She Would Never! She is a Girl: Exploring Intimate Partner Violence in Lesbian Relationships in Kazakhstan

By Ainagul Aitbayeva

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies

Supervisor: Dr. Erzsébet Barát
Second reader: Dr. Nadia Jones-Gailani

Vienna
June 2024

Abstract

While intimate partner violence (IPV) has traditionally been viewed as a problem that affects heterosexual couples, research has shown that lesbian women also experience partner violence at similar rates. According to recent studies, lesbian women experience similar cycles of violence, however, there are additional factors such as lack of recognition, fear of homophobia, and systematic discrimination that affect their approach to help-seeking in cases of IPV. In my research, I am exploring the life stories of Kazakh lesbian women, hoping to unravel the intricacies of intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lives. Through qualitative semi-structured interviews with fourteen participants, the results of the study revealed that heteronormative ideas on masculinity and femininity shape the power dynamic of the relationships, especially within the context of Kazakhstan dating norms that are based on patriarchal ideas of gender roles. Moreover, the findings are consistent with previous studies that indicate the importance of nuanced factors such as fear of homophobia, lack of legal and social recognition and systematic discrimination.

Keywords: intimate partner violence; heteronormativity; same-sex relationships; gender roles; Kazakhstan

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 15,101 words

Entire manuscript: 18,294 words

Signed Ainagul Aitbayeva

I dedicate this thesis to every Queer person in Central Asia.

I see you. I care about you. I love you.

Acknowledgments

While I am solely responsible for the shortcomings of this thesis, it is the result of teamwork and continuous support from many people. First, I thank my supervisor, Dr. Erzsébet Barát, for her invaluable guidance and patience throughout my master's program. Her dedication to students is truly inspiring, and I am immensely grateful for her efforts. I also thank Dr. Nadia Jones-Gailani for her enthusiasm and insightful guidance. I genuinely enjoyed learning from her and hope our paths cross in the future.

Many thanks to all the faculty members and administrative staff at Central European University. Your dedication to students is immense and I felt supported every step of the way.

I also thank my newly found friends and university classmates Yasmine Ansari, Ausrine Smilgyte, Jiani Zhu, Qing Ji, and Ayca Bececir for sharing this master's program journey together. Shared joy is double joy, and shared sorrow is half sorrow with you all. I hope to work with each of you in the future as colleagues. I am grateful to the organizations, Feminita, Education Community, Econ Kazakhstan, Mira Ungarova, and Raduzhnyy Kazakhstan for their indispensable assistance with recruitment and their substantial support of my research projects.

My greatest thank you goes to all the women, Madia, Alzhan, Dania, Alex, Marzhan, Nura, Leyla, Aishet, Madina, Alfiya, Zhanar, Sasha, Zina and Aya, without whose willingness to participate this project could not have been realized. I thank you for offering your time and stories. Getting to know you has been a privilege, and I am excited to share this final project with you. I truly hope that I made you feel heard and provided a safe place for you to share your experiences.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

IPV —Intimate partner violence refers to “behaviors within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors” (World Health Organization, 2014).

KZ —Kazakhstan

CA —Central Asia

Introduction

My undergraduate supervisor, Dr. Ronald Harvey, often said, "Research is me-search," emphasizing that researchers are typically deeply personally invested in their fields of study. I am no exception to this anecdotal rule. Growing up in an environment where violence was normalized and tolerated, I saw firsthand the suffering women endured from their husbands and ex-husbands. The World Health Organization (2014) reports that a third of women globally will experience some form of violence from their current or former intimate partners. These numbers are alarming, especially considering that many cases go unreported due to cultural, social, and legal barriers preventing victims from seeking help. The actual number is likely much higher.

Initially, it seemed this issue was prevalent only among heterosexual couples. I witnessed this narrative repeatedly in feminist meetings and protests and saw it in news reports of family abusers murdering their wives. One notable case that captured Kazakhstan's attention was Saltanat Nukenova's murder by her husband, Kuandyk Bishembayev, in November 2023, in a well-known restaurant in Almaty. He was sentenced to twenty-four years in prison. Following this case, Kazakhstan finally criminalized domestic violence on the 15th of April 2024 in decree №73 —VIII. It is often referred to by the given name of the victim in that case as "Saltanat's law" (Sputnik, 2024).

Such cases occur daily in Kazakhstan (Ministry of National Economy Kazakhstan, 2017). Violence affects all types of relationships, including queer ones. Through my advocacy work with queer organizations, I have seen that unhealthy relationship dynamics are common in both heterosexual and queer relationships. However, most of the limited resources are aimed at heterosexual women struggling with male partners, making it virtually impossible for queer victims of violence to seek help. In Kazakhstan, a queer person fears not only their abuser but also a system that permits systemic discrimination against queer individuals by society and law enforcement. There are many variables to consider, and I hope to unravel some of the key elements in my current research.

1.1 Situating the Research

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1991, Kazakhstan has transitioned into a semi-democratic government system and a capitalist economy (Surucu, 2002), meaning that Kazakhstan is a democratic state based on the government structure, however, the authoritarian rule remains

unchanged with dishonest elections and corrupt government, forbidding freedom of speech and expression (Busygina et.al, 2018). This transitional period has led to changes in social and cultural norms and restructuring of the public sector. Kazakhstan is considered a middle-income country with the fastest-growing economy in Central Asia (Kalyuzhnova & Patterson, 2016).

As the largest country in Central Asia (apart from Russia), Kazakhstan has a population of over 19 million people (World Population Review, 2024). It is a multi-ethnic nation, with Kazakhs and Russians making up the majority of the population.

Gender relations in Kazakhstan are influenced by the socio-cultural norms of patriarchal beliefs, the emerging influence of Islam, and newly redefined national identities (Somach & Rubin, 2010). While Kazakhstan is a conservative and authoritarian state, women in Kazakhstan enjoy more freedom compared to those in other Central Asian countries (ABD, 2006a), possibly due to their nomadic lifestyle and a wider acceptance of Soviet influence. Kazakh women were able to own property, get an education and work outside of the home, while women in other Central Asian cultures did not have the same rights. (Sharygin, 2013).

The Kazakhstani government at long last recognized the importance of eliminating violence against women and children. In April 2024, Kazakhstan signed a decree №73 —VIII that criminalized all forms of domestic violence in the light of Saltanat Nukenova's case. Saltanat was murdered by her husband, Kuandyk Bishembayev, an ex-minister of economy. This case has been one of the country's most watched court cases, leading to the decree's being called "Saltanar's law" among people. Previously, domestic violence was considered an administrative offense punishable by a fine or volunteering (Human Rights Watch, 2024). While this is an improvement, there is still a long way to go in combating the normalization and tolerance of family violence that requires governmental involvement and citizen participation. After the final courtcase of Bishembayev's case, numerous partners of Kazakh government officials came forward to share their struggles with abusive husbands. Currently, one of the most prominent cases is Karina Mamash who came forward with allegation of domestic violence from her spouse, Kaken Mamash, counselor at the Embassy of Kazakhstan in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Daryo, 2024). Karina Mamash is currently back in Kazakhstan due to government order that returned the whole family back to Kazakhstan for investigation. Bishembayev's guilty verdict gave hope to victims that perpetrators

of family violence can be punished regardless of their social status and power, resulting in many more victims of violence seeking help.

1.2 LGBTQ+ Research in Central Asia

Kazakhstan decriminalized homosexuality in 1997 (Itaborahy & Zhu, 2014). Following the revised criminal code, same-sex relations between consenting adults were no longer a criminal offense. Since then, activists and academic scholars have been working to fight for the recognition and protection of LGBTQ+ rights in the region. Despite these efforts, Kazakhstan continues to tolerate homophobia and transphobia, resulting in discriminatory behavior across governmental institutions such as hospitals, universities, and law enforcement. Moreover, the general attitude toward the LGBTQ+ community remains largely negative (Levitanus & Kislitsyna, 2024). This leads to increased invisibility and isolation of queer individuals, particularly queer youth. While these challenges create a unique environment with potential for violence, the queer community nevertheless perseveres and continues to celebrate itself in community safe spaces, online queer activism, and mutual support (Levitanus & Kislitsyna, 2024).

In agreement with Buelow (2012), I believe that research can act as a form of queer activism by recognizing queer individuals' struggles and celebrations and creating a space where these stories are permanently recorded. Conducting fieldwork in Kazakhstan is challenging for many reasons, including safety precautions, general mistrust towards researchers, language barriers, and difficulties reaching marginalized communities. However, recent trends over the past 10 years show that the Central Asian queer community is interested in research, both as researchers and participants. Numerous scholars such as Georgy Mamedov, Mariya Levitanus, Cai Wilkinson, Nina Bagdasarova, Mokhira Suyarkulova, and others are actively involved and engaged both professionally and personally. I hope to follow in these scholars' footsteps and shed light on the struggles of queer relationships through the lens of my field of study—intimate partner violence.

Queer safety is often considered in terms of violence from outside the community. I wish to examine queer safety from within their interpersonal relationships, particularly in the context of romantic connections. There is a significant number of studies dedicated to this topic within the context of Western countries (Cannon, 2015; Calton, 2016; Brown & Herman, 2015). However, this is not the case for Central Asia. Currently, there are no published studies on intimate partner violence within same-sex couples in Kazakhstan. There is only one research article on this topic

based on Tajikistan by Ibragimov, Luu, and Wong (2020), which focuses on the impact of gender roles and sexual positioning on violent behavior within gay and bisexual male couples. I would like to continue this much needed research and study intimate violence within lesbian couples.

1.3 The Research Question and Hypothesis

I decided to focus my research question on relationship power dynamics, specifically looking at the feminine and masculine dynamics within relationships. This heteronormative gender role-based dynamic was prominent in all of my interviews, despite some participants denying that gender roles affected their relationships in any way. Scholars widely agree that heteronormative gender roles impact the way queer individuals navigate their interpersonal relationships, often using their gender representation as a tool within the context of a romantic connection (Habarth et al., 2019). In other words, living in a social order of heteronormativity can entail that heteronormativity may also provide a behavioral framework and might not necessarily be harmful on a personal level (Jackson, 2006). Based on this premise, my research question is: How does heteronormativity affect the relationship's power dynamics in the context of abusive romantic relationships of Kazakh lesbians? In other words, the principal aim of this thesis is to explore the existence and shifts in the power dynamics in lesbian relationships where violence occurs, and to see in what ways it is influenced by heteronormative gender roles within Kazakh culture. Answering this research question will give me a deeper understanding of how heteronormativity affects queer individuals' relationships, especially in vulnerable contexts such as intimate partner violence. Growing up in Kazakhstan, where there is a silent acceptance and tolerance of intimate partner violence, lead me to hypothesize that heteronormativity significantly impacts the romantic relationships of Kazakh lesbians, displaying a power dynamic through the existing power structures of femininity and masculinity found in heterosexual relationships. This initial hypothesis was supported by the narratives I collected, although there is more nuance to it than I initially anticipated.

I will be discussing the role of heteronormativity within lesbian relationships and its application to intimate partner violence through theories presented by Cannon and Buttell (2015). Traditional feminists and academic scholars argue that gender category is central to the experience of an individual both on micro and macro levels. I argue that sexuality plays a similarly vital role in the same context. Heterosexism and homophobia are embedded in the current patriarchal structure of

society and impact all individuals living within this social institution (Sedgwick, 1990; Warner, 1993).

Gender theories have been extended and evolved into various definitions of what gender is. These shifts are consistent with the Foucauldian understanding of power that positions it as fluid rather than static in society. The deconstruction of categorical binaries has shifted towards understanding gender representation through multiple forms of femininity and masculinity instead of women vs. men (Connell, 2005). The creation of feminine and masculine pairings further perpetuates the idea of the binary system and reinforces heteronormative norms based on the masculine men and feminine women ideal dynamic. According to Connell (2005), masculinity and femininity are socially assigned activities and values that embody the human experience of being. However, according to the normative model, they are conceptualized as innate traits. Masculinity is connected with aggression, power, strength, and leadership, while femininity is routinely believed to embody submissiveness, weakness, and emotion. Based on this premise, it is often assumed that masculine individuals, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation, are the aggressors in the context of intimate partner violence.

Chapter 1: Global Perspectives on Intimate Partner Violence

1.1 Overview

While intimate partner violence (IPV) has traditionally been viewed as a problem that affects heterosexual couples, research has shown that lesbian women also experience abusive relationships at similar rates (Messinger, 2011; Rolle, 2018). Researchers who study family violence and discuss "family violence" see violence in intimate relationships as bi-directional, meaning that both partners cause harm to each other. Feminist scholars, however, see partner violence as "heterosexual violence" directed predominantly by men at their female intimate partners to maintain power and control over them (Mason, 2014). The concept and definition of power, particularly patriarchal power, is subjective and it complicates our understanding of intimate partner violence in same-sex couples, especially in non-Western contexts.

For this thesis, I draw on the concept of power developed by Foucault (1990). According to him, power operates in the field of relations — it is highly contextual. People's access to power is heavily dependent on their socio-cultural location and identity. Based on their social status, location, and institutional context, people might have differential access to dominant forms of power. In other words, we are always already caught in multiple power constellations, power is dispersed unevenly in the various discursive fields.

The traditional understanding of intimate partner violence (IPV) predominantly uses the Marxist model of power, where men, who are imagined to "have" all the power, will inflict abuse and violence towards women, a subordinate group of victims with no power, as an expression of patriarchal dominance (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). While Foucault does not negate the existence of such a hierarchical power structure, he argues that there are *several* forms of power, therefore there may emerge contexts where power can be mobilized unexpectedly by an individual or group that is misrepresented or marginalized on a systematic level. In the context of the study, lesbian relationships involve individuals that identify themselves as "women" or "non-men" —m they may have no power within a Marxist definition of power struggle. Based on this premise, lesbians cannot be violent toward each other in a romantic relationship, either. However, this is not the case. Lesbians and queer women in general can create and sustain a power structure within their relationships, despite their marginalized identity and systematic oppression in a heteronormative structure. Therefore, the Foucauldian conceptualization of contextual power is more applicable in

this scenario. Similar to the concept of power, the definition of violence has shifted over the last thirty years. According to World Health Organization (2014), intimate partner violence refers to "refers to behaviors within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors". They offer a one-size-fits-all definition which does not translate well into complicated relationship dynamics involving violence and socio-cultural location.

The definition of intimate partner violence (IPV) depends on the research field. Public policy and family research focus on intimate partner violence defined as "one partner taking control over another partner" (Johnson, 2005, p. 323). It is also called "intimate terrorism" and the majority of studies operate under the framework with a definite perpetrator and a victim of violence. In addition to intimate terrorism, there are two additional types of violence differentiated: violent resistance (victim resists aggression by showing violent behavior as a means of self-defense) and situational couple violence (violence and aggression happen during occasional conflicts rather than being a patterned behavior) (Johnson, 2005, p. 324).

The intimate terrorism (intimate partner violence; domestic violence) framework is loosely based on the binary separation of perpetrator and victim. Researchers, such as Holmes (2019) and Palmetto (2013), give insight into the workings of bi-directional violence, meaning that both partners are aggressors and victims at the same time, due to ongoing dual exhibitions of violent behavior. However, the concept of bi-directional violence is heavily criticized by family violence researchers who point out the unequal power dynamic even in bi-directional violence. According to family researchers, such as Hine (2022), intimate partner violence represents an unequal power dynamic where it is clear who has the most power within a relationship.

The concept of power is heavily debated when defining intimate partner violence. Power is most often defined as "an individual's ability to control and influence another individual through coercion, fear, manipulation and violence" (Mondal, 2021, p. 2532). These feminist researchers define power as a tool of patriarchy; a man's attempt to exert control over a woman. This definition is commonly used in public policy and family research, it has a strong positioning that creates a narrative of intimate partner violence where a man is the perpetrator, and a woman is the victim, denying her any agency which should be attested to by the daily struggles of survival. Other

scenarios are often overlooked, power is based on a binary heterosexual dynamic; man has all the power and woman has none.

This framework does not translate well into lesbian intimate partner violence (Cannon, 2015). In lesbian relationships, both partners are women/non-men who are involved in a romantic relationship. If we consider the previous definition of IPV, violence is not possible in lesbian relationships because women simply do not have the power to create a hostile situation with partners abusing each other. This definition of IPV has made it difficult for lesbians, and other queer couples, to identify violence in their relationships and seek help in case they needed support services.

1.2 IPV in Lesbian Relationships

Intimate partner violence (IPV) in lesbian relationships has a complex historical background rooted in societal and cultural factors (Karydi, 2018). Historically, IPV in lesbian relationships has been overlooked and ignored, partly due to the societal invisibility of lesbian relationships. In the early 20th century, homosexuality was considered a mental illness and was criminalized in many countries (Drescher, 2010). Lesbians faced discrimination and persecution, with their relationships often labeled as abnormal. This marginalization meant that IPV in lesbian relationships was neither widely recognized nor discussed.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the feminist movement brought attention to domestic violence, making IPV in heterosexual relationships a public discussion topic (Garber, 2001). However, lesbian relationships were still largely ignored, and IPV within these relationships remained hidden. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that researchers began studying IPV in lesbian relationships, revealing that IPV in these relationships was widespread, with rates similar to those in heterosexual relationships (Burke, 1999).

While there are multiple studies on IPV in lesbian relationships, many of these studies have limitations that affect the statistical data. Recent evidence suggests that lesbian IPV rates range from 25% to 75% of same-sex couples (Stiles-Shields & Carroll, 2015). This drastic variability among studies is partially due to sampling and methodological procedures. Moreover, West (2012) argues that most of the studies do not include questions about the participant's sexual orientation and the perpetrator's sexuality. Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC) stated that 43.8% of lesbian women reported experiencing physical violence, stalking, or sexual violence by their partners (Walters et.al, 2013). However, the study highlights that out of 43.8%, only two-thirds were women (67.4%), resulting in actual statistics of 29.6%. These numbers are, nevertheless, skewed since many lesbians find themselves in heterosexual relationships before coming out. In contrast, heterosexual women (35%) and bisexual women (61.1%) experience higher rates of physical and sexual violence compared to lesbians. Based on these numbers, bisexual women are more likely to be a victim of partner violence compared to both lesbians and heterosexual women, however, it is important to highlight that bisexual women suffer abuse at the hands of their male partners. There is a possibility that marginalized queer identity of a bisexual woman can contribute to their vulnerability to violence, especially if they are rejected from both heterosexual and lesbian communities, thus lacking social support for help-seeking.

It is challenging to understand how IPV operates in lesbian relationships without taking discrimination and homophobia into account. The lack of recognition and understanding of IPV in lesbian relationships has led to several challenges in addressing the issue. For example, lesbian victims of IPV may hesitate to seek help from mainstream organizations and services, such as domestic violence shelters, due to concerns about homophobia or discrimination (Calton et al., 2016). Moreover, stereotypes of lesbian relationships as nonviolent or inherently egalitarian may make it difficult for victims to identify and acknowledge abuse (Little & Terrance, 2010). This underscores the importance of increasing awareness and understanding of IPV in lesbian relationships and providing appropriate support and resources for victims.

1.3 IPV in the Context of Kazakhstan

According to the Ministry of National Economy of Kazakhstan (2017), 33% of ever-partnered (married and unmarried) women report at least one occurrence of IPV in their lifetime. Among married women over the age of eighteen, 15.5% have experienced physical violence, 3.8% have experienced sexual violence, and 13.8% have experienced emotional violence. Considering these figures only account for legally married women, the actual percentages might be higher due to the prevalence of religious marriages that do not hold legal status, though no data is available on the number of such marriages. These survey results indicate that IPV is a serious issue in Kazakhstan,

highlighting the need for background and intervention research to develop appropriate measures aimed at reducing and eliminating intimate partner violence on a national level.

The sample survey conducted by Ministry of Economy and United Nations included over 15,000 women from various economic and social backgrounds across several large regions of Kazakhstan. The highest rates of intimate partner violence were found in North, East, and South Kazakhstan, while the lowest rates were found in Kyzylorda and Zhambyl regions in the South-Central part of Kazakhstan. These findings are inconsistent with social conventions that depict the South and West regions of Kazakhstan as "traditional" and "patriarchal" (Childress, 2013). Due to their secluded location, both South and West Kazakhstan retained traditional practices longer and westernized later compared to other regions. Moreover, the major ethnicity in these regions is Kazakh, while other regions have a mix of ethnic groups, made up of Russians, Germans, Uyghurs.

Further sample survey results revealed that 57% of women who experienced IPV reported frequent violence in the past 12 months (out of the 33% of women who reported experiencing intimate partner violence in their lifetime). Since Kazakhstan does not recognize and allow same-sex marriage, these statistical numbers include only heterosexual marriages, making it impossible to identify the severity of this problem for lesbian women.

The situation with the family has worsened during the Covid-19 pandemic. The National Crisis Hotline received over 300 calls in the first weeks of April, compared to around 150 calls in March (Zhulmukhametova, 2020). Meanwhile, crisis shelters were not considered essential according to quarantine regulations, forcing them to stop providing their services and putting many women in danger. Moreover, since battery and minor harm to health (in forms of minor physical injuries) were decriminalized and reclassified as an administrative offense in 2017 (Zakon, KZ,), domestic violence cases have been largely overlooked by the police enforcement. In 2023, over half of the 47,600 cases classified as administrative offenses and were considered form of "family conflict". Of the remaining cases, 9,400 ended in just a warning, with law enforcement treating domestic abuse as a private family matter (Ranking KZ, 2024).

1.4 Power Dynamics and IPV in Lesbian Relationships

Power dynamics play a central role in shaping relationships between people, influencing how people interact, and govern. As conceptualized by Foucault (1990), power is not only a top-down

structure, but operates through various channels and is highly contextual. It permeates social interaction and is constantly negotiated in relationships. Power can manifest itself in many ways, including dominance, control and manipulation, resistance, and negotiation. In romantic relationships, power dynamics are often complex and multifaceted. They can be influenced by many factors such as socio-economic status, cultural norms, personal history, and personalities. How power is exercised and maintained in a relationship influences the behavior and experiences of both partners. In contexts with significant power imbalances, one partner can dominate the other, leading to various forms of abuse and manipulation.

Intimate relationship violence (IPV) is a critical issue that highlights the harmful effects of power imbalances in relationships. IPV includes physical, emotional, sexual, and mental abuse by one partner against another. Traditional understandings of IPV have often focused on heterosexual relationships, where men are typically seen as dominant aggressors and women as submissive victims (Dobash and Dobash, 1979). This perspective is consistent with the Marxist concept of power, according to which power is concentrated in the hands of the ruling group. However, Foucault's concept of power (1990) suggests that it is not static and can be exercised in different forms, even by the marginalized or oppressed. In IPV's context, power dynamics are not just physical force or economic control, but also psychological manipulation, coercion, and resource control. Power imbalances create an environment where the victim feels trapped and unable to escape the abusive situation, often due to fear, dependency, or social pressure.

1.5 Power Dynamics in Lesbian Relationships

Examining power dynamics in lesbian relationships presents unique challenges and complexities. Lesbian couples, like heterosexual couples, are not immune to power imbalances and IPV. However, the dynamics of these relationships can be affected by additional factors such as internalized homophobia, social discrimination, and the invisibility of lesbian relationships in mainstream discourse (Karydi, 2018). Research on IPV in lesbian relationships began to gain attention in the 1980s and 1990s, revealing that the prevalence of IPV in these relationships is comparable to that in heterosexual relationships (Burke, 1999). Despite this, IPV in lesbian relationships is often overlooked due to the societal perception that romantic relationships between women are egalitarian and non-violent (Little and Terrance, 2010). This lack of understanding can make it difficult for victims to recognize and acknowledge the abuse they have experienced.

Several factors influence the power dynamics of lesbian relationships. For example, internalized homophobia can play a key role. Internalized homophobia refers to the negative feelings and attitudes that lesbians may have about their sexual orientation due to social stigma and discrimination (Herek, 2004). These negative emotions can affect people's self-esteem and mental health, causing unequal power dynamics in relationships. A partner who has internalized negative beliefs about their sexuality may feel less worthy and more dependent on their partner, creating a power imbalance. Social pressure also affects the power dynamics of lesbian relationships. The heteronormative culture that focuses on heterosexuality as the norm often marginalizes and stigmatizes same-sex relationships (Warner, 1993). Lesbians may face discrimination, lack of acceptance and pressure to conform to social expectations. This social pressure can reinforce power imbalances in the relationship, as partners can feel isolated and unsupported, making it more difficult to seek help or leave an abusive relationship. In addition, the lack of legal and social recognition of same-sex relationships can create vulnerability for lesbian couples. Without legal protection and recognition, victims of IPV may have limited access to resources and support systems available to heterosexual couples. Lack of recognition can also lead to fear of rejection, which can be a significant barrier to seeking help. Many lesbians may fear losing their job, social support, or risk of violence if their sexual orientation is revealed (Parry and Oneal, 2015). Research has also shown that the dynamics of control and dependence may differ in lesbian relationships compared to heterosexual relationships. For example, financial dependence, a common factor in heterosexual IPV, may not be as prevalent in lesbian relationships, where partners are often both financially independent (Hardesty et al., 2011). Instead, psychological manipulation and emotional abuse may be more common, as abusers may use isolation, emotional blackmail, and intimidation to gain control over their partner.

Chapter 2: Heteronormativity in Kazakh Society

2.1 Cultural Norms and Gender Roles

Kazakh tribes led a traditional nomadic life from the 1600s to the 1900s. There is no available written historical data on Kazakh culture before the 1600s. According to Kangas (1994), during the pre-Soviet period, power and authority within the tribes passed down from one generation to the other, with social and cultural norms defining behavioral and communal interactions. The nomadic culture significantly influenced the norms and traditions of the Kazakh people. According to Nezhina & Ibrayeva (2013), key features of nomadic Kazakh society included a high degree of religious tolerance, a collectivistic culture, respect for the elderly, and high adaptability to changes in the external environment. Both women and men needed to ride horses, hunt, and prepare food to survive the harsh conditions of the Central Asian Steppe. However, Kazakh women had central roles as mothers and daughters, strengthening the family structure as a cultural priority. Women were expected to take care of their families from an early age, marry, and then become part of their spouse's family. Household responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and building the traditional portable house, the "yurt," were managed by women

Kazakh people value their traditions and preserve their ancestral ways by passing down cultural knowledge to their children and grandchildren. As a highly collectivistic culture, argue Perlman & Gleason (2007), Kazakhs ensure traditions are followed and respected by paying attention to the traditionalism of their neighbors and clan members. Collectivistic cultures tend to focus on community goals rather than individualistic ones, creating pressure to fit in within the community. In such a culture, your background and family define your position and your social status within a societal structure.

Family traditions in Kazakh culture include bride kidnapping, bride price (kalym), and amanat (there is no direct translation to English; it can be explained as "trusting someone to care for my family). According to Malić (2018), bride kidnapping can be consensual or non-consensual. This discussion focuses on non-consensual bride kidnapping. Typically, a young man kidnaps a woman, he might or might not know, with the intention of creating a marital union. Once the woman is in the man's household, female relatives attempt to convince her to stay through emotional manipulation and cultural pressure. In some cases, the woman is raped, and she stays to protect her family's honor since she will be unable to marry once "blackened" by sexual assault. Even

without rape, the woman is considered "impure" and unlikely to be able to marry. Bride kidnapping is often organized to avoid paying the bride price, or kalym. The bride's price (kalym) is paid to the bride's parents in exchange for their daughter, usually in cattle and/or jewelry. Kalym, says Snajdr (2007), can be expensive, and many men cannot afford it without their families' help. It is still practiced among traditional Kazakh families as part of the religious and cultural tradition of "giving away your daughter" to another family.

Another Kazakh tradition biding the woman to her husband's family is amanat. When a married woman becomes a widow and her husband's family wishes to keep her within the family the woman marries her deceased husband's brother and continues to live with him as his wife. While rare in urban areas, amanat still occurs in rural regions (Perlman & Gleason, 2007).

Kazakhstan became part of the Soviet Union due to external political and economic pressures. Under the atheist Soviet regime, Kazakh tribes were not allowed to practice their religion or traditions. Religious schools were replaced with mandatory formal education, requiring all women to attend school and work after graduation. The Soviet regime affected the Kazakh gender role distribution by providing employment opportunities for women, making them financially independent and developing a sense of identity separate from the family structure. According to Snajdr (2007) over 80% of Kazakh women received formal education and supported their families financially during the Soviet regime.

However, the situation changed drastically once the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Kazakhstan transitioned from a Soviet socialist regime to an autonomous country, affecting the cultural norms of Kazakh society and leading to the reconstruction of public health, social, and legal sectors (Joshi & Childress, 2017). The structural changes were heavily gendered. As Terry (2005) contends, women lost their jobs and became financially dependent on their partners. The small percentage of women who stayed in the workforce were forced to work double shifts as workers and caregivers. A typical working Kazakh woman spent eight hours working and then took care of household responsibilities after work. This was due to gender role expectations, lack of family support, increased religious practices, and economic instability post-USSR. This dynamic remains largely unchanged today.

Compared to culturally similar neighbors such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Kazakhstan had several major differences in economy and societal norms. Kazakhstan is a middle-income country,

while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are reportedly low-income countries (United Nations Development Program, 2015). Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan experienced ethnic and political conflicts, increased drug and sex trafficking, and higher domestic violence rates. Tajikistan also went through a violent civil war from 1992-1997, during which women were subjected to sexual assault, forced marriages and violence (Joshi & Childress, 2017).

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan share a Turkic-Persian heritage and the Russian language as lingua franca of the USSR, but each ethnic group has a unique view of its history and culture. Gender relations in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries reflect Soviet influence, the transition to Islam, and the construction of new identities as independent nations. These differences make it difficult to generalize gender relations, but two patterns characterize gender relations in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan: women's autonomy is compromised, and the gender equality achieved during the Soviet regime has diminished. Kazakh women are relatively freer compared to their neighbors, possibly due to the nomadic social structure before the Soviet regime and the popularized Russification during the Soviet era (Joshi & Childress, 2017).

All these factors contribute to an increased violence against women in Kazakhstan. Cultural and governmental attitudes towards IPV have been lenient due to the complexity of the issue and cultural norms. Kazakh women are expected to "keep the family together," often at the expense of their safety and health. Family pressure allows intimate partner violence to occur if not seen by outsiders, framing it as a private family matter. Women are discouraged from sharing marital problems with their parents and friends to protect family honor, creating a system that prevents help-seeking through emotional and sometimes physical manipulation within the cultural context.

2.2 Impact on Lesbian Relationships

Lesbians and other queer individuals often experience isolation, feelings of disconnection, and inadequacy within mainstream society, particularly in heteronormative cultures that center on heterosexuality (Warner, 1993) and assume it as the default sexual orientation (Rich, 1980). Lesbians who do not engage in heterosexual relationships face a lack of acceptance, isolation, and cultural pressure to conform to societal and familial expectations.

Kazakh culture, like other Global South countries, is centered around family, childbearing, and the collectivist responsibility of expanding and supporting the community (Kabayeva et.al, 2018). As

previously mentioned, family issues are considered private matters, especially regarding domestic violence. Kazakh women are expected to endure such relationships, often at the expense of their health and well-being (Childress, 2017). Similarly, Kazakh lesbians, who often choose to remain "single" by avoiding heterosexual relationships, face pressure to marry before they become "too old." This pressure is particularly intense for lesbians perceived as stereotypically feminine by their families.

If a Kazakh lesbian enters a same-sex relationship, she will likely hide it from her family for safety reasons. Her romantic relationship must remain confidential to ensure the safety of both partners, as being outed can lead to losing employment, familial support, and even violent threats from family members (Sev'er & Yurdakul, 2011).

These limiting circumstances leave lesbians in a vulnerable position with little to no social support. Lesbians who are abused by their partners typically lack legal or social recognition of their relationships, creating a dangerous situation. Many victims of IPV fear being outed more than the systematic violence they endure in their relationships, resulting in a continuous cycle of abuse (Calton, 2016). Coupled with cultural acceptance of IPV and homophobia, lesbians are cornered if they ever become victims of a perpetrator.

Moreover, it is important to highlight that homophobic cultures often use the rhetoric that same-sex relationships are violent to promote homophobia. During discussions with local feminist and queer organizations, we argued that addressing such issues within the queer community is crucial. However, making these issues public risks them being weaponized by conservative groups promoting hate speech and homophobic tendencies.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Overview

This study is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with 14 lesbian/queer individuals from Kazakhstan who experienced intimate partner violence in their romantic relationships. I interviewed my participants to explore the unique power dynamics, personal narratives, and coping strategies these individuals use in the face of intimate partner violence. By analyzing their stories, I hope to gain a broader understanding of power dynamics and heteronormativity that are perceived in same-sex relationships of Kazakh lesbian women.

3.2 Recruitment

Due to the sensitivity of the research study, the recruitment process required that I take measures of precautions for my participants' and my own safety and vulnerability. Although, as of April 2024, Kazakhstan does not have any laws in place related to anti-LGBT propaganda that would criminalize my research on Kazakh lesbian women (Vlast KZ, 2024), I still consider the safety of my respondents as a top priority due to the existing homophobia prevalent in the region.

The interviewees were recruited and selected with the help of LGBTQ+ and feminist organizations in Kazakhstan as well as my personal networks within private LGBTQ+ groups on Telegram. While the recruitment process is challenging in Kazakhstan, especially within the LGBTQ+ community, I am happy to highlight that my professional and personal involvement with the community provided me with an opportunity to reach a wider range of contacts. I work as a counselor primarily with queer clients from Central Asia and I am active within the network of queer activists as a mentor and a teacher. I openly identify as queer and my stance on intimate partner violence is based on a genuine interest in raising awareness and developing a strategy to address violence within the community. My insider position allowed me to recruit participants for my research study with relative ease despite the sensitivity of the topic and the hostile social climate in the country. I am eternally grateful for the trust of my participants (Aitbayeva, 2024). However, it is important to note that my insider position might result in bias since I can relate to their experience of navigating a queer relationship in Kazakhstan and that may influence how I analyze the emerging relationship dynamics from the interviews.

3.3 Participants

The criteria for participation required that potential participants identify as lesbian/queer, be over the age of eighteen, and have experienced any type of intimate partner violence in a same-sex romantic relationship in the past. Due to the limited amount of time dedicated to fieldwork within this study and my interest in the region, I focused only on Kazakhstan. It is important to note that while Kazakhstan might share similar cultural values and traditions there are distinct differences between countries in Central Asia so the findings of this study might not be fully applicable in other contexts. For this study I included the selection criteria that participants must be from Kazakhstan; meaning that a participant must be (a) a Kazakhstan citizen or (b) hold permanent residency in Kazakhstan at the time of the interview.

Within two weeks of recruitment, around 25 individuals contacted me expressing an interest in participating in the project as interviewees. Out of the 25 individuals, 14 participants met the selection criteria, and they were all invited for an interview. Regarding the language of the interviews, I am fluent in both Kazakh and Russian, the two official languages of the country. This eased the process of recruiting participants in the fieldwork from all regions in Kazakhstan and deciding on the language of the interviews in accordance with their preference. All participants requested to speak Russian during the interview.

Out of the fourteen participants, twelve identified as cisgender lesbians, and two identified as nonbinary lesbians. While identity terminology is not the focus of this study, I note the importance of understanding how participants identify themselves in a research setting. Each participant was able to categorize themselves independently as "lesbian" and their definition varied from "woman who is attracted to women" to "non-men who are attracted to non-men." when answering the open-ended question "How do you identify yourself?" Four participants used the term "queer" and "lesbian" interchangeably and felt comfortable using both terms during the interview process, while others felt strongly about lesbian and preferred to be strictly called "lesbian" or "dyke." To keep the terminology consistent and inclusive, I will use the term "lesbian" and "queer" interchangeably when talking about the participants as a group, however, I specify the term "lesbian" for interviewees that felt strongly about their identity category.

All my participants completed high school education or above; all were employed and/or studying at a university level. My participants' age range was diverse, from 18 to 32 years old at the time of the interview. All, but one, of my interviewees identified themselves as ethnically Kazakh; the

latter one identified as ethnically Russian. While I offered to interview Kazakh, Russian, and English languages, all my participants preferred to speak Russian during the interview. Despite various academic efforts to de-center Central Asian studies from Russia and Russian language (Marat & Kassymbekova, 2023), many of the participants reported that it is challenging to navigate social life without knowing the Russian language in Kazakhstan. It is difficult to socialize and engage in queer circles, including community centers, safe spaces, and nightlife establishments without Russian. Although queer scholars and activists (Mamedov & Bagdasarova 2021; Suyarkulova 2019) are in the process of translating and adapting queer terminology into Kazakh and Kyrgyz languages, most of the online content and information related to LGBTQ+ issues continue to be published in Russian and English languages. Thus, it is important to note the need to have Russian in addition to all local languages for fieldwork and ensure inclusion of individuals who might not be fluent in the official language of the state.

3.4 Research Design

All participants signed a written consent form before the interview and received a debriefing before and after the interview to familiarize themselves with the goals of the study, their rights, and the procedure for the interview. During the interviews, I audio recorded with explicit permission from the interviewees, then later transcribed the texts and translated the relevant quotes of my findings into the English language. Interviews lasted from forty minutes to seventy-two minutes, with an average interview lasting around sixty-one minutes. Ten of the interviewees preferred to have a video/audio call on Telegram and the remaining two preferred to get interviewed using the password-protected Google Meet video calling platform. In agreement with the participants, they are going to be identified by the following pseudo names for research purposes: Madia, Alzhan, Dania, Alex, Marzhan, Nura, Leyla, Aishet, Madina, Alfiya, Zhanar, Sasha, Zina and Aya. I am providing their short bio in Appendix 1.

For the interview I prepared several questions, with some additional questions occurring for clarification purposes in the discussion. For the actual list of questions please visit Appendix 2 in Russian, and English. At the beginning of the interview, I asked basic demographic questions, followed by inquiries about the history of their relationships and requests to share their stories of intimate partner violence. Due to my introduction during the process of negotiating their participation, the participants were aware of my lesbian-ness. That knowledge could make them

feel comfortable and they could open up to narrate their stories of their experiences with intimate partner violence at the end of the interview, I thanked my participants for giving me an opportunity to hear their story and provided them with my contact information for future reference. Most participants expressed their gratitude and showed interest in reading the results of this study after the completion. Therefore, I collected their contact information to share my thesis project once I complete it.

Once all interviews were completed, I transcribed, analyzed, and then translated the representative parts to be quoted in the thesis in English. All the transcriptions were uploaded into MAXQDA, Version 24.1, the qualitative analysis software with a keyword search to identify emerging themes from the transcriptions in the original language.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Overview

Before analyzing the stories, I listened, transcribed, and read each story twice, following Plummer's (2001) approach of centering the narrative of the interviewee and the expertise of their life story. Plummer argues that social methodology must move towards a more humanistic approach, equalizing the participant vs researcher relationship dynamic. His approach is often referred to as a "Document of life" where he describes how to conduct interviews that center participants as the experts and narrators of their story, while the researcher takes the role of a willful listener (Plummer 2001, p. 144). Interviewees are speaking their truth, and it is the researcher's responsibility to collect and read these stories in their original form. By adopting this approach, I managed to establish trusting connections with my interviewees. I familiarized myself with the language, and popular jargon used in the community and could reflect on my positionality in relation to my participants. As a result, I think I conducted a rich analysis of fourteen nuanced life stories presented in this chapter.

Based on Plummer's (2001) approach to analyzing fieldwork narratives, I identified four recurring elements within the trajectory of the personal narratives that were common across all interviews: (a) The Initial Honeymoon Period —"You are so special to me", (b) Exhibition of Abusive Behavior —"She would never, she is a girl", (c) Invisible Heteronormativity —"Dress like a girl", and (d) Influence of Cultural Norms —"I am still Kazakh". Following Johnson's suggestion (2005), I respected the painful and sensitive relationship dynamics of my interviewees' life stories of intimate violence and offered a safe space where they were able to share how they felt towards the relationship and their understanding of the violence they survived in their relationships. This was particularly important given the fact that one of my participants, Sasha, is choosing to stay in their relationship with recurring situational couple violence and is working through these relationship issues with a therapist or mediator (see Appendix 1 for Participant Bio).

All my participants experienced some form of psychological violence, including but not limited to manipulation, lying, gaslighting, and verbal abuse in their queer romantic relationships. Eight participants shared that they experienced pressures of heteronormativity, xenophobia from their partner, and invalidation of their gender identity by their partner.

4.2 The Initial Honeymoon Period — "You are so special to me"

All fourteen interviewees reported that the initial dating stages of their relationship started on a positive note and did not indicate any signs of unhealthy behavior. The honeymoon phase refers to the early stages of dating consisting of excitement, passion, and intense romantic connection between partners due to the novelty of the relationship (Reese-Weber, 2015). My initial transcription analysis showed that the honeymoon phase range was between two weeks to a six-month long period (see Appendix 1 —Participant Bio for more details).

Dania, a 26-year-old cisgender lesbian, shared that her ex-partner was very attentive during the first month of their relationship. She insisted on paying for all date activities, would send a taxicab to pick up and drop off Dania from dates, and presented her with extravagant gifts regularly during the four-week period. While Dania was not fully comfortable with this dynamic and attempted to establish a more equal dynamic, her partner refused for Dania to even pull out her wallet:

> She would not even let me bring my wallet *nervously laugh*. While I was not fully comfortable with this and tried to pay for dates or gifts, she assured me that this is how she shows love, and she does not accept it when her partners contribute financially to the relationship. I got expensive flower bouquets every week and she took me to fancy restaurants and rooftop bars. Getting into those places was almost impossible without reservations or connections. When I would tell her that these places were too fancy for me and did not have clothes for it, she would take me out shopping right before our date. I felt like a princess *laughs*. (Dania)

While the honeymoon phase is common in romantic relationships, it tends to slow down within three months and turn into a more equal dynamic over time (Reese-Weber, 2015). The initial excitement wears off, and partners are less likely to spend all their time together. However, a honeymoon phase can be confused with what Kozlowski (2020) calls love bombing. The metaphor implies a relationship of excessive and violently imposed romantic behavior that results in extravagant gifts, gestures, and dates to build trust quickly and create a codependent dynamic. Love bombing can be unintentional; many perpetrators of partner violence use this as a tactic of manipulation to make their victims rely on them both financially and emotionally. Similarly to Dania, Leyla, a 27-year-old cisgender lesbian, shared that the first six months of her relationship were nothing but blissful:

> I am a very careful person. I do not trust easily and certainly, I do not believe loud romantic words, especially when you just met the person. Please believe me when I say this —I am cynical, and I have trust issues. Now even more, I guess *laughs*. My ex-girlfriend and I met on a plane during my work trip to Almaty. She was sitting on the same row as me and we had a wonderful chat for two hours straight. She was from Almaty and I lived in a different city. We spent an amazing few nights while I was working on a project. Of course, I had to leave after it was finished. She spent every free minute with me and when I was supposed to fly back to my hometown she surprised me and said that she was flying with me. I got very anxious but she assured me that she wouldn't get in my way and we spent a month in my hometown together. During that month she rented out a luxurious apartment and invited me to stay with her. I reluctantly agreed and we had a wonderful time. She worked remotely, cooked me my favorite dishes and listened to me without ever interrupting me. I felt understood for the first time and I slowly started trusting her. (Leyla)

Both Dania and Leyla shared that they felt "special," and their respective ex-girlfriends expressed a genuine interest in them through romantic gestures and courting. These courting behaviors are quite common in Kazakhstan where being a romantic person and showing affection through gifts is considered to be the best way to show commitment to a person (Absattar, 2024). Since Kazakhstan is a patriarchal country with traditional family structures, men are often judged for their ability to court through financial investments in the form of gifts and dates to show serious intentions towards a woman they are pursuing. Women prefer this type of courting to weed out any candidates who do not have the financial means to support their wants and needs since most Kazakh women plan to stay at home with kids for at least a year (Rezvushkina & Karipbayev, 2021). This gendered division of labor in the family means that they will be financially dependent on their spouse, so they wish to create a family with a financially responsible partner. While these standards are in place, financial dependency creates an unequal dynamic where both partners are vulnerable and under pressure —for different reasons.

Based on the dating and courting style in Kazakhstan, I am suggesting that heteronormative ideas of dating are affecting lesbian couples as well. Dania shared that her ex-girlfriend preferred to

court her similarly to heterosexual Kazakh men and would refuse any kind of reciprocation unless it was in the form of cooking food or offering her company:

> I felt deeply uncomfortable that she paid for everything, even for taxi rides. When I asked her — "how can I take care of you?" —she would respond by saying "Dress pretty and show up on our dates. That is enough for me." It was really weird but I wanted to make her happy, so I just did what she asked of me. She really enjoyed seeing me in full glam and a dress *laughs* (Dania)

While the honeymoon period is common in most romantic relationships and it can be manifested in various forms of romantic gestures and behavior, there is a correlation between the grandeur honeymoon phase and gendered dating norms. As stated previously, Kazakh men are likely to show excessive attention, even if it is unwanted, and this behavior seems to manifest itself in a similar manner in lesbian relationships. Both Dania and Leyla attempted to equalize their relationship dynamic and did not expect their partners to be the sole financial contributor, however, they were met with rejection of such advances and forced into an unequal dynamic (Absattar, 2024).

4.3 Exhibition of Abusive Behavior — "She would never, she is a girl"

All fourteen participants reported experiencing psychological and verbal violence like lying, gaslighting or verbal abuse. Out of fourteen participants, more than half reported physical abuse as well that resulted in minor injuries that did not require hospitalization. These findings are consistent with other studies (Donovan & Barnes, 2020; Hardesty et.al, 2011) that report psychological violence being the most prevalent form of violence in both heterosexual and same-sex couples. It is likely that emotional violence is prevalent due to its invisible damage – physical and sexual violence leaves physical evidence that cannot be ignored or overlooked. Moreover, physical injuries are visible to other people who might push the victim of abuse to seek help and recognize that this situation is causing them harm, while psychological harm is often invisible to people.

Dania, a 26-year-old cisgender lesbian said that after the initial honeymoon phase, her partner's behavior drastically changed. She noticed that her partner started to create elaborate lies on serious

topics, which resulted in confrontation and recurring conflict. For example, one of the lies was the alleged brain cancer diagnosis that Dania's partner got:

> We've been dating for six months at that point. Everything was going well. Then she came home one day and she said that she was diagnosed with cancer. I was, of course, panicked. I asked to go see doctor with her; I was about to take time off work so I could take care of her. But she disagreed with me. She said that she got her own doctor and she will be okay. Then the next week she told me that her labs came back worse. I asked to see them so I could show it to my mother (Dania's mother is a doctor). She refused and said that she only trusts her doctor. I asked to go with her to her clinic to meet her doctor and she made bunch of excuses and I did not go. Eventually I decided to google and I could not find this doctor or the clinic she was talking about.
>
> I got very suspicious when a couple of weeks later she said that she got the surgery and tumor is out; that she is okay and will be home soon. My friends told me that cancer does not work that way. This is when I started getting paranoid about her lying. When I eventually confronted her about the surgery, she told me that they did the surgery through her nose. I googled and it was true, they did do brain surgeries through noses. So I believed her but then the lies continued — *(*Dania)

Unfortunately, Dania's relationship continued to be hostile till the very end. Her ex-partner threatened her with physical violence during their last meeting, implying that "someone will come after her." Dania's friends intervened at this moment, and she is no longer in contact with their ex-partner.

Perpetrators of violence use various types of tactics and manipulation to establish control over their victims (Brown & Herman, 2015). In Marzhan's case, her ex-partner used homophobia as a tool of power to establish power over her. It is not uncommon when marginalized individuals will weaponize someone else's oppression to keep them under control —Marzhan's story shows us an example of how a queer person used fear of homophobia to her advantage:

> Yeah, my ex was quite homophobic as a person, even knowing that she was a full on dyke who hated men. She kept our relationship a secret from everyone else and I was not allowed to tell any of my friends, even my gay friends. I was not out to my family and workplace, of course. Whenever we got into conflict, she would scream "I am gonna tell everyone that you are a fucking dyke" to my face and I would be terrified. At that time I worked at a school and I was sure that I would be fired if anyone ever found out.
>
> [...]
>
> Eventually, she did what she promised after a big fight. She reported me to school anonymously and told all of our acquaintances that I was lesbian. My circles knew I was gay, so it was not that big of a deal. But I did lose my job. They made me write a resignation letter for "personal reasons." **—** (Marzhan)

Marzhan's ex-partner likely was experiencing internalized homophobia that resulted in self-rejection and hostile attitude toward others that did not experience it. Internalized homophobia refers to ""the gay person's direction of negative social attitudes toward the self" (Meyer & Dean, 1998, p. 161) and it can be manifested in form of complete rejection or denial of their sexual orientation. I argue that individuals with internalized homophobia might be hostile towards other queer individuals that are self-accepting. In Marzhan's case, her ex-partner's internalized homophobia resulted in further stigmatization and fear that led to controlling behavior.

Similar to Marzhan, Alfiya, a 26-year-old cisgender lesbian, lost her job due to fear of being outed by her ex-partner. Unlike Marzhan, Alfiya lives in a small city with a population of less than 200,000 people. So, if she were outed, she feared she would not have been able to find another place of employment. Due to this fear, she decided to take matters into her own hands and switched her jobs after the first threat she received from her partner:

> She really threatened to out me to all of my friends, family and my employment. She knew that I was supporting myself financially and I depended on this income. I could not believe my ears when she threatened me. I knew that she was aggressive and crazy enough to out me, so I decided to start working remotely before I lost my job. My current job is from overseas, so I am safe to work for them but she did out me to everyone that knows me

> through social media. Funny enough, she also outed herself because she shared pictures of us kissing and doing all of those couple things but I guess she did not care. I think there was even a video of her grinding on me. I still can't believe she shared those things with everyone. I had to cut contact with everyone for a while after she did that crap. —*(*Alfiya)

Financial violence is common in unhealthy relationships, especially when the perpetrator is attempting to create a codependent dynamic (Johnson, et.al, 2022). Alfiya's ex-partner used threats of outing to have control but also to ensure that Alfiya loses income, leaving her completely vulnerable and dependent on her partner without family and friends' support. Often enough, abusers will either control all the finances in the relationship or cause damage to your finances/income purposefully. Similarly to Alfiya, but on a much bigger scale, Madina, a 21-year-old cisgender lesbian, is currently dealing with debt. Her ex-partner asked to borrow money repeatedly during their short-lived relationship, resulting in over $3000 debt in Madina's name:

> Yeah, I feel very very stupid. We dated for a month, and we talked for several months before that, so I thought I knew her. She was very generous during the talking stage and I knew she had a good job. Then she started asking for money "till salary deposit hits." She asked for such small sums that I did not mind. Then those sums became bigger and bigger in a matter of days. I borrowed money from friends so I could give it to her. After our one-month anniversary, she ghosted me and I have not seen her since. I have tried to contact her but I am blocked everywhere. And now I am still paying off the money I borrowed from friends. This is so embarrassing and I feel stupid. There is no evidence of her stealing because I willingly transferred the money. Police will not get involved. **—(**Madina)

The most extreme case of violence was shared by Sasha, a 25-year-old cisgender lesbian. She is the only non-Kazakh respondent; she is Russian. Moreover, Sasha is the only participant who is still in a relationship with an abusive partner. Her partner struggles with mental health, which may result in emotional outbursts intertwined with physical violence:

> I remember this time she got very upset with me and she locked me out on the balcony. It was early fall and yet it was already freezing. I kept knocking on the door, i was dressed in shorts and a t-shirt. She just kept staring at me and was not reacting to my pleas to open the door. I was about to break the balcony door when she finally opened the door and let me in. I immediately got under the covers to get myself warm and she started walking towards me. She got on top of me and then showed me my phone, screaming at me and asking "who is she?!." I was already so terrified so I was crying and I could not see the screen properly. I told her that I need a minute and she hit me with my phone, right at my cheekbone. It hurt so much and I started crying even more. The more I cried, the angrier she got so I did my best to calm myself down. Eventually, she got off of me and she started crying. I had to comfort her because I knew she was not feeling well. But I was terrified, very very terrified. **—** **(**Sasha)

Sasha shared that these episodes happened at least three times and she was experiencing anxiety and fear during each episode. After the episode ends, Sasha's partner asks for forgiveness and behaves as if everything is back to normal. Since her partner struggles with mental health and sees a psychiatrist regularly, Sasha feels like she cannot leave and she can make her relationship work with enough support from mental health professionals. Both perpetrators and victims of violence often struggle with mental health issues; it is one of the risk factors when it comes to family violence. Some studies (Swanson, et.al. 2002) report that there is a correlational link between mental health issues and the risk of violent behavior. Based on Sasha's interview, I was able to see that her partner's well-being is her priority, even if it harms her on an occasional basis. Sasha believes that struggling with mental health indeed can create a hostile situation for everyone involved, including her partner who is inflicting the pain onto her. During the interview I offered Sasha information on support services in her city; she assured me that she will seek help if things escalate or turn for the worse in her romantic relationship.

4.4 Invisible Heteronormativity — "Dress like a girl"

During the analysis stage of the study, I noticed that features associated with heteronormativity were in every story shared with me. Heteronormativity in the sense of "a set of norms, discourses and practices that construct heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of

sexuality" (Robinson, 2016, p.1). Often, heteronormativity in romantic relationships is expected to result in unions with a masculine man and a feminine woman present. These societal views of heteronormativity can be found in my participants' stories of same-sex relationships. Normative notions of masculinity and femininity go hand in hand with heteronormativity (Robinson, 2016) but can be a shaping factor in my participants' life stories. Madia, a 29-year-old cisgender butch lesbian shares her story of how her feminine partner weaponized her femininity to her advantage during an episode of physical violence towards Madia:

> She was very beautiful. Not like other girls, even more beautiful. She turned heads every time we went out together and I absolutely loved it. However, I wish I knew that this beauty was going to cost me my mental health. She was passionate and loud from the very beginning. I just assumed that it is her personality. I have never seen her angry or in any other way —but once we started dating seriously she became very controlling and aggressive. I was not allowed to go out with other women, if she did not approve them beforehand.
>
> At one of our hangouts with friends she got drunk and punched me because someone else winked at me. I was bleeding and crying and my friends called the police. When police came over she chatted them up with a nice conversation and they left without doing anything. After we got home that night she screamed at me for getting police involved — she said "no one will believe you, look at yourself and look at me." —(Madia)

Weaponizing femininity as a tool of control and power in a romantic relationship is not a rare occurrence. According to Little (2020), our perception of femininity and masculinity affects how we perceive victims and perpetrators of violence. In Madia's case, her ex-partner took advantage of how police officers view feminine presenting of woman as "weak," making it nearly impossible for Madia to receive any assistance for her physical safety. In the eyes of the police officers, she was more likely to be the perpetrator of violence due to her masculine gender presentation. Madia's case of IPV challenges the notion that masculine presenting partners are more likely to be perpetrators of violence due to the preconceived notions that connect masculinity and violent behavior. Moreover, Madia's gender representation might disadvantage her if social services/police get involved due to the gendered norms that equate femininity with weakness and

submission. A feminine presenting partner can use these gendered norms to their advantage, especially when they try to avoid accountability for violent behavior.

Gender presentation involves both masculine and feminine presenting lesbians, especially those who consider themselves butch or femme (Carter & Noble, 1996). Both butch and femme lesbians prefer a relationship dynamic that takes their needs and wants into account, which includes but is not limited to sexual positioning, power structure, household division of labor and financial responsibility. Alzhan, a 25-year-old femme lesbian, shared a story of how her butch partner was initially very romantic and attentive, but then the relationship dynamic became too controlling. While Alzhan enjoyed partners took charge and led the relationship, she was not fully comfortable with forced control and abuse of her boundaries:

> My partner was always sweet and considerate, even though she was dominant. I enjoyed dating such women, so I was happy with her. Eventually, her little concerns turned into angry orders. I was not allowed to wear pants, only skirts and dresses which was absurd! I loved makeup, I loved wearing heels and skirts but she made me hate it eventually.
>
> We would fight constantly about this —then she would cry and I would fall for this manipulation. I loved her so I hated seeing her cry. Now of course I understand that she was being manipulative and controlling like men *nervous laugh*. —(Alzhan)

Alzhan's case is a good example of how gendered norms affect lesbian relationship dynamics, especially in Kazakhstan. Kazakh men are often attentive and controlling at the same time; this behavior is considered to be a form of affection and protection (Kabakova, M., & Maulsharif, 2013). This behavior can be observed in Alzhan's relationship in a clear manner.

"Like a man" —this phrase is commonly used by lesbians who describe toxic masculinity. Toxic masculinity refers to a set of norms, beliefs, and behaviors that are considered harmful toward men and women as individuals (Harrington, 2021). Toxic masculinity can be manifested in the form of control, jealousy, and insecurity —all of these traits align with the behavior exhibited by perpetrators of violence (Parkhill & Ray, 2021). Similarly to Alzhan, Aishet, a 19-year-old cisgender lesbian, shared that her partner treated her "like a man" during the one-year-long relationship:

> She would get upset and throw tantrums if I did not behave the way she wanted me to. And if I showed similar emotions, she would not understand and would get upset. So I stopped showing my emotions just to avoid conflict. I do not think she allowed me to cry even once during that year. I felt horrible.
>
> I was thinking of growing my hair out since I got the university graduation in a couple of years and she had a whole mental breakdown about it. In her mind, a masculine lesbian cannot have long hair. I told her that she was being unreasonable but she persisted. The conflict was about to happen again, so I cut my hair to her liking. I love short hair but I wished to have long hair for my graduation. She did not seem to care about my wishes and it made me feel unseen. —*(*Aishet)

While Madia, Alzhan and Aishet were forced to find themselves in a position that signifies their gender representation, Zina, a 25-year-old masculine lesbian, shared her story of how her partner attempted to make her feminine against her wishes. She was forced to change her clothing style, making her grow her hair out and try wearing makeup daily. When Zina expressed her discomfort, her ex-partner became verbally and physically abusive:

> "You are such a pretty girl. Why would you not try being feminine? You would look so much better with long hair! I wanna date a real woman, not a woman that is like a man" — that is what she would scream at me when I resisted the changes she wanted me to make. I was deeply uncomfortable and felt out of place. She even managed to make me wear heels for one day *nervous laugh*. By the way, heels are terrible and I almost broke my ankle wearing those torture devices. Can I count this as physical abuse?
>
> I hated being in this position where my partner did not accept me the way I was. I am not sure why she even approached me if she did not like masculine girls. I am who I am and I am comfortable. I am not "like a man," I am a girl who likes being masculine. That's it. Our relationship ended quickly of course. — *(*Zina)

Zina's story highlights the importance of respect and autonomy in romantic relationships, regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation. It is clear that while gender representation is

important and even celebratory toward queer individuals, it can be weaponized and used as a way to assert power and control over a partner (Oringher & Samuelson, 2011). Contrary to the assumption that masculine-presenting individuals would be more likely to intimidate and control their partner, the findings of this interview indicate that both feminine and masculine-presenting individuals are likely to reach for an unequal power dynamic through the re-establishment of heteronormative gender roles that dictate male domination and female submission. Moreover, feminine presenting individuals are more likely to be perceived as the victims of violence rather than perpetrators, especially in the eyes of outsiders. If police or social services get involved, masculine presenting partner is more likely to end up perceived as the abuser, which, in turn, shows how harmful preconceived gender norms are in cases with intimate partner violence. These findings are consistent with Hall & their colleagues' (2020) observation that indicated Tajik passive men are more likely to receive help and recognition of their relationship by police and social services (both medical and LGBTQ+) compared to active Tajik men that are often perceived as "masculine" and "heterosexual".

4.5 Influence of Cultural Norms — "I am still Kazakh"

Three participants argued that Kazakh cultural norms affected their relationship dynamics. Alex, a 25-year-old nonbinary lesbian, narrated the story of their first romantic relationship that started when they were a high school student. Alex's partner was almost a decade older than them, and she was fully aware that Alex was a high school student. According to Johnson & their colleagues (2015), there is a slight correlation between age-gap relationships and violent behavior. The study results indicate that age-gap couples are more likely to have an unequal power dynamic, especially when the age gap is more than 10 years in total. Based on Alex's story, I argue that age-gap relationships can be unhealthy, especially in couples that involve a minor and a legal adult. Moreover, relationships with minors are illegal in Kazakhstan, however lack of social and legal recognition of same-sex relationships leads to invisibility of such relationships, resulting in child abuse that is overlooked. Furthermore, Kazakh culture normalizes age-gap relationships in serious unions: an older partner (usually a man) is looking to mold his partner into an ideal wife and kelin while she is still young and obedient (Nydegger et.al, 2017). Alex's ex-partner considered their relationship unequal and yet this was a dynamic that she was comfortable with due to their idea of molding Alex into a perfect kelin:

> She wanted me to be a "kelin" *laughs*. Every time we went out with her friends, she would tell me what to wear, what to say and how to pour tea, just like a real Kazakh wife. I was young and I thought this was normal. Her friends were also very much older than me so I did not argue and I listened to what she said. She would also buy me whatever I wanted, so it did not matter to me that she wanted me to be a kelin. She paid for everything and I was happy because I was a high schooler with no money. She drove me to and from school, got me restaurant food and bought me clothes every time I asked for it. It was not particularly bad.
>
> It got much worse when she started fantasizing about our future; she would often tell me that after my graduation she would take me away to Europe; that we would get married and I would get pregnant and we would be wonderful mothers to three children. And on top of all that, she wanted me to be a housewife. That is when I knew that she was fully delusional. **—** (Alex)

"Kelin" means "daughter-in-law" in Kazakh language. Kelins have a special role in the family structure; she takes care of the household, kids, her husband, and her parents-in-law (Kudaibergenova, 2018). Alex's partner was a lesbian woman; however, she was still dreaming of a heteronormative Kazakh marriage involving a housewife and multiple children. This further elaborates on my argument that identifying as a queer person does not necessarily mean that you reject your cultural norms of what it means to have a family. Some queer individuals are fond of traditionalism, while others prefer to follow a more modern approach to relationship unions. Kazakh gendered norms are the result of traditionalism and religious beliefs (Kudaibergenova, 2018), affecting relationship dynamics regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Moreover, Kazakh queers now strive to uphold traditional values, including gendered norms and dating culture of chasing and impressing with grand gestures, to reclaim their ethnic identity. One of the most popular homophobic rhetoric revolves around queerness being brought from the West, mainly he United States and European countries; Kazakhs were never queer, they are being turned queer by Western propaganda (Morris, 2023). This idea resulted in Central Asian queers losing connection to their ethnic identity; it is being taken from them forcefully. Currently, Kazakh queer individuals are fighting back and reclaiming their ethnic identity by building bridges with traditional relationship norms and queer relationships.

Similar to Alex, Nura, an 18-year-old queer, shared the story of their first romantic relationship. Unlike Alex, Nura's partner was age-appropriate, however, there were other issues arising in the relationship:

> She was fifteen and I was fourteen. We met at school while playing volleyball and I immediately liked her. I was not sure what it was but I was drawn to her and she was drawn to me. We became friends, then we dated. It was my very first relationship, so she led the whole relationship. She told me what to do, how we spend time and we sometimes would end up fighting because I did not want to speak Russian only. Whenever I did that, she would get extremely angry and insult the Kazakh language, saying that it sounded like a broken record or a helicopter. It was also very ironic considering that we both studied in Kazakh.
>
> I remember one time she was telling me how all Kazakhs are so unintelligent and I am not like other Kazakh people. But she would ask me to stop speaking Kazakh and pick out a more "Russian" name. I was named after my grandmother. I could not do it. I love being Kazakh and speaking Kazakh so after that I argued with her and our relationship ended. (Nura**)**

Nura, similarly to many Kazakhs, is proud of their Kazakh identity. While being a queer person does certainly create distance and isolation from ethnic or religious backgrounds, queer individuals might be more likely to approach their ethnic identities through the intersectionality lens. Nura loved being Kazakh; it was an important part of their self-perception. According to Sharipova (2020), the national campaign of relating pride with ethnic identity helps people to feel secure in their place in the community by creating a sense of belonging. Based on this premise, if people feel that they have space in the community, then they are more likely to be protective of their national and cultural traditions and values, including those that might not be considered "modern." This type of "protectiveness" has the potential to turn into an aggressive stance of gatekeeping a nationality or ethnic community from outsiders (Muller, 2008). It becomes a clear example of "Us vs Them" rhetoric that leads to ethnic nationalism, xenophobia, and discrimination. Queer people might be considered outsiders by homophobic ethnic groups; however, they are not an exception from the same nationalist idea. Aya, a 23-year-old cisgender queer woman, shared her story on

how her ex-partner accused her of abandoning her lesbian identity and following Western propaganda of being "queer":

> It was such a shock for me. She was always very accepting of me, even when I dressed like a man or like a woman or something in between. We have gone through many arguments but I never thought that this would be an issue. She is a very proud Kazakh; she refuses to speak Russian, she follows traditions and she wants a big family with kids. All of that I agree with and I hoped to build that family with her one day. Lately, I felt that the term "lesbian" did not fit me anymore. It felt a bit suffocating so I decided to call myself queer. I cheerfully told my girlfriend at that time and she got silent. She looked very disappointed and then she screamed in my face: "How dare you to call yourself queer? What the actual fuck is queer? Do you wish to fuck men?! That is some gayrope (slur for Gay Europe) shit. Go there if you wanna be queer so badly." I never thought she would react that way and I started crying. Shortly after this fight we broke up. (Aya)

There is a biased notion that queer people are liberal, especially when they are living freely out of the closet (Cimino, 2012). However, being a queer individual does not necessarily mean that you suddenly become a liberal or left-leaning activist; they are part of the system, though to different extend and in different ways. Based on Aya's and Nura's stories, we can understand how queer individuals might feel a sense of belonging in their community by upholding traditional values and beliefs, especially towards social issues that are directly related to their queer identity. Traditional values involve gendered dating norms that are not necessarily healthy or egalitarian in the context of Kazakh culture, potentially resulting in unequal power dynamic and unhealthy behavior. However, it is clear that identification with your ethnic background pushed queer people into more traditional relationship dynamics which can be potentially counterproductive in queer relationships. While unequal power dynamics do not always result in unhealthy behavior, the likelihood of IPV increases in correlation with financial dependence and emotional dependence.

The limitations of this study include a small sample size built off of convenience sampling and "word-of-mouth" techniques which are not always reliable or consistent. Moreover, the study includes participants mainly from major cities and of the younger age-group. There is a possibility that older generations of Kazakh lesbians and those and those who live in rural as might perceive

heteronormativity and Kazakh gendered norms y, especially in the context of intimate partner violence. Future research may potentially result in interesting findings if they diversify their participants' pool and engage in a long-term study, possibly in a focus-group session.

Conclusion

In this study, I investigated and analyzed how Kazakh lesbians perceive existing power dynamics and heteronormativity within their romantic relationships within the context of intimate partner violence. I interviewed fourteen queer individuals by adopting Pummel's (2001) approach of centering participants' expertise in their life stories and positioning myself as a willful listener. Based on my findings, I presented two main arguments. First, lesbians are able to access power and create unequal relationship dynamics within a particular context, supporting Foucault's (1990) conceptualization of power dispersed unevenly in the discursive field. Secondly, lesbians are affected by heteronormativity of masculine and feminine roles within their romantic relationships, especially in the context of an abusive relationship. In my analysis, I approached the themes of invisible heteronormativity and the impact of cultural gender roles stemming from patriarchal Kazakh culture, which allowed me to speculate on the role of culture on how queer individuals perceive themselves and others through the lens of "being Kazakh."

Traditional understandings of IPV have largely been framed through a heteronormative and patriarchal lens, often using a Marxist conception of power that sees men as dominant aggressors and women as subordinate victims (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). While this perspective illuminates some aspects of IPV, it fails to capture the complexities and nuances of power dynamics in same-sex relationships, especially between lesbian couples. Adopting Foucault's framework, I could explore and understand that power is not only a top-down structure but is exercised in many forms and through various contexts.

Power dynamics in lesbian relationships are affected by unique factors such as internalized homophobia, social discrimination, and the invisibility of these relationships in mainstream discourse (Donovan & Barnes, 2020). The social invisibility and marginalization of lesbian relationships contributed to the lack of recognition and understanding of IPV in this context. Lesbians often face discrimination and cultural pressure to conform to heteronormative expectations, leading to isolation and lack of acceptance. These pressures can exacerbate power

imbalances, making it difficult for victims to seek help or even admit that their experiences are hurtful.

Studies have shown that IPV is a widespread problem in lesbian relationships, with rates comparable to heterosexual relationships (Messinger, 2011; Rolle, 2018, Walters, 2013). Social stereotypes and misconceptions, such as the notion that lesbian relationships are essentially egalitarian and non-violent, have prevented awareness and treatment of this issue. Lesbian victims of IPV often face additional barriers, such as fear of homophobia and discrimination from mainstream organizations and services. This fear can lead to reluctance to seek help and further perpetuate the cycle of abuse (Karydi, 2018).

Factors such as internalized homophobia and social pressures significantly affect the power dynamics in lesbian relationships. Internalized homophobia can negatively affect an individual's self-confidence and mental health, leading to an unequal power dynamic where the other partner can feel more dependent and less valuable. Social pressures, especially in heteronormative cultures like Kazakhstan, emphasize family and having children, further ostracizing lesbian people and relationships. This cultural context can lead to lesbians being pressured to conform to heterosexual norms, often at the expense of their safety and well-being.

The lack of legal and social recognition of same-sex relationships further aggravates the problem. Without legal protection and social acceptance, victims of IPV have limited access to resources and support systems (Little and Terrance, 2010). Fear of coming out can be a significant barrier, as it can lead to loss of employment, social support or threat of violence from family members. This precarious situation leaves many lesbians vulnerable and trapped in abusive relationships.

Addressing IPV in lesbian relationships requires a multifaceted approach that includes education, support services, and law enforcement. It is important to challenge social stereotypes and misconceptions about lesbian relationships and provide a safe space for victims to seek help without fear of discrimination or retaliation (Herek, 2004). Raising awareness and understanding the unique power dynamics of lesbian relationships are essential to developing effective interventions and support systems.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the broader cultural and societal context in which these relationships exist. In Kazakhstan, where family and community relations are central,

addressing IPV must address cultural norms and values while promoting the safety and well-being of all. My findings indicate that Kazakh lesbians date according to Kazakh cultural norms, even in their queer relationships that are not seen as "traditional." Moreover, Kazakh lesbians view IPV through the prism of a local cultural context that might not consider emotional violence as actual violence due to the cultural understanding of IPV as a definite physical action.se findings further suggest that Kazakhstan is still in the first stage of addressing IPV issue —raising awareness and identifying what is considered an "violent behavior". Collaboration with local feminist and queer organizations is critical to creating culturally sensitive interventions that can effectively support victims and challenge harmful social norms that only recognize major physical harm rather than systematic emotional violence and pressure.

Finally, this study offered an opportunity to look into the complexity of power dynamics in romantic relationships and the important implications of this dynamic for IPV, especially in lesbian relationships. By embracing a nuanced understanding of power and its various forms, I propose that we can better respond to the unique challenges faced by lesbian victims of IPV. Responses to IPV must be inclusive, culturally sensitive, and focused on providing comprehensive support to all victims and ensuring their safety, dignity, and well-being.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Participants' Bio

Pseudonym	Age / Gender / Sexual orientation	Short bio
Madia	29/ Cisgender woman / Lesbian	Madia is a 29-year-old cisgender lesbian who identifies as "butch". She shared the story of her one year long relationship that was on and off. Her partner exhibited controlling traits, jealousy and used their femininity as a weapon to avoid accountability in front of the police. Madia eventually had to leave the city to escape her ex-partner. Currently, she is doing well, and she is safe in her hometown.
Alzhan	25/ Cisgender woman / Lesbian	Alzhan is a 25-year-old cisgender lesbian, and she identifies herself as "femme" and exclusively dates masculine presenting lesbians. During the interview, she described her 2-year-old relationship with her emotionally abusive butch ex-partner. At the beginning of the relationship, her partner was attentive and romantic; they insisted on financially supporting porting Alzhan. After several month, her partner requested her to dress/act per how "Kazakh women" dress. Her

		ex-partner showed controlling behavior towards clothing, makeup, her friends, and then eventually her career. Alzhan managed to end the relationship when she refused to have children. She is safe now and has not been in contact with her ex-partner.
Dania	26/ Cisgender woman / Lesbian	Dania is a 26-year-old cisgender lesbian; she works and studies in one of the larger cities in Kazakhstan. During the interview she shared about her 10-month long relationship where her ex-partner was both emotionally and physically abusive. The initial stage of the relationship was grandeur and romantic, however, this quickly turned into an issue of control, jealousy and lying about cancer diagnosis, stalkering, financial issues and threats.
Alex	25 / Nonbinary / Lesbian	Alex is a 25-year-old nonbinary lesbian, who is currently studying at a graduate level. During the interview, they described being groomed and stalked by an older partner, their first romantic relationship. The age gap was about 9 years. Their ex-partner was financially and emotionally controlling while they were in high school. The relationship lasted for

		about 8 months, then Alex was stalked online for three years post-breakup. During meetings with their partner's friends, Alex was expected to be silent, serve tea, clean and nod to not "shame" her partner. This was consistent behavior in most public settings.
Marzhan	32/ Cisgender woman / Lesbian	Marzhan is a 32-year-old cisgender lesbian; she works as a professor at a large university. She has been in multiple unhealthy relationships; one of them resulted in her being outed and fired from her previous workplace. Her ex-partner was controlling and used emotional manipulation and homophobia to keep Marzhan in this unhealthy dynamic for 2.5 years. Marzhan's partner used her femininity as a weapon to control her. Currently, Marzhan is doing well; she managed to leave her partner with support from her friends and a queer organization.
Nura	18 / Nonbinary / Queer	Nura is an 18-year-old nonbinary queer person; they are currently a first-year student. During the interview, they described their short-term relationship with an older partner that happened during high school. Their older partner was controlling and showed extreme jealousy. Nura was

		not allowed to have friends of the same gender. Their ex-partner was also xenophobic towards Kazakhs and often mentioned that Nura was "not like other Kazakhs," while degrading Kazakh language and culture. This relationship ended after Nura stood up for themselves for the first time. They are doing well now and feel safe.
Leyla	27/ Cisgender woman / Lesbian	Leyla is a 27-year-old cisgender lesbian; she owns her business and is actively involved in the queer community. She shared her story of her relationship that started with a blissful honeymoon phase which later turned into a cycle of emotional violence and gaslighting for 6 months.
Aishet	19/ Cisgender woman / Lesbian	Aishet is a 19-year-old cisgender lesbian; she is currently a second-year university student. During the interview, Aishet described her 1-year-long relationship with an emotionally abusive partner. Her ex-partner was bisexual and previously only dated men, so she expected Aishet to act "like a man" and have no emotions or space for herself in the relationship. Aishet struggled with this relationship dynamic, even considering that they enjoyed being in a more masculine role. The breakup happened when

		Aishet moved away for university. She is safe and well now.
Madina	21/ Cisgender woman / Lesbian	Madina is a 21-year-old Kazakh lesbian that had the shortest relationship among participants. Her relationship with her ex-partner lasted one month, however, she is still experiencing lasting emotional and financial consequences two years later. Her ex-partner financially abused her, then initiated a breakup by disappearing and leaving her in debt.
Alfiya	26/ Cisgender woman / Lesbian	Alfiya is a 26-year-old cisgender lesbian from a small city in Kazakhstan. She works as a teacher and is closeted for safety reasons. During the interview, she described her 7-month-long relationship in which she experienced emotional violence in the forms of lying, gaslighting, and then emotional cheating. When Alfiya tried to confront her partner, they threatened to out her. Alfiya had to switch jobs and cut contact with this person; she got outed to her friends and some family members. Her safety was compromised but she is well now.
Zhanar	18/ Cisgender woman / Lesbian	Zhanar is an 18-year-old cisgender lesbian; she is currently a first-year university student. She described her

		relationship as “rocky but fun,” but after 6 months of the honeymoon phase, the relationship shifted into extreme control and jealousy. Her ex-partner prohibited Zhanar from having friends of any gender and attempted to isolate her from her family. The relationship ended when Zhanar’s family intervened, and she was taken back home by her parents.
Sasha	25/ Cisgender woman / Lesbian	Sasha is a 25-year-old cisgender lesbian; she is Russian ethnically. During the interview she described her ongoing relationship with her partner that has been abusive from the beginning. Her partner struggles with mental health and is emotionally and physically abusive towards her during her mental health worsening episodes. One episode involved police intervention.
Zina	25/ Cisgender woman / Lesbian	Zina is a 25-year-old cisgender masculine-presenting lesbian who prefers to date only feminine presenting lesbians. She shared her story of her ex-partner who attempted to force her to be more feminine by changing her clothing style, making her grow her hair out and try wearing makeup daily. When Zina expressed her discomfort, her ex-partner got

		enraged and had an episode of throwing Zina's belongings and smashing them. Zina ended this relationship after this episode and is currently working with a therapist.
Aya	23/ Cisgender woman / Queer	Aya is a 23-year-old cisgender queer woman; she works at a large firm in a large city in Kazakhstan. She had a short-term relationship with an emotionally abusive and controlling partner. Her relationship ended when Aya switched labels from lesbian to queer; her ex-partner reacted negatively to this change and decided to end the relationship before Aya "goes to fuck men." Currently, Aya is doing well and is safe.

Appendix 2

Consent form —English version

Informed Consent Form

Study Title: ***She Would Never, She is a Girl: Exploring Intimate Partner Violence in Lesbian Relationships in Kazakhstan***

Principal investigator: Ainagul Aitbyeva

PLEASE READ THIS DOCUMENT CAREFULLY. YOUR SIGNATURE IS REQUIRED FOR PARTICIPATION. YOU MUST BE AT LEAST 18 YEARS OF AGE TO GIVE YOUR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH. IF YOU DESIRE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM, YOU MAY REQUEST ONE AND WE WILL PROVIDE.

Please be informed that participation in the research is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time, without prejudice, should you object to the nature of the research. You are entitled to ask questions and to receive an explanation after your participation.

Description of the Study:
The aim of this research is to learn more about LGBTQ+ individuals and their life experiences in Central Asia. You will be asked to answer questions on your experiences with certain behaviors in your romantic relationships.

Purpose of the study:
The purpose of this study is to gather data on the occurrence and manifestation of intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships of LGBTQ+ individuals from Central Asia.

Possible Risks:
There are minimal risks associated with the study. If you feel that you might need psychological help, please contact the Education Community Psychological aid through whatsapp - +996 (507) 745 751 - for further assistance.

Possible Benefits:
The findings from this study will help us learn more about the life experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in Central Asia. Furthermore, the study findings will help us understand if there are problems within the community that need to be addressed through community help.

Compensation for your time:
No compensation is provided.

Confidentiality:
Face-to-face interviews are fully confidential and all of the personal information that can be linked to the individual will not be collected or shared. All of the interview data will be stored on a password-protected computer and only the main investigator will be able to access it. Collected data will be used for the completion of thesis requirements at Central European University. Additionally, collected data might be used for a journal publication in the future. If you do not wish for your interview data to be used for publication purposes, please let us know.

Opportunities to Question:
Any technical questions about this research may be directed to:

Principal investigator: Ainagul Aitbayeva
Contacts: aitbayeva_aina@student.ceu.edu

Opportunities to withdraw at will:
If you decide now or at any point to withdraw this consent or stop participating, you are free to do so at no penalty to yourself.

Opportunities to be Informed of Results:
If you would like to receive the study findings, please let the researcher know during the interview process.

Date: dd/mm/yyyy

Signature of Participant _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _____

Форма информированного согласия

Название исследования: «*Она никогда не стала бы, она же девушка:* возникновение и случаи насилия со стороны романтической партнерки в однополых отношениях ЛБК-женщин из Казахстана через призму гетеронормативности»

Главный исследователь: Айнагуль Айтбаева, студентка программы магистратуры по гендерным исследованиям.

ПОЖАЛУЙСТА, ВНИМАТЕЛЬНО ПРОЧИТАЙТЕ ЭТОТ ДОКУМЕНТ. ДЛЯ УЧАСТИЯ НЕОБХОДИМА ВАША ПОДПИСЬ. ВЫ ДОЛЖНЫ БЫТЬ НЕ МЕНЕЕ 18 ЛЕТ, ЧТОБЫ ДАТЬ СОГЛАСИЕ НА УЧАСТИЕ В ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯХ. ЕСЛИ ВАМ НУЖНА КОПИЯ ЭТОЙ ФОРМЫ СОГЛАСИЯ, ВЫ МОЖЕТЕ ЗАПРОСИТЬ ОДНУ, И МЫ ПРЕДОСТАВИМ.

Обратите внимание, что участие в исследовании является добровольным, и вы имеете право отказаться от участия в любое время без ущерба, если вы возражаете против характера исследования. Вы имеете право задавать вопросы и получать разъяснения после вашего участия.

Описание исследования:
Целью этого исследования является изучение более подробной информации о лицах ЛГБТ+ и их жизненных опытах в Казахстане. Вам будет предложено вспомнить некоторые истории и ответить на вопросы о ваших опытах насилия в романтических отношениях.

Цель исследования:
Целью этого исследования является сбор данных о опыте насилия в романтических отношениях (вербального, эмоционального или физического) в однополых отношениях у женщин ЛБК+ из Казахстана.

Возможные риски:
Существуют потенциальные риски, связанные с исследованием, так как интервью может вызвать у вас неприятные воспоминания. Если вы почувствуете, что вам может понадобиться психологическая помощь, вы можете связаться с Образовательным сообществом Психологической помощи через WhatsApp по номеру +996 (507) 745 751 для получения дальнейшей помощи или попросить меня сделать это за вас.

Потенциальные выгоды:
Исследование поможет нам узнать больше о жизненном опыте квир женщин, переживших насилие, в Казахстане. Кроме того, исследование поможет нам понять, есть ли проблемы, которые нужно решать с помощью общественной поддержки.

Компенсация за ваше время:
Компенсация не предусмотрена.

Конфиденциальность:
Лицом к лицу проводимые интервью являются полностью конфиденциальными, и вся персональная информация, которая может быть связана с участником, не будет записана или передана третьим лицам. Все интервью будут храниться на компьютере с защищенным паролем, и доступ к ним будет иметь только основной исследователь. Собранные данные будут использоваться для выполнения требований магистерской диссертации в Центральноевропейском университете, Вена. Кроме того, данные интервью могут быть использованы для публикации в журнале в будущем. Если вы не хотите, чтобы ваши данные интервью использовались для публикационных целей, пожалуйста, сообщите мне об этом.

Возможности задать вопрос:
Любые технические вопросы, касающиеся этого исследования, можно направлять по адресу:

Главный исследователь: Айнагуль Айтбаева
Контакты: тел. aitbayeva_aina@student.ceu.edu

Возможность отозвать свое согласие по своему усмотрению:
Если вы решите сейчас или в любой момент до 20 мая 2024 года отозвать свое согласие и прекратить участие, вы вправе сделать это без необходимости объяснений.

Возможность быть осведомленным о результатах:
Если вы хотите получить результаты исследования, пожалуйста, сообщите об этом исследователю в любой момент до 1 июня 2024 года.

Дата:

Подпись респондента _____

Подпись исследователя _____

Appendix 3

Interview Questionnaire —English version

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL:

1. **Opening:**

   1.1 Welcome and extend thanks to the participant, acknowledgment of her time and consent.

   1.2 Introduction - You will be interviewed on your experiences within your romantic relationship. + I'd like to call your attention to the fact that at any moment you may ask me to stop the recording or refuse to respond to any of the questions.

2. **Questions**

1.. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

2.. Could you tell me a bit about your relationship with your current partner/ex-partner? Such as, how you meet, if you lived under the same roof, how long you (have) lived together?

3. Do you mind sharing the story of the first encounter you had involving aggressive behavior in your relationship?

4. How did you react to your partner's behavior then?

5. Did you proceed with the relationship?

6. Did you consider turning to anyone of your friends, family and ask for advice or help? Did you turn to anyone who, according to your knowledge,

had been struggling with or survived something similar?

7. Were you eventually able to get help (from friends/family/community services)?

8. Can you recall the story of how the relationship end?

9. How do you feel about the relationship now?

10. Is there anything you wish you had known then?

3. Closure

a. Do you have any questions for me?

b. Do you have additional comments to share?

c. Thank you for your time and participation.

Interview Questionnaire —Russian version

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL:

1. **Opening:**

   1.1 Welcome and extend thanks to the participant, acknowledgment of her time and consent.

   1.2 Introduction - You will be interviewed on your experiences within your romantic relationship. + I'd like to call your attention to the fact that at any moment you may ask me to stop the recording or refuse to respond to any of the questions.

2. **Вопросы**

   1. Могли бы вы рассказать немного о себе?

   2. Могли бы вы рассказать немного о вашем отношении с вашим текущим партнером/бывшим партнером? Например, как вы познакомились, жили ли вы под одной крышей, сколько времени вы прожили вместе?

   3. Вам не против поделиться историей первой встречи, включающей агрессивное поведение в вашем отношении?

   4. Как вы тогда реагировали на поведение вашего партнера?

   5. Продолжили ли вы отношения?

   6. Думали ли вы обратиться к кому-то из ваших друзей, семьи и

попросить совета или помощи? Обращались ли вы к кому-то, кто, насколько вам известно, сталкивался с чем-то подобным или пережил что-то подобное?

7. Вам в конечном итоге удалось получить помощь (от друзей/семьи/общественных служб)?
8. Можете ли вы вспомнить историю о том, как закончились отношения?
9. Как вы сейчас относитесь к этим отношениям?
10. Есть ли что-то, что вы хотели бы знать тогда?

Завершение

a. У вас есть какие-то вопросы ко мне?

b. Есть ли у вас дополнительные комментарии для обмена?

c. Спасибо за ваше время и участие.

Bibliography

Absattar, A. (2024). Dating Norms in the Society of Kazakhstan. *Nazarbayev University.*

ADB. (2006a). Gender assessment: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Philippines: *Asian Development Bank.* Retrieved from http://www.adb.org/documents/central-asian-republics-gender-assessment-synthesis-report

Aitbayeva, A. (2024). Fieldwork within queer communities in Central Asia: a research note. *Central Asian Survey, 43(1),* 143–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2023.2296540

Brown, T. N., & Herman, J. (2015). Intimate partner violence and sexual abuse among LGBT people. *eScholarship, University of California.*

Buelow, S. (2012). Locating Kazakhstan: The role of LGBT voices in the Asia/Europe debate. *lambda nordica,* 17(4), 99-125.

Busygina, I., Filippov, M., & Taukebaeva, E. (2018). To decentralize or to continue on the centralization track: The cases of authoritarian regimes in Russia and Kazakhstan. *Journal of Eurasian Studies, 9(1),* 61-71.

Burke, L. K., & Follingstad, D. R. (1999). Violence in lesbian and gay relationships: Theory, prevalence, and correlational factors. *Clinical psychology review, 19(5),* 487-512.

Calton, J. M., Cattaneo, L. B., & Gebhard, K. T. (2016). Barriers to help seeking for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer survivors of intimate partner violence. *Trauma, violence, & abuse, 17(5),* 585-600.

Cannon, C., Lauve-Moon, K., & Buttell, F. (2015). Re-theorizing intimate partner violence through post-structural feminism, queer theory, and the sociology of gender. *Social Sciences, 4(3),* 668-687.

Carter, C., & Noble, J. (1996). Butch, Femme, and the Woman-Identified Woman: Menage-a-trois of the'90s. *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme.*

Childress, S. (2013). A meta-summary of qualitative findings on the lived experience among culturally diverse domestic violence survivors. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 34(9),* 693-705.

Cimino, K. (2012). Gay conservatives: *Group consciousness and assimilation*. Routledge.

Connell, R. W. (2005). Masculinities. *Oakland: University of California Press.*

Daryo (2024) "Kazakhstan Diplomat's Wife Alleges Decade-Long Abuse, Prompts Swift Action from MFA." *Daryo.Uz, Daryo.uz*, 7 May 2024, daryo.uz/en/2024/05/07/kazakhstan-diplomats-wife-alleges-decade-long-abuse-prompts-swift-action-from-mfa#:~:text=Karina%20Mamash%2C%20spouse%20of%20Saken,husband%2C%20Nemolchi.kz%20reported.

Dobash, R. E., & Dobash, R. (1979). Violence against wives: A case against the patriarchy *(Vol. 15).* New York: Free Press.

Donovan, C., & Barnes, R. (2020). Help-seeking among lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender victims/survivors of domestic violence and abuse: The impacts of cisgendered heteronormativity and invisibility. *Journal of Sociology, 56(4),* 554-570.

Drescher, J. (2010). Queer diagnoses: Parallels and contrasts in the history of homosexuality, gender variance, and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. *Archives of sexual behavior, 39,* 427-460.

Foucault, M. (1990). The history of sexuality: An introduction, volume I. *Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 95,* 1-160.

Garber, L. (2001). Identity poetics: Race, class, and the lesbian-feminist roots of queer theory. *Columbia University Press.*

Habarth, J. M., Wickham, R. E., Holmes, K. M., Sandoval, M., & Balsam, K. F. (2019). Heteronormativity and women's psychosocial functioning in heterosexual and same-sex couples. *Psychology & Sexuality, 10(3),* 185-199.

Hall, C. D., Ibragimov, U., Luu, M. N., & Wong, F. Y. (2020). Actives, passives and power: Heteronormative gender norms and their implications for intimate partner violence among men who have sex with men in Tajikistan. *Culture, health & sexuality, 22(6),* 630-645.

Hardesty, J. L., Oswald, R. F., Khaw, L., & Fonseca, C. (2011). Lesbian/bisexual mothers and intimate partner violence: Help seeking in the context of social and legal vulnerability. *Violence against women, 17(1),* 28-46.

Harrington, C. (2021). What is "toxic masculinity" and why does it matter?. *Men and masculinities, 24(2),* 345-352.

Herek, G. M. (Ed.). (1998). *Stigma and sexual orientation* (Vol. 4). Sage.

Herek, G. M. (2004). Beyond "homophobia": Thinking about sexual prejudice and stigma in the twenty-first century. *Sexuality research & social policy, 1*, 6-24.

Hine, B., Noku, L., Bates, E. A., & Jayes, K. (2022). But, who is the victim here? Exploring judgments toward hypothetical bidirectional domestic violence scenarios. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 37(7-8),* NP5495-NP5516.

Holmes, S. C., Johnson, N. L., Rojas-Ashe, E. E., Ceroni, T. L., Fedele, K. M., & Johnson, D. M. (2019). Prevalence and predictors of bidirectional violence in survivors of intimate partner violence residing at shelters. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 34(16),* 3492-3515.

Human Rights Watch. "Kazakhstan: New Law to Protect Women Improved, but Incomplete." *Human Rights Watch, 25 Apr. 2024,* www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/23/kazakhstan-new-law-protect-women-improved-incomplete.

Itaborahy, L. P., & Zhu, J. (2014). State-sponsored homophobia. *A world survey of laws: Criminalisation, protection and recognition of same-sex love.*

Jackson, S. (2006). Interchanges: Gender, sexuality and heterosexuality: The complexity (and limits) of heteronormativity. *Feminist theory, 7(1),* 105-121.

Johnson, L., Chen, Y., Stylianou, A., & Arnold, A. (2022). Examining the impact of economic abuse on survivors of intimate partner violence: a scoping review. *BMC public health, 22(1),* 1014.

Johnson, M. P., & Leone, J. M. (2005). The differential effects of intimate terrorism and situational couple violence: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey. *Journal of family issues, 26(3),* 322-349.

Johnson, W. L., Giordano, P. C., Manning, W. D., & Longmore, M. A. (2015). The age–IPV curve: Changes in the perpetration of intimate partner violence during adolescence and young adulthood. *Journal of youth and adolescence, 44*, 708-726.

Joshi, M., & Childress, S. (2017). A national survey of attitudes toward intimate partner violence among married women in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan: Implications for health prevention and intervention. *Social work in health care, 56(4)*, 294-319.

Kabakova, M., & Maulsharif, M. (2013). Transformation of social roles and marital relations in modern kazakhstan: social-psychological analysis. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 82*, 638-641.

Kabayeva, Z., Imanmoldayeva, B., Mussabaev, S., Madalieva, Z. M., & Karanov, Z. (2018). The formation way of independent Kazakhstan from the individualism and collectivism perspective. *Opción: Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales, (85)*, 757-779.

Kalyuzhnova, Y., & Patterson, K. (2016). Kazakhstan: long-term economic growth and the role of the oil sector. *Comparative Economic Studies, 58*, 93-118.

Kangas, R. D. (1994). Problems of State-Building in the Central Asian Republics. *World Affairs, 157(1)*, 29–37.

Karydi, A. (2018). Intimate partner violence in lesbian relationships: A systemic view *(Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University).*

Kozlowski, L. (2020). Trauma Bonding: Understanding and Overcoming the Traumatic Bond in a Narcissistic Relationship. *Escape The Narcissist.*

Kudaibergenova, D. T. (2018). Project Kelin: marriage, women, and re-traditionalization in post-soviet Kazakhstan. *Women of Asia,* 379-390.

Levitanus, M., & Kislitsyna, P. (2024). 'Why wave the flag?':(in) visible queer activism in authoritarian Kazakhstan and Russia. *Central Asian Survey, 43(1)*, 12-32.

Little, B. (2020). Who's the victim here? The role of gender, social norms, and heteronormativity in the IPV gender symmetry debate. Intimate partner violence and the LGBT+ community: *Understanding power dynamics*, 69-88.

Little, B., & Terrance, C. (2010). Perceptions of domestic violence in lesbian relationships: Stereotypes and gender role expectations. *Journal of Homosexuality, 57(3),* 429-440.

Malić, S. (2018) Bride kidnapping in Kazakhstan-Personal Security perspective.

Mamedov, G., & Bagdasarova, N. (2021). Tema, a ne «LGBT»? Vremia i prostranstvo seksual´ no-gendernogo dissidentstva v postsovetskom Kyrgyzstane. *Cahiers du monde russe. Russie-Empire russe-Union soviétique et États indépendants, 62(62/2-3),* 283-306.

Marat, E., & Kassymbekova, B. (2023). Reclaiming the narrative: Decolonising Central Asian studies for a more inclusive understanding. *APSA Comparative Politics Newsletter, 33(1),* 9-12.

Mason, T. B., Lewis, R. J., Milletich, R. J., Kelley, M. L., Minifie, J. B., & Derlega, V. J. (2014). Psychological aggression in lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals' intimate relationships: A review of prevalence, correlates, and measurement issues. *Aggression and violent behavior, 19(3),* 219-234.

Messinger, A. M. (2011). Invisible victims: Same-sex IPV in the national violence against women survey. *Journal of interpersonal violence, 26(11),* 2228-2243.

Ministry of National Economy Kazakhstan (2017). Sample Survey on Violence Against Women in Kazakhstan. Astana.

Mondal, D., & Paul, P. (2021). Associations of power relations, wife-beating attitudes, and controlling behavior of husband with domestic violence against women in India: Insights from the National Family Health Survey–4. *Violence against women, 27(14),* 2530-2551.

Morris, J. (2023). How homophobic propaganda produces vernacular prejudice in authoritarian states. *Sexualities,* 13634607221144624.

Muller, J. Z. (2008). Us and them: The enduring power of ethnic nationalism. *Foreign Affairs, 18-35.*

Nezhina, T. G., & Ibrayeva, A. R. (2013). Explaining the Role of Culture and Traditions in Functioning of Civil Society Organizations in Kazakhstan. VOLUNTAS: *International Journal*

of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 24(2), 335–358. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-011-9256-7

Nydegger, L. A., DiFranceisco, W., Quinn, K., & Dickson-Gomez, J. (2017). Gender norms and age-disparate sexual relationships as predictors of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and risky sex among adolescent gang members. *Journal of urban health, 94*, 266-275.

Oringher, J., & Samuelson, K. W. (2011). Intimate partner violence and the role of masculinity in male same-sex relationships. *Traumatology, 17(2)*, 68-74.

Palmetto, N., Davidson, L. L., & Rickert, V. I. (2013). Predictors of physical intimate partner violence in the lives of young women: Victimization, perpetration, and bidirectional violence. *Violence and Victims, 28(1)*, 103-121.

Parkhill, M. R., & Ray, T. N. (2021). The role of masculinity in the perpetration of relationship violence. *The Sage handbook of domestic violence*, 187-201.

Parry, M. M., & O'Neal, E. N. (2015). Help-seeking behavior among same-sex intimate partner violence victims: *An intersectional argument. Criminology, Crim. Just. L & Soc'y, 16*, 51.

Perlman, B. J., & Gleason, G. (2007). Cultural determinism versus administrative logic: Asian values and administrative reform in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. *Intl Journal of Public Administration, 30(12-14)*, 1327-1342.

Plummer, K. (2001). Documents of life 2: *An invitation to a critical humanism (Vol. 2). Sage.*

Ranking, KZ. "Названы Регионы —Антилидеры По Количеству Правонарушений в Семейно-Бытовой Сфере. Arnapress, Translation: "Regions Named —Anti-Leaders in Number of Crimes in the Family and Domestic Sphere" www.arnapress.kz/obshchestvo/221359-nazvany-regiony-antilidery-po-kolichestvu-pravonarusheniy-v-semeyno-bytovoy-sfere. Accessed 2 June 2024.

REESE-WEBER, M. A. R. L. A. (2015). Intimacy, communication, and aggressive behaviors: Variations by phases of romantic relationship development. *Personal Relationships, 22(2)*, 204-215.

Rezvushkina, T. A., & Karipbayev, B. I. (2021). Motherhood with many children in Kazakhstan: combining work and care. Bulletin of the Karaganda university History. *Philosophy series, 102(2),* 163-175.

Rich, A. C. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Journal of women's history, 15(3),* 11-48.

Robinson, B. A. (2016). Heteronormativity and homonormativity. *The Wiley Blackwell encyclopedia of gender and sexuality studies, 1-3.*

Rollè, L., Giardina, G., Caldarera, A. M., Gerino, E., & Brustia, P. (2018). When intimate partner violence meets same sex couples: A review of same sex intimate partner violence. *Frontiers in psychology, 9,* 393254.

Sedgwick, E. (1990). Epistemology of the Closet. *Berkeley: University of California Press.*

Sev'er, A., & Yurdakul, G. (2001). Culture of honor, culture of change: A feminist analysis of honor killings in rural Turkey. *Violence against women, 7(9),* 964-998.

Sharipova, D. (2020). Perceptions of national identity in Kazakhstan: Pride, language, and religion. *The Muslim World, 110(1),* 89-106.

Sharygin, E. (2013). Essays on demographic legacies of twentieth-century population planning. *University of Pennsylvania, Dissertation available from ProQuest, Paper AAI3565228.*

Snajdr, E. (2007). Ethnicizing the subject: Domestic violence and the politics of primordialism in Kazakhstan. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 13(3),* 603–620.

Somach, S., & Rubin, D. (2010). Gender assessment: USAID/Central Asian Republics. *USAID.* Retrieved from http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADS880.pdf

Sputnik (2024). "Saltanat's Law." *Sputnik,* ru.sputnik.kz/20240515/zakon-saltanat-kak-v-kazakhstane-budut-zaschischat-prava-zhenschin-i-detey---kruglyy-stol-44262417.html.

Stiles-Shields, C., & Carroll, R. A. (2015). Same-sex domestic violence: Prevalence, unique aspects, and clinical implications. *Journal of sex & marital therapy, 41(6),* 636-648.

Surucu, C. (2002). Modernity, nationalism, resistance: identity politics in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. *Central Asian Survey, 21(4),* 385-402.

Suyarkulova, M. (2019). Translating ‘queer’into (Kyrgyzstani) Russian. *Sexuality and translation in world politics.*

Swanson, J. W., Swartz, M. S., Essock, S. M., Osher, F. C., Wagner, H. R., Goodman, L. A., & Meador, K. G. (2002). The social–environmental context of violent behavior in persons treated for severe mental illness. *American Journal of Public Health, 92(9),* 1523-1531.

Terry, V. (2005). Postcard from the Steppes: A snapshot of public relations and culture in Kazakhstan. *Public Relations Review, 31(1),* 31–36.

UNDP. (2009). *Human Development Report 2009*. Retrieved from http://hdrstats.undp.org/ en/indicators/103.html

Vlast Kazakhstan (2024). “Kazakhstan’s Lawmakers Roll Back a Plan to Ban ‘LGBT Propaganda.’” *Vlast Journal*, 18 Apr. 2024, vlast.kz/english/59836-kazakhstans-lawmakers-roll-back-a-plan-to-ban-lgbt-propaganda.html.

Walters, M. L., Breiding, M. J., & Chen, J. (2013). The national intimate partner and sexual violence survey: *2010 findings on victimization by sexual orientation.*

Warner, M. (Ed.). (1993). Fear of a queer planet: *Queer politics and social theory (Vol. 6).* U of Minnesota Press.

West, C. M. (2012). Partner abuse in ethnic minority and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender populations. *Partner Abuse, 3(3),* 336-357.

World Health Organization. (2014). Global status report on violence prevention 2014. *World Health Organization.*

“World Population Review.” *Kazakhstan Population 2024 (Live),* worldpopulationreview.com/countries/kazakhstan-population. Accessed 2 June 2024.

Zhulmukhametova, Z. (2020, April 24). В Казахстане всплеск бытового насилия во время карантина. Куда жаловаться на семейного дебошира. Translation: "Rising cases of domestic violence in Kazakhstan during the quarantine. Where to go to find help?" https://informburo.kz/stati/v-kazahstane-vsplesk-bytovogo-nasiliya-vo-vremya-karantina-kuda-zhalovatsya-na-semeynogo-deboshira.html