratives in dialogue with existing studies. Lastly, Chapter Six brings the story together and presents a conclusion of the work.

1.2. Notes on language

One of the first issues that arose when researching gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan was the question of language and translation. In my case, my research was conducted in a country with two official languages: Kazakh and Russian. In this study, I am both the researcher and translator, and I would like to engage with the issue of language and translation critically. As Santaemilia (2017) points out, the act of translating the language of gender and sexuality "is not a neutral affair, but a political act, with important ideological implications, registering the translator's attitude towards existing conceptualisations of gender/sexual identities, human sexual behaviour(s) and moral norms" (p.12). Let us first evaluate existing research in the region and the language that was adopted by the participants and researchers.

The research by Cai Wilkinson and Anna Kirey (2010) in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan found that non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people used diverse language to describe their gender and sexuality. Among non-heterosexual women, words such as "tema" (slang for "family" or it can literally be translated as "subject", sometimes used in the context of "lyudi v teme", meaning "people who are in the loop"; see Findings for further discussion on the use of "tema"), "takie" ("such people"), "nashi" ("ours"), "nu takie kak ia" ("well, people like me") or comments such as "I just like women" were used. Among non-heterosexual men, Russian terms such as "gei" ("gay"), "goluboi" (slang for "gay", literally "sky blue"), and derogatory "pidor" ("faggot") were used. Furthermore, Wilkinson and Kirey's (2010) research showed that some people preferred not to name themselves but rather allowed their sexual identity to be implied through the use of silences during a conversation. I found limited literature focusing specifically on non-normative gender identifications in the Russian language.

In his article on the role of LGBT voices in Asia/Europe debate Samuel Buelow (2012) found that the acronym “LGBT” is used by the Kazakhstani resource centres and websites. LGBT is largely the same acronym in Russian as it is in English, according to Buelow (2012). L stands for “lesbian”, “lesbi” and “lesbiyanki” (“lesbian”), G for “gei” (“gay") and, according to Buelow (2012), occasionally for “gomoseksual” (“homosexual”), B is uncontested as “bisexualy” (“bisexual”) and T for “transgendernyje lyudi” (“transgender people”) or “transseksualy” (“transsexual”). Moreover, I found that the local initiative Alma-TQ, which aims to support transgender and gender non-conforming people in Kazakhstan, uses terms such as “transgendernyje lyudi” and “transseksualy”, as well as “agendernyje lyudi” (“agender people”), “bigendernyje lyudi” (“bigender people”) and “nebinarnyje lyudi” (“non-binary people”). The terms “cisgendernyj” and “cisgendernaja” (“cisgender”) are used to signify people who are not transgender.

Buelow (2012) writes about the Kazakh language used to describe non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people as written exclusively by heterosexuals and cisgender Kazakhs. According to Buelow (2012), terms like “qyzteke” and “erkekshora” are used for gay and lesbian respectively. “Qyzteke” translates to ‘biol. germofrodit’ (“biological: hermaphrodite”) in the online Kazakh-Russian dictionary Sozdik.kz. As Buelow (2012) speculates, “qyzteke” comes from two words, “qyz” (“girl”) and a young goat used to describe someone who is flighty and unstable. My understanding of “qyzteke” is different from Buelow’s (2012). In this study, I found that Kazakhstani queer people contest the meaning of “qyzteke” and “erkekshora”. For example, Sozdik.kz (2018) translates “erkekshora” to Russian as either “devochka-malchik” (“girl-boy”) or “med. germofrodit” (“medical: hermaphrodite”). As explained by a participant from Almaty, “these words [qyzteke and erkekshora] are more relevant to transgender people. Qyzteke

means looking like a man… I think these words are about gender identity, not about sexuality." (Gulzada, Almaty).

In line with Buelow's (2012) findings, I found that local initiatives in Kazakhstan use the acronym LGBT or part of it. For example, the Kazakhstani organisation Kok.team (*https://www.kok.team/kz)* uses "LGBT", while Kazakhstani feminist initiative Feminita (*http://feminita.org*) uses "LBQ" (Q stands for "queer". I discuss the term queer below). Moreover, I have noticed terminology such as LGBT, lesbian and gay creeping into Kazakh language and used on Kok.team and Feminita's websites.

In his book "LGBT Transnational Identity and the Media", Pullen (2012) argues that LGBT transnational identity emerges through varying forms of media. However, one criticism of using LGBT is that this acronym and its meaning inherently express Anglocentric notions of gender and sexuality (Vicinus, 1992; Ferguson, 1990).

Altman (2001) acknowledges that new sexual identities mean a loss of certain traditional cultural comforts, while at the same time offering possibilities to those who adopt them. Therefore, international activists are given an opportunity to consciously draw on both traditions. Ferguson (1990) is also aware of the positive side of the transnational identity of LGBT in that it may allow for self-determination within local communities. Indeed, Wilkinson and Kirey (2010) found that the acronym LGBT was used strategically by Kyrgyz Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to manage societal stigma and access international support. I believe that the reason Kazakhstani NGOs use LGBT lies in community strengthening and support.

1.2.1. Queer

I predominantly use the term queer in this research. The term represents fluidity and hybridity of gender and sexuality (Baer, 2011). Queer theory attempts to walk away from the notion of essentialisation of gender and sexuality and disrupt the normative relationship between "gendered bodies and sexual desires" (Johnson, 2015, p.90; see Chapter Three for elaboration on queer theory). As pointed out by Jeffrey Weeks (2017), the question of identity keeps returning when using the term, where queer itself becomes "a non-identity identity" (p.133). Therefore, the statement "I am queer" is rich in ambiguity (Weeks, 2017). On the one hand, it is anti-identitarian, while on the other hand, it retains its positioning in the politics of identity. Furthermore, in using queer, I am mindful of the "western romanticism" (Altman, 1996, p.80) in depicting post-Soviet countries as a site of "queer possibilities" (Plummer, 1992, p. 17) and assumed tolerance of different genders and sexual practices "which disguised the reality of persecution, discrimination, and violence, which sometimes occurs in unfamiliar forms" (Altman, 1996, p.80).

No satisfactory translation of queer exists in the Russian language. While queer has been borrowed into Russian as "kvir", its use is limited, and it is still to be integrated into the Russian language. As with LGBT or the word feminism, kvir is inscribed with Western hegemonic claims and as a result, further reinforces the still common belief amongst post-Soviet citizens that different gender and sexual practices are a foreign import.

I choose to use queer not as an identity category but to encompass people who do not conform to normative sexualities and gender binary. The language of gender and sexuality is ever-changing, so whatever term I choose will likely be outdated in no time. As Maria Popova (2019) writes in her "Figuring":

> "We are always trapped by the lexicon of the present in narrating the past, so let it be a shorthand for the complex and confusing ecosystem of emotional and physical relations…" (p.267).

In agreement with Popova, I use queer as shorthand, as I do the terms cisgender and heterosexual (or non-cisgender and non-heterosexual). Whilst I understand there is a risk of inappropriate categorisation, I feel that within certain contexts such naming is politically important, to identify the unnamed or unmarked. Regarding cis terminology, Serano (2014) writes that it allows to "name the unmarked dominant majority [that is, people who are not trans] in order to better articulate the ways in which trans people are marginalized in society".

During interviews with my research participants, I ask them explicitly about their preferred terms of identification and explore their interpretations. I adopt the technique of cultural "dubbing" (Boellstorff, 2005) also used by Francesca Stella (2015) in her research, Lesbian Lives in Society and Post-Soviet Russia. When using cultural dubbing, the researcher is aware and openly acknowledges the limitations and contingency of translation. Like Stella (2015), I try to retain the language used by people in their everyday lives. I also include original Russian and Kazakh words to signal complexity and the subjective nature of the terms of identification, as well as discrepancies that occur through translation. The terms LGBT, lesbian and homosexual are used consistently with the primary sources that I cite.

1.2.2. Kazakhstani

Terminology in relation to ethnicity - nationality labelling - is controversial in Kazakhstan (see Peyrouse, 2007; Kesici, 2011). I use both “Kazakhs” (“Kazakhy”) and “Kazakhstani” (“Kazahstancy”), the former to refer to the Kazakh ethnic group and the latter to all groups (Kazakhs as well as more than 100 other ethnic groups) who live within Kazakhstan's territory and hold citizenship status (Yuval-Davis, Anthias and Campling, 1989).

Chapter Two: Contextualising Gender and Sexuality in Kazakhstan

In this chapter, I aim to contextualise gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan. I map out various discourses and practices surrounding gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan. Dominant discourses on gender and sexuality are deeply intertwined with the existing and historical gender order (Foucault, 1978; Connell, 1987). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the notion of Kazakh identity has been continuously (re)thought, (re)imagined, and (re)defined, which illustrates the social-constructionist nature of nationhood. Mohira Suyarkulova (2016) explains the social-constructed nature of the Central Asian states in her writing on gender and politics of dress in contemporary Kyrgyzstan.

> "…[A]fter the Central Asian republics (somewhat reluctantly) acquired independence following the dissolution of the USSR, the "national form" with its repertoire of symbols and practices inherited from the Soviet past became *the* content of the sovereign statehood of the new states. This does not mean that Central Asian nations and nationalism are somehow more "artificial" than their more established normativised European peers, but that very much like all other nations, Central Asian cultural identities are a result of myth-making, in which history is discursively transformed into nature; in other words, what is socially constructed and contingent appears as natural and eternal" (Suyarkulova, 2016, p.248, original emphasis).

Gender roles in Kazakhstan have also been changing over the course of time. Following Judith Butler (1990, 1995), here I will use the concept of

gender as the ideal that is time and context-bound and to which people are supposed to live up to in order to be intelligible to and accepted by their communities (see Chapter Three). Foreign trade, Islamisation, Russian colonisation, Sovietisation and more recently, Western investment and globalisation, along with Western and Russian media, are just some of the factors determining gender order and influencing attitudes towards non-heterosexual sexualities in Kazakhstan.

I begin by first discussing Soviet regulations of gender and sexuality in Soviet Central Asia, and looking at silencing, medicalisation and criminalisation as regulatory practices applied to gender and sexual dissidence in the Soviet Union. I will continue by discussing existing academic and non-academic research in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. I then consider political context and examine the legal regulation of gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan. After that I turn to the impact of media and the Internet before discussing some instances of visibility of queerness in the public eye. I follow that by discussing the structure and discourses around the family in Kazakhstan and look at how a shame-and-honour system is used as a mechanism of regulating non-heteronormative gender and sexuality expressions in Kazakhstan. Lastly, I explain the role and the impact of religion on the attitudes towards queerness in Kazakhstan.

2.1. Queer in the Soviet Union

Russia had a long history of influence on the territory of today's Kazakhstan. Before the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan was colonised by Russia through a series of political and administrative reforms and military interventions (Abuseitova *et al.*, 2001). Together with mass migration, territorial proximity and the long history of Russian influence, Kazakhstan was seen as the "most Sovietized" Central-Asian culture (Akiner, 1995, p.51). At this point, it is important to point out that most of the literature on queer lives in the Soviet Union with few exceptions (see below, Healey, 2001 on Bacha Bazi) has been written about the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and not specifically about the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. As Popova beautifully put it: "[h]istory is not what happened, but what survives the shipwreck of judgment and chance" (Popova, 2019, p.4). The history of gender and sexuality in the post-Soviet space has even harsher judgment and a slimmer chance of survival. Several mechanisms of regulation and control of gender and sexuality were employed in the Soviet Union, which include but are not limited to silencing, pathologisation, medicalisation and criminalisation. Before I discuss those mechanisms of regulation, I will explore the regulation of gender and sexuality in the Soviet Central Asia.

2.1.1. Regulation of gender and sexuality within Soviet Central Asia

Under Soviet ideology, the eradication of local customs such as child marriage, bride abduction and veiling along with campaigns against patriarchal intuitions in Central Asia associated with "backwardness", became a pre-requisite for social progress (Kamp, 2006; p.33). Concurrently, the new Soviet state engaged in the major reshaping of the Central Asian region between 1924-1938 - a process that is commonly referred to as

"national territorial delimitation" according to Suyarkulova (2016, p.249). Suyarkulova explains that under national territorial delimitation,

> " …the political, administrative, and economic boundaries in the region were recognised following a mainly ethnonationalist logic seeking to grant the formerly oppressed people of the Russian empire self-determination and ease their integration into the Soviet state as equals in status to other Union republics." (Martin, 2001, as cited in Suyarkulova, 2016, p.249).

One of the features of regulating gender and sexuality in Central Asia in the 1920s was an attempt to eradicate "Bacha Bazi". In his travel memoirs, Eugene Schuyler writes that, "In Central Asia Mohammedan prudery prohibits the public dancing of women; but as the desire of being amused and of witnessing a graceful spectacle is the same the world over, here boys and youths specially trained take the place of dancing girls of other countries" (Schuyler, 1966, p.132). Those dancing boys were referred to as Bacha Bazi. Similarly, in his travel memoirs in Turkestan[2], Count Pahlen recounts watching boys who were "barefoot, and dressed like women in long, brightly-coloured silk smocks reaching below their knees and narrow trousers fastened tightly around their ankles, their arms and hands sparkle with rings and bracelets" (Pahlen, 1964, p.170).

Bacha Bazi were involved in cross-generational same-sex practices and were seen by Soviets as "survivors of primitive customs" (Healey, 2001, p.160). The prohibition against Bacha Bazi was instated in Turkmen and

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[2] Turkestan covered territories of present day Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and the Southern parts of Kazakhstan as well as the territory of Uigur Autonomous Region of Sinkiang, China (Referred to as Eastern Turkistan or Chinese Turkestan). Western Turkistan or Russian Turkestan (administratively excluding Southern Kazakhstan) was also used a synonym for Soviet Central Asia (Duarte, 2014).

Uzbek SSR in 1927, which were viewed as “the places where homosexuality was traditionally most prevalent” (Kon, 1995, p.70) along with Azerbaijan and Georgia. While such legislation was not present in Kazakh SSR, the evidence that Bacha Bazi was prevalent in Kazakhstan comes from the writing of the biologist Kol’stov, who in his 1929 correspondence with German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, noted the economic exploitation of *bacha* “in such Republics as Kazakhstan” (cited in Healey, 2001, p.167). In 1934, anti-muzhelozhstvo legislation (legislation prohibiting same-sex male activity) was adopted throughout the Soviet Union (Healey, 2001).

The change of gender and, in particular, women's social status, was reinforced by the declaration of “kalym” (money for the bride), polygamy, underage marriage, and other familial customs seen as illegal and “harmful vestiges of the past” in 1924 (Stasevich, 2011, p.30). Indeed, women in Central Asia were labeled as “surrogate proletariat” (Masell, 1974). Therefore, the Soviet State prioritised changing their role in society, which in turn meant uprooting the existing gender and sexual norms and practices in the region. Traditional Central Asian kinship ideology was gradually weakened and replaced with the endorsement of the nuclear heterosexual family in Soviet society (Ashwin, 2000; Zdravolmyslova and Temkina, 2007). Furthermore, Soviet authorities reinforced the rights of both men and women to choose marriage partners independently of their families’ wishes. Women received rights to divorce, and a mother was allowed to keep her child following divorce as part of the laws on the protection of motherhood and childhood (Wood, 1997). Women could more easily access abortion, which was frequently used as a birth control measure at that time (Healey 2001). While in 1936 abortion was banned and divorce was made less accessible (the abortion ban was lifted in 1955), the state continued to encourage childbirth through generous welfare entitlements and greater access to daycare facilities (Healey 2001). Otherwise, couples would have to pay taxes for not having children (Codex on Family; Cleuziou and Direnberger, 2016).

Regardless of ethnicity, Soviet women were obliged to contribute in the form of a socially productive labour, which was consistent with the “primary loyalty of the Soviet citizen to the collective and the state, rather than to the private sphere of personal relations” (Stella, 2015, p.29). Stella emphasises that the double priority of labour and childbearing is embedded in the gender contract of the “working mother” that was central for women in the Soviet Union. Within the working mother gender contract, women were expected to contribute to Soviet Society by both being in paid employment and through childbearing and domestic labour (Stella, 2015, p.29). While labour was expected from the Soviet woman (Einhorn, 1993), motherhood was seen as the pinnacle of womanhood and the most important contribution to Soviet society (Stella, 2015). Stella (2015) highlights the centrality of, “the nuclear heterosexual family as the funding unit of the Soviet society”, serving the needs of the socialist state, “rather than being championed as a private commitment or source of personal fulfillment (Stella, 2015, pp.28-29; Ashwin, 2000; Zdravolmyslova and Temkina, 2007). Finally, Stella argues that “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1980) was one of the key underlying mechanisms of making non-heterosexual practices invisible and deviant. Compulsory heterosexuality stands for “hegemonic discursive practices endorsing heterosexual romance, marriage and the nuclear family as ‘natural' norm” (Stella, 2015, p.52). I will now discuss other forms of regulation of gender and sexuality in the Soviet Union.

2.1.2. Silencing, medicalisation and criminalisation

Silencing of any discussions surrounding sex and sexuality and making sexuality primarily belong to the private domain were some of the key strategies of regulating queerness in the Soviet Union. Stella observes that, apart from reproduction, in the Soviet Union sexuality was considered to be a

private matter: “references to sex and erotica were considered to be dubious and morally reprehensible” (Stella, 2015, p.35). Moreover, negative attitudes towards any conversation about the sexual body, non-reproductive sex and sexual pleasure was a prominent feature of the Soviet gender order (Kon, 1995; Zdravomyslova, 2001; Stella, 2015). Indeed, as highlighted by Kon (1995), talking about sex in the public domain was legitimate only when the conversation was linked to marriage and reproductive sex. This functioned as a normalisation practice (Foucault, 1978), whereas the new “truth” of sex being a deeply private matter and only appropriate in reference to reproduction, was instilled in the minds of Soviet citizens. While public conversations about sex were inappropriate, any reference to non-heteronormative sexuality or non-cisgender gender expression was completely off limits.

Gender and sexually diverse practices transgressed the Soviet gender order and were stigmatised as deviant and perverted. According to Stella (2015), queerness was regulated differently depending on gender. The introduction of the 1934 anti-sodomy law (Healey, 2001) criminalised only male same-sex sexuality, with up to five years imprisonment. Nevertheless, both male and female same-sex sexualities were seen as a “perverted attraction to persons of the same sex” in medical discourse (Stella, 2015, p.30; also see Healey, 2001; Clech, 2018). Both Healey (2001) and Stella (2015) argue that while male homosexuality was criminalised in the Soviet Union, it was less intertwined with reproductive and family roles compared with female homosexuality. Until the 1950s, female homosexuality was thought to be a curable deviance correctable through motherhood (Healey, 2001). From the late 1950s, a renewed interest in lesbianism was sparked in Soviet sexology, where lesbianism was thought to be cured through forced hospitalisation and the use of psychiatric drugs and psychological therapy (Gessen, 1994; Healey, 2001).

The work of Arthur Clech (2018), who conducted interviews with thirty-six men and women who lived and expressed their same-sex sexuality during the late Soviet period, has been crucial to my understanding and making sense of the experiences of older queer participants in this study. Clech (2018) warns scholars against the danger of oversimplification of the view that male homosexuality was penalised, while women's sexuality was medicalised and subjected to psychiatric intervention. Clech (2018) writes, “[m]y interviewees attest to a more fluid reality: men were also subject to the psycho-pathologisation of their homosexuality, just as women feared the article penalising male homosexuality" (p.7). According to Clech (2018), both men and women experienced pathologisation and criminalisation of same-sex sexualities as forms of stigmatisation.

Finally, in her study, Stella found that alongside the criminalisation and medicalisation of same-sex desire in the Soviet Union, there were other, more ordinary mechanisms of social regulation. For example, comrades courts (“Komsomol”) performed punishments by public shaming of female same-sex practices, which was deemed as “morally corrupted behaviour” (Stella, 2015, p.50; Healey, 2001). As mentioned before, according to Stella (2015), the working mother contract and compulsory heterosexuality were amongst other subtler regulatory mechanisms in the Soviet Union. In the next section, I will discuss existing research on queer lives in post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

2.2. Existing research on queer lives in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan

While social science research on gender and sexuality has grown exponentially over the last two decades, most focuses on the global West (Binnie, 2004; Boellstorff, 2005; Puar, 2007; Rahman, 2010). More recently, attention has been focused on Russia following the adoption of the law banning the spread of "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" (for example, Kondakov, 2014; Persson, 2015; Stella, 2015; Moss, 2017; Edenborg, 2018). Russia's "soft power" (Nye, 2004) has been evident in the attempt to pass regional versions of the propaganda law in the "near abroad" (Healey, 2017). However, comparatively little has been written about gender and sexuality in post-Soviet Central Asia.

Within Central Asia, most scholarly attention has been directed to Kyrgyzstan's queer people (Wilkinson and Kirey, 2010; Kirey, 2015; Omurov, 2017; Boemcken, von, Boboyorov and Bagdasarova, 2018). According to Wilkinson and Kirey (2010), this can be explained by the strong presence of Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) activism devoted to LGBT rights, enabling socio-political climate and high international donor activity in the country.

There are few publications, albeit a growing number, focusing on the lives of queer people in Kazakhstan. Most information is held in five published NGO reports: research conducted by the Soros Foundation Kazakhstan (Vanner, 2009); the Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2015) report; a study conducted by the British Embassy Astana, also named Article 19 (2015); a report presented by the group initiative supporting transgender and gender non-conforming people in Kazakhstan, ALMA-TQ (2016); and a report on lesbian, bisexual and queer women's needs by Kazakhstani Feminist Initiative

Feminita (2018). While other publications exist (for example, Equal Rights Trust, 2016), they mainly rely on secondary data, citing the five NGO reports mentioned above.

Presently, there are two peer-reviewed academic publications focusing on queer lives in Kazakhstan: Latypov, Rhodes and Reynolds (2013) offer commentary on a socio-historical context in relation to stigma towards HIV, focusing on men who have sex with men (MSM) across Central Asia; and Buelow's (2012) article debates how the "East" versus "West" divide shapes sexual politics in Kazakhstan. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the Doctoral thesis of Mark Berry (2011), who conducted quantitative research on sexual health, HIV/AIDS and human rights among MSM living in Almaty, Kazakhstan and the Masters dissertation of Azamat Seksenbayev (2018) on mental health and suicidality among gay and bisexual men in Kazakhstan.

I will explore the findings of the academic studies on queer people conducted in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and then talk in greater detail about the five NGO reports.

2.2.1. Academic studies on queer lives in Central Asia

An article published by Wilkinson and Kirey in 2010 has been particularly influential in this study as it is one of the few publications looking at everyday aspects of queer lives, in this case in Kazakhstan's Southern neighbour, Kyrgyzstan. The authors used numerous sources including group and individual interviews with six staff members of local LGBT initiative Labrys, discussions on Labrys's online forum, posts from Labrys's blogs and articles from its magazine, international reports, and local media publications. They argue that non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people involved with the NGO

Labrys have made a strategic choice to use an LGBT identity. This allows LGBT people in Kyrgyzstan to delineate a safe space and community to which they can belong. Moreover, the use of an LGBT identity creates a link to wider human rights discourses; hence it "serves as a way to challenge the stigma associated with being non-heterosexual or transgender and demand recognition and tolerance from mainstream society" (pp.495-496). The work prompted other publications on managing and disclosure of LGBT identity in Kyrgyzstan, where it is highly stigmatised (Omurov, 2017; Boemcken, von, Boboyorov and Bagdasarova, 2018).

Latypov, Rhodes and Reynolds (2013) also draw significant data for their article from studies conducted in Kyrgyzstan. Their research is based on historical documents, existing research literature and surveillance data to explore the socio-historical context affecting MSM in Central Asia in general, while including some data from Kazakhstan. According to the authors, evidence emerging from NGO reports and existing studies in the Central Asian region during the past decade indicate a highly negative attitude, often manifesting itself in discrimination and psychical and psychological violence against MSM. They highlight the everyday humiliations, experiences of rape and forced marriages of MSM as well as blackmailing, money extortion and violence from the police in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Of note is that the authors offer limited information on the everyday lives of MSM in Kazakhstan. Latypov, Rhodes and Reynolds give an overview of the HIV epidemic situation and HIV-prevention services in Kazakhstan. Their findings show that MSM in Kazakhstan are reluctant to use the HIV prevention services. The authors argue that the HIV epidemic in Central Asia among MSM is exacerbated by the broader social conditions, stigma, and the structural inequalities affecting this group of people. Latypov, Rhodes and Reynolds write that,

> "public prejudice limits access to HIV testing, counselling and prevention information, since most men who have sex with men fear identification if they are seen in a public place perceived as associated with gay men. The potential consequences of HIV exposure range from social rejection to fatal assault" (p.61).

Their study calls for anti-stigma, anti-discrimination campaigns, legal reforms and policy change as well as highlighting the need for research of HIV in MSM in the region. However, it is important to emphasise that their research is based on secondary data drawn from both academic and non-academic sources.

The only peer-reviewed publication exclusively focusing on queer lives in Kazakhstan is by Buelow (2012). Buelow used internet sources to conduct textual analysis of LGBT activists' articles to investigate the role of the Europe/Asia debate in Kazakhstan's LGBT discourse. Specifically, two articles were analysed: "Mum, I smoke"/"A guy with a difference" written by a Kazakh drag queen; and "Ban on prejudice"/"Gay love leaves Kazakhstan" following a gay couple who moved from Kazakhstan to Brazil (Buelow, 2012, p.110). Buelow traces how the authors of those articles employ temporality and spatiality in locating themselves within the dichotomies of North/South and East/West. He argues that Kazakhstan's LGBT cultural producers use a variety of sources of influence and actively negotiate Kazakhstan's ambiguous relationship between North/South and East/West to shape sexual politics.

There are at least two unpublished dissertations: one written by Berry (2011) from John Hopkins University in the USA; and Seksenbayev's (2018) Masters thesis from Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev University. Berry conducted a quantitative study of 400 MSM in Almaty using interviewer-administered surveys. The goal of Berry's research was to "characterize the MSM

community in the city of Almaty, to quantitatively assess the relationship between human rights and health outcomes among these men, and to compare men who have sex with men and women to men who have sex with men only" (p.18). Akin to Latypov, Rhodes and Reynolds (2013) amongst other findings, Berry reports a high prevalence of human rights violations, "including rape, blackmail, assaults or threats from the community, government workers, family and co-workers, and denial of religious services, health care or jobs" (Berry, 2011, p.121). Whilst the relationship between the increasing number of human rights violations and HIV risk behaviours was not statistically significant, Berry highlights the plausibility of "denial of human rights may lead to psychological trauma or reduced access to tools that can help prevent HIV infection" (p.85).

Finally, Seksenbayev's (2018) dissertation focuses on exploring the prevalence of mental health and suicidality amongst gay and bisexual men. Seksenbayev carried out an internet-based survey of 204 gay or bisexual men to investigate mental health disorders, suicide ideation and suicide attempts. He found that 55% of participants reported severe suicidal thoughts or attempts at suicide. Almost half of Seksenbayev's participants identified with depression and 35% with mild or severe anxiety. Seksenbayev highlights the need to target the gay and bisexual male population when developing suicide-prevention programmes in Kazakhstan.

Generally, the literature suggests queer people in Kazakhstan face challenges in everyday life. With the exception of Buelow's work, existing research predominantly concentrates on MSM, gay and bisexual men. Furthermore, the majority of existing studies that use primary data employing quantitative survey methodology, which gives little room for voices of Kazakhstani queer people to be heard. This brief overview highlights the need for further research on queer lives in Kazakhstan.

2.2.2. NGO reports on queer lives in Kazakhstan

Before I discuss the findings of NGO publications, I want to acknowledge that all five focus on human rights violations of queer people living in Kazakhstan. The Soros Foundation (Vanner, 2009) and HRW (2015) reports focus on a wide array of human rights, including the right of liberty and security, the right to equality before the law, the right to an effective remedy, and more (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). The research conducted by British Embassy Astana, also known as Article 19 (2015), and Alma-TQ (2016) highlight freedom of expression, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly (Article 19, 2015) and the right to legal recognition of one's gender identity (Alma-TQ, 2016). Feminita's (2018) report covers equal rights for LBT women in employment, on crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity against LBT women in Kazakhstan, and on the provision of appropriate healthcare. Moreover, both HRW (2015) and Article 19 (2015) were written in response to the potential adoption of "On the Protection of Children" legislation (see Kazakhstan's political context section).

The Soros Foundation surveyed nearly 1000 individuals who identified as LGBT and found that a considerable number face discrimination and prejudice on the grounds of their sexual orientation or gender identity in everyday situations (Vanner, 2009). At least one in four people who participated experienced physical and/or psychological violence because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Half of those surveyed had suffered psychological abuse, and the majority of respondents consider it necessary to conceal their sexual or gender identity from their neighbours, landlords, healthcare professionals, and in the workplace.

The HRW interviewed 23 people who identified as LGBT as well as a number of human rights activists and public health and social services practitioners and experts. Interviews were conducted in three cities - Almaty, Astana and

Karaganda. Despite differences in methodology, HRW findings were in line with the Soros Foundation's study six years earlier, indicating that prejudice and discrimination were still a part of everyday life for LGBT people in Kazakhstan. The interviewees reported a lack of adequate response from the authorities. As one activist from Astana put it, "If LGBT people go to the police, we risk getting insulted at best and at worst, attacked again" (HRW, 2015, p.8). Moreover, in agreement with the Soros Foundation's findings HRW points out that due to abusive experiences in medical settings and widespread homophobic attitudes, LGBT people often conceal their gender and/or sexuality from health professionals. HRW (2015) also describes some key obstacles facing transgender people, including the lack of protection from violence and discrimination, and obstacles to legal recognition of the individual's gender identity. Negative media portrayals of queer people were identified by HRW (2015) as one of the primary mechanisms of shaping public opinion.

Article 19 is based on 33 interviews with LGBT people in six cities in Kazakhstan (Astana, Almaty, Karaganda, Semey, Ust-Kamenogorsk and Shymkent). Article 19 (2015) offers an analysis of Kazakhstan's domestic legislation and media monitoring, reportedly an "environment in which expression related to LGBT identities is directly censored" (p.2). Participants reported direct censorship, blocking of online content, and indirect censorship endorsed by the media in Kazakhstan. Confirming earlier findings, Article 19 also highlights that societal prejudices and lack of legal protection against discrimination, based on sexual and gender identity, force LGBT people to self-censor their LGBT identity to avoid violence and harassment. Additionally, the report emphasises the absence of platforms where LGBT people can publicly express themselves or access relevant information around the issues they face. The lack of platforms is compounded by the homophobic rhetoric propagated by influential public figures, encouraging negative attitudes towards LGBT people. Article 19 cites

evidence of “attempts to prevent, censor speech and other expression related to sexual orientation and gender identity on the grounds of protecting morals or traditional values” (p.41). The report concludes that despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression, this right in Kazakhstan is repeatedly violated.

In December 2016, Alma-TQ, the voice of the transgender community in Kazakhstan, collaborated with the Centre for International Human Rights, Northwestern University, USA, and Heartland Alliance and Global Initiatives for Human Rights, to publish a report on Kazakhstan’s violation of the right to legal recognition of one’s gender identity. Alma-TQ surveyed 41 respondents from unspecified locations. The report states that, “Kazakhstan refuses to allow transgender individuals to change their gender designation on their official identity documents unless the person first submits to an arduous, humiliating, and expensive series of procedures” (Alma-TQ, 2016, p.1). Furthermore, transgender children, young adults below the age of 21, and persons deemed to have a mental disorder are not allowed to apply to change their designated gender on their official identity documents. Legislation around gender reassignment is explained further in Legally (in)visible queers section of this chapter.

In March 2018, Feminita submitted a report for the consideration of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The methodology is unclear and it states: “[m]ost of the data presented in the present submission was obtained by the reporting organization in course of its research and monitoring activities in Kazakhstan” (Feminita, 2018, p.1). The report states that discrimination against LBT women at work “ranges from insults, humiliation, harassment, withholding of bonuses, illegal dismissals, or forces resignations” (Feminita, 2018, p.5), which occurs regardless of whether or not the targeted person is open about their sexual or gender identity. The authors argue that crimes, violence and police abuse

against LBT women remains invisible in the eyes of the official statistics because sexual orientation and gender identity is not recognised as one of the prohibited grounds of discrimination. Feminita reports cases of police violating privacy, blackmailing, threatening “outing”, money extortion, and discrimination as well as further abuse when LBT victims of hate crimes attempted to report incidents to the authorities. Finally, the report highlights healthcare issues encountered by LBT women in Kazakhstan, namely discrimination of medical staff members when attending sexual and reproductive health checks, and lack of support with reproductive needs.

All five documents include recommendations urging the government of Kazakhstan to acknowledge the problem of violence and discrimination against queer people and improve legal protection of LGBT people in Kazakhstan. There is also a recommendation to revise procedures for legal recognition of individual’s gender identity, to allow transgender people to change their legal gender on all documents through a process of self-declaration free from medical procedures of coercion (Vanner, 2009; Article 19, 2015; HRW, 2015; Alma-TQ, 2016). A further recommendation, to promote freedom of expression by refraining from filtering, blocking, removing and endorsing other technical or legal limits on access to information related to LGBT identities, comes from Article 19 (2015) and HRW (2015). Furthermore, there is another on monitoring and raising awareness, and on educating members of law enforcement agencies and medical professionals on the needs, rights and freedoms of queer people in Kazakhstan (Vanner, 2009; HRW, 2015; Feminita, 2018). Finally, HRW (2015) emphasises the importance of engagement with MSM and the transgender population on HIV/AIDS education, prevention, counselling, testing and treatment.

All in all, even though previous studies and NGO reports help to illuminate aspects of the lives of queer people in Kazakhstan, the majority use

quantitative methodology and focus on MSM, gay and bisexual men. No academic research to date uses empirical qualitative data and engages directly with non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people. Moreover, much is either conducted by foreign scholars or sponsored by Western funding bodies, highlighting the hierarchy of knowledge production (Nay, 2014). Crucially, few studies address the agentic power of queer Kazakhstani people to negotiate and navigate societal and structural barriers. Furthermore, there is a gap in the literature in terms of locating queer people within a historical context (with the exception of Latypov, Rhodes and Reynolds, 2013). In the next section, I will discuss the political context of gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan.

2.3. Kazakhstan's political context

I argue that Kazakhstan's regulation of queer people reflects its national narrative of Eurasianism and foreign policy of multi-vectorism, in which internal and external peace and working relationships with major political players are prioritised. Because of its geographical location, Kazakhstan has long been at the intersection of ancient world civilisations and the crossroads of major transport arteries connecting East and West (Kanagatov, Abdiraiymova and Zanabayeva, 2013). Indeed, the rhetoric of Kazakhstan as a bridge between Europe and Asia has been widely employed by the first president, Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Political scientist Mostafa Golam (2013) argues that Eurasianism in Kazakhstan serves three main goals:

> "Internationally, it helps the state to develop and maintain balanced and friendly relations with all major states and blocs; regionally, it is used as a vehicle and policy guideline for creating and deepening the integration process at the post-Soviet space; domestically, the policy of Eurasianism is used for consolidating national integration, nation-building and creating national consensus and harmony among the different segments of population" (p.169).

Golam (2013) highlights different facets of Kazakhstan's Eurasianism, part of which is retaining inter-ethnic peace within the country. Indeed, during the Soviet era, deportation and mass immigration of various groups of people[3]

[3] Russian and Ukranian kulaks ('rich peasants') as well as Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars and Koreans were forcibly deported to Kazakhstan in the 1920s-1930s (Dinasheva and Egamberderbiyev, 2014). During World War II, Kazakhstan served as a "dumping ground' for

resulted in Kazakhstan becoming the only republic in the Soviet Union in which the indigenous population became a minority population (Spehr and Kassenova, 2012). The newly independent Republic of Kazakhstan consisted of over 100 ethnic groups, among which Kazakhs and Russians are by far the biggest (Olcott, 1995, 2010). Therefore, defusing the potential inter-ethnic tensions and promoting inclusive identity amongst the Kazakhstani population became one of the priorities (Cummings, 2003; Spehr and Kassenova, 2012; see Anceschi, 2014 for a more detailed discussion of neo-Eurasianism in Kazakhstan).

At a regional level, Eurasianism can be closely associated with Kazakhstan's foreign policy of multi-vectorism. Previous president Nursultan Nazarbayev was described as a largely pragmatic leader prioritising modernisation with little intention to engage in a geopolitical confrontation with the "West" (Popescu, 2014; Shendrikova, 2015). Kazakhstan pursues multi-vector foreign policy. In his study of Kazakhstan's foreign policy, Hanks defines "multi-vectorism" as a non-ideological policy primarily guided by a focus on state security and economic development (Hanks, 2009, p.260). Hanks explains that multi-vector foreign policy focuses on the sustenance of internal societal peace; good working relations with Moscow, Washington and other major international players; active participation in regional and global security organisations and maintenance of favourable relationships with foreign trade and investment partners (Hanks, 2009; Nourzhanov, 2017). One of the examples of multi-vectorism, according to Engvall and Cornell (2015), is Astana's refusal to officially recognise Russia's annexation of Crimea in order

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groups perceived as "deviant and dangerous" (Otarbaeva, 1998, p.428). Many ethnic Germans, Koreans, Polish, Jewish and others were forcibly resettled in Kazakhstan (Dinasheva and Egamberderbiyev, 2014). Finally in 1953, the Soviet authorities launched the 'Virgin Lands Campaign' to open the vast steppes of northern Kazakhstan for wheat farming. About one million virgin land 'enthusiasts' from all over the Soviet State moved to Kazakhstan (Spehr and Kassenova, 2012, p.138).

to keep good relations with the “West”. According to Patalakh (2018), Kazakhstan’s multi-vectorism is evident in its positionality regarding the rights of queer people.

In February 2015, the draft law “On the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to their Health and Development” passed the Senate (the upper-house of Kazakhstan’s parliament) and was sent along with a second bill amending related legislation to Nazarbayev for signature (HRW, 2015). The draft of laws included a broad ban on the publication or sharing of information relating to LGBT in settings where children might receive or encounter that information (Draft of Laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015). In June 2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed Federal Law No. 135-FZ which, like the legislation proposed in 2015 in Kazakhstan, bans the “promotion of nontraditional sexual relations to minors”. The legislation, banning the promotion of homosexuality amongst minors, has been shown to reinforce homophobia in Russia, affecting psychological health and wellbeing of the Russian LGBT community (Lapina, 2014). In May 2015, Kazakhstan's Constitutional Council found the two pieces of pending legislation unconstitutional. As Healey (2017, p.201) points out, Russia’s “soft power” (Nye, 2004) projections in the form of political homophobia cannot be ignored in the “near abroad” of Eurasia where regional versions of gay propaganda laws have been passed[4].

[4] Along with Kazakhstan, draft bills have been proposed in Ukraine (2012) and Armenia (2013), yet in all these cases the bills were refused on different grounds (Human Rights First, 2016; IGLYO, 2018). Currently, Russian-like drafts of ‘propaganda’ law are under consideration in Belarus and Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, Latvia, Lithuania and Moldova have seen proposals of similar laws (Human Rights First, 2016; IGLYO, 2018).

It appears that Kazakhstan's politics of multi-vectorism challenges some of Russia's soft power. As highlighted by Patalakh (2018), "while Russia is positioning itself as a strong opponent of LGBT rights domestically and abroad, Kazakhstan behaves far more neutrally" (p.37). Several scholars and media outlets point out that the rejection of Russian-like law was "interpreted through the prism of Kazakhstan's desire to host the 2022 Winter Olympics" (Patalakh, 2018, p.37; see also Flintoff, 2015; Putz, 2015). Moreover, Patalakh (2018) highlights that Kazakhstan's ambiguous position in relation to its queer citizens has been evident when in October 2014, Kazakhstan's representative in the UN Human Rights Council abstained from voting on a resolution to combat violence and discrimination based on sexual and gender identities in contrast to Russia's voting against it (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2014, p.2). The most recent development in relation to the legislation "On the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to their Health and Development" is that the law was passed on 2nd July 2018 and came into action on 11th January 2019 (The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2018). Unlike Russian law, the latest version of Kazakhstan's legislation does not include the LGBT discriminating clause. This is said to be a conjoint effect of activist and international human rights organisation advocating efforts (Serzhan, 2019). I believe that Kazakhstan's narrative of Eurasianism and its foreign policy of multi-vectorism also played a role in not passing discriminatory legislation. In the next section, I will discuss further the legislation that affects the everyday lives of queer people in Kazakhstan.

2.4. Legally (in)visible queers

In this section, I discuss various legislative practices that affect queer Kazakhstani people, starting with the issue of invisibility, exploring legislation around family, and considering the criminal code. I then talk about the legislation around transitioning in Kazakhstan. Lastly, I discuss the legislation affecting the queer community and queer collective actions.

Although Kazakhstan decriminalised consensual same-sex conduct in 1999, existing reports indicate that discrimination and the threat of violence remain a part of everyday life for queer people in the country (Vanner, 2009; Article 19, 2015; HRW, 2015; Alma-TQ, 2016). The Soros foundation (Vanner, 2009) and HRW (2015) reports emphasise the need for queer Kazakhstani people to be invisible in various everyday contexts. According to HRW (2015), “LGBT people in Kazakhstan courageously adjust their daily lives to avoid harm or exposure – curtailing their movement and silencing themselves for safety” (p.2).

Existing reports point out that Kazakhstan's legislation, along with government officials' responses to gender and sexuality diversity, play an important role in the invisibility of queer people in Kazakhstan. While the constitution of Kazakhstan includes a definition of “discrimination”, it does not include “sexual orientation and gender identity” as a category that is protected from discrimination (Article 19, 2015; HRW, 2015), which allows law enforcement authorities to interpret this constitutional provision in various ways (Sekerbayeva *et al.*, 2015; Sekerbayeva, 2017). Queer people are often reluctant to come forward to report crime and abuse due to the inadequate and negligent responses of law enforcement (HRW, 2015; Feminita and Alma-TQ, 2019).

Within family and civil law, marriage is defined as “a union between a man and a woman” (The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2011). Consequently, same-sex relationships (or relationships outside of the heterosexual binary) and same-sex partnerships and marriage are not recognised by family law. Kazakhstan’s family law specifically states that, “[t]he factual cohabitation of a man and a woman, as well as persons of the same-sex shall not be recognized as a marriage (matrimony)” (The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2011). Kazakhstan also does not provide any privileges in issuing long-term visas, residence permits or citizenships to the same-sex partners of citizens of Kazakhstan (Vanner, 2009). Adoption of children by same-sex partners is not allowed in Kazakhstan, while adoption is allowed by one of the partners (Article 80 of The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2011). However, as highlighted by Vanner (2009), “due to the fact that selection of adoptive parents is made by bodies of custody and guardianship with regards to moral and other personal qualities of the potential custodian, the likelihood of a homosexual person becoming an adoptive parent remains purely academic” (p.27). At the same time, there are no restrictions on access to artificial insemination in Kazakhstan (see Vanner, 2009).

While there is little legal protection for queer citizens in Kazakhstan, same-sex practices are singled out within Kazakhstan’s legislation. As pointed out by Vanner (2009) and by Feminita’s report written in cooperation with Alma-TQ (2019), the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan specifically references the terms “sodomy” and “lesbianism”. Under Article 123 of the Kazakhstan Criminal Code, “[c]oercion to sexual intercourse, *sodomy, lesbianism* or other acts of sexual nature by use of blackmail, threats of destruction, damage or seizure of property or use of material or other dependence of a victim” (Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kazakhstan, 2014; my emphasis). The report points out that lesbianism and sodomy are also

figuring in Articles 121 and 122 and appear in the Normative Decree of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which defined rape as “a sexual intercourse in a natural form with use of force or threat of use of force”, which is separated from “acts committed […] under same circumstances in unnatural form” such as “lesbianism, sodomy, etc.”, which should be understood as “other violent acts of sexual nature” (Feminita and Alma-TQ, 2019, p.6). The report highlights that the singling out and the use of language [sodomy and lesbianism] within Kazakhstan’s criminal code perpetuates the pathologisation and stigmatisation of queer people in Kazakhstan.

2.4.1. Transitioning in Kazakhstan

As highlighted obove, for transgender people one of the primary barriers to exercising their gender identity rights is the complexity of the legal gender recognition procedure. It appears that since 2009 there has been an increase in state-level transphobia. The legal gender recognition procedure in Kazakhstan requires, “humiliating, invasive, and abusive procedures in order to change the gender on official documents” (HRW, 2015, p.14). Until 2009, the legal recognition allowed transgender individuals to change their legally recognised gender identity without the mandatory requirement of gender reassignment surgery and hormone treatment therapy (The Minister of Health and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2003).

In 2009, a new health code recognising the right to gender reassignment surgery was passed (The Minister of Health and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2009); however, subsequent guidelines have made it increasingly difficult to exercise this right. Kazakhstan law now requires individuals to undergo hormone therapy and surgical correction (sterilisation or genital reassignment) to obtain a legally recognised gender identity (The

Minister of Health and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015). Furthermore, they must be 21 or older and must undergo a “mental, neurological and somatic state” examination on an in-patient basis in a psychiatric institution. Therefore, transgender people in Kazakhstan are regulated through medical epistemologies by the mechanisms of classification and pathologisation (Foucault, 1978; see Chapter Three). Without legally recognised documents, transgender people struggle in a range of daily activities including opening a bank account, finding employment and travelling (Article 19, 2015; HRW, 2015; Alma-TQ, 2016).

Conversely, in Russia theoretically a person is able to change their documents without gender reassignment surgery and/or hormone therapy. According to the Transgender Legal Defense Project (2018a), there is no legal requirement that the change of gender in the passport is contingent on an operation in Russia (Transgender Legal Defense Project, 2018b). Currently limited scholarly attention has been paid to the lives and medical care for non-gender normative people during Soviet period and more generally, within post-Soviet space (see Husakouskaya, 2018 on transitioning in Ukraine). However, recently published interviews with Viktor Kalnberz (Turovsky, 2018) reveal some procedures of transitioning during Soviet era. Turovsky (2018) writes about a female-to-male sex change operation performed in 1970 in Moscow that was kept secret for 20 years. The interview with Dr Kalnberz describes the complicated procedure that Innokenti (who was operated on) had to go through to access the operation from female to male gender. According to Kalnberz, Innokenti was only able to change his documents following the operation (Turovsky, 2018). While more research is required to understand the lives of transgender people in the Soviet Union, it appears that the 2009 health code in Kazakhstan may have reverted to Soviet gender reassignment legislation.

2.4.2. Regulation of queer community and collective action

Current publications point out that the invisibility of queer people is also evident from the lack of organised queer community in Kazakhstan (Article 19, 2015; HRW, 2015). For example, Article 19 (2015) highlights the isolation amongst LGBT people, emphasising the absence of coordinated LGBT rights movements and limited social connections between queer people in Kazakhstan. I am aware of the presence of a few NGOs in Kazakhstan before 2014, the most prominent being “Amulet” and “Adali”. Both organisations were based in Almaty but appear to no longer be operating.

Complex legal procedures surrounding the setting up of NGOs explains the limited number of queer organisations prior to 2014. As explained in Article 19 (2015), the process of NGO registration is complicated and bureaucratised, and NGOs are frequently refused without any specific reasons. While participating in unregistered organisations is illegal and carries administrative and legal penalties (Amnesty International, 2017). Besides, engaging in peaceful assemblies that are not agreed upon and approved by the government also carries administrative and legal charges (Article 19, 2015). The above factors complicate the establishment of a queer movement in Kazakhstan.

Nevertheless, there has been a change in the queer community marked by the emergence of a number of NGOs and online platforms that started around 2014 including: Kazakhstani Feminist Initiative, Feminita – a queer-feminist collective that aims to strengthen the rights of women and activist communities to make a positive change in social, political, economic and cultural spheres for lesbian, bisexual, queer, women with disabilities and women in sex work; Kok.team – LGBT mass media and the first LGBT website with the content in the Kazakh language; and Alma-TQ – an initiative group aiming to support transgender and gender non-conforming people in

Kazakhstan. New online platforms along with social media groups create a unique space for queer people to be “visible” and for their voices to be heard. In this respect visibility is relative. For example, anonymous authors publish a large segment of the articles posted on Kok.team, yet their voices are heard, and their presence is known.

All in all, while Kazakhstan does not have legislation that directly targets queer people; legally there is little protection of queer people rendering Kazakhstani queers exposed to potential violence and discrimination, and, therefore, creating barriers to exercising their human rights. At the same time, the special mention of sodomy and lesbianism within the legislative framework singles out and facilitates further stigmatisation of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender citizens of Kazakhstan. For transgender people, the invisibility is exacerbated by the complicated procedure of legal recognition that currently requires individuals to undergo hormone therapy and surgical correction. Invisibility is further enforced by the complicated procedure of registering NGOs and by the ban on engaging in peaceful assemblies in Kazakhstan. In the next section, I will consider the representation of queer people in the Kazakhstani media and Internet.

2.5. Media and Internet

In today's world, the media is increasingly integrated into the fabric of everyday life (Silverstone, 2007). Following Hannah Arendt, Silverstone (2007) argues that media functions as a "space of appearance" in the twenty-first century, "both in the sense of where the world appears, and in the sense of appearance as such constituting the world (p.27; see Chapter Three for elaboration on Arendt's concept of spaces of appearnce). For the majority, events in the world are experienced through media appearance. Such "mediated" experiences are deeply intertwined with the world of experience, according to Silverstone. It is particularly the case for one's experience of "the otherness", whose appearance in the media will be the only encounter of the other that many of us will have. Silverstone (2007) writes, "the media provide […] the frameworks (or frameworlds) for the appearance of the other and define the moral space within which the other appears to us" (p.7). In line with Silverstone (2007), Butler (2004, 2010) argues that given the influence of the media in today's world, the power lies in the ability to control appearance and control what is excluded from appearance. In considering queerness as one of the forms of otherness, I believe that queer visibility in the media is one of the key mechanisms shaping attitudes towards non-heterosexual and non-cisgender Kazakhstani people. This section focuses on examining representation of queerness in Kazakhstan's media.

The Article 19 (2015) report emphasises that Kazakhstan is an environment in which "expression of LGBT identities is directly censored – often justified on the grounds of protecting 'morality' or 'traditional values'" (p.2). Given the lack of legal protection, queer people resort to self-censorship to avoid harassment and violence. Article 19 (2015) interviewees report a range of ways in which their freedom of expression is compromised. These include

direct censorship; blocking of online content; indirect censorship by media outlets that often reinforce negative, sensationalist and discriminatory attitudes towards LGBT people; and self-censorship that queer people use to avoid discrimination or violence. In this way, the Internet is used as a censorship and surveillance tool in Kazakhstan. One of the extreme cases of surveillance on the Internet is anti-LGBT group Occupy Pedophilia. Founded in Russia in 2011, Occupy Pedophilia targets LGBT teens online under the pretext of protecting children by hunting paedophiles (Buyantueva, 2018). According to Article 19, similar groups first spread to Kazakhstan in 2013. As copy-cat groups appeared on social networks, several cases were reported throughout the country (Article 19, 2015).

Another potential impact on societal views of queer people in Kazakhstan is Russian media and Russian Internet (Runet). Russian remained the dominant language of other ethnic minorities in Kazakhstan, including Belarusians, Tatars, Germans, Koreans, and other "linguistically Russified" ethnicities living in Kazakhstan (Smagulova, 2008, p.446). Moreover, Russian is still a widely used language for a high number of ethnic Kazakhs (Smagulova, 2008). According to Jankowski (2012), although not officially recognised as such, Russian is taken as an interethnic language in Kazakhstan. Additionally, the majority of Kazakhstani mass media still publish and broadcast in Russian (Shaibakova, 2004; Bauer, 2010).

Russian TV is widely used and popular in the country (Bauer, 2010). Thomas (2005) highlights that the Russian network ORT's news programme (called Channel One Russia after 2002) has the "highest ratings of all television channels available" (p.330). Similarly, Laruelle (2015) along with Junisbai, Junisbai and Ying Fry (2015) emphasise that Russia-produced Television is still dominant in what the general population watches in Kazakhstan. Junisbai, Junisbai and Ying Fry (2015) point out that, "[b]ecause most television viewers continue to consume Russian-language news, viewers are

heavily influenced by Russian perceptions of the world and local events" (p.252). In addition to television, it is important to emphasise that the Russian Internet of Runet is widely consumed in Kazakhstan (see Uffelmann, 2011).

At this point, no research exists on the effects of Russian media on the attitudes towards queer people in Kazakhstan. However, it is plausible to assume that Kazakhstan's general public is affected by the LGBT-hostile narratives dominant in the Russian mediascape (Persson, 2015). Persson, (2015) conducted qualitative text-analysis of Russian mainstream media. Some of the dominant narratives that he identified were: "non-heterosexuals threatening survival of the nation, as imposing sex-radical norms of a minority onto the majority, or as connected to an imperialistic West which aims to destroy Russia" (p.256). The threat to the nation discourse emphasises the connection of same-sex practices to the demographic crisis, whereas, "homosexuality is narrated as sterility; it becomes a symbol of the nation's inability to reproduce itself" (Persson, 2015, p.262). The second narrative is that of "homosexuals as a small but very influential minority that enforces its values and lifestyle upon the majority" (p.264). The third dominant narrative is that of same-sex practices being "a symptom of the failure of Western modernity, to which Russia can offer an alternative" (p.270). I argue that due to the pervasive influence of the Russian media in Kazakhstan, those dominant narratives infiltrate Kazakhstani mediascape, influencing attitudes and discourses around queerness in Kazakhstan.

In the next section, I go into greater detail about the media representation of queer people in Kazakhstan. I give an outline of some of the instances of visibility in the media since 2013 as well as public and media reactions to those events.

2.5.1. Instances of visibility in the media

In his “Anthropology News” article, “LGBT in Central Asia: 2014’s Most Pivotal Moments”, Buelow (2015) outlines the timeline of events from April 2013 until February 2015 that he believes are significant for queer people in Kazakhstan. In this section, I elaborate on some of the events pointed out in Buelow’s (2015) article and explore events beyond 2015. I will reframe what Buelow called pivotal moments to see those events as instances of visibility of Kazakhstani queer people in the media and more generally in the public eye.

In April 2013, the popular photo essay blog Voxpopuli.kz released a photo essay on a lesbian wedding in the city of Karaganda. According to Buelow (2015), this piece was one of many releases featuring queer Kazakhstani people, however, specifically, this piece had attracted a lot of local as well as international attention (Bitner, 2013; Lillis, 2013; Article 19, 2015). When MP Aldan Smayyl found out about the wedding in Karaganda, he had forwarded a request to the Prime Minister to “forbid gay clubs, demonstrations, and all those revolting relations” (Trubacheva, 2013; my translation).

In October 2013, MP Bakshybek Smagul of the Nur Otan party, headed by Nursultan Nazarbayev, called for Kazakhstan to recriminalise homosexuality and “root out homosexual relations”, and proposed to adopt legislation to criminalise “gay propaganda” similar to Russian legislation (Lillis, 2013; Kosolapova, 2014). The initiators of the recriminalisation say that same-sex practices contradict the “national mentality” and “threaten family values and demographics” (Kosolapova, 2014). This rhetoric echoes some of the Russian media discourses associating LGBT rights with “Western neo-imperial project of imposing its norms and values onto the rest of the world”,

threatening the local national mentality and positioning homosexuality as a threat to the survival of the Kazakhstani nation (Persson, 2015, p.267).

In January 2014, the parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan began discussing criminalising lesbianism (Lillis, 2014). As reported by Tengrinews.kz (2014), deputy Nurlan Abdimov raised a question of “bringing to book” for “lesbianism and other aspects of the sexual and gender sphere” (Lillis, 2014). No further actions were taken regarding “anti-lesbianism” legislation. The public homophobic discourse further escalated in May 2014 when one of the brides from the Voxpopuli photo essay, Kristina Chernysheva, was shot, and her wife along with two other women were arrested and convicted of the murder (BBC News, 2014; Villareal, 2014; Zakon.kz, 2014). Ten days later, anti-gay activists built a wall around one of Almaty's gay nightclubs and covered the wall with homophobic graffiti; It is unclear whether the wall was designed to prevent people from entering or leaving the nightclub (Tharoor, 2014; Villareal, 2014; Buelow, 2015).

In August 2014, the Kurmangazy-Pushkin kiss poster was released, created by advertising agency Havas Worldwide Kazakhstan to advertise Almaty’s most well-known gay club Studio 69 (HRW, 2015). The poster depicted Kazakh composer Kurmangazy Sagyrbaiuly and Russian poet Alexandr Pushkin kissing, with the words, “Kurmangazy 69 Pushkina” beneath the image. The image was a play on the famous image of the Honecker-Brezhnev kiss and was meant to represent the club's address – the intersection of Kurmangazy and Pushkin streets (Trilling, 2014; Buelow, 2015). Within a month, Almaty’s mayor’s office along with a group of individuals studying at the national conservatory and the orchestra named after Kurmangazy, filed a lawsuit against the advertisement agency. The poster was referred to as offensive "to the honour and dignity of the composer and poet's descendants" as well as offensive to "all people not indifferent to their art…” (Human Rights Watch, 2014). The mayor's office

contended that the poster, "offends the image of the great artists and violates widespread moral norms and behaviours given that it shows nontraditional sexual relations, which are unacceptable to society" (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Almaty's court subsequently found the poster to be "unethical" and fined both Havas and its director for violating Kazakhstan's law on advertising. Moreover, thirty-four students and teachers of Kurmangazy conservatory filed a lawsuit for mental anguish caused by viewing the poster. In October 2014, they won, and each was awarded 1 million tenge (a total of 34 million tenge or $188000), causing Havas Worldwide Kazakhstan to become financially bankrupt (Article 19, 2015). The narrative of same-sex desire as violating and threatening the moral norms of behaviour is evident here.

In September 2014, MP Dauren Babamuratov suggested a DNA test for gay people and claimed that gay men can be identified by the fact that they wear coloured trousers, causing a strong reaction from the international media (Dearden, 2014; Duffy, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2014).

In February 2015, the previously mentioned law "On the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to their Health and Development" (Draft of Laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015) was passed to Senate and later rejected. It is difficult to say if the constellation of the above-described events had compounded the influence of the Russian "soft power" (Nye, 2004) contributing to the proposal of Russian-like propaganda legislation. Nevertheless, there appears to be an increase in the discourse around queer citizens on a governmental level and in society in general in Kazakhstan (HRW, 2015). As Persson (2013) writes on Russian propaganda legislation,

> "…the anti-LGBT project is not only about silencing and hiding but also a spectacle in itself. […]It aims at maximising visibility, spreading a certain narrative and to display a specific imagined community to the

> Russians and to the world: the story of a Russia that stands up against Europe and America, offering an alternative modern project and a moral leadership for those dissatisfied with the West" (p. 20).

The dominant narrative and orientation towards the "West" in Kazakhstan differs from that of Russia (see Kazakhstan's political context section above). However, what resonates with Persson's (2013) observation is that even an attempt to pass the law "On the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to their Health and Development" aimed to decrease the visibility of queer people in Kazakhstan, ironically, became a spectacle in itself, attracting public attention to Kazakhstani queer citizens.

After the law had been declined, there were several events attracting media attention. One of them was a kiss between two women in Esentai mall in Almaty, which was filmed by Mamedov Eldar Arafoglu (publically known as Eldar Gamilzade) without consent and published on social media (Utepova, 2018). The post contained the writing: "These might be someone's children and sisters or acquaintances. Repost this. Make them talk to them. Maybe it is still possible to summon them, correct them or at least put them to shame" (Feminita and Alma-TQ, 2019, p.7). The post gained widespread attention. In February 2018, a complaint was filed against the two women in the video together with an activist from Feminita. After two hearings, the court established that the two women behaved "immorally" and that Eldar Mamedov acted "as a defender of the morality of the population" (Feminita and Alma-TQ, 2019, p.8). In August 2019, with support from Feminita, the two women appealed to Kazakhstan's supreme court and won the case establishing that the right of privacy and "untouchability of personal life" was violated by the publishing of the video.

Queer-hostile narratives such as outlined above are not unchallenged within Kazakhstani mediascape. At times, alternative, more positive or at least neutral representations and stories appear in the media (for example Bajdildaeva, 2014; Informburo.kz, 2017; Shajkezhanov, 2017; Sugirbaeva, 2017; Korosteleva, 2018; Newtimes.kz, 2018; The-village.kz, 2018). Part of the emergence of alternative narratives is due to the visibility-enhancing efforts of queer activists in Kazakhstan. While anonymous authors write many of the articles, and problematic language such as homosexual and "netradicionnaja orientacija" or "non-traditional orientation" is used, those articles present an alternative representation of queer people in Kazakhstan. Questions such as what is it like to be LGBT in Kazakhstan? are addressed, illuminating everyday homophobia, social isolation and suicidality within the Kazakhstani queer community. As highlighted before, Kazakhstan's position towards queer citizens differs from that of Russia's. One of the key differences lies in Kazakhstan's leniency towards the "West". As highlighted by Persson (2015), as one of the "cracks" within Russian dominant narratives, "coupling the Western modernity with LGBT rights can potentially work for the benefit of Russian non-heterosexuals" (p.269). Such association might be even more attractive for Kazakhstani citizens, where the rhetoric of the "West" associated with moral collapse is less prominent compared with that of Russia. In the next section I consider discourses around family in Kazakhstan.

2.6. Family in Kazakhstan

In his book “The Kazakhstan Way”, President Nazarbayev addresses citizens as members of one common house or family. “The House is something much greater than windows, walls, and rooms… it is our common shelter, and space of life… where grandchildren grow up in freedom, unity, stability, and prosperity” (Nazarbayev, 2007). Benedict Anderson (2006) notices that through the metaphor of a heterosexual family, national concepts and symbols as well as hierarchies of values are transmitted to society. According to Anderson, the analogy of kin assigned codes of femininity and masculinity and implies hierarchical principles of the organisation where some members are “unquestionably more important than others” (Anderson, 2006 in Ringmar, 1998, p.536). Along with seeing the nation through the metaphor of family, the Kazakhstan state positions itself in adherence to “Western” gender equality principles. The signing of “The Strategy of Gender Equality 2006” (The Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2016) has been an essential step in raising the issue of gender and equal opportunities in Kazakhstan.

In the Strategy of Gender Equality, the Kazakhstan authorities call for the revival of the best ethnocultural traditions and support the formation of egalitarian models of gender equality in families (The Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2016). I am particularly interested in the meaning of its term “ethnocultural traditions” and what is considered to be “traditional” by the Kazakhstan government. As pointed out by Craig Calhoun (2007), tradition is not only about the “fixed” past, rather it is a political project that is continuously reproduced.

Kazakhstan prides itself on the history of strong women. For example, the official “Plan for the Establishment of Historical Consciousness in the Republic of Kazakhstan” (Baipakov,1995) emphasises direct continuity from the Andronov culture of the Bronze Age, Scythians and Turks to contemporary Kazakhs. Existing archaeological evidence suggests that women may have occupied more privileged positions than men (Davis-Kimball, 1997; Rolle, 1989; Davis-Kimball and Behan, 2003). The Scythian linkage can be observed in the symbolic use of “Golden Man”[5]. This became one of the nascent symbols of Kazakh nationality (Shnirelman, 2010). However, research since the late 1990s indicates that the Golden Man was, in fact, a “Golden Woman” (Gontijo, 2018). Another Scythian figure that is venerated in today's Kazakhstan is Queen Tomyris, who in 530 BC repulsed the invading Persian monarch Cyrus the Great (Blakkisrud and Kyzy, 2017). Additionally, while women became less prominent in political life in Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the lifting of quotas (Kuehnast, 2004), women are still present in the highest ranks. This is evidenced by Dariga Nazarbayeva being elected as a Parliamentary speaker in March 2019 and potentially succeeding her father in the 2019 elections (for example, Astrasheuskaya, 2019; MacFarquhar, 2019).

At the same time, government discourse calls for more “traditional” women’s roles. Indeed, there seems to be a misalignment of the Gender Equality Strategy and the “Strategy Kazakhstan-2050” (Nazarbayev, 2012) where the role of parenting and domestic tasks are prioritised for women alone. The Strategy Kazakhstan-2050 emphasises family and motherhood as the foundation of a successful nation. Nazarbayev begins by addressing women: “You are a pillar of the family, and therefore – a pillar of the State”

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[5] In 1969, 60km from Almaty, archaeologists found an outfit decorated with more than 4000 pieces of gold enveloping the skeleton, dating back to the 4th or 5th century BC (Gontijo, 2018).

(Nazarbayev, 2012). The former strategy seems to assume a much more patriarchal gender order where women have to prioritise motherhood and family. The Strategy of Gender Equality and Kazakhstan-2050 both highlight the centrality of the heterosexual family and the binary construct of gender in Kazakhstan.

The family is at the heart of Central Asian social structure; this is frequently seen as the primary difference between Russia and Central Asia (Harris, 2006). For Kazakh people, family does not only constitute the nuclear family but includes the extended family. Schatz (2005) points out that before 1917, the focal point of identity for Kazakh people was the local clan ("ru"). As highlighted by Bhavna (2007), "the Kazakh nomadic organisation was internally differentiated by informal hierarchies of statuses and seniority within clan segments and clan agglomerations" (p.33). At the centre of a kin-based relationship was genealogical knowledge. "Each nomad was normatively expected to know and be able to reproduce orally his genealogical background ('shezhire' or 'zheti ata') at least to the seventh generation" (Schatz, 2005, p.237). Shezhire allowed nomads to enforce endogamous marriage. Hence, procreation occupies one of the central roles for Kazakhs. Indeed, marriage for Kazakhs is interconnected with adulthood: as Kuehnast (2004) and Werner (2004) highlight, adulthood is granted to a Kazakh person upon marriage; however, it is sealed with having children. Kuehnast (2004) emphasises that having more children is believed to bring luck to the entire extended family.

The importance of kin is also evident in marriage, as marriage is not only considered to be a union between two people but a union of two family-related groups. This is reflected in childcare responsibilities, where grandparents (especially grandmothers) share the responsibility for looking after children. Moreover, it is common for Kazakhs to give the first-born child to the paternal grandparents. It is believed that an upbringing with the

paternal grandparents results in the eldest child becoming more responsible and taking in the experience and wisdom of the elders to become an example to younger siblings (Werner, 2004; Stasevich, 2009).

Marrying and having children affect both female and male status. The effect of marriage is long-standing, as Werner (2004) points out that a woman's status increases when her adult children marry and procreate. This tie between marriage, procreation and adulthood is problematic for queer people in Kazakhstan. According to existing reports (for example, Vanner, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2015), Kazakhstani queers frequently marry and have children to fulfill the obligation to the family, while also having same-sex sexual relationships. For queer people who choose not to marry, there is a risk of being permanently infantilised. For the remainder of this section, I discuss masculinity in Central Asia.

As pointed out by Eeva Kesküla (2018) in her article on the masculinity of Kazakhstani miners, most literature on gender order in Central Asia focuses on women and femininity (for example, Doi, 2002; Edgar, 2003; Northtop, 2004; Kamp, 2006; Tlostanova, 2011). One example of an analysis of masculinity has been done in Uzbekistan by Nick Megoran (2008), who looked at the practice of legitimisation of the Andijan massacre in 2005. Based on his ethnographic research among Uzbek and Kyrgyz men in the Fergana Valley, Megoran (2008) writes that, "[h]egemonic Uzbek masculinity (which might be termed 'dutiful son-husband-father') envisions men as first dutiful sons and then heads of families and providers for their own wives and children" (p.22). Hence Megoran (2008) highlights the importance of kinship in the notion of Central Asian masculinity. Similarly, Kesküla (2018) found that being a family provider is one of the key aspects of masculinity amongst Karaganda miners. She explains that labouring, a healthy body, consumption of alcohol and sexual prowess were characteristic of Kazakhstani miners' working-class masculinities.

Collette Harris (2006) in her writing about youth in Tajikistan offers a useful insight into nuances and complexities of masculinities and femininities in Central Asia. According to Harris (2006) women are supposed to be caretakers, while for men the primary role is to be a provider for the family. Harris writes that some traits of masculinity and femininity overlap. For example, while subservience is primarily a feminine trait, it is also desirable in a man. Both sexes are raised to be subservient to their parents and elders. Furthermore, one of the defining characteristics of masculinity is control over women, but in the mother-son relationship even an adult man is supposed to be subservient to his mother. As Harris (2004) puts it, "…younger men find themselves in an ambivalent position […] they have control over women of their age and younger while being subject to the control of their elders *of both sexes*" (p.74; original emphasis). In the next section I will look at one of the most significant mechanisms in which gender order is regulated in Central Asia – the shame-and-honour system.

2.7. Shame-and-honour in Central Asia

Existing research indicates that the system of honour-and-shame is one of the key regulatory practices within families and broader communities in Central Asia. In particular, I draw on literature from Tajikistan and neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, as there is little research in Kazakhstan. In her ethnography on control and subversion of gender order in Tajikistan, Harris (2004) emphasises the regulatory power of the honour-and-shame system (nomus and ayb in Tajik; p.73). Harris explains that there is a geographical variation of what is seen as acceptable and what is deemed as shameful; however, there are specific determining characteristics of honour-and-shame hegemony in Tajikistan. Harris writes:

> "What is crucial … is to understand how men and, by extension, the family, can be shamed by even a hint of female non-compliance. Masculine gender identities and with them men's honour are highly dependent on the visible demonstration of their ability to control their womenfolk. That makes men extraordinarily vulnerable, since a single deed or even word can destroy their honour (see Gilmore, 1987, p.4) and this is what allows gossip to play such a vital role in social control" (Harris, 2004, p.73).

Harris stresses the importance of visibility in honour-and-shame dominated societies. Hence, it is not the violation of the norms per se that is critical here, but the public nature of the violation that is then required to be followed by punishment.

Similarly, in her study of bride abduction in Kyrgyzstan, Baigamai Sataeva (2017) argues that the concept of *uyat* or "shame" is central in regulating

force in Kyrgyz culture. “Uyat bolot" (Kyrgyz: “there will be shame!”) is a phrase typically used by the Kyrgyz to control each other's behaviour (Heide, 2015, p.293). Sataeva (2017) writes, “[s]haming generally starts at the kitchen table, amongst family members, friends and acquaintances, and is handed down by word of mouth” (p.25). Deviation from public “norm” leads to public shaming and can result in social exclusion and stigmatisation as well as to verbal and physical abuse. Similarly to Harris, Sataeva highlights the importance of the public dimension of norm violation. She writes about the Kyrgyz "*El emne deit*?/What will people say” (Sataeva, 2017, p.25) as the crucial aspect of regulation of gender norms within Kyrgyz families. According to Sataeva (2017),

> “[a]ll social behaviour tends to be modified in order to avoid being shamed in front of other people […] [t]his understanding is often used as a benchmark by which to preserve traditions as well as the honour and dignity of the family within the framework of these traditions” (p.25).

In this study, the notion of “what people will say” also appears to play an important role in regulating queer Kazakhstani people. In Kazakhstan, the mere mention of sex and sexuality within or outside the family is considered to be taboo. As highlighted by Karkygash Kabatova (2018) in her article on normalising sexuality education in Kazakhstan, “[t]ypical Kazakh parents are not comfortable discussing sex with their children.” Kabatova (2018) argues that one of the obstacles for sex education in Kazakhstan is the culture of *uyat* or shame. “It is *uyat* for unmarried women to get pregnant, but it is also *uyat* to talk or ask about sex” (Kabatova, 2018, p.4; original emphasis). This creates a veil of silence around any relationships before and outside of marriage within Kazakh families.

It is noteworthy that in 2016, the cartoon “hero” *Uyatman* was created by Murat Dilmanov. *Uyatman* has been popular in Kazakhstan’s media since. *Uyatman* is a cartoon superhero "who patrols Kazakhstan to stop women from behaving ‘indecently’" (Kumenov, 2018). For example, it was *Uyatman* who was shaming the two women kissing in the Almaty mall (Utepova, 2018). Journalist Assel Satubaldina (2017) explains the nuanced and complex nature of *uyat: “Uyat*, though translated as shame, actually reflects a much stronger social code that condemns any actions that go beyond the traditional norms prevalent in Kazakh society" (my emphasis). Given that queerness by definition subverts gender and sexuality norms, queerness in Kazakhstan is subjected to *uyat*.

2.8. Religion

The Republic of Kazakhstan is a sovereign, secular state, which is reflected in Constitution and legislation. For example in 2011 (modified in 2016), law "On the Religious Activities and Religious Associations" was passed (The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2016). The first chapter of the law states:

> "This Law is based on the fact that the Republic of Kazakhstan represents itself as a democratic, secular state, affirms the right for everyone for freedom of conscience, guarantees equal rights of everyone regardless of his or her religious beliefs, recognizes the historical role in the development of culture and spiritual life of the people, respects cultural and historical value of religions that are compatible with the spiritual heritage of the people of Kazakhstan, recognizes the importance of interreligious harmony, religious tolerance and respects for religious beliefs of the citizens."

Despite Kazakhstan being a secular state, Islam is the dominant religion of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which is attested through the large Islamic following as well as the government's narrative of the central role of Islam in Kazakhness (Omelicheva, 2011; Yemelianova, 2014; Orange and Petersson, 2017). Ro'i and Weiner (2009) conducted a study of Muslim identity in four Central Asian states. Almost 100 per cent of respondents professed to be Muslims (Ro'i and Wainer, 2009). In contrast, Trofimov (2001) and Telebaev (2003) estimate that Muslims constitute 52-65 per cent of all believers in Kazakhstan. It is important to point out that Ro'i and Wainer (2009) observed that Muslim-identified people in Kazakhstan visited a mosque less, wanted a state religion less and had less identification with people in other Muslim

countries in comparison to citizens of other Central Asian republics. Similarly, Omelicheva (2011) highlights that,

> "[t]he majority of those identifying with Islam are rather light observers of Islamic laws and prohibitions. Many Kazakh Muslims do not fulfill the duties associated with canonical Islam. The "Muslimness" of Kazakhs is commonly defined through their participation in an array of life-cycle rituals, adherence to values and social mores of the Kazakh communities, and celebration of communal traditions" (p.243).

In line with Omelicheva, a professor at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University named Saniya Edelbay (2012) describes "Kazakh Islam" – "a synthesis of Islam and elements of pre-Islamic beliefs and cults." Edelbay (2012) argues that the specificity of Islam in Kazakhstan is its interlacing with national customs and the synthesis of Islam with ancient Turkic beliefs (see also Klyashtornyi and Sultanov, 1992; Privratsky, 2001). This synthesis is evident in the celebration of annual holidays such as Nauryz, the performance of life-cycle rituals, and the cult of ancestors (Khalid, 2007; Edelbay, 2012).

Orange and Petersson (2017) highlight that Islam in Kazakhstan is cultural as much as it is spiritual (see also Privratsky, 2001). Orange and Petersson (2017) write that, "[e]xcept for a subculture of discriminating modernists, all Kazakhs think of themselves as Muslim by birth, and 'Muslimness' is believed to be one of the things that make a Kazakh a Kazakh" (p.31). Kazakh "Muslimness" is also deeply intertwined with the symbolism of strength against Soviet distraction and the resilience of Kazakh Islam despite the Soviet state's attempts to quench it (Privratsky, 2001). In this way, Kazakh Islam is interconnected with independence and nation-building (Orange and Petersson, 2017). However, despite its Muslim majority, Kazakhstan officially favours religious pluralism.

As mentioned before, there is an emphasis on inter-ethnic peace in Kazakhstan. This emphasis has been enacted in the creation of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, where all ethnic groups in contemporary Kazakhstan are represented (Jones, 2010; Orange and Petersson, 2017). In his speech at the Third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in 2010, Nursultan Nazarbayev said:

> "The Kazakhstan experience of inter-ethnic and interconfessional concord has been recognised as one of the most successful in the post-Soviet space" (Nazarbayev, 2010).

In his speech to Congress, Nazarbayev highlights the importance of not only inter-ethnic peace and stability but also of religious freedom in Kazakhstan. While Kazakhstan positions itself as a secular state, religion is frequently brought up in arguments against queerness in the country.

Research by Vanner (2009) addresses the views of non-queer Muslims and Christians in Kazakhstan. Vanner (2009) cites research by Ekaterina Belayeva as part of the report. Belayeva conducted a survey of 200 people, examining the attitudes of people in the general population towards the LGBT community in Kazakhstan. One of the questions Belayeva asked her respondents was: "[w]hat danger do LGBT people inflict on society?", to which 30 percent of respondents said that same-sex relations breach the commandments of the Bible and the Koran (in Vanner, 2009, p.33). Belayeva also quotes reaction of the Union of Muslims in Kazakhstan (UMK) and its chair at the time – Murat Telibekov – when in 2008 an announcement of a planned pride parade in Almaty was made. Telibekov stated that pride parades could not be held in Kazakhstan, citing that it was a Muslim country (in Vanner, 2009, p.34). Further mentions of Kazakhs being Muslims and the incompatibility of Muslimness and queerness can be found in Vanner's (2009) report.

It is important to highlight that while attitudes of non-LGBT Muslims are considered in Vanner's (2009) report, no voice is given to queer Muslims (or queer Christians). Equally, while Berry (2011) asks his respondents about circumcision, indicating that many of the participants in his study have a link to Islam, he does not explore this question further. Buelow's (2012) article highlights the silence around the issue of religion amongst LGBT people in Kazakhstan. Buelow writes, "[t]his absence is not necessarily out of place, and could be said to be typical also of the (lacking) discussions of LGBT Christians' relationship between faith and sexuality" (p.106).

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

My project builds on the theoretical foundations of the works of Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt and Erving Goffman, along with Queer Theory, the conceptual framework of Intersectionality, and Narrative epistemology. I argue that those theories are particularly useful when researching queer subjectivities in Kazakhstan. I will discuss the ideas of Foucault, particularly with regard to analysing mechanisms of power, visibility and surveillance, agency, technology of self, and resistance. Secondly, I will turn to Arendt, whose ideas, I believe, complement Foucault's and add to the concept of agency in expanding the role of collective action and contributing towards the Foucauldian view of visibility by introducing the idea of spaces of appearance. Thirdly, I will consider how the work of Goffman and his notions of stigma and impression management might be useful to my research, particularly in understanding how queer people might negotiate their subjectivities within different contexts. Finally, I will outline how my epistemology is also grounded in queer theory and intersectionality, both of which question normalisation and capture the complexity of lived experience. My research questions will be developed in the course of this chapter. The chapter will culminate in formlation of the questions this thesis sets out to answer.

3.1. Michel Foucault

A poststructuralist philosopher and historian, Foucault explores the concepts of knowledge, power and discourse. In the first volume of "The History of Sexuality – The will to Knowledge", Foucault (1978) uses historical processes to argue that sexuality is a constructed category with complex roots in Western culture rather than a natural fact of human life. Foucault's thesis sets out to demonstrate how discourses produce subjects, hence demarcating the complex relationship between power and knowledge. Foucault (1984) uses the method called genealogy, which aims to investigate historical "emergences" of discursive practices and how they, in turn, constitute knowledge and power.

3.1.1. Technologies of power

Foucault's (1977) notion of technologies of power through which people and their bodies are governed and punished helps to understand how queer people's lives are constrained by knowledge around gender and sexuality as it is produced within particular power relations. I will outline three technologies of power that appear to be particularly relevant to my research: classification, normalisation and surveillance. For example, Foucault (1978) describes the emergence of the "homosexual" and (later) "heterosexual" binary as a result of medicalisation of sexual matters in the 19th century. Within this medicalised discourse, homosexuality was classified as pathological deviance, where heterosexuality was deemed to signify the "natural" and "healthy" norm (Foucault, 1978).

Foucault (1978) argues that normalisation of these ideas happened through repeated cultural practices that continue to influence individuals' minds and

bodies. Discourses are, therefore, sets of “truths” that are inherently connected to the networks of power within society (Foucault, 1978). Normalisation is evident in the notions of “traditional” gender roles in Kazakhstan, namely hegemonic masculinities as “the protector” and “the breadwinner” (Kudaibergenova, 2016a; Kesküla, 2018) and femininities “subservient mother” (Harris, 2004; Kamp, 2006; Nazarbayev, 2012). As Shane Phelan, (1990) summarises, “Power is not opposed to knowledge or truth, but functions through it and the systems of meaning upon which it rests. Power operates through discourses that define and legitimise its operation” (p.424).

Foucault (1978) explains how technologies of power affect and shape the body by exerting control over biological aspects of human life. According to Foucault, with an increasing interest in controlling populations and birth rates, governments assign themselves to manage populations by regulating reproduction and human sexuality, health and illness, and living and working conditions as well as birth and deaths. This understanding of power constitutes biopower, or the embodiment of a power over populations (Foucault, 2008; Chaput, 2009). Soviet policies within Central Asia aimed at eradicating “backward” traditions such as practices of Bacha Bazi, instilment of the priority of reproduction, the working mother contract, and compulsory heterosexuality, are all vivid examples of Foucauldian biopower and biopolitics that found expression in “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of the population” (Foucault, 1978, p.245). When a person departs from the “norm”, punishment through embarrassment, humiliation and shame can be expected (Foucault, 1977).

Moreover, Foucault (1978) highlights how in the “West”, discourses on sex were encouraged and “scientia sexualis” which was nourished by psychiatry

became an object of study incorporating the truth of individuality. Foucault moved away from “subjugated subjects”, instead arguing that from the 19th century onwards, individuals became engaged in subjectification by constituting themselves as subjects by using available discourses on sexuality (Foucault, 1978). It is important to point out that when Foucault wrote about sexuality in the “West”, he omitted the Soviet Union (see Engelstain, 1992; Healey, 2001; 2018; Clech, 2013; Roldugina, 2016 on Foucauldian history of homosexuality in Soviet Russia).

3.1.2. Foucault on power and visibility

Foucault associates power with visibility in his seminal work “Discipline and Punish” (1977), where he discusses Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon prison architecture as one of the mechanisms of social control, where “visibility is a trap” (Foucault, 1977, p.200). While this metaphor is widely criticised (for example, Haggerty, 2006 and Lyon, 2006), I believe that Bentham’s panopticon is useful in understanding the process of regulation and self-regulation within society. Bentham's panopticon consists of an annular building with the tower in the middle. The peripheral building is divided into cells each with one window facing out of the building and another facing the tower (see Image 1). From the tower, all inmates can in theory be seen, however the design of the tower is such that it is not clear whether it is occupied or not. The result of Bentham's architecture is “to arrange things so that the surveillance is permanent in its effects” (Foucault, 1977, p. 201).

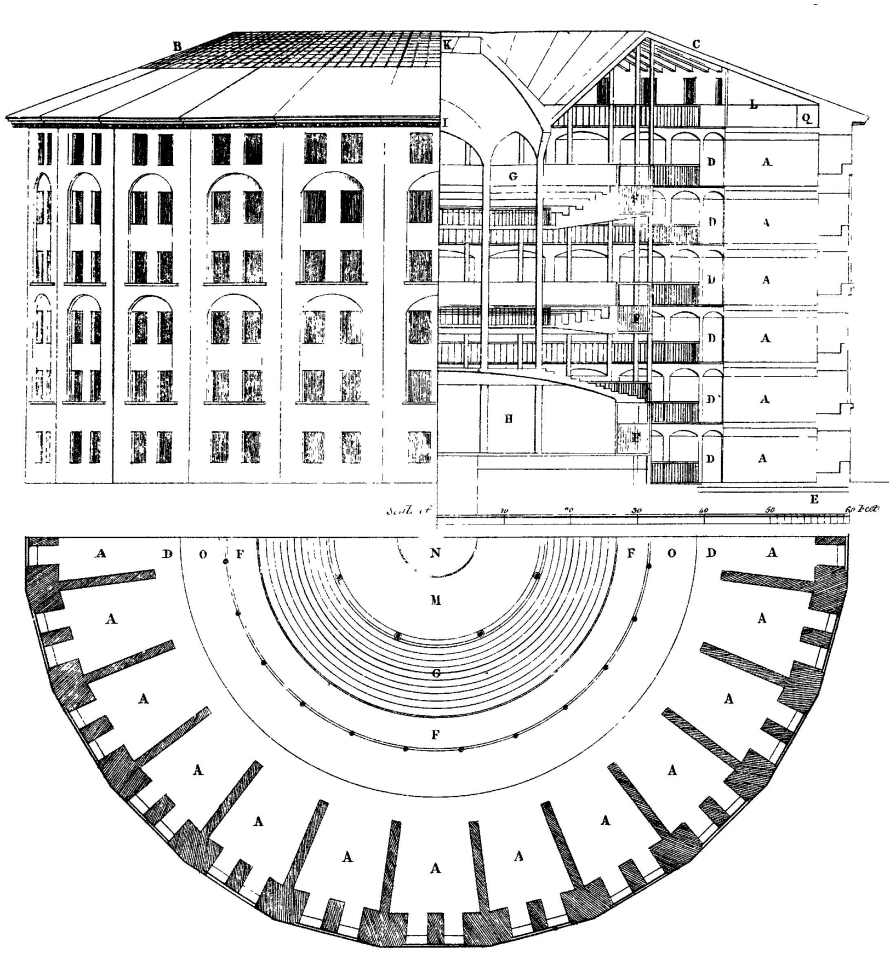


Image 1 "Panopticon", Jeremy Bentham. From "The works of Jeremy Bentham Vol. IV", 172–3. Licensed under Public domain via Wikimedia Commons. Available via license: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

The development of new information and communication technologies has marked a significant shift in the nature and extent of surveillance practices. With the advent of computer technology, information became storable, searchable and accessible (Marx, 1988; Zuboff, 1988). Furthermore, as highlighted by Ivan Manokha (2018), the growth of social networks and more recent use of biometric and facial recognition technologies allows potential

access to previously unattainable data to both private-sector and public-sector entities. As highlighted by Bauman and Lyon (2013), we now live in an era of "liquid" surveillance with blurred boundaries between different "watchers". Hence technology allows the deployment of panoptic structures to be distributed invisibly throughout society, which is exemplified by the idea of "electronic panopticon" (Poster, 1990). Electronic panopticon is particularly relevant given the level of state interference in the Kazakhstani internet (Article 19, 2015; Amnesty International, 2017). As emphasised by Caluya, (2010), Foucault's analysis of panopticon should be situated within the context of his view of power.

Foucault believes power not only comes from above, but it operates in a "capillary" fashion, dispersed throughout society (1980b, p.96). Power "is quite different from and more complicated, dense and pervasive than a set of laws or a state apparatus" (Foucault, 1980b, p.158).

> "I don't want to say that the State isn't important; what I want to say is that relations of power, and hence the analysis that must be made of them, necessarily extends beyond the limits of the State […] The State is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth" (Foucault, 1980b, p.122).

Placing the panopticon metaphor in the context of Foucault's understanding of the microphysics of power reveals that for Foucault (1977), it is not only the overseeing dominating gaze that holds power but also the internalised watchtower's gaze, such that the prisoner became his own overseer (Caluya, 2010). Foucault argues, "the major effect of the Panopticon" was "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (1977, p.201). As argued by Caluya (2010), the panopticon should be viewed as a mechanism of power that incorporates

the watcher and the watched. Foucault (1977) considers that those who judge and watch normality could be omnipresent within society, so not even the prison guards in the panopticon metaphor are immune to "the gaze". People can be judged and scrutinised from numerous angles: family, friends, employers, governments, corporations and many more (Foucault, 1980). Equally, politicians are scruitinised by "the anonymous and constant gaze of the mass public" (Marquez, 2012, p.21). The panopticon illustrates that power "has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (Foucault, 1977, p.201).

Therefore, Foucault calls for "an *ascending* analysis of power" (Foucault, 1980b, p.99, original emphasis) proceeding from micro-level (as opposed to macro-institutional, for example legislation or state power) in order to understand particular techniques of power (Geciene, 2002). However, it is important to point out that power and discourses can be only partially examined. Indeed, for Foucault, power is relational in character and cannot be considered to be a capacity of a particular group or individuals (Foucault, 1977). Accordingly, discourses and exercise of power can rarely be traced back to a single source. Instead, practices and discourses are results of a complicated network of relationships and intentions gradually evolving and changing over time (Foucault, 1986).

But what about the "macrophysics" of power or state power, critics asked (for example, see Garland, 1994). Foucault addressed this in a 1978 lecture on Governmentality. According to Foucault (2007), the question of "how to govern" has been central since the 16th century, culminating in the 18th century when the process of "governmentalisation of the state" took place. Governmentalisation of the state followed developments in knowledge in practices such as statistics, economics, and establishing the institution of the

police, which made the management of the population possible (Foucault, 2007). Committing to Foucauldian methodological approach does not mean denying there are regulated forms of centralised power, however it means committing to the claim that the peripheral relations of domination and subjugation must also be examined.

In this study, I employ Foucault's understanding of power and technologies of power to investigate the way gender and sexuality are regulated in Kazakhstan. I use an ascending analysis of power when considering everyday practices used to regulate and constrain queer subjectivities in the context of existing discourses surrounding gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan.

3.1.3. Agency and resistance

"The problem of agency" (Nealon, 2008, p.102) appears to be the cornerstone for numerous scholars both critiquing and defending Foucault (for example, Giddens, 1984; Newton, 1998; Allen, 2000; McNay, 2000). It is notable that Foucault does not draw a careful distinction between his use of terms: subjectivity, a practice of self and agency (Gros, 2002). In this section, I attempt to clarify some of those terms and outline some of the critiques of Foucauldian notions of agency. I use subjectivity as "the forms through which the individual is called to become a subject" (Guenancia, 2002, p.241). Subjection then suggests that a subject is "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault, 2000, p.331). Subjection should be distinguished from subjugation. As Ruffolo (2009) explains, subjection is not a top-down approach to power, "instead it is a productive force that is less of a relationship between subjects and more of a modifier of actions" (p.10). Subjugation, on the other hand, relies on prohibition and domination.

Subjectivity also needs to be distinguished from identity. Following Arthur Clech (2018), I see that the notion of queer subjectivity is wider than that of queer identity, "it can include, but cannot be reduced to, this identity" (p.8). I believe that identifying as queer, gay, bisexual, lesbian, transgender, pansexual or anything else is only one of the possible forms through which individuals in their experience of non-heterosexual desire or non-cisgender gender identity can render themselves a subject.

Let me clarify here what I mean by identity. My understanding of identity is based on Stuart Hall's (1996) definition. Hall writes,

> "I use identity to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourse and practices which attempt to "interpellate", speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be "spoken". Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions, which discursive practices construct for us. The notion that an effective suturing of the subject to a subject-position requires not just that the subject is 'hailed', but that the subject invests in the position, means that suturing has to be thought of as articulation, rather than as a one-sided process…." (Hall 1996, pp.5-6).

Hall's (1996) notion of identity as a temporary attachment is derived from a cultural understanding of psychoanalysis – the establishment of similarities and differences implies personal meanings and self-regard. According to Hall, identity is a process involving the production of a category of identity which happens alongside the process of individual identification, consisting of the alignment of a category of identity and the subject's attachment to it (Jenkins, 2008). Hence, the process of identification signifies how categories

of identity are experienced by the subject (Jenkins, 2008). Categories of identities and identification are not one and the same thing. According to Jenkins (2008), different categories of identities may produce different identifications and experiences in different contexts. For example, identifying as gay in Edinburgh, Scotland, is very different to identifying as gay in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Therefore, I assume identifications are drawn from existing categories of identities and the narratives associated with them. While personal identifications may transform and change over time, they are intricately connected to existing discourses and categories of identities. My understanding of identity has been influenced by queer theory and narrative epistemology, which I explore later in this chapter.

One of the links made by many scholars is that between agency and resistance in Foucauldian writing. For example, Evans and Davies (2004) emphasise that given the bi-directional and relational nature of Foucauldian conception of power, individuals should not be viewed as powerless. In Foucault's (1980) words, individuals "are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising…power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation" (p.98). For example, Foucault (1978) notes how discourse that was meant to control deviant sexualities also led to unintended effects facilitating the creation of "reverse" discourse: "homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (p.101). Indeed, for Foucault, resistance is a precursor to power as power relations fundamentally stem from antagonisms.

Such power-resistance binary is potentially problematic; if resistance is fundamentally situated within power, there is a risk that resistance reproduces existing power relations (Ruffalo, 2009). The question of freedom and agency remains opaque in Foucault's writing. One of the central

criticisms of Foucault's view of self is that it is deterministic and voluntaristic, which leaves little hope for change (Taylor, 1984; Dean, 1994; Newton, 1998; McNay, 1999). Indeed, in "The Order of Things", Foucault (1970) insists, "subject's ability to speak is ontologically bounded by the discourses through which his or her subjectivity is constructed" (Heller, 1996, p.91). This implies that subjectivity is essentially discursive. However, Foucault's view of power and agency changed between 1978 and 1984, from a subject with minimal freedom to one capable of relatively autonomous practices of ethical self-formation. In Foucault's (1988) words:

> "[P]erhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power. I am more and more interested in the interaction between oneself and others and in the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of the self" (p.19).

Technologies of the self are practices used by individuals to achieve their desired state. By using technologies of the self, individuals:

> "Effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, 1988, p.18).

Accordingly, individuals are engaged in the process of constructing their own self, using the discursive resources available to them. This is an active process of negotiation where language, discourses and other cultural sets of meanings are reconciled, accepted or rejected (Baker, 2000). Technologies of self "may span a wide range of spheres, and include cultivating the ability to have at our ready disposal theoretical knowledge, developing capacity to

listen appropriately, the habit of self-reflection, abstinence from physical indulgence, envisaging the worst possible circumstances which might befall us, and deciphering and meditating on one's thoughts and representations" (Mitcheson, 2012, p.64). The main aim of technologies of the self is to develop independence through practices of self-control and self-examination, as opposed to being constituted as a subjugated subject defined by others.

Foucault (2006) highlights that such practices are essential forms of resistance that allow one to challenge the existing power order. As pointed out by Mitcheson (2012) and Schrift (1995), while possibly unable to reverse the structure of domination, an individual might be able to challenge particular forms of relations and take different strategies in response to the strategies of control. Mitcheson (2012) notes, "the space, therefore exists for creative strategies, including self-formation along novel lines that might weaken and eventually reverse these structures, or going beyond mere reversal, contribute to radically different structure" (p.66). I admire Jeffrey Nealon's (2008) explanation of Foucauldian notion of agency,

> "It took me quite a while to figure out, but it finally became clear to me that the 'problem of agency' in Foucault is perhaps better stated as the problem of how to measure, predict, incite, or guarantee subjective resistance in the face of interpellating social norms. Agency, in short, is not simply actions or the emergence of something that wasn't there before, a happening; rather, agency is a code word for a subject performing an action that matters, something that changes one's own life or the lives of others. Agency is doing something freely, subversively, not as a mere effect programmed or sanctioned by constraining social norms" (p.102).

Nealon captures the tension of how agency is possible in the existing power structure. Following Nealon, I contend that the Foucauldian subject is not

simply caught up in power; the subject could use technologies of the self, which allow one to critically reflect on social-situatedness and reveal its own contingent and constructed nature. This opens up the space for new forms of subjectivity, and hence a new form of resistance.

In my analysis, I will take account of the various forms of subjectification that Kazakhstani queer people experience whilst allowing room for expression of agency, creativity and negotiation of existing power structures within the context of Kazakhstan. I am particularly interested in how Kazakhstani queers actively resist and self-create in the face of daily structural limitations.

I believe that Foucault's accounts of subjectivity, agency and visibility are not entirely adequate. As Jackson and Scott (2010) highlight, Foucauldian ideas around gender and sexuality fail to do "justice to the complex interrelationships between discourses (or cultural scenarios) and agency/identity (the intrapsychic)" (p.820).

In order to address this gap between agency and discourse, I find it useful to acknowledge unreflexive and unconscious elements of individual's practices. While Foucault himself rejected psychoanalytic concepts of repression and associated notions of the unconscious, I believe that along with his technologies of power suggestion, there are unconscious and unknowable elements of past and present experiences that may affect individuals' actions, for example, how Soviet discourses on gender and sexuality influence Kazakhstani queer people's thoughts and behaviours without them being aware of it.

All in all, Foucault's ideas around power, visibility and agency have informed my study and its key questions. My research is Foucauldian in its nature, in that I am interested in the ways power contains and regulates queer people's experiences in Kazakhstan, and how non-heterosexual and non-cisgender

Kazakhstani resist and negotiate their queer subjectivities in their everyday lives. However, I see Arendt's understanding of agency and visibility as useful and complementary to Foucault's, in that Arendt's ideas elucidate the relational aspect of agency and visibility.

3.2. Hannah Arendt

3.2.1. Collective action

Similarly to Foucault, Arendt criticises the juridical or command-obedience model of power. She argues that the command-obedience model is a result of the separation of action – beginning or leading (archein) and seeing an action through (prattein) (Arendt, 1958, p.189). Arendt (1958) suggests that this separation of action, ruling and obeying has disrupted the relationship between action and power. For Arendt (1958), action or beginning something anew is inseparable from the human condition of natality. According to Ardent (1958), "the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting" (p.9). Therefore, natality holds significance in the fact that the "newcomer" is capable of action. Similarly, the impulse to act and to begin anew is a part of the condition of natality. For Arendt (1958), this beginning anew is constitutive of being an agent.

I particularly connect with Arendt's ideas around agency and collective action since they help me to understand the importance of visibility for non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender people and the queer community in Kazakhstan. Arendt (1958) argues that, "in acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human word" (p.179). For Arendt, that does not mean the agent merely expresses their pre-existing identity nor does it mean that the agent is creating their identity (Allen, 2002). Instead, Arendt (1958) contends that identity is dialectically constructed, and writes,

> "Nobody is the author or producer of his own life story […] the stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is not an author or producer. Somebody began it and is its subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely its actor and sufferer, but nobody is its author" (p.184).

According to Arendt (1958), an action is always in relation to other actors and serves to maintain that relationship pattern. This is similar to Foucault, who views power as relational and dispersed, however Arendt (1958) adds an extra dimension to the notion of power – collective action. For her, power "exists only in its actualisation", the power is not "an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity", but a relational potential, which "springs up between men when they act together and vanishes the moment they disperse" (p.200). In other words, Arendt sees power as a function of collective action, or "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert" (Arendt, 1969, p.44).

Foucault largely neglects the notion of collective action in his work around power and agency although in his later studies he inadvertently agrees with Arendt's point, that "sometimes we have to rely on such and such type of community in order to resist a greater danger which comes from another community" (Foucault, 1983, p.7). However, the Arendtian view of power and agency is not unproblematic. As highlighted by Allen (2002) in her account of agency, Arendt predominantly focuses on the public domain and the role of publicity in the formation of individual subjectivity and agency, while the role of private and semi-private realms, such as family and schools, is undervalued. In line with Allen (2002), I believe that Arendt complements Foucault's conceptions of power and agency/subjectivity in adding the collective power dimension, which can serve as a resource for individuals struggling to resist existing power relations. Arendt's collective action

concepts will be useful when considering queer activism and the queer community in Kazakhstan.

3.2.2. Arendt on power and visibility

Like Foucault, Arendt (1958) sees a close relationship between power and visibility. Given that action always occurs in spaces (whether physical spaces or virtual spaces), it can be more or less visible depending on the spectators and on the quality of the space (how visible the space is). Examples of highly visible places include mediascape and political assembly, and less visible spaces include prisons and households (Marquez, 2012). In this respect, visibility is impermanent and what constitutes as visible to one group of spectators may be invisible to another. According to Arendt (1958), visibility and invisibility have different meanings and valences depending on place. For example, while visibility is desirable for a political actor in order to generate power by enabling them to act in front of spectators (Arendt, 1958), invisibility can also be valuable in private spaces such as one's household, offering the option to escape from the world.

Xavier Marquez (2012) compares Arendt and Foucault's conception of visibility and power: following Arendt, Marquez (2012) uses the term "spaces of appearance" (p.11) to signify spaces where visibility generates power; and following Foucault, Marquez (2012) introduces the term "spaces of surveillance" (p.11) where visibility subjugates. Marquez also distinguishes between "private or secret spaces", where invisibility makes it possible for the individual to escape observation, and "marginal spaces" (p.12), where the operation of power creates invisibility. Marquez (2012) notes that the above terms denote only ideal situations, "In real life, visibility always constrains as well as empowers, and invisibility always involves both an escape from

unwelcomed observation and some degree of marginalization" (Marquez, 2012, p.12).

The edge between appearance and surveillance can be seen in terms of the degree of symmetry and relative equality in the relationship between participants (Foucault, 1982). In a symmetrical relationship, there is a freedom for every participant to start something new, persuade others, and direct collective actions towards new purposes (Marquez, 2012). Marquez (2012) also points out the importance of actors' ability to escape the visibility as another factor in the distinction between spaces of appearance and spaces of surveillance. The ability of the actor to escape visibility determines their experience of the gaze as normalising and controlling (Arendt, 1969). Therefore, the actors' ability to manage their visibility has the potential to disrupt the mechanisms of normalisation and control. Similarly, the ability of the spectators to appear in the public view has the potential to disrupt the power of the highly visible others (Foucault, 1977).

I believe that Arendt offers important insight and complements Foucault's later thoughts on technologies of the self in exposing some of the conditions of visibility and expanding on the idea of the agency through collective action. As pointed out, the theories of Arendt and Foucault show some of the exemplars and extremes of the concepts in question. As Marquez (2012) writes, "at best, we can disclose ourselves as individuals (in spaces of appearance) or as types of roles (in spaces of surveillance), or as a mixture of both (in most spaces)" (p.30). In the next section I will discuss in more detail mechanisms of regulating visibility by turning to Goffman's (1959) ideas of stigma and impression management. I believe these will assist in understanding how queer people in Kazakhstan negotiate their subjectivities within different contexts

3.3. Erving Goffman

Goffman's (1963) idea of stigma is "the phenomenon whereby an individual with an attribute deeply discredited by his/her society is rejected as a result of the attribute" (p.6). According to this model, any individual possessing characteristics that are deviant from the widely held normative expectations is stigmatised. In this way, individuals who are involved in same-sex practices and people who transgress "the normalised" heterosexual practices and binary gender are seen as deviant and stigmatised (Plummer, 1975; Westbrook and Schilt, 2014; Martino and Cumming-Potvin, 2016). According to Goffman (1959, 1963), individuals practise impression management in their social interactions to control how others see them. Therefore, one's identity is not entirely fixed, nor is it solely the other who determines it. According to Goffman (1959), impression management is dialogical in nature: constructing one's identity is a joint negotiation between an individual and others that happens within a particular context.

Goffman (1959) speaks about the mechanisms of impression management. For instance, people collect information about others through sign-conveying vehicles (Goffman, 1959) such as clothing, age, posture, speech patterns, facial expressions, bodily gestures and the like. While some of those vehicles conveying signs are relatively fixed (for example, height and ethnicity), others are transitory (such as facial expressions). Hence, a person's appearance and self-presentation can be considered as "meaning generating" - through the body people can "glean clues" (Goffman, 1959, p.1) to inform their judgments. Such connotations are not fixed (Denzin, 1969) and can mean different things within different contexts and across different time. Passing is one of the types of impression management that Goffman (1959, 1963) recognises, and which is particularly relevant in this study. Passing is

undertaken by a person who wishes to conceal stigmatised information about themselves by passing as one without stigma (Goffman, 1963).

Goffman (1959) uses dramaturgical analogy to explore the presentation of identity as performance. For Goffman, any communicative setting has a front stage and a backstage. In the front stage, social agents present themselves in the way that they intend to appear to their particular audience. The backstage is similar to Arendt's (1958) private or secret space, where the social agent may choose to exit the view of the audience. The line between being the agent or the audience, as Arendt suggests, is easily crossed, and the social agents who are performing at any given point are also spectators for someone else. Goffman (1959) highlights that, “the access to the back and front stage is controlled not only by the performers but by the others” (p.229). The backstage is crucial for one’s maintenance of the self. Leib (2017) argues that the backstage is needed “for the moments of rest and respite, in order to get ready for a different role one must play, or do those things which are not constant with any role” (p.199). In a society with high levels of citizen surveillance, the backstage is denied (Marquez, 2012; Leib, 2017).

For queer people, managing information related to their stigmatised gender and/or sexuality defines their ability to cope with stigma. Lasser and Tharinger’s (2003) idea of visibility management is closely related to Goffman’s impression management. Building on Goffman’s impression management, Lasser and Wicker (2008) argue that visibility management is a process by which queer individuals “employ multiple strategies to actively regulate the degree to which they disclose or reveal invisible traits or characteristics to others” (p.105).

While in their original model Lasser and Tharinger (2003) refer to visibility management only in relation to gay, lesbian and bisexual people, building on

queer theory, I would like to use this concept in a broader sense to include gender diverse identities. In this study, impression or visibility management includes exaggerating masculinity or femininity, acting “straight”, not wearing certain symbolic clothing, and hiding or playing along with the normative assumptions about one's gender and/or sexuality. Goffman posits that individuals often deliberately aim to project an idealised impression to their audiences, an impression that is “close to the sacred centre of the common values in society” (Goffman, 1959, p.36). However, it is important to note that despite the malleability implied above, people do not necessarily have complete control and freedom in relation to their impression management. Some aspects of an actor’s front can be relatively fixed and difficult to conceal or change, for example, height can be an issue for a transgender woman. In my view, Goffman’s work complements the theories of Foucault, by showing how individuals may choose to resist and negotiate dominant power relations, and Arendt, by explaining the mechanisms of managing one’s “appearances” to others.

3.4. Queer Theory

My next theoretical foundation lies in queer theory. Following Foucault (1978), queer theory challenges the dominant constructions of gender and sexuality and in doing that, also the notion of normativity. Queer theorists ask: what are the conditions for the possibility of the emergence of gendered and sexual subjectivities and how does power operate as both an oppressive force and that which enables resistance in the name of gendered and sexual subjects.

In “Gender Trouble", Judith Butler (1990) challenges reductive theories of gender and sexuality. In her outline of the theory of performativity, Butler (1990) argues that gender is the result of repeated “styles of the flesh”, limited by their contexts (p.190). Butler (1990) introduces a useful concept of the “matrix of intelligibility” which designates the grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalised. Butler (1999) argues that the cultural matrix through which gender and sexuality becomes intelligible requires that “certain kinds of gender ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’ – that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender” (p.24). Butler (1990) contends that subjectivity emerges via language or the terms and significations used to describe others and ourselves (McCann, 2016).

In following Foucault's (1978) argument that sexuality is a discursive product of social and historical forces, Butler asserts that “gendered terms by which we are made subjects are never fully fixed, though these coalesce into seemingly natural embodiments over time” (McCann, 2016, p.231). Hence the “natural” gender order is ever-changing, albeit so gradual and seamless that it is difficult to detect (Butler, 1990). Gender norms are functioning on an

unspoken level, often taken for granted, and are frequently challenging to articulate. It is only when the norm is violated, or the tension around an aspect of gendered expectations arises, that they enter the domain of the public discourse. Once articulated publically, gender norms may become the tool of power and control within society. Furthermore, the patterns and repetitions are not arbitrary, but directly grounded in and related to the broader societal hegemonic ideology. The long history of Russian influence, colonisation and later Sovietisation, meant that Kazakhstan's people were forced to rethink and redefine their social norms, frequently as a response and resistance to previously dominant ideologies. In this study, I look at the confluence of different discourses to produce everyday life narratives of gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan.

Queer theorists introduced the concept of heteronormativity, meaning the collection of norms, institutions and practices that make dominance of heterosexuality natural and correct and that organise homosexuality, as its opposite (Warner, 1991; Crawford, 1993; Jackson, 1999). The notion of heteronormativity is exemplified in the Russian term "netradicionnaya seksualnaya orientacyja" ("non-traditional sexual orientation"), which reflects that certain sexual identities are "traditional", while others are "non-traditional". Indeed, the queer epistemological perspective "involves changing how one understands the normal and the natural" (Hall, 2017, p.162). According to Epstein and Johnson (1994), heteronormativity illustrates how heterosexuality is "encoded in language, in institutional practices and the encounters of everyday life" (p.198). This heterosexualisation of desire "required and instituted the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between "feminine" and "masculine", where these are understood as expressive attributes of "male" and "female" (Butler, 1990, p.24).

This binary is also exemplified by the notion of the "closet", which is the symbolised space of shelter or as Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick (1990) puts it, as the "defining structure for gay oppression" (p.71) in the 20th century. The idea of the closet is synonymous with the "coming out" narrative, which has become a part of the culture of storytelling about the sexual self in modernity (Plummer, 1995). Following queer theory, I would like to question the binaries and challenge the ways in which heteronormativity structures everyday life of queer people in Kazakhstan.

One of the criticisms of queer theory is that in its rebuttal of identity, it may paradoxically result in denial of difference. As Seidman (1993) writes,

> "This very refusal to anchor experience in identifications ends up, ironically, denying differences by either submerging them in an undifferentiated oppositional mass or by clocking the development of individual and social differences through the disciplining compulsory imperative to remain undifferentiated" (p.133).

Sally Hines (2006, 2007, 2010) problematises queer framework for its tendency to ignore the complexities of lived experiences and identifications of transgender subjectivities (also see Stryker, 2006 for a critique of queer theory from a transgender perspective). Following Hines (2010), I contend that even though transgender as a concept may be read as queer, for transgender people themselves, experiences of transgressing gender normativity and heteronormativity are variable as well as "materially, culturally, socially and spatially contingent" (p.589). Therefore, alongside problematising heteronormativity, I would also like to question and interrogate cisnormativity or the "assumption that assigned sex and gender identity are congruent, fixed and binary" (Catalpa and McGuire, 2018, p.89; see also Bauer *et al.*, 2009; Kuvalanka *et al.*, 2018). In analysing queer

Kazakhstani narratives, I will at times differentiate transgender experiences in an attempt to understand their unique experiences and positionalities.

Returning to Butler's (1990) notion of performativity, her conceptualisation is distinct from Goffman's (1959) on performance. One of the key differences is that the agentic emphasis in Goffman's (1959) notion of impression management and presentation of self contrasts with Butler's understanding of performativity as a practice of repetition, rather than performance consciously enacted by an agentic subject (Hall, 1996; Brickell, 2003). Butler (1990) argues that,

> "In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed. […] There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (p.33).

While Butler's insights about the discursive formation of the subject, heteronormativity and naturalisation through repetition are informative, in this study, I integrate Goffman's conceptualisation of performance as (at least in part) intentional or deliberate, when looking at creative negotiations used by Kazakhstani queer people within different contexts.

As emphasised by McCann (2016),"queer theory is primarily concerned with unmaking and undoing of the subject, often via genealogical approaches, considering the various social and contextual elements that have contributed to the categorisation of the subject in the first instance" (p.232). Hence in employing queer methodology, I would like to problematise regimes of "normality" that bear on the sexual and gender status quo that operate within queer narratives and wider discursive practices in Kazakhstan (Green, 2002,

p.522). In the next section I explore intersectionality and how I see it complementing queer theory.

3.5. Intersectionality

Intersectionality theory is “interested in how the differential situatedness of different social agents affects the way they affect and are affected by different social, economic and political projects” (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p.4). Yuval-Davis (2011) provides a beautiful metaphor of flowing interweaving threads, which constitute intersectionality. According to this perspective, different identities: gender, race, class and sexuality have their ontological basis which cannot be reduced to or separated from one another, “there is no separate concrete meaning of any facet of these social categories, as they are mutually constitutive in any concrete historical moment” (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p.7). Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix provide this definition for intersectionality:

> “We regard the concept of ‘intersectionality’ as signifying the complex, irreducible, varied and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasises that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands” (Brah and Phoenix, 2004, p.76).

Intersectionality allows me to visualise the complexity and multilayered nature of queer experiences in Kazakhstan. There are historical layers of pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-independence Kazakhstani discourses on gender and sexuality. There are layers of personal positionalities and attributes: age, ethnicity, religion, education, access to financial capital, perceived gender,

geographical location and bodily characteristics. All of these intertwine and interconnect to emerge into a unique constellation of personal experience.

Similarly to queer theory, the intersectionality perspective has been criticised for being largely theoretical rather than methodological (McCall, 2005; Valentine *et al.*, 2010) and that many different theoretical approaches coexist somehow uneasily under the banner of "intersectionality" (McCall, 2005; Stella, 2015). Furthermore, Erel *et al.* (2010) argue that intersectional approaches are in danger of being additive rather than relational "grids" of social divisions that run the risk of merely describing the interlocking power relations. Queer theory and intersectionality seem to share a commitment to problematise the idea of the "normativity" and highlight the complexity of an individual's subjective experiences. However, the two theories also seem to diverge from each other. While queer theory is inherently anti-identitarian and deconstructionist, intersectionality mostly concerns itself with a "theoretical paradigm based on identity categories" (McCall, 2005, p.1771).

In my research, I integrate both queer theory and intersectionality to inform my methodology. On the one hand, by drawing on queer theory, I question existing identifications, language and place emphasis on subjective experiences of individuals. On the other hand, I incorporate intersectionality into my understanding of how people negotiate the multiple strands of their situatedness and view those different dimensions as interactive rather than additive.

To conclude the theoretical framework section, my research is Foucauldian in its nature, drawn chiefly from Foucault's concepts of power, visibility and agency. I complement those with Arendt's idea to incorporate the collective action dimension of agency and visibility. I also integrate the theories of Goffman to account for the mechanisms of visibility and impression

management. I use queer theory and intersectionality to problematise "normativity" and to explain the complexity of individuals' experiences. I, therefore, formulate my research qurstions primarily in Foucauldian terms, whilst their answers are affected by the other theories outlined in this chapter.

3.6. Research questions

I intend to present in detail some of the forms queer subjectivity takes in Kazakhstan by looking at non-heterosexual and non-cisgender individuals' narratives of everyday life, while locating these narratives within their socio-historical context. This study aims to answer two main questions relating to Kazakhstan:

1) What regulates and constrains queer people's everyday lives?
2) How do queer people negotiate their queer subjectivities?

Chapter Four: Methodology

One question that remains is how can queer subjectivity in Kazakhstan be studied? How do people (for example, me as a researcher) access individual subjectivities within particular contexts? The answer to this question leads me to another theoretical foundation for my study, narrative epistemology. I will begin this chapter by discussing how narrative epistemology lines up with my theoretical framework and how the personal narratives of everyday lives of Kazakhstani queer people will allow me to understand the interaction between discursive practices and individual agency.

4.1. Narrative

4.1.1. Defining narrative

My stance is in line with the concept of Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), who looks at the question of how people use narratives to understand and create self-understanding within specific socio-historical context. Ricoeur (1992) writes:

> "[…]do we not consider human lives to be more readable when they have been interpreted in terms of stories that people tell about them?[...] It, therefore, seems plausible to take the following chain of assertion as valid: self-understanding is an interpretation; interpretation of the self, in turn, finds in the narrative, among other signs and symbols, a privileged form of mediation; the latter borrows from history as well as from fiction, making life story a fictional history or[…] a historical fiction" (p.114).

Agreeing with Ricoeur, I believe it is the narratives of my participants that I hear as I inquire about their everyday lives as queer people in Kazakhstan.

For Ricoeur, narrative gains ontological status: “all actions and experience require interpretation, and it is in the act of interpretation that narrative acquires its centrality” (McNay, 1999b; p.325). Ricoeur argues that interpretation is “caught inside a circle formed by the conjunction of interpretation and interpreter” (Geanellos, 2000, p.113).Therefore, the interpreter plays a crucial role in the understanding of narratives and their meaning. Following Ricoeur, I acknowledge and embrace the interpretative nature of my research and with it, the plurality and incomplete quality of my interpretation.

Like Ricouer, Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) suggest that,

> “[N]arratives (stories) in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it” (p. xvi).

Given this definition, three key features of the narrative can be identified. Firstly, narratives are temporal and sequential, or as Phillida Salmon puts it in her co-written chapter with Catherine Kohler Riessman (2013), “[w]hatever the content, stories demand the consequential linking of events or ideas. Narrative shaping entails imposing a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected” (p.197). Secondly, narratives are meaningful. Indeed, Labov and Waletsky (1967) highlight that narratives are more than just a sequence or chronicle of events and are used to make sense of past experiences both for the individual concerned and for the audience. And lastly, narratives are co-constructed in relation to the audience. Whether or not the audience is physically present, it exerts an

elemental influence on what (and how) is said and what (and how) is not expressed (Salmon and Kohler Riessman, 2013). I, therefore, believe that my own positionality will inevitably influence the narratives of my participants and my interpretation of those narratives. I will use reflexivity to acknowledge how my own experiences and contexts informed the process and outcome of this research (see Reflexivity and researcher's positionality section of this chapter).

In addition to those features, I employ the view of narratives from a Foucauldian perspective, viewing individual narratives as discursively constructed or "narrative as/in discourse" (Tamboukou, 2015b, p.42). In the next section I will elaborate on this idea by explaining the Foucauldian approach to narratives.

4.1.2. Foucauldian approach to narratives

Following Maria Tamboukou (2013, 2015) who developed the Foucauldian approach to narrative, I believe that personal narratives should be taken as:

1) Effects of power/knowledge
2) Modalities of power
3) Productive and constitutive of the subject

Firstly, Tamboukou invites narrative researchers to trace the conditions of the possibility of emergence of particular narratives in the light of specific power/knowedge structures. This point is reflected by many narrative scholars and is not unique to Foucauldian approach. For example, for Plummer (1995), stories of sexual lives are a part of larger historical, situational and cultural narratives. Similarly, Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) explain that narratives are rooted in and structured in ways that reveal a person's position in the specific social context, of which the person may or

may not be aware of (in Abell, Stokoe and Billig, 2004). From this perspective, Kazakhstani queer narratives illuminate aspects of existing power structures and discourses around gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan. Therefore, wider socio-historical discourses around gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan will need to be investigated as part of the analysis of narratives of individual queer people.

The second and third characteristics of narratives suggested by Tamboukou are interrelated. Narratives mediate and reflect reality. However, narratives can also challenge and produce reality, and indeed alter the subject (Tamboukou, 2015b). Building on Arendt's conceptualisation of speech and actions, Tamboukou (2015b) suggests that narratives can be viewed as spaces "in which human beings appear to each other" (Arendt, 1998, p.177). According to Arendt, the story allows capturing the action that would otherwise be lost in the fleeting moments of life. Following Arendt and Foucault, Tamboukou (2015) argues that,

> "Stories should not be conceived only as discursive effects but also as recorded processes wherein the self as the author/teller of his/her story transgresses power boundaries and limitations [...] It is this very process of storied actions, revealing the 'birth' of the political subject, that the political in narrative research is about" (p.43).

In this respect, narratives of Kazakhstani queer people are both vehicles through which power and discourses are circulated, and at the same time, narratives are "spaces" and tools that create the potentiality of those discourses to be creatively negotiated and resisted. As Murray (2003) points out, "through narrative, we do not only shape the world and ourselves, but they are shaped for us through narrative" (p.96). To use Foucault's terminology, narratives can be technologies of power, "which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an

objectivizing of the subject" (Foucault, 1988, p.18), while concurrently, narrative may function as technologies of the self or an active practice of self formation (Tamboukou, 2013). In my research, I am interested to see how my participants' queer narratives reflect, are constrained by, and/or resist existing power structures and larger social discourses about gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan.

4.1.3. Narratives of everyday lives

In line with the Foucauldian call for researching micro-levels of power and resistance, I chose to look at the everyday lives of queer people in Kazakhstan. I aim to understand what affects and shapes their daily lives as well as to illuminate the practices that Kazakhstani queer people use to resist the dominant discourses and creatively negotiate them. I believe that everyday life is a microcosm of the social order on a macro-level. As explained by Nynas and Kam-Tuck Yip (2016),

> "Everyday life is characterised by messiness, fluidity and "taken-for-grantedness". It is constituted by – and constitutive of – identities, subjectivities, experiences, emotions, bodies and desires that are lived out on individual and collective levels of spaces and politics" (p.8).

I believe that the mundane, repetitive and familiar illuminate the strands that tie and constrain queer people's lives that individuals have to then struggle with and creatively negotiate in spaces like home and work. Scott (2009) argues that there are several dimensions to everyday life:

> "[Everyday life] is that which we presume to be mundane, familiar and unremarkable […] that which is routine, repetitive and rhythmic […]

> our everyday lives appear to us as private and personal, the product of our individual choices" (p.2).

Scott's use of "appear" here is crucial, as everyday is located within an existing power structure (see May, 2011, and Pink, 2012, for more about researching everyday lives).

Everyday context is also useful in illuminating intersectionality of queer experiences - the cross-over and interplay between different aspects of one's social situatedness. Different aspects of an individual's identity and identifications become apparent within a variety of everyday contexts. As pointed out by Nynas and Kam-Tuck Yip:

> "[E]ven the most committed of activists does not live her/his life exclusively on the basis of that singular identity. Her/his everyday life is embedded within a power-infused interactional web which requires her/him to function as an individual with multiple identities, or at least context-specific identifications" (Richardson and Monro, 2012; Taylor et al., 2011 as quoted in Nynas and Kam-Tuck Yip, 2016, p. 9).

To capture the everyday intersectional nature of queer experiences in Kazakhstan, I framed my research as "researching everyday lives" to my participants and asked questions about the daily experiences within contexts that were relevant to and determined by each participant, whether it be the online dating scene, university, workplace or their family and home (see below).

So far, I have argued that narratives are discursive in their nature, and emphasised that individual narratives reflect, channel and resist existing discourses and practices. I have chosen to conduct narrative interviews to develop further understanding of queer subjectivities.

4.2. Narrative interviews

One of the key aspects of a narrative design is to invite participants to have their own voice and allow space for their stories to emerge. This seems particularly important, considering that much of the existing research on queer lives in Kazakhstan is based on survey data and questionnaires with narrow focus, rather than explorative interviews. Indeed, the most common way of conducting narrative inquiry remains the recorded and transcribed interviews (Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou, 2013).

I was aware that telling stories about gender and sexuality in the context of societal homophobia and transphobia may be difficult (Plummer, 1995). Such accounts could include strange, painful and maybe confusing memories and emotions. However, as pointed out by Squire *et al.* (2014) "[t]he need to narrate difficult and unfamiliar experience is part of the very human need to be understood by others, to be in communication even from the margins." (p.56). As highlighted by Czarniawska (2009), during the interview an interviewee may retell narratives that circulate within their context. Indeed, in line with the Foucauldian approach to narratives, the interview situation may itself become a site for narrative (re)production and/or a site of resistance to the dominant narratives.

The practice of collecting narratives from others involves trust and a relationship between the researcher and participants that allows for the gathering of spontaneous and rich information (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The relationship is at the core of the interaction. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) affirm:

> "Narrative inquiry is the study of experience, and experience, as John Dewey taught, is a matter of people in relation contextually and temporally. Participants are in relation, and we as researchers are in relation to participants. Narrative inquiry is an experience of the experience. It is people in relation studying with people in relation" (p.189).

As a Foucauldian researcher, I have paid particular attention to power. I was aware of the inherent asymmetry in the relationship. On one hand, I believe that participants in my research are the only experts on their own narratives. Or as pointed out by Czarniawska (2009), "[t]he power of knowledge if not other types of power, lies on the side of the interviewee" (p.48). Hence, I gave participants space and showed interest rather than exchanging ideas. On the other hand, I chose to use semi-structured interviews to facilitate participants' discussion of their everyday lives by asking about different contexts such as family, relationships, work, medical setting and other contexts while also following each participant's narrative, allowing exploration of new areas raised by them. Hence, as a researcher I was able to steer the conversation towards issues related to the project while allowing some leeway for participants to express their chosen angles. I used an interview schedule with a rough outline for me (see Appendix E). I asked open-ended exploratory questions about participants' everyday lives and ensured I clarified their meanings (Riessman, 2008).

Riessman (2008) believes it is essential for the researcher to relinquish some control to allow the extended narration to emerge in its own time. Riessman (2008) also emphasises that the specific wording of the question is less important than the researcher's attentiveness, engagement and degree of reciprocity in the conversation. Despite creating an interview schedule, my priority was to allow narratives to flow without controlling how stories unfolded (Riessman, 1993; Mishler, 1995).

While I initially decided to conduct one-to-one interviews, I made an exception with a couple (pseudonyms Anna and Sasha) to interview them together at their request. For logistical reasons, the interview was conducted dyadically, meaning that Anna and Sasha interacted in response to open-ended research questions (Morgan *et al.*, 2013). The dyadic interview has both advantages and disadvantages: for example, as Zipp and Toth, (2002) highlight, when interviewing couples, each partner's response is influenced by the previewed (or known) position of the other partner. As emphasised by Taylor and Vocht (2011), "when partners are interviewed jointly, they represent themselves not just as individuals, but also as concurrent participants in a relationship" (p.1577; see also Morris, 2001). Consequently, the narrative emerging from the dyadic interview is jointly co-constructed by each party in the couple and the researcher, which gives a different, collective perspective on the research subject at hand (Valentine, 1999; Racher, 2003; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). At the same time, dyadic interviews may allow a participant to stimulate and challenge experiences that might not be recognised or remembered in a one-to-one interview setting (Morgan *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, partners in a dyadic interview setting are able to introduce new themes for further discussion, which can result in richer data. This was evident in the interview with Anna and Sasha, who frequently reminded each other about aspects of experiences or past events and co-edited each other's narratives.

Interviews were conducted in Russian. The debate around the status of the Russian language in Kazakhstan is beyond the scope of this research. It involves complex arguments about Kazakhstan's Soviet past, nationalism, ideological influences and legislation (see Sabitova and Alishariyeva, 2015). In short, although the Kazakh language has the status of the state language, Russian retains its legal status as an official language of the Republic. Russian is still a widely spoken language not only among Russian and

Kazakh populations but also ethnic minorities living in Kazakhstan (Smagulova, 2008; Sulejmenova, 2010).

Moreover, there are differences between the Russian language in Kazakhstan and the Russian language in the Russian Federation (Sabitova and Alishariyeva, 2015). They reflect specific socio-cultural phenomena and can be observed in phonetic, grammatical levels of the language as well as vocabulary used to denote equivalent-lacking words to represent realities of Kazakh culture (for example, “akim” for the “head of administration”; “zhuz” for “tribe”, “toy” for “big festivity”; Sabitova and Alishariyeva, 2015). For Russian language speakers in Russia, some of these words are exotic and unfamiliar. Being a Russian-native speaker who grew up in Kazakhstan, I am familiar with the Kazakhstani Russian language nuances.

It is widely accepted that interview questions should be asked in the vocabulary and language of the individual being interviewed (Benner, 1994; Squires, 2009). Therefore, my choice to conduct interviews in Russian - I am not proficient enough in the Kazakh language - is an obvious limitation to the study. It precludes access to participants who are not proficient in Russian.

4.3. Reflexivity and researcher's positionality

In essence, both researcher and participants are "subjects" of the research as they enter the research relationship from their prospective "positions", which are more or less valued – hence the term "positionality". Scott-Dixon (2004) defines social location as "the complex interaction between our gender, race/ethnicity, age, ability, sexuality and socio-economic class" (p.32).

Robyn Dowling (2005) writes on the importance of researchers' positionality in qualitative research:

> "Collecting and interpreting qualitative information relies upon a dialogue between you and your informants. In these dialogues your personal characteristics and social position – elements of your positionality – cannot be fully controlled or changed because such dialogues do not occur in social vacuum. The way you are perceived by your informants, the ways you perceive them, and the ways you interact are at least partially determined by social norms" (p.25).

Dowling continues to argue that critical reflexivity is the most appropriate strategy to engage with one's positionality. Critical or self-reflexivity means to situate myself in the context of my research, to acknowledge my own positionality in relation to each participant's subject positions, and be aware of how they may interact and how this interaction may transform research process and outcome (see Veroff and DiStefano, 2002; Finlay, 2003; Etherington, 2007; Gorman-Murray, Johnston and Waitt, 2016). I identify as queer, however, most people perceive me as a feminine cisgender woman. I am Jewish-Russian, born in eastern Kazakhstan, and left there when I was

17. My family remains in Kazakhstan. I trained to be a counsellor in Scotland and reside there still.

My positionality enacts complexity and "hybridity" of intersections of various identities (Narayan, 1993, p.30) in that I cannot classify myself as fully "in" or "out", being queer Kazakhstani yet living abroad for so long (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Indeed as Naples (1996) points out, "[i]nsiderness or outsiderness are not fixed or static positions, rather they are ever-shifting and permeable social locations that are differentially experienced and expressed by community members" (p.140). The researcher has to continuously negotiate within the spectrum of various social identities. I paid careful attention to the intersectionality of my social positionalities in an attempt to shed light on potential avenues of operation of power within my relationships with participants (see Carstensen-Egwuom, 2014 for exploration of the connection between intersectionality and reflexivity).

While self-disclosure is a debated terrain in qualitative research (for example, see Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2006; Wigginton and Setchell, 2016), I decided to be open about my sexuality and national identities with my participants during interviews. I believe that my self-disclosure was important to build on the relationship and is congruent with the value of transparency (see Evans and Barker, 2010 and Mcdonald, 2013 for more information on disclosing queer identity in research settings). However, my complex positionality was evident. For example, participants would use phrases such as: "Mariya, as a queer person, you know yourself…" indicating the sense sharing the identity. At the same time, I was mindful of my "outsiderness" as at times I struggled to understand the slang used by a participant or, for example, when one pointed out, "for you in the West it is different, but here…". In that instance, the participant attributed me to the West, knowing that I live in Scotland and conduct my research as part of a programme at the University of Edinburgh. I had to pay attention to the power that comes with the connotation of a

Western researcher coming to study the “orient” (Central Asia) and the potentiality of re-enacting the structures of oppression that are present within the academic domain (see Suyarkulova, 2018 on the debate around foreign researchers working in Central Asia).

Lastly, I was transparent with my participants about my identity as a counsellor, which I believe had an effect on the interview process. I recognise my training has given me some valuable skills, for example I was trained in listening attentively, probing, being empathic, and creating a safe environment in which people can share their stories (Finlay, 2011; McLeod, 2014; Georgiadou, 2016). Furthermore, as a counsellor I use reflexivity consistently in my work (Etherington, 2007). ” Arthur Frank (1998) warns counsellors who also conduct research against inadvertently setting up a situation where one assumes certain therapeutic effects, or feels compelled to “share with a therapist”. In line with Foucauldian thinking, I paid particular attention to these power dynamics as well as using my own voice and setting clear boundaries between the role of researcher and counselor. This was crucial in navigating the complex terrain of research relationships (see Ethical Considerations section).

4.4. Research design

In this section, I explain how I conducted my study. I discuss the practicalities of my research and outline how what I planned worked in practice.

4.4.1. Inclusion criteria

Potential participants in this study were 1) aged eighteen or older and 2) (a) identified as non-heterosexual and/or b) non-cisgender.

4.4.2. Exclusion criteria

Those who did not wish to participate in the study, those who did not meet the inclusion criteria, and participants with dual relationships were excluded from the study.

4.4.3. Number of participants

Given the political and social context, I was aware that recruiting participants for my study might be a challenge. Moreover, in my intention to delve deeply into exploratory narratives of everyday lives of queer Kazakhstani people, I was mindful that I would need to allow at least 90 minutes for each interview and predicted that each would generate approximately 50 pages of transcription. Furthermore, the larger the number of participants, the less chance I would have to engage in the in-depth understanding of their narratives (Creswell, 1994). I decided to aim to recruit ten participants, which would allow me ample time for transcribing interviews, analysing and answering my research question. However, in the end, while ten interviews

were conducted, eleven participants took part in this study as two were interviewed as a couple.

4.4.4. Interview location

Initially, I considered that it would be feasible to conduct interviews via Skype or a similar platform. In attempting to find out about the security of the Internet as a potential medium of research, I discovered the press release by Kazakhtelecom stating that internet users would be required to install a national security certificate on their devices by 1st January 2016 in compliance with recent amendments to the Law on Communication (Freedom House, 2016). According to the report, "[t]he announcement raises several privacy and security concerns. The certificate is designed to intercept traffic to and from foreign sources, and allow government officials to gain access to encrypted mobile and web communications" (Freedom House, 2016). As highlighted by Freedom House, particular importance will be given to data from outside the Republic of Kazakhstan. As such, the law determined my decision to conduct interviews face-to-face.

Interviewees were recruited from Almaty, Astana and Karaganda. Astana and Almaty were chosen since most queer NGOs are based there, which allowed for easier access to potential participants. Furthermore, Astana and Almaty are the two biggest cities with many internal migrants from other (frequently more rural) regions of Kazakhstan. This allowed me to potentially gain access to queer people from different regions as well as to hear the narratives of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender peoples' everyday lives in the two most economically prosperous cities in Kazakhstan. The inclusion of Karaganda was driven by the recruitment of two additional participants from there.

The next question that I needed to address was: where will I conduct my interviews so that my participants and I feel safe? According to Herzog (2005), interviews that deal with sensitive, emotional or private issues are best conducted in a participant's home as home offers a sense of comfort and safety. In Kazakhstan, Herzog's assumption of home as a safe and private place can be questioned. It is common for people to share their apartments with family or friends. Small apartments and a lack of privacy may, for some, compromise safety and confidentiality. Home may be an option for those who live on their own. However, even then, there may be challenges in the form of distractions (for example, pets, telephone and children). Given these limitations, I decided to offer the home option only if the participant was unable or uncomfortable to attend an interview in the selected interview location. My selected interview location, offered to all participants, was a private room within an open plan office. Several participants preferred to meet in a more informal setting, such as a café. I took a preliminary look at their chosen café to ensure there was some private space (enclosed spaces with good sound insulation, commonly called VIP areas in a café). Three of the interviews were conducted in privately rented VIP areas in a café, while six took place in office locations. The remaining interview, the dyadic one, was conducted in the participants' home.

4.4.5. Sampling

My sampling strategy changed during the course of my research. I intended to use snowball sampling, "a technique in which the researcher initially samples a small group of people relevant to the research questions, and these sampled participants propose other participants who have had experience or characteristics relevant to the research" (Bryman, 2016, p.415). The snowball sampling method is particularly useful when researching hard to reach or stigmatised populations (Noy, 2008). Initially, I

intended to recruit my participants through two activists from Kazakhstan. Moreover, I planned to use personal acquaintances (initial informants) who identify as queer or are affiliated with non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender individuals living in Kazakhstan.

The first sampling strategy involved the initial informants speaking to potential participants about my study. Once potential participants met the criteria and expressed an interest in participating in my research, they were given my email address and/or telephone number. This medium would be used to make arrangements for the preliminary meeting.

However, my initial sampling strategy only allowed me to recruit three participants. After a month with no further leads, I had to employ another sampling method, which is not uncommon in qualitative research (see Bryman, 2016).

My second sampling strategy was the maximum variation purposive sampling strategy, ensuring the widest variation possible in terms of dimensions of interest (Bryman, 2016). The second sampling strategy involved using a closed social media group for Kazakhstani queer people. I was added to the group by an acquaintance who was one of the founders and gatekeepers, and allowed to post a short advertisement on the group "wall" (see Appendices H and I). Sixteen people contacted me, and of those eight were selected to represent the greatest variability in terms of age and sexuality and/or gender identities.

4.4.6. Participants' self-identification

Intersectionality theory stresses the importance of how different strands of an individual's identity intersect in shaping individuals' subjectivities (Brah and

Phoenix, 2004; McCall, 2005). In line with intersectionality, I had intended to make participants' situatedness visible in this study. However, this goal was complicated by the need for anonymity and confidentiality, given the potential risks for participants (discussed further in the Ethical considerations section). While I enquired about participants' ages, approximations are given in my findings to preserve the anonymity of participants in the study. An exception is Gulzada, a participant who chose not to be anonymised (see Ethical considerations).

One of the first questions in the interview was about identification. Out of the eleven participants, three identified as cisgender gay men (cisgendernyj muzhchina gei), three as bisexual women (biseksulka or biseskual'naja zhenshina), one identified as a lesbian, one as pansexual, two participants identified as transgender women (transgendernaja zhenshina) and one identified as a transgender man (transgendernyj muzhchina).

Other identifying characteristics, such as ethnicity, religion and profession, were not noted unless they were deemed important by the participants themselves. This information comprised Table 1, which demonstrates the diversity of social situatedness amongst participants in this study. While this approach is an obvious limitation of this study, I believe this was a necessary safety precaution.

Table 1 Interviewee's socio-demographic data

Pseudonym	Identity	Age (Approx.)	Place of Residence	Ethnicity	Education	Activist (Yes/No)
Zhanna	Transgender woman	Early 20s	Astana	Mixed	Incomplete higher	Yes
Bolat	Cisgender homosexual man	Early 20s	Astana	Kazakh	Incomplete higher	Yes
Ekaterina	Transgender woman	Mid 20s	Almaty	-	Higher	Yes
Gulzada (actual name)	Lesbian woman	44 years old	Almaty	Kazakh	Higher	Yes
Ivan	Pansexual man	Mid 40s	Almaty	Russian	Higher	Yes
Zarina	Bisexual	Late 20s	Astana	Kazakh	Higher	Yes
Miras	Cisgender gay man	Early 20s	Astana	Kazakh	Higher	Yes
Amir	Cisgender homosexual man	Mid-30s	Astana	Mixed	Incomplete Higher	Yes
Oleg	Transgender man	Early 30s	Almaty	-	Higher	Yes
Sasha	Bisexual	Early 30s	Karaganda	Mixed	Higher	No
Anna	Bisexual	Mid 30s	Karaganda	Russian	Higher	No

4.5. Ethical considerations

Lee and Renzetti (1990) define sensitive research as research that "potentially poses for those people involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched, the collection, holding and/or the dissemination of research data" (p 512). As you will see, some of my participants are engaged in public activism, meaning visibility is not an issue for them. But others voiced concerns about being "outed" to their families, friends, colleagues and acquaintances, or having their sexuality or gender identity disclosed without consent, through participating in my research. For many, "coming out" could put them at risk of losing family, jobs, friends and potentially facing the threat of violence. Therefore, it was my priority to ensure my participants' safety at each stage of the research. Firstly, I ensured fully informed consent of my participants. Secondly, I made sure that emotional support was provided during and after interviews. Thirdly, I protected participants by anonymising the data. Secure data management and storage was imperative. I discuss each of these stages then address the issue of trustworthiness and risks for me as a researcher, and how I managed risk.

4.5.1. Pre-interview meeting

I informed participants about the goals and procedures of the study to ensure they made a fully informed decision and consented to participation. Furthermore, I communicated clearly the right to withdraw at any point during the research.

I intended to hold a pre-interview meeting to provide more information about the study and explain the information sheet (see Appendices A and B). I

planned to talk about the benefits of participation and highlight any potential risks that might arise during and after the interviews. I would also explain anonymisation and data protection to ensure informed consent (see Appendices C and D for the consent form). I was to give potential participants twenty-four hours from the pre-interview meeting to decide whether they wished to participate in my study. I also planned to use this meeting to collaboratively identify the resources and strategies vulnerable participants could use to manage anticipated difficulties arising from the interview.

In practice, I conducted preliminary meetings with only three participants. Most requested to have a single one-off meeting. Therefore, the preliminary meeting was integrated into the interview for eight participants.

4.5.2. Emotional support for participants

Another risk that I identified was that interviews might trigger painful and difficult feelings and memories. Virginia Dickson-Swift and her colleagues (2006) emphasise that qualitative researchers "may need to encourage people to talk openly and frankly, to tell their stories" (p.860), thereby reproducing the environment of safety akin to what clients experience in psychotherapy. Indeed, Bondi (2013) highlights that an invitation to talk with an attentive listener may even be a motivating factor for some in their decision to take part in the research. To manage that boundary, I made sure I clarified the purposes of my interview, contrasting it to therapy (Hutchinson and Wilson, 1994). However, there were times, particularly when participants required emotional support, when the boundary between therapy and interview was more fluid.

According to Draucker, Martsolf and Poole (2009), it is crucial to develop strategies to deal with participants' distress when researching sensitive topics, particularly for example with stigmatised groups and individuals who have experienced traumatic events. Draucker, Martsolf and Poole (2009) recommend using interviewers trained to handle psychological distress. I am a qualified counsellor with substantial experience of working with clients who identify as queer, many of whom have had traumatic experiences in their lifetime. I prepared to use my counselling skills during the interviews, where appropriate.

In practice, participants in this study rarely required emotional support. However, one interview was particularly emotive, for the participant I have called Amir. I had to pause Amir's interview when he spoke about his friend's recent suicide, asking whether he would like to delay, stop completely or continue. Amir wanted to continue, saying that he had been in touch with his counsellor before the interview and reassured me that he had a good system of emotional support in place. At the end, Amir said: "Thank you for that [the interview] and sorry I have used you here a little bit", indicating that he may have gleaned some psychotherapeutic effect. Other participants expressed that they enjoyed the interview process and found it useful to talk about their experiences.

Finally, I prepared a list of resources with contact details of mental health services to signpost my participants to professional sources of support (Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2006; Draucker, Martsolf and Poole, 2009; see Appendices F and G). When researching support resources, I noticed there are few organisations offering psychological, legal and social support in Kazakhstan, not just for queer people but also for vulnerable individuals in general. While I included Kazakhstan Mental Health Helpline, I made sure that I explained I could not guarantee the helpline staff had an understanding of queer issues. I was also careful in recommending any psychological

therapy, having personally encountered homophobic attitudes among Kazakh psychotherapists and having found numerous “corrective therapy” clinics. I built up a network of counselling practitioners in Kazakhstan who either identify as queer or who support the queer community, and were happy for me to pass on their details should participants request it.

4.5.3. The anonymity of the participants

Anonymising was an essential aspect of protecting my participants. As pointed out by Saunders, Kirzinger and Kitzinger (2015), anonymity is often confused with confidentiality. They explain that confidentiality refers to all information kept hidden from everyone outside the core research team, whereas anonymity is a specific aspect of confidentiality related to keeping a participant's identity hidden. As suggested by Scott (2005), participants’ anonymity can also be seen as a continuum from fully anonymous to very nearly identifiable. Given the risks of my research, I would have liked to anonymise my participants fully, but a balance needed to be retained between maximising the protection of my participants' identities and maintaining the integrity of the research.

Additionally, since I employed the snowball sampling method, considering the relatively small size of the queer community in Kazakhstan there was a risk of breaching “internal confidentiality” (Tolich, 2004). Internal confidentiality refers to the possibility of participants identifying themselves or other members of their community. I made sure that I anonymised any identifiable information such as names, professional occupation, descriptions of appearance and recognisable traits. Moreover, I omitted names of specific locations that were mentioned in interviews.

One participant, Gulzada, chose to be known by her real name and "renounce" her right to anonymity (Wiles *et al.*, 2008). Following discussion of the potential risks, Gulzada's decision to renounce her anonymisation in this research was confirmed and has been approved by Edinburgh University's Ethics committee.

4.5.4. Data management

The audio recordings of the interviews and resulting transcripts were stored electronically in the University of Edinburgh's Datastore. The hard copies of signed consent forms were scanned and also copied into the Datastore. Once anonymised transcipts were complete, I destroyed the audio recordings of the interviews. I did not label any files related to the participants (interview transcripts or consent forms) with their names, I assigned a pseudonym instead. I informed participants that I would retain the anonymised transcripts for up to two years after completion of the doctorate for the purposes of further scholarly publications.

4.5.5. Trustworthiness

A trustworthy research requires careful consideration of ethical issues at the appropriate time. Ideally, built into each stage of the research, it includes identifying researcher's biases, checking the accuracy of the participants' transcripts and continually challenging one's views of data collection and analysis (Morrow, 2005). Researcher reflexivity has been considered a hallmark exemplary of trustworthiness and credibility (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

As Bondi (2013) emphasises, as a researcher one should be able to differentiate oneself from the other reliably. I anticipated the potentiality that

some of the interview material might be difficult for me to hear and analyse. My own counselling qualification, along with my personal therapist and supervision, were crucial in the process of self-reflection and in separating myself from my participants to retain the integrity of the study (Bingley, 2002; McDonald, 2013). It is an ethical responsibility to represent participants' experiences faithfully (Fine and Weis, 1996), and I fully recognise that.

4.5.6. Managing risks of research from the researcher's perspective

One of the critical risks for me was to be approached by "pseudo" queer participant who would intend to harm me based on ideological or religious beliefs. Instances of murder and abuse of non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender individuals in Kazakhstan are known (HRW, 2015). I minimised that risk by using reliable referral sources when recruiting participants and ensuring the presence of at least one other person in the same building (in the next room) when interviews were being conducted. When conducting interviews in the home, I ensured a trusted person knew my location and could call the emergency services if I was not accessible by the end of the interview. In the next section, I will explain how I analysed the interview data.

4.6. Analysis

4.6.1. Transcription

Upon my return to Scotland, I transcribed the interviews that I had collected. Transcription is an essential element of research. As emphasised by Skukauskaite (2014) "[t]ranscribing is analysis; it constitutes a logic the researcher creates as she listens to the recording[…] and makes decisions about what to transcribe, in what ways, for what purpose, and with what outcomes" (p.5). Transcription enables a researcher to revisit and get more familiar with the data and have more in-depth and more detailed knowledge of the content of the interviews (Seidman, 1998). Skukauskaite (2014) warns against choosing a single format of transcription prematurely and suggests trying several formats.

Furthermore, the process of transcribing is a process of interpretation as well as (co)construction of the narratives (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999, p.72). Bourdieu (1996) claims that "even the most literal form of writing up (the simplest punctuation, the placing of the comma, for example, can indicate the whole sense of a phrase) represents a translation or even an interpretation" (p.30). In the process of transcription, I kept track of my ideas and interpretations as well as noting my initial thoughts on potential links between individual narratives and wider discursive practices.

At the beginning of transcription, I employed a relatively "naturalised" system of transaction, attempting to capture every utterance in as much detail as possible (Oliver, Serovich and Mason, 2005; Evers, 2011). Initially I included pause length and recorded nuances of voice, valence and intonations. Later I used a more pragmatic approach to transcription (Evers, 2011), omitting the

micro-linguistic and structural features of participants' narrative. This decision was made for two reasons: the time it took me to transcribe each interview meant I had limitations on the detail of transcription (Bryman, 2016, recommends at least five to six hours for each hour of transcription); and emerging themes and interpretations clearly showed the focus was content, and structural and linguistic features were not relevant given my analytical choice (see Appendix J for table of transcription notations employed). I used the qualitative software package NVivo for transcription and subsequent coding. Transcripts were anonymised during the process.

4.6.2. Selecting the method of analysis

Choosing a method of analysis took extensive thought and discussion. Two particular features of the narrative approach to analysis were considered significant. Firstly, as Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou suggest, the study of narratives allows the investigation of, "not just how stories are structured and the ways in which they work, but also who produces them and by what means; the mechanisms by which they are consumed and how narratives are silenced, contested or accepted" (2013, p.2). My adaptation of Tamboukou's (2013, 2015a) Foucauldian approach to narratives allows me to consider how power and existing discourses circulates through, how it constrains and how it is resisted within the narratives of Kazakhstani queer people. As Riessman states, "narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself" and "gives prominence to human agency and imagination, [therefore] it is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity" (1993, pp.1,5). My focus on narratives of subjectification and resistance is congruent with narrative methodology.

Secondly, I appreciate the very diversity and incoherence of the field of narrative inquiry that offers a wide range of possibilities to create a constellation of analysis, rather than more highly structured and contested

methodologies such as discourse analysis and grounded-theory (Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou, 2013). As Mishler commented on the state of the narrative approach, “depending on one’s temperament, the current state of near anarchy in the field might be cause for despair or exultation for shaking one’s head or clapping one’s hand” (1995, p.88). Indeed, there is no set of rules or procedures governing the process of narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008; Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou, 2013). This almost messy and undefined quality of narrative research appealed to me from the start, offering the opportunity to create a unique fusion of data analysis.

In line with that, in her descriptions of the Foucauldian approach to narratives, Tamboukou (2013, 2015a) does not give any instructions to follow. She writes, “It is by no means presenting a closed methodological framework; it should rather be taken as a map charting genealogical traits and at the same time inviting the researcher to follow these lines, but also to bend them, erase them and add his/her own” (p.91).

As previously highlighted, Tamboukou advises using genealogical strategies as research tools in the Foucauldian approach to narrative. Tamboukou (2013) points out that,

> “…a genealogical approach to narrative will be attentive to a number of themes that will emerge in the process, stripping away, as it were, the veils that cover narrative practices by simply showing how they have been mere discursive constructs of historical contingencies, and in this vein how they can be interrogated and reversed” (p.91).

I chose to employ an adaptation of thematic analysis where I integrated aspects of Foucauldian genealogy. “Thematising meanings” (Holloway and Todres, 2003; p.347) or thematic coding involves analysing data to discover emerging themes. Crucially, thematic analysis is marked by theoretical

flexibility. In my analysis, I draw chiefly from the frameworks offered by Braun and Clarke (2006). However, Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach has been criticised for the lack of critical engagement with connectivity of individual narratives with wider socio-cultural discourses and practices nestled within particular power-relations (Lawless and Chen, 2019). In this study, I adopted thematic analysis to integrate Tamboukou's (2013, 2015a) Foucauldian approach to narratives. By doing that I created space to consider the interrelationship between interview narratives, wider social discourses and power relations.

4.6.3. Foucauldian- informed thematic analysis

As noted above, the data was analysed using an adaptation of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Clarke and Braun, 2018). Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87) suggest six phases of thematic analysis:

1. Familiarising yourself with the data
2. Generating the initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report.

However, apart from implementing those steps, I engaged with the data with the set of questions in mind. I interrogated each line of transcribed narratives and narratives as a whole to help answer the questions around power and wider societal discourses. I questioned how power operates through and within the narratives of queer people in Kazakhstan. As highlighted by Tamboukou (2013), the Foucauldian approach to narrative focuses on "the way power intervenes in creating conditions of possibility for specific narratives to emerge as dominant and for others to be marginalised" (p.92), hence, "power becomes the central analytic theme" (Tamboukou, 2015a, p.68). Consequently, in my analysis I considered the data in the light of my research questions: What regulates and constrains queer people's everyday lives in Kazakhstan? And how do queer people there negotiate their non-heteronormative and non-cisnormative subjectivities?

Throughout the process of data analysis, I continued fulfilling the core tasks that the Foucauldian approach to narratives concerns itself with: tracing the links between existing "regimes of truths" and the ways individuals understand and narrate themselves as subjects (Tamboukou, 2015a, p.69). Following the genealogical method, I paid attention to that which is left unsaid, or as Tamboukou (2015a) points out, the "noisy silences of the narratives under investigation" (p.70). Lastly, I kept in mind the question that I adopted from Carla Willig (2014) who asks, "what may be the potential consequences of the discourses that are used for those who are positioned by them, in terms of both their subjective experience and their ability to act in the world?" (p.344).

Following the phases suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), I started by familiarising myself with the data. As highlighted above, this process started during interview transcription. The second stage was generating a list with initial codes, which was derived following my notes from the field and my notes on transcription. Braun and Clarke (2006) define coding as identifying a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst. I began organising the data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005), basing my codes on my adaptation of indicators suggested by Owen (1984), who presents three criteria for analysing data: recurrence, repetition and forcefulness. Owen differentiates between repetition within the manuscript (not necessarily using the same language) and recurrence or reappearance of specific words or phrases. The third coding tool, forcefulness, demarkates the importance or salience of a particular part of the narrative.

Both inductive codes and deductive codes were used at this phase of the analysis. Inductive codes are derived largely from the content of interviews, staying close to the participants' narratives and meanings. Deductive codes are those grounded in theory (whether looking at data through the lense of Foucauldian-inspired questions as discussed above, theories outlined in

Chapter Three. Deductive coding also marked the emergence of the links between interview narratives with larger societal discourses (see Chapter Two). While some scholars recommend to separate inductive and deductive coding for analysis (for example, see Lawless and Chen, 2019), I see them as inseparable and interrelated processes.

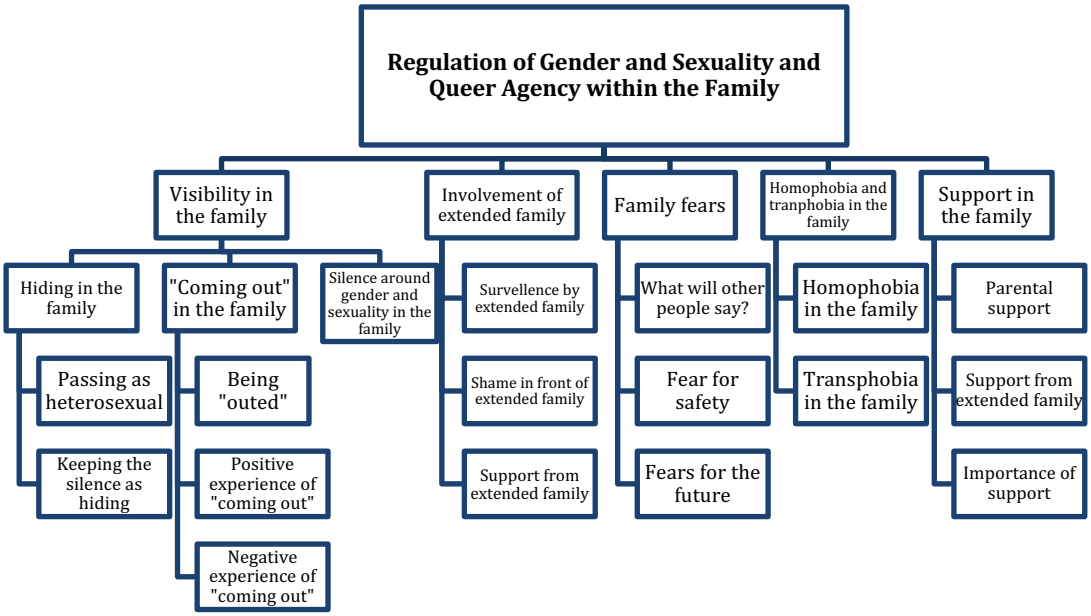
Codes were made in English; hence, coding also involved the process of translation from Russian into English. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that the structure and framing of the interview questions affected and shaped the codes identified in my analysis. The questions focused on different aspects of everyday life, such as experiences within the home, family, work, community, public spaces, education, medical settings and so on. This might have influenced the way specific narratives were elicited.

As I worked systematically through the entire data set, I made sure to include as many potential codes as possible. I also kept extracts within the surrounding data to give some context. Furthermore, I coded individual excerpts within as many different codes (and later themes) as they could fit into. The intial coding was performed using NVivo software (see Figure 1 for an example of the generated codes during the intermediary stage of analysis, and Figure 2 for final themes and sub-themes).

There are many advantages and disadvantages of using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis in research (CAQDAS; Fielding and Lee, 1991). CAQDAS has the advantage of handling a large volume of data as well as options for easy storing, retrieving, searching and simplified coding and recoding of datasets (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Silverman, 2005). Furthermore, CAQDAS offers a more rigorous and comprehensive approach, making individual searches and prevalences easily accessible to the researcher (Silverman, 2005; Gibbs, 2013). Analysis is also assisted through

the numerous data visualisation options (Gibbs, 2013). However, CAQDAS also has some disadvantages. Training to use NVivo was time-consuming and involved learning by trial and error. Using computer-aided systems can also be alienating for the researcher, creating a distance between themselves and their participants (Gibbs, 2013). Another significant criticism of CAQDAS for narrative research is that programs such as NVivo, ATLAS.ti or NUD*IST were designed to facilitate grounded theory analysis, and as such, they are designed to break transcripts into fragments and perform comparisons across interviews, rather than to look at the interviews as narratives (Lonkila, 1995; Kikooma, 2010). Hence, I mainly used NVivo in transcription and the initial coding stage of the research. Morevoer, I ensured that individual transcripts were coded and thematised as wholes before performing cross-interview comparisons.

Figure 1 Example of generated codes



Once all the data were coded, I proceeded to sort different codes into potential themes and sub-themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006, see phase three). The sorting involved analysis and further interpretation of codes through the Foucauldian-informed questions explained above, and also included occasional recoding as well as examining how codes can combine into overarching themes. Identifying the patterns of the meaning of data or themes is the main feature of thematic analysis (Joffe, 2012). I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) definition of a theme - “[a] theme captures something

important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set" (p.82; original emphasis). I saw a theme as a complex interplay of the prevalence with which data occurred; the degree to which something that had been given considerable attention or space in the narratives of participants; the saliency or the extent with which the data captured something important in relation to the research question.

The next stage (Braun and Clarke, 2006, see phases four and five) involved a review of the emerging themes both within individual interviews and across interviews, as made before the final set of themes was identified (see Figure 2 for list of final set of themes).The last stage of analysis involved the write-up.

It is important to highlight that the process of analysis was far less linear than presented above. I went back and forth between and across different interviews, coding and recoding and changing themes and codes throughout the process of analysis, and even later as I was writing up. Furthermore, at later stages of analysis, I became aware of the interrelatedness of the themes and engaged in the continuous process of reworking the themes, which by no means had clear boundaries.

Throughout the process I was informed by queer theory, to resist the urge to normalise and categorise participants' narratives to fit into a binary organisation of intelligible matrix. I used the conceptual tools of queer theory to question, deconstruct and interrogate the "normal", and assumed when interpreting and categorising the data (Elia, 2003). It was crucial that I noticed moments of confusion and disorientation during the interpretation stage of research. Having said that, the results of my analysis are not all-encompassing. As pointed out by Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) within Foucault's analytic framework, the researcher "…must accept that the

centrality of the problem s/he has chosen to explore emerges as an interpretation" (p.69) and "can therefore be contested by other interpretations growing out of other concerns" (p.xii). Hence, my themes and interpretations are by no means exhaustive or finite. Indeed, my analysis involved focusing on some narratives and experiences while editing out others (Heaphy, 2008).

Finally, my extensive use of direct quotations and the use of untranslated Russian and Kazakh expressions was a deliberate choice. It allowed me to stay close to the data during the process of writing up. Crucially, I wanted to give participants enough space so that the reader can "acquaint" themselves with them and get a sense of the lived experience of a queer person in Kazakhstan. You will find that within interview extracts, researcher's voice is presented in italic

Chapter Five: Interview Findings

The eleven people who participated in this study offered me personal stories about their everyday lives as queer people in Kazakhstan. From the transcribed interviews I had with them, I selected five core themes and eighteen sub-themes (see Figure 2). While I treated the themes as seperate, I would like to acknowledge the interrelated nature of both themes and sub-themes. For example, while I placed *Soviet Legacy* into a separate core theme, you will see that Soviet discourses will be touched upon in the *Regulation of Gender and Sexuality* and *Queer Agency within the Family* and *Regulation and Negotiation of Queer Subjectivity at Work* core themes. I discuss each theme in turn. My analysis involved interpreting the narratives through and in dialogue with existing research and literature from the global West and other regions of the world including Russia and other Central Asian countries. This allowed articulating and developing a deeper understanding of queer subjectivities in Kazakhstan as they are discursively produced and experienced in everyday life.

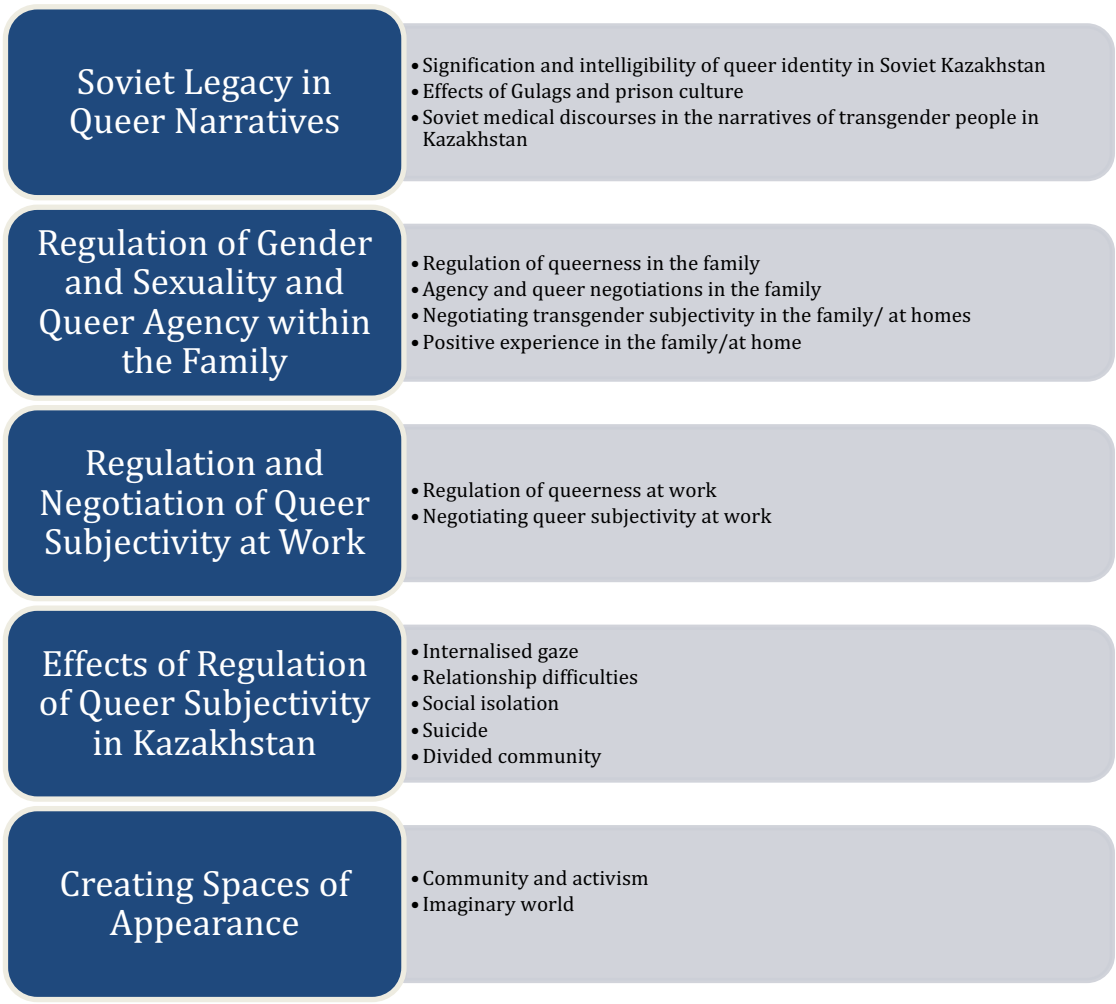


Figure 2 Core themes and sub-themes

5.1. Soviet legacy in queer narratives

In this section, I explore the influence of Soviet discourses in the narratives of Kazakhstani queer people interviewed in this study. In the first two sub-sections - *Signification and intelligibility of queer identity in Soviet Kazakhstan* and *Effects of Gulags and prison culture* - I mainly focus on the narratives of two older participants: Gulzada and Ivan. In the third sub-section - *Soviet medical discourses in the narratives of transgender people in Kazakhstan* - I concentrate on the narratives of transgender participants.

5.1.1. Signification and intelligibility of queer identity in Soviet Kazakhstan

The legacy of Soviet perceptions of queerness is evident in the narrative of a participant named Gulzada. Gulzada, a 44-year old ethnic Kazakh, stresses her difficulty in making sense of her experiences. Gulzada was born and grew up in an “aul” (“village”) in Southern Kazakhstan. She talks about her experiences of growing up as a lesbian in Kazakh SSR and how this has affected her self-understanding:

> “I couldn’t recognise my sexual orientation. Before, because there was no information since everyone lived behind the [Iron] Curtain, mmm… [information] was absent. I always had a feeling that something was missing, and I was searching for it…
>
> *How did you understand yourself back then? How was it for you?*
>
> I think because there was no information, I couldn't identify myself. I think because of that I was immersing myself in work or looking for some other activity to distract myself from these feelings. I would just hide those thoughts deep inside so that they did not come up. Because I had to live somehow. But I have one vivid memory from when I was 12 years old and going through puberty, you know you start feeling different from others, well about sexual orientation. I didn't understand what was happening because I had no model of what I should look for. […] Those I could see around me were heterosexuals, and I had a feeling that I absolutely did not fit in. And I thought that when I reached around 30 years old, maybe I would have to kill myself. Because as a child I thought I did not want this life, the life I

> saw adults living. Because it is not mine [“eto ne moje”], but I didn’t know what was mine ["chto moje"]…” (Gulzada, Almaty).

Here, Gulzada explores her struggle to locate herself within the context of an *aul* in Kazakh SSR where gender and sexuality diversity were absent. She describes her alienation in the effort to understand her feelings and emotions as she was growing up, looking at women around her getting married and having children and realising that this was not something she wanted. The invisibility of non-heteronormative sexualities within wider society made it difficult for Gulzada to find signification for her non-heterosexual subjectivity. In Butler’s (1990) terms, for Gulzada her sexuality was unintelligible and she struggled to find the language to describe what she experienced. As Baer (2013) puts it, “Soviet culture offered little ontological basis for the representation of homosexuality as an identity, as a stable subject position through which one might assume a voice in the […] public sphere” (p.37). As a child, Gulzada finds her life inconceivable in a society where there is no space for her sexuality, and decides to kill herself when she grows up. Stella (2015) describes a similar struggle to self-identify for women who were socialised and had same-sex relationships in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. Stella (2009) points out that, “[w]hile punitive and stigmatising discourses circulated, the categories ‘homosexual’ and ‘lesbian’ remained unavailable as affirmative narratives of social identity for most of the Soviet period” (p.134). Women in Stella’s (2015) study reported that censorship on sexuality-related matters, and the invisibility of gender and sexuality diversity in the public sphere, resulted in their isolation and struggle to find a collective name to describe their experiences (also see Rotkirch, 2002).

Part of Gulzada’s struggle to find signification for her experiences was the Iron Curtain that prevented her from finding literature to help her to understand and name her experiences. Gulzada continues:

> "I was searching in books for what I was missing. But they only cover heterosexual relationships, right? This was not me ["ne moje"]. Well, I understood the feelings described but they are described from a male perspective and I didn't understand the women's side. I read a lot of Russian classics because there were no other books available. I wish that we had had access to some American women writers back then, ugh ((sighs)), that would have been good…" (Gulzada, Almaty).

In Gulzada's narrative, as she tried to make sense of her experiences, she turned to literature where she found little comfort and mostly identified with the male perspective. Same-sex desire was heavily constrained and not talked about in the media, academic and professional circles (Kon, 1997; Essig, 1999). Healey (2001) highlights the silence around same-sex desire in the Soviet Union and notices how it was consistently associated with moral corruption and the influence of Western societies. Kon (1993) writes, "homosexuality was simply never mentioned anywhere; it became the 'unmentionable sin' in the literal sense of the world" (p.15). Baer (2013) observes that references to any form of queer desire were removed from both Soviet publications and foreign literature translations. While the literary works of Sappho, Proust and Colette were not banned in the Soviet Union, these works were not widely available, and according to Gulzada were not available in the small Kazakh *aul* where she grew up.

Before continuing, I want to touch upon the general silence surrounding discussions about relationships and sexuality within the families of most of the participants interviewed in this study, which is consistent with existing literature on *uyat (shame)* around discussing sexuality and gender non-conformity in Central Asia (Sataeva, 2017; Kabatova, 2018). I will further address the issue of family silence on these matters in *Regulation of Gender and Sexuality and Queer Agency within the Family* section. At this point, I

would like to emphasise that while most of the participants in this study were born after the collapse of the Soviet Union, their parents were born and brought up in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. For example, Amir, who identifies as a cisgender gay man in his mid-thirties, explains his parent's attitude towards queerness:

> "No one from my surroundings spoke to their family members about their relationships or sexuality. It was normal not to.
>
> *Why do you think that was?*
>
> I don't know… well, our parents are of the Soviet generation where it wasn't supported, I mean talking about sex and private relationships." (Amir, Astana)

Amir attributes not talking about his private life to his parent's Soviet values, where conversations around gender and sexuality are unacceptable. This is in line with what Kon (1995), Zdravomyslova (2001) and Stella (2015) highlight as being one of the features of Soviet gender order: sexuality being a profoundly private matter not openly talked about unless it is to do with marriage and reproduction. However, it is unclear whether it is Soviet taboo around the topic of sex or if Kazakh *uyat* in relation to explicit conversations about sex and sexuality outside of matrimony also plays a role in the silence that, according to Amir, is common within Kazakhstani families around the topic. It is also possible that the two "silences" overlap and augment each other.

Anna, another participant, mentioned in her narrative that her mother is "Sovetskoj zakalki" ("Soviet forged"; Anna, Karaganda). Anna emphasises that for her mother, who is in her 70s, "it is in principle impossible to accept such a thing" (Anna, Karaganda). The term Sovetskoj zakalki kept figuring in

the narratives of participants in this study. The Russian dictionary defines Sovetskoj zakalki as old-school (Reverso Context, 2019). However, the word zakalki can also be translated as training, tempering, hardening or forging (Linguee, 2019). In this thesis, I will translate Sovetskoj zakalki as Soviet forged.

5.1.2. Effects of Gulags and prison culture

Another facet of the Soviet legacy that emerged in the narratives of the older participants in this study is the echo of the impact of Gulags ("Glavnoye Upravleniye Lagerej" or "Main Camps' Administration") and prison culture in participants' stories.

Gulzada remembers her first encounter with the word lesbian and what it was like for her:

> "I remember how information started to appear. The Soviet Union collapsed and 'the gate' opened but the first information about lesbians that I encountered was horrible. I was at university and someone brought a newspaper into our student accommodation. It said on the cover that when women in prisons want- well, sexual relations, some of them pretend to be 'men' and others 'women' and they have intercourse. And it's called, well, those pretending to be men are called lesbians [lesbianka]. That is how the word was defined. This was how it reached me.
>
> *So lesbian means to pretend that you are a man?*
>
> Yes, yes, yes, you pretend to be a man and have sex. I couldn't understand why women would need to pretend to be men […] it simply

> confused me. To top it all, the word lesbian was related to... well, why would I identify myself with women who are in prison? And secondly, why would I identify myself with those who want to pretend to be men?" (Gulzada, Almaty)

Gulzada expresses how confused she was and how she could not identify with the word as it was presented in the article; she didn't want to be a man; she didn't want to be associated with prison culture. Similarly, Slavist Sonja Franeta (2015), who conducted oral history interviews in the 1990s with men and women expressing same-sex desire, demonstrates how the penal system is deeply associated with Soviet representation of female homosexuality. Franeta (2015) writes about the experiences of Sasha, aged 20, who said: "I didn't consider myself a lesbian because I thought that all lesbians were in prison" (p.140). Healey (2001) also notices that in the depiction of lesbians, there is a strong emphasis on portraying women in gulags as "true" criminals charged for murder or theft rather than false "anti-Soviet agitation" or "counter-revolutionary" actions (p.236). This association is echoed in Gulzada's encounter with the newspaper where lesbians were defined as criminals.

Furthermore, my findings follow Clech's (2018) conclusion that disrupts the binary of women's homosexuality being associated with pathologisation and male's homosexuality being related to criminalisation. Indeed, Gulzada's account demonstrates how women in Kazakh SSR also saw themselves in the light of the criminalisation of homosexuality.

The association of queerness, marginality and criminality was actively encouraged during the Soviet era (Kuntsman, 2009). This association can be traced to gulags and the "dissident literature" – a body of gulag memoirs written by former political prisoners of Stalinist and post-Stalinist labour camps (Toker, 2000). As pointed out by Clech (2018), it is in the world of

Soviet labour camps that a particular image of homosexuality was visible in the USSR. Similarly, Stella (2015) highlights that both female and male homosexuality was "symbolically confined to the prison camp, an environment where they could find expression and be tolerated as a surrogate of heterosexual relations and justified by the need to satisfy one's sexual urges in an 'unnaturally' same-sex environment" (p.34). This echoes the previously mentioned Soviet biopolitical project (Foucault, 2008) where heterosexuality was actively normalised with reference to appropriate gender roles and reproduction; while non-heterosexual and non-cisgender practices were consistently stigmatised, pathologised and criminalised, creating new "truth" and language around non-heteronormative subjectivities in the Soviet Union.

Another participant, Ivan, who identifies as a pansexual in his mid-forties, refers to Soviet prisons and gulags as having a lasting impact on queer subjectivity in today's Kazakhstan.

> "…we are very much affected by prison subculture. It impacts a lot… For example, they ask "who are you in life?" ["Kto ty po zhizni?"] Are you a real man? ["muzhik"] And based on that they put you into casts. In prison subculture, there is a category called "opushennyj", considered to mean beyond reach ["schitajutsia priam za gran'ju"], I mean they are like untouchables, no one talks to them… no one sits near them or uses their dishes. They are discriminated against. This started, I don't know, maybe in the Soviet period from gulags, when half or at least 30 per cent of people were either in prisons or affected by prison culture, right? This Soviet culture… it has dissolved, and it affects [us]. And here and in Russia, you feel it very acutely. So if you are gay, it means that you are opushennyj." (Ivan, Almaty).

Ivan seems to be well aware of the role of opushennyj[e] and links the pervasive effects of Soviet gulags and later prison culture on the views and narratives about queer people in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Healey (2001) along with Ol'ga Zhuk (1998) and Vladimir Kozkovskii (1997) emphasis that queer people are depicted in the dissident literature as hostile, “with a shade of disgust” (Kozlovskii, 1997, p.338). “Men” who were perceived to be feminine were viewed as occupying the lowest ranks (opushennyj) in the prison hierarchy and were routinely degraded, abused and exploited by other prisoners (Essig, 1999; Healey, 2001, 2010; Horne *et al.*, 2009; Kuntsman, 2009). Zhuk (1998) writes that the literature on gulags “shows little compassion for the humiliating situation of homosexual men and talks about women with disgust and unmasked contempt” (p.97). Ivan and Gulzada’s narratives are also in line with the findings of previously mentioned Belayeva (in Vanner, 2009) who found that 60 percent of 200 respondents to the question “What danger do LGBT people inflict on society?”, associated homosexuality with prisons, “dirt” and venereal diseases (p.34). Looking at Belayeva’s findings, the association of queerness with “dirt” can potentially be traced back to the Soviet past.

The findings of this study indicate the pervasive presence of collective memory where, “for Soviet generations, images of queerness, marginality and criminality have become metonymically entwined through repeated association” (Stella, 2013, p.6; also see Kunstman, 2009). For Gulzada, this association is retrospective when she recalls her first encounter with the word lesbian. However, Ivan highlights how this association persists in today's queer culture in Kazakhstan. Of note, such an association was highlighted chiefly amongst older participants of this study, pointing towards the intersectional nature of queer identities in Kazakhstan. The fact that a participant was born, grew up and received their education in the Soviet Union seems to play a significant role in shaping their narrative (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Taylor, Hines and Caset, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2011). In the

next section, I explore how Soviet legacy is present in the medical system and discourse on transgender people in Kazakhstan.

5.1.3. Soviet medical discourses in the narratives of transgender people in Kazakhstan

The legacy of the Soviet Union can also be seen in the narratives of participants who identified as transgender. Participants in this study highlight that it is a widely held view that transgender women are homosexual men. As Zhanna, a transgender woman in her early twenties, expresses:

> "There is a common myth about transgender people, for example, it is thought a transgender woman is actually a homosexual man." (Zhanna, Astana)

Similarly, Ekaterina, a transgender woman in her mid-twenties, explains:

> "People don't know... For many people, there are no transgender women or men. For them, transgender men are lesbians and transgender women are simply gays. They just dress up." (Ekaterina, Almaty)

Soviet sexologists and psychiatrists linked gender variance and hermaphroditism with homosexuality, which was not unlike the way gender diversity was viewed in the West at the beginning of the twentieth century (Healey, 2001). According to Healey (1997), who writes about the Soviet Union of the 1920-30s, not conforming to prescribed gender roles for "men" was primarily associated with homosexuality. Furthermore, transcending gender roles for men was associated with foreign backwardness and political dissidence (Healey, 2001). Along with having strong associations with

lesbianism, gender variance in “women” attracted medical attention and was treated with psychoanalysis and hypnotherapy (Healey, 1997, 2001). Before I continue, it is important to point out the epistemological challenge that arises in historical scholarship on queer subjects. As Catherine Baker (2017) puts it: “where there is evidence of incongruence, variance or dissent, how do we know the gender of our historical subjects?” (p.241).

Several of my participants spoke about doctors who were still influenced by Soviet values, or Sovetskoj zakalki (“Soviet forged”). For example, Ekaterina talked about going through the medical commission in order to access operations and hormones. Here she speaks about the head of commission:

> “I came to see the head of the commission, and she is a woman “on fire” [“baba-ogon”] ((Ekaterina laughs)). She is also really transphobic; she is Sovetskoj zakalki. I came wearing a dress, it was summer and boiling hot, so I was not wearing any makeup. And she said to me, “what, you think if you put on a dress you are a woman?” I was angry. She continued, “what, you couldn't put on normal makeup, at least some eyeshadow?” I responded that it was hot outside and she said, “do you think it is easy to be a woman?” (Ekaterina, Almaty)

Here, Ekaterina speaks of an older medical professional who was likely to have been trained in Soviet medical education system. The head commissioner expresses expectations of femininity such as wearing makeup that Ekaterina is supposed to adhere to as a transgender woman. Similarly, Oleg, who is in his early thirties and identifies as a transgender man, talks about the process of going through a psychiatric commission. Oleg explains that a transgender person has to adhere to a specific heteronormative story. Here he talks about transgender men going through the commission.

> “For the commission, if you say that you are homosexual, if you don't want to have a family, or if you don't want kids, or just don't want a traditional family… for them, it casts as a contraindication… So more often, folk go there and say that they just want a stable job, they want to plant a tree and build a home, and then everything is fine. Even better, take a friend and say she is your girlfriend.” (Oleg, Almaty)

To use Foucauldian terminology, within both Ekaterina and Oleg’s narratives the “Soviet forged” medical professional serves a classifying and normalising regulatory function determining what it means to be “a man” and “a woman” (Foucault, 1978). Oleg also emphasises creative ways in which transgender people predict and meet heteronormative and cis-normative expectations of medical professionals by talking of following “traditional” expectations of “building a house and planting a tree” and bringing their heteronormative friends to act as their partners. Oleg continues:

> “Why are people afraid to go to a psychiatrist? Because people still have this Soviet understanding of psychiatry. Now I will be given a diagnosis and tomorrow I won't be able to get a job because of it. Or I won't be able to get a driving licence. They treat a doctor like a god… what if he says that you are not transgender, what will you do then? That is why when people are about to undergo a commission, they ask ten times about what to expect. How do they know? I don't myself understand how they diagnose? What are they trying to find out? Okay, they are trying to exclude some intersex variations, right? They do some tests and try to understand potential risks and so on. But what is the rest for? Take any man and ask him to go through this commission… let him prove how he is a man…” (Oleg, Almaty)

Oleg highlights that psychiatry is still viewed with fear by the general population and by transgender people in particular. In their article on the past

and present state of Russian psychiatry, Korolenko and Kensin (2002) highlight that, “to a certain extent the Soviet psychiatric mentality has been preserved among psychiatrists working in administrative and leading official positions” (p.61). During the Soviet period, psychiatry and the conception of mental health were strongly influenced by ideology (Buda *et al.*, 2009; Voren, 2010; Zajicek *et al.*, 2014). Following Foucault, Zajicek and colleagues (2014) argue that psychiatry was used as a mechanism of control, shaping the norms of social life, “Soviet psychiatrists employed a ‘regime of truth’ that rested on a statistical conception of normal human capacities and asserted the ability of the clinician to use this knowledge to place the individual into his or her natural position within the social body” (p.172). Soviet psychiatry has also been criticised for its political abuses (Laveretsky, 1998; Spencer, 2000) which constitute “misuse of psychiatric diagnosis, treatment and detention for the purposes of obstructing the fundamental human rights of certain individuals and groups in a given society” (Global Initiative on Psychiatry in van Voren, 2010, p.33). For example, the term “sluggish schizophrenia” (Snezhnevsky, 1969) encompassed practically any type of behaviour that did not coincide with socially approved patterns and that was widely used for “scientific justification” for elimination of political opponents and dissidents by declaring them “mentally ill” (Korolenko and Kensin, 2002; Voren, 2013). During the Soviet era, patent rights were severely restricted (McDaid *et al.*, 2006) and psychiatry assumed a paternalistic orientation in mental healthcare (Polubinskaya, 2000). Korolenko and Kensin (2002) emphasise that in the Soviet Union psychiatry was viewed negatively, furthermore, mental health issues were heavily stigmatised and people who were deemed as “mentally ill” were actively excluded from society.

This is consistent with Oleg's description of medical professionals being viewed as “gods” since in today's Kazakhstan, medical professionals act as gatekeepers for transgender people to access necessary medical care that, in turn, is linked to their ability to change documents and live in the preferred

gender. Remember that many medical professionals were trained in the Soviet Union, where training was directed towards “symptoms, syndromes and nosologies” with the emphasis on “how to single out the signs of psychopathology” (Korolenko and Kensin, 2002, p.56). Consistently, Oleg's description of not knowing what the psychiatry commission is looking for reveals the ambiguity of the process and the residual fear of the possibility of being singled out as “mentally ill” by the medical professional. Furthermore, Oleg names some of the ways in which transgender people in Kazakhstan resist the power of medical professionals, highlighting the agentic power of transgender people in figuring out the expectations of the medical staff and deliberately self-fashioning and playing into the cis-normative and heteronormative assumptions and narratives of medical practitioners. There is still the question of what happens to those who are unable to resist and fit within the matrix of expectations of medical professionals? What is it like to transition in Kazakhstan for people who do not fit into the binary system of gender, such as non-binary and gender-queer identified individuals?

This research shows the presence of Soviet discourses in medical healthcare, which is especially evident in the medical care of transgender people. While little research exists on the process of transitioning in the Soviet Union, the narratives of transgender people in my study indicate the pervasive effects of stigma and the normalising function that medical professionals have in today's Kazakhstan. Furthermore, the findings of this study highlight how people creatively negotiate and navigate the expected hetero- and cis-normativity by playing to the expectations of medical professionals. In the next section, I look at the practices that are used to regulate queer people within a family context in Kazakhstan and how Kazakhstani queers express their agency in navigating their family lives.

5.2. Regulation of gender and sexuality and queer agency within the family

Before I proceed, I would like to clarify what I mean by family. In this research, I use a broad definition of family to include not just parents and their children, but grandparents, siblings, uncles, aunts, cousins as well as non-blood related close friends (D'Augelli, Hershberger and Pilkington, 1998; Tarrant, 2010). Eve Sedgwick encapsulates the multiplicity of family expressions in her concept of avunculate relationships. For Sedgwick (1993), the avunculate family is inclusive of all family ties including extended family and close friendships. In line with queer theory and following Sedgwick, I would like to destabilise the biological imposition and its concomitant constraints. As noticed by Schroeder (2015), "[t]his broadened definition implies more than extended family; it implies a level of intimacy, knowledge, and fluidity among even non-blood relations. The avunculate, therefore, speaks to the multiple, fluid, elastic geographies of relatedness within and around the home" (p.787; also see Nash, 2002, 2005; Harker and Martin, 2012). Additionally, here I use domestic space or "home" as more than merely a physical site, but instead "a matrix of social relations, personal meanings and emotional attachments" (Gorman-Murray, 2008; p.32). Hence, home is continually (re)generated and (re)constituted in interaction with the subjects, discourses and practices surrounding domestic spaces (Valentine, 2001).

The family is the largest theme that emerged out of the analysis. For participants, their families' acceptance of them and their relationships was one of the most sensitive topics discussed during the interviews. The family simultaneously offers emotional security and a potential place of control where my participants had to continuously negotiate their identity and

visibility. It is not uncommon for queer youth to experience the parental home as a site of conflict, constant surveillance, marginalisation and violence (Predegast, Dunne and Telford, 2002; Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003; Takach, 2006; Brickell, 2012; Stella, 2015). Indeed, home and family can be viewed as a "locus of social reproduction" (Schroeder, 2015, p.785) that is embedded in the micro- and macro-power relations, and that sustains gender and sexual normativity (Gorman-Murray, 2008; Atkinson, Dowling and McGuirk, 2009; Johnston and Longhurst, 2010; Brickell, 2012).

5.2.1. Regulation of queerness in the family

One of the themes emerging from the interviews, specifically with Kazakh participants, was the extent to which extended families were involved in the process of surveillance and regulation of their queer family members' lives. For example, Miras, a Kazakh in his early twenties who identifies as a cisgender gay man, had a challenging experience of being "outed" by one of his cousins who was staying at his house for the summer. One evening, Miras disclosed his sexuality to his cousin and the next morning discovered that his mother and aunt had been told. Miras states:

> "My aunt came over with my mother, and they asked me to talk to them. No one was saying anything directly; they were asking me questions like, do you have a girlfriend, are you planning to get married?
> I was fourteen; what kind of questions are these? Then my mum told me that she knew everything and asked me what more I could tell her about it. Of course, I had no way out of it so I confirmed that all that my cousin told her was true. My coming out happened in that way, against my will, and it was actually quite bad. There was no violence

but my mum was weeping. And she said things like, “it is my fault but I didn't do anything...

How did it make you feel?

I felt terrible. And then I had a conversation with this cousin of mine [who outed me]. I asked her: “why did you do that? Why did you tell? Because now I feel objectively horrible. It's all happened because of you…” And then we all just stopped talking about it, and everyone started to pretend it had never happened.” (Miras, Astana).

In Miras’s coming out, his extended family played a central role. He explains that his mother and her sister were very close and he spent a lot of time with his cousins. Despite Miras’ young age, his cousin’s disclosure appears to have been taken very seriously both by his aunt and his mother. He was asked questions about marriage and children, questions that surprised him at the time. Miras also notes, “everyone started to pretend that it never happened.” Miras’s narrative highlights the involvement of the extended family in the surveillance of queer family members in Kazakhstan. In this way, Kazakh families use gossiping and tale-bearing as Foucauldian micro-instruments of power, creating a system akin to the panopticon to monitor and regulate their queer family members (Foucault, 1980). Miras’s experience falls in line with existing literature on the centrality of family and a more extensive network of kin for Kazakh people (Ashwin, 2000; Harris, 2006; Zdravolmyslova and Temkina, 2007) as well as the regulatory power of the extended family in Central Asia (Harris, 2004, 2006; Sataeva, 2017). Extended family came up again in Miras’ narrative, when after several years of silence, he had another conversation with his parents.

“My mother told me that she could overcome many things, but she would not be able to live if her father found out I was gay. So the

> biggest problem is my granddad. My mum comes from a family where her father is in charge of everything; he is a patriarch, a god... and if this god and master finds out that his daughter has a gay son, she will not survive. I was surprised by that because I hardly see him. He lives in another town. It was bewildering to me that I should sacrifice my life and my wellbeing because my mother doesn't want to disappoint her father. He is practically a stranger to me, and I asked how come this stranger plays such a big role in my life. This is where we are at with my mother." (Miras, Astana)

The importance of subservience within the Kazakh family is evident in Miras's narrative. His mother's biggest fear is that her father will find out about her son's sexuality. Here, the system of honour-and-shame or Kazakh *uyat* is potentially at play. It would be *uyat* for Miras's mother if her father (an elder in her family) discovered that his daughter brought up a man who does not conform to normative gender and sexual expectations. Consequently, Miras's non-heteronormative sexuality is a potential source of dishonour for her family. This fear is present for Miras's mother even though her father lives far away and is "practically a stranger" to Miras. Miras's mother seems to have internalised the societal structure of honour-and-shame, becoming her own observer to use Foucauldian terminology. According to this structure, it is the visibility of deviance that bears repercussions. As highlighted by Harris (2004), "[s]ince above all it is the *image* that is important, punishment will follow not so much the actual violation of the norms as the violation being made public" (p.74, original emphasis). Hence silencing, making invisible, and avoiding the discussion of sexual or gender deviation, are crucial strategies to retain honour within the family and the wider community.

For Miras's family, invisibility of their son's sexuality is pivotal.

> “It's easier with my father; I can talk to him without hysteria; he does not cry. I recently told him, ‘you told me before that I was too young, now I am [age] and I still feel it’ [I am still gay]. I told him to be prepared for the fact that I will always be like that and that I will not marry. We have so many gay people in Kazakhstan who get married just so that their relatives do not talk behind their backs.
>
> *So marriage is expected to happen?*
>
> Yes, absolutely. And I told them, don't even expect it, it won't happen. You have four other sons in the family so there won't be any problem with continuing the family…. My father said he understood but his position was that I shouldn’t be an activist, that I shouldn’t be public; that I should always be very careful; it would be dangerous if people find out. That it might be life-threatening if someone finds out.” (Miras, Astana)

While I will focus on the theme of agency in the next section, it is notable that here Miras asserts his identity by confronting expected heterosexuality, saying that he will never marry. Interestingly, one of Miras’s arguments is that his parents have other sons to continue their lineage; the question arises what would happen if Miras were the only child in the family. Miras highlights that his father’s request is driven by fear for his son's safety and wellbeing. These fears are not unfounded, according to previous research (Vanner, 2009; HRW, 2015; Article 19, 2015; ALMA-TQ, 2016). However, the reference to family honour is made in a subsequent conversation where Miras's father suggests that it would be best if he left Kazakhstan.

> “My father told me once that it would be best for you and for the rest of the family if I went to live abroad. He said I could do anything I want there such as marry or have kids. His words were: it would be better

for you and for us; we would not need to explain anything to anyone. This is an optimal solution.

How was it for you to hear that?

I knew it came out of concern for me...
They know what I am doing; they know what I am like. They told me on one occasion, 'we know what you want to achieve in your life, and we are absolutely sure it will happen, but not here in Kazakhstan.'" (Miras, Astana)

Miras's father tells his son that it would be best if Miras left Kazakhstan, expressing fears for Miras's safety but also indicating that this would be a better solution for the entire family who, "would not need to explain anything to anyone". In his father's view, Miras's emigration would mean preserving the honour of the family as well as ensuring his son's safety.

Ensuring invisibility as a form of regulating queer people in Kazakhstan is highlighted in the narrative of another participant. Bolat, an ethnic Kazakh who identifies as a gay man, is in his early twenties. He told me about his "coming out" to his family, which was initiated following his father's suspicions about Bolat's sexual identity. While Bolat's mother was distressed and upset by the disclosure, his father dismissed Bolat's statement by saying, "you just haven't yet met the right woman" and emphasised that Bolat first needed to finish university. Despite this apparent denial, Bolat's parent's behaviour has changed following Bolat's coming out. Bolat explained that ever since the disclosure, his father has been actively monitoring his appearance, making sure that his sexuality remains publically invisible. For example, as Bolat explains,

> "If I wore any LGBT-related symbols or signs on my clothes, he would immediately be on my case saying: "take it off right now!" He would also threaten me, saying: "there'll be hell to pay" ["tebe malo ne pokazhetsia"]. He would threaten me with physical violence." (Bolat, Astana)

Bolat's father also used the Internet to ensure the invisibility of Bolat's sexuality.

> "It went sometimes as far as my father sending me screenshots of my [queer-related] posts, insisting that I delete them from my page immediately." (Bolat, Astana)

On one hand, Bolat's father denied his sexuality yet on the other, he used resources to make sure Bolat was not publically displaying his queerness. His parents employed different means of regulating their son's visibility, including the Internet and social media. Bolat's family justified their request for Bolat to put his sexuality "on hold" by appealing to the notion that, "education comes first". Being a university student and financially dependent on his parents, Bolat complied with his parent's expectations.

> "Basically, I went along with it. I decided that I would first finish university and then make my own choices. For now, I am financially dependent. They are paying for my education and generally have invested so much in me […]. I realise that I need to conform and I can't express myself before I graduate. I understand that it is total control. But I am trying to just be quiet about certain things for now…" (Bolat, Astana)

Given that his parents financially support Bolat, he feels that he has to conform to their demands and pass (Goffman, 1963) as heteronormative in

public. I asked Bolat what he thinks is behind his parent's insistence on his sexuality being invisible. Bolat said:

> "I think they believe that if people find out it will be a disgrace ["pozor"]. ((pause)) Basically, they are worried about what people will say about me. Because now they are proud.. if I am attending meetings and workshops. They like that, and they tell relatives and friends that, 'Bolat is doing this and that' […] They think that my sexuality will ruin ["perecherknet"] everything, that people will look at me in a different way, that they will speak differently to me or stop communicating with me at all. And that people will stop communicating with my parents." (Bolat, Astana)

In this extract, Bolat exemplifies the use of the honour-and-shame system. As Sataeva (2017) writes about public shaming in the context of Kyrgyzstan, "[e]very aspect of vital activities are paraded before the community, relatives, friends, and acquaintances in order to gain public approval" (p.25). Bolat's family is exhibiting his success and participation in public activities. Bolat further explains that his parents are sure that if his sexuality were to become public, it would bring "disgrace" to them and result in the social exclusion of their family by the wider community. Bolat's narrative is particularly useful in illuminating some of the tools that family members use to control their queer members' visibility, as well as exposing an example of the motivation behind the compliance with the invisibility contract by Kazakhstani queer people and their families.

As pointed out in the narrative of Bolat, surveillance in the family takes on different forms, including surveillance online. Another participant from Astana - Zarina - a woman in her late twenties who identifies as bisexual, told me about publishing a video online where she openly discusses her queer identity and how this had negative consequences for her romantic

relationship after the family of her partner saw her video. While her own family knew of and supported her sexuality (see below), her partner's family did not approve of their son dating a bisexual woman.

> "He [Zarina's boyfriend] went back to his house and his parents caused a scene ["ustroili emu skandal"] because they had found out that I am bisexual. And they told him that this would shame their entire family, that they did not bring him up for this, and that he had to leave me. Otherwise, they would turn away from him ["otkazhuts'ia ot nego"]. There was even some violence towards him from his mother…" (Zarina, Astana)

When I asked Zarina whether she thought this was because of the video, she responded:

> "Well, it's likely that they went to my page [on social media] because it is open. And if you search my name, this video pops up, so yes, I think it's because of the video." (Zarina, Astana)

After much deliberation, Zarina's boyfriend ended their relationship. She was still making sense of the break-up that had happened a few days before we met for the interview. She explained that the relationship had been very serious, and she appeared still shocked by recent events. The family of Zarina's ex-boyfriend seemed to have been actively monitoring and scrutinising the public persona of their potential daughter-in-law, which is made easier on the Internet. The fact that Zarina openly identifies as bisexual is a potential source of dishonour for the entire family, and they put an ultimatum to their son asking him to choose between his girlfriend and his family.

The narratives of Miras, Bolat and Zarina highlight that family and extended family take on a regulating and surveilling function. In this way, the family's and extended family's gaze (Morgan, 2011) can be seen as a panoptic modality of power in its capacity to induce "a state of conscious and permanent visibility" (Foucault, 1977, p.201) in relation to how a queer person monitors and edits their behaviour. Furthermore, the narratives of Bolat and Zarina show the use of technology and the internet in the surveillance, illustrating the workings of the "electronic panopticon" (Poster, 1990) in regulating queer Kazakhstani citizens.

According to British scholars Valentine, Skelton and Butler (2003), children "are a 'public' face of their family" and "if a child does not turn out right", parents can not only blame themselves but fear that others will blame them too, and that the whole family's identity will be "spoiled" (p.484). Valentine, Skelton and Butler's (2003) idea of children being a "public face of the family" is consistent with the honour-and-shame model, where non-compliance with "the norm" leads to the potentiality to dishonour the entire family. As exemplified by the narratives of Miras, Bolat and Zarina, special importance is given not so much to the deviance from "the norm" itself, but to the visibility of this deviance. Hence, in the cases of Miras and Bolat, efforts are made to retain the invisibility of the child's queer identities. Zarina's narrative shows her boyfriend's family to be actively engaged in the practice of monitoring and scrutinising the public persona of their son's dates, which demonstrates the potential repercussions of being publically visible as queer in Kazakhstan. In this way, reluctance to be visible in Kazakhstan stems from a complex interplay of practical concerns (financial dependence on the family), fear for oneself (fear of not having good career prospects, fear for one's own safety; fear of losing one's family) and concern for others (fear of shaming and dishonouring the family; Omel'chenko, 2002; Stella, 2015). Furthermore, the honour-and-shame system seems to play a pivotal role in regulating queer lives within the families of their origin and within broader communities.

In the next section, I explore how queer people navigate and negotiate their non-heteronormative and/or non-cisnormative subjectivities within their homes and families.

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5.2.2. Agency and queer negotiations in the family

Negotiating here refers to the continuous process of decision making about if, when and how to discuss or make visible one's non-normative sexual and/or gender subjectivities. Participants in this study were intentional in regulating their (in)visibility. For example, the above mentioned Bolat explained to me that while his family is convinced that his sexuality is invisible in public, he is engaged in the active process of managing his visibility and negotiating who is able to see his gay identity.

Bolat said he is involved in much activism, both online and in person. He uses social media and the Internet as impression management tools.

> "What I did was… My parents have only [my social network name] and of course we are 'friends' there. I just limit what they can see on my page. They can see some of my normal, neutral posts, and even political ones. [This is] so they can see that I am still active on social media." (Bolat, Astana).

Despite the outward appearance of complying with his family's demands, Bolat is able to exercise his agency in being an activist without his parents knowing. Bernie Hogan (2010) introduces the notion of virtual "curator" in his discussion of self-censoring practices that take place in the context of digital platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Using Hogan's (2010) terminology, Bolat is carefully curating his online self-presentation, filtering who can see what on his social media. Consequently, Bolat complies with his parent's

demand only on the “front stage” (Goffman, 1959) preserving his family’s beliefs that he remains discreet in public, while also fulfilling his LGBT rights activist identity.

As pointed out previously, the silence around gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan can be associated with the Soviet discourse of making sexuality a private matter (Kon, 1995; Stella, 2015), and to the attribution of *uyat* or shame to discussing sex and sexual matters as well as not conforming to gender norms (Kabatova, 2018). Bolat’s narrative illustrates his use of agency in his choice of when and to whom he reveals or silences his queer identity both in real life and online. Indeed, research participants and their families seem to employ this silence intentionally to both regulate and negotiate non-normative gender and sexuality within a family context.

Not everyone in my study chose to disclose their queer identity to their parents. Instead, some preferred to play to implicit assumptions of heteronormativity and alluded to the ambiguity of their sexual identity by virtue of a “don't ask, don’t tell” family protocol, thus, actively making their sexuality invisible in the eyes of their family. This was exemplified by bisexual couple Sasha and Anna from Karaganda.

> *Anna:* “My ex-girlfriend's mother always said, ‘it would be better if I guessed than knew for sure’ [about your sexuality]. I think [my] parents hold similar views. It's better for them. In my opinion, many parents who don't understand it [being bisexual or non-heterosexual], and of course there are those who do, but for those that don't-. Well, my mother is now in her seventies; she is a Soviet woman and strongly Russian orthodox.”
> *Sasha: “*We always called each other sisters, from the very beginning. This affects us psychologically (“psychologicheskyj sdvig”), let alone because we are like this [in the same-sex relationship] and that would

be incest ((Sasha is laughing))[…] But again, we never know what our parents really think."
Anna: "Because we never raise this topic."
*Sasha: "*And god forbid if that should happen."
*Anna: "*I think we should never raise it. [the topic of their relationship]."(Anna and Sasha, Karaganda)

Here, Anna and Sasha discuss the silence and careful avoidance of the topic of their relationship. This is explained by the desire to preserve family peace and beliefs that their families would not understand, given their Soviet upbringing and religious background. Anna and Sasha speak of calling themselves sisters as one of the ways in which they explain their relationship and cohabitation. Other participants have mentioned using such an explanation. Anna and Sasha (although, with laughter) mention some of the costs or "psychological effects" of the "sisterhood" dissimulation, alluding to the incestuous nature of such an explanatory framework. I discuss the effects of invisibility on relationships in the section *Effects of Regulation of Queer Subjectivity in Kazakhstan*. This is another case of "impression management" and shows the length that Kazakhstani queers will go to present themselves in a heteronormative way on the "front stage".

Interestingly, later in the interview, Anna says:

"…Once mum asked me [asked whether I am a lesbian]. Well, I laughed it off and and changed the subject, ha ha ha ((Anna imitates laughter)). Well, mum knew about some of my relationships, but we didn't speak about them…" (Anna, Karaganda)

Despite Anna's mother's knowledge about some of her relationships, Anna's sexuality remained unspeakable and ambiguous. Anna never openly

disclosed her sexual identity to her mother, even in the face of being openly confronted.

Furthermore, Sasha points out that Anna's dad always jokes around with her, subtly letting them know that he is aware of their sexuality.

> *Anna: "*Yeah, it happens mostly as a joke."
> *Sasha:* "So for example, I would suggest giving a toast to the family [during a family gathering] and he would-"
> *Anna:* "He would say things like, 'now to which family are you drinking?'"

Here, the tacit knowing or "open secret" (Zavella, 1997) becomes apparent when Anna's father makes an implicit link to the fact that Anna and Sasha are also a family. Therefore, Anna and Sasha are carefully navigating the "knowing" and "not knowing" in their families, retaining conscious ambiguity around naming and spelling out the obvious. Anna's remark about one of her ex's mother's saying, "it would be better if I guessed than knew for sure" (Anna, Karaganda), exemplifies this silent awareness and her agentic choice to retain the silence. The findings of this study question the assumption that "being out" for queer people is necessary benificial for their wellbeing (see Seidman, Meeks and Traschen, 1999; Green, 2002 for the critique). Indeed, for Anna and Sasha, openness about their queer identity is not seen as positive and empowering (see Natrova, 2004; Stella, 2015). Instead, the "don't ask, don't tell" protocol seems to be employed intentionally to preserve the existing relationship with their families.

This strategic use of silence is in line with the results of a study by Katie Acosta (2010), who looked at first- and second-generation lesbian, bisexual, and queer Latinas. One of the strategies that Acosta outlines in her article is sexual silencing, where women in her study choose "not to disclose their

sexuality and instead are complicit with family members in pretending their relationships with women are platonic friendships" (p.64). The sexual silencing strategy "allows individuals to meet the expectations of normalcy because no one acknowledges or verbalises the transgressions" (p.76). One of the advantages of such a strategy is that using it allows families and queer individuals to avoid shame in their communities as long as gender and sexual nonconformity remains hidden or discreet (Acosta, 2010). Moreover, such an arrangement allows queer individuals to preserve family bonds and avoid complications that come with open disclosure.

For many queer Kazakhstani people, family and home are an ambiguous space where they are neither "in" nor "out" of the closet but a "tacit subject" (Decena, 2011, p.19), occupying the space in between visible and invisible. In this respect, coming out and the decision to be visible at home is a result of the "complex interplay between emotion, affect and pragmatic assessment of the benefits and risks involved" (Stella, 2015, p.74). The narratives of Bolat, Sasha and Anna demonstrate agentic use of silence and visibility that allows them to retain viable relationships within their families as well as to live authentic lives.

5.2.3. Negotiating transgender subjectivity in the family

Many of the transgender participants in my study also used hiding and silence as a strategy to navigate their familial home. However, unlike sexuality, gender could be disguised only up to a certain point. Living in small apartments is one of the difficulties that queer Kazakhstanis have to navigate around. Stella (2015) writes about some of the peculiarities of the parental home in post-Soviet Russia and how lesbian women experience it, some of which are shared by Kazakhstani queer people. For example, as in Russia, most Kazakhstanis live in small apartments, usually sharing their

accommodation with several generations, which allows for little privacy. Sometimes, the lack of privacy means that Kazakhstani queers are being found out by their family members. In this extract, Ekaterina, who identifies as a transgender woman, explains the difficulties in a small space.

> "I was getting ready – it was almost the end of school, 9th form. I was getting ready to go to some birthday party. I was standing [in front of the mirror] and putting on my makeup when I noticed that mum was home. Before I would kind of try to put my makeup on in my own room, quickly quickly. But there is only one big mirror in the main room. So I was trying to do everything quicky and leave, say goodbye and say when I would be back [without being seen]. And then I noticed that she [mother] was at home. I just said 'Mum', and she replied: 'that's it, I understand everything'. And I could see that she really understood now, that she struggled to talk. So I left because I also didn't know what to say. And we did not have a direct conversation. Only much later, when I had finished school and started college, did we have an indirect conversation through my little sister." (Ekaterina, Almaty)

There was no direct discussion between Ekaterina and her mother when she came home from work early and saw her putting on makeup and wearing women's clothes. The understanding of her child's gender identity is unspoken. While Ekaterina managed to hide her gender until she was 16, the process of concealment seems to be difficult and energy-consuming in a small household. Hiding and avoiding conversations about gender with parents as well as concealment of "authentic gender expression" for the sake of family peace, and cohesion, were common in the findings of Catalpa and McGuire (2018), who did ethnographic content analysis based on interviews with 90 transgender youths in the USA, Canada and Ireland. This similarity in

strategies employed by transgender people across different cultural contexts needs to be acknowledged.

Some participants described their ability to find safety in their parental home, despite a small household conditions or homophobia and transphobia at home. Zhanna, a transgender woman in her early twenties, who experienced bullying at school, found sanctuary in her room.

> "My relief ["otdushina"] was always in my room. I closed the door, and it was my whole world there. I deliberately - […] decorated my room so that it resembled a scene from my favourite book, Alice in Wonderland […] I painted a Cheshire Cat on my wall. I had a magical lamp with twigs. I felt that I could shut myself away ["abstragirovat'sia"] from everything… I now understand that it was a very relaxing space; I felt safe in my room." (Zhanna, Astana)

As highlighted by Schroeder (2015), who conducted an ethnographic study of queer cultural politics in the Midwestern United States, "[f]or queer youth, the bedroom becomes an important space they choose for their own privacy, or are banished to, due to other circumstances." (p.796). Zhanna carved out a space where she could express her authentic gender and feel safe. To use Marquez's (2012) terminology, when Zhanna was a child, she used her bedroom as a "private or secret space" (p.11) where she could retire to from the outside world. However, the fact that safety was only possible "behind closed doors" highlights the oppressive side of the bedroom; the bedroom bears some similarities to the closet as "both the bedroom and closet can conceal protectively or trap oppressively. It can be a prison or a sanctuary – and often both simultaneously" (Schroeder, 2015, p.796).

In the Handbook of Identity Theory and Research, Diamond, Pardo and Butterworth (2011) emphasise that transgender people have variability in

their experiences, and each person must make decisions as to when and to what extent they want to socially and medically transition as well as disclose or claim a transgender identity.

Oleg, a transgender man in his early thirties, decided to reveal his gender identity to his family relatively recently in his life.

> “I can’t tell that in my family- Well, there is no full acceptance [of my identity] by my family. They use my name and the correct pronoun. But my mum is against the operation and against hormonal therapy. That's why I don't talk about it with them.” (Oleg, Almaty)

On the one hand, Oleg's mother addresses him appropriately while on the other, she is against him transitioning medically. This is consistent with the previously mentioned findings of Catalpa and McGuire (2018), who found that transgender youth experience relational ambiguity within their families. In their study, transgender youth perceived a whole range of reactions, such as acceptance, rejection, negativity, ambiguity, ambivalence as well as positivity and support. Their findings show that “transgender-identified youth negotiated family connectedness and authentic gender identity in the context of complex and ongoing parental reactions or behaviours towards gender identity” (Catalpa and McGuire, 2018, p.98). The ambiguity of his family’s reactions along with Oleg’s choice to not talk about his gender led him to feel isolated.

> “I had a difficult time when I went to have my operation abroad. I was completely alone. One morning I woke up and realised that I absolutely needed to talk to someone. But I couldn't phone my mother. It was very difficult. The pre-operation period - a crucial, sensitive, important time - is scary and I couldn't share it with anyone. I really wanted support and someone to tell me that everything would be

> okay. I didn't want to hear it from a friend, I specifically wanted to hear it from my mother. And I couldn't. When I woke up after the operation, it was also difficult… I just wanted some support." (Oleg, Almaty)

Oleg explains that he works with other transgender people in Kazakhstan, many of whom specifically ask to be supported during the operation, "to make sure that at least someone is there for them". Oleg then explains how he coped with the feeling of isolation at the time of his operation.

> "… There is a psychiatrist who looks a lot like my mum […], and I have orchestrated everything so- well, we have a good relationship. I asked her- I told her that I was having the operation and she hugged me and said that the scary part was still to come [after the operation]. After the operation, when I was recovering, I thought to myself that my mum would probably have said the same thing. I just imagined my mother saying those words. At least my friends were supporting me. They came over to support me." (Oleg, Almaty)

Here, Oleg exemplifies the notion of an avunculate family (Sedgwick, 1993) where he uses his non-familial relations (psychiatrist and friends) to represent a family at this time of need. What struck me in my conversation with Oleg was the extent of his preparation before transitioning and his ability to creatively adjust and meet his needs. What comes across in this section is the consistency of the narratives of transgender participants in the study with the experiences of transgender individuals reported in studies from developed nations. For Ekaterina, Zhanna and Oleg, home and families are ambiguous spaces, spaces where they can be "found out", exposed, silenced, and where they can both find safety and solace as well as confinement. All in all, participants in this study seemed to skillfully navigate and negotiate home and wider family.

5.2.4. Positive experience in the family

It is important to emphasise that not all participants in my study reported negative experiences with families and within homes. Indeed, such bias towards negative and traumatic experiences with little explicit consideration of the potential for family support and acceptance in studies of queer people has been highlighted by several scholars based in the global West (Miceli, 2002; Gorman-Murray, 2008). Australian scholar Gorman-Murray (2008) points out the importance of not essentialising "normative" heterosexual subjects when thinking about family responses to their queer family members. In other words, Gorman-Murray (2008) warns us against a normative assumption that heterosexual and cisgender parents will not understand different gender and sexuality. "Such normative perceptions fail to recognise the life experience and decision-making capacities of parents, who instead come to be seen as "heterosexual breeders" rather than multifaceted individuals" (Gorman-Murray, 2008, p.38). This bias towards negative portrayals of queerness is particularly prominent in the post-Soviet region, where the hegemonic discourse is that of post-Soviet countries opposing the pro-LGBT West (Persson, 2015). In the light of this, it was particularly important to give space to the positive narrative of queer people within their families in Kazakhstan.

Zarina, who identifies as a bisexual woman, told me of the positive reception of her disclosure to her parents.

> "I have a very close relationship with my family, and I am lucky that my family is relatively progressive for our society. It was like that when I came out to my mother, she also came out to me and told me that she

> also dated girls when she was at university. They were dating for two years. So she took it very well." (Zarina, Astana)

Zarina told me that she could predict her mother's positive response because she knew that her mother was forward thinking.

> "I wasn't surprised. It was actually predictable. She hates it when people are homophobic, and she watched the whole series of the L Word ((laughs))" (Zarina, Astana)

As highlighted by Savin-Williams (1989, 1998) and Gorman-Murray (2008), who wrote from the perspective of the global West, prior life experiences of parents shape their responses to their children's disclosure of a queer identity. Zarina observed before disclosure of her sexuality that her mother was sensitive to queer issues in her vocal opposition of homophobia and her TV choice focusing on a group of lesbian, bisexual and queer women living in Los Angeles. Here, the consideration of the intersectionality of various levels of individual situatedness (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 2011) plays a role. Zarina's mother's economic and educational background, as well as the level of exposure to other cultures, may have contributed to her positive response towards her daughter's disclosure of her sexuality.

For another participant, Ekaterina, acceptance in her family meant a lot:

> "Yeah, sometimes grandmother calls me the wrong name, but she is just used to it… I am not angry at it; I am not hurt by it. I understand that, I love my grandmother so much; I could forgive anything, even if she always called me the wrong name. But when she did call me Ekaterina for the first time ((pause)), it was unexpected. I really did not expect it- I was so grateful to be accepted. Grateful that no one kicked me out of the house, no one turned away from me… Even

> though they could see that I was wearing makeup and have long hair ((Ekaterina cries))…" (Ekaterina, Almaty)

Here, Ekaterina's response of being surprised by not being kicked out of the home is indicative of the normalisation of the transphobic family home in the popular discourse in Kazakhstan. Ekaterina's entire family, including her grandmother, has accepted her transgender identity. Interestingly, Ekaterina's narrative of her family's acceptance triggered an emotional response in me during the interview. I joined Ekaterina in crying, surprised by how much her story of acceptance felt like an exception to me.

The Soros foundation report (Vanner, 2009) is currently the only publication that offers a more nuanced picture of family life for queer people in Kazakhstan, including acceptance and approval within the family following disclosure of non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender identities. This study complements and expands on existing reports and highlights that parents and other family members, too, have the choice and agency to support and accept gender and sexual differences within the family, despite the constraining social norms in Kazakhstan.

5.3. Regulation and negotiation of queer subjectivity at work

The workplace is another site of interaction that reflects larger processes of social ordering and regulation (Connell, 1987; Adkins, 1995; Compton and Dougherty, 2017). Workplace studies in economically advantaged nations such as Australia, United States and the United Kingdom, convey that non-normative gender and sexualities are tightly regulated and often silenced in workplace contexts (for example, Gherardi, 1995; Clair, 1998; Lombardi *et al.*, 2002; Ward and Winstanley, 2003). Organisational scholars from developed nations highlight the practices of silencing gender and sexuality in workplaces due to the persistent belief that non-normative gender and sexuality will interfere with professionalism and productivity (Burrell, 1984; Brewis and Sinclair, 2000). Moreover, several authors have pointed out that queer identity influences and restricts career choices (Hetherington, Hillerbrand and Etringer, 1989; Croteua, 1996; Fassinger, 1996; Vanner, 2009; Schneider and Dimito, 2010; HRW, 2015; 'Feminita', 2018). Given the lack of legal protection of queer individuals in the workplace, Kazakhstani queers face discrimination and live with the risk of becoming visible in their workplaces. In this section, I explore the narratives of queer working lives and look at how Kazakhstani queers negotiate their working environments.

5.3.1. Regulation of queerness at work

Participants in this study voiced difficulties and fears associated with being visible as queer in the workplace. Ivan, a pansexual man in his mid-forties, described his ex-partner losing his job after being diagnosed with HIV AIDS.

> "It was a government organisation, and they just asked him to resign. No one knew about his sexual orientation. There is just an assumption

> that if you have AIDS, you are either a drug addict or gay. There is a stigma towards AIDS, and he was asked to resign. Never mind, he had had a contract for five years, and technically they could not fire him." (Ivan, Almaty)

Hence, the HIV AIDS diagnosis made his ex-partner visible as a potentially queer man, which resulted in him being asked to resign. Ivan remains unsure of how the information about his ex's HIV positive status became accessible to his employers.

Post-Soviet Central Asian republics have experienced some of the fastest growing HIV epidemics in the world (Renton *et al.*, 2006; Bodrova *et al.*, 2007; Ferencic *et al.*, 2010; Thorne *et al.*, 2010). While sharing drug-injection equipment remains the critical driving force of HIV transmission in the region (Thorne *et al.*, 2010), men who have sex with men (MSM) are also at considerable risk of HIV (Baral *et al.*, 2010). Latypov, Rhodes and Reynolds (2013) link the stigma towards MSM in Central Asia to the stigma around HIV. Latypov, Rhodes and Reynolds (2013) highlight the dangerous, vicious cycle of hostility towards MSM being linked to the increased HIV risk and to constraining in the production of reliable HIV evidence. In other words, the stigma towards MSM increases the likelihood of engaging in unprotected sex and not seeking sexual health advice, which in turn limits the knowledge base on HIV in Central Asia. In their words, "[t]he social conditions regulating MSM practices shape what is known about HIV as well as what is knowable" (Latypov, Rhodes and Reynolds, 2013, p.61).

Ivan described another instance of queerness becoming visible and the danger associated with it.

> "One of my friends, he was also fired because during one corporate event he started to behave... well, more openly, so to speak. And the

> deputy came over to him and forcibly took him outside where he was… well, not beaten up badly but hit in the chest so that he could not breathe for a while. He was told he had to resign immediately. That there was no place in the organisation for people like him" (Ivan, Almaty)

Being visible in the workplace carries risk. Ivan's friend started to act more "queer-like" after getting drunk at the corporate party, which resulted in him being asked to resign immediately. Studies conducted by Sharp and Getz (1996) and O'Grady (2013), based in the USA, support that substance use could be a form of impression management. The choice of such an impression management tactic by Ivan's friend is understandable, given the deep and pervasive link between drinking and masculinity in post-Soviet Kazakhstan (see Hinote and Webber, 2012; Kesküla, 2018). However, it seems that such a strategy of impression management was disassembled when Ivan's friend got too drunk and started to behave "more openly." Hence, under the influence of alcohol, the stigmatised identity became more visible and resulted in dismissal.

For participants who identify as transgender, the search for a job and retaining a job is a challenge every step of the way. For Ekaterina, finding employment was problematic. She initially worked unofficially for one of her extended family members.

> "… I used to work unofficially, just part-time in the beauty parlour. I was studying, and I needed to support my mum and to earn myself some pocket money. Then my [family member] closed that beauty parlour and I started working in a shop, but I earned very little there. I searched for a job before, and everyone was just, "no, we can't take you". Before, I would go [to the interviews], but my documents didn't

> match [my gender]. I would just waste my time. It's a shame to waste that much time ((laughs)).” (Ekaterina, Almaty)

The biggest obstacle for Ekaterina is her documents, which give away her non-cisgender identity. Ekaterina found a way not to waste her time and dodge potentially homophobic employers by intentionally revealing her stigmatised identity, putting the fact that she is transgender in her CV.

> “When I was writing my CV - and everyone who knows still laughs about it - I wrote in the section ‘about me’ at the end that I am transsexual. And someone called me and asked me for interview. I actually called them back and asked, “have you read my CV right up to the end?” and they said yes. So I came over all dressed up. And again I said, “I am transsexual, is that okay?” And she said, “I read your CV and spoke to the director, it's alright”. And they hired me, first as a shop assistant, then as a merchandiser and then as a shop manager. It was one of the best jobs in my life; I really enjoyed it. I only worked there for a couple of years, and then the shop closed down.” (Ekaterina, Almaty)

Ekaterina describes how she was able to find and progress within a job, even though her employers were fully aware of her non-cisnormative gender. This contrasts with the findings from existing reports (HRW, 2015; Alma-TQ, 2016) which focus on the violation of rights and discriminatory practices against transgender people in Kazakhstan. Ekaterina’s narrative reveals the diversity of attitudes towards non-cisgender Kazakhstani people within the workplace.

Ekaterina then reported that after the shop closed down, a manager had offered her another job in the same organisation.

> “I was super excited about his offer. I did the interview and all, and then I brought in my documents. A couple of days later they called me and said, “sorry, we are unable to employ you.” I asked them what the problem was and they told me that the director saw my documents. It turns out he did not know that I am… I was- everything became clear. That's the reality of it…” (Ekaterina, Almaty)

The offer of employment was withdrawn when a different manager became aware of her transgender identity. Even within the same organisation, a change in the management is a risk for transgender employees in Kazakhstan. Similarly, for Oleg, retaining a job was particularly problematic when he began the process of transitioning.

> “My transition was delayed because...well, when transitioning started to be visible at work. I used to work in a big trading company… I was the face of the company and questions started to arise. You know, transitioning at first is very active. I wanted to buy myself a tie, a nice suit. I wanted to go to work wearing all of this… And once you wear them [these clothes] in public, there is no way back... At work, the first questions started to arise with security. I cut my hair and started hormone therapy, and they wouldn't let me through security. I changed my pass, changed the photo so that I wouldn't have any problems. Then at work, my managers started to call me in to meetings. They would say things like, “we hired a woman and in front of us is a young man.” That was very weird as I have met all of their criteria. Well, they demand that all employees wear a white top and dark bottoms. I looked presentable and appropriate. Sales were good so I couldn't understand what the problem was. They started to pull me out. For example, when foreign customers came over, they said, “unfortunately, you cannot represent us because we don't like the way

> you look." And things are complicated with the documents. They told me that they don't know who I am anymore." (Oleg, Almaty).

As Oleg began transitioning, his non-cisgender identity became progressively more visible. He didn't have an explicit "coming out" moment at work. Indeed, as highlighted by Budge, Tebbe and Howard (2010) in their article on transgender employees within UK organisations, "this process of transitioning for transgender individuals is very visible; even when an individual does not engage in hormone therapy or undergo sexual reassignment surgery, there may be notable changes" (p.383). Unlike Ekaterina, Oleg was not made instantly redundant. Instead, it was a gradual process: he was no longer able to represent his company; his customer base was taken away from him; and eventually, he felt that he had to quit his job, despite there being no explicit request to resign. He was later able to find another job but it did not match his qualifications. Oleg explains to me that he had been prepared for this outcome.

> "When my friends told me to just do it, transition, I knew I should delay it to save money and prepare a 'financial cushion' for myself. I knew that it would be difficult to find employment for some time after I transitioned … Of course, it still hurts as I really loved working in that company and I was good at what I did there…" (Oleg, Almaty)

Hence, Oleg was anticipating the difficulties that he would encounter at work. Job loss and difficulty gaining employment as a transgender person is the subject of previous research, largely carried out in the UK, Europe or the USA (for example, Schilt, 2007; O'Neil and McWhirter, 2008; Budge, Tebbe and Howard, 2010). This study complements existing research by bringing in the experiences of Kazakhstani transgender people. Oleg prepared himself for such an outcome and made some savings, anticipating discrimination at work and difficulty finding new employment. However, he also voices his

feeling of loss of the job that he enjoyed and that he worked hard to progress in.

Previously mentioned participant Zarina also experienced difficulties in retaining her job after becoming visibly non-heterosexual (openly speaking about her non-heterosexual identity in an online video, see *Regulation of Gender and Sexuality and Queer Agency within the Family* section). Zarina said:

> "No one said anything or changed their attitude towards me [after the video came out], but after a while one of my colleagues wrote to me and said that he saw the video and thinks I am very brave, but he warned me that my other colleagues speak behind my back after seeing it." (Zarina, Astana)

Here, the theme of tacit communication persists. Zarina was tipped off by one of her colleagues that she is being talked about after the video was seen at her workplace. Two weeks later, Zarina received notice that her employment contract was changing and coming to an end, even though she had a fixed contract for two more years. While nothing was said explicitly, Zarina links this sudden change in the contract with the video being published online. Zarina says:

> "When I went to see the director, he started giving me a very long speech that as a government worker I need to think about what I publish on the Internet and about my Internet image, that I need to be more cautious. Because things that are posted on the Internet have a long-lasting effect. Nothing concrete was said, but he gave me this lecture. Where would this speech have come from if not from this [him seeing the video]?" (Zarina, Astana).

Her director's reference to the online image makes it clear to Zarina that her dismissal is linked to the video published online a couple of weeks before. In this way, being open and visible on the Internet comes at a risk for queer people in Kazakhstan. In Zarina's case, the emergence of the video where she openly speaks about her sexual identity has resulted in her losing her job and relationship. Consistent with previous research (Article 19, 2015), the Internet was used as a tool of surveillance, making Zarina in this example exposed and vulnerable to discrimination.

It appears that being "out" at work is potentially risky for queer people in Kazakhstan. This means that most participants end up striking a balance between being visible and invisible. Within workplace literature that predominantly originates from Western nations, scholars report numerous negative effects of such a balancing acts with an impact on self-esteem and self-worth as well as the physical and psychological demands of remaining invisible (Colgan *et al.*, 2006; Ragins, Singh and Cornwell, 2007). Miras explains to me that he could not be fully "out" as that would mean compromising some of his career ambitions. In his words:

> "I am an ambitious person, I want to build a good career, and of course, I will have competition from others… And in any problematic situation, this [my sexuality] might come out and act against me. Someone will definitely use it against me at some point." (Miras, Astana)

In Miras's case, along with ambition his knowledge of the danger associated with being out has determined his decision not to be fully visible. Miras is clear that he does not feel his sexuality is "wrong" and therefore his decision to not be fully visible comes from concern for himself, namely, fear for the potential consequences to his career rather than an irrational fear of homosexuality (Omel'chenko, 2002).

It is important to point out that the response to queer visibility in workplaces was not always negative in the narratives of my participants. For example, Gulzada, who works as a schoolteacher, describes being pleasantly surprised after an interview with a popular Kazakhstani newspaper.

> “I gave an interview to NUR.KZ, well, I thought I was giving an interview to another publication, but then it was published in NUR.KZ. Everyone reads it, right? I felt uneasy in my heart. I felt that people were looking at me differently at school. I thought to myself, “right.. it will happen now”. I felt so stressed, and in the end I decided to go and talk to the school director. I went to see him and I said: “I imagine you are shocked after reading the paper" ((Gulzada laughs)). And he replied, “oh, that article came out about a month ago, it's old news”, and he reminded me that when we spoke last time I explained everything, so it was okay”. And then I remembered that he did actually ask me about what I do and I told him about my activism and that I am promoting the rights of people, etcetera. He told me it was fine but that a couple of teachers had complained and he had put their minds at rest. It was so touching to hear his words of support. I cried a little when I heard him say those things to me.” (Gulzada, Almaty)

Gulzada had anticipated a different response from her employer who turned out to be supportive of both her sexual and activist identities. Gulzada's surprise and anticipation of an adverse reaction as well as the presence of “a couple of teachers who complained” indicates the shadow side of her narrative - the presence of the dominant discourse of heteronormativity. Together with Ekaterina’s mention of her successfully finding and retaining employment while being transparent about her transgender identity, Gulzada’s narrative shows that the workplace could be (at least in part) a supportive, accepting environment. This contrasts with some existing

publications (Vanner, 2009; HRW, 2015) which focus solely on experiences of discrimination, hiding and concealment of ones' queer identity in the workplace.

All in all, the participants in this study seemed to have little opportunity to escape visibility at work, making workplaces "spaces of surveillance" (Marquez, 2012, p.11). In Foucauldian terms, transgressions, whether deliberate or not, are rarely just private and are followed by punishment (being fired, as in the example of Ivan's ex and Zarina). Furthermore, employers appear to engage in the active process of surveilling their employees, whether by monitoring their bodies (HIV within Ivan's narrative; clothing and body changes for Oleg as he started transitioning), or using an "electronic panopticon" (Poster, 1990) to see their employees' activity on the Internet and in the media. Such regulatory power of employers seems to act as a normalising function, keeping the status quo in place (for example, Miras, who chooses to be invisible in his workplace as he would like to progress in his career).

5.3.2. Negotiating queer subjectivity at work

The workplace can be viewed as another "stage" where wider power structures determine interactions and where queer individuals are actively engaged in the process of identity management to present an appropriate "front" (Goffman, 1959).

Queer people employ different strategies to negotiate and cope with discrimination in the workplace (see Chung, 2001 for an overview of coping strategies within workplaces for lesbian gay and bisexual employees in the US). One way in which people may negotiate their queer identity at work is "passing", where queer people are camouflaging aspects of themselves to

pose as members of a dominant heteronormative and cisnormative group (Clair, Beatty and Maclean, 2005; Willis, 2011). “Passing” depends on a presumption of heteronormativity and cisnormativity and may include strategies of concealment such as dodging questions about personal life or presenting oneself as asexual (see research by Woods and Lucas, 1993; Chrobot-Mason, Button and DiClementi, 2001; Willis, 2011). Anna explains the nuances of “passing” at work.

> “People do always ask. I frequently switch jobs and so the people around me change, too. And every time I start working somewhere, people ask questions like: ‘where do you live? Who do you live with? Are you married or not? How old are you and why haven't you married yet?’ Those are standard questions that people ask about relationships. I always answer, ‘I’m not married yet’, or ‘I’m not officially married but I am in a relationship’. Those are my standard answers. When they ask me ‘who do you live with’, I stop. I don’t say that I live alone as there is sometimes an inadequate reaction to that. Some people want to take advantage, for example, managers say things like: ‘well, since you don't have a family, you can do overtime’ or something along those lines.” (Anna, Karaganda)

Anna highlights the extent of compulsory heteronormativity (Rich, 1980) in the workplace which is exemplified by the questions typically asked. Anna seems to be skillfully navigating the expectations while “artfully dodging” (Link and Phelan, 2001, p. 378) other potential stigmas (the stigma of being a single woman). Indeed, research by Shadrina (2014, 2018) highlights that single status for women in post-Soviet countries remains problematic in the public perception. Moreover, as highlighted by Anna, being a single woman makes her a potential target for exploitation in her workplace. Drawing from 24 in-depth interviews conducted in the UK, McDermott (2006) reports that for lesbian women, acting heterosexual at work may entail using “signification

of conventional feminine markers" (in Willis, 2011, p.960), such as references to marriage, dating men and childbearing during casual conversation. Anna uses the metaphor "walking on a blade" to describe when she tells half-truths to ease her life and to feel included.

> *Anna*: "More recently, I have started saying that I live with my sister. It's easier this way. When everyone talks about their weekends or evenings, there is some balance there. I do the same in my family. I always did. I tell more truth than lies. It's like I am always walking on the edge. I always live on the edge.
> *Sasha*: "It's difficult to live a lie, and trying to remember who you told what."
> *Anna*: "That's why I try to lie as little as possible. I don't need to remember. Because I am always walking on a blade. I say that I live with- I call you [referring to Sasha] my sister. Everyone [at work] knows your name; they know where you work and what you do." (Anna and Sasha, Karaganda)

I found the work of Paul Willis (2011) on negotiating LGBT identities in the workplace in Australia useful to understand the different strategies that participants in this study described in their narratives to manage the workplace environment. Using terms employed by Willis (2011), Anna and Sasha apply the strategy of "monitoring and modifying speech and actions" (p.966). In Willis's study, this sometimes meant "elaborate measures such as avoiding direct allusions to same-sex partners during work conversations or by inserting gender-neutral pronouns when discussing significant people in their intimate lives with other adults" (p.966). Anna and Sasha try to minimise the number of lies and to give as much accurate information as possible. Potentially, such a strategy also allows them to avoid some of the feelings of social isolation by enabling them to participate in everyday workplace conversations.

Similarly, Sasha tries to tell legends, approximating those stories as closely as possible to real life.

> *Sasha*: “When you work with people for a long time, it gets tricky. Sometimes I feel I should be saying something.”
> *Anna*: “Right, and you start things that are pretty close to the “truth”, but you also tie in other stories and names... You know in some places people think that I am divorced. I never said anything like that. If they ask me a direct question, I tell them: “I have never been officially married, where did you get that? I never told you anything; where did you get it from?” People think what they want, and I let them.” (Anna and Sasha, Karaganda)

Anna continues:

> “You see, everyone who I know from ‘ours’ [“nashich”] has a particular legend. The legend needs to be changed all the time and aligned with your age, time and surrounding context. You need to support the legend. My legend is that I used to have a relationship, but that it didn’t work out, and now I am disappointed, or something like that […] I understand that I am soon to reach my forties and that I have a right to have a past that can be different from others.” (Anna, Karaganda)

Here, Anna describes playing along with people’s heteronormative assumptions. Adkins (1995, p.51) highlights that “other” sexualities are made invisible at the workplace where a tacit assumption of the heterosexual “norm” is being accepted (see also Holliday, 1999; Taylor, 2007). The narratives of Anna and Sasha are consistent with Stella's (2015) findings

where her participants employed the strategy of “passing” as heterosexual by making up imaginary boyfriends.

Miras describes a similar way of negotiating his gay subjectivity at work.

> “In some ways I am lucky. You know there are some gay men… who are… I suppose, more flamboyant. They are a lot more open in their expressions. I am not like that. Of course, I don't want to categorise like that, but in relation to some people, it's easier for me to hide it. I am not sure it is a good thing; maybe it's a bad thing. But because of that, in my workplace I was never suspected by anyone. Any mannerisms and peculiar ways of speaking may be interpreted by people.” (Miras, Astana)

Miras is talking about a specific advantage that he has, an appearance and mannerisms that allow him to “pass” as heteronormative and remain invisible in his workplace. As pointed out by Dyer (2002) “unlike gender or race, sexuality is not ‘written on the body’” (in Stella, 2015, p.97). Therefore, specific performances and bodies are more likely to be seen as queer. Miras’s narrative is evidencing how the existing discourses on gender and sexuality are embodied in the voice, language, gestures and other behaviours, therefore demonstrating the power of biopolitics (Foucault, 2008). However, it is clear that embodiment is not just “happening” to Miras: it is, at least in part, an intentional act or agentic choice.
In Goffman’s terms, Miras controls expressions “given” (verbal communication) rather than impressions “given off” (non-verbal communication, appearance and demeanour; Goffman, 1959). As explained by Willis (2011), strategies of “passing” can be stressful and tiring to sustain daily.

Moreover, such strategies do not remove the risk of becoming involuntarily visible in the workplace (see Badgett, 1996; Ward and Winstanley, 2005). To avoid stress, some of the participants chose to draw a boundary and divide their private life and work life. For example, Amir, who in the past used to work on a fly-in/fly-out basis on oil rigs, explains that:

> "I left my private life behind when I went to work. I did not speak about my relationships or anything private there, a very clear delineation between the two… It was easy to keep the status quo. Well, we would work for 12 hours, and then everyone went to the gym or to have dinner. We would talk only about work-related topics, and outside of the rigs, we never got together, and called each other only in emergencies." (Amir, Astana)

Many of my participants choose to work in queer-friendly workplaces or organisations promoting the rights of queer people in Kazakhstan. For example, Amir currently works with MSM.

> "Right now, I feel very comfortable, and I can be open about my sexuality if I want to be. For example, my managers know. People also know about my activist activity. There is nothing to hide." (Amir, Astana)

Furthermore, Ekaterina and Oleg started working in organisations promoting the rights of transgender people in Kazakhstan. Participants in my study find that teaching and educating the public about queer issues and sharing their experiences with the broader public and other Kazakhstani queers, is highly gratifying for them professionally and personally. Existing research from the global West confirms that queer individuals have significantly different expectations for their careers than heterosexual people (see Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2012). Some link it to the presence of anticipated discrimination

in the light of personal or observed discrimination in the past (Levine and Leonard, 1984; Avery, 2003). In Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons's (2012) study, which was based in Canada, queer individuals were more likely to select a career in a non-profit organisation relative to their heterosexual counterparts (also see Lewis, 2010). Moreover, according to Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons (2012), queer individuals reported a greater emphasis on altruistic values, "likely out of their concern for social justice and collective self-interest on the basis of group identity" (p.346). It is important to remain critical of the notion of "queer-friendly" employers and ask about the underlying power dynamics and heteronormative logic behind such binary (queer-friendly/ non-queer-friendly organisations; Colgan and Rumens, 2015). Furthermore, due to the lack of research on queer experiences at work in post-Soviet countries, most studies cited in this paper originate from the UK, USA, Australia and Canada, where the workplace environment and socio-cultural context differs from that of Kazakhstan. Therefore, I would like to question the application of those findings to a Kazakhstani context. How much of a choice or an act of "altruism" it is for Ekaterina and Oleg to work in an NGO or other "queer-friendly" organisation, given that their transgender identity is instantly known to their employees due to the legislative difficulty for transgender people to change documents and where no legislative protection against discriminating queer people exists?

5.4. Effects of regulation of queer subjectivity in Kazakhstan

This theme is comprised of five diverse sub-themes: internalised gaze; relationship difficulties; social isolation; suicide and divided community. Those themes are broadly related to the effects of some of the above-mentioned practices of regulation of gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan. I will discuss each in turn.

5.4.1. Internalised gaze

Internalised gaze was evident in subtle comments and when reading between the lines of participants' narratives. For example, during the interview with Anna and Sasha, Sasha said to Anna, "lower your voice, we have neighbours and they have ears". Internalised gaze was also evident in the fears of participants who have never personally experienced homophobic violence.

In answer to my question of how open he and his boyfriend are in public spaces, Bolat told me:

> "Mostly we are free at home. We kiss and hug and everything. As they say, 'behind closed doors.' My boyfriend says, 'First of all I am worried about your safety. For our safety.' Who knows how people could react out on the street." (Bolat, Astana)

When I asked Bolat whether he had had any personal experience of harassment or abuse in public places, he said that he had never personally experienced that but he had heard of other people who did suffer homophobic abuse whenever they displayed public affection. Similarly, when

I asked Miras whether he had had any personal experience of abuse or violence, he responded:

> "Not personally but you hear about stuff, people talk about it. I think sometimes people overstate the danger. But at the same time, we all hear about what's going on in Chechnya, about Azerbaijan. And Chechnya isn't that far away, and we are not so different from Chechens. Everything is possible and if something starts, if gay pogroms begin, then activists will be targeted first. We all understand that." (Miras, Astana)

Even though Miras does not have any personal experience of abuse, he is aware of the abuse that occurs in other post-Soviet countries. Miras emphasises the proximity and similarity of Chechnya to Kazakhstan, and highlights the fragility of the position of visible queer citizens (activists) in Kazakhstan (see Edenborg, 2018 for more information on a state-initiated campaign of homophobic violence in Chechnya). Miras continued:

> "If I were to speak about the everyday life of a gay man in Kazakhstan, or lesbians... or non-cisgender and non-heterosexual people. The biggest problem we face, bigger than homophobia in society, than violence, the biggest problem is internalised homophobia. And inner abuse. Because at some point society does not need to hate you and beat you up. At some point, you start to hate yourself and beat yourself up. I know that this is something I will be fighting my entire life…" (Miras, Astana)

Miras exemplifies the workings of the Foucauldian panopticon when he speaks about the inner abuse of queer people in Kazakhstan. He highlights that his own inner abuse is something that he is aware of and will probably be struggling with in the future. Therefore, it seems that Miras does not only

internalise the gaze; he also internalises oppression (Pharr, 1988; Appleby and Anastas, 1998).

Research shows a connection between experiences of harassment, rejection, aggression, violence or discrimination as a result of perceived sexual and/or gender identity to mental health difficulties in queer people (Kon, 1998; Nagornaya, 2009), resulting in internal stressors (Meyer, 2003) such as internalised homophobia (Allen and Oleson, 1999), internalised heterosexism (Szymanski and Chung, 2002), internalised homonegativity (Williamson, 2000), internalised transphobia (Hendricks and Testa, 2012), and internalised stigma and prejudice (Herek, Gillis and Cogan, 2009). The growing body of research that originates mostly from developed nations supports the hypothesis that internalised oppression may contribute to health difficulties, such as depression (for example, Lewis *et al.*, 2003; Testa *et al.*, 2015), low self-esteem (for example, Peterson and Gerrity, 2006), and suicidality (for example, D'Augelli *et al.*, 2001; Perez-Brumer *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, internalised oppression in queer people influences and results in difficulties in relationships, which I discuss in the next section.

5.4.2. Relationship difficulties

Anna and Sasha talk about the struggles in their relationship shortly after they got together.

> *Anna*: “She thought it was not normal.”
> *Sasha*: “I still think like that sometimes, it's been five and a half years.”
> *Anna*: “She would say things like, “why do you need a woman? You are so good and you can have a family, you just haven't met the right man yet."
> *Sasha*: “I really struggled... We cried so much then. I would tell her, “that's it; we are no longer a couple. We can't be a couple, we can't be together!” I had full-on hysteria at times, and I would exhaust her with all of this. I have no idea how she tolerated me then.” (Anna and Sasha, Karaganda)

Sasha continued:

> “I was so confused. There was just a heap of thoughts and such a lack of understanding. What's happening to me? I was scared, terrified. I felt I was torn apart. I couldn't understand my emotions and feelings anymore.” (Sasha, Karaganda)

The inner turmoil of Anna and Sasha is evident in the above extract. Sasha’s questioning of why Anna would want to be with a woman and statements such as, “we can’t be a couple, we can’t be together” are indicative of the internalised homophobia that Sasha struggled with. The lack of a legal status for same-sex couples in Kazakhstan and the discursive construction of “family” as nuclear, heterosexual and composed of a married couple with

kids, are reflected in Sasha's assertions that Anna is "good" and that she "could have a family". This is another example of how the Foucauldian internalised gaze affects individuals and their relationships. Eventually, Sasha was able to find a queer-friendly counsellor to help her to cope with her self-hatred and work on relationship issues between herself and Anna.

Findings of the US-based study conducted by Frost and Meyer (2009) show that higher internalised homophobia is associated with more relationship problems in queer couples. Furthermore, internalised homophobia is negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (Mohr and Daly, 2008), perception longevity (Rostosky *et al.*, 2007), and high sexual anxiety and sex problems (Frost and Meyer, 2009). In a study conducted on lesbian couples, internalised homophobia was positively related to relationship conflict (Otis, Rostosky and Riggle, 2006), and increased intimate partner violence (Balsam and Szymanski, 2005; for a review see Hammack, Frost and Hughes, 2018). Existing research on post-Soviet sexuality scarcely acknowledges the effects of societal regulations and stigma attached to queerness on individual or relationship wellbeing. For example, while Stella (2015) indirectly acknowledges the strain on relationships due to the lack of recognition of the same-sex partnership in Russia, she does not go into great detail on how it plays out within queer relationships.

The narrative of Anna and Sasha indicates the impact of wider societal discourses and practices on their relationship. Existing NGO reports focus on relationship difficulties arising due to the lack of legislative recognition of the same-sex partnership and limitations of the adoption law (see Vanner, 2009). Moreover, while HRW (2015) mentions a case of intimate partner violence in reference to the difficulty of reporting instances of domestic violence to the police, it does not go into detail about the prevalence and nature of domestic violence, nore does the report explore other relationship difficulties that may be prevalent for queer people in Kazakhstan.

Other participants in my study mentioned relationship difficulties that they connected to the effects of living in an environment of invisibility and societal homophobia.

> "Many people in Kazakhstan have to be bisexual. Well, because they have wives, children and then they see a guy on the side. It makes relationships difficult." (Ivan, Almaty)

Ivan's narrative is consistent with research conducted in Russia. For example, Essig (1999), Rotkirch (2002), and Stella (2015) all highlight the prevalence of heterosexual marriage amongst their research participants. Stella (2015) writes that for older women in her study, "heterosexual marriage was sometimes short-lived, and motivated by practical reasons such as finding a living space and obtaining a residence permit" (p.53). Sometimes the reason was grounded in a loving feeling towards the heterosexual partner, or the desire to settle down and have a child within a socially acceptable framework (Stella, 2015). For many in Stella's study, marriage meant retaining the façade of a "normal" heterosexual life.

Ivan's experience, however, indicates the other side of being in a relationship with someone who is married or has children. As someone who would like to be in a same-sex relationship openly, Ivan struggles to navigate the double lives of his potential partners. He elaborates:

> "It's really difficult to build relationships for those who aren't traditional. There is societal pressure. I was in a long-term relationship with a guy for five years. Our relationship broke down just because of societal pressure. I am an open person; I can talk about my sexuality. I never had any problems with that. But my boyfriend did. He worked for a government organisation and they have rules. He was expected to

> marry and have kids. Everyone at work asked him: 'you are nearly thirty, why aren't you married yet, and so on.' So he found himself a girl while still in a relationship with me. He even introduced her to me. He had sex with her. Is it cheating then? And he explained, that 'no, it's not cheating because she is a girl.' I said, 'what, a girl isn't a human?' I told him that it wasn't right to lie to her, that he shouldn't conceal his 'essence', and that sooner or later it would come out. In the end, he told her that he is bisexual and she did not accept it. It's not surprising given that there were so many lies in their relationship." (Ivan, Almaty)

Ivan highlights the strength of expectations of heteronormativity in Kazakhstan's society that permeates different aspects of life. For his ex, the pressure to marry and have children stemmed from his government job, which led his ex to be in a heterosexual relationship (see *Regulation and Negotiation of Queer Subjectivity at Work*). In an Israel-based study of 13 heterosexually married men who define themselves as "gay", Ben-Ari and Adler (2010) found that splitting between a "heterosexual life" and a "homosexual life" appears to be a dominant theme in their interviewees' narratives. Similarly, in Ben-Ari and Adler (2010), "interviewees refer to their double lives in a dichotomous manner, using contradictory language" (p.109). This splitting is evident in the statement of Ivan's ex regarding cheating, "no, it is not cheating because she is a girl" (I will further discuss the concept of splitting in the *Creating Spaces of Appearance* section).

Ivan's narrative illustrates some damaging effects of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) for the parties involved. Similarly, Miras emphasised his struggle in deepening and establishing longer-term relationships within the context of Kazakhstan.

> “Personally, I feel a lot more comfortable with my sexuality at this point of my life, and I don't mind being a bit more open about it. Of course, with people in my circle. However, I understand that not many have such an opportunity. You always see this lack of confidence, this fear. Sometimes they are married men with kids. And very often they say, “I am not gay, I just like having sex with men.”
>
> *What is that like for you?*
>
> Well, when I start looking for a partner for the night, I know exactly what will happen. That after the night together, we will forget each other and never meet again. I don't have high expectations. You get used to that… It is difficult even if you start dating. And even if the person finally decides, “Okay, let's have a serious relationship”. Those fears, the fear of losing confidentiality, they stay and they influence how things are…” (Miras, Astana)

Miras appears to know what to expect and to be well used to the peculiarities of queer encounters in Kazakhstan. The split between sexuality and an “other” life is highlighted in the phrase spoken by Miras, “I am not gay, I just like having sex with men”. Consistently with the argument of Stella (2015), I see that heterosexual marriage and having children can be an expression of an agentic choice that sometimes can be strategically used as a “front” for practical reasons or to avoid association with stigmatised “deviant” groups of people. Nevertheless, such a strategic choice has another potential outcomes – difficulty for queer people in finding and sustaining long-term relationships.

When I asked Miras whether he has any other kinds of relationships, he told me that he meets people for sex and that the primary way for him to meet people is through the Internet.

> "Of course, I have sexual relationships, how could I do without? Mostly it all happens through the Internet. People find each other, meet and then run in separate directions ["razbegajuts'ia"]. Well maybe it's not like that for everyone, but that's how it is for me. These meetings, mostly they are anonymous. For example, people never want to tell each other their real names or share information about who they are and where they work or study. So you wouldn't get any personal information. They fear to lose their confidentiality, right? You could say that it is not the person who comes to meet you but just his sexuality. So nothing personal…" (Miras, Astana)

Here, Miras talks about the Internet becoming the space of queer possibilities and sexual relationships. He also mentions the anonymity and confidentiality that the Internet affords to Kazakhstani queers. In their study of dating application users in the US, Blackwell, Birnholtz and Abbott (2015) highlight that dating applications, especially location-based real-time dating applications, "allows for meeting proximate strangers" (p.1121) with very little contextual detail, allowing a high degree of anonymity and confidentiality. Meeting proximate strangers has another consequence: the split of sexuality from the person as a whole, so as Miras says, "it is not the person who comes to meet you but just his sexuality". The priority of anonymity and confidentiality for queer people in Kazakhstan is consistent with existing research (Vanner, 2009; Article 19, 2015; HRW, 2015). Indeed, as Enguix and Ardevol (2012) put in their chapter in the 'The Handbook of Gender, Sex and Media', "the Internet should not be seen as a separate or isolated context independent of everyday life since it is a significant source of data for the analysis of cultural representations of the body in our current society" (p.503; see also O'Riordan, 2007). In this way, using dating applications results in the split of the "person" from their sexuality in a society where gender and sexual transgressions are under constant surveillance, and

where visibility can potentially be threatening and dangerous for queer people (Vanner, 2009; HRW, 2015; Article 19, 2015).

For Gulzada, who identifies as a lesbian and is open about her sexuality as an activist for queer women's rights, the struggle in a relationship comes from the different preferences around (in)visibility. In response to the question about relationships, she said:

> "I have a problem with that at the moment. There are very few lesbians of my age around… Those who do not pretend or silence themselves, those who do not make appearances ["delat' vid"] that they are someone they are not. That I am a friend or something else. I don't know. I can't be with someone with internalised homophobia or internalised lesbophobia. I can't deal with it anymore. And that's why I have a crisis. Because here in Almaty.. I know many lesbians and bisexuals. Most of them are young. So there is an age gap, and it plays its role…" (Gulzada, Almaty)

Gulzada highlights how internalised homophobia can affect finding and forming same-sex relationships in Kazakhstan. Highlighting the intersectional nature of her various identities, Gulzada emphasises that age also plays a role in her struggle to find relationships. According to her, most lesbians her age are either heterosexually married or struggle with internalised homophobia or internalised lesbophobia. Studies conducted in the USA confirm that within-couple "asynchrony" in being open or not about their sexuality is associated with stress and relationship difficulties (Jordan and Deluty, 1998; Clausell and Roisman, 2009). The narratives of participants in this study show that intersection of internalised homophobia and different preferences regarding (in)visibility play an important role in the difficulties of finding and sustaining long-term relationships for queer people in Kazakhstan. In different ways, Miras, Gulzada, and Ivan all report feeling

socially isolated in their struggle to find a long-term romantic partner in Kazakhstan.

5.4.3. Social isolation

Other participants spoke about social isolation. For example, Sasha and Anna talked about the feeling of isolation that has resulted from their relationship.

> *Sasha*: “I used to love hosting people, but now I can't do that any more. It is a bit difficult. We cannot be social.”
> *Anna*: “Yeah, that’s really tough for us.”
> *Sasha*: “We live in our own world. We cannot communicate with people in the way we want to. Because people will judge…”
> *Anna*: “You see, we have a very limited circle of friends that we are in touch with. We also have those who don’t know about us. We’ve also started to avoid big gatherings.”
> *Sasha*: “We kind of don’t fit anywhere anymore.”

Keeping the relationship invisible and concealing their stigmatised identity in the social realm has resulted in social isolation and the feeling of “not fitting in” for Sasha and Anna. Over time, Sasha and Anna started to avoid social occasions, and apart from a close circle of friends, they fear telling people about them being a couple. For Sasha and Anna, not appearing in public seems to go beyond not socialising, since in the interview they spoke about the self-doubt that such isolation imposes on them, questioning whether their relationship is real. As Arendt wrote, togetherness is the precondition of power, “… for without a space of appearance and without trusting in action and speech as a mode of being together, neither the reality of one’s self, of

one's own identity […] can be established" (Arendt, 1958, p.208). Arendt wrote further,

> "[S]ince our feeling for reality depends utterly upon appearance and therefore upon the existence of a public realm into which things can appear out of the darkness of sheltered existence, even the twilight which illuminates our private and intimate lives is ultimately derived from the much harsher light of the public realm" (Arendt, 1958, p.51).

For Sasha and Anna, social isolation appears to be ontologically challenging, resulting in questioning the reality of their relationship, losing a part of their identities (as people who love hosting), and feeling like they no longer "fit in anywhere", echoing Arendt's words that "isolated men are powerless by definition" (Arendt, 1985, p.172; I elaborate on the importance of appearing to others in the *Creating Spaces of Appearance* section).

Existing reports mention the feeling of loneliness and isolation of queer people in Kazakhstan that comes from making themselves invisible and concealing their identity, however, isolation is only vaguely alluded to in current publications (Vanner, 2009; HRW, 2015). Research from Russia suggests that loneliness is common amongst sexual and gender minorities, who frequently encounter rejection from family and friends (Kon, 1998; Lapshina and Kochetkova, 2016). Moreover, as pointed out in the US-based review of theories and evidence for stigma and minority stress among LGBT youth, conducted by Hatzenbuehler and Pachankis (2016), fears of future rejection and negative evaluation may lead to avoidance of social interaction and close relationship formation, which over time can lead to further loneliness, introversion and social anxiety. Social isolation is also highly pronounced in the narratives of transgender people.

Ekaterina explains that many transgender women are forced into sex work and social isolation due to the legislative complexity of transitioning and changing documents as well as due to the fear of transphobia.

> “While my fear has decreased since I moved to the big city, I still feel it inside me. For example, when I need to tell someone or if I have a suspicion that someone has found out... I used to be overwhelmed with fear. “What if they insult me, call me names, reject me or kick me out?” Slowly, I learned that there are people who don't care about this kind of thing at all and my self-confidence started to grow. Still not a 100 per cent, but in 90 per cent of cases I think I will survive whatever some stranger yells at me in the street… So many people close themselves off, and many trans people never go out. Or they would go to the shops at night so that fewer people see them. They shut themselves away from society and then they struggle to socialise. And then they can't find a job. What are they supposed to live off then? They have to start doing sex work, and that's a vicious cycle.” (Ekaterina, Almaty)

Ekaterina highlights how over time she became more resilient to transphobic assaults and comments that she encounters in her everyday life. Ekaterina also highlights other realities of being transgender in Kazakhstan, notably marginalisation, social isolation and sex work. The narrative of Ekaterina indicates that many transgender people in Kazakhstan seem to inhabit “marginal spaces” (Marquez, 2012, p.12), where the power operations in society force transgender people to be invisible. Due to the lack of research of transgender subjectivities in the post-Soviet space, I turn to research from other socio-cultural contexts. For example, Nadal, Davidoff and Fujii-Doe (2014) conducted a literature review on the discrimination of transgender people and explored how discrimination influences participation in sex work in the USA. Nadal, Davidoff and Fujii-Doe (2014) emphasise that “[b]ecause

transgender people face discrimination on systemic, institutional and interpersonal levels, the previous literature has supported that many transgender women view the sex work industry as their only viable career option" (p.169). Sex work, in turn, exposes transgender women to multiple risks including violence, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, drug use, and incarceration (Rekart, 2005; Operario, Soma and Underhill, 2008; Hoffman, 2014). Indeed, according to Ekaterina, many transgender women in sex work in Kazakhstan do not see any other way to support themselves while also living authentically.

5.4.4. Suicide

Suicide was mentioned by only one participant in this study. Amir talked about losing one of his friends just a day before the interview.

> "I didn't want to finish on this note, but I think it is important. In the last six months, I have lost two people to suicide; they were both very close to me. One guy, a friend that I shared a flat with once, killed himself in August. And yesterday… Well, we weren't really that close. He was a young guy who had just graduated. We saw each other every now and again, in the clubs. I heard yesterday that he killed himself. [pause] I'm not sure how to react…" (Amir, Astana)

He continued by talking about his friend, telling me what he was like. The fact that he found out about his friend just the day before the interview made it quite difficult for Amir speaks about his loss. Towards the end of the interview, Amir said,

> "This is the reality we have to face. It's now easier for me because this is the sixth person in my life who ended their own life. The sixth person I know... and now this is becoming ordinary." (Amir, Astana)

When he talks about losing a sixth person from his surroundings to suicide, Amir reveals the reality of suicide becoming an "ordinary" experience.

Kazakhstan scores high on the suicide scale compared with other countries. According to the World Health Organisation, Kazakhstan ranked 5th for suicides in 2015 and 7th in the study by Vernik (2012). There is a substantial body of research, predominantly from developed countries, demonstrating a relationship between marginalised sexual desire and gender identity, being young, and increased chances of feeling suicidal, attempting suicide and self-harming (for example, Bailey, Ellis and Mcneil, 2014; Bostwick *et al.*, 2014; Ellis, Bailey and Mcneil, 2014). Moreover, Amir's narrative echoes the results of Seksenbayev 's (2018) study of sociality amongst gay and bisexual men in Kazakhstan. Seksenbayev found that 55 per cent of the 204 participants reported severe suicidal thoughts or previous suicide attempts (see Chapter Two). I was both touched and provoked by the immediacy and urgency of Amir's words about the suicide being a reality for him in Kazakhstan; that six queer people from his surroundings have taken their own lives. Amir's words and the above-mentioned statistics make me curious about the silence around suicide within the queer community and outside of it. Is it a case of one of the "noisy silences" (Tamboukou, 2015a, p.70) amongst queer Kazakhstani people? Would he have mentioned the suicide if it had not been so close to the day of the interview?

5.4.5. Divided community

As previously pointed out, several participants highlighted that the queer community is new in Kazakhstan (participants in this study used “community” as a singular, my use of the word “community” is consistent with my participants’). However, as is evident from the accounts of most of the participants, there seem to be divisions and conflicts within the Kazakhstani queer community. For example, Amir believes that most of the people in Kazakhstan struggle with activism and the idea of increasing visibility.

> “Most people in the LGBT community here… Okay, they found a job, they are building some kind of career, and that's the only thing that they are concerned with. And they say, ‘Okay guys, if you want to do your activism, that’s fine, just don't touch us.’ I mean, they are comfortable, they meet guys in clubs, on dating apps, and they don't have to talk about it. They don't need to assert themselves and fight for their rights. That's okay; this is just a part of the community.” (Amir, Astana)

Amir stresses how in his view, the majority of queer people in Kazakhstan fear increased visibility due to internalised homophobia and prefer to get on with their lives without attracting much attention. Amir continues:

> “There are apps where men who have sex with men meet, and they ask are you in the ‘tema’ [“ty v teme?”]. I don’t differentiate lesbians, gays, bisexuals – all of them, whether they are open or not, are a part of the community. I don’t separate them. I think that a lot of gay and bisexual men are suffering from internalised homophobia. I mean, they can't acknowledge it to themselves, let alone anyone else. They basically occasionally meet other guys in secret for sex while being married to a woman. I have a couple of very good friends. They’ve

> known each other for fourteen years, and they live together. To everyone else they are brothers. Yeah, they use this term ‘tema’ ‘ne tema’, they can't say the word ‘gay’, and they make up other language and terminology.” (Amir, Astana)

Amir sees people as being part of the community regardless of their visibility preferences. Once again, Amir brings up an example of queer people being heterosexually married and having children. Moreover, Amir gives an example of his friends who live in secret and use the word tema to self-identify, while being unable to say the word gay. Similarly, Miras refers to tema when speaking about the subculture of queer people in Kazakhstan who struggle with internalised homophobia.

> “Tema is a huge thing in Kazakhstan, and I actively try to avoid it. I don't want to live a passive life of tema. What? should I occasionally meet people for sex and the rest of the time pretend that I am not me?”

Miras elaborates:

> “Tema is hypersexualised, it does not even mean sexual orientation, it’s more related to the term ‘sodomy’. It’s not a way of life, it’s not sexuality... It’s just one singular act of sex. Hence people ask: ‘how long have you been in the tema?’ They mean when did you first have gay sex? Moreover, you can come in and come out of tema… and those who leave tema are heroes. They are able to overcome the temptation. It’s like they talk about cigarettes, ‘I want to give up, but I can’t’. So in this subculture of tema, there is lots of internalised homophobia.” (Miras, Astana)

In Miras's understanding, tema is intrinsically connected with internalised homophobia in the community. That's evident in his metaphor of tema being akin to cigarette smoking, and his statement explaining that leaving tema means being a hero. Miras seems to be referring to a section of the population who hide and avoid visibility as tema. However, other participants use the word tema differently. For example, Ivan and Gulzada explain that tema is a neutral word used by people who want to be discreet. For them, tema is an insider's term that would not be understood by non-queers. They both highlight that it is widely used and understood by queer people in Kazakhstan.

Most participants agreed that the central division within the queer community stems from the different preferences regarding (in)visibility. Gulzada told me about the split that happened within the lesbian community when she and her colleague started to speak more about human rights issues and feminism.

> “We have separated from this lesbian community. We started to read feminist literature. People found it unpleasant that we started to bring in politics. They had calm, measured lives, and we brought in this disturbance.” (Gulzada, Almaty)

Gulzada continued:

> “We have split from other girls because they think that we are attracting danger. It's like we are waving a red flag, that we are here and that our community is here. They probably think, why do that? We are living here; we are earning good money, going to restaurants, going abroad, speaking English. They ask us, why do you need that, dear? What are you lacking? It's all good… and some of them are totally open. They are questioning why we should cause problems. While we [Feminita activists] are thinking that if we don’t come

> together, the community won't develop and grow. I personally think that it's important to speak up and be visible, right? I personally suffered from that.
>
> *Tell me more?*
>
> Well, I had no role models. There was no 40-year old lesbian woman to follow when I was 12." (Gulzada, Almaty)

Gulzada described the main separating factor being "attracting attention" and making the queer community visible. According to Gulzada, the prospect of increasing the visibility of lesbians in Kazakhstan brought fear to a section of the community, which resulted in a split from the politically active group. In her article, Radzhana Buyantueva (2018) reports similar attitudes towards activist activity in the Russian queer community. She writes that given that activism often involves increased visibility and exposure in public life, many LGBT people do not express support for activists and their action (Buyantueva, 2018; see also Kondakov, 2014; Soboleva and Bakhmetjev, 2015). In their study of the explanatory narratives of a homophobia campaign in Russia, Soboleva and Bakhmetjev (2015) report a similar belief among LGBT people. Soboleva and Bakhmetjev (2015) found that the majority of their respondents reported that they believe that nonaction, invisibility and distancing themselves from state officials is the best strategy for LGBT people in Russia, given that the authorities expect some reaction from them. Similarly, Stella (2013), in her article "Queer Space, Pride and Shame in Moscow", problematises the notion of visibility as universally empowering and argues that in the Russian context, visibility of homosexuality has become intertwined with the crisis of national identity. According to Stella (2013), "visibility can incite danger, alienate LGBT constituencies, and fail to attract support from the broader civil society while exposing queer activists to very public displays of victimisation and shaming." (p.480).

I wonder, however, whether for some participants visibility is at all possible. Do people who are financially or otherwise dependent on their families (as in the case of Bolat in the *Regulation of Gender and Sexuality and Queer Agency within the Family* section), or for whom losing their job is undesirable for the time being (see Oleg in the *Regulation and Negotiation of Queer Subjectivity at Work* section), have a choice to be visible? Alternatively, what if being visibly queer means potentially being rejected from the family and the community (for example, Miras in the *Regulation of Gender and Sexuality and Queer Agency within the Family* section), or if one does not have access to knowledge and resources about queerness and struggle with internalised homophobia? Indeed, most of the participants in this study who chose to be visible have third level education, most have lived abroad, and many speak the English language. One could be tempted to consider that the conscious choice to be more visible amongst the participants of this study is a result of using technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988, 1997) in the form of, for example, education and travelling, which allows resistance to being a subjugated subject defined by others. However, I am deeply suspicious of this interpretation as it alludes to the binary of seeing queer visibility as "healthy" and "good" as opposed to invisibility infused with internalised homophobia and subjugation. As I should have demonstrated by now, such binary is inherently problematic, given that most of the participants exist in between the visible and invisible, and the level of (in)visibility is a result of a complex interplay of various factors including emotional and pragmatic concerns of the individual. In the next section, I discuss the last theme of *Creating Spaces of Appearance*, where I further consider how queer Kazakhstani people exercise agency by carving out spaces where they can come together.

5.5. Creating spaces of appearance

In this section, I use Arendt's (1958) notion of the "spaces of appearance". For Arendt (1958), "space of appearance comes into being whenever men are together in a manner of speech and action" (p.199). Ideally, the public realm is, "the space within the world which men need in order to appear at all… for without a space of appearance and without trusting in action and speech as a mode of being together, neither the reality of one's self, of one's own identity… can be established" (Arendt, 1958, p.140). Therefore, for Arendt (1958), the notion of the space of appearance holds her understanding of what being and reality mean and is fundamentally co-created. She eloquently writes:

> "For us, appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves – constitutes reality. Compared with reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life – the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses – lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized." (Arendt, 1958, p.50).

In this section, I explore the importance of partaking and carving out spaces of appearance for participants in this study. I discuss two sub-themes: *Community and activism* and *Imaginary world*.

5.5.1. Community and activism

The possibility of belonging to a queer community was an essential source of support for the participants in this study. As Zarina points out,

> "Community helps. Of course, in Kazakhstan, the LGBT community is just in its early stages of development. For example, last month an activist from Feminita came over. And I remember after the meeting I felt very emotional. I felt elevated. Emotionally high. Because when we met, there were many bisexual girls there, lesbians… and to see people was so good for me, it had a very positive effect. It did not matter what we talked about; it was just good to see them. To see couples, too. They were actually together in serious relationships. When you see that, the feeling of isolation just dissipates. It gives you strength." (Zarina, Astana).

Here, Zarina highlights that although the LGBT community in Kazakhstan is a relatively new phenomenon, for Zarina its presence is a significant source of support. Zarina highlights the importance of seeing other queer people and couples in long-term relationships. This echoes Arendt's (1969) thoughts about the power of collective action and the importance of appearing in public in an environment where one is recognised (Arendt, 1958). This is in line with current research on the role of community in increasing the feeling of belonging to a queer community, sharing affinities and values with other individuals, and feeling connected to others (Difulvio, 2011; Mason, Lewis and Winstead, 2015; Zimmerman *et al.*, 2015; Omurov, 2017). Belonging means, "an unfolding space of attachment, affiliation, and recognition" (Gorman-Murray, Waitt and Gibson, 2008, p.172), or as Nira Yuval-Davis emphasises, belonging is as much an emotional connection as it is about "feeling safe" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.198).

As mentioned previously, nine out of the eleven participants in this study self-identified as activists. Collective action, defending the rights of their group, and activism can be viewed as other mechanisms of managing stigma (Nouvilas-Palleja *et al.*, 2018). Being an activist had different meaning for

different participants. However, several participants voiced that activism is an important support mechanism for them. Amir told me that for him, activism has some therapeutic functions.

> "In becoming an activist, I found myself: I can gather people; read and educate others; give interviews; participate in training events on gender and sexuality-related matters. I am interested in this stuff. Another thing is that it helps to improve visibility, it helps to bring the community together, but also it's like a therapy for me. It helps me to accept myself more. I no longer think how to fit in, how to conform to heteronormativity. I no longer think about getting married to a woman and having children just so that no one finds out about me…" (Amir, Astana)

Amir's belief that activism is therapeutic is in line with previous research findings (for example, see Klar and Kasser, 2009; Fine *et al.*, 2018, both studies are US-based). Amir talks about owning his stigmatised identity: by educating others and advocating for issues around gender and sexuality, Amir seems to reclaim his gay identity. Activism, therefore, can be viewed as a form of stigma management amongs non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people in Kazakhstan. This echoes the findings of Wilkinson and Kirey (2010) on transgender activism in Kyrgyzstan, where activists fight for their rights as a "survival strategy" when "effort to minimize the effect of one's non-traditional gender presentation have failed and the person is already experiencing the consequences of not conforming to social expectations". Wilkinson and Kirey (2010) write about reclaiming stigmatised identity by using LGBT as a politicised and more positive identity associated with the international LGBT rights movement. That, in turn, serves a ligitimising function at an individual level. Indeed, Amir indicates the shift he observes over time in self-acceptance, no longer feeling confined by heteronormative expectations of society and feeling connected to the wider LGBT community.

For Miras, activism has a different meaning; he sees it as a way to give support to young queer people by increasing the visibility of queer people in Kazakhstan. Miras writes articles in Russian and Kazakh, which he publishes anonymously on activist websites.

> "I have no idea who reads my articles and what conclusions are drawn from them. I just throw them into the abyss, right? I like to think that somewhere, someone is reading them and drawing positive conclusions. People ask me why I go to activist meetings, why I write. Why I need all of this. My main answer is that when I was growing up as a gay teenager, I learnt English and started watching TV shows in English. I always thought to myself, why do they have it so good and why it is so bad here? We became independent in 1991; I don't know where all the gays were in the 2000s. Where were gay people at that time, those who were in their twenties then? Why didn't they change things for the better so that we had what they had [in the TV shows]? To some extent, I blamed them, blamed them for their cowardice and passivity. I thought that my life is so because they did nothing to give me a better life. And then I realised that if we don't do anything and instead say things like, "we just need to be quiet and hide in the corners so that no one notices us, no one beats us up"… then in 10-20 years time, someone else growing up gay in Kazakhstan will ask us those exact same questions. They would be addressed to me." (Miras, Astana)

Miras's activist writing has uncertain results. He notes how he sends articles into the "abyss". However, Miras has a deep sense of responsibility to improve things that seems to drive his activist wirting. In his words, there is a frustration at the previous generation of queer people living in the early 2000s, and the weight of the potential question, "where were you at that

time?". Junot Diaz (quoted in Stetler, 2009) wrote about the importance of visibility and recognition:

> "You know how vampires have no reflections in the mirror? If you want to make a human being a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves. [G]rowing up, I felt like a monster in some ways. I didn't see myself reflected at all. I was like, "Yo, is something wrong with me?" That the whole of society seems to think that people like me don't exist? A part of what inspired me was this deep desire, that before I died, I would make a couple of mirrors. That I would make some mirrors so that kids like me might see themselves reflected back and might not feel so monstrous for it."

Miras's motivation for activism and writing seem to echo Diaz's words. Such motive of "becoming a change" has been previously reported in research into queer activism (for example, Fine *et al.*, 2018). However, there is an added level of complexity for Miras in his project of "making mirrors" in that he writes his articles and increases visibility anonymously. Indeed, most of the participants in this study were involved in some form of activism. Here I would like to employ the notion of "intimate activism" used by Fine and colleagues (2018). Intimate activism involves "the hidden and bold, relational and solitary, everyday enactments of interruption, care and solidarity, evident in delicate challenges to family, friends, teachers, and strangers who vocalise discriminatory attitudes…" (p.623). The acts of intimate activism are evident across the themes, whether it is in the family in refusal to follow heterosexual expectations of marrying and having children (Miras), within a work contexts, where one puts her transgender identity at the top of her CV (Ekaterina), or when one has a same-sex wedding in a public place (Anna). As Arendt put it: "The smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of … boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation" (1958, p.190). All of those acts in some way

either create or expand the spaces of appearance, whether for the people involved or for the future generation of queer people in Kazakhstan. I have already mentioned that many of the participants found that the only place they could find a space of appearance was online. For example, the Internet has been used as a space to date people (see *Relationship difficulties*), a space where they can meet other members of the queer community, and a space where they can be an activist (see above). In the next sub-section, I explore how Anna and Sasha used play and imagination, in creating spaces where they could authentically be themselves.

5.5.2. Imaginary world

Anna and Sasha used imagination, play, and rituals to create a safe haven.

> *Anna:* “We would escape to those imaginary worlds, fantasies and all those games. Worlds where we felt comfortable with ourselves. A world so different from reality. We would easily switch into an imaginary scenario; we would come up with games. We created some rituals for ourselves. And maybe sometimes it seemed like we were mad.”
> *Sasha:* "Yeah, I had a split personality; I was also Ruslan. ((Sasha laughs)) We used to call my “male side” Ruslan. So we had that. You see, my mum always wanted a boy, and if she had had a son, she would have called him Ruslan. That’s why it was Ruslan”.

Sasha then told me that Ruslan was mainly present during intimate moments and sexual activity. One way to understand Sasha and Anna's introduction of "Ruslan" into their intimate life is through the above-mentioned concept of splitting. It appears that Sasha struggled to hold together both her female gender and her same-sex sexuality, especially during moments of sexual or

intimate closeness. Kernberg (1980) describes splitting as keeping apart contradictory mental contents or experiences. Splitting also sometimes refers to a division of incompatible self- or object-images (Hamilton, 1990). Therefore, “Ruslan” can be seen as the result of a defensive mechanism of splitting, making her sexual desire for Anna more digestible as it would not be coming from her but from her male part (see Kellett, 2004 for more information on the use of the concept of splitting within therapy with a client who identifies as queer in the UK context).

Anna and Sasha also speak of the use of imagination and rituals to escape and find safe space for themselves. Sasha told me that at some point she proposed to Anna by surprising her with a ring. Anna continued:

> “By the way, it was not the first time that I had been proposed to. I had weddings before. And, yes, I mean weddings, three in fact. Yeah, it was within a close circle of people, but still… And I had weddings that were visible to people around. Ten years ago, I was a lot more reckless…” (Anna, Karaganda)

As highlighted in the literature review where I mention the wedding between Kristina Chernysheva and Karolina Kan, same-sex wedding celebrations are not unusual in Kazakhstan (see Bitner, 2013). In her article “Love Politics: Lesbian Wedding Practices in Canada and the United States from the 1920s to the 1970s”, Elise Chenier (2018) follows Jennifer C. Nash's (2013) notion of love-politics to argue that enactment of conventional wedding rituals by same-sex couples constitutes an act of resistance. Cheinier (2018) notes that,

> “…hundreds of thousands of lesbians and gays embraced the opportunity to marry, even when the state did not recognise it, because wedding ceremonies and marriage rituals also serve as a

> powerful way to affirm queer love and desire. They are semipublic acts that claim, embrace, and restore the wounded self and radically reconceive the public sphere to include genderqueers and same-sex desire and intimacies." (p.298).

It is, therefore, evident that Sasha and Anna did not create their own world in isolation or separately from their reality, instead it appears to be in response to the oppressive heteronormative environment that they embraced and appropriated some of the most iconic heterosexual rituals.

Within this short section, I have discussed the theme of queer people carving out spaces where they can authentically appear to themselves and others. Zarina, Amir and Miras spoke of the queer community as a place where they can find belonging, where identity can be reclaimed, and where the duty to future generations of queer people in Kazakhstan is being fulfilled. Finally, in the *Imaginary world*, I looked at how Sasha and Anna, who mostly keep their queerness invisible, find the space of appearance within their imagination. All in all, it seems that being visible as a queer person in Kazakhstan can be both empowering and limiting, sometimes both at the same time. As Marquez (2012) puts it, "[t]he creation of spaces of appearance may well involve providing opportunities for individuals to escape visibility, but it is not reducible to such an escape" (p.30).

Chapter Six: Conclusions

This thesis focused on the narrow but growing body of literature on queer lives in the post-Soviet space and more specifically, in post-Soviet Central Asia, exploring the narratives of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people in Kazakhstan and locating those narratives within their socio-historical context (see for example, Essig, 1999; Healey, 2001, 2017; Natrova, 2004; Latypov, Rhodes and Reynolds, 2013; Stella, 2015; Clech, 2018). A key focus of my study has been to use micro-analysis of power to examine the processes that shape and regulate queer subjectivities, as well as to understand how queer people resist and express their agentic power in negotiating their subjectivities in everyday life. I have emphasised the importance of framing Kazakhstani queer experiences within their historical and cultural references, by charting the multidimensional nature of discourses around gender and sexuality and by framing the empirical interview data within this context.

In Chapter Two I charted shifting discourses around gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan, considering historical, geo-political and legal perspectives as well as the representation of queerness within the Kazakhstani media and discourses on gender roles and family order in Kazakhstan. This thesis offers a critique of homogenisation in the post-socialist world, exploring Kazakhstan's ambiguous positionality in relation to dominant political players in the Central Asian region and beyond. I argued that Kazakhstan's politics of Eurasianism and multivectorism contribute towards its political and legal standpoint in relation to queer citizens. Unlike the overt "anti-gay" Russian stance (Edenborg, 2018; Patalakh, 2018), Kazakhstan's preferred strategy seems to be to surround queerness with silence and invisibility, which

enables the state to remain loyal to other political actors. I have discussed the effect of Russian media within Kazakhstan, looking at how Kazakhstani homophobic discourse in many ways echoes Russian narratives of queerness being threatening to demographics, as imposing sex-radical norms, and connected with the decaying morals of the "West" (Persson, 2015). I have also considered how Kazakhstani hegemonic discourses around family and gender roles are deeply entwined with heteronormativity and cisnormativity; I have emphasised the importance of shame-and-honour discourse in Kazakhstan, exploring its potential impact on gender and sexuality diversity.

Analysis of the interview data showed how layered and complex the process of regulation of gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan is. Participants' narratives reflect the influence of the institutional and legislative regulation and normalisation of heteronormative and cisnormative hegemonies in Kazakhstan. The pervasive impact of Soviet discourses on gender and sexuality that intersects with the discourses around femininity and masculinity is particularly evident within the narratives of the two older participants in this study. The findings show that older participants' ability to signify their experiences during Soviet times was impacted by the general silence around gender diversity and sexuality in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the narratives of older queer participants reveal the impact of the association of queerness with marginality and criminality in the Soviet Union (Stella, 2013; Kunstman, 2009). This research also highlights echoes of the Soviet discourses in medical healthcare, particularly evident in the medical care of transgender people.

The narratives of the participants showed the strength and impact of surveillance as a mechanism to regulate transgressions of gender and sexuality. Within the family, such regulation occurs through the shame-and-honour system, often with the involvement of the extended family. Moreover,

both within the family and at work, the regulation and surveillance of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people is compounded by the use of technology and the Internet. The narratives of participants reveal that the choice and ability to be visible and/or invisible is one of the crucial aspects of the regulation of queerness and queer resistance in Kazakhstan. Many of the participants expressed their inability to escape visibility in certain aspects of their lives (for example, being consistently under scrutiny at home, or losing a job due to publishing a video online where one is open about sexuality). To use Marquez's (2012) terminology, many of the daily environments function as “spaces of surveillance” (p.11) or spaces where being visible subjugates queer people in Kazakhstan. The effects of such subjugation were reflected in different aspects of participants’ lives, including mental health and inter-personal relationships.

At the same time, the participants’ narratives demonstrated the capacity of queer people in Kazakhstan to resist and creatively negotiate the regulatory practices by carving out spaces where they can authentically appear. Queer Kazakhstani can express their agency by creatively adjusting their visibility, managing their impressions, passing as heteronormative or cisnormative, and fulfilling heterosexual expectations.

The findings of this research show that establishing new spaces of appearances can serve as opportunities to express individuality and as ways to resist the dominant hegemonies. In this study, both visibility and invisibility can function as expressions of power and resistance. The decisions around (in)visibility and the choice of impression management strategies are contingent upon a complex array of considerations, including emotional, relational, and pragmatic factors. Furthermore, a particular intersectionality of personal identities appears to extend or limit an individual choices and options.

My findings add to the debate around visibility in post-Soviet space (Stella, 2013, 2015; Persson, 2015; Edenborg, 2017). Writing about Russia, Stella argues that the "Western" model of visibility-enhancing LGBT identity politics is not necessarily the best way to improve the situation for Russian non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender people. My findings are in line with Stella's argument (2009, 2013, 2015) that queer visibility in post-Soviet space is a controversial matter, on the one hand offering opportunities for connection and association, while on the other, igniting potential risks for queer people.

Expanding on previously published research on gender and sexuality in Central Asia, my focus goes beyond the violations of human rights and the difficult experiences of queer people in Kazakhstan. As pointed out by Stella (2009), "a research agenda privileging LGBT rights and discrimination over other issues may ultimately backfire by victimizing non-heterosexuals, and indirectly contributing to the creation of social barriers and antagonisms, rather than to their demystification" (p. 229; see also Stychin, 2003; Binnie, 2004; Stella, 2007). This thesis addresses that issue by considering instances of acceptance, support and positive experiences within various social contexts alongside experiences of homophobia, transphobia and discrimination. By doing this, I resist the essentialisation of post-Soviet queerness as purely problematic and consider the agentic power of individuals to resist the dominant discourses.

The main contribution of this thesis to queer studies lies in the exploration of queer subjectivities in the context of post-Soviet Kazakhstan. By exploring the narratives of everyday lives, I illuminate the complex and nuanced landscape that queer citizens navigate, bringing to light the processes that shape their lives and the practices of resistance that queer people in Kazakhstan engage in. I explore queer experiences in the light of research from Central Asia, Russia, and in an Anglo-American context. As pointed out

by Stella (2015), differences between Soviet and "Western" sexualities have been portrayed in very stark terms, reinforcing orientalist representation of the region. By using a comparative research framework, I argue against Kazakhstan's exceptionalism, highlighting the similarities and divergences in non-heterosexual and non-cisgender regulatory practices and experiences across the Central Asian region, in the context of post-socialist states and within a broader Western research framework. In that respect, I follow the call to reflexively use the "West" as a socio-historical construct rather than a normative paradigm (Stella, 2015; Kudaibergenova, 2016b).

More broadly, this study contributes to research agendas on gender and sexuality in post-socialist Central Asia. Within the Central Asian region, the subject of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender experience is still a fairly new and unexplored field of academic enquiry within the social sciences. This study contributes to the typically silenced topic of sexuality in Kazakhstan (Kabatova, 2018), challenging the commonly assumed heterosexuality in the conversation in "sexualities studies" in Kazakhstan. In addition to this, my study explores the diversity of gender presentations in Kazakhstan, looking beyond the cis-normative binary of men and women, which is often assumed to represent gender order in Kazakhstan (Werner, 2004; Cleuziou and Direnberger, 2016). Hence, my study contributes to the scarcely researched topic of non-cisgender experiences in post-socialist countries.

Within counselling and psychotherapy, this study highlights the need to engage in understanding of an individual's lived experience in its entirety and contextually. Over the past decade, epidemiological studies have demonstrated an increased risk of mental health problems and suicidal behaviour among groups of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people (King *et al.*, 2008; Eliason, 2011). Despite the increase in research on gender and sexuality in social science, most of the existing empirical and theoretical work has focused on English-speaking or Western European countries

(Binnie, 2004; Puar, 2007; Rahman, 2010).This study addresses such a limitation, by focusing on the experiences of queer people in Kazakhstan.

My research is limited in several ways: I had a relatively small sample of participants that came from similar demographic backgrounds. Interviews were conducted in three big cities in Kazakhstan and did not include participants from rural areas. While my participants frequently mentioned that most queer people in Kazakhstan live in hiding, nine out of the eleven self-identified as activists who were either “out” or “partially out”. Future research is needed to include participants from broader demographic backgrounds and more non-activist participants.

Furthermore, this research indicates the impact of Soviet values and ideologies on Kazakhstani queers. It suggests it is worth exploring in greater detail the influence of the Soviet ideology on queer lives today, as well as considering experiences of older queers who grew up in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. As mentioned previously, future research could consider the impact and the role of religion on shaping queer subjectivities. Lastly, in the light of the pervasive effects of Russian media in the region (Junisbai, Junisbai and Ying Fry, 2015; Laruelle, 2015), and the emergence of several online platforms in recent years, further investigation is needed into discourses around gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan in the arenas of the Internet and other media.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge that as well as being an academic endeavour, this research has been a personal journey that taught me many lessons and expanded my horizons. Alongside developing a deeper awareness of my own cultural context, I engaged with a process of unpicking my assumptions and expectations as well as those of my family, and fostering compassion and understanding towards myself and others. I want to leave you with the words of Oleg:

“I used to feel a very acute sense of hopelessness. All this sense of uncertainty: what will happen tomorrow or the day after? But everything works out in the best possible way. Kazakhstan keeps changing and the situation for LGBT people keeps changing too. But I am hopeful. Maybe you are struggling today, but it’s likely that tomorrow you will have many joyful opportunities.”

Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet (Russian)

Информационный лист для участников в исследовании

Название проекта: Ежедневная жизнь людей с другой сексуальной и/или гендерной идентичностью в Казахстане.

Имя и ученая степень главного исследователя: Мария Левитанус, соискатель на ночную степень доктора наук по психотерапии и консультированию.

Название организации: Университет Эдинбурга, Шотландия.

Я, Мария Левитанус, приглашаю Вас принять участие в исследовании, целью которого является рассказать о ежедневной жизни людей с другой сексуальной и/или гендерной идентичностью в Казахстане. Прежде чем Вы примите решение об участии в этом исследовании, я бы хотела предоставить Вам информацию об этом исследовании, о том, что ожидает Вас, и о возможных рисках, а так же ответить на любые Ваши вопросы относительно данного исследования.

Условия участия в исследовании.

В этом исследовании примут участие люди

1) 18-ти лет и старше

и

2)

(a) которые идентифицируют себя как не гетеросексуалы

и/или

(b) люди, чей социальный пол (гендер) не совпадает с биологическим полом.

Чтобы принять участие в этом исследовании вы должны отвечать критериям 1) и 2), так же удовлетворять критерии (а) и/или (б).

Процедура исследования

Вы будете приглашены на интервью, которое будет длиться не дольше двух часов. Интервью будет проводиться Марией Левитанус. Интервью будет состоять из

нескольких вопросов открытого характера, которые помогут вам рассказать о вашем каждодневном опыте.

Цель исследования

Главной целью моего исследования является: предоставить возможность рассказать о повседневной жизни людей с другой сексуальностью и/или гендерной идентичностью, тем самым внести вклад в диалог о людях с другими сексуальностями и гендерными идентичностями в Казахстане, и так же продвижение прав людей с не гетеросексуальной и/или другой гендерной идентичностью. В результате исследования я планирую выделить стратегии преодоления трудностей с которыми сталкиваются люди с другой сексуальностью и гендерной идентичностью в каждодневной жизни. Не смотря на то что мое исследование будет написано на английском языке, результаты моего исследования будут переведены на русский и казахский языки и будут доступны неправительственным организациям и населению в целом.

Добровольность участия

1. Ваше участие в исследовании исключительно добровольно.

2. Вы можете принять решение **не** участвовать в исследовании сейчас или отказаться продолжать участвовать на любом этапе без каких-либо негативных последствий.

Конфиденциальность

Интервью будут записаны на диктофон и будут храниться по процедуре, обозначенной этическим комитетом Эдинбургского Университета. Записанные интервью будут транскрибированы. Транскрибирование будет осуществлено главным исследователем. Как только интервью будут транскрибированы, аудио записи будут удалены. Транскрипты будут удалены по истечению двух лет после защиты докторской диссертации главным исследователем. Информация, записанная в ходе транскрибирования, будет анонимизирована, что означает, что любая личная и идентифицируемая информация будет изменена. Так же, упомянутые названия мест и имена людей будут удалены из транскриптов. По Вашему запросу, вы можете прочесть анонимизированый транскрипт для удостоверения анонимности. Дайте знать главному исследователю если у Вас есть желание прочесть транскрипт.

Место проведения исследования

Интервью будет проводиться в нейтральном месте, где Вам будет гарантирована приватность.

Возможные неудобства

Некоторые вопросы интервью, возможно, затрагивают личные и/или эмоционально тяжёлые темы. Если Вы почувствуете, что Вам будет полезно поговорить с

психологом, исследователь может предоставить Вам контакты психолога и телефоны доверия.

Выгоды

Участие в исследовании не предполагает получение респондентом денежной или материальной компенсации, или какой-либо другой прямой выгоды. Однако, информация, полученная в ходе этого исследования, может в будущем принести пользу и Вам, и другим людям. Возможность рассказать вашу историю и поговорить о вашей жизни также может оказать благоприятное воздействие.

Вопросы и жалобы

Данное исследование рассмотрено и одобрено Этическим комитетом Университета Эдинбурга, Шотландия.

Если у Вас возникнут вопросы, касающиеся исследования, Вы можете связаться с координатором исследования Марией Левитанус, по электронной почте s1422731@sms.ed.ac.uk

Если по какой-то причине вы не хотите говорить с Марией Левитанус, и у вас есть проблемы с исследованием, вы можете сделать формальную жалобу главе департамента Здоровья и Социальных Наук Университета Эдинбурга Профессору Шарлот Кларк по электронной почте hos.health@ed.ac.uk или по адресу Professor Charlotte Clarke, School of Health and Social Science, University of Edinburgh, Doorway 6, Medical Quad, Teviot Place, Edinburgh, Scotland EH8 9AG.

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet (English)

Participant Information Sheet

Project name: The everyday experiences of people with different sexualities and/or gender identities in Kazakhstan**.**

Name and academic qualification of researcher: Mariya Levitanus, candidate of the Professional Doctorate in Counselling and Psychotherapy

Name of organisation: The University of Edinburgh, Scotland

I, Mariya Levitanus, invite you to participate in my research, which aims to give voice to the everyday experiences of people with different sexualities and/or gender identities in Kazakhstan. Before you decide to participate in this study, I would like to provide you with some information about this study including the aims of my research, the procedure, possible benefits and risks.

Conditions of participation

I wish to invite to my study people:

1) Who are aged 18 or older

and

2)

a) Who identify as non-heterosexual

(1) and/or

b) Whose social sex (gender) is not the same as their biological sex.

To participate in this study you need to meet criteria 1) and 2). Criterion 2) can be met through a) and/or b).

Procedure

You will be invited to an interview that will last no longer than two hours. Interviews will be conducted by Mariya Levitanus and will consist of several open questions that will encourage you to talk about your everyday experiences.

Aim of the research

The main aim of my research is to give voice to the everyday experiences of people with different sexualities and/or gender identities. In doing so, I would like to contribute to the discourse on gender and sexuality in Kazakhstan and ultimately, to promote the rights of non-heterosexuals and/or people with different gender identities. As a result of my study, I plan to identify specific coping strategies used by non-heterosexuals and/or people with different gender identities in their everyday life. Although, my study will be written in English, I plan to translate the results of my study into Russian and Kazakh languages and make them available to non-governmental organisations and the general public.

Consent

1. Your participation in this study is voluntary.

2. You can change your mind and withdraw your participation at any stage of the research without giving any reason, and without any negative consequences.

Confidentiality

The interviews will be audio-recorded and the recordings will be stored in line with University research ethics procedures. Once transcribed, the audio recordings of the interviews will be deleted. I will retain the anonymised trascripts for up to two years after completion of the doctorate. All information that is written down will be anonymised – this means that there are no names or identifying details attached to it. In addition to this, if anyone states particular details of other people's names or specific places, these would be removed in the final results. You will have an option of receiving a copy of your interview transcript to ensure the anonymity of the transcript. Please let the main investigator know if you would like to read the transcript of your interview.

The location of the interview

The interview will be conducted in a neutral setting, where you will be guaranteed privacy.

Possible risks

Some questions will possibly touch on some personal and/or emotional experiences. If following the interview, you feel that you would like to speak to someone; the researcher can provide you with a list of suitable resources.

Benefits

Participation in this study does not include any monetary or material compensation to the participants however; talking about these experiences may be beneficial to you. Moreover, the information obtained in this research can potentially benefit you and other people in Kazakhstan.

Questions and complaint procedure

This study was approved by the University of Edinburgh Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please get in touch with the researcher via email: s1422731@sms.ed.ac.uk.

If for some reason you are unable to speak to Mariya Levitanus and would like to make a formal complaint or provide feedback, please contact Professor Charlotte Clarke, the Head of School of Health and Social Science via email: hos.health@ed.ac.uk or via post: Professor Charlotte Clarke, School of Health and Social Science, University of Edinburgh, Doorway 6, Medical Quad, Teviot Place, Edinburgh, Scotland EH8 9AG.

Appendix C: Consent Form (Russian)

Подтверждение информированного согласия на участие в исследовании

КОНФИДЕНЦИАЛЬНО

Пожалуйста, проставьте галочки, Ваше полное имя, подпись и дату.

Заявление участника исследования

Подписывая данную форму информированного согласия, я подтверждаю:

☐ *Что прочитал(а) и понял(а) цели, процедуру, методы и возможные неудобства участия в исследовании.*

☐ *Я понимаю, что участие в этом исследовании добровольное. Я могу в любое время и без объяснения причин забрать свое согласие, и это не повлечет никаких нежелательных последствий.*

☐ *У меня была возможность задать все интересующие меня вопросы. Я получил(а) удовлетворительные ответы и уточнения по всем вопросам, интересовавшим меня в связи с данным исследованием.*

☐ *Я даю свое согласие на участие в исследовании.*

Полное имя участника

_____

Подпись участника

_____

Дата _____

Заявление исследователя

Подписывая данную форму информированного согласия, я подтверждаю:

☐ *Я объяснил(а) респонденту предложенную выше форму информированного согласия.*

☐ *Я ответил(а) на все вопросы респондента относительно участия в исследовании.*

☐ *Решение принять участие в исследовании не навязано кем-то, а является осознанным и добровольным, о чем получено согласие.*

Полное имя исследователя _____

Подпись исследователя _____

Дата _____

Appendix D: Consent Form (English)

Consent Form

CONFIDENTIAL

Please tick the boxes, and then write your name and sign and date the

form at the end.

Participant Statement

□ *I confirm that I have read and understood this Information leaflet*

□ *I confirm that participation in this study is voluntary and that I can change my mind and withdraw my participation at any time without giving any reason, and without any negative consequences.*

□ *I confirm that I had an opportunity to ask questions. I have received satisfactory answers to any questions in relation to this study.*

□ *I agree to take part in this research*.

Full name of the participant _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Researcher Statement

□ *I confirm that I have explained to the participant the information sheet*

□ *I confirm that I have answered all the participant's questions regarding participation in this research.*

□ *The decision to participate in the study is voluntary and made consciously by the participant.*

Full name of the researcher _____

Signature_____

Date _____

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

How do you identify yourself in terms of gender and sexuality?

What does being X mean to you? (X meaning their proffered gender and/or sexuality identity)

Tell me about your relationships?

If the participant chooses to talk about their romantic relationships, ask about their family or other non romantic relationships. For example, could you tell me about your relationship with your family?

Tell me about your work life?

Tell me about the way your gender and/or sexuality affects other aspects of your everyday life?

You mentioned X. Tell me what that was like for you? (X meaning the experience that the participant described to me or mentioned during the interview)

Can you give specific examples?

What helps you to manage/negotiate X? (X refers to some difficult experiences the participant talked about during the interview).

Вопросы Интервью

Как Вы идентифицируете свою гендерную принадлежность и сексуальность?

Что ___ для вас означает?

Расскажите про Ваши отношения?

(Разрешите Вас спросить) Расскажите о Вашей семье?

Расскажите о Вашей работе?

Расскажите о других областях Вашей жизни на которые влияет ваша гендерная идентичность и сексуальность?

Что произошло в том эпизоде о котором вы упомянули?/ Расскажите более подробно о том, что случилось?

Вы упомянули ____что Вы испытывали и испытываете по поводу этого события?

Как Вы ощущали и ощущаете себя сейчас по поводу этого события?

Приведите пожалуйста конкретные примеры?

Что Вам помогло/помогает справляться/ решать/урегулировать ____

Appendix F: Resources (Russian)

Ресурсы

Kok Team

Kok.team - новый казахстанский ресурс, который ставит целью формирование ЛГБ-сообщества. Чтобы объединить всех неравнодушных, создан этот информационный, научно-публицистический портал с регулярно обновляемым контентом.

https://www.kok.team/ru/special-projects

Feminita

Феминита – казахстанская феминистская инициатива, ставящая целью совместно с инициативной группой Alma-TQ создание платформы ЛГБТИК-инициатив (лесбиянки, гомосексуалы, бисексуалы, трансгендеры, интерсексуалы и квир) и партнеров для развития и укрепления сообщества, содействия изменению дискриминационных процедур и инициатив, улучшения доступа к правовым и медицинским услугам ЛБТ людям, мониторинга ситуаций с ЛГБТИК-сообществом в Казахстане и информирование общества о равенстве и многообразии.

http://feminita.org

Alma-TQ

Данный сайт является информационным ресурсом по поддержке трансгендерных и гендерно-неконформных людей в Казахстане и Центральной Азии.

https://www.alma-tq.org/about

Steppe Unicorn

Центральноазиатский ресурс о недискриминации людей с другой сексуальностью и/или гендерной идентичностью.

На сайте есть возможность задать вопросы психологу. Ответы будут опубликованы на рубрике «Психолог отвечает». Вы так же можете узнать о дружественном психологе в Вашем городе.

https://www.steppeuca.info

Российская ЛГБТ-Сеть

Этот сайт предоставляет отличные статьи и материалы. Вы также можете получить Онлайн психотерапевтическую поддержку круглосуточно 7 дней в неделю (категория «онлайн чат»).

https://lgbtnet.org/ru

«Телефона доверия» психологической службы ГУ «ЦМК» МЧС РК

8 (7172) 38-03-06. Психологическую поддержку оказывают профессиональные психологи службы, прошедшие специальную подготовку. График работы: Понедельник – пятница с 9:00 до 18:30, суббота – с 10:00 до 13:00.

Appendix G: Resources (English)

Resources

Steppe Unicorn

Central Asian Resource on Non-discrimination of LGBTQ+

Useful website which offers the possibility to receive free online support from a psychotherapist and to be published on the public page "Psychotherapist answers". On this website you can also enquire about non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender friendly psychotherapists in your region.

https://www.steppeuca.info

Russian LGBT Network

Russian LGBT Network has some excellent articles and offers online support to non-heterosexuals and/or non-cisgender people.

https://lgbtnet.org/ru

Kazakhstan Mental Health Helpline

8 (7172) 38-03-06

Emotional support is provided by professional psychologists. Working hours: Monday-Friday 9.00-18.30, Saturday 10.00-13.00.

At your request the main investigator can provide personal recommendations of non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender-friendly psychotherapists who can provide both online as well as face-to-face counselling.

Appendix H: Advertisement (Russian)

Приглашаем Вас принять участие в исследовании, целью которого является рассказать о ежедневной жизни людей с другой сексуальной и/или гендерной идентичностью в Казахстане. Исследовние проводится соискательницей докторской степени из Эдинбургского Университета, Шотландия.

Для участия приглашаются люди:

18-ти лет и старше

и

которые идентифицируют себя как не гетеросексуалы

и/или

люди, чей социальный пол (гендер) не совпадает с биологическим полом

Вы будете приглашены на короткую встречу где у вас будет возможность более подробно ознакомиться с исследованием. Позже вы будете приглашены на интервью, которое будет длиться не дольше двух часов. Интервью будет состоять из нескольких вопросов открытого характера, которые помогут вам рассказать о вашем каждодневном опыте. Любая личная и идентифицируемая информация записанная в ходе интервью будет изменена и будет использоваться с соблюдением конфиденциальности. Интервью будут проводиться в **Алматы и Астане в ноябре 2017 года**.

Если у вас есть желание принять участие в данном исследовании, пишете в **WhatsApp** [redacted] или на почту [redacted].

Большое спасибо за помощь!

Appendix I: Advertisement (English)

I, Mariya, invite you to participate in my research, which aims to give voice to the everyday experiences of people with different sexualities and/or gender identities in Kazakhstan.

I wish to invite to my study people:

who are aged 18 or older

and

who identify as non-heterosexual

and/or

whose social sex (gender) is not the same as their biological sex.

You will be invited for a preliminary meeting where I will explain my study in more detail. This will be followed by an interview which will last for approximately 2 hours and will consist of several open questions that will encourage you to talk about your everyday experiences.

If you are interested in participating in my study, please contact via **WhatsApp** [redacted] or email [redacted]

Thank you for your collaboration!

Appendix J: Transcription notation; adopted from Sidnell (2010)

Symbol	Description
(.)	Pause
.hh	Speaker's in-breath
hh	Speaker's out-breath
:	Stretching of proceeding sound or letter
a	Speaker's emphasis
((sniff))	Indicates a non-verbal activity or transcriber's description of events, rather than representations of them
(word)	Uncertainty on the transcriber's part but represents a likely possibility
pro-	Shows a sharp cut-off
=	Marks an immediate "latching" of successive talk

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