

Men's Views on the Domestic Division of Labor: Premises for Family Egalitarianism in Kazakhstan

By
Yuliya Pleshakova

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Department of Gender Studies

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Supervisor: Elissa Helms
Second Reader: Éva Fodor

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Abstract

This thesis explores men's reported positioning vis-a-vis marriage and domestic division of labor under the president's proclaimed course of an egalitarian family in Kazakhstan. By employing interviews and focus groups, I ask how men rationalize their present-day or future domestic responsibilities in reference to women's and how their individual notions of masculinity and femininity act as factors of influence on their perceptions of family roles. My argument is twofold. First, I claim that the President's national strategies and individual accounts persist in conceptualizing the husband's role in traditional terms. Secondly, I argue that respondents' definitions of fulfilling marriage align well with the egalitarian model of a family despite the seeming preponderance of traditional views on gender roles in the study.

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INTRODUCTION

In Kazakhstan, a rising trend in the number of divorces stimulated numerous sociological investigations in the sphere of marital satisfaction. Researchers advocate the revision of family role attitudes, mainly among young men. Based on women's reported complains of men's low participation in the private sphere, they suggest an alternative mode of interaction for spouses. Moreover, the national discourse of a new Kazakhstani family as egalitarian represents the national idea of the Republic and calls for the transformation of traditional family practices.

In my thesis, I explore Kazakhstani men's reported positioning vis-a-vis the division of labor in marriage. I ask how men rationalize their present-day or future domestic responsibilities in reference to women's and examine their individual notions of masculinity and femininity as factors of influence on their perceptions of family roles. Throughout the analysis, I not only assess the degree to which their views rely on a traditional framework of a nuclear family. More importantly, I direct attention to the common contradictions resurfacing in respondents' discussions on marriage and domesticity with the intention to understand ways to achieve a more egalitarian orientation within Kazakhstani family.

Accordingly, my main research question is what Kazakhstani men's reported views on marriage and domestic work imply for the possibilities of family egalitarian ideology to become dominant in Kazakhstan. My argument is twofold. First, I claim that the President's national strategies and individual accounts persist in conceptualizing the husband's role in traditional terms. Secondly, I argue that respondents' definitions of fulfilling marriage align well with the egalitarian model of a family despite the seeming preponderance of traditional views on gender roles in the study.

The analysis builds up in the following scheme. I start by contextualizing family discourse in Kazakhstan and assessing the President's formulation of egalitarian roles. I continue by tracing cultural and historical constructions of gender roles in marriage. As I show, the expectations directed at men in the domestic domain have not been changing prior, during and after the Soviet period. I also establish the ways national discourses shape the concept of 'family,' 'husband,' 'wife,' 'motherhood,' and 'fatherhood.' Then, I specify the theoretical framework and qualitative methodology used for data collection and examination. The empirical discussion of the study is divided into three chapters. First, I probe respondents' definitions of fulfilling family relationships as such. Secondly, I inquire their willingness to perform certain tasks in the household. Third, I explore childhood socialization into family roles and explore

their current notions of proper masculinity and femininity; both, as I detail, acting on men's positioning in relation to personal contributions to the domestic routine. Finally, I delineate the discursive construction of masculinity embodied in the role of a husband and discuss several implications for family egalitarianism in Kazakhstan. To a large extent, my analysis is informed by references to Western feminist research on the subject.

CHAPTER 1. SITUATING RESEARCH IN KAZAKHSTAN

Eurasian Identity and National Vision of Gender Equality

Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union and Kazakhstan's acquisition of sovereignty in 1991, the government of the fledgling republic affirmed the Eurasian idea to consolidate all citizens. Given the geographical location in the center of the Eurasian continent, this national identity is proclaimed by President Nursultan Nazarbayev to synthesize Western liberal principles (closely allied with modernization) and values of the so-called East (representing psychic-ethical culture and groupness). In this discourse, the President alludes to the family rhetoric to convey the integrated themes of the national idea (Nyssanbayev & Dunaev, 2010).

In his book *The Kazakhstan Way*, the President addresses citizens as members of the common house/Kazakhstan by stating that "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). The allusion of the nation to the family is highlighted to communicate "mutual understanding ... stipulated by ethnic kindred and mental unity" (Nyssanbayev & Dunaev, 2010, p.253). Nyssanbayev and Dunaev, the two leading scholars on nationalism in the country, elucidate that the "miracle of understanding" is possible when there is a meaning shared by all. This common and intelligible significance is translated through the family imagery in the national discourse. The family also reinscribes the merit of kinship ties upon which ethnic Kazakhs are known to have relied in their political and cultural past.

A number of concerns arise. Anderson ascertains that it is precisely through the heterosexual family analogy that national concepts and symbols as well as its hierarchies of values are transmitted to society (2006, p.7). The simile expresses kin relations to assign codes of proper femininity and masculinity. Similar to Anderson's point, Ringmar asserts that family metaphor implies a hierarchical principle of organization where some members are "unquestionably more important than others" (1998, p.536). Namely, the gendering of nationalism serves to implicate two different and unequal modes of men's and women's participation in the national project. To clarify this argument, nations' ideological foundations are largely based on the patriarchal family model. Within it, men are seen as leaders and women act as supporters of men's power. Accordingly, in national narratives women's roles are stressed as biological, cultural, social, and symbolic reproducers of the nation incriminating rigid and passive behavior (Mayer, 2000, p.1). Men's roles, in contrast, lack explicit determination but

bear active, independent, and powerful influences. This makes women's and men's roles distinct in public and private domains.

Along with seeing the nation through the lens of familial relations, the state positions itself in adherence to Western gender equality principles. On the one hand, gender equality has been recognized as ancillary to economic stabilization (Abdykalikova, 2012). On the other hand, its benefits are expected to extend beyond the financial component and impact social stability directly. Consequently, investment in juridical revisions and transformation of public practices into more gender equal processes are being developed as part and parcel of Kazakhstan's political track.

Several recent achievements speak of the progress in promoting gender-balanced national politics in Kazakhstan. The republic secured 33rd place among 154 countries according to the Gender Equity Index while the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report for 2011 ranks it 49st, one place behind France (48th) and before Italy (74th) and Hungary (85th). In terms of law, Kazakhstan has built a strong legal framework to secure women's rights. It constructed a normative base to regulate questions of family social support. There was established a consultative body, the National Commission on Family and Women Affairs, which functions to protect and empower women in all spheres. Finally, the signing of *the Strategy of Gender Equality* in 2006 constituted an important step in raising the issue of gender and equal opportunities for every citizen. What can be noted is the fact that similar documents have been passed only in a few countries of the world.

Despite acclaims, researchers regard existing gender equality policies as a project declarative in tone and superficial in nature to gain visibility as a "democratic, secular, legal and social state" and to obtain active participation on the international arena. Kozyreva, the president of the NGO "Feminist League", among several other feminists in Kazakhstan assesses the *Strategy of Gender Equality* poorly substantiated by effective practical measures (Tengrinews, 2012). She contrasts the formal acknowledgement with the insufficient understanding of the subject at the executive level. She calls for rearticulating the ways to transform traditional social perceptions of womanhood and manhood. She voices hesitation in her expectations of positive changes for women without them.

I see truth in Kozyreva's forecast. The Kazakhstani national family discourse is gendered in a way that privileges patriarchal power relations. Despite the proclamations of political advancement on gender equality, Nazarbayev lacks clarity in delineating how exactly traditional gendered representations associated with private and public spheres are to be transformed. To

illustrate, I will examine two strategies, one of which is the latest national address *the Strategy “Kazakhstan-2050”* and the other *the Strategy of Gender Equality 2006-2016* serving as a foundational and currently a key document for advocating gender equality in the country, which prompts my analysis of comparing these two texts.

According to the second strategy, gender equality should be attained within the private realm in alignment with the cultivation of a positive image of marriage in society. In calling for a revival of the best ethno-cultural traditions, the President supports the formulation of new egalitarian models oriented toward gender equality in families. As equitable conjugal practice, he attributes equal allocation of responsibility for children’s education and domestic division of labor to the legal equality of spouses pronounced in the Republic of Kazakhstan Law “About marriage and family”. At the same time, in *the Strategy “Kazakhstan-2050”* the roles of a parent and family housekeeper are prioritized for women alone. In the next paragraphs I will explore Nazarbayev’s overarching definition of a man’s role in the family by incorporating conjugal and parental positioning in relational female and male terms. This enables me to address Mayer’s concern of men’s constructed roles remaining unmasked in the analyses of national ideologies (2000, p.5). I will understand the notions of ‘manhood’ through the interpretations of ‘womanhood’.

The Strategy “Kazakhstan 2050” emphasizes family and motherhood as pillars of a successful country. The use of the family allegory for the nation stands for discursive and actual dependence of the state on the preservation of family as the union between a man and a woman. In the strategy the President voices alarm over the status of falling familial commitments in society. He correlates it to the declining patriotism in the country. He deduces that “when parents take proper care of their children who once adults return their care to them, and when the woman meets esteem in the family and society, we can be at peace for the future of our country.” At this point, Nazarbayev conflates the issues of the allegedly low status of the family, high divorce rates, and a dipping prestige to be a mother with the low status of a woman in general. According to him, women’s status depends on the marriage status and decision to give birth. This discriminates against women. It also situates them as responsible subjects for family/culture/country’s well-being and absolves men/state from blame and accountability.

Nazarbayev calls for teaching women motherhood and domestic skills and elevating respect for motherhood among youth (Tengrinews, 2013). In this regard, he also endows the role of primary caretakers and educators to Kazakhstani women and omits specific allusions to men. He does not draw attention to the father figure as the one lacking high opinion in society. Still, national empirical studies continuously find support for the low role model status of the father in the country (Kabakova, 2011). It also contradicts *the Strategy of Gender Equality 2006-2016*

which encourages transforming the concept of educational function as exclusively female and raising participation of fathers. Instead of pronouncing parenting as a cherished experience irrespective of gender, the President portrays fatherhood as less valuable and men less accountable.

For the scope of my study, I paid attention to *the Strategy's "Kazakhstan 2050"* explicit emphasis on women as home keepers. The reference can be understood in terms of women's negotiation skills and performance of domestic chores. For this reason, the statement accentuates the genderedness of an expected compromise within households. Women would sacrifice job prospects, not men. Women yield to men's decisions, not a collaborative effort. Secondly, the fact that men are excluded from the function perpetuates the scheme of traditional gender roles. Since approximately 77.2 percent of men and 66.6 percent of women are officially employed in Kazakhstan, women confront a double burden of responsibilities (United Nations Statistics Division, 2011). This disadvantages them in professional opportunities. Therefore, when *the Strategy "Kazakhstan-2050"* mentions the creation of conditions for women to obtain "a quality education, good jobs and be free", it is highly ambiguous which conditions are meant, which obstacles are there to remain, and, ultimately, where gender equality is to be achieved.

By looking at the intersections of national liberation, development, and gender in the context of postwar transition in Eritrea, Bernal explicates why nations fail in true gender equality. Based on her examination, the "resurgence of the domestic sphere as social arena not directly governed or organized by the progressive movement" renders the attempts of peaceful and just politics through the connection of gender equality futile (2001, p.62). Similarly, without definite insights into egalitarian practices in the private sphere, it may be well argued that little transformation for public equality can be possible in Kazakhstan too.

It is significant that in *the Strategy of Gender Equality* the President acknowledges that the allocation of domestic responsibilities is based on traditional division of labor in Kazakhstan. He admits it as highly discriminatory against women. Nazarbayev recites the results of empirical studies which have inferred that time-wise, men invest more in paid labor and leisure, while women are preoccupied with paid labor, unpaid domestic labor, children's up-bringing, and caring for all extended family members. These responsibilities rid them of any time for hobbies or energy for career advancement. To create conditions where family is not an obstacle to women's career growth and personal self-actualization, the President determines the imperative to change assessment of housework value by revealing its social and economic functions. He specifically establishes an objective of involving men in domestic labor and the process of child

upbringing. In the latter address, however, Nazarbayev omits earlier recommendations. This makes the discourse incohesive.

Finally, *the Strategy "Kazakhstan-2050"* emphasizes unconditional esteem to women. The President proclaims that "we must return unconditional respect to the woman – the mother, wife and daughter." From this statement it can be presumed that, first, men lost their respect for women and, second, gaining back respect entails locating the woman in the limits of the domestic terrain. This is not unconditional in itself and avoids men's role in the private sphere. Attributing value to the woman through the family discourse (private realm) constrains women's self-determination and objectifies them as performers of the state's assigned functions. Men, at the same time, are presumed to play an outside role. Hence, Nazarbayev speaks of two distinct roles which underlie traditional ideology of separate spheres, not an egalitarian one.

The Strategy "Kazakhstan - 2050" ends with the request, "we must get rid of a parasitical behavior and help women with an active life believe in their strength and abilities." As shown, the strategy is biased in terms of domestic work, child's upbringing, and its expectations toward women as citizens. Thus, I argue that the President's extant formulation of family roles and gender roles in the nation undermines significant improvements in women's lives, omits men's participation and constrains possibilities for egalitarian marriage.

I have no intention to overlook current gender equality efforts, but quite on the contrary. Precisely due to the celebrated international recognitions, I see an imperative to be aware of certain inaccuracies. Claiming a desire and seeing relevance for gender equality policies constitute initial steps. The formulation requires much effort and critical self-reflexivity as well as receptiveness to future modifications in framing national rhetoric. Several researchers note that the main initiatives as well as all strong-willed decisions in Kazakhstan proceed solely from the President (Peyrouse, 2007; Suny, 2000). The National Committee on Affairs of Family and Women only implements propositions rather than negotiates. Achieving a status of "The Leader of the Nation", the President endorses significant power in the testimony of receptiveness to gender equality ideals. Also, youth exposed to the President's strategies throughout school education can be introduced to the principles of gender equality in all realms of life. For this reason, I find inaccuracies in existing framings in need of revision for an egalitarian position.

Contextualizing Men's and Women's Roles in Kazakhstani Family – Historical Shifts

President Nursultan Nazarbayev claims that the Eurasian idea of the Republic reflects the formulation of collaboration and concord among numerous ethnic groups residing in Kazakhstan. Likewise, he declares that the pursuit of gender equality politics aims to emphasize cooperation, peace, and mutual understanding between men and women (*the Strategy of Gender*

Equality, 2006). In view of that, since its independence Kazakhstan has been positioning itself in adherence to egalitarian gender-role ideology. The patriarchal gender contract characterized by the hierarchical relations of women's status inferior to men's is being officially replaced by the contract of 'equal statuses' (Karaeva & Tuebakova, 2011). In other words, the role of men and women in the public and private domains must become more leveled. Simultaneously, the roadmap towards the established goal of gender equality in the country incorporates its specific historical, ethno-cultural, social, economic and political experiences. Because my research examines the ensuing changes in terms of men's view on gender relations in the family, I will delineate how domestic responsibilities of the spouses have shifted. I will also indicate the alterations of the gendered system itself by attending to the historical analysis of the Kazakhs' family structure.

As of 2013, there are approximately 17 million people of 140 different ethnicities residing on the territory of Kazakhstan, Kazakhs (59.2%) and Russians (29.6 %) as the largest groups and others who comprise another 10.2 per cent. Women make up 51.9% of the population. Traditional gender-role ideology with its superior male positioning is attributed to the core of ethno-cultural representation all ethnic groups. Researchers explain that what is today predominantly understood as 'traditional gender-role ideology' irrespective of ethnic background is women performing the functions of a home-keeper and mother as well as engaging in agricultural labor. Men act as wage-earners by working outside home. Karaeva and Tuebakova affirm that Kazakhstani society's reading of male and female duties under traditional gender-role ideology involves the following features associated with the idea of separate spheres (2011). First, they say that it implies a rigid division of tasks into strictly feminine and masculine, that is women do allegedly light domestic work while men carry out heavy labor. Secondly, women prioritize family, home, and children. Men focus on public goods and self-realization beyond household. Consequently, men are highly esteemed for their success in professional endeavors while women are valued for their motherly and housekeeping skills. Third, the motivation of the woman to look and behave respectfully comes from her accountability to the husband. Fourth, the man is the head of the household whose authority the woman obeys. Fifth, the woman is held responsible to build relationships with extended family members. In terms of traditional gender stereotypes, men show domination, independence, and enterprising spirit which contrasts to women's characteristics as emotional, submissive and weak. The researchers also found that many respondents perceived such patriarchal models of a family as natural. They premised its discrete assignment of duties on biological differences between the sexes.

To understand how gender-role ideology has been changing in time, I will first look at what constituted pre-Soviet familial relations between Kazakh men and women. I will suggest

how traditional gender-role ideology can be understood from the information available about the Turks. Then I will point to the attempts of challenging what is commonly referred as traditional gender-role ideology in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods.

In the pre-Soviet past, the nomadic life of Kazakhs facilitated an extended family structure with two generations residing in one household. Within, the highest authority belonged to the eldest male member whose life experience and wisdom justified him to community as superior to other men (Stasevich, 2011). Women's status gained the most significance when she was known to be skillful and economic in housekeeping. Patriarchal gender-ideology forbade men's involvement into women's housework due to the fact that expertise in domesticity conferred a woman a 'real' woman, not a man (Stasevich, 2011, p.63). Despite the overwhelming household duties, researchers claim that women would ridicule men for attempts to complete their work.

Upon the revolution of 1917, political reforms intended to transform nomadic arrangements into settled forms and undermine patriarchal gender-ideology. Kinship sentiments became pronounced marginal to the Party loyalty and forfeited its value in the social life of the Kazakh aul (village). Until the mid 1950s there had been a weakening of parental, spousal and relative connections (Stasevich, 2011). Under the Soviet ideology, social progress became understood as "the pre-requisite eradication of old customs" (p.29). The objective of changing women's social status led to the declaration of *kalym* (money for the bride), polygamy, underage marriage, and other familial customs illegal and "harmful vestiges of the past" (p.30). Moreover, the Soviet authorities enforced the recognition of the rights of both men and women to choose their marriage partners freely and independently from their relatives' wishes. By the new legislation, women also received the right to divorce and, alongside the laws on protection of motherhood and childhood, the mother was allowed to keep the child. The father was required by the state to provide material support when previously the father's family always raised all children. Women were said to no longer be afraid to leave the unloved husbands imposed on them by the elders (Shakirova, 2005, p.106). However, as Shakirova argues, women rarely based their decisions to marry on the feeling of romantic love. Finally, any Soviet woman regardless of ethnicity was obliged to contribute in the form of 'socially productive' labor.

At the same time, gender inequality in the domestic division of labor was not subject to major transformations. While the communist ideology was explicitly directed at the eradication of a patriarchal family in order to subject women to the state control, it implicitly discouraged career aspirations as secondary to motherhood. Raising children was a woman's primary function to the Soviet state. Consequently, for many "Soviet kolhoz people", "traditional precepts kept their real-life influence" (Stasevich, 2011, p.31). Men performed masculine tasks of pasturing and cattle-raising. Women bore the largest burden of "kolhoz work" in addition to domestic responsibilities

carried out in the past and left unchallenged then. Based on the studied reports, researchers concluded that instead of relieving women, the state overburdened them twice as much. Shakirova elucidates that women would pursue active public activity along with the family and children's upbringing (2005). It was done to prove their social importance and personal aspirations. In such context, Karaeva and Tuebakova claim that the type of gender contract prevalent in the Soviet years can be defined as a 'contract of a working mother' (2011).

Research analyzing typical images of the Soviet persons summarizes the roles of both women and men as experienced workers, group leaders, innovators, and creators of the latest development. However, on the pages of the Soviet newspapers, men were also represented as prone to drunkenness and apathy in the private sphere. In particular, the image of a Russian family man (*muzhik*) represented a type of man who does the job at work but will drink at home and not burden himself with family troubles. As it is argued, *muzhik* became one of the ideal models of manliness in the late Soviet period and played a role of a patriarchal symbolic father. It meant for many women to yield to the authority of men irrespective of the lack of domestic involvement and social vices.

After independence, Kazakhstan proclaimed both egalitarian gender-role ideology and a revival of Kazakh culture. Some researchers find them conflicting as Kazakh's pre-Soviet culture stressed strictly patriarchal forms of gender relations (Karaeva & Tuebakova, 2011). However, the notion of 'tradition' is complex and does not necessarily stand in opposition to the modern. As argued by historians, the primary view of masculinity and femininity turns out to be more egalitarian in the Kazakh-ethnic context.

Kazakhs speak a Turkic language and trace their origin to the son of Noy by the name of Yafsa from the Turkic peoples. They view their ethno-genesis and consequently traditional way of life from the point of the Turks (Argynbaev, 1975). The 7th Asian Winter Games in 2011 in the capital Astana exhibited the symbols of the Turks' mythology and cosmogony as important recognition and pride of Kazakh cultural heritage not in conflict with egalitarianism (Shakirova, 2005). Adylbekova explains that for the ancient Turks women's position in the family was more often equal to that of men than not (2013). Based on the analyses of epos from the 7th-11th centuries, she states that men expected women to be almost their equals in skills and conduct. They wanted to see their wives be strong, free, and full of dignity. To marry, the groom had to prove that he was no less of an equal to his bride in competitions with other male contenders and with the bride as well: in jumping, shooting, and wrestling, (Shakirova, 2005).

Moreover, some Turkic women were rulers whose successful leadership lasted for many years. The comparative analysis of Uigurs and Kazakhs leads researchers to claim that generally there was not a distinct division between Kazakh men's and women's roles. Both shared the

communal space. Based on personal characteristics, both could lead the people of that land (Shakirova, 2005, p.45). Shakirova claims that a Kazakh woman possessed the greatest independence and the most public functions among other Asian peoples. Namely, according to her, the history accounts portray women as advisers to a khan, rulers of the clan, ambassadors, wisecrackers, commanders, and warriors.

Just as women accomplished successes in the so-called men's endeavors, men were also permitted to do 'women's work' as it is known now. The Turks considered the household a shared property of everyone in the family. Therefore, the man was called "ev agasy" ("the male head of the household") and the woman was referred as "ev hanymy" ("the female head of the household"). Adylbekova elucidates that according to certain popular beliefs there are two spirits living at home, the first is "od ata" and the second is "od ana", representing equal patrons of the male and female sides (2013). Also, the observation that the Turks endowed equal status to both spouses can be evidenced by the fact that their national belonging and lineage had to be confirmed by the Turks origin of both, a mother and a father.

Overall, researcher claim higher gender equality in the earlier period of the Turks. Adylbekova attributes a certain 'feminist' mode to the society of the Turks. She characterizes the Turks as highly respected people primarily because they were raised by proud and free Turkic women, and not harem slaves. However, due to the gradual adoption of the ancient customs of Persians, Arabs and other adjacent people, it is argued that the centuries-old Turkic traditions weakened and disappeared. In the later periods, Kazakh women forfeited their equal status, complied with men's orders, suffered offenses and humiliation from the husband's relatives and knew nothing but domestic chores (Davydenko, 2012).

The present-day revival of traditions is said to be distanced from their pre-Soviet forms, existing in the XIX and beginning of the XX century. Argynbaev in his Ph.D. dissertation "Kazakh Family and Marriage" (1975) and Shalgynbaeva in her dissertation on the present-day customs and ceremonies (2002) show how contemporary family life of the Kazakh people recovers old-age traditions and customs in a new way. Shalgynbaeva finds this process prominent in the urban sector. Modern Kazakh youth abides by the seven-generation marriage prohibition and pursues knowledge of one's ancestors (2002, p.109). Young marriages are no longer welcomed for both men and women (average marriage age for girls is 20-25 years; for men – 23-27). Weddings share traditional ceremonialism and passe through the two stages appointed by the custom: the first that takes place in the house of the bride and the second that is held in the house of the groom, thereby preserving some elements of the Kazakh culture. But, unlike the feared position of a new wife towards the husband's parents (common in the past), nowadays the wife relates openly to them. Parents take on many household responsibilities, so

that she can work (Argynbaev, 1975, p.114). To illustrate, the proper behavior of the daughter-in-law (kelin) surmised a particular rule of conduct. She was obliged to submit to the mother-in-law and listen to her instructions in performing all the specified household chores. She was also forbidden to call the husband, the father of the husband and his brothers by their names. Instead she was told to address them by the chosen names (Stasevich, 2011). Overall, the pre-Soviet norms dictated that all interests of the woman after marriage had to be subordinated to the interests of the husband's family. Today, such dependence is said to have been completely overcome in most Kazakh families. While kalym in its traditional pre-Soviet sense has disappeared as a custom, the modern practice of giving the bride some dowry remains but acquires a different meaning. It is not distributed among the relatives of the husband, but serves exclusively the interests of a newly married couple as a lump sum of money.

Simultaneously, the majority of married women are overburdened with housework. In many Kazakh and Russian families men completely abstain from participation in household labor such as cooking, doing dishes, cleaning the house, grocery shopping, laundry, ironing, elderly, and child care (Shakirova, 2005). Similar to the gender norms of the Soviet-era characterized as highly egalitarian in public, but traditional in private, the post-Soviet gender system is argued to remain a combination of egalitarian ideology, quasi-egalitarian practice and traditional pre-Soviet stereotypes (Stasevich, 2011, p.11).

In terms of gender ideology, Shakirova studied perceptions of typical psychological qualities for women. Respondents identified such female traits as long-suffering, obedience, patience, child care, diligence, humility, hospitality, compassion, sympathy and fragility significantly more than free spirit, pride, liveliness, and intelligence (2005, p.133). This, she argues, corresponds to the traditional pre-Soviet image of a woman rather than to a new Kazakhstani woman representing a combination of "the Western activity and spirituality of the East" (2005, p.7). Moreover, she identified that a shared image of a 'real' woman is predicated upon the interests of the family but incorporates the imperative of personal development. To date, men are ideally expected to be strong and lucky while women should be patient, calm, and modest, married and a husband's helper, not the leader in the family (p.180). Shakirova also notes that there is a prevalent metrosexual iconic male look following the latest trends in Western fashion and a glamorous public female image in the media popular with youth.

The synthesis of the Turks tradition, pre-Soviet custom, Soviet ideology, and post-Soviet egalitarian course afford much deliberation about the combinations of all those factors. Gender characteristics appear ambiguous. The official commitment to gender equality is neither cohesive nor specific. The national surveys show women's increased interest in men's share of domestic

responsibilities while men's attitudes towards marriage remain traditional in essence. Thus, the empirical part of the research builds on men's perceptions of what constitutes a fulfilling marriage in general terms juxtaposed to their rationalizations of the division of labor specifically. In the summary of the results I provide a partial answer for their reluctance to pursue a more egalitarian orientation.

CHAPTER 2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

The primary objective of the present study is to examine Kazakhstani men's reported positioning towards marriage and domestic division of labor. This analysis will contribute to an understanding of some implications for family egalitarianism. Throughout the research, I integrate the mutual influence of male perceptions of their own and ideal masculinity as well as of appropriate domestic labor arrangements. In this section, I will explicate several foundational terms and theories on the subject and delineate how I incorporate them in my own investigation.

The concept of 'family' requires initial clarification. The definition is problematic to construe in order to account for all contemporary discourses and practices. For the purpose of this research, I utilize the legal definition spelled out in the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Namely, Item 1 of Article 1 in the present Law "On marriage and family" establishes the following characterization of marriage and family in the country:

Marriage is an equal in rights union between a man and a woman, registered at a free and full agreement of both sides in the order established by the Law, with the objective of a family creation and generation of property as well as personal non-property relations between spouses.

Family is a circle of persons, connected by property and individual non-property rights and duties which result from marriage, kinship, adoption or a different form of children's up-bringing and called up to assist strengthening and progress of family relations.

Accordingly, the current Law incorporates the definition of the nuclear family of a husband, wife and their children which I will draw to my analysis (Parsons & Bales, 1955).

My study relies on sociological theories of family roles. A family role is a social role which stands for a particular behavior regime. It comprises expectations directed at the individual assuming the role and sustains proper and consistent enactment of the requirements (Flynn & Lemay, 1999). The concept also addresses desires, objectives, beliefs, feelings, values, and actions internalized by the person. Notably, family roles correspond to the behavior assumed and demanded by individuals in marriage and can be subdivided into conjugal and parental. In the limits of my research I focus on the former, namely, conjugal roles. I aim to understand the perception of the husband role in the family. To achieve this goal, I am examining spousal positioning towards domestic division of labor.

More specifically, I pursue an empirical inquiry into grounds and conditions for egalitarian family role. An egalitarian perception of a husband and wife does not presuppose a distinct division of labor between men and women as a gendered group. Consequently, all

throughout the research, I problematize the issue of gendered domestic work and render its revision a crucial variable in the marital quality equation. In multiple studies examining underlying reasons for the lack of marital satisfaction, researchers have identified incongruence in attitudes on housework among the leading reasons for family dissolution. Moreover, numerous feminist and family studies stress that perception of domestic responsibilities as more fairly divided impacts marital stability and satisfaction positively (Oláh, 2001; Sanchez & Gager, 2000). Coltrane infers that division of household labor is becoming inseparable from “life-course issues, marital quality, kin relations” (2000, p.1209). Finally, feminist researchers claim that prevailing practices of feminizing household make it a “stalled revolution” for women worldwide and prevent personal growth and empowerment (Friedman, 2011; Hochschild, 1989).

The basic framework for the present study also pertains to Connell’s theories of masculinity. The typology introduces the concept of hegemonic masculinity. As argued in the field, there is no essential and single masculinity to portray all men (Connell, 1995a; Donovan, 1998). At the same time, Connell elucidates that hegemonic masculinity ought to be understood as an over-arching masculine principle which always tends to differentiate itself as highly distinct from and superior to social norms for femininity irrespective of time and culture (2005). As shown earlier, the dominant assumptions about hegemonic masculinity in Kazakhstan include the emphases on men’s economic independence, physical strength, and authority, all of which are opposed to feminine traits like weakness, emotions, economic dependence, and submission. They presuppose men’s exclusion from the allegedly feminine activity, that is domesticity.

Such a theoretical base affords the discussion on the positioning of one’s masculinity in relation to domestic division of labor. Research shows that hegemonic masculinity establishes privileges for men in terms of resources. It endows them with superiority and dominance over women, underpins an unequal system of power relations and undergirds unequal division of labor. The inequity results in “men, as a group, enjoying [access to certain] institutional privileges” not afforded to women (Messner, 1997, p. 5). As Connell explicates, “hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy” (1995a, p. 77). In other words, the patriarchal nuclear family which supports ideals of a working man as a single breadwinner, a housewife as a homemaker, and their children constitutes the formative location of hegemonic masculinity (Donovan, 1998, p.830). Under such circumstances men are expected to avoid change to sustain their status quo, thereby eschewing alterations of their domestic labor arrangements.

Connell refers to hegemonic masculinity as a “historically mobile relation” (1995a, p. 77). He also underscores that when “conditions for the defense of patriarchy change,” the viability of a previous hegemonic masculinity will decrease. As the economic situation is changing, researchers suggest that maintaining hegemonic masculinity is more strenuous for men (Connell, 1995a; Donovan, 1998). Kimmel and Kaufman assert that “the changing dynamics and complexion of the workplace” are confronting the norms of masculinity display and cause a situation where “masculinity has been increasingly seen as in ‘crisis,’ [manifested in] a widespread confusion over the meaning of manhood” (1995, p. 16). I incorporate it in my study that Connell calls the struggle of the family institute to adapt to contemporary changes a vital factor fueling the tensions experienced by men (Connell, 1995a, p. 85). At the same time, I recognize that men may be affected differently in maintaining hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, my thesis intends to explore some of the discourses used by Kazakhstani men in articulating their experiences and views.

In the analysis I am cautiously looking for contrasting discourses of masculinity which can endorse a more egalitarian form of gender relations in marriage. Donovan holds that “Collectively, men can redefine masculinity within a field of structural and discursive possibilities” (1998, p. 819). Connell outlines three potential responses to the ‘crisis’ of hegemonic masculinity which either “reassert the validity of traditional ends and seek new avenues for their accomplishment to redefine their ends” or redefine masculinity and absorb current changes or abandon and replace the hegemonic project with the egalitarian position (1995a, pp.84-86). Therefore, I attempt to uncover discourses which reinforce patriarchal roles, reframe masculine identity by alluding to increased participation in the domestic labor rather than abiding by the breadwinning concept and choosing the definition of masculinity independent of the archetypes of hegemonic masculinity.

Additionally, I rely on the following concepts. As evidenced by international scholarship, the trend towards equitable economic position between men and women does not imply the same trend toward an equitable division of household labor. Several researchers have argued that such resistance in the private sphere stems from the couples’ “doing” gender in their conjugal relationship in a particular way (Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994). To elaborate, West and Zimmerman assert that “material embodiment of wifely and husbandly roles, and derivatively, of womanly and manly conduct,” guides their interactions according to the normative expectations prevalent in society (1987, p.114). As gender being “routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p.126), housework in the present study is understood as the medium to be used to produce and reproduce gender difference. Berk adds that

“members ‘do’ gender, as they ‘do’ housework and child care, and what has been called the division of labor ... is the mechanism by which both the material and symbolic products of the household are realized” (1985, p.201). Consequently, I intend to understand material and symbolic aspects in the interviewees’ narrations of the domestic division of labor.

Finally, research indicates that ambivalence constitutes a valid and under-researched feature of family relationships (Connidis & McMullin, 2002). In my investigation, I incorporate the concept of ambivalence as a structurally formed contradiction that men may experience in relation to their spousal role. I will study any contradictions and disruptions in respondents’ articulations of a marriage partner role to understand what evokes ambiguities. Also, I will look for ways that men sustain or challenge and replace acquired patterns of behavior in cases of ambiguities. Finally, I will draw attention to perceived positive and negative subjective qualities of the informants’ positioning. It is important to learn if choosing to share more domestic chores evokes simultaneously taxing and fulfilling experiences.

METHODOLOGY AND REFLEXIVITY

The research was set up in two complementary stages, informed by two types of approaches, interdisciplinarity and intersectionality, and relied on qualitative methodologies.

In the first stage, I was studying the latest national discourses on gender egalitarianism. Some were presented by the President. Some were formed by recent sociological research and conference reports on family in all regional centers of Kazakhstan. I used multidisciplinary literature and delineated social and cultural contexts of the present study. I also integrated demographic, historical, sociological and economic data on the family position in Kazakhstan which jointly afforded a more complex, across-disciplinary examination of documents and arising debates.

In the second part of the research, I aimed to understand what motivates and informs Kazakhstani men's perceptions of fulfilling conjugal relationships by using two sources of empirical data: male focus groups and individual interviews. I combined 20 one-to-one male interviews and 2 focus groups with 7 and 8 members, respectively, in each. The qualitative methodology rather than the quantitative best suited my research objective, as conducting a qualitative study allows going beyond the given brackets of prior analysis. It gives a subjective sense and descriptive value from the disclosed information (Sprague and Zimmermann, 1989).

I deliberately chose men as informants. Little up-to-date research is done about the extent to which men are bound by their own gendered identifications that construct their roles within families in Kazakhstan. Moreover, feminist scholars argue that in order to achieve gender equality, the analysis of change should extend to men as well (Segal, 1990). Hence, I attempt to understand the challenges that men confront.

To evaluate the premises for an egalitarian position, I aimed to raise the likelihood for men's interest in it by the following sample choice. I advertised my study in the educational center which helps students to apply for Master's and Ph.D. programs abroad. It regularly conducts English-speaking debates for everyone who wants to practice English. I employed the snowball principle to choose participants. They decided whether a one-on-one interview or a focus group suited them best. The interviews were then held in cafes and university settings and ranged from approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Each focus group lasted for 2 hours straight on Saturdays in one of the class rooms of this educational center. Everything was audio recorded.

Also, the research took place in the fourth most populous city in Kazakhstan, Karaganda, located in the central region of the country. This is important because northern and central regions have been found to support the consolidating idea of a multiethnic and egalitarian Kazakhstani nation more than in the southern (Stasevich, 2011, p.108). People in southern regions tend to advocate conservative views and are known to abide by traditional social hierarchies among their kinship groups.

I included men without children as I don't account for parenthood in the study. They were either not married or married for not more than 3 years. Attitudes are said to appear less rigid before and early in marriage (Black, 2000). Research in Kazakhstan also showed that spouses try to carry out many family functions together at the beginning of marriage with no children. It is when the roles have not been settled yet. It leads to significantly more advocates of egalitarian relationships among younger people who have been married for a shorter span than among those who were older and longer in marriage.

The participants were Kazakh and Russian (two dominant ethnicities in the country), middle class with a completed undergraduate study, and in the age-range between 22 and 32 years. Higher educational achievements are said to impact gender-role attitudes toward a more egalitarian mode (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004; Crompton & Lyonette, 2005). According to Foteeva, young Russian husbands and husbands with higher educational levels are more willing to help their wives at home (1990).

The interview format was semi-structured. The questions served as a guide and encouragement to share their positions in their own words without my suggestions if only for clarifications. Instead of raising questions about traditional and egalitarian families and asking informants to ascribe their families to either type, I used a narrative strategy. I offered many open-ended questions to reflect on gendered premises at the personal, symbolic, and institutional levels (Wekker, 2004). By means of a discourse analysis, I was able to elaborate on how respondents made sense of their everyday behavior and future goals from the perspective of gender. It allowed “identifying institutions which are reinforced when this or that discourse is used; and those that are attacked or subverted when this or that discourse appears” (Parker, 1991, p.18).

In conducting interviews and focus groups, my being female is likely to have an influence on the male participants’ answers. Many interviewees exhibited reservations in describing their positioning towards the household labor and defining their ideal masculinity and femininity to me. Since I anticipated it happening in advance, I asked a male friend to lead one focus group discussion for me. I was still present in the room to take notes. This allowed me not only to gain an outside look at the dynamics but also perceive the behavior, interactions, language and relation to the male mediator. I also included very short and anonymous questionnaires in the focus groups asking who can, who does, and who wants to learn to do what at home in terms of household chores.

What was conspicuous is that in male-mediated environment men exchanged more jokes, but kept the conversation quite uninformative. Despite voluntarily agreeing to come, they were not very active and appeared reluctant to give details to their opinions. As one explanation, I could have given more recommendations to my friend guiding the focus group.

Having learned from this experience, I mediated the other group myself. The outcome was significantly richer data and much livelier atmosphere. Partly, it was due to my own improved preparation and to the sociability of the participants. Another factor that played a role in turning a discussion into a well-rounded debate is the heterogeneity of the situation. I was a female inquirer among male participants. In many respects, I was able to invite participants to clarify their positioning and recount explicit examples in their lives missing from the shared-gender focus group and mediator. In the process, I was highlighting some of their answers on the white board and summarizing their main points.

In the interviews and the focus groups, many participants were trying to guess my reaction to what they were saying. On the one hand, it signified a multidirectional power, men’s

concentration on the topic, and curiosity in the diversity of views (including mine). On the other hand, it construed certain difficulties for me as a researcher. I simultaneously strove to build rapport and maintain a detached composure.

In interpreting data, I sought to understand the subjects' meanings and sense-making practices. Still, I would like to acknowledge that the feminist framework of my research position influences the interpretations of the interviews. Namely, Borland talks about the responsibilities that the researcher assumes once interpreting respondents' narrations (2003). She also states that how the researcher understands the claims may diverge from the original intentions of the narrator. To reconcile the conflict, I allowed all my participants to choose the names by which I would use their citations and granted them "interpretive respect" without "relinquishing [my] responsibility to provide [my] own interpretation of their experience" (Borland, 2003 p. 64). Therefore, I will provide those who expressed interest in reading the finished version of the thesis, my English copy. To my pleasure, quite a few participants left their contact details and have at least an intermediate proficiency in the English language.

CHAPTER 3. SHIFTING VIEWS ON MARRIAGE

The crisis of a family exists [in Kazakhstan] because people don't understand and appreciate each other. The fact of the matter is, many marriages end in divorce because the majority of us are too egoistical and think only about our own interests... we do not compromise. To me, a happy marriage is a deep interconnection of two people. This requires time and effort. But people no longer want to spend time on creating family and want immediate results.
(Adilbek, unmarried, 28)

President Nursultan Nazarbayev addresses the meaning of a family as the greatest value for the people and country. It forestalls the family as the bedrock of the Kazakhstani national idea. As evidenced in the latest address as well as official speeches, Nazarbayev increasingly expresses concern over the present generation forsaking the priority of family in their own lives. He buttresses his apprehension with the statistics of divorces. In fact, divorce statistics were high in 2013 surpassing the previous years. Official numbers estimate 1 in 3 marriages ending in divorce or 34.1 divorces per 100 marriages (Ranking, 2013). Also, he points to a lower number of children within families and a higher figure of orphans, 42,000 out of 4.8 million children (Kazinform, 2010). Hairulina, the leader of the "League of women of creative initiative," calls the existence of children's homes in Kazakhstan as a "shameful fact of our life" (Iskanderov, 2013). She explicates that historically there had been neither orphanages, nor houses for the elderly in Kazakhstan.

As a step in raising family prestige and thereby accomplishing the goal of "Kazakhstan without orphans", the President introduced a Kazakhstani Family Day. It is to be officially celebrated on the second Sunday of September every year (Tengrinews, 2013). The first celebration took place on the 8th of September in 2013. On its observation Nazarbayev declared the date as a distinct national holiday besides the one recognized by the United Nations (UPF International, 2013).

Relying on the results of sociological research conducted in Kazakhstan in the past years, family has been continuously identified as 'the greatest value-orientation' for both young men and young women. This inference includes 72.5 % of Kazakh and 76.4 % of Russian youth; 82.6% of rural and 69.7% of urban (Omarov, 2013). The second most significant goal for Kazakhs pertains to education (62.9%) and for Russians to employment (51.6%). In a different national survey, the majority of men and women agreed that "family is the main value and only for its sake one should live" (Abdiraiymova, 2008). At the same time, researchers detected a concurrent trend where financial prosperity, high social status and fame were combined with the family-oriented aspirations in young people's system of priorities. When asked "What do you need to feel happy?" financial affluence topped in respondents' answers and left behind the

desire for love and relationship. Moreover, such qualities as unselfishness, willingness to extend one's support to others, and care were regarded significant only by a minimal proportion of informants.

In relation to the explanations for the high index of divorces, several reasons have been consistently revealed across all Kazakhstan. The lack of deeper relations and understanding between spouses constituted the most relevant one. Violence came second while sexual dissatisfaction was identified as third most common. Kodar, director of social and gender research in Almaty, enumerated additional premises like egoism, pride, prejudice, reluctance to admit one's fault, addictions to drugs, alcohol, internet, computer games, economic difficulties, parents' influence on the spousal choice, infidelity, marriage for money, childlessness, differences in social statuses, and, finally, religious disagreements (Yntykbaeva, 2013).

In order to examine men's readings of family roles, I started with similar inquiries. I asked whether respondents perceived that young people are losing interest in creating families (according to the President). I investigated men's statements of personal priorities (similar to sociological research). It was also important to detect diverse discourses of what constitutes a fulfilling marriage for a man and why marriages fail. Finally, I probed the pertinent characteristics of the role of a good spouse. I juxtaposed them to men's alleged positioning towards domestic work and examined as consequential for egalitarian Kazakhstani family.

Most respondents asserted that contemporary attitudes to family have changed negatively for both men and women. They regarded earlier generations as less materialistic and more family-centered. Modern people, with the exception of rural residents, were said to seek financial advantage and personal entertainment. Informants viewed traditions, public opinion and common welfare being less critical than ambitions and individual beliefs. Abai, 25, explained the shift in the following way,

The attitude to family has changed because the attitude to traditions has changed. People became more egoistic, and such notions as kin, clan, family are unfortunately losing its significance for some young people.

Abai gave an example to show the decline in people's loyalty to traditions. It was related to the custom of a younger son in the family taking care of his parents in their old age. In line with the Kazakh tradition, he, as the youngest son among 4 children in his parental family, is obliged to look after them and secure their living. He does it by staying with parents in the same household, bringing his wife and raising children under the same *shanyrak* (roof). Having been married for 2 years, Abai plans to abide by the custom. He admitted that few Kazakhs follow the rule as

strictly. He resolved to live separately from his parents but in close distance to their apartment building. In contrast, several men among his friends went abroad for education with an intention to settle there “for the sake of their own career prospects.” He inferred that abiding by traditional family values is losing its importance. “Personal convenience” overrides communal interests. Another informant, Talgat, 24, unmarried, validated Abai’s supposition. He maintained that young people are less preoccupied with the opinion of their extended family. He elucidated it with the fact that couples choose to divorce easier and faster and are less disturbed by breaking the ties between the two families.

Simultaneously, the declining loyalty to familial traditions and the weakening conjugal commitment do not mean a decision to eschew official marriage vows. As most interviewees confirmed, with rare exceptions, men in their circle of acquaintances want to get married. As Marat inferred, “everyone wants a family... it is a natural desire for support.” The official statistics show a 3.13 percent increase in the marriage records between 2012 and 2013 which confirms the claim that people want to create marriages (Kazinform, 2014).

On the other hand, men speculate that a lowering significance of conjugal relationships stems from the motivation behind it. According to respondents, contemporary marriage serves as a viable solution to improve financial status, escape from parental control, “secure someone to give you a glass of water when you are dying in bed,” and, more generally, not to feel lonely. Regular sex was another incentive in marriage. Unplanned pregnancy or a wish to have a child takes other young people to the altar. These reasons, however, were juxtaposed to marital aspirations as expressions of affection and care or concern and dedication for the familial kin. Also, these reasons were regarded as ill-suited for a fulfilling and lasting relationship between a husband and wife. Men stressed that marriage ought to be grounded on the desire for an emotional and intellectual connection between partners. Abai elaborated on the importance of mutual respect between spouses in Kazakh marriages. He said that because to some extent parents still attempt to arrange marriages (common in southern regions), without respect, spouses will hardly stay together for long. Abai witnessed this with his close friend who divorced after a year of marriage despite his parents’ disapproval. Abylgazy, 27, married, talked about the issue in his interview,

People get married because of different situations, but if the person is ready to give and care for the other, there can be a strong family.

Aleksei, 30, unmarried, expressed a similar opinion concerning Russian marriages,

When people are together even if there is no such romantic love between them, they will be happy together if they take care of each other and appreciate each other's company as friends. When everyone is only looking out for number one [concerned with their own skin and pulling the blanket to his side], what can you expect?

A lot of the other interviewed men spoke about the mounting self-centeredness of the present generation in the country. They proposed that it leads young people to derive personal conveniences and exploit the other person rather than create shared goods and mutually benefit thanks to the common effort. As Aleksei summarized, "everyone asks what he or she can get from the relationship, not what he or she can give to the relationship."

What has been noted by other informants is that marriage remains a dictated decision. Men may feel reluctant to opt out of it either because of the parents, girlfriends or social norms. "Ninety percent of motivation", according to Oleg, 29, unmarried, comes from pure physiology, not a deep spiritual meaning or the person's intellectual need for connection. Oleg proposed that "if one observes men's attitudes, for a great number of them marriage is a fuzzy concept." He hypothesized that societies may come to a point when marriage may lose its relevance in the dynamic and multi-variant environment especially as people learn to live longer.

While Kazakh and Russian men agreed that their parents' opinions are important, neither group said to base their decision for the marriage partner on them. Parents' insistence on whom, when and why to marry is to a larger extent divested of its strongest influence as in the past. However, several informants admitted that men yield to marriage due to their girlfriend's implicit or explicit expectations for a long-term intimate relationship. In fact, there seem to be a distinct belief shared by the majority of my respondents that women want to get married more than men. Aleksei substantiated this view in this way:

When two people are together in an intimate relationship, it is the woman who is usually the one who brings up the topic of legalizing their relationship. What I mean is not that the woman proposes. It is the man who does. But the man does not want to propose not because he does not want to be with this woman. Because love is love, but responsibility will lie on the shoulders of a man. He must secure the family financially. A responsible man will delay the decision if he is not confident in his financial situation, in his own capacities. It does not mean that he does not love her... as because he loves her, he is afraid to disappoint her... so he will first want to save some money for both of them. The ones, who don't care, are not responsible or the ones who are self-confident and rich will easily promise marriage vows.

Another respondent, Maksim, 26, married, gave a different opinion on why men may hesitate in committing to marriage,

Men are afraid to lose their freedom. They don't want to get married because they are afraid that family will tie their hands and legs.

Overall, respondents implied that they can be swayed to get married because of their girlfriends' eagerness, not their own inclination. They emphasized though that officially it is a man who proposes in Kazakhstan. In such context, two conclusions may follow. First, many men may not be the actual agents of a marriage initiation. They do not ask themselves why this marriage is personally necessary for them. Secondly, under such circumstances they may rid themselves of a stronger sense of personal accountability for the decision made and of the feelings of shame and guilt in case of the family dissolution (this conjecture can be contrasted to men's emphasizing that men feel stronger responsibility). Simultaneously, there were several married men who described their marriage proposal as a surprise for their wives. They had to wait from a year to 3 years before their partners gave consent to a wedding, the reason being their partners' desire for financial stability. Hence, men's financial status often appears primary for a marriage decision.

I asked respondents what makes them feel fulfilled in life. The majority posited that creation of a family is their way of self-actualization. It will give them a feeling of completeness of life and the moral satisfaction with their existence. Limited as it is, the sample in the study confirmed national research on marriage attitudes. Researchers claim that in balancing work and family, a Kazakhstani person will report family primary due to the loyalty of kinship traditions (Shakirova, 2005; Stasevich, 2011).

In the explanations for the rising number of divorces in Kazakhstan, respondents reported lack of respect, self-centeredness, financial problems, and parental intrusion into family affairs as likely causes. Marat, 27, married, talked about the inadequacy of the worldview of society at large. He summarized this idea as a "macro displacement of values",

In our society we can see a shifting of values. Government thinks about enhanced consumer economy, media stimulates avaricious consumption, technology makes it easier to consume more and faster, so in the end, consumption is pretty much the only thing that is on an individual's mind... consumption overrides concerns about others, about culture, about posterity... We are converting into greedy customers of whatever is around us.

A similar suggestion of people "converting into greedy customers" and it being harmful for relationships is presented by Adilbek, 28, unmarried. He said that nowadays, when people are free to choose any marriage partner independently, many women and men "approach marriage as a business deal." He noted the difference with the past as "history recounts about marriage deals for the sake of the clan, not for one's own benefit." According to Adilbek, women will marry the guy who is wealthier. Men will take a wife who attracts them "like a shiny object" to have rather than a holistic person to know. Adilbek called many beautiful women "sellers of themselves" to older men because they want to afford a sumptuous lifestyle. He gave an example that women

tend to constantly emphasize which presents they receive from their men. He was certain that many women place the highest value on the “purchasing power” of men. The above consumer consciousness translated into the private relationships is said to encourage easy relationships. Konstantin, 28, unmarried, illustrated it by saying that “people don’t want to build relationships, they want to get them, as if marriage is a transaction that you make in the registration room.” Many respondents agreed that the majority of people do not hope for genuine connection with another person. Rather they settle for someone who is available and convenient to them.

Such frame of mind is strongly correlated with the interviewees’ contention that nobody wants to assume responsibility for anyone else. The current generation is thought to be reluctant to sacrifice their wants for other’s needs. Talgat puts higher blame on men,

Men do not want to take responsibility. Perhaps some fear it. So they do not want to get married and either live alone or with the parents. Others don’t want responsibility and so if their parents want them out, they get married to have their wife take care of them like their mother before.

Some men in the interviews expressed reluctance to give any conjectures for the family break-up. They said they didn’t know and didn’t like to think about it. Azbek, 24, married, stated, “I don’t know: some get divorced, but some live together. It is best not to think about how you feel about it.” Gani, 24 unmarried, said that marriage goes on until people become frustrated with it and added that “you don’t think why it failed but rely on your own feeling of dissatisfaction and let the whole thing go in order to give yourself another chance at happiness.” These views contrast with Adilbek’s position. He argues that not thinking about the causes of divorce is a sign of youth not meditating on reasons and effects of events in general. He clarified that “people are becoming almost stupid while becoming more intelligent.” According to his speculations, it stems from too much information, pervasive distractions and easily-reachable changes accompanied by “very little common sense and personal reflection”. He said,

They don’t understand the value of a family. They think that they know what they want and that life and happy marriage will just happen for them. But do they really think is what is questionable.

Respondents found women’s emancipation as another factor contributing to high divorce rates in the country. By emancipation they meant rising opportunities for women to sustain their own and their children’s living without men’s help. It was perceived as both a positive and negative phenomenon. On the one hand, men admitted that emancipation has made women more confident about protecting themselves from a disastrous relationship. On the other hand, women were thought as less inclined to hang on to any relationship. This latter effect was stressed more often and treated as highly injurious to an institution of marriage and family.

Finally, all interviewees attributed a fundamental loss of communication skills in both men and women, but more in men. They stated that “people don’t talk.” Without talking, spouses can hardly arrive at any understanding a priori. Vladislav, 26, unmarried, expressed it in the following way,

Communication and understanding can be achieved only through actually talking to each other. A wife and a husband must be interlocutors! Only with words we can polish the rough edges in relationship and resolve that lid on the lavatory bowl has to be put down, and the dressing for the salad should be oil, not sour cream. Misunderstanding can turn into Godzilla if you keep silence with your spouse.

While highlighting communication as a necessary means for eradicating confusions and preventing misunderstandings to grow out of proportions, Vladislav as well as several other men, proposed co-habitation before actual marriage. Successful co-habitation was perceived as a possible guarantee that the couple will tolerate each other. In fact, several married respondents referred to living a few years together before marriage. They called that period a “test” of compatibility accomplished through the application of family roles. In this respect, such trial or preparation places a paramount value on the roles that men and women acquire in marriage. Namely, it puts into practice individual’s notions of the division of household labor. It reveals disruptions and conflicts in the household tasks enumerated as another factor leading to divorce. This issue is to be addressed in more detail in the next chapter.

In the present chapter I want to underscore interviewees’ reading of the meaning of marriage and conditions for family sustainability. Respondents agreed that if it is not about romantic affection, it is about mutual respect, care, support, and understanding which both spouses should demonstrate toward each other on a day to day basis. They gave examples such as wanting (not being forced by norms) to give presents, to spark smiles on the faces of family members, and give compliments. The men asserted that prioritizing family relations means striving to benefit one’s loved ones before benefiting oneself from them. Some men in focus groups emphasized mutual growth and respect which encourage children and parents alike to learn about and from each other rather than dominate, order, or isolate from one another. It is about “actually hearing what the other person is trying to say,” yielding and compromising in disagreements rather than “pushing one’s own agenda”, being flexible and adaptive. Finally, almost all men stated that fulfilling marriage entails trust, dependence, and disposition to do one’s best. It makes cooperation possible in good and bad times. This leads me to finish the chapter with the following inference.

My respondents attributed mutual respect, nurture, and communication as essential investments into relationships. The emphasis on mutuality corresponds to an egalitarian mode of relations. Also, men's views in this respect coincide with the President's formulation of a marriage quality. In the consequent chapters, I argue that exercising those traits in one's private life is a challenge for men. I will explore men's discourses of the domestic division of labor and therefore determine the possibility for more egalitarian vision of marriage in Kazakhstan.

CHAPTER 4. MEN'S FAMILY ROLE POSITIONING

Traditional vs. Egalitarian Frameworks

In the *Strategy of Gender Equality in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2006-2016*, President Nursultan Nazarbayev has formulated an aspired goal of egalitarian family for Kazakhstani nation. This document prescribes concrete measures about implementing gender equality policy in the country. It postulates that the foundational element of gender equality politics is educational (p.9). It involves recognizing and overcoming gender stereotypes (p.17). According to the President, the transformation of education and socialization sets the ground for equality in rights and opportunities for both men and women in all domains of life (p.18). As noted in Chapter 1, Nazarbayev underscores an imperative to revisit the role of men in the family and to promote more equal sharing of responsibilities in housekeeping and child-raising (p.32). At the same time, I will present several recent sociological studies which show that more than half of married couples voice preference for patriarchal arrangements. Only about a third of all respondents claim partnership model as most desirable.

The question of examining Kazakhstani men's role in the family was raised in 2012 by the College of Political Decision in Almaty. It distributed questionnaires to 2305 respondents in the age range of 18-60. The results were found consistent across 16 towns of Kazakhstan. It was estimated that men's positioning in the family is predominantly viewed in terms of a breadwinner, protector, and leader (Davydenko, 2012). It was also found that the majority of women voiced dissatisfaction with their husbands' decreased involvement in domestic affairs. Male respondents, on the other hand, expressed willingness to participate and noted positive changes in their domestic time. Overall, more than half of all informants (51.7%) agreed that the role of men had changed. In part, it informs an interest in studying its dynamics by researchers in the country. The study held in 2008 by the Center of public opinion inquiry in Almaty Kazakhstan (ciom.kz) came to such conclusions when they surveyed 3000 informants. Approximately 59 percent of the surveyed indicated parents as exemplary in constructing matrimonial relations. Nonetheless, in the remaining 41 percent of the sample only 1 percent corresponded to the father's example as favorable alone. Then, 11% thought that the mother was the only model. The remaining 29 % did not view either mother or father exhibiting the right type of ideals for married life. Consequently, researchers have proposed that young married couples hesitate to define the family type by which to adhere in their own lives due to escalating divorce rates of their peers and parental disappointments in married living.

To understand the implications for family egalitarianism from the perspective of men, I will first introduce the features differentiating the two types of families in the scholarly literature. I start with the traditional patriarchal family and juxtapose it to the alternative egalitarian one.

Traditional patriarchal families are characterized by the division of labor which assigns discrete demands on a husband and wife. Namely, husbands act as breadwinners, financial supporters, and protectors. Wives perform housekeeping duties by engaging in domestic work and raising children (Parsons, 1955). Consequently, traditional views emphasize a dichotomy between the spouses which forms the differential power relations. Under such a functional framework, roles do not cross. Women need men to provide for the family's material necessities. Men need women to serve their basic domestic and emotional wants for ultimate performance at work. Hence, women assume responsibility for the house and gain self-realization in the private sphere. Men embrace accountability for professional self-fulfillment in the public sphere by excelling in political, economic, military, and scientific endeavors. In such a situation, homogenization of all women as a group and all men as a group as well as the gendered bifurcation into female and male tasks disregard individual inclinations and undermine flexibility and adaptation to the changing environment. Also, traditional division of labor does not allow for common time and contact between spouses. Because a man is endowed the right to full authority and the woman is obliged to yield, the patriarchal framework precludes dialogue as a means for role negotiation in marriage.

An egalitarian division of labor stands as an alternative to the kind of traditional mode described above. It emphasizes collaboration, interchangeability, equal sense of responsibility and authority between spouses irrespective of the domain, professional or domestic (Holdert & Antonides, 1997). Consequently, family egalitarianism is also called a symmetrical family where both partners attempt to find a satisfactory balance between job and home, leisure and social communication. This family structure accommodates the needs for individual realization of talents not at the expense of the other but thanks to each other. Under egalitarian arrangements, success of the individual and of the family as a whole necessitates mutual efforts and sacrifices.

In order to distinguish between traditional and egalitarian family practices, such criteria as time and decision-making power have been consistently used (Henthorne et al., 1997). However, in the inquiries I made, these are not as reliable indicators as the nature of tasks performed or planned to be performed in marriage. Since egalitarian division of labor is based on ideas of people's equal worth and value and represents fair partnership, it is important to account for the gendered nature of task involvement. In several professional contexts feminist scholars

have demonstrated that femininity in itself is ascribed an inferior position to masculinity. In terms of the private sphere, this implies that stereotypically feminine tasks in the household are likely to be devalued more than stereotypically masculine. Therefore, men may be more reluctant to pursue traditionally women's skills, like cooking and cleaning, while women may appreciate such contribution higher in comparison with traditionally men's tasks. This line of reasoning finds empirical support in several studies. Hochschild, Hawkins, and Blair and Johnson determined a higher relational fairness reported by wives when husbands contributed to 'female' tasks rather than when husbands spent the same amount of hours but in traditionally masculine domestic engagements (1989; 1995; 1992).

Secondly, there is empirical support that power distribution in decision making does not in itself point out to egalitarian mode. When wives become equally in charge of financial and economic spheres of domestic life, without challenging the gendered association of the private/public spheres, they may be significantly more overburdened by the subsistence of the family than the husbands. Gurko elucidates this issue with the example of post-Soviet Russian families. She states that practically in all spheres of family life wives perform more problem-solving than men (1996). For that reason, in contrast to control for making decisions and allocating family budget, positioning regarding housework is a more accurate measure of egalitarianism in this study. Moreover, nowadays, in a variety of countries more women can secure an equal social status and commensurable earnings which altogether conduces to equal participation in decision making. Still, in the persistence of the old gendered notions of family roles housework is likely to remain the woman's task and her discrete responsibility. In light of this, Gurko argues that traditional mode resurfaces vigorously when one asks the question not about what men and women do in the family realm or how much they spent on housework but inquire about the ideal wife and ideal husband. Applying the suggestion in the present research, I explore family role positioning of my respondents not only through the reports of married men, but also through the desired course of household management expressed by unmarried men. This will allow me to understand their standards for household division between spouses.

Finally, the paramount factor in achieving egalitarianism in the family is making sure both spouses are made accountable for domestic tasks. As De Vault noted, even if husbands did most of the cooking, the wife could still act as the household manager and control most planning functions related to cooking (1990). The woman would be held responsible by others for the nutrition of the family. Coltrane's study yielded similar results (1989). The male positioning of 'sharing' domestic responsibilities de facto included a man as an occasional or frequent helper. He would receive the wife's directions on what kind, how and when to do chores in the

household. Thus, even if men confirm that they are willing to be involved in a task, I will look beyond and verify that involvement/desire includes an equal sense of responsibility for it.

To summarize, an egalitarian framework corresponds to the absence of gendered normative constraints in terms of family roles. It means that there exist no gender differentiations in roles, identities, and expectations premised on normative justifications. There are no specific chores which are regarded strictly men's or women's in the household. This strategy that guides my analysis of individual family role positioning coincides with the definition of strong gender egalitarianism provided by Brighouse and Wright. They define strong gender egalitarianism as "a structure of social relations in which the division of labor around housework and care giving within the family and occupational distributions within the public sphere are unaffected by gender" (2007, p.6).

To examine the possibility for family egalitarianism in Kazakhstan, I did not limit the investigation to the question if Kazakhstani men prefer traditional type based on the ideology of separate spheres. It expected it from the beginning. In the analysis I was interested in how men explain their positioning in terms of domestic division of labor and how they may challenge uneven distribution of chores. Also, it was important to understand whether there is a trend toward the transformation of the status of specific tasks as masculine and feminine. This would stand for a step toward overcoming traditional gender stereotypes. More so, I wanted to reveal any confusion in terms of family roles in general. Thus, I juxtaposed greater or lesser traditional and egalitarian views of my respondents on breadwinning, housekeeping, emotional rapport, and management of communication and pastime. I evaluated descriptions not only by identifying differences in them, but also by revealing common assumptions behind divergent convictions.

Individual Considerations about Domestic Division of Labor

In order to assess the tendency toward family egalitarianism from a male perspective, I inquired what married informants habitually do at home; what unmarried respondents are planning to do; and what all the male interviewees and focus group participants think men ideally should do at home. The answers I received did not vary significantly in terms of marriage status or ethnicity and included both serious and humorous notes.

The humorous replies delineated men's ideal obligation as lying on the sofa watching football on channels, controlling the remote control, eating well and sleeping an adequate amount of hours, including short naps. Ideal women's tasks, on the other hand, entailed all domestic chores, children and husband's entertainment. Exaggerated as it is, such a scenario was problematic to define even hypothetically. On the surface it appears to be as highly traditional,

but, upon further evaluation, it violates the necessary condition. Ideally husbands ought to make money on the job rather than loaf on the couch. Work, domestic or public, was omitted in these descriptions.

The serious responses can be divided into those which stress a strict traditional division of labor and those which can dispense with it to a larger or lesser extent. Whether it is possible to file the latter as egalitarian, I will indicate further in the analysis.

Many traditionally-oriented respondents alluded to the principle of gendering tasks as natural and efficient. Men make money, drive, lift and carry, install and fix. Women cook, clean, do laundry and mend in addition to nursing, teaching, comforting and bookkeeping. Such a prioritized distinction was considered self-evident because of women's allegedly innate proclivities towards these tasks and little insight and capacity towards the others. Marat proclaimed that "were there no physiological differences, then there would be no 'men's' and 'women's' obligations; but since there are differences, there should be distinct obligations." Notwithstanding, most of the group (traditionally inclined men) admitted that many modern women are successful employees/employers and good drivers.

The reasoning behind the stated opinion falls back on essentializing men's and women's traits. To explicate, an essentialist gender role paradigm establishes innate characteristics which differentiate women and men from each other. Throughout their lifetimes, women and men are supposed to develop differently. In contrast, the social constructionist approach which guides ideas about gender roles postulates absence of a single inherent masculinity. Instead, it recognizes the presence of a contextually formed norm for masculinity (Levant, 1996). Alongside the above essentializing logic, many interviewees refrained from asserting fixed and gendered hard-wired skills. Oleg retorted that "in all honesty, the only truly female task is to give birth." Consequently, this group of respondents recognized that housework can be done just as well by men while women can learn to be just as competent in "men's business" (Talgat). Relying on this belief, these men considered rigid labor division into masculine and feminine tasks a remnant of the past. They presented their own domestic skills as evidence of absolute independence from women when it came to domesticity. In fact, at least a third of all respondents claimed that they can do almost everything in the house including typical men's work such as hammering a nail, clearing the sewage, installing and fixing electronic devices and sockets. They could also manage typically women's work as cooking, cleaning, doing laundry and decorating. Aleksei explained,

Division is irrelevant. Many modern men can do the same thing as women. For example, I can do it all in my apartment. If it is necessary to clean up or do the laundry, no problem. I vacuum and cook... I don't need praise for it and I don't think it is belittling or insulting for a man to cook... Of course, I can do some simple mechanics as well and enjoy tinkering with the car. My sister is not as good at it, but I taught her a few things here and there. She is smart, so she can do it.

From these words, it is clear that housework for some men is no longer gendered in its content and is recognized as social construction or acquired skill rather than a natural fact. In addition, in a few interviews, men acknowledged their own incompetence in fixing electronics or renovating. They did not consider it unmanly to call for an expert electrician or when it comes to house renovation for a crew of trained construction workers. Still just a few others stated that they could do nothing and wanted to do nothing about the household be it a man's or a woman's task.

Besides rare essentializing of male and female aptitude, domestic labor was often recognized as heavy and time-consuming (read: masculine) and light and fast (read: feminine). According to all respondents, moving and lifting, taking out trash and carrying bags are unequivocally 'men's' tasks. Some emphasized that these tasks spread beyond family life and necessitate men's assistance in the public domain as well. For this reason, a common definition of a 'man's' job is hard physical labor and, according to some more traditionally aligned men, the type of work which requires a technical mental structure. However, presented descriptions designate women's work as light and simple which, therefore, excuses men's involvement. Moreover, because men tend to perceive housekeeping as simple to do, they may opt out of it to be doing something more challenging. Vladimir, 26, who is not married but in a committed relationship, argued,

I can personally do a lot of tasks at home, including 'women's'. I can do a lot *even* in marriage (my emphasis). But only if at a certain point my wife does not have time or cannot do it for some other valid reason. Otherwise, wouldn't it be silly on the part of a man to do the dishes after lunch and being late for work not to distract his woman from the preparation for the afternoon shopping spree?

The notion of domesticity as easy and fast as well as an assumption that women have plenty of time at hand evident in Vladimir's answer have been shown to be fallacious in several empirical studies in the Russian context. The researchers argued against the popular opinion of women doing easy chores in the house while men completed more strenuous and lengthy repairs. During an entire year, they recorded the hours spent on housework by a housewife who takes care of the husband and 2 children (Gurko, 1997). They illustrated the cumulative quantification of women's 'light' work and determined that a housewife washes nearly 18,000 forks, spoons, and knives, 13,000 plates and 3,000 pots and pans (it is a relevant statistical report as dishwashers are

not common in Kazakhstan). With the help of special devices, statisticians also measured the distance that a housewife needs to cover in one day. If the family lives in a regular 2-bedroom apartment, then the wife makes around 10 thousand steps a day. If one combines shopping trips, then she walks about 2 thousand kilometers in one year. It has also been approximated that women spend 10 hours and 20 minutes a week on cooking in cities and on average 58 hours on laundry and ironing per person per annum (Shineleva, 1997, p.151).

Overall, research indicates that if paid and unpaid labor is counted, women's average work week will surpass that of men by an equivalent of no less than an extra month of full-time job per year (Kemp, 1994). In the reviews of 200 studies completed since 1989 in the USA, Coltrane posited that "the average woman still does about three times the amount of routine housework as the average man" despite working the same hours (2000, p.1208). What is significant for the current study is the data which shows that single women tend to do less household labor than women with a husband and no children while single mothers report that losing a husband actually decreased time pressures in housework (Graham, 1987). Finally, Stafford infers that husbands do not just add an extra seven hours a week of housework for wives, but create substantially more housework than they do (1996). Ferree and Ratcliff also concluded that if both spouses approached each other's duties with more empathy, the division of domestic labor would appear fairer despite the fact that it would remain unequal (1998).

Beyond the simplicity argument, in several answers in the present study there appeared a common conviction that women enjoy housekeeping in marriage. Men reasoned that women should perform it because they find more pleasure in it. Accordingly, men did not see anything wrong in their "lack of interference." Moreover, participants explained that because men are keen on other activities like playing football and watching news or a movie, they would rather save their time on those endeavors. At first sight, stating that women find pleasure in housework as if it were their hobby evoked much hesitation and concern for me as a researcher. It contradicts the findings by Shaw as well as Allen and Walker in the U.S. context (1988; 2000). In their research, domestic labor was unambiguously rendered a second shift/work as neither men nor women regarded the chores as leisure. Ferree found in his study that both male and female informants associated housekeeping tasks as sufficiently worrisome, tiresome, menial, isolating, unfinished, inescapable, and often unappreciated (1984). Although male respondents in the current research admitted many of the listed characteristics of housework, they still held an opinion that women are glad to do it. To elucidate such impressions and clarify the seeming contradictions between my study and previous, I propose the following. I assume that men may conflate domestic work and women's hobbies. Since traditionally women engaged in such

pastime as crafting, cooking, sewing and knitting, interviewees may have associated female stereotypical diversions with their stereotypical family obligations. It leads them to presume that domestic work is more enjoyable for women than men without disregarding the negative features determined by Ferree.

At the same time, some answers I received suggest that several men are fond of their domestic activities. For example, Vladimir felt very strong that “everything that is done for the family should bring joy as it is done for your home, for yourself.” Twiggs and Atkins may shed light on the reasons why men report higher satisfaction with their own domestic duties than women (1994). The researchers indicate that the types of domestic jobs which men complete are very different from the ones that women have to do. It has been observed that when men contribute, they choose domestic tasks that can inspire creativity or fun like fixing, working in the yard, and playing with children and pets (this was confirmed by my informants’ examples of the housework they do). Wives, on the other hand, are relegated to the core and mundane preparation of meals, cleaning, washing, ironing or caring for children. Thus, the content of the job corresponds to the potential for enjoyment in line with the specific gendered distinction.

To understand more accurately why some men seem to share positive feelings about housework, it is also important to account for the fact that their ‘masculine’ domestic work bears an episodic character rather than unceasing daily preoccupation. In probing how married men prioritize their time in the family, the majority in the study pointed out to the imperative to include leisure time not their household demands in the daily schedule. Several unmarried men who live with the parents admitted that they have been considering leisure opportunities before domestic duties throughout the whole time. Women, on the other hand, seem to always emphasize the lack of time for rest because of the inescapable second shift of housework both in the local and international research (Hochschild, 1989).

Finally, the most conspicuous motive in escaping equitable domestic work and thereby abiding by the patriarchal arrangement is men’s commitment to making the family’s living. Breadwinning appears one of the leading factors allocating respondents on a scale of a more or less traditional outlook. A marginal percentage of men, including one married man, insisted on their wives’ unemployment. For the majority, both married and not, it would be best if a man could earn enough money for the whole family and a woman worked part-time. But in the given economic situation, men acknowledged that their present incomes were insufficient. Therefore, they acceded to their wives’ equal participation in the labor force and felt glad to afford more

with the extra earnings. Once they could secure a promotion and gain the main provider role, they would expect their wife to work less but fulfill domestic responsibilities more.

Still other men expressed a viewpoint that it is not out of necessity that their wives should work, but out of their own desire and to their own benefit. The category of these men encouraged women to pursue education and start careers because of intellectual and communicative benefits as well as purely financial premises. Talgat put it simply when he said that “if there is money invested in a woman’s education, why should she stay at home?” Moreover, these respondents emphasized that the unemployment of husbands does not have to label them as unmanly or failures. Though this would appear as the least traditional claim (no association with masculinities and work), men explained that the difficult situation with the job market, not their personal reluctance to work, makes it unfair to associate successful employment and manhood.

Upon the assessment of participants’ answers, I argue that Kazakhstani men do not yet adhere to egalitarian principle in the present or plan to do it in their future marriages. The endurance of gender stereotypes inherent in traditional modes becomes visible in the following comparative analyses. First, while at first sight the attitudes to wives’ employment seem to diverge among respondents, in many respects they are similar. All men speculated, including those for whom the family budget should unquestionably be a shared endeavor, that if had they a chance for promotion, their wives would need to create the necessary conditions to support them. On the other hand, none of the men agreed to sacrifice their lower-paid jobs and prospects to relieve a wife of her household responsibilities, if only for a short time. In defense of their position, they said that the situation hardly ever happens in Kazakhstan. Irrespective of exceptional occurrences, these responses testify to the persistence of traditional associations linking “woman and family.” Men treat career and any amount of income as secondary to female primary obligations of being a wife and a mother. On the contrary, they relate “a job and a man” emphasizing men’s primary focus on career, money, public success rather than a family’s well-being. Moreover, if work is secondary to wives’ roles in men’s underlying assumptions, then allowing a right for women to choose whether to work part-time or full-time may result in undervaluing women’s financial participation as such. Hence, assumptions that married women work voluntary or are motivated by career rather than by necessity in many instances are highly problematic.

Assuming family wellbeing to be the prerogative of a woman is also apparent in the textual analysis of men’s narrations about housekeeping. The vocabulary of respondents consisted primarily of ‘shoulds’ for a woman, and a mix of a few ‘shoulds’ and many ‘cans’ for a

man. The reverse situation takes place once professional duties are inquired about. As a result, the private and public division is salient. The influence of public and private differentiation on men's positioning toward family roles can be best illustrated through the example of cooking. While all men proudly declared that the best chefs are men and that men cook meat better than women, I heard of no instances of men's actual or probable cooking responsibilities in marriage. Another example that articulates a similar idea pertains to grocery shopping. A lot of respondents' consistently pointed to both men and women performing grocery shopping regularly. Therefore, they did not attribute any gendered expertise. Some claimed a masculine feature to it and emphasized being better in finding quality products. They told me that they decided on the menu and brought ingredients while wives prepared meals. However, in many of the cases married men admitted that it is usually a wife who gives a list of things to buy. The case serves as an excellent illustration that women bear responsibility for the private duties irrespective of men's share.

Besides income provision and housekeeping duties, conjugal roles entail two significant functions of emotional and communicative exchange. Marriage necessitates maintaining support work or in other words managing the emotional state of the family. The basic feature of emotional well-being can be defined as the availability of the family members to attend to the personal problems of the partner, to listen, express acceptance and sympathy, or to help resolve a problem. However, traditional stereotypes dictate that women not men are expected to assume the responsibility for the creation of private comfort. Reported 'emotional distance' on the part of men has been detected by Duncombe and Marsden in the interviews with 40 married women (1995). The wives complained of the husbands' reluctance to invest emotionally in the relationship with them and with the children. They felt that their husbands were missing from their and their children's lives. In such a case, wives not only dedicate more of their time to children rather than share their up-bringing and support with the husbands. They also receive very little emotional return for themselves from the husbands. Thus, Duncombe and Marsden argue that women may sometimes have to perform a triple shift which amounts to paid work, housework and childcare, and emotional work.

Married respondents in the present study described their emotional participation in rather vague terms. For the most of them, it equated to giving presents on holidays and giving compliments. Also, almost everyone emphasized that they expected emotional intimacy with their wives but omitted any reference to how they themselves could invest in its achievement. The given situation can be explained due to the notions of care. Caring behavior similarly to emotionally supportive behavior has been associated with femininity, femininity – with being a

woman. Nevertheless, in egalitarian families, there is no feminine or masculine housework, but individual skill and effort. Both are creators of family climate and the load of housework. Drawing from this analysis, emotional responsiveness and care imply a stereotypically wife's responsibility and indicate traditional family attitudes in my respondents.

To conclude this section, while none of the married men reported carrying out absolutely different tasks in the household and most unmarried men expressed an inclination towards the joint mode, assessing the attitudes from the point of willingness to replace their wives at performance of stereotypically feminine house chores, to be held accountable for the domestic sphere and to invest more emotionally in marriage render the views on family more or less traditional rather than egalitarian. It testifies to the inference that Holdert and Antonides made through the investigation with couples in the USA, that is "allegiance to masculinity and femininity respectively remains undeterred" (1997). Kynaston explains this "allegiance" by postulating that while women have been entreated to complete men's work when it was urgent or desired, it will only be women who continue performing women's work due to "much uncertainty, unyieldiness, and threat to men's sense of masculinity" (1996, p.227). In the subsequent chapter I examine how such allegiance may be created and recreated by inquiring into informants' childhood memories of household arrangements and present-day views on femininity and masculinity.

CHAPTER 5. FACTORS AFFECTING MEN'S FAMILY ROLE POSITIONING

Gender roles inform men's principles of conjugal roles. In this chapter, I will address two processes correlated with the production and reproduction of gender roles in families: socialization of household labor and gender ideology. I will indicate which ideas about gendered behavior men say they acquired in childhood. Then I will consider whether they retain those notions as part of a proper gender regime, thereby reinforcing it. I will further determine if men challenge an acquired gender ideology to abandon it for a new pattern of doing gender.

Socialization

Research shows that gender role positioning is largely formed within families (Collins & Russell, 1991; Eccles, 1994). Parents become vicarious instructors and facilitators of sex-typed behaviors. At this stage of development, young children may observe their parents acting out traditional roles and perceive these roles as model, innate and inevitable (Skolnick, 1992). They may also be exposed to the atmosphere of gender-undifferentiated responsibilities which will allow them to become more egalitarian parents in the future.

In childhood recollections, most interviewees in the given study described the father's household role as a wage-earner. Mothers combined housewife and wage-earner roles together in both single-parent and two-parent homes. I need to specify that the large majority of men in my sample came from a single parent family. Consequently, they remembered mothers performing a breadwinner role and carrying most decision making and domestic responsibilities despite the help of relatives. In some cases respondents from dual-parent homes alluded to joint performance of chores and problem-solving. Also, since a lot of men have one or two siblings, they talked about splitting housekeeping and cooking duties among each other, thereby "pitching in" with the 'female' responsibilities. One informant grew up in his teenage years completing almost all house duties himself because his mother was seriously ill and the father worked long hours. However, in the last exceptional example as well as in the households where respondents' parents collectively performed domestic duties, it was admitted that the wife/mother directed everyone's actions in the household. It was she who assumed unequivocal accountability for domestic comfort and emotional atmosphere. Hence, the households followed a more traditional family paradigm.

As children, most men were held in charge of washing the floors, scrubbing the bathroom, shopping, and occasional cooking and doing laundry. Those experiences were characterized as a bore and detraction from the fun things. In adult life, several unmarried men

highlighted their firm resolution not to be a ‘housekeeper’ in their own marriage. When asked to explain their stance, they emphasized a stronger need for making money as adults over the childish continuation of their domestic assistance.

Though briefly, almost all men mentioned that, growing up, their families struggled financially to be able to afford the basic things. Kazakhstan’s transition to an independent state involved serious economic recessions accompanied by unemployment, overdue and low wages, and little certainty about the job prospects. Because both parents and in one-parent families the only parent had to make a living and provide for the children, some men expressed sadness at not being able to spend as much time with their parents and at seeing their parents work very hard for so little. It seemed especially upsetting for men that their mothers had been overworking for them (children) and felt torn between home and work. Kairat, 24, married, emphasized the distress accordingly,

For me, this is clear that traditional division of labor is important. It creates conditions where children receive attention. What happens when both parents provide full-time and think only about careers? Children are forgotten.

Similarly to Kairat’s concern, some respondents said that since they didn’t have a father and the mother was the only person working, she did not pay much attention to them due to lack of time and energy. This fact may elucidate why for some men it is best when a wife can have a choice to be at home rather than be pushed into the labor force to provide subsistence. Moreover, this common experience of financial hardship may have spurred a strong desire to become financially secure. Respondents said that their parents (often mothers) repeatedly encouraged them as sons to find a nice job and live a better life. While at present the situation with the job market in major Kazakhstani cities has changed due to the successful mining and oil industry development, there remains a poor middle class and financial problems pervade many of the families, especially with the 2014 devaluation of Kazakhstan’s currency by 19 percent (*Economist*, 2014). In such a context, it is not only men who have to make sure they find a decently paid and relevant occupation to be independent from the parents. Also many of them declared being a help for parents now and in the future because their retirement will not be sufficient to cover the basic costs of living. It becomes clearer why men highlighted such values as family and cooperation, on the one hand, but felt inclined to invest the most of their time to material matters, on the other hand.

Irrespective of Kazakhstan’s financial course, several points are missing in men’s accounts. First, men did not mention as much concern for their mothers’ overwhelming domestic burnout as they had for the mothers’ tiring professional labor. Second, men recounted their

fathers' inability to provide adequately for the entire family as the greatest disappointment that the fathers seemed to share about themselves. Men remembered that arguments between parents circulated over the lack of finances rather than domestic duties. It clarifies why respondents did not problematize men's insufficient domestic involvement, but rather the lack of professional achievements. Moreover, men from single-parent homes claimed that had there been a man in their family, it would have been easier financially. This, however, obliterates the increase in domestic chores for their mother had there been that man. Third, in describing the emotional state of the family, men left out the possibility that family comfort and positive atmosphere might be created by their own efforts. In their attempts to do the best for their closest people financially, men do not seem to assume responsibility for their emotional well-being.

Proper Femininity and Masculinity and Gender Ideology

Parsons ascribes traditional division of labor as a match to distinct predilections between men and women (1964). Similarly to Eagly's social role theory, he assigns instrumental traits to men and expressive traits to women (1987). Instrumental dispositions mean that men are dominant, reserved, and emotionally distant. They endow men with the supposedly natural capacity for active pursuit of their goals suited for the professional domain. Expressive inclinations mean that women are passive, quiet, compliant, and submissive. They allow for nurture and support relevant for the domestic realm. In this regard, the binary categorization of women's and men's traits is essentialist and sustains men's choices of traditional domestic arrangements (Delphi & Leonard, 1992). I argue that without recognizing a gender binary and the concept of hegemonic masculinity as free from everything feminine changes in the domestic sphere a distant reality. This has also been argued by Connell (2005). Thus, it was relevant for me to understand to which extent men support or contest the hegemonic masculinity image underlying traditional division of labor and the functionalist approach to female and male characteristics. I accomplished this by asking respondents to describe ideal traits of a man and a woman.

I started by asking interviewees whether they have heard the phrase, a 'real' man. I wanted to know whether anyone in their surroundings or they themselves used it to make any point. In response, men reported being told the phrase at home and at school as well as hearing it in the media. Some have mentioned it to their younger brothers; one man overheard his wife calling her favorite actor a 'real' man. Nevertheless, this turned out not to be something my respondents consciously contemplated or referred to in their everyday life. Some men stated that a 'real' man ideal is a manipulation - the phrase "are you a man or not?" (ты мужик или нет?) – was meant to sway a man to do something. The majority of participants perceived the phrase

favorably pointing out to its constructive purpose. Moreover, despite the disagreements over its usefulness, all respondents presented similar characteristics of what is usually meant by the phrase ‘real’ men. Some elaborated on historical examples and others on contemporary role models of ‘real’ men. Several informants specifically underlined that a ‘real’ man is a viable, not an abstract notion of perfection. Konstantin conveyed this view explicitly in his statement,

A ‘real’ man is a human being. A human being who makes decisions, recognizes consequences, and takes full responsibility for his actions. His words are for good. He takes care of the people around. He protects, provides and helps his relatives. He is a husband, a father, a role model. He is a breadwinner.

As nearly all men in the study, Konstantin highlighted reliability and accountability in words and deeds as determining factors to be considered a ‘real’ man. I found the same traits in men’s answers as important qualities to create a fulfilling marriage in reference to men.

Caring behavior is recognized widely for a ‘real’ man. From the above description it is not clear, however, if care, support and help that a ‘real’ man is expected to offer equate to money, things, and status exclusively. In defining a ‘real’ man as a role model for children, it may not necessarily be associated with excellent parenting skills or a direct relationship with a child. It may stand for admiration for the father’s financial success. I argue that conflating emotional and intellectual involvement in a relationship with its financial input contradicts men’s insistence on overcoming excessively materialistic dispositions in societies. Sergei, 24, married, explicates my reservations about the reading of ‘care’ better:

A ‘real’ man is a provider. He knows how to earn money, earns a lot of money; thinks more about business and goals, not about his looks and gossips. He is astute, prudent, and tenacious... a ‘real’ man is ambitious and aspires to be the best in all situations. He is capable of reaching his objectives and loves football and sports in general.

A love for sports presents a contradictory message. On the one hand, they may correspond to the lack of interest in fostering nurturing and compassionate skills if sports mean domination. It would not make an individual responsive and yielding to the needs of others. On the other hand, sports teach not only physical agility, but cooperation and help inside a team.

Although all respondents highlighted physical might as important for a ‘real’ man, many mentioned “emotional vigor” and “intellectual dignity” which “steer his muscles.” A ‘real’ man was portrayed as kind and merciful in both interviews and focus groups. Instead of showing off his own superiority, he was said to instruct, lead by example and support. Aleksandr, 24, married, gave the following depiction of such behavior,

A ‘real’ man is someone who respects women, who will not forsake his friends in a dark hour, who will not offend an older person or hurt a child. A ‘real’ man will never hit a woman. He will never provoke fights but will punish offenders and protect anyone.

This description by Abai adds to Aleksandr’s,

He reveres older people and follows traditions. He provides fully for the family, and will give his seat to a child, a woman, or an older person. He is attentive and caring. He gives presents to his wife and does not let her do heavy labor. His words translate into actions and speak his mind. He may not be talkative but his words are important. He resolves conflicts and does not scandalize.

Summarizing these and other alleged assets, respondents described a ‘real’ man as responsible and hardworking, intelligent and physically fit man who provides not only financial, but emotional support for others. He can recognize the true nature of people and understands emotions of women. He expresses his emotions appropriately (“does not vent his anger” and “panic uncontrollably”). A ‘real’ man is emotionally stable and does not equivocate in his promises. Moreover, he is versatile in his interests and aspirations without losing the site of the main priorities: the well-being of his parents, woman/wife, and children. He knows what he wants and how to achieve it; therefore, he is confident, resolute and firm. According to the participants, a ‘real’ man must never be indifferent to the needs of people around him, never betray and lie for his own benefit.

Apart from the general definition of ideal manhood, men addressed the significance of certain qualities specifically for them. They wanted to become sociable and open in public. They aspired to learn how to express their feelings and to articulate opinions agreeably. Vladimir wanted to gain insight how to interpret people’s motivations in order to understand people’s behavior better, avoid conflicts, and find compromises. To think critically appealed as the most desirable skill for Adilbek. However, Oleg called it imperative to learn how to fight literally and metaphorically, “punishing the bad guys in the streets” and “conquering the heights in business realms”. He explained that “other men, those who are ‘not real’ man, may take that what you love if you don’t defend it with your fists.” Correspondingly, Talgat found the qualities of firmness and steadfastness in defense of physical territory or intellectual convictions and values most urgent. Finally, many stressed diligence, activeness, and prudence. Thus, effective communication skills and emotional intelligence constitute just as vital dimensions for men in the study as physical fitness.

Assessment of the presented descriptions contrasts respondents’ proper masculinity to hegemonic. As noted, hegemonic traits underscore aggression, competitiveness, roughness, dominance, emotional reticence and inability to nurture. To the majority of participants,

perception of a ‘real’ man comprised alternative views of masculinity. Oleg mentioned that unlike the image of a ‘real’ man socializing primarily with his fellow male friends and co-workers, his kind of a ‘real’ man can spend more time with the woman he loves. Konstantin formulated it in the idea that a ‘real’ man can have a weakness of a strong love for a woman as a “great force to the beautiful of the world”. Moreover, almost all men agreed that a ‘real’ man can and should be emotional on certain occasions instead of burying the feelings inside and restraining stress. They said that when men do not express feelings and subdue their emotions, they start drinking, gambling, and engaging in other social vices. Hence, contrary to the dictate that ‘real’ men never cry, these men expressed no shame in tears (still many respondents consider that it is best not to do it publically). They also did not deprive a ‘real’ man of the occasional experience of vulnerability. The circumstances included feeling bashful and uncertain around the woman the man loves. Overall, it is rightful to infer that men considered expression of emotions a healthy skill for any person regardless the gender. This stands in opposition to the hegemonic ideal.

Moreover, participants’ descriptions do not imply a binary between proper femininity and proper masculinity. They do not put them in polarities. A lot of men indicated the same traits for both men and women: nurture and concern for people’s welfare, service to others and peace-making, confidence and positive outlook, industriousness and intelligence, trustworthiness and honesty. These adjectives disagree with the portrayal of femininity as passive and in opposition to masculinity. Some elements did not coincide. Some differed in degrees. Compared to what the men had said about a ‘real’ man, loyalty, parenting skills, and neat appearance were given a higher value for a ‘real’ woman. In addition, care for a ‘real’ woman was implied solely in terms of emotional support and domesticity rather than financial contribution or provision. It played a self-actualizing role rather than a duty to the family. This is how Abylgazy envisioned a ‘real’ woman,

She is a keeper of the family hearth, but, yes, she works equally with her man and takes part in providing for the family. Her job is important not because of the money she earns, but intellectually. If a woman grows in her job and it is interesting to her, she will be interesting to her man. Then her man will listen to her advice and they will make decisions together.

In respect to the ‘keeper of the family hearth’, the participants imparted housekeeping skills and particularly, culinary talents and expertise as the most desirable for any woman. It reiterates wives’ traditional roles in the family. The majority of men stated that at least she has to “learn how to improve her cooking.” A few others jokingly said that a ‘real’ woman is the one who “wins their culinary taste.” This attention to ‘real’ women’s culinary skills contrasts drastically

with the complete absence of any reference to ‘real’ men’s cooking or other housekeeping efforts. Accentuating ‘real’ women’s mothering and housekeeping skills, but neglecting ‘real’ men’s domesticity as a masculine ideal corresponds to the traditional gender ideology of separate spheres for men and women.

Referring back to the socialization of the domestic division of labor, I recognized that if the father was not present or did not allocate much time into household cleaning, washing, and cooking, it socialized boys of certain masculine and feminine models. Also, international scholarship has observed numerous differences in boys’ and girls’ upbringing (McHale et al., 1999). It shows that parents and teachers tend to foster stereotypically masculine traits for men irrespective of men’s inherent temperament. Moreover, drawing attention to the association of certain traits with manhood creates an ideal of what a man ought to be like. Konstantin, whose parents have lived together for 36 years, admitted that in many ways his father tried to raise him as a ‘real’ man among his two sisters. Being by nature more reserved, he remembered his father’s insistence on being more tough and rough.

We are different. My father is a colonel of the medical service, so he is a hard and rigid man. I did not get much nurture and gentleness from him because of his nature. He still pays little attention to me. Though my sisters (older and younger) are his favorite and have a great connection. They are more like him. I am more like my mother who is a very peaceful and calm person.

Konstantin added that he would not want to be like his father or follow in his footsteps in terms of the methods of upbringing. He said that everyone needs care and communication whether female or male and whether similar or different from the parent in character. Konstantin admitted that occasionally he would feel stressed that his character did not comply with the vision of a ‘real’ man his father endorsed.

Studies in Kazakhstan found the father a rare role model among youth. I was interested in finding out whether there was a male figure whom respondents considered exemplary. The majority hesitated to refer to anyone if only to the characters on the screen. Azbek, who was raised by his mother, explained,

There were men whom I admired for this or that quality or for this or that action. I would like to resemble them in this or that, but not to be like them... it is usually the father who the boys want to be like.

Oleg proposed that for many men upbringing is a deterrent to knowing what it means to be a man. He said that there are few men who can supervise and teach this at an early age. Overall, respondents were very brief in their descriptions of the father-son interactions and emphasized the source of their ideas on masculinities from books and media. Only a few called their fathers

‘real’ men (again due to the fewer cases of dual-families in my sample). Abai was among these few men, who said,

My father taught me how to be a ‘real’ man. He did not have to say, I should do this or that. His actions spoke louder when in the middle of all troubles, my father provided for the family... he is my role model because he was ready to spend all weekends, night and day, working as a taxi driver and he would work regular hours at his other job during the week... he did it because he cared for the family.

Abai’s statement reiterates the idea of a man’s role in the family as a breadwinner. It underlines the importance of making sufficient money to be a ‘real’ man.

To conclude, many men were allegedly socialized to do all types of domestic chores in their childhood. However, the absence or traditional behavior of the father socialized them to view domestic responsibilities as women’s, not men’s (according to Wekker, 2004, personal or intra-individual level). In light of this, redistribution of domestic chores entails an apparent lack of serious financial problems for which the father may be or feel the first to blame. This experience relieves men of an expectation to solve material matters for the family independently. On a symbolic level, many respondents ascribed gender-neutral status to several positive individual traits. These were also listed to create and sustain marriages. Still the qualities related to domesticity defined femininity, not masculinity. It illustrated how men model their behavior in line with the general understanding of being a man, not only through their prior experience of socialization. In the next chapter, I will provide concrete examples illustrating how young men struggle to realize their main relationship ideals and assert their own ideas on masculinity in the available paradigm of conjugal relationships. I will determine how reproducing conceptualizations of the patriarchal model of the household rests on traditional understanding of gender roles (institutional level).

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARIZING CONTRADICITONS AND AMBIGUITIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR EGALITARIAN CONJUGAL ROLES

Throughout the analysis, I attempted to indicate contradictions in men's statements. Recognizing conflicting elements will not eliminate them. Nonetheless, it will allow for better understanding of impediments for egalitarianism in Kazakhstani society on intra-and-interpersonal levels. In the first section of this chapter I will expand more on the inconsistencies; in the second, I will discuss implications for advancing an egalitarian male role in marriage. My central argument is that egalitarian positioning for men is more congruous with their desired marriage qualities. However, this is not recognized by men.

Public/Private

- Dad, what does it mean to be a 'real' man?
- Hmm... To be a 'real' man is to be a strong man who loves, protects and cares for his family!
- Cool! I want to be a 'real' man like mom!

(Anecdote circulating the Russian-speaking social networks)

Nazarbayev addresses family wellbeing as a central priority for citizens. National research finds evidence that both men and women report their highest aspiration connected with families. Simultaneously, official strategies and my informants' narrations show inconsistencies in ways men say that they prioritize private relations in their lives. I demonstrated how men's increased involvement in the domestic sphere is poorly conceptualized in the President's formulations of gender equality in Kazakhstani family. Women are portrayed as primary private agents. Now I will show some ambiguities in men's reports of family as their first priority and the likely conflicts associated with the confusion.

Men described work as "a vital drive" and "area of men's personal success". Informants expanded on their career aspirations in such concrete terms, like salaries, things they want to be able to afford, workshops and seminars that they try to attend in order to raise their qualifications. Oleg shared his intense interest in computer technologies ever since he was a small boy. Now he enjoys working in the IT department of an outsourcing, supply-chain management company. He replied to my question about the meaning of work for a man in this way:-

A man must have professional realization as without business (*'delo'*), he will degrade, turn into a nobody... lose meaning of his existence, start drinking, and slide into evil ways.

Other respondents supported Oleg's supposition. It was agreed that a man's sense of meaningfulness relies on being "busy" and "accomplished" at work. Western scholarship

provides other examples of this kind of opinion. Alcoholism, depression, and risky behavior are enumerated as manifestations of coping with frustration upon the break of professional ties throughout retirement transition or resignation (DeGenova & Rice, 2005). Nonetheless, researchers note that decreased participation in the public sphere becomes detrimental to men's psychological health only if they consider their job as their ultimate and unique calling. Acquiring meaningful identification with the private sphere negates such outcomes.

In contrast to work, family seems singled out in abstract articulation. When questioned about the steps that men can take to achieve a great conjugal relationship, interviewees offered less detailed descriptions than when they elaborated on their professional objectives. Also, all respondents said that not being married in life will not 'kill' a man. Marat said,

I love my wife and we enjoy our relationship now... I know some men at my job, who don't have a family, or they have never been married and they are in their 40s. I don't think it is good for them... But you never know. I know they are good at what they do at the job; maybe, they find meaning in something else.

In the interview Marat expressed a view that men may have a fulfilling life despite the absence of a family. At the same time, in both interviews and focus groups men agreed that a man "must work and earn money." Hence, work is very likely to constitute the dominant sphere. To some extent it explains why informants decided to sacrifice family time rather than work time given a hypothetical choice.

I need to note that prioritizing career advancement to domestic engagements was justified by men's alleged motivation for family well-being. They said that excessive time at the job is done for all family members. Gani, 24, unmarried said that "In the long run my time investment will pay off for all... she (wife) will have to be patient." A few months earlier, Gani received employment with the oil company in Kazakhstan which will require of him frequent business trips. Being in a committed relationship, he recognized that taking the job means most of the year away from home. Consequently, he stressed that this lifestyle, though difficult for him, will last even if he and his girlfriend of 3 years get married in the near future. Despite such rationalizations, it implies at least a question. It contradicts respondents' claims that family time is a resource of a good relationship. Aleksei talked specifically about it,

Nowadays people are so busy, they become detached. Everyone wants to live well off: an apartment, a car, an Apple computer and mobile phone. Spouses come home to sleep and change. They may improve their economic situation, but will lose each other.

The interviewed men maintained that devoting time together from the start of the relationship is essential for it to endure. Moreover, they disclosed that some of their relatives in the old age have a hard time tolerating each other's company. They explained that they became gradually accustomed to distance themselves.

Based on these data, professional pursuits appear to be shaping men's primary focus. As argued earlier, being a man and being a husband are often translated as being a primary wage-earner. By holding on to this conception, men are likely to struggle in the environment where they can no longer secure this position. High unemployment and salary cuts in the future challenge them to earn more now. They may also perceive it as a threat to their masculinity when they compete with their working wives in getting the highest paycheck in order to be designated a breadwinner or the breadwinner. Talgat elucidated this reason when he said that men have almost lost the sense of what it means to be a man in the family.

The meaning of the family has changed for a modern man. It was self-evident for everyone that men earned money for everyone. It was expected, but not nowadays. Nowadays, such notions evaporate. Men do not feel ashamed if women earn more in the family... but men should strive to fix the breadwinner role upon their position in the family.

The quote illustrates the necessity to define manhood and being a husband through the earning potential of a man. Kimmel and Kaufman state that in the U.S. context "Our traditional definitions of masculinity had rested on economic autonomy" (1995, p.17). Today, when women equally participate in the labor force, men's entitlement to the head of the household status is challenged and puts men's self-perception as 'real' men under pressure (Messner, 1997). In my study in Kazakhstan this applies as well. The respondents regarded it fair for them to earn more than wives. However, men did not say that they aimed to earn more than their female colleagues or minded having a female boss. The incongruity stems from men's attempts to preserve their male identity and defend masculine privilege (Connell, 1998). Men remain less critical of inequality between men and women at home than in the public sphere (Kane and Sanchez, 1994). I argue that this is due to the axiomatic connections among masculinity and the status of an essential wage earner.

Alignment of Domestic Division of Labor with Men's Qualities of a Fulfilling Marriage

How both men and women see masculinity is integral to individual entitlement and is decisive for the domestic arrangement of labor. My research confirms that if men translate masculinity in terms of financial superiority over wives, they are less likely to do tasks which constrain their professional engagements. They will be reluctant to invest time in unpaid labor like traditionally female housekeeping. By avoiding this type of domestic work, men can stay longer at the job which for them correlates with the role of a dedicated spouse.

Simultaneously, I argue that such orientation may undermine men's commitment and responsibility for the family rather than imply them. Men explicitly formulated their

accountability at home in terms of financial procurement. However, this task coincides with their work time for which they are paid and provided a status. It also implies that men rid themselves of other obligations at home by combining private and public roles. In contrast, women bear distinct kinds of responsibilities at home and at work. They are expected to show both types of commitments which do not overlap under their family role definition. In such circumstances, men are exempt from recognizing domestic concerns unrelated with the financial side of the question. Women assume them as their immediate expertise. It reduces the probability that men will know how to help women in other matters like cooking, cleaning, and raising a child or how to comfort, encourage and understand the spouse's emotions. It means that women would logically rely on men strictly as "financial moneybags," the expectation that was met with strong dissatisfaction on the part of all respondents, even though men did not seem to imply that.

A man's role premised exclusively on his earnings may also lead to ignorance and distance. In the present research many men seem to limit their own engagement with women to financial procurement. Some assess themselves from the point of financial competence and ignore many other basic incompetencies. While I do not assert that the same holds true in their everyday experiences, I raise the question why this logic reappears in many narrations. Kirill, 22, unmarried, among many other men in the focus groups posited that "financial success overrides many secondary failures." Hence, men do not mind being unable to acquire so-called women's skills like cooking and cleaning properly or even being inept to do so-called men's skills like fixing electronics and doing renovations. There is a contradiction though. All respondents indicated autonomy, mastery of things, and women's reliance and dependence on men as desirable qualities of a 'real' man. Their positioning, however, embeds the husband in a situation where it is insignificant if he becomes highly dependent on a wife for the basics of living: locating things, nutrition, and cleaning. Other men, who have learned traditionally women's skills and consider themselves self-sufficient in every need, financial or domestic, admitted feeling too lazy to do housework or tired from work. In this case I propose that men contradict themselves when they referred to laziness as one unacceptable attribute of a 'real' man and good spouse. It implies that this type of housework is not worth their efforts.

The two scenarios bring to light critical clashing points in men's positioning. In the first, it is the dependence of a man on a woman when men voiced desirability of the opposite. In the second, it is the persistence of a lax and negligent attitude when they stressed energy and stamina as their aspired masculine qualities. Alluding to these inconsistencies, I infer the following. Informants emphasized that a 'real' man is an adult who cares for his family. After evaluating their relation to the private sphere as a ground for rest and domestic division of labor being their spouses' obligation, I would not consider a man an equal partner to a woman. He is either a child

in need of his wife's adult care or a boss who receives domestic service from the person inferior in status. The latter cancels out men's insistence of fulfilling marriage as a union between people of equal status and worth.

Furthermore, in one of the focus groups, participants elaborated at length about the prototypical differentiation of a 'child' behavior and an 'adult' one. What instigated the discussion was the popular opinion that men are increasingly referred as 'big children' in the family. Because almost everyone affirmed the tendency, I suggested coming up with the characteristics that separate a 'child' and an 'adult'. The results included two essential qualities of self-accountability and responsibility for others as demarcating each lifestyle. A child was thought of as free and unencumbered by any sense of responsibility for her/his actions. He/she was described as someone who predominantly focuses on his/her own individual self and places the most paramount significance on his/her own wants. In contrast, an adult was defined as a person who calculates consequences and takes concern for the impact of his/her actions on other's well-being. Unlike a child, an adult will remind him/herself of the things he/she mustn't do and obligations that she/he must do whether pleasant or not. An adult draws on experience rather than on inherent inclinations and other's recommendations. Given that marriage is framed as a union between two adults in terms of biological age, men viewed childish behavior in marriage as immature and inappropriate. At the same time, the logic of responsibility for domestic work and performing it as a shared rather than delegated duty did not translate into an adult behavior. It was mentioned in the previous chapter that because as children, men were given responsibility to do some of the domestic chores, once adults, they intended to perform an 'adult' function, a wage-earner.

Men in my focus groups also underscored a reciprocal relationship between spouses on all levels of interactions. They categorized the physical level (money, sex, hobbies, cleaning, cooking, shopping and etc.), intellectual and social (communication, discussion of news, problems, planning), spiritual (common principles and spiritual growth) and emotional (respect, attraction, positive atmosphere). The participants posited that a satisfactory exchange between spouses constitutes a solid pillar of a marital relationship. However, the elaboration on what counts as satisfactory investments brought divergence in views. Some men perceived it fair to engage more or less equally on all levels, that is when a wife works, performs domestic labor, provides emotional support and takes interest in her husband's self-actualization, he returns the same to her by earning money, doing chores, establishing rapport and helping her to advance professionally and personally. This is how they defined reciprocity even though the degree to which men and women engage in those tasks was said to vary. Several men withheld from any

comments. It is of great consequence for the discussion that financial procurement is commonly perceived as tantamount to other functions of the exchange collectively.

In this respect, I argue that limiting manifestation of care, which almost all men identified as the cardinal factor of lasting marriage and essential quality of a 'real' man, to money and purchases creates the following assumption. The only needs that men should fulfill for the close person are financially measurable. It then leaves aside other needs which do not commonly associate with a price tag in society, like housework, encouragement, and communication. In fact, informants recurrently mentioned that the husband should take care of his wife, and some explicitly stated that care includes more than the budget or buying occasional presents. In focus groups, participants discussed how care is articulated differently by men and women. Men earn money and purchase things for women. Rather than spending money on men, women encourage, comfort, feed and help a man. Nevertheless, they admitted enjoying and expecting their wives and girlfriends to purchase them gifts for holidays, that is, engaged in so-called 'masculine' care.

Seeing housework as an integral sign of care on the part of both spouses has been proposed by Ferree (1990). He suggests altering the meaning of housework from unmitigated "bad" and trivial topic to an expression of significance. The common perception of domestic work value for the large majority of respondents is distant from this one. From the start, it was mostly met as a dull subject for research and discussion. To extend Ferree's logic, men avoiding housework rid themselves of the opportunity to learn to care for their wives. They may fail women when they need their help. For instance, if women do not rely on men in mundane domestic matters and if men position themselves as external agents who benefit the relationship financially, there is a problem when (not if) the one who does everything in the house gets sick. To give a historical example, upon the crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Union many women felt that men lacked psychological resources (allegedly feminine qualities) to protect their families and seek solutions during the recession (Ashwin & Lytkina, 2004). Women had to stand up for their families financially and take care of their children's and helpless husbands' domestic needs. With this note, I only mean to suggest that men eschewing most household chores may sabotage women's reliance on men to be interchangeable in times of crises. Men's passivity in domestic chores socializes them to the thought of accepting rather than exchanging and, therefore, more adult-like and appreciative in domesticity. Not to mention that men's contributions are investments into women's good health and attractiveness, positive mood and personal involvement, all of which men acknowledged desirable qualities of their current or future wives.

The final ambiguity detected in men's narrations pertains to the characteristic of respect. They mentioned that modern-day women tend to "boss" men around and lack willingness to listen and follow their husbands. Several men expressed that women's disrespectful treatment of men is one of the factors for family dissolution and for men not being 'real' men. According to my informants, this female behavior prompts men's feelings of purposelessness and uselessness and puts down their confidence, all of which undermines men's sense of their own masculinity.

The reason for such women's attitudes men attribute to the inability of men to provide more for the family. They regard women's dissatisfaction as connected to their inadequate earnings. Azbek said that men feel under pressure "to measure up to women's financial standards." In terms of domestic division of labor, many respondents hypothesized that their wives would appreciate them less if they suddenly started cooking, cleaning or decorating things with them. They said that neither would they feel masculine doing housework, nor would they be perceived as masculine by their wives. I conducted another study with married women in Kazakhstan where I found support for the men's opinion. Based on interview information, I argued that irrespective of a man's upbringing and his present-day definitions of the husband role, his gender ideology is unlikely to take an egalitarian form unless a woman contests a view that it is men's most utmost duty to provide for her and it is her unquestioned authority in the housekeeping. Allen and Hawkins proposed a term 'gatekeeping' to conceptualize women's tendency to control men's domestic engagements by encouraging or inhibiting them (1999).

The gap in household chore allocation stems from identifying domestic labor as 'unmanly' and improper for a respectful man. To an extent, I argue, housework is understood as not just feminine, but unproductive activity. It endows marginal respect in the eyes of men. It steals time from productive engagement (referred to earlier when men emphasized the need to generate income rather than occupy themselves with domestic work). The devaluation of housework in society is a different topic in itself. Nevertheless, the contradiction lies in the fact that housework deserves respect (in my informants' words), but men do not feel respected and appreciated if they do it. In return, it can be questioned how much respect and gratitude men express for their wives' performance of chores.

The scope of my research substantially limited my inquiry to men. Still the aspect of men's financial competence is important to understand from the point of women. Through assessments of interview data with Russian women married for 16-17 years, Shishkina found that fair distribution of a household load between spouses in addition to adequate amount of rest, sexual harmony, dialogue, mutual understanding with children, and friendly atmosphere of respect and care constituted the desired qualities of a stable marriage for women (1998). Similar

results were produced by Accitelly when his female respondents defined mutual support in all realms of life as key to family satisfaction (1994). I hold that financial characteristics, though significant, are overestimated in its significance by men. Other factors of a fulfilling married life come at the fore front for many women.

As a final remark to this section, the majority of my informants persevered in their contention that a woman should appreciate a man for the relationship they are creating, not for the money he makes. In other words, women should not base men's evaluations on traditional imperatives. At the same time, men find it appropriate to appreciate a woman strictly for domestic skills, especially cooking and caring, which underlie patriarchal power relations. Similar rational is traced when the men expressed the need to feel understood, inspired and emotionally supported by women but did not consider the necessity to return the care and support back to a woman in a likewise form. Contrary to the allegedly desired mutual exchange between both spouses, such an arrangement equates more with a one-sided, adult-child, relationship.

Premises for Egalitarian Marriage

“Most wives live with and love men who are in some very fundamental ways strangers to them – men who withhold themselves and, in doing so, withhold their loving.”

(McGill, 1985, p. 203: citing Balswicks).

Two overarching assumptions re-appear in the narratives. First, men seem to hold that domestic division of labor does not pose a serious dilemma for couples and does not influence the relationship quality and longevity. I already discussed this perception at length. Second, I propose that men voiced certain hesitation towards egalitarian shift in conjugal responsibilities they conceive a patriarchal model more proper for marriage and family.

In his theoretical work, Parsons contended that family life based on traditional division of labor and distinct gender roles served the needs and allowed mutual comfort in industrial societies (1955). As part of the feminist paradigm, Oakley and Delphi and Leonard argue contrary to Parson's inferences (1974; 1992). They postulate that functionalist theories ignore internal conflicts associated with this family model. In the information age of post-industrial society, traditional nuclear family and its subsequent division into public being masculine and private being feminine have been increasingly contested. Whether it is an economic necessity for both partners to work or a personal desire to pursue a career, but married couples are employed for proportionate amount of hours. Escaping changes in terms of gender-role stereotypes in the private sphere prevents personal relationships that people are capable of forming, renders the

domestic sphere unfair and dissatisfactory for women, and makes family experience limiting to men (DeGenova and Rice, 2005).

Egalitarian perspective rather than traditional affords cooperative strategies which prevail in effective conflict resolutions in marriage (Commuri & Gentry, 2000). It has been also extensively observed that obligations based on gender as in traditional marriages evoke much resentment for women (Chesters, 2012; Delphi & Leonard, 1992). Western researchers attribute no division into female and male tasks in self-reportedly fulfilling families. Coontz argues that “people who lament the collapse of patriarchal family commitments usually do not envision any serious rethinking of the individualistic, antisocial tendencies in our society, nor any ways of broadening our sources of nurturance and mutual assistance” (1992, pp. 40-41). The objective of overcoming this tendency necessitates overriding traditional binary perceptions of husbands as higher in status and dominant (because of their primary role as productive breadwinners) and wives as lower in status and submissive (secondary contribution to the budget) (Qualls, 1998, p.443).

While egalitarian models locate emotional bonds as dominant for both spouses, restrictions on emotions define traditional views of manhood and a male role in a patriarchal marriage. Research suggests that the former is conducive for higher life satisfaction (Giddens, 1992). In achieving emotional closeness, egalitarian couples share more communication and investment in each other’s self-actualization and understanding. Giddens conceives of an egalitarian family as a ground for flexibility and common development, essential qualities in the fast-changing environment with the multiplicity of opportunities and unexpected situations.

I argue that by adhering to the traditional division of labor, men do not reflect on how well or how poorly the given model of a traditional family serves their personal relationships. Referring back to the notes of what men consider integral characteristics of a fulfilling spousal union, numerous misalignments become evident. Since informants indicated that they especially appreciated qualities like responsibility, commitment, understanding, support, respect and care, then they would acquiesce with the egalitarian family at least in theory. They emphasized that when people love each other, they try to spend more time together. Without a question, an egalitarian arrangement affords more time than traditional. Oleg recognized this trait by saying:-

There are many families who rely on the traditional division of labor. But when a husband and wife do housework together, it binds them. It is not an individual burden, but collective effort.

Some other men agreed that an egalitarian share of housework can unite spouses and avoiding it rids them of fun memories. Also, in men’s assessments of an ideal family member, such qualities as inattention, rudeness, despotism, moodiness were inadmissible characteristics. However, it

was a traditional male role in the family which was identified as most likely bearing such connotations. Traditional roles contradict respondents' hopes to see a friend in a spouse. According to Risman's research, friendship, following precisely egalitarian not hierarchal precincts in terms of interactions, confirms an intimate relationship (1998). Hence, I infer that there is a conflicting point expressed in the misalignment of one's perception of what is important for a particular role and one's conformity to enact this role in a particular gendered way.

The arguments that I heard throughout focus groups was the impracticality of egalitarian marriage and a necessity to have one leader in the family. For the majority, there is a firm conviction that "there ought to be one person who "guides 'the ship' (read: family) and prevents the chaos." For them, egalitarianism means "no authority" and "no one will know what to do." Several participants (less traditionally inclined) defined the head as the smartest and most energetic person which would make either of the spouses a leader irrespective of gender. Some said that women themselves do not want to be heads of the household despite a higher intelligence in comparison with the husband. Others claimed that some men may enjoy a more dependent position and do not want to be an equal head. All of the examples, according to them, corresponded to egalitarian interest and practice as exception to the rule.

Other men emphasized that harmony in relationships may be maintained only in a situation where everyone has his/her place, that is men work and women care. Complying with the demands of today's world, they said that they could yield to a situation where 51% of the time men work and women care and 49% women work and men care. This observation denotes the underlying vision of inequality and unacceptance of 50/50 if only in theory. The crucial premise is the gender of the spouse. However, an egalitarian marriage as a practice necessitates crossing a gender boundary embedded in traditional stereotypes of men's and women's behavior.

Altogether, men exhibit traditional views on conjugal roles with some gender-equitable messages. The inconsistency of the discourse stems from the reported desire to be more connected with the spouse in the relationship in order to make it more fulfilling and, simultaneously, from the evident reluctance in overcoming reliance on the gendered portrayals of roles (Almeras, 1997). To form a firm egalitarian view on men's roles in families, men would need to disrupt their accustomed orientation of a primary breadwinner. They would also need to acquire knowledge of a novel perspective as a more congruent alternative with their definitions of a good spouse. I argue that in practice it requires men's honest evaluation of every decision and action from the point of gender. They would have to juxtapose their decisions to the listed qualities of a fulfilling relationship to see if they align. It may be more effective rather than

alluding to new or old stereotypes and models that the government seems to inconsistently advocate. It is also a valid proposition for both spouses to assume personal responsibility rather than generic gendered excuses. Namely, in the interview with Azbek, he phrased the interactional expectations between a woman and man in the following scheme:- “a woman has to understand me, inspire me and accept my occasional weaknesses... a man has to accept her and treat her like a mystery.” Marat explained it differently, “men do not understand women because women do not understand themselves.” Justifying reluctance to persevere in communication by the following generalization undermines any effective dialogue from the start.

Conclusion

The analysis of the findings leads to several important inferences. From the informants' descriptions, discrepancies often appear between what men say is important for marriage and how they see their own role in achieving it. In regards to the former, egalitarian conjugal relationships relate best. However, traditional perceptions predominate more.

Based on respondents' narrations, domestic labor in marriage remains in theory gender segregated. Despite much support of some men for challenging traditional views of domestic arrangements and traditional stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, the private/home domain is unequivocally distinguished as a wife's territory. Nonetheless, it is not always singled out as a wife's expertise which is a step towards egalitarian positioning. Above all, men see themselves as financial suppliers whose involvement in housekeeping is limited and situational. They read it as help not as proportionate contribution or equal sense of responsibility.

The research enhances the understanding of which needs and challenges men face in order to approach an egalitarian principle and how these needs can best be attempted to be met. The investigation is relevant in so far as it enriches the understanding of nations' dilemma to reconcile gender equality aspirations, particularly in the Central Asian region. My sample is not representative, so I don't generalize the findings. I only attempted to bring to light certain issues that should be further revisited in Kazakhstani family and gender equality programs as well as in feminist scholarship and gender discourses.

In hindsight, I recognize that adding a mixed study where both men and women respondents engage in explicating their opinions, arguing and attempting to understand each other's points of view has a potential to expand the dimension of the study. For instance, negotiation techniques as well as reactions to contrary persuasion and juxtaposition of men's and women's ideas on femininity and masculinity may be an enlightening and exciting investigation. Future research may investigate the modes of boys' and girls' up-bringing in relatively egalitarian households of Kazakh and Russian families. Research of older couples upon retirement can reveal domestic division of labor in the context where professional engagements do not take place or subside. Longitudinal studies would be especially useful in tracing the dynamics and prospects of egalitarianism in the private realm.

As a final remark, Weiss ascertains that the interviewing relationship is a "research partnership" (p. 65). One of the focus group participants commented that men in his circle of friends rarely take time and deliberate what their thoughts are about marriage and division of labor. My research affords this chance. My interviewees could use the experience to reflect on

personal convictions and behaviors not contemplated previously or at least not in the same way as when they were asked to respond to my questions. Based on their feedback, the exploration was reciprocal and prompted joint contemplation. Simultaneously, it displays the need for more layered understanding of men's expectations and concerns which make maintaining personal and family well-being difficult for them.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP SCENARIO

Thank you for participating in the interview/focus group today. My name is Yuliya Pleshakova. Please, feel free to address me by my first name. I am pursuing Master's degree in the Central European University in Budapest, Hungary. My thesis project looks into contemporary family role attitudes of men and women. I am conducting research by employing both interviews and two focus groups. I situate my study in Kazakhstan not only because it is my home country, but also because of its unique geographically-based Eurasian identity encompassing European and Asian elements of influence. In light of this, I want to find out how men understand being a husband and being a man in Kazakhstan society. I am going to record our conversation/discussion and for confidentiality reasons, you can make up a name for you when I transcribe your statements. I have several themes to inquire, but do not hesitate to mention anything you regard important. There is no judgment, just a sincere interest to hear opinions and ideas and this topic. Is there anything else about the study you want to know before we begin? So, are you ready? Now I will turn the recorder on and we can start.

Let's start with you telling me a little bit about yourself. Can you tell me your age, educational level, and marital status?

'Real' man:

Do you often hear an expression a 'real' man? What do you think is meant by it?

Which qualities make a man a 'real' man?

Can you describe anyone in your surroundings who models for you a 'real' man ideal? Do those men, who are your role models, possess these qualities?

What is not 'manly'?

What are 'real' man's likely weaknesses?

Which traits of a 'real' man would you like to develop?

What is the role of women as representatives of a sex/gender group in forming the image of a 'real' man?

Do you often hear the notion of a 'real' woman in comparison with a 'real' man? What is meant by the former?

Family:

What is the meaning of a family for a modern man?

What is necessary for an individual's wellbeing? Is marriage important for individual happiness?

Do you think your married friends are happy in marriage?

Why do you think people arrange families? Get married? Before? Now?

Marriage is necessary for growth? For raising children? For not being lonely? For serving your domestic needs?

Today fewer and fewer people are getting married. What do you think keeps people from getting married these days? What about people you know?

Has the family meaning changed over the years?

If not married - Are you going to create a family? What is a happy marriage?

What can we do to mend the relationships? What can men specifically do? What can women do?

Contemporary family roles:

If married: how do you arrange domestic division of labor in the household?

Do you think there ought to be strict division of labor in the house?

Which responsibilities are considered “male” and which “female”?

Do you agree that men and women are opposites and have different functions?

Do you think the role of men in the family has changed in our country in the last 10 years? Or not? How?

What is the man’s role in the family?

Do you think men in family have a low level of responsibility and status?

Do you have a clear image of what your role in the domestic sphere entails?

Ideal:

Ideally, who should do what?

For your children what kind of future marital arrangement of division of labor would you like?

Complementary:

Do you discuss arrangement of domestic work in your family?

Is domestic work pleasant?

Do you consider domestic division of labor as a crucial element of family satisfaction equation?

Parents’:

How was the allocation of domestic work done in your family?

Walk me through some of your childhood memories of what family duties were like?

Egalitarianism:

Do you think there ought to be someone who is the head of the family? Should major decision be assigned to one specific member?

Do you think that there is gender equality in Kazakhstan? In the public?

Are you familiar with the concept of “egalitarian family” and what do you think about gender equality in the family? Do you think it is possible?

Do you think women would like such arrangements? Do you think men benefit from such arrangement?

To summarize, what would you conclude the most urgent factor detracting from family satisfaction?

Well, these are all the questions I wanted to ask you in this interview. I appreciate your time and such active participation. Is there anything else that you would like to add to your response on this topic? Any suggestions? Could you leave me your contact information, as I will email you the transcription of this interview and you can make sure that everything is correct? I hope it has been interesting for you.