

Capstone Seminar

SOC 499

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Is cooking perceived as a gendered activity by NU students?

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Abstract

This study examines the perception of cooking activity among Nazarbayev University students and their families, with a focus on gender as a social construct. Through online surveys and in-depth interviews, the research analyzes differences in cooking behavior between male and female students, as well as their attitudes towards cooking responsibility in relation to their current or ideal partners. The results of the work demonstrated that the kitchen is predominantly viewed as a female space in the families of the students, with males typically only cooking on special occasions. However, the study revealed a trend towards more egalitarian attitudes towards cooking responsibility across generations. This suggests that for students, cooking behavior is driven by personal desire and partner workload rather than gender. Moreover, it was identified that males express and uphold their masculinity through food choices, opting for either simple or complicated meat-centered dishes. The preference for meat-centered dishes within the family may reflect social order and power distribution, indicating male dominance over women in the household, as was discussed by Sobal (2005, p.137). Overall, this study contributes to a better understanding of how gender identity can be shaped through cooking among the youth and opens up opportunities for further research on gender roles in culinary practices.

Key words: cooking, gendered behavior, gender identity, students, gender norms, division of labor.

Introduction

This research paper delves into the topic of cooking behavior among Nazarbayev University (NU) students, with a focus on its association with gender and its perception as a gendered activity. Gender is social construct that plays crucial role in the formation of one's identity. Various factors can shape and influence one's perceptions and expectations regarding gender, and cooking can be one of them. West and Zimmerman (1987) suggested that gender can be “done” through social interaction and daily activities (p.125). Therefore, I anticipate that through cooking behavior, students can express their gender identity. Swenson (2009) asserts that cooking is a gendered activity that can express masculine or feminine traits, and the kitchen has become a space dominated by women (p.38). In the context of Kazakhstan's common family model and mentality, where men are expected to be breadwinners and women housewives responsible for domestic duties, children are likely to witness the division of activities into gendered categories from an early age. This could significantly affect their expectations of gender, gender norms, and gendered behavior, making cooking an essential factor in shaping or altering their self-perception and identity. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the perception of cooking activity and its relation to gender among families of NU students. The research also studied the cooking behavior of male and female students to identify possible differences and analyze their vision of cooking behavior concerning their current or ideal partner. The collected data and findings can provide insight into whether the perception of cooking as a gendered activity is passed from parents to their children and illustrate the differences in cooking behavior between male and female students.

Literature review

The objective of this literature review is to critically examine the existing scholarly literature and conceptual frameworks related to cooking activity and gender performance. The sources analyzed in this review will inform and contribute to the development of a theoretical framework for the research.

One of the most important and frequently utilized concepts in the research is "doing gender" introduced by West and Zimmerman (1987). To understand how certain activities, such as cooking, acquire gender-ness, it is essential to understand how gender is "done" or constructed. Authors propose a new understanding of gender and explain it as a social construct, which appears not as a physical or personal trait but rather as "routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction" (West&Zimmerman, 1987, p.125). They explain that an individual's performance of gender constructs gendered behavior and expectations about it (West&Zimmerman, 1987, p.130). Although the article was written more than 20 years ago, and its main downside is that the sex categorization, mentioned in the paper, might have significantly changed, the idea that "sex categorization and the accomplishment of gender are not the same" remains relevant to the modern days (West&Zimmerman, 1987, p.134). This implies that sex is separated from femininity and masculinity, and the performance of gender is considered social, while sex refers mostly to physical characteristics. I suggest that social interactions, analyzed in the paper might also imply cooking as a behavior and a way of gender performance.

Considering the construction and maintenance of gender roles, it is also important to observe the role of power dynamics and social structures. One theory that sheds light on this topic is the power-control theory of gender and delinquency introduced by Hagan, Simpson, and Gillis (1987). The theory sheds light on how power dynamics are established within families and how they contribute to gendered division in domestic social control, which is closely related to the division of domestic labor. The theory is based on a new model of class relations that takes into account the relative positions of husbands and wives in the workplace, with higher workplace status implying greater domination within the family. This concept can be linked to the masculine ideal of a male breadwinner and a female housewife responsible for domestic duties such as cooking.

The authors employ quantitative analysis to explore the relationship between gender inequality, delinquency, and social class. The study concludes that "the social organization of work and family relations influences the social distribution of delinquency through the gender stratification of domestic social control" (Hagan et al., 1987, p.812). This theory is important to the research as it provides a framework for understanding how power dynamics within families can impact gender roles and the distribution of domestic labor.

Brines' (1994) statement that the economic dependency of females on males is the reason why housework remains mainly a female occupation, confirms the idea of previous authors that social position in the workplace translates into power control at home" (Brines, 1994, p.671). The author examines the idea that household labor is provided in return for economic support. The secondary data analysis, performed by Brines, revealed that domestic

work remains feminine and provides the important notion that although economically dependent men fully rely on their female partners, they still perform minimal housework: “the effect of male unemployment on families shows that unemployed husbands do not substantially increase their participation in housework. One study suggests that some of these husbands resist housework because they perceive it as further threatening their male identity” (Brines, 1994, p.672). Here author emphasized that such behavior is how men “do gender”, which once again proves that domestic work is associated with femininity. Cooking is also an integral part of domestic work, so I believe that this idea is suitable for my research about genderness of cooking. Also, this source is an important addition to the theoretical framework considering the relation between the economic dependence of females and genderness of housework, such as food preparation. The author uses quantitative methods to measure the dependency and providership, however, despite the accurate performance of analysis, the study’s limited “because of PSID data limitations, so comparisons by race are confined here to African-Americans and whites”.

Considering the topic of household divisions in couples in-depth, Carriero and Todesco (2018), found out under what conditions the effect of women’s gender ideology on the allocation of domestic duties changes. One of the main advantages and strengths of the research is that the analysis “uses estimates of housework from time-use diaries, which the literature unanimously considers more reliable than estimates derived from questionnaires with direct questions” (Carriero&Todesco, 2018, p.1055). Deriving from the obtained results, egalitarian attitudes in housework division emerge corresponding to the level of income, compared to the male partner. The trend is similar to the dependance of domestic duties’ division on female’s education. It was indicated that higher education is another variable that affects gender ideology and the reduction of the housework burden. This means that females with higher education tend to share their housework duties with partners, instead of being the only one in a couple who takes care of domestic responsibilities such as cleaning or cooking. I assume this is an important study because, in my research, I focus on students – males and females who receive higher education. Since higher education was admitted to be an important factor affecting gender ideology and equalitarian attitudes towards activities such as food preparation, I believe that the same pattern might appear during my own analysis: female students might show egalitarian attitudes towards activities that are generally perceived as gendered. Also, the methodology applied in this study seems suitable for my study, so I will rely on the research methods of scholars.

Swenson's (2009) work takes a deeper dive into the concept of 'doing gender' by examining how gender is expressed within the kitchen. Scholar's analysis of social media and popular cooking shows investigates the presentation of masculinities and femininities in cooking culture. Through textual analysis, the author investigates how masculine and feminine images are negotiated within the kitchen, highlighting that the act of preparing food is often associated with caring for others and is considered a maternal, altruistic instinct of women. Consequently, she argues that household tasks are typically associated with women and the image of a caring wife and mother. Despite the increasing participation of men in cooking, the study reveals that production, social, and ideological conventions in popular cooking shows still present cooking as a gendered activity (Swenson, 2009, p.36). Swenson's analysis further shows that masculinity is associated with high-level skills and

professionalism, with men being presented as professional chefs, while women are often depicted as less skilled, cooking ordinary dishes. Additionally, Swenson mentions that certain food choices can be used to express masculine and feminine traits, with meat being considered a symbol of masculinity. Ultimately, the study concludes that “kitchen is perceived as a gendered place” dominated by women with popular cooking shows employing subtle and nuanced ways to reinforce traditional gender roles in the kitchen (Swenson, 2009, p.38).

The concept of gendered food continues to be explored by scholars, such as Jeffrey Sobal (2005), who posits that certain types of dishes are assigned gendered features. Sobal contends that meat, particularly red meat, is considered an archetypical masculine product (p.135). Although the author focuses on studies of Western food culture, which limits the generalizability of the work to one particular ethnic group, Sobal's use of both singular and multiple models of masculinities provides a reliable means of analyzing the gendering of meat. Sobal further argues that individuals "do gender" through the consumption of gender-appropriate foods, emphasizing the differences in food behavior within marriages and contributing to our understanding of how masculinity is maintained and preserved within households. Specifically, Sobal suggests that meat-centered dishes indicate male dominance over women, with men consuming much more meat than their female partners (2005, p.137). Single men are observed to consume more meat than those in partnerships, marriages, and parenthood, indicating that men adjust their food choices to conform to family expectations. This source is integral to the research as it provides insight into how power is established through a family's food choices.

Graziani, Guidetti, and Cavazza expand on the notion that certain foods are associated with masculine and feminine qualities and provide a more comprehensive analysis of gendered food by examining the food preferences of preschool children. This age range is crucial, as it is a period of initial gender socialization and the formation of gender roles. The authors note that "family meals are occasions for socializing children to gender roles and the symbolic meaning of food and eating" (Graziani et al., 2020, p.1). The strength and originality of this study lie in its focus on children; while food-gender associations have been mainly explored in adulthood in previous research, this study specifically targets 137 Italian preschool children (Graziani et al., 2020, p.4). Authors point out the gender connotation of food, indicating that red meat is “considered the quintessential male food, whereas fruit, vegetables, dairy, desserts, and fish are considered typical female food” (Graziani et al., 2020, p.1). Furthermore, the study investigates how mothers influence the transmission of gender stereotypes concerning food. To determine the gendered nature of various foods, the authors employed an implicit association test and a waiter's game, with 4-6-year-old children assigning images of different foods to male and female faces. Mothers were also given a questionnaire assessing gender-based stereotypes about food and eating habits. The results confirmed the existence of gender stereotypes about food, demonstrating that certain foods possess masculine or feminine traits. The study also established that food plays a crucial role in the gender socialization of children. Although this source proposes new powerful ideas about family influence, it still has some limitations. For example, fathers were not included in

the research, as well other adult family authorities. I assume that fathers play a crucial role in the gender socialization of the children and transmission of gender stereotypes, and therefore, should be included in further research for a deeper and more reliable analysis.

One more article that utilizes the concept of “doing gender” is the one written by Cairns, Johnston, and Baumann (2010). Authors not only investigated the gendered relations of foodies and the ways by which gender inequality persists but they also “contended that opportunities for doing gender in foodie culture cannot be considered apart from class privilege” (Cairns et al., 2010, p.591). This paper effectively explains the correlation between class and gender performance in a food culture, which is essential for my project. The author suggests that elite class conceptualize food “through aesthetic terms”, while lower class tend to perceive it as banal necessity (Cairns et al., 2010, p.596). There is also a correlation with another reading that suggests that “hard” masculinities are constructed in opposition to supposedly feminine discourses of gourmet food” (Cairns et al., 2010, p.593). Considering that gourmet food is associated with femininity, it is fair to conclude that higher-class representatives perceive cooking as a feminine behavior. The study is based on a qualitative research methodology and the conclusions are drawn from in-depth interviews with male and female foodies. The research included overall 30 participants from 11 states of the United States. Based on the obtained answers about memories and personal experiences of being involved with food, scholars provide a great critical analysis of gender roles in the “foodie” identity. It was concluded that foodie discourse is affected by historically shaped masculinity and femininity as well as “a system that is also conditioned by the economic and cultural implications of class positions” (Cairns et al., 2010, p.609).

In conclusion, the suggested readings significantly contributed to the development of the theoretical framework, showing that the kitchen is perceived as a gendered space for women, and men, who participate in such a feminine activity, feel the urge to maintain their masculine image by identifying themselves as professional chefs or cooking “masculine dishes”, which are mainly made of meat. The analysis of the findings revealed that women don’t get the same credit and recognition for food preparation, as men do, which points out the gender inequality in this field. Also, it seems like the household labor division is significantly affected by the education and social class of family members, which contributes to my research. These variables will be included and considered during the data collection and analysis. Also, the research methods, applied in some papers will be used in my own study.

Methodology

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach to examine the cooking habits and behavior of students at Nazarbayev University (NU). Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were applied to collect the necessary information. The data collection process involved an online survey and in-depth interviews. From February to March 2023, an online survey among NU students was conducted. A recruitment message, explaining the purpose of the

study, was sent to public chats for NU students such as “NU Dorm”, and “NU ladies”, posted on the wall of the “Vatriume” group in Vkontakte social media, and sent to the email of NU cooking club. The recruitment method of this research is voluntary sampling.

The survey was designed to obtain quantitative data on cooking behavior and habits among NU students. The recruitment method used for the survey was voluntary sampling. The survey was created using a google forms template, and the questions were carefully chosen to minimize the risk of discomfort. Generally, multiple-choice questions were prioritized over open questions because it is less time-consuming and increases the willingness of students to participate in the survey. A total of 60 students responded to the survey. Survey questions provided a general overview of the cooking habits of NU students, and examined gender, the frequency of cooking, the reasons why a person cooks or doesn't cook, and the level of cooking abilities.

After the survey, the emails of the participants were collected, and purposive sampling was used to select 15 participants for in-depth interviews. Participants were selected based on their cooking abilities, with 2-3 respondents chosen from each level category ranging from low to great cooking skills. Cooking skills were self-assessed by students on a scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 being the highest and 1 being the lowest cooking abilities). Although 15 students (25% of all survey participants) were recruited to participate in in-depth interviews, only 10 students agreed to participate in the in-depth interview. Students were chosen from 4 different levels of cooking abilities, illustrated in Fig.6 “Distribution of assessment of cooking among all survey respondents”: great cooking skills, average cooking skills, below average, and low. Purposive sampling for in-depth interviews was essential to obtain diverse opinions on the same topic. During the interview with students who have no cooking experience, the first and third questions were skipped because it demands elaboration on the learning journey.

The in-depth interviews were aimed to collect more detailed, personal data about the research participants and their families. Therefore, open questions, related to the cooking behaviors of the family were asked. Advanced cooks were asked more questions than those, who show low cooking abilities. The information about class belonging and the education of parents was demanded, to check the theoretical framework. Reviewed literature suggests that the correlation between these factors and relationships towards the division of domestic duties, such as cooking activity, persists in society. The interview questions also touched upon what type of food is cooked by family members to check the concept of masculine and feminine foods. Questions were developed to make the participants as comfortable with sharing their personal information and details as possible. More importantly, all ethical considerations were followed.

Participation in the survey or interview was strictly voluntary. Participants of the survey were asked to sign the mandatory consent question at the beginning of the survey to take part in the research. For in-depth interviews, I have prepared written consents that were signed by students. Additionally, all participants were informed that they could discontinue participation at any time without witnessing any negative consequences. The confidentiality

of the respondents was preserved: real names of the research participants were substituted with codes or nicknames for complete anonymity. Currently, all information is kept on the personal computer of the researcher for research purposes only. It is possible that 3 years after the competence of the study, survey, and interview responses will be discarded and deleted for data leakage prevention and elimination of the possible risks for the participants. Other data apart from the names or surnames were included in the study process.

Although there are some strengths in the methodology employed in this research, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The recruitment method used was voluntary sampling, which may not fully provide a representative sample of the target population, and participants who chose to take part may have different cooking habits than those who declined, leading to potential selection bias. Furthermore, the sample size was relatively small, with only 60 survey participants and 15 in-depth interviewees, which could restrict the applicability of the results to other contexts or populations. Additionally, relying on self-reported data may also introduce response bias to the study, where participants may not accurately report their cooking habits or behaviors. Lastly, although the study adhered to ethical guidelines, the use of open-ended questions in the in-depth interviews may have resulted in subjective or incomplete responses, limiting the interpretability of the data.

Findings and collected data

1. Survey results and general overview: cooking behavior of students

Survey included the following questions:

1. Indicate your gender (male/female) / Укажите свой пол (Женский/Мужской)
2. Are you a local/international student? / Вы местный или иностранный студент?
3. Do you know how to cook? / Умеете ли вы готовить?
4. If yes, how often do you cook for yourself or for others? Answer options: every day, more than 3 times a week, less than 3 times a week, never / Если вы ответили да, то как часто вы готовите для себя или кого-то еще? (Ответы: каждый день, больше 3х раз в неделю, меньше 3х раз в неделю, никогда)
5. If you don't cook, please indicate why. Answer options (multiple options are allowed to be chosen): I prefer ordering food, I eat at canteen/restaurant, I don't have time, I don't consider it a necessary skill, another option / Если вы не готовите, то укажите причину (Ответы: Я предпочитаю доставку еды, Я кушаю в ресторане/столовой, У меня нет времени на приготовление пищи, Я считаю, что этот навык мне не нужен, своя причина)
6. Please assess your cooking abilities from 1 to 10 (with 1 being the worst and 10 being the best)/ Пожалуйста оцените свои способности в готовке от 1 до 10 (где 1 - это «плохо готовлю», а 10 – «готовлю очень хорошо»)

According to the results of the survey, 60 students participated in the survey, with a gender distribution of 65% female and 35% male. All participants were local students, meaning that their citizenship is Kazakhstan and all of them are familiar with Kazakh culture and traditions. Regarding cooking skills, 91.7% of all respondents reported knowing how to cook, while 8.3% did not. The third question was analyzed by gender to explore potential differences, but the results showed only a small disparity: 9.52% of males (2 out of 21) and 7.69% of females (3 out of 39) reported not knowing how to cook, indicating a difference of only 1.83%.

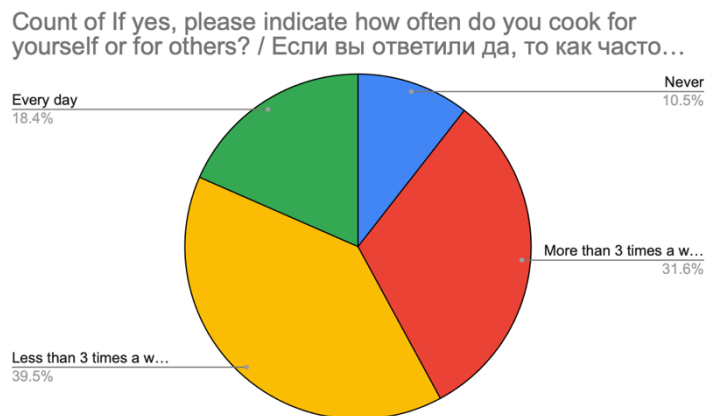


Figure 1. Frequency of cooking (question #4) among female students

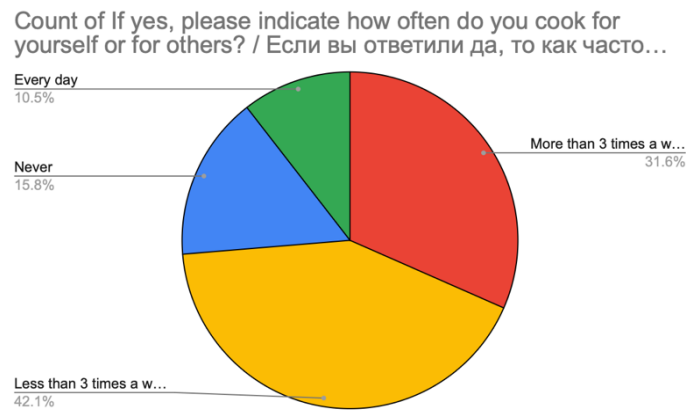


Figure 2. Frequency of cooking (question #4) among male students

Upon comparing the findings displayed in Figures 1 and 2, minor dissimilarities are noticeable in terms of cooking frequency among male and female students. Specifically, the proportion of male and female students who cook less than three times a week is approximately equivalent, with 39.5% of females and 42.1% of males falling into this category. Interestingly, only 10.5% of female students never cook, whereas 15.8% of male students reported the same. A considerable segment of students cook frequently, more than

three times per week, with this category constituting 31.6% of both male and female respondents. The smallest group of students cook every day, with 18.4% of females and 10.5% of males correspondingly. Overall, all students who reported having cooking knowledge indicated that they prepare meals for themselves at least a couple of times per week.

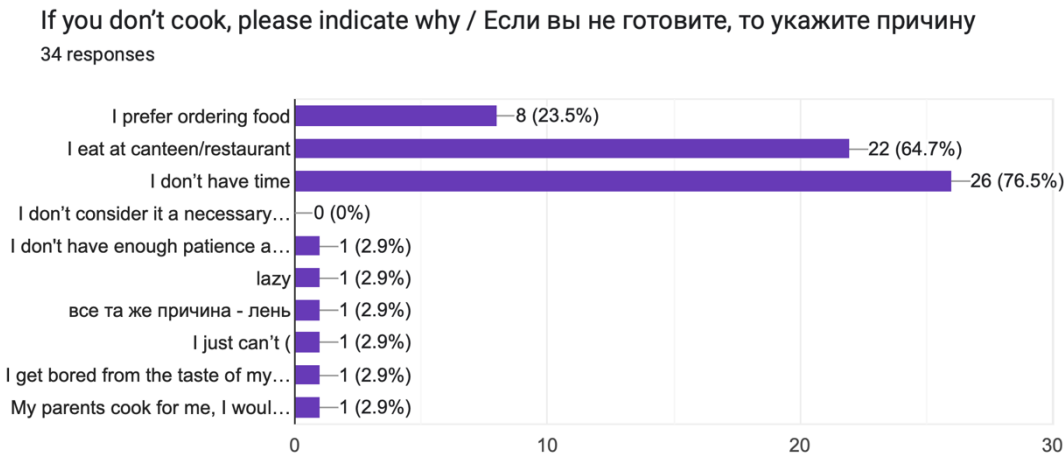


Figure 3. Reasons describing why students don't cook.

The most frequent reason for both male and female students was the lack of available time for food preparation. This reason is closely correlated with the 2nd most popular one – students prefer to eat at the canteen or restaurant. A total of 8 students indicated that they prefer using delivery services and ordering food. There were few answers typed by students in the section “other reason”, which will be presented next. Six answers showed the following additional reasons: 2 students mentioned laziness, 1 student indicated that she doesn't have enough patience and skills for the process, 1 student typed “I just can't”, which has quite confusing meaning but can assume a lack of cooking skills, 1 student explained that his parents cook for him, and he sometimes participates in the process to help. Also, nobody chose the answer “I don't consider it a necessary skill”, which assumes that all students consider cooking a useful skill.

Fig.4 depicts the distribution of cooking skills among male NU students. The chart shows that the majority of males evaluate their cooking skills as 5, 6, and 8 on a scale of 10, which is above medium. The most frequent evaluation among female students is 8. The differences demonstrate that women assess their cooking abilities higher than their male counterparts do. This trend will be explained in the discussion section.

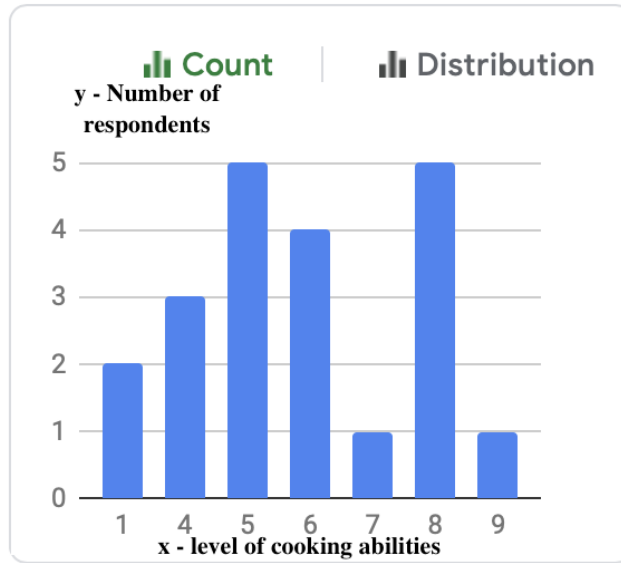


Figure 4. Evaluation of personal cooking skills level by male students

Fig. 4 Evaluation of personal cooking skills level by male students

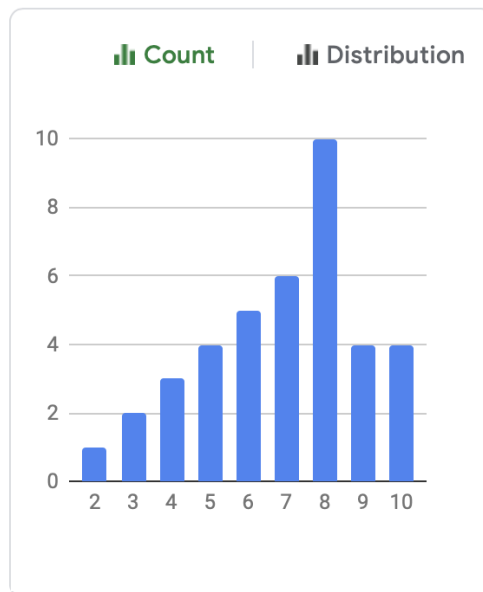


Figure 5. Evaluation of personal cooking skills level by female students

Please assess your cooking abilities from 1 to 10 (with 1 being the worst and 10 being the best)/ Пожалуйста оцените свои способности в г...хо готовлю», а 10 – «готовлю очень хорошо»)
60 responses

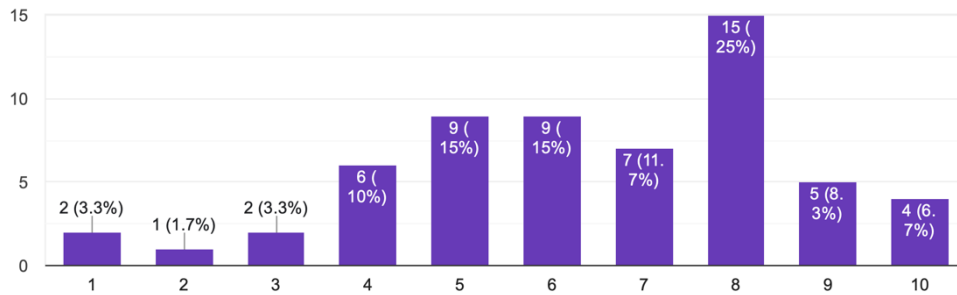


Figure 6. Distribution of assessment of cooking among all survey respondents

Fig.6 illustrates that students tend to assess their cooking abilities above the average (>5). Twenty students evaluated their cooking abilities from 1 to 5, and 40 students evaluated their skills from 5 to 10. This statistic confirms that approximately 67% of all students think they are good at food preparation.

Overall, there are no tangible differences in the cooking behaviors of males and females. It appears that students choose to eat at a restaurant/canteen or utilize delivery services instead of cooking for themselves primarily because of the lack of spare time and not because of other reasons, such as lack of cooking skills or desire to cook. Lack of time is the main concern when it comes to food preparation.

2. In-depth interviews and coding

Here is the list of questions that were asked during In-depth interviews:

1. How did you learn how to cook? Did your parents participate in your learning process? / Как вы научились готовить? Кто-нибудь из членов вашей семьи помогал вам научиться этому?
2. Please indicate the level of education of your parents and class belongingness / Укажите пожалуйста уровень образования ваших родителей и классовую принадлежность
3. What type of dishes do you usually cook? / Какие блюда вы обычно готовите?
4. Who is responsible for cooking in your family and why? / Кто ответственен за приготовление еды в вашей семье?
5. Who cooks more in your family women or men? / Кто готовит в вашей семье больше: женщины или мужчины?
6. What type of dishes do your family members cook? / Какие виды блюд готовят члены вашей семьи?

7. As you were growing up, did anyone teach you that cooking is a gendered activity? / Вас когда-нибудь учили тому, что приготовление еды — это гендерный навык?
8. What do you think about a stereotype that “cooking as a feminine behavior”? Do you consider cooking a feminine behavior? / Что вы думаете о стереотипе «Приготовление еды — это женская обязанность»? Согласны ли вы с таким суждением?
9. Are you currently in relationships/married? / Вы состоите в отношениях/браке?
10. Who is in charge of cooking for your couple? / Кто ответственен за приготовление еды в вашей паре?
11. How do you see the division of domestic duties among spouses? / Как вы видите распределение домашних обязанностей между супругами?

For analyzing the data obtained from in-depth interviews, I used a coding system to facilitate the interpretation of the findings and identify repeating patterns and ideas that emerged among participants. The codes are based on the posed questions and discussed topics. I have divided the codes into categories based on repeating phrases and ideas. For each question, categories will be discussed separately.

Question #1

Considering the ways by which research participants learned how to cook, two patterns emerged. Two participants, who don't possess cooking abilities, were excluded from the question.

Codes	Number of instances
Individually	2
Taught by an adult	4
Combination of 2 codes	2

“Individually” refers to the idea that students obtained knowledge on how to cook on their own, without external help of adults or via watching educational videos on social media platforms, such as YouTube.

“Taught by an adult” indicates that parents or other adult members of the family participated in the learning process of a student.

Question #2

Class affiliation of the students and their families

Codes	Number of instances
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Upper middle class	4
Middle class	6

Referring to “upper middle class” students characterized their class affiliation as: lower than the upper class but above the middle class.

Question #3

Types of dishes cooked by students

Codes	Number of instances
Simple and quick	2
Interesting	2

Reasons used for explanation of the cooking behaviors

Codes	Number of instances
Lack of time	5
Opportunity to buy food	2

“Simple and quick” - dishes that require minimum effort, cooking skills, ingredients and time. One common and repeating example is “chicken with rice”. Usually these types of dishes include groats and meat.

“Interesting” - dishes that are more time consuming and require more effort: baked foods, manty, plov, lasagna, etc.

“Lack of time” - reason that explains why students prioritize “simple and quick” dishes over “interesting ones”.

“Opportunity to buy food” - reason that explains why students don’t cook. Refers to the availability of canteens and cafes on campus.

Question #4

Answers refer to the family member, responsible for cooking in the family.

Codes	Number of instances
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Mother	10
Substitute	8
Busy	4

“Substitute” – Something or someone who substitutes the mother or other females of the family when they don’t have an opportunity to prepare food. Can refer to a person (sister, student, father) or a delivery service that takes over the responsibility for cooking in the family.

“Busy” - phrase refers to the cases when mother of the family is busy and thus, can’t prepare food for the family

Question #5

100% of the respondents indicated that women of the family cook more than men.

Question #6

Answers refer to the types of dishes cooked by family members

Codes	Number of instances
Ordinary/daily referring to women	1
Ordinary/daily referring to men	3
Diverse/Signature meal referring to women	4
Diverse/Signature meal referring to men	2
Meaty	5
No difference	2

“Ordinary/daily referring to women” - ordinary meals cooked every day by women, for example soup, manty, salad, etc.

“Ordinary/daily referring to men” - ordinary meals cooked every day by men, that require minimum effort, cooking skills and ingredients. For example, fried eggs, sandwiches, groats and meat.

“Diverse/Signature meal referring to women” - signature or complicated meals cooked for special occasions by women

“Diverse/Signature meal referring to men” - signature or complicated meals cooked for special occasions by men

“Meaty” - dishes that contain meat

“No difference” - refers to the fact that students noticed no difference between food choices between males and females

Question #7

Teaching that cooking is “gendered activity”

Codes	Number of instances
Indirect demonstration	4
Traditional family	3
Purposive teaching of girls	4
Necessary skill	1

“Indirect demonstration” - implies that students were not directly taught that women should be responsible for cooking in the family but it was rather demonstrated through domestic labor division in the household

“Traditional family” - refers to the values of the family that were directly told, expressed and transferred to the child(students). This implies that male or father should be a breadwinner, while women should be “a keeper of the hearth”, who performs household duties.

“Purposive teaching of girls” - means that females (sisters daughters) of the family were purposively taught to cook unlike males (brothers, sons)

“Necessary skill” - refers to the idea shared within the family that cooking was viewed as a necessary life skill for everyone regardless of the gender

Question #8

Opinion about a stereotype that “cooking as a feminine behavior”

Codes	Number of instances
Against	10
Stereotype should be vanished	2

Fair division of labor	7
Useful skill	5

“Against” - refers to the opinion of students that are against gender-based stereotypes about cooking activity. Students don’t support the idea that females should be responsible for cooking in the family

“Stereotype should be vanished” - refers to opinion that stereotypes should be eliminated from the society

“Fair division of labor” - means that students believe that division of cooking responsibilities along with other domestic duties should be fair: based on the workload of the family members. If both spouses cook, domestic chores should be divided equally, if somebody has more free time, he or she should take over the responsibility to cook for the family

“Useful skill” - refers to the idea that cooking is not gender-based activity and behavior but rather a necessary skill for every adult person

Question #9

Answer considers relationships/marital status of the student. 4 out of 10 respondents currently have a relationship. No one indicated marriage.

Question #10

Codes	Number of instances
50/50	2
Boyfriend	1
Nobody	1

“50/50” - indicates equal sharing of cooking responsibility or mutual participation in the process

“Boyfriend” - male partner is responsible for cooking in the relationship

“Nobody” - no one is responsible, because partners prefer to eat at university canteen

Question #11

Codes	Number of instances
Act of caring	4

Equal	6
Would like to see women cook	2

“Act of caring” - shows that students would like to see their partner cook not as a responsibility but rather as an act of showing love and care towards their loved one. They perceive cooking as an act of service made with sincere intentions to express feelings and desire to make their partner happy

“Equal” - student expects to see an egalitarian attitude towards cooking among the family members. The assigning of responsibilities may depend on the workload and the desire to cook to make the labor division fair

“Would like to see women cook” - an opinion that implies male student’s desire to see their female partner cook for the family and be responsible for food preparation

3. Discussion of results

3.1. Learning how to cook

Based on the data gathered from participants, the acquisition of cooking skills can be classified into two categories: learning from family members and learning through online sources such as YouTube videos. The female members of the family, such as mothers, aunts, and sisters, were found to be the primary figures who taught student respondents how to cook, while only two out of ten participants mentioned male relatives, such as fathers and grandfathers, as contributing to their learning process. This suggests that females played a central role in transmitting knowledge on cooking activities within the family. Furthermore, the data indicated that cooking skills were acquired through a combination of individual learning and external help, where students learned by observing family members and receiving guidance from other adults while cooking by themselves. Some students perceived the acquisition of cooking skills as an urgent and necessary task, especially when adapting to a new environment without the presence of adults. This was particularly true for those who moved out of their parental homes and started living independently, where they had to take over the responsibility of cooking and feeding themselves and their siblings. Moreover, some students reported that their parents were occupied with work and did not have the time to cook for the family, further highlighting the importance of learning how to cook as a means of fulfilling this responsibility.

3.2. Food choices of students

Based on the interviews conducted, it was found that students prioritize quick and easy dishes over more complex ones due to their busy schedules during the weekdays. This finding aligns with the results of the online survey, where most students cited lack of time as the main reason for not cooking. Additionally, some students choose not to cook at all, as

there are several canteens and cafes on the Nazarbayev University campus, allowing them to quickly grab a meal and return to their studies. Combining food preparation with studying or working seems to be a challenging task, which is why students who do choose to cook for themselves tend to select the easiest and least time-consuming recipes.

Interestingly, these simple dishes were often referred to as "boring," while time-consuming ones that require significant effort, skill, and ingredients were labeled as "interesting." This language choice reflects the participants' perception of different types of dishes, where the activity of cooking is considered mundane unless it involves the preparation of complicated recipes. This observation is consistent with Swenson's argument about the portrayal of male and female cooking on television, where women are shown cooking daily domestic recipes, while men's cooking of complex dishes is viewed as creative or professional, showcasing their advanced culinary skills (Swenson, 2009, p.44).

I suggest that the findings confirm that domestic dishes, cooked daily are underrated in society, as opposed to fancy dishes, cooked on special occasions. Also, the fact that both males and females expressed the same idea about perceiving simple, domestic food as tedious, and more complex recipes as intriguing and sophisticated, suggests that cooking is not gendered among students. They share the same perception of certain dishes without distinguishing them by gender. This idea will be further elaborated with additional findings.

3.3. Childhood and genderness of cooking: passing stereotypes.

Before conducting interviews, from the theoretical framework it was assumed that adult family members play a significant role in shaping children's gender expectations. It has been historically established that preserving cooking expertise has been a feminine task, and mothers or other female figures were expected to play a vital role in transmitting these skills to younger generations of females. Moreover, "family meals are occasions for socializing children to gender roles and the symbolic meaning of food and eating" (Graziani et al., 2020, p.1). By dividing household duties, individuals express their gender and uphold feminine or masculine images, with cooking for others being viewed as a strongly feminine act and being the breadwinner as a masculine one. This social performance, embedded in everyday interactions, reinforces gender norms in society.

However, the interviews with students revealed that cooking as a gendered activity dominated by women was not directly taught, but rather indirectly conveyed through labor division within families. Respondents noticed the prevalence of female domination in the kitchen, with women being responsible for cooking, unlike males. While only a small percentage of students indicated that their parents directly taught traditional gender roles, some intentionally passed cooking skills to younger females, while neglecting to educate young males. I assume that this could explain why female students self-assessed their cooking skills in the survey higher than males did.

For example, in Kazakh families, cooking is often seen as a traditionally feminine activity that has been culturally associated with women for generations. Girls may be

encouraged to help their mothers or grandmothers in the kitchen from a young age, which can result in them developing more experience and confidence in cooking and skills. On the other hand, boys, who are traditionally raised as the breadwinners of the family, may not receive the same opportunities to develop their cooking skills, resulting in a lack of experience or confidence in culinary arts. In addition to this, only one person shared that his parents emphasized the importance of cooking as a necessary life skill rather than a gender-bound activity, demonstrating that gender-based stereotype about cooking persists in the families of the students.

Therefore, the study highlights the indirectly expressed influence of familial gender expectations on the division of labor and transmission of cooking skills, perpetuating traditional gender norms in society.

3.4. Distribution of cooking responsibility among family members

Through data collection, it was discovered that in the families of NU students, females tend to take on the primary responsibility for food preparation. The recurring notion that someone else can only substitute for females when they are busy reinforces the idea that women are the ones who dominate the kitchen space. When females are unable to cook for their families due to time constraints or other circumstances, cooking responsibility is transferred to another family member, such as a sibling, father, or student. In modern times, substitutes for cooking may also include food delivery services, but the responsibility still falls on the female member of the household in most cases. However, regardless of the situation, students confirmed that their mothers were primarily responsible for food preparation, especially during their childhood.

As for the student's views on the distribution of cooking responsibilities in their current relationships or ideal family model, it is evident that trends are changing across generations. All students expressed egalitarian attitudes towards household division in marriage. It is worth noting that the division of domestic chores, specifically cooking, is strongly linked to the workload of the partners. For instance, participant C mentioned that his partner would only be expected to cook for the family if she were a housewife who was financially dependent on her husband. However, if the spouse chooses to work, household chores would be divided to assist each other. Moreover, cooking appears to be dependent on personal desire. Several respondents stated that if their partner would prefer not to be involved in the cooking activity, they would not be asked to do it. Only two male participants mentioned that they would be happy if their wife cooked for them, but they also highlighted that they did not view it as solely a woman's responsibility.

3.5 Cooking as an act of care

Some participants expressed that they see cooking for their partner as a way to show care and affection. Interestingly, cooking is viewed as a means of expressing feelings, love, and attention. Both male and female participants stated that they appreciate receiving care in

the form of a home-cooked meal prepared by their loved ones. For example, Trubek (2000, p. 12) concluded that "female labor demonstrates love for the family and is a gift to a husband or children, while the male laborer aims to produce more fleeting sexual encounters, put on a glamorous show for others, develop a career or pursue the pleasures of eating for himself." This idea was reflected in the students' responses, as they viewed cooking as an act of care for their family members, likely because they had seen their mothers perform this task and associate it with care and love.

However, a contradiction arises in the fact that cooking for others is traditionally viewed as a caring behavior associated with femininity: "preserving the familial chain of cooking expertise has long been a feminine task; these hosts reify their femininity by coding cooking as a fulfilling act of love and intimacy done for others" (Swenson, 2009, p. 44). Nowadays, not only males but also females expect their partners to cook to please and care for them. This suggests that either the perceptions of femininity and masculinity have changed among the current generation, and an action of care for others is no longer viewed as a feminine trait, or femininity and masculinity have lost their tangible significance in society, as gender roles are starting to shift.

3.5. Gender appropriate foods: femininity and masculinity

Before conducting the investigation, the importance of food choices in expressing masculinity and femininity had been discussed. The discussion centered around how certain foods can be used as a tool for expressing gender identity. In particular, meat consumption was identified as a way of expressing masculinity. The research findings confirmed that males demonstrated a preference for meat in their diets. Both male family members and male students emphasized the significance of meat in their diets, stating that it provides a feeling of satiety.

Cultural peculiarities of the Kazakh folk were found to play a role in the prevalence of meat in food choices, as traditional Kazakh cuisine has historically been based on grains, dough, and meat. This trend persists today, with families in Kazakhstan commonly choosing to cook meat dishes. This observation is consistent with previous studies on the role of food in expressing gender identity. For example, Sobal's research suggests that food choices within marriages reveal the "gender order" of the family. Specifically, scholar argues that dishes centered around meat indicate male dominance over women (Sobal, 2005, p. 137).

Considering the traditional family model in Kazakhstan, where women are perceived as housewives and men are the breadwinners of the family, I suggest that the same food choices of the family reflect the power relations within the families of NU students. A small fraction of participants mentioned that some females prefer less calorie-dense food, such as salads, which can also be correlated with gendered food choices, unlike males who tend to choose meat over vegetables. These findings suggest that traditional gender norms regarding food choices persist among the family members of NU students.

Sobal's article emphasizes the differences in food behavior within marriages. Similar patterns were found among the family members of the participants in this study, emphasizing that men tend to preserve their masculinity through cooking in both scenarios. One scenario revealed that females preferred to cook more diverse and difficult dishes, while men preferred simpler dishes that could be prepared by someone with minimal cooking skills, aiming to make the dish as simple and manly as possible.

Another scenario suggested that while females tended to cook ordinary domestic dishes, that family members are used to, men preferred to cook complicated, fancy, and meaty dishes on special occasions. The male-dominance and masculine image may also be defined by the frequency and types of dishes cooked, as male family members tended to prepare signature dishes such as plov, kebabs, and shashlik on special occasions, all of which contain meat. These dishes require advanced cooking skills and a lot of effort, which makes the dish very special and complicated.

Therefore, it can be concluded that traditional gender norms regarding food choices persist among the family members of NU students. Men tend to preserve their masculinity either by cooking extremely simple dishes or extremely fancy and complicated ones. The study's findings show that traditional gender norms regarding food choices continue to play a significant role in shaping people's perceptions and practices around food.

3.6. The relation between class affiliation, education and cooking

The vast majority of student participants self-identified as belonging to the middle class, with a few individuals specifying that they were at the "upper end of the middle class". All parents of the participants had attained higher education and earned university degrees, with some holding multiple degrees. Prior to conducting this study, the researcher had hoped to gather insights from individuals representing a range of social classes, as certain food preferences and gendered behaviors are linked to particular social classes. For example, those in higher social classes tend to favor aesthetically pleasing, gourmet foods over simpler fare and may view cooking as a feminine pursuit. Research has shown that lower social classes are more likely to select simple dishes, emphasizing their role in providing nourishment rather than pleasing the senses. Additionally, according to Carriero and Todesco (2018), individuals with higher education are more likely to hold egalitarian views regarding the division of household duties (p.1050). This means that those with higher education are more inclined to share domestic responsibilities with their partners. Conversely, in households where females have not received higher education, men tend to hold dominant attitudes, and women are often tasked with household chores, including cooking, due to financial dependence. However, this study revealed that despite the participants' parents' higher education, women still tended to dominate culinary activities and kitchen space, while men were less likely to cook. Thus, based on the theoretical framework, it was expected to observe more egalitarian attitudes regarding the distribution of domestic responsibilities between educated spouses. The female domination in the kitchen regardless of their higher education and economic independence may be described by Brines' (1994) observations. Scholars

identified that some husbands resist housework because they perceive it as further threatening their male identity” (Brines, 1994, p.672). Therefore, I assume through exclusion from the cooking process, males in the families of the students were maintaining their power and masculinity. Moreover, the relative positions of husbands and wives in the workplace influence the division of domestic chores, including food preparation (Hagan et al., 1987, p.812). Higher workplace status implies greater domination within the family, which can explain why females in the families of NU students were responsible for cooking. Therefore, the workplace position in relation to the division of household duties should be considered in further research.

It is worth noting that students who receive higher education at Nazarbayev University may develop more egalitarian attitudes, unlike their parents. Therefore, education, along with the university's tolerant values, likely plays a significant role in shaping young people's attitudes toward gender norms. It is worth noting that students who receive higher education at Nazarbayev University may develop more egalitarian attitudes, unlike their parents. Therefore, education, along with the university's tolerant values, likely plays a significant role in shaping young people's attitudes toward gender norms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study conducted on the cooking practices of Nazarbayev University students revealed several interesting insights. Considering the cooking behaviors of students, the acquisition of cooking skills was found to be primarily through learning from female family members and online sources. Students tend to prioritize quick and easy dishes due to a lack of free time during the weekdays, and some opt not to cook at all due to the availability of canteens and cafes on the campus territory. The study also revealed the indirect influence of familial gender expectations on the division of labor and transmission of cooking skills, perpetuating traditional gender norms in society. The responsibility of food preparation was found to be dominated by females in the families of NU students, with males taking over only in the absence of females. However, attitudes towards the division of household chores in the current or ideal relationships were found to be increasingly egalitarian across generations, with cooking being dependent on personal desire and the workload of partners.

Furthermore, the study identified that meat consumption is associated with masculinity and is preferred by male participants. This trend can be attributed to traditional Kazakh cuisine, which has historically emphasized meat. Both men and women use gender-appropriate foods to perform gender, as was highlighted in Sobal's (2005) research. Food choices within marriages reflect the "gender order" of the family, with meat-centered dishes indicating male dominance over women. The study also found that male family members tend to preserve their masculinity through food choices. In one scenario, male members prepared meat dishes on special occasions to demonstrate their professionalism and masculinity, while females preferred to cook ordinary domestic dishes. In another scenario, males opted for simple and manly dishes, while females preferred to cook diverse and complicated dishes, expressing their femininity through care for others. These findings

suggest that traditional gender norms persist regarding food choices among the family members of NU students. However, the study also indicates that these norms were not necessarily passed down to the students, as they do not correlate cooking behavior with gender expectations or norms. Therefore, the most important observation is that cooking is not perceived as gendered activity among NU students, and it does not affect their gender performance.

These findings provide valuable insights into the culinary practices and gender roles in Kazakhstan, underscoring the need for further research in this area.

Considering the suggestions for further research, I suggest that a study similar to the one performed by Graziani et al. (2020) can be conducted to investigate gender-appropriate foods among children in Kazakhstan. Childhood is a period of primary socialization, implying that gender norms in relation to family meals have a strong impact on the gender expectations of children and their food choices. Additionally, including participants from diverse class backgrounds may provide valuable insights into the perceptions of gender and cooking. For instance, Cairns et al. (2010) suggested that individuals from elite classes conceptualize food "through aesthetic terms", whereas those from lower classes tend to view it as a banal necessity (p. 596). Therefore, it can be anticipated that students from different class backgrounds may demonstrate distinct perceptions of the gendered nature of cooking. In light of this, I propose that future research should include participants from a variety of class backgrounds to more fully understand the complex ways in which gender performance and norms concerning cooking behavior are constructed and perpetuated. Also, regardless of the egalitarian attitudes toward cooking, the perception of the activity can change over time, as students will form their own families.

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Appendix

Written Informed Consent Form for interviews/surveys

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Introduction

Amina Shakhtamirova is conducting research that investigates the genderedness of cooking activities among NU students. The research question sounds like “Is cooking perceived as a gendered activity by NU students?”. You are invited to take part in the research survey/interview because your participation will significantly contribute to this study.

Procedures.

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur: you will be asked a list of prepared questions considering your cooking behavior as well as the history of cooking habits and perception of this activity by you and your family members. The approximate time the survey/interview might take is approximately 15/40 minutes. Your personal information will be requested, which includes the status of the family (full-parent, single-parent, etc.)/social class of the family/parental education/domestic labor division among parents. All answers will be recorded in written form online.

Risks.

You should be reassured that the risks of your participation in the research are minimized. However, there is a small risk of you feeling uncomfortable with the survey/interview questions. Please feel free to skip the questions or quit participation in the research whenever you feel uncomfortable.

Benefits.

There are no direct benefits to you from participating in this research study. However, your participation will significantly help to study gendered behaviors among students of Nazarbayev University, as well as their families. Moreover, your answers might contribute to the study of gender inequality and provide a foundation for further research in this field.

Compensation.

No tangible compensation will be provided. Research results will be available only at the conclusion of the study. If you would like to see the results of the research, please contact the researcher – Amina Shakhtamirova for access to the paper. Contacts are indicated above.

Confidentiality & Privacy.

Any information that is obtained during this study will be kept as confidential as possible. Your identity will be carefully hidden and preserved: the name of the participant will be substituted by a code. After the data collection is completed, all research information will be stored in a locked

file on a personal computer of Amina Shakhtamirova. Only research personnel will have access to the files containing research data. All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep your personal information in your research record confidential but total confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. There is an extremely small risk that research data will be stolen from the computer because it is carefully secured by passcodes.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. If you agree to participate in the research, you can be withdrawn at any time and discontinue your participation without prejudice.

Questions.

If you have any questions regarding this project, please directly contact the researcher - Amina Shakhtamirova. *Call: +77019600606, email: amina.shakhtamirova@nu.edu.kz*

Statement of Consent.

I, _____,
give my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

The researchers clearly explained to me the background information and objectives of the study and what my participation in this study involves.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I can at any time and without giving any reasons withdraw my consent, and this will not have any negative consequences for myself .

I understand that the information collected during this study will be treated confidentially.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher:

Signed _____ Date _____